

POLIMODA

Shining A Light on Jeff Koons

As the *Jeff Koons. Shine* exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi reaches 70.000 visitors, Polimoda students interview America's most popular contemporary artist

Florence, 25 November 2021 – It's been two months since the official opening of the ***Jeff Koons. Shine*** exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi and it has already reached 70,000 visitors and continues to attract people from all over the world who are eager to admire the artist's most celebrated works in Florence. **Palazzo Strozzi chose Polimoda as educational partner of the exhibition, and the two institutions have joined forces to reach an international community of young people who are passionate about fashion, art and creativity.**

A group of fashion students from different countries and disciplines —ranging from fashion curation to trend forecasting and brand management— were given **the exceptional opportunity to meet and interview America's most popular contemporary artist in person** and get a sneak peek of his exhibition before the opening.

The creative outcome of this partnership is a 20-minute video (<https://youtu.be/TmkgHc1wRFA>) that launched today on the Polimoda and Palazzo Strozzi digital channels. A group of Master Students from the Fashion Critique and Curation, Fashion Trend Forecasting, Fashion Brand Management and Business of Fashion programs were selected to interview Koons based on the thought-provoking questions they came up with. Before sitting down with the contemporary artist, students prepared with the Palazzo Strozzi Communications team.

Sitting in front of *Balloon Venus Lespugue (Red)*, Jeff Koons' reflection bounced off the glossy red surface as he freeheartedly answers the curious questions Polimoda students Alisa Rebecca Watson, Rano Karimova, Autumn Caroline Mowery, Ario Mezzolani, Ana Maria Barth Teixeira and Julian Restrepo Espinal asked him about his remarkable career.

Koons is an open book throughout the interview, talking about everything and everyone that moves him. From self-discovery to transcendence, **the artist goes into detail about how he approaches art and what he loves most about his work.**

*"When I was a young artist, actually my first day of art school, I had an experience where I went to the Baltimore Museum of Art in Baltimore, Maryland in the US. I realized when I went to the museum that I knew nothing about art. [...] I went back to my art school, and I was given an art history lesson that day and it transformed my life. This lesson spoke about a Manet painting, it was called *Olympia*. The professor spoke about how the black cat over in the right corner had meaning in 19th century France. The position of *Olympia* related to Goya's work, and all of a sudden, I realized that it was a vehicle that so effortlessly was going to connect me to philosophy and psychology, theology, physics, aesthetics, really all the things in this exhibition of *Shine* that you can see taking place all the different dialogues.*

From that moment, I wake up excited every day about the possibility of transcending through art. It is never weakened. It's never in any way been a less intense experience than it was at first."

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"I don't think that money is what's of interest in art," says Koons. "I don't look at an artwork and think about money. I look at an artwork and I think about the ability that it has to inform me about life experience, and hopefully, it can make me more courageous that I can be more open to life and accept being in the moment and to transcend."

Koons spoke to the students about the **relationship between the public and technology**: *"The way people view art, they interact with art, has changed. I think people will go to exhibitions and they're trying to capture exhibitions in their phones instead of just observing the artwork itself and letting it be absorbed. We can have almost everything known to humankind at our fingertips at one moment. We can investigate everything, but at the same time, people do not open themselves up to life experience and we're getting further and further away from that. It's really about being in nature and being open and interacting with people, and feeling the vitality of life, of desire, the senses, and what it means to be a human being in this world, in this landscape. We're very far from that right now. I think that it's very, very healthy that we can try to stay connected to our past, stay connected to really what it means to our senses. To stay involved with our senses, our biological memory, and to try to open ourselves up to the world."*

The artist also spoke about Shine, the theme of the exhibition: *"Shine is a symbol of transcendence. It has been throughout history, you can look at all different theologies. The idea of people radiating, wanting to be connected to the power of light is a consistent thing. If I hear about people being attracted to a shiny object. A shiny object is fantastic because again, it's a symbol of transcendence. That surface of the object, that aspect of shine, to me is really a reference of everything. The surface itself, what's on the inside, that identity of self-love can also be there on the inside but the idea of reflecting the environment is showing to be in tune with people, to be aware of the environment, to interact with the environment. That's really life experience."*

Additionally, thanks to this special partnership, **Palazzo Strozzi will publish a series of video Reels on their Instagram page this month created by Polimoda students**, sharing their unique point of view related to the Shine exhibition. Students from Fashion Art Direction and Fashion Communications worked as a team on an educational project for Palazzo Strozzi's digital channels, conceptualizing and creating a video campaign dedicated to Jeff Koons' most celebrated works.

The project reflects the educational approach of the school, which provides for a hands-on approach and a continuous comparison of students with the reality of the fashion industry and the artistic and cultural sectors related to it. By communicating with the greatest figures on the contemporary scene, young people have the opportunity to build a solid cultural background and thus develop the full potential of their creative vision.

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About the exhibition *Jeff Koons. Shine*

Palazzo Strozzi, Florence

Open everyday from 02 October 2021 to 30 January 2022

Curated by Arturo Galansino and Joachim Pissarro, the exhibition brings to Florence a wide selection of the most celebrated works by Jeff Koons who, from the mid-70s to the present day, has forged a reputation as one of the most important and controversial figures in the contemporary art world.

Developed in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition entitled *Jeff Koons. Shine* hosts loans from some of the world's most important collections and museums, exploring the concept of "shine" in Jeff Koons's work – an ambiguous idea that oscillates between the dualities of being and seeming, or truth and sensation.

The creator of works that have entered our collective imagination due to their ability to merge the academic with popular culture through their references to art history and allusions to the world of consumer society, Jeff Koons has found a key principle in the idea of "shine" for his innovative sculptures and installations, which set out to question our relationship with reality but also the very concept of a work of art. The American artist's works place the observer before a mirror in which they can at once see themselves within their environment and thus experience affirmation. As Jeff Koons puts it: "The job of the artist is to make a gesture and really show people what their potential is. It's not about the object, and it's not about the image; it's about the viewer. That's where the art happens."

About Polimoda

Polimoda is known worldwide for its independence in thinking and action by combining business and design across all departments. Internationally recognized as one of the best fashion institutes in the world, Polimoda balances the know-how of Italian design and production with an international vision.

The undergraduate, master's and short courses offered at Polimoda connect the legacy of the past, with new research and creativity. Professors offer experience-based learning, adapting courses to the changes in the industry as they happen, which is nurtured inside the Renaissance-style building of Villa Favard and in the state-of-the-art laboratories at the Design Lab and the Manifattura Tabacchi.

With 70% of students from countries outside Italy, Polimoda is a cultural force in the heart of Florence.

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