

REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART  
6916 SANTA MONICA BLVD  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90038

Peter Fischli  
Ungestalten  
February 17 – April 1, 2023

Nine new sculptures approximate the basic forms of city traffic lights, composing an infrastructure of vertical shafts and horizontal arms bearing suspended signals, which flash and change. These kinetic works signal strangely, each with its own particular on/off rhythm and colors, flashing white, orange or lemon yellow. Sometimes, instead of electric lights there are opaque mirrors or simple discs of daylight stained glass. A few of the sculptures present only dangling black wires, unplugged. One of these is topped with a crest of simulated snow. Peter Fischli's deviated, schizoid traffic lights sometimes suggest gallows. Or trees: symbols of life, or knowledge. We could also see them simply as abstract compositions of dots and lines. Or as psychograms: humanoid, diagrammatic. It's a Constructivist forest transmitting a sort of Arecibo Message from beyond, or within. The feeling is wintery and transcendent.

Writing on the medium of electric light in *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan remarked how the content of illumination (brain surgery, a night baseball game, a tv show) blinds us to the character of illumination itself. The message of electric light is totally radical, pervasive and decentralized. Its power is to say nothing while eliminating time and space between humans. It's no wonder that in their earliest proposals to reinvent urban life, the Situationists' first thought was to reprogram the lighting. Jean Baudrillard, meanwhile, thought it appropriate to empty the new Centre Pompidou of all artworks and to have nothing inside but a few blinking lights.

Fischli's kinetic sculptures are constructed mainly of wood, glass and cardboard, then painted. A colorful base coat has been calmed with many subsequent layers of differing grays and silvers mixed with champagne chalk. The vertical poles house digital controllers that program the signals.

A series of photo-collages capture and recompose traces of minor vandalism throughout the city of Zürich, photographed over the last three years by Fischli. On Halloween and at the end of the school semester, teenagers tag their everyday surroundings with shaving cream – foamy graffiti-blobs that mark private and public property and then dissolve harmlessly overnight. The artist has sliced into these images and reorganized them as a sort of mute, nocturnal photo-fairytale. The collages are mounted on aluminum plates and presented in pairs.

A steel grate covering a hole in the pavement outside the gallery emits a recording of a practice session by the Zürich-based band One-Two-Three. What we hear is the sound a song that's not yet a song, or of searching for a song. Fischli's new sound installation meanwhile creates the illusion of an active, basement practice space in Los Angeles, where basement spaces are nonexistent.