



Julia Wachtel

Plastic Fantasy

27 October - 09 December 2023

Washington DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce the opening of *Plastic Fantasy*, a solo exhibition by New York-based artist Julia Wachtel. This is Wachtel's first one-person show with von ammon co, and the gallery's twenty-seventh project in its current location.

The show will consist of six new vertically oriented works hung on one purpose-built wall that will span the length of the gallery's second arcade. In a similar manner to Wachtel's previous major project at the gallery, the series involves a consistent motif: between two abutted canvases, Wachtel makes a juxtaposition of a panoramic landscape (sourced from stock imagery and rendered using color-separated screen printing) with a hand-painted representation of a plastic toy animal.

The artist's scaling of each landscape decomposes the dot patterns inherent in CMYK printing into abstraction. When viewed at a distance, however, the dots realign into disaster. Each of the landscapes portend some variation of ecological ruin, either explicitly or implicitly: an oil refinery bathed in astringent pink light is an unmistakable augur of anthropogenic climate change; an uninterrupted ocean horizon may imply untouched nature, but the pure waves belie a tainted, warmer water and the decimation of the biodiversity they contain below the surface. The possibility of a planetary existential crisis is held at arm's length by its sheer scale. Only when viewed from farther away can we begin to process and internalize its implications.

Above or below the landscape is a representation of a toy animal. Rhinoceroses, pandas, elephants and big cats have become mascots for the conservationist movement, and are beloved by the very humans who enact the demise of their habitats. Each animal wears a cartoonish, person-like expression, bearing witness to its corresponding landscape. Like an actor in Greek theater, the animal plays the role of the chorus within the painting's dramatic narrative, and expresses shock, dismay or depression via its bloodless expression. *Hypocrite* is a word derived from Greek drama, and translates roughly to *one who wears a false face*. While toys of threatened animals are mostly sold to those interested in learning about the natural world, they are injection molded from petrochemical-derived plastics, and they do not biodegrade. Wachtel's toy animals are hypocritical images: they serve as emblems of nature's majesty but just barely conceal their true essence as disposable consumer objects. Looming over a terrifying scene of industrial gas burnoff is the lone domesticated animal in the group: a black cat, whose species has successfully bargained with the human race for vicarious survival.

Julia Wachtel (b. 1958, United States) is a painter and multimedia artist most closely associated with The Pictures Generation. Since the early 1980's, Wachtel has created a practice based on the appropriation, reframing, juxtaposition and recontextualization of images drawn from news media, advertising, and the internet. Wachtel uses isolation, context removal and forced comparison to synthesize new, uncanny interpretations from the torrent of visual content encountered daily by the American consumer. Wachtel has exhibited in galleries and Institutions worldwide, with recent solo and group exhibitions at The Whitney Museum, The Bergen Kunsthall, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Phillips Collection, MAMCO Genève, Mary Boone Gallery, and Helena Anrather. Her work is held in institutional collections worldwide. This is her second major project at von ammon co, where she is also a represented artist. von ammon co was founded in 2019 in its current location in Georgetown. Gallery hours are 12-6pm on Saturday and Sunday, and by appointment. For more information and image requests, please email info@vonammon.co