

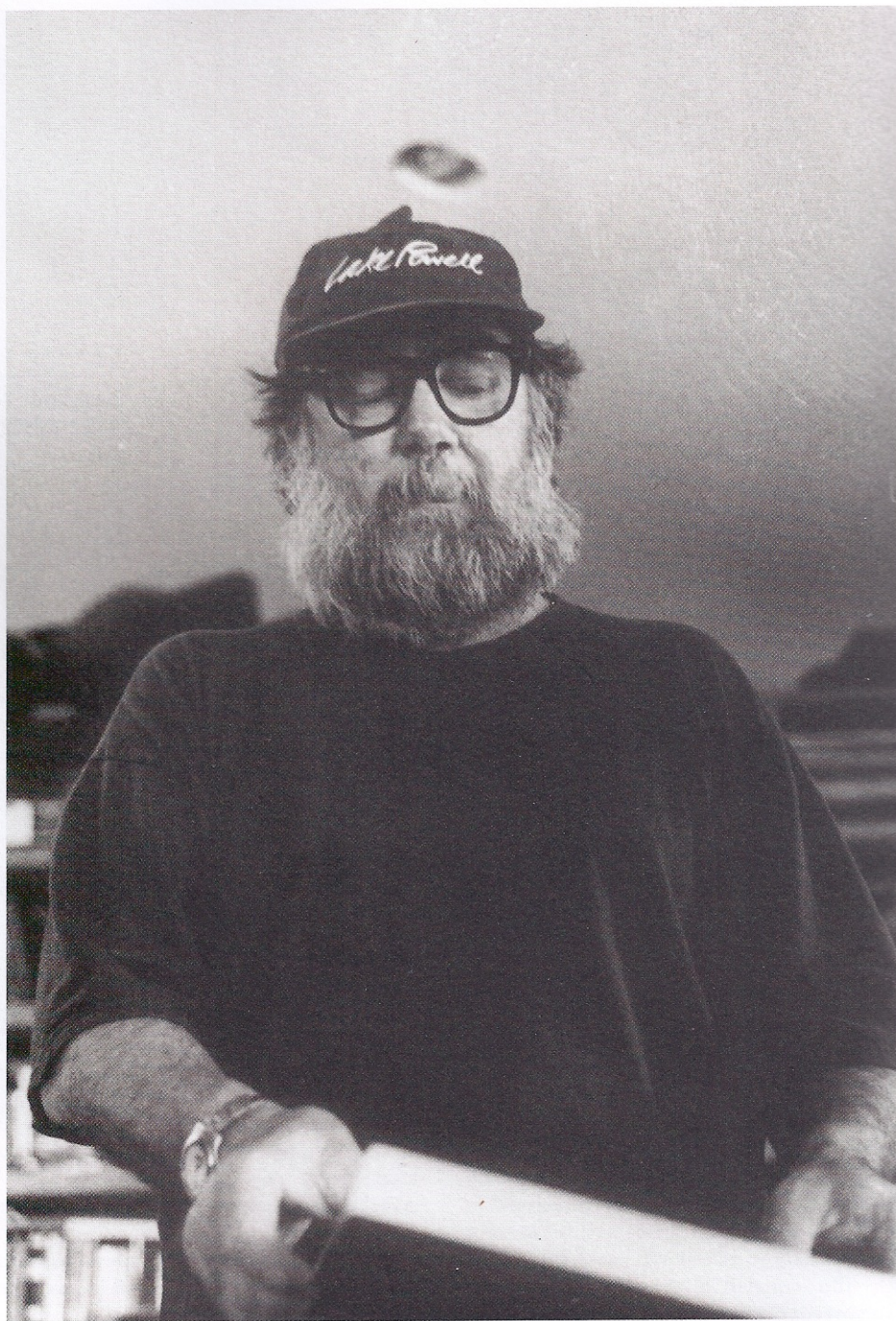
"In his grotesque and trashy universe, the L.A. based artist deconstructs the American entertainment industry"

Distorting Disney

Belgium is often said to have the highest density of art collectors in the world. Though most keep their collection hidden, some prefer sharing their pride and joy with the public. Charles Riva – partner of the Sutton Lane galleries in London and Paris – is one of the latter. This 37-year-old Frenchman, who splits his time between Brussels and New York, opened his collection three years ago through a series of exhibitions made accessible to everyone. Housed in a contemporary "maison de maître" in Ixelles/Elsene, the shows take place on the first floor, while Riva lives in the above apartment, whose walls are lavishly decorated with artworks. "I love waking up in the morning in my bathrobe, have a little coffee and then look at my art works," he reflects. He estimates his collection to reach approximately 300 pieces, including high flyers like the Chapman Brothers, Christopher Wool, Jonathan Meese and Sterling Ruby.

Riva is the first to downplay his attributed sense of altruism: "opening this collection to the public is not as generous as it may sound. I often buy works, but never have the opportunity to see them all gathered in one room. I have been putting a lot of time in cataloguing my collection over the past three years. As it took me so much effort, I thought I might as well show it to the public and present it accordingly." Riva intends to collect artists in depth and compares the act to that of a jigsaw puzzle: buy the most emblematic pieces first and complete the missing links after. He loves showcasing retrospectives, though they are rather humble due to his space and budget limitations. "I'm no François Pinault or Bernard Arnault," he admits. Last year saw him presenting a nice overview of Andreas Hofer, and he is currently showcasing a mini-survey of Paul McCarthy. In its compactness, Riva's collection gives a good idea of McCarthy's versatile practice, which includes performance, sculptures, drawings, videos and installations.

In his grotesque and trashy universe, the L.A. based artist deconstructs the American entertainment industry by fusing the visual language of Disney classics with horror, porn, B-movies and the abject in general. The results are unsettling, as they explore our primal fears, while revealing dark, Freudian implications. Often targeting Disney characters, which he sees as the earliest form of child indoctrination, one of his recurring figures is Pinocchio – an interesting Freudian case. Included in the exhibition is the sculpture Drop Head/Bounce Head, a red, silicone casting of a Pinocchio



© Mara McCarthy

without nose – and thus "castrated". The torture does not stop there, as another bronze sculpture has his testicles hanging right under his face. Other iconic sculptures such as Santa Claus with a Buttplug and the so-called Captain Dick Hat, whose "hat" explains his bizarre name, are also on view. Besides the tantalising video Heidi in which the epic fairy tale becomes a story of horror and perversity, one of the central pieces in the show is Pirate Party Portfolio. These 79 pictures form a narrative and are extracted from a performance in which some randy pirates go

looting and raping. Though an impressive work, Riva admits with a smile that "it is a difficult piece to live with. I am not sure I would be able to have it in my living room." (SS)

Paul McCarthy: Selected Works
Until 2nd October
Charles Riva Collection
Rue de la Concorde 21 Eendrachtstraat
1050 Brussels

charlesrivacollection.com