

TOTAH

KENNY SCHARF

blue blood

May 2 - July 28, 2019

TOTAH presents *blue blood*, an exhibition of new works by Kenny Scharf, opening May 2nd, 2019. This is Scharf's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Using a strict palette of three colors—red, blue, and gray, with subtle shades and overlappings thereof—*blue blood* showcases surrealist landscapes that are playfully ebullient without lacking in emotional depth. Extending Scharf's inimitable iconography, the paintings in the main gallery are replete with otherworldly creatures, equally parodic and pop. What distinguishes *blue blood*, however, is the way these painterly compositions seem to physicalize abstract notions—futuristic planets, personified nebulae, and risible vortices transmogrify into alluring visages and patterns.

Scharf's paintings hint at narratives bubbling just below the surface of the paint. In *FUZZUNGLE* (2019) the natural world, filled with sidereal flora and fauna, becomes a gala for humanoid lifeforms. In a work titled *IN THE BEGINNING* (2019) a troop of clownish spermatozoa seem to parade from a place of invisible origin. Both paintings superficially look like illustrations; but they wholly resist the narrative that illustration presupposes. In the way both are composed, there's a nervous rhythm that seems to express the presence of the artist's hand—Scharf's subjectivity—more than the narrative of any story.

The in-situ performance installation in the gallery's lower level, submerged in black-lit darkness, establishes a counterpoint to the paintings in the main gallery. Scharf's use of spray paint—partially onto the walls, partially onto canvas—alludes to his historical connection with the East Village of the 1980s, underscoring a masterful painting technique while exemplifying his exuberant disregard for boundaries. Translating painting into an environment, Scharf's artistry seems to capture momentary hallucinations, like a net thrown around what would otherwise be a fleeting perception, difficult if not impossible to bring to the light of consciousness.

Kenny Scharf (born in Los Angeles, 1958) attended Manhattan's School of Visual Arts and came of age in the 1980s New York downtown art scene alongside his contemporaries Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. A painter and performer inhabiting the visual worlds of both street art and popular culture, Scharf's graffiti paintings gained him notoriety and established a vernacular language all his own. Often working with improvisation, he creates playful, gestural pieces that blend stylized motifs with references to the surreal, science fiction, and icons of popular culture. Many of his larger works still adorn New York streets to this day. Scharf was included in the 1985 Whitney Biennial and again in their show "Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s" in 2017. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Miami Center for the Fine Arts, Florida, and the Queens Museum of Art, New York, among others. Work by Scharf is held in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Broad Foundation, Los Angeles, and The Jewish Museum, New York, in addition to others worldwide. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

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