



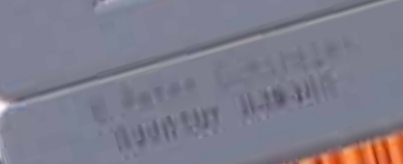
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Jeff Koons
Made in Heaven
Paintings

LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN

64 EAST 77TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10075





Introduction

In Jeff Koons's "Made in Heaven" series, art bleeds over into life, making a radical and historical contribution that changed art forever. In this perfect marriage between fact and fantasy, Koons has opened up new formal and conceptual possibilities. Like all great art, Made in Heaven serves as a strong link between the art of the past and the art of the future. Koons's knowledge of the past, whether conscious or unconscious, is transformed into a risky exploration of the self. This complex vision of the crash of fact and fiction has touched so many artists and added a new chapter in the history of contemporary art. We are very proud to be able to reunite the majority of the paintings from this historical body of work, they feel fresher and even more relevant today than ever before.

Daniella Luxembourg & Amalia Dayan
New York, October 2010

Previous Spread:
EXALTATION
1991, (detail)
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm

Opposite:
Image Courtesy
of Peter Schinzler
Photography

Seaboard

MADE
IN
HEAVEN



Starring:

JEFF KOONS - CICCIOLINA

© 1997 Seaboard

IMAGE WORLD THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART



Born through Porn: How Jeff Koons Became Jeff Koons

BY ALISON M. GINGERAS

MADE IN HEAVEN: THE BIRTH OF JEFF KOONS

In 1990, Jeff Koons granted Sveriges Television (SVT) a revelatory interview to promote “Made in Heaven,” his new body of work that would be shown at that year’s edition of the Venice Biennale.¹ The rarely seen segment, filmed in Rome, opens with Koons and his soon-to-be wife Ilona Staller sitting in a fancy restaurant. It cuts to images of a casually dressed Koons sitting on a couch in a well-appointed suite at the Hotel Hassler. He talks on the phone, thumbs through a magazine, and an assistant shuffles in as a voice-over in Swedish introduces the scene. Koons and Staller are filmed standing close together on the hotel’s balcony for part of the interview. Koons says into a microphone: “I’ve never had any interest in shock value.”

Cut to an interior scene. The journalist continues her voice-over in Swedish. Koons is seated in a director’s chair. Shirtless, his chiseled physique—the result of months of intensive training for the “Made in Heaven” works—is readily apparent. His hair is perfectly coiffed and he is wearing eyeliner and heavy foundation on his face. As a make-up artist dabs his face and torso with a powder puff, he responds to the journalist’s questions. She asks off camera in English, “What do you call this kind of art that you are doing right now?” Now in close-up, Koons replies between skin touch-ups:

I think the work is very objective. I’ve been trying to make work like this for quite some time, and I think this work pushes it to the limit of returning art back to the realm of the objective where art was really at the service of the masses. To try and meet the needs of the masses. So the work tries to present oneness to people that they can feel a sense of—excuse me, my voice is fluctuating because of the make up being applied—a sense of oneness in their life. So that spiritually they can feel a connection to the world, and biologically they can feel a connection to the world.

The journalist presses further: “Can you give more to the public than what you are doing right now?” Koons deadpans, “I would say yes, because I believe in ‘becoming.’” He pauses for a sip of water, he adds: “Jeff Koons is interested in becoming Jeff Koons.”

Previous spread: JEFF KOONS

Made In Heaven, 1989
Lithograph billboard,
125 x 272 in
317.5 x 690.9 cm



SVT IMAGEBANK
Programme *Dabrowski*,
Original air date:
Dec 8, 1990

Opposite:
Image Courtesy
of Peter Schinzler
Photography



Although the footage continues for several more jaw-dropping minutes as Staller, mostly nude, joins a now fully unclothed Koons on a white leather couch where they cuddle, kiss, fondle, and pose for a photographer as the journalist continues with her questions, it is Koons's third-person quote that is the most revealing part of the interview.

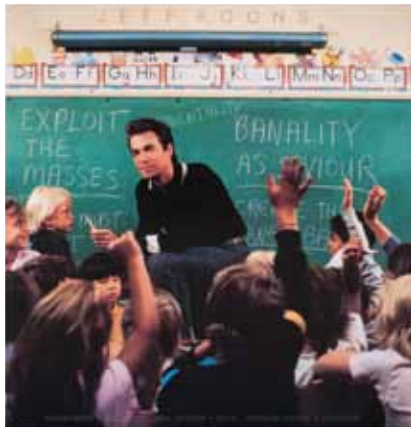
In the process of making "Made in Heaven" from 1989 to 1992, Jeff Koons became Jeff Koons. It was over this crucial three-year span that he forged both his art world and mainstream identity. As has been documented in recent art historical scholarship,² this body of work allowed Koons to "crossover"—catapulting him from art world star to mainstream media figure.

"Made in Heaven" was a succès de scandale from the moment it was first publicly unveiled, in 1989, in the form of a billboard in Lower Manhattan advertising a porn film (never to be realized) titled *Made in Heaven* and starring Koons and Staller.³ Comprising a diverse group of paintings and sculptures, the series remains notorious and headline grabbing to this day.⁴ Works range from representations of sexualized metaphors and suggestive representations of amorous unions between animals and birds—such as the polychrome wood sculpture *Wall Relief with Bird* (1991), which epitomizes Koons's then-signature use of kitsch aesthetics and the iconic elevation of banal found objects—to the explicit depictions in monumentally scaled paintings of the artist consummating his marital union with Ilona Staller, also known by her adult-film moniker Cicciolina.

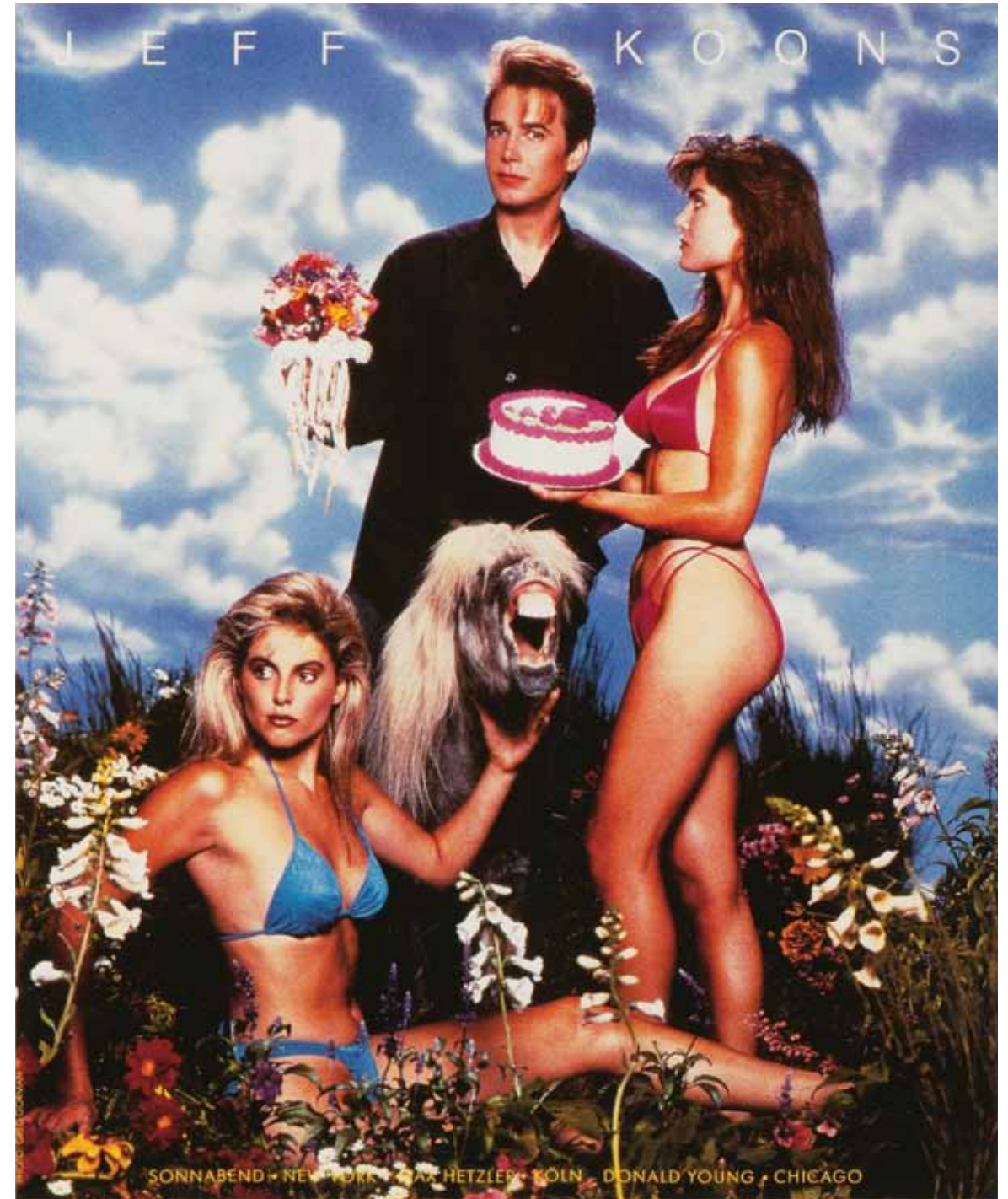
"Made in Heaven" is more than just a work of self-promotion-as-conceptual-art; there are radical departures in the series that had an irrevocable impact on Koons's artistic identity. Perhaps most significantly, it marks a fundamental and strategic shift in authorship for Koons. Like many of his fellow 1980s art stars such as Julian Schnabel, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring, Koons cranked up the self-promotional hype—particularly his full-page magazine ads for his Sonnabend exhibitions that show him in various tableaux such as one that features Koons with a pop star worthy pompadour surrounded with bikini-clad ladies. But until "Made in Heaven," his paintings and sculptures did not include his presence or likeness. On the contrary, Koons's prior artistic strategies conformed to certain orthodoxies of '80s art. As with his Neo-Geo and Sonnabend Four comrades (Ashley Bickerton, Peter Halley, and Meyer Vaisman), Koons relied primarily on appropriating found images and objects for his work. His sculptures, like his stainless steel sculpture *Rabbit* (1986), were deliberately slick, depersonalized, and aesthetically cold. But with "Made in Heaven," he broke from away from the aloof and ironic sphere of the art world "brat pack" into a perilous zone of full exposure. Through his conflation of life, love, and art Koons laid bare his body and his sexuality for all to consume. By taking center stage with Ciccolina in these controversial and explicit works, he willingly leapt into the hot water of aesthetic incorrectness.

By actively participating in the work Koons assumed immense personal and artistic risks—risks that would ultimately, if not immediately, fortify Koons's overall credibility and vouch for his claims of sincerity. How could an exhibitionist, self-exploitative and "pornographic" body of work bolster Koons's integrity?! However paradoxical, "Made in

SVT IMAGEBANK
Programme *Dabrowski*,
Original air date:
Dec 8, 1990



JEFFKOONS
Art Magazine Ads
Artforum, 1988–89



JEFF KOONS
Art Magazine Ads
Art in America, 1988–89

Heaven” demonstrated all too graphically that Koons truly believed that through his conjugal union with Staller he was able to forge an ideal vehicle to communicate his redemptive messages. If the crux of Koons's artistic aspiration is to “communicate with as wide an audience as possible” and to use his art as a means of “delivering the bourgeoisie from guilt and shame,” it was the efficacy of porn’s communicative powers and authenticity of their marriage that made his discursive claims credible.

In other words, the depicted acts were not just staged for art’s sake. This was no mere performance for the cameras or an empirical conceptual exercise. “Made in Heaven” is a *gesamtkunstwerk* that unfolded in real time over several years. Limiting our focus to just the works themselves misses the fact that the most radical aspect of the entire project is the way it encompasses not only the works, but his life. The couple’s complex, often conflicted yet truly amorous relationship, the birth of their son, Ludwig, in 1992, their very public break up and bitter divorce, and their subsequent (and ongoing) legal battles⁵ are as much part of the “art” as the paintings and sculptures. Koons did not just blur the boundaries between art and life. He purposefully orchestrated their collapse.

The veracity of “Made in Heaven” and the overwhelming dose of real-life messiness it delivered did not win over many Koons skeptics. As Sylvère Lotringer summarized in his seminal 1992 essay “Immaculate Conceptualism”:

Below:
Image Courtesy
of Peter Schinzler
Photography



There are many critics who consider his work artificial and cheap, boring, sensational, puerile, empty, meaningless and exploitative. Koons wouldn't deny any of it. "The vocabulary I want to use," he said 'is that of advertising and entertainment' (...) Koons's deadl[iest] sin is what critics perceived as his cynicism, which I would rather call 'creative humor.' This kind of humor is intolerable because it remains forever ambiguous. Is he putting us on? Objectively speaking it doesn't make any difference. His enthusiastic embrace of kitsch culture and market values—"the market" he says 'is the greatest critic'—is so unbelievable (so innocently perverse) that is bound to raise endless suspicion.⁶

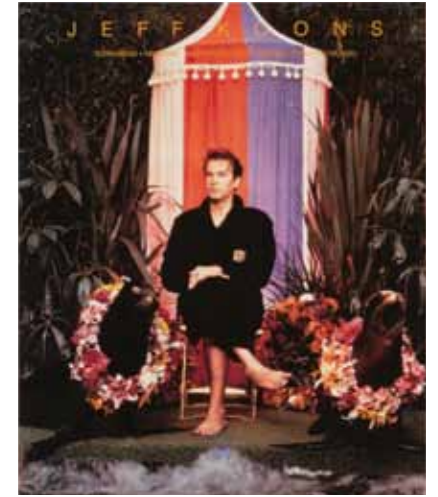
But now, with some 20 years hindsight, a critical reconsideration of the lasting radicality of “Made in Heaven” goes some way toward dispelling the accusations of cynicism or artificiality that have been historically leveled at the work.

From day one, Koons has maintained that *all* of his art is sincere and motivated by the desire to communicate. “My work has no aesthetic values, other than the aesthetic of communications.”⁷ Reading such aphoristic proclamations alongside his earlier, more “clinical” works—such as the Plexiglas-encased vacuum cleaners, basketballs submerged in tanks of water, and porcelain Michael Jackson figures—it is hard to take Koons at his word.

Yet it was when the stakes were at their highest that Koons put it all on the line with “Made in Heaven” and cemented the artistic authority that has shaped his present-day identity. “Made in Heaven” amounted to a litmus test for his credibility. When Koons passed it, and the sensationalism died down, his entire oeuvre was boosted both critically and financially. “Made in Heaven” continues to serve as collateral for all Koons has done since. It is the aura of veracity that emanates from his most polemical series that imbues the rest of Koons's work with a sense of authenticity—whether lending credence to the legendary perfectionism of the “Celebration” series or giving psychic depth to his most recent abstract paintings. The markers of his current successes—the auction records, his decoration of France’s Légion d’honneur, the glowing magazine profiles—all are legitimated by the sincerity he proved with “Made in Heaven.” Jeff Koons as we know him today was born through porn.

CARNAL KNOWLEDGE: THE MATRILINEAGE BEHIND “MADE IN HEAVEN”

While “Made in Heaven” may have spawned the present day incarnation of Jeff Koons, the artistic DNA that contributed to the conceptual and formal formation of this decisive body of work is varied and complex. Reams have been written about Koons's relationship to the high patriarchs of the art of self-promotion: Salvador Dalí and Andy Warhol. Although their artistic strategies, and in particular the calculated performance of the self, did indeed shape Koons's own persona, the historical list of other masters of staging the self-as-public spectacle: the politically incorrect, flamboyant dalliances of Francis Picabia on the Côte d’Azur; Jean Cocteau's legendary social climbing and narcis-



JEFF KOONS
Art Magazine Ads, Art
1988–89



JEFF KOONS
Art Magazine Ads
Flash Art, 1988–89

sism; and the extravagant publicity stunts of Yves Klein (including the elaborate, pompous ceremony staged when he married Rotraut Uecker) provide compelling historical paradigms for Koons's exhibitionist entwinement of life and art.⁸

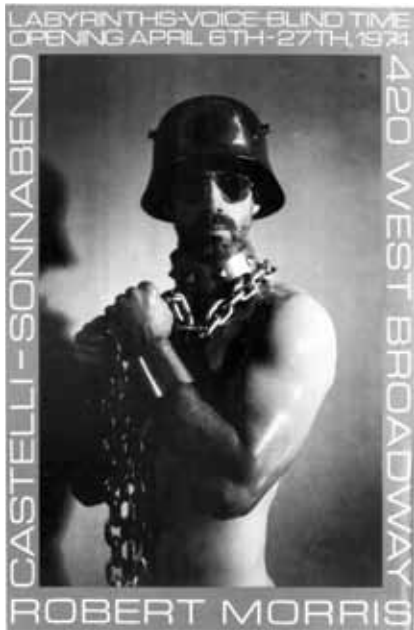
But a more recent and perhaps unexpected antecedent for Koons's meshing of sex, art, and self-promotion is Lynda Benglis's infamous *Artforum* 1974 advertisement-as-self-portrait. In this now iconic "centerfold" published in the November 1974 issue of the magazine, Benglis appears stark naked save a pair of white shades. Her body is oiled, her hair is slicked back, her lips curled in a suggestive snarl. At her crotch, Benglis is wielding a spectacularly detailed dildo. The controversy over the image may be known, but it is worth repeating for the light it sheds on Koons's own advertorial project of 1986 as well as "Made in Heaven."

Benglis's photograph was violently dismissed at the time of its publication. She was accused of "making a shabby mockery of the movement for women's liberation."⁹ What is often overlooked is that the image was one of a string of performative gestures by Benglis. In part, the ad was also a mischievous response to another rabble-rousing self-portrait advertisement by Robert Morris published in the April 1974 issue of *Artforum* showing the artist semi-nude with S&M props crowned with a German army helmet. Yet as critic Roberta Smith recalls, this gesture was not just a tit-for-tat between Benglis and Morris. Since 1973, Benglis had been creating sexually provocative images of herself as a means of "flouting gender and sexual stereotype." Smith writes,

One, an announcement card for a show at the Clocktower in 1973, used a childhood portrait for which she wore the national dress of Greece (her family's country of origin)—the boy's costume, since the girl's was too small. In an ad in the April 1974 Artforum she appears in a jacket and jeans, leaning against her silver Porsche, in a pose of slouchy West Coast male-artist cool. The third photograph, by Annie Leibovitz, for the card announcing Ms. Benglis's May 1974 exhibition at Paula Cooper, shows her from the back. She's in Betty Grable mode, except she wears jeans that are dropped around her ankles.¹⁰

With this more complete account in mind, Benglis's gender-bending performance becomes less a narcissistic monument than a statement of sociopolitical defiance—both in the face of then-dominant ideologies of academic feminism and mainstream misogyny. Thanks to these insolent gestures, Benglis became a key player in forging a specific subset of women's art: she's the poster girl for black-sheep feminists.

On the surface, it may seem incongruous to equate Benglis to Koons, to compare the gender politics of Benglis's '70s condition to the aura of white, heterosexual male entitlement that surrounds Koons. But in fact, Koons actually owes a huge debt to Benglis. She provides him with a model of politics that draws its empowerment from the deliberate desecration of social and intellectual boundaries—especially those set by the art world's intelligentsia. Like Benglis before him, Koons knowingly transgressed taboos of identity politics. In all its phallogocentric glory, "Made in Heaven" plays on all the inflammatory archetypes



ROBERT MORRIS
Untitled, 1974
Offset lithograph on paper
23.875 x 36.75 in.
60.6 x 93.3 cm
Copyright Robert Morris
Courtesy Sonnabend
Gallery and ARS



LYNDA BENGLIS
SELF (1974 *Artforum*
Advertisement) Various
dates 1970-76, Portfolio
of 9 pigment prints
34 x 23 in, 86.4 x 58.4 cm
Edition of 25, Copyright
Lynda Benglis, Courtesy
Cheim & Read, New York

of “normative” hetero-male sexual desire. By celebrating the subject position of straight white guy—something that was highly problematic in the early 1990s (and, in most circles, still is)—Koons pushes all the buttons to ignite the knee-jerk moralizing reactions of the art world.

A further excavation of the fringes of feminist art history provides larger matrilineal context for this chapter of Koons's work. A host of key artists working in the late '60s and early '70s have pioneered influential, revolutionary models of performative agency that find striking resonance for the making of “Made in Heaven.” Additional precedents are found in the radical practices of Cosey Fanni Tutti, Hannah Wilke, and Betty Tompkins (to name some of the most salient examples). Given that most of these artists have been only marginally recognized in the recent scholarly evaluations of feminist art, it is perhaps unsurprising that they have never been cited as providing a key performative, discursive, and iconographic precedents for “Made in Heaven.”¹¹ These matriarchal forebears proposed such extreme approaches to issues of the categories of “body art” and female sexual agency that many of them have been shut out of the cannon of “feminist” art all together.

If there is one figure from this period whose provocative work most legitimizes “Made in Heaven” it is Cosey Fanni Tutti.¹² From 1973 to 1980, she explored the comparatively tame conventions of “feminist” body and performance art by completely immersing herself as a model for pornographic magazines. Without announcing herself as an artist or delimiting the terms of her work as a “performance”—thereby depriving herself of the safety net of artistic discourse, she posed in more than 40 triple-X magazine “actions” that range from hardcore lesbian exploitation scenes to coquettish centerfolds.

In 1976, Fanni Tutti “came out” as an artist when she showed these images in her infamous “Prostitution” exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London.¹³ As Fanni Tutti explained: “My express intention with the project was both to infiltrate the sex market to create (and purchase) my own image...and to gain first hand experience of being a genuine participant in the genre. To achieve my aim, I couldn't adopt the approach of a voyeuristic or analytic artist viewing from the

COSEY FANNY TUTTI
Tessa from Sunderland,
Park Lane No. 12
1975–76, Copyright
Cosey Fanni Tutti



outside because that wouldn't provide me with a true experience. What was required for me was to become 'one of the girls.'"¹⁴

Fanni Tutti's strategy of total immersion—becoming “one of the girls”—and her intrepid commitment to a risky, all encompassing lifestyle/art practice—provide a compelling artistic model for Koons's own life-altering journey through his collaboration and marriage with Staller. Fanni Tutti's solicitation of phenomenal tabloid coverage and vociferous dismissal by the critics also foreshadows the media attention that “Made in Heaven” would receive 15 years later. Although Fanni Tutti's “Prostitution” exhibition was censored by the Arts Council of Great Britain, Koons's “Made in Heaven” pictures were never pulled from public view.

During roughly the same period, Fanni Tutti's contemporaries in the U.S. were expressly advocating for the right to make sexually explicit art. Art historian Richard Meyer chronicles the activities of a group of vanguard women artists in his groundbreaking essay, “Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art and the Force of Censorship in the 1970s.”¹⁵ Most pertinent to the tracing of precursors for Koons's work is Meyer's account of the collective Fight Censorship formed in 1973. Meyer writes,

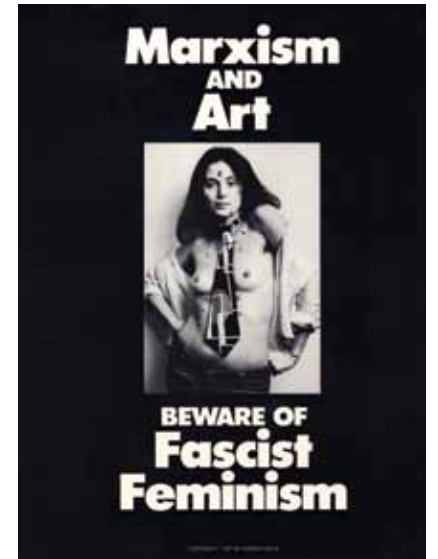
At the inaugural meeting, [Anita] Steckel (the group's founder) recited a manifesto prepared for the occasion. It read in part, ‘We women artists... demand that sexual subject matter—as it is part of life—no longer be prevented from being part of art! Following the meeting, the FC group issued a press release drawn largely from Steckel's manifesto. Headlined ‘Women Artists Join Fight to Put Sex into Museums and Get Sexism and Puritanism Out,’ the press release denounced the double standard whereby “females are shown in a seductive, sexual and nude manner” in the “very same museums [that] refuse to show the sexual male nude.”¹⁶

While Koons certainly did not face as much opposition as the members of FC in the '70s, his explicit imagery and advocacy of sexual content in the realm of high culture speaks to the group's mission to “embolden other women—and men—to join in the struggle for free expression.”¹⁷

Some of the work of Hannah Wilke, a member of the FC collective, also uncannily resonates with Koons's strategies. Known mostly for her erotically evocative latex sculptures and her “performalist” self-portraits that often featured her in glamorous nude poses, Wilke also made several works that publicly exposed her romantic exploits—often with well-known male artists. One such exhibitionist performance entitled *Intercourse With...* (1978) involved Wilke publicly playing intimate messages compiled from her answering machine by her lovers (past and present) as well as friends and family while she stripped naked. Once undressed, she wrote all their names on her chest. Even more incendiary were Wilke's photographic “men” files that documented “male lovers and intimates,” material that she often incorporated into her work.¹⁸ The most compelling precedent to “Made in Heaven” is her *Untitled* photographic portfolio completed between 1970–75. These images captured personal, often sexually charged details of her life with then-



COSEY FANNY TUTTI
Prostitution poster, 1976
Copyright COUM



HANNAH WILKE
Marxism and Art: Beware of
Fascist Feminism,
1977, off-set poster
9 x 11.5 in, 22.9 x 29.2 cm
Courtesy Ronald Feldman
Fine Arts, Copyright Marsie,
Emanuelle, Damon and
Andrew Scharlatt, Licensed
by VAGA, New York, NY



partner Claes Oldenburg—this work has been rarely seen or discussed because of suppressive legal action by Oldenburg. As Meyer describes,

*“Taken as a whole, the untitled portfolio traces what might be called an erotics of everyday life, an erotics in which the male body (and on one occasion, the female) appears in various states of undress, arousal, concentration, communication and distraction.”*¹⁹

The transgressive nature of Wilke’s public exposure of her private life as art particularly evokes the totality of the “Made in Heaven” project. Although the erotic scenes depicted in Koons’s paintings are staged, the remaining residue of the *gesamtkunstwerk*—the copious press clippings, snapshots and interviews that were publicly documented during Koons and Staller’s three-year partnership easily can be placed into the radical lineage of Wilke’s unprecedented, more diaristic works.

Although not a member of the Fight Censorship collective, Betty Tompkins also provides some ancestry for Koons’s “Made in Heaven” paintings. Beginning in 1969, Tompkins began to make monumental photorealist paintings of hardcore, heterosexual pornography. For her *Fuck Paintings* Tompkins applied black and white paint with an airbrush, which allowed her to accurately render every anatomical detail from the original source photographs. Her compositions focused purely on the “action”—she cropped out faces and extraneous body parts so that the act of penetration became her only subject. Tompkins’s works were censored at the time they were made and only recently rediscovered,²⁰ so it is unlikely that they would have directly influenced Koons. Nevertheless, the scale and confrontational composition of Tompkins’s *Fuck Painting #1* (1969) is strikingly similar to Koons’s *Ilona’s Asshole* (1991), and just as Tompkins refused to ascribe any moralizing messages to her pictures, so too did Koons reject the notion of purity as anything but a construct.

To list these artistic precursors is not to deny the influence of perhaps the most powerful matrilineal force in “Made in Heaven”: La Cicciolina. If this series was a watershed moment for Koons, the major catalyst for his personal and professional transformation was Staller, whose notoriety and controversial exploits in adult entertainment, pop music, and Italian national politics gave her celebrity status in Europe in the mid-1970s and ’80s.²¹ It was her stardom, now since eclipsed by Koons’s financial and artistic successes, that generated the tabloid headlines and art-world shock value for Koons. Before their acrimonious breakup, Koons himself acknowledged Staller as an artist. Toward the conclusion of the same SVT interview, he tells the journalist:

Some artists use cameras, some artists use paints, some use wood to chisel. Ilona uses her genitalia. And it’s to articulate the vocabulary of her genitalia to its fullest. So it’s shaved to fully reveal itself. It’s quite special. I mean the lips of her vagina are quite beautiful. They are quite large. Its articulation. Ilona has always been an artist. But now that Jeff [again, his use of the third person is striking] is presenting [her] to the world in the traditional context of art that she can be recognized as one the great artists of the world.”



JEFF KOONS
Ilona’s Asshole,
(detail) 1991, Oil inks
silkscreened on canvas,
90 in x 60 in
228.6 cm x 152.4 cm

Opposite:
BETTY TOMPKINS
Fuck Painting #1
1969, acrylic on canvas,
84 x 60 in,
213.4 x 152.4 cm,
Collection Centre
Pompidou, Musée
National d’Art Moderne,
Paris, Courtesy the
artist and Albus
Greenspon Gallery



Above:
JEFF KOONS
Jeff in the Position of Adam, 1990,
 Oil inks on canvas
 97.7 x 144 in.
 248.3 x 365.8 cm

MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI
Creation of Adam
 (detail, Sistine Chapel)
 1510, Copyright
 Bettmann, CORBIS



JEFF KOONS
Exaltation, 1991,
 Oil inks silkscreened
 on canvas,
 60 x 90 in.
 152.4 x 228.6 cm

Opposite:
GIANLORENZO BERNINI
Ecstasy of Saint Teresa
 (detail), 1647–1652,
 Marble, Copyright
 Bellman, CORBIS

Back in 1990 Koons credited Staller with equal artistic standing, but it is worth noting that in the majority of the coverage and analysis to date never sufficiently acknowledged her as an active artistic partner in the “Made in Heaven” enterprise. Rather, in most accounts, Staller is (at worst) discussed as if she had been simply utilized by Koons as a porn actress or (at best) downplayed as his lover and muse who came with added shock value to generate press attention. Yet to underplay Staller’s pre-Koons “achievements” and her aura of political radicality that she brought to their partnership is to completely underestimate her active authorship in “Made in Heaven” and consequently ignores a central force in Koons’s artistic formation in this period.

**IN A BIBLICAL SENSE:
 MADE IN HEAVEN AND THE CULTURE
 WARS OF THE 1990S AND BEYOND**

The Book of Genesis provided Koons with an arsenal of historical references that he used to bolster the “Made in Heaven” project. As he wrote at the time:

*Ilona and I were born for each other. She’s a media woman. I’m a media man. We are the contemporary Adam and Eve. I believe totally that I’m in the realm of the spiritual now with Ilona. Through our union we’re aligned once again with nature. I mean we’ve become God. That’s the bottom line—we’ve become God.*²²

As the late art historian Robert Rosenblum observed, the biblical undertones of “Made in Heaven” were not limited to the promulgations Koons offered to the press. Rosenblum writes, “biblical and old master archetypes are lurking”²³ all over Koons’s iconographic appropriations. The horizontal painting *Jeff in the Position of Adam* (1990) “paraphrases the posture of Michelangelo’s nude Adam joining an almost-nude Eve (who wears a few modern accessories such as silver spike heel shoes and an open bra).”²⁴ Likewise, in the work entitled *Exaltation* (1991) Koons portrays Staller in close up—her eyes are rolling skyward, as she blissfully receives Koons’s ejaculate on the side of her face. The euphoric rendering of this moment suggests the conventions of spiritual jouissance in Baroque art, such as Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1652).

It is worth remembering the original socio-political context in which “Made in heaven” appeared. The early 1990s were the cultural-war years in America. In fact, in 1991, the same year that Koons was preaching sexual redemption to the masses, the sociologist Davison Hunter published his influential book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. At the end of the first Bush presidency, Hunter argues, Americans had entered a particularly discordant period. Polarizing issues such as abortion, homosexuality, the separation of church and state, and censorship had engendered a severe ideological rift, splitting the nation into opposing camps on the left and the right.

Although he was thinking Old Testament, Koons’s words call to mind New Testament narratives. Rather than embodying Adam’s struggle with original sin Koons takes more of a Christ-like position. And against the divisive cultural landscape of the ’90s, his rhetoric seems





TITIAN
The Penitent Magdalene
 1555–1565, Oil on canvas
 Copyright Massimo Listri,
 CORBIS

more messianic than anything else. After all, through his union with Staller, he aspired to “deliver” the public from shame and guilt. In the 1992 collection of his “phrases and philosophies” published as the *Jeff Koons Handbook*, he writes:

*Morality has always played a very important part in my work. Many times I will go the depths of hypocrisy and resurface without making any direct moral judgment. By some I am viewed as a sinner but I am really a saint. God has always been on my side. Anyone with enough distance will be able to find my positive moral position.*²⁵

And if Koons is Christ, then Staller may be his Mary Magdalene, a figure who has been conjured in a myriad of guises over the centuries—the beautiful sinner, penitent prostitute, Christ’s illicit lover, and even his lone female apostle. Mirroring the shifting perception of the Magdalene identity, Staller’s own reception—feminist sex worker-politician-artist or publicity starved harlot for hire—is determined by which ideological camp one ascribes to. Recasting Staller as Magdalene also reverberates on an art historical, iconographic level—given that “most painters used the subject of the Magdalene as an occasion for portraying lots of repentant, naked female flesh barely concealed by the saint’s flowing hair.”²⁶ In “Made in Heaven” Koons spun a narrative where he not only offered Staller salvation from sin by sanctifying her as “an Eternal Virgin,” he prophesized that he would ultimately deliver us all from puritanical moralizing and repressive politics on a path to self-acceptance.

The Koons-as-Messiah construct did not gain any real political credibility at the height of the '90s culture wars. Instead “Made in Heaven” successfully inflamed both the left and the right. For conservatives, his transgressions were obvious, and although liberals were anxious not to call for Jesse Helms-style censorship, they demonized Koons for his embodiment of negative gender stereotypes.²⁷

By now the initial shock over “Made in Heaven” may have faded and Koons’s redemptive take on sex and public life seems less offensive. In fact, in the current age of reality television, constantly updated Facebook pages, and exhibitionistic YouTube videos, it is almost quaint. The entire paradigm of the public sex scandal has evolved—think of the many falls from grace and subsequent second acts in the political arena, from former President Bill Clinton to New York governor Eliot Spitzer. In light of the present, perhaps slightly less Puritanical climate in America, Koons’s 20-year-old messages of self-acceptance and liberation through sexuality actually seem prophetic. Just as Bill Clinton has been “born again” by publicly confronting his demons—his owning up to the infamous blue dress even fulfills Koons’s favorite maxim “embrace your past”²⁸—Koons himself has established his long-term reputation through a policy of transparency. While his career and personal life have hit numerous well-documented highs and lows since 1992, he has never disavowed “Made in Heaven.” Staying true to his birth through porn, Koons’s current status as the world’s most famous (and expensive) living artist is predicated on the credibility that this controversial body of work won for him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison M. Gingeras is a curator and writer living in New York.

The author wishes to dedicate this essay in loving memory of Robert Rosenblum.



HELMUT NEWTON
 Copyright The Helmut
 Newton Estate
 and Maconochie
 Photography

Following Spread:
 Image Courtesy
 of Peter Schinzler
 Photography





Jeff Koons
HAND ON BREAST
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm



Jeff Koons
FINGERS BETWEEN LEGS
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm

Jeff Koons
PONIES
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm





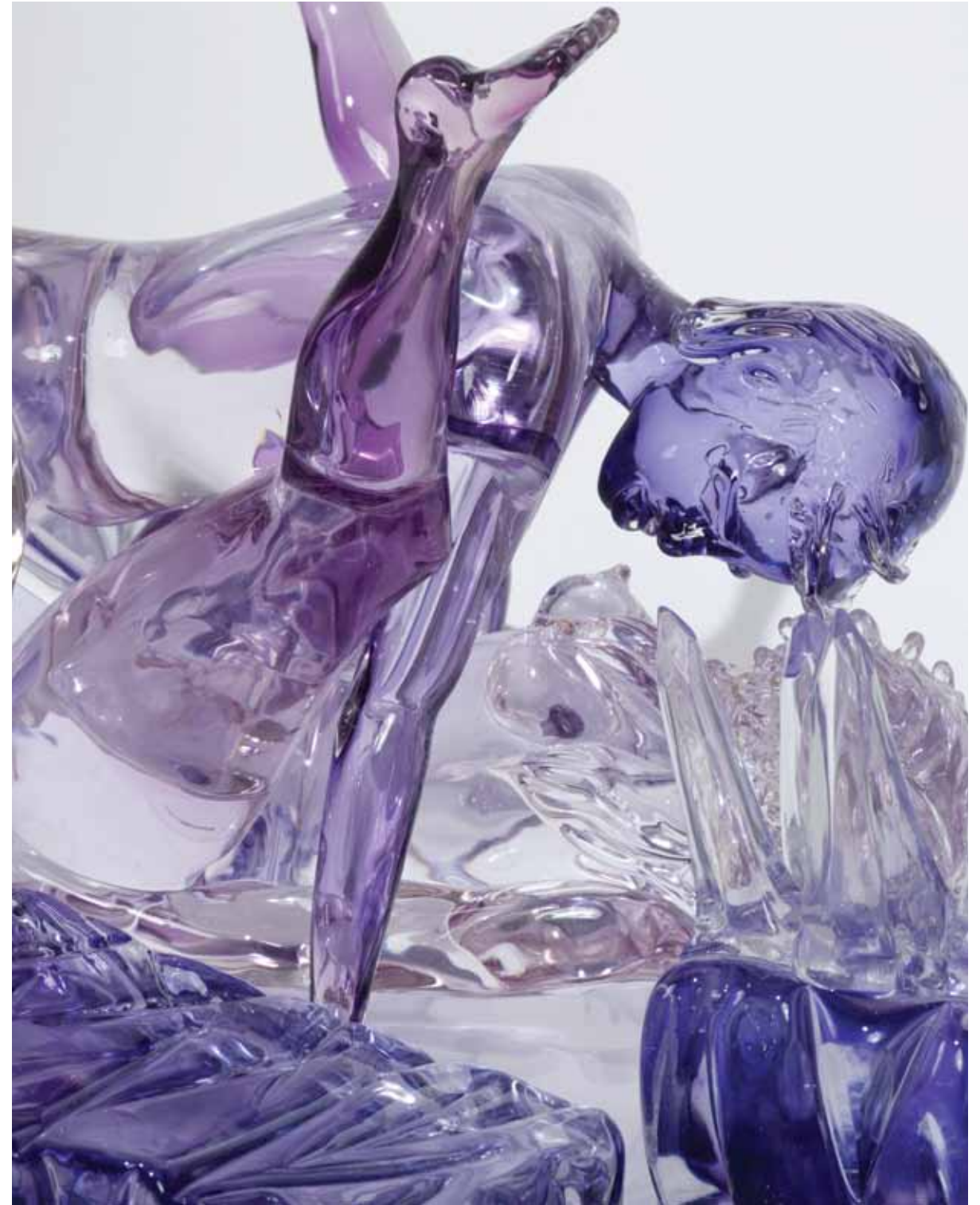
Jeff Koons
ILONA'S HOUSE
EJACULTION
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm



Jeff Koons
VIOLET-ICE
(KAMA SUTRA)
1991, Glass
13 x 27.25 x 16.5 in
33 x 71.1 x 43.2 cm

Following spreads:
Details of *Violet-Ice*
(*Kama Sutra*)

Photographs by
Adam Reich





Jeff Koons
SILVER SHOES
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm



Jeff Koons
RED-DOGGY
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm
Photograph by
Jim Strong

Jeff Koons
RED BUTT
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm





Jeff Koons
DIRTY-EJACULATION
1991
Oil links on canvas
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm



Jeff Koons
EXALTATION
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm

Works in the Exhibition

Hand on Breast
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm
Private Collection

Fingers Between Legs
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm
Private Collection

Ponies
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm
Private Collection

Ilona's House Ejaculation
1991
Oil inks on canvas
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm
Private Collection

Violet-Ice (Kama Sutra)
1991
Glass
13 x 27.25 x 16.5 in
33 x 71.1 x 43.2 cm
Private Collection

Silver Shoes
1990
Oil inks on canvas
95.8 x 144.1 in
243.3 x 365.8 cm
Stefan T. Edlis Collection

Red Doggy
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm
The Sonnabend Collection

Red Butt
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm
Private Collection

Dirty Ejaculation
1991
Oil inks on canvas
90 x 60 in
228.6 x 152.4 cm
Private Collection

Exaltation
1991
Oil inks silkscreened
on canvas,
60 x 90 in
152.4 x 228.6 cm
Murderme



Notes on the Essay

1
This clip was originally broadcast on December 8, 1990 on SVT as part of the daytime talk show called *Dabrowski*. I am deeply indebted to my colleague Jack Bankowsky for bringing this clip to my attention when it was posted to YouTube in 2008. This segment was a focal point at a conference held in June 2010 during the opening of the *Pop Life* exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. Last accessed on August 25, 2010: http://svtplay.se/v/1393081/oppet_arkiv/jeff_koons_och_cicciolina

2
For a discussion of the making of Koons mainstream stardom, see Scott Rothkopf, "Made in Heaven: Jeff Koons and the Invention of the Art Star" in *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), pp. 37-45. Also, for a more detailed discussion of Koons's deliberate crafting of his performative persona as part of his conceptual oeuvre, see Alison M. Gingeras "Lives of the Artists," *Tate Etc.*, no. 1, Summer 2004.

3
The billboard was created as a public artwork for the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1989 exhibition "Image World." It was conceived as an initial step towards creating a feature length porn film that Koons hoped to shoot with Staller. The making of this image marked both the initiation of the "Made in Heaven" project and the start of their relationship.

4
See for example, Cicciolina's autobiography "*Per amore e per forza*" ("By love and strength") published by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore in 2007; and Suzana Sucic, "All ways lead to Rome: Talking to la Cicciolina," *C: International Contemporary Art*, no. 81, March 22, 2004, pp 40-42.

5
Koons's ongoing legal and personal conflicts with his ex-wife have been widely discussed in the press and even Koons as integrated this fallout as part of his self-spun mythology in the way it has impacted his art practice and life since *Made in Heaven*. See for example, Ingrid Sischy, "Koons, High and Low," *Vanity Fair*, March 2000, pp. 226-277; and Sischy "Jeff Koons's World," in *Jeff Koons* (Cologne: Taschen, 2008).

6
Sylvère Lotringer, "Immaculate Conceptualism," *Artscribe* 90, February/March 1992, n.p.

7
Jeff Koons, "Phrases and Philosophies," in *Jeff Koons Handbook*, (London: Rizzoli and the Antony d'Offay Gallery, 1992) p. 31.

8
See again Rothkopf and Gingeras.

9
Carter Ratcliff, "The Fate of a Gesture: Lynda Benglis," article available at http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/index/ratcliff/ratcliff6-13-97.asp

10
Roberta Smith, "Art or Ad or What? It Caused a lot of Fuss" *The New York Times*, July 25, 2009, page C1.

11. The 2007 feminist-art exhibitions "WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution," organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, and "Global Feminism" at the Brooklyn Museum, either downplayed or excluded entirely the presence of Wilke, Tompkins and Fanni Tutti. For example, Betty Tompkins was merely mentioned in one of the catalogue essays and was omitted from the exhibition.

12
I would like to acknowledge Tate curator Catherine Wood's scholarship on the work of Cosey Fanni Tutti and credit her contribution to my thinking about this essay. Specifically, her essay "Capitalist Realness" in its discussion of the strategies of Prostitution and Exploitation published in *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*.

13
Interestingly, Ilona Staller began her porn career in Italy in 1973, the same year as Fanni Tutti, and both women are the same age.

14

Previous spread:
Riccardo Schicchi
Cicciolina nella natura, 1976
Photographic print
mounted on aluminum
35.4 x 47.2 in., 90 x 120cm
Courtesy The Office –
Contemporary Art, Rome

Poster of the show *Il Frutto Proibito* (The Forbidden Fruit) Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi



Ilona Staller during *Radio Luna*
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi



LP *Muscolo rosso, Cicciolina Avec toi*, 1976
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi



LP cover Ilona Staller *Cicciolina*
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi

Catherine Wood, "Capitalist Realness" *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009) p. 85.

15
See Richard Meyer, "Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art and the Force of Censorship in the 1970s," in *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; and Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press), 2007, pp. 362–383.

16
Ibid., p. 366.

17
Ibid., p. 367.

18
Ibid., p. 380.

19
For a complete description of the Oldenburg portfolio, see Meyer, p. 380.

20
See Meyer, pp. 376–77: "In 1973, [Thompkins] was invited to exhibit two of the pictures at a gallery exhibition in Paris titled 'Realism, New Realism, Photo Realism.' The paintings never made it to the gallery, however. French customs officials deemed the works obscene, confiscated them as contraband, and refused to release them for nearly a year...Thompkins' *Fuck Paintings*, meanwhile, spent more than two decades rolled up under her pool table until the New York art dealer Michell Albus exhibited them in 2002."

21
The ongoing controversial reception of *Made in Heaven* is evident in the ample press coverage of the exhibition *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* at London's Tate Modern in 2009 that featured the first full-fledged restaging of the "Made In Heaven" series since its original showings in 1991–92. For a representative example of the coverage, see Adrian Searle, "Pop Life's Schlock Horrors," *The Guardian*, September 29, 2009.

22
Jeff Koons as quoted in *The Jeff Koons Handbook* (London: Rizzoli and the Antony d'Offay Gallery, 1992), p. 140.

23
Robert Rosenblum, "Notes on Jeff Koons" *The Jeff Koons Handbook*, p. 24.

24
Ibid., Rosenblum, p. 23.

25
Jeff Koons Handbook, p. 39.

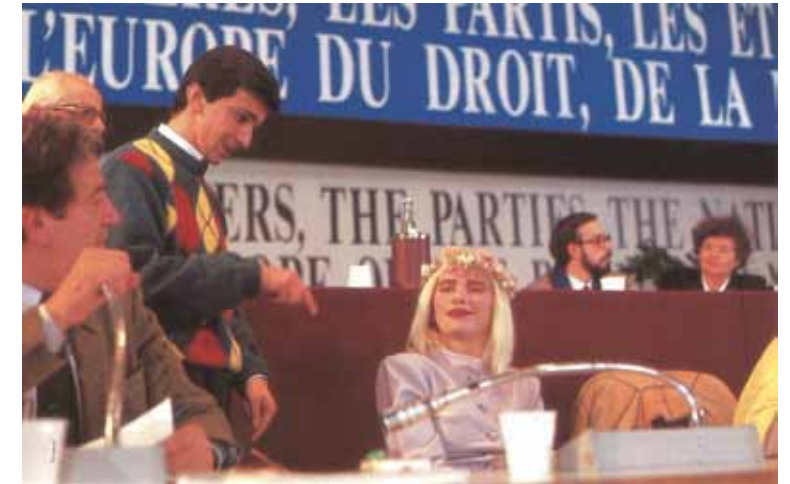
26
Francine Prose. *Caravaggio: Painter of Miracles*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005 p. 55.

27
Scholars have spilled significant amounts of ink denouncing Koons. Laura Cottingham, for example, writes of his "narrative of straight white male valuation" and enforcing "female subordination." See Laura Cottingham, "Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Postmodern" *New Feminist Criticism*, ed. by J. Frueh, C. Langer and A. Raven (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), pp.133–151.

28
Jeff Koons Handbook, p. 138.



Ilona Staller during the time she was a member of Parliament
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi



Playman cover with Ilona Staller, June 1980
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi



Ramba, Ciccioletina and Moana outside the Parliament.
Courtesy archive of Riccardo Schicchi

Thank You To Following

Jeff Koons
and the
Jeff Koons Studio

Alison Gingeras
for writing
an inspiring essay

Meghan Dailey
for editing
the catalogue

Riccardo Schicchi
and his studio

Peter Schinzler

Elisabeth Del Prete



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F 1 212 452 4656
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ESSAY

Alison Gingeras

EDITOR

Meghan Dailey

PROJECT COORDINATORS

Stephanie Adamowicz,
Alissa Bennett,
Roberta Brambilla
Marion Chanson,
and Stephanie Schleiffer

PHOTOGRAPHY

Adam Reich Photograph
New York, NY
www.adamreichphotography.com

Ricardo Schicchi Photography

Peter Schinzler Photography
Munich, Germany
www.schinzler.com
www.muenchenmenschen.de

Jim Strong Photography

DESIGN

DesignWatson, New York, NY
William Richmond-Watson
and Jonathan Pfeiffer

Previous Spread:
Image Courtesy of Peter Schinzler
Photography

Following spread, front, and
back endleaves: Image Courtesy
of Peter Schinzler Photography





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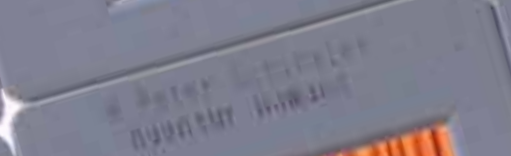
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