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**JIM SHAW: HOPE AGAINST HOPE**



20 OCTOBER 2020 – 16 JANUARY 2021  
SIMON LEE GALLERY, LONDON

Simon Lee Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Jim Shaw, his first at the London gallery since 2016. As the United States prepares for its upcoming Presidential election, Shaw is more analytical and daring than ever before in his satirical depictions and social commentary.

Shaw is celebrated for the outlandish narratives and sharp wit with which he brings his dystopian, albeit eerily familiar, universe to life. His provocative tableaux, whether sinister, comedic, or somewhere in between, are pieced together from the artist's own imagination and his prolific collection of magazine and newspaper cut outs, posters and prints, comic books and gimmicky advertisements, which he began collecting during his teenage years in Michigan in the 1960s.

Shaw's practice has always been inherently 'American', imbued with national references and critiques, some contemporary, others historic and now deeply embedded into American culture. In these latest works – painted over found theatrical backdrops, with some featuring three-dimensional and multimedia elements – produced during a time of constantly evolving political, social and economic polarity, Shaw plays on oppositions: alluding to past events in service of urgent commentary on our fraught present and blending fiction with reality in order to highlight the fantastic state of contemporary American life.

In new acrylic works on muslin, retro home appliances hark back to the post-War promise of the production line despite their redundant use-value in this context, while politicians and notable public figures are disfigured by the representational effects of their self-centred and aggrandising decisions. Shaw has never been one to shy away from provocation: the artist boldly imagines Donald J. Trump, President of the United States, and his wife, Melania, descending an escalator into Dante's Ninth Circle of Hell to find a group of traitors, some of them discarded former aides, frozen alongside Satan in a sea of ice. Shaw's monsters and villains, whether real or fictional, are larger than life; ultimately, these paintings convey a sense of vicissitude that is reflective of the country's ever-shifting socio-political landscape.

Throughout the exhibition, Shaw continues his fertile commentary on the grotesquery of late capitalism in contemporary American society. *1 Percent for Art*, is concerned with the country's booming real estate market. Percent-for-art programmes require a portion of the budget of large-scale development projects be allocated

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to fund public art and installations; as a result, in cities such as Los Angeles and New York, sweeping avenues and corporate plazas play host to countless classic abstract sculptures - an Alexander Calder stabile, for example - symbols of wealth and power. The '1 percent', a term that also references the wealthiest echelon of society, implies divide and excess, in order to highlight, in this case, the art world's tolerance for inequity, and the increasing inaccessibility of culture to those of a lower socio-economic bracket - the irony of the artist's own participation in what he perceives as a toxic gallery system that predicates cultural access on status and riches is not lost here.

Constructed through his unique lens on esoterica, conspiracy theory, popular culture, and his own fictional religion Oism, these paintings demonstrate Shaw's fearless desire to tell of an alternate reality, one in which ill intention, conspicuous consumption, gross wealth and corruption are met with consequences. Societal ills are exposed, although the question of whether aspiring to a more transparent future is fool's paradise remains unanswered.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About Jim Shaw**

Jim Shaw was born in 1952, Midland, MI and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. Recent solo exhibitions include *Michigan Stories: Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw*, The Broad Art Museum at MSU, Michigan, MI (2018); *Jim Shaw: The Wig Museum*, Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA (2017); *The End is Here*, The New Museum, New York, NY (2016); *Entertaining Doubts*, MASS MoCA, West Adams, MA (2015); *Jim Shaw*, Simon Lee Gallery, London, UK (2015); *Jim Shaw: The Hidden World*, Centre Dürrenmatt, Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2014) and Chalet Society, Paris, France (2013); *Jim Shaw's Dream Drawings*, LACMA, Los Angeles, CA (2012); *The Rinse Cycle*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK (2012) and *Left Behind*, CAPC, Musée de'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France (2010). In 2013 his work was included in *The Encyclopedic Palace* at the 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy. His work is held in major institutions and private collections worldwide, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, amongst others.

### **About Simon Lee Gallery**

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme. In 2014, Simon Lee Gallery opened an office and private viewing space in New York. In 2017, this space was re-launched with a year-round programme of exhibitions and events, showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in dynamic group and solo exhibitions.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @SimonLeeGallery  
[www.simonleegallery.com](http://www.simonleegallery.com)

Image: Jim Shaw, *The Master Mason*, 2020, Acrylic on muslin, 109.2 x 198.1 x 6.3 cm (43 x 78 x 2 1/2 in.). Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

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