

PAUL McCARTHY at Hauser & Wirth London ***PICCADILLY CIRCUS***

16th October – 20th December 2003

Press Preview: 15th October 2003, 11.00 – 14.00

Following the presentation of his inflatable sculptures, 'Blockhead' and 'Daddies Bighead', at Tate Modern, the American artist Paul McCarthy (born 1945) is set to inaugurate Hauser & Wirth London with his latest project, a video and installation entitled *Piccadilly Circus*.

Paul McCarthy is one of the world's most influential artists. He first came to public notice in the 1970s with his performances and videos. Since the mid-1980s, he has created complex installations and videos as well as a number of sculptural works, most recently the large-scale, inflatable outdoor sculptures on display outside Tate Modern until the end of October 2003. In his work, Paul McCarthy makes use of the language and imagery of American consumer culture, from Disneyland to the Hollywood dream factory. But he gives them another twist, transposing the commonplace into the disturbing and the grotesque, unmasking the dysfunctional reality that lurks behind the American dream.

With his new work, *Piccadilly Circus*, McCarthy makes references to earlier works such as *Bossy Burger* (1991), *Santa Chocolate Shop* (1997) or *Saloon Theater* (1995-99), which have come to be regarded as milestones of video installation art. In *Piccadilly Circus* video becomes part of the installation as a whole, which consists of the original set for the performance and the video projected around the room. This combination creates a unique perspective for the viewer, one that keeps oscillating between what is projected as a video and the room that acted as the backdrop to the earlier performances. In this way, the setting and the performance record coincide: with the viewer given access to the set that was home to the projected action, the content of the video is made to merge with the viewer's real-life perspective.

The project was first conceived when McCarthy visited the new Hauser & Wirth space in London. To him, the Lutyens designed former bank presented itself as an ideal building to work in: the ground floor held an impressive banking hall – with the drawers behind the counters only partially emptied. In the labyrinthine basement, McCarthy found a vault encircled by a corridor, resembling a dungeon or a gloomy hiding-place. On the top floor there was a dark-panelled office decorated with massive stucco work, that was inexplicably referred to as the 'American Room' in the floor plan.

These spatial and atmospheric impressions – with additional influence from the current global events – helped produce the characters that refer to notable leaders of our time that interact within this space: all identifiable by oversized masks and clownish costumes that give the figures a comic-like quality. Exaggerated and distorted, these characters are not interpretations of existing personalities, but rather represent systems of ideologies, values and moral precepts. The often disturbing actions and interplay depicted in the performances, filmed on site in London before the space was converted into a gallery space and later in a reconstructed version in Los Angeles, hint at psychological processes such as regression, self-destruction and obsessive behaviour. With the characters multiplying their images and growing increasingly indistinct, the impression that forces itself on the viewer is one of increasing isolation and helplessness.

Notes to Editors:

Paul McCarthy's *Piccadilly Circus* is the first exhibition at the new Hauser & Wirth gallery located at 196A Piccadilly. Tel: 020 7287 2300

Gallery hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am – 6 pm

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an essay by Ralph Rugoff

For press enquiries please contact:

Farah Rahim Ismail on 020 7287 2300 or email: farah@hauserwirth.com