MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

Karl Wirsum: Eye Adjustment 1963–2020 March 16 to April 20, 2024 Opening: Saturday, March 16, 2:00 to 6:00 PM

Matthew Marks Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of historic works by Karl Wirsum. The show features over thirty paintings, sculptures, and drawings made between 1963 and 2020 and is organized in collaboration with Derek Eller Gallery (300 Broome Street), where Wirsum's work will be on view concurrently. The two exhibitions together comprise the largest presentation of the artist's work in New York to date.

Karl Wirsum (1939–2021) first came to prominence in the mid-1960s as one of the founding members of the Hairy Who and became known for his vividly colored figurative work. Drawing inspiration from newspaper comic strips, advertisements, carnival sideshows, Mesoamerican pottery, and Japanese woodblock prints, Wirsum created a distinctly graphic style. As the artist described it, "The flat color seems to clarify and accentuate the shapes and forms in a more abstract way, independent of what the shapes represent." With fragments taken from the real world and riddled with word play, Wirsum's work is defined by layered references both enigmatic and humorous. His process was one of recollection and invention, what the artist called "an image stream of ideas" pulled from his "memory bank."

The works in the exhibition span Wirsum's six-decade career. Early paintings include *Memory Mask* (1964), which evokes an advertisement for before and after dental reconstruction, and *Spawning a Yawn with a Yellow Awning On* (1966), a deteriorating face informed by medical disease drawings rendered in bright, undulating patterns inspired by fabric awnings at a local amusement park. In later works, such as *Fat Snowball's Chance* (2013), Wirsum animates the idiom with a stylized devil in an arctic landscape posing with a snowball perched on his shovel. Wirsum's paintings on shaped panel, which he referred to as "flying cutouts," elaborate kites, and papier-mâché sculptures further animate the artist's explorations of the body and activate the surrounding environment.

Drawing was foundational for Wirsum, as both an independent art form and a preparatory medium, and the exhibition includes several finished works on paper and studies for paintings, as well as an early sketchbook.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated publication co-published with Derek Eller Gallery and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago.

Karl Wirsum: Eye Adjustment 1963–2020 is on view at 523 West 24th Street from March 16 to April 20, 2024, Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

For additional information please call 212-243-0200 or email inquiries@matthewmarks.com.