

Press Release
MUTANT
Peles Empire
5 April - 25 May 2015



Opening Saturday 4 April 2015, 5-9pm

When I first travelled to Romania in order to attend my friend's wedding, I landed in Bucharest. There, an old BMW 518 with rear wheel drive picked me up. Within minutes I realised how paradoxical this place was—the bleak reality of a soaring economy was casting a sad shadow over the remnants of a grand past. It was just a few months after Romania started its plea to join the EU, needless to say, hopes were thriving high and foreign investments were starting to spark up around the country. This was around 2007, the newlyweds were celebrating in Targoviste, a mid-sized town and the home of Vlad Dracula (the impaler), in fact we were at the doorstep of the man who inspired the world-famous vampire character. Besides this historical highlight, the Romanians were still recovering from a traumatizing 30-year long episode orchestrated by dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who was executed in 1989. Between meals and dancing, we were invited to explore the surroundings, from Transylvania to Wallachia, where the Peles Castle sits on top of a green hill. Inaugurated in 1883 by King Carol I of Romania, this Neo-Renaissance castle is situated in the Carpathian Mountains, near a small city called Sinaia. During the hour and the half that lasted our journey, we went from the harsh daily life reality to the kingdom of tourism, dramatically shifting our perspective of the country.

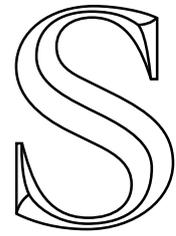
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On top of a sumptuous hillside, the sheer glitz and bastardized architectural mishmash of the castle's façade is exhilarating. With elements drawn from Neo-Renaissance to Gothic Revival, the building merges Italian classicism with German Baroque, while keeping a Renaissance flair. The interior of the 170+ rooms is coated with Rococo-inspired wooden carved ornaments and exquisite fabrics. Also gathering Art Deco and Orientalist inspirations, the thematically decorated rooms are dedicated to specific countries and distributed according to function (offices, libraries, art galleries etc.) The guide explained that the commissioners hoped to avoid any trends in order to materialize their concept of an ideal castle. The kooky ancestor of today's copy-paste culture, the Peles castle is the architect's ultimate fantasy: freed from any budgetary restraints, he gives birth to a monster that encompasses all his visions.

Peles Castle gave its name and *raison d'être* to artist duo Peles Empire. Founded in 2005, Peles Empire is a collaborative work by artist duo Katharina Stoeber and Barbara Wolff. Over a decade of research and documentation of the castle, the duo has been gradually unfolding the complex layers of its rich history and aesthetics, creating a continuous body of work in which each exhibition aims to grasp the essence of the castle. Each new project and its documentation are integrated into the artists' archive and potentially re-used in the next exhibition, ultimately feeding into a loop of controlled abstraction. Though deliberately adding layers of interpretation, this process inevitably moves away from the original material.

Having documented various rooms of Peles Castle on location, the artists proceed to divide one image into A3 printed segments, and re-construct it into large-scale wallpapers. Here, the photographs are simultaneously subjects and objects of the exhibition. Jumping from one dimension into the next, from a two-dimensional collage to a sculpture and back, an open system of interpretation and misinterpretation is put into action; highlighting the gains and losses emerging from each transformation. For *MUTANT*, Peles Empire worked site-specifically, responding to the architecture of SALTS. Further emphasizing the process of layering both physically and conceptually, a dramatic tear in the front wallpaper uncovers a monumental paper backdrop, highlighting the room's top light shaft, while visually merging floor and ceiling. Adding to the visual bewilderment, two column-like Jesmonite sculptures finish the dramatic setting.

Working mostly with A3-sized photographic paper and Jesmonite, the use of sober material and the absence of colours contrast with the richness and extravagance of the castle. Adopting the same undemocratic fashion as initially set out when the castle was designed, the clumsy heaviness of the original architecture fades away as the artists create their own version(s) of it, embracing Baudrillard's notion of simulacra while highlighting the impossibility of a "true" representation.



Peles Empire is Katharina Stöver (*1982 in Germany, lives and works in Berlin) and Barbara Wolff (*1980 in Romania, lives and works in Berlin) studied at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, 2002-2007 (class of Michael Krebber and Wolfgang Tilmans) and the Royal Academy School, London, 2008-2011.

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They have been exhibiting widely, including shows at Gesellschaft für aktuelle Kunst GAK in Bremen and the Moving Museum in Istanbul in 2014; the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; the Glasgow Sculpture Studios and Shanaynay, Paris and at Young London V22 in 2013. They have been awarded numerous scholarships amongst them the Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg and the Deutsche Bank Award. They are currently preparing for their upcoming solo exhibition at the Wilhelm Hack Museum in Ludwigshafen, Germany.

We would like to thank Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, for their generous support.

List of works, from left to right

Foyer:

Peles Empire, *Mutant 1*, 2015
Paper, Jesmonite, bag of Jetcem
Dimensions variable
courtesy Wentrup Berlin and the artists

Hallway:

Peles Empire, *Duo 10*, 2014
Jesmonite, pigment & paper
216 x 115 cm
courtesy Wentrup Berlin and the artists

Peles Empire, *Allel 19*, 2015
Jesmonite, pigments & paper
42 x 29.7 cm
courtesy Wentrup Berlin and the artists