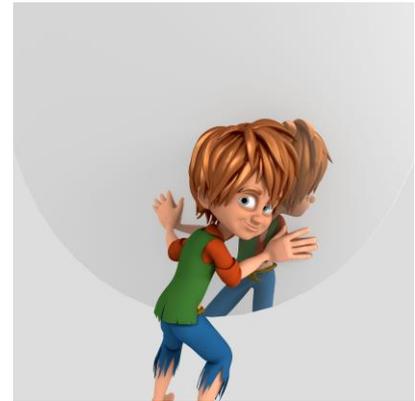


Jordan Wolfson  
*Riverboat song*  
 27 April – 17 June 2017

1 Davies St London W1  
 62 Kingly St London W1  
 Tuesday – Saturday, 11 – 6pm

In his first exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Jordan Wolfson presents a new video, *Riverboat song* – installed in the Kingly Street gallery – and a group of new works in a parallel display at Davies Street. Over the past decade, Wolfson's practice has traversed video, film, installation, performance, print and photography. Employing animation, digital imaging and animatronic sculpture, his recent work has centred on ideas of literal and virtual reality, especially the projection of inner impulses (desire, optimism, violence or guilt) into constructed selves or scenarios.

*Riverboat song* is a narcissistic surreal nightmare, drawn from the banalities and horrors of contemporary life and its online extension. Combining animation and found clips, pop soundtracks and voiceover, the video revolves around a Huckleberry Finn-style character (seemingly lifted from a Disney classic) who has recurred and morphed in Wolfson's work. In one sequence, the boy delivers a monologue voiced by the artist. Addressed to an absent lover, it is a chain of deadpan statements – confessional, coercive, retributive. The words are funnelled through other cartoon cut-outs including a crocodile in the bath and a pair of dining horses.



Wolfson adapts the formulaic stuff of the internet – avatars, memes, clips and mash-ups – and coerces these into a dark psychodrama. Through a splicing of images and a disconnect between image and script, *Riverboat song* erases the line between the perverse and the gleeful. The fictive world of animation, which grows more lurid as the video progresses, is contrasted by the found reality of YouTube footage. The movement from animation to YouTube signals a shift from introspection to an outward view – a subjective shift from the images and fantasies of the inward imagination to the outward search for place and identity through the surfing of the web. The act of surfing itself becomes a mirror-portrait of the horrors, injustice and perversions of contemporary life. Wolfson is at once an autobiographer (as participant and witness in the worlds he tracks) and creator of fiction (as the maker of his art).

One clip in *Riverboat song* shows a pair of brawling men, one viciously raining punches on the other. This clip was the stimulus behind Wolfson's virtual reality work *Real violence* (2017), on view at Davies Street, in which the manic brutality of a witness's iPhone video of real-life violence is translated into a heightened, disorienting, and contextless experience. (*Real violence* is also included in 2017 Whitney Biennial). The Huck Finn character is reincarnated in *Black sculpture* (2017) – a puppet cast from rubber segments, which follows Wolfson's sculptures (*Female figure*) (2014) and *Colored sculpture* (2016). In contrast to those works' painted finish and dynamic movements, the articulated figure sits motionless and monochrome, suspended between abstraction and figuration. Its eyes are hollow, awaiting animation and character. Its diabolical grin and awkward anatomy nod to the genre of evil dolls and toys, while its disconnected limbs – threaded by metal chains – carry a deeper subtext of latent violence.

The mood pervading Wolfson's recent work, of a classic American fairytale betrayed, is crystallised in *House with face* (2017). This is a giant representation of a witch's face modelled from faux timber. A pop-cultural image – and ancient cliché of malignant woman – is recast, as if by magic, into the animated roof of a rustic log cabin. Wolfson has spoken of cartoons as constituting "a dream world where anything is possible, but everything is subject to distortion and mutation." Throughout his latest work, he exploits the distortions of cartoons to render the reality of human acts and behaviours without moralizing or polemic. The power of Wolfson's work owes equally to the visceral impact of its complex, animated representations – which slide seamlessly from banal to violent, and from vividly imaginary to scarily real – and to its disturbing refusal to judge.

Jordan Wolfson was born in 1980 in New York. In 2003, he received his B.F.A. in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design. His work *Real violence* (2017) is currently on view at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York. Solo exhibitions include *TRUTH / LOVE* and *MANIC / LOVE*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016 and 2017); *Jordan Wolfson: Colored sculpture*, LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2016); *Jordan Wolfson: Two Early Works*, Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio (2015); *Jordan Wolfson: Ecce Homo/le Poseur*, organised by the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent (2013); and *Raspberry Poser*, Chisenhale Gallery, London (2013). Group exhibitions include *World As Cartoon*, Tate Britain, London (2017); *Manifesta 10*, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2014); 6th Glasgow International (2014); and *14 Rooms*, curated by Klaus Biesenbach and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Art Basel (2014). In 2009 he received the Cartier Award from the Frieze Foundation.

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