Jeff Koons and Kiehl’s Bring the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children into the Spotlight
Kiehl’s collaborates with Jeff Koons on another limited-edition collectible item, for the sake of children and by way of beauty.
by Sunhee Grinnell | May 11, 2017

Left: Jeff Koons stands with his Seated Ballerina at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills.
Right: a Seated Ballerina close-up. Photos by SunHee Grinnell.

Jeff Koons has been very busy lately.

Having launched his master-painters-inspired collection of bags with Louis Vuitton (aptly called the Masters Collection) and having been honored at MOCA last week, Koons now has a show at the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills, where I managed to catch him for a breather.

Perhaps it was the golden afternoon light streaming in through the gallery’s grand frosted wall of glass, but this collection of work looked particularly shiny and bright that day—very much like Koons’s hypnotizing, penetrating, gazing blue eyes. Surrounded by his “Gazing Ball“ series, including Hercules, Manet Luncheon on Grass, and Peter Paul Rubens The Tiger Hunt, there sat, gracefully, Seated Ballerina, the subject of our meet. For Koons’s fourth collaboration with Kiehl’s, his Seated Ballerina was chosen to be the sign of hope in honor of National Missing Children’s Month—a collaboration that was brought about in association with the not-for-profit Art Production Fund to benefit the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children. “I was a left-behind parent, and you really don’t know where to turn,” Koons explained. In 1998, his ex-wife, Ilona Staller, abducted Koons’s firstborn son, Ludwig Maximilian. Since then, I.C.M.E.C. aided Koons when he needed it the most. He now sits on the board and donates his time and awe-inspiring art moments to raise awareness of and put a spotlight on this very disturbing topic.
As explained by Chris Salgardo, president of Kiehl’s USA, “There were 465,000 reports of missing children last year in the U.S., and it’s gratifying to know that we are able to make a difference in the lives of our children.”

Lifted from Koons’s “Antiquity” series, Seated Ballerina was originally exhibited outside the Malba museum, in Buenos Aires. “When we first showed, this piece gave people so much hope, and I can feel that,” Koons said. “No matter what age people were, it gave them a sense of hope and optimism.” Hence, it became the selected piece for Kiehl’s collaboration for the cause.

For the entire month of May, Kiehl’s will donate all proceeds, up to $100,000, from the sale of the limited-edition Jeff Koons Tin, which is graced with the Seated Ballerina’s face. The tin is filled with Kiehl’s Midnight Recovery Collection, which comprises their classic cleansing oil, concentrate, and eye cream, in support of the ongoing cause.

Then, to take it up a notch, Seated Ballerina is scheduled to literally blow up to 48 feet at Rockefeller Center on May 12. “The piece has gradations. As porcelains, the way they are painted, they gradate in the flesh from darker to warmer, from hands to the arm, and this helps to communicate time. Any type of gradation is related to sunrise and sunset, and, like the sky, it gradates,” interpreted Koons. “It’s another way to bring metaphysics to a piece, and the ballerina has this reflective surface, and I think the piece communicates a sense of optimism and a future for people. Art is something that happens inside a viewer. That excites people. That excitement is sighting one’s own potential as a human being. That’s the art. And I am thrilled to be able to exhibit this at Rockefeller Center.”

As art, she will sit gracefully, exuding much confidence and refinement, or “joy of culture,” as Koons put it, until the end of May, signaling much-needed hope and will to all the precious lives that we live to protect and to celebrate.

And in case you’re wondering if Koons is a fan of Kiehl’s, “we have it all over the house and my wife loves it, and I always liked their body cream (he’s referring to Crème de Corps, of course),” says Koons. “It’s been great working Kiehl’s as they been very supportive of the cause and the arts.”