

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Paul McCarthy

SS EE Saint Santa Eva Elf
Drawing Sessions 2025
with Lilith Stangenberg

Hauser & Wirth Paris
21 March – 31 May 2026



One of the leading contemporary American artists of his generation, Paul McCarthy has developed a distinct and subversive artistic practice throughout his career, which now spans more than five decades. This exhibition at Hauser & Wirth Paris presents works in a new series by the artist entitled 'SS EE Saint Santa Eva Elf,' comprising large-scale drawings and a new six-channel video installation. Marking the latest chapter in McCarthy's ongoing collaboration with German actress Lilith Stangenberg as a continuation of his acclaimed A&E series, this new body of work sees the artist return to one of his most potent and enduring motifs, Santa Claus. McCarthy recasts the beloved holiday icon as a vessel for an unflinching examination of corporate capitalism and the spectre of fascism.

Known for visceral, transgressive and politically incisive yet humorous work across a variety of media, McCarthy has long sought to parody social hierarchies and cultural conventions, explore power relations and challenge the art historical canon. In 'Saint Santa Eva Elf,' abbreviated to the pointedly resonant 'SS EE', McCarthy and Stangenberg appear as Santa and the Elf, two figures whose seemingly innocent cultural familiarity belies a darker underbelly. For McCarthy, Santa is nothing less than the god of capitalism, and capitalism itself a form of psychosis that spreads through the rituals of commercialized culture. The Elf, Santa's compatriot, operates as an independent and enigmatic figure: at once alien, accomplice and autonomous agent.

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The series continues the landmark 'A&E' project begun in 2019, in which McCarthy, with Stangenberg, has created drawings, films, theatrical performances, paintings and sculpture through freely improvised performative sessions. Where 'A&E' saw the pair transformed into Adolf Hitler/Adam & Eva Braun/Eve, Saint Santa and Eva Elf transpose these explorations of power, entanglement and the grotesque onto the terrain of holiday mythology. Santa has been an essential part of McCarthy's assembly of characters for over four decades, memorably deployed in his 1996 'Tokyo Santa' series and in 'Chocolate Shop' at the Monnaie de Paris in 2014. This long-running interrogation deepens within this new body of work, informed by the intensity of the collaboration with Stangenberg and the charged architectural setting in which the performances were staged.

The filmed performances and drawing sessions took place over thirteen days inside the White Snow interior set that remains housed in McCarthy's Los Angeles studio—a painstaking full-scale reconstruction of the artist's childhood home in Salt Lake City, Utah. Originally created for the 'WS White Snow' series (2012–13), the set here becomes a new kind of stage. The characters of Santa and the Elf inhabit this recreation of the house where McCarthy grew up, raising questions about architecture, memory and containment.



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The large-scale drawings were made during these unrehearsed performative sessions, exemplifying McCarthy's long-standing practice of drawing while in character. As the artist has said, 'Drawing is a form of analysis. I'm not controlling it, just allowing it to unfold. It's not about clarity, it's about each piece suggesting the next one in a continuum.' The works on paper bear the raw, expressionistic marks of deeply consuming improvised events. In this series, the drawings take on a distinctly vertical, totem-like structure, standing figures that suggest figureheads or idols, infused with red and green, Santa's red and the Elf's green.

The six-channel video installation presents video performances from the SS EE series that McCarthy is editing, across six screens, creating an immersive environment that moves beyond the conventional dimensions of a single monitor. The multi-angle footage places the viewer in the role of editor. As McCarthy notes, 'the artist edits, the viewer edits.'

The collaboration between McCarthy and Stangenberg has evolved into a form of liquid theatre—a shared improvisational delirium in which conscious and unconscious memories of previous performances bleed into the present. There is no script, no predetermined ending, only entanglement.

'SS EE Saint Santa Eva Elf' locates the traumas lurking behind the stage set of our most cherished cultural myths and identifies their counterparts in the political and psychological realities of the present. Through buffoonery, abjection and an unwavering critical gaze, McCarthy continues to reveal the darker dystopian truths of mass commodity culture—and the psychosis that sustains it.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday to Saturday
10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy:

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Paul McCarthy
SS EE, , D8 #4-8
2025
Charcoal, pastel, paint marker, and glue on paper
199.4 x 147.3 cm / 78 1/2 x 58 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Paul McCarthy (b. 1945)
SS EE, Kandinsky, D4 #1
2025
Charcoal, pastel, paint marker, collage and tape
on paper
322.6 x 279.4 cm / 127 x 110 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Paul McCarthy
SS EE, Pose File, Diptych, D1 #2 and 1
2025
Pencil, pastel, paint marker, stuffed doll, and collage
on paper
2 drawings, each: 121.9 x 91.4 cm / 48 x 36 in
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Paul McCarthy with Lilith Stangenberg
SS EE, Saint Santa Eva Elf, Drawing Session, 2025
Performance, video, photographs, installation
Photo: Alex Stevens.