

# Petzel

James Clegg, "Urs Fischer & Georg Herold, Modern Institute, Glasgow," *Art Review*, September 2011, pp. 168-169.

## URS FISCHER & GEORG HEROLD

Urs Fischer & Georg Herold  
Modern Institute, Glasgow  
2 July – 3 September

**As you find out** when you get older, creativity and play might overlap, but they are not synonymous. As Johan Huizinga remarks in his study *Homo Ludens* (1938), 'First and foremost... play is a voluntary activity'. Although art is something people often choose to do and it can be playful, having a career or working with institutions can be fraught with obligation and responsibility. Play isn't wholly appropriate all the time because it doesn't have clear goals and outcomes; children don't assess their own productivity after melting crayons on the radiator. Play is characterised by ambiguity.

Urs Fischer's and Georg Herold's individual practices seem to share this ambiguity. They collaborate here for the second time, and the relationship between creativity and play seems to be the key to developing a critical interpretation of what they do. Fischer describes his own praxis as follows: 'Each work begins with a quick sketch, but as soon as I start to work with materials, something goes wrong... My work never ends up looking the way I had intended.' And I use the term 'praxis' because he adds, 'Your thoughts determine the images, and it is the images, in turn, which determine your thoughts.'

In this exhibition, multiple, cracked and predominantly 'unskilful' clay renderings of the female form on ramshackle 'art school' plinths create a twee environment: the removal of some of the plaster board in the gallery, a china cheese dish and cups balanced on the exposed cross sections, and – just visible on the way out – a plaster head with hat and pipe crudely pasted on add

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nuances. But what really complicates the exhibition is the decision by the artists to include the life models themselves. The models' presence is powerful and forces you to consider the relationship you have to them as a viewer. But this exhibition is as far as you could get from the glamour of Vanessa Beecroft, and it doesn't have the models work in order to expose exploitation, as in Santiago Sierra. Rather, this just seems to be the result of the impulsive decisions Fischer and Herold make. And yet, where in the past the artists have enlarged blobs of clay to gigantic proportions, made figures out of candles that poignantly melt during a show or created Abstract Expressionism using caviar, this still seems oddly low-key. The naked female form is always going to be politically charged, but what makes it feel awkward here is that is being co-opted into an approach that doesn't make things legitimate through clean concepts or strategies, but follows something more immediate and intuitive.

So should we effectively become the parent in this messy room and seek an explanation for what we find? Certainly having explanations can be of great benefit. To say that this work strategically engages with historical issues, such as the nude, works on paper. But the point actually seems to be that explanations fall short of capturing something that all people do. What is important here and what cannot be concisely summed up are the open and variable results of creative play.

**JAMES CLEGG**



**Urs Fischer & Georg Herold**  
*Untitled*, 2011 (installation view),  
18 clay sculptures, two sofas,  
models, dressing area, flowers,  
dimensions variable. Photo: Ruth  
Clark. Courtesy Modern Institute/  
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