

## PAUL McCARTHY

The New Museum of Contemporary Art will present the first American museum survey of the work of Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy. Bringing together more than one hundred works from over thirty years of McCarthy's work, the exhibition will incorporate a wide range of media including large-scale video installation, sculpture, photography, drawing, and video, many of which have never been seen before in New York.

Working from a pioneering fusion of sculpture and conceptually based performance, Paul McCarthy (b. 1945, Salt Lake City) is one of the most influential yet least recognized artists in the U.S. today. While his architectural installations incorporating video and performance artifacts have received critical and curatorial attention during the present decade, few viewers are familiar with his artistic evolution, or with the impact his work has had on two generations of Los Angeles artists. By showing representative works covering three decades of McCarthy's career, the exhibition will trace the early development of his artistic ideas and practices and reveal how they have become widespread in recent years.

While a fine arts undergraduate in Utah in the mid-1960s, Paul McCarthy was first exposed to the work of such proto-conceptual artists as Yves Klein, Allan Kaprow, Gustav Metzger, Yoko Ono, and Wolf Vostell. His first pieces employing a performance-installation vocabulary were created in 1968, during his graduate studies at the San Francisco Art Institute. In 1970, he produced photo-works in which a room and hallway were photographed with their lighting fixtures installed on the floor. Viewed upside down, the simple reversal of perception causes a physical sense of dislocation. In another installation work of the early 1970s, McCarthy punched two holes in the walls of his windowless studio, then plastered his arm and head inside the resulting voids. From 1970 to 1983, following his move to Los Angeles, McCarthy created dozens of performances in makeshift spaces and alternative galleries, generally documenting them through videos as well as hundreds of photographs. Part of the New Museum exhibition will focus on a selection of works from this period; each documented in both media, along with sculptural works created from installation paraphernalia.

Addressing such concerns as the repression of the individual by social conditioning and the symbiotic relationship between violence and sexual behavior, Paul McCarthy's early work centers on the creation of archetypal performance images. In these performances, McCarthy sets up a dynamic tension between audience and site by employing a rubber mask, a table, toys and food-based props to create a ritualistic tableau from which the audience is unable to maintain a comfortable distance. The persona developed in these works challenges societal taboos surrounding human behavior while presenting a weirdly comic spectacle. McCarthy's lumbering,

obscene alter ego, muttering semi-coherently as he subjects himself to a chaotic sequence of disturbing events, is emblematic of human confusion in the face of cultural upheaval.

In the second half of the 1980s, McCarthy began producing large-scale sculptural tableaux. One of his first works to become known to a wide audience, The Garden (1991), employed robotic figures in place of a live performer, thereby conveying to viewers an even more intense feeling of the uncanny. McCarthy has followed this model in a number of more recent robotic installations, such as Cultural Gothic (1992) and Saloon (1996), as well as in a large body of statue installations. Related to the toys used as props in his earlier performances, these sculptures are frequently based on cartoon characters taken to expressive extremes. Among the works considered for the New Museum exhibition are Bear and a Rabbit (1991), Spaghetti Man (1993), Tomato Heads (1994), and Picabia Nude (1998).

The most confrontational of McCarthy's recent works are in many ways his most enigmatic. Video installations such as Bossy Burger (1993), Pinnocchio Pipenose Household Dilemma (1994) and The Painter (1996), which contain architectural and sculptural elements that are directly related to the taped performance, provide the viewer with what appears to be a backstage view of the action depicted on screen. The absence of the performer heightens the sculptural tension between performance and viewing space, while the determined irrationality of the performer's actions and words provokes a combined sense of fascination and dread.

Paul McCarthy will be accompanied by a full-length catalog, with essays by the exhibition's curators, Dan Cameron and Lisa Phillips. In addition, new texts on McCarthy by the performance art scholar Amelia Jones and the architectural and art historian Anthony Vidler will be included, making the publication a major addition to the body of critical literature on this provocative artist's work.