

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

## MAX ERNST

BIG BROTHER: TEACHING STAFF FOR A SCHOOL OF MURDERERS  
515 WEST 27<sup>TH</sup> STREET, NEW YORK  
MARCH 30 – MAY 13, 2017  
OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 6 – 8 PM



Paul Kasmin Gallery is pleased to announce *MAX ERNST Big Brother: Teaching Staff for a School of Murderers* on view at 515 West 27th Street, March 30 – May 13 2017. At various moments throughout Ernst's career, from his Cologne Dada period in the 1920s onwards, the artist turned to three-dimensional materials and sculpture in intense bursts of activity. The exhibition will feature Max Ernst's *Corps enseignant pour une école de tueurs* (*Teaching Staff for a School of Murderers*), conceived in 1967 at a pinnacle moment in Ernst's career in which he fully committed himself to sculpture with fresh rigor. Comprised of three monumental bronze figures, the sculptures synthesize Ernst's iconic use of language and sharp witticism that in turn transcend personal significance and make pointed commentary on the modern social and political climate.

The trio's central figure is *Big Brother*, taking its title from George Orwell's famed dystopian novel, *1984*, published in 1949—specifically, the story's slogan "Big Brother is Watching You!" Flanking *Big Brother* is *Séraphine Cherubin* and *Séraphin le Néophyte*, whose poignant titles reference spiritual authority in Christian and biblical iconography.

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Mayan-like in their abstracted forms, the sculptures hone in on the primordial energy of tribal and ancient traditions and underscore the breadth of influence in Ernst's practice. *Big Brother* is portrayed wearing a flat cap that ominously casts a shadow onto his smooth face, almost completely hiding his eyes to evoke the uneasy sense of surveillance. The two flanking guardians appear almost identical in their form, depicted in crouching poses with similar protruding tongues, slender faces and tapered hoods. Though *Big Brother* is the focus, his form is relatively small in comparison to the two angelic figures by his side. The figure's title is an ironic pun, a taunting humor and romantic paradox that is a central feature of Ernst's oeuvre.

Ernst's use of word play is in keeping with the principles of Dada, which "sought to undermine the fundamental structures" of a rational, ordered society. By disrupting conventions of both the pictorial and literal, Ernst liberated his work from a rigid, coherent and orthodox message. *Corps enseignant pour une école de tueurs* is an anti-monument to false authority and subverts the apparatus of a corrupt political order. Viewed as gigantic gargoyles or monsters of the subconscious that, the sculpture, just like Orwell's *1984*, embodies the fears of an invasion of corrupt political surveillance in the postwar world.

*Corps enseignant pour une école de tueurs* was first exhibited at Alexandre Iolas Gallery in Paris with *La plus belle*, recently shown at Paul Kasmin Gallery's inaugural Ernst exhibition in 2015 *Paramyths: Sculpture, 1934-1967*. Editions of this sculpture are on view in the collection of the Max Ernst Museum in Brühl and the Kunsthalle Würth, Germany.

This is the gallery's second exhibition of Ernst's work. A fully-illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

**Max Ernst (b. Germany, 1891 – 1976)** is one of the most prominent figures from the Dada and Surrealist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and known for being a master of provocation. Ernst's body of work demonstrates his persistent engagement with culture, especially in terms of the social and political climate. His subjects range from ancient mythology to literature to theory, often imbued with undertones of the artist's biting humor. While varied, Ernst's work also exhibits consistency in the recurring scenes of highly incongruent and disorienting groups of figures and objects that often display striking disruptions of scale, invoking an overwhelming sense of anxiety. For Ernst, art was a device by which the nightmarish realities of the world could be reflected.

## Media Contact

Anna Rosa Thomae  
art@annarosathomae.com  
ART Communication  
DE: +49 30 9154 7466  
US: 917 361 1673

## Image details

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Photography by Christian Baraja

## Gallery Contact

Madeline Lieberberg  
madeline@paulkasmingallery.com  
212 563 4474