

new building/floor 2

Paul McCarthy

Brain Box Dream Box

Brain Box Dream Box brings together more than three decades of work by Paul McCarthy (*1945). The artist has been working in Los Angeles since 1970. In the 1990s McCarthy became internationally known for his sculptures, installations and videos. The exhibition turns a special spotlight on his many, largely unknown works on paper from 1968 until the present.



Party Box, 1969.

The drawings reveal the artist's thought processes; the path from mind to hand to paper is short and direct. But the work has not grown only from intellectual impulses sent out by the brain, there are also influential, intuitive, emotive episodes. In the 1970s and 80s the artist's own body was the vehicle for this interplay of 'brain' and 'dream'. Since the 1990s, the sets used as installations – a reconstructed reality – form a physical extension to his body.

A series of early drawings explores the issues of bodily form and 'literal' meaning. 'Dead H' is not just a Minimalist figure, but also a torso whose innermost part remains hidden from our gaze. Unlike 'Dead H', which can be realised as an object, McCarthy's long-held utopia of a 'Brain

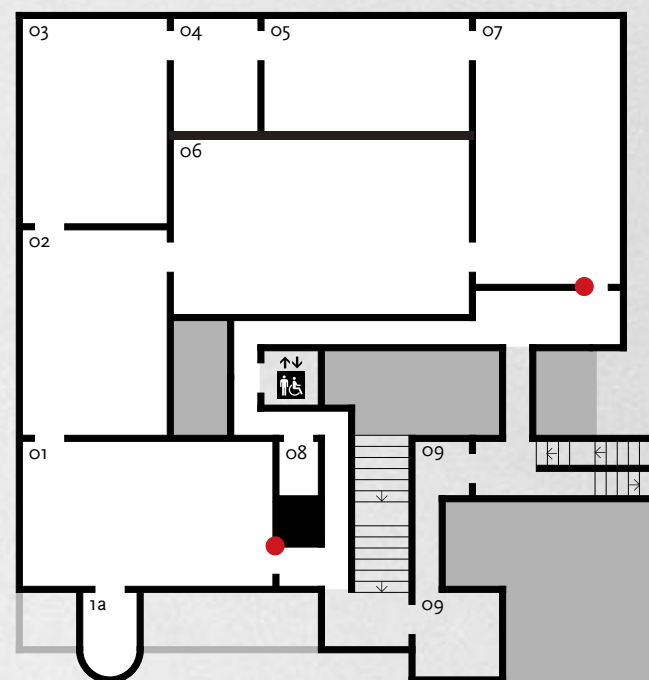
Box' can never become reality. As a mental conundrum, it connects memories of what has gone with visions of what is yet to come.

Seeing and perceiving are the tools that Paul McCarthy uses to question his (our) world. His methods are often drastic, they bombard viewers visually and spatially, unsettling them; they seem to exaggerate, they are provocative – physically and emotionally. The exhibition as a whole becomes a 'box', a body, with and within which we are lured into a world that we may never have seen portrayed with such complexity and such relentless openness.

At the heart of the exhibition is the new, large-scale installation 'Piccadilly Circus'. This is based on a performance that took place in 2003 in a decommissioned bank in London. The American President, the Queen Mum and Osama Bin Laden are the players in a grotesque drama in which Paul McCarthy (alias George Bush) forces a politician into the various roles, among them that of an artist. In this bourgeois setting the 'exchange rate' for sweet biscuits, ketchup and chocolate sauce are measured against the insignia of artistic power, crowned by the model of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The poetry of the multiple projections and carefully archived material remains of the action tell of the sad hopelessness of an attempt to understand the mechanisms of our society.

The spaces and the works in 'Brain Box Dream Box' are ordered by theme rather than chronology. Each room opens up another aspect of the work. The display with the huge 'Yellow Table' (2004), and the larger-than-life drawings bridges the time and space between the early performances in the 1970s and McCarthy's later return to them. The pieces themselves become architecture; the scale skews our reading of the contents. An instrument becomes a space; partial exaggeration turns a popular picture into an ironic paraphrase.

The block of 'Stoned Blue Drawings' (1968) was made under the influence of drugs, yet the clear lineature already prefigures with astounding simplicity the vocabulary of many of McCarthy's later works. The 'Inventory Drawings' (1990), and the 'Sushi Drawings' (1998-2003) – made while eating in the Yamaha-restaurant – provide a register of artistic topics, comprehensible in principle but vast in its dimensions. In terms of



form and content, there are many categories of drawings in the exhibition: sketches, texts, notebooks, instructions for performances, sculptural studies, explanatory drawings of projects, instructions for producing sculptures or films through to autobiographical accounts and intense, densely narrative, autonomous drawings.

The McCarthy pirate and McCarthy Santa Claus meet in the drawings; collective and individual phantasies build up into monstrous tales. Paul McCarthy uses culturally loaded figures ('fabrications') as his shell, with them and in them venting his sense of unease. The yearning for the spectacular, media power and advertising mingle in his work and emerge as fragmented scenarios. They ask a lot of the viewer – and respond gratefully to the unbiased gaze with their characteristic sense of humour that takes the sting from the occasional biting review and leaves room for hope.



Picadilly Circus, 2003, performance photograph.

Video program McCarthy: during weekdays in the library and during weekends in the auditorium.

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www.vanabbemuseum.nl