

BORTOLAMI

*Artist/City*

## **Paul Pfeiffer/Washington, D.C.**

### ***Exodus***

26 October – 25 January 2020

Watergate Office Building, 2600 Virginia Ave NW, Washington, D.C.

Bortolami is pleased to announce the seventh Artist/City project, Paul Pfeiffer/Washington, D.C. A group exhibition at the Watergate curated by Pfeiffer, Exodus brings together a selection of artworks – primarily found-object sculptures – to investigate the collapsed boundary between representation and reality that now defines everyday life. It includes works by Lutz Bacher, Renée Green, Arthur Jafa, Josh Kline, Eric N. Mack, Cady Noland, Lorraine O'Grady, Sondra Perry, Cameron Rowland, Wu Tsang and Danh Vo.

The show explores the question: How can an existing object be a mask? The artists in the exhibition draw materials from daily life, distilling them down through processes of selection, sampling, editing, and arranging. The resulting artworks take the form of everyday gestures and appearances, and yet their installation within the stripped-down setting of the white cube renders them alien. On first encounter, they appear like fragments of reality isolated and objectified through their enshrinement as art objects. They radiate a presence and pathos akin to that of living beings, or forensic clues from the scene of a crime. While their material presence may speak volumes, they also invoke their former context. They resist easy explanation, refusing to identify. Their uncanny status contradicts their seeming familiarity, so that in the end they become like mirrors, merely reflecting what we want to see. Which begs the question: who or what is behind the mirror? And what is their true purpose?

This game of seemingly simple appearances and hidden motives is nothing new, dating back at least to Duchamp's ready-mades a hundred years ago. But then context is everything. What was once called trompe l'oeil, then appropriation, then simulacrum, then sampling, has proliferated exponentially along with handheld screens and social media, reaching into every aspect of public and private life, ubiquitous to the point that it no longer has a name. In the era of personal branding strategies, algorithmic pinpoint marketing, and other self-encapsulating feedback loops, the line between human personality and image machine has become indistinguishable.

Society today is a stadium, a circus, and a hall of mirrors. Everything can be turned into a widely distributed image, from the most prosaic customs and routines, to human and environmental tragedy, to political discourse, to intimate encounter. Violence nor pleasure are less real, but our state of war is mediated through images. If data-driven algorithms can interpret personal preference from clicks and eye movements, then customize a feed predicting our appetites as consumers, how then to discern free will from manufactured habit? If A.I. sets the ontological horizon beyond the limits of human perception, how can we be sure that the images we see are real and not a customized projection?

This is the ontological Exodus, the voyage we're on as we navigate the perverse spaces and temporalities of global capitalism.. But while the technologies are new, the state of cognitive dissonance is not. The uncanny has been fundamental to human experience from the very beginning. In the current moment of sensory overload we are reminded that the Exodus was never simply a geographic journey, it was always ontological – a journey to liberate human consciousness – and has been ongoing for millennia.

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To amplify the strategic selection of artworks in the exhibit, the choice of the Watergate Building as setting is meant to communicate strongly and wordlessly the urgent context of contemporary societal transformations to which this project responds.

**Paul Pfeiffer** (b. 1966 in Honolulu, HI) lives and works in New York. He has had solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, MIT's List Visual Arts Center and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, MUSAC León, Spain, the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. He was the subject of a retrospective at Sammlung Goetz in Munich, Germany. Pfeiffer's works have also been included in international, large-scale exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, Biennale of Sydney, Busan Biennale, Cairo Biennale, and Whitney Biennial. He has received numerous awards and fellowships, including a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship and the Bucksbaum Award from the Whitney Museum.

**Artist/City** is Bortolami Gallery's experimental programming initiative that pairs an artist with an American city. Taking place in unconventional settings for longer durations than the standard gallery exhibition, these site-responsive projects grant artists freedom to present their work according to their own creative vision. Previous projects include Daniel Buren/Miami, Eric Wesley/St. Louis, Tom Burr/New Haven and Barbara Kasten/Chicago. Ann Veronica Janssens/Baltimore is ongoing. Paul Pfeiffer/Washington, D.C. was developed in conjunction with Denniston Hill's thematic program for 2017-2022 (<https://www.dennistonhill.org/exodus-and-the-ethics-of-uncertainty>).

For more information, please contact [artistcity@bortolamigallery.com](mailto:artistcity@bortolamigallery.com) or 212-727-2050. The exhibition opens Saturday, 26 October from 5 – 7pm at the Watergate Office Building, 2600 Virginia Ave NW, Washington, D.C.. *Exodus* is open Fridays and Saturdays from noon – 6pm and by appointment.