



Rose c'est la vie

HERE ARE THE HILTON BROTHERS!

Camera-friendly canines, Andy Warhol, horses, flowers and Paris Hilton all play a part in the world of the Hilton Brothers. The real-life freakiness of a numbed-down culture is reassembled in the often-hilarious eyes of an alter ego that gives a warm welcome to the art of gimmickry.

Text by Walter Bettens

'An average day is usually centred around food. We have an unwritten food manifesto, similar to the Italian futurists in the 1930s, who believed food was an avant-garde activity, not merely sustenance. In an average day, the topic of garlic and white pepper is discussed frequently. Maybe new ways to think about fennel or a really firm noodle, beyond "al dente". We just discovered an Indian grocery store in New York called Kalustyan's. We're not elaborate cooks, but these museums of food are where we like to hang out and look at pretty colours and talk to people. It's the new disco,' says 'Chris and Paul Hilton'.

This unfiltered statement comes out of the mouth of the hedonist Hilton Brothers - the art alter ego of Christopher Makos and Paul Solberg - dwelling on the theme of an ideal day in the life of. Not unusual for an art brotherhood baptised four years ago over a 'gambas al ajillo' - the Spanish breathtaking shrimp with garlic sizzler - not far from an egg-smelling volcanic black rock on the island of Lanzarote. So far for the olfactory element. The origin of their name derives from the 1930s freak-show performing Siamese twins, Violet and Daisy Hilton, while at the same time referring to the modern day sideshow - hotel heiress's Hilton Sisters - as a comment on contemporary American culture going upside down. Among their trashy sisters are Britney Spears, Jessica Simpson and George Bush. As they say 'they're all a part of the numbing of current 'culture'. We're simply compelled to put a mirror up to the faces of a few of these icons.'



When appearing together as the Hilton Brothers both men act in the 'we' form, like to dress up like twins do, wearing identical Vegas shirts, cowboy ties or funky hats. 'The world is one big museum to us. We certainly appreciate the art of the gimmick, where our dressing-up tendencies occur, with or without a show.' In that sense they are reminiscent to 'twin brothers' Gilbert & George. As they continue: 'we're curious about "identity", the search for identity, the lack of identity, like Cindy Sherman or Pierre et Gilles.' Both personalities were involved in art and photography for a while before taking up this new joint identity. Makos has been a seminal figure in New York's contemporary art scene since his Warhol days, while Solberg operated in the film industry with the independent film *Double Parked*, where he acted as co-writer /co-producer, but also staged a little cameo role as a wig salesman.

It's a good bridge to the Andy Dandy portfolio, where both brothers present 20 diptychs twinning Makos' 1981 Warhol portraits – wearing wigs and make-up – with Solberg's flower images from his Bloom project. As Makos explains the original context: 'Andy and I wanted to work together, similar to what Paul and I are doing now, although not just playing with identity in a personal, but in a more abstract way. We thought of what we might do that had some historical context, with reference to the 1920s collaboration between Man Ray [Makos was an apprentice to the master in the Seventies] and Duchamp in *Rose Sélavy* as our provenance for this series.'

For the Hiltons, the first magical spark of working together on a mutual project occurred in the studio in 2005 at the time when Makos was producing his horse book named *Equipose* and Solberg was shooting his flowers for the Bloom project. As the Hiltons say: 'we were proofing the images for both publications, and the combination appeared. We had little to do with it. We had just the two subjects on the studio floor and put them together.' *Hippofolium* was born, and from these horse-flower combinations, they shifted to the Warhol-flower diptych, another project called the Andy Dandy. Warhol's 'wig' pictures, half of the diptych, had already been shown and gone worldwide in 1982 under the codename *Altered Image*, but recently tuned to Solberg's flowers as an homage to the pop icon. Like Duchamp's feminine persona, the Andy Dandy combines sexual ambivalence, further feminised by the image of a flower as a kind of ready-made. Although the Andy Dandy in a way is a project with recycled elements – Warhol and the flowers – both images create a most magical and poetical dialogue between Makos' and Solberg's work. *Rose c'est la vie.* #

**The Andy Dandy was shown at Art Basel Miami Beach 07 in the Kartell flagship store, and during Madrid's Arco 08 at Galeria Moriarty. The Hilton Brothers 'solo' show takes place later this year at La Casa Encendida, Madrid, www.lacasaencendida.es
www.thehiltonbrothers.com**



Without the leash, but behind bars

A NEW BREED BY THE HILTON BROTHERS

The Dog Show is a new pictorial adventure by the Hilton Brothers. It all started when they saw a dog on a plane, sitting in first class. It was from the Puppies Behind Bars programme, a North American initiative where puppies are given to prison inmates who raise and partially train them as guide dogs for the blind or law enforcement purposes. For the Hiltons the dogs 'are connected with humans, while being much more honest. For a photographer it is much easier to get the truth from dogs than from humans. They haven't been trained to lie in front of the camera. They don't doubt themselves'.

Besides being featured in a new publication called Puppies Behind Bars, these dog's eyes were also staring at you from the walls of the bar at the Palace Hotel in Madrid during Arco'08. #

