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Jeff Koons: In His Space

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ABSTRACT

Space, a major visual element, can be examined in depth in Jeff Koons's artwork. Koons produces art in different series and each series contains numerous pieces. The appendages of the mechanical devices, a major element of space in the early series, accentuate the sexuality present in Koons's art, as well as the surface quality and materials used in all the series. Koons's obsession with perfection is what generates the flawless exteriors making the surface material void of human touch and elevating the sometimes kitsch subjects of the pieces. Koons uses stainless steel, a relatively inexpensive material associated with manufactured goods commonly used by everyone. This combination of commonly found material for the low-brow subject matter on one side, and the artist's obsession with the surface's perfection on the other side, represents a major challenge to traditional sculpture. Traditional sculpture commonly uses expensive materials, such as bronze or marble, to represent allegorical subject matter, mainly addressing the upper classes. Through this strategy, Koons elevates kitsch into high art. The series examined include: *Pre New*, *The New*, *Equilibrium*, *Luxury*, and *Degradation*, *Statuary*, *Kiepenkerl*, *Banality*, *Made in Heaven*, and *Celebration*.

JEFF KOONS: BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

In 1955 Jeff Koons began his life in York, Pennsylvania. He started his higher education at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore in 1972. Koons also attended school for a year at the Art Institute in Chicago. After graduating in 1976 with a Bachelor in Fine Arts from Maryland Institute College of Art, he decided to move to New York (Guggenheim Museum). Koons resides and works in both New York and York, Pennsylvania.¹

¹The list of places Koons has exhibited in the United States and abroad is quite impressive and consists of New York, Washington, DC, San Francisco, CA, Santa Monica, CA, London, UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and Japan. Koons has lectured at numerous locations, including: Harvard University, Columbia University, Yale University, Royal Academy of Arts, New York University, Museum of Modern Art, Hirshhorn Museum, and Corcoran Gallery of Art. Although there has been much controversy involving Koons's art, he has obtained awards and recognitions throughout the years: Art Start for Children Award in 1999, BZ Cultural Award in 2000, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur in 2001, Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture in 2002, Appointed to Board of Directors for the International

THE EVOLUTION OF KOONS'S WORK AND THE CONCEPT OF SPACE

Jeff Koons began making art by working in series. The first two series began in 1979 and are titled *Pre New* and *The New*. Those works echo Minimalism by using mass-produced goods and highlighting these objects of consumers' affection with fluorescent lighting. What is interesting about these works is that Koons left the object's original title instead of renaming it. *The Hoover Celebrity III*, 1980 (Fig. 1: http://www.jeffkoons.com/site/images/new1_sm.jpg), a new appliance in 1980, is a bold red spherical shape and appears to be hovering on the wall. Two fluorescent bulbs illuminate the vacuum. The space is orderly and organized with the vacuum's hose neatly tucked away. A twist tie tidily pulls together the vacuum's cord. The composition affirms the sterile object's intentions to function in the home.

Another work in *Pre New* and *The New* is *New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers, New Shelton Wet/Dry 10-Gallon Displaced Tripledecker*, 1981-87 (Fig. 2: http://images.artnet.com/images_US/magazine/features/nance/nance6-9-08-4s.jpg) This piece is composed of six Plexiglas cases stacked atop one another. The bottom box contains six long fluorescent bulbs, and another layer contains a box of two shampoo polishers, the next box holds six more fluorescent lights, two more polishers in a cube, again a box containing six lights, and the climax of the boxes holds the Shelton Wet/Dry. There is space, visible to the onlooker, contained by the Plexiglas; however, there is also another kind of space, which is not visible to the spectator, contained inside the vacuums. It is a sterile environment for these cleaning appliances not yet getting the opportunity to do their job. The Plexiglas possesses some reflective qualities that, at the right angle, mirror the cleaners and lights. The viewers' reflection is as close to the cleaners as one will get, due to the object's surrounding walls. The Plexiglas both creates an environment and serves as a display case for the Hoovers and Shelton products.

Koons's display of ready-mades is in direct correlation with Duchamp's *Fountain* (Fig. 3: <http://www.installationart.net/Images/IntroDuchampFountainCOL.jpg>). The difference between the urinal and the cleaners is that Koons's ready-mades had no allure like the forbidden urinal (Gopnik and Venedoe, 1990). In actuality, the idea of a urinal in use is nothing like the cleaning machines Koons portrayed. What the objects did share, besides being out of their usual surroundings, was their inner cavities for containing the unwanted.

Koons's father partly influenced Koons's representation of consumer-focused society. His father owned a furniture shop, and Koons often worked in the showroom growing up (Bonami, 2008). The spatial formation of the varying objects fascinated Koons, and this is the reason why in his early series he displayed his works as if they were in a retail showroom.

Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in 2002, Inducted to the Signet Society of Arts and Letters at Harvard University in 2002, Doctorate of Fine Arts in 2002, Global Vision Award in 2002, Museum of Fine Arts School Medal Award in 2003, Creative Patron Award in 2005, elected to the American Academy for Arts and Sciences in 2005, honored by Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families in 2005, Artistic Achievement Award in 2006, honored by President Jacques for strengthening relations between France and Us in 2007, and honored by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in 2007 (Jeff Koons).

As well as addressing society's obsession with objects, Koons also associates these cleaners with human bodies that breathe and have male and female sexual parts (Bonami, 2008). Where are these parts found? Are these just vacuum cleaners and polishers? One can use his/her imagination to realize that the open spaces at the bottom of the cleaners can be construed as female anatomy. The cleaners' attachments may be interpreted as male physiology. For this reason, Koons's work addresses society's obsession with sex.

In the same series, a white and green iridescent tube encloses two lights in *Toaster*, 1979 (Fig. 4: http://hangten.typepad.com/hangten/images/2008/04/26/5_jeff_koons.jpg). A gleaming toaster rests in front of the tubes. The toaster's openings for bread seem to serve as eyes staring the viewers in the face and challenging them to look into the intimate parts of the toaster. A tie neatly loops together the toaster's cord, as if the toaster just came out of the box.

Like *Toaster*, *The New Jeff Koons* (Fig. 5: http://www.chicagomag.com/images/2008/June%202008/arna_koons1.jpg) uses illumination as with other works in this series. Koons uses a simple light box in a silver frame, but adds a picture from his childhood. Crayon in hand, the artist looks at the viewer. The spectators cannot help but feel as if they are looking into Koons's life. The simplicity of the subject also captures one's attention, for it tells of an innocent time in the life of a youth. Just standing in front of the light box, the audience can be transported back to their childhood and what they wished to become when they grew up.

The next series that Koons formulated was *Equilibrium* in 1985. This body of work persists with the concept of consumerism, but adds the element of desire for the eternal and for social mobility. The works in *Equilibrium* are comprised of common objects out of their ordinary environment that cannot be used because of their unnatural materials.

Within the *Equilibrium* series, a bronze cast titled *Lifeboat* (Fig. 6: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/06feb/images/koons02a.jpg>) is displayed on the surface of the floor. One can walk around it, as well as tower over the life-saving device. Paddles extend from the inflated surface as if looking for some sign of water in order to perform their duties. However, because *Lifeboat* is made in bronze, it cannot and will never carry out its responsibilities. Instead, the boat would be a death trap. The shadows that play with *Lifeboat* and mingle with the surface of the bronze material take the viewer amidst the life-like surface. The difference between the bronze sculptural boat and the actual people-saving boats is that the bronze one will last forever. *Lifeboat* will always keep its original shape in that it will never tear or capsize, and it's paddles will never move.

Lifeboat has been compared to everyday objects and war memorial sculptures (Bonami, 2008) (Fig. 7: <http://www.abbeygardens.name/images/History/Washington%20DC/Bronze%20Soldiers%2002.jpg>). Before Koons, countless other artists cast objects in bronze and other metals. Jasper Johns was no exception by casting many banal objects into pieces of art (Fig. 8: http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/1996/johns/jpegs/johns.painted_bronze.jpeg). Compared to artists like Jasper Johns, Koons seems to embrace the hollowness of the cast rather than disguise it (Barron, 2001). The inflatable objects Koons cast paid special attention to ripples in the air-filled surface.

Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Fig. 9: http://images.artnet.com/images_US/magazine/features/nance/nance6-9-08-5s.jpg), part of the *Equilibrium* series, minimizes movement to inventory (Kerrigan, 2005). The basketballs in the glass tank appear to be suspended in motion. The space seems static and continues to be the same at any given time. However, with the following knowledge the previous statement is untrue. Rather than adding

oil, to make the balls permanent, Koons opted to keep the purity of the water. This means that after six months the ball will have slowly sunk to the bottom of the tank and need to be reset (Bonami, 2008). So really these spheres are in motion! The space is continually changing inside of the glass holding tanks. Recently, Koons had a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The show spanned from May 31 to September 21 in 2008 and included works from the *Equilibrium* series. When looking at the basketballs in the tank, a viewer may notice a dark irregularly shaped substance growing on the balls. This possible fungus appears to be unintended, but none the less interacting with the inflated surface of the spherical balls. This also may force a scrupulous eye to inspect the rest of the tank for signs of life. One may not see the basketballs at the bottom of the tank after the six months when not on display, but armed with the knowledge one can observe the contained environment for any signs of changes in the interior space.

Around the same period as *Equilibrium* in 1986 the *Luxury and Degradation* series began. Once again Koons explores consumerism, but in partnership with the implications of advertising to various class levels. Koons explains this series, "This was a panoramic view of society. I wanted to show how luxury and abstraction are used to debase people and take away their economic and political power" (Koons qtd. in Bonami, 2008).

The exquisitely made pieces in the *Luxury and Degradation* series look like collectables from an elite catalog. The stainless steel exteriors have never-ending reflecting surfaces that change with the lighting from above or the reflection of the person stationed near the work. The differing types of sculptures represent the desires of people, coming from all income levels, to accumulate objects to signify prosperity. One may wonder how the stainless steel surface relates to the concept of consumerism. People are marketed to in a way that uses gleaming surfaces, whether this is the advertising itself or the product. *Luxury and Degradation* involves alcohol in the mix as the connection of booze with affluence.

Clive Barker's glorified tool of the trade for an artist, *Art Box II* (Fig. 10: Livingstone 171), resembles Koons's *Travel Bar* (Fig. 11: <http://www.csulb.edu/~karenk/20thcwebsite/439final/ah439fin-ImageT.00013.jpeg>), the elitist's tool. Both *Art Box II* and *Travel Bar* are unusable after the works have been cast in their metals. *Art Box II* was cast in gold and this material is associated with the upper-class and lavish goods. *Travel Bar* was cast in stainless steel. Stainless steel represents goods that appeal to the entire society, because of a lower cost compared to gold. Therefore, *Art Box II*, a lower status object, is glorified by the use of gold. In contrast, the use of a cheaper metal debases *Travel Bar*. This contrast alludes to Koons's belief in social mobility for all classes. *Travel Bar*, made in 1986, serves as a symbol for that decade. The 1980's were characterized by high spending by urban professionals. The term "yuppie" was coined for the flashy business people. Travel bar is a symbol for what would have been a necessity for yuppies to travel with.

Alcohol and sex are used as a status symbol. *I Could Go for Something Gordon's* (Fig. 12: http://www.artdaily.com/imagenes/2008/03/13/cc8c8gordons_cmyk.jpg) addresses sex and alcohol as a status symbol. Koons utilizes advertisements to represent the subject because they were uniquely marketed to the population. Koons uses this type of work to say that what is used as a status symbol, will ultimately lead to human degradation. There is closeness between the two beings in the middle ground and the monumental bottle of liquor in the foreground. The use of space gives off sexual innuendos and ambiances. Of course,

sex appeals in marketing and has continued into today's society, since previous years have proved that sex sells. In this, and other works of the series, Koons himself has not created this advertisement. Instead, he has used it as found object and reproduced it. We still find similar advertisements in our society like the ones Koons has featured.

Statuary, a series made entirely of stainless steel, evolved around the same time as Koons's other works in 1986. Likely, the most recognizable piece from *Statuary* is *Rabbit* (Fig. 13: http://www.lyseo.edu.ouka.fi/kuvataide/albums/album05/Jeff_Koons_Rabbit.jpg). Although *Rabbit* is made in stainless steel, it looks more like a mylar balloon. The rippled edges of the ears, arms, and feet give the hard metal surface the flexible look of a balloon. What is even more stunning is the reflective quality of the polished steel. The surrounding objects reflect and distort upon the rabbit. Even the camera that takes the photograph is forever cast as part of the sculpture. The surrounding art in the gallery becomes part of the *Rabbit*. These other artworks take on different characteristics as their original space has changed, if only for a period of time, as they have become part of the *Rabbit*. Anyone who has brought a balloon home has experienced the temporary qualities of the inflated material. What Koons has done was to transform this everyday object into a permanent sculptural piece of art.

The stainless steel *Rabbit* was made into a balloon for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (Fig. 14: <http://rawartint.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/jeffk.jpg>) in 2007. The *Rabbit* in the parade plays with its space differently than the *Rabbit* in the gallery. Instead of a gallery setting, the *Rabbit* in the parade has a city for its backdrop. Bystanders replace what would be other works surrounding the original *Rabbit* in a gallery. As the parade progresses, the space constantly moves. One may parallel this with social mobility. A person may also notice the strings leading from the inflatable rabbit to its puppeteers and the massive scale difference it takes to be an impressive balloon in a parade. The reflective qualities that were in the original *Rabbit* have changed to a duller, more blurred surface on the parade *Rabbit*. Photographs and television capture the temporary quality of the parade *Rabbit*. This does share some similarities with the original *Rabbit* in that it too is captured by a photograph, because like that parade, gallery shows are usually temporary.

Along with the famous *Rabbit*, *Statuary* produced other stainless steel works. The year after the *Statuary* works were completed, Koons made another stainless steel statue titled *Kiepenkerl* (Fig. 15: http://www.mcchicago.org/exhib_images/4ae29universalcurrent2.jpg). *Kiepenkerl*, a market peddler, turns into a decoration. His statue-like appearance is due to the base that he stands on and everything he brings with him rests on this base. The base makes the sculpture more stationary, because the space in *Kiepenkerl* is confined to the geometric pedestal. The folds of the fabric give it softness, even though it is made of metal. The walking stick has the appearance of wood or bamboo. Even though the figure appears to be looking at the viewer, it still seems emotionally detached, as the eyes were thought to be the windows of the soul. It may be because there is no sign of a pupil in the eye, just a smooth surface. *Kiepenkerl* can be compared with traditional statuary, such as a *Roman bust of Augustus wearing the crown of corona civica* (Fig. 16: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/Aug11_01.jpg), of which Koons emulates the void in the eyes.

In 1988 *Banality* followed *Statuary* and *Kiepenkerl*. These works served to symbolize the objects that middle class society found appealing. It is definitely kitsch raised to a higher

level. These objects were increased from the size of a shelf ceramic to something that can sometimes be larger than the viewer. The massive scale also brings to the viewer's attention the hyperrealist qualities of the pieces. Even if one were looking for a flaw there is not one to be found on the surfaces of the pieces. Along with the subject of kitsch versus high art, Koons incorporated sexual connotations in these pieces (Bonami, 2008). Porcelain, a material that shrinks, contributes to the sexuality in the work. Koons is questioning our culture's message of pleasure and shame. He does this by using the subject of masturbation in some of the pieces. Koons is trying to heighten the stature of pleasure and being comfortable with one's own sexuality.

Sexual exploration is seen in *Woman in Tub* (Fig. 17: <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/polsky/Images/polsky10-5-3.jpg>). The woman in the tub is touching her breasts with an ambiguous expression on her face. We cannot tell if the open mouth is pleasure or surprise of self-discovery. The expression cannot be fully realized, because her head is missing from her mouth upward. The space in the bath is crowded, due to the larger proportion of the woman and the smaller size of the small tub holding the scene. This space forces the viewer to stay focused on the sexual connotation of the subject. There is no question that some people may be uncomfortable looking at *Woman in Tub*. This is exactly what Koons is addressing, the shame often associated with pleasure. The surfaces become convincing when rendered believably, such as the reflective surface of the white bath tub and the matte exterior of the woman's skin.

Proportion plays an essential role in *Stacked* (Fig. 18: http://www.artinthepicture.com/artists/Jeff_Koons/stacked.jpeg), *Bear and Policeman* (Fig. 19: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3164/2578494910_3de29e9886.jpg?v=0), and *Buster Keaton* (Fig.20: <http://www.thecityreview.com/f02pco1f.jpg>). *Stacked* manipulates proportion by placing the largest animal at the bottom and the smallest critter on top of the pile. This difference in proportions brings a humorous element to the sculpture. Koons also places the animals so that they face in different directions. This keeps the viewer moving around the piece, so that one does not just take in the view from one side. *Bear and Policeman* feature what the title alludes to, a bear and policeman coupled together. The bear, which looks like it was scorned by a circus, resembles a human by standing on its hind legs and wearing a multicolored garment. The hairy animal is towering over the policeman and is occupying his space by holding the officer's whistle. What makes the policeman's space so intruded upon is the difference in the size of the bear and the man and the fact that the man is wearing dark dull colors and the bear is covered in bright hues. What is even more peculiar is that when people walk behind the officer, they see he is holding a club to persuade violators of the law. In *Buster Keaton*, the man is in the middle of the order, the smaller horse is on the bottom, and the tiny bird is on top of the man's shoulder. Although an order is present, the forms, with their different proportions, entangle one another. The bizarreness present in these sculptures could be comparable to that of "dollar store" ceramics, however, the strength of the underlying thought elevates them into high art.

The *Banality* series includes two gold sculptures. One is the representational *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (Fig.21: <http://www.worldofart.org/aktualno/wp-content/2007-08/stallabrass/lecture/68koons.jpg>), and the other is the abstract *Christ and the Lamb* (Fig.22: http://www.curatedobject.us/photos/uncategorized/2008/03/13/a1d1achristlamb_cmyk.jpg).

Michael Jackson and Bubbles is a figurine that Koons manipulated into a life-sized ceramic piece. The two subjects represented appear as one figure because their texture is the same and their coloring is identical. The glossy sculpture has a frontal quality to it, in that the main subjects pose in one direction and the flowers attached to the base gather in the area Michael and Bubbles face. *Christ and the Lamb* has patches of mirror reflecting the objects surrounding the piece. This can have an interesting effect if the viewer tries to get close to the work. One can move to an angle to avoid being exposed in the mirror, but other works on display still become part of this piece.

The next controversial series of works Koons produced is *Made in Heaven*. It began before Koons and the Italian adult film star Ilona Staller were married. Koons was married in 1991 to Ilona Staller, also known as La Cicciolina, who was an Italian adult film star from Hungary (Coskun). Staller left her film vocation for five years (1987-1992) to become a member of the Italian Parliament. It was this relationship that inspired Koons to create the series *Made in Heaven*. This series consists of sculptures, paintings, and photos that displayed the two in detailed sexual positions. As can be imagined, this series created much controversy. The couple had a son in 1992 and named him Ludwig. After the birth of their son, the marriage soon ended. Koons was awarded custody, but Staller fled with Ludwig to Rome. Koons felt that he learned a lesson from the ordeal. He believed that he was losing his sense of humanity and wanted to be more generous as an artist and communicate more.

The introduction of Ilona as ready-made subject gave a more personal twist to Koon's art. Indeed, this is the first time Koons uses his personal life in his artwork to communicate his beliefs. It also continued to depict Koons's fascination with love and sexuality, which was captured in previous works. The relationship did not work out, but when it first began Koons had accepted Ilona's past and believed that she wanted to change. He thought she was using her body as art. This acknowledgement of his own sexuality and his sexual experiences with Ilona were what Koons said make them heavenly.

To further clarify the intent of *Made in Heaven* Koons explains, "It's about the sense of security one has with one's own body and the sense of being with nature itself. It is also about the act of how we preserve the species through procreation. The *Made in Heaven* series has an aspect of the eternal, spiritual, and sexual. You know, there are these two poles of eternal: the biological and spiritual (Koons qtd. in Bonami, 2008)."

Koons drew on the inspiration of seeing the painting *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (Fig. 23: <http://www.spiritual-paintings.com/imde-files/masaccio-adam-eve.jpg>) by Masaccio (Bonami, 2008). One can see the shamed and crying faces of Adam and Eve as they attempt to cover themselves out of guilt. Koons works in sharp contrast to this feeling of shame. He has essentially done away with shame. A fitting piece to introduce the *Made in Heaven* series is *Made in Heaven* (Fig. 24: <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/artist-rooms/koons-heaven.jpg>). The scene is intimate and sexual. It is like a snapshot of a movie set. The yellow words declare Koons and Staller the stars of the work. There is drama and beauty involved with the sexual image. Compare this with Masaccio's painting. Adam and Eve do not even touch one another, but in Koons's *Made in Heaven* they come in contact with one another. Staller's expression is of pleasure, not shame. Koons is directly looking at the viewer, rather than looking away from onlookers.

An intimate marble bust was produced of Staller and Koons titled, *Bourgeois Bust – Jeff and Ilona* (Fig. 25: <http://www.nationalgalleries.org/media/7/koonsbourgeoisbust.jpg>). Staller and Koons embrace one another and they are preparing for what looks like a kiss. Both torsos are bare flesh and Ilona is adorned in pearls. The smoothness of the marble appears to have softness to it. This piece is comparable with classical statuary. A Greek sculpture, *Doryphoros* (Fig. 26: <http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110tech/BodyLanguage/images/largest/doryphoros1.jpg>) features the idealized proportions of a man. Koons's depiction of himself in *Bourgeois Bust – Jeff and Ilona* has idealized proportions. We can see this because lithographs that were produced at the same time, such as *Made in Heaven*, did not have the same muscle definition or surface texture. A *Portrait bust of a Flavian woman* (Fig. 27: http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/flavianhair4f.jpg), which is from the Roman period, also has idealized proportions. *Portrait bust of a Flavian woman* has a contemporary quality, because it is depicting idealized beauty with contemporary dress and is not representing images of Greek goddesses. This sculpture shares similarities with Staller's bust. Indeed, Staller looks like a contemporary woman, at the same time she has been idealized through her proportions, her facial expression, and the use of polished marble.

A notable difference is evident in the theme of Koons's series following *Made in Heaven*. In 1994 Koons began work on *Celebration*. *Celebration* is about child wonderment and the appeal of reflective surfaces and vibrant colors. While looking at the amazing surfaces, one really is transported back to a child-like state. While continuing to represent Koons's ideal of beauty and eternity, *Celebration* served Koons in a personal way. Along with previous series, *Celebration* was done with a flawless execution of materials.

Koons explains some of the reasoning behind *Celebration*: "My son was born in October 1992. Immediately I became interested in a lot of images I came across, the packaging of toys, a playful rabbit- things that I enjoyed again. I had used a lot of these images in the past. I started the Celebration series without a title. My son used to come into the studio while I was working on *Hanging Heart*. Then he was abducted, and my ex-wife later kidnapped him. So the work fell into an area where I felt that I wanted my son to feel how much I was thinking of him" (Koons qtd. in Bonami, 2008).

Hanging Heart (Fig. 28: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3013/2754065895_e0a99b06d2.jpg), which Koons refers to, is of a colossal size. Every surface on this object is reflective, from the smooth heart to the ripples of the ribbon-looking silver material. When on display, *Hanging Heart* towers above the viewer. People must strain their neck and look up to see the blue heart in all of its shining glory. Then, they see a distorted version of themselves in the reflective surface. Koons is displaying his love for life and his son, along with people's infatuation with sex and surface.

Although one is three-dimensional and the other two-dimensional, the sculpture *Cracked Egg (Magenta)* (Fig. 29: http://www.artinfo.com/news/enlarged_image/28908/118124/) and the painting *Cracked Egg* (Fig. 30: http://www.faz.net/m/%7B45A0BC37-20D4-497F-97EC-A1A19B4274B3%7DFile1_4.jpg), share the same idea, in that they both inspire awe in seeing a bird's egg shell on the outside ground for the first time. The split eggshells refer to the reproductive aspect of being born and seeing the world for the first time through new eyes. *Cracked Egg (Magenta)* is able to be inspected in a full 360 degrees. One can even peer into the sculpture and see the difference in reflection on the inner shell. There

is the reflection of the ceiling, which often times cannot be seen if the sculpture is too tall. The painting *Cracked Egg* depicts a more fragile-looking eggshell on a gleaming surface. The background surface contains elements of wondrous reflecting blues and very subtle tonal passages inside the egg.

KOONS, KITSCH, AND PERFECTION

The concept of Kitsch is extremely complex; giving a complete and satisfactory definition of it does not fall within the scope of this essay.

We can go at least as far back as the nineteenth century, when the German verb “kitschen” gained widespread adoption with this new connotation. The definition comes from the German verb “kitschen”, which, according to Calinescu, means to “make cheap” or “collecting rubbish from the streets” (1987). The scholar also makes note that in southern Germany the verb “kitschen” translates to “to make new furniture from old.” The word kitsch, in association with inexpensive art, derives from a dialect form used in the 1860s and 1870s by dealers and painters in Munich (Calinescu, 1987).

Koons’s work displays surreal-like qualities, as well as a sort of partnership with kitsch. Indeed, Koons is actually celebrating kitsch in his work. With some of the negative connotations that this word has taken in the XX century, one may wonder why Koons is considered a significant artist when he uses kitsch for subjects in some of his works. Koons has professed his love for art many times over and wants to reach the masses. Using kitsch is one way of doing this, by bringing common objects and materials into artworks suitable for a gallery. No matter what the response is, Koons believes the audience is right. His work is about finding the potential in the viewer.

Koons has been referred to as a self-help art guru, whom the following statement reflects. The comment is from a recent interview with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where he just completed a major show. The conversation takes place in his studio, with his assistants diligently working in the background on his next conceptual piece. He speaks evenly in a calming voice almost prophetically about art.

“The amazing thing about art is it can empower and it has the ability to constantly let people know that everything about them is perfect and art is this amazing vehicle that really shows that there can be no judgment. Recently I participated in the Macy’s Day Parade and I made a large inflatable of my rabbit. It was participating in the parade with Shrek and Dora the Explorer and so there is a sense of reaching the mass of 35 million people saw it on television. But the sensation of knowing that somebody can go into a museum and they can experience one of your works and then if you really believe that they open themselves up that they felt a sense of their own potential, that’s connecting” (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008).

This statement summarizes what Koons has believed throughout his entire career. Koons is credited as having a mass-marketer’s sense of opportunity (Ratcliff, 1992). While in New York, Koons worked at the membership desk at the Museum of Modern Art. He was known for his shocking dress and hair, which was only the beginning for what is now known as a provocative, many times shocking artist (Guggenheim Museum). During this time he

created sculptures by using mirrors and inflatable rabbits and flowers. In 1980 Koons left the museum to bring in a rather different source of income to fund his works. He was selling mutual funds and stocks at First Investors Corporation. The money generated from this job went to create works for his series *Pre New* and *The New*. Instead of assisting another artist or waiting tables to finance his work, Koons ventured himself into Wall Street and was in tune with public relations and advertising (Rimanelli, 1997).

Attias has made a connection between Koons's time on Wall Street and the way he runs his studio, like a corporation (1998). Indeed, Koons often uses assistants to carry out his visions, but this does not mean he does not have control over the pieces. Koons's exacting eye supervises the assistants. Many of his works, being large scale, would not have been completed without help. The scale is critical to a work that is interacting with its surrounding space. Koons commented that he would probably only complete one work a year, if he did it all himself.

Koons is a perfectionist with his art. One cannot tell that dozens of assistants worked intensively on a piece, because all traces of human touch are erased (Graw, 2001). By looking at the perfectly finished surfaces of his sculptures, no flaw can be found. When people put their nose up to the subject, they cannot see a scratch or smudge in the paint or finish. Even in his oil paintings there is no evidence of a painterly brush stroke. Koons admits he is extremely demanding about how the work is produced (Attias, 1998). The absence of flaws on the artwork leaves uninterrupted surface void of unintended textures. "Koons insists on a 'personal touch' in works that in their relentlessly corporate and industrial methods of production explicitly militate against the notion of touch. He plays both sides of the argument (seemingly now exhausted) between those who believe art is all about the artist's hand and those content to draft plans that others will carry out" (Rimanelli, 1997).

This obsession with perfection and detail is one of the components which transform Koons's kitsch into high art. Koons believes that the viewer can easily relate to everyday objects, and therefore these can have an impact on the viewer's eyes. Whether people believe that this artist's creations are relatable or not, they cannot deny that kitsch has had a hand in shaping America. This is a lot of what America stands for, which is overconsumption, overindulgence, and kitsch. Kitsch is really a partner with overindulgence and overconsumption, since it is made to be mass-produced and sold to the masses.

Over time, there has been a hierarchy that put manufactured items below handmade works (Ratcliff, 1992). However, Kitsch cannot be written off as unimportant, because it is really a part of society. Many people collect kitschy objects and give them meaning. It is still pertinent to keep in mind that someone values these kitsch things because they play a role in their lives.

Throughout his work, Koons address a widespread psychological investment in material possessions. He has used space in ways that sometimes make the viewer uncomfortable; the space is not unfavorable in itself, but it is the interaction of the space with the kitsch-looking objects that makes the space undesirable.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing a portion of Koons's extensive body of art, we can conclude that use of space in his works is meant to elevate any kitsch component into high artistic standards. He has been able to achieve this through his perfectionism and use of materials. Although Koons has sometimes made highly controversial pieces, one cannot deny his influence on art. He made many direct depictions of kitsch along with sexual connotations, and put them right in front of the viewer. Koons has a belief in every viewer's potential, as well as the vast potential of art as a great form of communication.

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