

Press Release

John Waters

Hollywood's Greatest Hits

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Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles

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Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to announce their first solo exhibition by John Waters at the Los Angeles gallery. *Hollywood's Greatest Hits* features a selection of works, most of which have never been seen before in LA, that shed light on the artist's decades-long, wide-ranging art practice, and in particular, Waters' humorous and irreverent takes on the movie industry. The over 30 works on view encompass videos, photographs, sculptures and installations that skewer film tropes and culture while also offering cutting, but loving, critiques of mass media, celebrity and insider art-world knowledge.

In the early 1990s, Waters began shooting photographs straight from his television screen. The results were grainy, arty-looking images that he pieced together into evocative photomontages, creating storyboard-like sequences read from left to right. These playful acts of appropriation and juxtaposition, which transform favorite or forgotten films into what Waters calls his "little movies," create condensed stories or testimonies that offer narratives the original directors never intended.

While this process – which the artist understands as akin to writing and editing – mirrors aspects of movie making, Waters' artworks function apart from his films in a conceptual field of their own. Some works stem from his productions: *Alley Cat* (2003), for example, highlights a one-second view of the actor Divine from Waters' 1969 movie, *Mondo Trasho*, in a composition that focuses on persona, space and movement rather than the film's narrative. Other works present a montage from numerous sources, whose original contexts becomes less important than their function within Waters' new constructions. In *Shoulda!* (2014), the faces of five famous women, including Whitney Houston, Princess Diana and Amy Winehouse, appear next to a film title exclaiming "She Shoulda Said 'NO'!" The work evokes, with Waters' characteristic dark humor, the destructive sides of fame and limelight, while also tapping into the public's insatiable fascination with celebrities and their unending stream of tragedies.

Several of Waters' film influences come to the fore in works such as *Swedish Film* (2000), which pauses on a disturbing moment from an Ingmar Bergman classic, and *21 Pasolini Pimples* (2006), a collage of acne spots snapped from the beautiful, youthful faces of the Italian director's male protagonists. The more pedestrian,

commercial realms of the movie industry receive the artist's treatment as well, as in *Bad Director's Chair* (2006), a ubiquitous object on film sets that here is emblazoned with every insult a director might receive: HACK, TESTED BADLY, NO SHOT LIST and DGA REJECT. Noises emanating from *Sound of a Hit* (2006), on the other hand, replay the steady "cha-ching" of money being exchanged inside the box office on the opening day in Baltimore of the wildly successful *Harry Potter* franchise. More than just a one-liner, this work also calls to mind avant-garde precedents in the art world, from the monochromatic abstraction of Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) to Robert Morris' storied conceptual work, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961).

Waters' image and biography weaves throughout the exhibition as well. *Beverly Hills John* (2012) pictures the artist as a bright-eyed victim of Hollywood's pile-on of plastic surgery, with companion works that imagine the same fate for Lassie and Justin Bieber. *La Mer* (2009), features a many-times-enlarged container of one of Waters' guilty pleasures: the popular anti-aging cream, La Mer, a less-invasive but still costly path to taught skin. And *Bill's Stroller* (2014) – with leather bondage straps and fabric printed with the logos of now-defunct gay bars in New York, San Francisco and LA – offers an unusual seat for the artist's fake son, Bill, while also commenting on the immense shift in queer American life from an earlier "underground" existence to one that is open to family-oriented park strolls and playdates.

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Children are also the subjects of Waters' twisted – if clean-cut – film *Kiddie Flamingos* (2014), on view at Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles. Based on his X-rated and frequently censored cult classic *Pink Flamingos* (1972), its script is rewritten for an all-kid cast performing a table-read of the now self-censored original. Across this and many other works in *Hollywood's Greatest Hits*, Waters emerges as a figure with an unusual status within the spheres of film and art: at once an insider and a perpetual, consummate outsider. His precise and playful examinations lean firmly into cultural taboos, flouting aesthetic rules and established social mores in ways that remain accessible to all viewers.

John Waters (*1946, Baltimore, MD) lives and works in Baltimore. Selected solo exhibitions include Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2019), Baltimore Museum of Art (2018), Kunsthaus Zürich (2015), Fotomuseum Winterthur and New Museum, New York (both 2004). Selected group exhibitions include Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2015), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2011), Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2010) and MoMA PS1, New York (2006). Waters' work was also included in the 57th Venice Biennial (2017).