

## Paul McCarthy

*Them as Was Is*

organised by Cornelius Tittel

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

13 September – 21 October 2023

Opening: Wednesday, 13 September, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *Them as Was Is*, the first solo exhibition of **Paul McCarthy** with the gallery, at Potsdamer Straße 77-87, in Berlin.

Bringing together past and present, then and now, *Them As Was Is* presents two fundamental aspects of McCarthy's practice. On the ground floor, eighteen sculptures constitute an early endeavour by the artist to combine different periods of sculpture into one, allowing visitors to draw out the similarities that weave together his most iconic sculptural projects. On the gallery's upper floor, a series of drawings and video works from the artist's more recent 'A&E' (2019–) project show film and performance to be at the heart of McCarthy's practice.

At once playful and uncanny, the *Colored Carbon Fiber Group (CCFG)*, 2004–2012, revisits many of the motifs for which McCarthy is most known. Two sculptures depict Michael Jackson with enlarged head and feet, distorting the King of Pop while simultaneously paying homage to Jeff Koons' *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* of 1988. Eight 'Pirate Heads' complicate the historical bust, and point to the pirate's dual symbolism as an articulation of heteronormative masculinity and of wanton greed. The grouping is overseen by two monumental sculptures which measure over six metres in height. *Henry Moore Bound to Fail*, 2010–2013, relates to numerous existing variations of the same sculpture, including a smaller version in free-form plaster made by the artist in 1960, and a large inflatable created for the roof of New York's Whitney Museum in 2004. *Santa with Butt Plug*, 2009–2012, perhaps one of the artist's most recognisable motifs, compounds a symbol of childhood fantasy with one of debauchery and desire. Our fundamental impulses, McCarthy here suggests, collide with our most cherished and fictitious cultural myths.

The gallery's second floor presents drawings created by McCarthy during improvised performances between himself and German actress Lilith Stangenberg as part of their ongoing 'A&E' project. The project's title refers to the layered alter egos which McCarthy and Stangenberg assume: Adolf Hitler & Eva Braun, Adam & Eve, Arts & Entertainment, America & Europe. Created during hours-long sessions in which the collaborators enter a state of delirium, the drawings possess a radical immediacy and undeniable physicality. Alongside unconscious scrawls, magazine clippings, and imagery of Hitler and Mickey Mouse, certain drawings incorporate the artist's tools, providing witness to the gestures embedded in them.



Paul McCarthy, *Santa with Butt Plug* (molded from 20' *Santa with Butt Plug Foam*), 2009–2012, photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Three video works further elucidate McCarthy's 'A&E' project. One, titled *A&E, Yellow Monkey (FUCKUR)*, 2022, chronicles a drawing session at McCarthy's Santa Anita studio, while *A&E, Adolf and Eva, Dead End Hole (Picnic)*, 2021/2023, and *A&E, Adolf and Eva, Cooking Show*, 2022/2023, present two recent performances – the former taking place in the basement of the KODE Art Museum in Bergen in late 2021, and the latter at a property in California in 2022.

In *A&E, Adolf and Eva, Cooking Show*, a quasi-comical reenactment of the ritual of cooking quickly descends into a sinister scene of domestic violence, as McCarthy's drunken buffoon Adolf Hitler and Stangenberg's Eva Braun, dressed as Marilyn Monroe, torment each other in a depiction of reciprocal love-hate and violence. As the film increases in brutality, so do the characters' muddled identities: McCarthy is an American acting as a German, Stangenberg a German dressed as an American. There is no stability, no redemption, only the catharsis of unrestrained violence and the compulsive stammering of insults – Eva repeatedly calls Adolf an 'American capitalist pig', while he calls her a 'German whore'. Shifting back and forth between male and female, public and private, attraction and repulsion, McCarthy's films are existentialist theatre, holding up a mirror to the conventions and fallacies of Western culture.

**Paul McCarthy** (\*1945, Salt Lake City) lives and works in Los Angeles. McCarthy's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions in international institutions including KODE Art Museum, Bergen (2021); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2020 and 2011); Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2018); Fundació Gaspar, Barcelona (2017); Lokremise, St. Gallen; Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle (both 2016); Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Volksbühne, Berlin; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (all 2015); Monnaie de Paris; Space Studios, London (both 2014); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2013); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2012); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2011); Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan (2010); Salt Lake Art Center (2009); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2005); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Malaga (2004); Tate, London, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo (both 2003); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2001); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Secession, Vienna (both 2000), among many others.

Works by Paul McCarthy are in the collections of Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburg; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; Kunsthaus Zürich; Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf; MONA - Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; mumok, Vienna; Museum Boijmans Van Beuingen, Rotterdam; MOCA - The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New

York; Tate, London; Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

Further exhibitions and events

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15 September – 28 October 2023

**Beatriz Milhazes**

*Paisagem em Desfile*

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623

14 September 2023, 3 pm

**Beatriz Milhazes in conversation with Lisa Zeitz**

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623

Registration via: [rsvp@maxhetzler.com](mailto:rsvp@maxhetzler.com)

15 September – 28 October 2023

**Albert Oehlen, Richard Prince, Rudolf Stingel**

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

Paris:

8 September – 21 October 2023

**Katharina Grosse**

*The Bedroom*

46 & 57 rue du Temple, 75004

London:

21 September – 28 October 2023

**Eleanor Swordy**

*Busy Signal*

41 Dover Street, W1S 4NS

Marfa:

4 May – 10 December 2023

**Grace Weaver**

1976 Antelope Hills Road

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