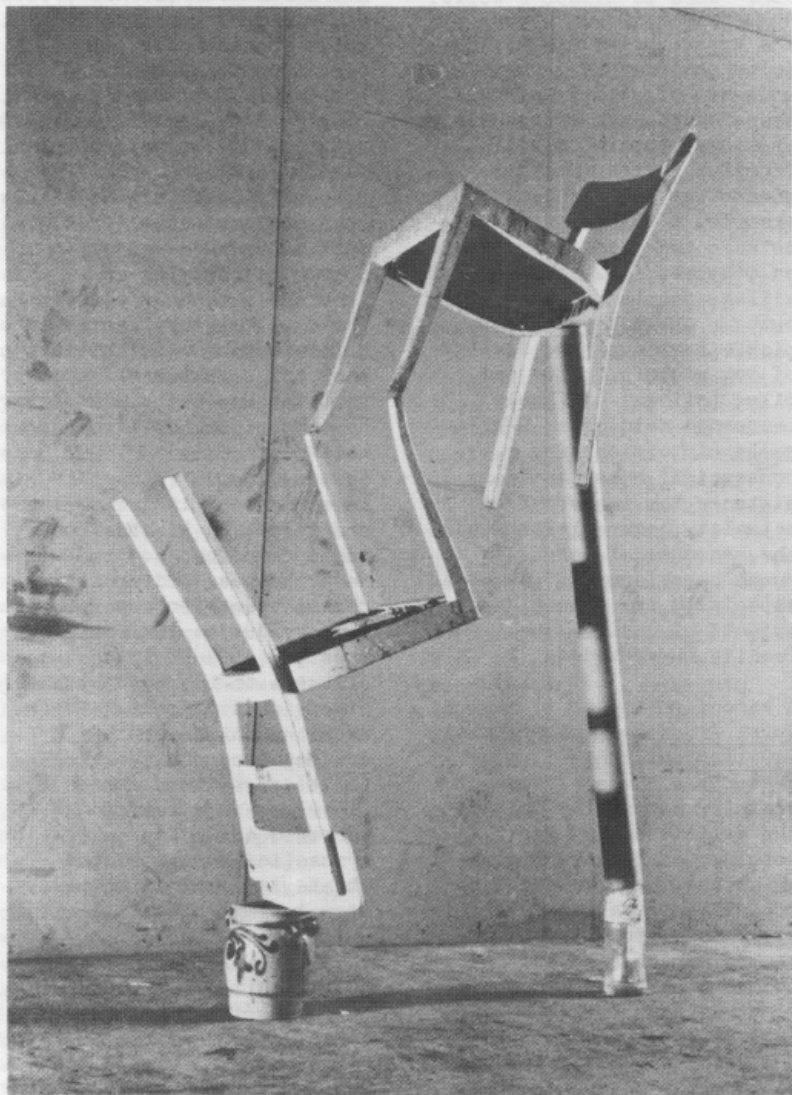


Fischli/Weiss  
MATRIX/BERKELEY 118

University Art Museum  
late June - late September 1988

Outlaws, from Equilibrium Series, 1984-85



The art of Peter Fischli and David Weiss articulates the meeting point between order and disorder, the ordinary and extraordinary, creation and destruction. These two Swiss artists, who work as a collaborative combo, construct clever, comic contrivances of common components. The spirit of child's play prevails, though this is coupled with evocations of absurdity, waste, wreck, and ruin.

Absurdity reigns supreme in the Wurst Series (1979, 10 color photographs), where sausages of all types are transformed into protagonists or stage props within fanciful, often ribald scenarios. In Accident, for example, a collision occurs between two frankfurter cars on a street in a cardboard village peopled by cigarette butts. Or in Carpet Shop, pickle people peruse displays of dog biscuit "mats" and piles (slices) of finely patterned cold cuts. While scale distortions and nonsensical substitutions distance the imagery from actuality, comparisons with the nonsensical actuality of human behaviors and values--especially the valuation of objects of desire--are readily suggested.

A second photographic series, Quiet Afternoon (also titled Equilibrium, 1984-85), features a diverse range of ordinary materials (objects the artists see as "next to nothing, or nothing special") which have been arranged as precariously balanced "still life" conglomerates. The camera captures moments of wondrous poise as eccentric constructions teeter on the edge of impending collapse. A ladder, broom, chair, and bottles may hold each other

upright in Provisional Arrangement, but stasis is clearly a momentary condition. And a carrot-spatula-fork-grater-bottle circuit, in Roped Mountaineers, may evince a feat of acrobatic wizardry and high caliber tension-suspension engineering, but here, too, it is an occurrence about to fall apart. Represented are inventive but utterly vulnerable structures. They are structures of decontextualized individual parts wherein each part functions to sustain and physically support a complex, contrived system. Like Swiss watches, the structures are highly regulated and precisely equilibrated. They are, however, also irrational designs and useless constructions with an inherently tenuous character. While proudly manifesting a brief instant of stability, they offer full realization that the stability, no matter how ingenious, will lead to self-destruction.

Because focus is not on the end result, a lighthearted tone predominates. Nevertheless, a disquieting undercurrent permeates the imagery due to its metaphoric power, particularly the allusion to those shaky and often inane organizational architectonics within contemporary socio-economic-political systems which likewise are a hodgepodge of borrowed elements, futile gymnastics, shortsighted strategies, and suicidal structurings.

In their film The Way Things Go, Fischli/Weiss animate the frivolous/ill-fated constructions of the Equilibrium photographs, making the tragicomic spirit

and metaphoric implications even more compelling. The film proceeds slowly, each conglomerate setup being methodically activated by energy released from the collapse of another setup. Chaplinesque horseplay merges with Frankensteinian madness as flowing, dripping, steaming water, smoking and flaming fire, and the falling, crushing, sliding, rolling, melting, hurling, sputtering obtrusions of crafty contraptions sustain a relentless concatenation.

The film is structured as an arduous, determined but lumpen chain reaction that is inherently eruptive and death-ridden. Indeed, efficiency is measured by success in effecting disorder and destruction--actions which keep the system operative. And meaning resides not in individual objects but in their power to transport energy and perpetuate a continuous motion. Recurrences occur, each somewhat different but all ultimately repetitions of an already familiar image or type of activity. And the whole has the character of an unremitting, utterly nonreversible system that is devoid of denouement, hierarchical stratas, or closure. It is, however, tension-ridden and tension-producing (despite its playfulness), for one feels frustration with the plodding pace, anxiety with laborious movements that attempt to defy gravity and logic, uneasiness in anticipating what comes next, and fear of a failure that will stop the system.

On the one hand, the film can be viewed as an awesome metaphor for the life-threatening experiments

performed in "real" research laboratories and the wasteful, counterproductive operations of technocratic institutions and societal organizations. On the other hand, the film alludes to natural systems of entropy wherein matter undergoes continual degradation and energy expenditures decrease order within the universe.

For Fischli/Weiss, the film and most all of their art follow a desire to show "the way things go," to call attention to the play of meanings that can be provoked by common objects, to manifest paradoxes and oppositions while indicating that there are no clear dividing lines or resolutions.

Fischli was born in 1952 in Zurich and attended the Academy of Fine Arts, Urbino and the Academy of Fine Arts, Bologna. Weiss was born in 1946 in Zurich and attended the School of Arts and Crafts, Zurich and the School of Arts and Crafts, Basel. In 1979 the two artists began working collaboratively and have since shown their art in galleries and museums throughout Europe and the United States. Fischli/Weiss live in Zurich and are represented by Sonnabend Gallery, New York, and Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne.

Sidra Stich  
Senior Curator

Works in MATRIX (all works courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, NY; Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne, W. Germany; and the artists):

1. Wurstserie (Wurst Series), 1979, 10 color photographs, 18-3/8 x 24-3/4".

2. Stiller Nachmittag (Quiet Afternoon, or Equilibrium Series), 1984-85, 20 black and white and 10 color photographs, 10-3/16 x 18-1/8".

3. Der Lauf der Dinge (The Way Things Go), 1986-87, color film.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne, W. Germany, '83, '85, '87; Galerie Crousel-Hussenot, Paris, '84; Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland '85; Groninger Museum, '85; Kunstverein, Cologne, W. Germany, '85; Sonnabend Gallery, NY, '86.

Selected group exhibitions:

The Museum of Modern Art, NY, International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture, '84; Kunstverein, Hannover, W. Germany, Zwischen Plastik und Malerie, '84; Paris, Biennale, '85; Arnhem, Netherlands, Sonsbeek, '86; Kassel, W. Germany, Documenta 3, '87.

Selected bibliography about the artists:

Winter, P. "Zwischen Plastik und Malerie," Kunstwerk, Apr. '84.

Curiger, Bice. "Peter Fischli und David Weiss," Kunstwerk, Sept. '86.

Ratcliff, Carter. "Masters of the Glum Eureka," Art in America, Jan. '87.

Grazioli, Elio. "Peter Fischli & David Weiss," Flash Art, May '87.

Tazzi, Pier Luigi. "Peter Fischli and David Weiss," Artforum, Summer '87.

Collings, Matthew. "The Stumbling Objects of Fischli/Weiss", interview in Artscribe International, Nov./Dec. '87.

Saltz, Jerry. "Peter Fischli and David Weiss, The Way Things Go," Arts Magazine, Apr. '88.

The Fischli/Weiss exhibition was organized by the MIT List Visual Arts Center and has traveled in modified form to the Renaissance Society, Chicago; the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York; P.S.1, New York; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. A catalogue is available in the Museum bookstore.

This exhibition is supported by funding from PRO HELVETIA, the Swiss Council for the Arts.

MATRIX is supported in part by grants from Mrs. Paul L. Wattis, The LEF Foundation, and the Alameda County Art Commission's County Supervisors' Art Support Program.