

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 (2011), was a controversial exhibition with works by more than 100 artists, illustrating graffiti and street art.

At the exhibition press preview, MOCA director Jeffrey Deitch, 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, hip re-created bedrooms and galleries from the 1970's and 80's, displays of aerosol spray cans, photographs of graffiti sprayed buildings, subway cars, bridges, graffiti artists and much more.

The exhibition was filled with small to large graffiti pieces and massive installations—works that brought the viewers to places they might otherwise avoid. The art was displayed museum and salon style, in cogent, logical ways, with adequate signage, giving viewers a comprehensive understanding of the

works exhibited. Running throughout, there 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 and others were producing works with form, color, harmony and aesthetic beauty. The show was infused with dynamic youthful energy, with large swirling swaths of color and occasional in-your-face comments on the state of the world.

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 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.

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, including a passed out drunk.

"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 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 with 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 his *Obama Hope* poster and several incarnations of his *Andre the Giant* stickers and drawings.