September 7 - October 12, 2019

William Powhida

Complicities

Postmasters Gallery is pleased to announce Complicities, William Powhida’s first solo exhibition with the gallery in nearly five years (and almost a decade since the Brooklyn Rail published "How the New Museum Committed Suicide with Banality").

Complicities is a show of painfully obvious, politically didactic, research-based, and precisely rendered works on paper. Produced over the last ten months in the wake of the crisis at the Whitney Museum, the work makes visible generalized and abstract systems – investment, real estate, museum boards, private family-owned companies, curation, public policy – illuminating the connections between art and the ruling class.

Through specific subjects and case studies, Powhida uses an aesthetic of what might be best described as ‘capitalist realism’ to render an image of neoliberal governance and art’s instrumentalization in perpetuating a system of private-public partnerships. Punctuating these slow takes are a series of paintings based on the artist’s Instagram memes drawn from films and series including Halloween, Don’t Look Now, The Terminator, Robocop, Chernobyl, and Billions, which offer a different kind and degree of reflection on art’s role in society.

Over the last decade the need for critical re-evaluations of American social and cultural governance continue to intensify as the degrees and layers of structural, systemic, pragmatic, and opportunistic ‘complicities’ are laid bare.
The private and public systems that William Powhida maps out involve a lot of powerful white people. The artist visualizes financial investments in a military and defense conglomerate by four Whitney board members; the corporate web of profit, violations, lobbying, and philanthropy of the Koch Brothers' sprawling empire; the policies and investments behind developer Stephen A. Ross's Hudson Yard's project initiated by former mayor Michael Bloomberg; laws and executive orders behind privatization since President Reagan; the direct flow of businessman Warren B. Kanders' tear gas to his previous role as a trustee at the Whitney Museum; and the curatorial structure of the Venice Biennale.

The artist has described the resulting works as a form of 'capitalist realism' -- a data visualization made of charts, diagrams and annotations filled with his exquisite watercolor drawings. He is attempting to put information back into circulation as art-- the thing that links all of his subjects together.

Through a companion series of Instagram memes largely drawn from science fiction and horror, the artist comments on the institution of critique -- "political art is a joke" -- but as Kanders' resignation from the Whitney Board shows, there are, in fact, ways to engage institutional critique outside of the studio. As the Teargas Biennial essay, the Decolonize this Place protests, and the withdrawal of 9 artists from the Whitney Biennial demonstrate, internal and external pressure can compel institutions to change. Nan Goldin's efforts and lawsuits, brought by five states, representing thousands of victims, have caused museums to sever ties with the Sacklers and ask existential questions about their relationship with structural inequality.

Artsy's Nate Freeman recently reminded us that it's been nearly 10 years since Greek mega-collector Dakis Joannou purchased a $1,000 William Powhida print How the New Museum Committed Suicide with Banality. It is a drawing "that satirizes the various players in the scandal and maps out all their connections, brutally criticizing the institution and its benefactor. "Freeman's observation, beyond suggesting Mr. Joannou has a sense of humor, implies that Powhida's own complicity in the systems -- museums, the art market, social media, white male privilege -- undercuts or negates the function of critique. Powhida it would seem, is already bought and compromised.

At the risk of centering structural problems on himself the artist has long been engaged through satire, parody, and self-critique of the problem of his identity as an artist. A crucial aspect of this problem is best articulated by artist Xaviera Simmons, "Understand the historical American narrative and see yourselves within that framework; do the cultural autopsy, name what whiteness is and the centuries of harm it has done; show yourselves to each other and wrestle with the implications of whiteness on canvas, in performance, in front of the camera and definitely in writing; and, most importantly, stop oppressing us through dismissive and condescending words and deeds."

William Powhida has no illusions that this work will change the systems he inhabits, or save anyone, but he will not be selling any of this work to any of the subjects depicted (sorry, Glenn Furhman!). The artist will make any information about sales that transform art into commodity public upon request and tell you some other things about unpaid labor.

William Powhida [b. 1976] lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. His recent shows in 2018 On the Contemporary at Gallery Poulsen and After After the Contemporary at Charlie James Gallery follow his first solo museum exhibition After the Contemporary in 2017 at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut. His work will be included in Twenty Twenty at the Aldrich and SUM Artists: Visual Diagrams and Systems-Based Explorations at the Wellin Museum in Ithaca next year. His work has been reviewed and discussed in the New York Times, Hyperallergic, Art in America, Artforum, October, The Los Angeles Times, and Artnet. He holds a BFA in painting from Syracuse University and an MFA from Hunter College. He currently teaches at Cornell University and the School of Visual Arts.
Safariland (Direct Investment), 2019
watercolor, ink, transfer, and the Internet on paper mounted on dibond
21.5 x 54 inches
54.5 x 137 cm

$ 13,000
DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY® MANUFACTURES RIOT-CONTROL SUPPLIES INCLUDING TEAR GAS, PEPPER SPRAYS, LAUNCHERS, BATONS, AND ARMOR INCLUDING TRIPLE CHASER CO.

THE SAFARILAND® GROUP MAJOR U.S.-BASED ENGINEER, DESIGNER, MANUFACTURER, AND MARKETER OF EQUIPMENT FOR MILITARY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, INVESTIGATION, AND PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL (PLUS SPORTING GEAR) WITH 21 BRANDS, PRIVATE LLC DBA SAFARILAND GROUP

Warren B. Kanders

John C. Phelan

Morton County Sheriff’s Department
Textron (Indirect Investments), 2019
watercolor, ink, and the Internet on paper mounted on dibond
33 x 53 inches
84 x 134.5 cm

$ 15,000
"To survive, financially and otherwise, institutions have become dependent on central director and head curator figures to bring home the bacon on every front, while the "staff" keeps the place running... not to mention the extensive ubiquity of inequitable systems that determine who is even hired for these positions, and who controls the governance and decision-making structures."

**Textron**

Textron, $48.01 American industrial conglomerate that you've probably never heard of. Headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island. It started out in 1923 as the Special Yarns Company and has grown to become the 32nd top federal contractor with $7,226,000 obligated for 2,568 actions performed in 2015.

**LSAT light machine gun**

Prototype developed for the Joint Service Small Arms Program's lightweight small arms program that has been replaced by the Next Generation Squad Weapon-Automatic Rifle.

**Cased Telescope (CT) Weapons**

Textron's military-grade product line using polymer bullet casings. Availability upon request.

**Bell AH-1Z Viper**

"The modern attack helicopter" is built to meet the expeditionary requirements of the United States Marine Corp and sold to Pakistan and Bahrain.
La Biennale di Venezia (Propaganda), 2019
watercolor, gouache, graphite, transfer, and the Internet on paper
Image courtesy of the gallery and the Nasher Museum. Special thanks to Paddy Johson for her collaboration on the piece.
27 x 74 inches
68.5 x 188 cm
$ 15,000
In 2004 the Biennale became a foundation legally registered in the Netherlands to become eligible for private funding. Produces the odd year Biennale Arte, every year Biennale del Film, with annual Biennales in film, dance, music, and theater. Questions about the financing of the Biennale Foundation is limited to the Biennales.

**THE PRESIDENT**

Baratta, an Italian economist, has twice served as president (1998-2001, 2008-present) staying on after 2011 when another nominee expressed little interest in the cultural sectors. Previously he served as a minister of public works, environment, and foreign trade in the government.

**PAOLO BARATTA**

**INVITED ARTIST**

I consider all of the press about Barca Nostra to be my work. My cake!

**CHRISTOPH BÜCHEL**

Büchel, a Swiss artist represented by Hauser & Wirth, is known for controversial projects including withdrawing from an exhibition that was displayed under tarps at Mass MoCA, opening a mosque that was quickly shuttered in the 2015 Biennale, and recently claiming U.S. border wall prototypes as art. Barca Nostra is the artist's latest conceptual provocation.

**GUGGENHEIM**

The U.S. Pavilion was privately built in 1935 and operated by Grand Central Galleries until 1941. It was purchased by MoMA and eventually sold to the Guggenheim Foundation in 1952 with funds from the Peggy Guggenheim collection who helped coordinate U.S. representation.

**May You Live In Interesting Times**

**Biennale Arte 2019**

**Barca Nostra**

The main exhibition has been thematically curated since 1979. This edition, centered around anxiety and complexity, includes 29 invited artists in both the Central Pavilion and the Industrial Warehouse at Arsenale. Additional programming includes two special projects, academic and educational sessions, and 25 collateral events spread across the city. The budget for the main exhibition is €13 million.
Neoliberalism (Policy), 2019
watercolor, ink, The U.S. Government, and the Internet on paper mounted on dibond
23.5 x 54 inches
60 x 137 cm
$ 13,000
Liberal Pragmatism

Represents the complete internalization of the New Federalism as the Only Way—the enclosure of liberal values within a consumer-oriented society—where the federal government should operate with “market discipline” and rely on markets and competition to deliver social services like health care and education with limited tax increases and major spending increases.

Pub.L. 111-148

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

The logical outcome of transforming government to work like the market, the most sweeping health care reform since Medicare created health insurance exchanges or markets where individual consumers without coverage can purchase plans with federal “premium tax credits” expanding the pool of customers for the insurance industry that competes with non-profit, public benefit corporations for individual and public money. The federal government still cannot regulate insurance companies.

GPRA Modernization Act of 2010

Required agencies to make performance results public by posting them on agency websites and added greater OMB oversight.

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

Repealed No Child Left Behind’s federal performance mandate shifting performance evaluation back to the states. Also barred the federal government from using grants, awards, or agreements such as Obama’s Race to the Top program to control states’ assessments.

Barack Obama

American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012

“If you look at the platforms, the economic platforms of the current Republican candidates for president, they don’t simply defy logic and any known economic theories, they are fantasy. Slashing taxes particularly for those at the very top, dismantling regulatory regimes that protect our air and our environment and then projecting that this is going to lead to 5 percent or 7 percent growth, and claiming that they’ll do all this while balancing the budget. Nobody would even, with the most rudimentary knowledge of economics, think that any of those things are plausible.”
The Sacklers (Family Tree), 2019
watercolor, ink, The New York Times, and the Internet on paper mounted on dibond

53 x 40 inches
134.5 x 101.5 cm

$ 15,000
Koch Industries (Private Company), 2019
watercolor, ink, Rolling Stone, and the Internet on paper mounted on dibond
38 x 54 inches
96.5 x 137 cm

$ 15,000
Koch Industries is the 2nd largest, privately held company in the U.S. with $110bn in annual revenues and 110,000 employees spread across the globe. As a private company, the Koch brothers have been able to maintain total control over their company. They have constructed a corporate veil around Koch Industries through a vast web of subsidiary holding companies and LLCs concentrated in the tax havens of Bermuda and the Cayman Islands (with others spread liberally across multiple low-tax countries). This corporate structure limits both their tax and legal liabilities for profits generated through a sweeping expansion of their core business to create an interconnected supply chain from extraction to manufacture. They are able to profit on nearly every aspect of the natural and manufactured resources they own or trade. The Koch brothers have been able to reinvest 90% of profits back into Koch Industries. This is the base that has fueled their philanthropic efforts to reshape America according to their core values by funneling billions of dollars into an equally complex network of political, educational, and cultural organizations.

Lincoln Center

Matador Cattle Company

The company operates branches with 12,000 head of cattle on 40,000 acres. The methane-producing cattle are a small part of Koch Industries' annual emissions that have included 240 million tons of carbon dioxide.
Hudson Yards (Phase I), 2019
watercolor, graphite, colored pencil, PVA glue, ink, the Internet and The Cost of the Hudson Yards Redevelopment Project by Bridget Fisher and Flávia Leite on paper mounted on panel.
58 x 78 inches
147.5 x 198 cm
$22,000
**Public Infrastructure Investments**

The second element of the Hudson Yards redevelopment plan involved $2.1bn for the extension of the No. 7 Subway line, $1.2bn for property acquisition and public amenities including the Hudson Boulevard extension and Park, and $200mn to buy towers from the MTA.

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**The Children’s Investment Fund**

Provided $1.2bn in financing for 35 Hudson Yards and $850mn for 15 Hudson Yards. The UK-based LLC fund was started by "venture philanthropist" Chris Hohn.

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The New York State Housing Finance Authority provided $42mn through bond sales for the 101 80/20 affordable apartments at 15 Hudson Yards. The units are set aside for those making 50 to 60% of AML. Rents range from $558/month (studio) to $1,350/month (two-bedroom) and open to people making $31,303-$62,580 annually based on household size.

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'The Vessel'

The $200mn "staircase to nowhere" designed by Thomas Heatherwick is owned and was fully funded by related companies. Stephen A. Ross built a '12-month Christmas tree' for his shopping mall.