

Paul McCarthy
9 September – 22 October 2016

White Snow
&
Coach Stage Stage Coach,

Spinoffs

Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to announce the opening of a new exhibition by Paul McCarthy. In his first major showing in Brussels, the artist takes over both gallery spaces with drawings and sculptures that reflect two of the seminal themes within his oeuvre, Walt Disney and the American Western.

In this presentation, McCarthy continues his long-standing critique of contemporary American mythology by subverting popular icons and narratives into works that arouse our latent fears, obsessions and neuroses while exposing the darkness at the heart of mainstream culture. The artist has long been captivated by the innocence and artificiality of Walt Disney's universe, and Snow White is a particular leitmotiv. McCarthy refers to her as 'White Snow' or 'WS' (slang for cocaine). Here, she appears in sculptures from McCarthy's on-going series entitled 'Spin Offs', in which the artist melds an assortment of Disney characters – Snow White, Prince Charming, Bambi, Thumper and Dopey – into dystopian, dynamic conglomerations that are brimming with pathos and malice. Using techniques not far removed from the art of animation itself – cutting and splicing, replication, transposition, mirroring and morphing – McCarthy conjures up nightmarish mutations that are as visually compelling as they are perturbing.

The origin of the 'Spin Offs' project lies in the entertainment industry's insatiable appetite for endless variations (spin-offs) of popular franchises. In response, McCarthy has created his own 'by products' from the Disney aesthetic – hybrid forms that juxtapose mutually incompatible elements and disrupt the natural order of things. In all of these works, the eyes lack pupils – an omission that deprives the characters of their typical joie de vivre. They thus become hollow representations, their glassy stares an allusion to the intertwined notions of death and sleep in the Snow White fairy tale. This quality is most pronounced in the large-scale renderings of the princess's head, which appear to be in various states of melting dissolution. In perhaps the most opulent and disturbing work in the Disney series on display, *WS, White Snow Walt Paul, the Grove*, McCarthy presents his heroine 'WS' and the semi-autobiographical 'Walt Paul' in an artificial paradise that resembles the Garden of Earthly Delights. But unlike the fairy tale, there is no happy ending...

Masculine identity comes to the fore in the works from the second of McCarthy's long-term projects on view, 'Stagecoach', or 'SC' for short. This series, which encompasses a wide range of different media, is inspired by John Ford's classic Western from 1939 starring John Wayne. The most recent iterations of the theme are the drawings and large-scale composite sculptures in the galleries, including one of Wayne, and an excerpt from a new film. In the latter, McCarthy uses the recognizable structure of the original plot – a group of strangers travelling across the United States in a stagecoach pursued by Apache Indians – as a springboard for an alternative

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scenario. In his contemporary reimagining of Ford's black-and-white narrative, the artist places six characters within the confines of an actual stagecoach and sends them on a psycho-sexual escapade that degenerates into an anarchic and provocative breakdown of social conventions. By visualising the taboos surrounding sex, violence and deviant behaviour, and scripting them large, McCarthy exposes our darkest sources of revulsion and disgust, while showing us the reality of a world without constraint. The question is always the same: why do we persist in being shocked and repulsed by such transgressions and moral dysfunction? To find the answer, McCarthy forces us to look deep within ourselves and to question the systems and protocols – from the sacred and the profane, to those associated with gender, politics and popular culture – that invisibly govern our world.

Paul McCarthy (b. 1945) lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. Recent exhibitions include: *Paul McCarthy*, Lokremise, St.Gallen, Switzerland (2016); *Full Exposure: Paul and Damon McCarthy's Pirate Party*, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC (2015); *Paul McCarthy. Drawings*, The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL (2015); *Rebel Dabble Babble*, Volksbühne, Berlin, Germany (2015); *Paul McCarthy*, Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin, Germany (2015); *Chocolate Factory*, Monnaie de Paris, France (2014).