

## I Was Here!

Peter Fischli, artist, tutor, and occasional curator, has always possessed a keen eye for the interface between art and that which is evidently located beyond it.

Tag is a graffiti term referring to the simplest and most prevalent type of graffiti, a stylized signature in a color contrasting sharply with its background. Tag is also a verb meaning “to sign.” In the urban, global subculture of this largely male-specific youth culture, the tag has established itself as an elementary sign, denoting: “I was here!”

Peter Fischli is, in any case, interested in a soft, ephemeral variant of the tag; white (shaving) foam that has likewise been clandestinely applied by youngsters to façades, concrete pillars, mailboxes, park benches, and lawns in public spaces. They evoke fresh snowfall; the fine, fluffy pillows and lines that form along railings, cables, and ledges, before once more dissipating. They masquerade as energetic calligraphic figures or impasto painting, and sometimes entail a thin yellow trace, a creamy thread meandering over the foam. It is the ephemeral, a mere hint, which unfolds its magic when crystallizing in the poetic obtrusiveness of virtual nihility. Peter Fischli has been on a hunt, lovingly photographing and subsequently collaging what has been captured into pictorial form, into neat black and white compositions which create a compelling play between negative and positive. The white trail promptly becomes a black figure resembling a ferret, and the night sky, into which a street lamp transmits its rays like a black sun, is now white. Fischli, the artist, excerpts the found intervention, inserting the sign into the photographic landscape once again.

The simulated brushstroke from the aerosol can — which could equally be hair mousse or carpet cleaning foam — is employed in self-confident gestures. In any case, these gently rebellious youthful, mini, micro, or pseudo-vandals act as “landscape painters” with a can, utilizing an industrial product remote from art. Is this latent aggression at work? Or is it rather what the anthropologists call a potlatch, (artistic?) work that is given away, squandered!

We may recall that plein air painting originated in the 19th century thanks to the new, industrially manufactured paint in tubes. In getting out of the studio, the necessary materials had to be portable and quick to use. The world was accelerating. And so it was that during the 20th century steel, glass, and plastic, originating in both heavy and light industry, were added to sculpture’s lexicon of materials. It would soon seem obsolete to paint and sculpt at all; a bottle dryer, displaced to the context of art, was already having its long-lasting effect.

And what was the approach of Fischli / Weiss to the industrial product? They decelerated the readymade with sculptures fabricated in hardened synthetic foam; meticulously hand-made objects, uncanny counterfeits aping banal everyday objects. A breathtaking interim realm of art unfolded, one which included a great many aerosol cans!