

*And the three nails*, Peter Wächtler's second exhibition at the gallery, presents five suspended sculptures in the shape of airplanes of different makes and periods, framed by four large watercolors.

The sculptures conflate, into unlikely ensembles, tropes culled from the repertoires of popular culture, wholesale interior decoration, and faux-vernacular trumpery: the good-natured old magician of some best-selling fantasy novel or Disney adaptation, whose magic is already fading, but who still keeps up embodying the coziness and wisdom of long nights spent over dusty tomes in warm, candle-lit solitude; the vintage airplane model that might have adorned the ceiling above the DJ's turntables in your favorite pizza parlor back home. If the single seater and the double-deckers call to mind the heroic days of first-time Atlantic-crossings or fighter aces, the two jumbo jets dominating the space cannot but evoke the vulgar efficiency of today's fully rationalized mass transport. Techno-social evolution, they seem to suggest, has relegated yesterday's emblems of elegance and vigor—in fact, the very values of elegance and vigor themselves—to the dustbin of history.

The watercolors, composed like establishing shots, set the stage accordingly. They subtly reference the gallery's architecture to embed it within atmospheric, narrative scenarios and their nuanced mood of obsolescence and longing. Their compositional structure pushes the viewer out of the picture, withdrawing the scene behind an unsurmountable threshold, not unlike the *Rückenfigur* popularized by German Romanticism. The romantic wanderer here gives way to an I-beam, however, overlooking not a sea of fog, but decommissioned or repurposed industrial architecture. (To drive home the architectural reference in a visual pun, the I-beam is doubled in *No longer alone*, which hangs right next to the gallery's two columns that must have inspired the motif.) It is no longer a matter of heroic solitude vis à vis the natural sublime, but rather one of the Zaungast or looker-on, the odd man out who remotely witnesses scenes of heart-warming conviviality from out in the metaphorical cold: a gang of workers playing cards in a vast, sparsely lit *Warehouse*; a couple, past their prime by the look of their hairdo, attending a rock concert, *No longer alone*, but sluggishly lingering at the very back of the large, agile crowd. *A winter morning* may be read as a reverse shot, showing the onlooker himself, in all the unaware creepiness and proud eccentricity accumulated over years of entrapment in the echo chamber of his own mind.

The theme of the loner, finding himself an uninvited spectator to his own stubborn failure at coming of age, runs throughout Wächtler's writings and works. They draw on a cultural repertoire of aesthetic devices and narrative tropes for conjuring longful memories of "the good old days," be it in provincial West German childhood hometowns or Mittelerde, where craft, sincerity, and kindness of heart still counted for something, and one could still legitimately harbor dreams and hopes. They do so, however, only to isolate, abstract, repeat, superimpose, and exaggerate them to the point of absurdity. Rather than warm up an imaginary of days of yore, Wächtler's works tend to overboil it.

- Jakob Schillinger

Peter Wächtler (1979, Hanover, Germany) lives and works in Berlin and Brussels. Recent solo exhibitions include M KHA, Antwerp, Schinkel Pavillon (2017), Chisenhale Gallery, London, Renaissance Society, Chicago (2016) Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster (2014). His work has been featured in numerous international group exhibitions, such as Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, 'The Absent Museum', WIELS, Brussels, 'Zeitgeist', Mamco, Geneva (2017) L'Almanach 16, Le Consortium, Dijon (2016), Triennial: Surround Audience at the New Museum, New York (2015), the Liverpool Biennial (2014), among others. A book of his texts, *Come On*, was published in 2013 by Sternberg Press.