

SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

Beverly Hills John

John Waters

Sprüth Magers London July 01 - August 15 2015

Opening reception: June 30, 2015 | 6-8 pm

Sprüth Magers is delighted to present John Waters' first ever exhibition in London, *Beverly Hills John*, a fresh set of affectionate barbs about the movie biz. While he hasn't lost his mordant wit or sense of mischief, *Beverly Hills John* finds Waters in a more reflective mood, asking the question: 'Since celebrity is the only obscenity left in the art world, where do I fit in?' He also hopes to resolve issues about childhood fame, false glamour, the horrors of nouveau-riche excess, his ongoing sexual attractions and the possible risk of 'careericide' with dignity.

After decades of flouting cinematic conventions with movies such as *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Hairspray* (1988), Waters embarked on his photo-based work in the early 1990s. He might start a work by taking a group of snapshots while watching a movie, often off a TV. He renders these into storyboard-like sequences, transforming favourite or forgotten films into what he calls 'little movies'. These playful acts of appropriation and juxtaposition create condensed stories or testimonies that never hesitate to revel in the crudest possible taste, while setting off a range of possible new meanings.

In the main gallery, *Shoulda!* (2014) depicts, in classic exploitation movie tradition, the faces of five famous women, from Whitney Houston to Amy Winehouse, with Princess Diana in the middle. On the left, looming like the title treatment of a B-movie, we see 'She Shoulda Said NO!' Whose voice provides this late notice, tinged with gossip and indignation? Showing these tragic female figures accompanied by a kind of vox-pop sermon, Waters creates a mood between sympathy and sacrilege. Yet sometimes a single image is alarming enough. *Beverly Hills John* (2012), the work from which the show derives its title, shows the artist as a freakish product of plastic surgery, with cheekbones like giant fungi, bulging lips and a lustrous carpet of copper hair. Despite the grotesquerie, the transformation is almost believable. When he applies the same principle to Hollywood's most lovable pooch in *Reconstructed Lassie* (2012), the result is downright bizarre. But when we see the face of Justin Bieber all smooth and bloated with silicone in *Justin's Had Work* (2012), our credulity is challenged once again.

Waters excels at striking a balance between brutality and humour, defamation and care. *Grim Reaper* (2014) shows President John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, descending from Air Force One at the height of their pomp and popularity. Hot on their heels, however, is the figure of Death from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). If *Grim Reaper* offers an irreverent take on the traditional *memento mori*, *Cancel Ansel* (2014) is ghastlier. The grid of doctored Ansel Adams black-and-white photos show, among other things, a giant cruise ship ploughing through a lake in Yosemite National Park, a high-rise apartment block obscuring the view of a waterfall and a sinister-looking clown flipping off the viewer from behind an evergreen tree. The brutish forces of Waters' modernity have invaded the American west, defiling its untouched nature. But what, exactly, is being parodied here? The dreams of a more innocent era or what was once considered fine art photography? Innocence is almost restored with *Kiddie Flamingos* (2015), a 74-minute video based on Waters' cult film *Pink*

Flamingos (1972). Rewritten as a children's movie with an all-kid cast performing a table-read of the purposely censored script, it's almost as if these kids were just doing their homework. Waters hopes that this defanged and desexualized sequel is yet more perverse than the original.

John Waters lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland. He has had numerous solo exhibitions, including a retrospective, *John Waters: Change of Life*, at the New Museum, New York (2004) and, most recently, at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2015). In August of this year, Kunsthau Zurich will present *How Much Can You Take?*, featuring 39 works donated by Matthias Brunner. In September 2015, the British Film Institute, London, will host a month-long retrospective of the director's films entitled *It Isn't Very Pretty... The Complete Films of John Waters (Every Goddam One of Them...)*.

For further information and press inquiries please contact Craig Burnett: cb@spruethmagers.com.

Opening reception: June 30, 6 – 8 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm