

Wallpaper: 'Ready-made success: Jeff Koons reflects at Almine Rech Gallery, London' by Elly Parsons, October 7, 2016.



Jeff Koons walks us round his latest exhibition at Almine Rech's new Mayfair gallery. Pictured left: *Ballerinas*, 2010–2014. Photography: Hervé Véronèse Centre Pompidou. Right: *Seated Ballerina*, 2010–2015. Photography: Consultatio Real Estate

Dubbed the 'first celebrity artist' and having already seen a full retrospective at New York's Whitney Museum, one wonders what commodity-broker-turned-art pioneer Jeff Koons has left to achieve. The goal now, in the artist's own surprising words, is 'to reach a state of complete self-acceptance'.

With the inauguration of a new exhibition at close friend Almine Rech's Mayfair outpost, this philosophy is given the space to breathe and develop. The self-titled show consists of two majestic ballerina ready-mades from Koons' *Antiquity* series, framed by a group of technically exacting reproductions of Western masterpieces, created with the help of computer algorithms in Koons' New York studio. They include Old Master paintings such as Giotto's *The Kiss of Judas*, Titian's *Pastoral Concert* and Tintoretto's *The Origin of the Milky Way*. On how he chose these particular pieces, Koons explains that they have all profoundly influenced his work. Some of them, he feels, have moved him to the extent that they have biologically altered his DNA. Outlandish, maybe, but he says it with such passion and integrity, that it's easy to believe him.

In front of these imposing, oil-based works, Koons has placed a series of hand-blown blue globes, rendered in the same glowing stainless steel as the ballerinas, providing a continuity and narrative that unites the show. Within these mirrored *Gazing Balls*, 'the painting is reflected, and you're reflected into it – you become part of the painting, it takes you back in time'.

They're not just 'shiny' for the sake of it, and they're not arbitrarily placed – there is real, conceptual purpose to them that belies their initial, comical appearance.

The reflective Gazing Ball paintings promote Koons' idea of 'linkage' between the audience and artwork that is so central to his practice. As he's been saying throughout his career, 'the viewer completes the work'. He goes on to explain that seeing ourselves within the image helps us to understand our place within the world. It affirms our small existence in the grand scale of things. 'Really, this show celebrates giving it up to things outside yourself, things greater than yourself.'

And it works. Standing in Almine Rech's pristine new space, among these handsomely reproduced masterpieces, and standing before Koons himself, one is humbled. The artist's coveted brand of 'self-acceptance', however, might be a little way off yet. Especially when Koons reveals that the only man ever to have truly achieved it is Picasso – his artistic hero. 'I feel that when an individual is able to have self-acceptance as Picasso did in his late 80s, then you're able to move outward, outside yourself, which eventually leads you to the acceptance of others. This is the highest state. A state that art can take you to.'