

Press release

Paul Pfeiffer | *Incarnator*

16.03.-18.04.2019

Opening: Friday, March 15, 2019, 6-9 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to present *Incarnator*, Paul Pfeiffer's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery. Pfeiffer's *Incarnator* series expands from the artist's internationally acclaimed eponymous video, which is further brought to life through a series of life-sized sculptures. All sculptures were produced during the artist's six-month residency at Bellas Artes Projects in Bagac, Bataan, Philippines in 2018. Pfeiffer's solo exhibition, *Incarnator*, travels from its institutional exhibition at Bellas Artes Projects curated by Diana Campbell Betancourt.

Incarnator draws its title from the old Spanish word "encarnador" – a term for the person who transforms paint into seemingly live flesh on sculptures. "Encarnación", or making flesh, is an over six-hundred-year-old technique primarily associated with religious icons and is a separate production process from that of carving sculptural forms. Modern and theological objections to this lifelike use of color in sculpture have pervaded over centuries. In the Philippines, this power can be clearly seen through mass devotion of the *Santo Niño de Cebú*, a polychrome (encarnado) religious icon which was brought as a gift from Spain in 1521 by Magellan, making it one of the oldest Christian relics in the country. Replicated in many homes and business establishments across the country, the *Santo Niño* is the most popular object of devotion in the Philippines and is a cultural icon of Filipino Catholic identity.

Released in April 2017, the song *Despacito* (Spanish for slowly) took global airwaves by storm, marking the first time that the Canadian popstar Justin Bieber sang in Spanish. Justin Bieber was discovered by the music industry when he was only 12 years old through a video he uploaded on YouTube, and his image and identity were transformed from that of an innocent young boy into the unmistakable icon of 21st Century capitalist values that we see and hear all over the world today. His primary fans, known as beliebers, are children who look up to him as a symbol of power, an example of the potential to be a global player, a king as a kid.

Pfeiffer's film *Incarnator* opens with a scene taken from YouTube where a young girl in Bangladesh is crying, begging for Justin Bieber to come to her country. It later pans to children playing in trees in Bataan, emulating Bieber's iconic haircut via hand-symbols and imagining life with heightened Bieber-like powers and mobility. Truly a global phenomenon, Bieber has also become one of the world's first popstar Evangelists, promoting Christianity via his Instagram account (which has over 100 million followers) with the same fervor and techniques that he uses to promote his songs. Kids become overwhelmed, almost speaking in tongues as they sing *Despacito*, a song with extremely sexual undertones that get lost when sung by people who do not speak Spanish (such as the teenage girls from Bangladesh in Pfeiffer's video).

"To me – the word 'Incarnator' is about production. The production of an image. The production of human flesh...What interests me is what production means in 21st century global capitalism, where the means of production have been radically separated from their natural function. This is Marx in the 21st century perfected into a global scheme; a branded production, where innocence is turned into a profit-making system in the face of a child," Pfeiffer shared with curator Diana Campbell Betancourt.

Collaborating with Willy Layug, one of the leading and most famous Santo-makers in the Philippines who apprenticed under encarnadores in Spain, the image of Justin Bieber is brought into the flesh through traditional techniques of encarnación – accentuating the growing number of tattoos surrounded the inked phrase "son of God" on his stomach.

Further engaging with the history of sculpture, paired with his fascination with new technologies of mass production, Pfeiffer, his team, and the artisans at Las Casas Filipinas de Acuzar create portraits of the artisans' children using state-of-the-art 3-D scanning and printing technology. These technologically manufactured forms were later translated back into man-made forms through traditional hand-carving techniques passed on from a head artisan from the Filipino carving district of Paete, speaking to the often-invisible effects that digital translation has on the most manual aspects of public life.

Paul Pfeiffer (b.1966, Honolulu) lives and works in New York. He has received numerous awards and fellowships including a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship and the Bucksbaum Award from the Whitney Museum. In 2011, he was the subject of a retrospective at Sammlung Goetz in Munich, Germany. Selected exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge US; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago; the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; MUSAC León, León; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Baibakov Art Projects, Moscow; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin; Artangel, London; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila. His work is held in international collections including LACMA, Los Angeles; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Pinault Collection, Paris; Castello di Rivoli, Turin; and MoMA, New York.