

Time Out

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Jill Greenberg

★★★★★

ClampArt, through Sat 11
(see Chelsea)



Jill Greenberg is a well-known celebrity photographer who has shot the likes of David Bowie, Liza Minnelli and Tom Cruise during the past decade. But since 2001, she has also been taking large-scale, digital portraits of primates—monkeys, apes and chimpanzees—most presented in classic head-and-shoulder format against gray backgrounds.

These aren't the dirty banana grabbers kids love to gawk at in the zoo. Instead, Greenberg's gussied-up mammals, photographed in a

commercial studio, look more like overpampered pets, their exotic coats and fur-trimmed faces fluffed and groomed to perfection. Digital tinkering ("finishing," as the artist calls it) adds to the hyperidealized effect, bringing to mind the kind of visual enhancements—airbrushing, body doubles, cosmetic surgery—used in celebrity portraiture.

The parallel isn't entirely coincidental. If Greenberg gives her subjects the star treatment, the fact is that most of them *are* stars, working in film and television. But however accustomed we are to doctored photos of celebrities, we don't envision our simian cousins this way. The intense artifice is what makes these images so intriguingly peculiar. That and the surprisingly subtle displays of anthropomorphic emotions Greenberg elicits. Exhausted, seductive, recalcitrant and bored, the facial expressions and body language suggest lives full of psychological consequence. Indeed, as J. Fred Muggs, the famous chimp who starred on the *Today* show in the 1950s, revealed when he bit comedian Martha Raye in one of his legendary fits, being a star ain't easy—no matter where you hang on the evolutionary ladder.

—Jane Harris