

Art in the Streets



Patti Astor at her NYC Fun Gallery, hosting Keith Haring's 1983 exhibition

"Art in the Streets" at L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) was a controversial exhibition with works by more than 100 "artists," depicting this underground art genre.

At the April 2011 exhibition press preview, MOCA's director Jeffrey Deitch (at that time) with co-curators Roger Gastman and Aaron Rose, compared the works to cubism, constructivism, Dadaism and surrealism, in its potential impact on the art world.

The show was an enormous amalgam of graffiti, street art, murals, assemblage pieces, installations of decrepit graffiti filled streets, hip re-created bedrooms and galleries from the 1970's and 80's, displays of aerosol spray cans, numerous photographs of graffiti sprayed buildings, subway cars, bridges, photos of people who did the "artwork" and much more.

The exhibition was filled with small to large graffiti pieces and massive installations - fascinating works that brought the viewer to places she/he might

otherwise avoid. The art was displayed museum and salon style, in cogent, logical ways and with adequate signage, giving viewers a comprehensive understanding of graffiti and street art. Running throughout was a timeline of the evolution of the genre. There was also a display about a graffiti forerunner, railroad writings, going back to late 19th century.

The exhibition demonstrated that several graffiti artists, Shepard Fairey, Banksy, Barry McGee, Mr. Cartoon, are producing works with form, color, harmony and aesthetic beauty. The show was also infused with dynamic youthful energy, with large swirling swaths of color and occasional in-your-face comments on the state of the world.

The Good

OsGemeos' *People Say What They Want*, a mixed media installation, about three stories high, of pieces of torn-down buildings, included doors, siding, wallpaper and mirrors. The installation also included a drum set and guitar, banked by an artistic array of colorful speakers.

Margaret Kilgallen's *Main Drag*, a large, primitive wall painting combining folk art, hobo graffiti, muralistic work and Bay Area street scenes with contemplative people, was breathtakingly beautiful in its simplicity.

Banksy's large *Stained Glass Window* was a magnificent replica of a stained glass window with graffiti scrawls by local school children—a brilliant evolution of graffiti into fine art.

The most aesthetically beautiful work was Swoon's *The Ice Queen*, a black and white 10-foot-tall paper cutout of a mythical, ethereal woman, with light creating dramatic shadows through the cutouts.

The Bad and The Ugly

Street Market and *Street* were powerful pieces, exposing humanity's dark side, transporting us to locales seldom seen, or shown in museums. *Street Market* by Barry McGee, Todd James, Stephen Powers, Devin Flynn, Josh Lazcano, Dan Murphy and Alexis Ross, was a walk-through fun-house-like installation featuring gruesome, graffiti covered dilapidated little stores, a tiny, messy bedroom and a public men's room with blood-splattered sink. Neckface's *Street* was a dark alley installation of a slum with a passed out drunk on the ground.

Fun Gallery and More

"Art in the Streets" featured a re-creation of the 1980's Lower East Side *Fun Gallery*, one of the first venues devoted to graffiti art. There was also a room devoted to works by Keith Haring on subway station walls, a second room

featuring the colorful, glistening *Ice Cream Truck* by Mister Cartoon, and a third room devoted to "Wild Style Graffiti" development, wild, elaborate designs based on bubble letters.

There was: a neon 1970's style room—like a child's fantasy room—called *Cosmic Cavern*, Lee Quinones' magnificent oil and graffiti painted work on canvas, Benchmark, re-creating a contingent of graffiti artists in a 1970's Bronx subway station; and an entire gallery devoted to current and historic works by Shepard Fairey, including *Obama Hope* and several incarnations of *Andre the Giant* stickers and drawings.

Liz Goldner