



Richard Johnson

The man who knows New York

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Koons' latest work 'insane'

THE world's most successful living artist — **Jeff Koons** (right) — is working on a new series of paintings inspired by the Old Masters, using lasers and stencils and an army of low-paid assistants.

Surrealist painter **Alex Gardega** responded to a help-wanted ad and was given a tour of Koons' factory on West 29th Street. "It was beyond insane," he told me.

Gardega said, "They have lasers printing holes in paper, so they make thousands of pieces of paper with holes in it, and these artists sit all day long and take one stencil, dab paint over it, take the next over that . . . repeat hundreds of times a day — all for a 5-inch section."

Koons, whose Balloon Dog (Orange) sculpture sold for \$58.4 million at a 2013 auc-



Getty Images

Jeff Koons is working on a new series of paintings.

tion, is said to have three shifts of assistants working around the clock, about 100 people total.

"Jeff's a tough taskmaster," said one art expert. "He has workers that just polish sculptures all day. There is high turnover."

"It made an iPhone factory look like a fun place to work," said Gardega. "It was the most lifeless place I have ever seen. I left there, and then right to the Met to clean my soul. Rembrandt would have spit on his fluorescent-lit floors."

Reps for Koons didn't get back to me. [More on Koons: Page 20.]

'Midnight' strikes again

LAVERNE Cox (right) of "Orange Is the New Black" was the glam centerpiece at **John Berendt's** Upper West Side townhouse Monday.

Berendt was celebrating the multimedia Metabook release of his nonfiction best seller "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil." Cox voiced infamous Savannah drag queen **Lady Chablis** on the app's audiobook.

The author told the crowd that when "Midnight" was published in 1994, he insisted no photos be included because he wanted the book to be seen as literature.

Twenty years later when he was approached by Metabook, "I said, 'What the hell. Why not?'" This new version even has crime-scene photos.

Raising a glass were novelist **Wally Lamb**, **Judith Regan** and **Alfred Uhry**, who is adapting "Midnight" into a Broadway musical.



AP

Quick hits . . . quick hits

FORMER Brooklyn Supreme Court Judge **Barry Kamins**, forced off the bench after improperly giving campaign advice to ex-Brooklyn DA **Charles Hynes**, was welcomed to the firm of Aidala Bertuna & Kamins by Fox News legal analyst **Arthur Aidala** at a party Wednesday . . . **CLIVE Davis** and the Rev. **Al Sharpton** helped **Aretha Franklin** celebrate her birthday at the Ritz-Carlton. Among other gifts, the Queen of Soul, who turned 73 on Wednesday, was presented with a huge feathered hat by milliner **Ivy Supersonic**, who said, "She's my favorite singer in the whole world since I was 11."

Endquote . . . endquote

"AN artist is someone who produces things that people don't need to have but that he — for

some reason — thinks it would be a good idea to give them."

— Andy Warhol