

COUNTRY CLUB

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For The Kids

January 21 - March 4, 2012

Opening Reception
Saturday, January 21st, 2012, 6-9 pm

Country Club and Mondrian Los Angeles are pleased to present *For The Kids*, an exhibition of sports lithographs from the archives of John and Tock Costacos. Opening on Saturday, January 21st, 2012 at Country Club and Mondrian Los Angeles, and curated by Adam Shopkorn, the exhibit serves as a mini-retrospective of early Costacos posters from 1986 through 1990. *For The Kids* was originally exhibited in 2011 at Salon 94, New York and was organized with the help of Fabienne Stephan. For the Los Angeles exhibition at Country Club and Mondrian L.A., the selection of lithographs from the archive will be expanded to include many west coast works that will be shown for the first time. Mondrian L.A.'s retail space will be converted into a white box gallery for this particular show. Michael Gross, the CEO of Morgans Hotel Group says "We are really excited and happy to support the exhibition at Country Club, and honored to be able to bring a part of the experience to our property to share with our guests and the community." In addition to these works, pieces will be presented from Jeff Koons' first solo exhibition, *Equilibrium*, the 1985 show that included basketballs floating in display tanks, cast bronze scuba diving tanks and framed advertising posters that appropriated imagery contained in Nike advertisements that preceded the earliest Costacos work. The Nike posters were purchased by Koons with the permission of the manufacturer, and were presented as his own artworks.

Costacos Brothers, originally a sports t-shirt manufacturer, built a reputation for "fantasy" sports posters that gave professional sports heroes a larger-than-life look and appeal. Their products captured the imagination of sports fans at a time when athletes were becoming pop stars. Without a license from professional sports leagues, they were unable to produce game action shots. Instead, they made personality posters, marrying pop culture to an athlete and his persona. They understood that at a certain point a player gains a public profile that transcends their team, catapulting them to individual stardom.

Tapping into their local sports market, the brothers' big break came in 1985 when Kenny Easley, the All-Pro safety for the Seattle Seahawks, agreed to pose for a poster. Rather than posing him for an action shot in team gear, which was the sports poster industry standard at the time, Kenny liked the concept of his image as a tough-guy in leather jacket and



gloves. He became "The Enforcer." Soon after, they signed Los Angeles Raiders defensive back Lester Hayes and, using the language of a popular daytime television show at the time, titled their work "The Judge: Lester's Court." The sales of both posters were modest and they did not gain much traction outside of their local markets. Following suit, the Chicago Bears Jim McMahon became "Mad Mac," playing on the film "Mad Max." On the heels of the Chicago Bears 1985 Super Bowl victory, McMahon's poster struck a chord in the marketplace and sales soared. In its first week, 10,000 copies were sold.

Costacos said, "We wanted to make the athletes into comic book heroes. They're larger than life. They're Superman. They're Batman. They're Hollywood action stars that kick the shit out of 20 bad guys always living to fight another day." The Costacos signature images, with their campy porno-like titles, are at once commando-kitsch and aspirational. Nike's posters used similar players to similar ends, helping athletes like George "Iceman" Gervin and Darrell "Dr. Dunkenstein" Griffith achieve iconic pop status.

Koons' Duchampian gesture brings a media phenomenon into the gallery space, highlighting its cultural relevance. The roles played by the athletes in the Nike ads were those typically associated with power, standing in contrast to a social system that traditionally denied power to African-Americans.

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