

PAVEL KRAUS

RETROSPECTIVE 1976-2016





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Essay by Marek Bartelik





Game, 1982. Cell vinyl on acrylic panel, 36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist

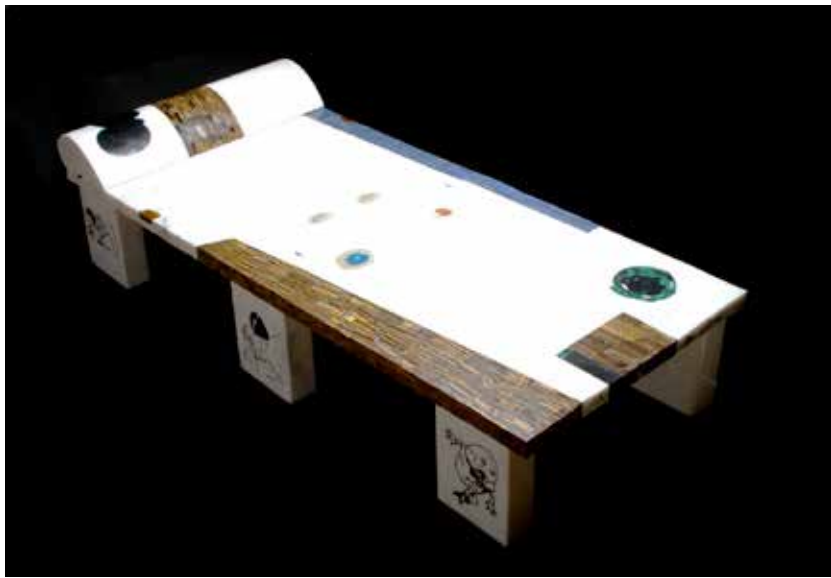
A Visit

When crossing over from nature to existence,
 walls are rather unkind,
 walls wet from the urine of talents, walls bespattered
 by eunuchs revolting against the spirit, walls not diminished
 even though they may not yet be born,
 and still walls already rounding out the fruit of the womb...

—Vladimír Holan, *A Night with Hamlet*

Inside Pavel Kraus's large and bright studio in Brooklyn, New York, three paintings lean against the wall near the entrance. They are placed back-to-back; little rectangular pieces of cardboard protect them from rubbing against each other. The paintings date to 1980, 1982, and 1983—the earliest from this series reaching back to the artist's studies at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, from which he earned an MFA in 1977, and the latest to a year prior to his moving to New York in 1984. Shiny and bright, they look as if they were finished yesterday.

In *Game*, 1982, the title appears on top of the image inscribed in cheerful red, orange, and pale blue, hanging garland-style above a desk that calls to mind a slice of a frosted layer cake—red-orange-red-pink-red-orange-red—sharply tilting toward the viewer. A small diamond-shaped hole in the middle, a pen, and two little square objects that look like inkwells are arranged on the desk in such a way that the ensemble resembles a face belonging to a whimsical, jolly creature. It looks to me like a “transformed” Magritte (“This Is Not a Piece of Cake”) wearing the clothes of Douanier Rousseau's felicitous footballers.



To reach the middle of the studio, we pass by a Barcelona Couch. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed the prototype along with the famous Barcelona Chair, which were first introduced in the German Pavilion during the 1929 Universal Exposition in the Catalan capital. Kraus tells me he uses this couch as a bed for napping during breaks from working on his art.

A series of works from 2015–2016, entitled “Fresh Marble,” arranged in the middle of the long room, defies the linear chronology that would allow me to see Kraus’s works as a progressive continuity. The studio seems to revolve around these newest works: six sculptures made of narrow slabs of white marble and natural resin displayed on plywood pedestals painted white. Each piece looks like a large model of an ancient temple produced, however, with a total disregard for perfect proportions and classical standards of beauty. Together they form a miniature archeological site made of structures that are asymmetrical, fragile, and wobbly to the point that a careless move could cause them to tumble down. Small objects, cast in resin, sprout from their tops, some of which

look like half-melted ice cream twists or spills of chocolate fudge; others look like dabs of bright frosting covering the top of a slab. These colorful, “unrestrained” objects, some sexually explicit and some obscure, remind me of Paul McCarthy’s small “perverse” clay sculptures, modeled on animated cartoon characters with distorted features. Suddenly, the startling contrast between the white marble and the colorful resin forms in Kraus’s works makes me think of the mutual dependence of the eschatological and the erotic as a triangulation between death, sex, and food. And I smile to myself.

Another “bed” appears in front of us. Kraus’s *Bed*, 2011–2013, from the “Roman Wedding” series, is made of white marble inlaid with lapis lazuli, malachite, and Tiger’s eye by stone craftsmen in India using the ancient technique of *pietre dure*. The work has spot-like, circular configurations of the artist’s DNA inlaid on the marble surface of the bed and cartoonish, erotic drawings covering the legs graffiti-style. Looking at this sculpture, I feel as if the Barcelona Couch from the other side of the studio has metamorphosed into a fantastic

The artist installing *Remains of the Present*, 1997. Raw beeswax, lead, wood, and steel; at the Joyce Goldstein Gallery, New York, NY. Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite left: *Roman Wedding*, 2011–2013. Pietre dure marble inlay with lapis lazuli, malachite, and Tiger’s eye. 20 × 81 × 36 inches (50.8 × 105.7 × 91.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite right: Installation view of *Levitation Glass*, 2016. Water white acid-washed laminated glass, neon tubes. 48 × 16 × 2 inches each (121.9 × 40.6 × 5.1 cm.). Private collection, London, England.



place for sleeping or, perhaps, even for final resting.

Scattered around on the floor next to *Bed* are pieces from the “Offering/Redemption” series, 2006–2009, executed in white marble and inlaid with a variety of semiprecious stones polished to perfection. These bifurcated egg-shaped objects of various sizes, which also carry fantastic images of the artist’s DNA, marry two cosmological symbols of the origins of life—one universal and one personal—while asserting the unity of the *sacrum* and the *profanum* as one of the fundamental conditions of life. They are visually stunning, dazzling with richness of their colors, and, at the same time, totally serene.

As we make our way toward the back of the studio, which ends by a large window, more works lie on the floor. Among them are several from the “Offerings” from 2006, of which, I wrote nearly a decade ago, “resemble small mummies, as if the tight bundles were cocooned figures.” I look at them again, and find the “cocooned figures” both humorous and horrifying, just as I did when I saw them the first time at OK Harris gallery in New York in 2006. “Il y a peu de chose qui sépare l’horrible du comique” (There is a little that separates the horrible from the comical), as Milan Kundera quoted

Eugène Ionesco in *L’art du roman*. Clearly, Kraus has been probing that “little” in such an original fashion. That is what attracted me to these works so forcefully back then, and what continues to attract me now.

Before I finish my visit, we sit at a table near the window to chat about the artist’s life. It has been marked by many extraordinary twists of fate, and produced the rich artistic output, which spans the last four decades, covered by his retrospective at Project: ARTspace. It all might have begun back in 1969, with Kraus’s leaving his native Czechoslovakia for the United States at the age of twenty-three after the tragic end of the Prague Spring. Carrying with him a heavy suitcase weighting forty-four pounds (twenty of which belonged to the weight of his books in Czech), he arrived in Chicago on July 16, the same day the Apollo Eleven was launched into space. As we know, four days later humans landed on the moon for the first time in history.

Marek Bartelik is a Polish-born and New York-based art critic, art historian, and poet. He has written for numerous publications in the United States and abroad, including *Artforum* (as a regular contributor), *Bookforum*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Art Journal*, *Art in America*, *Cultural Politics*, *DARE*, *Depart*, *Paletten*, and *Obieg*. He currently serves as the XVth President of AICA International, an association of art critics comprising 5,000 members globally in 63 national sections on 5 continents.



Blade, 1980. Cell vinyl on acrylic panel, 36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Theater, 1980. Cell vinyl on acrylic panel, 36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Installation view of four *Self-Portraits*, 1985–1987.
Mixed media on Mylar. Each: 40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Made in America, 1983. Cell vinyl on acrylic panel, 36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Above: *Time Capsule*, 1992–2016. Lead, marble, encaustic, natural resin, and copper, 43 × 10 × 11 inches (109.2 × 25.4 × 27.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Opposite: *Object of Desire*, 1993. Lead, 67 × 23 × 7 inches (170.2 × 58.2 × 17.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Following spread: *Offerings/Redemption*, 2006. Pietre dure black marble inlay with lapis lazuli, Tiger's eye, and red marble. Dimensions range from 12 × 8 ½ × 5 ½ inches to 14 × 14 ½ × 16 inches (30.5 × 21.6 × 14 cm to 35.6 × 36.8 × 40.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist





Above and opposite: *Archeology/Excavation*, 2002. Encaustic, lead on wooden panels.
Each panel: 72 × 48 × 3 inches (182.9 × 121.9 × 7.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Above and opposite detail: *Levitation Glass*, 2004–2005. Water white acid-washed laminated glass and neon tubes.
Each panel: 48 × 16 × 2 inches (121.9 × 40.6 × 5.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Levitations, 2006. Pigment on Mylar. Dimensions range from 116 × 68 × 36 inches and 28 × 48 × 29 inches and 29 × 58 × 28 inches (294.6 × 172.7 × 91.4 cm and 71.1 × 121.9 × 73.7 cm and 73.7 × 147.3 × 71.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Following spread: *Fresh Marble*, 2015–2016. Marble, organic resin and slate. Dimensions range from 3 × 6 × 3 inches to 3 × 22 × 6 inches (7.6 × 15.2 × 7.6 cm to 7.6 × 55.9 × 15.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist





Left: *Candy*, 1996–2016. Reclaimed wood, raw beeswax, natural resins, 12 ½ × 48 × 1 ½ inches (31.8 × 121.9 × 3.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Right: *Candy*, 1996–2016. Reclaimed wood, raw beeswax, natural resins, 12 ½ × 48 × 1 ½ inches (31.8 × 121.9 × 3.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist

Opposite: *Candies*, 1996–2016. Reclaimed wood, lead, quilts, slate, encaustic, raw beeswax, and natural resins. Dimensions range from 12 × 2 × 7 inches to 67 × 4 × 5 inches (30.5 × 5.1 × 17.8 cm to 170.2 × 10.2 × 12.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist



ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1946, Pilsen, Czech Republic

Lives and works in New York City

EDUCATION

- 1977 MFA, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago
1976 Graduate Studies, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago
1968 Masters Program, Brno University, Czech Republic
1966 BS, Institute of Technology, Plzen, Czech Republic

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *Pavel Kraus: Retrospective 1976–2016*, Project: ARTspace, New York, NY
2014 *Enigma*, Stephen Romano Gallery, Brooklyn NY
2006 *Archaeology/Excavation*, OK Harris, New York, NY
2005 *Levitation*, Bond Gallery, New York, NY
2004 *Archaeology 2004*, OK Harris, New York, NY
2002 *Sex Death Offerings/Transfiguration*, University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, WY
2001 *Sex Death Offerings/Levitation*, Robert Pardo Gallery, New York, NY
Archaeology/Cathedral, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
2000 *Archaeology*, OK Harris, New York, NY
1999 *Sex Death Offerings*, Konsthall Manes, Prague, Czech Republic
Books Of Lead and Honey, Joyce Goldstein Gallery, New York, NY
1998 *Remains of the Future II*, Galerie Gambit, Prague, Czech Republic
Sex Death Offerings, Exquisite Corpse Gallery, Burlington, VT
1997 *Monument*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
1995 *Remains II*, Embassy of Czech Republic, Washington, D.C.
Remains of the Future, The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Prague, Czech Republic
Remains of the Present, Joyce Goldstein Gallery, New York, NY
Remains of the Past, Czech Center New York [CCNY], NY
1994 *Works of Lead*, Galerie U Bileho Jednorozce, Klatovy, Czech Republic
Pavel Kraus, Czech Permanent Mission of the United Nations, New York, NY
1993 *Pavel Kraus*, G.H. Dalsheimer Gallery, Baltimore, MD

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *Light and Line*, 50 Hudson Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
November SVAC Members Show, Southern Vermont Arts Center, Manchester, VT
September SVAC Members Show, Southern Vermont Arts Center, Manchester, VT
2015 *Group Show*, Chase Edwards Gallery, Bridgehampton, NY

Select Art Fair, New York, NY

Under Construction, Governors Island, New York, NY

Laws of Attraction, Governors Island, New York, NY

NAC Members Show, National Arts Club, New York, NY

Clito Art Fair, New York, NY

Mysterium Cosmographicum, Stephen Romano Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2011 *Spring Round Up*, The Proposition, New York, NY

2006 *The Invisible in the Visible*, Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, NY

Monument and Fragments, Koehline Museum of Art, Oakton College, Des Plaines, IL

2005 *Offerings & Books*, 5+5 Gallery, New York

2004 *Identity—Records*, Lönnström Art Museum, Rauma, Finland

2003 *Gravity*, Robert Pardo Gallery, Chelsea, New York, NY

Human Factor, London Czech Center, England

2002 *Crossing Boundaries: Seven Contemporary Artists*, University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie, WY

Codes and Signs, The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Prague, Czech Republic

By Pound Per Piece, Kunsthall, Ceske Budejovice, Czech Republic

1999 *6 + 1*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

1995 Art Institute of Chicago, IL

1994 *Seda Cibla 66/1994*, Exile, Prague, Czech Republic

1993 Griffin McGear Gallery, New York, NY

Exile in New York, Galerie Spalova, Prague, Czech Republic

1992 Foster Peet, New York, NY

1986 Sally Hawkins Gallery, New York, NY

1985 Gallery K, Washington, D.C.

Crux Gallery, Chicago, IL

Davidson Gallery, Seattle, WA

101 Wooster Street, New York, NY

808 Penn Modern, Pittsburgh, PA

1984 DBN Exhibition Space, Washington, D.C.

Brandeis University Art Exhibition, Washington, D.C.

Lansburgh's, Washington, D.C.

PERMANENT PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS

2006 *Chandelier* American Asset Corporation [AAC], Charlotte, NC

Levitation Whitehall Corporate Center, Charlotte, NC

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2016 Bartelik, Marek. "A Visit" in *Pavel Kraus: Retrospective 1976–2016*, Project: ARTspace, New York, NY (Exh. cat.)

American Twist, Governors Island, New York, NY (Exh. cat.)

2015 *Laws of Attraction*, Governors Island, New York, NY (Exh. cat.)

2014 *Ebony*, David. "Enigma: The Work of Pavel Kraus" in *Enigma*. New York: Stephen Romano Gallery. (Exh. cat.)

2007 "Pavel Kraus, Public Art 2006 in Review," *Art in America*, Annual Guide

Bartelik, Marek. "Pavel Kraus at OK Harris," *Art in America*, February

2005 Leffingwell, Edward. "Pavel Kraus at Bond Gallery," *Art in America*, December

2002 *Crossing Boundaries: Seven Contemporary Artists*. Laramie: University of Wyoming Art Museum, WY. (Exh. cat.)

2000 *Ebony*, David. "12/15 in '6 + 1': Better Late than Never," *Art in America*, April

1999 *Ebony*, David. "Pavel Kraus at Manes," *Art in America*, November

6 + 1. Saratoga Springs: Skidmore College, NY. (Exh. cat.)

Sex Death Offerings. Prague: Konsthall Manes. (Exh. cat.)

"Zivot ve smrti — Obetiny," *Atelier*, October "6 + 1," *Atelier*, July

1998 "Pavel Kraus — Sex a smrt," *Atelier*, January

1997 "Ancient Mysteries," *Seven Days*, December "Imaginary Archaeologies," *Vox*, December

Ebony, David. "Pavel Kraus at Joyce Goldstein Gallery," *Art in America*, October

"Vaclav Blaha and Pavel Kraus,"

TimeOut New York, March

"Souzneni v romanskem podzemi, Pavel Kraus — Zbytky budoucnosti," *Atelier*, March

"Kraus se nevraci ze sentimentu," *MF DNES*, February

"Romanske sklepy," *MF DNES*, February

1996 *Pavel Kraus Hearts and Minds*. Prague: The Czech Museum of Fine Arts. (Exh. cat.)

"Mozky a jine zbytky," *Reflex*, December

"Pavel Kraus (New York — Prague)," *Labyrinth*, December

1994 *Seda cibla*. Klenova: Galerie Klatovy. (Exh. cat.)

2016 New York Foundation for the Arts, Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program, New York, NY

2014 *Marble House Project Residency*, Marble House, Dorset, VT

2012 Workshop Artist, National Academy Museum and School, New York, NY

Peter S. Reed Foundation Grant

2001–2002

Visiting Artist, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

CHECKLIST

Blade, 1980
Cell vinyl on acrylic panel
36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm)

Theater, 1980
Cell vinyl on acrylic panel
36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm)

Game, 1982
Cell vinyl on acrylic panel
36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm)

Made in America, 1983
Cell vinyl on acrylic panel
36 × 36 inches (91.4 × 91.4 cm)

Self-Portrait, 1985
Mixed media on Mylar
40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm)

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40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm)

Self-Portrait, 1986
Mixed media on Mylar
40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm)

Self-Portrait, 1987
Mixed media on Mylar
40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm)

Object of Desire, 1993
Lead
67 × 23 × 7 inches (170.2 × 58.2 × 17.8 cm)

Offerings, 1992–1999
Quilts, natural fibers, and raw beeswax
Dimensions range from 16 × 6 × 5 inches to 30 × 11 × 10 inches
(40.6 × 15.2 × 12.7 cm to 76.2 × 27.9 × 25.4 cm)

Archaeology/Excavation, 2002
Encaustic, lead on wooden panels
Each panel: 72 × 48 × 3 inches
(182.9 × 121.9 × 7.6 cm)

Levitation Glass, 2004–2005
Water white acid-washed laminated glass and neon tubes
Each panel: 48 × 16 × 2 inches
(121.9 × 40.6 × 5 cm)

Levitations, 2006

Pigment on Mylar
Dimensions range from 116 × 68 × 36 inches and 28 × 48 × 29 inches and 29 × 58 × 28 inches
(294.6 × 172.7 × 91.4 cm and 71.1 × 121.9 × 73.7 cm and 73.7 × 147.3 28 × 71.1 cm)

Offerings/Redemption, 2006
Pietre dure black marble inlay with lapis lazuli, Tiger's eye, and red marble
Dimensions range from 12 × 8 ½ × 5 ½ inches to 14 × 14 ½ × 16 inches
(30.5 × 21.6 × 14 cm to 35.6 × 36.8 × 40.6 cm)

Candy, 1995–2015
Marble, lead, encaustic, and natural resin
7 × 4 ½ × 4 ½ inches (17.8 × 11.4 × 11.4 cm)

Time Capsule, 1992–2016
Lead, marble, encaustic, natural resin, and copper
43 × 10 × 11 inches (109.2 × 25.4 × 27.9 cm)

Candies, 1996–2016
Reclaimed wood, lead, quilts, slate, encaustic, raw beeswax, and natural resins
Dimensions range from 12 × 2 × 7 inches to 67 × 4 × 5 inches
(30.5 × 5.1 × 17.8 cm to 170.2 × 10.2 × 12.7 cm)

Candy, 2016
Wood and natural resin
3 ¾ × 16 × 3 inches (9.5 × 40.6 × 7.6 cm)

Candy, 2016
Wood and natural resin
3 ¾ × 15 ½ × 3 inches (9.5 × 39.3 × 7.6 cm)

Fresh Marble, 2015–2016
Marble, organic resin, and slate
Dimensions range from 3 × 6 × 3 inches to 3 × 22 × 6 inches
(7.6 × 15.2 × 7.6 cm to 7.6 × 55.9 × 15.2 cm)



The artist in his studio, Brooklyn, New York, 2016

I would like to thank the entire staff of Project: ARTspace who helped organize and mount this extraordinary exhibition; and a special thanks to Pavel Kraus for sharing his unique vision with us through this astonishing retrospective of his work.

—Michael Yi, Founder, Project: ARTspace

I would like to thank everyone who helped make this exhibition and catalogue possible, especially Michael Yi and the staff at Project: ARTspace; Aaron Zulpo for his artistic advice on the exhibition; Joan Teaford for her support and guidance; Marek Bartelik for his insightful essay; my invaluable studio assistant Olivia Kane; the team at SNAP Editions of Sarah S. King, Kathleen Nora White, and Sam DiBella, along with Tim Laun for his design; my wife Bette Kraus, our pup Malta, and all of my family, friends, colleagues, and collectors, who have supported my work over the past forty years.

—Pavel Kraus

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Cover:
Offerings, 1992–1999. Quilts, natural fibers, and raw beeswax. Dimensions range from 16 × 6 × 5 inches to 30 × 11 × 10 inches (40.6 × 15.2 × 12.7 cm to 76 × 27.9 × 25.4 cm)

Frontispiece:
Detail of *Candy* installation at Project: ARTspace, 2016

Back Cover:
Two *Candy* paintings from 2016
Wood and natural resin
Left: 3 ¼ × 16 × 3 inches (9.5 × 40.6 × 7.6 cm)
Right: 3 ¾ × 15 ½ × 3 inches (9.5 × 39.3 × 7.6 cm)

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Project: ARTspace

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