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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN  
FINE ART SCULPTURE

**'THE POST HUMAN CONDITION : FROM DUCHAMP  
TO KOONS'**

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A sincere thanks to Gerry Walker.

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“.... a man who doesn't adopt the natural attitude in an unknown situation - in this case alarm - such a man merely proves that he has no natural instincts...You just don't have the primitive minimum of mistrust which you will find in any animal you care to name and without which it would perish on a planet like ours.”

Brecht

Extract from 'Short Stories 1921-1946'



## **INTRODUCTION**

**THE POST HUMAN : FROM DUCHAMP TO KOONS**







“We will have to face decisions not only about what looks good, but what is good or bad about the restructuring of the mind and body. The limits of life will no longer be something that can be taken for granted. We will have to create a new moral vision to cope with them. In future artists may no longer be involved in just redefining art. In the ‘Post Human’ future artists may also be involved in redefining life.”

(1:1)



Post Human: 'Who are you?'  
'I'm not myself today'

In the '40s and '50s art critics responded in a literary style to the expressive content of the specific works and focused on the mind of the individual artist. By the '60s , art writers became less interested in the individual artist and shifted to critical theory and cultural studies using the work of the artists as illustrations of cultural constructs and sociopolitical discussion. Critical theory is derived from a philosophy and theoretically orientated society.

Modernity was considered a revolt against the normalising functions of tradition. To define Post- Modernism is not an easy task but in terms of the Post - Human it is necessary. It could be said that Post - Modernism attacks truth, the very same truth it hides. Around the '60s French structuralist theory had made it clear how much our interpretation of the





world is shaped by the language we use to describe our own experience. Pop art, whether intentional or not, stressed the priority we give to the images we see in magazines and television as our points of reference in experience. Thus began the enquiry in to what is real and what is not real. A popular characteristic of the Post - Modern that has managed to confused a lot of people with it's typical contradiction. The essence of Post - Modernism has steeped itself into the mass subconsciousness of the public. They may not be able to define it but subconsciously they understand it. Similar to human nature or human instinct.

Different levels of thought and theory have made it possible to prove the wrong right and the right wrong. We are made to believe that whatever is presented to us, we must examine it in relation to the cultural and society trends of the time therefore giving the object or art piece an instant value. The same way the public receives the pop persona.



The structure of 'Self' in a Post Modern society has often been questioned. Artists have been trying to resolve what 'identity' means in term of our bodies, gender, nationality, religion, moral values and cultural background. If we are living in a Post Modern age then 'we' could be easily be described as Post Humans. So how do we distinguish between what is Human and Post Human?

It is my intention to examine the boundaries between what is considered to be Human and Post Human by looking at the work of Warhol and Koons and their use of Duchamp as a backdrop and a device that helped make art a commodity and the transformation of themselves into art celebrities and Pop persona. They incorporate into their work objects that we buy and make our own, through our choice, senses, intellect, desire and imagination could be considered to be extensions of our very own 'selves' and our personalities. Warhol and Koons brings us into the drama, into the game of art for without us





- the mass public there would be no consumer, no market, no demand, no money, no art! We are part of this process .

Publicity is the name of the game and whether we hate their work or adore it ( or adore them whichever ) it doesn't matter.

What matters is the attention.

**“The desacralization of art ends, curiously, in the fetishization of the artist, for in his very person, his very body, he represents the only thing left as a criterion of art after the triumph of the ready-made.”**

(1: 2)

Duchamp was the first to make consumer objects and images as 'Ready- made' art recognising that in a world uniqueness and singularity was becoming rare. By relocating these objects in an art context, he conveyed a new message that defined art and life within the framework of commodity

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fetishism. Duchamp transformed the everyday object in to an art object thus ironically knocking all sacred art values by using a mass produced object.

With this simple act of displacement what were the consequences? By making 'Anti- Art' and 'Anti - Craft' statements, did Duchamp intentionally take away the need for the human element from the making of art to highlight the fact that what the artist makes or transforms is not important but the concept of the artist. How does Duchamp's denial of the art object - through his use of the ready -made, run parallel to the denial of the persona? How did Warhol and Koons benefit from the Duchampian legacy?

Warhol continued the Duchamp tradition by transforming both his art and personality into pure commodification. Warhol's works instantly conjure up people, objects, and stories whose reality is guaranteed by familiarity and feeling even though production of the image is without perception or passion.





In order to take a closer look at Koons and how his works falls under the Post Human theme it will be necessary to examine where he fits in, in the Duchamp and Warhol line. I shall discuss how Koons uses Kitsch - is it the ultimate debasement to to humanity and art? Or is it the saviour? By embracing the banal will it resurrect us from being Post Human to being Human again. Is Kitsch the mirror that Koons holds up to our faces revealing our real desires, needs, reminding us that what we buy and desire makes us what we are. Are we really only Human after all.

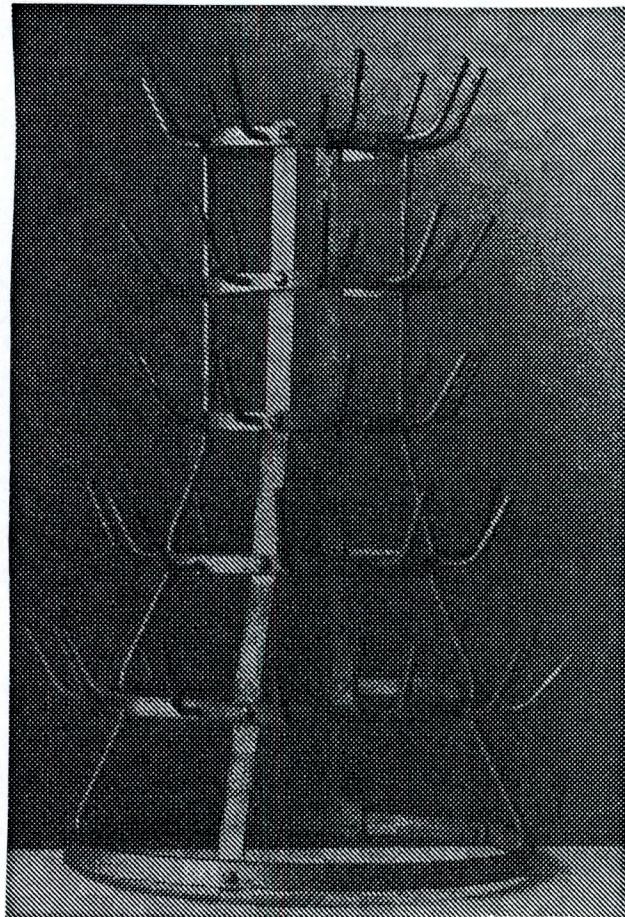
By magnifying the tastelessness or Kitsch that is inevitable a by product of mass culture we will see how Koons and Warhol not only ironically drew attention to that debasement of tastes and humanity but equally stressed their own detachment from it, asserting themselves as a privileged people - Post people who are able to stand outside society, remaining untainted and pure by it's corruptions.





## CHAPTER ONE: DUCHAMP





'BOTTLE RACK' 1914 (FIG.2:1)





“ To insist on purity is to baptise instinct, to humanise art, and to deify personality. Artists are above all men who want to become inhuman.”

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1913.(2:1)

“The Warhol generation... How have we been led astray? Why is it that ‘negative’ actions in art always turn out as acceptable documents understood and welcomed by established cultural agencies? The culprit is, of course, Marcel Duchamp. His notions, concerning the Ready - Made especially, have found it difficult for us to find the truly trivial. As soon as we do it, it turns into art ...”

Gregory Battcock, 1970.(2:2)





**“Whether Mr. Mutt (pseudonym used by Duchamp) with his own hands made the fountain or not is of no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that it’s useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view, and created a new thought for that picture.”**

**Duchamp: ‘The blind Man’ magazine.**

In 1912, Braque and Picasso incorporated bits of newspaper into their cubists collages. The range of acceptable materials and iconography in art was widening, resulting in the introduction of Mass Culture. In 1914 Duchamp pushed the issue further, selecting objects from the real world and ‘re-representing’ art. In defiance of art, of the aura, and the sacredness of the ‘work of art’, Duchamp never tried to describe objects, instead he tried to desecrate the relationship between the eye, the hand and the mind.





The intention of Duchamp were to challenge both Aesthetics and art ideologies which placed manufactured objects at the bottom of the hierarchy and handmade works of art at the top. The art of displacement and transformation that turned a bottle rack into 'BOTTLE RACK' (FIG.2:1), proved that a mass produced object can achieve singularity as an artwork can become more valuable than most handmade works of art. Duchamp's Readymades tend to raise more questions than they answer and their significance endlessly debated. In 1934 Andre Breton defined the works as “ **Manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of objects of art through the choice of the artist.**”

Duchamp's Readymades delivered a terrific cultural shock and it's a wonder how they got exhibited in the first place. Duchamp was a brilliant, controversial artist, a man of intelligence, sensitivity and force of character. Had he been unknown, his bottle racks and urinals would never have got near a gallery.

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‘ETANT DONNES’ 1946-66 (FIG.2:2)





## DUCHAMP AND POP

Duchamp was not a self - promoting artist unlike the pop artists who defined pop art as being transient, popular, low - cost, mass - produced, young, witty, gimmicky, glittery, and glamorous. Preferring privacy, he sustained the widely believed myth at the time that he had retired from art to devote himself to his true love - the game of chess. Upon his death, it was discovered that Duchamp had, in fact, devoted some 20 of the last years of his life to his last major work 'ETANT DONNES'(FIG.2:2)

Pop was anti - art and anti - high art in the form of rejection of the aesthetic and dismissed abstraction as elitist. Even though Pop art was also anti - intellectualism and anti - human, many of the artists were highly articulate and cerebral and very much influenced by Duchamp.

Duchamp himself was alive to witness the Pop movement to which the Readymades were of special importance. He was



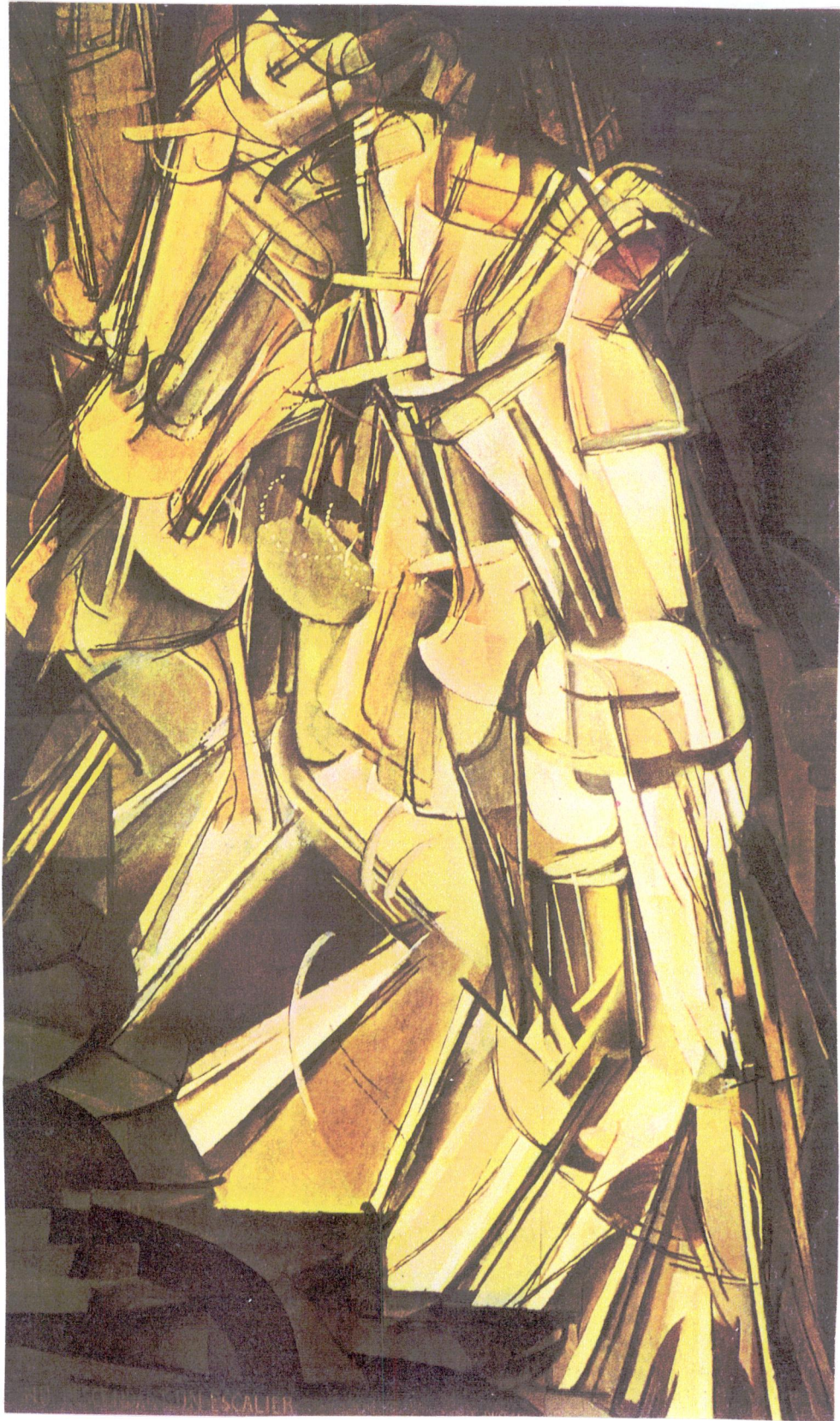


a somewhat unwilling father figure at this stage. He is reported as having written in a letter to the former Dadist Hans Richter : **“ This Neo - Dada, which they call New Realism, Pop Art, Assemblage, etc. is an easy way out and lives on what Dada did. When I discovered Readymade I thought to discourage Aesthetics. In Neo Dada they have taken my Readymade and found Aesthetic beauty in them.”**

Historically Pop art can be said to react from a contemporary culture in which reality was subordinated to the interests of art. The subsequent de - individualisation of art, it's mechanical, anonymous quality, stood at the end of a long process of development in art history. Pop art holds a mirror to the industrial, mass society with it technological progress, it's expansion of mechanically reproducible media and it's commercialization of popular culture. Since Pop art is, for the







‘NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE’ 1912 (FIG.2:3)



'NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE, 1912 (FIG. 2.3)

time being, sited at the end of a process which have trivialised reality and humanity reducing it to the status of a consumer product.

Duchamp's "NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE" (FIG.2:3) created a considerable stir at the 'Armory show'. Duchamp remained in New York where he met the Parisian painter Francis Picabia and the American photographer Man Ray. These three artists were the founders of the New York Dada movement. From 1915 Dada questioned traditional notions of art and took as its theme the idea of the affront, shock or offend. This was one of the later Pop art movement. To throw doubt on art was also to throw doubt on its forms and subject matter, on traditional modes of its reception and on its concepts of beauty and truth.

In 1917 Duchamp presented an urinal "FOUNTAIN" (FIG2:4.) for the 'Independents' exhibition and signed it Richard Mutt. Duchamp stated that it did not matter whether or not Mutt had made this 'fountain' with his own hands. The







'FOUNTAIN' 1917 (FIG.2:4)





important thing was that he had selected it. Mutt had taken a normal household article and displayed it so that its intended purpose had disappeared behind a new title and a new way of looking at it. He had thus given this object a new meaning.

The idea of abolishing the contradiction between reality and representation and of presenting reality directly and dubbing it art was highly radical at the time and later influenced Warhol. What was it which made Dada so inspiring for the development of Pop art?

Dada combined advertising images and texts, slogans, folk art and popular culture in collages, pictures with text, photos, films, assemblages, theatre and performances. The unorthodox and in some ways surreal, manner in which it combined these integrating both the rational and ordering principle and elements of chance influenced Pop art.

The work of art as an object, as an object trouve or Ready - Made, the everyday consumer product as an object of artistic





interest - this recipe shocked the art scene and insulted its sense of aesthetics. The Ready - Made, as a forerunner of Pop art, shows how art became part of the everyday world.

Duchamp was not interested in the aesthetic attraction of the products themselves, or in analysing the banality of their aesthetics.. His objects were a means to an end, a means of demonstrating, rather than illustrating the cultural rift between explosive social problems in society and its artistically saturated establishment.





## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

**'BOTTLE RACK' 1914 (FIG. 2:1)**

**'ETANT DONNES' 1946 - 66 (FIG.2:2)**

**'NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE' 1912 (FIG.2:3)**

**'FOUNTAIN' 1917 (FIG.2:4)**

## CHAPTER TWO : WARHOL









'DIAMOND DUST JOSEPH BEUYS' 1980 (FIG.3:1)







“.... however much Pop Art has depersonalised the world, platitudinised objects, dehumanised images, replaced traditional craftsmanship of the canvas by machinery, some ‘subject’ remains. What subject? The one who looks, in the absence of the one who makes. We can fabricate a machine, but someone who looks at it is not a machine - he desires, he fears, he delights, he is bored, etc. This is what happens with Pop Art.

Roland Barthes.(3:1)

“I got to [know] Andy quite well... he was very selfconscious about going bald... I’d tell him to get a hair piece, and he finally did... He thought that he was totally unattractive. He was very bald. He was quite prematurely grey, and he had a rather large nose. He had plastic surgery on [it], sanded the nose and corrected it.”

Alfred Carlton Walters.(3:2)



## POST WARHOL POST HUMAN PURE COMMODITY POST ART

Warhol's persona was a familiar to the public as his art. Warhol provided a model for the American celebrity artist of the 1960's, publicly pursuing profit, glamour and fame. He became a success as a commercial artist and discovering the power of advertising Warhol ultimately put this knowledge to use in packaging and marketing himself as an art phenomenon and as a superstar commodity by way of self transformation via Duchamp. Warhol's success lay in the fact that he recognised that a persona could be communicated via the media better than an art object, and he defined his existence entirely on a shallow plane of representation and reproducible images.

Warhol exploited both style and the media and in doing so highlighted the values of contemporary society. He demonstrated that fame, art, and people were equal and meaningless in a world willing to accept anything,





without questions, without values except for money. Even though Warhol's own persona and self - made image was irresistibly glamorous and manipulative but also left an emotional void, a much talked about nothingness.

**“In a sense that his very presence was a releasing agent which released people so they could live out their fantasies and get undressed, or, in some cases, do very violent things to get Andy to watch.” (3:3)**

Not only did Warhol manipulate the media and art but also people. He commodified people using them as the source of inspiration. In 1963 Warhol moved his studio to an old factory building. ‘The Factory’ became an environment lined with silver

foil and followers of Warhol. These followers or hanger - ons ranged from drag queens , ‘beautiful people’, chic fashion personalities, rock bands, to drug users and the weirder the better as far as Warhol was concerned. ‘The Factory’ was the place to be seen thus attracting not only sub cultures but.





the rich and famous.

Many of the hanger - ons self- destructed as a result of their drug taking and they were not missed by Andy. People became out-of-date through death and their places filled by others who fell off the mass production line of life. Warhol exploited these people in order to promote himself. A self - promotion that can only be obtained the exaltation and awe of others.

Warhol continued the Duchamp tradition by going a step futher by transforming the object into subject into repetitive images. The Warhol subject always represents an easily recognisable everyday image. No special knowledge is required nor a knowledge of history. Subjects like packaged food, are everywhere and are particular to our time. Warhol directly mirrored cultural uses and abuses and emphasised to the point of absurdity the complete attachment around him.



His celebrity portraits depict popular heroes, superstars, filmstars, popstars, whom our culture has transformed into it's very own superstar art. Warhol desired nothing more than to be up there with the elite, the stars. Such a compulsion for fame certainly explains the painter's love of partying or what he called his 'social disease'. He wanted to wallow in stardom. He never condoned it. He even managed to mass produce fame for the public by proclaiming his 'everyone is famous for fifteen minutes' slogan, suggesting the notion of celebrity as a kind of consumer good that anybody can have. Warhol was the superstarred, commodified, plastic answer to Beuy's 'everyone's an artist.'

DIAMOND DUST JOSEPH BEUYS'. 1980 (FIG.3:1)

At the time of his death in 1986 Beuys was financially the most highly valued artists in the world. Something which





appealed to Warhol even though he wasn't impressed with the German artist's . Beuys was brilliant at communicating his green issues through the media. His close encounter with death during the war inspired his work, which was generally considered to be very spiritual, ecological, humane and far from Kitsch. Synthetic diamond dust was sprinkled over the image of Beuys whilst the silkscreen ink was still wet. In reality the diamond dust gives off a brilliant glitter that introduces potent associations of a showbiz, glitziness entirely and wittily appropriate to Beuys's role as an art-world superstar. Was the earthy Beuys a Warhol example of a Post Human?

Warhol attracted a lot of interest because of his seemingly cool and detached attitude to his life and work. The famous embraced him as much as he embraced them .He never posed a threat to them and vice versa. Even after prolonged







'BEFORE AND AFTER' 1962 (FIG.3:2)





exposure by the media his personality remained the unrevealed. This is probably because he consistently projected a character which exemplifies some of the essential aspects of a Post Modern, Post Human society for example; Warhol represents a depersonalised and value free man. He never made earnest statements about his work and conversed entirely in trivialities.

Warhol spoke a great deal about himself but only in a flat and often contradictory manner. His paintings are like his biographical ramblings; they are filled with facts and empty self revelations;

**“If you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films, and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.”**  
**(3:4)**

But it is precisely in that nothingness that the artist’s





meanings lay, for it proves the meaningless that Warhol saw a world around him, a spiritual emptiness in which western man lives in. The denial that his works bore any meanings may be explained by his reluctance to explain his works by verbal explanation and by his suspiciousness of critical dialogue.

### EARLY START

As a child Warhol developed rheumatic fever and this illness somewhat disrupted his schooling. The artist's mother made a big fuss over him and Warhol later remembered with great affection these periods of enforced idleness which provided opportunities to live around reading and cutting up comic books. Warhol discovered movie glamour magazines and would make make creative use of that discovery in his later years. He enjoyed the movies, idolising movie stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. With the death of his





father at an early age the Warhola family had to fend for themselves.

Warhol obtained a place at the Carnegie Institute of Technology where he encountered problems such as difficulty in being understood due to his thick accent. He also suffered from the need to fix his artistic personality, very frequently the timid Warhol would produce work. designed to appeal to his teachers rather than express his own views as a result they threatened to fail him. The fear of failure and death would always haunt Warhol through his life and when his mother, whom he stayed close to all his life, died he did not attend her funeral.

### ANDY THE MACHINE

In 1963 Warhol told Time magazine that “ **paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechanical. Machines have less problems. I'd like to be a machine,**

wouldn't you?" To achieve this machine - like end, Warhol achieved an almost robotic emotional and intellectual vacancy. His machine - like stance was certainly very effective in increasing media interest in him, for the more non - committal he appeared the more intriguing he became. This automatism also extended his work which he wrote about in his book 'POPism: The Warhol Years';

"I still wasn't sure if you could completely remove all the hand gesture from art and become noncommittal, anonymous. I knew that I definitely wanted to take away the commentary of gestures - that's why I had this routine of painting with rock and roll blasting the same song, a 45 rpm, over and over all day long... The music blasting cleared my head out and left me working on instinct alone. In fact , it wasn't only rock and roll that I used in that way - I'd also have the radio blasting opera and the T.V. picture on( but not





the sound) - if all that didn't clear my head, I'd open a magazine put it beside me and half read an article while I painted. The works I was most satisfied with were the cold 'no comment paintings'.

Warhol was noted for obtaining some of his most important ideas from others. His experience as a commercial artist made it natural to receive instruction on the visual direction of his imagery. Warhol's use of ideas from others meant that he could serve to focus ideas and responses from his surrounding culture. Warhol himself was very open about the source of his works, as he stated again from his book 'POPism'; The Warhol 60's';

“ I was never embarrassed about asking someone, literally, “ What should I paint?’ because Pop comes from the outside, and how is asking someone for ideas any different from looking for them in a magazine?”.

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**“Promoting devices and products promising improved posture silhouette, fuller hair, broader shoulders, and bigger arms, these ads touched the core of Warhol’s physical insecurities.” (3:5)**

In his 1962 ‘BEFORE AND AFTER’ (FIG.3:2) the title alone suggests self - transformation and the artists aspiration for his own metamorphosis . Cultural banality is the under-lying theme in this stark image derived from a small ads in a magazine underlines the pettiness of human vanity by stating that

a straight nasal profile is generally considered more appealing than a hooked nose. The irony whether intentional or not is Warhol himself in 1956 had an operation on his rather bulbous nose to make it less ugly, an adjustment that was unsuccessful. The work deals with the concept of physical







'CAMOUFLAGE SELF-PORTRAIT' 1986 (3:3)







attractiveness and how it may be artificially created, is the main concern of both mass culture and art itself.

On the otherhand it might be said that the profile image of a woman's face may have been inspired by Andy's own facial refinement, but it had no more to do with him personally than the Campbell soup cans he began painting almost immediately after this work.

#### CAMOUFLAGE SELF - PORTRAIT. 1986 (FIG.3:3).

After 1963 Warhol became a master at masking his real self from public gaze. To art critics, art historians and media people, he usually went out of his way to appear naive, mentally slow, emotionally detached and even robotic.

Yet in private he was very worldly, intellectually quick, frequently manipulative(to be manipulative requires an understanding of human character). The late series of camouflaged self-portraits therefore projects the 'real' Andy



Warhol in a direct fashion indeed, for camouflage is a means of masking true appearances or false ones.

### LIFE MEDIA DEATH TRAGEDY DAILY LIFE

Warhol's pictures illustrate the fact that tragedy, in as far as it is picked up by the sensation - hungry media, may make a person famous for fifteen minutes of his life, but that his personal fate is immediately forgotten again. Life is cheap - ened by a repetitive stream of banal and consumer filled cliches. For a person to become famous as a result of a personal tragedy is a rare enough event, yet society accepts and expects such events as part of it's daily diet.

Warhol himself was confronted a life threatening experience in 1968 when Valerie Solanis, the founder and only member of S.C.U.M, ( The Society for Cutting up Men) shot him down. In his interviews, Warhol pointed out the link between personal fate and social destiny in his work.





FINAL\*\* 5c New York Mirror

WEATHER: Fair with light clouds  
— temperature

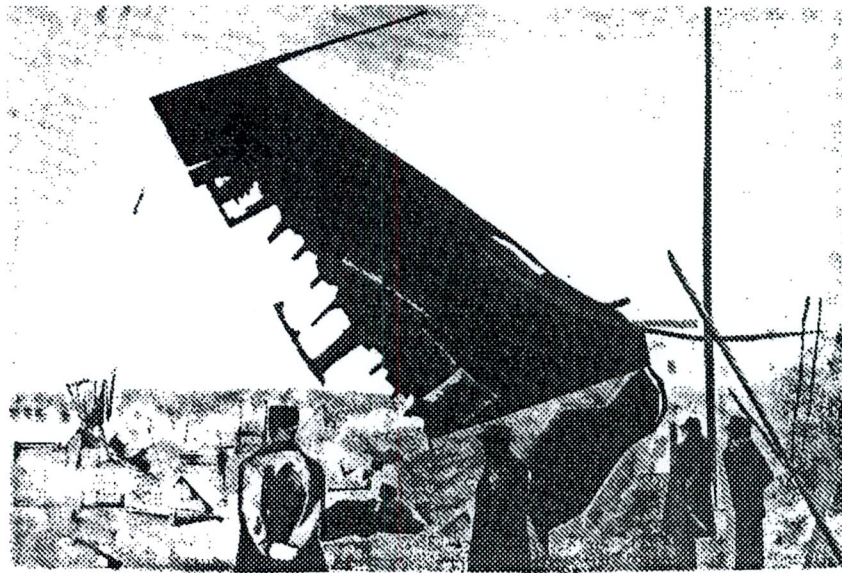
Vol. 87, No. 219

MONDAY, JUNE 4, 1962

C



# 129 DIE



# IN JET!

'129 DIE IN JET' 1962 (FIG.3:4)

“ It was Henry who gave me the idea to start the ‘Death and Disaster’ series. We were having lunch one day... and he laid the Daily News out on the table. The headline was ‘129 Die in Jet’. And that’s what started me on the death series - the car crashes, the disasters, the electric chairs... whenever I look back at that front, I’m struck by the date - June 4,1962. Six years - to the date - later, my own disaster was front page headline ‘Artist Shot’. (FIG3:4)

Warhol’s ‘MARILYN’ (FIG.3:5) , produced in 1962 after her death, reveals the authenticity of her image by repeating her face or her lips in rows. He translates the manipulability character of her image into a mechanical form containing apparently meaningless pictures. Using the silkscreen screen technique, he arranges some design or other of Monroe, in apparent random sequence, and then transfers them onto the canvas in any old way. Warhol turns the stereotyped persona







'MARILYN' 1962 (FIG.3:5)







of the star, who is forced to reproduce herself constantly in staged scenes and settings, into a series of identical images, merely touching up her face with various colour nuances.

The lack of subtlety of her make - up relies on her expected pose - ' a mask' which the viewer is invited to identify. Her glossy hair, bright eyes and sensual lips simulate beauty and happiness - a marketable persona - a marketable art work by a marketable artist.



## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

**'DIAMOND DUST JOSEPH BEUYS' 1980 (FIG.3:1)**

**'BEFORE AND AFTER' 1962 (FIG. 3:2)**

**'CAMOUFLAGE SELF - PORTRAIT' 1986 (FIG.3:3)**

**'129 DIE IN JET' 1962 (FIG.3:4)**

**'MARILYN' 1962 (FIG.3:5)**





## **CHAPTER THREE : KOONS**







‘THE ALL NEW JEFF KOONS’ 1980 (FIG.4:1)





“Contradiction is a powerful tool. You cannot liberate everyone. The contradictions in my personality run deep. In part, I am a sham, a con man. But I also have a sense of integrity that I hope comes through in my work.”

Jeff Koons.(4:1)

“To me it’s about using the public as a ready-made. It’s about the public - what their dreams and ambitions are.”

Jeff Koons.(4:2)





## CONSUMER AFFAIRS

The art movement connected with Koons is generally recognisable by the type of theory associated with it rather than by style or look. A theory that reflects equally to a form of abstract art known as 'Neo - Geo' or 'Neo - Pop' - the art of appropriation, transformation and simulation. But Koons's work is about style and appearance, the theory helped justify his choice of objects within the art world thus adding an aura to the ordinary object that Duchamp had taken away from the art object.

The work of Jeff Koons owes its origin to Duchamp's readymades, but the differences between them are obvious. Duchamp selected ordinary, everyday objects - a bicycle wheel , a urinal , and the associations of their functions in a world outside of art.





Koons by contrast, and this reflects the difference between our world and Duchamp's, uses objects that are already a little closer to art, or at least to design, and that defined not so much by their function as by their audience, their market, their appeal. What distinguishes Koon's objects from others is who they are designed for. Their form is determined not by any particular function but by the public demands, desires and wants. These objects are ideal for any human that finds themselves lacking in emotional and psychological comfort.

Koons's work reflects the relationship we have with consumer objects and how they bring out certain aspects of our personality and nature by the way they represent success, our desire to own them in order to enhance our own lives. These objects also represent our human activities such as consumerism, sports, entertainment, shopping, and substitutions for human relationship.



“ My father decorated in Upper Middle Class... bourgeois class... progressive... many different styles. Anything from French Provincial to Modern of Colonial. What had an effect on me was that it was an articulated environment. My father's showroom was wonderful. One room would be a living room, an artificial living room, and you'd go down the hall and you'd have an artificial kitchen... an artificial sitting room... a den... .” (4:3)

We know exactly where Jeff Koons is coming from. He speaks frequently of his past and we know exactly where he gets his influence for his consumer, yuppie - style of work, by his father's work as an interior designer and his own working as a wall street commodities broker. Just like Warhol growing up with magazines and movies, we can imagine Koons growing up amidst highly decorative kitsch furniture and ornaments that meant something to the people around him. Koons makes



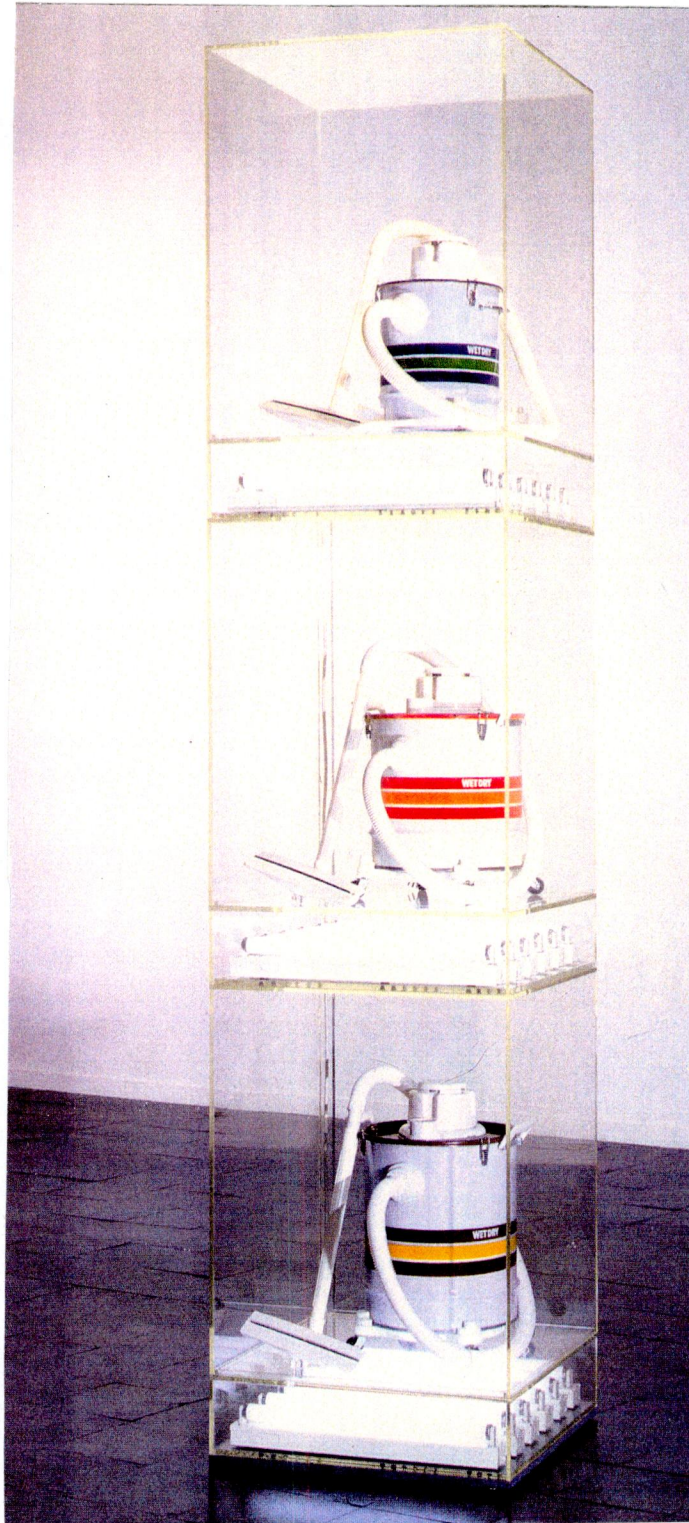


up for Warhol's 'empty' statements with his self-proclamations of spirituality and liberation. Koon's calls out to us to embrace our true past and that our true past is made up of these objects, whether we like it or not they are part of us, just as much as the image on the television and in magazines. Jeff believes that self - transformation can be obtained through our past unlike Warhol's craving to be a machine personality. **"People expect certain needs to be fulfilled by objects, by material things... To me consumer objects still have meaning... I embrace everything for what it is and I love things for what they are. Materialism... is a supplement for things which people are not receiving in their own lives."**(4:4)

By embracing these substitutes for our wants we are liberated to enjoy consumerism and life guilt free, **' I'm trying to liberate people, to remove inhibition and to**







‘NEW SHELTONWET\DRY TRIPLE DECKER’ 1981 (FIG.4:2)





let the individual be as loud as possible, to remove people's fear and guilt and let them know that all the great things in the world to come are already here.

Nothing new is ever going to come here." (4:5)

There is a subtle pessimistic tone to Koon's positively uplifting statements just as much as there is loaded meaning behind Warhol's apparent nothingness aphorisms.

#### IT'S LIFE JIM, AS WE KNOW IT.

In 'THE NEW' series, Koons brings together consumerism's object - lust, and the compulsive pursuit of the New, both in the art world by replacing the 'aura' of brand new household, domestic appliances with the 'presence' of the art object. For Koon's an object is at it's most powerful when it is new, proving that people could qualify for this standard once they keep themselves new, they will never become boring. Koon's himself qualifies for this treatment in his piece 'THE

ALL NEW JEFF KOONS' (FIG.4.1) The advert - like title alone





suggests self-renewal similar to Warhol's BEFORE AND AFTER. Koon's uses a childhood photograph of himself, there is no sign of transformation except the obvious, here is Jeff when he was a kid and now he is an adult. By placing himself amongst domestic, banal objects Jeff is telling us ; look! I've embraced my past and this is what it looks like, this is me and you may not know it or want to know but this is you also.

'NEW SHELTON WET/DRY TRIPLE DECKER' (FIG.4.2), consists of vacuum cleaners stacked on top of the other, displayed in fluorescent-lit plexiglass containers. These encased vacuum cleaners portray an elegant, pristine 'aura' of extreme and everlastingnewness. Their very function is taken away due to their replacement in the art environment. They could easily be placed as they are in any department store but their newness would not last as they would be sold brought home and put to use. It is as if they are aware this position and



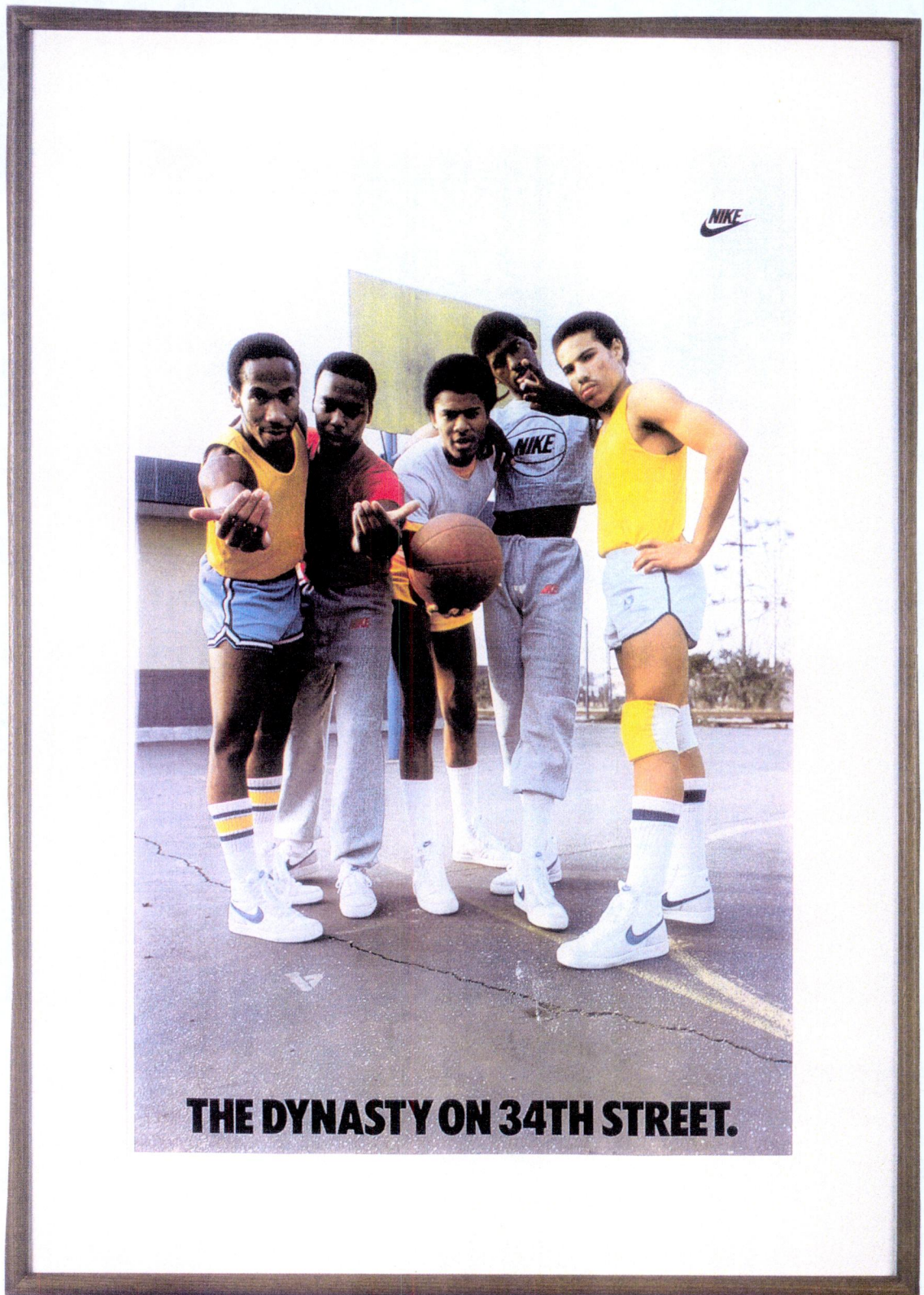


consider themselves fortunate in comparison to all the other ordinary vacuum cleaners. As a result they can flirt and flaunt themselves as flawless new products , desired but never used, so long as they remain protected by their function as an 'art object'. They also tease and mock us by reminding us of our own modest immortality that by being what they are, pure display, and non - participation, that they can outlast any human being.

**'The objects are displayed in this completely pristine situation just displaying their integrity of birth - brand new, never being used. The reason I chose the vacuum cleaner too, wasn't for the form. This is supposed to be new - so why not show an object that's used to clean and pick up dirt? It's too easy to see that's new because it's dirty. If it were used, it's lungs would be dirty. It's a little bit of a breathing machine. You could think of the state of being 'new' as**







'NIKE -THE DYNASTY ON 34TH STREET' 1984 (FIG.4:3)





the individual. That's what I really want you to think about, how you can't be new. To have your own integrity you have to live and you're not immortal. But here the machine can just have integrity forever by not participating.”(4:6)

Koons Nike (FIG.4:3) posters feature well known black basketball players wearing new Nikes and surrounded by new Spalding basketballs. The comment Koons makes here concerns the delusive American fantasy exploited by sporting - goods manufacturers and that success in athletics offers fame and stardom. These posters are testaments that success is there for the taken and it is easy to achieve. The Nike players also become media products and stars, “ **In dealing with the Nikes, I am dealing with unachievable sociological states of being. Having my Nike posters there, the**





great deceivers - with reference to not only Nike ( the Goddess of victory ), but sirens, the mythological temptresses and deceivers; “ Oh come on! I’ve achieved it! I’ve done it! I’m a star! You can do it! Go for it!” (4:7)

The ‘ EQUILIBRIUM’ series has a more darker, pessimistic tone to it than the clean, fluorescent vibe of ‘THE NEW’.

Basketballs float in water filled aquariums. with a look of anticipation, waiting to be used but are stuck only to function for pure display, the same fate as the vacuum cleaners.

Koons uses dense, heavy, traditional sculptural material to make life - sized bronze casts of a life jacket and a life boat .

They are objects designed to preserve life but similar to the basketballs they are on constant display, in an eternal state of still life. These objects could easily be used for any science fiction film set or museum pieces of the future set



in the future where no human life exists. Since everything is dead there is no need for implements that sustain life. They keep themselves alive artificially. These domestic and sporting goods are no longer functional because the human is no longer around to use them, as result these objects become relics, proof of the dead human.

#### 'LUXURY AND DEGRADATION'

**“When I was growing up with my parents and they started to make money and joined The Country Club, they would go travelling with friends. The travel bar was their symbol and they’d go off with their friends... .They always took their travel bar with them because it was a symbol of mobility.”(4:8)**

In the 'LUXURY AND DEGRADATION' Koons replaced the Nike posters with liquor advertisements, and the basketballs and the bronze objects with stainless steel casts of liquor







‘FRANGELICO - STAY IN TONIGHT’ 1986 (FIG.4:4)





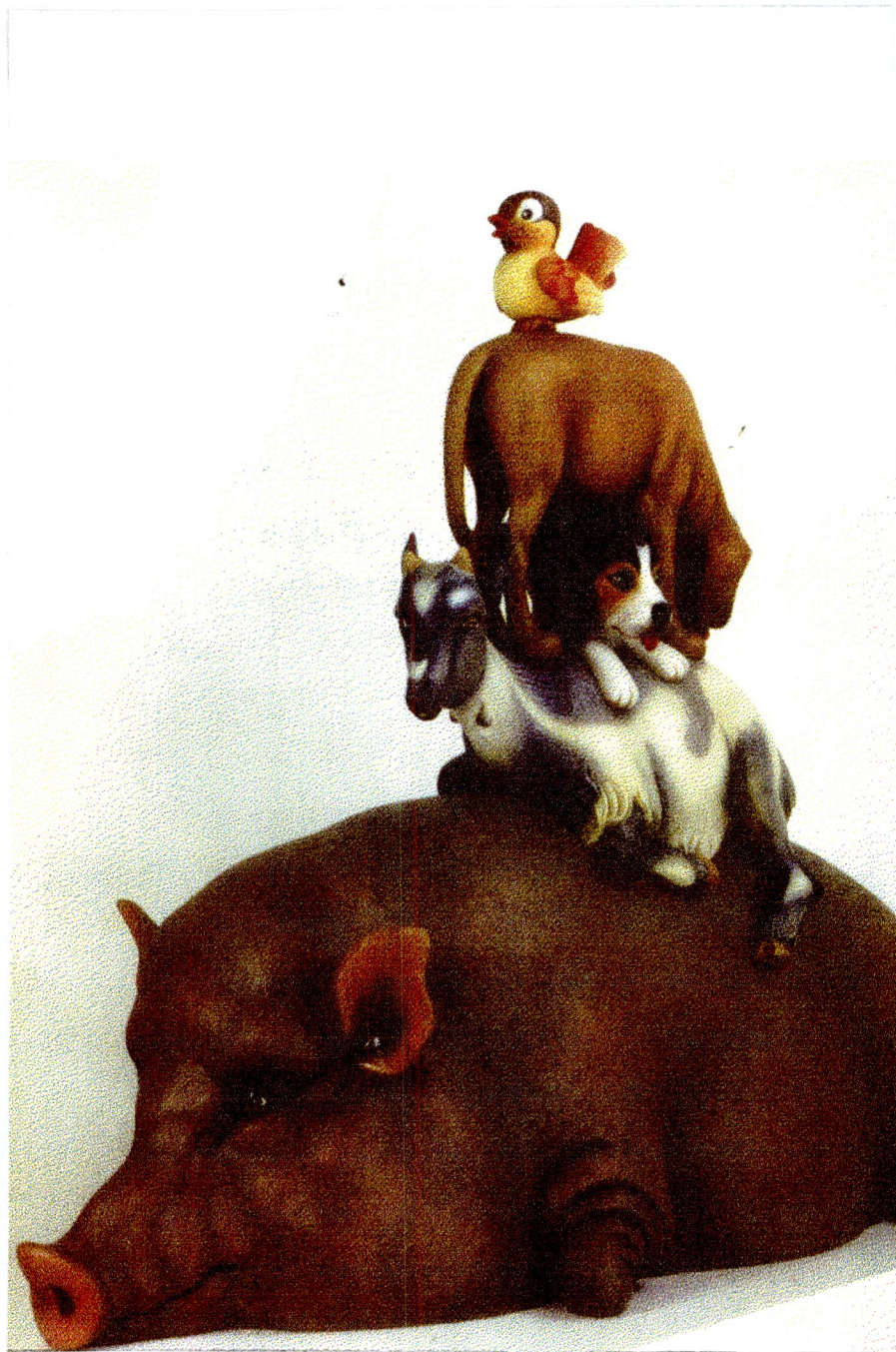


decanter and travel bar . Each ad and each object have a specific social class standing, but the stainless steel is the leveller. The objects range from the 'low' plain Pail to the 'high' 'Baccarat Crystal Set. The advertisements/paintings include a yuppie Henessey ad "The civilised way to lay down the law", the sophisticated Frangelico ad "Stay in tonight."(FIG.4:4)

Like the Nike advertisements these luxury items are a symbols of upward mobility.

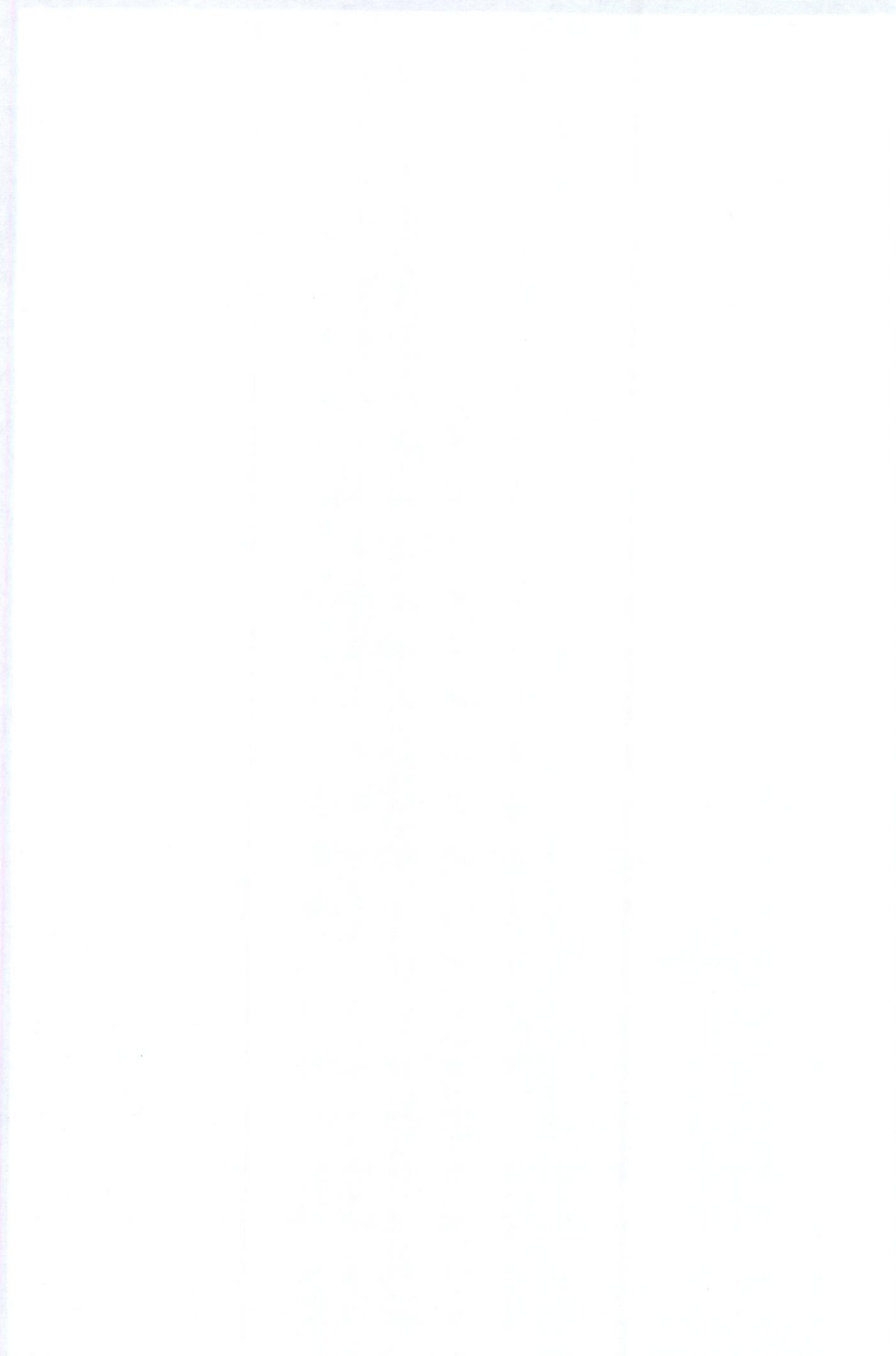
The stainless steel represents fake luxury. It is a mass produced material and would not be used for such fancy goods if they were to be purchased in a shop. The irony implied here is that, although posh decanters are a luxury, the material used is cheap and common suggesting that only outward appearances matter to the middle class.





'STACKED' 1988 (FIG.4:5)





**“ A sewer rat may taste like pumpkin pie. I’ll never know ‘cause even if I did, I wouldn’t eat the filthy motherfucker. Pigs sleep and root in shit. that’s a filthy animal. I don’t wanna eat nothin’ that ain’t got enough sense to disregard its own feces.”(4:9)**

For the BANALITY show Koons changed his use of material from bronze and stainless steel to porcelain and polychromed wood. Instead of combining object and transferring purchased goods into another medium, as in earlier works, Koons merged together appropriated images and projected them into sculptural works.

In ‘STACKED’ (FIG. 4:5 ) Koons uses a pig , a his favourite symbol for banality, a goat, two puppies and a chicken inspired by images found in a magazine. The found object becomes a found image. Koons conveys the larger - than - life aspect of the most banal media images. Koons lifts these familiar, kitsch, banal objects from out of their everyday existence and into a more interesting context by ‘artifying’ them and sexualizing them.







In the 'PINK PANTHER' we see a blond, buxom, partially nude woman embracing an anxious looking pink panther - kitsch style bestiality. In 'BEAR AND POLICEMAN' an enormous brown bear wearing a striped shirt and floppy bow tie stands with his arm around a policeman whose whistle he is about to blow. These works are ordinary, familiar amusing artifacts of mass culture. We look on them with affection. In Koons treatment of them, there is a sinister appeal about them if not too obvious. The oversized bear overthrows authority.

The topless and headless woman (FIG.4: 6) in the tub, looks like she is going to be attacked or mutated by something unknown in her tub. Even the provocatively clad woman is not safe as a pig approaches her (FIG.4:7). The more conventional subjects can be also be considered disturbing. A couple on a park bench hold eight puppies in their arms, an image taken from a greeting card. The electric - blue string of puppies are held by







'WOMAN IN TUB' 1988 (FIG.4:6)





their owners gives an eerie suggestion of the mutations that may be induced by genetic engineering.

**“Micheal Jackson was there as the symbol of a contemporary Christ, one who has been baptised and who is now performing effectively as a great liberator and doing anything that is necessary to be able to communicate. He has embraced aspects of who he is, and he has been baptised in banality.” (4:10)**

‘MICHEAL JACKSON AND BUBBLES’ (FIG. 4:8) is a portrait of the consciousness of Self, demonstrating how one can reshape one’s body ( and nose ) through plastic surgery, again echoing Warhol’s ‘BEFORE AND AFTER’. Jackson sits with his arm around his chimpanzee Bubbles, ( the only being Jackson claimed to love at the time ) in a pose conventionally used for man and wife or sweethearts. Micheal Jackson saw himself as







'FAIT D'HIVER' 1988 (FIG.4:7)





the modern Peter Pan and preferred children's company to adults. Faced with accusations of child abuse that resulted in an out of court settlement, Jackson went on to marry Lisa Marie Priestly, the only daughter of "The King" Elvis Priestly, resulting in the merging of Americas most popular icons, a marriage resulting in divorce. Could Micheal and Lisa Marie be Koons example of the Post Human couple or Koons example of how to communicate to the mass public?

Koons dissolves religion and popular culture into banality and consumerism, claiming that Micheal Jackson "**has been baptised in banality**" and that Koons himself is the all new St John the Baptist, "**I present myself as John the Baptist... I want to assume leadership and responsibility and I will do things to afford this level, things that I can't do with my limitations but they are greater things to come. My show was like a baptism**





signifying that there are greater things to come.”

(4:11)

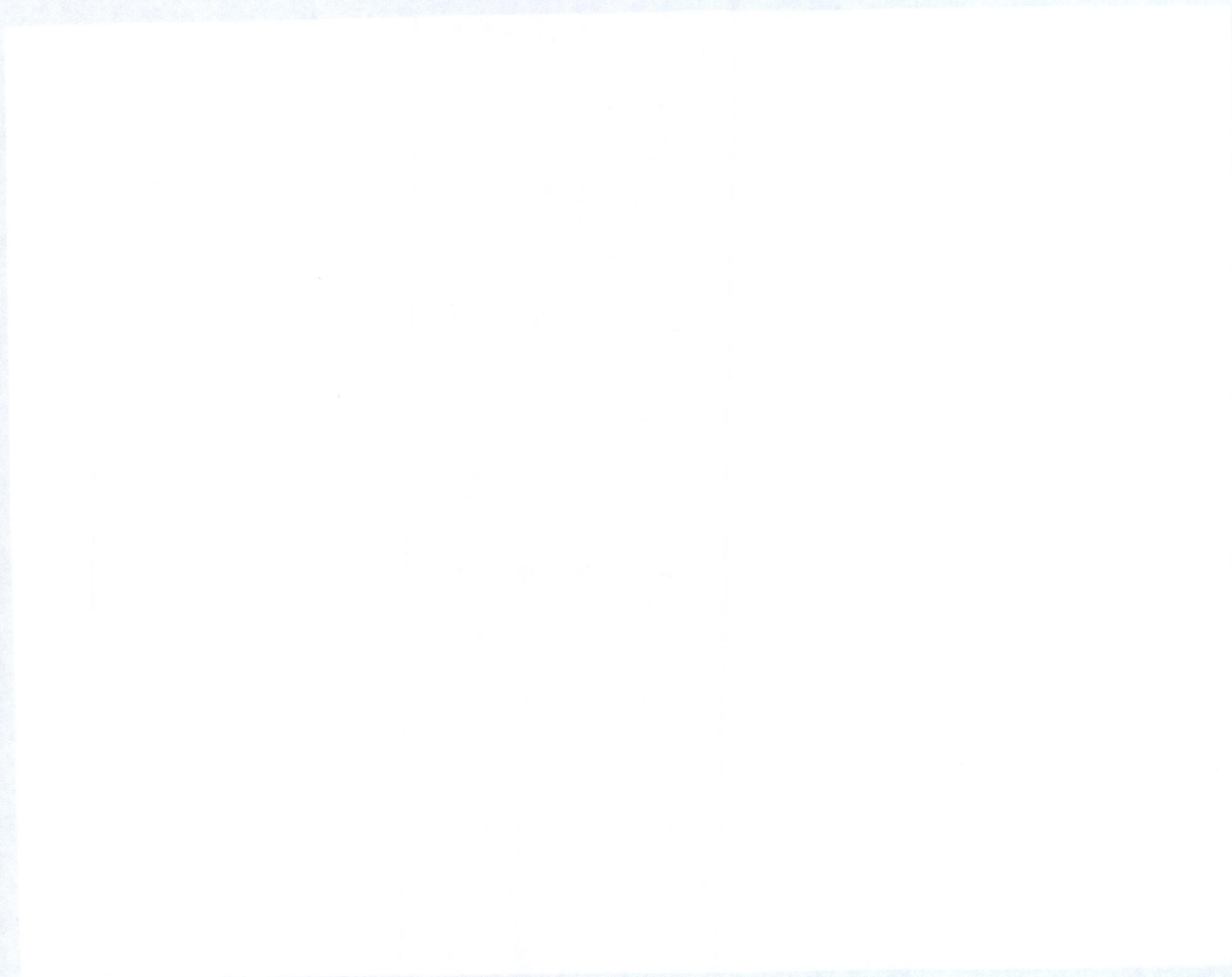
Does Koons see himself as the spiritual saviour to the Post  
Human nation whose only salvation is banality.







‘MICHEAL JACKSON AND BUBBLES’ 1988 (FIG.4:8)





## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

‘THE ALL NEW JEFF KOONS’ 1980 (FIG.4:1)

‘NEW SHELTON WET\DRY TRIPLEDECKER’ 1981(FIG.4:2)

‘NIKE -THE DYNASTY ON 34TH STREET’ 1984(FIG.4:3)

‘FRANGELICO - STAY IN TONIGHT’ 1986 (FIG.4:4)

‘STACKED’ 1988 (FIG.4:5)

‘WOMAN IN TUB’ 1988 (FIG.4:6)

‘FAIT D’HIVER’ 1988 (FIG.4:7)

‘MICHEAL JACKSON AND BUBBLES’ 1988 (FIG.4:8)





## **CHAPTER FOUR : KITSCH**





“ In a broad sense art always reflects the image of contemporary man, and if Kitsch represents falsehood ... this falsehood falls back on the person in need of it, on the person who uses this highly considerate mirror so as to be able to recognise his own lies.”

Herman Broch(5:1)

“ Every ambiguous, false, tearful, emotional exaggeration brings about that typically Kitsch attitude which could be defined as ‘sentimentality’. “

Gillo Dorfles (5:2)



## THE COMMODITY, THE STYLE, THE TASTE.

### I DON'T HAVE AN OPINION

We have become accustomed to living in a world of commodities, where nature is perhaps only a poster for a holiday resort and man an advertisement for a new product. Poets and philosophers of the iron age complained that man had become a fragment of his own self. According to Marx a commodity was an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. In a world of possession, of commerce, of profit, human emotions - the most considered essential - love, has shrivelled into a mere act of having, “ **production does not only produce man as a commodity, the human commodity, man in the form of a commodity; in conformity with this situation it produces him as a mentally and physically dehumanised being... .” (5:3)**





The objects which we make our own, through our senses, our intellect and our imagination becomes our own objectification. We unite with them making them, our own creation and part of ourselves our persona by absorbing them.

Objects or commodities are made up of various elements such as style, taste, function, appeal. necessity, labour - saving, time - saving. When relating style to an object, we see that the object has it's own style, and this style is transported on to the person who acquires it.

Style has become a critical factor in definitions of self - style in a way of stating who is - politically, sexually, status and class. Style conveys mood, style is a device by which we judge and are judged by others. By surrounding ourselves with objects that emit a social aura they end up being an extension of personality on a physical plane, an attractive otherness.





In reference to Kitsch , critics often use Clement Greenberg's definition of the term in his 1939 essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. Pop art seems to fulfil Greenberg's criteria for Kitsch:

**"To fill the demand of the new market a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch.... Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits .... Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money."**(5:4)

Because Pop can be easily placed in the category of Kitsch it is easy to see that Pop art and Pop artists therefore have no redeeming value.



To put Kitsch into simple terms is not easy. In his manifesto of American Conceptualism, " Art after Philosophy, 1 and 11" the conceptualist Artist Joseph Kosuth claims that " **Art's ability to exist will depend... on its not performing a service - as entertainment ... or decoration - which is something easily replaced by Kitsch culture and technology.'**

According to Gillo Dorfles " **the trouble starts when we remythify - or rather idolise the demythified objects and look upon them as expression of the highest degree of sophistication: we then produce 'Hyper-Kitsch' 'Kitsch - Squared.'**"(5:5)

So in an attempt to discover what is 'human' we are really re - rediscovering instead and this act alone is kitsch and dehumanising in its own way - is this an example of "Hyper - Human' 'Human - Squared'. The attempt or the act in defining what is real, life, and human has in itself become Kitsch.





Kitsch is accessible and mindless, enjoyable requiring little effort and loves the latest fads and crazes. Kitsch fits in smoothly in a luxury obsessed society interested in status and material wealth as the ultimate goal in life. Kitsch holds the unique power of satisfying a universally popular taste because we are more familiar with it's motifs and metaphors.

Koons's work is filled with motifs, metaphors, bad taste, good taste, high and low culture. His work are dreams, real dreams and fantasies. These dreams of taste entice the most 'ignorant' to buy the most 'disgusting' things, disgusting in the eyes of the knowledgeable. Koons understands all of this. He joins the low animal - the pig, the symbol for banality - with high human artifice and merges Kitsch with art.

**"I don't seek to make consumer icons, but to decode why and how consumer objects are glorified." (5:6)**

I don't think Koons manages this decodement but this 'honest' attempt or effort adds to the glorification of consumer





objects. It gives them mystery and makes them more enigmatic as a result we desire them more , we want their mystery to be part of us. It is this mystery that makes them Kitsch and makes us Kitsch also.

**“We cannot escape Kitsch: as soon as something becomes conformist and traditional it can seldom be saved and then only with great difficulty.” (5:7)**

Traditionally a fuss has always been made over any new movement or style whether or not ‘firsts’ in themselves are praiseworthy for been good is irrelevant, what matters is that it is a first. Koons claims that the ‘new’ is now and that there will be no more ‘new’. The only firsts we will see are are ‘firsts’ like his vacuum cleaners, they are eternally new (provided they are kept plugged in) and in a way they transcend any contamination of Kitsch through the fact that thy are physic-



ally eternally new. Due to the problematic definition of Kitsch we cannot label them as Kitsch objects. Koons pushes further by using 'Kitsch' objects as a form of communicating. It is the only universally understood language, it has no meaning only effect. We hate it , we love it. We can't segregate "Kitsch". The Kitsch argument is constantly being recycled, just like the vacuums, constantly new. We don't know what we like or dislike anymore the result is mutual taste for the masses. By the illusion of transformation things will always seem new to us thus avoiding boredom.

Kitsch is not just a matter of taste, it can't be defined. It occurs only in civilisations where choices are offered to the consumer. If taste is a matter of choice and discrimination, what choice can there be when only the radically new is acceptable. Everyone has taste but it can be a taboo subject with some people. By making statements about your taste you expose yourself. From people's choices and tastes it is possible



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to see where they stand socially and culturally in society, therefore it is possible to like everything both high and low without commenting on who you are.

Taste may be an expression of personal values, but it also identifies an individual with a certain class. Since taste was invented by and for the middle class it is always the middle class who suffer in discussion of it. Making statements about social class and material taste are as part of the post industrial and reordering of the world and as Nick Furbank writes in his book about snobbery "Unholy Pleasures" (1985)

**"...in classing someone socially, one is simultaneously classing oneself", in other words in criticising someone else's taste, one is simultaneously criticising oneself."**

As we've seen in Koons's "LUXURY AND DEGRADATION" social values and taste are the running themes, he talks of embracing his past as means of liberating himself. He doesn't pass judgment he rather sways between high and low,





Kitsch and art as a lover of all tastes and this 'liberation' will result in 'one' taste for all.



## CONCLUSION





Kitsch, souvenirs and the imagery of the mass media, consumer goods and packaging industries not only became subjects of art but also collections by people, museums and art galleries. Topics in everyday life were becoming popular in art, literature, and drama, the historical thematic material was extracted from its context thus freed from conventional frames of reference. The mass media encouraged an internationalization of styles and forms of expression, making every symbol and art universally accessible.

The Pop artists neutralized the system of values which defined culture in terms of 'high' and 'low', trivial or valuable, by aligning their work with the average level of social awareness. By treating so - called 'high' and 'low' art in a banal manner they subverted popular preconceptions which saw art and artists in terms of demanding and difficult contents. The trivial was suddenly dubbed art, the artists had descended onto the cultural lowground, and it was there that





they found the symbols and the true face of the age, images with which they identified, which they loved and hated. The contrast between their exposed status as artist and the triviality of their work surpassed traditional notions of art. Art could now be anything the artist wanted it to be or not.

#### ART PROMOTION PERSONA PROMOTION

With their constant reference to the mass media in their work, the Pop artists visually and conceptually incorporated the media environment into the realm of high art, often without questioning their use of subjects just plainly presenting and displaying them. As a result, these works reinforced the ideology of consumption, not only reproducing the persistent presence of the media in the viewer's surroundings but also by utilizing the very strategies employed by the media, in the works themselves and in their presentation and also more importantly the public presentation of the artist's persona.



The trivial was suddenly dubbed art, the artists had descended onto the cultural lowground, and it was there that they found the symbols and the true face of the age, images with which they identified, which they loved and hated. The contrast between their exposed status as artist and the triviality of their work surpassed traditional notions of art. Art could now be anything the artist wanted it to be or not. Many critics opposed Pop art and encouraged the total rejection of it. **"The genuine arts of today are engaged in a heroic struggle against mediocrity and mass values, and if they lose, then art, in any meaningful sense, is dead. If art dies, then the spirit of man becomes impotent and the world relapses into barbarism"** (6:1)

Pop artists valued publicity and realised that success in the media meant big business. Through the media they could speak directly to the public whether to explain their work or





not was not important, what mattered was that they were transformed their own persona into a commodity that could easily adapt to all forms of media and consumer markets. Warhol was one of the first successful prototypes in the business of art, the most accomplished publicist and self - promoter of the Pop movement.

Warhol utilized the mass media for self - publicity purposes. He realized the value of projecting a recognizable public image through the many interviews he gave. These interviews revealed the astute mind of a promoter, yet the statements made by Warhol were simple yet safe and contradictory in terms of content. Warhol looked to others not only for artistic inspiration but for responses to questions, “ **Just tell me what to say,**” he asked at one of his television interviews. Warhol realized that it was the act of publicity, rather than the information being communicated and understood.





Koons is a prime example of how marketing skills dominate the 'Post Modern'. In 1989 Koons gave up his career as a commodities broker to become an artist. By 1989, his sculptures were selling for up to \$250,000 each. Koons participates in the production of his work as little as possible, he comments in Wall Street Journal, **"I manage production ... I want to be as big an art star as possible."** Koons controls the sale of his works to ensure that the works will end up in collections that will enhance his career. **"Not everyone can enhance the works... It's very important to place them. It's like a company choosing a franchisee: You want one on a busy corner, not in the middle of nowhere."** Koons markets himself through extensive advertising in art journals, featuring photographs of himself rather than of the art works. **"Advertising and film use every means they can to seduce and manipulate the audience. If the art world doesn't do that too, we won't"**



**build a power base for our art.”(6:2)** Koons art celebrates the cliches of art professionalism in order to self - serve himself in his rise to fame and global attention. Koons parades his endless use of Duchampian device therefore we feel we must grant him respectful attention, but if one were to have an authentic interest in art and belief that by devaluating art we devalue ourselves, our very being, to the state of the Post Human.





## **FOOTNOTES**

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(5.5) 'Kitsch' Gillo Dorfles. Page 26.

(5.6) Jeff Koons. Interview at I.C.A. London 1989.

(5.7) 'Kitsch' Gillo Dorfles. Page 130.

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