

MARK WALLINGER

Arcadia

5 October – 18 November 2023

Galerie Fabian Lang is immensely proud to present *Arcadia*, an exhibition of Mark Wallinger's latest body of work. After their collaboration in Venice, Italy in 2016, Lang and Wallinger stayed in touch. A few years and a pandemic later, they come together again for a first show in Lang's own gallery.

Wallinger is showing what he has made during those extraordinary years. Confined to isolation and guiltless pleasures Wallinger draws on an existential reflection of it all. "The purpose or meaning of work moved from habit to something more existential for everyone ... just as the limited freedom that was allowed in the first lockdown for solitary exercise and recreation brought something new to the streets of London, as we learned to move from moment to moment." (Mark Wallinger)

Isolated Figures: The joke almost sticks in the throat. No matter where we turn around the room, we see figures spinning slowly and relentlessly around themselves on the spot. Something about them isn't genuine. An intangible unease and mistrust towards their veracity. And yet we will hardly be able to resist laughing a little at them and the situation. At our own fright and at the figures' eel-like sleekness. Because they are both mirrors and projections. They come from the internet, as Wallinger says, from anonymous stock photographic agency figures. Generic, so-called stock images of people made alive and exposed by Wallinger. Spinning in one place, they suggest something of our own loop in which we find ourselves and from which we cannot escape. Who can argue that it is not an ingenious allegory of our collectively but solitarily experienced emotional world during the pandemic?

The figures are surrounded by durational photographs on the walls that describe the otherworldly new London during the first lockdown – they are collectively called *Panorama: London 2020*. At the beginning of the first lockdown Wallinger took to the streets of Central London near his Soho home and made haunting photographic works of once thronging parts of town—Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square— that were now deserted, bar the occasional wraith-like figure using the city's deserted commercial hub as a place to walk rather than to work or shop.* "All the furious purpose that happens in the city has been emptied out." (Mark Wallinger)

Here, too, we are looking at something that seems familiar to us, even if it is only recognisable in a distorted way. Did the whole thing happen at all? We deliberately blur our memory of what happened. It is as hazy as the distorted photos on the walls.

"Solitary human figures simultaneously appear and disappear, vanishing into space like apparitions. A cyclist dematerialises into a fragment of front wheel and trailing shadow, the railings outside the British Museum repeat into a relentless row of bars, while the back end of a bus evaporates into nothingness." (Louisa Buck)

These encounters are animated further downstairs where we premier Wallinger's latest film work which gave the exhibition its title: *Arcadia*. A documentation of the spring lockdowns of 2021 and 2022. The double screen installation takes us "through the looking-glass" taking its formal cue from the glassy stare of the redundant shop widows and the recreation ground that central London became; with empty buses running their routes regardless. People and vehicles appearing and disappearing as things meet themselves or come apart in the gutter of reflection and symmetry.

One peculiarity: the two contiguous films are of different lengths, running in a never-repeating continuous loop, so there is always a new combination of image pairings.

Again, the pleasure in Wallinger's work lies above all in its illumination of complex themes that he breaks down into an emblematically striking aesthetic that conveys an enlightening essence of universal validity, with a pervading wit that is as pleasurable as it is ingenious.