PRESS RELEASE *PLEASE LIST*

Jesse Chapman

Johnny Milton

16 September–19 October 2011

Reception for the artist, 16 September, 6.00–8.00 PM

Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?

—Johnny Rotten, Winterland Ballroom, San Francisco, January 14, 1978 (the Sex Pistols' last gig)

McCaffrey Fine Art is delighted to present *Johnny Milton*, a new multipanel narrative painting by Jesse Chapman. The title is a conflation of John Milton, the author of the epic seventeenth-century poem *Paradise Lost*, and Johnny Rotten, the front man for the late 1970s English punk band the Sex Pistols.

Chapman describes the genesis of the painting as follows:

> I started with the evictions that were discernible by piles of particleboard furniture appearing in yards around where I live. This subject brought me to *Paradise Lost*. I was also reading Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*, which links the Sex Pistols with a line of quasi-progenitors, all the way back to a medieval cult called the "Brethren of the Free Spirit"(with whom Hieronymus Bosch may have been affiliated). It seemed odd that John Milton was never mentioned, because his regicidal stance in politics and his sympathetic portrayal of the Antichrist seem to me worthy of a place in the front ranks of such an assembly.

As a timeless parable, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden has been updated by Chapman to resemble a generational coming-of-age story gone wrong. Drawing on recent events, the cycle of paintings begins with *The Crash* and traces a narrative through multiple canvases bearing titles such as *The Idiots* and *The Thief*, to culminate in the show's massive centerpiece, *The Audience*, which is Chapman's largest painting to date. The allusions are varied and deliberate, reflecting on classical themes, Britain in the 1970s, youthful naïveté, and the current state of the American Dream.

Central to Chapman's endeavor is a meditation on free will and its limits in the hybrid character of Satan/Johnny Rotten. As in *Paradise Lost*, Satan/Johnny Rotten is portrayed in a sympathetic manner as a libertarian/anarchist teller of truths who challenges conformity and reveals idolatry and hypocrisy. As the giver of unrestrained freedom, provided with a devil-may-care disregard for outcomes, Satan/Johnny Rotten gives the people what they want—and that ultimately brings about their ruin.

Johnny Milton asks if humans understand and are prepared for unrestrained liberty; particularly at a time when the frightening spectacle of originalist fundamentalism, laissez-faire libertarianism, and anti-intellectual skepticism dominate today's political and economic debates. Further, with a Situationist take on events, Chapman points to this prevailing *spectacle* and asks whether these phenomena are merely the system *recuperating* to maintain control and preserve its edifice. Is Paradise Lost really a loss after all?

Jesse Chapman lives and works in Hudson, New York. He received his BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999 and an MFA from Yale University in 2003.

For further information, please contact
Lisa Panzera: Tel.: 212-988-2200 / lisa@mccaffreyfineart.com.

Exhibition arranged in co-operation with Marianne Boesky Gallery