

## **Artists or Artful at Self Promotion: A Comparison of Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons**

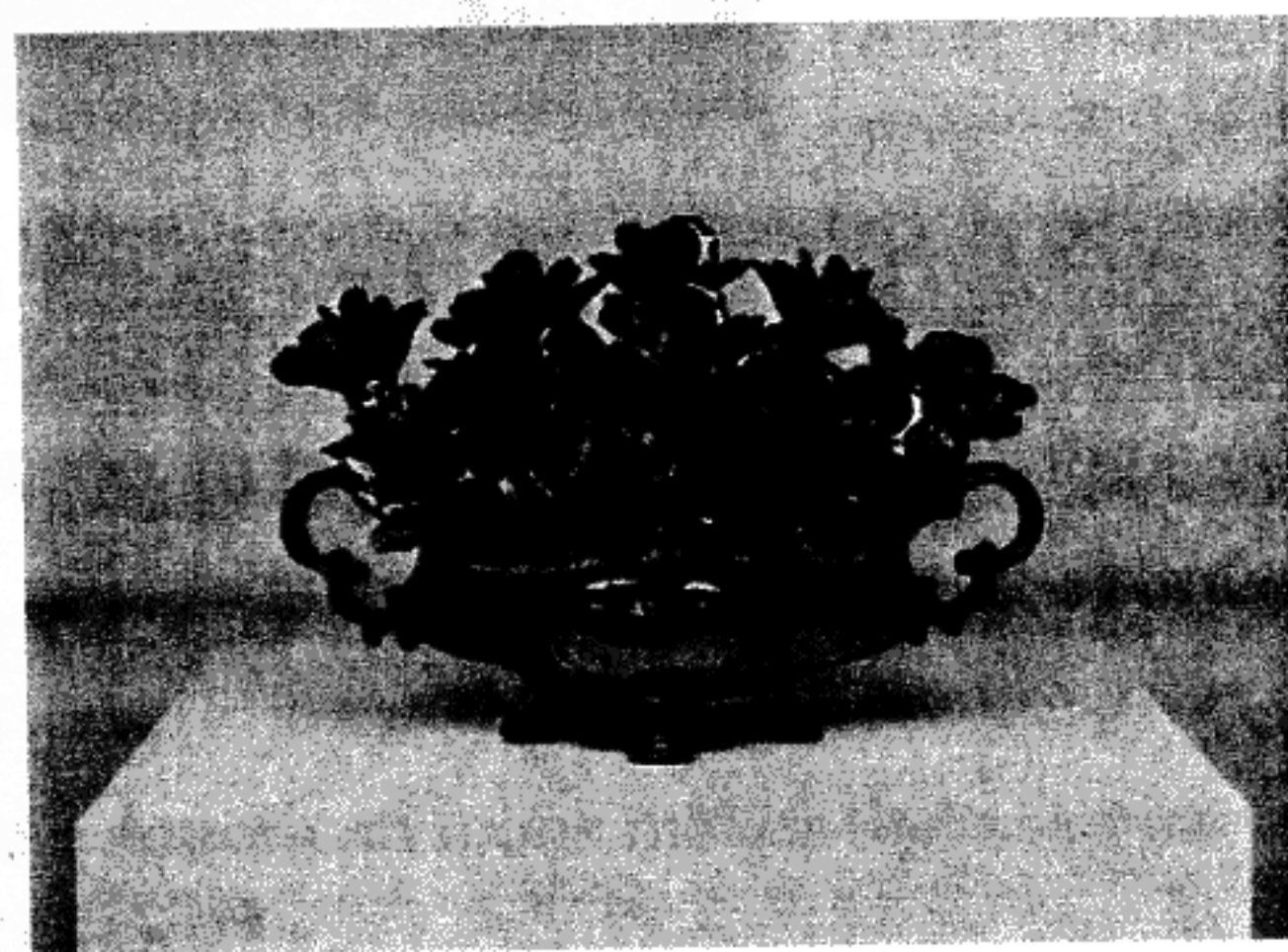
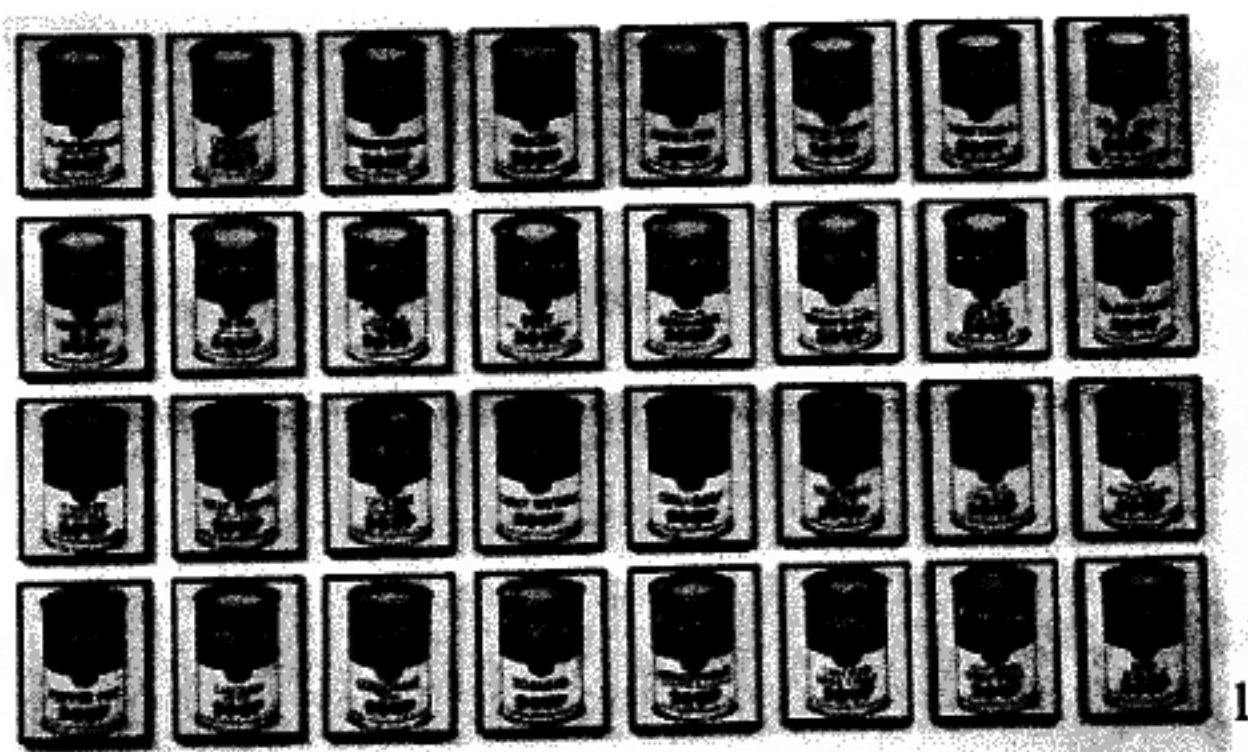
It is obvious Jeff Koons has studied Andy Warhol. As Robert Hughes puts it, “Koons is the baby to Rosemary’s Andy Warhol” (78). His work haunts the audience with kitsch and color. Like Warhol, it’s difficult to tell if he is an artist, or merely artful at self-promotion, or both.

The similarities between Warhol and Koons extend beyond their abilities as public-relations wizards. Both artists grew up in Pennsylvania, and worked “corporate” jobs -- Warhol as a commercial artist, Koons as a Wall Street commodities trader (Hughes, 78). Both state that their work is meant for the average person. Warhol is quoted as saying, “Pop art is for everyone” (qtd in Bailey, 208). Koons states his art is “morality theater, trying to help the underdog” (qtd. in Plagens, Hangin, 53). Although their mediums are different; Warhol primarily uses photos, printmaking, and video while Koons prefers large-scale sculptures and (most recently) collage like paintings, both artists have rarely fully produced their artworks. Warhol uses newspaper clippings, existing photos, and his cohort of followers from The Factory to create his works. Koons comes up with an idea, but rarely executes his works. Various artisans help build and his large sculptural pieces, and his 80 artist assistants assemble his collage-like oil paintings (Schjedahl 131). Although these facts are of interest, the most significant similarity between Warhol and Koons is the subject matter of their artwork. Both men are inspired by pop cultural events, and the exploration of everyday moments in an artful way.

In a consumer society like America, it is hard not to be inspired by the undertones of celebrity and commoditization. Warhol explores these themes in a number of pieces, showing how everyday objects, like Campbell’s soup cans, Brillo pad boxes, and knives



can be displayed to enhance their natural state. Simple product labels become intriguing and a household-cooking object becomes eerie and dark. Likewise, Koons explores throwaway childhood objects, like balloon animals, basketballs, or flowers. He transforms them into memorable treasures by enlarging them, suspending them in a glass case, or by making them devoid of color. His techniques make the everyday item seem extraordinary and allow the audience to think about how these meaningless objects change our surroundings.

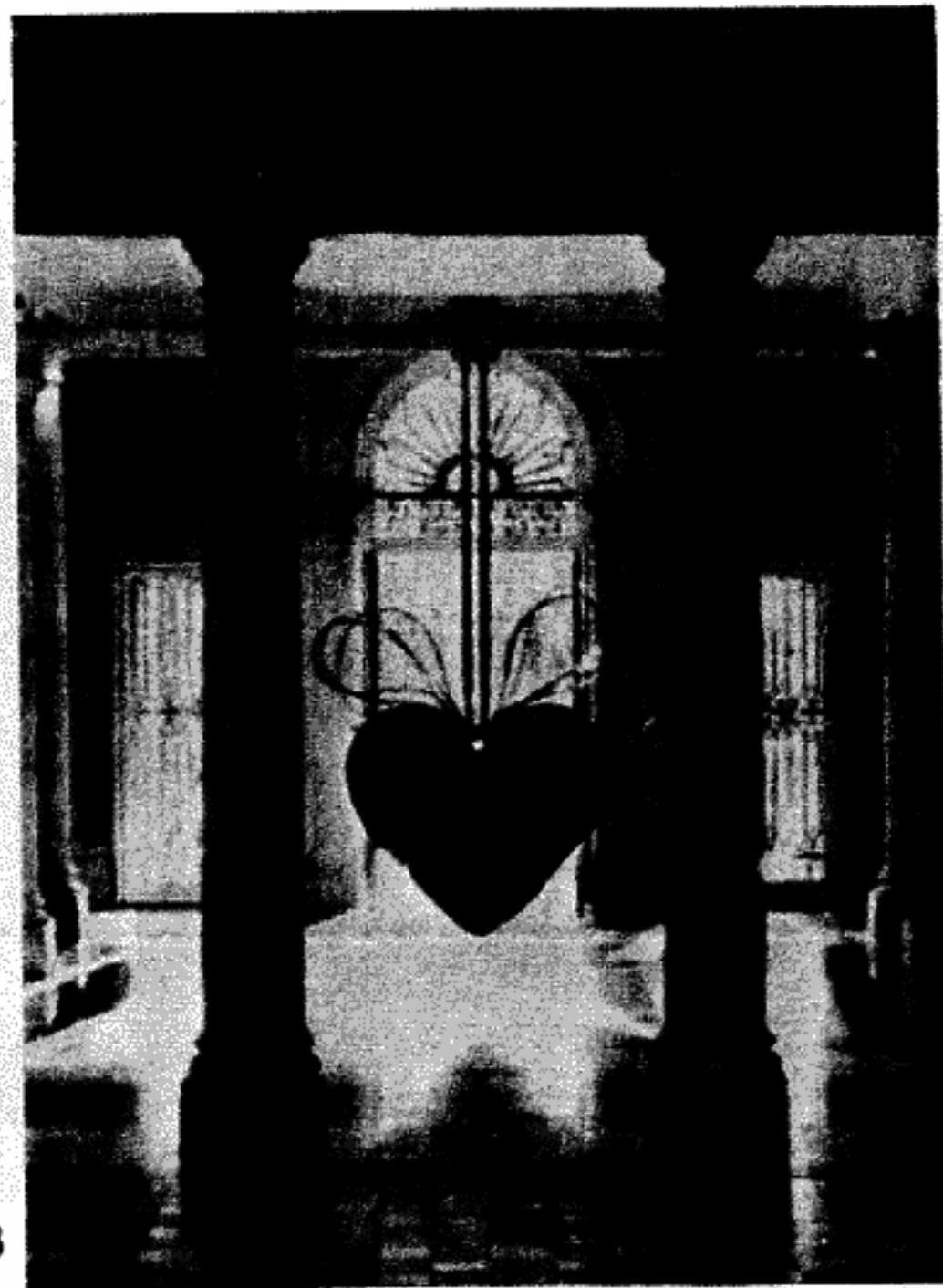
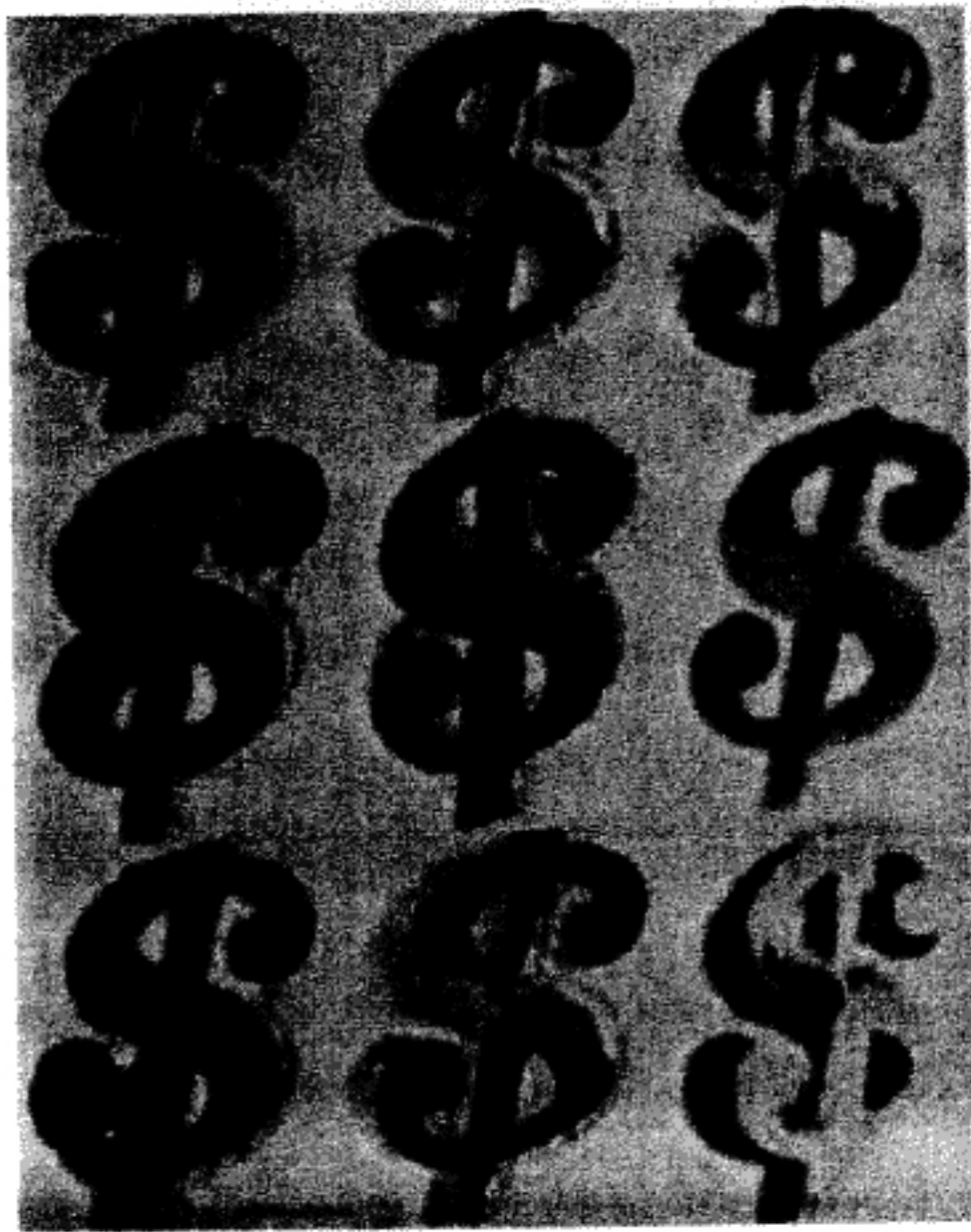


Both Warhol and Koons also play with our prominent cultural symbolism. In one series of prints, Warhol features the dollar sign. Simple, yet impactful, this symbol controls much of our American society. By presenting the symbol alone, the audience begins to think about how they individually relate to money and how Warhol might relate to money. Koons features the heart symbol in one of his boldest pieces entitled “Hanging Heart.” Similar to the dollar sign, the heart is a widely recognized shape. It’s hard not to associate this symbol with a personal experience, or wonder what the bold presentation means to the artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Warhol: **Campbell's Soup Cans**, synthetic polymer paint on 32 canvases, each 508×406 mm, 1962 (New York, Museum of Modern Art); © 2007 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA /Art Resource, NY

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Koons: **Flowers** stainless steel 12 1/2 x 18 x 12 inches 31.8 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm Edition of 3 plus AP 1986  
Courtesy of [www.jeffkoons.com](http://www.jeffkoons.com)



Another common theme in Warhol and Koons' works is the idea of celebrity.

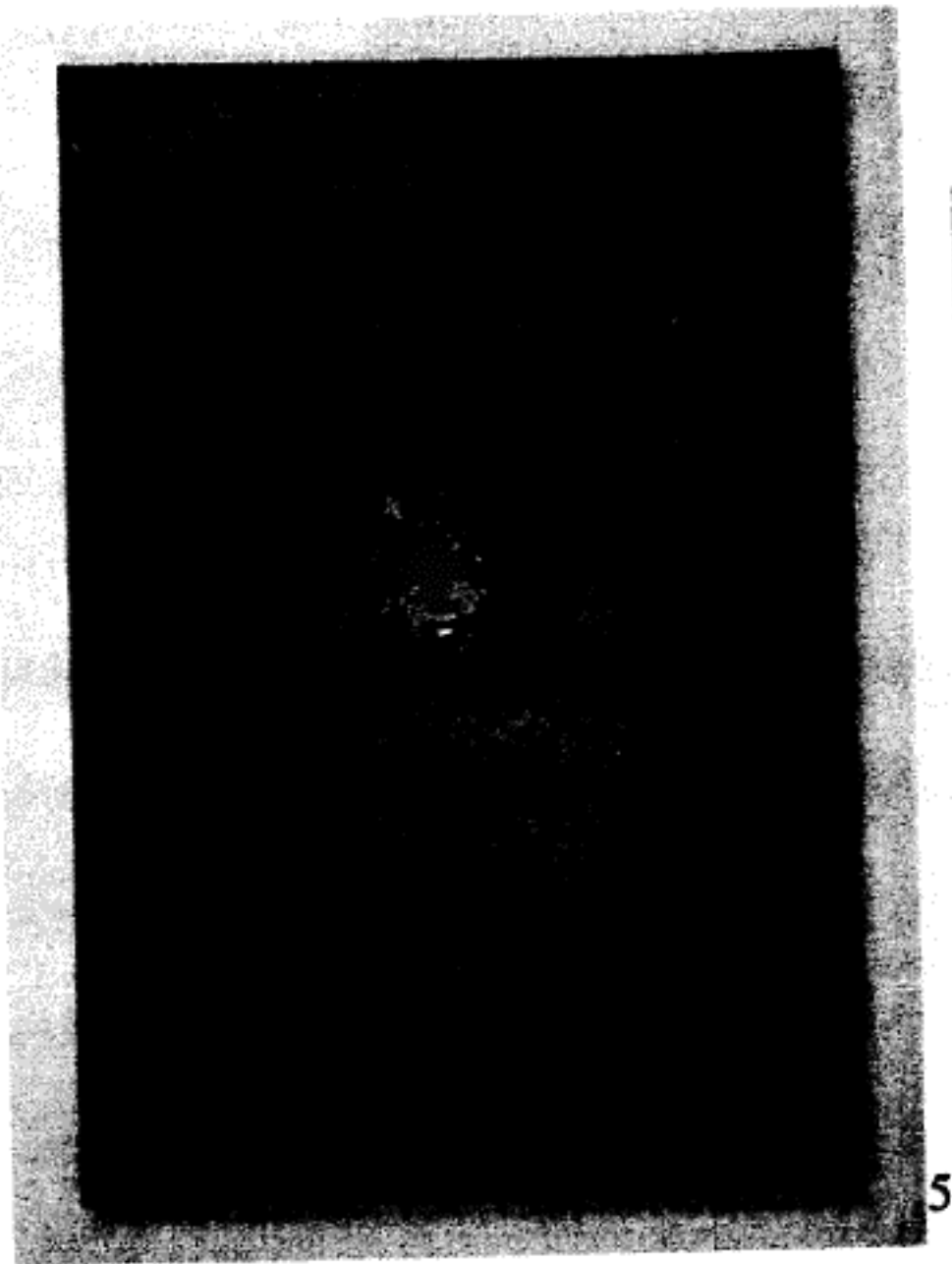
Warhol is famous for his prints of Marilyn Monroe, in particular a series featuring a gold tint. Koons is famous for his gold sculpture of Michael Jackson and his pet chimp, Bubbles. Using the color gold to represent these American icons makes them appear as commodities. The gold symbolizes wealth, and at the same time gives the implication of the artist cashing in on the celebrity's fame. Warhol's prints came out shortly after Marilyn Monroe's death, and Koons' sculpture was completed in 1988, at the height of Michael Jackson's fame. Ironically, as each artist uses the idea of celebrity as the fodder for his artworks, each man has become a celebrity in his own right.

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<sup>3</sup> Andy Warhol: **Dollar Sign**, 1982 © The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh. Founding Collection, Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Koons: **Hanging Heart (Red/Gold)** high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating and yellow brass 106 x 85 x 40 inches 269.2 x 215.9 x 101.6 cm 5 unique versions (Red/Gold, Magenta/Gold, Silver/Blue, Violet/Gold, Gold/Red) 1994-2006. Courtesy of [www.jeffkoons.com](http://www.jeffkoons.com)





Although Warhol was a celebrity, he kept his personal life private. He does explore his appearance in several print and photographic pieces. Koons on the other hand, not only discusses his personal life in detail with interviewers, but also made it the subject of his “Made in Heaven” series. In this series, he graphically shows himself in sexual positions with his (then) wife, Italian porn star Ilona Staller. This series of pieces made Koons a very recognizable name because of the shock value and the graphic way in which he was displaying himself in the artwork.

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<sup>5</sup> Andy Warhol: **Gold Marilyn Monroe**, synthetic polymer paint, silkscreened and oil on canvas, 2.11×1.45 m, 1962 (New York, Museum of Modern Art); © 2007 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Koons: **Michael Jackson and Bubbles** porcelain 42 x 70 1/2 x 32 1/2 inches 106.7 x 179.1 x 82.6 cm Edition of 3 plus AP 1988. Courtesy of [www.jeffkoons.com](http://www.jeffkoons.com)



Despite the noticeable differences in style and use of celebrity/pop culture, it's clear Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons are cut from the same cloth. Their artistic displays make the audience question their surroundings and redefine their definition of art. In many of their works, it's hard to tell if they are illustrating a commodity, celebrating the idea of celebrity, reminding us of our childhoods, or trying to indicate the power of media and pop culture in American society. Leaving the interpretation open to the viewer is the full intent of each of the artists. In many ways, Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons shouldn't be credited with changing the art world through their pieces, but rather through their skills at self-promotion and public relations.

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Warhol: **Photobooth Self-portrait**, gelatin silver print, 19.6 x 3.6 cm (7 3/4 x 1 7/16 in.) each, c. 1963 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Rogers Fund, Joyce and Robert Menschel, Adriana and Robert Mnuchin, Harry Kahn, and Anonymous Gifts, in memory of Eugene Schwartz, 1996, Accession ID: 1996.63a,b); © 2007 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Koons: **Jeff and Ilona (Made in Heaven)** polychromed wood 66 x 114 x 64 inches 167.6 x 289.6 x 162.6 cm Edition of 3 plus AP 1990. Courtesy of [www.jeffkoons.com](http://www.jeffkoons.com)



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