

PRESS RELEASE

Steven Shearer
Wools and Effigies

September 2 – 27, 2025
Opening on Monday, September 1, 4 – 7 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber x P21
74 Hoenamu-Ro, Yongsan-Gu, Seoul, South Korea
Opening hours, Tuesday – Friday, 11 am – 6 pm, Saturday, 12 – 6 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Wools and Effigies*, the gallery's eighth solo exhibition with the Canadian artist Steven Shearer. This is the fifth collaboration between the gallerists Eva Presenhuber and Soo Choi.

Wools and Effigies weaves together disparate approaches to portraiture through a selection of drawings, painting and print works. While echoing the bric-a-brac quality of Shearer's signature *Archive* works, the exhibition title suggests an unconventional shop dealing in woolen goods and curios—where the refined taste and authority of antique artifacts meet the monstrous refuse of a more recent past.

The show's central painting, *Figurine Peddler* (2025), depicts a male figure holding a polychrome statuette against an ambiguous backdrop. Given the scale relationship between the two, the painting's title suggests that the older-looking man is a peddler, possibly offering the object in his hands for trade. The figurine contrasts sharply with the peddler: it portrays an attractive young man, while the peddler is rendered with less conventionally desirable features. It is unclear whether he is contemplating the figurine or presenting it.

Although the man's naturalistic flesh tones support the reading implied by the title, Shearer's treatment of the hands complicates the distinction between animate and inanimate. The same bright yellow is used on both the peddler's hands and the figurine's face, suggesting they may belong to the same realm, or that one has somehow contaminated the other, evoking a reversal of the Pygmalion trope. Perhaps the hands don't belong to the peddler at all. This ambiguity is deepened by the older man's contemplative or quizzical expression: while he appears pensive, his eyes do not fully focus on the figurine, rendering him mannequin-like. In contrast, the figurine seems to meet the viewer's gaze directly, asserting a curious vitality.

The illusion of the painting as a window is disrupted by a *trompe l'oeil* curtain rod along the canvas's top edge. From there, the composition transitions from naturalistic elements to increasingly stylized ones: the folds of fabric recall the mountain range below, while the sky above morphs into a fantastical, sculptural form—as if carved from wood or shaped from paper. Surrealist elements permeate the image, especially in the lower portion, where a stylized sun emerges behind an anthropomorphized cloud, lending the work a dreamlike, otherworldly quality.

Part vitrine, part inventory catalogue, *Womba Loom* (2017) presents a formal contrast to the other works in the show. The piece centers on Shearer's archive of images sourced from wool fetish websites in the early 2000s. While blending commercial photographs from mail order catalogs with more explicit pictures taken by amateur photographers, the collection builds upon a preexisting archive of woolen handicraft evocative of body parts and reproductive organs. A key catalyst in Shearer's decision to turn the archive into a printed work was his realization that the featureless or large-breasted figures in these fetish images resemble the Venus of Willendorf and other prehistoric Venus figurines.

If one sees the *Archive* works as a formalist weaving of images, the images of wool handicraft then become a type of patchwork within the patchwork. To use another metaphor, the *Archive* works are digital mosaics in which Shearer fits the images together so that formal and narrative echoes among the various depicted subjects are amplified by their proximity. If he views his interest in the images as pseudo-sociological or pseudo-anthropological, it's because they ultimately lead to non-hierarchical arrangements, allowing unexpected connections to emerge. Thus, while *Womba Loom* may reflect a wider human fascination with wool and voluptuous shapes, its proximity to the pastel drawings brings forward another motif: masks and face coverings. Biomorphous headdresses begin to populate the

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work, in images of individuals shrouded in knitted blankets, in balaclavas that muddle facial expressions, or in monster-like craft pieces.

While female figures, their social roles, and their attributes dominate *Womba Loom*, the pastel drawings center on the male figure as effigy, defined by headgear and facial markings. In these works, Shearer employs a relatively new technique and format with which the pastel pencil imposes jolts of movement, resulting in shorter, less fluid strokes than those found in his earlier work. The result is a kind of abbreviated description; the lined and craggy faces lend themselves well to this treatment.

Some of the drawings evoke classical busts, with vacant eyes and scooped coverings that resemble wigs or togas. Others recall mythic or religious figures, adorned with face paint and headgear marked by eye-like motifs that, while suggestive of animal pelts, obscure and complicate the legibility of the underlying face. The titles variously imply a sense of untrustworthiness, emphasizing masks that contrast verisimilitude and respectability with artifice and deception. While nodding to the memorialization of ancient philosophers through statuary, Shearer also references one of rock music's most iconic uses of makeup. But if the thinker is a poser, the showman just might be a shaman... or not.

Together, the works in *Wools and Effigies* reveal a shared fascination with the figure as both object and artifact, linking the painting's ambiguous exchange between peddler and figurine, the archive's mosaic of fetishized forms, and the drawings' effigy-like heads into a meditation on identity, display, and the porous boundary between the animate and the inanimate.

Steven Shearer was born in 1968 in New Westminster, BC, CA, and lives and works in Vancouver, BC, CA. For over 20 years, Shearer has worked with a wide range of materials including, print, sculpture, painting, drawing, and collaged found photography. Shearer has become increasingly well known for his adept portraits of figures painted within interior spaces. These portraits recall figures from past music subcultures and art historical paintings and are rendered employing stylistic references from Fauvism and Symbolism to German Romantic Art. Reconfiguring Renaissance systems of perspective, he creates complex perspectival elements within the compositions that animate the viewer's engagement with his paintings.

Selected solo exhibitions took place at institutions including The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY, US (2024); The Economou Collection, Athens, GR (2023); The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, CT, US (2016); Charles Riva Collection, London, UK (2015); Canada at the 54th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT (2011); MUCA Gallery, University Museum of Arts and Sciences, Mexico City, MX (2008); New Museum, New York, NY, US (2008); and De Appel Center for Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, NL (2007). Shearer's work is included in numerous public and institutional collections, including the Aïshti Foundation, Beirut, LB; The Bailey Collection, Toronto, CA; The Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT, US; Burger Collection, CH / HK, CN; Ellipse Foundation Contemporary Art Collection, Lisbon, PT; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH; London Regional Museum, London, CA; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, CA; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, Montreal, CA; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerpen, BE; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, US; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, US; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, CA; Pinault Collection, Paris, FR; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL, US; Sammlung Ringier, Zurich, CH; and Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, CA.

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