

# DEREK ELLER GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Karl Wirsum**

October 12 - November 16, 2013

**Opening Reception: Saturday, October 12, 6-8pm**

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of drawings and paintings by Chicago artist Karl Wirsum. This will be his first New York show of recent work in over 25 years.

Wirsum first came to prominence in the mid-1960s as a founding member of the Hairy Who. His paintings and drawings combine psychologically heated and mordantly humorous imagery influenced by comic books, popular icons, Chicago blues, Japanese prints, and Mesoamerican pottery. His singular style has influenced generations of artists, and he continues to innovate today.

For Wirsum, drawing is as important as painting. The drawings, in fact, germinate the whole of his work. Through repeated drafts, sometimes spaced over the course of several years, he perfects the lines and colors of compositions before deciding to begin a painting. His meticulously constructed figurative works forgo painterliness in favor of precise layers of acrylic. The flatness of the surfaces teamed with the vibrant color gives the work a feverish, pulsating quality, and activates the abstract underpinnings of his figurative work. He writes, "The flat color seems to clarify and accentuate the shapes and forms in a more abstract way, independent of what the shapes represent."

The paintings' cryptic content and ambivalent atmosphere oscillates between ominous and playful. *Taffy Pull Tilt-a-Whirl*, for example features two figures, one of which appears to be stripping the flesh off of the other. In *Eye Adjustment*, a skeletal arm holding a knife reaches from outside the frame to 'adjust the eye' of an unsavory green character. Wirsum writes that, "Like Seurat's frozen-moment depiction of Sunday afternoon in the park, I select out from a particular arena of narrative action, leaving the viewer free to conjure up what may have come before...[and] the future unresolved, with no definitive "The End.""

Wirsum's painted wood frames add to the narrative, they act as barriers between the outer world and his inner world. Wirsum communicates inner worlds through enigmatic characters and a visual language that is as captivating as it is hermetic. To experience the drawings and paintings of Karl Wirsum, is to enter into a world surfeit with humor, strangeness, mystery, and joy.

Karl Wirsum was born in Chicago in 1939 where he continues to live and work. His work was recently featured in *Sinister Pop* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Chicago Imagists* at Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison; *Made in Chicago: The Koffler Collection* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D. C.; *Chicago Imagists: 1966-1973* at Thomas Dane Gallery, London; *Seeing is a Kind of Thinking: A Jim Nutt Companion* at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and *Looking Back: The Fifth White Columns Annual*, organized by Bob Nickas at White Columns, New York. This is Wirsum's second solo exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery.

**\*Book Signing Event: Saturday, October 12, 5-6pm.** The gallery will host a book signing party to celebrate the release of the 64 page catalogue accompanying the exhibition. It includes contributions by Robert Cozzolino, Carter E. Foster, KAWS, Jeff Koons, Gary Panter, Erik Parker, Mark Pascale, Peter Saul, Robert Storr, and Chris Ware.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 615 West 27th Street, between 11th and 12th Avenues. Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday from 11am - 6pm. For further information or visuals, please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com)