

Press release

Paul Pfeiffer | *Revelation 21*

13.09.-16.11.2024

Opening: Friday, 13 September, 2024, 6 - 10 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce Paul Pfeiffer's solo show *Revelation 21*. Engaging with the topics of spectatorship, architectural structures and mass media, this exhibition features a sculpture from the *Incarnator* series and photographs from the series *Temple of Solomon (After Villapando)* alongside the heteronomous body of work titled *Vitruvian Figure*. This exhibition shows for the first time the early prints - large-scale sepia works depicting architectural floorplans of significant Western Churches - in context with the latest sculpture. As Nora Wendl argues: "The *Vitruvian Figure(s)*, 1998-2009, arguably form the most enduring and untheorized body of work in Pfeiffer's oeuvre, marking architecture as a serious line of inquiry that permeates his practice".¹ Following almost 20 years, in 2008, Pfeiffer creates the first model: a miniature of the Sydney Olympic Stadium expanded by Pfeiffer to the capacity of 1,000,000 viewers. In 2009, Pfeiffer slices a model of London's reconstructed Wembley Stadium to a quarter of the inner grandstand. Reflected by a mirrored glass, this work conjures the illusion of a complete circle.

The to this date final *Vitruvian Figure* from 2015 is carried out in plywood and forms a half-circle divided by a mirror. The two meters high sculpture is based on the Philippine Arena, world's largest indoor arena located outside of Manila. This colossal building was built in 2014 by religious organization *Iglesia ni Cristo*, a Christian church founded in the Philippines in 1914. In the wake of anti-colonial movements, it offered an opposition to the Catholicism imposed by the Spanish colonial rule. Today the arena continues to host the congregations of *Iglesia ni Cristo* as well as sport events and music concerts.

Pfeiffer's work reflects the vast proportions of the arena while containing it within a gallery space. The sculpture itself appears as a paradoxical model, in the relation to the spectator the model still looms overwhelming in size, while simultaneously representing a miniaturized stadium, with 119 abstracted rows of seats. A "mimetic intensification"² plays out on the scale of the work. It places the spectator in a peculiar position of encountering an architectural structure, which appears distinctively as a miniature mimicking an object much larger and yet its scale feels enormous when confronted with. Simultaneously, it allows the viewer an otherwise impossible, nearly bird-eye like perspective of the stadium it represents, enabling them to overview the structure and thus intensifying its perception. The arena is however deployed of the crowd, the event. In the widest sense a device for spectatorship, it becomes here it's object. The focus is directed on its form, an inverted dome. A centralized, symmetrical shape it seems to represent the ideal form, which can be mirrored into completion and create the illusion of a whole.

The search for the perfect form, which finds its expression in symmetry, occupied ancient roman architect and engineer Vitruvius in the first century BC. The third books of his treatise *De Architectura* titles *On Symmetry in Temples and in the Human Body*, introducing the foundational metaphor of architecture as a reflection of the human body. Pfeiffer's early *Vitruvian Figures* elaborate on this metaphor by eponymously titling architectural floorplans after Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing illustrating man's ideal proportions. The open spaces perforated by columns as well as the walls and niches in these floorplans raise the question of opening, opening up to another body, to the potentiality of encompassing another body, of man as a penetrable being. There is a sexual undertone in these works, becoming overt in a reading of the Vitruvian figure as two copulating men.³ Contesting the notion of architecture as a stand in for the universal body, Pfeiffer's *Vitruvian Figures* draw our attention to the particular, individual bodies which might inhabit these buildings.

Linking architectural plans and speculative models by title and timing, these works evoke a representation of what is not there, models or plans for what is to come, precise and generative at the same time. Are these plans and models made after these respective buildings or are they made for these buildings? In *Revelation 21*, a chapter of the bible the end of the world and the following new Heaven and Earth is described. Curiously this new world is envisioned in an architectural language, stating exact measurements and material specification. In a similar vein as above, one could ask: when describing this new world, is the revelation a stand-in for a new world or after an old world?

Paul Pfeiffer (b. 1966, Honolulu, Hawaii) is an artist living and working in New York City, who has been making work in video, photography, installation, and sculpture since the late 1990s. Known for his innovative manipulation of digital media, Pfeiffer recasts the visual language of mass media spectacle to examine how images shape our awareness of ourselves and the world. Pfeiffer has had many one-person exhibitions at Whitney Museum of American Art (2001); the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2003 and 2017-18); the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2005); MUSAC León, Spain (2008); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2009); Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila (2015); Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil (2018); and The Athenaeum, Athens, GA (2023). Pfeiffer's first large-scale retrospective of his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2023-24) will travel to the Guggenheim Bilbao and open November, 2024.

¹ ³ Nora Wendl: *Impossible Architectures/Immodest Proposals in Contemporary Art About Architecture A Strange Utility*. Edited by Isabelle Loring Wallace, Nora Wendl, 2014

² Hal Foster in conversation with Paul Pfeiffer: *Go for Broke? A conversation between Paul Pfeiffer and Hal Foster*. In: *Paul Pfeiffer*. Edited by Ingvild Goetz, Stephan Urbaschek, 2011