

“We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from nature, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destructions; and finally from our own relations to other men... the ‘aesthetic attitude’... [results]... in little protection against the threat of suffering, but it can compensate for a great deal.”

—Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Soil simultaneously portends the emergence and burial of culture, technology, politics, art, everything, until it starts all over again in never-ending cycles. Kai Matsumiya presents *Sour Ground*, a solo exhibition of Swiss Brazilian artist Pedro Wirz’s latest work consisting of nascent life and soil, literally.

In the face of environmental decline, the artist advances his investigations into the interwoven realms of the organic, synthetic, and technological, as each combat fundamental battles between renewal and extinction. In the exhibition, forms manifest through information, imagination, wonderment, often all residues of storytelling from the vantage point of children seeking exegesis on a crumbling landscape.

Wirz was born and raised in the tropical region Paraiba Valley, Brazil, and he often discusses his influences from the region’s massively changing ecologies, demographics, mythologies, and superstitions. Populations consisting of industrialists, farmers, royalists, slaves, would come and go, indigenous people would stay, emigrate, settle, and leave. Political governances would radically alter. Raised by an agronomist who specialized in soil, and a biologist who conducted research on the influence of polluted water on DNA alteration within the region, the artist attributes this upbringing in which, in his own words, “traverses these territories and seeks to merge the supernatural with scientific realities.”

Increasing earthquakes, tsunamis, massive forest fires, rising waters, intra-state conflict, pandemics, unsuccessful resistances, bear the footprints of man-made darkness and nature’s wrath. *Sour Ground* may be argued to be based on the intuitive observation that world-wide disasters, natural and unnatural, beg an expression of universal human solidarity; collective reflection on the proper relation of the human being to his aesthetic environment; and the renewed alternatives for what could emerge from the imaginations of new life.

The title *Sour Ground* refers to the pH levels of sourness (acidity) or sweetness (alkalinity) of soil

samples. While different ecosystems maintain certain pH ranges, unnatural developments often occur under the influence of pollution, the degree of which is often indicated by the sourness, or acidity of the soil. However, the title is not “soured ground” because it is possible to regenerate pH when compost topsoil renews the chemical balance for other forms of life as a result of acid’s decomposition potential.

The full expanse of the gallery will be painted a deep orange based on the pH spectrum, indicating a range of acidity between lemon juice (pH = 2) and bleach (pH = 1). Around a dozen forms consisting of infant dolls— universal relics of sociocultural identity—first wrapped in chicken wire and clothes, then smothered with an admixture of soil and acrylic paste, will be displayed in varying configurations around the gallery walls.

Pedro Wirz (b. 1981, São Paulo, Brazil) lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland. Concurrent with the opening of this exhibition, he will be presenting a solo booth with Kai Matsumiya as recipients of the second annual Gramercy International Prize at The Armory Show in New York. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin; Kunsthaus Langenthal, Switzerland; LongTang, Zurich; Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, BR; and Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris. He is a 2018 recipient of the ProHelvetia Cahiers d’Artistes Prize and a 2020 winner of the City of Zürich Kunst Und Bau competition. This is Wirz’s third solo exhibition at the gallery.

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