

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Jeff Koons' Whimsy Takes Over NYC Museum

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Jeff Koons is taking over the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The contemporary artist's oversized toylike sculptures of a dog, gorilla, Popeye and other works spanning a three-decade career will fill nearly the entire museum from June 27 through Oct. 19.

"Jeff Koons: A Retrospective" is the most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work — and the Whitney's final show at its Madison Avenue location before moving downtown to a Renzo Piano-designed building in 2015.

Koons is arguably one of the most popular living artists today. Last year, he became the most expensive living artist, too, when his "Balloon Dog (Orange)" sold for \$58.4 million at auction.

"From tchotchkes and kitsch objects to working with pop stars like Lady Gaga on her recent album cover, he's a rare artist who's managed to find a broad audience," said Scott Rothkopf, a Koons expert and curator of the exhibit.

The show's planning and installation, four years in the making, has been a herculean task for the museum. For the first time, it had to remove the front doors and find creative ways for getting the monumental pieces to upper galleries.

His objects "are quite complicated to install in terms of their rigging and how they can be handled," Rothkopf said. "They're heavy, they're big. They have very fragile surfaces that can crack or chip."

He added: "In terms of weight, size and delicacy, all together they create a trifecta."

The museum created full-scale models of some objects to test how they would fit in the elevators. It made videos, 3-D renderings and small models to test clearances. It worked with engineering firms, riggers, Koons' own team and the objects' fabricators. The sculpture court pavers were re-enforced to take the weight of two never-before-seen black granite pieces: a woman reclining in a tub and Popeye planted with live flowers.

"It seems like an appropriate age to have a retrospective on this scale," Koons, 59, said in an interview. "I was able to develop more work and execute ideas that I wanted to realize."

His eight children have been an inspiration, he said, adding that his work is about "embracing the things that we love and enjoy" and bringing "a time and memory" from youth "when we were open to everything."

The exhibition is a survey of his work from 1978 to the present, with the aluminum-cast 10-foot-high "Play-Doh" and a re-creation of the Liberty Bell among several new works completed just days before the show's opening.

Among the exhibition's 120 works are a Mylar-like balloon dog of polished steel and a gold ceramic Michael Jackson with his pet chimpanzee Bubbles. Early works include vitrine-encased vacuum cleaners and basketballs suspended in water tanks.

But his work is not without controversy. In 1990, he created a stir with his "Made in Heaven" series of paintings and sculptures depicting explicit sexual poses with his then-wife, the Italian porn star and politician Ilona Staller, aka La Cicciolina. They're being shown in a gallery with a parental warning.

The exhibition will travel to the Pompidou Centre in Paris in November and to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain, in summer 2015.