

Laster, Paul. "Down the Rabbit Hole with Terence Koh," *Art Asia Pacific*, Winter 2004.

## Art AsiaPacific DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE W



*Today is August 12th, 2003; save the munchkins day! -Asianpunkboy*

*Asianpunkboy* is a unique magazine and website, which its maker describes as "filled with an infusion of gentle surfaces, dissident eruptions, haikus, mapped pictures, dirty illustrations, moist cum, decadent artificial words, love and all manners of foggy filth." The artist Terence Koh created *asianpunkboy* in 2001, while completing his architectural studies in Vancouver. To this multimedia project, Koh brought his experience as a designer at the supra-stylish Visionaire in New York and as a London-based member of Zaha Hadid's competition design team for the new Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati. That know-how, along with a sly sense of humor and a remarkable awareness, has helped APB attract an international audience.

The magazine *asianpunkboy* is a do-it-yourself publication in a small edition. It mixes images and texts stolen from other artists with APB's own contributions. Each copy is made-to-order and designed especially for the collector. APB01: the empty city issue featured the work of 37 artists with a different cover for each of the 200 sold. Available at prominent art bookstores, like Art Metropole and Printed

Matter, it came with a CD soundtrack, fairy dust, tears and a variety of other trinkets. APB1.3 is only available in April. It consists of a custom-sewn T-shirt (Hanes or Prada) and other delights in a wooden box portraying the owner drawn by *asianpunkboy*. There's a version for boys with strings to tickle the genitals and another interpretation for girls that has special fabric added to stimulate the nipples. "No one will know but you!" declares APB's promotional text.

The APB website ([www.asianpunkboy.com](http://www.asianpunkboy.com)) represents the magazine in motion. On one hand, it lacks the tactile pleasures derived from its material mate; while on the other, it beats with a pulse that will never be found on paper. The site is an interactive forum with endless content in continuous flux. Mixing issues of identity with design concepts and poetic idealism, the *asianpunkboy* world offers songs, stories, amusing sounds, slide shows with lots of boys and a few girls, animations of defecating dogs and rotating bunnies, and other collected pleasures cast in a hot pink ambiance. Most things are brief; nothing is overly long. APB's muse Garrick pops up here and there, often pensive or playing dead. Wicked photos by friends like Bruce LaBruce, Matthias Herrmann and Ryan McGinley, as well as APB's deftly obscure pix drift in and out of faerie portals.

# WITH TERENCE KOH

BY PAUL LASTER



The artist behind all of these playful deeds was born in Singapore to Chinese parents and then moved to Toronto at age 12 when his family immigrated to Canada. Koh received a degree in architecture from the University of Waterloo, about 100 miles west of Toronto. His education took place in a co-op program that allowed him to alternate on-campus school terms with work terms in jobs related to his studies. Those work terms are what brought Koh to New York and London, opening new doors of opportunity for the young designer. By the time he returned to graduate school in Vancouver, he held a definite advantage over most of his class. It was in Vancouver that he made his first *asianpunkboy* book and began to think of his output more in terms of art production than design.

While still in Vancouver, APB received a commission from Philip Aarons, the real estate developer, collector and the board president of Printed Matter. In response, Koh created his most ambitious project to date, a large mirrored coffin filled with hundreds of interlocking white plexiglass boxes, each holding precious white objects that were made, assembled by, or given to the artist. Trimmed in fake white fur, the mirrored sarcophagus doubles as a low table (somewhat of a twist on Duchamp's idea of using a Rembrandt as an ironing board) in the collector's home. Regarding Koh's work of art, dubbed "untitled (the

world left behind...)," Aarons said, "Terence originally proposed a book work which would record his activities each week for six weeks. What evolved was a brilliant meditation on the notion of time passed and preserved; encapsulated objects of personal significance entombed but accessible. As with a book (or coffin), the cover serves to protect and separate the heavenly white world within from our reflected views of the present. It also makes a nice coffee table for the library."

After gathering the up-to-the-minute press, such as *Vice*, *V* and *Dazed & Confused*, and gaining significant collectors, including Aarons and the Altoids Curiously Strong Collection at the New Museum, *asianpunkboy* happily landed on Artforum's Top Ten list, selected by artist AA Bronson for the September 2002 issue. The media worked like magic in bringing APB's activities to the attention of edgy curators and dealers. His multimedia work began to appear in various group shows and the opportunity for a solo came quickly as Peres Projects relocated from San Francisco to the art-hip Chung King Road in Los Angeles. With pals Bruce LaBruce and Assume Vivid Astro Focus already in the stable, APB opened the new space with an enigmatic installation called *The Whole Family*. Ryan McGinley, then the subject of a photography show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, assumed the role of DJ for the inaugural event.





The special edition catalogue for *Asianpunkboy: The Whole Family* showcases art by APB; cryptic texts by AA Bronson, Larry Clark, Matthias Herrmann, Bruce LaBruce, Ryan McGinley and Richard Prince; and a CD of "music for the boy(s) alone in the treehouse after the snowstorm," by March21 of Circlesquare. The exhibition was a virtual symphony-in-white as the entire floor of the gallery's lower level was covered in a snow-white powder and symbolic sculptures (including an owl with huge diamond eyes, a bunny flag, a slingshot, and the word "felt" in neon) were hung upside-down on the walls. A pair of white budgies kept watch, freely roaming their white-world while littering it with shit. Standing out in this dreamy setting were 21 identical lavender likenesses of a boy, ganged together in a continuous row, each image pierced by a bullet. On the ground level, a three-inch-wide hole in the floor, lit by a small lamp, provided a peephole into the cellar action.

A prankster at heart, APB next found himself kicked off the popular youth-oriented website Friendsters for downloading pictures of shirtless guys from the site and posting a slide show of his new friends on his own website. Titled *my favorite friends* on [www.friendsters.com](http://www.friendsters.com), the

project presents some 50 bare-chested muscle boys in a variety of amateur poses. Of course, posting the endeavor on the Friendster's message board was probably the red flag; though the naked doppelganger representing APB in his primary photo on their site would have eventually caused his friendly demise.

Around the same time, APB celebrated a new beginning and a demise of another sort with "the creation of terence koh by asianpunkboy" on August 21, 2003 at 9:17 p.m. in Myrtle Park. With a developing career as an artist, Koh decided it was time to assume personal credit for his art works and let asianpunkboy take care of the rest. A month later, he was listed on the invitation for "DL: The 'Down Low' in Contemporary Art" at Longwood Art Gallery in the Bronx, New York, as Terence Koh (formerly asianpunkboy). Remaining true to his former persona's conceptual wit, Koh made a sculpture of two identical Michael Jackson figures facing off on a pedestal from Hershey chocolate. Poetically speaking, it takes the narcissistic star down the poolie trail while celebrating the transformation. Now that's a tough act to follow.