



A CONVERSATION WITH PAUL MCCARTHY

The scuffed and dirty objects in Paul McCarthy’s series PROPO have a strangely menacing quality. They seem displaced and degraded, as if filth and time have turned these soulless mass-produced things into animated characters who are about to avenge their mistreatment. This theme of subverting conventionally innocent images—from children’s TV characters to Christmas ornaments—into provocative statements that disrupt the pleasant veneer of popular culture has stayed consistent through Paul McCarthy’s 40-year-long career.

Born in Salt Lake City, capital of Mormons and conservative family values, and trained in Los Angeles where he still lives, McCarthy is known as one of the most difficult-to-stomach, yet commercially and critically successful, American artists of recent decades. In this project, his art takes yet another twist as these socially critical images are used to build and support another kind of social structure: skateboard parks and educational centers where young people can get empowered though work and play. Here he tells us why:

**How come you decided to create a project that would support Skateistan?**  
**PAUL MCCARTHY:** It seems very straightforward. Skateistan builds skate parks. They build parks in poor, traumatized areas of the world where no one would expect that a skatepark would exist. But these are places with a youth population that dream of having such a thing, a skate park. They are fulfilling needed dreams. In this case, the sale of the boards will build a skatepark in South Africa.

**Why did you choose the PROPO project as the imagery for the skateboards?**  
**PM:** PROPO is a bank of images that became a book. The images are of items used in my performances during the 1970s. They seemed suited for skateboards. They are aesthetically ugly but beautiful.

**Do you plan to stay involved with Skateistan and the skatepark in the future?**  
**PM:** I think so. We’ll figure out something.

**Has skateboarding had any influence in your own life?**  
**PM:** Damon skated. A lot of his friends skated. We built a half pipe in our backyard in the ‘80s. I’ve always been a bit of a fan.

DAMON MCCARTHY EXPLAINS WHY HE AND PAUL CREATED SOMETHING GREATER THAN JUST ANOTHER ART DECK

The PROPO collection is sold as 10 single decks, just like any other skateboard collection. But Paul McCarthy and his son and close collaborator Damon also wanted to create something more authentic and multi-dimensional than art decks to hang on a wall—they wanted to make boards that could be used in the real world. Hence, they conceived a special PROPO edition of 11 decks, which are all signed by Paul and packaged in a custom flight case that includes wheels, trucks, bolts and clear grip tape. “In the hopes of creating a board that would be used for skating, Paul and I decided that the edition should be large and should come with everything needed to ride it,” says Damon.



The special edition also includes a film by Damon, which will be sent to the purchaser upon completion. The film will tell the story of the PROPO boards, show them in action and chronicle the building of the Skateistan skate and education center in Johannesburg that the project will finance. “The film will have aspects of our LA-based production as well as skating in LA, NYC and Africa. It will exist as a sort of tracing of the project, told in a McCarthy abstraction style that has become all its own,” says Damon.

The McCarthy father and son team has collaborated closely since Damon graduated from Cal Arts in 1998. At that time, Paul was beginning to make film and videos again. “Since I was fresh out of film school and had been watching him make art in the garage ever since a young age, it was a natural step to get more involved in making his work,” says Damon. Since then, he has been involved in shooting and editing every film or video that Paul makes.

The film about the skateboard project hits a personal nerve: “I was a lifelong skater until ten years ago, when, at the age of 31, I broke a bone, healed, and then broke another one right after,” Damon explains. “I now skate vicariously through my son and friends.” He also collects skateboard decks and has a large collection that ranges from his own early decks from 1978 to art collectables such as the Skateroom editions. This personal connection gives the project a depth and authenticity that makes its charity aspect even more meaningful. Says Damon: “It’s exciting to think that I could directly affect another group of kids by providing a place and an attitude that has offered me so much joy throughout my life.”

### THE SKATEROOM

HELPING YOUTH  
A SKATEBOARD AT A TIME

The Skateroom invites contemporary artists to interpret skate culture by creating art on skateboards. The Skateroom produces, promotes and sells these limited edition skateboards. In doing so, we support non-profit projects that empower children through skateboarding and art.

In doing so, the Skateroom makes substantial donations to Skateistan, an NGO that empowers children across the world through skateboarding and art activities.

### SKATING BEYOND SKATING

The Skateroom wants to enrich skate art history. We want to offer board and art collectors a new aesthetic universe. The Skateroom wants to mix the energies of a legendary underground culture and legendary artists. We see it as an experiment, an interaction between two art forms.

The Skateroom wants to make big names of contemporary art more affordable and useful at the same time. We love the idea of skateboarding as a tool to emancipate youth.

Our aim is to put as many children on wheels as we can, and get as many children as we can into classes, too!

# RIDING HIGH

A project  
by Paul McCarthy and  
The Skateroom  
in support of Skateistan



Wheels in Motion



Photo: Mark Straw

BUILDING A DREAM WITH SKATEBOARDS AND ART

**A collaboration between Paul McCarthy, Damon McCarthy, The Skateroom and Skateistan.**

Skateboarding first started as a means of expression for restless surfer kids. More than three decades later, Skateistan has proved that it can change the lives of the world’s most desperately vulnerable kids. In 2007, Australian skater Oliver Percovich found himself in Kabul looking for work as a researcher. He had brought his skateboards with him and when he started riding them in a nearby park, he immediately

got the attention of the local children. “They had never seen such a thing,” he says “And boys and girls of all ethnicities and backgrounds wanted to try it.”

Percovich and the kids kept getting together every day. And from these rather ordinary moments grew an extraordinary realization: The activity of skating brought children from a deeply fractured society together in ways they had never experienced before. It also offered an opportunity for girls, who are banned from most sports, to do something athletic and gain confidence and respect from their peers.

“Half of the population of Afghanistan is under 16 years old,” says Percovich, “Those kids have an enormous potential to improve the country’s future. But there’s no infrastructure to support them. I realized that we had created a micro cosmos of what Afghanistan’s future could be: young people from different ethnicities and social backgrounds coming together as a community.

**Only once you have that trust, can social change be effective.”**

Percovich also found that the skating sessions could be used as a tool for getting kids off the street and back into school. Together with friends, he approached the parents of the poorest kids, who worked on the streets all day, to offer an alternative: allowing their children to go back to school if they could make extra income as skate tutors.

These simple steps provided the foundation for the first Skateistan skatepark and education center in Kabul. As the children thrived and took on more responsibilities, Skateistan’s program expanded to include arts and an intensive back-to-school program where kids without any former schooling could get a fast-track education that made them ready to be absorbed into the regular school system.

Today, Skateistan is considered one of the world’s top 100 NGOs, with three thriving centers, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan and Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Skateistan’s next stop is Johannesburg, where a safe, purpose-built facility will provide skateboarding and educational programming to children ages 5–18. The center is slated to be opened in September 2015, but before it can built, Skateistan must raise enough funding. With the proceeds from the PROPO skateboard collection, Skateistan, The Skateroom and Paul McCarthy aim to fund the Johannesburg facility in its entirety. We hope that you’ll join us in this mission!

## SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, 29.2% of the population is under the age of 15. Some of the issues facing its young people are poverty, high rates of youth unemployment, vast social divisions, health issues (particularly those related to HIV), and gender-based violence. Practically all of these issues can be addressed through education.

In collaboration with the City of Johannesburg, Skateistan has identified some of the most at-risk communities that will most benefit from a quality youth education program that provides academic and leadership training alongside skateboarding.

Skateistan is therefore building its own indoor skatepark and education facility in central Johannesburg.

The building will incorporate successful design elements from the flagship skate school in Kabul, as well as the creative use of recycled shipping containers.

The facility design will be developed together with local artists, youth, and other stakeholders.

Skateistan South Africa has a long-term vision to work throughout the region in coming years, guiding youth-led community projects. The Johannesburg facility will serve as a regional training hub for skateboard-based, youth development initiatives.



