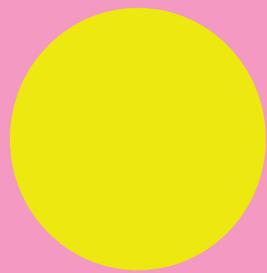


# John Waters

# FI RE



HE'S TURNING UP EVERYWHERE THESE DAYS, FROM CABLE TV AND THE STANDUP CIRCUIT TO BROADWAY AND THE ART WORLD. BALTIMORE'S SUBVERSIVE FILMMAKER IS MORE COMPLEX THAN YOU MIGHT THINK.

**By John Lewis**  
**Photography by Bryan Burris**

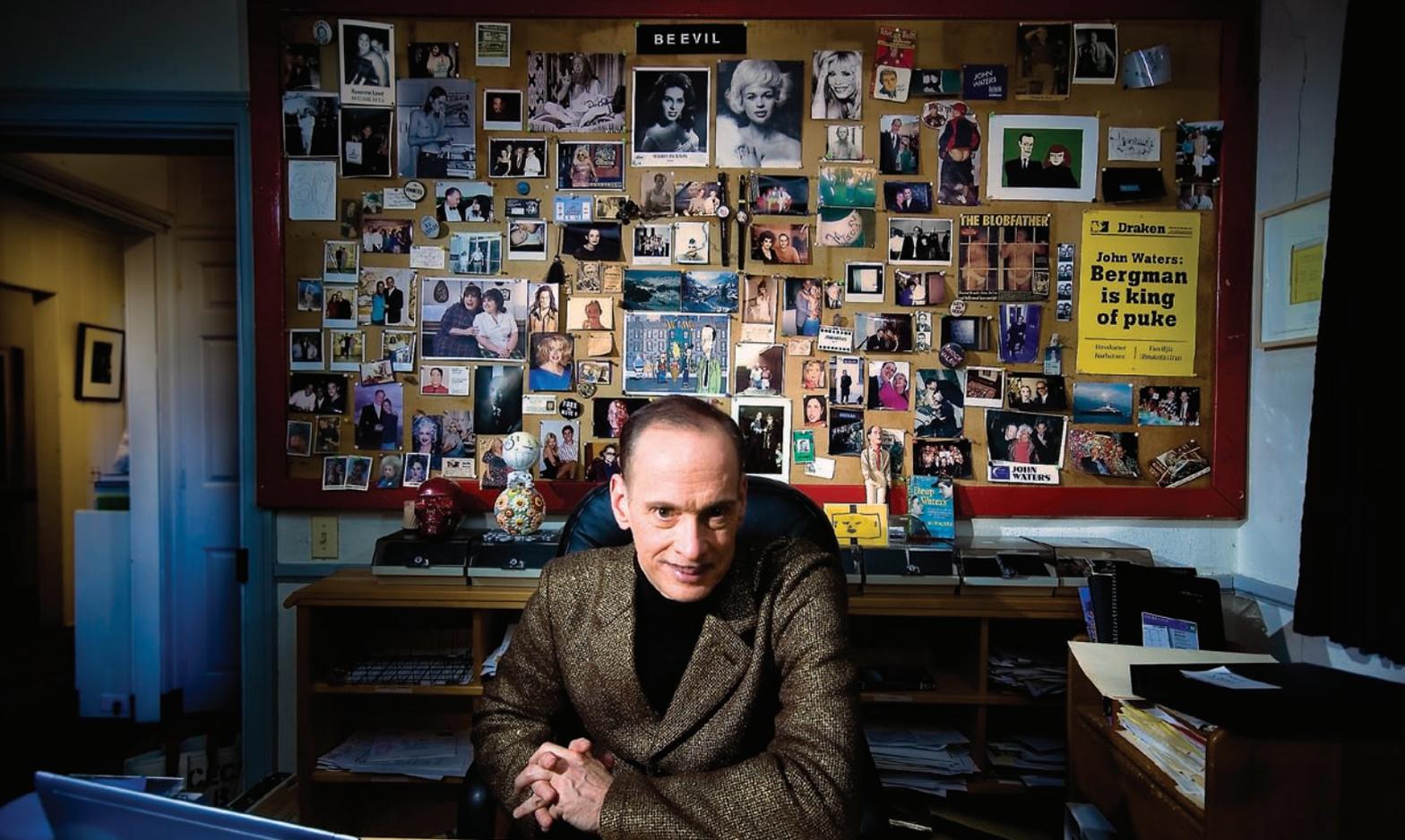
Hair and makeup by Cheryl "Pickles" Kinion  
Photography assistance by Crystal Whitman



LIVES

PASOLINI

CY TWOMBLY



**“ I was a mere pebble of filth in the old days. ”** —Divine, *Flamingos Forever* screenplay

It's been 20 years since William Burroughs dubbed John Waters "the Pope of Trash." And it wasn't long before it spawned other similarly spirited, press-ready titles: "the Sultan of Sleaze," "the Prince of Puke," and "the Duke of Dirt" among them. They were certainly well deserved, as anyone who's seen *Pink Flamingos* can attest, but those oft-repeated phrases no longer seem applicable. If they do, you haven't been paying close attention to Waters's career.

Waters has become something of a ubiquitous—and welcome—presence on the cultural landscape. On any given day, he might be speaking at Oxford, exhibiting his artwork at The Andy Warhol Museum, kibitzing with Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, starring in his own TV series, releasing a CD, taking the Tony Awards by storm, writing a piece for *The New York Times* book review, or recording a DVD commentary for *The Little Mermaid*. He may even be working on a new film project of his own.

"I've always wanted to sell out," Waters wrote in his 1986 book *Crackpot*, "but no one wanted to buy me."

That's no longer true, as Waters has reinvented himself and diversified in ways that broadened his mainstream appeal and won him new fans in niche markets other than indie cinema. As Middle America sings along to *Hairspray, the Musical*, the contemporary art world embraces Waters as a fine artist. As a

result, the trashy sobriquets no longer fit and come across as simplistic, even quaint.

Waters has turned himself into something much more sophisticated and engaging.

And Baltimore's bad seed has morphed into a bankable brand name around the world.

How did that happen? And what future business prospects does Waters have in mind? Getting into opera, or opening a reform school, perhaps? Don't laugh. Stranger things have already happened.

**“ Doesn't it feel fabulous to be home again? ”**

—Divine, *Flamingos Forever* screenplay

Waters works in the upstairs office of his North Baltimore home. Books are everywhere—mostly art and culture, fiction, true crime, and biographies—on shelves and stacked in neat piles. A magazine rack in the corner holds many of the 160 publications he receives in the mail: *Entertainment Weekly*, *Vari-*

ety, Jet, Cooking Light, Metropolitan Home, Artforum, Butt, and a host of others.

Items from Waters's extensive collection of fake food have been placed discreetly around the room. On a low shelf, for instance, a dish of plastic chocolates sits beside a framed photo of Edith Massey, the actress who won cult fame appearing in Waters's early movies.

A corkboard displays an assortment of eye-catching ephemera and photos. Amidst snapshots of Waters with various celebrities—including Leonardo DiCaprio, Björk, and Henry Kissinger—there's an ID badge from the Cannes Film Festival, an autographed picture of Don Knotts, and a "BE EVIL" Believe-style bumper sticker.

Waters sits at a desk with a laptop computer, telephone, legal pads, pens and pencils, toothpick dispenser, adding machine, and a fake cup of coffee (complete with red plastic stirrer). Dressed in a black-and-white striped pullover shirt and gray pants, Waters looks like a stylish convict. Known for being fashion-forward, he has a penchant for striped socks, flashy footwear, and sports jackets that are, as he says, "ripped, but ripped well, by Japanese designers."

Although Waters keeps an apartment in Greenwich Village and practically lives in airports, Baltimore remains the center of his universe, which he makes instantly clear. "This is my main place," he says, tucking one leg under the other. "It's certainly my home. Whenever I have to think of an idea, I come here."

Up at 6:15 each morning, he gets an early start. "In the morning, I write or think up something every day—from eight o'clock to noon," he says. "I sell it in the afternoon."

A productive day might also include learning lines for a guest spot on a TV show, doing press interviews, preparing for a lecture, and fielding numerous phone calls. "I have business appointments just like everyone else," he says.

Waters will be the first person to tell you that, for years, he's been "selling Baltimore." In fact, there are few artists more closely associated with a single locale, and Waters's relationship to his hometown invites highfalutin comparisons to Faulkner's Mississippi or Dickens's London. And no film director has endorsed or validated a city as Waters has with Baltimore. Even Woody Allen eventually made films outside New York, though that city, like London, hardly lacked for artistic validation.

### HStarQuote

**"He's so outside the system and such a radical filmmaker. John is one of my heroes in film."**

—Johnny Depp, *Cry-Baby*  
"It Came From Baltimore" documentary (*Cry-Baby* DVD)



That's why the Faulkner comparison may be most apt. Like Mississippi, Baltimore is considered something of a cultural backwater that mostly gets ignored by tastemakers and trendsetters. So when Waters descends on a neighborhood like Highlandtown and points his camera at the Formstone façades and beehive hairdos and captures the local dialect, it comes across as exotic in other parts of the country. And as the nation becomes increasingly homogenized, such hyper-regionalism (especially in Waters's early films) seems all the more distinctive and real.

Critic Gary Indiana has written that "[Waters's depiction of Baltimore] may now be more authentic than the 'big' cultures of New York or Los Angeles, where fewer and fewer genuine local identities survive the many cycles of gentrification."

When Waters took an A&E film crew to one of his favorite blocks in Hampden a few years ago, one of the locals came out of his house dressed in leopard print pajamas to see what the fuss was about. Because the guy looked like he'd stepped out of Pat Moran's casting office and was, as Waters recalls, "playing with himself the whole time," the crew thought the director had put him up to it. He hadn't. "It was so amazing," says Waters. "It showed that you can come to Baltimore and see that my films are really true—they're part documentary of how I see Baltimore."

But the city is changing. "The Baltimore I make films about is vanishing," says Waters. "But that's not so surprising."

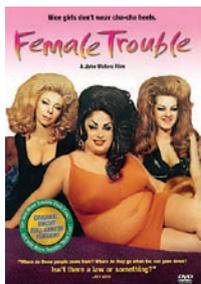
The recent demise of a favorite movie theater is a case in

## Neighborhoods: John Waters Films

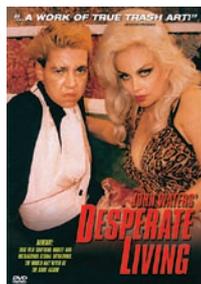
**Phoenix**  
Pink Flamingos (1972)



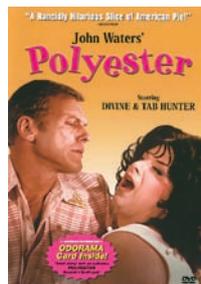
**Lutherville**  
Female Trouble (1974)



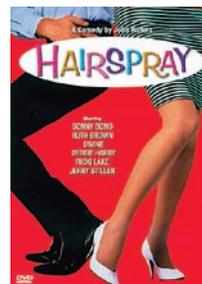
**Hampstead**  
Desperate Living (1977)



**South Baltimore**  
Polyester (1981)



**Highlandtown**  
Hairspray (1988)



point. "I'm really upset The Earle [an adult theater on Belair Road] closed," he says, with a sly smile. "All this stuff about The Senator possibly closing—how come nobody was out there when The Earle closed? I was out of town when it happened, but I went and took pictures of it. It's a church already."

"And I saw what went on there—talk about sacraments. I saw a lot of things turned into a lot of things in there."

He shakes his head. Other favorites are gone, as well: the Wee Wee Hours, an after hours bar in Fells Point; Hutzler's department store, downtown; The Atlantis, a male strip club near Central Booking; Cap'n Jack's, a thrift shop at Charles Street and North Avenue; the Timonium Drive-In, and numerous others.

Still, he doesn't seem particularly resentful of the changes and development around town. "What is called the Yuppification of Baltimore is good for the city," he says. "Otherwise, it would just be empty. I'm not against any of that, but fancy Baltimore offends me a little bit. Pretentious Baltimore really gets on my nerves. I think, 'Oh, please.' Hipster Baltimore, I'm all for. I think Hampden is becoming what Fells Point should have become. There's still an uneasy mix there."

"But I love that people in Baltimore have a sense of humor about the city, and they don't want to leave. They don't understand why anyone would leave. That is heartwarming to me. I'm not saying it has to stay poor, or it has to stay redneck, but it has to have a sense of humor about itself to be appealing to me."

But if Waters's Baltimore is fading, he has no intention of vanishing along with it. While remaining fiercely loyal to his hometown, he's been branching out into other careers that are less about Baltimore and more about an ever-evolving artistic persona.

**“It is a very minor cult right now, but one that is growing and growing.”**

—Divine, *Pink Flamingos*

**HStarQuote**

**“John's one of the smartest people I've ever met, and if I had a quandary in my life or career, he's one of the first people I would call. He's a big bowl of enlightenment.”**

—Jeff Garlin,  
Director, *This Filthy World*



This summer, Waters seems to be popping up everywhere. His Court TV series, *Til Death Do Us Part*, continues with new episodes; the film of his stand-up show, *This Filthy World*, comes out on DVD this month; "John Waters Presents Movies That Will Corrupt You," a series he put together for here!, a gay and lesbian cable channel, will be rebroadcast throughout the summer; and "Eliminate," an art show he curated for Provincetown's Albert Merola Gallery opens June 15.

"John never stops creating," says Christine Vachon, the producer of Waters's latest film, *A Dirty Shame*. "He goes where the ideas are, and what he does doesn't feel false or opportunistic in any way."

"He is a real student of culture," notes Marianne Boesky, who shows Waters's artwork at her New York gallery. "Because of that, he's able to communicate with many different kinds of people."

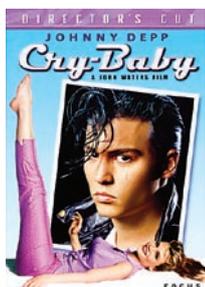
"John is always doing something different," says publicist Steven Trachtenbroit, who worked on the promotion of last winter's *A Date With John Waters* CD. "Plus, he really likes his work and that shows in everything he does."

Waters will also be in the new *Hairspray* movie—based on the musical inspired by his 1988 film—that opens nationwide next month. Although Waters didn't direct the new film—which was shot in Toronto instead of Baltimore and stars John Travolta and Queen Latifah—he makes a cameo as "the flasher."

"It was weird going to Canada and seeing a \$75 million version of my movie," says Waters, who spent just \$2.7 million mak-

**→ Neighborhoods: John Waters Films**

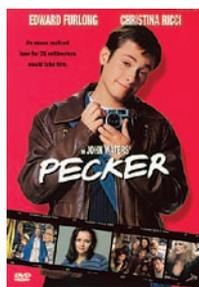
**Milford Mill**  
*Cry-Baby* (1990)



**Towson**  
*Serial Mom* (1994)



**Hampden**  
*Pecker* (1998)

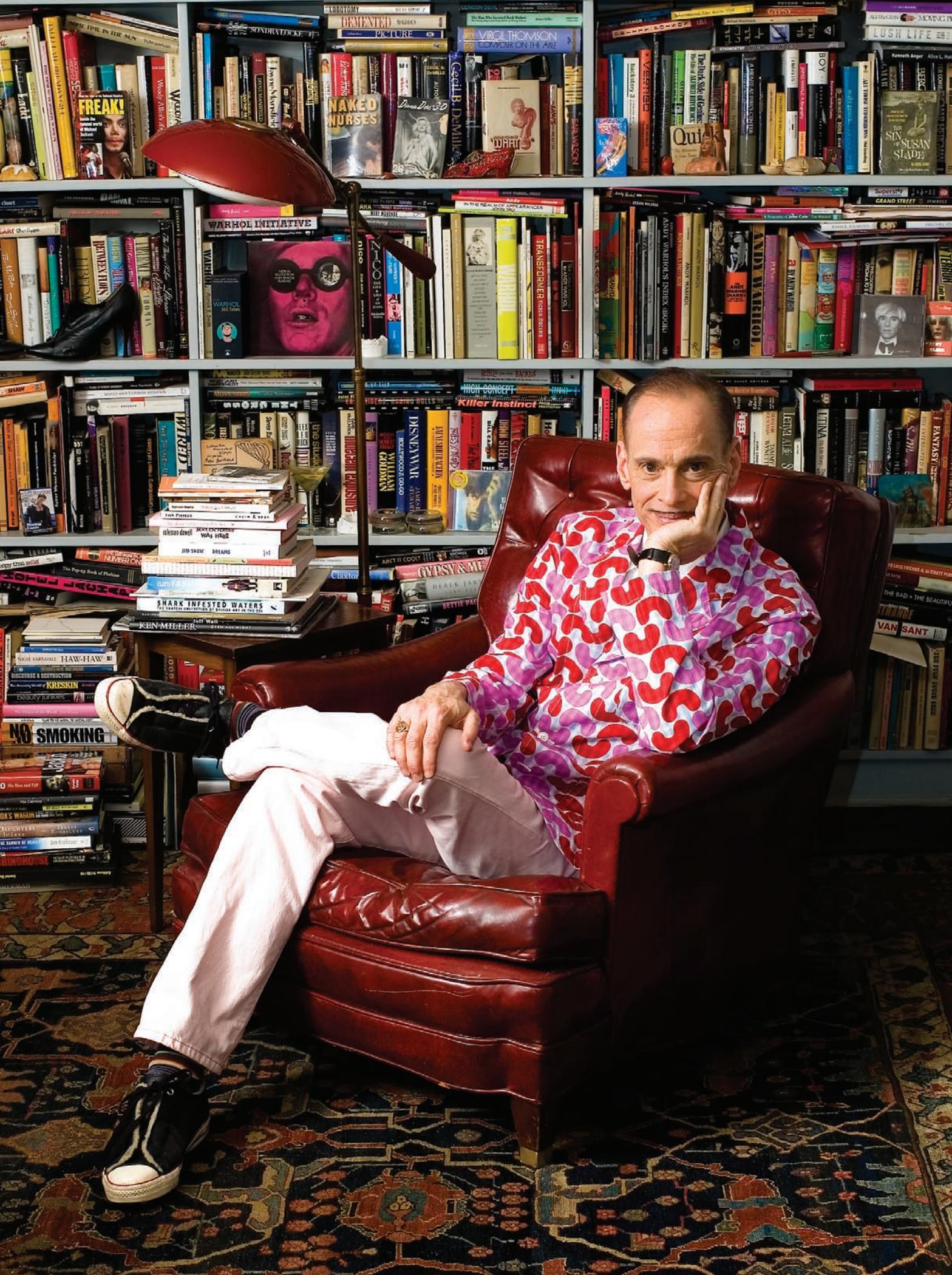


**West Side (Hippodrome)**  
*Cecil B. Demented* (2000)



**Harford Road**  
*A Dirty Shame* (2004)





## HStarQuote



**"He's just an inspiring guy. . . . He kinda makes you want to work a little harder being around him. I feel like I'm not doing enough with my life, getting all I can out of the day like he does."**

—Johnny Knoxville,  
*A Dirty Shame*,  
to ign.com

ing the original film. "It was weird seeing Highlandtown built in Canada. Seeing the fake Baltimore always makes me laugh. It looks like Essex, in a way. And that's all right, because Essex and Highlandtown are the same world. It looked pretty good to me."

Advance screenings have already created a buzz, making *Hairspray* one of the most anticipated movies of the summer. "Everyone in Hollywood is talking about it right now," says Vachon, who is currently shopping Waters's next project, which the director describes as "a terribly wonderful children's Christmas adventure called *Fruitcake*."

"We don't have the money yet, but we're working on it," says Waters. "The budget is \$7-9 million, which is a lot for an independent film. But if the new *Hairspray* is a hit—who knows—maybe we'll get this new movie financed easier. Not everything goes smoothly, and luckily, I have a lot of other things I do."

From experience, he knows the value of having a second (or third) job.

In the early 1980's, Waters's film career was stalled. He was hoping to make a sequel to *Pink Flamingos*, called *Flamingos Forever*, and wasn't getting any takers. In fact, between 1981 and 1988, he didn't make a movie.

"So I tried to use what I had," he says. "I turned myself into a marketable product, and then I had fun with it, and it became a business."

Waters stepped from behind the camera and presented a fuller, more nuanced version of himself to the world. He wasn't selling a twisted vision of Baltimore so much as he was selling himself as a humorist and pop culture personality. At a time when he was unable to make a film, he actually widened his audience by expanding into other fields.

He'd been doing a stand-up act at colleges across the country, but its reach was somewhat limited. "So I wrote books," says Waters, noting that the two volumes he produced during this period, *Crackpot* and *Shock Value*, have never gone out of print. "I also worked as a journalist when I couldn't get the movies made. In fact, I still have my *Rolling Stone* press card."

He wrote for a variety of publications about subjects that both expanded and deepened the public's perception of him. He gave a personalized tour of Los Angeles to *Rolling Stone* readers, named 101 things he hated (the list included Amish people, apples, and *The Hobbit*) in *National Lampoon*, advised *Newsweek* readers on how to be juvenile delinquents, profiled Pia Zadora for *American Film*, and professed his love for "The Buddy Deane Show" in *Baltimore*.

These pieces were bundled with a few previously unpublished essays in *Crackpot*, which earned rave reviews for its author: "a very funny commentator" (*Playboy*), "a uniquely observant humorist" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a cross between Evelyn Waugh and Miss Manners" (*Los Angeles Times*).

*Shock Value*, an offbeat memoir, was similarly lauded. Like the essays, it had a distinct edge—one chapter was titled "Why I Love Violence"—but its overall tone was affable, its wit droll, and Waters came across as immensely likeable. Writer Fran Lebowitz, like many others, was impressed and found the book "funny, informative, and suffused with boyish charm."

A new John Waters was emerging, one that could simultaneously appeal to cult film buffs and play well on David Letterman.

## “Boise, Idaho, here we come!”

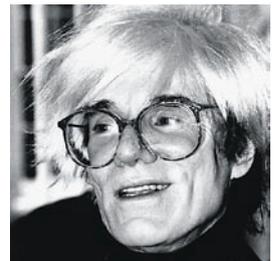
—Divine, *Pink Flamingos*

When Waters finally got financing for his next film, it wasn't for a *Pink Flamingos* sequel or some other midnight-movie fare. The only time he attempted to repeat himself, he was stymied, and the project never got off the ground. So he refined and reinvented himself again, and the next movie was "shocking" in an entirely different way—it was a family film, with a PG rating.

### Waters On: Film Biz Influences

#### ● Andy Warhol

**"He was never pretentious. In fact, he would make fun of pretension. And he talked about business being art."**



#### ● Walt Disney

**"His very name meant 'wholesome,' but at the same time, he had the scariest villains of anybody."**



#### ● William Castle

**"He was the first person who made being a director part of selling a movie. He used himself to sell the movie."**



"When I wrote *Hairspray*, I certainly never thought I was trying to be mainstream," recalls Waters. "It just happened accidentally."

*Hairspray* was both a departure and a surprise hit, though it was hardly a blockbuster by Hollywood standards. About a perky and plump teenager pining for integration in the early-1960's, it grossed close to \$10 million (says *Variety*), launched Ricki Lake's career, and showcased Divine as an actor with legitimate commercial appeal. It was subversive enough that it didn't completely alienate Waters's core audience, but it was commercial enough to play at the local mall.

The ascendance of indie film didn't hurt, either. With directors such as Jim Jarmusch, Hal Hartley, and Gus Van Sant citing Waters as an inspiration, the one-time Pope became something of a patron saint.

A more lenient culture and the proliferation of cable TV and video rentals also conspired to make Waters more palatable and accessible in the long term. Early in his career, Waters focused on celebrity worship, sexuality, and sleaze, topics that eventually migrated from the tabloids to the mainstream media. Waters, and his trademark pencil-thin mustache went with them.

"So many kids tell me, 'My parents showed me your movies,'" he says. "It's the exact opposite of when I was younger when parents called the police about my movies. Times have really changed, but I don't know if I've changed all that much. I've had to change to keep going, but if you look at my last film, *A Dirty Shame*, it's not that astoundingly different from the early films.

"*Pink Flamingos* was shown recently on the Sundance Channel, uncut. I don't even know how that could be. Someone called and wanted to know if they could blur the blowjob scene. I said, 'Yes, fine. You can do that.' They didn't! They forgot or something, and it was shown uncut.

"I look in the cable guide and sometimes five or six of my movies are playing on TV that month. That's amazing to me. *Female Trouble* plays on the Independent Film Channel all the time. That surprises me. *Pecker* regularly plays on television and actually found its audience through TV. *Serial Mom* has played on Lifetime on Mother's Day."

Flipping through the cable stations, viewers might also catch Waters appearing in films such as Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild* or Woody Allen's *Sweet and Lowdown*, or maybe on a rerun of *The Simpsons*.

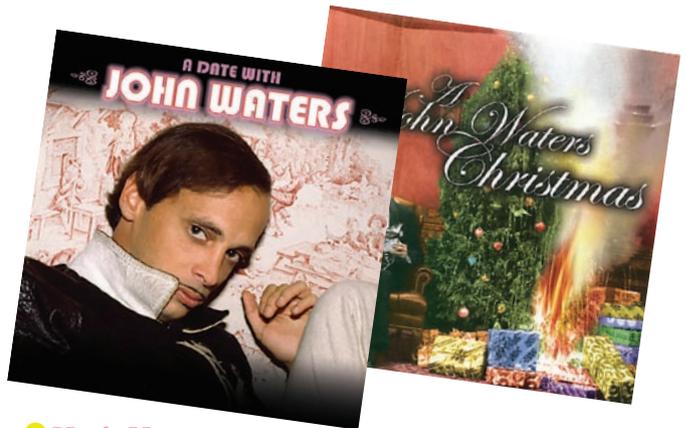
Waters appeared in a 1997 *Simpsons* episode, "Homer's Phobia," as John, the owner of a pop culture memorabilia shop. In the episode, Homer learns something about John that changes his perception of the shop owner.

**Homer:** That John is the greatest guy in the world. We've gotta have him and his wife over for drinks sometime.  
**Marge:** Hmm, I don't think he's married, Homer.  
**Homer:** Oh, a swinging bachelor, eh? Well, there's lots of foxy ladies out there.  
**Marge:** Homer, didn't John seem a little . . . festive to you?  
**Homer:** Couldn't agree more, happy as a clam.  
**Marge:** He prefers the company of men.  
**Homer:** Who doesn't?  
**Marge:** Homer, listen carefully. John is a ho . . . mo . . .  
**Homer:** Right  
**Marge:** . . . sexual.  
**Homer:** AAAAHHHHH!

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## Other Projects: CDs, TV, Books



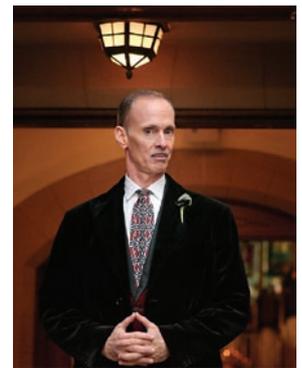
### ● Music Man

With help from fellow Baltimorean Larry Benicewicz—the music consultant on Waters's films since *Hairspray*—Waters has put together two CDs of his favorite songs. Benicewicz says Waters's tastes run toward rare rockabilly and oddball novelty tunes, and he often has something very specific in mind. "He might, for instance, ask if I have any songs that equate sex with itching," says Benicewicz.



### ● The Simpsons

In a 1997 episode titled "Homer's Phobia," Waters played John, the owner of a campy memorabilia shop. The show won an Emmy Award and placed fifth on *Entertainment Weekly's* top 25 list of *Simpsons* episodes.



### ● 'Til Death Do Us Part

Waters stars in Court TV's first scripted series. As the Groom Reaper, he introduces and wraps up each show, a la Alfred Hitchcock, and offers commentary throughout.



### ● Classic Waters Reading

Both *Shock Value* and *Crackpot* showcase Waters's nuanced wit, while the "Change of Life" exhibition catalog provides an excellent overview of his artwork—with insightful commentary from Brenda Richardson and Gary Indiana.

## JOHN WATERS, INC.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 141 Homer then fears that John might be influencing his son. He asks Bart, “He didn’t give you gay, did he?” To counter any such influence, he takes Bart to a steel mill—where all the steel workers turn out to be gay.

Such unabashed, over-the-top discussions and depictions of sexuality could have been straight out of a Waters film. In the not-so-distant past, they would have been midnight movie material, but here it was on prime time TV. The episode even won an Emmy Award.

“More people have seen that than all my movies put together,” says Waters. “And there are people who *only* know me from seeing me on *The Simpsons*.”

Waters later landed in an even more unlikely venue, Broadway, with similar, award-winning results. The musical version of *Hairspray*, with Waters on-board as a consultant, opened at the Neil Simon Theatre in August 2002 and quickly became a favorite of audiences and critics alike. It won eight Tony Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, and a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for “Best Musical.” It also won a Grammy Award for “Best Musical Show Album.”

A touring version of the show has been criss-crossing the country, taking Waters’s brand of subversive humor and offbeat worldview deep into the Heartland.

Last month, it even played for two nights at the Morrison Center for the Performing Arts in Boise, Idaho.

“**Is that all you want, money?**”

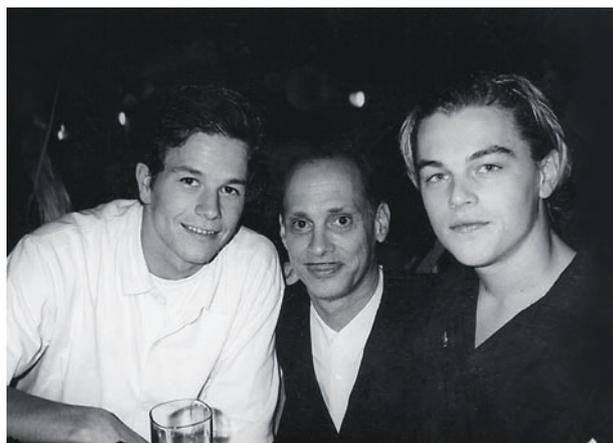
—Divine, *Flamingos Forever* screenplay

*Hairspray, the Musical* provides Waters with what he jokingly refers to as “the only passive income I’ve ever received. I’ve been very nicely paid for that.”

Otherwise, he says, “Everything in my career has been incredibly gradual. Nothing has happened overnight. I never made that much money on the early movies. And with both *Female Trouble* and *Pink Flamingos*, there were music rights issues. When they were re-released, fees had to be paid for all the music. For *Pink Flamingos*, it was approximately \$500,000, so I doubt I’ll ever see another penny from that movie—but at least it can be released.

## Personal Snapshots: Waters and fellow celebs

Clockwise from top left: Waters with Jeanne Moreau; Mark Wahlberg and Leonardo DiCaprio; Pedro Almodóvar; Debi Mazar, Henry Kissinger, and Todd Solondz; Björk; and Rei Kawakubo



COURTESY OF JOHN WATERS

"I wasn't able to buy a house until I made *Cry-Baby*, which is a Hollywood movie. On the Hollywood movies, I make a good salary, but I never see anything after that. I get residuals from the writers and directors guilds, but you can't live on that. Basically, the early films paid my rent, and the Hollywood films allowed me to buy my house. And I paid a mortgage just like everybody else."

He politely demurs when asked about income figures. "That's between me and the IRS," he says, "but I've made less from the movies than you probably think. Still, I'm not complaining."

But Waters doesn't hesitate to say what he spends his money on: books and contemporary art. A quick tour of the house confirms this. In just about every room, books are stacked in neat piles and lined on shelves. Many of them, especially in the living room, are art books—coffee table books on the work of Larry Clark, Andy Warhol, Richard Prince, Carl Andre, Cy Twombly, and many others. Original art by Fischli/Weiss, Mike Kelley, Roy Lichtenstein, Christopher Wool, and Peter Hujar are hung in the living room.

Much of the art is provocative. "The art I like best makes me mad first," says Waters. "All contemporary art should make you mad. Otherwise, what's the point? I like things that are original, and original is usually never easy to like. It's not about decoration. It's not about pretty. Most people *should* hate contemporary art. It hates you."

He points out a small Jess von der Ahe painting in the hallway. An abstract piece comprised mostly of gold and red flecked spirals and circles, it would hardly seem to qualify as outrageous—that is, until you learn that the artist paints with her own menstrual blood.

In the office upstairs, there's a small jewelry box holding three clear capsules filled with gold filings. It's a conceptual piece by O. Tobias Wong. Waters explains: "You're supposed to take the pills, and your turds will have glitter in them—they'll be sparkling. I love it. I think of it as being for the really rich."

When asked if you're supposed to photograph the results as documentation, Waters shakes his head. "No, I think it's more of a private moment," he says. "The artist told me that most people who take the pills actually forget to look. Talk about disposable income! Ah, the sins of capitalism."

The most shocking piece in the house is hidden away, where most folks will never see it. In the third floor guest room, he swings open the door to what looks like a walk-in closet. Inside, it looks like a mad bomber's lair; it's actually an installation by Gregory Green. "It's the only piece the artist has ever done in a private home in the United States," Waters notes, obviously pleased with the results. "It took him a week to do it. Isn't it great?"

**“ I think if I concentrated, I might be able to work up some sort of minor miracle.”**

—Divine, *Flamingos Forever* screenplay

## Artwork: Waters As Contemporary Artist

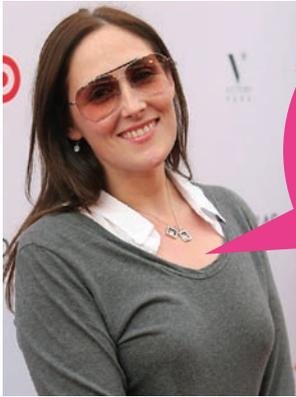


Clockwise from top left: *Sneaky J.F.K.*; *Epic*; *Edith Tells off Katherine Hepburn*; *Cut/Uncut*; *21 Pasolini Pimples*.

Waters's passion for contemporary art extends beyond collecting. In fact, for the past ten years, he's been creating and exhibiting fine art of his own and circulating in the upper echelon of that world. None of his own work hangs in his house.

But Waters's art has been shown in galleries throughout the U.S.—including the C. Grimaldis Gallery in Baltimore—and across Europe. Much of his work is comprised of film stills he creates by photographing images off a TV screen, though he also does collage, sculpture, and mixed-media installations.

A one-man show, "Change of Life," opened at New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004 and traveled to



**"Every experience with John Waters exceeds the expectation."**

—Ricki Lake, *Hairspray*, *Cry-Baby* "It Came From Baltimore" documentary (*Cry-Baby* DVD)

the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the Orange County Museum of Art in California, and Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland. *The Village Voice* called it "the work of a true American original."

One of his pieces—a print he designed at Baltimore's Globe Poster—even made the cover of *Artforum* magazine.

According to Marianne Boesky, his limited edition prints sell for \$3,500, while one-of-a-kind pieces fetch as much as \$35,000. "We've had great success with John," says Boesky. "He has a cult following of people who are fans of his film work, but, more impressively, he has a strong collector following as a conceptual artist. He is not just a famous filmmaker trying to make art, because, as he knows, his celebrity won't get him anything in the art world."

Boesky and Waters both credit his previous dealer, Colin DeLand, with helping him overcome that celebrity. When in New York, it's not uncommon for Waters to visit dozens of art galleries in a single day. Back in the 1990's, DeLand's American Fine Arts gallery in SoHo was a particular favorite, and during one visit, DeLand, who was highly regarded in contemporary art circles for his discerning taste, asked Waters if he created artwork of his own. As it turned out, Waters had been doing the photo work—or "little movies," as he calls them—and had a body of work finished.

Not long after, DeLand became Waters's dealer. "Colin was so respected as being the real thing as an art dealer," says Waters, "that he neutralized most of those fears that I was a celebrity coming into the art world, because that is the worst possible thing you can be. That's why I've kept my art career *completely* separate. It's been very important for me to do that."

When he wants to work on art, Waters gets in his gray Buick LeSabre and drives to an art studio he keeps in Hampden. Housed in a nondescript brick building off the beaten path, it's a tidy, sprawling space with wall-to-wall carpeting, a few Persian rugs, long wooden tables on which he can work, and eye-catching items scattered around the room—including stacks of *Nest* and *Parkett* magazines, a Girls of Dundalk calendar, a box of Farrah Fawcett doll heads, the "Gertie" painting (which was pictured in *Shock Value*), a photo of James Brown, and a Campbell's soup can print.

Waters has just started working on a Fall 2008 show at the Boesky Gallery. "I just started making a list of ideas for

it," he says. "It really does take that long to get together a whole new show."

Far from being daunted, he seems strangely unencumbered by the whole thing. It might be tempting to chalk it up to the fact that he's just cool, but it's obviously more than that. There's something peculiarly liberating about his art career. "It's a relief to not have to pretend that I'm appealing to everybody," notes Waters. "In the movie business, you have to do that no matter what. When you go to sell a movie, you basically say it's going to cross over and everyone's going to love it. In the art world, you can be subtle, impenetrable, and harder to get—that's actually considered a good thing.

"Art isn't for everybody, whereas when you do a movie you're trying to get everybody to buy a ticket. In the art world, you aren't trying to get everybody to buy a ticket. As a matter of fact, if everyone bought a ticket, it would be terrible."

**"In my maturity, in my autumn years, if you will, I have decided to . . . live like all world leaders: financially secure, surrounded by zombie worship, and bathed in the constant glare of publicity."**

—Divine, *Flamingos Forever* screenplay

At 61, Waters shows no signs of slowing down. "I don't feel that different than 30," he says.

And he's hardly lacking for future projects. *Cry-Baby* follows *Hairspray* to Broadway next year, and *Pink Flamingos* is being optioned as an opera. Waters mentions possibly writing a follow-up to *Shock Value*, or putting together another themed CD collection like the Christmas and Valentine's Day compilations he's already done. He could organize his papers, which are housed at Wesleyan University's Cinema Archive (along with the archives of Martin Scorsese, Federico Fellini, and Frank Capra). And there's the new film, of course.

This summer, he also plans to write an entirely new stand-up show. "If I do, I can take it to the colleges, and I've visited hundreds of them," he says. "But do I really want to visit all those colleges again? But that's the thing—I *can* always do it. I



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have contingency plans. If I have the new act ready, I can do that, which is nice to know.

"Or maybe I'll retire and open a reform school. I taught in prison in the 1980's, so I know people in corrections. I was approached to start a private reform school for rich delinquents in the corrections system. I want to do it, but I said, 'When will I have the time?' They said I'd only have to do a master class and talk other people into coming there. We were talking about taking fire-starters because no one else will. No child left behind. This is in the talking stages—the John Waters reform school. I could be good at it."

When asked if he ever worries about money, Waters gasps. "Oh my God, yes," he says. "I think anyone in show business is lying to you—even people who are incredibly wealthy—if they say they don't think it could be over in one day. This business is built on insecurity. As far as the banks are concerned, I don't have a job. I don't have a guaranteed weekly paycheck. You always think it could stop.

"But I'm always optimistic. I don't believe in higher powers, but I do believe in the basic goodness of people. That's about as spiritual as I get. As far as my enthusiasm and my excitement for being interested in things and caring about life, I still feel like I'm Gabby Hayes shot out of a cannon."

JOHN LEWIS is Baltimore's arts and culture editor.

**UP FRONT: SHOPPING**

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**WHERE TO BUY:** Coach, several locations including, The Gallery, 200 East Pratt St., 410-385-1772. Fells Point Surf Company, two locations including 1631 Thames St., 410-276-SURF. Ikea, 8352 Honeygo Blvd., Nottingham, 410-931-5400. Optical Images, 1500 Reisterstown Rd., Club Centre, 410-484-6348. South Moon Under, several locations including Shops at Kenilworth, 822 Kenilworth Dr., Towson, 410-337-7484. Target, several locations including 6717 Ritchie Hwy., Glen Burnie, 410-487-0038. Urban Outfitters, 301 Light St. #2540, 410-685-3115. The Wine Source, 3601 Elm Ave., 410-467-7777.