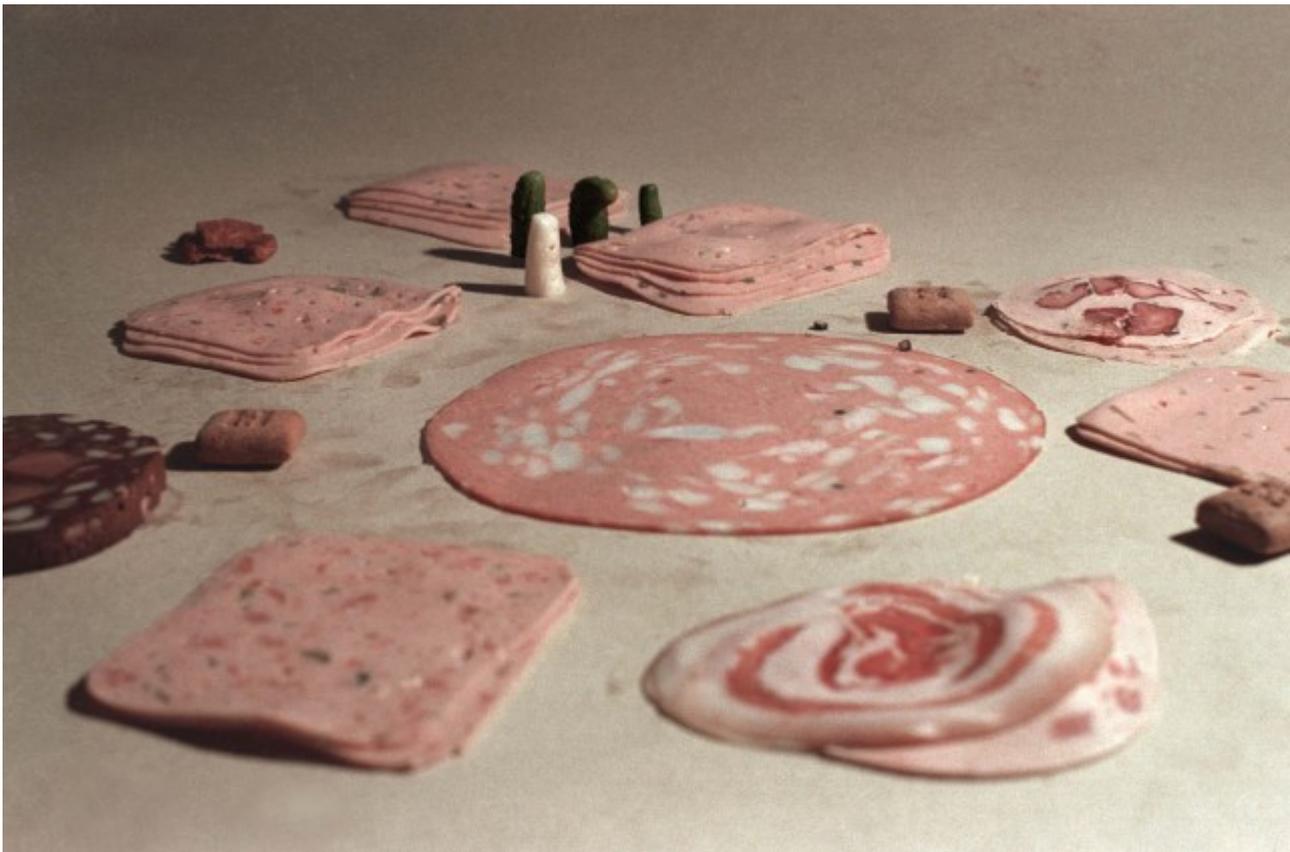


## Art Agency, Partners

Art Agency, Partners is a bespoke art advisory firm founded in 2014, and built upon decades of combined experience, to provide counsel to many of the world's leading art collectors and institutions on collection assessment and development, estate planning, and innovative approaches to museum giving and growth.

## Plenty of Fischli (and Weiss) in the Sea

### Challenging the Archetype



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *'At the Carpet Shop' from the Wurstseries* (1979)

By  Joe Dunning

director at AAP

Published 8 June 2017 in [Analysis](#)

There “are artists who speak to the wider world, and there are artists who inspire the discourse,” says the Serpentine Galleries’ artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist. “Fischli and Weiss are rare because they do both. With their art, it is a case of one plus one equals at least eleven.”

More than 40 major museum exhibitions have been dedicated to the work of Swiss artists Peter Fischli and the late David Weiss over the years, across Europe, North America, South America and Asia. They have featured prominently in three editions of the Venice Biennale, including in 2003 when they were awarded the Golden Lion, as well as in two iterations of Documenta, in 1987 and again in 1997.

Other artists revere their work, and their relevance is underscored by collaborative exhibitions such as “[Wade Guyton Peter](#)

[Fischli David Weiss” at the Aspen Art Museum](#) (22 June—26 November).

Yet, despite this acclaim, their work has never troubled the upper echelons of the market. Their auction record is decidedly unspectacular: there have been 344 auction sales globally since 1993, around 14 sales annually; and their work has never surpassed the \$1m mark.

## Global Politics

Being “European is a disadvantage compared to being an American. There aren’t as many European artists in the high price range,” says Monika Sprüth, the co-founder of Sprüth Magers gallery who has represented the artists since 1983.

Certainly, their work portrays a European worldview, forged in the DIY punk scene of 1970s Zürich, says Bice Curiger, the artistic director of the [Fondation Vincent van Gogh](#) in Arles, France. They “challenge the archetype of the artist with a big ego and all the answers,” she says.

Determinedly iconoclastic, Fischli and Weiss’ self-proclaimed strategy was “to attempt the encyclopedic and at the same time run it aground”. As a result, “their work is resistant to categorization—and to the market,” says Allan Schwartzman, co-founder of Art Agency, Partners and executive chairman of Sotheby’s.



Artists David Weiss (right) and Peter Fischli (left) (2008). Photo credit: Jens Rassing/AP Images

Throughout their 33-year partnership (Weiss died in 2012) the pair made art in a range of media—from sculpture to photography to video—often situated in the mundane everyday. In the wonderful [30-minute film](#) *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*) (1987), the force of gravity is applied to ordinary objects in a choreographed chain reaction of organized chaos. The photographic series *Airports* (1987-2012) exudes banality while *Visible World* (1986-2012)—snaps of the most popular tourist spots in the world—is remarkably unremarkable. Their work finds absurd humor in banality: *Sausage Series* (1979) comprises dramatic scenes staged with meat and cigarette butts. Ordinary objects including a dog bowl and vinyl record are recast in *Rubber Sculptures* (1986-88/2005-6), becoming both useless and unfamiliar.

“Their work has many faces,” says Beatrix Ruf, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, adding that the artists used materials as a means to transport their ideas, rather than purely as aesthetic objects. Simply put: there’s no such thing as typical with Fischli and Weiss.

## Market Specifics

Their market has largely followed patterns in the broader art market. There was a steady climb in volume and value that peaked in 2008 with the auction of an edition of *The Way Things Go*, sold at Christie's together with a collection of objects used in the film for CHF1m (\$843,085 in US currency. Est. CHF900,000-CHF1.5m).

Their market dropped dramatically in 2009 and 2010, recovering after 2011. In 2013, a record was set with the sale of the 72-part installation *Floß* (1982-83) for £602,500 (\$958,326) at Phillips (est. £600,000-£800,000).

These two top prices aren't the norm: the works were large and rare to come to auction. And, despite the high prices, the fact that both hammered below their low estimates suggests that bidding was thin. There is deeper activity for editions and works from series and, in general, their auction prices range from around \$30,000 to around \$100,000.



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled (Amsterdam, Air France)* (1998/2000) © Peter Fischli/David Weiss. Courtesy Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery, Galerie Eva Presenhuber

Of the top 100 works sold since 2000 at auction, 56 are sculptures and 41 are photographs (only three are films). Works from *Airports* and *Equilibres (A Quiet Afternoon)* (1984-86) account for 29 of the 41 photographs.

Of the 56 sculptures, 23 are *Rubber Sculptures*. This series (which comprises 24 works produced in editions of five or six, with four additional works made in 2005-6 in editions of three) is the most expensive body of work on average. Fifteen works from it have sold for more than \$100,000 (in total, only 32 works have sold above that figure).

## Collector Confusion

It isn't always obvious how rare works by Fischli and Weiss are, because they produced some series in different formats, while other series are ongoing. *Visible World*, for example, found form as an eight-hour slideshow-style video in 1997 (in a series of six) and, in 2000, as transparencies on light tables (in an edition of three) and an artists' book. The *Sausage Series*, meanwhile, was printed in three different sizes as sets of 10. *Suddenly This Overview* is ongoing. There is no catalogue raisonné, which might help clarify production size.



Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Galileo Galilei Starts to Doubt the Idea of the World as a Disc*, from *Suddenly This Overview* (1981-2012) © Peter Fischli/David Weiss. Courtesy Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery, Galerie Eva Presenhuber

Supply is also impacted by the fact that many of the major works have been placed in important museums and private collections that are unlikely to resell. "From the beginning, institutions looked at their work. For example, the curator Kasper König liked them early on," says Monika Sprüth. The German collector "Peter Ludwig bought a piece from my first show."

There is not much resale, says Stephanie Dorsey, senior director at Matthew Marks Gallery, which has represented Fischli and Weiss since 1999. "What we've sold has largely stayed where it is."

The lack of circulation on the secondary market becomes self-fulfilling. "Some great collectors don't know their work so well," Sprüth says. "Advisors don't really point out their work. They are not part of a speculative market."

Many of the themes in their work and market can be summed up by looking at one body of work—*Suddenly This Overview* [CLICK HERE](#)