

# TKOON

## THIS IS JARVIS

*brit pop icon spills the beans*



DINOSAUR JR.  
*make up, make album*

KLAXONS  
*sound your siren*

TERENCE KOH  
*art star rising*

PRINTED IN CANADA

\$3.99US \$8.99CAN

58>



# TERENCE KOH

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artwork courtesy of  
PERES PROJECTS

*When you walk through the manicured streets of “New New York,” it’s tough to imagine that at one time the city had balls the size of two tightly clenched gorilla fists and housed thousands of hungry artists, living off of the fumes of hope and dreams. By all accounts, things have changed. Those aforementioned “balls” have slowly morphed into 401Ks and condos, and the artists have been replaced with young investment bankers brought up on strict diets of Sex and the City and Jerry McGuire. But in the search for a livable existence, the occasional miracle can occur and give reason to believe in dreams. One such miracle...*

is Terence Koh’s rise to fame and fortune in the art world. And it’s the type that was acquired neither through being the offspring of high art collectors nor wealthy industrialists. Koh’s career, thus far, can be in part be accredited to the old fashioned art of bullshitting. Well, bullshitting and, of course, his prolific, bewildering and unimaginable output.

Stories of Koh’s beginnings are comical and engaging at best, and befuddling at worst. His gallerist was quoted as saying that Koh “lies about everything.” He claims to have been born in Beijing, bred in Canada and currently reside in New York City. Facts that may all be true, but when his d.o.b. has backslid from 35 to 33 to 30 to (currently) 29, it exhibits either a relatable weakness for vanity or a clever execution of projecting mystery.

His artistic birth, on the other hand, occurred on May 10th 2003, when former international lawyer and newly minted art dealer Javier Peres (who was Koh’s lover at the time) poured a small fortune into opening up the Peres Projects gallery in Los Angeles. Billed under his moniker “asianpunkboy” (made popular by his gay art-porn website [www.asianpunkboy.com](http://www.asianpunkboy.com)), the inaugural show was Koh’s first solo, and the beginning of a fast-tracked and controversial art career. While many artists with his level of experience sell works in the \$20,000–\$50,000 range, Koh’s pieces now fetch upwards of half a million dollars.

His work, which is highly self-involved, and to a large degree self-loathing, explores themes of gayness, racial identity, mythology, religion, power, sadomasochism, provocation, luxury, egotism, wealth and love. No matter how distant from the subject he may seem (on his current website [Kohbunny.com](http://Kohbunny.com), he posts an unexplained tinted aerial photograph of Nazi soldiers in swastika formation, for example) all arrows point back to him. The site acts as a working studio of sorts, where he packs in link after link to short films, gay pornography and poetic scribbling of his infidelities and desires,

which are all highly intimate and reveling. He even manages to squeeze in a laundry list of high priced designer items that he acquired in 2006, including the amount he paid for them. It’s a 24-7, voyeuristic portal into the life of the artist. Nothing is off limits. Everything is all at once taboo and appropriated.

But it’s really his work outside of the website that has earned him his mettle. Koh creates environments and objects to fill those environments. It is within those environments and objects that he literally and figuratively cages himself. When he recreated the popular New York City gay club, the Cock, in his Lower East Side apartment, Koh’s version of the its iconic neon rooster sign was white instead of red, and thusly titled “Big White Cock.” For the recreation of the interior, the show featured a group of naked young men groping participants as they immersed themselves in Koh’s seedy, dungeon-club fantasy. When asked whether he choreographed these performances, he replied, “I don’t direct. People are best when they are themselves.”

That said, viewers who attended the opening night of a recent installation at SoHo’s Deitch Projects gallery were required to wear all white. The warehouse-sized space was filled with white smoke and powder, and a group of young boys were directed to walk around in their underwear, spackled in white powder and ghostly sheets—a far cry from a natural occurrence.

It’s that type of control and mild sadism that’s part of the essence of his artistic identity. At the Whitney Museum of Art, where Koh was given his first solo museum show this year, he chose not to fill the space with his signature vitrines (glass boxes) of gold plated feces or cum-soaked underwear, but rather to blast a 600-watt film lamp from the downstairs gallery, virtually blinding all passers-by. In his work, he shows, tells and controls all, but outside of it, it’s smoke, mirrors and self-loathing submission. Koh’s work can be

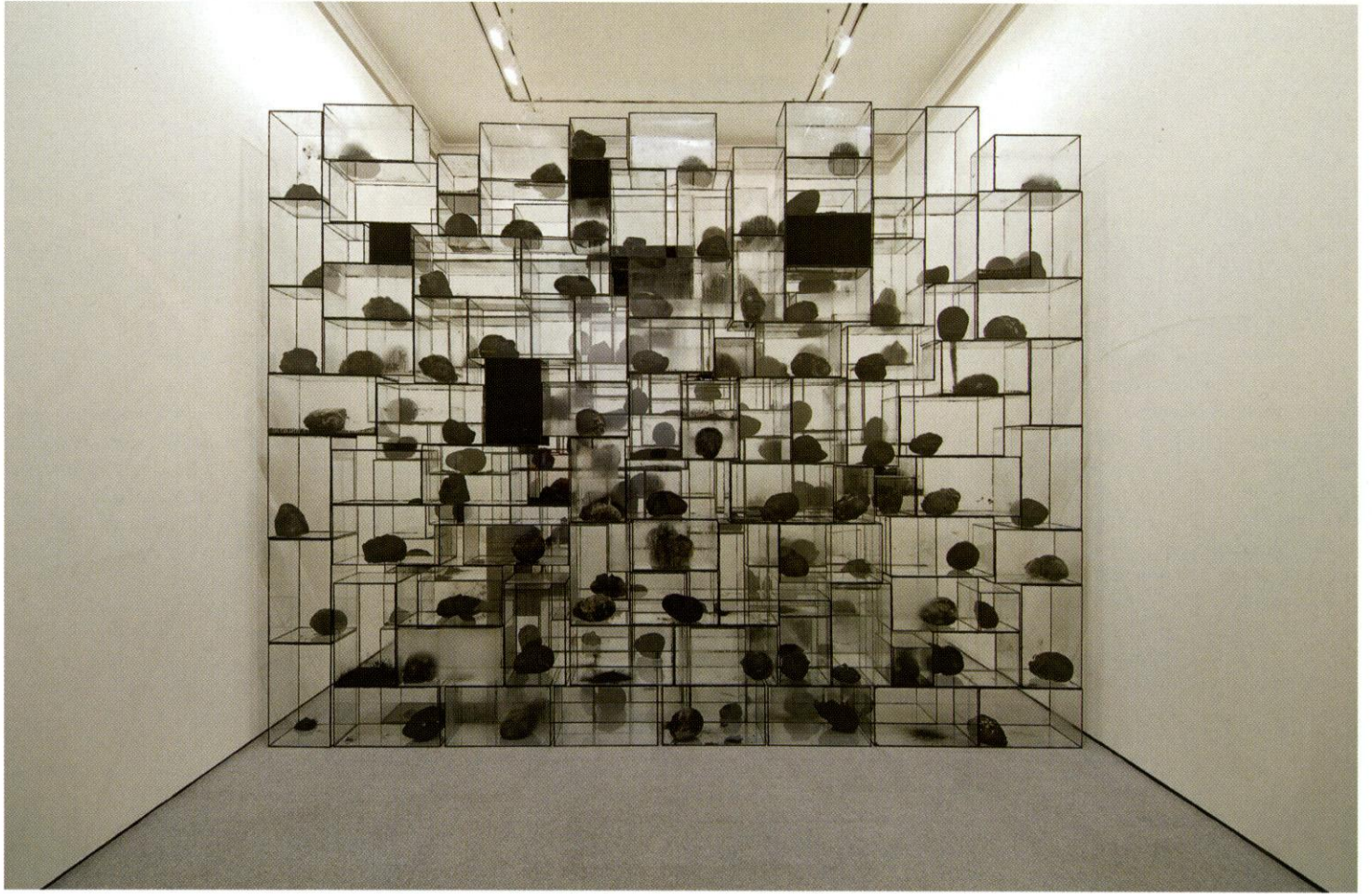
frustrating in that the work itself amplifies his artistic selfishness so well. But it’s that same selfish indulgence that makes it so magnetic. When asked what his legacy will be, he poetically replied, “A failure. A comet crashing into an asteroid in the cold nether of space. No sound. No taste. Dying embers disappearing as temporary star light.”

His exploration in “the temporary” is integral in that an acceptance of expiration bleeds from his ego into every inch of his art. He created a sculpture titled “Michael Jackson, Michael Jackson,” which consisted of two miniaturized chocolate Michael Jackson statues, one from “Thriller” and the other from “Beat It,” standing and facing one another. When the buyers complained that the statue had begun to produce white spots from decay, Koh professed that it now looked more like Michael Jackson, insisting that its value had increased.

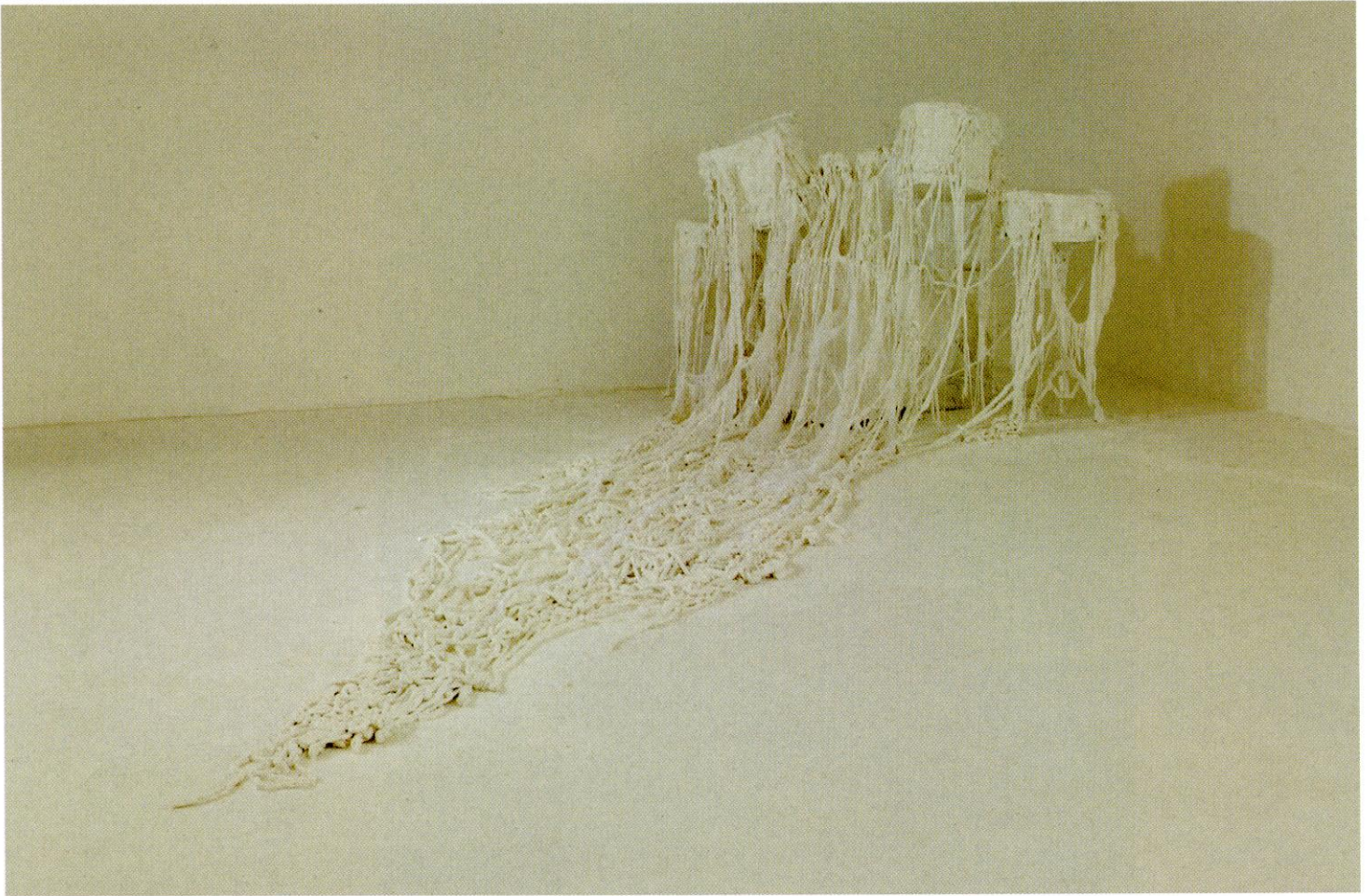
It’s not just his choice of materials, but the use of his own, temporal body, that touches upon the theme of legacy. While many artists work in lasting mediums, Koh deliberately uses materials that fall apart, alter and decompose over time. The choice to work in chocolate, excrement or semen would be career suicide for most artists, but for Koh, that impermanence makes his work all the more valuable. “Every piece of work that I sell,” he explained, “comes with a certificate stating that change is inherent in the artwork. It’s so easy. If it breaks or rots, it just gets more beautiful!”

Amongst the crop of new, New York “art stars,” Koh is the best example of an artist who bravely explores all aspects of hedonism. He lives and breathes what many others hide underneath social niceties. His worship of self, luxury and sex are all tendencies that reside slightly beneath the skin of society, bulging and begging to be bled dry. Koh has simply sliced it open and exposed the flesh. His work begs the question, What fun is success unless you’re around to enjoy it? In the eyes of Koh, it’s no fun at all. All that matters is that his work exists as long as he does.



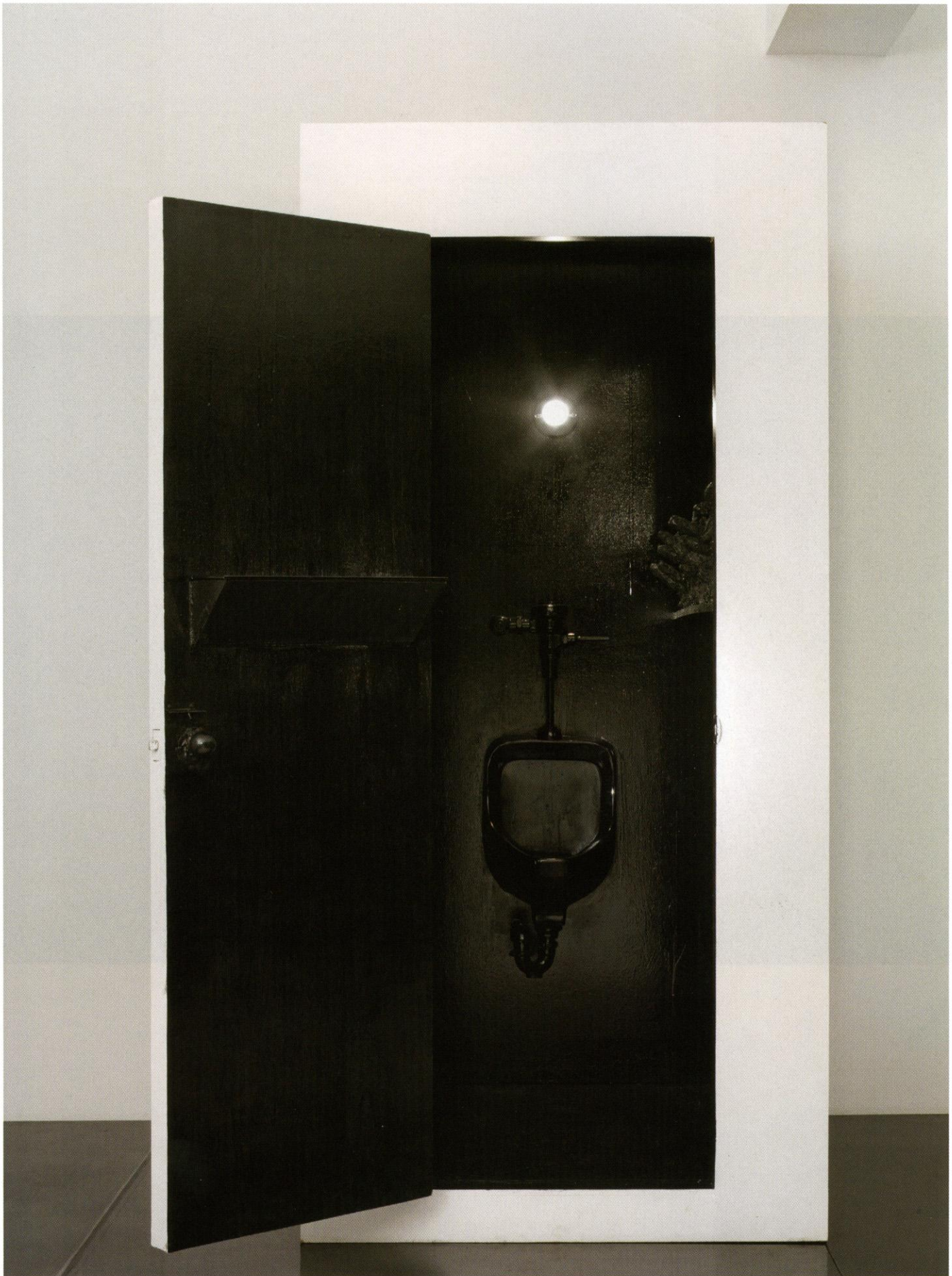


CRACKHEAD  
2006



THESE DECADES THAT WE NEVER SLEEP (DRUM SET 2 OF 2)

2004



UNTITLED (MEDUSA)  
2006



THE VOYAGE OF LADY MIDNIGHT SNOWDROPS THROUGH DOUBLE STAR DEATH (THE COMET I DESTROYED AGAIN AND AGAIN, I)  
2006



MEIN TOD MEIN TOD  
2005



UNTITLED (VITRINES 1-10, *DETAIL*)  
2006