

DAZED

PICTURE THIS
Debbie Harry
meets Karen O

MAGIC AND MAYHEM
Terence Koh's dark art

PLUS
Lee Hazlewood
Jeremy Scott
Kate Nash
Ghetto cowboys



BE AMAZED

ZOOEY DESCHANEL

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INTO THE VOID:

The art of Terence Koh



In art's recent return to ritual and magic, **TERENCE KOH** reigns sorcerer supreme. Mixing bodily fluids with religious iconography, he addresses sophisticated notions of transformation and decay, exulting in the pristine beauty found at the dark hearts of our beings. But don't forget the cock, he reminds **ANA FINEL HONIGMAN**. Portrait photography by **DASH SNOW**





"Art should not be sexual," proclaims Terence Koh. "It should tickle something beyond the physical, the psychological, and even beyond the unconscious." Mixing beauty with debauchery, Koh's art embodies this ethereal definition. Crucifixes and cocks are just two of his signatures, and his art is a beautiful combination of Zen and cum.

Koh, who was born in 1977 in Beijing and raised in Vancouver, now lives in New York. He first came to prominence in the LA and NYC art worlds as his alter ego Asianpunkboy (APB), with his eponymous custom-made books and websites – www.asianpunkboy.com and www.kohbunny.com – that feature doodle-like drawings, coy haikus and images appropriated from pop and gay porn sites. The Asianpunkboy site, which has a deliciously Dionysian porn and pop culture focus, opens with a drawing of an owl perched on a naked man's back, over his open asshole with the words "Enter Faggo" leading into the site.

Effinely elusive, Koh's identity remained unknown until he "killed off" Asianpunkboy in 2003. "He wasn't behaving," Koh claims. "He was being BAD." Since Asianpunkboy's "death", Koh has stopped updating the sites and Asianpunkboy's saucy form of bricolage has grown more mature, potent and powerful as Koh transferred his aesthetic into large-scale installations.

Koh's debut solo show *The Whole Family*, held at Los Angeles' Peres Projects in May 2003, included 21 images printed on lavender paper of laddish boys stolen from gay porn sites, masses of flour, two live love birds, sculptures of a cannon, a white neon light sculpture in the style of Tracey Emin that read "Felt", a white silk flag, an engraved mirror, an owl with bombastic diamond eyes, shattered glasses, a rhinestone-encrusted switchblade and many bullets. Peres Projects has been showing Koh in LA and Berlin ever since, along with other intelligently irreverent artists such as Dan Colen, Brazilian New York-based artist Assume Astro Vivid Focus, and gay art icon Bruce LaBruce, author of *The Reluctant Pornographer*.

In 2004, "29 Seconds of Attraction" followed, one of the few "self-portraits" Koh presented to the public. It consisted of 29 identical inkjet prints of his head and shoulders, lined up in a row and presented in red frames, his face covered with thick circles made from Hershey's chocolate and semen. Koh's use of cum is in the tradition of Marcel Duchamp, the first known artist to use spunk as a medium. In 1946, Duchamp gave a woman he wanted, but who was not interested in him, a work he called "Paysage fautil" ("Faulty Landscape"), an apparently abstract greenish painting on abalon, backed with black satin. This pretty splotch was later discovered to be the artist's semen. In the same spirit, Koh's use of his own cum is endearingly punky and poetic, not pervy or irrelevantly irreverent.



Above: Mein Tod Mein Tod, 2005. Top: Sprungkapf, 2006



29 Seconds of Attraction, Hershey's chocolate and artist cum, 2003

Since then, Koh has been mostly making white monochrome work. For the 2004 Whitney Biennial, Koh crafted a hut covered in white plush panels and filled it with constarch. Pushing back a furry flap, the viewer was introduced to a pristine and serene enclave decorated with idiosyncratic objects that had been painted white. Among the chilly mementos mori was an owl hanging upside-down which stared outward with diamond eyes, and yet another switchblade glistening with rhinestones. Like a trip into Narnia, the cool world that Koh had created was terrifyingly tantalising and a beautiful, though all too brief, escape from the Biennial's crowds. Being enveloped in the whiteness was a calming retreat from all the other art trying to pop off the exhibition halls' white walls.

For his first solo show in Germany in 2005, Koh organised a memorial service for himself at the Peres Projects space in Berlin, entitled "Mein Tod Mein Tod", which consisted of a white marble tombstone, made entirely of edible cake, left under a gap in the gallery's ceiling, and presided over by two priests and a group of choir boys, all slathered in white paint. The group sang to the tombstone memorialising Koh, before his funeral party was served a seven course, all-white meal to help them mourn Koh's "passing".

White is the perfect colour for Koh. Perhaps the most paradoxical of colours, it is associated in the West with brides and purity, yet it is also the colour of sexual fluids, blank canvases, cocaine, fluorescent office lighting, cigarette paper, hospital sheets. And in many Eastern cultures, it is the colour of mourning. Like Japanese *Butoh* dance – for which the performers are coated in white powder, the dances dealing with the subject of homosexuality, and of which the first documented work culminated in a live chicken being smothered between the choreographer's thighs – Koh's all-white work transforms white into a blinding white-hot flame of emotion and a tide of antisocial urges.

In contrast, black can be cool and calming. Koh has produced black sister pieces to his all-white work. Last August, Koh pre-positioned beautiful topless blond boys, and black damaged drum sets in the pitch-black Peres Projects Berlin gallery, and then he arrived with his face covered by a streaming, tangled black "devil's lock" do, the signature hairstyle of Glen Danzig and the deranged, damned dead girl in *The Ring*. Writting and howling to the frenzied beat of the drums, Koh



**"IT'S NOT ABOUT BLACK OR WHITE. IT'S LIKE THAT
GREY ZONE WHEN YOU LOSE SENSE OF THE HORIZON
AND ENTER A UNIQUE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES"**

The Temple of The Golden Piss, 2004







"FUCK COLOUR, IT'S A NEW VOID OF EVERYTHING"





Mirroring Swiss Chocolate Mountain Spirits, 2006

mixed Yoko Ono-style song with the sinister aesthetic of Satanists to create a love song to all things grotesque, dark and decayed.

Shamim Momin, curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, describes Koh's allure: "Much has been said of the push to ritual and magic in very recent art, and to me, Koh is our consummate sorcerer of the moment. Awash with desire, transformation, death and loneliness, Koh's work embodies the true value of such a notion, one of the oldest and most necessary of human impulses. He lets us know, over and over, that the secret interiors of all things, whether flesh or glass coffins or black holes or one's heart, cloaked in perfect, often heartbreakingly empty beauty, can almost never be obtained. But it's enough – far more than enough, actually – that he reminds us why we all keep trying."

In *USA Today*, the recent exhibition of the hottest and hippest American work in Charles Saatchi's collection shown at the Royal Academy, Koh was represented by "Crackhead," a monumental installation of 222 disfigured plaster casts of his face painted black, covered in wax and charcoal and encased in 222 glass vitrines. Koh explains his use of black: "Everybody seemed to be excited about the goth and darkness; the dark side of America is what everybody is talking about. I was a goth once anyway, I painted my nails black, danced with my hands to Sisters of Mercy's 'Lucretia My Reflection' every day. I made a really cute little Asian fey goth boy."

Despite the surface dissonance between black and white, Koh affirms that for him, "The black and white works are equal. Like the song by Michael Jackson, – 'If you're thinkin' about my baby / It don't matter if you're black or white.' It's like it's not about black or white love. It's like that grey zone when you lose sense of the horizon and enter into a unique realm of possibilities. I would prefer not to describe my works as any colour. Fuck colour, it's a new void of everything."





Koh did, however, add some colour to his oeuvre with "Temple of The Golden Piss", in 2004, at the Extra City Centre for Contemporary Art in Antwerp. A shower of gold, "Temple of The Golden Piss" was constructed of two metal coat racks, a dildo, animal horns, masks, gloves, cuffs, leather, chains, a plastic basket and a ram's horn, all coated in glistening gold leaf and bathed in a golden glow. The "Temple of The Golden Piss (Redux)" was installed in Hackney's George and Dragon pub during the 2005 Frieze art fair, where Koh nailed an inverted gold-plated crucifix on the door of the men's toilet so Jesus was dangling downwards. He lined the lavish loo with glittering gold paint and illuminated the cubicle with lit candles in a shrine to a gold sculpture of a hermaphrodite Mary, her arms outstretched and a big cock prominently protruding from her virgin belly, offering an alternative explanation for her impregnation.

Mary may have answered Koh's prayers that year, as he proceeded to sell out the Peres Project booth at Frieze with a series of white objects in vitrines. In these, Koh installed objects including dildos, Marys, chastity belts, shoes and objects he liberated from friends' homes, his own old childhood toys and gifts from his boyfriend, all painted white or black and embedded in solid walls of glass. The vitrines lent these banal and odd objects the authority of museum quality artifacts, as Koh proceeded to turn trash into treasure.

But Koh's work remains as much about the importance of ass as the significance of glass. During *The Armory Show* last March, Javier Peres, director of Peres Projects, and Koh, under the pseudonym of "Asian Song Society" (aka A.S.S.), launched "The Future of the Cock", at which Koh occupied the semen-soaked space of the once notorious but now-shuttered East Village gay bar, The Cock. The opening party was held in two rooms, one unlit and painted black, where revellers pressed against one another to get to the second, bright white room where naked men served champagne in front of an installation by Koh.

In August this year, Koh exhibited his first solo museum show at the Kunsthalle in Zürich. His installation consisted of objects and substances including chandeliers, lollipops, vegetables, hair, glass, gold, china, plastic kitsch, blood, piss and children's toys. He is now scheduled to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in January 2007, and has plans to create the first public sculpture in China to coincide with the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. As the first Western artist to ever erect a huge public art project in the world's biggest country, his goal is to make a "Guernica" of China. "I love Terence because he is Asian and I love Asians the mostest," explains Javier Peres. "Also I love the mostest people who love Asians, and those who detest them. He is my Asian prince, my one love, my only love. Thank you and good night."



Garrick My Lover Forever and Forever and Forever, 2006