



Case Study: Art and Celebrity
at Landings 3
curated by Geir Haraldseth
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Art and celebrity culture has been intertwined for centuries, but the conflation of the two has never been more frequent. There are a number of examples that illustrate the correlation between artist and celebrity, and the reciprocal nature of the relationship between art and entertainment. For Case Study: Art and Celebrity James Franco has been selected as a prominent example. Franco is an actor who has starred in big Hollywood movies. He has also collaborated with visual artists such as Carter and Kalup Linzy, and recently he has ventured into a making art himself. He has been received with skepticism in the art world, but has been embraced by some. For example, Franco's exhibition *The Dangerous Book Four Boys* at the Clocktower gallery cemented his relationship with Alanna Heiss, founder of PS1 and current director of AIR, and Klaus Biesenbach, director of MoMA PS1.

This exhibition presents James Franco, the character, as he is perceived and represented in mainstream media as the hunky movie star and model for Gucci. In addition there is a time-line contrasting his work as an actor with his work as an artist. His output as an actor displays a balance of blockbuster movies, such as the Spider-man trilogy and *Eat Pray Love*, and more serious roles, such as *Howl* and *127 Hours*. With his movie star credentials Franco has most likely experienced difficulties in being taken seriously in his venture as a visual artist, but he must be doing something right if he is being picked up and championed by a few art world powerhouses. The scrutiny of the art world is however upon Franco, and only time will tell if he escapes unscathed.

Geir Haraldseth (1977) lives and works in Oslo as an independent curator and critic. He is currently working as editor for Landings Journal and is on the editorial board of *kunstkritikk*. Haraldseth has a BA from Central Saint Martins and an MA in curatorial studies from Bard College. Haraldseth has curated shows at The National Museum of Art/Oslo; Fotogalleriet/Oslo; Bastard/Oslo; Center for Curatorial Studies/Bard College; Teatro de Arena/Sao Paulo; Vox Populi/Philadelphia; Johan Berggren Gallery/Malmö and Torpedo/Oslo. Haraldseth has contributed to a number of different journals, including *Acne Paper/Stockholm*, *Billedkunst/Oslo*, *Kunstkritikk.no* and *Elle Mann/Oslo*, and lectured at Art in General/New York, the University of Oslo, and the Art Academy in Oslo.

JE: And that's kind of how you got back to painting?
GVS: Well, I just recently got that book. What got me back into painting was that Philip Glass had written to me, asking if I wanted him to do the score for a film, but the letter was lost. It was sent to the wrong address, and so the letter was really six months too late. I was planning to write him back, but it had been so long that I felt like I needed to make something to give him as an offering to apologize, so I was making these paintings. I haven't made his painting yet.
JE: So I got Philip Glass's painting...
GVS: Well, I made a bunch of them, and I never gave him one. But I can make them really fast.
JE: You know, the first time that we met was, like, five years before we even met for *Milk*. I'm pretty sure it was when you came and saw the play that I co-wrote called *The Ape*.

GVS: Yeah.
JE: When we were doing one of the costume fittings for *Milk*, you brought it up. You were like, "I remember going to see *The Ape*. What happened to that?" And I was like, "Well, I did make it into a movie..." You still haven't seen the movie.
GVS: No, I haven't seen it. The play was a comedy, though. You fell and stuff like that. It was physical comedy.

JE: There was physical comedy—it was basically a guy in an ape mask. But it was very obvious that it was an ape mask, and that's what I liked about it. I had bought this wacky ape mask for something else, and I thought, "Wow, this mask is kind of scary, but also kind of funny. We could write a whole play around this mask." [The jaw actually moved.]
GVS: You did another play about picking up girls with certain...

JE: [Laughs] Yeah, well, there were two one-acts, and so it was *The Ape* and—
GVS: You didn't like that other one?

JE: We wrote the other one, too—we and my writing partner at the time, Merrivether Williams. He wrote for *Spring-Back Square Pants*. The other play was called *Fool's Gold*. It was kind of inspired by stories that I had heard at acting school, but then there was also this guy I worked with named Max Martini... We worked together on this movie, and he had been, like, Brad Pitt's roommate. I don't know if they had been acting school together, but he was like, "Yeah, man, I just went to acting school to pick up girls, and we knew which scenes to do"—like the romantic scenes. He said, "You've got to always use *Fool for Luce* by Sam Shepard." But I don't know—it has a great title, but it's not that romantic a play. It's actually kind of incestuous—these people who are in love find out that they're brother and sister... So we used that in our play, but I know better scenes if you're really going to try and pick up a girl.

GVS: Really?
JE: Well, I'm bad with the names of the things, but there's a horrible one that starts out almost like a rape scene. I think Farrah Fawcett did the movie version of it [*Extrémities*, 1986]—it's a scene where the woman turns on her attacker.
GVS: Right, I saw that outrage. She puts him in the fireplace.

JE: I know some guys who use that one. But I remember reading an interview with Robert Duvall and Gene Hackman and Dustin Hoffman, and I guess they were all roommates back when they were in acting school, and they were like, "Yeah, we just went for the girls." It seemed every actor said, "Oh, yeah, I just went to acting school to meet girls." Even the greats were doing it. So I was like, "All right, maybe we can write a play about two guys who do that." We made a movie out of that one, too. I directed it, but it was so... I don't know. It turned out badly. I'll never show it to anybody.

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GVS: You filmed it?

JE: Yeah, we filmed it. It was hard to adapt.
GVS: So I have some questions for you on this piece of paper.

JE: What's my favorite color?
GVS: No. Actually, what I have written down is "Zac-slats-romance."

JE: What?
GVS: And it says "stoner-slash-wind in hair."

JE: Oh, it's wind in your eye?
GVS: It's wind in your eye? That's how you made yourself look stoned in *Pineapple Express*?

JE: [Laughs] Because I don't... I just played a stoner in *Pineapple Express*, and I don't really smoke weed anymore, so everyone says, "Oh, you looked really high in the movie. How did you do that?" And I say, "Oh, I just pretend the wind is in my eyes."

GVS: You have to use certain words like *stude*. You say dude...
JE: I don't know how much I say dude in *Pineapple Express*. I probably say it once or twice. I'm sure I say man. I certainly say bro.

GVS: So the lines that were written in the script for *Pineapple Express*—were they basically what we were seeing on the screen?
JE: Oh, no.

GVS: So in that movie, you're improvising a stoner as well as just pretending there's wind in your eyes.
JE: Yeah, well, I don't actually use the wind in my eyes—just rub my eyes a bit and talk slowly or something. When Seth and me were doing interviews for the movie, everybody would ask us if we were smoking real weed when we were filming. And basically we'd say, "Did you ever see Cheech and Chong's *Up in Smoke*? That's what happens if you really smoke weed and make a movie. You get two guys and no plot and it's basically like, 'Yeah! Lee's drive a van made of weed!'" And that's pretty much the movie.

GVS: But when you're working with these guys like Seth and Judd Apatow—some of them do stand-up comedy, right?
JE: I mean, it's in their backgrounds.

GVS: I used to work for a comedian.
JE: You did?

GVS: Yeah. Actually, that's how I got my start. His name is Kenny Shapiro and I was his assistant for about three years. He made *The Greeney Tube* [1974], which later inspired parts of *Saturday Night Live*. Lorne Michaels had worked with Ken, and Ken had sort of pitched that same concept of skit humor for this late-night show. Cheryl Chase was in *The Greeney Tube*—he was a friend of Shapiro's. So I worked for Ken, but I was not a funny person.

I couldn't tell a joke or anything like that—I was just surrounded by these comedians.

JE: Well, I have to say that I think *Dragstore Cowboy* [1989] is hilarious.

GVS: I mean, there's funniness, but it's not like a showbiz comedy.

JE: No, but Matt Dillon is pretty damn funny in that. Like, the hat on the bed.

GVS: But there's an interesting element to the Judd Apatow world in that it's sort of a mixture of comedians and noncomedians in the same film. On *Pineapple Express* you were working with a lot of the same people you'd worked with on *Frakes and Geeks*, right?

JE: Yeah, but *Frakes and Geeks* was TV, so there were lines you had to say. There was a little improvisation, but nothing like what Judd and those guys do in their movies now. I think I could try and improvise more than anybody on that show. When we were doing *Frakes and Geeks*, I didn't quite understand how movies and TV worked, and I would improvise even if the camera wasn't on me. I thought I was helping the other actors by keeping them on their toes, but nobody appreciated it when I would trip them up. So I was improvising a little bit back then, but not in a productive way. [Laughs]

GVS: So we haven't talked about Zac yet.
JE: What's Zac?

GVS: Zac Efron.
JE: Oh, well, yeah, we can talk about Zac.

GVS: Where did you see him?
JE: I met him for the first time backstage at the MTV Movie Awards. Luke Grabel, who is in *Milk*, is also in *High School Musical* [2006] with Zac Efron, and so we had been talking about *High School Musical* a lot. I hadn't seen it, but my girlfriend was a big fan of the movie—I don't know why. She was like, "You've got to watch it." And I was like, "All right, I'll watch it because Lucas is in it." So I watched it, and I guess I could kind of see the appeal. Some of the songs are kind of catchy. There's one where Zac is playing basketball, but it's also like a musical number...

I don't know. [Laughs] I remember we were all sitting around on the set of *Milk* and I said, "I saw *High School Musical*." I said it like I had never sounded so interested in anything before. Then I think you said that you had tried to get Zac for a small role in *Milk*.

GVS: Yeah. The pizza guy. He never had time.
JE: Right. So then when I saw him at the MTV Movie Awards, I was like, "Hey, man. Good to meet you, Zac. I really like the movie, and I just worked with Gus, and he tried to get you in his movie."

And Zac was like, "Yeah, yeah. It just didn't work out." And I was like, "Well, you should really do a movie with Gus. I think it would be a good contrast to your other stuff." He's like, "Yeah, maybe." And then I was walking away to go back to my seat, and he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "We should do it together, man." And he, like, gave me a high five. He was really the nicest guy.

GVS: Yeah. He is really nice. We should all do a Judd Apatow movie. You and Zac and me.

JE: Yeah. You should do a movie that Judd produces, and we'll do it with Zac. What do you think?

GVS: Keep your eyes open for it.
JE: What kind of movie do you think it could be?

GVS: I'll have to think about that one.
JE: If you have an idea and it's like me and Zac playing basketball or delivering pizzas or whatever, I'm in.

GUS VAN SANT IS A PORTLAND, OREGON-BASED DIRECTOR WHO'S NEW FILM *HEAVENLY CREATURES* WILL BE RELEASED BY SONY PICTURES CLASSICS. *FRANKIE* WAS WRITTEN BY JEFF KLEIN AND DIRECTED BY JEFF KLEIN. *FRANKIE* WAS WRITTEN BY JEFF KLEIN AND DIRECTED BY JEFF KLEIN. *FRANKIE* WAS WRITTEN BY JEFF KLEIN AND DIRECTED BY JEFF KLEIN. *FRANKIE* WAS WRITTEN BY JEFF KLEIN AND DIRECTED BY JEFF KLEIN.