

# KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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## NEW YORK

***TOBACCO SUBSIDIES: NAN GOLDIN ORIGINALS FOR EIGHT DOLLARS?***

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Absolut has its major modern artists (Francesco Clemente, Ross Bleckner); Helmut Lang his transgressive photographers (Robert Mapplethorpe). But luring A-list artists to shill for cigarette companies must be a trickier proposition, right? Not if the artists in question want to cause a sensation -- or even another "Sensation."

So while stodgy Philip Morris supports a midtown branch of the Whitney Museum, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company's Camel brand is funding even smaller spaces -- in the form of cigarette packs designed by Damien Hirst, Nan Goldin, and newcomer **Christopher Chiappa**. They're betting art-loving smokers will keep coming back to the exhibits.

RJRT's contemporary-art initiative was developed with the marketing company Y-Core, since, as RJRT spokesperson Carole Crosslin admits, "we are not art critics." Hirst's and Goldin's packs are instantly recognizable. Goldin's photo shows a chicly grungy man using a pay phone while toting a pack of Camel Lights. Hirst more abstractly re-purposed his "Butterfly" series from the early and mid-nineties. (The artist has noted that butterflies look just as beautiful dead as alive -- perhaps this subtle commentary is his version of the Canadian government's just-announced proposal to adorn cigarette packs with graphic images of diseased hearts and lungs.) Christopher Chiappa -- the only nonsmoker of the three -- celebrated selling out with a photograph in which he's wearing a sandwich board with the Camel logo on it. "I felt like Pete Sampras wearing Nike," he reports gleefully. "I just didn't have to sign a multiyear endorsement deal."

In the true spirit of arty exclusivity, the packs are available at just three locations in Manhattan: Global 33, Wonder Bar, and Gemini Lounge. In the month they've been on sale so far, patron preferences have been busily tallied (scores of German tourists, it seems, are buying up cartons of the Hirst editions). "The packs are selling like hotcakes," says Ian Morgan, a manager at Global 33. "In fact, I took in almost as much money off these cigarettes last night as I did off the bar." The fact that the packs are being sold for \$8 probably helped -- but who knows how much they might appreciate in value?

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