

## Jason Rhoades: The Black Pussy... and the Pagan Idol Workshop

Hauser & Wirth

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Jason Rhoades studied under Paul McCarthy – the latter got him his New York dealer – and, more than a decade into his career, in some respects he is still doing so. Two years ago, McCarthy revelled in the fact that Hauser & Wirth's Lutyens-designed London outpost used to be a bank, spraying mess all over its wood-panelled environs with pseudo-infantile glee. Now, for his extraordinarily tardy London debut, Rhoades too has requested that the fake white walls be pulled off to reveal the authoritative oak, and has elected to riff on the banking context. He's also made his own chaos, dimming the lights and letting materiality surge in: *The Black Pussy...* is a maze defined by chrome trolleys, which brim with many things but mostly Egyptian hookah pipes, 'dream catchers', rag-rugs, beaver-felt cowboy hats and ancient Chinese 'scholar's rocks'. Illuminating the crepuscular clutter are 427 neon signs that spell out slang words for the vagina: 'The Notorious VAG'; 'Miss Daisy'; 'Mukongo'; 'Buss Elastic Ban'... Orange electrical cables snake up towards four apexes on the ceiling and overhang a chill-out area, a machine dispensing 'Vegan Soft Serve' (a mushy ochre liquid), 896 coloured-glass vegetables, 11 wagon wheels, and much, much more.

But the disorder is deceptive, as closer inspection reveals that Rhoades has turned the place into an interpenetration of culturally loaded artefacts, one that riffs on the idea of the bank as a place of protection for valuables, where – given the 'workshop' of the

title – they'll also be recombined, fiddled with. (Making the point, gallery flunkies mill around, messing continuously with the display.) The show, apparently, is 'a reinterpretation of the 360 pagan idols that Mohammed threw out of the Ka'bah on his return home', and is only half of the work: the other half is in Rhoades's private Los Angeles showroom. Clearly, the multiple foci for belief systems range from the sacred to the profane: the press release explains the title and the associated neon works as referring to 'the feline mystique of the black pussy' – merging, one supposes, black-cat superstition with an average-male consensus on what constitutes sexual exotica – but it still feels like little more than a tired, unnecessary attempt at provocation.

That aside, the implication is that culture isn't a given – that it can be overthrown, sidelined or destroyed when greater imperatives take precedence; and, as such, the fact that, at the time of writing, Republicans in the US House of Representatives are lobbying to discontinue all funding to the National Endowment for the Arts makes Rhoades's concern timely. For all the sprawling excess of the show, this point feels both concise and urgent, leaving one to engage with tertiary aspects: the cowboy hats next to the Native American artefacts that point up the poetics of might-is-right domination and subjection that rumbles through Rhoades's visual maelstrom, and the oblique presence of – as the exhaustive breakdown of works puts it – 'a few right-handed Koons Bunnies'.

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