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The poster features a central graphic of a wine bottle silhouette in shades of purple and pink. The text is arranged around and on this graphic. The background is white with scattered pink snowflake patterns. On the right side, there are several vertical silhouettes of wine bottles in various shades of purple and pink.



Kenny Schaeff, Binary Noselock, 2019. Oil, acrylic spray paint, and faux gemstones on linen with powder coated aluminum frame, 36 x 40 in. (Courtesy of Honor Fraser. Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)

# KENNY SCHARF MELTS YOUR MIND

 TRINA CALDERÓN (<https://www.laweekly.com/guest-author/trina-caldern/>). x NOVEMBER 7, 2019



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*The beloved artist makes work with a message in his new show at Honor Fraser*

As you drive north up La Cienega from the 10, keep your eyes peeled for a colorful garland of large plastic toys hanging off the front of Honor Fraser gallery. This assemblage of discarded single-use plastics was collected over the summer leading up to Los Angeles artist Kenny Scharf's newest exhibition, and is just one of the unconventional ways he continues to make enjoyable and valuable art. Finding meaning in used children's toys, Scharf never ceases to create joy where there is pain. Because while there is truth in global anxiety, there should also be hope — and where there is Scharf, there will always be optimism.

"Sometimes you feel so helpless," Scharf tells the *Weekly*. "I do, because it's such a huge thing and you want all your hopes, wishes and prayers to do something. You recycle stuff then you find out it's all going to the landfill. You're trying to be conscientious and it's very hard. I'm not perfect because I take airplanes. I'll take the plastic bottle in the plane that they give me but I'm kind of obsessed so I collect all the stuff and I use it," he explains.





*Kenny Scharf: Optimistically Melting! at Honor Fraser, installation view (Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*

***Optimistically Melting!*** is a large exhibition of paintings, found object assemblage, ceramics and installation, both indoors and outside, with Scharf's personal alternative to recycling methods threaded throughout. "It says it pretty clear. We're all here together, we know what's going on," he says.

In the larger gallery salon, Scharf presents a living room, alive and vibrant but with warnings of impending environmental concerns. Silk-screened messages from climate change headlines in Korea and the U.S. share the stage with his painted abstractions on canvases and sofas. His big-eyed, anthropomorphic characters strike poses in that bold Scharf color palette, but there's more black this time around. The compositions seem happy, though a darkness creeps. You have to think hard about what you're seeing — and how it makes you feel.





Kenny Scharf, *Mini Maxi*, 2019. Oil, acrylic spray-paint, and faux gemstones on linen with powder coated aluminum frame, 40 x 36 in. (Courtesy of Honor Fraser. Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)



Hanging on the walls, the giant paintings in his “Sloppy Melt” series reinforce his serious and vibrant take on the future of human consumption and responsibility. Scharf suggests, “I’m offering help, I always do. Otherwise I would just die. Otherwise why would I do it, why would I do all this, if there wasn’t any hope?”

Born and raised in L.A., Scharf grew up in Van Nuys. From the days of his youth, riding his bicycle down to the local art supply store on Ventura Boulevard to take art classes, he has memories of the smog that once heavily blanketed this community. In L.A., a place where comfort in the present seems to take priority over the future, Scharf is aware of why that is so dangerous. Throughout his storied career, his connection to the environment has been expressed in his work — whether it’s living in Brazil and collecting trashed plastics on the beach for mixed-media sculptures, or painting on the street in New York to help restore vitality in an otherwise gray Babylonian metropolis through public art.



*Kenny Scharf, Fleurs et Vase sur la Table, 2019. Oil, acrylic, and faux gemstones on canvas with powder coated aluminum frame, 120 x 96 in. (Courtesy of Honor Fraser. Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*

In Los Angeles, these themes persist not only in his gallery shows, but also his Karbombz project. “It’s just such a great public art project that is going on indefinitely,” Scharf explains. “There are so many things about it, not just the fun it gives to everyday life in the traffic in the city, but also that anybody can make a change. Something as easy as painting your car! Also the fact that I don’t charge for it, it’s absolutely free. It’s a little to combat the idea, in my opinion, that art is only valuable if it’s expensive. Here is something I think is very valuable and it’s free. It’s art for all, art for everyone, and non-elitist.” Chances are you’ve seen a car on the road with a Scharf cartoon painted on the side, if not, [check out his IG \(https://www.instagram.com/kennyscharf\)](https://www.instagram.com/kennyscharf). And if you want to spread some joy on your own car, email [karbombz@kennyscharf.com \(mailto:karbombz@kennyscharf.com\)](mailto:karbombz@kennyscharf.com) to inquire.

Inside the Honor Fraser exhibit, Scharf also shows new ceramics in “Plantiki,” “Monstiki” and “Earth Flint Stone.” The huge cartoony vessels house giant plants, the perfect compliment to the large works on canvas in the same room. Reminiscent of his 1980s jungle paintings, Scharf brings back the still life in “Vivo Floro” and “Fleurs et Vase sur la Table.” Both works shine with bees and animated flora, while hinting at the harms of impending climate change, with black paint melting in the background and flowers wilting off the table.

For over 18 years, Scharf kept a studio on Adams and Sycamore, a time he recalls fancy art people wouldn’t dare to visit the neighborhood. His cartoons remain on nearby walls, but now he’s in Inglewood, on the edge of another outcast neighborhood flirting with gentrification. Although he moved to NYC in 1980 after seeing Warhol’s Factory films, he’s a true Angeleno. “Everyone thinks I’m a New York artist because I made my name there,” he says. “I try to explain, well, think of me as more of an L.A. artist who brought L.A. to NYC. I did.”

After New York, he lived and worked in Miami. “I was too early, like 10 years before Art Basel,” he says. “It reminded me of the East Village. Then all the artists left and it turned into modeling agencies.”



*Kenny Scharf: Rainbow Truckin', 2019. Found plastic assemblage, 28 x 33 x 11 in. (Courtesy of Honor Fraser. Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*

Scharf has always pushed boundaries with his art and in his practice, which consists of painting, video, sculpture, performance, fashion, ceramics and Karbombz. *Optimistically Melting!* is a standout exhibition in Los Angeles, and it feels like he got something big off his chest.

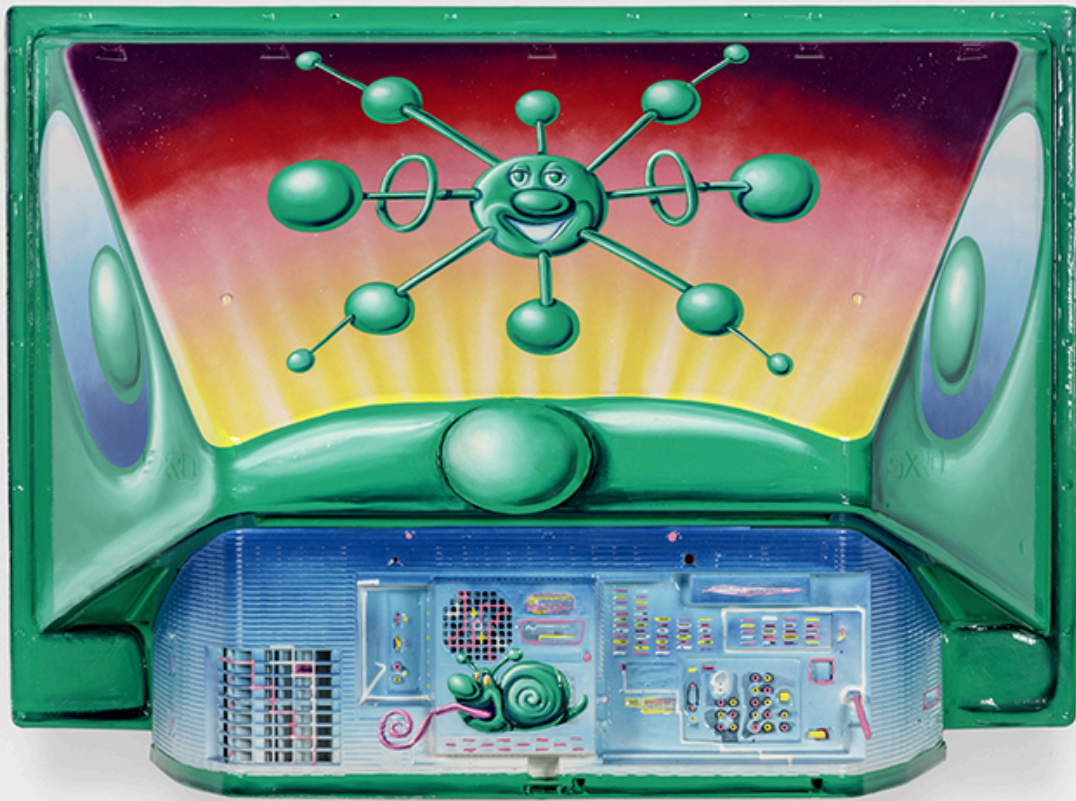
"I try in my own way to not only not impact everything around me all the time," he says. "But I also try to send messages out there to try to get other people to think the same way, in a pleasurable way, a meaningful way. I'm not trying to proselytize, but my art is a little like that. Everybody just thinks, 'oh, it's so fun and pretty and let's just lose ourselves in the colors.' I'm all for that, I'm not saying no, but there's other stuff I want to convey and it's all for the good. I'm not trying to convey world domination, I want the fucking world domination off our backs. I'm pissed — and obsessed!"

***Kenny Scharf: Optimistically Melting!* is on view through November 16 at Honor Fraser, 2622 La Cienega Blvd., Culver City; [honorfraser.com](http://honorfraser.com) (<http://honorfraser.com>).**





*Kenny Scharf at Honor Fraser (Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*



*Kenny Scharf: TV Baxo, 2019. Oil and spray-paint on found TV back, 35 x 51 x 19 inches. (Courtesy of Honor Fraser. Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*





*Kenny Scharf: Optimistically Melting! at Honor Fraser, installation view (Photo by Joshua White / J.W. Pictures)*

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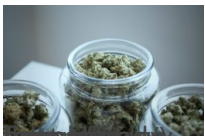
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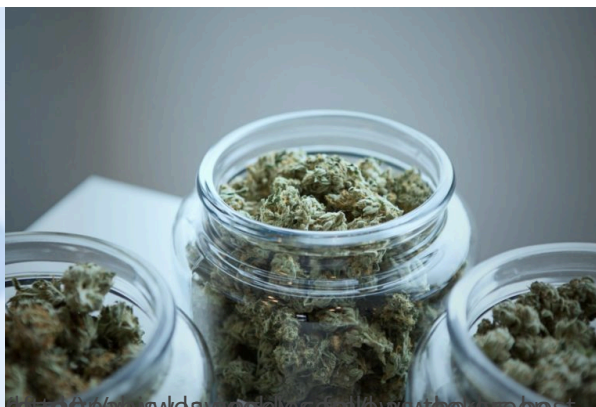


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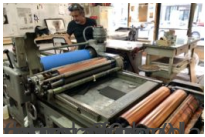
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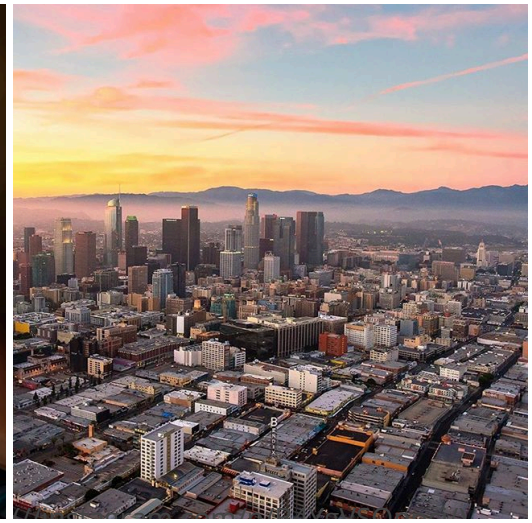
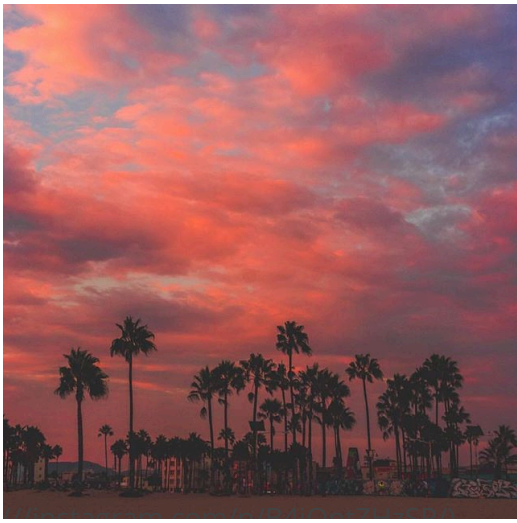


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