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Rhapsody in blues: Andres Serrano celebrates diversity and artistic freedom — no surprise from the maker of "Piss Christ" in his book *America*

## GOD BLESS U.S.

THE ARTIST BEHIND "PISS CHRIST" RETRAINS HIS GAZE ON THE DIVERSITY OF AMERICA — AND ANNA NICOLE SMITH

**I**"I'm not just an American," photographer Andres Serrano clarifies. "I'm an American artist who thinks he knows what America's all about." The 54-year-old artist's ideas about the country all on full view in his new book from Taschen, *America and Other Works*.

The first half of the book splits attention between celebrities — cover girl Anna Nicole Smith, Snoop Dogg, B.B. King — and ordinary citizens (a Muslim housewife, a doctor, a Boy Scout.) But in Serrano's case, the "other works" addendum to the title is key: Serrano is the

artist whose iconic "Piss Christ" piece acted as a lightning rod for cultural conservatives rallying against arts funding in the mid-1980s. But the inclusion of this older work is exceptionally meaningful: Serrano is saying he's an American and a controversial artist, and that those two things are indelibly, rightfully linked. "I could have done a book just called *America*, but it had to be *America and Other Work*," Serrano says. "I wanted everyone to know that the guy who did

*America* is the same guy who did the *Other Work*." The New York City-born and -based artist says this book was a response to the September 11th attacks. The types of people Serrano included — the Muslim housewife, for example — were conjured up in the days following. "A lot of times, I was just looking at TV and the news, like everyone else," he says. "And certain types of people came to mind immediately." It's a comprehensive, challenging work, which con-

stantly forces its readers to reconcile — to reconcile the maker of *America* with the maker of *Other Works*, but also, centrally, to reconcile all these different kinds of Americans. Cultural conservatives may see it as heresy, but more inclusive minds will see it as a celebration of the country's best. "America is about diversity and contradiction," Serrano says. "And it's all good."  
 DIANE VADINO