

THIS SHIT IS BANANAS

Written by **STACY SEILER**
ART EDITOR



© courtesy of *Toilet Paper*.

If you are not familiar with the work of Italian artist **Maurizio Cattelan**, then you've been living under a rock. Seriously, you need to lift the rock. Why, might you ask, am I throwing out insults? It is because Mr. Cattelan's satire-filled, hyper-realist sculptures and dark-humored publications hold an underlying message that - if taken to heart - is guaranteed to generate happiness. That's right, genuine, Prozac-free happiness, and it is his methodology that we all need to pay more attention to. Here is why.

In his artistic practice, Maurizio Cattelan does not feel compelled to play by the rules. If you'd happened upon Mr. Cattelan's latest work at this year's international art fair, Art Basel, Miami

Beach, then you might know what I am referring to - a banana. More specifically, an overly ripe banana purchased at a local Miami grocery store. And just to add insult to injury, the banana was fastened securely to the wall by the most proletariat of art materials, a silver strip of duct tape. The Mona Lisa it is not.

Yet, in an environment where the who's who of the art world are exchanging millions in daily sales, you would think that a non-archival piece of fruit, entitled *Comedian* and modestly priced at mere 120,000 USD, might piss a few people off. In fact, it did just the opposite. *Comedian* turned into a media frenzy. So much so that the work, presented by Galerie Perrotin, was purchased three times over and inspired an impromptu



© courtesy of *Toilet Paper*.

performance act [artist **David Datuna** ate it]. The banana drew so many visitors that it had to be removed on the final day for fear that crowds might create a safety hazard. *Comedian* was a hit, and not just because it was high-art anarchy. The appropriately titled fructose-filled phenomenon touched upon something that we as humans deeply crave, which is also a priority in Mr. Cattelan's own practice - the catharsis generated by humor.

Unfortunately, it's not always easy to experience the joy of Mr. Cattelan's work in person. *Comedian* was the first sculpture that he'd created for an art fair in over 15 years. Even more elusive is Cattelan's 'interactive' sculpture entitled *America*. The fully functioning 18-karat gold toilet, openly welcomed patron participation during its residency on the fifth floor bathroom of New York's Guggenheim museum. However, *America*'s four million dollar value just happened to catch the eye of a few others with more nefarious interests than relieving themselves. Last fall, while *America* was on loan for a retrospective of Mr. Cattelan's work at the Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, the toilet mysteriously disappeared and has yet to reemerge. One can only imagine the lingo its calculated kidnapping must have conjured between the art thieves... "It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it." Are you giggling a little bit? Good. You should be.

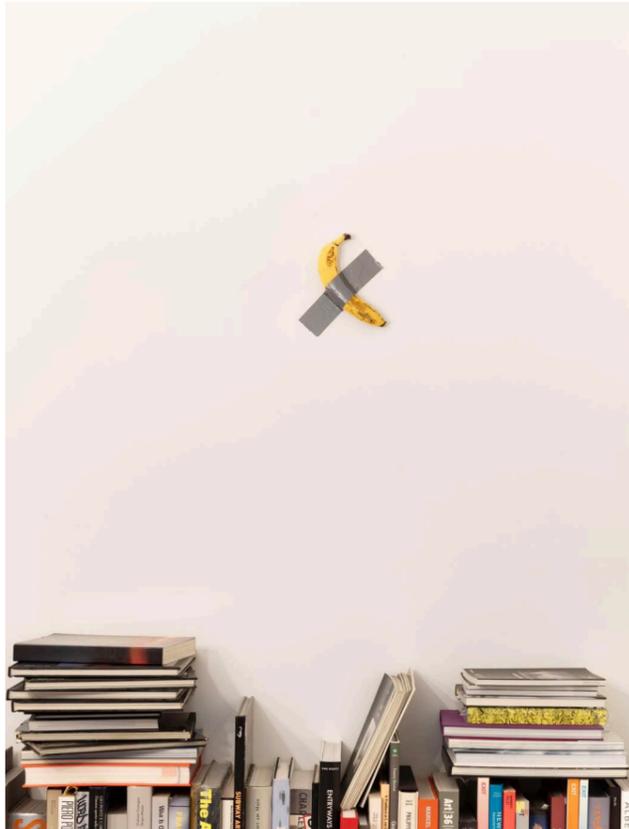
The truth is Mr. Cattelan is a huge fan of toilet wit as well, and I'm not just talking about his missing commode. He, along with

the Italian commercial photographer **Pierpaolo Ferrari**, are the founders of *Toilet Paper* magazine. Yes, that's right... *Toilet Paper*, and if you have yet to peruse the pages of the biannual publication, you need to get off of the can right now and buy an issue.

Toilet Paper launched in 2010 after what Cattelan describes as "collaboration at first sight". He and Ferrari were asked to create a fashion shoot with **Linda Evangelista** to be published in *W Magazine*, and quickly realized that their creative symbiosis had to find a permanent home. Cattelan shares, "We simply couldn't get enough. *Toilet Paper* gave us the chance to be experimental, make mistakes and not take ourselves too seriously. It's definitely a luxury in these times, and a terribly serious issue in the arts today."

With the combined talents of Cattelan's visual genius and Ferrari's commercial expertise, having worked for advertising giants like BBDO and Saatchi & Saatchi, *Toilet Paper* is where the collaborative imaginations of Cattelan and Ferrari become completely unhinged. No limits. The magazine's article and ad-free pages are filled with photos of surrealist environments, snarky commentary, potty humor and double entendres that glow in 1950s Technicolor.

While flipping through its pages you are visually accosted by scenes such as two tongues carefully balancing the opposing



Top: *Comedian* photographed by **Zeno Zotti**. © Courtesy of the artist **Maurizio Cattelan & Perrotin**.

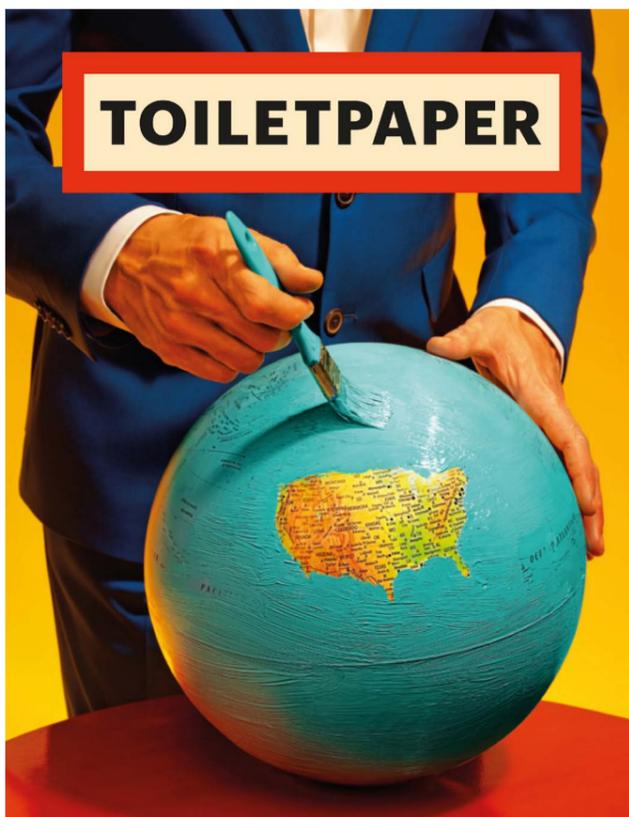
Bottom: © courtesy of **Toilet Paper**.

ends of a razor blade a la *Lady and the Tramp*, an athlete participates in foreplay with a massive pile of French fries, one woman's mouth is filled to the brim with protruding hot dogs, while another woman smiles to reveal the word 'SHIT' written across her teeth. As absurd as this may sound, Cattelan and Ferrari have infused a trick-of-the-eye aspect to each image that turns the experience of thumbing through a magazine into an insatiable treat. Cattelan explains, "Each Toilet Paper image is like the recipe of a delicious, and at the same time, lethal dish. It is worthy when it has enough salt to be tasty on your tongue and, at the same time, to recall memories in your mind." At first glance you are drawn into the chromatic glow and visual sensuality of Toilet Paper's staged vignettes that allude to vintage commercial advertising. Then, as you curiously lean in for a closer inspection - wham - you are hit over the head with its irony. This 'caught off-guard' experience is followed by spontaneous laughter and four-letter declarations of shock that leave you wanting more.

Similar to *Comedian*'s popularity amongst the art world, Toilet Paper's unconventional vision has created a demand for the one-of-a-kind sense of humor generated by Cattelan and Ferrari. To date, they have produce wildly popular campaigns for Kenzo and OK Cupid, covers for New York Times Magazine and a collaboration with the Italian design company Seletti, to create a series of Toilet Paper inspired tableware and kitchen objects. Their images have even graced the front windows of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Needless to say, people can't get enough.

So why is it, you may ask, that the highbrow of society are jumping with joy at the likes of bananas and toilets? It seems that the work of Maurizio Cattelan is grounded in a place that we are too often taught to suppress as adults - our devious inner child. Not to get sentimental here, but think back to a time when you were without responsibility and a box of crayons allowed each fantasy that lived within your 7-year-old imagination to come to life. Remember the joy it gave you? Why did you stop? What if, in your adult life, you once again let your imagination go wild and allowed yourself to break the rules? What would you create? Let's stop for a second and consider Mr. Cattelan's work from the same perspective. Did it make you laugh? Did it feel naughty? Did it break the rules? Did it bring you joy? If you said yes to any of the previous questions, then maybe, just maybe, a duct-taped banana is exactly what we've all been craving.

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