

DOUBTED LOVE:
The Tyranny of Pornography and Jeff Koons' *Made in Heaven* series

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1990, New York based artist Jeff Koons presented a body of related works under the poetically vague title “*Made in Heaven*” which presented sculptures and photographs of the artist and his then wife (former adult industry star Ilona Staller, known as La Cicciolina) in various moments and positions of passion. Colorful and glossy, pointedly referencing the stylistics and aesthetic conditions of Rococo painting and sculpture and undeniably explicit in the depictions of arousal, intercourse and the acrobatics of love-making, the series was generally, indeed, almost universally vilified. But what was strikingly overlooked was that the series constituted a carefully considered and calculated interrogation of questions surrounding representations of sexuality in the age of mass media. Through an analysis and contextualization of select *Made in Heaven* works, this paper explores the ways in which Koons dismantles cultural binaries in order to challenge and expand the limitations of erotic art.

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For you, Dad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vii
Preface.....	1
Introduction.....	4
I Heaven Couldn't Wait.....	10
II Heavenly Real or Simulated?.....	35
Conclusion.....	50
Bibliography.....	56
Appendix A.....	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Jeff Koons, *Made in Heaven* (1989), lithograph billboard. Image courtesy of the artist, page 62.

Figure 2. Jeff Koons, *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), oil inks on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist, page 63.

Figure 3. Jeff Koons, *Self-Portrait* (1991), marble. Image courtesy of the artist, page 64.

Figure 4. Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425), fresco, page 65.

Figure 5. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Fountain of Love* (1785), oil on canvas, page 66.

Figure 6. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Confession of Love* (1771), oil on canvas, page 67.

Figure 7. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-52), marble, page 68.

Figure 8. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Bust of Pope Gregory XV* (1621), marble, page 69.

PREFACE

At the age of 59 Jeff Koons may be at the pinnacle of his artistic career. Having opened his touring “Jeff Koons: A Retrospective” exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in June 2014 to great fanfare and having witnessed the sale of his *Balloon Dog (Orange)* (1994-2000) for 58.4 million dollars in November 2013 (the most money received by a living artist for a work sold at auction), Koons has achieved unprecedented fame and fortune in the contemporary art world.

Although Koons had his first retrospective in 2008 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the 2014 Whitney exhibition was his first major show in New York City. It was also the largest exhibition in the museum’s history as it occupied almost every available space in the building including the restaurant walls. The Whitney spared no expense in organizing and installing Koons’ work. Doors and transoms were removed and industrial cranes were used to install the heaviest pieces of work (for example, Koons’ 15,000 lb. granite *Gorilla* (2006-2012)) in locations specifically chosen by the artist. As one tour guide said, “Koons was given carte blanche and he used it”.¹

Promotion around this exhibition was endless and it acted as the centerpiece for other exhibitions around town including the artist’s monumental *Split Rocker* (2000) installed for the summer in Rockefeller Center and smaller shows at the Gagosian Gallery and other uptown locations. Concurrent with the

¹ “Jeff Koons: A Retrospective”, Tour, Jeff Koons: A Retrospective, from the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, August 19, 2014.

extensive publicity generated by the Whitney, Koons participated in a Vanity Fair magazine photo shoot in order to coincide with an article on the retrospective that included a two-page spread of himself au naturel doing pull-ups in his private gym. A few pages later the artist and his wife, Justine along with their six children are snuggled up in bed in the family's Pennsylvania farmhouse. Above, a bacchanalian Old Masters painting hangs. Over the summer of 2014, Manhattan was gripped with a Jeff Koons mania. Accordingly, the city became the artist's personal playground for the duration of the show.

And yet, within the wealth of visual information and curatorial mandate for a comprehensive presentation of work designed to attract and appeal to the viewer, there were anomalies. Memorably, Koons' chose to include some of the few pieces remaining (as he destroyed most of them after his divorce) from his highly controversial *Made in Heaven* series of photographs and sculptures. Stepping off the third floor elevator, visitors at the Whitney were immediately confronted with the artist's gigantic 10 ft. by 22 ft. *Made in Heaven* (1989) (Fig. 1) billboard. Depicting Koons and his then wife, Ilona Staller (the Hungarian-born former adult entertainer, known as La Cicciolina) in a moment of lovemaking bliss, the image uses the graphic design of Hollywood advertising. Organized visually as if a film still the image shows the actors/stars/artists' having sex. Koons smiles for the camera; his wife appears to be in the throes of passion initiated by the artist himself but also in recognition of the fact that the two are being photographed for public display. Her character as a paid adult entertainer

reasserts itself within the billboard image, as she is cloned to flawlessly mirror La Cicciolina's distinct public character, image and persona. The viewer is drawn in by the billboards sexually inferred explicitness. At the same time, the viewer almost immediately gets the feeling that this is all an act – which of course it may or may not be. In addition to this large piece and other photographs depicting the couple in various staged poses of a sexual nature like *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) (Fig. 2), the exhibition also featured two table-top sized marble sculptures – Koons' *Self-Portrait* (1991) (Fig. 3) – his first and arguably best work of this kind, and *Bourgeois Bust – Jeff and Ilona* (1991) that takes up where the billboard left off.

The *Made in Heaven* series stands out within the artist's oeuvre principally because they push the limits of social and cultural acceptability almost as much today as they did when they were first shown. Through the use of overt sexual content, Koons sets up a series of scenarios that have be regarded as walking a fine line between art and pornography. The controversial nature of this work is not solely in—what some might consider—its explicit content but also the way in which it draws on the conventions of art as a means of expressing physical intimacy between couples, while simultaneously transversing those boundaries. By merging elements of the art historical past with what might be called or deemed as the production techniques of mass media, he expands our understanding of what is possible and reveals the precarious nature of the relationship between fact and fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Long misunderstood and often ridiculed, representations of sexuality in art have nonetheless become a significant force in both contemporary culture and contemporary cultural production, largely because of their pervasive desensitization to sexually graphic images that the public is opposed to. Although the estranging and disturbing aspects of erotic art may disrupt and alienate, they also challenge and test the viewer. Through an analysis and contextualization of the aforementioned *Made in Heaven* series works: *Made in Heaven* (1989), *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) and *Self-Portrait* (1991), this paper explores the ways in which Koons dismantles cultural binaries in order to challenge the boundaries of sexual representation in cultural production. By combining cultural production with mass media techniques—two relatively autonomous realms—Koons presents us with new modes of representation in the genre of erotic art.

At first glance, the *Made in Heaven* works most closely resemble images found on the pages of an adult entertainment magazine. However, on further examination these same pieces contain subtle surprises and elicit involved questions such as: What factors cause these works to be classified as bona fide elements of cultural production rather than mere pornography? Are the photographs real, or simulated representations of sexual acts? Is this real love or fake love? What is the artist trying to communicate to the viewer? The means by which Koons investigates these questions and what the *Made in Heaven* series reveals about culture is at the core of this paper. By combining the seductive

large-scale industrial gloss production methods of manufactured intent with the ‘authentic’ real-life demonstrative romantic behaviors of Jeff Koons and Ilona Staller, the artist places his audience squarely in the midst of the complex world of human perception. Simply put, Koons’ work encourages viewers to question what they see and believe.

I came to the study of Jeff Koons with the idea that my thesis would investigate the notion of Koons as the quintessential ‘celebrity artist’. I thought that through him I would explore the notion of the artist’s ‘persona’. In particular, I was interested in how the role and identity of the artist has evolved into a realm of performativity within the contemporary art paradigm. Often referred to as a successor to Andy Warhol, the artist’s early work appears to illustrate this viewpoint culminating in spotless displays of factory-made objects, like his *The New* (1980) series shown at the New Museum in 1980. But Koons’ success is more than a temporal or even cultural fluke. What separates him from the contemporary artists’ pack is his “superstar effect”.² The press and public are as much fascinated with him as a person as with the art he produces. In her book, *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity*, Elizabeth Currid-Halkett discusses what constitutes artistic talent in the contemporary era, specifically addressing how ability and skill no longer offers us a validation of how good or bad an artist’s

² A term coined by Sherwin Rosen and quoted by Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 158.

work is, but how successful he/she is in establishing a public persona.³ Koons is the poster boy for celebrity art culture. He is a bad boy genius: influential and controversial precisely because of his unbridled self-publicity. However, unlike other artists, including Warhol, who have achieved what operates as star status, Koons gives the public more to consider and definitely much more to talk about. He is as popular with other art professionals as with the mainstream public because his work has substance, ever-challenging the limits of fabrication and culture both materially and conceptually. It is this blending of factors that makes Jeff Koons a ‘celebrity artist’ in the contemporary global art market.

However, in the course of my studies, my research gradually moved beyond the question of Koons’ celebrity status towards the work that launched him into his role as a ‘pop star’ – the *Made in Heaven* series. On closer examination, I discovered that these works raised complex issues and questions surrounding representations of sexuality in the age of mass media. More specifically, I was intrigued with the possibility of exploring the dialectic between what is considered to be the high and low, the sacred and profane, art and pornography, real and simulated. My concern is to develop a critical engagement with the ways in which Koons utilizes these cultural binaries in order to expand the limitations of erotic art. Although there were feminist debates⁴ centered on pornography in the 1980s and 1990s, I will not be discussing these perspectives in

³ Ibid, 155.

⁴ See Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989) and Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

this paper. I am interested in how the *Made in Heaven* series operates as art form of cultural production and not pornography.

Although critics, art historians, curators, galleries and museums have been collecting, studying and exhibiting much of Jeff Koons' artistic practice since the 1980s, there has not been a comprehensive investigation and/or analysis into his most debated work – the *Made in Heaven* series. As an investigation of the aesthetic dimensions and artistic credentials of these works, this interrogation makes no claim to be the first analysis of Koons' *Made in Heaven* series. However, it does seek to reframe the work on the establishments of new standards for cultural production, specifically in the genre of erotic art. Accordingly, critical strategies from art history, art theory, aesthetics, politics and cultural studies will be employed as rationales for an interdisciplinary approach. This interdisciplinary methodology will reflect to the ways in which the production and consumption of contemporary art inhabit the intersection of many different fields and disciplines.

In hindsight, Jeff Koons' indebtedness to the permissive relativistic conditions of what is called postmodernism seems obvious. At the time of making *Made in Heaven* series, there were ferocious arguments across North American society about morality and culture (the phrase culture wars was coined at the time) and many theorists see the period between 1985 and 1995 as pivotal in the shift from the hegemony and morality of the modernist movement to the altered standards and conditions of the postmodern. Furthermore, for many centuries, architecture, painting and sculpture were the three principal mediums in cultural

production. Today the situation is very different as our culture is dominated by the mass media and technological advancements. This altered social context in which cultural production operates is rooted in what John A. Walker discusses in his book, *Art in the Age of Mass Media* as three intersecting principles: 1) the industrial revolution, 2) the development of capitalist economic systems, and 3) the emergence of consumer society.⁵

While my analysis of Koons' *Made in Heaven* series is situated in the field of contemporary art history, I will also draw on theoretical frameworks from cultural theory studies to provide further understanding of how society actively impacts the modes of representation in cultural production. The cultural theory texts that I have chosen to discuss and examine through the lens of my analysis are Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* and Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". I have selected these readings because they play a key role in framing directions for theory in the influence of culture and the digital age on art.

Although Jeff Koons is well known for variety of reasons including: his artistic bravado, his overt salesmanship and his mirror-polished balloon dogs, what singles him out for scholarly attention is his ongoing ability to reconcile the seemingly incompatible in playful yet profound ways. With his roots in both Wall

⁵ John A. Walker, introduction to *Art in the Age of Mass Media*, (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 1.

Street and Warhol, his sources in classicism as well as in kitsch, his ability to transform low end everyday objects into high end art works using the latest production techniques, and his need to engage in an interplay between the simulation and reality, Koons is an essential figure for examining the trajectory cultural production in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Furthermore, even though Jeff Koons is considered to be a highly innovative and influential contemporary artist, his work has been underrepresented in academic research in terms of where it is situated in the genre of erotic art. This paper presents new insights in this regard and also argue that the *Made in Heaven* series is important, both as representative of the early postmodern period and also as seminal in opening the way to further explorations into sexuality and eroticism in contemporary art. The conclusions drawn from this analysis will help to determine where the *Made in Heaven* series is situated within the contemporary art field and how it challenges the limitations of sexual representation in cultural production today. Furthermore, this will contribute to the ongoing discourse around the role and function of representation in cultural production and contemporary art practices.

I HEAVEN COULDN'T WAIT

When first exhibited at the 1990 Venice Biennale, Jeff Koons' *Made in Heaven* series of paintings and sculptures claimed a complex, perceptually uneasy place in the world of postmodern art. The carefully staged scenarios were not easily ignored due to their direct character, containing an assortment of explicit sexual acts, including: ejaculation shots, oral sex and both vaginal and anal intercourse. The 'actors' in the works are a naked impeccably coiffed man (Jeff Koons) and a woman (Ilona Staller) often wearing a semi-transparent body suit, lace stockings, metallic heels and a floral headband. While Staller seems to be rapturously engaged with her lover, Koons seems more concerned with his audience as he turns a coy gaze outwards.

As explained by Jeff Koons, the *Made in Heaven* series was not about presenting love or sexualized fantasies or the performance of sexual acts. Rather the series was a celebration of his union to his then wife, Ilona Staller (the Hungarian-born former adult entertainment star, known as La Cicciolina) with the purpose of removing the guilt and shame that is often morally associated with sex.⁶ However, the explicit content and provocative titles of the works (such as: *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), *Fingers Between Legs* (1990), and *Dirty Ejaculation* (1991)) generated immediate controversy that overshadowed their complex dialogue with representation in the genre of erotic art, the parameters of

⁶ Historically, sex or sexuality has been determined by sexual ethics or sexual moralities, which are ethics that are concerned with issues surrounding human sexuality. These ethics are derived from society's theological and philosophical assumptions of what's wrong and right and is often associated with political and religious beliefs.

taste in cultural production and the ideological, theoretical and aesthetic sensibilities of the work itself. Explicably, Koons' *Made in Heaven* series remains the most debated work in his career.

. . .

The personas of “Jeff Koons” and “La Cicciolina” were already well established in their respective fields by 1989, allowing the images of the *Made in Heaven* series to arouse a wider audience and gain that much more media attention. Notably, the trajectory of their early careers contains many parallels.

In the early 1970s Staller met pornographer Riccardo Schicchi with whom she co-hosted the radio show Voulez-vous Coucher Avec Moi? (“Do you want to go to bed with me (tonight)?”) on Radio Luna, featuring live calls from listeners, asking questions about sexual matters. Here is where she initially acquired the name “La Cicciolina” (“little chubby one”), as she often referred to her male fan base as “cicciolini” (“little tubby boys”). Staller and Schicchi later co-founded Diva Futura, an adult entertainment video production company, where she appeared in her first adult entertainment film, Telefono Rosso (Red Telephone) in 1983. In 1987, she expanded her professional following when she won a seat in the Italian Parliament as a member of the Partito Radicale (Radical Party) (a bastion of liberalism) by polling over 20,000 votes.⁷ At the time, many people believed it was a cynical protest vote or another publicity stunt used by the

⁷ Sophie Inge, Italian of the Week, “I’m a Courageous and Free-thinking Woman”, in *The Local*, April 12, 2013, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.thelocal.it/20130412/im-a-courageous-and-free-thinking-woman>.

Radical Party in order to gain voters and make jesting statements towards the Italian political system. Perhaps practicably this is why Staller was not re-elected at the end of her term in 1991. Instead she founded her own protest party, Partito dell'Amore ("Party of Love"), with another adult entertainment star, Moana Pozzi.⁸ Thus, like Koons, Staller is famed not only on her professional works but for her adopted personae as well, specifically La Cicciolina through which she unabashedly embraced and flaunted her naked body in the adult entertainment world and her political campaigns.

Jeff Koons entered the public eye at a similarly early age. Born in 1955 in York, Pennsylvania, he received his BFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art and completed further studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. By twenty-five he had achieved art world notoriety with four exhibitions: *The New* (1980), *Equilibrium* (1985), *Statuary* (1986) and *Banality* (1989) series. Indeed, it was the Banality series that brought Koons the fame he had been seeking throughout the 1980s. In works drawn from images and icons of popular culture such as *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988) and *Pink Panther* (1988), Koons dismantled the traditional boundary between "high art" (the idea) and "low art" (majority taste).

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⁸ Jonathan Jones, "Jeff Koons: Not Just the King of Kitsch," in *The Guardian*, June 30, 2009, accessed May 5, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jun/30/jeff-koons-exhibition-serpentine>.

Historically these distinctions have been determined by certain standards that are controlled and established by societal values (politics, morals, ethics, religion).⁹ As such, the aesthetics of art are viewed as part of or through an overall *taste structure*, which is a hierarchical system influenced by the values, morals and politics of society.¹⁰ High culture is associated with the sophisticated, upper class of the bourgeoisie whereas low culture is linked to mainstream society and is influenced by the mass media and things that permeate the everyday. By appropriating things of the later: industrially produced pop-cultural commodities and reproducing them as large-scale figurines in a variety of high end materials such as fine porcelain and cast metals, Koons replaces their lowbrow status with an elite one. By exploiting the role taste has played in determining the social order and by extension social values, and then undermining these cultural imperatives, he carves out radically new territory in the realm of sculpture and the visual arts generally.

Michael Jackson and Bubbles (1988) is ostentatious in both its design and scale. With its high-gloss shine, flawless execution and impeccable craftsmanship it demands to be seen as a precious artifact. Made of white porcelain with details rendered in gold, it recalls the 18th century Rococo porcelain figurines made by European factories such as Meissen and Chelsea.¹¹ However, its large size, about

⁹ Herbert J. Gans, Chapter Two: "A Comparative Analysis of High and Popular Culture" in *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹ Since the early 13th century, Europeans had been importuning porcelain at high prices from China. European factories such as Meissen started researching how porcelain was made in the early 18th century. In 1708, under the direction of Johann Friedrich Bottger, Europe's first white

6 feet in height puts it at odds with historical precedents of this kind. The scale of the work recalls Greco-Roman and Medieval statuary, the mythical gods and saintly figures of ancient times. It is this historical/materials disconnect that lends an edgy playfulness to the work. Viewers are ultimately required to reconcile the exquisite with the audacious, the conflation of time, styles and techniques that make this work possible. With *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, Koons sets up the viewer to ask questions and in the process confers 'god-like status' on Michael Jackson and his pet monkey. In doing so, he points to American penchant for aggrandizing and immortalizing their pop idols.

The *Banality* series also included what Koons called his *Art Magazine Ads* (1988) campaign starring the artist as his very own commodity. This largely promotional strategy helped to further solidify his newfound art world celebrity status. As suggested, these works may be seen as precursors to those in the *Made in Heaven* series in that the ads present Koons in a number of staged roles, with a variety of props, real-life models and extravagant backdrops. The photographs are provocative; not only aesthetically but also ideologically and sociologically how they raise questions around the merits of what is considered to be "high art". As Koons states:

[These ads were intended to] remove bourgeois guilt and shame in responding to banality. I was telling the bourgeois to embrace the thing that it likes. Don't divorce yourself from your true being, embrace it.

porcelain was produced and by 1710 Meissen's first porcelain manufactory was established. The Chelsea porcelain factory was founded in 1743 by two Frenchmen, Charles Gouyn and Nicholas Sprimont and first opened its doors in England in 1750. Chelsea is well known for their porcelain figurines that were initially inspired by Meissen porcelain models and later by the French company Sevres porcelain.

Don't try to erase it because you're in some social standing now and you're ambitious and you're trying to become some upper class.¹²

The advertisements appeared in several magazines – Flash Art, Art Forum, Art in America, Arts – and featured the artist surrounded by scantily clad women swooning over his bath-robed body. Slogans such as “Exploit the masses” and “Banality as Savior” highlighted the overall intent of the ads, pointing clearly to the aestheticization of society's media-soaked interests and desires (even that of the bourgeoisie's). Through such seductive, mass media techniques Koons was able to reach the ‘majority’. At the same time, the artist is able to disassemble the hierarchical structures of taste by placing all components of the ads on the same level. And, by infusing such popular culture objects with the persona of Jeff Koons/art star he blurred the boundaries between the high and low even further. Here, Koons utilized the basic tenets of advertising practice to make his work more widely known and visible. By making art that was accessible and popular he was able to broaden the audience for cultural production in general. Furthermore, he understood that the ads merely reflect and reinforce attitudes and behavioral trends that have already begun to take hold; they do not actually create a self-indulgent America, but rather reveal it for what it is.

Though critical to the message Koons hoped to convey, the Banality series was only a first step. It was in his *Made in Heaven* series that the artist moved from the vagaries of the public sphere to more personal considerations. As Koons

¹² “Jeff Koons: Resource Pack”, *Tate*, accessed May 4, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/37631>

explained in a 2014 interview with Norman Rosenthal, “With ‘Banality’ I had started communicating for the first time that people should embrace who they are; embrace their own history, their own cultural history.”¹³ Koons goes on to discuss his *Made in Heaven* series, noting that:

‘Made in Heaven’ was about one of the things that distances people from embracing who they are, embracing their own being; their sexuality. So I wanted to use sexuality as a metaphor, as a kind of continuation of ‘Banality’, but go a little more direct psychologically into what keeps people from embracing who they are. After I saw the Masaccio painting *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425) I wanted to make a body of work about sexuality that would help remove that guilt and shame.¹⁴

It was the artist’s belief that the removal of guilt and shame needed to be confronted and communicated via a mass media outlet and that such transformations could be projected to an even wider audience. Accordingly and in keeping, Koons (with his fascination in popular culture forms) felt that the best way to achieve this was through film. And, of course the easiest way to get into the film industry was through adult entertainment.

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Jeff Koons got his first glimpse of Ilona Staller in 1987 when she appeared in Stern magazine to publicize her recent election into Italian Parliament. The artist used Staller’s bare-breasted torso as a model for his *Banality* series sculpture

¹³ Norman Rosenthal, “Chapter 4: There’s Just an Acceptance of Everything” in *Jeff Koons: Conversations with Norman Rosenthal*, (London: Thames & Hudson) 2014 ,145.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

Fait d'Hiver (1988).¹⁵ Koons saw her photograph a second time several months later when she appeared on the cover of an unnamed adult entertainment magazine. The artist recalls being mesmerized by her beauty and how comfortable she was with her own body and sexuality. As Koons explained in a 1990 interview in *Vanity Fair* "...I realized this was one of the greatest artists alive. She was able to present herself with absolutely No Guilt and No Shame. This put her in the Realm of the Eternal."¹⁶ At about the same time, Koons was invited by the Whitney Museum of American Art to create an outdoor billboard for *Image World*, an exhibition exploring the relationship between art and the media. Reflecting on the commission, Koons explained "...as a readymade I will call up this woman, this Italian politician, and I'll just place myself in these sets."¹⁷

In 1989 the artist proposed that the two should be photographed together, using her photographer and manager, Riccardo Schicchi. He appropriated costumes and backdrops from her adult entertainment work in order to present the complete La Cicciolina ready-made. By replicating the manufactured persona and aesthetics of La Cicciolina, Koons pushed Marcel Duchamp's work and its profound legacies to new limits. By producing the first ever, human ready-made Koons positioned La Cicciolina within an artistic context that included explicit

¹⁵ Scott Rothkopf, "Made in Heaven: Jeff Koons and the Invention of the Art Star" in *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*, ed. Jack Bankowsky, Alison Gingeras and Catherine Wood (London: Tate Modern, 2010), 41.

¹⁶ Jeff Koons and Ilona Staller, interview by Anthony Haden-Guest, "Art or Commerce?" in *Vanity Fair*, November 1991, accessed May 8, 2015 <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/1991/11/art-or-commerce>.

¹⁷ Andrew Anthony, "The Jeff Koons Show" in *The Guardian*, October 16, 2011, accessed May 8, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/oct/16/jeff-koons-art-custody-son>.

sexual content. And as such, he was able to challenge the aesthetics of representation and raise questions about what art could and could not be.

The photo-shoot resulted in the billboard work, *Made in Heaven* (1989), which conceptually served as an advertisement announcing the unmade film of the same name. The pair are presented against a grandiose backdrop of foaming waves splashing against a rocky shoreline. Staller is dressed in a provocative white silk and lace camisole, gloves, fishnet stockings, gold platform sandals, a floral headband and her signature red lipstick. She reclines face up, with her back arched on an artificial rock with her head thrown backwards and mouth open in bliss. Cradling Staller's lower torso, Koons appears to be naked as he stares out at the viewer, paying no attention to his stage partner. Comparable to a film advertisement or poster, the billboard is inscribed with large yellow typeface that provides the title of the unmade film, "Made in Heaven", the people involved in the making of the billboard (Riccardo Schicchi and the Whitney Museum of American Art) and the actors that will be starring in it, "Jeff Koons" and "Cicciolina".

Displayed in several locations on the streets of downtown New York City, the billboard represents the kind of art that serves as a symbol of cultural capital in the postmodern era. It is slick, extravagant, sensational and celebrity-driven. Koons had cast himself as a superstar alongside a darling and dignitary of the adult entertainment world. This billboard launched both a media mayhem and body of work that raised questions surrounding the boundaries between art and

pornography, the sacred and profane and the high and low. Unlike artists of the past, the artist in his first work of the *Made in Heaven* series does not hint gingerly at sexuality and its popular, cultural implications but candidly places it in front of the viewer's face.

History records that Koons was immediately enthralled by his newfound muse. Riding the wave of media attention, he returned with Staller to the studio to make more works. The first works included a life-size wooden sculpture (*Jeff and Ilona (Made in Heaven)* (1990)) and large-scale photographs (*Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), *Ilona with Fingers Between Legs (Blue Background)* (1990), and *Silver Shoes* (1990)) which were given their public debut in the Aperto section of Venice Biennale in 1990. By this time, Koons and Staller's professional relationship had developed into a romance. They would arrive daily at the installation to pose hand-in-hand for the paparazzi in front of their doppelganger sculptures and photographs.

Although at the time, Koons' work was not regarded as especially shocking, particularly in comparison with that of the AIDS activist collection *Gran Fury*, Andres Serrano and Roberto Mapplethorpe. However, it did elicit considerable commentary by critics and historians. And, Koons was happy to talk about both the series and his relationship. In doing so, he was seen by many as a first-rate salesman, but he also appears to have demonstrated the sincere belief that he and Staller were the contemporary version of Adam and Eve. Like the original couple, they were meant to instill in those around them a set of higher

ideals, but in a strange and rather presumptuous reversal they were also given the task of removing the guilt and same accompanying ‘Original Sin’ by demonstrating to all their commitment to each other and to open unencumbered sexuality. Thus, Koons chose to communicate the depth of his involvement to the broadest possible audience by whatever means at his disposal. And Staller followed suit. In an interview in Flash Art from 1990, the artist stated:

She’s a great communicator. She is to me the most beautiful woman in the world. She absolutely is the most photogenic woman in the world. There is no-one in the world more photogenic than Ilona. She is a media person, she is a media personality, she survives by the media...We’re dealing with communication. Together Ilona and I are able to communicate these ideas. We have a sexual, spiritual, intellectual relationship...This is a complete relationship. This is made in heaven.¹⁸

Furthermore, Koons says that the *Made in Heaven* works were a re-writing of Massacio’s *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425) (Fig.4). He goes on to say that the series was intended to redirect the public’s fear of these moral conflicts towards the notion of adaptability.¹⁹ As Koons explained, “It redirects the public to removal of fear, to adaptability. Adaptability is really the key to no fear, and when you get rid of fear, there’s no guilt or shame. So adaptability plays a very large role...Ilona is the essence of adaptability. I mean, Ilona is the eternal virgin.”²⁰ Koons then states, “When one views it, one is going to feel just a total sense of ease that they are in the aura of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Absolutely left

¹⁸ Jeff Koons, interview by Andrew Renton, “Jeff Koons: I Have my Finger on the Eternal” in *Flash Art*, no. 153, Summer 1990, 112.

¹⁹ Ibid, 111.

²⁰ Ibid, 111.

at ease, no conflict, absolute beauty. In a way, it's a return to the Garden, but after the expulsion, after the Fall".²¹ Koons thought that these grand ideas would be most effectively communicated to mainstream society by exploiting and manipulating the visual tropes of well-known religious imagery and iconography combined with those of popular culture specifically the adult entertainment industry. By combining both spiritual and material seductions he was able to reach a wider audience.

In the autumn of 1990, Koons and Staller got engaged. By January 1991, rumors had spread that the marriage was off, but by May it was on again. Finally, on June 1, 1991 the couple exchanged vows in Budapest, Hungary and became Mr. and Mrs. Koons. Although the wedding was small, European tabloids ran multipage pictorials of their marriage ceremony, which reached millions of readers. The news worthiness of Koons' personal affairs and the extent of their coverage propelled the artist into a media sphere inhabited not by pop artists but *pop stars*.

Koons and Staller never did make the film. Presumably this was because *heaven* did not last. The two divorced in December 1994 and proceeded to go through a lengthy custody battle over their son, Ludwig (b. 1992). It is generally accepted that this battle precipitated the destruction of most of the *Made in Heaven* works. In a 2009 article in [The Guardian](#) the artist states that "I was going through a custody situation for my son, and Ilona kept trying to pull the work

²¹ Ibid, 111.

down to a level that it would be viewed not as artwork but as pornography, so I ended up just destroying most of the works because of that.”²²

However, despite the highs and lows of Koons and Staller’s relationship, what emerged from their short-lived romance was a series of work that fundamentally challenged the boundaries of artistic merit, taste and morality at a time when the American Republican party was trying to revive religion, not dismantle it. In this it has huge implications for contemporary art making and American culture as a whole.

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When the *Made in Heaven* series returned to New York after the Venice Biennale in 1991 it generated considerable mostly negative media attention. The museums were not interested in exhibiting the series (the Sonnabend Gallery was the only gallery in New York City, let alone America to exhibit the work)²³ and the work was generally vilified. New York Times critic, Michael Kimmelman, described the series as: “one last, pathetic gasp of the sort of self-promoting hype and sensationalism that characterized the worst of the decade” and claimed that the works continued “to celebrate the emptiness, meaninglessness and Disney-like unreality of contemporary life, now extended to the arena of love.”²⁴ In similarly cutting ways Washington Post critic, Judd Tully stated that Koons’ physique was

²² Jonathan Jones, “Jeff Koons: Not just the King of Kitsch”.

²³ Sonnabend Gallery first opened in New York City in 1970 on Madison Avenue, but soon after relocated to SoHo in 1971, establishing SoHo as the international art center until the early 1990s. The gallery is also known for bringing European art of the 1970s to America.

²⁴ Michael Kimmelman, “Art in Review” in *The New York Times*, November 29, 1991, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/29/arts/art-in-review-233491.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw>.

“Heavily made up, grappling with the pink-booted, blonde-tressed Cicciolina, Koons looks like a miscast version of Tarzan performing a skit on Saturday Night Live”.²⁵

Indeed, the controversial character of the works was not solely based on what viewers and critics deemed as Koons’ egomania, but also on their explicit content – the performance of sexual activities. Kimmelman described the work as “artificial and cheap in their settings and emotions, they are not fundamentally different from what one might see in an adult entertainment magazine, translated almost to the scale of a movie screen” and that “Cicciolina optimizes the standard reactionary pornographic male fantasy of the Madonna-whore”.²⁶ However, these castigations in the press were in keeping given the tenor of the time and keeping with the ethical divide between art and erotic art. This perhaps expected warp of Koons’ campaign to change morality was not so easy. However, the works that comprised *Made in Heaven* did generate critical discourse and reverberations, which continued to 2014 and the curation of his Whitney retrospective.

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The portrayal of sex in art is nothing new. In fact, depictions of sex have been part of a long history of cultural production. However, such work has traditionally occupied a category unto itself – erotic art. But, defining erotic art is difficult since the perceptions of both what is erotic and what is art are ever

²⁵ Judd Tully, “Jeff Koons’ Raw Talent” in *Washington Post*, December 15, 1991, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://juddtully.net/articles/jeff-koons-raw-talent/>.

²⁶ Kimmelman, “Art in Review”.

evolving. The term ‘erotic’ derives from the Greek word for sexual desire or passionate love – *eros*. In Greek mythology, the notion of *eros* incorporates a range of meanings including: thoughts of desire, sexual representations in art and the sexual act itself.²⁷ Therefore, erotic art must be linked to some form of emotion or implication (from the passion of love to sexual desires to sexual arousal). In her book *Eroticism & Art*, Alyce Mahon states, “Erotic art brings us face to face with love and sexual desire, titillation and carnal attraction, as well as the desires of others which we may find repulsive. It tests our individual and collective idea not only of what is ‘pleasing’ but also what is ‘decent’ or ‘proper’.”²⁸ These societal values are often associated with various forms of romance, religion, devotion and eroticism and are portrayed in erotic art by lovers, spouses and/or amorous couples.

Often depicted as nude, with fig leaves covering their genitals, Adam and Eve have been used throughout the history of art to represent “the primal narrative of humanity in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, which, despite their different interpretations, share the belief that God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and then banished them to earth for the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, thus ensuring their mortality.”²⁹ In Masaccio’s *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425), Adam and Eve are depicted fleeing from the Garden of Eden. An angel wielding a fiery sword guards the Garden entrance so

²⁷ Alyce Mahon, introduction to *Eroticism & Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁹ Christopher Lyon, *Couples in Art* (Munich: DelMonico Books, 2001), 5.

that the two cannot return. We see the deep pain on their faces. But, as society evolves so have the depictions of Adam and Eve. In European cultures, the emergence of couple's portraits became recognized as a depiction of the First Couple. Therefore, when analyzing Koons' *Made in Heaven* series, we should recognize that we are being presented with a real-life version of a happily married couple, or what Koons refers to as the "contemporary version of Adam and Eve." By merging biblical iconography with popular culture aesthetics, the work epitomizes a moment in art when the past and present collide, much like it does in Masaccio's *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1425), with shocking consequences.

Earlier Roman and Greek cultures often associated sexual acts with supernatural forces, such as gods and goddesses, allowing for these representations to be considered part of their religious beliefs and cultural practices. As seen in much of the Greek pottery, couples were regularly shown engaging in sexual activities. There has also been a long tradition of erotic painting in Eastern cultures. For example, in India the Kama Sutra is an ancient sex manual that is associated with spiritual meanings within the Hindu religion. Throughout history, the boundaries that govern erotic art have been impacted by technological shifts and advancements, politics and structures of taste and values. As the distribution of information has become increasingly rapid and far-reaching through new modes of communication such as: the development of the printing press, photography, advertising and the Internet, erotic art has remained an

incredibly powerful tool in maintaining the ‘attention/shocking’ paradigm that underlies sex and sexuality.

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In chapter nine of her book, *Eroticism & Art*, Alyce Mahon states:

Koons did not allow the viewer into his erotic world; rather, he exploited the voyeuristic dimension of pornography. While he translated porn images...into oil on canvas, Koons reveled in the pornographic industrialization and commodification of sex and, more importantly, in the commodification of art too. Yet he still insisted that it was art, that it was about form and ideas...Koons undoubtedly exposes the superficiality of consumer culture in taking commodity fetishism to its extreme pornographic level in these works, he inevitable becomes subsumed in it.³⁰

Although the work contains what some members of society would deem highly offensive sexual explicit subject matter and not much else, I will argue that there is a great deal more to be learned about the art, Koons and society through a closer examination. Using a four-pronged methodological approach I will conduct an analysis that looks at: (1) the *Made in Heaven* work’s formal and material properties, (2) its content, including the artist’s initial aim and intent of the work (3) its context, including its place within the history of erotic art, postmodernism and the early 1990s), and (4) its theoretical implications, including cultural production and with regard to the hyperreal.

In her book *The Social Production of Art*, Sociologist Janet Wolff discusses how art is defined by social factors that are involved in every stage of the creation of the artwork. She argues that “...where social influences are

³⁰ Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism & Art*, 243-244.

indirect, the work itself may not be affected, but the conditions surrounding its production, distribution and reception will still be.”³¹ Inspired by cultural studies, Wolff’s approach contributes to this discussion as it has value in the case of Koons’ *Made in Heaven* series because it links the production of art to its immediate social context. So much of the work’s impact relies heavily on the content of the work – highly managed and intricately stage vignettes that employ colorful props and backdrops – which demand to be examined in greater detail in relation to its social implications. Indeed, each of the works in this series relies on an initial visual punch that then leads the viewer into uncharted interpretative territory.

When considering the three works: *Made in Heaven* (1989), *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), and *Self-Portrait* (1991), their formal and material qualities are fairly straightforward if decidedly over the top. They are clearly designed to provide sumptuous eye candy to the viewer and to make immediate links between themselves and other representations of this sort in the world of advertising and especially movie making. They have, a fantastical Disney-like quality – similar to the landscapes found in the movie *Bambi*, containing whimsical trees and an abundance of colorful butterflies and flowers – which lends them a certain innocence. Yet, the images are obviously ‘X-rated’ in terms of their sexually explicit content and graphic nudity. This in your face

³¹ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: NYU Press, 1993), 34.

juxtaposition of seemingly irreconcilable elements engages us and ultimately gives us a great deal to consider and talk about.

Ilona on Top (Rosa Background) (1990) like the *Made in Heaven* (1989) billboard is a large-scale, oil-inked photograph depicting Koons and Staller in a staged moment of sexual intimacy. The couple is centered within the frame, appearing on an oval-shaped bed with hot pink satin sheets and surrounded by oversized pink butterflies. Behind them is an airbrushed grandiose backdrop, depicting an open window with curtains that seem to be fluttering from the fake breeze outside. Ilona is wearing a white long-sleeved body suit, light pink lace stockings, gold heels, a floral headband and her signature red lipstick. Staller straddles Koons on all fours, leaning her head in towards him with eyes closed and lips pursed as though she is going in for a kiss. The artist's left arm gently grazes Staller's right arm, while his right arm rests on her lower back. But, as in the *Made in Heaven* (1989) billboard, Koons resists real engagement with partner choosing instead to turn a coy gaze towards the viewer.

Self-Portrait (1991) is a rarity, especially within this series. Made of white Carrera marble, it is essentially a bust, an idealized version of the artist's body emerging head and shoulders out of a tabletop sized block of stone. A series of crystal-like forms encircle the base of the work. With raised eyes close, the artist seems to be in a moment of rapt concentration, even ecstasy. Perhaps he is experiencing the wonder of his own body, his masculinity in contrast to the femininity of Staller.

Any discussion of form and materials in Koons' work fittingly leads into questions of content. What lies beneath the surface glitz of the *Made in Heaven* series? What was the artist's intent in creating *Made in Heaven* (1989), *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) and *Self-Portrait* (1991)? And, perhaps most importantly what meanings can derive from his chosen subject matter? The answers to these questions are in themselves provocative. In this series, Koons produced a variety of works in a range of media not typically associated with erotic subject matter and in doing so challenged not only social norms but also aesthetic expectations concerning the depiction of sexuality and sexual acts in art. By conflating what could be read as lovemaking and what some might consider to be sexually explicit subject matter, and presenting sex with a pop sensibility he posed essential questions, such as: Are lovemaking and sex the same thing? What are the boundaries between art and pornography? What are the implications of taste, morals and ethics in art? What are the boundaries between the sacred and profane?

In both *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), for example, we can see how the line between what may be considered 'pornographic' and, on the other side 'erotic' has been purposely blurred. Koons achieves this sense of equilibrium through his choice of subject matter and medium. The photographic immediacy of the works allows the artist to represent a specific moment in time, a moment that inevitably belongs to a larger instantly recognizable world. However, if one focuses solely on the surface content of the

image, the subject matter as it were, the underlying meaning and value of the work may be lost. The fact that Koons uses visual tropes that belong to La Cicciolina's adult entertainment persona – her physical image, sets and sexual performances – invites the casual viewer to classify the work as mere pornography. But, on closer examination that same viewer will be asked to consider other possibilities centered on the fundamental differences between pornography and eroticism before making any hasty assumptions.

According to philosopher Hans Maes, the distinction between erotic art and pornography can be based on five classical principles: (1) pornography is objective, whereas erotic art is subjective, (2) pornography is emotionless, whereas erotic art is about the passion and/or relationship between partners, (3) pornography is non-aesthetic, whereas erotic art is concerned with beauty, (4) pornography can not be contemplated as it has one paramount aim (to sexually satisfy), whereas erotic art is meant to be interpreted as it is a representation of reality and tells us something about ourselves, and (5) pornography is inherently formulaic, whereas erotic art may contain similar imagery it is in some way original.³²

If Koons' *Made in Heaven* photographic works are compared to the visual content in an adult entertainment magazine such as Playboy or Hustler these differences are clearly confirmed. In an adult entertainment magazine the 'actors' have no attachment or physical relationship with the viewer other than to sexually

³² Hans Maes, "Drawing the Line: Art Versus Pornography" *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 6, no. 6, June 2011: 1-2.

arouse and stimulate him or her. The personality or thoughts of the ‘actors’ being depicted has no importance to the viewer; these are anonymous participants engaging in sexually arousing behavior. However, in works like *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), the ‘actors’ are recognizable celebrity figures allowing the viewer to make immediate connections and/or associations with Koons and Staller.

There is no emotional or romantic connection between the ‘actors’ that appear in the pages of an adult entertainment magazine or some similar publications. Here performers are merely being paid to act out someone else’s sexual fantasy or desire. In the case of *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) the reverse is true. This is a real-life couple engaging in a series of sexually explicit acts in order to display their commitment to each other and designed to promote sexual honesty and integrity to the public realm.

In his book, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, Sir Kenneth Clark distinguishes between the ‘naked’, which he associates with pornography and the ‘nude’ which is found in erotic art. Clark precisely defines the differences between the two arguing that such disparities have ethical as well as aesthetic ramifications. Clark describes the naked body as “being deprived of our clothes...and the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition” and the nude, by contrast as “a means of affirming the belief in ultimate perfection...the body

re-formed”.³³ For the author, the ‘nude’ is an ideal form of the human body as it characterizes a positive attitude and signifies beauty, whereas the ‘naked’ evokes religious guilt and shame. The precision with which Clark outlines the differences he sees apply absolutely to Koons’ *Made in Heaven* series and underlies the artist’s intent in producing the work. The religious element is present as he describes his relationship with Staller as being akin to that of the original Adam and Eve. And his goal of presenting unabashed nudity and honest sexuality as a remedy for the guilt and sin around these topics in society as a whole underlines the elevated status Clark confers on erotic art.

Finally, pornography is one-dimensional as it is intended to sexually arouse for the purpose of sexual release. The features in adult entertainment magazines such as Playboy have been produced for the sole purpose of being consumed by the viewer for these purposes. By contrast, *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) aim to represent a sexuality that humans share and were intended to remove the guilt and shame that is typically associated with it. Although Koons’ photographs may make us giggle, they certainly do not make us blush. This is because there is nothing embarrassing or arousing about them. The artist is using a pop cultural entity – porn – in order to reach a wider audience. He is highlighting the boundary between pornography and eroticism in order to dissolve it. It is in this tactical act that he defines these

³³ Kenneth Clark, “The Naked and the Nude”, in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 5.

works as being only multi-layered, original works of art, but also as a means of expressing both social criticism and cultural acceptance.

Koons investigates the conventional ideas of the “spiritual”. At first glance, it may seem that Koons is using a symbolism of the everyday, but his work is going beyond this. By linking opposing binaries (spiritual and media), he is able to manipulate his audience even further. Spirituality is often associated with the “ideal”, placing it within a hierarchy – something that exists closer to the top or to the elite. This would also mean that there are things that exist further away from the “ideal”. The spiritual is therefore reflected within systems of “taste” and contains commercial value. However, Koons is blurring this distinction by using biblical references and the art historical past of the bourgeoisie with pornographic visual tropes and kitsch aesthetics. Koons collapses the hierarchical order by bringing the “high” and the “low” together. Therefore, his work is operating within a spirituality that is furthest away from the elite or bourgeoisie. Although it is hard to take him seriously as the visual aesthetics of the work disagree with our notions of taste, as they reference pornographic visual tropes, fantastical backgrounds, etc., his sincerity and spiritual attachment to the work seems legit. Koons is merely trying to shift the hierarchical spiritual structure of the bourgeoisie to a more parallel one, where all things have value. By using/incorporating advertising techniques/mediums and including visuals that are recognizable to the average viewer, he is able to reach an even wider populous. The visual aesthetics of the work are seductive in nature,

but also make references to the sculptures and paintings of the Baroque and Rococo, which function as symbols of the desired or elite and allow for the works to gain further value. Some critics might argue that the performative nature of the work creates a sense of irony and that the inclusion of a ready-made porn star down plays any religious or spiritual symbolism. Koons is presents a seductive version of spirituality that allows the work to be viewed by even the most lowbrow audience. And, although he is contradicting conservative structures of morality and taste, he allows viewers to ask questions and reflect on the cultural of humanity.

II HEAVENLY REAL OR SIMULATED?

Following the rise of feminism and identity politics in the 1970s, there was a distinct political and cultural shift of resistance towards such progressive ideas in the 1980s and early 1990s. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the move to a new kind of Republicanism – not unlike the current Tea Party group of conservatives in the US today – issues around abortion, homosexuality, feminism, popular culture and multiculturalism became hot button issues, while an emphasis on family values, school prayer and the rise of new Right-wing religious groups, such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition began to undermine the left leaning cultural landscape.³⁴ This decisive move to the right throughout the 1980s instituted what is known as the ‘Culture Wars’. At this point in time the cleavages between the ideologies of Liberalism and Conservatism expanded and became increasingly hostile in the United States of America. All aspects of society were affected and the art world was no exception.

America’s artists tended to occupy one side of the fence or the other, the more progressive among them adopting positions that were quickly deemed as extreme. Works by artists like Andreas Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe were seen as ‘provocative’ and outright dangerous to the ‘public good’. The conservative backlash against such work did not just affect individual artists but also resulted in severe cutbacks to the funding of the US National Endowment for

³⁴ The Christian Coalition was originally founded in 1989 by religious broadcaster and former presidential candidate, Marion Gordon Robertson. It is known today as the Christian Coalition of America and is a political organization, made up of pro-family conservative Americans believe that the government serves to “strengthen and preserve”, rather than “threaten” what they deem as traditional American values.

the Arts (NEA). The art world was in turmoil. Jeff Koons was well aware of the way things stood and chose to confront the establishment head on. His *Made in Heaven* series (1989 – 91) can be seen as his own rebuttal against American conservatism.

However, Koons was not alone in challenging the moral and partisan status quo. His work of the early 1990s owes a great deal to that of artists who went before him, particularly those who championed issues surrounding gay rights and culture. Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987), a large color photograph of a small plastic crucifix submerged in a glass of his own urine was the artwork that became the centerpiece in this political controversy over government funding for the arts. In this work, a crucified Jesus is illuminated by an intense golden color provided by the artist's piss. The crucifix is shown against a saturated blood-red background. In this piece Serrano conflates the sacred (Jesus) with the profane (bodily fluids) and in one stroke addresses the taboo against challenging religious orthodoxy while simultaneously addressing sexuality and the AIDS crisis. The work is strikingly beautiful, its golden color resembling amber or a facsimile such as tinted resin, and it is only after reading its title that the viewer realizes the crucifix has been immersed in urine.

Although art critics defended the photograph as being a commentary on American superficiality, Republican political leaders saw it as a form of sacrilege. Republican Senator Jesse Helms from North Carolina stated: "I don't know Mr. Andres Serrano and I hope I never meet him. Because he is not an artist, he is a

jerk.”³⁵ In a similar sense, Republican Senator Alphonse D’Amato from New York called the work “shocking, abhorrent and completely undeserving of any recognition whatsoever” and proclaimed that “Millions of taxpayers are rightfully incensed that their hard-earned dollars were used to honor and support Serrano’s work” in a letter to acting chairman of the NEA, Hugh Southern in which he requested a review of their funding procedures.³⁶ The work’s apparent profanity was not the only thing that outraged these legislations. There was also the fact that Serrano had received a \$15,000 grant from the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem (SECCA), which received direct funding from the NEA.

For similar reasons, the work of artist Robert Mapplethorpe was also on the conservative chopping block. His travelling retrospective exhibition *The Perfect Moment* that included the controversial X, Y and Z Portfolio series drew harsh criticism from the right wing. Conversely, the general public and arts curators largely embraced the work. The X-Portfolio series (1978) of limited edition photographic prints of men engaging in sado-masochism, a graphic commentary on New York’s gay culture appealed to a wide viewing audience. Dynamic, glossy and beautifully executed the images established a whole new form of erotic art whose time had come. Some curators, recognizing the

³⁵ Helle Bering-Jensen, “The Cultural Politics of Controversial Art”, *Insight*, July 17 (1989), 8, quoted in Alyce Mahon, “Eroticism and the Culture Wars of the 1980s and 1990s”, *Eroticism and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 228.

³⁶ Letter dated May 18, 1989, sent by Senator Alphonse D’Amato (R.—N.Y.) to Hugh Southern, acting chairman of the NEA, quoted in Wendy Steiner, “Chapter 1: The Perfect Moment”, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in the Age of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11-13.

potentially problematic nature of the *X, Y, and Z Portfolios* segregated the work from other pieces in their collections, placing them in separate or private rooms. Viewers were informed that some of the photographs might not be appropriate for children.³⁷ The situation worsened. The *Portfolios* show slated to open at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington in June 1989 was cancelled. The gallery's director, Christina Orr-Cahall feared that some of the photographs would cause a public upset and lead to a withdrawal of the gallery's funding. Orr-Cahall's concerns were valid as the scandal over Serrano's *Piss Christ* had already initiated cutbacks in arts grants from government bodies. A year later, *The Perfect Moment* arrived at the Contemporary Arts Centre (CAC) in Cincinnati only to be immediately shut down. The Centre's director, Dennis Barrie was charged with obscenity and misuse of a minor in pornography.³⁸

Mapplethorpe's art caused not only a crisis in government sponsorship of the arts, but also put into question the definition of what constitutes art itself. Was Mapplethorpe's work artistically significant, that is 'erotic', or was it merely 'pornographic'? After a weeklong trial (September 28 to October 5, 1990), Dennis Barrie and the CAC were acquitted of all charges. Mapplethorpe's photographs were defended on the grounds of artistic merit, rescuing them from the undesirable realm of pornography. Art professionals and experts testified that the artist's photographs counted as art because of their exquisite formal properties

³⁷ Steiner, "Chapter 1: The Perfect Moment", 19.

³⁸ Five of the seven photographs depicted men in sadomasochistic poses, while the other two photographs showed children with their genitals exposed.

such as dramatic lighting, classical composition and abstract sculptural shapes. While Mapplethorpe's photographs were materially and stylistically within the genre of photorealist portraiture as pioneered by earlier artists such as Louis Hine and Diane Arbus, their subject matter clearly transgressed existing boundaries of what was morally acceptable.

It was in this heady political and intellectual environment that Jeff Koons found himself in the late 1980s. He had to decide where he stood in relation to other artists and how he could make his mark professionally. His decision to go ahead with the *Made in Heaven* series was predicated on the knowledge that he had to move on from his earlier work that focused almost exclusively on issues of consumerism and methods of commercial replication and into the less travelled and much more controversial territory of sex and eroticism. In the end, he produced a series of works that inhabits both realms. The *Made in Heaven* pieces challenge received cultural norms around sexuality but rely for their power and presence on commercial production methods combined with the employment of mass media promotional techniques. In presenting this work, Koons opened up issues that had been relegated to the secreted corners of the art world while simultaneously highlighting the place popular cultural phenomena like advertising and pornography have in informing contemporary cultural production.

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Just as politics greatly impacted the parameters of cultural production in the late 1980s and early 1990s so did the rise of mass media. America became so

dominated by simulated images from television, film, music, magazines, newspapers, billboards and the Internet that there was no way to determine their validity or even their sources. It was through the glut of reproduced images and their over-consumption by a public hungry for constant stimulation that the distinction between reality and fantasy became blurred and the legitimacy of what was 'real' was abruptly brought into question. How were artists to interact with and respond to the existence of mass media? And, how might they address a simulated reality?

Some artists responded negatively by overtly criticizing the media while others simply ignored its presence altogether. Jeff Koons saw the public's fascination with mass media as a golden opportunity for engagement. His starting point (as previously stated) was an invitation he received from the Whitney Museum to create an outdoor billboard for *Image World*. Here was his chance to exhibit – and market – *Made in Heaven* (1989), the first piece in a series that would occupy his attention for the next two years. His plan was to place reproductions of the work in various outdoor locations throughout New York City thus reaching the widest audience possible. By imitating the practice of advertisers through the use of a standard billboard format Koons could draw on the public's familiarity with this kind of image reproduction. He could get his messages across fast, even to drivers speeding by. The fact that the image contained a naked Koons canoodling with porn star, La Cicciolina would have made the billboard even more eye-catching, perhaps irresistible. For Koons, this

was not just a creative opportunity to narrow the gap between art and advertising, but also a chance to dismantle the negative connotations associated with sex and sexuality.

Historically, art has been concerned not with reality itself, but with images and interpretations of that reality presented and marketed as such. Traditionally, viewers have been able to quite easily discern between what is real and what is illusory. However, technological advancements and the consequent rise and proliferation of mass media have created visual confusion between what is perceived to be authentic, i.e. 'real' versus what is simulated, i.e. an imitation of the real. New media such as video and photography were once used to produce credible representations of reality, but are now often manipulated and altered to undermine our understanding of what we see.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Walter Benjamin discusses how the changes in technological reproduction of culture – specifically film and photography – caused art to lose what he terms its 'aura', or rather its unique existence in time and space. Benjamin writes: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced... by making many reproductions, it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or

listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.”³⁹ For Benjamin, ‘aura’ represents the originality or authenticity of an artwork, which cannot be found with film and photography. Furthermore, he argues that an original work of art preserves all of its authority, suggesting that meaning is determined at the moment of consumption rather than by the mode of production.

However, Koons’ *Made in Heaven* photographic works – *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990) – seem to establish a new form of authenticity by bringing together many different elements through media, aesthetics and subject matter ultimately creating a new and ‘original’ piece of artwork that inherently denies the possibility of fundamental and unassailable uniqueness. Photography plays an important role in creating these convincing simulations as it, more than any other medium, can substantively alter the appearance of reality even as it purports to be ‘telling the truth’. In this case, Koons presents the viewer with a reality, which may or may not have existed in the first place. The viewer’s relationship to the work is therefore based, not just on methods of visual representation, but also more specifically on cultural understandings of sex, love, and art history. While the viewer might be able to accept that there is a difference between the real Koons and Staller and the photographic depiction they see before them, contemporary society would still consider both of these things to be “real”. Therefore, it is our own cultural

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 221.

knowledge and experience that creates a connection between what we see and what we understand something to be.

By drawing from something which has been made to look real and then transforming it into an 'idea' of reality, Koons establishes a link between the two states of being. For Baudrillard, the understanding of the relationship between 'representation' and 'reality' is the essence of what constitutes the postmodernist era. Illustrating the aestheticization of all objects and forms, Baudrillard states:

Everything aestheticizes itself: politics aestheticizes itself into spectacle, sex into advertising and pornography and the whole gamut of activities into what is held to be called culture, which is something totally different from art; this culture is an advertising and media semiologising process which invades everything.⁴⁰

In the *Made in Heaven* series the viewer immediately interprets the works in relation to the images they are familiar with from other visual sites, like pornography. By dismantling the aesthetic spheres of cultural production and mass media into a visual parallel, Koons' exemplifies how we consume things that the media has created for us. Instead of looking at what is being represented in the image, the viewer focuses on how the image is represented (context) and produced (medium). Rather than alienating us from reality, the work compels us to consider not only what is being represented but also the medium through which it has come to be. The *Made in Heaven* photographic works present the viewer

⁴⁰ Jean Baudrillard, "Transpolitics, Transsexuality, Transaesthetics," in *Jean Baudrillard: The Disappearance of Art and Politics*, ed. William Stearns and William Chaloupka, (New York: St Martin's Pres, 1992), 10.

with something that seems too perfect and schematic to be true, yet claims to be just that.

Although we can acknowledge and accept the relationship between Koons and Staller as ‘true’ and also the fact that they are real-life lovers, we can also understand and appreciate the set-up, the photograph of the act of them having sex. Furthermore, we perceive the connection between the two representations and we link the two. We can question which one is ‘real’, but the answer will always be both. In actuality, the viewer experiences the photographic image as being more real than real, because of the way Koons blurs the distinction between the real and the imaginary. The image is ‘real’ but without an origin, forcing us to simply focus on recognizable signs and symbols – sex and pornography.

Baudrillard discusses this phenomenon at length and for him, signs and symbols are comprised of the simulacra, which are copies that depict things that lack any basis in fact or where the original is absent– hence, the ‘hyperreal’. As Baudrillard states:

What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it. That is why *contemporary ‘material’ production is itself hyperreal*. It retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is nothing more than its scaled-down refraction... Thus the hyperrealism of simulation is expressed everywhere by the real’s striking resemblance of itself.⁴¹

Baudrillard argues that simulation constitutes four separate phases: (1) it is a reflection of a basic reality, (2) it is a mask and perversion of a basic reality (3)

⁴¹ Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, (Stanford University Press, 1988), 180.

it is the mask of the absence of a basic reality, and (4) it bears no relation to reality whatsoever, as it is its own pure simulacrum – the ‘hyperreal’.⁴²

As Koons works are often taken from something which is made to look real – for example his *Made in Heaven* (1989) lithograph billboard – he transforms his works into an ‘idea’ of reality. This idea allows him to establish a link from the large billboard, to the familiar porn star (La Cicciolina) and then to Adam and Eve, where the reproduction first emerged. However, this link becomes undistinguishable as the relationship between the real (lovers) and the hyperreal (billboard) are dissolved within the postmodern era. Koons is taking the image of Adam and Eve (that is an imitation of the bible itself) and reproducing it into a pornographic version of Christian iconography. By creating work that refuses to be defined he establishes a new and more complex form of hyperreality, which though removed from all that we know to be true is, nevertheless, within the realm of possibility – a fantasy in reality. The complexities in Koons’ *Made in Heaven* series relegates this work not only to the world of the hyperreal, but also to the realm of ‘pastiche’.

Fredric Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, argues that ‘pastiche’ is one of two main characteristics of cultural production in the postmodern era. For Jameson, although pastiche is similar to parody in that it imitates a particular style or genre, it also neutralizes the satirical qualities associated with parody. He then discusses the end of

⁴² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 121.

individualism ('death of the subject'), what he describes as a schizophrenic character shift where personal identity has become a thing of the past or perhaps is merely a myth as it ceased to exist at all. According to Jameson, artists can no longer invent new styles, as everything has already been invented and there are only a limited number of possible combinations an artist can use.⁴³ The author has a point. Many, if not all of Koons' *Made in Heaven* works may be seen as visual compilations of elements – iconographic, compositional, subject matter – drawn from the past. For example, in his *Made in Heaven* (1989) and *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), Koons captures a single representative moment in time bringing forward the idea that though temporal in nature, love endures. Much like the figures in a Jean-Honoré Fragonard painting (fig. 5 and fig. 6) – dainty and devoted, perfect lovers inhabiting a pastel world – Koons and Staller are not just characters in a visual narrative, but represent the ideal couple whose love will last for all eternity in a comic book, visual culture sort of way.

Both Fragonard and Koons draw from the kind of idealized love depicted in love stories. However, the explicit, point-blank nature of Koons' *Made in Heaven* works take 18th century 'allegories of love' and, more broadly, the genre of 'couples in art' into brand new territory that owe a great deal to the spreads found in pornography magazines. Instead of manipulating light and composition to soften the scene, Koons employs the nude human body and graphic sex in order

⁴³ Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.

to emotionally heighten the atmosphere.⁴⁴ The format of *Made in Heaven* (1989) puts this work in the realm of large-scale commercial advertising. This was no accident as the billboard was originally intended to publicize a movie Koons intended to produce of the same name. The chromatic color palette and airbrushed style in which the backdrop was painted point to ads depicting celebrity film stars and yes, adult entertainment personalities.

This discussion leads directly into questions of need and desire as discussed by Umberto Eco in his *Travels in Hyperreality* where he talks about a constant longing for something that is better than the 'real' in contemporary culture. The *Made in Heaven* billboard creates in the viewer the desire and/or longing for the kind of sexual freedom and intensely euphoric experience the artist enjoys. The viewer too wants a romance for all time. It has been argued that pornography is explicit and that art invites us into it. Further, that pornography addresses fantasy while art addresses the imagination. It should then be possible to refashion reality as an object of our fantasies and desires. This is exactly what Koons is attempting to do. The success with which he reaches his goal is very much dependent on his unique ability to fuse the high and low, the sacred and the profane, the simulated and real.

⁴⁴ Andrei Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 68.

The artist's engagement with the art historical past is similarly evident in his bust, *Self-Portrait* (1991). The sculpture is made of *statuario* marble, quarried and traditionally carved near Pietrasanta, Italy where Michelangelo worked for many years. This particular kind of stone is generally reserved for the making of religious sculptures destined for points around the world. In the spirit of works like Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-52) (fig. 7) and *Bust of Pope Gregory XV* (1621) (fig.8), Koons' depicts the bliss and feelings of rapture that comes with experiencing the Divine. The placement of the sculpture (elevated) reinforces the notion of the artist's having achieved a close-to God state, but there are further connections: to Nature (see: the crystal-like formations out of which the bust emerges) and to popular forms of advertising. The super smooth form and finish of this work makes this piece the sculptural equivalent of an airbrushed painting. And, like other works in the *Made in Heaven* series, Koons' *Self-Portrait* is ultimately about sexuality. Bare-chested and self-consciously absorbed in the very act of presenting himself for public consumption as an object to be admired, this work expresses Koons' understanding of his own masculinity experienced solo, but also vis a vis the over the top femininity of his partner, Ilona Staller.

...

Made in Heaven (1989) and *Self-Portrait* (1991) (like all the works in the *Made in Heaven* series) are fundamentally derivative and referential, drawing both conceptually and materially on various eras in the history of art. They are, in

a sense, compressed visual compilations of the mythic heroic statuary of antiquity, Renaissance paintings of such masters as Boucher and Fragonard, and progressive experiments in realism by early and late modern artists such as Courbet and Monet. Indeed, Koons manages to draw from the lengthy canonized timeline of western artistic representation, while at the same time fashioning work that is autonomous and original. His deft ability to borrow from the creativity of other masters in the process of realizing his own work represents both a long-running practice in cultural production and equally importantly a postmodern strategy in contemporary art-making. Koons does not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality, but instead recaptures and represents the atmosphere and stylistic features of the past. It is through these provocative intersections of pastiche and mass media that Koons' *Made in Heaven* series demonstrates the artist's sharp, informed and wry sensibilities around the representations of sexuality in cultural production.

The *Made in Heaven* series proposes that we live in an age of "truthiness", a time when our understanding of truth may not be bound to empirical evidence, that is, to anything real, provable or factual. It is for these reasons that the work is as controversial today as it was in the late 1980s. Koons explores new contingencies of reality whereby traditional methods and emerging media operate together to create work that has the ability to inhabit and, as needed, instantly navigate the places in between. In a Koonsian world, there are no borders worth maintaining and no limits to what art and artists can achieve.

CONCLUSION

Since its first appearance at the 1990 Venice Biennale, and despite shifting temperaments and ethics around sexual and sexualized content in art, the central thematics of the *Made in Heaven* series persist in dividing opinion on issues of aesthetics and ethics. Indeed, in 2014 the work still had the power to require special handling and to shock. In deciding to exhibit work from the *Made in Heaven* series, the Whitney curators made two related decisions. The first was to separate the series spatially from the rest of the exhibition and to create an adjoining room for the display of what works clearly considered to be even more “explicit”. Here, works including *Wall Relief with Bird* (1991) and *Ilona’s Asshole* (1991) were in effect sidelined. And that the Whitney saw it necessary to post “parental warning” signs at the entryways of the space suggests that while the inclusion of the series made sense in a critical retrospective of the artist’s celebrated career, there nonetheless was institutional uneasiness at the implications of representations of overt and unabashed sexuality. Ultimately, Koons claims about the role of love being the inspiration for the series was no match for institutional wariness about morality and the standards of decency.

But while the Whitney's actions can be explained in terms of what can be called ethics, questions remain about how Koons *Made in Heaven* series can be approached critically. And while critics have in real ways favorable reappraised the work, for art historians, however, there exist interpretive, arguably ideological challenges of how to assess what is an artistically and culturally significant body

of work. While it is clear that the *Made in Heaven* series occupies a provocative and complex place in late 20th century art, the fact of the series and its persistent radicalism says much about both fixed and changing thinking about the role of art. Koons, ever the smart cultural observer and synthesizer, created his series as a testament to the beauty of love and in doing so pushed the boundaries of acceptable cultural production. No wonder then that when the innocent rationale for the series was destroyed by the acrimony and hurt of divorce so the images and objects could not be but transformed into remarkable and undeniably transgressive commentaries on the boundaries of public and private life and the portrayal of the same.

Just as the sexual imagery in *Made in Heaven* series was contested as cultural production in the 1990s, it now raises further questions, such as: Why does the *Made in Heaven* series still inherit “shock value”? And, what do works like the *Made in Heaven* series tell us about the changing theories and parameters of cultural production? To answer these questions it is important to consider what “shock value” means in regards to the audience’s relationship to explicit imagery when the series was exhibited.

“Shock value” in art is something that develops out of the viewer’s choice to be offended by the artwork. It arises because the work violates the viewer’s of religious, political or ideological belief system they uphold. This can explain why, when the *Made in Heaven* series first made its debut in 1990 – a time where American society was deeply divided between “orthodox” and “progressive”

political visions – viewers and critics did not respond to the artwork itself, but rather to the *idea* of it. The reception of Koons’ works is also directly related to the distribution and attainability of explicit imagery in the society of the 1990s. Though adult entertainment was available at the time *Made in Heaven* was exhibited it was not widely accessible as it is today. Adult entertainment was only available for purchase in printed magazine form. If you wanted to consume adult entertainment you had to visit your nearest convenience store and endure the awkward exchange with the cashier. It was not until the invention of the VCR that Americans were able to rent and play movies in their homes, including easily accessible adult entertainment films.

Today however, adult entertainment is available in many different types of media. Magazines can still be found at gas stations/convenience stores, X-rated films and DVDs can be found in the rare video store, purchased on cable or Netflix, or watched for free on various adult entertainment websites. These technological advancements, specifically the Internet, have provided society with an endless supply of promiscuous images and accessibility to sexuality. Furthermore, as this type of sexually oriented material has become more readily available through mainstream media outlets, the representations of sexual activity have also become more explicit. This increase in the consumption of adult entertainment materials is conceivably a sign that traditional values have been reconsidered or broadened. Arguably, it is the Internet that is the driving societal force behind the emergence of a hyper-sensitized, hypersexual culture. Therefore,

the viewer's interpretation of an artwork is not only determined by his or her own knowledge of experience, but also requires an understanding of the context and culture that surrounds the work.

While the distribution practices surrounding pornography have shifted, the reception of the 2014 retrospective illustrates that sex is still a controversial image prone to societal restrictions and criticisms. We may be finally desensitized to the naked human body, but as a culture we are still raw to the depiction of sexuality in public realms. For example, in a September 9, 2014 issue of *Huffington Post*, a sex blogger and mother discussed the experience she had when she took her children to see the *Jeff Koons: A Retrospective* at the Whitney and encountered the *Made in Heaven* series, stating:

We turned another corner and found one of the mural-sized works from his 25-year old "Made in Heaven" series, featuring a naked Jeff Koons and his Italian porn-star soon-to-be-wife (now ex). His penis and testicles and her pube-free vulva were at kid eye level. A woman behind me told her friend rather sternly – and loudly – "This is not appropriate for children."...I panicked, mumbling something to my kids like, "Nothing to see here!", and bee-lined it to the next, less scandalous room... I realize now that my frazzled reaction made this nudity a bigger deal than it was, made it instantly taboo, and therefore gave it more power, mystery and allure than it would have had otherwise. After all, we all have bodies – and genitals – that come in different shapes and sizes; just as everybody poops, everybody is naked under their clothes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "I Took My Kids to See the Jeff Koons Retrospective (Oops)," *Huffington Post*, September 9, 2014, accessed May 5, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/em-and-lo/i-took-my-kids-to-the-jeff-koons-retrospective_b_5810450.html.

These types of reactions toward the sexualized image are not confined to Jeff Koons' *Made in Heaven* series. In similar ways, viewers and critics were appalled when Kanye West released his music video *Bound 2* in 2014. The video opens with white horses galloping through a southwestern landscape before shifting to close-ups of Kim Kardashian West (Kanye's now wife) in bliss, alternated with Kanye rapping lyrics. Kim appears with her hair blowing, topless and making out with Kanye as he cruises down a highway on a motorcycle while he raps, all against a luminous sunset backdrop. For the duration of the video they appear together on the bike, enjoying each other's company. But, like Koons and Staller, Kanye was just exhibiting their love for everyone to see. Contrary to what viewers and critic's thought about the videography and kitsch aesthetics of the video, Kanye merely made a contemporary version of the film that Koons opted out of. But more importantly, Kim is presenting herself in similar vain to Staller, with complete removal of the guilt and shame that Koons was also trying to portray within his *Made in Heaven* series.

It must be noted however, that some viewers and critics have now altered their initial assessments of Koons' *Made in Heaven* series. In the June 24, 2014 issue of the New York Times, critic Roberta Smith says, "...Like his art (referring to the *Made in Heaven* series), he is completely sincere."⁴⁶ With the consideration of Smith's words it becomes clear that while Koons' *Made in Heaven* remains

⁴⁶ Roberta Smith, "Shapes of an Extroverted Life," Review of the Jeff Koons: A Retrospective, *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 26, 2014, accessed May 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/27/arts/design/jeff-koons-a-retrospective-opens-at-the-whitney.html>.

controversial both in terms of form and content, it is this ambiguity and complexity that evokes strong, competing heart-felt reactions in the viewer that makes the series significant. I believe this body of work is at once intimate, risky, and sincere in its intent.

This paper encourages the reconsideration of aestheticized representations of sexuality in cultural production, which are often dismissed for their explicit subject matter or shock value. By engaging with them we can further dismantle the negative connotations that are often associated with sex and sexuality in contemporary society. There is much to be said about artists, like Jeff Koons, who open discussions, take risks with their ideas and expand the parameters of cultural production. For Koons, this is a necessary strategy not a self-indulgent activity. And, like Koons, contemporary artists will continue to find yet new ways to shock and expand our awareness through sexuality. In doing so, they begin to dismantle the stigma attached to sexuality and sex there by altering us to the complexities of cultural ideological life.

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APPENDIX A: IMAGES

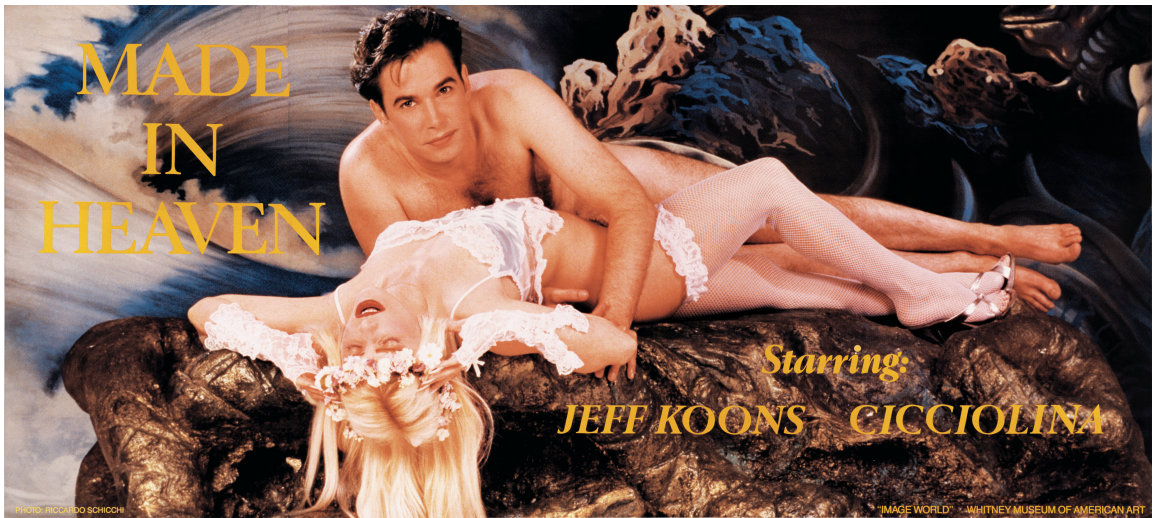


Figure 1. Jeff Koons, *Made in Heaven* (1989), lithograph billboard. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. Jeff Koons, *Ilona on Top (Rosa Background)* (1990), oil inks on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. Jeff Koons, Self-Portrait (1991), marble. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. Masaccio, The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (1425), fresco. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 5. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Fountain of Love* (1785), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 6. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Confession of Love* (1771), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 7. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-52), marble. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 8. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Bust of Pope Gregory XV* (1621), marble. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.