

Peter Friedl *Blow Job*



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Theater and its aesthetics have been a reference in Peter Friedl's work since the early 1980s, when he published a large number of essays on the subject. The theater embodies the whole complex of representation in the most direct form: the problem of 'speaking positions,' of transformation, and of acting – or, of what can be said and how, in what aesthetic genre and political context. In his exhibitions, Friedl uses a new concept of genre – strategies of bracketing, exposing, editing, and other contextual transfers – to discuss these questions in their respective institutional and historical frameworks and narratives. Throughout his artistic practice runs a deep concern about the language of the 'subaltern' – that is, what remains outside or excluded from accepted symbolic systems. Friedl's works are aesthetic models for disarming configurations of power.

This exhibition takes its cue from an internet project, *Blow Job*, initiated by Friedl in 2001 and set up as an anonymous blog: a brief scenario full of biographical, historical, and fictional references including seven acting characters. Running dialogues, stage directions, or prose insertions could be contributed to the website anonymously. It was conceived as a self-generated portrayal of a specific social situation in a specific place (Berlin) and time, but also as a reflection on participatory art, open structures, and post-dramatic theater. For the Antwerp exhibition, Extra City commissioned Peter Friedl to edit this trash material, which has now become anachronistic. Following Friedl's previous text-based projects, such as the children's monologues of *Kromme Elleboog* and *Four or Five Roses* or the interviews in *Working at Copan*, *Blow Job* raises questions of authorship, institutional practice, and visibility. The drama text will be published by Sternberg Press and will become the source for realizations and collaborations in various institutional contexts, beginning in São Paulo and Berlin in the fall of 2008. The exhibition brings together a selection of older and new works selected from the perspective of this commission.

The entry piece is the silkscreen *Kasperltheater* (1964–2008), based on one of Peter Friedl's children's drawings, which were also included in his recent retrospective exhibitions and in documenta 12. 'Kasperltheater' is (or was) a popular form of puppet theater for children, perhaps many people's first encounter with theater. The original drawing is part of the series of 45 drawings that are presented here chronologically from 1964 to 2008, many of them for the first time.

The site of action for the video installation *King Kong* (2001) is Sophiatown on the outskirts of Johannesburg. During the destruction of Sophiatown by the apartheid regime in the late 1950s, which turned it into a white-only neighborhood named Triomf, it was chosen as the scenery for the South African jazz opera *King Kong*, whose tragic hero was the boxer Ezekiel 'King Kong' Dhlamini. In Friedl's subtle deconstruction of a video clip, U.S. songwriter Daniel Johnston, surrounded by playing children, performs his own 'King Kong' song which retells the story of the Hollywood film.

Since 1992, Friedl has been collecting pictures from newspapers and magazines for his long-term project *Theory of Justice*. 'As the art of observation, every theory draws a picture of the world. But what happens if the images themselves want to become theory?' he asks. The title refers to the attempt at renewing social contract theory undertaken by the U.S. philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002). As classic examples of political liberalism, these advocate a well-ordered society based on overarching consensus among its members. But in the current global drama of exclusion and marginalization, conflict – politics as resistance – takes the place of consensus, and employs the logic of the political as opposition to the *dispositifs* of administration, police repression, and institutional regulation. Friedl's photographs single out motifs from his archival collection rephotographed with black and white negative film. As the document turns into an artifact with small shadows, the pictures give rise to a momentum of autonomy.

For the 48th Venice Biennale (1999), Peter Friedl collaboratively produced his own family and work history in drawings reworked on the computer and later printed as a coloring book. Several motifs are now used for an iconoclastic wall drawing. Perhaps a comment on participatory art, it certainly refers to the relation between memory and history, reminiscent of the Freudian image of memory as a palimpsest.

The slide projection *Snjókarl* documents children at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík. They build a snowman from papier-mâché

following a draft by Friedl's son. It should have reached the height of the artist, yet the young sculptors decided to stop at 140 cm. *Snjókarl* is like a film in the form of still images. The slides, taken in 1999, have not been exhibited until today.

Originally, *forty acres and a mule* (2001) – another work dealing with inadequacy – consisted of a living mule, a black rubber floor mat (any dimensions possible), and a series of five photos based on *Theory of Justice* pictures. The aesthetics of minimalism are charged with political history: '40 acres and a mule' is the compensation that was to be awarded to freed African-American slaves in the aftermath of the Civil War (1862–1865) – a promise never fulfilled and still haunting U.S. society.

*La Bohème* (1997) documents a performance in Berlin. Friedl designed a poster advertising 'La Bohème'; the event took place in an attic (like two scenes of Puccini's *La Bohème*). Rather than staging a performance for an audience, the audience was staged for the performance.

Other works on display include a color photograph of a stone relief in Copán, a Mayan site in present day Honduras. The picture appeared first in the context of Friedl's *Working at Copan* book addressing the fate of modernism. *Working at Copan* was released before the exhibition and is available at Extra City and in bookshops. The photo functions as a reference to the archaeology of performance which has become more prominent in recent years.

Peter Friedl's work has been exhibited worldwide, including at documenta X (1997) and documenta XII (2007), the 48th Venice Biennale (1999), the 3rd Berlin Biennale (2004), and the 2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Seville (2006). Solo exhibitions include the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1998); Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (1999); Casino Luxembourg, Luxemburg (2001); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2001); Institute for Contemporary Art, Cape Town (2002); Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne-Lyon (2002); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main (2004); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2004); Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2006); and Kunsthalle Basel (2008). In 2006 the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) organized a comprehensive retrospective, which was subsequently shown at Miami Art Central/Miami Art Museum and the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Marseille.



# List of works

## 1

*Untitled*, 1964 (March)  
Oil crayon on paper  
24.5 × 38.6 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1964 (May)  
Ballpoint pen on paper  
24 × 19 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1966 (8  
February)  
Pencil, colored pencil on  
paper  
21 × 29.7 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1966 (23  
February)  
Oil crayon on paper  
42 × 29.6 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1969  
Pencil on paper  
9 × 14.6 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1972  
Pencil, gouache on paper  
42.9 × 30.8 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1985 (3 October)  
Felt tip pen on paper  
20.7 × 14.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1986  
Charcoal, pastel on paper  
10.6 × 8.1 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1986  
Charcoal, pastel on paper  
11 × 13 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1987 (9 March)  
Charcoal, colored pencil,  
pastel on paper  
10.8 × 8.3 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1987 (31 March)  
Colored pencil, charcoal,  
pastel, watercolor on  
paper  
17 × 12 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Monte Cavallo*, 1988  
(July)  
Pencil, watercolor on  
paper  
20.7 × 14.8 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1989  
(19 February)  
Pencil, charcoal,  
watercolor on paper  
30 × 39.9 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1989  
(23 February)  
Pencil on paper  
30 × 39.9 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1989 (4 July)  
Pencil, vegetable color  
paints on paper  
29.8 × 39.7 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1989 (12 July)  
Ink, watercolor on paper  
30 × 42 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1990 (29 August)  
Watercolor on paper  
20.9 × 15 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1991  
(28 February)  
Stamp-pad ink,  
watercolor on paper  
14.4 × 20.6 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1991 (20 August)  
Ballpoint, watercolor on paper  
29 × 20.9 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1991  
(30 September)  
Watercolor on paper  
13.3 × 10.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1991 (8 October)  
Pastel chalk on paper  
18 × 12.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1991  
(31 October)  
Ballpoint pen, stamp-pad ink on paper  
29.7 × 21 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1992  
(26 January)  
Pencil, watercolor on paper  
21 × 23.2 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1992  
(26 January)  
Watercolor on paper  
21 × 23.2 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1992 (1 March)  
Pencil on paper  
10 × 7.2 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1992 (24 June)  
Ballpoint pen on paper  
19.4 × 11.1 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1992  
Gouache, oil on paper  
21.3 × 16.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1992 (16 August)  
Crayon, watercolor on paper  
20.5 × 14.7 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1992  
(12 September)  
Pencil, gouache on paper  
23.9 × 33 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1992  
(31 December)  
Pencil on paper  
17 × 24.1 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1993 (9 January)  
Pencil on paper  
21 × 14.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1993  
Ink on paper  
24.5 × 18.2 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1993 (16 April)  
Pencil on paper  
24.1 × 32.1 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1993 (22 April)  
Ballpoint pen, marker on paper  
18.5 × 14.7 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1993 (18 May)  
Pencil on paper  
13.4 × 10.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1993 (May)  
Color pencil on paper  
21.1 × 29.6 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1995  
(9 November)  
Ballpoint pen on paper  
29.6 × 21.1 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 1995  
(11 November)  
Ballpoint pen, watercolor on paper  
29.5 × 21 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna Hécey, Brussels

*The man who walked through the wall*, 1995–1996  
(16 November 1995 and 14 June 1996)  
Felt-tip, ballpoint pen, watercolor on paper  
20.9 × 29.4 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1998  
Pencil on paper  
35 × 27.7 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 1998  
Pencil on paper  
21 × 14.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 2003  
Colored pencil on  
photocopy  
21.1 × 16.2 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 2003 (30 April)  
Pencil on paper  
16.2 × 9.1 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

*Untitled*, 2008 (7 January)  
Gouache on paper  
29.8 × 20.9 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*, 2008 (18 March)  
Pencil on paper  
29.7 × 21 cm  
Courtesy the artist

## 2

*Theory of Justice*,  
2006–2008

*Untitled (1885)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
55.5 × 74.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (1920)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (1927)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
50.2 × 37.8 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (1960)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
50.2 × 34 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (1973)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
80.5 × 66.2 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (1993)*, 2006  
Black and white  
photograph  
55.5 × 69 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*  
(7 November 2000), 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
55.5 × 74.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (20 April 2003)*,  
2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
55.5 × 74.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (May 2005)*, 2007  
Black and white  
photograph  
34 × 50.2 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled*  
(12 December 2005), 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
34 × 50.2 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (2007)*, 2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
55.5 × 74.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist

*Untitled (August 2007)*,  
2008  
Black and white  
photograph  
50.2 × 34 cm  
Courtesy the artist

## 3

*Untitled*, 1999–2008  
Wall drawing, marker  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy the artist

## 4

*Untitled (Antwerpen)*,  
2007  
Color photograph  
35.5 × 45 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

## 5

*Snjókarl*, 1999–2008  
Color slides  
Courtesy the artist

6

*Hotel Libertas*, 2003  
Color photograph  
80 × 120 cm  
Courtesy the artist

7

*La Bohème*, 1997  
Video, color, sound  
4:37 min. loop  
Courtesy the artist

8

*Forty acres and a mule*,  
2001–2008  
Mule, rubber floor mat  
Variable dimensions  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

9

*Untitled (Copán)*, 2007  
Color photograph  
80 × 120 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

10

*Untitled (Berlin)*, 1995  
Color photograph  
73 × 48.2 cm  
Courtesy the artist

11

*Untitled*, 1998  
Color photograph, marker  
13 × 8.8 cm  
Courtesy the artist

12

*Untitled*, 1992  
Color photograph  
30 × 45 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

13

*Untitled (1962)*, 2007  
Color photograph  
30 × 45.3 cm  
Courtesy the artist

14

*Untitled (Torino)*, 1994  
Color photograph  
8.8 × 13 cm  
Courtesy the artist

15

*Untitled*, 1998  
Color photograph, marker  
8.8 × 13 cm  
Courtesy the artist

16

*Untitled*, 1991  
Natural resin varnish, oil  
on canvas  
40.5 × 35 cm  
Private collection, Italy

17

*Kasperltheater*, 1964–2008  
Silkscreen on paper,  
4 parts  
168 × 208 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Erna  
Hécey, Brussels

18

*King Kong*, 2001  
Video, color, sound  
3:57 min. loop  
Courtesy the artist &  
Vanhaerents Art  
Collection, Brussels

**Peter Friedl**

Blow Job

30 May–27 July 2008

Curated by  
Anselm Franke

Exhibition architecture  
Pieter d'Haeseleer,  
Kris Kimpe and Bruno  
Poelaert

Production  
Lotte De Voeght  
and Ari Hiroshige

Installation  
Bart Boussemaere, Benjamin  
Hertoghs, Caroline Van  
Eccelpoel, Egon Van  
Herreweghe, Eidotech,  
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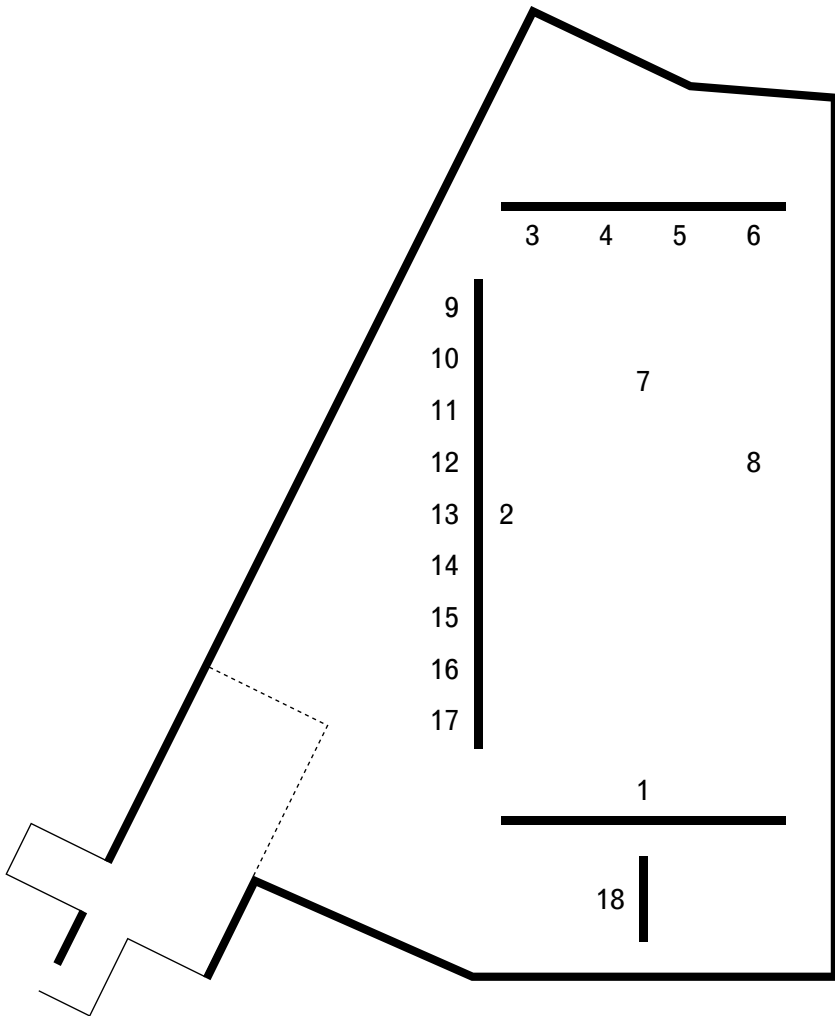
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# Floor plan



**Extra City**  
centrum voor hedendaagse kunst