

# rachel uffner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Upstairs Gallery: Julia Weist

***Governing Body***

May 19 - June 18, 2022

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 19, 6-8 pm



Rachel Uffner Gallery is pleased to present *Governing Body*, a solo exhibition spanning several bodies of work by artist Julia Weist which focus on the relationship between artists and government. Weist's practice is defined by a uniquely recursive approach in which artworks filter through the same systems they foreground as subjects. Throughout the included photographs, prints, paintings and installations Weist positions herself as both a researcher of and participant in the infrastructure of governance and circulation. Her resulting projects achieve an uncanny intimacy with contexts typically considered opaque despite their civic nature.

A primary focus of the exhibition is Weist's *Public Record* series. In 2019 Weist was selected by New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs to create an artwork inspired by the Municipal Archives, the historic repository for city records. The commission included a year-long residency within the city's Department of Records and Information Services, where Weist was given workspace and access to agency resources and staff. During her tenure within municipal government, she researched the complex relationship between the city and its artists as documented in bureaucratic records spanning the last century. Her investigation uncovered revelatory discoveries ranging from unseen images from Rudy Giuliani's little-known photographic practice (he had a gallery exhibition in 1998) to reports from undercover New York City Police officers who surveilled the Art Workers Coalition in the late 1960s.

Rather than simply complete her commission with new artworks featuring these archival findings, Weist sought a way to intervene in the retention processes that accounted for the documents' preservation. Using only equipment owned by the city—cameras, lights, computers—and with the assistance of agency workers, Weist created 11 collage-style photographs

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documenting her research. As a result of the strategic way they were made, the artworks themselves were classified as government records. By law they must now be maintained and made accessible indefinitely to the public. *Governing Body* includes a selection of photographs from the *Public Record* series, marking the first physical installation of works. Each piece is an edition of three and the first print remains in the custody of the City of New York. Many of the second editions have been collected by major institutions including The Brooklyn Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Modern Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to name a few.

Government records feature heavily in another project presented in the exhibition, a series called *Motion Picture Division Association of America*. Created after extensive research at the State Archives in Albany, this suite of works document film scenes censored by New York State government's Motion Picture Division in the early 20th century. Film standards were not gender neutral; they skewed heavily toward curtailing the representation of women-identified characters' bodies, liberties and sexual freedom. Weist located as many of the eliminated scenes as she could, creating wallpaper out of the taboo imagery and a short film that stitched the scenes together. She then submitted the film to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) who gave it an R rating by today's standards. As part of this process, the MPAA now has oversight over public imagery associated with the film which, according to their ruleset, must be "appropriate" for all audiences. *Governing Body* features movie posters for Weist's film that were rejected by the MPAA because they depict breastfeeding, childbirth and sculptures of the nude female form among other subjects.

Concurrent to her research of archival materials at the city and state level, Weist embarked on several smaller-scale projects related to individuals with unique government backgrounds. In one such project, Weist built a relationship with Robert K. Wittman, a retired FBI agent who worked undercover in the art world. Weist asked Wittman to help her feel more comfortable in the role of artist and his advice resulted in several pieces included here. Another significant relationship Weist formed in this period was with Silda Wall Spitzer, an artist and the former First Lady of New York. *Governing Body* features the first artwork Wall Spitzer has ever publicly exhibited in a gallery: a portrait of Weist.

**Julia Weist** (b. 1984 in New York, NY) received a BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art and a MLIS from Pratt Institute. Her public artworks include *Public Record* (2020, New York City), *View-Through* (2017, Miami) and *Reach* (2015, Queens) and her work has recently been exhibited at The Shed, New York; The Gwangju Biennale; The Hong-Gah Museum, Taiwan; The Queens Museum, New York; The Luminary, St. Louis; Kunststituut Melly, Rotterdam; and nGbK, Berlin among many other venues. She is the recipient of a Camargo Foundation Fellowship, a Jerome Foundation Fellowship and the Net-based Audience Prize from Haus Der Elektronischen Künste. Her work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Queens Museum, The Jewish Museum, MIT List Visual Arts Center and The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, among other collections. Weist lives and works in upstate New York.

Images: (Left) Julia Weist, *Demonstration*, 2020, archival pigment print on cotton rag, 29 5/8 x 39 3/4 in (75.2 x 101 cm); (Right) *Giuliani*, 2020, archival pigment print on cotton rag, 29 5/8 x 39 5/8 in (75.2 x 100.6 cm)

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