

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Sarah Peters

Special Online Presentation
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Portrait of the Artist

Emphasizing the free-form nature of play, this selection of sculpture and drawing by Sarah Peters (b. 1973) explores an intimate part of the artist's practice focused on instinct and pleasure. There is an automatic and spontaneous process that creates each work imbuing humor and playfulness into Peter's visual language while the artist infiltrates and distorts the images of Classicism. These works are whimsical, animated, and informed by a deep affinity for the history of figuration, particularly the history of handheld figurative objects such as dolls, puppets, talismans, jugs, and toys.

In practice, the process of how these works were created emphasizes their instinctual nature. The unique bronze sculptures were created in a direct, lost-wax casting technique, in which the artist thumbs, prods, cuts, melts, and essentially plays with the initial wax until the form has taken shape, later to be cast directly into bronze without a mold. Appearing as silhouette puppets the sculptural forms either lose their heads, or like the drawings, become body-less caricatures of the human psyche. For both the sculptures and drawings, there is no predetermined blueprint as Peters projects an ephemera of passing thoughts directly onto the medium. These works were made instinctually, marks etched equally onto paper and bronze prompting the viewer to look closer, and then to look underneath the surface.

In their entirety, these works show the psychic geography of people, a narrative critique of several themes that are often found throughout Peters' oeuvre; among them, cultural authority, identity, and gendered power dynamics. There is an element of irony in the dismembered sculptures and drawings that is transgressive, transforming a variety of social, historical, and cultural symbols into an open-ended game. This visual language of play allows a freedom of expression that can exist in two states at once: figurative but abstracted, familiar though strange, contemporary yet historical. Peters' process becomes not unlike an anthropological dig, you may not know what mysterious object you'll find underneath the many layers, and yet, once found and recognized, the objects are material evidence of the most ordinary human activity: the expression of power through functional objects.

For Peters, it is crucial that these playful objects relate to an element of basic human functionality, objects for daily life - like a Roman mirror with a handle that is formed into a body, a bottle opener in the shape of a leg, or a pipe with a face. All her sculptures in essence are related to the utility of the medium, not unlike the sacred objects of a foregone-civilization's tomb, containing a matter-of-fact spiritual and psychological function. Though Peter's figures may be reflections of human-kind, they are seen through a fun-house-mirror, injecting humor into a dilemma perhaps as old as time.