

Reena Spaulings presents *Help me Buddy*, an exhibition of new work by the Brussels-based German artist Peter Wächtler.

A series of six cast plaster busts on plinths seem to represent great men of Western civilization. But these heads do not belong to exact historical figures, they are vague males, possibly an “inner team” of multiple – potential or abandoned – selves, a six-headed self-portrait. Possibly Schiller, possibly Sitting Bull, or maybe not... Meanwhile, large format watercolors seem to depict historical scenes such as a Roman nautical battle, a chariot race gone wrong, and the discovery of an archeological dead end within a murky, flooded, ancient tomb.

Known for a practice that deploys handcrafted media in relation to exaggeratedly literary forms – for example, hand drawn animations featuring poetic narratives and sermon-like voice-overs – Wächtler seems to commit to anachronistic, folksy genres as a way of measuring both his immersion in and imaginary distance from a digitized present. History, in this case, is a genre and an occasion allowing the artist to tell the tall tale of his exile within the contemporary. It is a fantasy and a cartoon, produced by a hunched-over illustrator and a spinner of stylized fictions, open to the weird digressions and hysterical tics of a vaguely, clearly male producer-protagonist.

Filming from a helicopter, a video camera slowly approaches a Western metropolis (Mannheim) as the artist delivers a speech to an imaginary assembly of “friends and colleagues.” Like the busts, the oration is a form that signals greatness, gravity, and the marking of history. The long-winded speaker is as fictional as the cast heads, finally taking leave now, he says, and bidding his audience “farewell” on this momentous occasion, which also happens to be Wächtler’s debut show at the gallery. The artist’s leave-taking is at once a drone-like zeroing in.

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