

## Artists in the Marketplace

By Tami L. Gadbois



KEITH HARING IN POP SHOP

Photo by Charles Dolfi-Michels  
Copyright Estate of Keith Haring

It quickly becomes evident walking through any modern-day department store that celebrities have cornered the perfume market. Nicole Kidman is the face of Chanel. Sarah Jessica Parker, Paris Hilton and Britney Spears all have their own signature scents, and with each scent there is a unique bottle as well; JLo's features its own mock "bling" in the form of dangling diamond chains.

Celebrity involvement with consumer culture is not surprising anymore. Yet, what has been below the radar is the fact that fine artists are enmeshed in it too. In 1937 the artist Leonor Fini designed a scandalous perfume bottle in the curvaceous form of a woman's torso for fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli's signature scent, "Shocking." In 1946, Salvador Dalí followed suit, producing an elegant golden metal clamshell that housed a unique flacon for the same queen of couture. More recently in the accessories department, the popular Japanese superflat artist Takashi Murakami was commissioned by Marc Jacobs to produce his own colorful logo pattern now gracing Louis Vuitton handbags that remain in high demand.

But what does this activity mean and is it a good thing? Despite popular notions of moral superiority and separation, artists have been participating in the art market for as long as it has existed. More specifically, since World War II, a direct way in which artists have remained visually vocal within American consumer culture is through the medium/commodity of multiples. "Mass Production:

ALMA MONOGRAM MULTICOLORE. 2003  
Takashi Murakami  
Courtesy of Louis Vuitton North America





LA BOÎTE-EN-VALISE, 1941  
 From or By Marcel DuChamp or Rose Selavy (1968/Series G)  
 Copyright 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP,  
 Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp

Artist Multiples and the Marketplace," a recent exhibition at the Emily Davis Gallery at the University of Akron, exhibited examples of artist multiples produced over the past 50+ years as means for increasing personal profits as well as voicing dissent and disillusionment by artists within the art market.

Relying on the artist Daniel Spoerri's definition from 1959, a multiple is an art object that can be mass-produced but not conventionally duplicated, such as a photograph or print. It does not bear the hand of the artist, but instead is manufactured by a third party. Lastly, a multiple is commonly kinetic, relying on the viewers' interaction with it to realize its full meaning. For example, in 1967 Yoko Ono produced her *Box of Smile* consisting of a sterling silver box with the title delicately engraved on the front. When opened, a small mirror was revealed inside. The witty combination of the title and the act of opening the box to find the mirror inevitably made viewers smile; thus lending veritas to its title.

The exhibition "Mass Production," curated by Kevin Concannon, begins with Marcel Duchamp's *la Boîte-en-valise* from 1941. Upon immigrating to the United States, Duchamp commissioned miniatures of his famous European-produced artworks and had them shipped to the U.S. where he and others assembled them in elaborate boxes. The project stemmed from the artist's desire to preserve the memory of his artworks from potentially complete wartime destruction.

THE WRONG GALLERY, 2005  
 Maurizio Cattelan, Ali Subotnick and Massimiliano Gioni  
 Courtesy Cerealart



From Duchamp, the exhibition wound its way chronologically through several post-war movements including fluxus, minimalism and pop art, and included examples by Andy Warhol, Niki de Saint Phalle, Keith Haring, Larry Miller and Yoshitomo Nara. It finished with the recent collaborative project of the two-and-a-half-square-foot *The Wrong Gallery*, located in Chelsea. *The Wrong Gallery* "opened" in 2002 and exhibited art by leading contemporary artists for three years without ever unlocking its miniscule glass doors.

Walking through the exhibition was a bit like examining rare flea market finds beneath the pristine lens of a microscope. Small trinkets were neatly arranged within clear plexiglas vitrines while wall-friendly items adorned the stark white interior of the gallery. Artworks formed visual puns, poked, prodded and played among the mundane, such as Vincent Mazeau's red and white exit sign above the doorway that reads Evil. The items were at one time made available, and in some instances are still available, far below the exorbitant prices of luxury goods into which most notable art objects fall. Yoshitomo Nara's widely seen *Dish (Too Young to Die)*—a ceramic ashtray featuring a sinister child smoking a cigarette—may be purchased today at local museum gift shops. Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs*, optical

disks that spin on a turntable to create three-dimensional effects, are available on eBay at substantially low bids. Although interesting as objects, the exhibition's content exudes greater collective strength as representatives of an ongoing dialogue between artists and the art market. This dialogue is finding contemporary interest among art historians and curators alike, and "Mass Production" is symptomatic of this. Curator Concannon has nicely perpetuated the spirit of art accessibility, inclusiveness and lively debate by including Akron students in every facet of the exhibition's production from concept to catalogue entries and design.

MASS PRODUCTION: ARTIST MULTIPLES AND THE MARKETPLACE  
Emily Davis Gallery  
Mary Schiller Myers School of Art, University of Akron  
October 30 - December 1, 2006



RETRORELIEFS (OPTICAL DISKS), 1935  
Marcel Duchamp.  
Copyright 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP,  
Paris/Succession Marcel Duchamp