ALMINE RECH

Jeff Koons
The Painter, The Sculptor

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The Schirn Kunsthalle and the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung devoted themselves to the work of the U.S. American artist Jeff Koons (born in 1955), who has played a pioneering role in the contemporary art world since the 1980s. The two concurrent shows deliberately separated the sculptural and painterly aspects of his oeuvre and presented each in a context of its own. Encompassing forty-five paintings, the presentation entitled "Jeff Koons. The Painter" at the Schirn focused on the artist's structural development as a painter. With motifs drawn from a diverse range of high and pop-cultural sources, his monumental painted works combine hyper-realistic and gestural elements to form complexes as compact in imagery as they were in content. In the show "Jeff Koons. The Sculptor" at the Liebieghaus, on the other hand, forty-four world-famous as well as entirely new sculptures by Jeff Koons entered into dialogues with the historical building and a sculpture collection spanning five millennia. Jeff Koons's Antiquity, a new series in which he explored antique art and its central motif – Eros – debuted in Frankfurt on this occasion.

In his paintings and sculptures, Jeff Koons employed elements from the consumer world and "high culture" alike, quoted artistic epochs as readily as he did objects from everyday life and advertising, and thus drew our attention again and again to such categories as beauty and desirability. Within this context, he has become an unequalled master of the interplay between the sublime and the banal. Although his works quoted familiar motifs from the consumer context, it was not for the sake of kitsch and irony. In an interview he commented: "I work with things that are sometimes referred to as kitsch, even if kitsch per se has never interested me. I always try to convey self-confidence, a certain inner sense of security, to the viewer. My chief concern in my work is the viewer." Koons was interested "not in the complexity, but in the simplicity of being" and its acceptance. This aspect found expression in his oeuvre in elementary themes such as childhood or sexuality. Contrary to the long tradition of subjectivity in art, however, Koons constantly emphasized artistic objectivity, working in the tradition of the "ready-made." Both his sculptures and his paintings had a particularly evocative and striking effect on the viewer through their exquisite craftsmanship and the lure of their surfaces.

Curators: Vinzenz Brinkmann (Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung), Matthias Ulrich (Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt), and Joachim Pissarro (New York)