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Judging from Santa's most recent visit to Blum & Poe, one can't help but believe that the fat man cares far more for the naughty than the nice. In this latest exhibition, entitled "Tokyo Santa. Santa's Trees," Paul McCarthy takes a swipe at the pathology of holiday gift-giving as a metaphor for artistic production. By re-staging an earlier performance done in Tokyo in 1996, McCarthy creates an abject holiday landscape that echoes with the Ghost of Christmas Past.

In his original 1996 performance, the artist occupied an empty corner restaurant in Tokyo. With a nod to the grand ol' tradition of holiday window displays, the passing public was able to view Santa/McCarthy inside a makeshift workshop. Here, along with the help of a stuffed, rubber monkey (also in a Santa suit), Santa/McCarthy was seen feverishly making a series of paintings and drawings. The artworks, made with his now familiar palette of chocolate syrup, ketchup, paints, oil sticks, etc., were then systematically pasted over the windows of the restaurant. If not for a few curiously placed "fuck holes" in the paper (through which to see Santa

### Michael Minelli

Paul McCarthy, "Tokyo Santa. Santa's Trees," at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles  
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and his helper), the audience's view was wholly obscured. This formal window-dressing speaks directly to the inherent contradictions McCarthy struggles with as that very shit-covered artist, a figure he so sadistically parodies.

In "Tokyo Santa. Santa's Trees," Santa/McCarthy delivers his gifts from the Tokyo performance and revisits them in a new setting. This setting is a forest of artificial Christmas trees that McCarthy has salvaged from a flooded storage container. Still "decorated" with dusty lights, balls, and twisted plastic sheeting from the storage container, these holiday relics transform the gallery space into a perverse winter wonderland.

What's most interesting about McCarthy's performance-generated work (and the same rings true for "Tokyo Santa. Santa's Trees") is that post-party document-thing, if you will. Often, his brand of performance/celebration/exorcism is videotaped and then presented amongst the event's remains. The video, in a sense, acts as understudy to McCarthy. By presenting a representation of McCarthy's excess in real time, the video describes the abject in relation to both the original event as well as the present viewing experience. Acting as a document of "what's happened?" instead of "what's left?," the video emphasizes the vacancy of McCarthy's installations.

In its current form at Blum & Poe, this installation reaks with that Saks-at-the-holidays-type of vertigo one experiences when passing through retail spaces during the season. Like in a debased department store, we're confronted with all of the holiday goodies Santa has left on display. First, there's Santa's helper (the rubber monkey) lying belly-up on a gift box. Next, there's Santa/McCarthy's worktable complete with ketchup, cutlery, and lone sausage. Hidden in the back are about a dozen or so open boxes containing Santa's artwork. And lastly, but not leastly, staring blindly from beneath one of the trees, is the artist's blood and shit-covered Santa costume (Heinz and Hershey's, respectively). Somewhere between a crime scene and a crèche, we're left to negotiate the remains of an all out assault. However, *sans* the usual videotaped debauchery, there's not much to go on in this investigation.

In place of the video documentation, there are fifteen large-scale photographs from the Tokyo performance. At their biggest, baddest, billboard-like best, these stills can only approximate the intensity of Santa/McCarthy's performance. Even the artist's handling of these photos (some are hung upside down and/or sideways), suggests that he may privilege their object quality (i.e., their gift potential) over their content. This is, after all, the art world; and holidays or not, these "gifts" pay the bills.

McCarthy's work revels in the cult of spectacle. Be it infomercials or the holiday season, to him, it all smells like Hershey's. The "spectacular" is all about the surface; not only what operates upon this field, but more importantly, that which propels it from within. Without McCarthy's depraved sensibility to inform the lifeless Santa suit, it's merely a pile of laundry; with it, the costume becomes a corpse.



And, if the walls of the gallery serve as an advertisement for a previous event at another site, then the art world becomes its hollow tomb. The insistence, consistency, and downright lack of resistance with which this dynamic is played out on our cultural radar is what inspires McCarthy to excess, and eventually, to exhaustion. It is this masochistic, self-fulfilling fanfare of promise and regret that informs his work.

Standing in "Tokyo Santa. Santa's Trees," we're surrounded from floor to ceiling with pathos. It's not long before claustrophobia kicks in and we begin to sense that something more than McCarthy is missing. For him (the artist as Santa as artist), gifts represent the currency of a dysfunctional relationship. And while "wanting more" may be part of this exhibition's problem, it may also prove to be its most poignant lesson as well.



From inside the new dome designed by Norman Foster on top of the German Reichstag, one can stroll up a concrete ramp and gaze out through the high tech metal mullions over the forest of cranes busily constructing 21st century Berlin. From the Tiergarten or the Brandenburg Gate, one can in turn look up to the clean glass dome and watch people specs move on the walkways. According to the surprisingly eloquent dome, the mechanisms of democratic government are both transparent to observers and in fact run by these very same observers, yoked into participation, since each might take his turn up the ramp. Though a high percentage of

### Lytle Shaw

The Areale 99 Arts Festival,  
Brück/Linthe, Germany  
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