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ABOUT LAST NIGHT

Hot Rods and Hot Nights at a Hamptons Party for Kenny Scharf

CULTURE | BY JULIE BAUMGARDNER | JULY 29, 2013 7:11 PM



Cindy Sherman and Kenny Scharf. *Patrick McMullan/PatrickMcMullan.com*

T O T A H

Who

“I live in space, but I’m on planet Earth,” Kenny Scharf said. “I don’t want to go live in Mars but in my mind I go there all the time.” The painter, who was the roommate of Keith Haring and a friend of Jean-Michel Basquiat during the “anything goes” days of 1980s New York, was in East Hampton, N.Y., on Saturday for an opening at **Eric Firestone Gallery** that paired photos of the era by the late Tseng Kwong Chi with Scharf’s own paintings. Spotted at the party were downtown veterans like Bob Colacello; Patrick Demarchelier; Vincent Fremont and his daughter Casey; Calvin Klein, Max Levai, Kyle DeWoody, Lisa Marie Fernandez; and Kembra Pfahler. Cindy Sherman remarked that her friendship with Scharf began in the 1980s, “but I don’t remember how or in what context.” As the proverb goes: if you remember it, you weren’t there.

What

The exhibition, “Amerikulture,” consists of Tseng’s famed “Chinese Ambiguous Ambassador” mockumentary Polaroids (the East Village art scene’s answer to celebrity culture of the time) in a staged conversation with a new body of paintings by Scharf. Cartoonish, colorful and cheeky, Scharf’s works depict distorted icons of Americana — outlandish Jetson renderings, bloated doughnuts. The two sets may seem aesthetically discordant, but Firestone said, “There’s a performance element to both their works. The medium might have been different, but they’re very similar in their sense of humor and the way they live life.”

Where

The works were unveiled at Firestone’s Main Street gallery space, but the evening’s reception took place on the lawn of his house. There partygoers ate barbecue and soaked up Scharf’s other current project: over the last few months, he has been pimping people’s rides by spray-painting his signature alien characters on car roofs, siding and hoods. The project started in Alabama when a couple asked him to graffiti their car based on a mural he was creating there. He put a photo on Instagram, and the rest is history. “Most cars are pretty damn boring,” he lamented. “I will do the best I can to improve America’s highways.” The lawn was peppered with guinea pigs, including cars and airplane noses, and featured a huge interactive mural (which had revelers dancing and cartwheeling as the party continued through the night) and a drive-through movie screen playing old episodes of “The Jetsons.”

T O T A H

When

The mayhem ended around midnight, but the exhibition remains installed through Aug. 11. Scharf has plans to continue his rogue car project wherever and whenever anyone is itching for a vehicular makeover. (Follow his Instagram [@kennyscharf](#) and use the hashtag #karbombz to get his attention.)

Why

With a number of serious events happening in the Hamptons this past weekend (including the heavy-hitting Watermill Center benefit), this exhibit offered a playful respite by harking back to a time when artists were motivated by fun and excitement. “I want to get the focus back to art and off of money,” Scharf said. “Cars are the ultimate appliance. I’m interested in applying art to your daily life, so when you’re driving this car, you’re elevating the mundane tasks. Art is great on the wall, but I also believe in the power of art when you’re actually using it.”