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Press Release:

Pawel Ferus | Ex Future No Sleep

February 2 to March 24, 2018

Vernissage: February 1, 2018, 18-20h

Finissage: March 23, 2018, 17-20h

Artist talks and Tours through the exhibition: TBA

Balzer Projects is delighted to present Pawel Ferus' first solo show in the gallery, entitled, "Ex Future No Sleep". On view are sculptures, objects, installations and Smartphone drawings from 2017/18. He is interested in working out sculptural formulations, which often are based on or allude to classical/traditional sculpture and subtly or overtly make direct references to artistic predecessors and is frequently accentuated by ready-made influences.

Ferus rejects the idea of a passive relationship between artwork and viewer and he is interested in how the work speaks and interacts with the audience. He convinces by his excellent craftsmanship and his sense of humor. From abstract to figurative and something in between, his works possess a character that is at once lighthearted and deeply philosophical, abstract and figurative, political and full of witty references. He emphasizes clean geometrical lines that balance forms inherent in the materials with the symbolic allusions of figuration. Philosophical reflections upon time, posterity, memory, history, body, space and life in general are on his artistic agenda.

To understand and correctly situate the work in the exhibition, it is essential to engage with the artist's conceptual superstructure. His interest in music, traditions, literature, philosophy, technology, consumption and appropriation are vital to his work. In particular, his interest in art history led him to take on artistic icons, which he deconstructs and re-contextualizes. The work of Alberto Giacometti is referenced time and again. Ferus' "Femme de Venice Beach" is an homage to the great Swiss sculptor. Here, he re-contextualizes Giacometti's work "Femme de Venise" (1956) in form and title. The minimalist standing concrete sculpture wears a pink and white-striped bikini top by the American *Venice Beach* swim wear company. Contrary to Giacometti's roughly cast, yet fragile and elegantly androgynous figure, Ferus' "Femme de Venice Beach" consists of a geometric concrete solidly cast block, strengthened by construction armour.

Ferus does not shy away from contemporary politics. Not in the exhibition, but one of the artist's key works is entitled "Hodler's Revenge" (2007). It directly references Ferdinand Hodler's enigmatic painting "Der Holzfäller" which gained notoriety as it was prominently displayed in the office of former Swiss Federal Councilor Christoph Blocher, and by default, and for a while, became synonymous with the politician. Ferus translates the figure into the third dimension and replaces the ax by a baseball bat. Obviously a comment upon Blocher's extreme nationalist and isolationist political agenda.

Pawel Ferus is a perfectionist. A trained stonemason, he is at home with a multitude of materials and processes. Casting concrete, plaster, silicone, resin, bronze on the one hand, balzer projects | wallstrasse 10 | 4051 basel | switzerland

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working with wood, marble and clay on the other. He collects objects and repurposes them, such from beverage cans and bottles to blankets, carpets, shoes and clothes. The surprising juxtaposition of materials and the sheer size of some of his sculptures, force his audience to engage with their physical qualities. “ÄÄH (Big Yawn)” (2017), a giant egg-shaped plaster figure (placed on a lavender-colored XPS Polystyrol pedestal) with its superimposed yawning mouth, is exposing two rows of beautiful white teeth – a humorous commentary upon the universality of boredom!

Four concrete sculptures are the curatorial focus of the exhibition and function as a conceptual unit. In addition to “Femme de Venice Beach”, there are “Ex Future Figure”, a pair of massive concrete blocs, one wearing light blue, the other one white man underpants. (In 2017, “Ex Future Figure” (with white underpants) was exhibited in the Kunstmuseum Olten and received the prestigious *Auszeichnungspreis* of the Rentsch Foundation). “Deep Sleep”, the horizontal “sleeping” concrete work, is wearing light blue Long Johns. The objects are heavy, immobile and roughly cast. The light, almost transparent undergarments (cast into the blocks) seem surreal and out of place. The metaphorical unit of the concrete blocks, undergarments and armour irons create a narrative by association. Doubtlessly, here *Ex Future* and *No Sleep* come together!

Ferus combines the abstract with the figurative. The concrete blocks could not be more minimalist, but the armour irons dominantly sticking out of the blocks help to tell a story. The underwear tells the story of its wearer to the viewer. Maybe it is a story of building and construction, the men who work in construction, their lives and their dreams for the future – ex future, no sleep. But the sculptures do not stand alone and their stories are juxtaposed with additional objects and images in the room, creating complementing narratives. There are Smartphone drawings, reproduced on a canvas-like material. Motives of the drawings are cigarettes, gherkins and abstract doodles, all drawn with the finger on the phone, for the lack of something better to do.

Cigarettes and gherkins – motives that follow the viewer through the exhibition. A plaster gherkin smoking (as in “Agonizer”) suspended from the ceiling, cigarette packages and a lighter in the “Boredom West Bar”- and “Carpe Diem”, jars of different sizes, filled with a fluorescent liquid and plaster gherkins. The jars are placed around the space, seemingly at random. Smoking, a universal and trans-cultural activity, and strangely enough pickling vegetables. It is done everywhere in the world, only the foods to be pickled vary. In Poland, the *Ogórki kiszzone*, the pickled cucumber, is a national food. It is not preserved in vinegar, like in France (*cornichons*), but in a salt-based liquid. This method is especially popular in Eastern Europe. In fact, an invisible “gherkin line” is stretching from Berlin to Vienna through Eastern Europe and Russia, nick-named the *Salzgurkenmeridian*.

Historically, pickling was done for preservation purposes mainly, but nowadays, people eat pickled foods for the taste and out of tradition. Like for every pickled food, there is the prospect of consumption, in the near or far future. In “Carpe Diem”, consumption is denied and would be rather unhealthy, as plaster is inedible. “Ex Future” – does that mean: “No Consumption in the Future”? Therefore, seize the day, *carpe diem*, the urge to make the most of the present time and do not trust tomorrow.

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The “Boredom West Bar”, a complex installation of mostly ready-mades is the conceptual climax of the exhibition. On two plywood shelves, the “Boredom West Bar” features a free association game of West cigarettes packs, a Franz West bust (modeled and cast by Ferus), shot glasses, including a *Texas* shot glass, a *Luksusowa* Vodka bottle, a *Fat White Family* lighter (a band, Ferus likes) and a jar of home-pickled gherkins. A cast gherkin on a stick and drawings of gherkins and cigarettes complement the installation. Gherkins and cigarettes create a semantic dichotomy – time and boredom, smoking and planning for future consumption. All of it is hidden behind a Smartphone drawing on canvas with a tiny gherkin and a cigarette butt, “West”, of course. The Austrian sculptor Franz West (it is not a pun!) once declared: “It doesn't matter what the art looks like but how it is used”. Ferus shows his deep admiration for the sculptor in this installation – quite literally, everything in this “Boredom West Bar” can be used and consumed – an homage to Franz West.

Pawel Ferus was born in Poland in 1973 and came to Switzerland as a teenager. After an apprenticeship in stone masonry, he graduated with a diploma in Fine Arts from the *FHNW/HGK* in Basel. He has been the recipient of many prizes and awards. His work has been shown widely in Switzerland and abroad. His sculptures and installations are part of private and public collections in Switzerland, the United States, The Netherlands and South Africa.

Pawel Ferus is very visible in the Swiss art scene. He actively contributes to public debates and discourses and participates in numerous nonprofit exhibitions and activities in the visual arts.

Please contact the gallery for more information and visual material:
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