

# **Symbolism and Advertising in Pop Art**

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## Introduction

The premise of the written work on the subject of *Symbolism and Advertising in Pop Art* is to reveal that the thread of symbolism, in advertisement and other forms of media, whether it be ancient or contemporary, has been an intrinsic part of all artworks to date and that historically, movements in socio-economic structures of societies and their relative consumerism have been a catalyst in the direction of representational art works.

I will first approach the concept of *manufacture of consent*, which is investigated in the Al Gore book, *The Assault On Reason, The Politics of Wealth*. The indication of the concept of *manufacture of consent*, is that the same tools utilized to deploy political agendas, and to propagate public concern and spread political propaganda, are being appropriated by the advertising media in the present era of consumerism. With the rise of consumerism, the utilization of symbol is paramount in for the end result of increased consumption. Therefore I will reveal how the ancient pattern of symbol and code is continued in banal imagery of advertisement and how they ignite sensually to the public sensibilities, the longing for social acceptance, the appeal of a mass community, assembled by need of commodity, and fears of the outsider. With the definition of the words symbol and code I will reveal the relevance of the two terms in advertising and show it's natural rise to the interest of the advertiser and in turn, the artist as a media outlet and a medium of artistic expression.

I will introduce how the reality of certain eras inspired movements in entertainment for children and adults alike, by the presentation of the media cultural phenomena of *H.R. Pufnstuf*, *McDonaldland* and their creators, the Croffts, whom were attendant to social climate of tolerance of drug experimentation of the late 1960's and early 1970's, which spawn programs like *H.R. Pufnstuf*, featuring characteristic anthropomorphization of inanimate objects, brash colors, and hallucinatorily inspired settings. The psychedelic result of a

program designed to appeal to perhaps children and adults alike, being tremendously popular, touches on the allegorical quests of shamans and jesters, playing on themes of mythology and spiritual passage. In the adaptation of the advertising campaign of *McDonaldland*, with characters such as *Ronald McDonald*, and *the Hamburglar*, I argue the point of the semiotic nature of a seemingly benign advertising campaign that diversified the face of advertising, picking up the social trend of outsider culture and grasping an opportunity to sell the life style choice back to the revolutionaries whom were it's original conceptualists. The Croffts employment by McDonalds to create *McDonaldland*, was commercialization of psychedelic culture to market unhealthy food products and the fast food chain menu of McDonalds.

The political position of the McDonalds fast food chain and its ethic on the means of advertisement to children is compromised by the factuality of the inferior food product. I will discuss how this politically loaded position is the frequent subject of cogitation, by artists such as Jake and Dinos Chapman and Ron English, of which they enlist the original psychedelic attributes of the creators Sid and Marty Crofft, as well as the insidious nature of the low quality fare of the fast food chain McDonalds. I will demonstrate the creepiness of the *Ronald McDonald* character, which is in turn rendered in blissful ignorance of the threat of obesity that the character peddles in usage for McDonalds fast food chain, in it's representation of the institution of the globalization of the corporation in turn communal spaces, and the decline of spirituality over such a global corporation and the sublimation of consumerism.

I will then further explore the symbolization of the animal costumed character, in terms of its contemporary usage as well as the roots of its onset in African culture as a portal to the supernatural world, with the adaptation of animal mask or costume, comparatively the supernatural and aesthetic worlds, including costumed characters in rites to passage, in turn performance art form.

I will then address the relation of the adopted Pop Art attributes of mass cultural appeal, referring directly to the list of attributes authored by artist Richard Hamilton, creator of the iconic Pop Art collage, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* in comparison to the attributes of the McDonaldland advertising campaign as well as the appropriation of its characters by the artists formerly mentioned. I will then discuss the works of Jake and Dinos Chapman titled *the Chapman Family Collection* to signify their possession of symbolic meanings of political nature as well as their conception in the Pop Art realm. I will follow with an analysis of the works of the artist Ron English and his curiosity with the sinister perceptions of *Ronald McDonald* and the McDonald fast food chain, and Camel cigarettes, as well as touch on the subject of other artists categorized as Culture jammers and their approach to the manifestation of political art. This will bring to light the enormity of significance that consumerism has developed and the position it holds to the mass audience and consumer. I refer to Naomi Klein's book, *No Logo, 2000* for references on the subject matter.

I will make a reading of the 1950's advertisements, which are set in the period of post World War II America. Here I will reveal the optimism and upsurge of the age of consumerism, revealing the boom of commercialism and the profound socio-economic affect of paramount position of consumerism in the social community of the USA. The advertisements will render the golden age of plentiful products and plentiful buyers whom are enjoying the results of a national pride in the successes of the war, the reunification of family members and new unions of marriage and family life, the joys and the not visually depicted fears of isolation within the newly wealthy society. The coffee and cigarette advertisements depict a fearless victor of war, experiencing the boon of new commodification of every day lifestyle, in which happiness is perceived in the union of marriage and domestic satisfaction. I will then explore some of the possible symbolization in the 1950's advertisements and compare the conjurings of such in a comparison to the ancient cave paintings at Altamira, Spain and Lascaux, France.

I will then give a definition of Appropriation Art, which production in the 1980's involved the appropriation of mass culture images, specifically advertisements, as well as quotation of art objects as well as banal imagery, and discuss the symbolization of the elements of those newly declared works and their advertising sources. Within the genre of Appropriation Art, I will classify works and discuss their semiotic nature. The symbolism of the Richard Prince work series *Cowboys* in particular heavily weighted in symbolism of American societies and the realities and perceived realities, will be discussed. Bringing into my discussion I site the works of Richard Prince and Jeff Koons, and mention other artists of the genre such as Barbara Kruger, and Sherrie Levine as well as the predating artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. I will relate the adaptation of advertisement and specific copyrighted photography, in the legal term of *fair use in parody* and observe the case of *Rogers v. Koons*. I will speculate the relation of the works of Jeff Koons and Richard Prince, with excerpts from the 1986 interview of Jeff Koons by Klaus Ottman. I will follow with a symbolic reading of the Richard Hamilton collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*.

I then will relay the career of James Rosenquist and his many works in which the investigation of collage is utilized and of which many found images, or advertisements are appropriated. James Rosenquist, who was once employed as a billboard painter, continually quoted advertisements, borrowing the phrasing of such advertisements, whilst creating compositions, which had distinct new meaning, or may be viewed in another way from the hedonism of consumerism. Rosenquist may be an example of an artist which depicted the center stage in which consumerism had taken in the wake of the post World War II era in the USA. I will discuss the methodology of James Rosenquist to reveal that the artist used the language of the advertisement, in turn quoted those phrases in his works to create new existing works, such as the *President Elect, 1960-61/1964*. The phrasing results in a directional difference of rendition in comparison to other

Pop artists works that evolved quite separately but in parallel during the 1960's, such as the works of Andy Warhol, specifically I will compare the work of James Rosenquist titled *Marilyn Monroe I, 1962*, to the work of Andy Warhol titled *Orange Marilyn, 1964*. I will further discuss the sentiments symbolized by the elements of the Rosenquist montage, composed from fragmented and cropped source advertisements, and the relation it has to the viewer as a member of a mass culturally affected society.

I will then discuss the works of the artist Jeff Koons and his inspiration derived from the subject of the trite and common object, and so titled series, *Banality*. The artist, utilizing self commodification as well as commodification of his former spouse Ilona Staller, a.k.a. Cicciolina creates a billboard in his Made In Heaven series, which shows a profound influence of a media saturated era. I will then speak of the symbolization of the commodification of the human as well as the semiotics of celebrity on the subject of the works from the series *Equilibrium*. The notion of plurality of commodity is touched upon in my discussion of the series titled *the New*. I will discuss many series of the artist works from his very first, *the Inflatables* to the latter series such as *Easyfun, Easyfun – Ethereal* and *Celebration*, which were highly inspired by and compared to the works of the artist James Rosenquist. As the artist Jeff Koons bases his body of works in primarily sculpture, we will observe that the object of which Koons appropriates is the commodified object. I will show that his 3-dimensional works act as advertisement and his oil paintings directly quotes advertisement in the style of Appropriation Art such as that of artist Richard Prince, with his presentation of his series *Equilibrium*, and *Luxury and Degradation*. I call forward these examples of the works of the artist Jeff Koons to show the intrinsic semiotics of the advertisements quoted, and in turn another observation of societal perspectives by the viewer. I will show the neutralization of the human subject in the *Easyfun – Ethereal* series work titled *Lips, 2000*, showing the sensuality of the montage of advertisement images, with semiotic indication of fantasy, and sexuality.

In conclusion I will discuss the elements, which I find in common with the artists mentioned, taking advantage of the fragmentational and transient nature of the imagery of advertisement and found images. I will conclusively find that the semiotic nature of the advertisement is worthy of appropriation in the realm of art, and has been so for some time, dating back to the eras mentioned with the genres of Pop Art, and Appropriation Art, which are so mentioned in the following chapters, resting that my own works may be categorized as one of such genres and finding that my methodology may have some common investments such as these artists which I have looked to for inspiration and appreciation.

### Arise of Consumerism in Post World War II America

Is the flood of images from mass culture replacing the ancient language of code and symbol? Perhaps it may appear so as mass culture has proven to be driven by consumerism, setting the youth fervently on a quest to acquire as much as can be had. If we ponder the modern rise of consumerism in the United States, we can put it in direct correlation to the end of the Second World War. We may look at the political climate during the Second World War and note that radio was a rather important tool to broadcast propaganda. Al Gore speaks of Walter Lippmann suggesting that democracy adopt the techniques of propoganda, coining the phrase *the manufacture of consent*<sup>1</sup>.

With this so called 'manufacture of consent' there was created a one way broadcast system, which was used to dispense information, cause hysteria and fear and then offer a solution to the cause of fear. It both presented the threat to one's lifestyle, one's liberty and then offered a political solution with the desired politician, party, etc. Before World War II in response to national economic depression, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt used radio to communicate over the heads of newspaper editors and other intermediaries to bring about a dramatic shift in the boundary between democracy and capitalism

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<sup>1</sup> *The Assault On Reason, The Politics of Wealth* by Al Gore, page 96.



when he built public support for the New Deal agenda.<sup>2</sup> The rise of radio and then later television increased the use of this concept of *the manufacture of consent*.

In the years prior to the two world wars, mass media in the form of the press was used in a manner that has been both self – reflective of the people, mirroring the specter of societal culture, as well as a vehicle of control, presenting banalities and trivial information that lulls the masses in to passivity. Among those who were inclined to believe that a mass culture was a sign of a weakening culture, reaping a harvest of mediocrity, with the rise of consumption of anti – information, which serves to pacify rather than inspire greatness, was Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup>

Mass culture, moving abreast with mass consumption, is criticized by Theodor W. Adorno in that he notes that mass listening, although instating equality amongst the individuals of the masses by delivering into ones living room the opportunity to experience and appreciate symphonic music, that it indeed serves to spread false information, a false perception of the symphony, not indeed the *auratic* experience of being present in the music hall and actually experiencing it. This along with the evident alienation of the individual whom finds themselves in isolation of the music appreciating community, which would attend a symphonic concert, defines the passivity and falseness by which the masses had been so deceived by their newfound so – called equality.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States during World War II, advertising was directed to women. Naturally most adult males of appropriate age would have been enlisted men. The lifestyle suggested by the advertiser would have been one of conservation

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<sup>2</sup> *The Assault On Reason, The Politics of Wealth* by Al Gore, page 96-97.

<sup>3</sup> *Illuminations, Nietzsche's Critique of Mass Culture* by Douglas Kellner.  
<http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell22.htm>

<sup>4</sup> *The Dialectical Imagination, A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950, Aesthetic Theory and the Critique of Mass Culture* by Martin Jay, page 192.

and economy. However upon the end of the war, the soldiers returned, took up new homes, started families, purchased the goods that were not available during the war, creating business and employment for the masses and generating a broad prosperity. The economy experienced a wealth, as well as there being a relative wealth of the people. The advertising strategists made bold and enthused claims, assuring well being and respectability. The economy of the U.S. found security in the rise of consumerism. In turn big business sought to continue the rise of consumption and saw the importance of the advertising tool.

It is recorded that spending was instrumental in proving the superiority of democracy over Soviet socialism, which was the concern of the post World War II era at the onslaught of the Cold War:

*THE COLD WAR: BEATING COMMUNISM BY SHOPPING. By the late 1940s, the Cold War—a decades-long period of political tension between the United States and the former Soviet Union that began just after World War II and ended in the early 1990s—was well underway. To contrast the U.S. open market system with Soviet socialism—under which private ownership was generally disallowed—U.S. politicians argued that widespread ownership of more possessions would create greater social equality, thereby proving the superiority of the market system. Consumerism, therefore, acted as a function of the drive to defeat communism.<sup>5</sup>*

One can see how the main concepts of the advertising agencies were to make the individual more dependent on the consumption of products. That the advertiser must denote the lacking of significance one will be deemed without the desired product. The advertiser must demonstrate the consumer's inferiority without the so desired product. This would ensure a never-ending cycle of consumption and waste, creating a society of lost souls who will not feel good

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<sup>5</sup> *The American Consumer – The Rise Of The Consumer Culture.* The Library Index. <http://www.libraryindex.com/pages/1305/American-Consumer-RISE-CONSUMER-CULTURE.html>

enough ever, that is to say without the new season of products. Those products began as mere necessities, the likes of Hoover vacuum cleaners and soap powder, then carried on to the superfluous items that were not only unnecessary, but also unhealthy, from luxury cars to Marlboro cigarettes. To assure that the economy would prosper from this rise in prominence of consumerism, the advertiser sought to see no end to the spending cycle.

## Symbolism and Code

The role of symbolism has been prominent through the ages. When we may observe the use of symbol in architecture or other works of art we may note that the relevance of the symbol moves in parallel with historicity and not together in conjunction. We may be able to study the utilization of symbols in for example, a monastery, we would note the features of its existence such as:

*(a) the beauty of the whole; (b) the constructional technique; (c) its period-styling, bearing in mind the geographical and historical implications; (d) the implicit or explicit cultural and religious values, etc.; and also (x) the symbolic meaning of the forms.*<sup>6</sup>

This list of noted evaluation therefore separates the features unto which may experience the monastery, in observances that the historical elements of period style and structural techniques are notated in differentiation to symbolism of the forms.

Considering that the occurrence of symbolism is on the plane of reality, although it is absent from the plane of existence is supported by the imploring of the question; *'How could a legend be kept alive and perpetuated if each generation had not "intimate reasons" for believing in it?'*<sup>7</sup> Since symbolism cannot actually be on the level of the material we may summate that the reality of it occurred in

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<sup>6</sup> *A Dictionary of Symbols, Introduction, Actuality of the symbol*, page xiii, by J.E. Cirlot.

<sup>7</sup> *A Dictionary of Symbols, Introduction, Actuality of the symbol*, page xiii, by J.E. Cirlot.

every day life of ancient man. Mythology and spirituality was studied broadly and the attention paid to these is comparable to that in the present that we pay to the sciences and technology.

The definition of *symbol*, being: *something used for or regarded as representing something else; a material object representing something, often immaterial; emblem token, sign.*<sup>8</sup>, brings forth the concept of object of art or works of art as it defines the act of representation. We may observe that an advertisement has a specific purpose, the promotion of the sale of a certain product, which may include existing images of the product and/or representation of the possible buyer of the product, seen in a favorable light in lieu of the purchase of the product, however what is actually the immaterial is the emotive processes inspired by the subliminally loaded comprehensive advertisement. Certainly there is the danger of our general summation that everything is the representation of something else, however the transcendent nature of symbolism has paved the path between the material and immaterial, for the objectified to the spiritual.

Just as it was so the case that the general public were illiterate in the Middle Ages, there appeared the emblem of the cobbler, blacksmith, or haberdasher in form of relatively the shoe, horseshoe or hat, we may approach the present times with some *literacy* unto which to *read* advertisement and other media culture. It is uncertain whether wall paintings which date back to as early as 4000 BCE., are actually advertisements of some sort. It is certain that historically the sign and emblem have been defined as symbol or visa versa. Therefore symbolism has existed from the very beginnings of outlet of advertisement.

As we approach the definition of code: a system used for brevity or secrecy of communication, in which arbitrarily chosen words, letters, or symbols are assigned definite meanings.<sup>9</sup>, we may note that there is a systematic delineation

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<sup>8</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, page 1926.

<sup>9</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, page 397.

of words, letters and symbols which is adopted. Certainly this may be identified as the one of the prime activities of the advertiser, which uses the symbol to express a code, if in a somewhat secretive manner, subliminally. Facts of the attributes are enlisted with convincing messages, that touch on the regret one is to have in the future if not for purchase of the product, of the fortune destined for the customer who does purchase the product, etc. From several perspectives there comes into being a psychologically loaded campaign to procure brand loyalty, imagery is paramount in the campaign as well, which present depictions of the happy customer, blessed with domestic bliss, and a life in order, or perhaps the dissatisfied customer, playing on fears and threat of social alienation.

### H.R. Pufnstuf and McDonaldland

One sees the successes of the advertiser with the popularity of the McDonalds chain. It is not only a tasty and affordable meal but it promises happiness, with its *Happy Meal*. It becomes apparent to the advertiser and corporation that the key objective is to direct its message to the youth of society. With the carnival if not circus-like characters that in early days were so significant to the promotion of the *McDonalds* products such as *Ronald McDonald*. The creators of *H.R. Pufnstuf*, Sid and Marty Crofft conceived *McDonaldland*, in the year 1971.

*H.R. Pufnstuf* was aired on television in 1969 to 1970. Many, as a pro-marijuana use series and a psychedelic children's show, described it. A plot summary for *H.R. Pufnstuf* reads as follows; *a young boy named Jimmy has in his possession a magic flute named Freddie that can talk and play tunes on its own. One day he gets on a magic talking boat that promises to take him on an adventure. The boat happens to belong to a wicked witch named Witchiepoo, who uses the boat to kidnap Jimmy and take him to her home base on Living Island, where she hopes to steal Freddie for her own selfish needs. Fortunately Jimmy is rescued by the island's mayor, a six-foot dragon named H.R.*

*Pufnstuf*. After Jimmy is rescued by Pufnstuf and his two deputies, Kling and Klang, his adventures begin as well as his attempts to get back home.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of anthropomorphization of the flute called Freddie and the boat is shown in *H.R. Pufnstuf* prior to its use in *McDonaldland*. *McDonaldland* itself as depicted in commercials, was a magical place where plants, foods and inanimate objects were living, speaking characters. In addition to being the home of *Ronald McDonald* and the other core characters, *McDonaldland* boasted *Thick Shake Volcanoes* anthropomorphized *Apple Pie Trees*, *The Hamburger Patch* (where McDonalds hamburgers grew out of the ground like cabbages), *Filet-O-Fish Lake* and many other fanciful features based around various McDonalds menus items. In the commercials, the various beings were played by puppets or costumed performers, very similar to those used in the very popular *H.R. Pufnstuf* program.<sup>11</sup> In one striking similarity to *H.R. Pufnstuf* there is the presence of the character *Mayor McCheese*, the role of a mayor first shown with the actual *H.R. Pufnstuf* himself, the six-foot dragon, which is played by an actor in a costume. After the Kroffts were dismissed upon the success of the *McDonaldland* advertising campaign, the Kroffts filed a lawsuit against McDonalds in 1973. The lawsuit based its argument on the fact that the *McDonaldland* concept was strongly based on the one of the original children's program *H.R. Pufnstuf*.

Both *McDonaldland* commercials and the program *H.R. Pufnstuf* had strong elements of Surrealism and Pop art. Surrealism is defined as:

*a style of art and literature developed principally in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stressing the subconscious or non-rational significance of imagery arrived at by automatism or the exploitation of chance effects, unexpected juxtapositions, etc.*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> IMDb, *The Internet Movie Database*, *H.R. Pufnstuf*, plot summary by Brian Washington. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0063907/plotsummary>

<sup>11</sup> *McDonaldland* – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McDonaldland>

<sup>12</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, page 1916.

The premise of the Surrealist Movement of 1924, as defined by André Breton, was to implore to the unconscious, utilizing unconscious accretions to facilitate the emancipation of expression. Indeed the result of the amassing of elements did not lead to a foreseeable end. André Breton and his colleagues sought to include those whom had interest, to their Bureau for Surrealist Research, those whom dared to become inclusive under the canon created by Breton and his colleagues, of the Surrealism Movement. Although it proved to be exclusive of those who claimed that the poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), known for his body of work titled *Alcools, 1913*<sup>13</sup> was the original creator, such as Ivan Goll, who believed that Surrealism began in a poetic and literary movement, predating some fifteen years before André Breton's authorship of *The Surrealist Manifesto, 1924*, André Breton declared within the publication of *The Surrealist Manifesto, 1924*, an active defense of the rights of imagination, the liberty of the imagination, however bordering on madness it may endeavor. Breton strongly denounced the adaptation of intellectualization and moralization to the escapades of the surrealist. Rendition of dream – scapes was highly regarded as opposed to theorization of existence.<sup>14</sup> Thus the concerns of the child – like imagination would be superlative in the realm of André Breton's Surrealism. One may look upon the Breton – esque Surrealist as likening to the shamans, their premise being to embrace the extremes of the unconscious thought, to pressing their excavation of unconsciousness to the point of perceived insanity. For the shaman, the flight into insanity is the magical experience from which it is essential to return from, whereas for the Surrealist, it is the source of reference from which works are produced.

The Kroffts used elements of unexpected juxtaposition as they give verve to inanimate objects such as the hamburgers in *The Hamburger Patch*. The anthropomorphization of the sandwiches, seem to be the calling of subconscious

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<sup>13</sup> *Guillaume Apollinaire; Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.*

<sup>14</sup> *History of the Surrealist Movement, Chapter 2, 1924-1929*, by Gérard Durozoi, translated by Alison Anderson.

significance of the objects. The amalgamation of a colorful panorama filled with fantastic objects talking and walking is highly rousing for children as an audience.

The appearance of costumed performers has been essential in children's entertainment, such as the circus yet is equally important to performance art. Popular culture has recently experienced a rise of costumed performers in for example music videos of the 1990's and stage performance of musicians such as Beck and Sean Lennon. Conceivably these musical artists were inspired by the bear suited man on the average city corner handing out advertisements about a certain establishment, or our roots in ritual and magic such as that of the Upper Paleolithic period in which figures appeared with animal heads or masks which represent the *means to give expression to the relation with the supernatural*.<sup>15</sup>

There is the suggestion of elevated power of the individual whom can synthesize the features of the animal. Perhaps even the Fluxus artist and her works, mother of Sean Lennon, Yoko Ono. One must not over look the film work of a performance titled *Sleeper* from the Turner Prize winner of 2007, Mark Wallinger, in which Wallinger himself is filmed over ten nights, while wandering around in a Berlin art gallery in a bear suit. For the artist, the piece is about espionage as well as the view of symbols of one certain culture from that of someone from another culture. Another notion was that the bear was a symbol of the city of Berlin.

In reaction to the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition of his vanguard collage titled *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, created in 1956, Richard Hamilton defines the characteristics of Pop Art, being:

*Popular (designed for a mass audience)*

*Transient (short term solution)*

*Expendable (easily forgotten)*

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<sup>15</sup> *Masks of Black Africa* by Ladislav Segy; Gideon page 44.



*Low Cost*

*Mass Produced*

*Young (aimed at Youth)*

*Witty*

*Sexy*

*Gimmicky*

*Glamorous*

*Big Business*<sup>16</sup>

We can pick out of Hamilton's list certain aspects that apply to *McDonaldland*. Naturally since it was designed for and marketed to children, we cannot say that it is *sexy* or *glamorous*. However we can say the other qualities apply. In addition to hiring Sid and Marty Crofft, the creators of a fantastically popular show, they initially enlisted Willard Scott, who is famed for another popular children's character called *Bozo the Clown*. The *Bozo the Clown* program, which aired on television from 1959 till 1962, was the most popular children's program of its time. Certainly there was no risk in hiring this team as they were proven to have mass appeal to the youth of the United States, creating *big business* for the corporation of McDonalds.

The definition of Pop Art from Webster's Dictionary:

*An art movement that began in the U.S. in the 1950's and reached its peak of activity in the 1960's, chose as its subject matter the anonymous, everyday, standardized, and banal iconography in American life, as comic strips, billboards, commercial products, and celebrity images, and dealt with them typically in such forms as outsized commercially smooth paintings, mechanically reproduced silkscreens, large-scale facsimilies, and soft sculptures.*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Pop Art: A Continuing History* by Marco Livingstone; *The Foundations of Pop, Just What Is It?* Quoting the written words of Richard Hamilton.

<sup>17</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, page 1504.

This definition is seemingly descriptive of the exclusively American Pop Art works and not accrediting the works of artist Richard Hamilton, born in 1922 in London, England who is recognized as having made the first recognized iconic Pop Art collage, *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, which although exclusively appropriates magazine clipping of American publications, also omitting the media of collage. It is specifically ascribing to the works of Claes Oldenberg, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, and Roy Lichtenstein, mentioning the appropriation of comic strips, celebrity images, commercial products etc. Certainly we may conclude that the semiotics of the banal imagery links with symbolization of American lifestyle.

Looking to the symbolism of the clown, which has root in the divination in the Tarot of *the Fool* I quote J.E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*:

*The figure on the Tarot card is dressed in a costume of many colours denoting the multiple or incoherent influences to which he is subject. The red colour tends to orange, indicating – and this is unequivocal – the colour of the essential fire within him. He carries a bag at the end of his staff, this being symbolic of the mind and its burden. A white lynx is shown in the act of biting his left calf (left being the unconscious side), signifying what remains of his lucidity – that is, his remorse. But this does not deter him, rather does it urge him onward towards the background where may be seen an overturned obelisk – a solar symbol and also symbolic of the Logos – and a crocodile about to devour what must be returned to chaos. There is nothing definite to suggest that the Fool cannot be saved: on the contrary, his predicament, as we have described it, is balanced by the presence of a small, purple-coloured tulip (expressive of active spirituality) and a gold belt adorned with twelve plaques alluding to the Zodiac. This Tarot enigma corresponds, in short to the irrational, the active instinct capable of sublimation, but relaxed at the same time to blind impulse and the unconscious. ...Further, the Fool and the clown, as Fraser has pointed out, play the part of 'scapegoats' in the ritual sacrifice of humans.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> *A Dictionary of Symbols* by J.E. Cirlot, pages 110, 111. Cirlot further addresses the symbolism of the jester or clown in a submission under the title of *Abnormality* (*A Dictionary of Symbols* by J.E. Cirlot, pages 1, 2), which describes the belief of possession of supernatural powers by

We may apply this jester role to the figure of *Ronald McDonald*, whose prime purpose is perhaps sublimation to children of a product that has become widely considered unhealthful. It is considerable whether *Ronald McDonald* appears as this madman who is unwarrantedly enthused about peddling product, which cannot deliver good news.

### The Chapman Family Collection, Revisiting McDonaldland

The McDonalds characters have been inspiration to creators of Political Art and Pop Art such as Ron English and Jake and Dinos Chapman. A series of works by Jake and Dinos Chapman titled *Works From The Chapman Family Collection*, 2002 was full of references to the McDonalds characters. In this collection are sculptures of wood, crafted as sort of faux ethnological art objects, all featuring the golden arches of McDonalds, the portrayal of *Ronald McDonald* and various other characters such as *the Hamburglar*. In one sculpture the *Hamburglar* is portrayed crucified as the iconic Christian symbol of sacrifice of Jesus Christ is shown on the cross, a very powerful image showing the intensity of the insurgence of a fast-food chain over spirituality or perhaps making light of spirituality itself. This image surely appeals to our senses, the presentation of such symbolism as it has done with images of the crucified Jesus Christ. Is this sculpture made with the intention of diminishing the message of the Christian sectors or suggesting that organized religion is absurd?

Jake and Dinos Chapman are British artists who worked as a part of the Young British Artists (YBA's) whose main patron is Charles Saatchi. They attended the Royal Collage of Art in London, England. They had famously bought the 80 etchings printed in 1937 of Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* then drew a

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maimed creatures and madmen, stating as example shamans. This theory applied to not only living beings but went further on to objects crafted for magical purposes, such as amulets of a four fingered or six fingered hand or possession also for magical purposes of abnormal growth of plants, grains and seeds. The magical power applied consequentially to the jester (considered a maimed individual) as the sacrificial victim.

decision to, in their own words *rectify* them. They went through all 30 prints and changed the heads of the victims to clown and puppy heads and then titled the final work *Insult to Injury, 2003*. The Chapman Brothers who purchased the second edition prints for £25 000 have claimed they sold the reworked etchings to a Japanese collector at six times the price they paid, which would be £150 000. Their continued obsession on the works of Goya has been an inspiration for many of their sculptures, etchings and prints.

In the book published of plates of the works, Suhail Malik submits an essay titled *Elements Towards A Socio-Psychological Theory Of Fascism*, published in 2002, Malik quotes Sigmund Freud from *Totem and Taboo, 1913*;

*One of the most widespread magical procedures for injuring an enemy is by making an effigy of him from any convenient material. Whether the effigy resembles him is of little account: any object can be 'made into' an effigy of him. Whatever is then done to the effigy, the same thing happens to the detested original; whatever part of the former's body is damaged, the same part of the latter's becomes diseased.*<sup>19</sup>

Can we conclude that the intention of Jake and Dinos Chapman was to create effigies with these sculptures of the so-called enemy, McDonalds, to cripple its capital worth? It is clear that McDonalds has proven to be the enemy of the people by crafting advertising campaigns that made the product irresistible to most common adults and children, while destroying their health. While *Works From The Chapman Family Collection* is classified as Political Art it can also be slated in the Pop Art category as well, with its use of the brash likenesses of the McDonalds characters. In the reality of the McDonalds characters in form of African wood sculptures, we can say that the Chapman Brothers want to conjure the magic of a voodoo doll or an idol. The every day idol becomes the feared object. In the spirit of a kind of joy we are addressed with the hidden danger that the sculptures symbolize.

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<sup>19</sup> *Works From The Chapman Family Collection; Elements Towards A Socio-Psychological Theory of Fascism* by Suhail Malik; *Totem and Taboo* by Sigmund Freud, page 5.

We can classify the characters and *McDonaldland* as well executed commercial art if not actually Pop Art. Certainly this was a common case of commercial art following Pop Art, or entertainment to be exact. However there is palpably inspired Pop Art works based on these works crafted of the commercial art realm.

Returning to the plight of Sid and Marty Crofft, finally in 1977 McDonalds was ordered to pay the Croffts \$1 million in damages.<sup>20</sup> Other characters remained afterward however the concept and appearance of the original *McDonaldland* was withdrawn. The *Happy Meal Gang* and the *McNugget Buddies* were additions made to the characters in the 1980's, however in 2007 under growing pressure to offer nutritious alternatives to combat the rise of obesity, McDonalds decided to discontinue all marketing to children under the age of twelve.<sup>21</sup> It has taken the 2004 release of the poignant documentary by Morgan Spurlock called *Super Size Me* to unnerve the magnetism of the fast food chain and send a wake up call to the nutritionally ignorant Americans who frequent the McDonalds restaurants. Sadly it is the poor that are the most avid consumers of McDonalds products, it is the poor, young and uneducated that are employed by McDonalds. Perhaps for the moment the happiness can be fulfilled with the consumption of the *Happy Meal* but the long-term promise of happiness will inevitably fail as seen in the documentary *Super Size Me*.

### Ron English, Culture Jammers and Political Art

Ron English approaches the subject of obesity from the consumption of meals from the McDonalds menu. Paintings of Ron English were appropriately featured in the film *Super Size Me*. A recent work *MC Supersized* is photographed in a

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<sup>20</sup> *McDonaldland*, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

<sup>21</sup> *McDonaldland*, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

group of several of the sculptures of an obese *Ronald McDonald*, all grinning ecstatically, the expression could be compared to that of a Chinese Buddha. There is something contradictory about the Buddha-like smile and the actuality of the overweight *Ronald McDonald*. Like Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Works From The Chapman Family Collection*, the sculptures are conceived in protest of the demise of the McDonalds customer. Yet the cheerfully depicted face of *Ronald McDonald* has very much of the original appeal of the prior McDonalds representations of the character. In an interview for *Swindle magazine*, Ron English's daughter Zephyr replies to the question posed by her father on whether *Ronald McDonald* is her favorite clown. Zephyr's answer was *He's kind of creepy*.<sup>22</sup> This brings into question what *Ronald McDonald* actually represents to the masses. Is he a symbol of naïve joyfulness or does he become ominous with the reality of big business's exploitation of children to sell product?

Ron English is who frequently uses advertising images is known for the act of *liberating* commercial billboards, usually choosing advertisements of McDonalds or the cartoon mascot of Camel cigarettes, *Joe Camel*. The *Joe Camel* billboard is a variety, which is particularly disconcerting. It is apparent that there is a great yet deliberate blunder made when using a cartoon character to market cancer causing and highly addictive tobacco products. It cannot possibly be to appeal to adults. The reckless demand of the *Joe Camel* billboard is to call upon the youth, which after hooked will remain buyers of the product for their entire lives, which will inevitably become in danger of being unnaturally shortened. Ron English alters, or as it is put, *liberates* these billboards by showing the true destiny of the gullible customer of Camel cigarettes. He reveals the underlying lack of care that a massive corporation such as R.J. Reynolds for the welfare of the masses. They are only essential as to be duped; in fact English reveals that R.J. Reynolds will steal the lives of our children for the mighty dollar.

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<sup>22</sup> *Swindle Magazine*; *Sons of POP: Ron English* by Ron English.  
<http://swindlemagazine.com/issue12/ron-english/>

In Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, 2000, the focus of chapter 12 is *Culture Jamming*. Depicted are the images of *The Ballyhoo*, Depression-era ad jammers who manipulated and altered billboards of cigarette advertisements along side Ron English's so called *liberated* billboards of also cigarette advertisements. What Naomi Klein suggests with interviews of other artists such as Rodriguez de Gerada is that the Culture Jammer opens the media dialog. It can no longer be a one-way system unto which we accept information that we are perhaps not interested in receiving. Culture Jamming becomes a way to take back public space and inform the advertiser that the public will not be subjected to the enforced consumerism that the advertising billboard implies.<sup>23</sup>

### 1950's Advertising and Post War Optimism

There have traditionally been appalling cigarette advertisement such as those which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1950's. Several ads feature exclusively women who are smoking. It appears the objective is to sell tobacco with sex or to court an unconquered group of consumers, namely women. Another ad yet even more perturbing shows a mother embracing an infant with a pack of Phillip Morris cigarettes on the table in the background, the slogan proclaims of its product; *Born gentle*.<sup>24</sup> Is it possible that the advertiser is borrowing the subject of the Madonna and Child icons?

In a similar advertisement in *Life* magazine in which appears five celebrated athletes of the day, 1949 for Chesterfield cigarettes, the text reads;

*"The Top Men in America's Sports tell you WHY every smoker should smoke Chesterfield."*

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<sup>23</sup> *No Logo, Culture Jamming* by Naomi Klein, page 280.

<sup>24</sup> '50's American Magazine Ads 3: *Variety, Phillip Morris advertisement; The Saturday Evening Post*.

The list of athletes includes Joe DiMaggio, the baseball player and husband briefly of Marilyn Monroe, also Jack Kramer; tennis player, Ben Hogan; golf player, Lou Boudreau; baseball player, Frankie Albert; quarterback in the NFL, American Football. There is some irony in the endorsement of athletes for a tobacco product. The public, about the health risks of smoking cigarettes and using tobacco products, knew so little. It is obviously a priority to the advertiser that the pack of Chesterfield's be placed along side of the images of the athletes. This advertisement is clearly appealing to men.

Naturally for the addicted the moment of taking a cigarette can be quite pleasurable, and in each ad the possibility of pleasure is rendered. The indication in each ad is that of wholesome pleasure, however we have the information on the Public Health sector and can note that the connection of lung cancer to cigarette smoking was established in the 1940's and the Surgeon General's response to this information was delayed into the 1950's. To the general public smoking cigarettes was still an innocent indulgence. One may look at these advertisements and appreciate the symbolism used, pleasure, happiness, wholesomeness, sexual conquest, masculinity, conjugal fulfillment are all suggested here.

The *Saturday Evening Post* carries an ad from the Pan-American Coffee Bureau in 1950 with illustrations of domestic bliss, an out of frame wife is preparing coffee, the featured image is of the delighted husband holding his fishing rod in the rain on a camping site. On the adjacent page an out of frame husband is preparing coffee in the kitchen and the featured image is that of the youthful and freshly awoken wife in her bed, who is then seen in a smaller image floating down the steps, entranced by the fragrance of the brewing coffee. The text reads;



*Isn't it wonderful to awaken to coffees tingling, tantalizing aroma? Beautiful, warm, appetizing pictures flash through your mind - and the new day is suddenly brighter - more worthwhile!*<sup>25</sup>

The artwork is definitely placed in the realm of illustration. The smiling faces are noteworthy indication of the social climate in post war United States. It speaks to the members of the union of marriage and not the lone woman or community of women left to hold down the fort at home during the war. The text brings to mind an expansion of fantasy, creativity and prosperity. The products, coffees from various parts of the world, open opportunities of fulfillment and the actual beverage itself is seen steaming away, its essence wafting upon the air.

In the book by E. H. Gombrich titled *The Story Of Art, 1950*, the author describes the cave paintings of bison found in a cave in Altamira, Spain as well as cave paintings of animals found in a cave in Lascaux, France. Gombrich considers that hunters, with the intention of depicting the beasts so that they may surmount them in the hunt, made the cave paintings. He senses that the hunters were conjuring magic with these images for the manipulation of the subject. It is possible that the advertiser is working the same kind of magic when depicting domestic bliss and suggesting all is achievable with a whiff of this universally embraced product, coffee.

The powerful tool of advertising, television has presented us with these beyond effective commercials. Our one response to show our lack of approval of the programming of television is that we may turn it off. Television like radio is a one-way media that does not interchange ideas. It does not hear the voiced disapproval or the expression of exasperation at the fact of how out of touch the programming has become. Television and advertising through careful research dictate to the youth, the most vital consumer. They will even pass down the tendency of using certain products to future generations. Having such success

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<sup>25</sup> '50's American Magazine Ads 3: *Variety, Pan-American Coffee advertisement; The Saturday Evening Post.*

with the constant imbibing of products, with the massive success of consumerism and magnified effect on the economies of the developed nations of the world, it is worth the research to keep the cycle going.

## Appropriation Art

Appropriation Art is a movement that broadly expresses the works of many artists from seemingly polarized genres. It is defined:

*Strictly speaking, this strategy involves the direct duplication, copying or incorporation of an image (painting, photograph, etc.) from an identified source by an artist who represents it in a different context, thus completely altering its meaning and questioning notions of originality and authenticity. In the 80s, however, appropriation came to include the reinterpretation of images from fine art or mass media sources, and often the combining of various images derived from various sources.<sup>26</sup>*

With this definition, we may come to understand that Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917, the urinal famously signed R.Mutt, and most definitely a found object, which is also categorized as a *readymade* may be delineated under the genre of Appropriation Art as well as Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q*, 1919, which the title phonetically sounds like the phrase, "Elle a chaud au cul." , translated into English as "She has heat in the ass."<sup>27</sup>, utilizes a found object; *objet trouvé*, a postcard reproduction of the Leonardo da Vinci painting, the *Mona Lisa*, 1503-1506, upon which he drew a beard and mustache, as well as Cubist works, which included some newspaper clippings, of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. And so on, the artists who use any type of found object, or *quoted* any prior art works such as the *Mona Lisa*, or in the case of Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Insult to Injury*, 2003, the actual rare prints of Goya's *Disasters of War*, 1810-1820 were

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<sup>26</sup> Collections of the Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, Styles and Movements. [http://www.niagara.edu/CAM/special/Art\\_of\\_80s/Styles/appropriation.html](http://www.niagara.edu/CAM/special/Art_of_80s/Styles/appropriation.html)

<sup>27</sup> Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, L.H.O.O.Q; as "there is fire down below" (in fact the term "avoir chaud au cul" is slang used in the sense of "to be horny").

appropriated, Appropriation Art has been executed by so many known artists, from Dadaists<sup>28</sup> to Surrealists to Fluxus.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1980's Appropriation Art held another significance and was the movement which included a number of artists, including Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine and Gretchen Bender, with the attentions of the artists making a shift to mass cultural quotation, however the prior decades of the 70's, 60's, and 50's also proved to emphasize the influence of mass culture and its appropriation with artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and Claes Oldenburg.

There is continued controversy about the laws of copyright and the possible infringements of copyright owners with the act of appropriation. The artists Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, who created a series of 32 prints of the Campbell soup can, specifically the works *Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962* and *Brillo Boxes, 1964*, and Jeff Koons have been implicated in lawsuits for infringing on copyright owners for:

1. *A creates a unique collage that includes a copyrighted photograph taken by B.*
2. *A creates a limited edition series of prints that incorporates B's copyrighted photograph.*
3. *A constructs several identical sculptural works based on B's copyrighted photograph or comic book character.*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, *dada*, page 502; the style and techniques of a group of artists, writers, etc., of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who exploited accidental and incongruous effects in their work and who programmatically challenged the established canons of art, thought, morality, etc.

<sup>29</sup> Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; Fluxus—a name taken from a Latin word meaning "to flow"—is an international network of artists, composers and designers noted for blending different artistic media and disciplines in the 1960s. They have been active in Neo-Dada noise music and visual art as well as literature, urban planning, architecture, and design. Fluxus is often described as *intermedia*, a term coined by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins in a famous 1966 essay.

<sup>30</sup> Cultural Policy, University of Chicago, *The Arts and Humanities in Public Life*, by William M. Landes, <http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf1999/landes.html>

In the particular case of *Rogers v. Koons*, artist Jeff Koons is accused of hiring porcelain sculptors to produce three dimensional sculptures based on the popular photo, reproduced in postcard, of photographer Art Rogers, specifically the work *String of Puppies, 1988* is the sculpture in question.

Richard Prince, who proved to be an influence on artists such as Jeff Koons, who worked in the tear sheet room of the Time Magazine, and began to collect photos from the magazines and other newspapers such as the New York Times, of which he *rephotographed*, of subjects such as the Marlboro men; *Cowboys*, of the Marlboro cigarette advertisements, or the *Untitled couples, 1977*. These works may have been a significant influence on the works of Jeff Koons such as *Equilibrium* and *Luxury and Degradation* series, which I will discuss further below.

It is to be said that the intention of Appropriation Art is to borrow or use the existing images, real and found objects, and paintings to create yet another perspective of the objects, images, etc. from the existing one in their original purpose. In this perspective, the new found status of the object or works appropriated renders its usage in the new work as fair, fair use by parody, as perhaps the object may or may not have been considered originally an object of art, as in for example the urinal of *Fountain, 1917* as opposed to the use of the existing Goya prints of *Disasters of War, 1810-1820*, which were appropriated for the work *Insult to Injury, 2003* by the Chapman Brothers.

However in the case of *Rogers v. Koons*, the judge ruled against the artist Jeff Koons and this respect of the usage for the creation of art was not upheld. We may consider Koons appropriation of the original Art Rogers photograph as an act of piracy yet we may see that the semiotic relevance of the original photo by Art Rogers may have served to make it an intrinsic factor in the representation of

the theme of *Banality*, being as its is such prescribing to actual banality<sup>31</sup>. We may come to feel possession of the commonly presented images and in fact appropriate in our own expression as I quote Koons and Klaus Ottman:

*Ottmann How do you see advertisement?*

*Koons: It's basically the medium that defines people's perceptions of the world, of life itself, how to interact with others. The media defines reality. Just yesterday we met some friends. We were celebrating and I said to them: "Here's to good friends!" It was like living in an ad. It was wonderful, a wonderful moment. We were right there living in the reality of our media.*<sup>32</sup>

In this case we may say that life occurs before art or media instruments such as advertising but is the reality the advertisement or the advertisement the reality?

Predating the *Rogers vs. Koons* case, which took place in 1992, Koons is asked by Ottman to describe the differences between the work of Richard Prince and himself.

*Ottmann: What are the differences between your work and say someone like Richard Prince who rephotographs advertisement and media images?*

*Koons: Richard and I have been friends for many years. His work is more involved in the appropriation aspect, the aspect of theft, while my work comes from the history of the ready-made, which for me is position of optimism. Whether I'm casting my Jim Beam decanter or creating a painting from a liquor ad, I receive all the legal rights from everybody — a very optimistic situation.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, page 162; *banal*: devoid of freshness or originality; hackneyed; trite.

<sup>32</sup> *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Jeff Koons, by Klaus Ottman, 1986. <http://www.jca-online.com/koons.html>

Koons speaks of the slogan in form of a song or jingle, of several Löwenbräu beer television and radio advertisements, which opening lyric is 'Here's to good friends'.

<sup>33</sup> *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Jeff Koons, by Klaus Ottman, 1986. <http://www.jca-online.com/koons.html>

Since there is some comparison between the readymade and the appropriated, we will notice that indeed the readymade involves appropriation. In a copyright litigation blog by the author of Copyright Litigation Handbook, attorney Ray Dowd says about Richard Prince's works the following:

*Prince likened his taking of others' photographs to sampling someone else's 8-track tape, he could manipulate his "8-track photographs" in the following way:*

1. *the original copy*
2. *the rephotographed copy*
3. *the angled copy*
4. *the cropped copy*
5. *the focused copy*
6. *the out-of-focus copy*
7. *the black-and-white copy*
8. *the color copy*

*Prince's show is interesting, disturbing, and challenging. In Nancy Spector's catalog essay, she likens Prince's acts to the act of Marcel Duchamps submitting a urinal as part of an art show (Duchamps called this "readymade") - and this act is widely considered with opening up and introducing the art of the 20th century. Is Prince a Warholian or Duchampian genius - or a fraud? If auction prices, income, and museum shows are a measure - Prince is a genius of the highest order. He certainly has his critics, though.<sup>34</sup>*

We may examine the semiotics of the Marlboro Man advertisements and note how these symbolizations are highlighted, by the Appropriation Art of Richard Prince. They invoke a stereotypical Americanism, the cowboy gear, boots and

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<sup>34</sup> *Copyright Litigation Blog*, by Ray Dowd. <http://copyrightlitigation.blogspot.com/2007/12/richard-prince-practicing-without.html>

hats, the ruggedness. This is what we perceive to be an Americanism and yet the completely orchestrated scenarios photographed ring false and so alluding to the confusion of how life is perceived in America, a perceived reality in America, which is overrun by consumerism, and commodification of Americanism. It may appear that the *Cowboys* of Richard Prince may be more laden with semiotics than the *Fountain* of Marcel Duchamp.

## Symbolism Reading

Returning to the Richard Hamilton collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, the first celebrated icon of Pop Art, we may note that amongst the appearance of the nearly nude couple, there are the cut out images of a *Tootsie Pop* lollipop and a ham. The *Tootsie Pop* seems to appear with sexual innuendo but it is less obvious what the symbolism of the ham is. Upon finding a ham advertisement from '50's *America Magazine Ads 3: Variety*, in which two festively wrapped hams are rendered, there is some possibility that the hams could present some indication of the traditional Tarot card divinations for the Ace of Wands of *Case*:

*Energy, strength, enterprise, principle, beginning Crowley: Root of the powers of fire. Blind, solar, phallic fire; Mathers: Birth, commencement, beginning, origin, source. Persecution, pursuit, violence, vexation, cruelty, tyranny.*<sup>35</sup>

In the advertisement again is shown the ideal home during the Christmas holiday, the wrapped and tied hams shown in the manner of a swaddled infant, perhaps it is fitting to compare them to a swaddled infant Christ. Could the appearance of the ham in the Hamilton work symbolize the product of the union of the couple or the birth of the Savior? The collage that unifies an apparently random group of clippings can suggest many things. There is some indication of meaning in the emergence of each clipping.

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<sup>35</sup> *Dictionary of the Tarot* by Bill Butler, page 40.

## James Rosenquist and Found Images

I refer now to the collection of critical essays titled *About Modern Art* by David Sylvester, in particular a preface to the catalog of *James Rosenquist; an Exhibition of Paintings, 1961-1973* at the Mayor Gallery, London from 3 December 1974 to 18 January 1975. David Sylvester suggests that James Rosenquist in his former career of billboard painter that he was an elusive performance artist, as he executed his work in public, for e.g. in Times Square. To quote David Sylvester:

*Rosenquist's art is public in that its formal elements are largely derived from the brashness of commercial art, public in that its iconographic elements are generally taken over from the imagery of conspicuous mass-consumption and its attendant communal fantasies; in sensibility, it is beautifully private. It doesn't make its meaning plain, doesn't strike resounding chords of easily nameable feeling.*<sup>36</sup>

In my opinion or attempt to interpret the works of James Rosenquist I would say that his works are of spacious possibilities and sentiments. He grasps the symbols that are modern and consumer age and separates them from an actual product. He harnesses only the feelings of liberation, energy, happiness, handiness, comfort, insecurity, ineffectiveness, etc. that the commercial art represent. This association of images and sentiments borders on Surrealism as they are works of montage that group an assortment of images, utilizing *the exploitation of chance effects, the unexpected juxtapositions.*<sup>37</sup>

In receipt of a scholarship to the Art Students League, a young Rosenquist arrives in New York in September 1955. He must find work to finance his living expenses so he takes on a variety of work such as, as a chauffeur and

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<sup>36</sup> *About Modern Art* by David Sylvester, 1974, *Rosenquist; Untitled preface to the catalogue of James Rosenquist: an Exhibition of Paintings, 1961 – 1973*, page 234; at the Mayor Gallery, London from 3 December 1974 to 18 January 1975.

<sup>37</sup> *Surrealism*, *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* page 1916.



bartending. He then joins the sign painter's union and began working as a billboard painter in New York in 1957. He faced challenges of having to paint images of celebrated people such as Gregory Peck, which required that the face must be recognizable from a great distance. Although the painter himself was working directly against the surface, and could not afford the luxury of standing back to view the overall composition of the face, a likeness must be achieved. Rosenquist learned the technique of fellow billboard painters of using a grid so the sections of the grid would be rendered in units and maintain correct proportions.

Rosenquist worked principally from collage. His studio floor was strewn with pages of magazines and advertisements. He had a relatively short experience with the field of non-objective art. With works such as *Stairway, 1958* and *Untitled 1958-59* which he refers to as *excavations*, Rosenquist uses billboard enamel with oil, creating a cross-hatching effect that barely suggests a subject. They are perhaps his only abstract works. However it was his objective works, based on collage that would be his signature works. The roots of use of collage date back to Cubism in the works of artists such as Georges Braque. One of Rosenquist's first collages, *Untitled 1957, Unidentified clippings on magazine clipping* uses a clipping of faux-bois which may have been ascribed to use by Georges Braque of wood-grain wallpaper.

In collage Rosenquist has often used photos of celebrities from magazines. However his objective was to portray the celebrity unidentifiable. In their use as well as the images of advertisement products such as that of the Swans Down Devil's Food Cake in *President Elect 1960-61/1964* his premise was to neutralize the subjects. On the subject of collage, Rosenquist:

*... started cropping images and reconstructing them in unusual ways "I thought, how can I do a new kind of picture?" he says. "I thought, If I can take a fragment of something realistic, and put the fragment in space at a certain size, I could make a painting where*

*people would recognize something at a certain speed. The largest fragment would be the closest, and the hardest to recognize. Therefore, I could make a mysterious painting.*<sup>38</sup>

To quote Rosenquist from his comments on a 1964 Surrealist exposition in Paris, Rosenquist says,

*“...they hauled out every Surrealist thing they had. But the scale was really cabinet-size. It was very intimate. All of the paintings were like looking through an aperture, out of a window. And I felt completely the opposite of that. I wanted my paintings to spill out the front of the canvas in this very impersonal way.”*<sup>39</sup>

The use of clippings and photomontage most definitely harks back to the Dadaists, most certainly showing the roots of Pop Art in the Dadaist movement.

The evolution of Rosenquist's work seemed quite independent of the America's growing Pop scene. Rosenquist accredited the influence of artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg of his work. From as early as 1948 collages from Eduardo Paolozzi's *Meet the People* appeared, then later in 1956 works like Hamilton's collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, other British artists such as R.B. Kitaj, David Hockney appropriated images from American magazines. Also French and German artists as Yves Klein who made kitsch sculptures, Sigmar Polke's with his collage-like paintings, and the painting which utilized photo references of Gerhard Richter.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *James Rosenquist, A Retrospective, Connoisseur of the Inexplicable* by Walter Hopps, page 6; quoted the words of James Rosenquist.

<sup>39</sup> *James Rosenquist, A Retrospective, Connoisseur of the Inexplicable* by Walter Hopps, page 6; quoted the words of James Rosenquist.

<sup>40</sup> *Pop Art: A Continuing History; The Foundations of Pop, Just What Is It?* by Marco Livinstone.

## Rosenquist vs American Pop Art Scene

Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg dominated the Pop Art scene in the United States. They were using iconic images of *Dick Tracy*, *Superman*,<sup>41</sup> *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck*<sup>42</sup> and household items such as an Underwood typewriter, a candlestick telephone and a refrigerator<sup>43</sup>. Lichtenstein in particular painted Benday dots and incorporated comic strips graphic techniques.

An exhibition at Bellamy's Green Gallery in February 1962 gave Rosenquist prominence amongst the Pop artists in the USA. With the works which featured images of actresses Marilyn Monroe and Joan Crawford as well as consumer products such as paper clips, peaches<sup>44</sup> and cars. In a show in November of 1962 at the Sidney Janis Gallery titled *New Realists*, Rosenquist's *I Love You with My Ford, 1961* and *Marilyn Monroe I, 1962* hung, along side the works of Warhol and other assemblage artists, New Image artists and Pop artists from the USA and Europe. Although his work was presented along side that of Andy Warhol there are some differences that make evident how Rosenquist surpassed the fixed compositions of Pop art. For e.g. in his work *Marilyn Monroe I, 1962* it becomes evident his use of fragmentation of the face, hands and legs in collage is his formula for a certain period of work. Indeed the largest image in the montage is that of the face of Marilyn Monroe, which appears inverted. The face is intercepted by the lettering of the name Marilyn and on the painting's left is an image of Monroe's hand. The montage is effective as the face that appears on the right, upside down is presented in a neutral manner, the hysteria of Marilyn Monroe's popularity is not translated in this image. The cropping of the photo

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<sup>41</sup> Andy Warhol rendered images of *Dick Tracy*, *Superman* and *Sam Ketchum* as well as products from newspaper advertisements.

<sup>42</sup> Lichtenstein began with expressionist genre paintings of Walt Disney's cartoon characters *Mickey Mouse* and *Donald Duck*.

<sup>43</sup> These are the objects used by Andy Warhol in photo reference from advertisements.

<sup>44</sup> The peaches appear in the painting *Lanai, 1964* along with a car, a nude poised over a swimming pool and a pencil end.

sources creates an extreme effect. It is indeed as Rosenquist describes imagery *spilling out* of the canvas. Where as Andy Warhol's *Shot Orange Marilyn, 1964* shows a Pop Art formula of a solid background color with the single object of Marilyn Monroe, rendered in solid colors, the silk-screened image suggesting some dimension but leaving the face to retain flatness.

The painting *President Elect, 1960-61/64* comprises of three panel whose subjects have originally rendered in collage. Cropped clippings of the U.S.A. presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy from a black and white campaign poster, an advertisement for *Swans Down Devil's Food Cake Mix* reproduced in *Life* magazine of hands breaking a moist portion of the devil's food cake and an advertisement for *New Chevrolet for '49*. The montage of the completely unrelated objects does not directly reveal its meaning. However, here we have the first elected American president who employed the tool of mass media; the painting is interpreted by the artist as being about "*a man advertising himself*"<sup>45</sup> Experimenting with color, Rosenquist painted the left panel with the cropped image of John F. Kennedy in full color whilst his photo reference was black and white. In the center panel, which depicts the devil's food cake, the opposite is done with Rosenquist using a full color photo reference and then rendering it in grisaille. The use of *New Chevrolet for '49* advertisement is unusual as it represented a dated model of a car. The center panel intersects the three panels with a spectrum of color. There is a solid block of red under the back end of the Chevrolet.

The interpretations of *President Elect, 1960-61/1964* could be that the extreme publicity caused by the emergence of mass media could objectify these products in a sort of abstract way. The elements are again surreal and Rosenquist works with juxtaposition of Kennedy, the cake and car. The blocks of red as the spectrum of color at the center panel seem to illustrate the space of the

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<sup>45</sup> *James Rosenquist, A Retrospective, Collage and the Painting of Modern Life* by Julia Blaut, page 29 ; Rosenquist, quoted in Goldman, *James Rosenquist: The Early Pictures 1961-1964*, p.101

subconscious. The painting is possibly of a political topic, a U.S. president elect *advertising himself*, yet the impersonal manner in which these objects are presented may be causal to a certain peace that is resultant of the dispersal of the focus of the three objects. The use of the dated *New Chevrolet for '49* could be an act to mute the appeal of this nascent political hero that is John F. Kennedy.

## Rosenquist and Advertising

*I Love You with My Ford, 1961* Rosenquist employs his interest in the compositional fragmentation. He creates three distinct scenarios divided horizontally on two panels. The center scenario is of an embracing couple, which most of the woman's profile is seen. The top scenario is that of the grill of the Ford automobile. Both of these scenarios are painted in grisaille. The center scenario conforms to a Rosenquist formula of closely cropping body parts, therefore showing the face and head of the couple in closer detail. However it does not cause us to not make recognition of the faces as what they are. The bottom scenario is of spaghetti in sauce. When the artist was asked why he so often returned to the subject of spaghetti he is quoted to say; "*Two reasons: I like the way it looks, and I like the way it tastes.*"<sup>46</sup>

There was a certain randomness in the way that some paintings were composed such as *I Love You with My Ford, 1961* as the close-up of the spaghetti seemingly appears for no other reason except that the artist is fond of spaghetti. The spaghetti like the cake in *President Elect, 1960-61/1964* are used in a rather surrealist manner, yet they conjure such primordial responses such as hunger, satisfaction, comfort. The use of cars as subject of collage and photo reference also conjures feelings of masculinity, luxury, decadence and pleasure. On the subjects of celebrated individuals Rosenquist questions the intention of the

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<sup>46</sup> James Rosenquist, *A Retrospective, Connoisseur of the Inexplicable* by Walter Hopps, page 9; quoted the words of James Rosenquist.

individuals, who subjects themselves to constant media attention. Rosenquist finds this curious and presents these images as undefined paradoxes.

It is clear that the advertisers wanted to appeal to our senses and these primordial responses, yet artists like Rosenquist, Warhol and Lichtenstein have appropriated the advertising image to communicate a different message, perhaps a thought collage, especially with the constant juxtapositions in composition of Rosenquist. In reference to the advertisements used in collage and painting Rosenquist said *“I wasn’t glorifying popular imagery”, “I didn’t love this imagery.”*<sup>47</sup> However Rosenquist’s understanding of the powerful tools of mass media and commercial advertisement is thorough. He is quoted to have said:

*“I geared myself, like an advertiser...to this visual inflation - in commercial advertising which is one of the foundations of our society. I’m living in it, and it has such impact and excitement in its means of imagery. Painting is probably more exciting than advertising – so why shouldn’t it be done with that power and gusto, with that impact”, “My metaphor ...is my relations to the power of commercial advertising which is in turn related to our free society...are caustic to one another.”*<sup>48</sup>

In the collage for *4-1949 Guys, 1962* there appears the clipping from the two page Chesterfield’s cigarettes which ran in the May 2, 1949 *Life* magazine. Here is the representation on the advertisement of a product which use has proven to be a health risk, which is quite apparent by 1962. The faces are painted out and remain with both sides of the face intact. There are still the tools of the athletic trade positioned in the frames of each figure. However, in the four-scenario painting, which is divided in equal rectangles, the heads are cropped to one half and the identity of the athletes is obscured by an overlapping or insert of other images. On the top left a cigarette is held in the hand of the baseball player Lou

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<sup>47</sup> James Rosenquist, *A Retrospective, Collage and the Painting of Modern Life* by Julia Blaut, page 31; Rosenquist quoted in Peter Schjeldahl, *An Interview with James Rosenquist*, conversation with the author, April 19, 2002.

<sup>48</sup> James Rosenquist, *A Retrospective, Collage and the Painting of Modern Life* by Julia Blaut, page 31; James Rosenquist quoted in Swenson, *What is Pop Art? Part II* page 63.

Boudreau, his face is obscured by an insert that is unidentifiable. Boudreau is set against a solid red background. On the right of that image is an ice cream cone rendered in grisaille and undulating yellows. The lower left scenario shows another athlete's head cropped more extremely by a larger insert of the double barrel of a gun, this is rendered completely in grisaille. On the lower right the rectangle is divided in unequal sections, depicting literally the edge of two faces, the minor fragment shows a hand upon which the heads leans, rendered completely in grisaille, the major fragment features an ear almost at the center of the rectangle. The figure is painted in full color and the background is green. The advertisement elements of the work are completely rendered powerless as the faces of the sports heroes are spliced. The use of the images of an ice cream cone and double barrel gun formulate an equation that is incoherent.

It is possible that the fragmentation, the claustrophobic cropping of the images serves to repeal the power of the advertiser. To return to David Sylvester's quote from *About Modern Art* on Rosenquist;

*Rosenquist's art is public in that its formal elements are largely derived from the brashest kinds of commercial art, public in that its iconographic elements are generally taken over from the imagery of conspicuous mass-consumption and its attendant communal fantasies; in sensibility, it is beautifully private. It doesn't make its meaning plain, doesn't strike resounding chords of easily nameable feeling<sup>49</sup>*

It is evident that the objective of Rosenquist was to invoke the unspecified feeling, his works with the literal clashing of advertisements, the claustrophobic attention to detail. I assume that it was Rosenquist's intention to gather the power of these sources and create an agitation of another kind of significance.

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<sup>49</sup> *About Modern Art, Americans* by David Sylvester, 1974, page 234, Rosenquist; *Untitled preface to the catalogue of James Rosenquist: an Exhibition of Paintings, 1961 – 1973*; at the Mayor Gallery, London from 3 December 1974 to 18 January 1975.

## Postmodern and Jeff Koons

At this point we turn our attention to Jeff Koons with his works and series from 1979 till 2001, culminating in the offset of the oil paintings from *Celebration*, *Easyfun* and *Easyfun-Ethereal*. Jeff Koons initially received recognition for his works in the mid -1980's. He drew inspiration from an age of media saturation. He has said that with his work he wants to create a support system for people to feel good about themselves and has conceived his works with the idea of communicating to the masses. Jeff Koons worked as a commodities broker to support his art career. He fashioned the public persona of Jeff Koons by hiring an image consultant, which ran full-page advertisements in international art magazines, which featured photographs of Koons, surrounded by the trappings of success.<sup>50</sup> The advertisements were published in 1988-1989, which the artist categorized with his *Banality* series, were featured in *Art*, *Flash Art*, *Art in America* and *Artforum* magazines. The latter *Artforum* advertisement was featured in a clipping of a collage by American artist Adrian Piper. Adrian Piper, a Conceptual artist, would also be considered a Modernist artist as she rose in prominence in the aftermath of the Feminist and Black Power Movements. She is an early Conceptual artist who brought forth the considerations of identity based on race and gender. Piper is also the first tenured African American, female professor of philosophy, having received a B.A. from City College of New York and a Ph.D. from Harvard University.

The advertisements placed in the various art magazines actually show Koons surrounded by subordinates and projects an image of white, masculine supremacy, according to some critics.<sup>51</sup> We may conclude that with the insurgence of feminist and female art and gay art, anti-racist and non-white artists, that Koons amongst other white male artists, wants to assert the power of

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<sup>50</sup> Jeff Koons, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff\\_Koons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Koons)

<sup>51</sup> *Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Postmodern* by Laura Cottingham. <http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt1999/09/maseng.html>



the white male in the competitive spectrum of artists and their works. The political activism in the movements of Woman's Liberation, Black Power and Gay Rights had reallocated the gamut of vehicles of the arts and so therefore challenged the premise of European aesthetics.<sup>52</sup>

He is shown with two pigs, in one the pig being the icon of the *Banality* series, in another he is surrounded by scantily clad women, who sit or stand below him whilst he looks out of the picture at the audience, making no engagement with the women. The last he is standing before a classroom full of children, the children again portrayed as subordinates are placed lower than Koons, on the chalkboard behind him is written, *Exploit The Masses, Banality As Saviour*. A curious philosophical concept of the artist presented to young children. It could be considered that Koons shared a fascination with Rosenquist and Warhol of the concept of celebrity, which he achieved by advertising himself, and speaking of himself in the third person.<sup>53</sup> Frequently seen dressed in a business suit, the facet of his persona, as commodities broker seems permanently affixed. It is often argued by critics that his presentation of himself does not escort a message or real concept, however he has explained that the media is intrinsic to his personal life and persona. He addresses himself and his personal life as a commodity, conceptually as he does with later works of series *Made In Heaven, 1989*, which we return to. It occurs that it is vital for Koons and others, to introduce himself in the manner as the Feminist, Black Power activist or Gay Rights activist would have done in the late 1960's to reclaim a position of supremacy and refocus on the European aesthetic in the 1980's, generating the Postmodern movement.

There is some speculation however of what exactly the Postmodern movement could actually be defined as, accept for an order in time unto which the culminate

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<sup>52</sup> *Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Post Modern* by Laura Cottingham. <http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt1999/09/maseng.html>

<sup>53</sup> Jeff Koons, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff\\_Koons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Koons)

culture surfaced after the movements formerly mentioned (being Feminist, Black Power, Gay, etc.) came to pass. It is said that the so-called Postmodern movement is signified by no marked style change, in the arts or otherwise. I am therefore referring to *Postmodern* as a term, which describes a movement unto which Koons has contributed, with his influences squarely planted in Eurocentric renaissance.<sup>54</sup>

### Readymades of Jeff Koons

In his early works such as *Inflatables*, he explores the prefecture of Marcel Duchamp by arranging *ready-mades* in the form of inflatable objects and toys such as the bunny in *Inflatable Flower and Bunny (Tall White, Pink Bunny)*, 1979 with other materials such as mirrors. Koons has often compared the bunny, which appears here and in future works, to the *Venus of Willendorf*. The *Venus of Willendorf* is housed at the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria and is calculated to have been made some time between 24 000 to 22 000 BCE.

Here is the introduction of Koons interest in children's objects. Then Koons follows in 1979-1980 with the series *the Preenew*, which features household appliances arranged in front of fluorescent lights, some with gels. Koons continues with the *ready-made* concept however there is a trace of consumerism and or commodification as they are objects that may be sold. With the following series titled *the New*, 1980-1987, Koons focuses on a series of Hoover vacuum cleaner models. Perhaps one of the series most outstanding works is *New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers*, 1980-1986, which comprises of three shampoo polishers mounted on to a Plexiglas case with encased fluorescent lights. With repetition of the object, the shampoo polisher and fluorescent light,

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<sup>54</sup> *Media Culture, Theory wars and cultural studies*, page 47, by Douglas Kellner. "Obviously, there are social and historical phenomena from which theorists derive concepts like postmodernity, or practices, artifacts, and artists in the field of culture from whom one derives the term 'postmodernism'. Yet which phenomena, practices, artifacts and so on are seen as 'postmodern' are themselves a function of the theoretical discourse which denominates some things as 'postmodern' and others not."

there is linear symmetry. The New series seals the union of Modernism and Consumerism as Jeff Koons' premise of communicating with the masses is achieved. Here we have the use of the product of the 1950's that saw the rise of consumerism in the USA in its post-war phase. Jeff Koons may easily be revisiting the assertion of James Rosenquist with his use of clippings of cars, especially from advertisements of new models of cars.

The vacuum cleaner, or shampoo polisher, becomes the symbol of newly found security, safety and domestic bliss. In *New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Blue, New Hoover Convertibles Green, Blue Doubledecker, 1981-1987*, there is a stacking of the vacuum cleaners in Plexiglas containers, layered with fluorescent lights. Along with these sculptures are poster and billboard advertisements of cigarettes, as seen in work *New 100's Merit Ultra-Lights, 1981*, in which the cigarette advertisement appears twice in two fluorescent light boxes, hinting at influences of Warhol, cars such as *New Roomy Toyota Camry, 1983* and alcoholic beverages such as the work titled *The New Club Smirnoff Bloody Mary, 1983*. The advertisements are *ready-made* as well as for their primary purpose, commercial advertisements. *The New* therefore appears to be conceived in celebration of consumerism, which bring to mind the questionable intention of communicating to the masses or to the elite.

The following series *Equilibrium* present framed oil prints of advertisements for Nike, with depiction of basketball heroes and bronze sculptures of sports gear, such as the bronze basketball, Aqualung and a life raft as well as the actual basketballs floating in distilled water in a flotation tank and another single basketball centered in a tank of sodium chloride reagent and distilled water titled *One Ball Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series), 1985*. The case with the Nike advertisements it has been suggested that the stardom of the sports hero is an achievement of fleeting eternally, defying mortality. The athlete, as some fashioned Olympian deity is the receiver of eternal life. In a 1986 interview with Klaus Ottman, Koons is quoted to say:

*The Nike ads were my great deceivers. The show was about equilibrium, and the ads defined personal and social equilibrium. There is also the deception of people acting as if they have accomplished their goals and they haven't: "Come on! Go for it! I have achieved equilibrium!" Equilibrium is unattainable, it can be sustained only for a moment. And here are these people in the role of saying, "Come on! I've done it! I'm a star! I'm Moses!" It's about artists using art for social mobility. Moses [Malone] is a symbol of the middle-class artist of our time who does the same act of deception, a front man: "I've done it! I'm a star!"<sup>55</sup>*

The theme of commodification is strongly present in works such as *Encased-Five Rows (6 Spalding Scottie Pippen Basketballs, 6 Spalding Shaq Attaq Basketballs, 6 Wilson Supershot Basketballs, 6 Wilson Supershot Basketballs, 6 Franklin 6034 Soccerballs)*, 1983-1993. All of the soccer and basketballs are in their original packages encased as the title described in glass and steel, likening to an athletic superstore display, the products are pluralized as in a Warhol piece, yet the representation of the physical items make a marked difference. It is the case that Marcel Duchamp was a significant influence to Koons for the works, which comprise *the New* and *Equilibrium*. However works such as these have come to influence later artists such as Damien Hirst.

The series *Luxury & Degradation*, 1986 feature oil inks on canvas prints of alcoholic beverage advertisements. In all of these there is the presence of leisure time, sexual conquest, excess, wealth or suggestion of wealth. However as we recounted in the writings of Naomi Klein and her interviews with the guerilla artist Rodriguez de Gerada in *No Logo, 2000*, the depiction of extravagance in those advertisements is often directed to poor communities as these communities more often receive advertisements of cigarettes and alcohol, which encapsulate the

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<sup>55</sup> *Journal of Contemporary Art*, Jeff Koons by Klaus Ottman, 1986. <http://www.jca-online.com/koons.html>

ideas of escape, exotic destinations and *superior* lifestyle. These advertisements therefore represent a false impression of a life in leisure.

The Luxury & Degradation works most resemble Koons' friends' work Richard Prince. Richard Prince took photographs of photographs, which in some way was stealing advertising images in contrast to Koons having obtained permission to use all images. Along side the advertisements of alcoholic beverages are truly trite objects of opulence, to be used or acquired by the consumption of alcohol such as a bar set or the *Jim Beam – J.B. Turner Train, 1986* all cast in stainless steel.

### Kitsch Koons

*Statuary, 1986* continues with the use of the material of stainless steel, producing a collection of sculptures done in varying styles such as the Koons' favored *Barococo* and souvenir kitsch. One of the sculptures is a caricature of the actor Bob Hope, titled *Bob Hope, 1986*, rendered in the way the street artists do caricatures of the streets of Paris or New York, with an exaggerated size head and dwarfing body. Also featured are the *Mermaid Troll, 1986* and *Cape Codder Troll, 1986* that can be described as audaciously hideous and shocking in this sumptuously immaculate stainless steel. In the *Journal of Contemporary Art* interview with Jeff Koons by Klaus Ottman, 1986 Koons is quoted:

*The basic story line is about art leaving the realm of the artist, when the artist loses control of the work. It's defined basically by two ends. One would be Louis XIV — that if you put art in the hands of an aristocracy or monarch, art will become reflective of ego and decorative — and on the other end of the scale would be Bob Hope — that if you give art to the masses, art will become reflective of mass ego and also decorative. The body of work is based around statuary representing different periods of Western European art. Each work in the show is coded to be more or less specific about art being used as a symbol or representation of a certain theme that takes place in art, such as *Doctor's Delight*, a symbol of sexuality in art; *Two Kids*, of morality in art; *Rabbit*, of*

*fantasy in art. Italian Woman would be a symbol of the artist going after beauty; Flowers would be art being used to show elegance and the strength of money; Louis XIV is power, a symbol of using art as an authoritarian means; Trolls, a symbol of mythology.*<sup>56</sup>

In *Banality, 1988* we observe a change in materials to porcelain or polychromed wood. The concept is that of kitsch and triviality. Stuffed animals and teddy bears materialize in the variety of that of amusement parks and recreational machines at arcades in which one uses a mechanical arm to grasp one of, cast in an extraordinary porcelain. Works such as *Bear and Policemen, 1988* exemplifies the rather commonplace sentiment of the British uniformed policemen with the signature helmet standing side by side with a figure of a man costumed as a bear. There is suggestion that Koons fascination with commodification was approaching a change in focus from the inanimate object towards living beings. The most famous sculpture of the *Banality* series is that of *Michael Jackson and Bubbles, 1988*.

In an article from the *Stanford Undergraduate Research Journal*, written by Susan Cameron, titled *Classical Modern Irreverence: Jeff Koons' Michael Jackson and Bubbles Recontextualized*, the author compares the positioning of Jackson to that of Dionysus from the East Parthenon as well as Praxiteles' *Hermes with Baby Dionysus, ca. 340BCE*. The *King of Pop* is associated with the *King of Theatre*, as both possess qualities of effeminacy. Described by Ms. Cameron as *vulgar*, denoting the latin definition of the word meaning *of the common people*,<sup>57</sup>. *Vulgar* is also defined as *lacking in distinction, aesthetic value, or charm, banal*.<sup>58</sup> Beyond life-sized and completed with the signature of the porcelain craftsman commissioned to do the work, the work brings to mind the strange entertainer and his oddly eccentric tastes. It touches on the

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<sup>56</sup> *Journal of Contemporary Art, Jeff Koons* by Klaus Ottman, 1986. <http://www.jca-online.com/koons.html>

<sup>57</sup> *Stanford Undergraduate Research Journal*, written by Susan Cameron, titled *Classical Modern Irreverence: Jeff Koons' Michael Jackson and Bubbles Recontextualized*, Jeanne Siegel. "Jeff Koons: Unachievable States of Being", *Arts Magazine* 60 1/2 (Oct 1986): 68.

<sup>58</sup> *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, page 2133.

possibility that Bubbles the chimpanzee is likely to have been Michael Jackson's most trusted companion. Michael Jackson is an enigma of the era, revealing facets of excessively ornate costume, flamboyance and inordinate lifestyle with his certain isolation as an individual. In works such as *Wishing Well*, 1988, the *Barococo* gilded wood frame and mirror reminds one of the typical ghetto furniture store that sold these kinds of frames made out of plastic, on credit with high interest. They were an investment in an illusion, such as the alcohol and cigarette advertisements. The use of materials as the polychromed wood, porcelain and stainless steel serve to redeem the intention of the object, however clearly something is amiss. Each object by design expresses an abbreviated sentiment, perhaps a shorthand doctrine to our communal securities. The unlikely appeal of these sculptures is the resurfacing of banality, the pick up of a common language of communication of something perhaps based on ritual or celebration. Returning to Laura Cottingham's *Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Postmodern*, it is suggested that the Biblical references in the *Banality*, 1988 series lead the way to his following series *Made in Heaven*, 1989. The works *Naked*, 1988, *Serpents*, 1988, *St. John the Baptist*, 1988 are cited in Ms. Cottingham's writings, which I quote:

*In the late 1980s, Koons shifted his interest in hypercommodification away from exclusively inanimate objects. A 1988 sculpture of two Caucasian children, naked, marked a turn that would inspire the artist's production for the next five years. Koons has described Naked as follows: "The young boy and young girl are like Adam and Eve, overly standing on a heart that's flowered."(6) The piece was first exhibited with twenty kitsch-inspired sculptures, including others with Biblical references such as serpents and John the Baptist Naked calls forth the Judian determination for female subjugation made cohesive in the Adam and Eve myth. In Genesis, the male preexists the female, and, in fact, the female is a parasite, created from the male rib. Genesis is also the primary Western text to establish the female as evil: Eve is the original heretic, liar, and sinner, and because of her disobedience all of her female deserve and will receive punishment. After Eve eats a piece of (forbidden) fruit, "God said to the woman, 'You shall bear children in intense pain and suffering; yet even so, you shall welcome your husband's*

affections, and he shall be your master' " (Genesis 3:16). Genesis assigns women/women responsibility for her oppression, designates her as heterosexual, dictates reproductive intercourse as normative sex, and names man as woman's rightful master. Koons's *Naked*, as a "faithful" illustration of Judaism and Christianity, depicts two Caucasian children genitally naked as male and female, as inscriptions of whiteness and heterosexuality. Me "sentimentality," of which Koons is conscious, is a fantasy of innocence romanticized according to the mythic prerequisites of Europatriarchy.<sup>59</sup>

### Bad Boy, Eurocentric, Hetero Koons

The *Made in Heaven*, 1989-1991 series is based on photo representations and sculptures in various materials of the artist, Jeff Koons and his first wife the pornographic actress and singer, Ilona Staller a.k.a. Cicciolina (which translates from Italian as *Cuddles*), in various sexual acts. They are placed on a set of a faux nature that is a representation of the Garden of Eden as Koons acts in the role of Adam and Staller acts in the role of Eve. In the *Made in Heaven* billboard, Koons and Staller are arranged in an embrace and Koons stares out at the audience from the billboard. Staller is costumed in a typical way for herself, a truly ingenious and kitsch representation of a sex siren. The signature garland of flowers is placed on her platinum blond head and Staller is wearing her trademark blood red lipstick on her broad mouth. Ilona Staller has worked for several years composing her persona prior to her union with Jeff Koons and is apparently a perfect muse for the artist, as she has been photographed surrounded by stuffed animals and flowers. Koons has described Cicciolina's overt sexuality and exhibitionism as virginal and pure. However Koons presents an image of the superiority of the union between man and woman and appears as the master of this woman, his wife she is placed in a minor position in the composition of the photograph titled *Made In Heaven*, 1989. What is suggested in these works is the further exploitation of Ilona Staller and her careers' work,

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<sup>59</sup> *Masculine Imperative: High Modern, Postmodern* by Laura Cottingham.  
<http://www.haussite.net/haus.0/SCRIPT/txt1999/09/maseng.html>



although Koons himself assumes the guise of a porno actor. *Made in Heaven* is a series of several glass, marble, plastic, polychromed wood sculptures and photographs, mostly of the couple in a sexual act, flowers also made of polychromed wood, such as *Wall Relief with Bird, 1991*, *Mound of Flowers, 1991* in glass and dogs such as the *Three Puppies, 1991* and *Yorkshire Terriers, 1991*.

After his failed marriage with Ilona Staller and the beginning of the now famous custody and abduction case of the single child the couple produced, Ludwig Maximilian Koons, Jeff Koons creates the living sculpture of fourteen thousand flowering plants on a frame of stainless steel, including an irrigation system called *Puppy, 1992*. The twelve-meter sculptures have been on permanent exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain since 1997 and the Brant Foundation in Greenwich, Connecticut, U.S.A. since 2002 as well as temporarily exhibited at Rockefeller Center, New York City, U.S.A. in 2001 and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia in 1995. The sculptures have proven to change form through the spring to summer seasons, slowly morphing into a less manicured profile as the flowers become overgrown and unruly. They are considered very joyful public art, especially in the setting of the Schloss Arolsen Palace in Hesse, Germany, which serves as a natural frame or doghouse for the optimistic *Puppy* figure.

### Childhood and Adulthood Celebrated, Reflections of Rosenquist on Jeff Koons

*Puppy* was a natural continuation from *Made in Heaven* as the subject arose parallel to the works based on the figures of Koons and Ilona Staller. It is evident that these works were inspired by the absence of his son, Ludwig, which also inspired many works to follow, including *Celebration* and *Easyfun – Ethereal*. Koons continues his enchantment with commodification in terms of the material power of sculptures, after a task of commodification of his personal life, his partner, and himself in the most ultimate manner imaginable, from for example

*Celebration* but explores new terrain with the introduction of paintings. Though he has insisted that his prior works such as *The New* and *Luxury & Degradation* featured paintings, with prints in oil inks on canvas.

The departure of *Easyfun – Ethereal* entails the collection of advertisements, found images, from the Koons himself who therefore made collages from his clippings in Photoshop (a technique that Rosenquist later applied) and then with the assemblage of several teams of assistants, the paintings were executed in large scale on canvas with oils. *Celebration* seemingly entirely dedicated to Ludwig and his absence featured the gifts and foods that are intrinsic of holiday festivities such as Christmas and birthdays. Some of the most iconic figures of the *Celebration* series are the sculptures titled *Balloon Dog, 1994-2000*. The chromium stainless steel sculptures are coated in transparent colors of blue, magenta, yellow orange and red stands at approximately three meters high. The *Balloon Dog* sculpture touches upon the excitement of a birthday party feature of the entertainer that makes animals twisted from long balloons, moments of complete bliss and freedom in childhood. The series can be considered a gift to a child of happy times, cherished times. Many of the oil paintings of objects in *Celebration* show the predecessor to several sculptures, which dominate the collection of *Celebration*.

For example *Hanging Heart, 1995-1998* which displays the object set before red iridescent wrapping paper matches the *Hanging Heart, 1994-2006* sculpture of chromium stainless steel with transparent coating in five versions and yellow brass. *Hanging Heart, 1994-2006* rivals *Balloon Dog, 1994-2000* for position of some of Koons' most iconic work. *Hanging Heart, 1994-2006 (Magenta and Gold)* was sold in a Sotheby's auction to Larry Gagosian of the Gagosian Gallery for a record amount for a living artist at 23.5 million US dollars in 14 November 2007. The sculpture of *Hanging Heart, 1994-2006* as well as the painting *Hanging Heart, 1995-1998* seemingly grew from the inspiration of a Christmas tree bauble.

Jeff Koons with the series *Easyfun – Ethereal* proves that he is not finished with the subject of commodification. As he has continually addressed his inspiration from the works of James Rosenquist, he takes a departure from the template that may be considered Rosenquists' manner. The composition in a painting such as *Lips, 2000* shows off his use of his *barococo*<sup>60</sup>, and lacey arrangement of disembodied objects. The flight of the splash of orange juice harks back to Koons' theme of *equilibrium*, a perfect unattainable balance in space. Koons himself has referred to the series as being involved with the spirit world. This can be the surreal departure of this work. The poised, lip-sticked mouths clutter a mountainous horizon renders the painting both sexually charged and innocuous, reaching a plethora of sensuality. Perhaps we can compare the splashing orange juice to other paintings as *Cut-Out, 1999* from the *Easyfun* series, which take on a spirit of optimism. These sculptures and paintings signify a come-back for Koons as *Made In Heaven* was highly criticized. Koons ventures to neuter the figure with the presence only of their bathing suits or lingerie, hair or hands. One could wonder how those garments might be filled or to what purpose one might set the hands. Critics considered that the works are perhaps farcical, as they seem devoid of meaning yet Koons has repeated that the works are a support system for the viewer to feel good about him or herself that the works are about optimism. Some suggest that they present the consumer world as it may appear in all its sensuality with the deficiency of the human being.

The series of paintings from *Celebration, 1995-1998*, *Easyfun, 1999-2000* and *Easyfun – Ethereal, 2001* are outstanding in the way that they were an ambitious endeavor of the artist, some paintings taking up to three years to complete, whilst Koons employed numbers of assistants to work long days to complete them all, as well as the production of the highly polished stainless steel sculptures of massive proportions. So was the attention paid to detail for Koons that the

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<sup>60</sup> Barococo; A hybrid of the words Baroque and Rococo. Originally coined by musicologist H.C. Robbins-Landon, used by Jeff Koons to describe the amalgamation of the two genres in art terms.

production continued on and on. Koons who had been primarily dedicated to the production of sculptures had taken on the media of painting with assured success.

In my own unique manner, which I feel is evolving in time as I explore the idea of the medium of paint, to open volumes of optimism and envelopment in sentiment, I seek to go about using found objects, magazine clippings, photos from books of perhaps banal images and celebrate their simplicity if not directness of communicating to us. I have described some of the artists and works that have inspired me in the process of doing my paintings and feel an affinity to their objective, of using the tools of our ages, which are powerful, and make my own phrase with them.

### Transient Pleasure.

The importance of using the found photograph is to refer to the moment of gratification that one may have upon viewing that object of desire that may fulfill a vacuum in humanity. The consumer is lured by subliminal imagery and as an artist I may communicate in sublimation. My interest in subjects could be described as all that is gratifying, although that might be in passing. Two elements, which are listed in Richard Hamilton's definition of Pop art is *Transient*<sup>61</sup> and *Expendable*<sup>62</sup>. With Jeff Koons *Equilibrium*, the artist has captured a moment, as though by snap shot of celebrity, physical fitness and skill. I have been interested in capturing that fleeting moment in which an object becomes an ultimate solution to all that is lacking in that given moment. Today's athlete is of particular interest because they have seemingly super human strength in that they serve as semi-deities to the people, there moments of triumph and outbursts of endorphins increasing their god-like powers, almost as though as in

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<sup>61</sup> *Pop Art: A Continuing History* by Marco Livingstone; *The Foundations of Pop, Just What Is It?* Quoting the written words of Richard Hamilton.

<sup>62</sup> *Pop Art: A Continuing History* by Marco Livingstone; *The Foundations of Pop, Just What Is It?* Quoting the written words of Richard Hamilton.

consultation with a higher deity. Their significance becomes beyond the normal as we watch them form or sedentary position, achieve all the things that we aspire to do, as individuals, as a nation, etc.

I will describe these moments as *Transient* and *Expendable* because they are not to be repeated in real life. Life in fact is a series of those types of moments whether perhaps produced artificially or organically. Perhaps I have arisen (as a child) from a culture in which the excitement I encountered from Sesame Street or possessing a new pair of shoes has replaced some of the very basic functions of earning gratification by hard work done, having achieved something or learned it on my own accord. These incidents have served in life to entertain and as adults we also indulge in these types of moments to occupy ourselves and to get hooked on to the world community of sameness, oneness. With this emotionalism encapsulated in an oeuvre, which inevitably is the commodity, all our deficiencies will disband. The idol, object of art, and painting employ paranormal power.

In the world of advertisement, the use of this kind of magic is indeed very ruthlessly used. Perhaps we cannot compare the strength of the image of *Ronald McDonald*, to that of the cave paintings in Lascaux, France, however we can convoke that these images might be considered fetish objects as the Lascaux cave paintings served to bring about a fruitful hunt and the *Ronald McDonald*, object or embodiment was the enchanter of children. To create these types of idols we may employ a combination of assets to which many elements ascribe and summate the unspeakable. Even in the realm of Anti-Art there is the aesthetic.

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