

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Ingenuity and wisdom come out to play

BY LEAH OLLMAN

Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss collaborated for more than three decades, but have had little exposure in L.A.

Local audiences are likely to know them only by a single, deservedly popular work from 1987, "The Way Things Go." The mesmerizing, 30-minute video unspools like a free-associative poem, a meditation on momentum.

Using common industrial objects — tires, buckets, spools of wire — Fischli and Weiss created a continuous chain of actions and reactions involving balloons deflating, tires rolling, liquids draining, candles melting, balls dropping, fuses burning, wheels spinning, and much more.

Gravity performs itself, steam does its thing, and the stream of physical consciousness flows amusingly, remarkably on. Brilliant and yet profoundly simple, the piece marries Rube Goldberg-style ingenuity with elemental wisdom: This is the way things are, this is how substances behave, this is how things go.

That same convergence of material realism and ground-floor philosophy suffuses the duo's remarkable installation at Matthew Marks. The show occupies both adjacent gallery locations, but its heart and soul are to be found in the sprawling array of "Polyurethane Objects" filling the Orange Grove space. The title dials down our visual pace by answering the basic question: What, exactly, are we seeing?

Without that answer, we might not even ask, because what lies before us appears self-evident: clustered arrangements of studio debris. The pallets and pedestals, clamps, drills and sanders, buckets and brushes don't announce themselves as sculpture but as the raw materials for making sculpture.

The installation is, however, actually a full-scale, immersive, trompe l'oeil still-life. Everything, down to the strewn peanut shells and scatter of rainbow M&Ms, is carved from dense, rigid foam and painted. Each object is a replica extraordinarily fashioned to look like its ordinary model.



SWISS ARTISTS Peter Fischli and David Weiss riff on the debris of the everyday in a detail of an installation at Matthew Marks that depicts a cluttered studio re-created with polyurethane replicas.

Fischli and Weiss poke at the relationship between original and copy here, but without irony or pretense. The work feels refreshingly earnest, born of curiosity, reverence and abundant good humor. There are hints of the domestic — children's boots and toys, a dog dish — and multiple allusions to play, to art as elaborate game.

The artists began this body of work in 1982, and it appears to have had a variety of incarnations. Weiss' death in 2012 lends the current installation a faintly elegiac air, but the predominant tone is that of tender homage — to the everyday,

the work of the hand, to making and remaking as a manner of processing experience.

Like Borges' famous story of the map drawn the size of the empire it represented, Fischli and Weiss' work positions us at the intersection of truth and the absurd. Its illusions pull us closer to the real, to the necessity of humility, awe and laughter.

Matthew Marks Gallery, 1062 N. Orange Grove and 7818 Santa Monica Blvd., (323) 654-1830, through April 12. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.matthewmarks.com