

JULIA WACHTEL





Julia Wachtel

Born 1958 in New York, NY, lives and works in New York, NY.

Education

1979 Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1978 School of Visual Arts, New York, New York

1974-77 BA Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2024 “Thirsty for Myself”, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, Philadelphia

2023 “Plastic Fantasy”, von ammon co, Washington D.C.

2022 “Fulfillment”, Helena Anrather Gallery, NYC

Super Dakota, Brussels, BE

2021 “airlock or gazing into the void,” Two person show with Wendy White, von ammon co, Washington D.C.

“Fade to Fade” Library Street Collective gallery, Detroit, Three person show with Wendy White and Paul Pfeiffer

2019 “Tears, Drips and Pixels”, Super Dakota, Brussel

“Helpp”, Mary Boone Gallery, New York

2017 “Displacemeant”, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York

2016 Vilma Gold, London,

2015 “Empowerment”, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York

2014 Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

2013 Vilma Gold, London

1998 Galerie Georges-Phillipe & Nathalie Vallois, Paris

1995 Crypte de l'Eglise del'Assomption, Rosnay-L'Hopital, France

Eglise de Aumenancourt, Marne, France



- 1995 Passages, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Troyes, France
Gallerie Georges-Philippe Vallois, Paris
- 1993 American Fine Arts, New York
- 1991 Galerie Faust, Geneva, Switzerland
Options 41: Julia Wachtel, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
American Fine Arts, New York
- 1990 Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati
Galerie Georges-Philippe Vallois, Paris
- 1989 Diane Brown Gallery, New York, (US)
- 1988 Nature Morte Gallery, New York
- 1985 Nature Morte Gallery, New York
- 1984 Julia Wachtel, Nature Morte Gallery, New York, (US)
- 1983 Haim Steinbach and Julia Wachtel: Social Conquest, C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center Mall, New York
- 1981 Relations of Absence, Fashion Moda, Bronx

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2023 "50 Paintings", Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee
"Focus Group 4", von ammon co, Washington D.C.
"Pictures & After", Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MaMCO) Geneva, Switzerland
"Future Shock", Lisson Gallery, NYC
- 2022 "Une Nouvelle Aube", MAMCO, Musée D'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Summer 2022
"Broken Piñata" L21 Gallery, Majorca, Spain
"Off Kilter", Michael Benevento Gallery, Los Angeles, curated by Bob Linder
- 2021 "The Sum of All Parts", MoMA, NYC
"The 80s", The Albertina Modern museum, Vienna
The Phillips Collection museum, Washington D.C. 2022.
"F#%k U & ur DisNey", SuperDakota gallery, Brussels



- 2021 "K as in Knight", Helena Anrather Gallery, New York
- 2020 "The Secret History of Everything" Perrotin Gallery, New York
"World Peace", Museum of Contemporary Art Westport, CT
100 Sculptures, No Gallery, travelling exhibition
"Private Eyes: American Postmodern Art" KODE Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
"Passing Time", online show organized by curator Neville Wakefield. Cecilia Bengolea and Alex Perweiler
- 2019 "The Sorcerer's Burden", The Contemporary Austin, Austin
"Think about all the James Deans and what it means", Super Dakota Gallery, Brussels,
"Paradise", Westport Art Center, Westport, CT
"Mature Themes", Foxy Production, New York
"Brand New, Art and Commodity in the 1980's", The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.
"Open House: Elliot Hundley", Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
"été pourri peinture fraîche", FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France
"Focus Group", von ammon co, Washington, D.C.
- 2017 "Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Man Alive", Jablonka Gallery, Brussels
"Strange Attractors", Redling Fine Art, Los Angeles
- 2016 "Almanch 16", Le Consortium, Dijon, France
"Ordinary Pictures", Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
"Ideologue", The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City
"Champagne Life", Saatchi Gallery, London
"Not in New York: Carl Solway and Cincinnati: Highlights of 20th century art", Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati (US)
- 2015 "Gallery 30 / 130: Thirty Years of Books and Catalogs", White, Columns, New York
"The Shadow is Taken", Albus Greenspon, New York, (US)
"The Cack-Up", Room East, New York
Zabriskie Point, Geneva, Switzerland
"Venganza (I don't want to be friends)", Armada, Milan
"20 Years of Collecting", Zabudowicz Foundation, London



- 2015 “Toys Redux – On Play and Critique”, Migros Museum, Zurich
“Call and Response”, Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, New York
- 2014 “Portrait de ¾”, Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois, Paris
“New Hells”, Derek Eller Gallery, New York
“Forever Young”, Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels
“Ericka Beckman / Julia Wachtel”, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York
- 2013 “Post Culture”, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York
“Une odysée: les 30 ans du frac champagne-ardenne”, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims
“Selections from Absolut Collection”, Spiritmuseum, Stockholm
“Group Show”, The Artist’s Institute, New York
- 2012 “Remote Control”, Institute for Contemporary Art, London
“Face a Face”, FRAC Poitou-Charantes, Angoulême, France
“The Old, the New, the Different”, Kunsthalle, Bern, Switzerland
- 2011 “Situation New York 1986”, Art and Public – Cabinet, Geneva, Switzerland
“Group Show”, Vilma Gold Gallery, London
- 2009 “Images et (Re)Presentation”, Le Magasin, Grenoble, France
“Group Show”, Galerie Georges-Philippe & Natalie Vallois, Paris
- 2004 “I am the Walrus”, Cheim & Read Gallery, New York
- 2001 “W Exhibition”, Le Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dole, France
- 1999 “Urban Mythologies: The Bronx Represented Since the 1960s”, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York
“Artlovers”, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool
“Sweet & Sour”, Art & Public, Geneva
“Text & Signifier”, Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati
“Absolut Collection”, Louvre, Museum of the Applied Arts, Paris
- 1998 “Weather Everything”, Galerie Für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany
“I Love New York”, Edinburgh International Art Festival, Edinburgh College of Art
- 1996 “Can We Talk,” Basilico Fine Arts, New York



- 1995 "Pittura Immedia", Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum, Graz, Austria
"Peinture, Photo et Cie", Les rencontres d'Arles, Arles, France
- 1991 "Painting Culture", Fiction/Non Fiction, New York
- 1990 "Stendahl Syndrome: The Cure", Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
"Le Choix des Femmes", Le Consortium, Dijon, France
"Total Metal", Simon Watson Gallery, New York
"The Last Laugh", Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York
- 1989 "Group Show", Achim Kubinski, Stuttgart, Germany
"The Mirror in Which Two Are Seen as One", Jersey City Museum, Jersey City
"Simulations", Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
- 1988 "Works Concepts Processes Situation Information", Hans Meyer Gallery, Dusseldorf
"Appropriation and Syntax: The Uses of Photography in Contemporary Art", The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn
- 1987 "Nothing Sacred", Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
"Avant-Garde in the Eighties", Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
"Post-Abstract Abstraction", The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield
"The Art of the Real", Galerie Pierre Huber, Geneva
"Romance", Knight Gallery, Charlotte, North Carolina
"Comic Iconoclasm", Institute of Contemporary Art, London
"Perverted by Language", Hillwood Art Gallery, Long Island University/C.W.Post Campus, Greenvale, NY
- 1986 "American Fine Arts Co.", Colin de Land Fine Art, New York
"When Attitudes Become Form", Bess Cutler Gallery, New York
"The Ready Made Painted", Bard College, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York
"Group Show", Metro Pictures, New York
"Group Show", Nature Morte Gallery, New York, (US)
- 1985 "Split Vision", Artists Space, New York
"Persona Non-Grata", Daniel Newburg Gallery, New York
"Infotainment", Texas Gallery, Houston, traveled to : Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, Vanguard Gallery, Philadelphia, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, De Selby Gallery, Amsterdam, Galerie Montenay Del Sol, Paris



- 1985 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, included in “Americana” with Group Material
“East Village”, Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal
- 1984 “Neo York: Reported on a Phenomenon”, University Art Museum, University of California at Santa Barbara
“Emblem”, L.A.C.E. Gallery, Los Angeles, US
“Timeline of Intervention in Central America”, Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1, NYC
“Hundreds of Drawings”, Artists Space, New York
“Group Show”, Center Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg
“Contemporary Perspectives”, Sardoni Art Gallery, Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre
- 1983 “Group Show”, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, NY
“Terminal Show/Preparing for War”, Brooklyn
“Revolutionary High Art”, Latino Space, New York
- 1982 “Fifth Anniversary Exhibition”, The Drawing Center, New York
- 1981 “Selections”, Artists Space, New York
“Selections 14”, Drawing Center, New York
- 1979 Film/Audio Installation, Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1, Long Island City

Selected Collections

Absolut Collection, Stockholm

American Medical Association, Chicago

Brooklyn Museum, New York

Chase Manhattan Bank, New York

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

Fonds Régional d’Art Contemporain, Région Basse Normandie, Caen

Fonds Regional d’Art Contemporain Poitou-Charentes (FRAC), Angouleme (FR)

MOCA, Los Angeles, California

Musée d’art moderne et contemporain Geneva, Switzerland



The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Progressive Corporation, Cleveland

Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Zabludowicz Collection, London

Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas



Julia Wachtel

Thirsty for Myself

19 January - 09 March 2024

Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery is pleased to present the first Philadelphia exhibition by Julia Wachtel, *Thirsty for Myself*.

Educated at Middlebury College, Vermont; the School of Visual Arts; and the Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, Wachtel originally emerged as an associate of the Pictures Generation whose subjects focused on appropriated contemporary media in the late 1970s. During that period and the decades that followed, artifacts from our mediated society were morphing from mechanical reproduction into the digital era. Wachtel pioneered in critiquing and reconstructing the visual language of mass culture with great irony and wit while engaging in deep critical discourse about popular culture and politics, the construction of identity and emotion, and dominant narratives about consumption.

Through silkscreen printing and oil paint, Wachtel's appropriated images are interrupted by visual breaks that resemble pages as recorded against a scanner bed, stripes caused from printer heads being out of alignment, or entropic glitches running across a corrupted digital file. By juxtaposing high and low, clean and dirty, and right and left symmetry, Wachtel duplicates and displaces her imagery, allowing the resulting ambiguity to lead her viewers in unlearning received conceptions of power and intent. By implication, no one is innocent, as we are all immersed and complicit in the Society of the Spectacle.

The exhibition is a part of (re)FOCUS, which celebrates the 50th anniversary of Philadelphia Focuses on Women in the Visual Arts/1974, a citywide festival that recognized women artists. With over 150 exhibitions, panels, lectures, workshops and demonstrations, it was one of the first large-scale surveys of the work of contemporary American women artists and signaled the inception of the American feminist art movement. (re)FOCUS 2024 is also a Philadelphia citywide festival showing how women-identified and BIPOC artists have moved from the periphery to the center of the art world. Like its 1974 predecessor, (re)FOCUS is a collaboration among Philadelphia's large, small, and diverse visual arts institutions.



Thirsty for Myself
Rosenwald-Wolf
Gallery,
Philadelphia,
19 January - 09
March, 2024

























Julia Wachtel, *Thirsty For Myself*, 2019, oil on canvas, 60 x 121 in., 152.4 x 307.34 cm, JWA044, \$80,000.00 USD



Julia Wachtel, *Marine Park*, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 119 in., 152.4 x 302.26 cm, JW047, \$80,000.00 USD



PLASTIC FANTASY

Julia Wachtel

27 october - 09 december 2023

Washington DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce the opening of *Plastic Fantasy*, a solo exhibition by New York-based artist Julia Wachtel. This is Wachtel's first one-person show with von ammon co, and the gallery's twenty-seventh project in its current location.

The show will consist of six new vertically oriented works hung on one purpose-built wall that will span the length of the gallery's second arcade. In a similar manner to Wachtel's previous major project at the gallery, the series involves a consistent motif: between two abutted canvases, Wachtel makes a juxtaposition of a panoramic landscape (sourced from stock imagery and rendered using color-separated screen printing) with a hand-painted representation of a plastic toy animal.

The artist's scaling of each landscape decomposes the dot patterns inherent in CMYK printing into abstraction. When viewed at a distance, however, the dots realign into disaster. Each of the landscapes portend some variation of ecological ruin, either explicitly or implicitly: an oil refinery bathed in astringent pink light is an unmistakable augur of anthropogenic climate change; an uninterrupted ocean horizon may imply untouched nature, but the pure waves belie a tainted, warmer water and the decimation of the biodiversity they contain below the surface. The possibility of a planetary existential crisis is held at arm's length by its sheer scale. Only when viewed from farther away can we begin to process and internalize its implications.

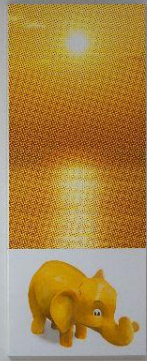


Above or below the landscape is a representation of a toy animal. Rhinoceroses, pandas, elephants and big cats have become mascots for the conservationist movement, and are beloved by the very humans who enact the demise of their habitats. Each animal wears a cartoonish, person-like expression, bearing witness to its corresponding landscape. Like an actor in Greek theater, the animal plays the role of the chorus within the painting's dramatic narrative, and expresses shock, dismay or depression via its bloodless expression. *Hypocrite* is a word derived from Greek drama, and translates roughly to *one who wears a false face*. While toys of threatened animals are mostly sold to those interested in learning about the natural world, they are injection molded from petrochemical-derived plastics, and they do not biodegrade. Wachtel's toy animals are hypocritical images: they serve as emblems of nature's majesty but just barely conceal their true essence as disposable consumer objects. Looming over a terrifying scene of industrial gas burnoff is the lone domesticated animal in the group: a black cat, whose species has successfully bargained with the human race for vicarious survival.

Julia Wachtel (b. 1958, United States) is a painter and multimedia artist most closely associated with The Pictures Generation. Since the early 1980's, Wachtel has created a practice based on the appropriation, reframing, juxtaposition and recontextualization of images drawn from news media, advertising, and the internet. Wachtel uses isolation, context removal and forced comparison to synthesize new, uncanny interpretations from the torrent of visual content encountered daily by the American consumer. Wachtel has exhibited in galleries and Institutions worldwide, with recent solo and group exhibitions at The Whitney Museum, The Bergen Kunsthall, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Phillips Collection, MAMCO Genève, Mary Boone Gallery, and Helena Anrather. Her work is held in institutional collections worldwide. This is her second major project at von ammon co, where she is also a represented artist. von ammon co was founded in 2019 in its current location in Georgetown. Gallery hours are 12-6pm on Saturday and Sunday, and by appointment. For more information and image requests, please email info@vonammon.co

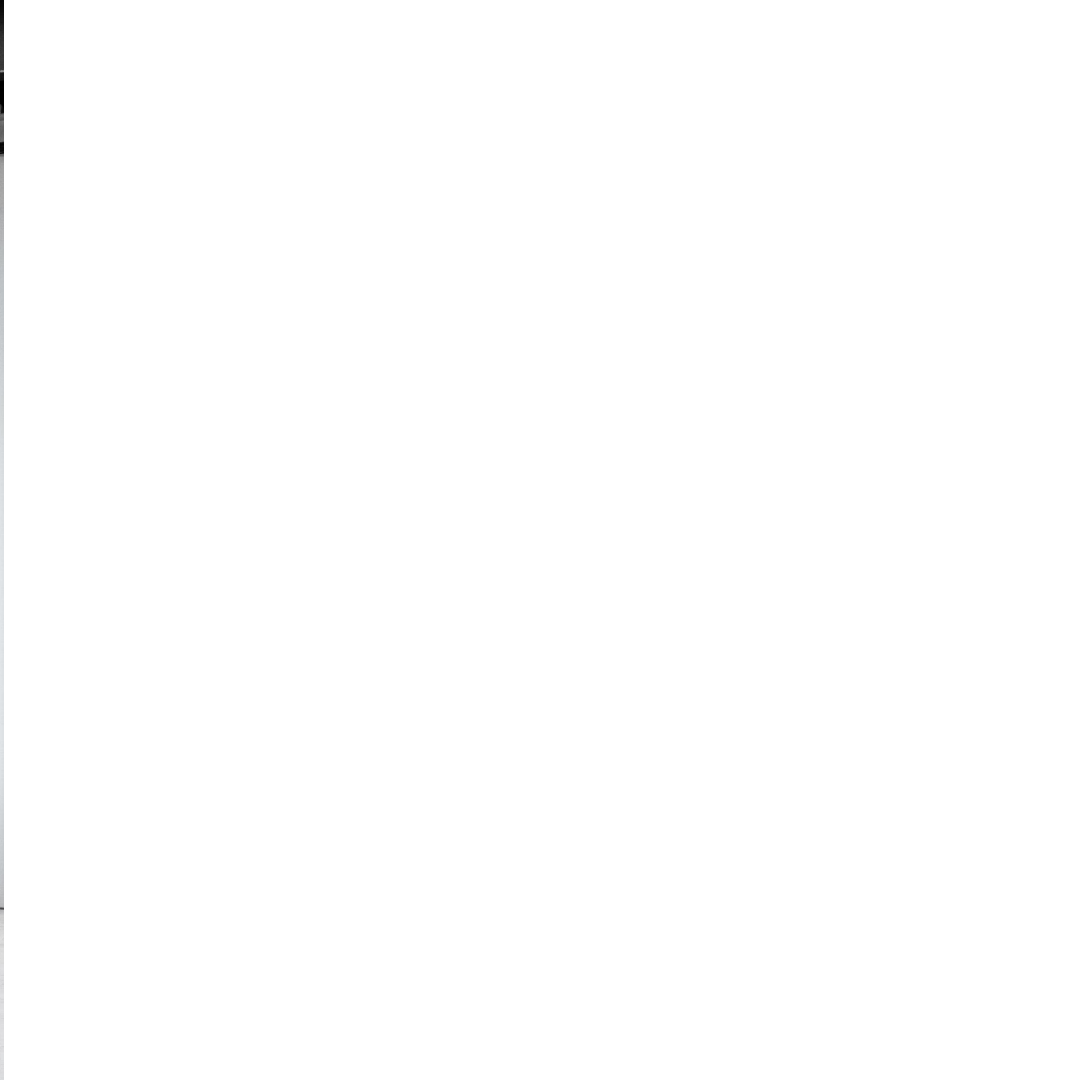


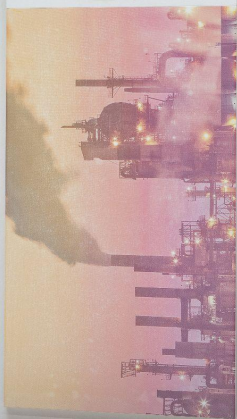
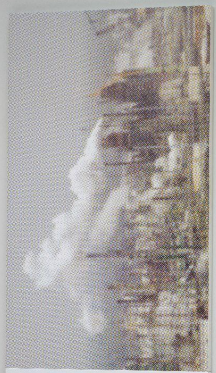
Plastic Fantasy
von ammon co
Washington, DC
27 October - 09
December, 2023

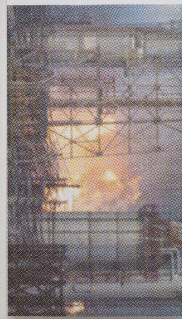
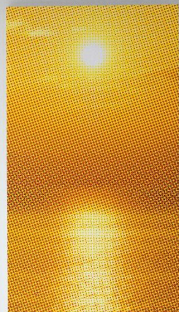


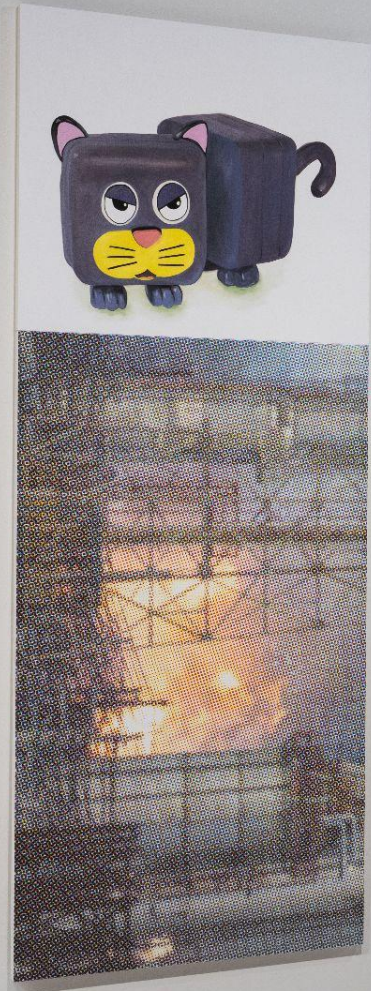


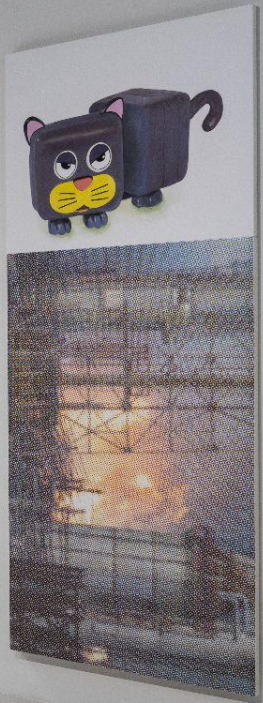
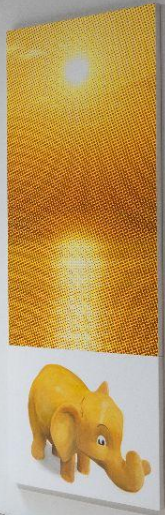






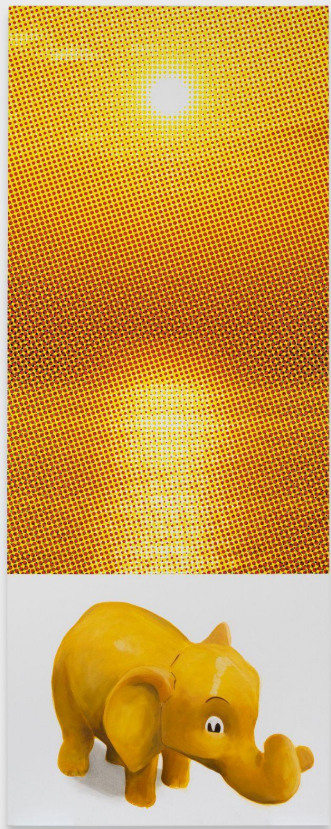








Julia Wachtel
i luv u, 2023
Oil and acrylic ink on canvas
96 x 36 in.
JW039



Julia Wachtel
hallucination, 2023
Oil and acrylic ink on canvas
92 x 36 in.
JW038

Julia Wachtel & Wendy White

airlok or gazing into the void

06 February - 14 March 2021

Washington DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce its next project, Airlok or Gazing Into the Void, a two-person show by New York based artists Julia Wachtel and Wendy White. Each artist has assigned a title to her contribution to the exhibition: Airlok, by Wendy White, consists of three large-scale suspended mobiles made of dibond, aluminum and LED light; Gazing Into the Void, by Julia Wachtel, consists of five new paintings on canvas. The artists largely avoid the use of existing gallery wallspace to install work, and instead construct an ersatz labyrinth of drywall and wooden studs spanning various structural columns. While the two projects assert their distinction through their respective titles, the installation allows for each artist's work to frequently overlap and communicate with the other as the viewer navigates the space.

Wachtel's first-ever single-motif series depicts one repeated, serialized subject: a white man with his head in a hole. Drawing from various techniques of image appropriation, Wachtel either directly lifts the likeness of these men from existing photographs or as hand-painted depictions of drawn caricatures. This exceptionally particular image—of the white man hiding his face, either out of denial, shame, fear, or self-justification—attracts new sociopolitical associations daily, and at an overwhelming rate. Wachtel's painterly project has sought to deconstruct the semiotics of media (both traditional and digital) and to reconstruct it within the language of painting. This has typically involved the juxtaposition of unrelated images to create synthetic effects of dark humor and critique. In this series, Wachtel concerns herself with only one recurring image, as a synthesis of opposites—the pathetic, pratfall figure is humorous in its clumsy, struthious oblivion; the implications that subtend this awkward stance are those of unspeakable existential horror.

Wendy White's three new, monumentally scaled mobiles involve the index of visual archetypes that the artist has developed throughout the course of her career: examples include a vector image of a black rainbow, a heart shaped from chunky pixels, a rain or tear droplet, a peace sign. While vaguely familiar, these signs lack a clear referent, and hover in a non-logocentric space, wherein the particular anxieties of childhood, adolescence and adulthood intersect depending on the viewer's perspective. Like Wachtel, White is concerned with the reindexing of cultural semiotics and their subsequent reconstruction as simultaneously absurd, melancholy and fearsome art objects. As infantilization of the American consumer becomes an overt marketing strategy and as screens supplant real objects as the means to soothe a child, White's sculptures straddle an in-between space: an abandoned realm of things on one side, and an uncertain future of virtual image-objects on the other.



*airlok or gazing
into the void*
von ammon co
Washington, DC
06 February - 14
March 2021







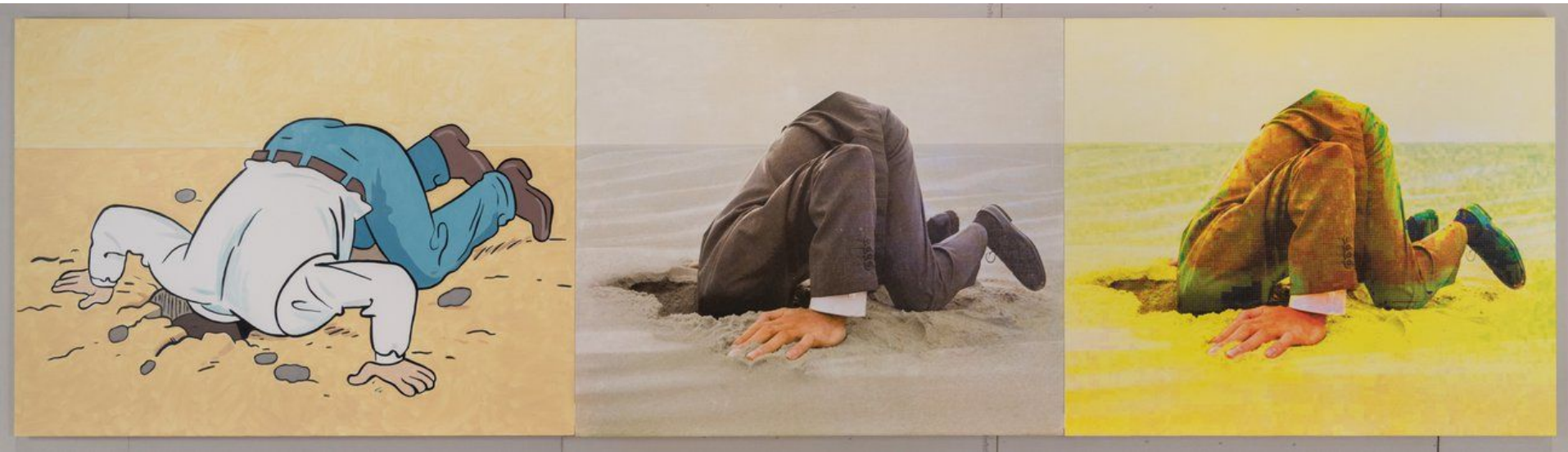




Plot Hole, 2020
acrylic on canvas
55 x 85.5 in
139.7 x 217.2 cm



Black Hole, 2020
acrylic on canvas
45 x 53 in / 114.3 x 134.6 cm



Blind Hole, 2020
oil and acrylic on canvas
45 x 167 in / 114.3 x 424.2 cm



Sink Hole, 2020
oil and acrylic on canvas
50 x 143 in / 127 x 363.2 cm



Rabbit Hole, 2020
oil on canvas
40 x 46 in / 101.6 x 116.8 cm



The Sorcerer's Burden: Contemporary Art and the Anthropological Turn
The Contemporary Austin, Texas, USA
14 September 2019 - 2 February 2020



what, what, what, 1988

Oil, flashe, and lacquer ink on canvas; 52 x 111 in

Brand New: Art and Commodity in the 1980's at Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC, 14 February - 13 May 2018



Fulfillment
Helena Anrather
New York, NY
14 April -4 June
2022











Fulfillment, 2021
oil and acrylic on canvas,
101 x 51 in / 256.54 x 129.54 cm

Dream, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
50 x 103 in / 127 x 261.62 cm



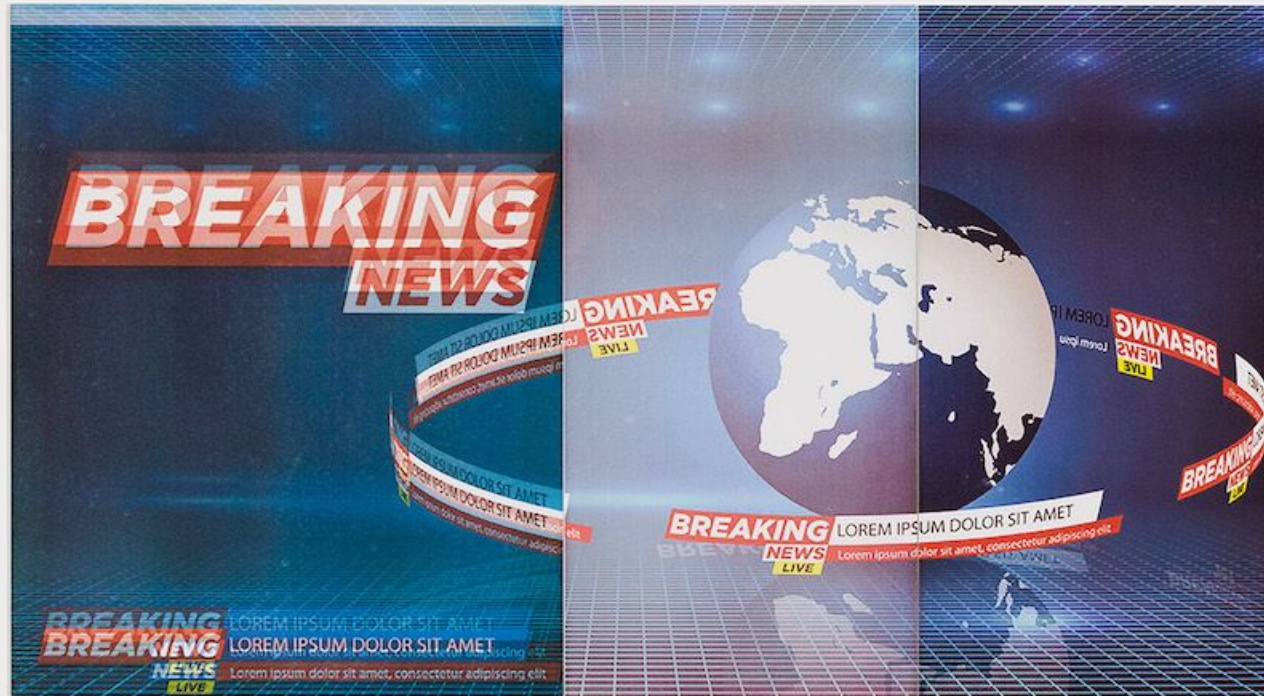


Hello, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
50 x 99 in / 127 x 251.46 cm



Duck, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
50 x 123 inches
127 x 312.42 cm

Loren Ipsum, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
50 x 131 in / 127 x 332.74 cm





Split, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
50 x 123 in / 127 x 312.42 cm



HELPP
Mary Boone Gallery
New York, NY
9 March - 20 April 2019



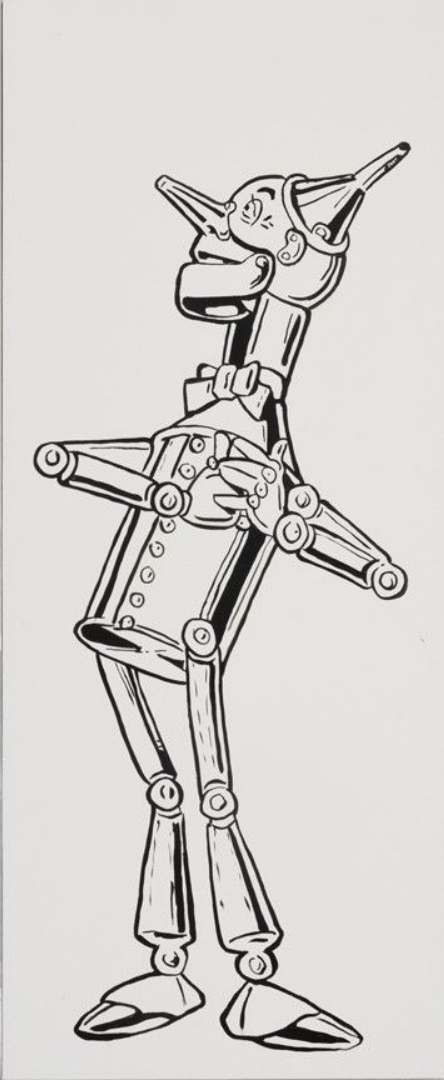






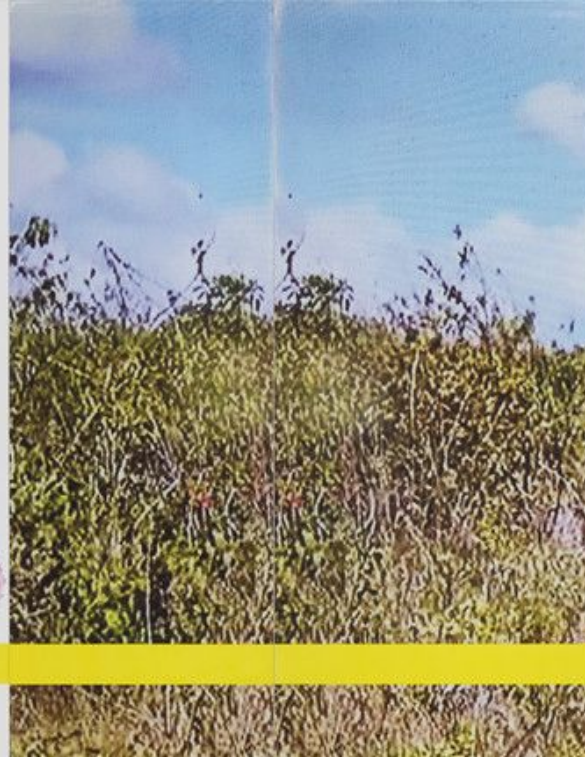


Helpp, 2018
Oil, acrylic,
ink/canvas
72 x 111 in



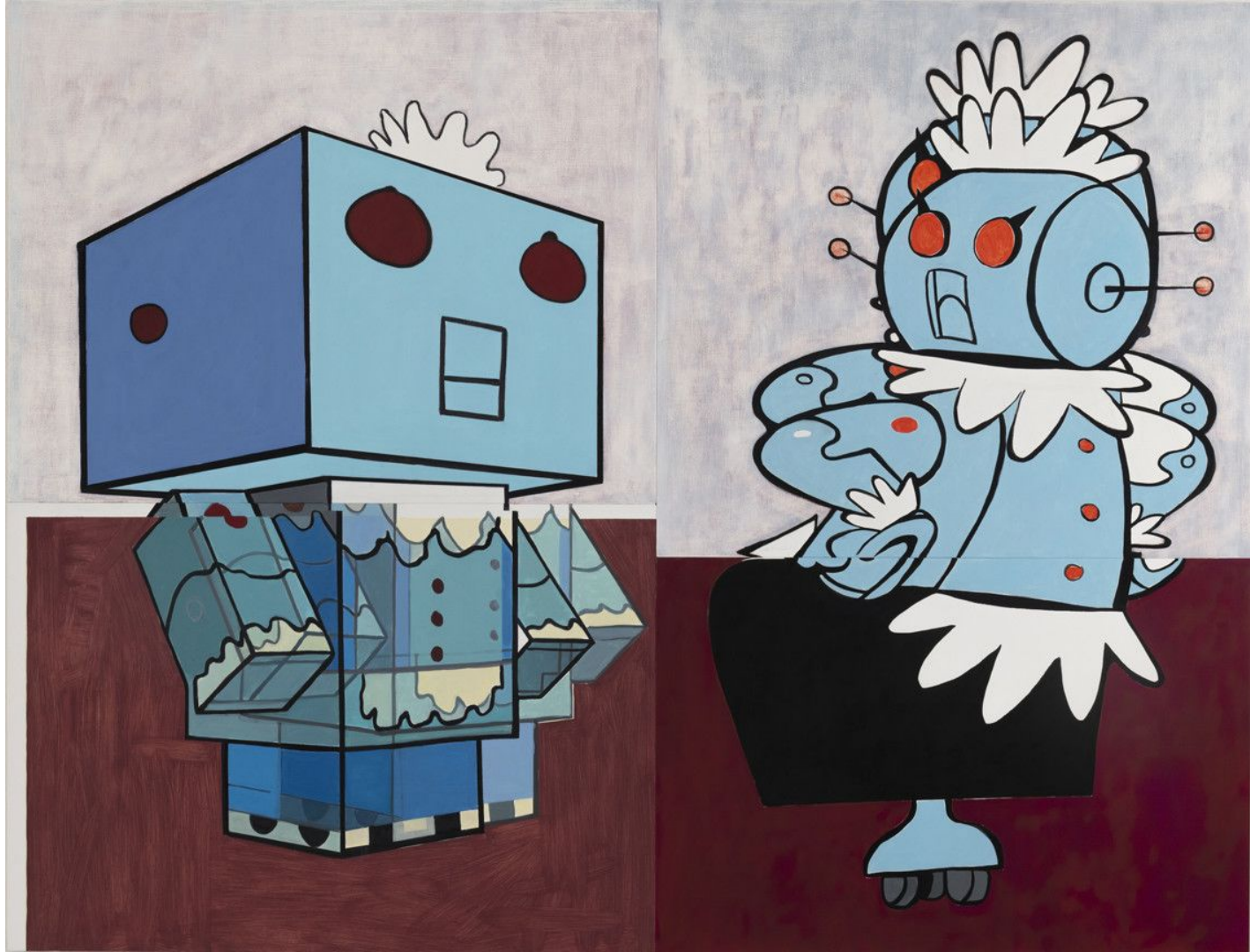
Man, 2018
Oil, acrylic, ink/canvas
60 x 73 in

Unicorn Foil Balloon



Modern Landscape, 2018
Oil, flashe, acrylic ink/canvas
50 x 127 in

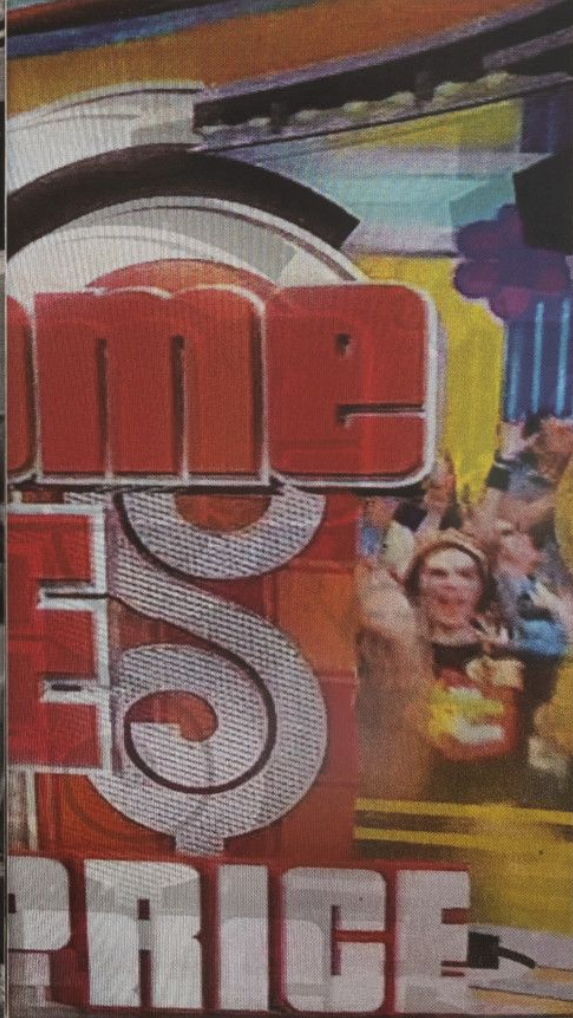




Iteration, 2018
Oil/canvas
72 x 94 in



The Existential State of Red, 2018
Oil, acrylic, ink/canvas
50 x 117 in



I Forget the Question, 2019, Oil, acrylic, ink/canvas, 50 x 86 in



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Depth of Field, 2018
Oil, acrylic ink/canvas
45 x 45 in

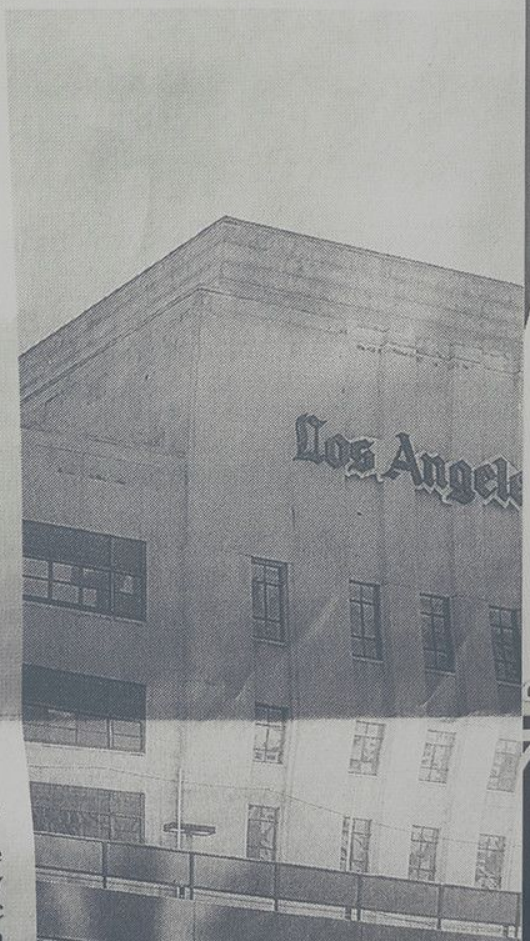
their family and seeking shelter.



Los Angeles Amid ling aper

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700

Flat, Folded and Doubled,
2018
Oil, acrylic, ink/canvas
60 x 85 in

JULIA WACHTEL

31 OKTOBER – 14. DESEMBER
NO.5

I NO.5 re-presenterer Bergen Kunsthall kunstverk og utstillinger som tidligere har vært vist andre steder. Programserien er et svar på den økende akuttbehovet av både produksjon og resepsjon av kunst, og en anledning til å skape nye rom, kunne utvide til og fokusere på utvalgte verk, utstillinger eller utdrag fra utstillinger. Bergen Kunsthall vil bestille en ny tekst skrevet spesielt for hver av utstillingene.

In NO.5 Bergen Kunsthall reworks selected artworks and exhibitions, previously presented elsewhere in the world. Initiated in response to the increasing acceleration of both the production and reception of art, NO.5 provides an opportunity to show them, focus on, and look again at particular works, exhibitions or fragments of exhibitions. Bergen Kunsthall will commission a new critical text to accompany each of these re-presentations.



NO.5













Displacement
Elizabeth Dee Gallery
New York, NY
11 November 2017 -
20 January 2018



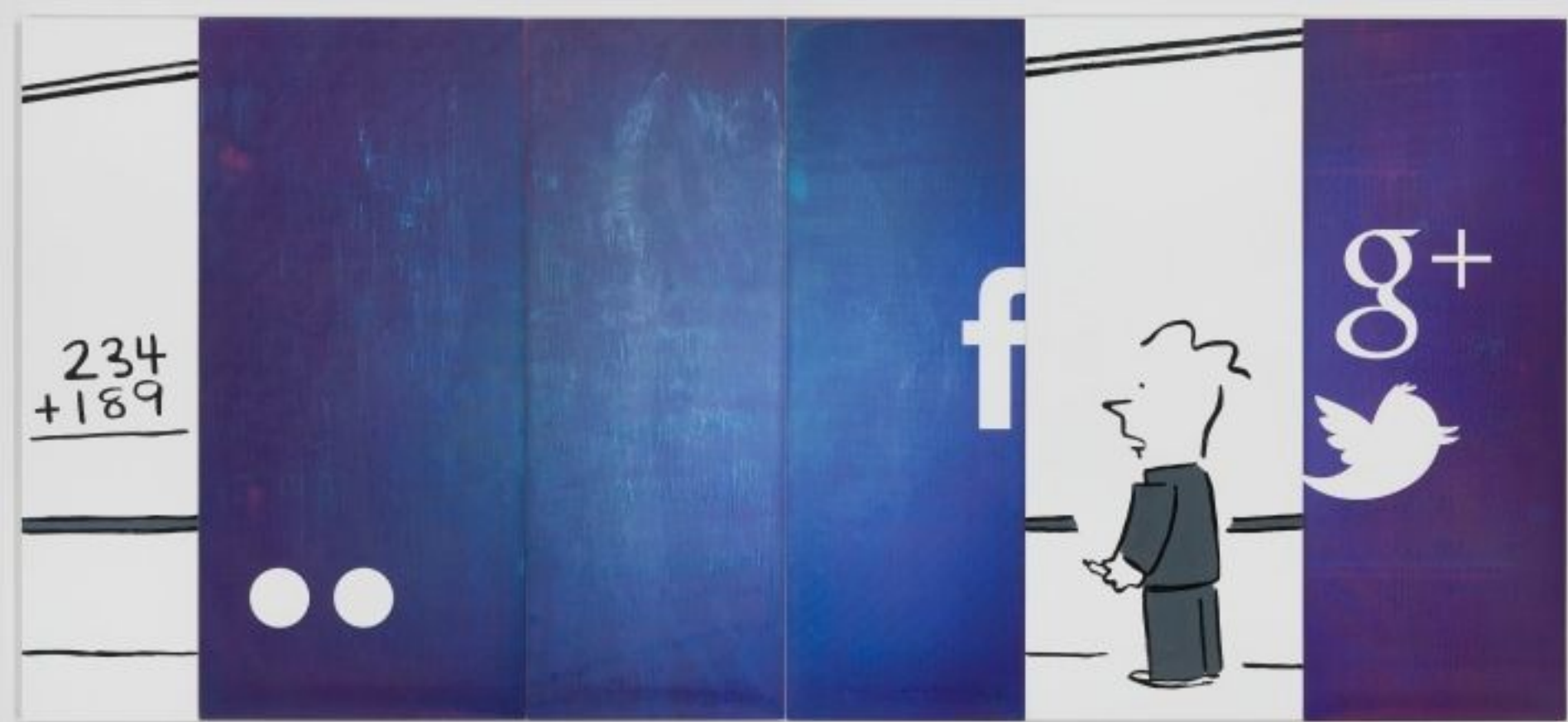


Communication, 2017
Oil and acrylic ink on canvas
50 x 152 in / 127 x 386.10 cm





Target, 2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas
60 x 76 inches
152.40 x 193 cm



The Space Complexity of an Algorithm, 2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas
50 x 122 inches
127 x 309.90 cm

Ascending and Descending, 2017
oil and acrylic on canvas
50 x 127.75 in / 127 x 324.50 cm



Sunday Afternoon, 2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas
60 x 160 in / 152.40 x 506.40 cm





Picnic, 2017
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 118 in / 152.40 x 299.70 cm



Mapping, 2017
Oil and acrylic ink on canvas
50 x 168 in / 127 x 426.70 cm

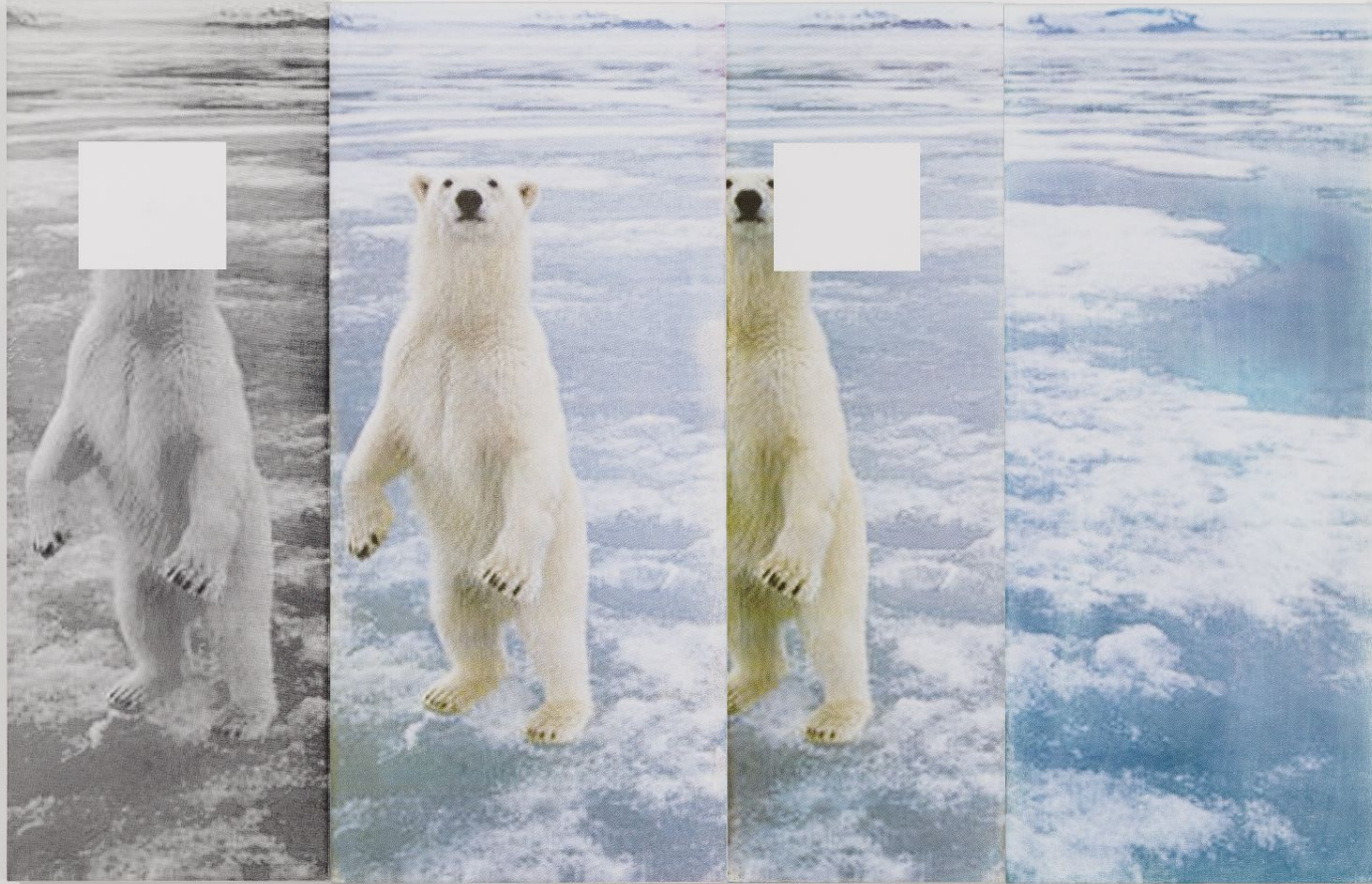


Julia Wachtel at Vilma Gold,
London, UK,
12 January - 27 February 2017



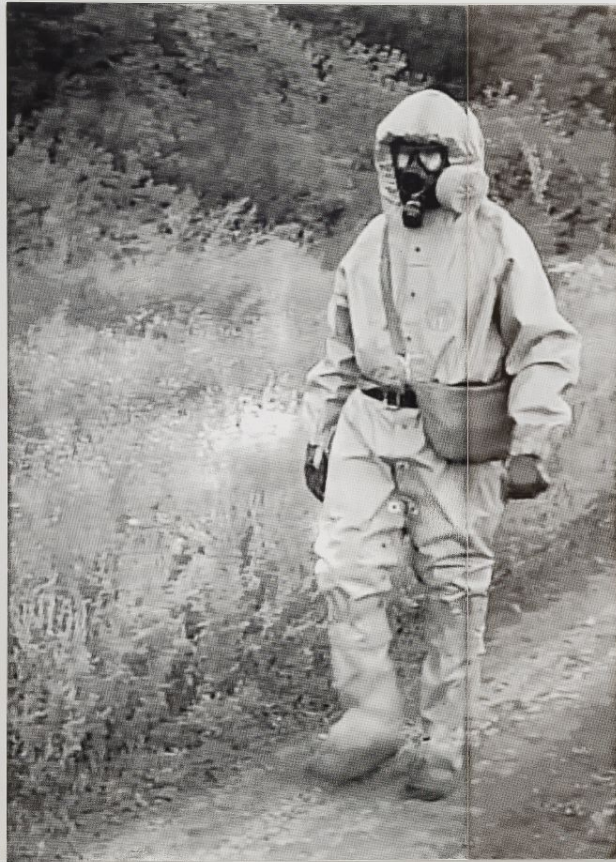


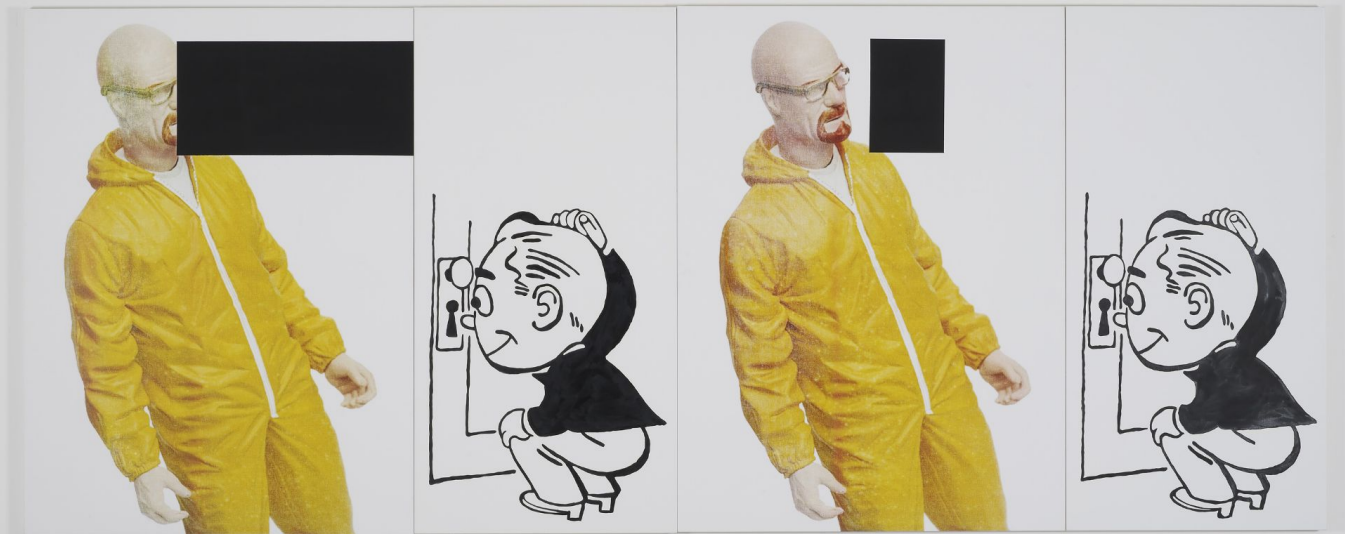




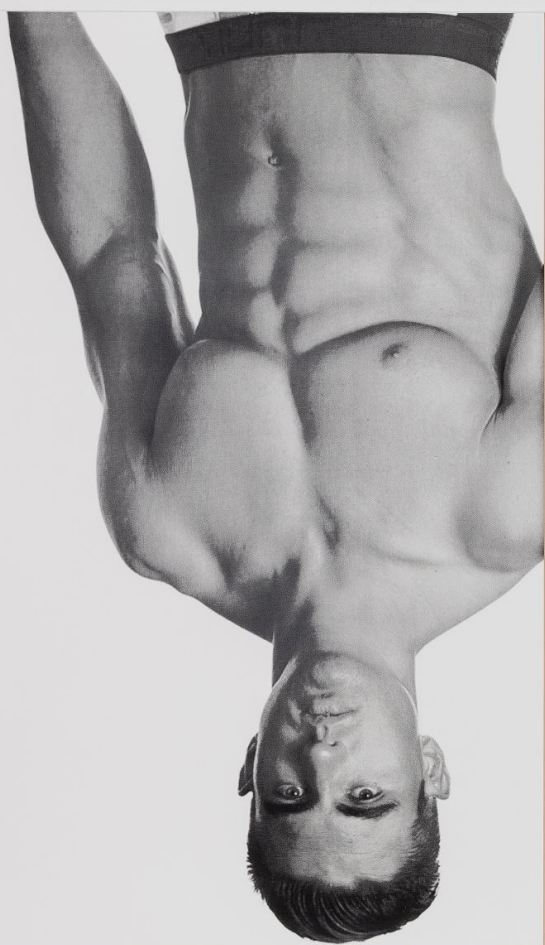
Hero, 2015
oil, flashe, lacquer ink on canvas,
60 x 126 in / 152.5 x 320 cm

Hope, 2015,
oil, flashe, lacquer ink on canvas
60 x 130 in / 152.5 x 330 cm





Untitled (bad), 2015
oil, acrylic ink and flashe on canvas
60 x 150 inches
152.4 x 381 cm



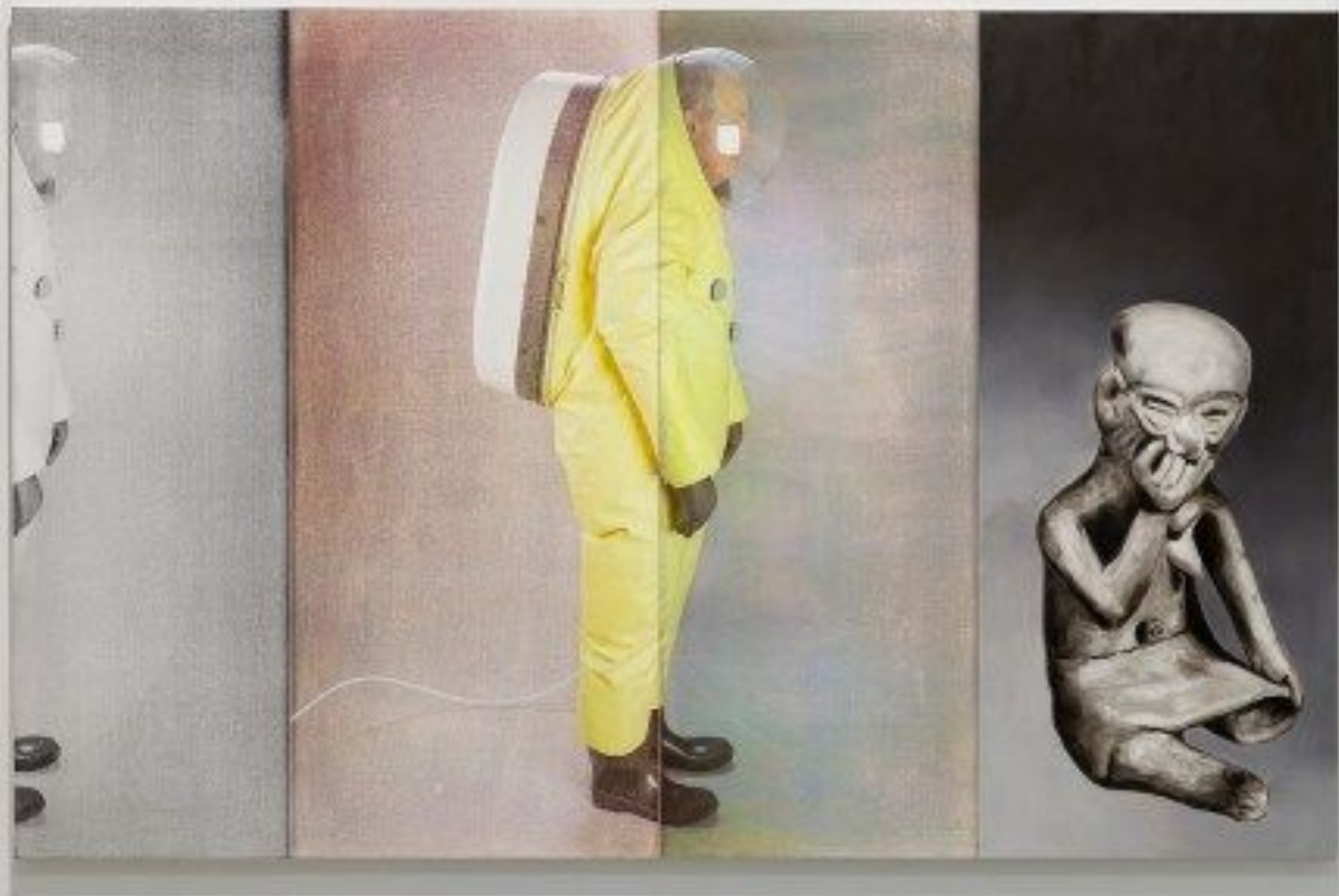
Sm, Med, Lg,
2015
oil, acrylic ink
and flashe on
canvas
60 x 106 in /
152.4 x 269.2
cm



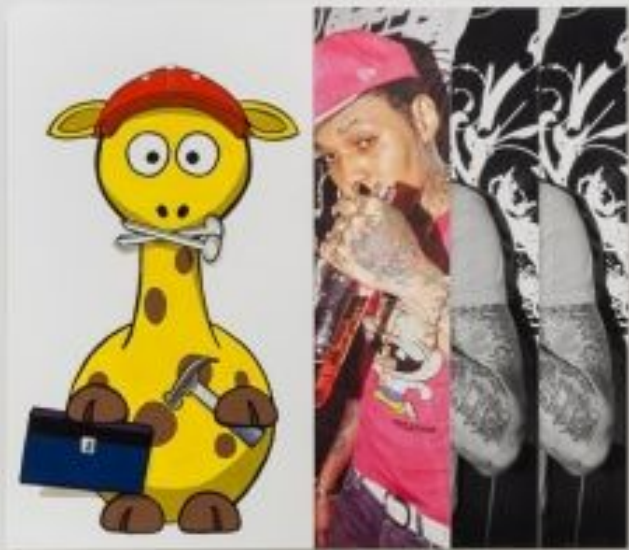
mart, 2015
oil, acrylic ink
on canvas
60 x 117 in /
152.4 x 297.2
cm



Empowerment
Elizabeth Dee Gallery
New York, NY,
16 May - 27 June 2015









Julia Wachtel
Cleveland
Institute of Art
11 October
2014 - 17 January
2015





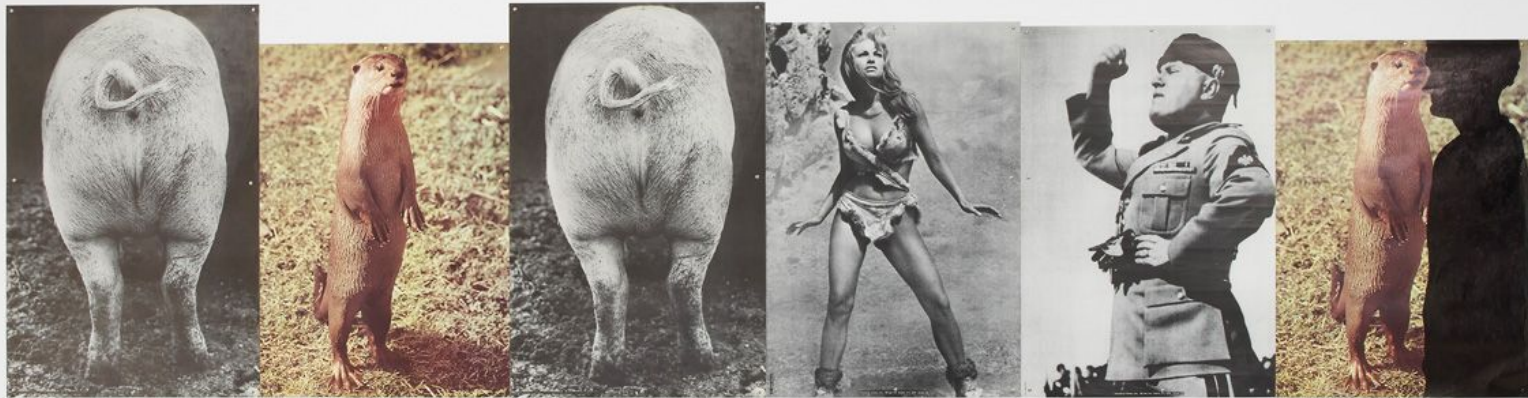


Post Culture
Vilma Gold, London, UK,
16 March - 27 April 2013



Them, 1981
poster, marker
81 x 28 inches
206 x 72 cm





Narrative Collapse I,
1981/2013
posters, marker
42 x 162 inches
106 x 411 cm



*Narrative Collapse
II, 1981/2013*
posters, marker
40 x 163 inches
102 x 415 cm



The Washington Post



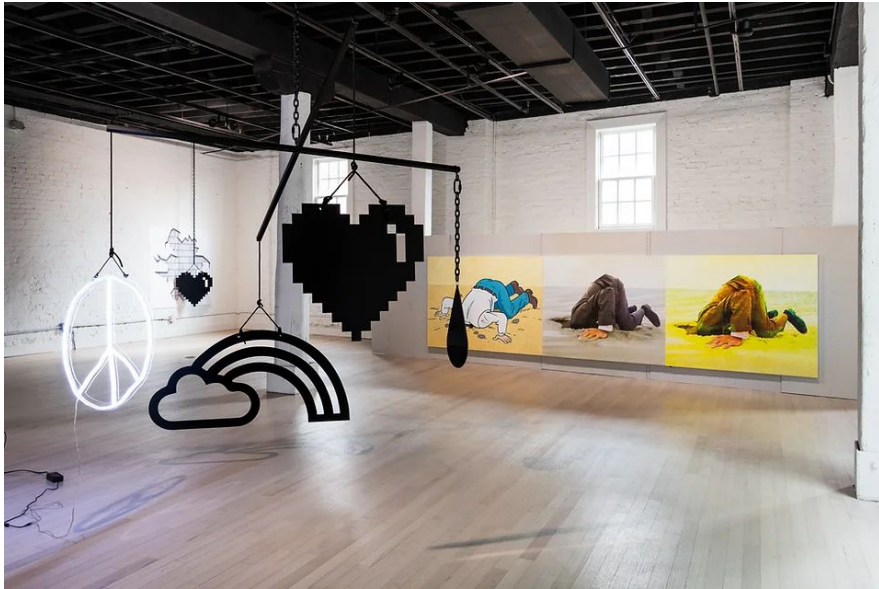
Two separate shows that overlap in places, Julia Wachtel and Wendy White's "Airlok or Gazing Into the Void" share a bit of technique and a lot of temperament. The New York artists have filled Von Ammon Co. with images that are appropriated (Wachtel prefers to say "reclaimed") from the Internet and deployed to convey anxiety and upset.

White begins with simple visual icons that can represent emotions or simply the weather, among them hearts, rainbows, clouds and rain (or tear) drops. She fabricates them as huge 3-D (but still essentially flat) shapes, made of steel or aluminum or outlined in space by white LEDs shaped like neon tubes. Three sets of these mostly black emblems are grouped in mobiles that hang off-kilter and close to the floor, so their presence is intrusive. White also suspends a lone heart, whose chunky edges reveal its pixel-built origins, in front of White's wall painting of a damaged wall. This collaboration is the show's title piece.

Aside from the simulated wall, Wachtel's contributions are five paintings of the same basic image: a man who's inserted his head into a hole. She has executed these in the modes of the originals — from cartoon to photograph. All of the men are White, and their reasons for hiding their faces are "denial, shame, fear or self-justification," according to the gallery's statement. The feelings that White's mobiles evoke are less specific, but the way they hang suggests they're distress signals of a sort. Both artists take banal, electronic clip art and render it curiously unsettling. - Mark Jenkins, 05 March 2021



GARAGE



For artists Julia Wachtel and Wendy White, inspiration doesn't need to come from much further than a Google Image Search. In a new show at Washington D.C.'s Von Ammon Co., titled *Airlok or Gazing Into The Void*, both artists culled generic depictions of familiar emotional states for those who are living, ahem, in these trying times. For Wachtel, that image was of a man with his head in a hole, representing at once feelings of shame, of isolation, of frustration, which she painted as a single-motif in several different styles. For White, that image was a more hopeful one: pixel art of an extra life from a video game in the shape of a heart, which she sculpted in steel and placed on a hanging mobile along with other ubiquitous, flat images that have existed for as long as the internet has.

Though these interpretations of the past several months' events are different, they certainly exist in tandem. As they're presented at Von Ammon Co., none of the art is on the walls, and instead, the two artists decided to create a bespoke structure to present the pieces on, to highlight their connectivity, where they will remain on view through March 14. Curious to learn more, GARAGE gave White and Wachtel a call.

From what I read, it seems like the work addresses two different kinds of troubled American archetypes: the American consumer (Wendy's work), and the white American man (Julia's work). It's funny to think of those two kinds of people being addressed in the same show.

ANNIE ARMSTRONG | 12 FEBRUARY 2021

Wendy White: I think our work overlaps with an interest in advertising and symbology and the mutability of images. For me, I wouldn't say it's really about the consumer, but as we are consumers of images and motifs, and as symbols move through us and around us, it's been a big part of my work for a while. I love the idea of the brand of the sheet rock on the outside, because that's a big part of my work: making sense of and navigating the world of symbols. So, a lot of my work is like clip art. If you Google "cloud" and "rainbow," that's what you get. And I've manipulated them over the years to make them exactly the way I want, but they come from clip art, so they're really ubiquitous. I think we both have a really similar way of finding images. I don't like to make images, I like to find them, and then use them. I wouldn't call what I do appropriation, but I lift and recast things that already exist.

Julia Wachtel: I have come up with a word that I substitute for appropriation: "reclamation." The advertising world of images claims us as consumers. It's very hard to escape the reality of the images in the world, you really have to climb into a hole to avoid that. So, in a way, the images own us to a certain degree. And I see the political aspect of taking images from the culture as saying: "I am essential to your existence, this image needs a consumer. Therefore, you've given me a certain power in the way in which you function, and I'm gonna take that power back and become the producer of that image." But, [Wendy], I didn't realize your iconography was from clip art. Because most of my cartoons now are from clip art. I mean, I kind of understood the space they were from in a more general way, but I didn't know that was literally where you found them.

WW: Well, the pixel heart is health, or lives, in video games. So, I chose them based on how they pop up in other places. Now, we have a cloud in our weather app. It's an Instagram filter. It's everywhere, and it represents this vague idea of weather or an atmospheric shift. So I just adopted them as stand ins for emotional states. I think they take on different personalities. Sometimes they're dripping oil rainbows, but they're always dystopian because they're usually black and they're always close to the floor. I originally got them from googling and finding vector-based rainbows, and there are some that I've used more than others. But just stuff I've grabbed from the internet.

JW: We're both finders. For me, my search when I'm working on a painting may come from an emotional idea. Like, if you plug in "dissatisfaction" to an image search, it's really interesting. Sometimes it's very obvious what you're gonna find, but other times it's not at all. And it becomes a path through the cultural mood, which represents itself in the images that come up with these words.

Where else did you lift some of the images from your “Head in Hole” paintings?

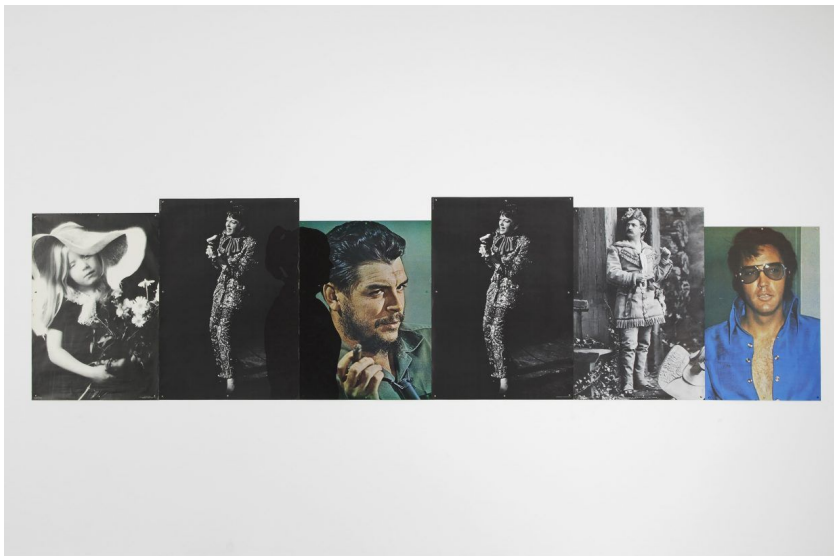
JW: Basically, all the images for the show that I use are from that search, “head in hole.” And, you find the cartoons and you find the photographic ones. And most of the photographic ones are from when you do the search. There are a lot of stock photos. And stock photos are a commercial thing. And you wonder: Why did they make this? Who is buying this, and what is the context it’s going into? But it all came from that very limited search.

One pothole image specifically reminds me a lot of Bruce Nauman. What has helped you feel inspired? Who have you looked to, if anybody?

JW: I don’t think there is anyone who has helped me. Whether that’s another artist, a political person, or a friend. Not to sound solipsistic or anything. But for me, sometimes, unlike Wendy, who said at the beginning she felt like it was irresponsible or morally wrong to make art at the beginning of COVID and Black Lives Matter, another overwhelming emotional situation, I almost feel like it is my responsibility to somehow reflect back something that is useful. And I’m not saying I’ve achieved that, but the impulse to do that has weighed down on me. This is my job. That thought motivates me.

Julia Wachtel’s and Wendy White’s *Airlok or Gazing Into the Void* at von ammon co., Washington, DC. runs through March 14 2021

ArtReview



Narrative Collapse II, 1981/2013, posters, marker, 102 x 415 cm. Courtesy Vilma Gold, London

JULIA WACHTEL: POST CULTURE

GABRIEL COXHEAD | 24 SEPTEMBER 2020

Julia Wachtel emerged at the same time as the Pictures Generation in 1980s New York, and her work shares a lot of the same concerns and strategies with regard to media appropriation and ironic juxtaposition – though with a slightly more oblique, cryptic twist. Astonishingly, though, this is her first solo show in the UK – and so takes the form of a miniature survey of works produced during different stages in her career.

Probably her best-known pieces internationally, however, are the large canvases onto which the artist paints oversize cartoon figures copied from chintzy greetings cards, alternating these with pictures sourced from news media. Superficially, then, there's a kind of contrast between the bright, buffoonish, absurdly caricatured emotions and the grayscale, ostensibly factual depictions – the point being that actually both sets of images are emblems of the same simplified and exaggerated mediascape. Yet if her technique sounds slightly formulaic, the results are often decidedly unnerving, richly ambiguous. *What, What, What* (1988) is a case in point, featuring one of those tacky, phallic homunculi you get on comedy erotic cards, together with an utterly bizarre newsprint image of a fur-coated woman wearing some kind of pale, rubbery mask. The combination clearly invites a reading to do with desire and concealment – yet the overall message is as much about the fundamental unknowability and obscurity of meaning. With their open, exclaiming mouths, the figures appear to be trying to communicate something – but all the specifics have been leached away, as if the sound has been suddenly turned down.

The cinematic or televisual analogy is appropriate. Wachtel's longest-running series consists of sequences of commercial posters, which, read left-to-right, evoke celluloid strips or random channel-hopping. *Narrative Collapse II* (1981/2013), for instance, goes: schmaltzy anonymous flower-girl; Judy Garland in a gold lamé suit; Che Guevara; the same Garland image again; Davy Crockett; middle-aged Elvis. Superimposed on each sequence, additionally, is a portrait silhouette drawn in black marker pen, like a permanent shadow – the idea presumably being that our sense of self is as much a projection, an artistic construct, as these larger-than-life pop-icons.

If these sorts of identity-based issues can sometimes seem a little jejune, Wachtel's *American Color* series from the 1990s onwards, combining monochrome canvases with silkscreened snippets of found imagery, is a more pertinent response to the massive proliferation of media technologies. In *I'm Ok, You're Ok* (1992), a freeze-frame from a daytime TV talk show drifts beyond the borders of an expanse of yellow, as if vertical hold has broken down; while by *ACv2.6* (2012), Wachtel's source material has shifted to the Internet, featuring some incomprehensible extreme sport sandwiched between uneven slabs of grey. In both works, the sense is of a loss of bearings – as if contemporary culture itself is simply scrolling away incoherently; as if all visual material has become completely atomised, hopelessly reduced to an indecipherable level of abstraction.

In which case, might not the logical endpoint, the ultimate abstraction, be total imagelessness? That's the sense, certainly, behind the show's most profoundly unsettling work: a brief sound piece from 1984, in which a sample of brokenhearted histrionics from a daytime soap is followed by a creepy, muffled, oddly beguiling voice uttering the looped phrase, "Come closer... you disappear me". A kind of sinister invocation of oblivion, then: a mantra for the mass media age.

This article was first published in the Summer 2013 issue.

BOMB



Julia Wachtel, *Habitat v.1 (dolphin)*, 2020, oil, acrylic, and Flashe on canvas, 60 × 92 inches. Courtesy of Library Street Collective.

Disposable Images: Julia Wachtel Interviewed by John Garcia

JOHN GARCIA | 23 APRIL 2021



“Even in a crisis, there are still commercials. Animated ads for anti-depressants, political campaign spots, and mini infomercials with celebrity-endorsed skincare products constantly circulate between cycles of “breaking news.” While much has been said on the “poor image,” Julia Wachtel has spent the last several decades working with the “disposable image.” These images exist in the interim: advertisers pay to make them memorable while most viewers do their best to forget them. Wachtel, however, catalogs and paints these images in sequence on multiple panels. In grouping these seemingly dissimilar images together, Wachtel provides viewers with another chance to consider the provenance and sociopolitical weight behind their visual ephemerality.”

—John Garcia

John Garcia: Your first exhibition ever was a group show in 1979 at PS1 in New York City. What did you present at the time?

Julia Wachtel: The exhibition at PS1 was an installation of film, video, and sound. Looking back at it now, I realize how foundational it was to the work that followed. I was constructing a contrast between an image of authentic interpersonal interaction, in this case a Super 8, black-and-white film of couples combing each other’s hair. I filmed pairs of people of varying ages and gender in all permutations. The setting was somewhat romantic, on a bluff overlooking Peconic Bay in Long Island. It was contrasted with a video of a close-up of a hand constructing an image of a face using toy plastic Colorforms body parts. There was an independent soundtrack that was sampled from daytime soap operas, which I cut up and edited using a kind of slice-and-dice aesthetic not unlike the way I use images now in my paintings.

JG: The earliest work of yours that I've seen is from 1981: *Relations of Absence*, which also references the trope of a romantic couple. Bob Nickas wrote about this piece, using it as a sort of ad for the infotainment movement. *Relations of Absence* consists of a row of posters pasted side by side directly to a wall. The posters, which feature images of celebrities, are all store bought. Painted on top of the posters is the black silhouette of a couple, as if it were the shadow of two viewers looking at the piece. By 1988, with a work like *A Dream of Symmetry*, you were creating a single artwork out of multiple canvases of disparate, but sometimes repeating, images all pushed together into one larger panoramic work. What rhetorical function are you after when sequencing images together?

JW: With the poster work I literally inserted the viewer into it by casting a shadow of a person and then using magic marker filling in the shape on top of the poster. So the magic marker figure represented both the presence of the viewer and the absence of the image, or at least the part of it that was covered by the shadow.

Having been working with film, the sequencing of images felt very natural to me. It's a way to reference narrative in a non-narrative way. It also created a structure to build a painting out of—a linear collage. There is a rhythm that can be created in the sequencing of images. I'm very influenced by music and put that into my painting in a structural way. But it's important to note that at the end of the day it is a whole static image that is meant to be looked at in its totality. It is one image. There is a bit of a demand put upon the viewer to sustain the contrasting elements and to allow them to exist simultaneously in one's experience. We do that all the time as we absorb imagery in the world, but I think we are largely unconscious of it.

JG: Another notable evolution in your work is the move from using appropriated posters to painting appropriated images on canvas. You elevated disposable images to a more commercially viable platform, but you didn't change the content. The move to canvas and paint is critically important. What catalyzed this evolution in medium presentation?

JW: There were two main reasons why I decided to make paintings. The first was simply to elevate the image to be taken seriously. As you point out, many of the images I use are of the disposable variety, as most images are today whether they are commercially produced or self-produced on social media platforms. When I first started painting, the internet didn't exist of course, so I was sourcing imagery primarily from greeting cards and magazines. They needed to be lifted off the throwaway paper and exist in the permanent historical space of painting. Scale was also important as I wanted the figures to feel life size, making them relatable as a surrogate for the viewer. The second reason was my rather romantic idea of my own investment in the painting. I wanted my labor to be there. I wanted to make a commitment to the image. As far as the content not changing, it's because the content is the ready-made. I contrast, repeat, crop, change orientation, adjust color, etc., but the content remains.

JG: One of my favorite works of yours is *Between Red and Green* (2017), from the show we did together at Foxy Production. That piece, along with *Stripe* (2015), both prominently feature cartoon characters. How does the role of the cartoon function in each of these works?

JW: I see the cartoons as actors that I cast in the painting. Sometimes they function in a directly narrative way as commentators on the scene they are placed in, but more often than not there isn't a direct narrative connection. Instead they lend a gravitas to the situation they find themselves in, in the paintings. It's counterintuitive to think that these ridiculous figures could do that, but, strangely, I think they do. In the painting *Stripe* I was interested in memes. The two cartoons were both images of the singer Psy from different how-to-draw websites. At the time, the "Gangnam Style" video which these memes were based on was the most widely viewed video worldwide. The cartoons were contrasted with a real image of Psy and with Kim Jong-un, the dictator of a country that has total control over the dissemination of images and information. The relationship between the two was quite obvious, but hopefully through the multiple variations of Psy and the comical nature of his figure I undercut a didactic reading. *Between Red and Green* is a variation of a painting I did in the '80s. The original series was a play on the binary terms of cartoon/primitive. In this case, cartoon/cartoon.

JG: The exhibition titles of your last three New York City solo shows seem to all be part of the same anti-humanist narrative. *Empowerment*, then *Displacement* (both at Elizabeth Dee), and finally *HELPP*—the last show at Mary Boone before it closed. What conversation is happening between this trio of shows?

JW: That's an interesting question. I really haven't thought about them in that narrative way. With the title of *Empowerment* I was approaching the idea in a variety of ways. The first was institutional empowerment, such as political or corporate. The second was the promise of the internet and social media to deliver self-empowerment through self-representation. And the third was a reference to myself, as it was my exhibition and my title. I hope the latter was with a great dose of irony. The paintings in *Displacement* were all created in the aftermath of the election of Trump. Kind of like how I felt after 9/11, it felt impossible to make an exhibition that didn't in some way address the trauma. It represented a shift from a known place to an unknown place. The title also describes a basic aspect of my process, which is to displace images from their found place into the space of my painting. The Mary Boone show was a year later and seemed to express the zeitgeist of the moment. I had the working title of "help" for one of the paintings in the show. As I was working on the painting in the planning stages on my computer, I added an extra letter "p" to the file name in order to differentiate it quickly from another file. As I looked at it on my screen over time, I became attached to it, and I thought it expressed the comical and the helpless at the same time. It also created a repetition within the structure of the letters not unlike the repetition of images within painting.



Art in America



Julia Wachtel: SuperMushroom, 2020, oil, Flashe, and acrylic on canvas, 60 by 119 inches; at Perrotin.

JULIA WACHTEL ON PANDEMIC AND SCREEN CULTURE

JULIA WACHTEL | 14 AUGUST 2020

Painter Julia Wachtel has spent the last four decades appropriating advertising and popular culture imagery. Wachtel's compositions tend to highlight wry juxtapositions of visual information: for example, a cartoon mushroom bifurcating a warehouse fully stocked with consumer goods in SuperMushroom (2020). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist began making short videos (all 2020). Culled mainly from television shows and commercials, they isolate and repeat specific visual and aural snippets. These videos have been featured on Perrotin Gallery's Instagram and in the experimental online exhibition "Passing Time," organized by curator Neville Wakefield with artists Cecilia Bengolea and Alex Perweiler. Three of her paintings—Encore (1988), SuperMushroom, and The Astronaut (2020)—were also recently included in the group show "The Secret History of Everything" at Perrotin in New York. Below, Wachtel discusses some of the ideas behind her work and the process of experimenting with video while in quarantine.

I have had an Instagram practice—if I can call it that—for a few years now in which I post pictures I've seen from the television and internet that I consider research photos. The imagery can be as diverse as a patch of grass, a close-up of a Maybelline commercial, or the recent SpaceX launch. I consult these images and video fragments as source material when developing my paintings.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, I participated in the video project "Passing Time." I submitted two video fragments that were then displayed on the website with other artists' work. I had never made a video before—in fact, I didn't even know how to edit the two sequences together at the time.

I quickly became obsessed while playing around with iMovie on my computer, making almost one fifteen-second to one-minute-long video per day. My son encouraged me to use the more sophisticated editing software Adobe Premiere. But, in constructing these videos, I'm still intentionally making them in a crude way. For instance, I was working on a video and wanted to have a few seconds of a solid orange frame, but I didn't know how to do it. I could have Googled it, but instead I started thinking of other ways to produce the color. I have a background of working in graphic design, so I used InDesign to make an orange square and videotaped my computer screen. I moved my camera in, out, and to the side to create a more dynamic shot by allowing the edge of the square to appear along the edge of the frame, which signaled the inclusion of the designed shape. Similarly, my video *Stay Playful* picks up on the dynamics of personified letters bumping into one another in an Oreo commercial. I isolate little moments like this to illustrate how all of these devices construct a particular language for the purpose of selling a product. Both my paintings and videos look at the language of representation in media and use devices such as repetition and speed to abstract the intended narrative and emotional tone. It has been a learning process, but I've found it exciting to create a variety of effects in this absurdist way of navigating technology. Even though video is a conceptual shift from my paintings, it has now become part of my process, akin to sketches.

My work has always focused on media and advertisement, but being under lockdown further intensified our interface with screen culture. Technology became the only means through which we could communicate. It seemed even more potent to take things from television as it became an increasingly shared experience and a point of connection between myself and the outside world.

The videos draw on the immediacy of events happening around us—such as COVID-19, Black Lives Matter protests, and political rallies—along with more casual cultural content like HGTV's "Love It or List It" and a Ford commercial. *Master Closet Issue* touches on the frivolous concerns and entitlement embedded in the white privilege displayed in a lot of television shows and advertisements. I've become more conscious of the normalization and hyper-aestheticizing of this type of content, particularly in the wake of the most recent Black Lives Matter protests.

In *Relentless Innovation*, Trump supporters are milling around, completely defying social distancing and not wearing masks, while the audio recording offers corporate double-speak on the benefits of "relentless innovation and the convergence of media, entertainment, and television." The work points to the ways in which people are being manipulated. In their desire to uphold personal freedom, a huge portion of this population is being used as pawns by politicians and corporations alike. They want to defend their autonomy, but in actually they're losing it.

I struggled to make work at the beginning of the pandemic. In the face of such an existential threat, I had to reconsider what can have meaning now and be in any way productive. But as an artist I feel it is my job to create meaning. I started thinking about personal protection equipment and cycled through a string of associations in my mind, including the planned SpaceX launch headed by Elon Musk. The idea behind *The Astronaut*, which shows a fully suited and equipped astronaut surrounded by a non-descript blue atmosphere, was to create a poignant image of entrapment—and, perhaps in some ways, it is a self-portrait about being caught between the desire for protection and the desire for escape.

The painting *SuperMushroom* was conceived over a year and a half ago. It's not a response to COVID and the rush to get toilet paper and other essentials, but it now resonates in a deeper way. I have long thought about globalization and the circulation of goods. That warehouse setting of products speaks to consumerism and the massive transportation of products around the world—a huge contributor to global warming—as opposed to a localized economy. The cartoon mushroom is a cute yet heightened reference to toxicity and how unnatural our process of consumption has become.

—As told to Francesca Aton



Remember when, seemingly overnight sometime during those first few weeks of quarantine, companies shoehorned uplifting messages of solidarity and hope into their TV ads, without ever neglecting to peddle their products?

“We’re here for a reason, and it’s bigger than selling cars,” began a Ford commercial that otherwise was just a Ford commercial.

“Now’s the time for us to show off our strength,” a Michelob Ultra ad inexplicably declared.

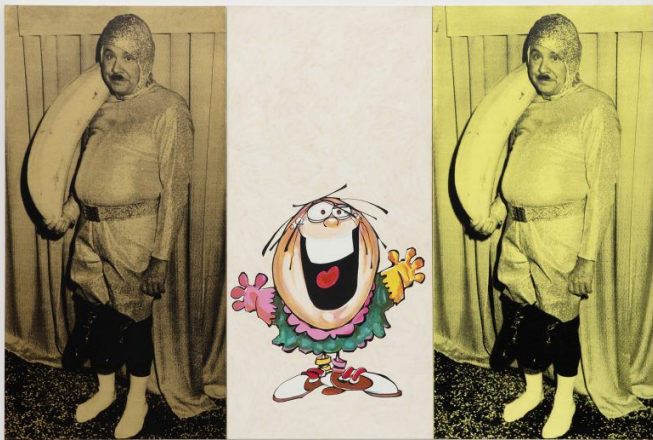
For pop appropriationist [Julia Wachtel](#), who for four decades has been mashing up mass-media images on painted canvases, the discordant tone wasn’t new.

“That’s the COVID advertisement—which is what advertising has always been,” she tells Artnet News.

After filming snippets of commercials, reality shows, and other bits of TV, the artist created a series of short videos exaggerating this tonal tension to trippy, often humorous effect.

In one, footage of a NASCAR pit stop is intercut with shots of an electric toothbrush cleaning a corn cob. In another, a low-budget bible commercial is set to polka music.

The films—her first stab at the medium—will premier weekly on Thursdays on Perrotin gallery’s Instagram. (Wachtel’s work is also included in “[The Secret History of Everything](#),” a group show on view at the gallery’s New York location.)



Julia Wachtel, Encore, (1988). Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist.

Stuck at Home Without Canvases, Artist Julia Wachtel Decided to Experiment With Video. The Strange Results Are Distinctly Characteristic

They're short and lo-fi and have a distinct, one-step-forward, two-steps-back rhythm. They're silly, but they're still underscored by a languid, late-capitalist sadness—like when you find yourself watching infomercials in the middle of the day.

In short, if Wachtel's paintings were to come to life, they'd look a lot like this.

And that makes sense, considering their origin. Not long after quarantining at her home and studio in Connecticut, Wachtel ran out of the custom-made canvases she uses for her painted work. So she decided to try her hand at video.

The process was humble. In a habit she likens to fishing, Wachtel would turn on the TV and simply started surfing, using her phone to record little clips along the way.

After she had reeled in enough material, she would load it into iMovie and start experimenting. Eventually she graduated to Adobe Premiere, but was sure to maintain the sketch-like quality—a balance she learned to strike with her painting.

But the formal logic of painting is not the one through which she thinks and talks about the works.

"I listen to a lot of hip hop and rap and have since 1979 when the Sugarhill Gang came out with the first rap song," she says, citing Kendrick Lamar as a particular hero.

"If you think about scratching or sampling and the building of overlapping layers of beats and melodies, there is a visual equivalent. For me, that's very inspirational."

There's another layer between the canvases and the videos too, one that the artist is still reconciling.

Through the act of painting, Wachtel says, she's undermining the ocean of images from which her material comes.

"I'm extracting out of that, and locating images in history. They become objects that are made at particular moments. They're physical things that will stay in their current form. It's about making static something that reflects a condition that is fundamentally time-based."

But making videos is to enter back into the information flow. It's as if, after a fishing expedition, she's throwing her catch back in the water.

"I'm swimming with the devil now."

SPIKE



Milk, 2014, oil, acrylic ink on canvas, Courtesy of Elisabeth Wingate



In an age of content providers sought after by information or entertainment services, the recent market ascendance of vacant abstraction may be difficult to grasp. While content is valued, its lack on canvas, painted and unpainted, is overvalued. How exactly did this come to pass? Is it possible that although content within business is desired, its presence in pictures, to use an old-fashioned term for paintings, is burdensome? For the shopkeeper, content is problematic because it must be explained. For the buyer, it must be reconciled with politics, morality and taste, though it may provide guilty pleasure. For artists, the “burden” is much more fundamental. What is my subject? How shall it be rendered? Where will its meaning reside or recede?

Picture-making designates the invention and replication of images – whether painted, drawn, filmed or photographed, as opposed to stained, bleached, sun-dried and stonewashed. It is an activity that can be seen in relation to its history and its prospects, at times as faithfully promiscuous. Yet the sort of painting that has found favour in recent years may be thought of as picture un-making, inhabiting a present without reflecting its time, or only unwittingly. An indelible image: The vampire remains invisible in the mirror, even to itself. And so we endure a desultory parade of canvases spun round washing machines, trampled on the studio floor, doused with turpentine, and electroplated. Where representation appears, to say “my child could do that” is to rudely insult the child. Negation, apparently, is its own reward. Consider Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning Drawing : today there would be no de Kooning, only an erasure ...

... *You Disappear Me*. Thirty years after the last significant period of representation, the Pictures Generation, our meager inheritance adds up, rather unspectacularly, to an Un-Pictures Generation. Despite creating a deficit for art historians and the story thus far – and no farther? – it's clear that lacking ideas for what to paint, or the capacity to paint at all, has generated many happy returns. (An old joke from the 1980s rears its bratty head. Q. "What's this painting about?" A. "It's about \$40,000.") And yet in the marriage of art and its markets, increasingly with underage partners, how is a lasting fidelity possible when commitments between artists and their projects are paper-thin? Art as a certificate of inauthenticity? How substantial, one wonders, is the artist's investment? When it's indifferent, the art, like a tiresome boyfriend, is unceremoniously dumped. The relations on display, devoid of human contact, suggest that the vulnerability required of human engagement, its messiness, confusion, and anxiety, are ...

... *Relations Of Absence*. This is the title of a 1981 photo-based installation by Julia Wachtel. Commercially available posters – of an eroticized waif, John Travolta as the boy-next-door, a woman defiantly bared, and Mussolini in full dictatorial pose – were pasted to the wall, sequenced in repetition, and over-painted with the silhouette of a male-female couple. What's missing, what can only be visualized as negative space, are viewers who attempt to inhabit and make sense of these images, at once seamless and fragmentary. Appropriation in this period transformed collage, which was no longer a matter of pieces overlaid and interlocked, but individual images presented in their entirety. The image-world of the 80s, in its fatal attractions, would provide a source of libidinal repulsion and fascination. In this charged atmosphere, Wachtel was among a number of artists, including Jessica Diamond, Gretchen Bender, Alan Belcher, Sarah Charlesworth, Peter Nagy, and Steven Parrino, whose diverse works were brought together in the mid 80s under the banner of Infotainment – the pop-inflected merging of information and entertainment – and in a moment, then as now, when movements were a thing of the past. Even as it was propped up, the status of painting was addressed. Nagy's *Painting of Value* (1984), was in actuality a black-and-white photocopy based on an ad for jewelry. Parrino's misstretched and distorted canvases allowed the monochrome to be seen as disfigurative and once again radical. Wachtel's representations, shown in proximity, also courted disfiguration.

By 1982, Wachtel dispensed with printed posters and began to paint individual figures, placing them side-by-side. The silhouettes were replaced by the artist's belief that viewers, suitably provoked, would complete the picture. Wachtel understood that an audience can catch itself in laughter and wonder how it is that they're laughing.

Just the Two of Us, from that year, presents a double image of a poised young woman and an awkward little girl, both appropriated from greeting cards. Wachtel not only turned to a traditional medium, but drew her content from lowly, suspect sources: representations found on the covers of cheap romance novels or donated to Goodwill stores. (Her works from this time call to mind Jim Shaw's "Thrift Store" paintings, Mike Kelley's *Missing Time Color Exercise* (1998), based on Sex To Sixty cartoons from the late 60s/early 70s, and the pulp illustration that fuels recent work by Richard Prince.) The doubling in Wachtel's work sets up a myriad of exchanges – between illustration and painting, painting and photography, manual and mechanical reproduction, abstraction and representation, high and low. Pairing cartoons and "primitives" (figures sourced from folk art and archaeology) and marrying cartoon characters to celebrities, her paintings resemble a schizophrenic shotgun wedding – most memorably in the coupling of Cher and a toothless peg-leg pirate in *You Disappear Me* (1987). Cartoons and primitives are isolated on monochrome and painterly grounds. Celebrities occupy the grit and transparency of the screen print. Sequentially arranged in multiple colour chart panels, they look like chromatic progressions by Ellsworth Kelly that inexplicably reflect the befuddled performers before them. Wachtel's mirroring may be regarded by purists as that of the funhouse. Yet her insertion of the unexpected – party-crashers, as it were – parallels the entry of Pop artists who came from commercial work, window decoration, and sign painting, as well as abstract painters with backgrounds in graphic and product design, who, in the 60s, laid the foundation for neo-geo. Wachtel has said that her original attraction to greeting cards was due to the characters and the emotions they signified, as well as the painted stage they occupied. Ultimately, two forms of pantomime. In the wake of 80s neo-expressionism, Wachtel's representations offered a rejoinder to an overwrought emotionality, enacted on its own terms – the "hallowed" space of painting – heightened and distanced.

By the late 80s, Wachtel adopted one of painting's most traditional genres, the landscape. Animating its politicized ground, she engaged with discontent and its fallout. Chernobyl, the Berlin Wall, the spectacle of self-help, better living through chemistry, government follies, police brutality, and that great fiction of banality: reality television. After a nearly ten-year hiatus, a stepping back not uncommon among artists from that time who are now being re-discovered, whose earlier work is seen as prescient – from Ericka Beckman and Sarah Charlesworth to Troy Brauntuch and Joel Otterson – Wachtel returned to painting. Since 2011, her cast of characters, vocabulary, and concerns have been rearticulated in works addressing much of what we remain consumed by: war and protest, politics as entertainment, corporate greed and environmental negligence, celebrity culture, billions of images with no end in sight, and conspicuous consumption itself. This brings us back to where this essay started, haunted and appalled by the specter of art being hijacked – nothing personal, it's only business – and artists who obligingly purge their work of bothersome content. To the non-expressionists we dedicate Wachtel's 2015 canvas, *The Execution of Abstraction*. Clearly, artists who have returned to working and exhibiting – and selling – do so in an even more heatedly absurd environment than the so-called big, bad 80s. The engagement with picture-making remains not only a matter of unfinished business, but a cause which painting may continue to serve.