

CELEBRITY

AND THE PECULIAR

Gahlberg Gallery
College of DuPage
425 Fawell Blvd.
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-6599
(630) 942-2321
www.cod.edu/gallery

Industry of the Ordinary/Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson

Through sculpture, text, photography, video, sound and performance "Industry of the Ordinary" are dedicated to an exploration and celebration of the customary, the everyday, and the usual. Their emphasis is on challenging pejorative notions of the ordinary, and, in doing so, moving beyond the quotidian.



INSTINCT



CURIOUS



UNFORGIVABLE



GLOW

The Stifling Smell of Success

“Another way to take up more space is with perfume.”
— *Andy Warhol*

Celebrities take up quite a bit of space. Regardless of their actual physical proportions or property ownership, they internationally occupy billboards, magazine covers and print ads, television and movie screens and many, many other things that crowd the earth. Some manage to further impose themselves through the development of perfumes that parlay their fame into a curious form of commerce and self-expression — a phenomenon that seems to have begun in the mid-1980s with products bearing the name or imprimatur of cinematic divas such as Catherine Deneuve and Elizabeth Taylor, and has eventually grown to include figures from the world of sports (David Beckham and Michael Jordan), pop music (J. Lo, P. Diddy and Beyonce), and, of course, the exasperatingly ubiquitous Britney Spears. Combining enterprise and industry, hubris and vanity, admiration and identification, celebrity scents represent big business and the curious cultural condition of establishing a connection with those touched by superstardom by whatever weird means necessary.

In his book *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, Andy Warhol reflects expansively on the power of perfume and the sense of smell in general — how it evokes moods, time periods and other experiences. One wonders what he might have made of the phenomenon of “celebrity scents” with their fragrant fusion of two of the cornerstone subjects of his oeuvre — fame and spectacular mass consumption. While it’s worth noting that a Warhol-related fragrance is being developed postmortem, the two-man collective Industry of the Ordinary, comprising Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, have assumed the responsibility of commenting on this most peculiar and ongoing trend. Their installation of oxygen tents filled with various celebrity perfumes provide a humorous yet succinctly biting satire of the strangely quiet assimilation of these substances into the general culture, despite the gaudy advertising hype that typically surrounds these products.

The mere fact that a duo billed as “Industry of the Ordinary” is creating work about these scents prompts reflection on what happens when the “ordinary” folk for whom these perfumes are developed choose to immerse themselves in the aura of those society has deemed “extra-ordinary.” It’s unsurprising, perhaps, that the primary demographic for celebrity scents are young adults and adolescents — that cross-section of humanity whose raging insecurities make them that much more likely to want to identify with someone who’s “made it” to the peak of stardom and fame. For the young fellows wanting to bend the ladies’ hearts like Beckham, they can avail themselves of his scent, *Instinct*. And for girls stuck in the American Midwest who need a touch of that South Beach glamour, there’s J. Lo’s *Glow*, *Miami Glow* and *Live*. Adolescents and young adults — for better and usually for worse — are regularly inclined toward exaggerated and hyperbolic behavior and speech (i.e., “I could have died when Tommy didn’t ask me to the prom” or “my mom’s gonna KILL me for flunking chemistry”) making Industry’s presentation of the smells of teen spirit in structures meant for the maintenance of life in an emergency that much more acutely meaningful.

Indeed, their use of vessels employed in times of the utmost urgent necessity for the presentation of substances of indulgent and extravagant superfluity and folly makes for a damning comment of sorts on how the industry, labor and resources devoted to the production of such trivial stuff might be better expended on curing some of the direst ills facing our civilization (in places like Darfur, Baghdad, Pakistan, Bangladesh ... among others.) On the other hand, one is tempted to play devil’s advocate (the perfect perfume for Johnny Cochran, perhaps) and suggest that the work resignedly accepts how celebrity scents, among other essentially useless worldly phenomena like ... well ... art, play a necessary role of their own in society on some bizarre and depressing level beyond rational comprehension. And further still, the work’s oppressive presentation of the perfumes could be a further reflection on how disturbingly pervasive the cult of celebrity and fame has become in contemporary culture. Given the political intentionality and affect of Industry of the Ordinary’s previous work, the last consideration seems the safest to assume. This latest project involving a contextual shift follows such similarly calculated aesthetic gestures as coordinating a choir to sing mildly offensive British football (read: soccer) chants or creating an ice sculpture of the Ten Commandments as an inspired take on the controversy surrounding the installment and removal of a similar sculpture dedicated to the Biblical phenomenon in front of the Alabama Supreme Court in 2001-2003. Just as those projects aimed to wind up relationships between high and low culture or the dialectics of permanence and impermanence and Church and State, this current presentation questions the rampantly fetishistic character of the culture industry (to borrow from Theodor Adorno) in its meditation on the extension of a superstar’s aura into saleable product. It also demonstrates Industry’s continuing interest in collective human experiences such as religion, politics and sports, by expanding their reach into the realms of celebrity worship and mass marketing and consumption.

It remains to be seen whether the project will result in the development and marketing of the duo’s own sponsored scent. In correspondence with the author, Brooks suggested such a fragrance would comprise “the aroma of dried mud on old football boots, with a high note of Boddingtons [pub ale] and just a soupçon of sweat,” yet when even a cult-appeal celebrity like actor Alan Cumming can sell \$1,000,000 worth of name-brand cologne in a year, perfumes of the probably rich and extremely-to-more-or-less famous are quite serious business. In their satirical reflection on the ubiquitous and by now quite overwrought spectacle of vanity that transcends the mere image to attach itself to our bodies and the air that we smell and breathe, Industry of the Ordinary, in their own modest way, calls for a long overdue reality check on drawing a more definitive line between giving the people what they want and overstepping the boundaries of taste, humility and simple common sense and decency.

— *Dominic Molon*

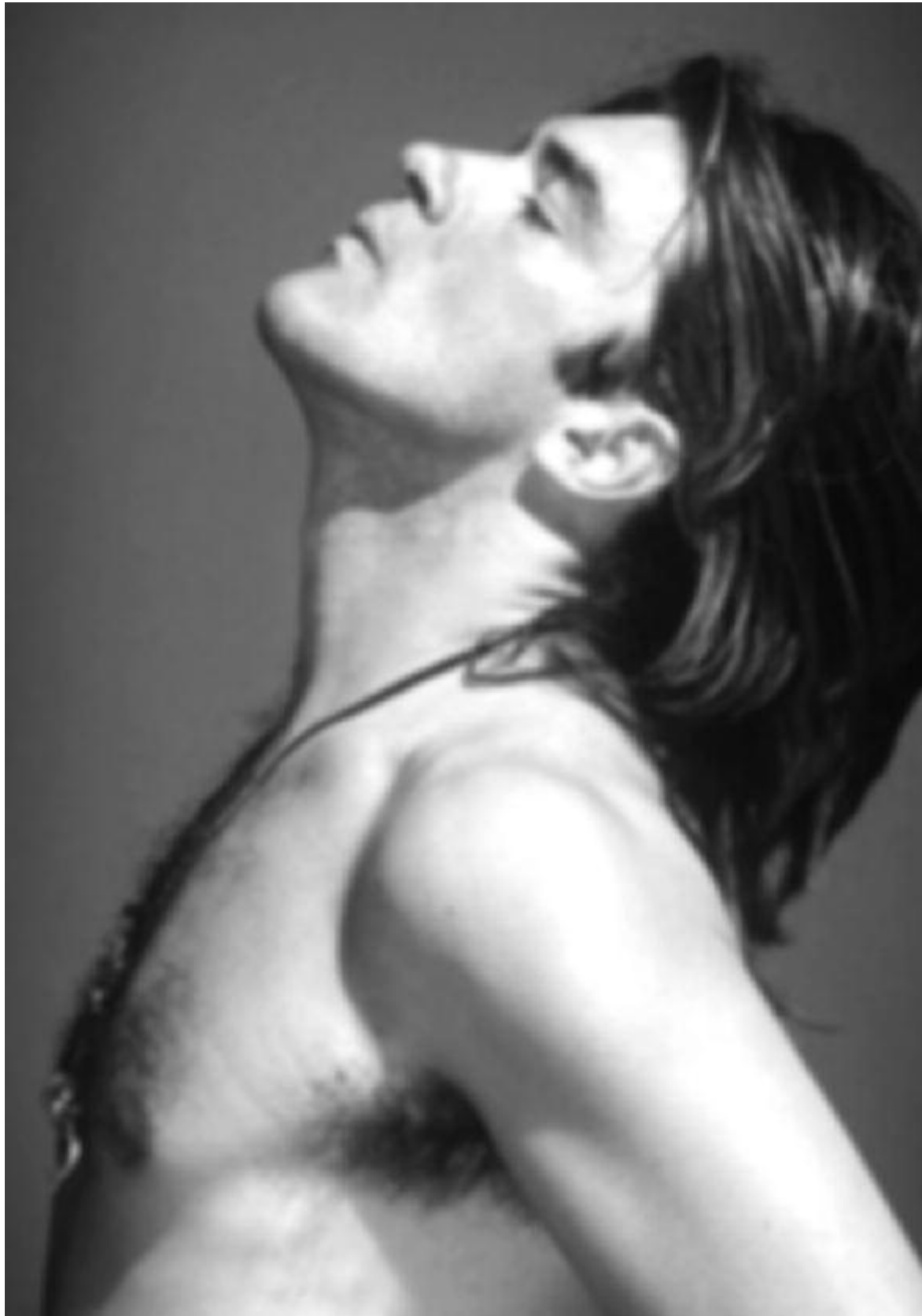
Curator
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago



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DIABOLO



COVET

Industry of the Ordinary/Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson

Celebrity and the Peculiar

Thursday, Jan. 24, to Saturday March 1, 2008

The Gahlberg Gallery and McAninch Arts Center would like to thank the artists, Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson, and the writer, Dominic Molon, for their generous assistance and creativity in developing this exhibition catalog.

Barbara Wiesen
Director and Curator
Gahlberg Gallery



This program is partially supported by a grant
from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and
by The National Endowment for the Arts.