

Press Release

Paul McCarthy WS SC

Hauser & Wirth London, South Gallery
13 September – 1 November 2014
Opening: Friday 12 September, 6 – 8 pm

Paul McCarthy, one of the most provocative and influential voices in multimedia, sculpture and performance art, unveils new paintings in his first exhibition devoted to the medium since the 1980s. McCarthy's paintings represent the latest iteration of two major ongoing projects within his multidisciplinary practice: *White Snow* and *Stagecoach*. In both series, archetypal American narratives are pitched against human drives and desires, and examined with McCarthy's characteristic wit and subversion. Informed by his own tradition of improvised performance, scatological performative practices are played out on the canvas in a charged, gestural painting style motivated by material experimentation and psychological processes.



The *White Snow* project began as a suite of drawings in 2009, which drew on the fairytale *Snow White* and explored the multilayered references within the original German folk story and its commercialised 20th century versions. The series has since evolved into a multi-platform narrative of McCarthy's own making, incorporating sculpture, performance and the epic installation 'WS', presented at the Park Avenue Armory, New York in 2013. In the WS paintings, McCarthy restages moments from his 'WS' performance and invents new scenarios entirely, recasting familiar characters in unfamiliar guises.

McCarthy combines his two central motifs with the language of painting as subject matter in itself, invoking the art historical canon as a framework for his narratives; in two paintings, McCarthy reworks the formal compositions of Edouard Manet's *'Le déjeuner sur l'herbe'* (1863) and *'Olympia'* (1863). *White Snow*, usually a paragon of feminine virtue, is depicted as a garishly made-up, despoiled protagonist. In 'WS, Dior', McCarthy casts *White Snow* as Manet's *Olympia*, but here she is an assertive figure aware of her seductive power as she regards a moustachioed character resembling Walt Disney in the foreground. Walt Disney continuously reappears as a character within McCarthy's WS series as the pathetic and semi-autobiographical figure Walt Paul. Formally figured as Michaelangelo's *'Pietà'* (1498 – 1499), McCarthy creates a caricature of Christ in the arms of the Virgin Mary in the painting 'WS, Christies', where the central characters are replaced by farcical renderings of Walt Paul and *White Snow* and the gender roles are reversed.

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Stagecoach is McCarthy's second long-term project, based on the film of the same name, a 1939 American Western starring John Wayne. The movie follows a group of strangers travelling across the United States in a stagecoach pursued by Apache Indians. Here, McCarthy uses the Western as a recognisable structure from which to form alternative interpretations; the SC works focus on social interaction between the genders and 'saloon girls' reappear as central characters. A repeated castration theme is conveyed through textual references scrawled across the paintings like a mantra: 'CUT OFF THE HEAD / CUT OFF THE PENIS'.



The Western genre is central to American masculine identity, and here McCarthy restructures reality using Hollywood's tactics. He alludes to classic icons of martyrdom whilst exploiting film stars as characters in a sexual vaudeville. 'SC, Leonardo DiCaprio' can be read as a profane version of St. Sebastian, as the composition centres around a figure with hands tied symbolically behind its head and with legs spread wide. McCarthy employs a wealth of art historical references to render his figures as powerless and impotent; even the horse, conventionally deployed as a symbol for military prowess, is represented here limp and pink, barely capable of supporting his charge. Together, the SC paintings function as unscripted storyboards in which McCarthy reverberates between the central

Stagecoach motif and male icons of the film industry in a series of sexual dreamscapes which form a starting point for a future Stagecoach performance and film.



McCarthy employs collage throughout these paintings, uniting a host of seemingly unconnected reference material such as ripped fragments of high-fashion magazines, images sourced from the Internet and three-dimensional objects including synthetic wigs, a pair of boots, a coffee table and soft toys that are wedged forcefully through the surface of his paintings. Within these works, McCarthy expertly weaves the history of painting with contemporary motifs in dramatic scenes that expose latent desire and exploit the uncomfortable space where childhood innocence meets adult knowledge.

Exhibited alongside his paintings, a room of Hauser & Wirth's Savile Row gallery is devoted to new drawings related to both White Snow and Stagecoach.

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About the Artist

Born in 1945 in Salt Lake City, Utah, Paul McCarthy studied art at the University of Utah and went on to receive a BFA in painting at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1969. He studied film, video and art at the University of Southern California, receiving an MFA in 1972. From 1982 to 2002, he taught performance, video, installation and performance art history at the University of California, Los Angeles.

In October 2014, Monnaie de Paris will present a re-installation of 'Chocolate Factory', his first major solo exhibition in a Paris institution. McCarthy will also present a new large-scale inflatable sculpture in the Hors-les-Murs programme at FIAC, Paris.

In February 2014, McCarthy realised a collaborative exhibition project with Mike Bouchet at Portikus in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. In summer 2013, McCarthy presented three solo exhibitions at Hauser & Wirth New York 18th and 69th street. In June, 'WS' went on display at Park Avenue Armory in New York, McCarthy's largest installation in the United States to date. Other solo exhibitions include 'The Box', Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany (2012); the artist's first transatlantic exhibitions, 'The King, The Island, The Train, The House, The Ship' and 'The Dwarves, The Forests', which opened respectively at Hauser & Wirth London and Hauser & Wirth New York in 2011; 'Pig Island', Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, Italy (2010); 'White Snow', Hauser & Wirth New York NY (2009); 'Paul McCarthy – Air Pressure', an exhibition of inflatable sculptures at De Uithof, City of Utrecht, Netherlands (2009); 'Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement – Three Installations, Two Films', Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY (2008) and the travelling retrospective, 'Paul McCarthy – Head Shop / Shop Head' which first opened at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2006); and travelled to Aarhus Museum of Art, Aarhus, Denmark (2007) and Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (2007 – 2008).

Paul McCarthy lives and works in Los Angeles CA.

Current & Forthcoming Exhibitions:

Phyllida Barlow
'GIG'
15 July – 2 November 2014
Hauser & Wirth Somerset

Matthew Day Jackson
'Family'
30 August – 8 November 2014
Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Philippe Vandenberg
'Dog Day'
30 August – 8 November 2014
Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Monika Sosnowska
'Tower'
5 September – 25 October 2014
Hauser & Wirth New York, 18th Street

'RITE OF PASSAGE
The Early Years of Vienna Actionism
1960 – 1966'
9 September – 25 October 2014
Hauser & Wirth New York, 69th Street

Pierre Huyghe
'IN. BORDER. DEEP'
13 September – 1 November 2014
Hauser & Wirth London

Franz West
'Early Work'
11 October – 9 November 2014
Hauser & Wirth Somerset

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Paul McCarthy
WS, Dolce & Gabbana, 2014
Acrylic and collage on canvas
mounted on board
335 x 245 cm / 131 7/8 x 96 1/2 in

Paul McCarthy
WS, Dior, 2014
Acrylic paint and collage on panel
with gessoed canvas
213.4 x 304.8 x 6.3 cm / 84 x 120 x
2 1/2 in
Courtesy B Squared Foundation

Paul McCarthy
SC, Leonardo DiCaprio, 2014
Acrylic paint, collage and soft toy on panel
with gessoed canvas
335.3 x 243.8 x 10.2 cm / 132 x 96 x 4 in

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