

# The New York Times

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## 'Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide' Review: Outlasting an Art Scene

A new documentary co-directed by the artist's daughter shows how Scharf, a poster boy for downtown New York art in the '80s, is hard at work decades later.



Kenny Scharf, left, with Andy Warhol and Keith Haring in the 1980s in a scene from the



By **Glenn Kenny**

June 24, 2021, 7:00 a.m. ET

**Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide** Directed by Max Basch, Malia Scharf  
Documentary | 1h 17m

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The condition of being an artist and the significance of what an artist produces are two distinct things. The post-pop artist Kenny Scharf, who came out of the same downtown art and music scene as Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Klaus Nomi, is someone whose critical and material stock has risen, fallen and risen again over decades. The documentary “[Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide](#),” directed by Max Basch and the artist’s daughter Malia Scharf, makes a considered and not entirely uncritical case for Scharf’s relevance.

Unlike the three other artists grouped with him above, Scharf is still alive and working. This, as some observers of the art world have noted, can be a career disadvantage. The movie’s canny assemblage of archival footage from Scharf’s early New York ascendancy in the late 1970s puts across what made his scene both exhilarating and, to many within and outside it, insufferable. (In early interviews Scharf often sounds like a snooty teenager being forced to make conversation with his boring parent.)



Scharf’s stories of meeting up with Haring (they were roommates for some

time) are evocative and moving. “This was the person I’ve been looking for,” he said, still in awe of his friend. Malia is actually on-camera, comforting her father, during a searing recollection of Haring’s death from AIDS. The range of Scharf’s work is intriguing — beyond his familiar cartoon-junkyard aesthetic, paintings from a dark period in his life have echoes of trenchant Surrealists like Yves Tanguy.

In recent years Scharf has taken up new forms of street art, in a way carrying the torch of his fallen comrades Haring and Basquiat. The movie shows him decorating the denim jacket of a young man who had just been passing by while Scharf was working on a mural. The gesture shows an admirable generosity of spirit.

**Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide**

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 17 minutes. In theaters and [on virtual cinemas](#).

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