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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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EXHIBITION LOCATION:

NADA East Broadway
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New York, NY, July 10, 2024 – ANDREW RAFACZ is thrilled to announce *Christmas in July*, a jolly holiday special curated by Santa enthusiast Wells Chandler, at the NADA Exhibition Space at 311 East Broadway in Manhattan’s Lower East Side neighborhood. Decking the halls with over sixty artists, this sprawling exhibition and online holiday market explores the pagan, gender queer and psychedelic roots of the archetype of Santa via Siberian shamanism and the mushroom sacrament *Amanita muscaria*. The exhibition opens Wednesday, July 10th and continues through Thursday, August 1st, 2024.

Amanita muscaria, commonly known as fly-agaric or fly-muscaria, is undeniably the most recognizable toadstool in popular culture. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* points to its transformative potency. A hookah smoking caterpillar sits upon a mushroom throne. After metamorphosing into a butterfly, he imparts to Alice, “One side will make you grow taller ... And the other side will make you grow shorter.” The video game *Super Mario* furthers this shape-shifting narrative. Scoring the fungus allows a player to ‘power up.’ Fly-agaric is consumed ceremonially by the Tungus people who are indigenous to Siberia. The iconic red and white psychoactive mushroom is also utilized by the Nordic reindeer herding, Laplander indigenous group the Sámi. In the mycophilic bible, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, R. Gordon Wasson proposes that *Amanita muscaria* is the numinous ingredient in Soma. The Vedic Indo-Aryan libation to access the divine is repeatedly mentioned throughout the RgVeda. Through anagrams, cross cultural comparisons of Sumerian and Indo-European etymologies and unorthodox interpretations of Judeo-Christian scripture, John Allegro argues that Christianity was a fertility and mushroom cult and Jesus Christ was in fact a magic mushroom namely *Amanita muscaria* in his 1970’s controversial book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*.

Siberia is the birthplace of shamanism. The term shaman is derived from the Tungus word *šaman*. The noun is formed from the verb *ša* -‘to know.’ A *šaman* literally translates as ‘one who knows.’

What does any of this have to do with Santa? Mythologically Santa is a harlequinian patchwork of rich and disparate narratives. Santa has worn many a Mithras stylized cap as Thor, Odin and Apollo to name a few. The enigma of the inherited Coca-Cola image of Santa fashioned in a red crushed velvet suit with white fur trim and the imprint of the current Christmas holiday both point to *Amanita muscaria* and its ceremonial usage by the Tungus and Sámi. Fly-agaric is the primordial image and the origin of the interconnected mycelium network of the archetype of Santa and her various fruiting bodies. This should come as no surprise. For after all, mushrooms are the gender queer guardians of timeless form.

Like *Amanita muscaria*, Santa Claus’ colors are red and white. Santa lives at the North Pole, a symbol for the axis-mundi. The axis-mundi reoccurs cross culturally. It is the bridge that shamans travel between the heavens and earth. Santa partakes in shamanic flight and is a master of reindeer. The Tungus and Sámi both have an animal husbandry relationship with reindeer. *Amanita muscaria* is psychoactive for reindeer, hence their ability to fly. Rudolph’s red nose guides Santa’s sleigh. Plain as the nose on your face! Rudolph’s misfit anatomy

literally represents an Amanita muscaria mushroom stuck to the snout of an altered animal achieving inner illumination. Shamans who eat Amanita muscaria end up looking splotchy like the mushroom. Female shamans in the Tungus don gray beards and dress in red and white polka-dotted outfits. In the dead of winter, they arrive at homes on a reindeer drawn sled. Unable to access the main entrance of the snowbound yurt, the shaman slides down the chimney. Instead of physical gifts, they bring healing and problem solving, which is rewarded with offerings of food. This is not dissimilar to the contemporary tradition of chimney portals and cookies as strange attractors at the end of time. Through drumming and the help of mushrooms, the shaman enters a trance state to access information from alternate realms to help the host.

Wasson suggests that Soma in the RgVeda is mushroom laced urine. Amanita muscaria is extremely toxic but less so when a body has processed it. There are several anthropological accounts of the Tungus and Sámi people imbibing the urine of both shamans and reindeer to consume a less poisonous version. Amanita muscaria have a mycorrhizal relationship to both spruce and pine. The gifts below the tree point to this union. Archetypal images and traditions are so packed within themselves that nobody ever takes the time to ask what they really do mean. Defying space and the temporal, Santa is the ultimate time traveler and the world's most ancient shaman.

An amateur comparative religious studies scholar, Chandler has extensively researched the way entheogenic plants have impacted visual culture and the ecstatic religious experience. Featuring painting, sculpture, drawing, fiber, photography, video, print, wearables, crafts, books and hohohomo-home goods, *Christmas in July* is Chandler's largest mounted exhibition exploring the role of Santa as the world's most famous shamanic figure. An accompanying exhibition catalog with texts by Wells Chandler and Jennifer Coates will be released August 1st with a poetry reading by Candystore and a somatic demon trapping ceremony lead by Tamar Ettun. Dress in ritual holiday attire, as your favorite elfin avatar or come as yourself! Raise a glass of reindeer piss or libation of your choice. Get in the holiday spirit and join us at NADA East Broadway on July 10th 5-8pm to celebrate Santa in all her cosmogonic glory. Ho, ho, ho!

- Wells Chandler

Participating artists include: Manal Abu-Shaheen, Baenk, Devin Balara, Abril Barajas, Hannah Barrett, Elizabeth Bonaventura, Katherine Bradford, Colin Brant, Farrell Brickhouse, Rick Briggs, Jibz Cameron, Candystore, Soso Capaldi, Carol, Wells Chandler, Kari Cholnoky, Jennifer Coates, Tony Coleman, Gaby Collins-Fernandez, Pearl Cowan, Carl D'Alvia, Steve DiBenedetto, Angela Dufresne, Florencia Escudero, Tamar Ettun, Travis Fairclough, Lauren Francescone, Theadora Frost, Glenn Goldberg, Tamara Gonzales, Adam Green, EJ Hauser, Kate Hawes, Clarity Haynes, Dove Hornbuckle, Cody Hudson, David Humphrey, Anthony Iacono, Anna Ialeggio, Mala Iqbal, G Imaginations, Valesca Lafrance, Dante Lentz, David X Levine, Madison Lewis, Michael Mahalchick, Jake Manning, Chris Martin, Shari Mendelson, Soumya Netrabile, Nick Payne, Erika Ranee, Amy Giovanna Rinaldi + Intimate Revolution, mosie romney, Tom Rubnitz, CJ Saft, Adrian Schachter, Rachel Schmidhofer, Michelle Segre, Randi Shandroski, Michael Sims, Hrvoje Slovec, Laurel Sparks, Julie Torres, Brandi Twilley, Jonathan Twilley, Katie Vida, Zeynab Izadyar + VVORK VVORK VVORK and Charles Yuen.