

curated by Dieter Roelstraete: FRICTIONS

Opening: Friday, 13th & Saturday, 14th September 2023, 12–7pm

Duration: 13th September until 19th October 2024

Galerie Martin Janda is part of *curated by 2024 – Untold Narratives*, the gallery festival with international curators in Vienna. The exhibition *FRICTIONS*, with works by **Nilbar Güreş**, **Devin T. Mays**, **Martha Rosler**, **Roman Signer** and **Fredrik Værsløv**, is curated by Dieter Roelstraete and runs from September 13 until October 19, 2024.

At the center of *FRICTIONS*, the viewer encounters one of the most readily recognizable, ubiquitous objects known to humankind, on a par with the traffic cone or (these aren't random examples) monobloc garden chair: a wooden shipping pallet – or rather, an awful *lot* of them.

On the ground floor, wooden shipping pallets provide the primary building blocks for a provisional sculptural installation by **Devin T. Mays** (b. 1985, lives and works in Chicago and Houston), for whom the pallet has become a signature material that grounds the artist's practice squarely in the historical continuum of some of sculpture's most basic formal questions – one such query being, for example: can pedestals and/or plinths be part of a sculpture? Does one ship shipping pallets? How much *détournement*, in the Situationist sense of the term, makes a work of art? Or: is an *objet* ever really, truly *trouvé*? (Etcetera.) In the basement, **Fredrik Værsløv** (b. 1979, lives and works in Oslo) has appropriated *what look like* a handful of wooden pallets and turned them into “canvasses” for his caustic, workaday experiments in high-end painterly abstraction veering between the forbiddingly minimal and gaudily maximalist. Flipping them on their side and mounting them some distance from the wall, these splattered wooden structures – Værsløv refers to these works as his “Garden Paintings” – inevitably start resembling *fences* more than anything else (borders, boundaries, *confines*). In other words: what inside the ground floor gallery is still fairly straightforwardly legible as a commentary, possibly, on the global economy's tireless fever-dream of the unceasing, frictionless flow of “goods” across land and sea – the marvel of motion – acquires a darker cast down below, reminding us of the fact that people (increasingly!) do not move around the globe quite as freely as the fruits of their labor.

An admittedly rather crude and rudimentary cause for coupling two very different art practices, in other words – one that clearly chooses “form” over “content” – morphs into grounds for a multifaceted, meandering reflection on some of the defining paradoxes of our time: an era that insistently demands the constant mobilization (trading, trafficking) of every-thing, yet which has turned the very notion of “transit” into an ordeal of inescapable stasis – of human sameness amidst the coming and going of matter and “stuff”. New and old works by **Nilbar Güreş** (b. 1977, lives and works in Naples) and **Martha Rosler** (b. 1943, lives and works in New York) consider the human cost of our expectation that “all that is solid melts into air”, as Marx and Engels once memorably characterized one of capitalism's cardinal “virtues”. Rosler has long been an avid chronicler of the daily, humdrum human drama of coming and going, as is attested in a selection of photographic works both old and new (*plus ça change*), while Güreş' works confront the epic of diasporic living and migration – foundational, recurring motifs in the oeuvre of an artist hailing from one of the world's greatest port cities, the capital of longing that is

present-day Istanbul. Two photographic works by **Roman Signer** (b. 1938, lives and works in Sankt Gallen) documenting the Swiss maverick's signature ludic experiments with energies and locomotions of all types recall an alternate history of movement that is integral to the fundamental promise of art as the "experimental exercise of freedom", as the Brazilian art critic Mario Pedrosa once memorably called it: an exercise in dreaming of *escape*.

In the opening paragraph of her curatorial meta-statement guiding the present edition of the *curated_by* gallery festival, Noit Banai observed: "we are in the third decade of the twenty-first century, and despite – or because of – claims that globalization is at a record high, there is a drive by various state and non-state actors and institutions to capture archives and tell mono-dimensional stories" – to close borders and "arrest developments". Aspiring, in contrast, "to remain in the borderlands", artists, however, forever keep both things *and* people moving – in a constant state of motion as well as *emotion*: flux and flow are eternal, all friction notwithstanding.

Dieter Roelstraete

Dieter Roelstraete (b. 1972) is the Curator for the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago, where he also teaches. Recent projects at the Neubauer Collegium have featured the work of Gelitin, Rick Lowe, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, Cecilia Vicuna, and Christopher Williams. He previously worked as a curator for documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens in 2017. Prior to that, he served as the Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2012-2015), where he organized and co-organized *The Way of the Shovel: Art as Archaeology* (2015); *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music 1965 to Now* (2015); and *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* (2016), among other exhibitions. From 2003 to 2011 Roelstraete was a curator at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen in his native Belgium. In recent years, he has curated exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada in Milan and Venice, Garage (Moscow) and S.M.A.K. (Ghent); in 2022, Roelstraete drafted the curatorial impulse for that year's *curated_by* gallery festival in Vienna. He has published extensively on contemporary art and related philosophical issues in numerous catalogues and journals.