

## PEDER LUND

Paul McCarthy

PAINTED PIRATE HEADS

May 8 May 2021 – 5 September 2021

Opening Reception: 8 May 2021, 12-4 pm

Beginning Saturday, May 8, Peder Lund will present nine painted bronze sculptures by one of the most widely influential and important artists of his generation, Paul McCarthy (1945- ). This is the gallery's second time showing the LA artist's work. Since the 1960s, McCarthy has worked within a broad range of artistic expressions, spanning media such as video, performance, painting, drawing, and sculpture. McCarthy is often associated with Wiener Actionism and its brutal and relentless expressions, which sought to attack conformism, conservatism, and the contentment of society. He challenges both his own and the audience's boundaries and invites us to view the ordinary with fresh eyes to discover how illusory and relative our conception of reality is.

These painted pirate sculptures were created as part of the artist's seminal *Caribbean Pirates* project, an ongoing endeavor that was realized together with McCarthy's son Damon McCarthy, with whom he has since produced work regularly. First exhibited in 2005 at Haus der Kunst in Munich, *Caribbean Pirates* was inspired by the popular 'Pirates of the Caribbean' attraction in Disneyland, however, predates the major blockbuster movie franchise of the same name that Disney would go on to produce. The McCarthys' project consists of three large installations, a vast number of drawings and sculptures, several thousand photographs, and many hours of video. Unlike the Disney ride, which offers sanitized depictions of pirates as merry swashbucklers, McCarthy's version centers on hyper-violent, hyper-sexual antics that are set against a backdrop of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. McCarthy critiques Western stereotypes of masculinity by transforming the iconic figure of the pirate through brutal images of debauchery and castration, as well as allegorizes the destruction, plunder, and collateral damage of uncaring and uninformed foreign governments. Through sickening irony, the artist exposes the jingoistic rationalizations and justifications of remote violence that so exemplified the American occupation and which brought about further destabilization to the Middle East. Other fascinating dimensions of this project were prompted by coverage of disasters at sea around the turn of the 21st century; piracy off the Horn of Africa and in the Strait of Malacca; oil spills from tankers and ocean-drilling platforms; and new waves of perilous seaborne migration in the Mediterranean, as well as McCarthy's personal assessment of the commercial art world at large. The pirate sculptures have never before been shown.

In John C. Welchman's expansive essay for the two-volume artist book, *Paul McCarthy and Damon McCarthy: Caribbean Pirates*, he highlights McCarthy's long-standing fascination with the sea, declaring that he belongs to a group of artists whom the author terms the "marine core". As opposed to numerous Los Angeles based artists who deliberately moved their focus away from the ocean that edges their city, instead preferring to engage with the artificial, superficial, or illusory aspects of "La La Land" - Richard Diebenkorn's boulevards from his *Ocean Park* series; Ed Ruscha's parking lots and gas stations; John Baldessari's examination of civic and Hollywood self-representations and fantasies - the McCarthys, in *Caribbean Pirates*, intentionally take up maritime lore and legend in their epic project. It should be noted, of course, that the artist and his son chose to focus their attention on the Caribbean, which is quite distant—geographically, historically, and conceptually—from the Pacific, however, offered them ample space to interrogate what Welchman refers to as the "conjectural relations of 'historical' and contemporary events as well as the allegorical conditions they broker between questions of democracy and anarchy, civil and extra-civil society, discipline and desire, rights and needs."

The centerpiece of the *Caribbean Pirates* film is an imposing five-meter high pirate ship, *Frigate*, made of fiberglass. The deck of its brownish-red hull is strewn with objects and smeared with chocolate sauce, ketchup, and fake blood. *The Pirate Party* videos projected on the walls surrounding the ship reveal the obscene and brutal scenes which took place on board the ship when it was parked in McCarthy's Los Angeles studio. The videos star thirty actors, some of them wearing oversize carnival heads. The actors, with Paul McCarthy in the lead, simulate the invasion of a village, complete with rape, mutilation, violence, and the public sale of women in the village. The parallel with today's global capitalism and imperialist invasions is striking. The other major set-piece, in addition to *Frigate*, was *House Boat*, an actual vessel purchased, rather than constructed, by Damon McCarthy. Originally meant to fit in a niche-like aperture in *Frigate* and physically prop it up, this plan was quickly abandoned due to its logistical impossibility. The desired, conjoined form, however, can be seen in the sculpture entitled *Frigate* (2010/2017) which comes in separate pieces of the vessels which, when installed, show the truly desired composition.

The sculptures presented at Peder Lund comprise mostly of busts created of Paul's head created at the time of performances, first cast in plaster, which is a fast and cheap way of working, allowing for McCarthy to then desecrate and mutilate his form, to then be cast in the final material of bronze. McCarthy created dozens of silicone masks of characters to be used in the performance, as well as traditional prosthetics and even an oversized animatronic, fiberglass head of the famed Captain Morgan. The animatronic head ended up being entirely too heavy for an actor to don, so the artist instead took a life cast of his body, affixed it to the head, and tied the entire monstrous piece to a chair where it was then completely remote controlled. McCarthy often uses references to popular culture figures and advertisements, especially those created by the alcohol and tobacco industries, to tear down the obvious cynicism and hypocrisy in light of their documented targeting of populations most vulnerable to becoming addicted to their products - young people and the under-served, often people of color - who were especially barraged with images of care-free, smiling billboard, magazine, and tv ads in the 1970s through early 2000s.

Central to Paul McCarthy's development for such a wide-ranging project as *Caribbean Pirates*, are his preparatory drawings, many of which now belong to renowned institutional collections and were integral to the Hammer Museum's recent comprehensive survey of the artist's drawings and works on paper, entitled *Head Space, Drawings 1963–2019*. The sculpture entitled *Captain Dick Hat* (2010/2017) was, according to the artist, first conceptualized via the drawing entitled *Penis Hat* (2001), which is owned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. According to Welchman, *Penis Hat* exemplifies McCarthy's career-long interest in the nature and consequences of excavation and the disposition of downwardness it precipitates. Present in many quite literal variants over the last forty years, the idea of the hole also correlates with several other concerns: boring into and breaking through the surface, ideas of de-hierarchization so often present in the judgment of art in the contemporary market, and the more general concept of a descent into what might "lie beneath" - repressed thoughts, dark memories, and the viscera of the human body. The busts of *Hammer Head*, *Shit Face*, and *Shit Face Fucked Up* are all victims to mutilations - with objects haphazardly, yet violently, punched through orifices and internal organs being yanked out for grotesque display.

*Hammer Head*, along with *Butter Dog*, was accessorized with a hat in the distinctive shape of a masterwork of mid-century architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright's "temple of the spirit" - the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Often viewed as a pinnacle institutional collection for post-war art, in McCarthy's hands, the stacked cylinders are unsteady, capable of slipping and crashing to the floor at any small disruption. The rough finishing of the enamel paint, which is capable of achieving high-gloss finishes in the works such as *Jack or Pot Head*, here looks degraded and weathered, as if its most glorious days are behind it. Still considered as an "outsider artist" to many, McCarthy has balked at the commercialization of his art, instead preferring to hold a mirror up to the cannibalizing cycles the art world often demands.

McCarthy was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1945, and began his art studies at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City (1966-68), followed by a BFA in painting at the San Francisco Art Institute (1968-69), and an MFA in film, video, and art at University of Southern California, Los Angeles (1970-73). He has been inspirational to several generations of artists and pioneered methods that are fairly common today. His way of creating sculptural video installations out of the sets he used in performance works has been adopted by many others. Artists who have been considered influenced in one way or another include Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelley, Jason Rhoades, Jonathan Meese, John Bock, Jake, and Dinos Chapman, to name a few.

McCarthy's work has been shown in major exhibitions at renowned public institutions, including Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2020); M Woods Museum, Beijing (2018); Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham (2015); The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago (2015); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2015); Park Avenue Armory, New York (2013); Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin (2012); California College of the Arts, Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2009); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (2007); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2006); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2005); the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2004); and Tate Modern, London (2003). He has participated in many international events, including the Berlin Biennial (2006); SITE Santa Fe (2004); the Whitney Biennial (1995, 1997, 2004); and the Venice Biennale (1993, 1999, 2001). He will hold a solo exhibition in 2021 at KODE, Bergen. His work is owned by the most prestigious institutions in the world.