

Wilde

PRESS RELEASE

DORIAN SARI

A PERMANENT FUGUE

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Curated by Elise Lammer

For his first solo exhibition at Wilde Gallery's location in Basel, Dorian Sari explores the unique spatial configuration of the gallery and its many rooms to discover, both literally and conceptually, through his research around the figure of the fool. On this occasion, he presents a series of works, which all further develop his interest in the relationship between madness and truth. Escaping a binary or didactic approach, Sari proposes a journey that takes the viewer into a constellation of historical, scientific, and spiritual speculations around concepts that, according to the artist, are crucial to understanding our contemporary condition.

The fool plays a significant role in interpretation when casting the Tarot for occult reading. It occupies a very autonomous, if not divergent, position among the 78 cards of a traditional deck. Since the Middle Ages, the Fool card has been conferred the most fascinating and mysterious interpretive potential, not only for being the first (0) or the last card of a deck but also for the symbolic elements that are conjured up in its representation. Since the 15th century, the Fool card has mostly depicted a beggar or poor man wearing rags and sometimes a hat adorned with feathers. The man carries a stick and stands on the edge of a cliff, followed or chased by a dog.

Sari traces a parallel between the symbolic figure of the fool and that of an artist. According to him, artists, just like fools, can inhabit paradoxical and even opposed features. Analyzing both figures from an archetypal point of view, Sari proposes to connect their similarities, and particularly their roles as pilgrims, messengers, intermediaries, and avant-gardists in society.

Echoing this, the title Sari chose for the exhibition, *A Permanent Fugue*, itself carries a double meaning and translates an ambiguity that is consistent in Sari's practice. The title hints at the artist's long-term interest in Jungian psychology and directly refers to a psychiatric fugue; a disorder that consists of temporary amnesia of one's own identity. Also called dissociate fugue, this condition is said to split a patient's mind between consciousness and the subconsciousness.

The exhibition comprises newly produced and existing works, which all refer to milestones in the history of art, psychology and literature—Sari's primary source of inspiration. All the works on display, be they sculptures, videos or photographs, translate an expansive interpretative scope, suggesting that each epoch is led by a specific system of belief that in turn influence and define the collective psyche.

Lying on the floor is *Gorgeous* (2018-2019), a life-size sculpture of a horse made of rags, plaster, and other filling materials that the artist collected during the making of the work. It's dressed in a hand-sewn fabric made of assembled white zippers. Having previously exhibited the sculpture in a pristine condition, the artist crushed and flattened it with the help of an

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industrial wrecking ball, symbolizing the passage to a hypothetical new, alternative life. Now disemboweled, the figure exposes all the material (most of it recycled) that was used in its creation, showing high contrast between hidden and what's meant to be visible, while metaphorically suggesting that the inner self can only surface once total surrender, sometimes even destruction, are embraced.

Zen balls, which the artist artificially rusted, are placed around the horse. Originally conceived to help achieve a certain state of consciousness while focusing on hand dexterity, their function is to remind the viewer that they play an active role within the exhibition. If accidentally bumped, the little bell inside each ball will betray their presence within an environment that traditionally forbids any physical contact with the artworks. Breaking the silence with this simple gesture challenges the power structure imposed by modernity, which have been defining the code of conduct of most of today's institutions, be they artistic or psychiatric.

In the adjacent room, a series of photographic self-portraits further explore the dualism of psyche from a symbolic perspective. *Hanged Man* (2019) is a still taken from Sari's eponymous film from 2017. In the Tarot, the Hanged Man is similarly represented hanging upside-down, suggesting that the figure is able to see the world from an entirely new perspective. In traditional readings, the card also conveys concepts around self-willed surrender, wisdom, and enlightenment. Next to it, *Dollhouse* (2019), portrays the artist conversing with a table. Taken from an early film by Sari, the two stills form a sequence that shows the frustration resulting from an impossible conversation. Following the recurring theme of the exhibition, its title, as well as the size of the figure in relation to the empty space surrounding it, the work suggests a shift in scale and power hierarchies. This, in turn, is mirrored by the small-scale belt hanging at eye level on the wall, whose circumference corresponds to the diameter of the sticks exhibited on the ground floor, but could equally fit the waist of the miniaturized Sari who is depicted right next to it.

The title of *Une Histoire de la Folie (El Pelele)* (2019) refers to French philosopher Michel Foucault's famous essay on the history of insanity¹. In this text, Foucault analyses a painting by Francisco Goya in which four women play blanket-tossing with a life-size manikin. Against all expectations, Foucault sees the women's action as a therapeutic strategy meant to appease a fit of madness. Re-enacted with a flesh and bone person, Sari's version is a film that once more confronts an archetypal figure against its contemporary and tangible counterpart, testing the limits of what a conceptual model can achieve in reality.

Hanging low in the high hall on the ground floor, *Commemoration to Fools* (2019)—the biggest work in the exhibition—is a rectangular monochromatic structure that was padded and wrapped with a thick sheet of white vinyl. Its spotless and shiny surface is pierced with a series of curved and half-painted wooden sticks. Both the materiality and the surface of this work echo the sterile and supposedly protective environment found in mental

¹ Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Ed. Gallimard, 1961

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hospitals. Each stick is topped with a circle, a Jungian archetype representation the Self, and a recurring motif in the exhibition. It also appears in *White Series (I-IV)*, a series of smaller, human-size sculptures made with the same combination of materials. The stick itself hints again at the Fool Tarot card, while the color white suggests the expected neutralizing power on mental conditions. Typical of Sari's approach to symbolism, the color white carries contradictory meanings, being both the color of purity and that of isolation.

The exhibition gave its title to the first work one can see when entering the gallery. *A Permanent Fugue* (2019) is a series of four prints shown in a rolling star, an analog advertising system, usually used outdoors. The artist hijacked the display to present graphic compositions of 1s and 0s, the binary code able to translate the entire existing digital data. Reflecting on notions of manipulation and information, this work is entrapped in an eternal loop of seemingly identical repetition. Yet Sari suggests that the understanding of it is a matter of personal perception. As such, knowledge, and art, just like insanity, have always been defined by a subjective state of things, one that is constantly shifting and ultimately bound to disappear.

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