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**Kenny Scharf's
Sci-Fi Surrealism**

The Experts Who's Who

**Collectors:
Passion and Power**





Cartoon innocence, phone-doodle psychedelia, magpie delirium, flash electric dazzle—Kenny Scharf's surrealism is strictly for the fun of it. 'I mean,' he says, 'you definitely cannot have too much fun'



KENNY

SCHARF'S Fun-House BIG BANG

BY GERALD MARZORATI

ANDY WARHOL SAID: "YOU HAVE TO go to it." It was opening night at the Palladium, the new club. Warhol was sitting on a banquette in the half-light not far from the dance floor. He was talking, but not much, and not because he really wanted to, about the installation Kenny Scharf had done in the lounge downstairs, right below where he was sitting. He had his arm draped across the back of the banquette behind Jean Michel Basquiat, who was nodding slowly and biting his nails. Again, and with precisely the same emphasis, the same lack of it, Andy Warhol said: "You have to go to it."

John Sex was standing at the edge of the dance floor near a stairway that led down to the lounge. "Kenny's done the best thing in the club," he said. John Sex and Kenny Scharf go way back, to the '70s. They used to hang out together, talk about painting together, perform together at Club 57 on St. Mark's Place when that was the new club. Kenny Scharf would dress up like Bam-Bam in "The Flintstones" and do the "sex dance" with his friend Min Thometz, who used to do Pebbles and dance with him but now is his studio manager. John Sex would wear tight pants and lip sync to old Tom Jones records, and the girls and boys (especially the boys) sitting at the tables would scream. Now John Sex

Scharf clowns at the wheel of Suprema Ultima Deluxa in the 1984 Halloween parade in Greenwich Village.

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COURTESY TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY



COURTESY TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY



TOP *When Worlds Collide*, 1984, 10 feet 2 inches by 17 feet 5 inches. ABOVE *Forever Now*, 1984, 4 feet 7/4 inches by 6 feet 7 inches: surrealism without the terror or dread.

is known, almost famous (he was in *People* magazine), for his blond hair; it stands straight up (way up!) like in the cartoons when somebody puts his finger in a socket. Kenny Scharf is getting famous too. He sells a lot of paintings, some for as much as \$20,000, and he was in *People* when he did a sculpture for Area, the new club before the Palladium. In New York, in the '80s, the gulf between art and nightlife has narrowed, as that between art and the university has widened; how you feel about this is a good indication of how you feel about the art of the '80s.

The stairway to the lounge downstairs was crowded with the young and fashionable (it is they who have negotiated the gulf between art and nightlife). At the bottom of the staircase, near the entrance to the ladies' room, Matt Dillon was leaning in the corner. In the clubs (in the restaurants too), the gulf between "success in art" and "celebrity in America" has narrowed (but not closed). To the right of where Matt Dillon was standing, down a long, narrow hallway, was where the Kenny Scharf installation began.

The hallway was lined with mirrors and fake fur in bright colors. It was crowded. There was music, but not too loud, coming from speakers. It was Prince and the Revolution. Prince sang: *Open your hearts, open your minds. . . .* Behind the singing, in the background on the record, there were the sounds of finger cymbals, a cello and an oud. Prince sang: *A wonderful trip through our time. . . .*

The hallway led to the lounge. It was hot and bright; the room, the people in it, seemed to shimmer. There were lots of flashes, lots of pictures being taken. The walls were covered with Day-Glo paint and lit by many spotlights; they seemed to absorb the light. On the walls there were images, glowing fluorescent—hundreds of them, quick-drawn and cartoony. There were drawings of little creatures and things that could have been done in a high-school kid's notebook, or painted on the side of a funny car, or drawn on a George Lucas storyboard. And there were all these shapes: spirals and blotches and thin spray-paint mists of white on deep purple backgrounds that looked like the heavens in those star boxes kids used to make of cardboard—you squinted into the box through a peephole and saw constellations made on black paper with pinholes that were lit from the back with a bulb.

Prince sang: *Paisley Park is in your heart. . . .* There were three pay phones in the lounge, covered with thick paint and toy airplanes and plastic dinosaurs. John Wiser stood near one of the phones in a brocade Nehru suit. He runs the men's-wear end of Charivari, the New York clothes shop that has all the new designers. The suit was by Scott Crolla, the English designer. (In the '80s, the gulf between art and fashion, never that wide anyway, has narrowed to a slit.) Prince sang: *I'm blinded by the daisies in your yard. . . .* A girl sitting in a chair beneath a deer head—a stuffed and mounted one, like those on the walls of Maine lodges—was wearing a tight mini-skirt and a paisley blouse and was enjoying herself very much, talking and smiling and looking around. She said: "It's so '60s."

It all seemed so '60s, it did. There was the Day-Glo and the paisley and the songs about trips and daisies. Things looked '60s, sounded '60s. But it didn't feel like the '60s; after all, in the '60s people didn't stand around and say: *It's so '60s*. It felt like a presentation of the '60s—the '60s in words and images. It felt like a world's-fair pavilion of

the '60s, or something in a theme park, or the set of a TV salute to the '60s. It felt like these things, but not exactly; there was no calculation, there was nothing cheap or cynical—it was campy, but in a generous way. It was innocent, in no way eerie or sad. It was the '60s lifted from its context—from what *made* it the '60s—and re-presented in the '80s as something fun.

There is talk now of a '60s revival—especially a psychedelic revival—in New York and London and Los Angeles; in music, in fashion, in *style*. But the word "revival" is slippery. In the 19th century, there were those who came to understand that earlier times, once understood *historically*, could be brought back to life; as man moved forward (another 19th-century understanding) he could pack up history and carry it along with him. The revivals of the 19th century were in essence spiritual, small-scale renaissances, attempts to restore values thought tarnished by disuse.

Later, in the 20th century, the nature of revivals changed. Revivals became more sentimental, more a matter of nostalgia. In America, in the early '70s, there was a '50s revival (particularly, but not exclusively, in rock 'n' roll). It was a reaction to change, a longing for youth and lost innocence—for a way of life, a *time*, actually experienced by those doing the reviving.

If we are going to call what is happening now a '60s revival or a psychedelic revival—the paisley and Day-Glo and songs about trips—we have to understand that what is happening now has nothing to do with reviving values that have faded—nothing to do with, say, dropping out. And it has nothing to do with nostalgia, with reviving a time once experienced. Few of those doing the reviving (if that is what it is) were yet allowed out after dark during the Summer of Love. They *missed* the '60s.

No, that is not quite right. They heard the '60s (the records blasting in their older brothers' and sisters' rooms) and, more important, watched it on TV. They saw "Laugh-In"; they saw movies like *The Trip*. This most recent of revivals, if that is the word, is the first brought on by memories of things in the media. It is about longings for things never experienced in the first place—but for things heard and watched. It is about remembrances for which the Proustian madeleine is the album found in the cut-out bin, or the late-night rerun. It is a youthful longing for childhood, one shaped by the TV set. It is the creation—in the real world—of a TV version of the '60s as remembered by those who saw the shows every night. It is the product of a *mentalité*—a mindset, a kind of common subjectivity—that is the first to be shaped, at one remove, by records, movies and especially TV.

At the Palladium opening night, Kenny Scharf wore pink hip-hugger pants by Stephen Sprouse, one of the young New York designers doing "'60s clothes" in the '80s. He also had on elbow-length gloves that Sprouse had designed and a swirling floral-pattern shirt with a big collar made especially for him by Carmel Johnson, an old friend of his who runs a boutique called Batislavia in the East Village (in *Rolling Stone*, they said the shop sells "Sixties gear"). And he had a big medallion around his neck, like the one Sammy Davis Jr. used to wear when he would be on the "Tonight" show.

He told me this story: "One day I was working on the lounge—God, it was like nervous-breakdown time every minute—and Steve Rubell came downstairs with Tatum O'Neal." Rubell runs the Palladium with Ian Schrager, his

old partner from Studio 54. "She saw what I was doing and said: 'You like Peter Max?' And Steve said: 'No, he doesn't like Peter Max.' I think he thought it was like an insult. But I didn't take it as an insult. I said: 'Sure I do.' Okay, I like Peter Max. I like the '60s. But it's not the '60s. It's the '80s, right? It's just not the same thing. It's like the Prince album. I played it over and over the whole time I was working. It's the best, so great. It's like he's packaged something that's '60s, except that it's not. It's the '80s. I mean, I was born in 1958. I wasn't even around for the '60s."

SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER, I MET SCHARF FOR dinner in the East Village at Hawaii 5-0, the new restaurant. The tabletops were shiny and sparkly, lacquered with car paint. People were sitting in Knoll secretary chairs, the ones with casters; once in a while, someone would roll from one table to another. At the back of the restaurant there were two Saarinen tables, one high, one low, pushed together: the bar. There were a blender and a bunch of bananas on one of the tables and on the other a small black-and-white TV with no picture, just fuzz and static. The glow from the TV was bluish, and so were the drinks—Blue Hawaiis, served in tall glasses with straws.

Scharf was wearing a black leather jacket, white jeans, black boots. Beneath the jacket he had on a white T-shirt with a picture he'd drawn, bright and cartoony, embroidered on the front. A friend of his mother-in-law's did the embroidery; his mother-in-law lives in Brazil, and for three months in the winter he and his wife, Teresa, and their baby daughter, Zena, go to live there too. "We live in a small place right on the beach," he said. "There's no electricity or anything. When my friends come down to visit, I have them bring magazines and tapes and stuff. All I do is paint and go to the store, which is like an hour away. But it's great. I can paint and look out and see the water and the coconut trees."

Scharf has a friendly, boyish face. His hair is short and light and scruffy, and he lets his sideburns grow longer, like in the '60s, when guys began to grow them. He looks like the college kids you used to see in pictures in *Life* listening to somebody playing a folk guitar. He has that openness, that air of wonderment—and a big smile. He smiles a lot, and when he does his eyes widen, and you smile too.

He took a long time to look over the menu, ordered the coconut shrimp and the soft-shell crabs, then said: "I just moved into a new loft, a sublet—a living place, separate from the studio. But it's been like nonstop party. I've been so busy I haven't had time to do any real customizing, just a little." "Customizing" is what he does to TVs and radios and household appliances of all kinds. He does it to his own things, and also for friends—sometimes it seems like every East Village apartment has a customized clock radio. He has sold customized things to collectors. Once, in Los Angeles, he customized an apartment he was subletting for a month—he just couldn't stand to leave it as it was. And when Nicolas Moufarrege, the East Village art critic, was dying in the hospital last spring, Scharf customized his room.

When Scharf customizes something, he becomes somebody he calls Van Chrome. Then he takes the thing to be customized and paints lines and shapes all over it, mostly in Day-Glo, and sometimes it seems with a metaphor in

mind—antenna waves on the front of a box (a big portable radio). He attaches things to it too: toy robots, tiny vacuum tubes, a hood ornament. The Minimal artists wanted to make things that looked machine-produced, like the artist just drew up the plans and dropped them off at the factory; Scharf takes things made at the factory and makes them look like they were made by an "artist." He thinks too many people settle for the standard-issue phone, the gray-and-silver TV, the fake-wood everything. Here's another art reference: He brings painting to objects like Robert Rauschenberg brought objects to painting. It's still Rauschenberg's line between art and life; Scharf is just working the other side of it. "Customizing is saying, 'It's plastic anyway,' so go all the way," he said. "I hate fake natural, and when everything is the same, just sitting there, it's so boring, right? I like to fill things up, transform things—it's like I feel better around all the stuff. Like what I did at the Palladium."

At the Palladium, the transformation took Scharf two weeks to finish, and he had help. He went shopping first (the Palladium paid for all the materials). He bought canvas—the walls in the lounge are actually big paintings that could be removed. He went to a warehouse on Broadway for the fake fur, to Woolworth's for toys and to the fabric outlets and surplus bins along 14th Street (that's where the Palladium is) for "fun stuff." "But mostly it's paint," he said. "Paint, some trash, and the deer head."

When he has the time, Scharf would rather not buy stuff but find it—in dumpsters on the street, like Rauschenberg used to do. He used lots of salvage (that's what he calls it) last spring to make *Closet #7*, his installation for the Whitney Biennial. Scharf's *Closets* are blacklit rooms painted with Day-Glo and filled with salvage and with customized stuff. He has done *Closets* at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery and at P.S. 1, the alternative space, but this was the first in a New York museum. "That was great, bringing all this junk in boxes up to the Whitney," he said. "Trash is so great. It looks like shit, but you put it under a blacklight and it looks great."

It took him five days to do the installation. "First we carted the stuff up there, and then I sort of moved in," he said. "I had food and tapes, and I slept on the couch in the lounge in the women's bathroom. It was unbelievable. You know, I would lie there and think: I'm painting the walls and spreading all this stuff around in a museum. I used one of the phone booths right there as my private phone, and my friends would call me, and the guards would let them up when they came to visit. It was like being in a hotel, except it was a museum. The guards were the best. One told me he went home and made his own blacklight room—I told him where to get the paint and stuff—and he sits in it after work."

There was a big Scharf painting in the Biennial too—at 10 feet high and 17 feet long, his biggest. The painting is called *When Worlds Collide* (1984) and fuses, in a kind of fun-house big bang, the Saturday-morning innocence, the phone-doodle psychedelia, the magpie delirium, the flash-electric chromatic dazzle. . . . "It was like I was trying for the ultimate," he told me. In the middle of the canvas and oozing off to one side, there is a field of soft-focus dots, dense and boiling—you think of a nebula, but also of Pollock and the galactic readings of his all-over paintings that were written in the '50s. Across the top of the painting and down the sides along the edges are: sprayed-on spirals that stretch like wire Slinkies; orbs of all sizes and colors, but



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ABOVE Kenny and Min do the "Sex Dance" at Club 57, ca. 1980. BELOW Scharf retouching *Juicy Jungle*, one of the irregularly shaped paintings he makes on the crooked wall of his studio in Brazil.

mostly the soft pinks and metallic blues and greens that in the '60s cost more if you wanted them for your new car; three black spheres spinning (catching light, tossing it); puffs of clouds and gaseous mists; and all those rings and chevrons and science-class molecule-model structures that in the '60s came to stand for "space" or "the future."

Scharf knows how to work his colors and shapes; here, as in other of his recent paintings, he has managed a vertiginous sci-fi push-pull. And *When Worlds Collide* is peopled too. There is a little orange-colored pixie on a pedestal that looks like a troll doll without the long hair. There are snaky and squiggly creatures, but the scary connotations of that word make no sense here: these are more like the creatures crowding the bar in *Star Wars* than like those Bosch painted. They're fake scary and seem to know it—one good "boo!" and they'd run home, even the one with big fangs. A big red one in the foreground grows out of icing sta-

lagmites; he's got a face like the Cookie Puss ice-cream cake at Carvel. He smiles and gives you the oogle eye—he's ready to make friends.

When *Worlds Collide*, like all Scharf's painting, owes something to Surrealism. The dreamscape composition, the pictorial conundrums (is there a face in that pink cloud?), the biomorphism and hyperreal rendering bring to mind Miró (in particular his paintings of the late '30s) and especially Yves Tanguy. But Scharf's paintings, for all their oneiric strangeness, don't work on you the way Surrealist paintings do. There is none of the still-spooky dread. There is no sex or sexual terror. There is no suffering, no anxiety of any kind. (*When Worlds Collide*, despite the title, is not apocalyptic.) Scharf's are not the dreams you wake sweating from or brood about. It is surrealism without the dark edge of night, surrealism for the fun of it.

After we finished dinner, I asked Scharf about his paintings—how he starts one, goes about completing it, and what it means to him when it's finished. "I don't really think about all that," he said. "I don't know. It's like I've said before, I guess: I start a painting, and maybe I have this idea from a dream or something. But when I'm working, it's more like what I'm thinking about all the time. I don't make drawings first. I just start. I use acrylic, spray it, airbrush in the background. I use oil paint too—I like the way it looks wet. I finger paint a lot. It's like I can't make a mistake really. I just use a mistake, keep going, transform it.

"I like bright colors, the brighter the better. When I was seven, I think, we got our first color TV, and I used to sit real close, and I would see these intense colors, like dots. That's the kind of color I like. There are childlike things in the paintings—children are uncalculating, I think, and I try to get like that. It's like my unconscious maybe, if that's what's formed when you're a kid—that's what they say, right?"

"There's the space thing—I think about that a lot. When I was little, in the early '60s, we were all told we were going to be able to buy tickets and get on board and go. It didn't happen. But that time—when the whole space look was in everything, cars and furniture and stuff—that time was the best.

"The whole thing about fun—I like to have fun. I think everyone wants to have fun. I think that having fun is being happy. I know it's not all fun, but maybe fun helps with the bad. I mean, you definitely cannot have too much fun." He cracked up. "Okay, it's like I want to have fun when



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A Scharf mural on the wall of a public grade school on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The school wanted to keep it, along with adjacent murals by Keith Haring and Futura, but the city had it painted over.

I'm painting. And I want people to have fun looking at the paintings. When I think, What should I do next?, I think: more, newer, better, nower, funner."

LATE ONE AFTERNOON LAST MAY, I VISITED Scharf at his studio on Broadway, north of Spring Street in SoHo. There were a hammock strung between two columns; an old bicycle and a box, both customized; one of those chairs, big in the '60s, like a big egg stood on its end and cut in half—with speakers built in; and a long table where we sat and talked. On three of the walls there were paintings that all looked nearly finished. "That's for Andy Warhol," Scharf said, pointing to one of them. "I have to take it over to him. We're friends now. He's so great, the best, once you get to know him—he's shy at first. It's Andy who inspired me. I remember growing up and learning about him and the whole scene."

Scharf was born 27 years ago in Hollywood. His father was in the knitwear business and did well; Kenny grew up in Sherman Oaks, east of Los Angeles, "in the Valley." When he was 15, the family (Scharf has two older brothers) moved to Beverly Hills; he remembers the adjustment as uncomfortable. "I was basically a Valley kid," he said. "Beverly Hills High—what a place. Well, I didn't have a Porsche, a Turbo Carrera. I drove a Capri."

Beverly Hills did have a good art department, "all the free paint you wanted and canvas too—you could just take it." Like so many young painters nowadays, painters who grew up in the '50s and '60s in the suburbs, Scharf started painting when he was very young, still in grade school. Out in the Valley, he attended art classes every Saturday for

about three years. "I used to ride my bike to the Flemish Art Shop—that's what it was called. And there would be Marie and George. They were the teachers; they were from Belgium, or he was. Outside the shop they had these easels set up, and a table with oranges on it. And before the parents would drive up and pick up the kids, she, Marie, would walk around and finish everybody's painting, so the parents would go, Oh! It's beautiful! Mine wasn't, but I always did my own."

I reminded him that he had talked at dinner about how a lot of what he's painting now has been in his head since his childhood; did he remember any specifics? He said that



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The "Hanna-Barbera Dance," choreographed by Ann Magnuson, with costumes by Scharf, was performed at P.S. 1 in 1982.

he used to look at old art books (like most kids, he looked hardest at the nudes). And he remembers being fascinated by encyclopedias, especially the drawings. But mostly he remembers watching a lot of TV. He remembers the cartoons, especially the ones by Hanna-Barbera—the Jetsons and the Flintstones. He remembers watching Michael Jackson and Donny Osmond and dancing for his brothers along with the shows, telling them that he was going to be a rock star when he grew up. “All kids then watched TV,” he said. “One of the weirdest things—I only realized it later—was that there I was, living in L.A., and what was on TV so much of the time was L.A. I mean, Burbank, where the studios were, was like right next door. The TV was right where I lived.”

Scharf graduated from Beverly Hills High in 1976. In the fall, he began classes at the University of California at Santa Barbara. “It was summer camp—total surfer mentality,” he said. He stayed two years. He painted a little. One of the paintings he made is called *George Simpson Barbecuing* (1977). It is a small painting, 18 by 24 inches, and has the flat, airless realism (detail, but no atmosphere) that you get in the cartoon adaptations of actual TV shows. George, all toothpaste-ad good looks, is tending to his hot dogs. The grill is hot. His apron says “Dad.” But he’s barbecuing in the bathroom. And there are leafy plants, eely and ominous, growing out of the drains.

Scharf moved to New York and enrolled at the School of Visual Arts in the fall of 1978. At first he had the idea that he might study commercial art and be an illustrator. “But I didn’t like doing projects to please someone else,” he said. He switched to fine art. He learned photo-realist



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technique from the painter Noel Mahaffey. (Scharf is good with the airbrush and often employs it.) But he didn’t want to be a photo-realist either. “I never understood why they would do photo-realist painting if they were just copying from photographs,” he said. “Why not just do the photograph?”

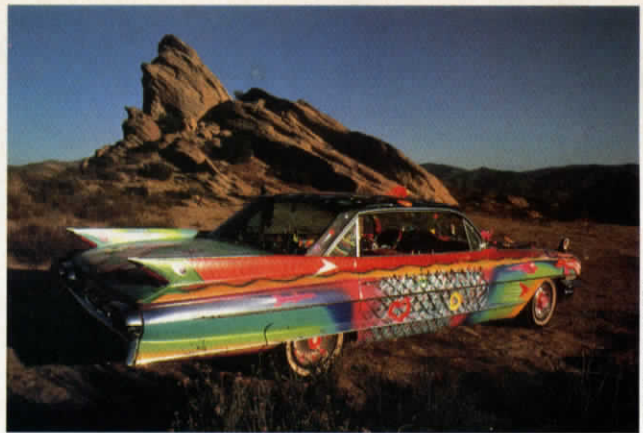
Perhaps the most important thing that happened to Scharf at SVA (he graduated in 1980) is that he met Keith Haring. “It was like immediate,” Scharf said. “We met in a sculpture class Barbara Schwartz was teaching. It was the kind of thing where you know right away here is a person you can talk with. I remember telling him about these broken TVs I’d found on Seventh Ave—I was starting to do art from trash; that’s how I first got into customizing. Keith and I—it was great—we’d meet in the morning at Disco Donut on 14th Street. We’d talk about art and stuff.”



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TOP Detail of an early blacklight *Closet*. ABOVE *The Closet* at the original Fun Gallery. The humanoid creature’s head and torso are sculpture; its limbs are paint.

In 1979, and for the next couple of years, Scharf and Haring were doing most of their hanging-out at Club 57. The club was in the basement of a church; the parishioners were mostly Poles and immigrants from other countries in Eastern Europe, and the club began as a form of community outreach, something for the kids. There were a bar, a few tables and a jukebox with a mix of old '60s garage-band singles, songs like "Nobody but Me" by the Human Beinz. People will say now that Club 57 was "very New Wave," but it was more than that. It was like nothing else. There was a Monster Movie club, and theme parties and special nights like ladies' wrestling night. It was a club not only like a nightclub but also like those clubs suburban kids have where they assume roles and personas and meet in paneled basements and put on skits. Ann Magnuson, the performance artist and actress (she's David Bowie's first victim in the opening minutes of *The Hunger*), had arrived in New York around the same time Scharf had; she pretty much set the tone of the place. She organized many of the events,

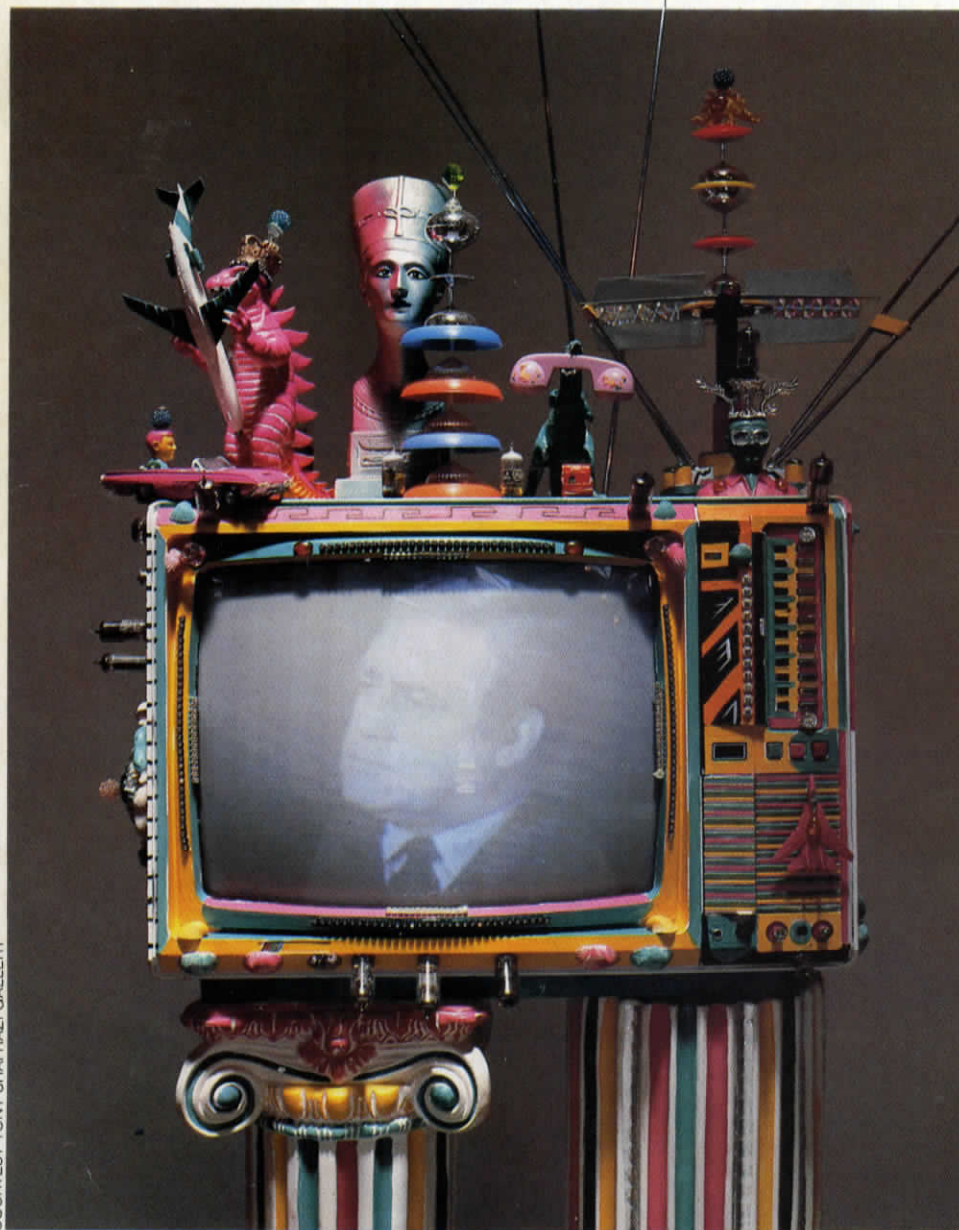


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especially the talent shows, which were more like re-creations (half ironic, half sentimental) of old TV variety shows like "Hollywood Palace." And that's it: in almost every way, in every undertaking, Club 57's skits and shows were devoted to realizing live, with kid-fun warmth, what had only been seen on TV.

At Club 57, Scharf found people who thought the way he did—who liked his ideas about art, about everything. At SVA, the teachers didn't like it when he melted toy dinosaurs or made a painting using Hostess Sno-Balls. "They thought it was bad taste," he said. "But now it would be good taste, right?" Even then, it was good taste at Club 57. He met Joey Arias, the performance artist, who was working at Fiorucci, the Upper East Side boutique. In May 1979, Arias asked him to make some paintings for an installation at the store. It would be his first New York show. "I did six paintings, maybe seven—I don't remember," Scharf said. "It was like a series or cycle—it was the story of Estelle. She's having a pizza party, and a Martian comes out of the TV set, and she gets a one-way ticket to outer space, and she just floats out there, having fun. In the last picture, she's just kind of having fun by herself, floating and watching the earth blow up."

One night not long ago, Scharf and I met as planned outside a parking garage on East 11th Street. It was a warm night and, more important, clear: it would be okay to uncover *Suprema Ultima Deluxa* (1984) and take a ride.



COURTESY TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY

TOP *Suprema Ultima Deluxa* photographed in California on a "Star Trek" location. ABOVE *Extravaganza Televisione*, 1984, a "customized" appliance.

Suprema Ultima Deluxa began life as a 1961 Cadillac four-door. Scharf bought it three years ago from a friend of Tony Shafrazi's. In April of last year, Scharf drove it across country, arrived in L.A., parked it in the Larry Gagosian Gallery (it was between shows) and set about customizing, bumper to bumper. It took him ten days to finish. He customized the interior, painted the seats and the dashboard; he customized the trunk ("inside there is Nirvana"). He painted everything—the paint job looks like the one given the station wagon Peter Sellers drives in *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas*, and then some. He epoxied a plastic Godzilla to the roof. "Maybe if the car had been red when I got it, I would have left it alone," he said as we set off slowly down West 11th Street. "But it was beige. I hate beige."

On Seventh Avenue, we made a left and headed south. I asked him what he did after the show at Fiorucci in the spring of 1979. "I had a couple of shows at Club 57," he said. "I was doing a lot of different stuff. I did Xerox collages—a lot of people were doing that in 1980, around then. For the 'Times Square Show' I customized all the electronic stuff in the building. I remember talking to Keith about how it was kind of stupid to do paintings. Around then Keith had met a lot of the graffiti guys, and then I had met them and done some graffiti—I did these mandalas of the Jetsons, Rosie the Robot, things like that. I was thinking: What's the point of doing paintings when there are all these other things to do? What was the purpose? It was then, when I thought about it, that I figured that there is a purpose—painting can be fun too."

We had passed Canal Street and were driving by the Odeon. Scharf pointed at the restaurant and said: "One night I took Sean Lennon for a ride in the car. It was his birthday. Yoko came along. And then we ate at the Odeon, and her bodyguards watched the car."

We drove further south, and then east through the financial district. It was quiet and empty. Scharf said: "In 1981 I had the 'Custom Appliance' show at Club 57. It was around then that Patty Astor started coming to the club. One night we talked, and she said she was going to start this gallery, and would I want to do a show? I said, Sure. I even named the gallery for her. 'Fun.' Fun Gallery."

He pointed *Suprema Ultima Deluxa* up a steep ramp to the FDR Drive; beyond a dinosaur on the hood, Manhattan's midtown twinkled. A taxi honked and passed and the driver gestured—thumbs up. We picked up speed. I felt around for the button to push to get the window up, but there were so many things glued around that I finally asked for help. Scharf pushed a button that raised the window, then said: "It was for the Fun Gallery show that I did the first Jetson paintings. I mean, I'd always been doing the Jetsons at school: I made a Jetson city from old stuff like TV dials and TV tubes—I loved those buildings. At the time of the Fun Gallery show, a friend of mine had a Jetsons comic book, and he showed it to me, and I just thought: I'm going to make paintings of them. And that's what I did. They were small, airbrushed—I put the Jetsons in scenes."

I mentioned to Scharf that it had been earlier that year, in the spring of 1981, that I had seen his first *Closet*. He was living at that time in a loft on Sixth Avenue just south of Bryant Park. He was sharing the loft with Haring, who around then was beginning to get some attention for his subway drawings. I had gone to the loft for an April Fool's party. The *Closet* was in the back—a blacklit space the size of a small bedroom filled with Day-Glo painted toys and

junk. There was music on—the Doors, I think—and a lot of people, mostly Scharf's friends from Club 57, were sitting on the floor. Some of them had eaten mushrooms and were tripping.

Scharf eased off the FDR at 96th Street; as we drove west in heavy traffic, with people on the street waving and pointing and shouting, I asked him about the first *Closet*, how it had come about. "I made it as a place to go and trip," he said. "There were a couple of months there when I was really into mushrooms—doing them maybe once a week. I don't know. I wasn't trying to reexamine the '60s or anything. It's sort of weird to think about now. It's just what we got into. Ann Magnuson and I were reading all this stuff about Jim Morrison and Andy Warhol and the Factory—I think we even declared that summer the Summer of Love. It's like so much of what is going on now—psychedelic revival and all—we were already doing four years ago. The first *Closet* was like making a safe place, solitude. I remember that I had this spiral on the ceiling and would just lie in there and stare at it for hours. It was like I would leave my body and float up to the spiral—all that kind of stuff."

Scharf said he needed gas. "It loves gas," he said. We cut through Central Park to the West Side. At a red light, a taxi pulled up on the passenger side and the cabbie stuck his head out. "Keith Haring, right?" Silence all around. "I mean Kenny Scharf. Kenny Scharf."

I asked Scharf how it felt to be recognized—how it had changed things. "It's great, but you can't take it for granted or anything," he said. "You don't really have control over that part. You have to learn more about business stuff—you just have to, or else things just get messed up. All I can try to do is like go to the next step, right? It's like after the Jetson paintings, I did the Flintstone paintings, and then there was this kind of metamorphosis—Flintjet, Jetstone. And then there was Felix the Cat. It was like Fred—no, wait—it was George Jetson. George and Wilma. George and Wilma had a baby they called El Fredix. And then there were other offspring—millions and billions, sects and subsects. That's how I explained all the things in my paintings that I did for my first show at Tony's in 1983. It's like the future is infinite and limitless."

On Ninth Avenue, right behind the Port Authority Bus Terminal, *Suprema Ultima Deluxa* was brought to a sudden halt by a double-parked Dodge van. A kid angling across the street pronounced the car "fresh." Scharf edged the car slowly, slowly into another lane, and we were soon humming along again. "What I think is that maybe I'll eventually be in show biz, entertainment," Scharf said. "I like the performing thing. I just did this videotape that will be shown in Japan this fall. I'm having a show there. It'll be a fun tape—it's going to be on TV. To make it we drove the car out to Queens, to the World's Fair site. I had on this long wig and a Stephen Sprouse jumpsuit. It was rock video all the way."

We eventually found an open gas station. Scharf got out of the car and a moment later was talking to a girl at the next pump, explaining things. He was smiling, and so was she. Under the orange lights at the gas pumps, *Suprema Ultima Deluxa* glowed.

"Great!" Scharf said when he got back to the car. "Did you hear what she said?" I hadn't. He turned the engine over, put the car in drive and pulled out slowly. "It's great. She said it should be on 'Real People.'"