

press information

September 16, 2002

Paul McCarthy & Jason Rhoades: Shit Plug

October 26 – December 21, 2002

Exhibition opening: October 25, 2002, 6 p.m.

As part of its current exhibition, Galerie Hauser & Wirth is pleased to present “Shit Plug”, produced this year as a joint project by American artists Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades.

The idea for this collaboration came about this past spring while working on another important joint effort, the complex installation “Proposition” shown at the 1999 Biennale in Venice and continually developed by the artists in the years since.

While mounting “Proposition” at the Sammlung Falckenberg in Hamburg, Jason Rhoades received a gift from the Kassel artist pair Jan Northoff and Benne Ender: the shit collected from critics, visitors, artists and curators in the public toilets during the opening weekend of documenta XI.

It was next a matter of pressing it into a suitable form. The creative process of determining form provides an exemplary illustration of the “ping-pong effect” that operates when Jason Rhoades and Paul McCarthy join forces. A perfect synthesis of individual artistic intentions is reached through the almost playful-seeming exchange of ideas, with each concept containing the seed for the next.

The specific form of the butt plug, a sex toy to which the “Shit Plug” bottle makes formal reference, was first employed by Paul McCarthy in 1978 for the sculpture “Plug Chair (Joke Chair)” and taken up again in 2001 in a series of “Santa” sculptures. The idea of the bottle as a container can be traced back to earlier pieces from the two artists, even before they began to work together.

The 11-liter “Shit Plugs” are presented in the exhibition together with the “Shit-Sledge/Sleds”. The latter are piles of rubber the artists found at the Phoenix Rubber Works, located on the same site as the Sammlung Falckenberg. These ready-mades fascinated the artists due to their complete coincidental form and the fact that a perfect sculpture – actually the waste product from an industrial manufacturing process – could be found in back of a factory.

What is special about the collaboration of Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades is that they are neither an artist duo in the classic sense, nor are their projects restricted to a limited time frame. Rather, the projects are pursued over years, taken up again and again and further developed, sometimes branching off into new projects. From intensive phases of working together, the artists transport

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ideas into their own personal cosmos, yet each artist always remains recognizable as individual.

The collaboration, as a specific form of artistic work, is a central theme of a further piece included in the exhibition. Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades reconstruct a series of collages that the French Situationist Guy Debord had created together with the Danish artist Asger Jorn in 1959. With this remake of a previous artistic partnership, not only is artistic energy exchanged between two artists from different generations, but also historical affinities and intersections are sought. The artistic energy yielded in this exchange becomes multiplied as in a "perpetuum mobile".

According to Guy Debord, a Situationist is someone concerned with the "construction of situations". Debord was one of the first who took note of the creeping penetration of "low culture" into the domain of "high culture" and who sought to further this gradual blurring of boundaries between the two realms. Perhaps this is the source of Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades's fascination with Guy Debord, for their works also oscillate between high and low, whereby both realms are treated with the same seriousness and analytic approach.

Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades do not produce hermetically enclosed works, but create complex situations that can be read on multiple levels, constructing a network of references and ultimately avoiding any sort of exhaustive definition. And precisely for this reason, their art in turn exerts an unavoidable pull for viewers.

The "Shit Plug" exhibition is accompanied by an artist book created by Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades with a text by Roberto Ohrt.

Guided tours of the exhibition will be offered at 12:30pm on the following Wednesdays: Nov. 6, Nov. 20, Dec. 4 and Dec. 18.

Hours: Tue–Fri 12 noon–6 p.m., Sat 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

Next exhibition: David Claerbout, January 25 – March 8, 2003