

THE PATHOS OF MANDY

WALTER SCOTT



The Pathos of Mandy
by Loreta Lamargese

Walter Scott's work deals with the possibility of funneling identity into multiple registers of representation. Shifting between comics, video, and sculptural material, Scott pays heed to the remnants of a person that can't be contained in any one of these mediums—the complications that make us human. This surplus becomes fodder for narratives Scott lays out, from his internationally celebrated comic character, Wendy, to his latest introduction, Mandy. Scott's characters' motivations perpetually fall short of their goals: they make unwise decisions, are curious but lazy, and find themselves advancing toward self-fulfilling dread. In other words, they are frustrating because they trip themselves up only slightly more than we do; they are satirized, but are not clowns. Scott's now familiar cast of characters remains intelligible to viewers as they navigate art-world contexts, imbued with their maker's empathy, and afforded the unfettered emotional arena that comics supply.

In *The Pathos of Mandy* we follow the titular character through his self-pitying journey to reclaim his artistic voice after discovering that his own comic's protagonist is no longer his intellectual property, as she's being shopped around for a screenplay in L.A. The question of artistic license, often romantically conjured as an open field of play, is closed down and stifled by the bureaucratic structures that grant further access to one's creations. Within these new confines, Mandy's story takes us from an intimate conversation with his partner, to his reading of Kathy Acker and Roland Barthes, and, finally, lands wryly on his adoption of a new artistic medium—quilts. With Wendy occupying the role of Scott's alter ego, the emergence of Mandy opens up an infinitely regressive field of identification. This reverberating grid of persons and their potential doubles is a site as emancipatory as it is claustrophobic.



Various surfaces are activated within the exhibition, establishing multiple settings for Scott's characters to inhabit. Beyond the video itself, which slides seamlessly between live-action footage and animation, the exhibition disarticulates and splinters onto a stack of papers, now operating as a screen.

The resultant blurring between drawing and animation seems to suggest a hierarchical leveling of types of image production. On the stack of papers, a character walks in place as a looped animation. Unflinching in its repetitive tempo, the animation also raises questions which slide from mediation to meditation. Within a materially-rich environment of endless possibility, Scott seems to call attention to the ritualized social contracts of labor attached to all forms of making, artistic or otherwise.



All photos are video stills from Walter Scott, *The Pathos of Mandy*, 2019, video. 6 min. 55 sec. Images courtesy of the artist.

Scott's sculptures evoke the restrictive and unbinding duality of production, echoing the clerical webs in which his comic characters are caught. Scott develops a *mise-en-scène* through cast and found materials, which bleeds past the arena of any given medium. A pair of shiny black shoes bound together by a neon string are heavy with the air of slapstick clumsiness usually relegated to comics. The string, sharply taut and narrowly cutting through a white square suggestive of a sheet a paper, borrows from the visual language of the draftsman's line—it is both an urgent gesture and a drawn-out metaphor.

The matrix of persons and objects in *The Pathos of Mandy* intentionally circles back to the artist. And yet, while embodying this centralized approach to making, Scott avoids the kind of fantasy of auteurship that necessitates an infallible creator. Instead, Scott's narration is one that can't help but implicate the artist as a series of imperfect translations onto Others. Wendy and Mandy sliver along the edges of cultural production spheres, their small wins momentous in light of their status as underdogs. At the same time, their characterization is one of desperation that goes beyond satire, leaving open an affective wound for us to attempt to see healed. And if we begin to extend pathos to these characters, it becomes quickly impossible not to see the artist himself as deserving of our understanding; after all, he is responsible for the same kind of production that embeds his characters in these Kafkaesque scenarios.

Walter Scott (born 1985) is currently an artist-in-residence at ISCP. Scott is an interdisciplinary artist working across comics, drawing, video, performance and sculpture. His comic series, *Wendy*, chronicle the continuing misadventures of a young artist in a satirical version of the contemporary art world. *Wendy* has been featured in *Canadian Art*, *Art in America*, and the *New Yorker*. It was selected for the 2016 edition of *Best American Comics*, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York. Recent exhibitions include *Who Isn't She? A Wendy Retrospective*, Galerie UQO, Gatineau; *Slipping on the Missing X*, Macaulay Fine Art, Vancouver; and *Betazoid in a Fog*, Remail Modern, Saskatoon. Scott's new graphic novel, *Wendy, Master of Art*, will be available from Drawn & Quarterly in Spring 2020. Scott's residency is supported by a Canada Council for the Arts grant supporting the arts and cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

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International Studio & Curatorial Program

1040 Metropolitan Ave.

Brooklyn, NY 11211

t: (718) 387 2900

www.iscp-nyc.org

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