

Emerging with the Pictures Generation artists in the early 1980s in New York, Wachtel has worked with juxtaposition and the visual language of mass culture for the last 30 years. Her oil, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas paintings enter into a visual language game wherein appropriated imagery is illustrated, simulated, replicated, altered and parodied. For her first exhibition at Vilma Gold, Wachtel brings together works from the 80s and 90s alongside recent painting and new poster work.

At the beginning of her career, Wachtel produced a series of poster and marker pen wall-based works that would inaugurate one of the artists's central concerns: how subjectivity — i.e., the psychology of the individual — is constructed, reconstructed, or even fragmented in relation to the panoply of images which saturate our lives. In acts of wantonly literal appropriation, Wachtel utilised commercially available posters of movie stars, pin-up girls, political figures, and pop music icons, among other related images in a presentational strategy based upon repetition and juxtaposition.

In 1983, Wachtel began to shift the focus of her method of appropriation towards another realm of mass culture. Cartoon figures selected from the domain of commercial greeting cards began to assume a central role in Wachtel's vocabulary. By recycling cartoon characters, Wachtel managed to underscore their latent function as symbols of a particular representation of the human condition within the context of late-capitalist society. Through their exaggerated expressions of pleasure, pain, anger, and confusion, among other emotional states, these characters became indices for particular psychological conditions. It is almost as if the cartoon characters, whose actual function is primarily entertainment-oriented, became cyphers designed to counter repression through comic means.

With the 'Landscape series', begun in 1989, Wachtel inserted these cartoon characters into the readymade lexicon of mainstream magazine and newspaper photographic images documenting the contemporary socio-political landscape of the time. The cartoon figures were utilized as symbolic commentators on the religious, cultural, ideological, and political issues that were inscribed on the adjoining silk-screened canvases. The ensuing juxtapositions produce a hybrid "landscape" wherein the cartoon characters underscore the position of Wachtel (and by extension the viewer), who equivocates between imposing moral or didactic political/ideological critique and assuming a position of ambivalence. Crucially Wachtel chose subject matter that elicited an emotional response. Her cartoons are choruses of stylised, extreme emotion and although the work can be analysed in light of the critique of the media, the strength and, moreover, durability of Wachtel's work rests on her interest in human emotion.

The 'American Colour series', from the period 1992-93 and first shown at American Fine Arts in

New York in 1992, continued under the larger paradigm of Wachtel's work — the juxtaposition of the figure with the social mediascape. For this series Wachtel took a slight twist and rendered the landscape an abstraction and literally inserted the subjects within it. The photographic subjects, taken with Wachtel's camera from the television and rendered in four-colour process silkscreen on canvas, are all portraits primarily of ordinary people confessing their personal stories on popular daytime talk shows, or actors in overwrought moments from daytime soap operas. The works were created before the onslaught of reality t.v. but prefigure it. The abstract elements are loosely associative of the American strip landscape with its generic corporate architecture and signage and the colour choices are equally inspired by this ubiquitous corporate aesthetic.

Within more recent work, Wachtel has turned to culling all of her imagery from the internet and although continuing to use cartoon characters, each painting now features a focal panel that expounds particular notions of the representational "everyman". This is presented through the juxtapositional semblance of both her characters and appropriated forms of transnational apologies. In 2012 Wachtel returned to the American Colour series to produce a new related body of works. The American Colour series 2012 combine silkscreen elements from the early 1990s with newly constructed and configured colour panels.

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