



- 1 *Prometheus Liver is the Cock's Comb (colour)*, 2015  
acrylic on muslin  
private collection,  
court. Blondeau & Cie,  
Genève
- 2 *Milk Separator*, 2019  
acrylic and ink on wood  
panel  
court. Praz-Delavallade,  
Paris, Los Angeles
- 3 *Gremlins From the Kremlin*, 2019  
acrylic and ink on wood  
panel  
court. Praz-Delavallade,  
Paris, Los Angeles
- 4 *Strange Beautiful*, 2019  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Praz-Delavallade,  
Paris, Los Angeles
- 5 *Mnemonic device #2, Third Stone From The Sun*, 2020  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 6 *The Mentor*, 2017  
ink on paper  
court. Gagolian
- 7 *Trump Distortion #2*, 2017  
ink on paper  
coll. privée,  
court. Blondeau & Cie,  
Genève
- 8 *Trump Distortion #4*, 2017  
ink on paper  
private collection,  
court. Blondeau & Cie,  
Genève
- 9 *Trump Distortion #1*, 2017  
ink on paper  
court. Gagolian
- 10 *St. George and the Dragon 2*, 2019  
acrylic on muslin,  
painted wood panels,  
animated projection  
private collection,  
court. Blondeau & Cie,  
Genève
- 11 *Rationalism and Delirium*, 2017  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 12 *The Bridge*, 2021  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 13 *Going For The One*, 2022  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 14 *Man-Machine (workingmen) #2*, 2017  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 15 *Official Portrait (Metaluna Mutant and Beautiful Girl)*, 2019  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian
- 16 *Religious Machine Man* 2020  
acrylic on muslin  
court. Gagolian

*Study Drawings*,  
2013–2023  
ink and pencil on paper  
court. Gagolian

*The Electronic Monster and thirteen Ghosts*, 2024  
five-channel AV installation,  
projected on scrims and  
background wall, black and  
white, looped, sound  
Co-production:  
M HKA, Antwerpen and  
KBCB, Biel  
Technical partner:  
Future Audio Video, Biel

Art at noon  
At the table with the  
Kunsthaus team: short guided  
tour followed by a lunch snack  
(with Epicerie Batavia)  
– Fri 23.8.2024, 12:15  
(de/fr)  
CHF 15.–  
Registration until the day  
before: info@kbcbb.ch

Guided tours  
– Thurs 20.6.2024, 18:30 (fr)  
Visite de l'exposition avec  
Paul Bernard, directeur  
– Thurs 15.8.2024, 18:30 (de)  
Führung mit Maja Walter,  
Kunstvermittlerin

# JIM SHAW

## THE PAST IS NEVER DEAD. IT'S NOT EVEN PAST.

cur.: Anne-Claire Schmitz (M HKA), Paul Bernard  
9.6.–25.8.2024

Over the past five decades, Jim Shaw (b. 1952) has developed a complex and exhilarating artistic practice that includes photographs, drawings, paintings, sculptures, installations, films and musical performances. The sheer number of works produced by the artist is not only daunting but also highly inspiring, as it affirms the power of culture as a regenerative and ever-evolving creative force in its own right.

Having earned cult status all the while working from the perspective of a male, middle-class *WASP* (*white Anglo-Saxon Protestant*), Shaw is unquestionably a leading figure of the Californian art scene and is one of the most influential American artists of our time. Like no other, he has given shape to a resolutely cathartic body of work that thrives at the intersection of the fictional and the real, the individual and the collective. Continuously driven by both doubt and faith, Shaw has developed a critical and speculative relationship with the United States of which he is the product, while simultaneously unfolding his art practice within it. The very mythologies that have forged American society, such as religion, music, popular beliefs, the entertainment industry, advertising, and even conspiracy theories, serve as inspiration, subject matter and raw material for the artist. As such, Shaw blurs not only the boundaries of artistic creation but also those of the personal and collective responsibilities at the source of the narrative flow we call 'culture': the complex human construction that gives meaning to—and normalises—our lives.

Shaw has never stopped dreaming, organising, distorting and distilling his thoughts. Bolstered by an encyclopaedic knowledge, the artist is both a creator and a fervent consumer of the cultures and countercultures that shape the context he evolves in: comic books, monster magazines, Hollywood cinema, art history, punk music, psychedelic posters, caricatures and amateur art. The exhibition *The past is never dead. It's not even past.* offers an insight into Jim Shaw's work of the last ten years: a collection of drawings, a selection of paintings and a large, immersive installation.

In 2024, at a time when society is increasingly polarised, Shaw's art acts as an ally for questioning the (sometimes recalcitrant) ideological underpinnings that took root in the aftermath of the Second World War, and have continued to shape the United States of America, and by extension much of the Western world, ever since. More than ever the artist's works are ambassadors for a political and cultural climate in the throes of implosion and transformation. They all reflect Shaw's interest in analysing structures of power and control, a concern also emphasised by the importance given in his work to mainstays such as the patriarchal model and white, North American capitalist supremacy. Such an insistent presence calls into question conservative movements and dominant values, doing so on both sides of the democratic establishment.



Kunsthaus Biel    Centre d'art Bienne

Opening hours  
Wed 12:00–18:00  
Thurs 12:00–20:00  
Fri 12:00–18:00  
Sa&Sun 11:00–18:00

The exhibition shows a vast selection of 145 *Study drawings* (2013–2023) produced over the last ten years. Together, they form a mental landscape that serves as a foundation for the rest of the exhibition, revealing the observations and preoccupations that permeate Jim Shaw's thought process. A talented draughtsman, the artist uses drawing to coincide a repertoire of graphic styles—including political caricature, comic strips, post-war advertising, hyperrealism, and the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder—with images he has somehow appropriated as well as figments of his imagination. Via this technique of controlled, ultra-precise pseudo-collage, the artist documents his research into the intricacies of historical and current social and political events, which he never stops analysing, processing and even transforming.

Both a technical and conceptual aid, these pencil drawings serve as preparatory studies for meticulously constructed paintings. Although painting has always been omnipresent in Shaw's practice, it seems to have found a particular relevance in his work over the last fifteen years, coinciding with a turning point in image culture, following the rise of social networking. One can therefore wonder whether «good old» painting, chosen by Shaw, is really the most reliable and effective medium to satisfy his desire to communicate and express his vision of the world today? Perhaps we should take into account Jim Shaw's ability to turn painting into something far more complex than it seems, something that goes beyond our relationship to the image and representation, something resolutely alive and seductive, at once of its time and outdated, inspiring confidence while defying truth.

*The Electronic Monster and Thirteen Ghosts* (2024) is a new work created for the exhibitions in Antwerp and Biel, inspired by the memories of a double-bill horror movie Shaw saw at the cinema when he was nine years old. The installation brings together singing wigs, an aggressive vacuum cleaner, catalogue models, cavemen, a half-cake, a half-intestine figure, and the ghosts of industrial power and consumerism in a last, grotesque and outdated dance. The work resurfaces American society's debris and components, like an adrift yet very much present floating ideology. It is apparent—in this piece and many others—that Shaw's oeuvre is marked by a vintage aesthetic that reveals how important the 1960s were in forging his vision as a young artist, while he now uses this aesthetic as a poignant means of both depicting and undermining «the mythologised golden age of patriarchy in post-war America, where white men ran everything». The present spectacle confronts viewers with a typically European standpoint: hungry for and critical of a stereotypical America, existing beyond a reality one can't quite grasp.

*The past is never dead. It's not even past.* is a deep dive into Jim Shaw's allegorical world, where tradition and innovation, popular culture and politics, social commentary and humour are intrinsically linked. A keen observer of the world around him, following in the footsteps of Hieronymus Bosch, Jim Shaw shares an abundance of attempts to capture reality as he sees it play out before his eyes: a tangle of values and beliefs that bind us together, for better or for worse.

Anne-Claire Schmitz

## ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Jim Shaw was born in 1952 in Midland, Michigan, in the northeast of the United States. He lives and works in Los Angeles, California and Milford, Connecticut. From 1971 to 1974, Shaw studied Fine Arts at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. There he met Mike Kelley, with whom he became friends and collaborated regularly. In 1974, he co-founded the proto-punk band Destroy All Monsters with fellow artists and filmmakers Mike Kelley, Cary Loren and Niagra. In 1978, he graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from CalArts (the California Institute of the Arts) and became part of the emerging Californian scene alongside artists such as George Deen, Mike Kelley, John Miller, Tony Oursler, Raymond Pettibon, Mitchell Syrop, Megan Williams and Robert Williams. Jim Shaw worked for many years in the film industry as a draughtsman and special effects artist to finance his artistic production until the latter became his main occupation in the mid-1980s. He mainly worked on horror, science fiction and fantasy films such as *Tree of Life* (2011), *The Abyss* (1989), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988), *Hidden* (1987), *Earth Girls Are Easy* (1988), *The Forbidden Zone* (1980) and *Tron* (1982), but also on numerous commercials.

In 2024, the M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp, dedicated an extensive solo exhibition to him entitled *The Ties That Bind*. In 2015, the New Museum, New York (USA) held a major retrospective of his work, entitled *The End is Here*. Other solo exhibitions have been held at the Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles (USA); the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams (USA); the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (UK); Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (Netherlands); CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (France); at MoMA PS1, New York (USA); Le Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble (France); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (UK); and at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva (Switzerland). His work has been shown in group exhibitions at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (USA); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (USA); the New Museum, New York (USA); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (USA); the Centre Pompidou, Paris (FR); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (USA). He also took part in the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.

*The past is never dead. It's not even past.* was created in collaboration with the M HKA and is an adaptation of *The Ties That Bind*, Jim Shaw's major solo exhibition, which was previously on show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (9 February - 19 May 2024).

Partner institution  
M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp

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