

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
AUGUST 31, 2023

MOCA PRESENTS
PAUL PFEIFFER: PROLOGUE TO THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF FREEDOM
THE FIRST U.S. RETROSPECTIVE OF THE ARTIST'S WORK

NOVEMBER 12, 2023–JUNE 16, 2024
THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA



Paul Pfeiffer, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (30)*, 2015, digital C-print on Fujiflex, 56 11/16 x 78 3/4 x 2 3/4 in. (144 x 200 x 7 cm). © Paul Pfeiffer. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

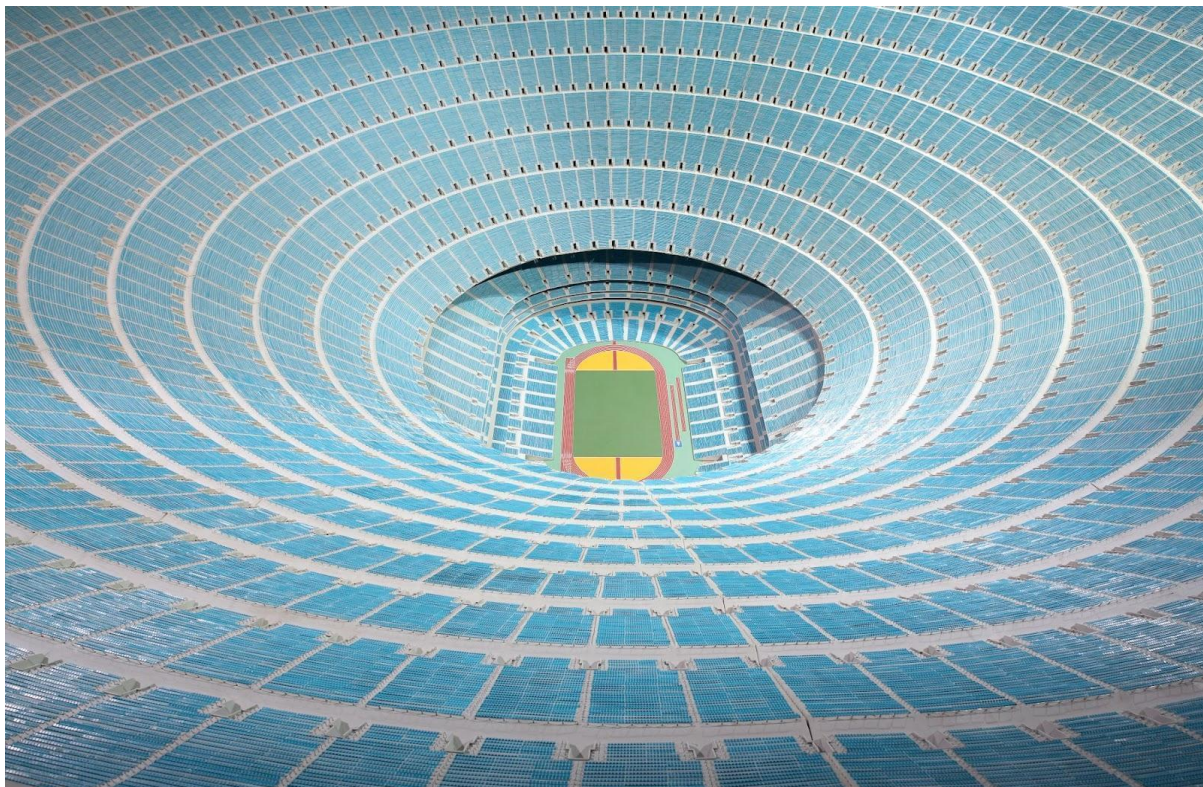
LOS ANGELES—The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) proudly presents *Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom*, the multidisciplinary artist's first U.S. retrospective. From era-defining early videos to recent, genre-breaking works in photography, installation, and sculpture, the exhibition brings together more than thirty works spanning Pfeiffer's career, establishing him as one of today's most influential artists. The exhibition is on view at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA from November 12, 2023, to June 16, 2024. *Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom* is organized by

MOCA Chief Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs Clara Kim with Curatorial Assistant Paula Kroll.

“It is a great pleasure to organize Paul’s first U.S. retrospective at MOCA, where The Geffen Contemporary spaces will provide a dramatic backdrop for his mesmerizing art and allow audiences to move from intimate viewings of his work to grand, immersive encounters for the first time,” said Kim. “Fundamentally, Pfeiffer gets at the undercurrents of what holds contemporary society together—our collective desires, fears, and sense of belonging. MOCA’s rich history of embracing innovative contemporary art and its commitment to fostering dialogues that resonate with the pulse of our times make it the ideal venue to present Pfeiffer’s thought-provoking explorations of modern society.”

Widely regarded as a pioneer of video art in the digital era, Pfeiffer (b. 1966, Honolulu; lives in New York) examines how media creates spectacle in sports and entertainment and its subtle but powerful impact on our experiences of belonging and identity. Meticulously taking video footage apart frame-by-frame and subjecting it to digital erasure, repetition, and looping, Pfeiffer’s earliest works influenced generations of contemporary artists in his wake. Such simple techniques revealed critical but subtle features inherent to the production of images and the construction of longing, truth, and heroism while reflecting the artist’s longstanding interest in the mechanics of movie-making. The exhibition title, *Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom*, is drawn from a critical moment in American media history: Cecil B. DeMille’s opening remarks introducing his epic religious drama, *The Ten Commandments*, the most expensive film ever made at the time of its release in 1956.

“Paul’s work has a global reach and gives us a profound sense of the technological landscape we live in. Yet Los Angeles offers an ideal setting for this long-awaited, ambitious exhibition of Paul’s work,” said Johanna Burton, The Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA. “Occupying more than 20,000 square feet at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA and set in the entertainment capital of the world, a city singularly poised to create—and manipulate—dreams, symbols, and mythologies, this show will have deep resonance here.”



Paul Pfeiffer, *Vitruvian Figure*, 2008, cast resin, aluminum and acrylic, 118 x 315 x 315 in. (299.7 x 800.1 x 800.1 cm). © Paul Pfeiffer. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo by Daniel Mansur (Stúdio Pixel).

Pfeiffer's quintessential LCD video pieces will anchor *Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom*. Iconic basketball and boxing matches, including Muhammed Ali's most famous fights, are the starting points for *Fragments of the Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)* (1999), *John 3:16* (2000), and *The Long Count* (2000–01) trilogy. The exhibition also features the artist's long-duration and live-feed video works and immersive video and architectural installations, such as *The Saints* (2007), an audio-visual recreation of the 1966 World Cup Final, and *Vitruvian Figure* (2008), a room-size model of a million-seat arena inspired by the Sydney Olympic stadium.

For this retrospective, Pfeiffer also expands on his *Incarnator* series (2018–23), nearly-life-size wood carvings of cultural and religious figures produced in the Philippines by “encarnadores,” (from the Latin word meaning “to make into flesh”) sculptors known for their production of *santos*, or Catholic religious icons. An early work in this series poses the pop star Justin Bieber as Jesus Christ in resurrection form. Made shortly after Bieber declared himself a born-again Christian, this work powerfully intercepts contemporary modes of devotion—both religious and to celebrity—and the mass influences that have shaped art, religion, politics, and nationhood. In a new commission for this exhibition, Pfeiffer examines the implications of today's global, instantaneous image circulation and how it intersects with contemporary labor conditions and the histories of colonialism and religion.

MOCA's presentation brings together Pfeiffer's immersive, large-scale pieces and many of his smaller-scale works for the first time in the U.S.. In close collaboration with the artist, Buro Koray Duman Architecture has developed an innovative, site-specific design for the exhibition that capitalizes on the cavernous warehouse space of The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA and the artist's longstanding interest in Hollywood movie productions and sets.

Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom is accompanied by a full-color monographic catalogue co-published by the museum and MACK, with new scholarship and critical readings of Pfeiffer's work that offer a much-needed overview of the artist's impact and influence. The monograph includes a curatorial essay by Clara Kim and additional contributions by Lawrence Chua, Tom Gunning, Julie Mehretu, Marian Pastor Roces, Chanon Kenji Praepipatmongkol, and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa. Available February 2024, the catalogue will also include documentation of Pfeiffer's installation at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Paul Pfeiffer was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and spent his teenage years in the Philippines. Museum solo shows and projects include Inhotim Institute, Brazil, 2018; Bellas Artes Outpost, Manila, 2018; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2017; Honolulu Museum of Art, 2016; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila, 2015; Artangel, London, 2014; Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, 2012; Sammlung Goetz, Munich, 2011; and Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart, Berlin, 2009. Pfeiffer has presented work in major international exhibitions, most recently the Performa Biennial and the Honolulu Biennial in 2019 and the Toronto Biennial and Seoul Mediacity Biennale in 2022. The artist lives and works in New York City.

Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom is organized by Clara Kim, Chief Curator & Director of Curatorial Affairs, with Paula Kroll, Curatorial Assistant, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Support for *Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom* as of August 31, 2023:

Lead support is provided by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and The Aileen Getty Foundation.

Major support is provided by Jamie and Robert Soros.

Additional support is provided by Jam Acuzar and Christopher Ax, Paula Cooper Gallery, Marcel Crespo, Thomas Dane Gallery, Jill and Peter Kraus, Amy and John Phelan, Anton Ramos, Maria Taniguchi, and Fernando Zobel de Ayala.

Supporters of the exhibition catalogue include The Katherine S. Marmor Award and the Blue Rider Group at Morgan Stanley.

Exhibitions at MOCA are supported by the MOCA Fund for Exhibitions with generous funding provided by The Earl and Shirley Greif Foundation.

This exhibition is carbon calculated. The museum reduced greenhouse gas emissions through planning efforts and balanced the remaining emissions through Strategic Climate Fund donations. Support provided by the MOCA Environmental Council.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MOCA)

Founded in 1979, MOCA is the defining museum of contemporary art. In a relatively short period of time, MOCA has achieved astonishing growth; a world-class collection of nearly 8,000 objects, international in scope with deep holdings in Los Angeles art; hallmark education programs that are widely emulated; award-winning publications that present original scholarship; groundbreaking monographic, touring, and thematic exhibitions of international repute that survey the art of our time; and cutting-edge engagement with new modes of media production. MOCA is a not-for-profit institution that relies on a variety of funding sources for its activities.

MUSEUM ADMISSION:

General admission to MOCA is free courtesy of Carolyn Clark Powers. Admission to *Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom* and other special exhibitions at MOCA is \$18 for adults, \$10 for students with ID and seniors (+65), and free for children under twelve and jurors with ID. Special exhibitions are free every Thursday from 5 pm to 8 pm as part of *Together Thursdays* courtesy of Cliff and Mandy Einstein. MOCA members always receive free admission to special exhibitions.

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS:

[Mapping an Art World: Los Angeles in the 1970s–80s](#)

MOCA Grand Avenue
On view through March 17, 2024

[Long Story Short](#)

MOCA Grand Avenue
On view through May 5, 2024

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS & PROGRAMS:

Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs
[KINK OUT: EPHEMERA](#)
September 9–October 2, 2023
The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs
[Moriah Evans, Remains Persist, 2023](#)
October 28–29, November 2–4, 2023, 4–8 pm
The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

[Paul Pfeiffer: Prologue to the Story of the Birth of Freedom](#)

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
November 12, 2023–June 16, 2024

[Olafur Eliasson](#)

PST Art 2024
The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
September 2024

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