

## gelatin

### *Beyond hard*

18 January–2 March 2019

Gelatin's roundelay of surprising narratives continues. An illegal balcony on the World Trade Center, a 70-meter-long knit bunny in the mountains of Artesina, an Arc de Triomphe in the Prada Foundation ... gelatin's work regularly combines gender themes with theories of culture and artistic production, while continuing to develop their preference for "penetrating" artistic activities. Gaps and holes have long occupied the group (Wolfgang Gantner, Ali Janka, Florian Reither, Tobias Urban). In 2007, they spent day after day digging themselves into the beach at Coney Island, New York, only to fill the hole back in again at the end of each day. The void left by holes can create space to think freely or evoke feelings of claustrophobia. Beyond the sculptural aspect, gelatin's preoccupation with holes metaphorically addresses the constriction and expansion of conventions.

Their rigorous continuation of this research, this time within an institutional framework, was demonstrated in the exhibition *Hole* at belvedere 21. At the center of the glass exhibition hall stood a styrofoam cube, which measured roughly eight by eight by eight meters at the beginning of the exhibition. To the sounds of an electric harp and Bösendorfer piano, gelatin spent five days working with and on the monumental material as an audience looked on. In the midst of this, as the white styrofoam trickled gently like snow or entire blocks tumbled into the depths, they dug holes with homemade hot-wire cutters, shovels, and hands. Plaster was poured into the voids and various bases were inserted into the still-wet material, by which the sculptures were later pulled out like huge lollipops.

The application of the same method—hollow spaces dug into layers of styrofoam blocks and cast in concrete—subsequently made it possible to erect two columns measuring 20 and 22 meters respectively in Guadalajara, Mexico—positive forms created not through composition and construction, but as a result of excavation and imprint.

The realization of a series of portraits for the exhibition *Beyond hard* at Galerie Meyer Kainer, using the same *ex negativo* process, originated with a specific commission to create a portrait bust. For gelatin, this was a coincidental but welcome occasion to circumvent their own artistic tastes and ambitions. Though they approach the theme of sculpture in emulation of classical figure groups, gelatin's special method allows them to roam back and forth freely between chance, *laissez-faire*, and complex formal sculptural language.

The portrait, born of a specific circumstance, shows a mirrored, faceless double head, sunk into a surface that suggests an accidental remnant of production—a mirror, water, or perhaps a speech bubble that opens out onto a larger echo chamber. Using this device, gelatin has developed a series of archetypal busts of the backs of heads, which draw their tension from the contrast between the feel of hard, mottled plaster casts and the soft, porous raw material of the styrofoam base. The juxtaposition of a specific technical process with the psychology of a specific portrait situation allows the formulation of general assertions regarding notions of everyday alienation and mental conditioning. In the Lacanian view, the myth of Narcissus in love with his mirror image is associated less with self-love than with the awakening of self-awareness and self-knowledge—important aspects in the process of individuation. The fact that the head is immersed in the separating surface also raises associations to biopsychological aspects, to the so-called diving reflex, a reflex that brings our breathing to a standstill and slows our heartbeat when we submerge.