

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JIM SHAW



19 NOVEMBER 2015 – 8 JANUARY 2016
PRIVATE VIEW: WEDNESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER, 6 – 8 PM

Saturday, 21 November 3pm - Jim Shaw in conversation with Laurence Sillars, Chief Curator, BALTIC, Simon Lee Gallery, London

Simon Lee Gallery is proud to present an exhibition of new paintings (all 2015) by Los Angeles based artist Jim Shaw.

Material wealth, innocence and guilt, man's relationship with nature and religious fanaticism all come under fire in Shaw's new paintings. Mining and splicing American histories, mythologies, children's stories, images from advertising, cartoons and his personal memories and collections, Shaw's seductive, darkly comic works invite us to reflect on social and economic power systems and subjugation.

Like the monumental backdrop paintings first shown in the exhibition 'Left Behind' in 2010 at CAPC, Bordeaux, these new works are painted over used theatrical scenic backdrops bought by the artist. Now cut down and stretched, these readymade canvases are typically from the 1940s and 1950s, and carry with them a sense of the history of that time. That sense of the past is combined with the imagery Shaw uses for the works - from late 19th century political cartoons to DC comics, 1970s album covers, Hollywood films and detective novels indicating a past which haunts the present and different vernaculars which co-exist within the same frame.

These new works reflect Shaw's rigorous research processes and systematic interrogation of cultural detritus. He employs strategies of the absurd to bring into sharp focus themes such as slavery and corruption, deftly revealing the underbelly of society whilst commenting on the construction of individual and collective identity.

One of the works in the exhibition, *King Cotton*, draws on the Rumpelstiltskin fable in a commentary on slavery, machines, and the cotton trade. The green mechanical elf featured in the foreground is based on a vintage toy owned by the artist called 'Mr. Machine', and in relationship to the turd-like spun gold created by the king, reminds us of the cycles of life, history repeating itself and the potential dangers inherent in the pursuit of personal gain over collective good. Shaw calls into question the desire for knowledge, the creative process, fiscal wealth and power.

Other paintings further develop Shaw's investigation into allegories, myths, conspiracy theories, faith and belief systems. *Whore of Babylon & Robber Barons* depicts the Book of Revelations beast composed of notorious 19th Century American merchants atop a sea of 1960s political conventioners. The whore holds a torch aloft and sports a crown, referencing French sculptor and Mason August Bartholdi, who designed the Statue of Liberty and was

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originally commissioned to build a giant Isis statue overlooking the Suez Canal. Shaw hints at false promises and swathing the protagonists in luscious pinks, vulva reds and funereal lilac, reiterates the inextricable link between sex and power. Sex, death, the perversity of leadership and the fractured self are also battled out in ***Wrestling with God: Moses (black and white)***, a composition which references both abstract expressionism and heroic mythological painting and is based on the Biblical story of Moses' return to Egypt, during which Yahweh attempts to murder him for not having circumcised his son.

Narratives from the artist's ongoing development of the fictional religion 'Oism' weave in and out of the iconography of the works and connect them with his wider oeuvre. Popular folklore blames ***Mrs O'Leary's Cow*** for starting the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and this is also the moment in Oist history when its founder Annie O'Wooton loses control over the church. Intended as an apocalyptic painting, the cow is a demonic beast rising from the flames gleefully lapping its tongue and snorting smoke – a force of nature impossible to keep at bay.

Shaw's ongoing dialogue with art history also punctuates these new works: ***Prometheus: Liver Is the Cock's Comb (colour)*** references Gorky's 1944 *Liver Is the Cock's Comb* and continues the theme of wrestling with God and shows Edward Snowden as Prometheus and the hollow fennel stalks in which he hid fire from Zeus. Referenced here too are Ad Reinhardt's *How To Look At Looking*, Courbet's *Origin of the World* and three different NSA intelligence-gathering elements: a Buzz Buzzard comic as a predator drone, warehouses where information is kept and rock-like formations on the ground used to collect audio data.

Weaving fact and fiction, found imagery and the imaginary, Shaw's new paintings reflect on the human condition - our complex idiosyncrasies, fallibilities and thwarted ideologies.

Jim Shaw was born 1952 in Midland, Michigan and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. He received his bachelor of arts from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and his master of fine arts at California Institute of the Arts. His work has been shown extensively internationally and has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including MASS MoCA, West Adams, MA (2015); Centre Dürrenmatt, Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2014); Chalet Society, Paris, France (2013), LACMA, Los Angeles, CA (2012); BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK (2012); CAPC, Musée de'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France (2010); MoMA PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY (2007); Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France (2003); Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (2001) and ICA, London (2000). In 2013 his work was included in *The Encyclopedic Palace* at The 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy. His work is also featured in prominent public and private collections, such as MoMA, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.

He currently has a major solo survey exhibition 'The End is Here' at The New Museum, NY which runs until 10 January 2016.

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020 7491 0100 / events@simonleegallery.com

Image: Jim Shaw, *Man with Top Hat*, 2015, Acrylic on muslin, 91.4 x 63.5 cm (36 x 25 in.)

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