

Portikus is proud to realize a unique exhibition project by Mike Bouchet and Paul McCarthy. Over the course of several years, the two artists have established an intensive dialogue that is now taking form in Frankfurt. A few years ago, independently from one another, McCarthy and Bouchet both had made a work that transformed the Guggenheim New York into a toilet. This coincidence sparked an ongoing conversation about shared interests in the politics of art institutions and their architecture. It has led them to develop a site-specific project for Portikus that takes up these concerns in a multi-layered exhibition structure involving not only the main exhibition space, but the office, the monumental attic space, the exterior of the building, the island that the institution is housed on as well as external locations within the city. The project will culminate in an extensive publication, documenting the process and the final outcome of Powered A-Hole Spanish Donkey Sport Dick Drink Donkey Dong Dongs Sunscreen Model.

Denying visitors the usual right of passage into the exhibition space, Bouchet and McCarthy have diverted access via a spiral staircase down to the island and through the back entrance of the building. Not only does this raise questions about the accessibility of art institutions in general, but—and this is specifically addressed through the architecture of Portikus—an aspect of fortification within today's cultural industry. The gesture of rerouting the flow of people turns the simple act of visiting an exhibition into a performative storming of a medieval fortress. Analogies of war, military defense structures, and armed forces continue to appear throughout the exhibition, hinting at the U.S. domination of the visual arts industry since World War II: oil paintings of the Guggenheim Bilbao as a military battleship are sprawled around numerous public sites in the city; superhero Captain America and his arch-enemy, the Red Skull (portrayed as an Italian fascist following the iconography of the 1940s comic), act as live protagonists in the show; hot tar in the form of energy drink "gummi" is being poured out of Portikus's arrow slit windows, and its drawbridge-like entrance is blocked off by sandbags and barb wire. During their research for the exhibition, Bouchet and McCarthy came across a medieval torture device of the cruelest kind, the "Spanish Donkey," used in medieval times to split people in half—alive. This, too, in an adapted form, takes a significant place in the show as well as on the exhibition poster designed by the artists.

The main gallery presents the center piece of the exhibition, a sculpture of the Guggenheim Bilbao, originally designed by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry. An over-scaled architectural model, this version of Bilbao is reminiscent of a battered, ragged warship that has washed up to the shores of the island after defeat. A long pipe extends upwards from the sculpture, through to the ceiling of the upper gallery. Here, hundreds of liters of liquid gummi are disposed of into the very core of the museum. This is also where the production of the A-Hole Sport Drink happens, a Beef & Banana flavored sports drink acting as a pseudo-exhibition sponsor through aggressive product placement.

The drink is needed to create the adrenalin-boosting concoction The Bigga Picka Uppa—one liter of A-Hole with a Snickers bar dropped into it. Playing further on the "Bilbao Effect," the artists also include over 60 paintings and a gigantic inflatable displaying Bilboa sunscreen lotion from Italy, Hollywood actors, star architects, as well as portraits of themselves.

For the first time since the completion of the new Portikus building in 2006, visitors have access to the colossal attic space, designed by the architect Christoph Mäckler as a citation of an artist's studio. The space has been transformed by Bouchet and McCarthy into what is commonly referred to as a "live/work artist loft," and will serve as the set for a performance, developed, produced and filmed by the two artists in collaboration with Damon McCarthy. The loft will host a dinner party typical of the art world, presenting a collection of personal and fictional anecdotes, some of which recall the brutality of the torture devices and warfare stratagems referenced in other parts of the exhibition.

The project for Portikus exemplifies both artists' use of excess, exaggeration, parody, misappropriation, dysfunctionality, and immoderation. There is a synthesis of shared beliefs and interests as well as a common aesthetics that facilitates a playful and highly proliferous gathering, drafting, and framing of ideas. Powered A-Hole Spanish Donkey Sport Dick Drink Donkey Dong Dongs Sunscreen Model also extends an homage to the late Jason Rhoades, a close friend of both McCarthy and Bouchet, whose Costner Complex (Perfect Process) counts amongst the most legendary exhibitions in Portikus's history.

This collaborative "tour de force" turns Portikus into a rampant Gesamtkunstwerk. By employing a language of exorbitance, and extending this beyond the exhibition space into various locations in the city, Mike Bouchet and Paul McCarthy create a sprawling exhibition that points at the multifaceted excesses of contemporary art production and commodification.

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