

**Guillaume Bijl
Press release**

Galleri Nicolai Wallner is pleased to present a solo show of work by Guillaume Bijl. This exhibition marks Bijl's first with the gallery.

Playing with the intersection between reality and fiction, Bijl uses context, pairing the expected and the unexpected, to create situations in which we are challenged to examine our own understanding of normality and how things are connected.

The exhibition follows his practice through installation and sculptural work, with one such large-scale installation occupying a full room of the gallery. Within this installation, the viewer is presented with the real and the non real. A stage stands on one end of the room, chairs and a judges table facing it. There are neons and spotlights, glittering curtains, palm trees and light music plays in the background. A sign floating on the stage reads "Miss Copenhagen Beauty". The installation is completely immersive, sweeping up the viewer in the drama and the theatrical nature of the work. Standing on the precipice of fiction and truth, the viewer is left with a sense of tension and impending reality—is Miss Copenhagen Beauty a fictitious mirage, or will we see a winner be crowned?

This ambiguity teased out by Bijl sets the backdrop for an exploration into our personal sense of image and worth. In an age when social media and selfies are a given, and photo-documentation of one's life has become so inherent to our culture, the idea of competing over superficial values seems almost mundane. Being able to measure your value compared to others through your ability to pose, the interesting things you do, what you eat, where you go, all readily available for anyone to see and judge shows just how comfortable we are with objectifying other people, but also with how comfortable we are with objectifying our own selves. In this context, what becomes apparent in the midst of *Miss Copenhagen Beauty*, is how little difference there is between the idea of the beauty pageant created within the space, and our real lives.

Bijl's ability to make our realities evident without exaggeration continues with his more sculptural work. Each creates a kind of pastiche of elements, assembling found objects from our time. Wedding cake toppers are grouped together, a headless figure stands under a shelf holding three possible heads, a female mannequin covered in stickers is surrounded by tailor busts, a Magritte reference is found amidst figures of seagulls. The deliberate nature of how each work is presented shows Bijl's intention, but the connotations are left open ended. Just as with *Miss Copenhagen Beauty*, the connotations which Bijl presents us with are not foreign, but rather things which we know to exist within our contemporary society.

In so doing, Bijl once again turns towards us, the viewer, asking us to weave our own narratives. We become an active part of the work, continually bringing forwards new meaning, creating an on going exploration of the realities of our lives.

Guillaume Bijl (b. 1946, Belgium) has had notable solo exhibitions at S.M.A.K. (Ghent), Arken Museum (Ishøj), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), The New Museum (New York), Wiener Secession (Vienna), Witte de With (Rotterdam), and Centre National d'Art Contemporain (Grenoble). His work is found in the collections of Centre Pompidou (Paris), FRAC National (Paris), MOCA (Los Angeles), Ludwig Museum (Cologne), S.M.A.K. (Ghent), Neue Galerie Graz (Graz), and Musée des Beaux Arts (Lausanne) among many others. Bijl will show as part of Manifesta 11 in June.