

WASSERMANPROJECTS

Italian Sculptor Willy Verginer, Norwegian Painter Christer Karlstad, And Michigan-Based Photographer Jason DeMarte to be Featured in Upcoming Exhibition At Wasserman Projects

Show Marks First Major U.S. Presentations for Verginer and Karlstad

On View February 3 – April 8, 2017, *After Industry* Highlights Distinct Artistic Responses to Important Social Issues

Detroit—November 21, 2016—On February 3, Wasserman Projects in Detroit will open *After Industry*, an exhibition of new and recent work by Italian sculptor Willy Verginer, Norwegian painter Christer Karlstad, and Michigan-based photographer Jason DeMarte. The exhibition marks the first time that Verginer and Karlstad’s work will be explored in depth in the U.S, and the first time their work will be exhibited together and with that of DeMarte. While vastly different in style, media, and technique, these artists’ works offer a subtle but unmistakable commentary on humanity’s disregard for and attempts to control the natural world. Their installations, paintings, and photographs convey the psychological and physical state of a world engrossed in consumption, and as a result at the cusp or just beyond collapse. On view through April 7, *After Industry* will immerse audiences in an aesthetically rich experience, while also providing a platform to engage with important underlying themes, including consumerism, human impact on the environment, and the effects of mass production.

The artists have not previously met and will not collaborate directly on the installation of *After Industry*. Instead, they will each present a selection of new and recent works that speak to the core of their individual conceptual and aesthetic approaches, creating a vibrant and diverse visual dialogue.

Professionally trained as a sculptor and wood carver in his home region of Val Gardena in Northern Italy—where wood carving traditions date back to the 7th century—Verginer creates installations that locate his life-like wood-sculpted figures in vignettes with seemingly incongruous objects such as barrels, tires, and light bulbs, producing scenes that defy clear narrative and capture an eerie otherworldliness. This alienesque sensation is also felt in Karlstad’s paintings and DeMarte’s photographs. Karlstad portrays a landscape where cities are just a memory and nature has reasserted itself. The animals and people that populate his highly realistic canvases feel familiar and yet their circumstances are strange and haunting. DeMarte’s vivid, large-scale photographs depict man-made tableaux of nature, highly composed and amplified through lighting and computer manipulation. DeMarte completes his scenes by inserting images of candies, syrups, and brightly colored products, creating sickeningly artificial and oversaturated environments.

“The discussions on sustainability, consumer culture, industry, and our lasting impact on the planet are so important, and also ever more divisive. *After Industry* offers an inroad for conversation through the work of three incredibly talented artists, who are approaching these subjects in very distinct ways and from the perspectives of individuals living in three very different places,” said Gary Wasserman, Founder of

Wasserman Projects. “Their work is both visually compelling and conceptually challenging. And in this particular moment in our history, it seemed right to bring them together to explore artistically subjects that are so relevant and resonant here in Detroit, but also nationally and internationally. This is very much in line with the vision of Wasserman Projects, connecting art to broader ideas and issues and presenting work that is in many ways both global and local.”

Willy Verginer

For *After Industry*, Verginer will present a freestanding sculptural installation and wall work, created especially for the exhibition, as well as several discrete sculptures and mixed-media works. The large-scale installation will feature several human and animal figures composed amid a series of full-scale oil drums. Taken wholly, the scene connotes a barren landscape and loss of social and civic order, where humans operate within the refuse of industry and attempt fruitlessly to create something from the remnants.

Adult figures attempt to harness the barrels that surround them to some use, but their actions appear darkly satirically. The children, who appear opposite in the scene, are strangely predatory, jarring our expectations of innocent play. The tension in the scene is further amplified by Verginer’s use of color, which he paints in broad swaths across his installations. In this work, black paint covers the bottoms of the barrels, spreads upwards on the adult figures, and consumes the children completely, enhancing the feeling that the viewer has come upon some type of wasteland and at any moment the strange figures will turn their attention to them. This installation is augmented by two wall works, including a new work featuring wood-carved tires, inspired by Detroit’s auto industry, and several sculptures, positioned as at once separate and related to the primary scene.

Christer Karlstad

A calm uneasiness permeates Karlstad’s paintings—the scenes inspiring more questions than answers. Are these figures dead or simply sleeping? Is the narrative comforting or disturbing? The images fluctuate within these dichotomies, evoking a melancholy quietude and strangeness. *After Industry* will feature a selection of Karlstad’s large-scale paintings, which are thematically linked by the dislocation of the human experience as we know it today and a newfound relationship with the animal world.

In these scenes, our self-appointed role as orchestrators of the world is recalibrated. The human figures find themselves either in nurturing embrace with the animals they may have once hunted or at the mercy of their wild instincts. In two paintings, large animals are shown carrying small children on their backs. The images at once conjure a sense of intrinsic connection among living beings and an instinctual concern for what may happen next. In another series of images, a man is shown slumped over an elk. The sequence of events prior and following the moment is unclear.

Together, the paintings offer a window into a mythic realm, one where the displacement of our world feels sudden and the fragility of our natural and man-made ecosystems is on full display. Karlstad’s work invites a meditative contemplation and thoughtful rethinking of our relationships and behaviors toward our environment and other living creatures. His uncanny ability to play with the psychology of a moment elicits a wide range of emotions and responses, and pushes the viewer to find personal resolution to the experience.

Jason DeMarte

DeMarte will present a selection of large-scale photographs from his latest series, titled *Confected*. The series explores the cultural desire to enhance and perfect nature, approaching it much as we would a consumer good that can be improved through augmentation. To create his highly curated tableaux, DeMarte takes discrete images of birds and flora, and then collages them together. The natural elements are enhanced through lighting and digital techniques, resulting in bright pops of color and hyper-realistic accents that feel unearthly. The scenes are completed with the incorporation of the man-made objects such as candies, plastic toys, and sweets, adding another layer of artificiality to the overall landscape.

DeMarte will present four photographs from the series in *After Industry*, including *Cowbirds and Cake Sprinkles*, which depicts two small birds sitting amid some wild flowers, as bright, rainbow sprinkles rain down on them. In another photograph, *Candied Cultivation*, huge flowers spring from a thicket, rising to impossible heights in the sky. Wrapped, shiny candies fall amid the pink and blue petals of the flowers. These fantastical, Willy Wonka-esque images have ominous undertones, conveyed visually through the gray clouds and smog that loom behind the colorful foreground elements.

The series speaks to our cultural obsession with unattainable perfection and beauty. The images convey a world in which the fake can be made to feel real, and the real feels lackluster in comparison. Together, these powerful and intense images highlight the destructive power of over indulgences, endless consumption, and desire to control and alter the world and reality around us.

After Industry will also feature work by Verginer's son, Christian Verginer, including several wall reliefs, made of wood and depicting scenes of forests. The exhibition marks a U.S. premiere for the artist.

ABOUT WASSERMAN PROJECTS

Wasserman Projects was conceived by Michigan-native Gary Wasserman, and opened its doors in a former firehouse in Detroit's historic Eastern Market, one of the oldest and largest year-round markets in the U.S., in fall 2015. Wasserman Projects is guided by a spirit of collaboration, recognizing that artist projects are best realized and most meaningful when they engage a broad range of cultural organizers, community leaders, and the dynamic and diverse populations of Detroit. The organization works with artists from across disciplines and around the world, presenting exhibitions and performances that will spark a discourse on art, but also cultural, social, or political issues, which are particularly active and timely in Detroit. Wasserman Projects is nimble in its approach, operating in part as a for-profit gallery as well as a presentation space, and helps artists bring to fruition new projects that may not otherwise be possible.

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