

# Paul McCarthy

## *Mixed Bag*

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Press Release

Xavier Hufkens presents an ensemble of sculptures, paintings and video work by the American artist Paul McCarthy, which will be displayed across both gallery spaces. The exhibition comprises works from three of McCarthy's most important video performance installations of the last two decades: *CP* (Caribbean Pirates), *WS* (White Snow) and *CSSC* (Coach Stage Stage Coach) / *DADDA* (Donald And Daisy Duck Adventure).

From *Caribbean Pirates*, McCarthy presents new iterations of three seminal works: *Captain Ballsack* (2001–2018), *Piggies* (2006–2018) and *Paula Jones* (2007–2018). This sprawling opus, which was inspired by the *Pirates of the Caribbean* amusement park ride at Disneyland, ultimately led to a spin-off project entitled *Pig Island*. The latter is the fictitious name given to a large object strewn stage in the middle of McCarthy's studio, upon which the artist would assemble sculptures on the themes of pirates and pigs (or mutations thereof). Conceived as an artwork from the outset, it functioned as the wellspring for a series of works in which political figures, such as George W. Bush, engage in perverse sexual practices. Both *Paula Jones* and *Piggies* are products of this island, so to speak, whereas *Captain Ballsack* is an iconic figure from the overarching *CP* narrative, and whose origins can be traced back to the drawing *Poop Deck* (2001). Previously seen in their raw original states or cast into materials such as fibreglass and stainless steel, McCarthy reinvigorates these pivotal works in a blast of lurid technicolour. The smooth and diffuse painted finishes are unique: sprayed by the artist himself and manipulated by hand.

A group of pustular dwarves that drip with resin, foam and polyurethane have emerged from *White Snow*. These are the original clay sculptures from which bronze editions were cast. Corrupted and abstracted by the foundry mould-making process, McCarthy pushes the sculptures yet further: 'freezing' the hand-modelled figures, so to speak, in unctuous layers of sticky, synthetic resin, filling in losses or adding new accoutrements. The clay/resin and painted sculptures all bear witness to the hand of the artist: how McCarthy coaxes his works into being through classical processes of modelling and assemblage followed by destruction, manipulation and distortion; or the transformations effected through the application of resin or paint. At the same time, they also emphasise the self-generating nature of his practice. These sculptures are a never-ending work-in-progress: pieces constantly return and morph into new hybrids, spin-offs and alternative formats.

McCarthy's large-scale *WS* paintings, two of which are also on view, combine traditional painting techniques with collaged materials (explicit images cut from porn magazines, a black-and-white photograph of Walt Disney, for example) and three-dimensional objects. In these works, McCarthy takes the medium of painting as a subject and uses it as a framework for his narratives around defilement. This also plays out in the bright and clear palette that becomes sullied through the swirls of brown and black pigments.

*Oval Office* (2015–2019) is a towering assemblage that critiques the myth of the Wild West and its role in the shaping of America's national identity. The horses allude to the work of sculptor Frederic Remington (1861–1909), who is famous for his paintings and bronzes representing the old American west of cowboys, Indians and the U.S. Cavalry; the title points to the fact that every

President, since time immemorial, seems to have placed one of these works in the Oval Office. Remington's sculptures are now an ubiquitous feature of American life and often seen in homes, offices and public buildings. In this assemblage, McCarthy juxtaposes fact with fiction: the base is comprised of two stacked plinths of differing scales, as typically seen in cheap reproductions and faked examples of Remington's work; the inner horses are made of resin-covered clay (using a technique similar to the aforementioned clay dwarfs); the outer horses, on the other hand, are polyurethane taxidermy forms, hence the lack of ears, manes and tails. Real saddles and straps reinforce the tension between reality and artifice.

The American West is also the setting for the film component of the exhibition, which comprises two 90-minute sequences from Paul and Damon McCarthy's *CSSC* and *DADDA* video performance installations. Made between 2014 and 2017, these projects will one day comprise some fifteen to twenty feature-length videos. In both films, McCarthy uses the visual language of Hollywood Westerns and their archetypal narratives—the stagecoach journey and the saloon fight—to magnify and intensify base human drives and desires. Both *CSSC* and *DADDA* depict hermetic dystopias that are devoid of all moral, religious and legal constraints. Within these dissolute realms, the marketable bedrocks of contemporary culture—sex and violence—are shown in their most extreme forms. Alcohol, the ever-popular social lubricant, features heavily in both scenarios as fuelling inhibition, loss of control and lascivious behaviour. Accompanying the films is a related series of photographic works.

Paul McCarthy (b. 1945, Salt Lake City) lives and works in Los Angeles. Solo exhibitions were held at M Woods, Beijing (2018); Fundació Gaspar, Barcelona (2017); Kulturzentrum Lokremise, St.Gallen (2016); The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2015); Monnaie de Paris, France (2014); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2012); Whitney Museum, New York (2008); SMAK, Ghent (2007); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2006); and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2005). He participated in many international events, including the Berlin Biennial (2006); the Whitney Biennial (1995, 1997, 2004); and the Venice Biennale (1993, 1999, 2001).

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