***PUPPETS***

During their studies in Paris, Joffrey Jans and Christophe Lopez-Huici worked together on numerous art projects. When they met again in New York, they crafted the idea for the "Puppet Project," which was ultimately realized in February 2005. “Puppets” came to fruition in two series: *The Americans of Decadence,* and *Masks*.

*The Americans of Decadence* is largely inspired by Couture’s painting *Les Romains de la Decadence*. Lopez and Jans ingeniously translate Couture’s image of the Roman Empire’s reckless, self-degrading debauchery into formally innovative photographs that satirize the analogous decadence and baseness of contemporary American society. Lopez-Huici used Super Sculpey to construct an alternate universe of cartoon-like, yet grotesque figures, and their respective props and stage sets. Joffrey Jans then painted these figures in ghastly flesh tones and gilded their props gold. Lopez and Jans then staged their creations into surreal, drooping Roman orgies complete with dollar bills, Pepsi bottles, and other miscellaneous paraphernalia of late-capitalist America. The photographs of these bizarre scenes were taken by Nick Demilio and Joffrey Jans, with the assistance of Oli Conrad and Gian Kleingutti.

In their second series, *Masks* Lopez and Jans metamorphose the high gloss aesthetics of established fashion photography into their Super Sculpey worlds of social satire. Hilarious, sharp, and never pedantic, Lopez and Jans appropriate the motifs and visual devices of this plastic aesthetic to comment not only on the commercialized visual vocabulary of beauty, power and success, but also on the institutionalism of the art world. In works that reference Damien Hirst, David la Chapelle, and the gallery and museum setting in general, Lopez and Jans redirect recognizable cultural iconography into an arbitrary world of Super Sculpey that forces the viewer to contemplate, or even laugh at, the exposed artificiality of the social symbols at work. Adept at conquering the semiotics of contemporary American media and art, *Masks* then moves into the realm of larger cultural and social stereotypes. The last portion of *Masks* features domestic dinner table scenes peppered with life-sized prescription bottles, and single portraits of individual Super Sculpey figures that eerily remind us of a vague, yet somehow universal cultural icons.