

Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide





so if you looked really

staged an end-of-the-
gnuson, John Sex and
il steel Unisphere relic
past, particularly tech-
is a theme that lurks
ow. Ironically enough,
usel annoys the actors
ad-on, Scharf laments

ol for the nuclear fan-
an artist born in 1958,
pp, scavenging media
a video camera at the
e image-within-image
est paintings featuring
abashedly lifted from
St. George, the hero
y, who has metamorph-
Elroy's triumph her-
and trance inducer. In
ropriations of cartoon
nkable, Scharf's work
tent in imagemaking.
acular, Scharf's acrid
as vulgar and unaes-
g Pop, not observing
unconsciousness with

it is as if his earlier landscapes had been swallowed whole by image-starved bug-eyed creatures emerging from skeins of space that only begin to be defined by the term "allover." In works such as *When the Worlds Collide*, celestial bodies or lunar landscapes are often visible within the gaping grins of mutant plantanimoids. Surrealism à la Scharf, unlike the 1920s variety, does not presume a disturbing co-inhabitancy of space in which a dreamlike scenario invades an otherwise normal setting. In paintings following his cartoon-classic appropriations, nothing is real to begin with – the only reality is one of endless possibility and transmutation.

As in Warhol's self-referential *Reversal* series, Scharf began recycling his own imagery and that of his Pop forebears in the late 80s and early 90s. His billboard-scale paintings of this time combine photorealistically rendered consumables, line drawings of dinosaurs and Jetson heads, and an assortment of his trademark vine-like forms. In *The Chain of Events*, hyperreal objects including a Gravy Train box, poodle head, and Golden Arches drift in a brushed and splattered color-field sea, accompanied by an outlined skeleton and a Big Boy logo. Alluding to our technologically packaged "food chain," the painting is brilliant in its perversity. While a skeleton wields a chainsaw on the lefthand side, a lavender bird flies over a pastel-hued jungle on the right. Around the same time, Scharf painted his grinning plas-moid blobs and illusionistic globules over dense grounds of photosilkscreened 50s and 60s newspaper images and texts – themselves applied over drips, swirls and splats alluding to Abstract Expressionism. In *24 Hour and Dot*, media-graffiti replace the spraycan in a consumerist phantasmagoria.

Kenny Scharf's art infuses sixties pop icons, Homeric chimeras, and sinuous biomorphic forms with a symbolism reflecting electronic media's insistent grip on our most primal fantasies. His highly charged emblems have withstood the crossfire of the turbulent 1980s, restlessly evolving, recombining, and wriggling their way into the 21st century. Pulsating with energy and overflowing with information and libido, Scharf's paintings fast-forward us from ancient Dionysian fetes of excess to the confounding search for sanctuary in our jangled, jacked-in world.

Barry Blinderman, Director of University Galleries

rawing media debris
3-D vortex. By 1983

Ex
Hei
1. U
acry
20
2. U
acry
10 x
3. E
oil 8
48
4. In
acry
89
5. S
acry
48
6. T
acry
36
7. T
oil 8
72
8. C
oil 8
48
9. J
acry
60
10. I
oil 8
86
11. B
oil,
on c
101
12. I
oil 8
84
13. I
oil 8
84
14. I
oil,
48
15. I
oil 8
77
16. I
oil o
120
17. I
oil 8
98
18. I
oil 8
49
19. I
oil 8
91 x
Left: Th
o
98
co
Right: 2
c
4
co



flowed whole by image-starved bug-
that only begin to be defined by the
Worlds Collide, celestial bodies or lunar
ing grins of mutant plantanimoids.
y, does not presume a disturbing coniaro
scenario invades an otherwise normal set-
appropriations, nothing is real to begin
ity and transmutation.

es, Scharf began recycling his own
ate 80s and early 90s. His billboard-
istically rendered consumables, line
an assortment of his trademark vine-
objects including a Gravy Train box,
crushed and splattered color-field sea,
Big Boy logo. Alluding to our techno-
is brilliant in its perversity. While a
e, a lavender bird flies over a pastel-
time, Scharf painted his grinning plas-
se grounds of photosilkscreened 50s
nelves applied over drips, swirls and
n *24 Hour and Dot*, media-graffiti
smagoria.

omeric chimeras, and sinuous biomor-
onic media's insistent grip on our most
have withstood the crossfire of the tur-
g, and wriggling their way into the 21st
g with information and libido, Scharf's
ian fetes of excess to the confounding
world.

alleries

Exhibition Checklist

Height precedes width precedes depth

1. **Untitled (Jetson Painting)** 1980
acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
20 x 30 inches
2. **Untitled (Jetson Painting)** 1980
acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
10 x 12 inches
3. **Elroy Bug** 1981
oil & spraypaint on canvas
48 x 36 inches
4. **In Ecstasy** 1982
acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
89 1/2 x 107 1/2 inches
5. **St. Elroy Slaying the Dragon** 1982
acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
48 x 62 inches
6. **The Flintstones** 1982
acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 inches
7. **Tune in, Turn on, Flip out** 1983
oil & spraypaint on canvas
72 x 48 inches
8. **Obsidian Barbera Death** 1983
oil & spraypaint on canvas
48 x 36 inches
9. **Junglina** 1984
acrylic on canvas
60 x 72 inches
10. **Moonray Man** 1983-4
oil & spraypaint on canvas
86 x 121 inches
11. **Baliroma** 1984
oil, acrylic, spray enamel & plastic collage
on canvas
101 x 126 inches
12. **Mundo Azul** 1985
oil & spraypaint on canvas
84 x 84 inches
13. **Op Bop** 1985
oil & spraypaint on canvas
84 x 72 inches
14. **Spinshine** 1985-6
oil, acrylic, enamel & spraypaint on canvas
48 inches diameter
15. **Growthological Organizzquizzit** 1987
oil & acrylic on canvas
77 x 149 inches
16. **Globup** 1989
oil on canvas with aluminum frame
120 x 96 inches
17. **The Chain of Events** 1990
oil & acrylic on canvas
98 x 137 inches
18. **24 Hour and Dot** 1990
oil & acrylic on canvas
49 1/2 x 50 inches
19. **Biorama** 1991
oil & acrylic on canvas
91 x 205 inches

20. **New World Order** 1991
oil & silkscreen ink on canvas
91 x 67 inches
21. **Popungle** 1992
oil & silkscreen ink on canvas
91 x 43 inches
22. **Junkle** 1992
acrylic on canvas
74 x 91 inches
23. **Monkidev** 1993
oil on canvas
55 x 98 inches
24. **Diatagua** 1994
oil on canvas
122 x 76 inches
25. **Modernorganica** 1995
acrylic & oil on canvas
80 x 104 inches
26. **Fabuvalia** 1995
acrylic & oil on canvas
72 x 46 inches
27. **Greenarama** 1995
oil & acrylic on canvas
118 x 154 inches

Objects

28. **Cigarette Machine** 1981
acrylic & found objects on front of
cigarette machine
43 x 30 x 7 inches
29. **Cheesee** 1981
mixed media on vacuum cleaner
12 x 16 x 24 inches
30. **Customized Boombox** 1983
mixed media
23 x 30 x 8 inches
31. **Zena's Crib** 1984
mixed media
32 x 52 x 28 inches
32. **Customized Vacuum** 1984
mixed media
12 x 12 x 24 inches
33. **Customized Humidifier** 1985
mixed media
9 x 15 x 21 inches
34. **Perfecta Moodsky** 1986
oil on bronze
29 x 20 x 12 inches
35. **Power Happy** 1987
oil on bronze
63 x 22 x 12 inches
36. **Large Customized TV** 1995
mixed media
81 x 54 x 43 inches
37. **Customized VCR** 1995
mixed media
10 x 24 x 30 inches
38. **Closet # 15**
mixed media installation
120 x 96 x 150 inches

Left: **The Chain of Events**, 1990
oil & acrylic on canvas
98 x 137 inches
collection of the artist

Right: **24 Hour and Dot**, 1990
oil & acrylic on canvas
49 x 50 inches
courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

Screen: **Growthological Organizzquizzit**, 1987
oil & acrylic on canvas
78 x 149 inches
private collection

Front: **When the Worlds Collide**, 1984
oil, acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
122 x 204 inches
collection of the Whitney Museum, NY

Front Right: **St. Elroy Slaying the Dragon**, 1982
oil, acrylic & spraypaint on canvas
48 x 62 inches
private collection

Rhizomatic/Schar(morphous): Scharf's (Outer)Space Fun

Kenny Scharf is smooth, and I don't mean smooth as in cool or hip, although that would certainly apply. No, Kenny Scharf is smooth in a hip theoretical way. Behind the bubble gum colors and through the gaping grins of his morphed cartoon characters are the foundations for intriguing critical thought concerning our fractured contemporary experience. For Scharf, it boils down to Fun. He has always said his work is all about fun, but fun has also brought him trouble. You see, fun is only fun when we are young. Coming of age recontextualizes fun – it becomes leisure, but what is leisure in an age when work is life, and our sense of self is defined by our work? In contemporary American society, there seems to be no room for fun, and thus no room for art about fun. Nonetheless, Scharf has always been serious about fun, and it is within this apparent contradiction that things get provocative. Scharf realizes fun has to be taken seriously because it is all we have to keep us smooth in our increasingly striated world.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed the concept of smooth and striated space in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. They theorize that smooth space is the kingdom of the nomad or wanderer – it is like the rhizome that branches out indefinitely with no nucleus and little order. Striated space, the domain of the State (the university, the military, the corporation), is hierarchical and is ruled by order, purpose, routine, and control – all attributes that cannot exist in smooth space which flourishes on anarchy and choice. Stuart Moulthrop, a leading hypertext theorist, notes that "smooth social space is mediated by discontinuities. It propagates in a matrix of breaks, jumps, and implied or contingent connections which are enacted. . . by the viewer or receiver." Plumbing the surface of a Scharf painting is analogous to jumping into this "matrix of con-

tingent connections." The cacophony and chaos of Scharf's facades activate the viewer's gaze, allowing him to embark on a smooth voyage through Scharf's fun to

The notion of limitless possibility (smooth space) has a factor in Scharf's work from the beginning. In an interview with Keith Haring, Scharf commented that his work ". . . has a lot to do with infinity. Going into space an infinite amount, as well as inner space where infinite amount is also the same thing." This concept is delineated in many of Scharf's paintings which contract worlds within worlds, contracting and expanding infinitely. Paintings such as *Baliroma*, *Moonray Moon Bop* and *When the Worlds Collide* provide a glimpse into outer space through the mouths and puppets of Scharf's ebullient creatures as they whiz across the faces of his paintings. Staring out at us with smiles and half-hearted glares, Scharf's characters seem to disclose vistas into worlds much more tranquil than the ones they inhabit.

As Scharf says, "the fun's inside." It is inside the spiral vortex, the conduit to worlds beyond our quotidian existence. It exists in the smallest deviation between an inside the code that constructs all that we know. Fun is smooth because fun exists as contingency and possibility – a diversion from work. Fun is freedom to do anything that is needed for survival, and this freedom can exist in a space free from the demands of striated space. Scharf's world, with its animated denizens engulfed in pleasure for pleasure's sake, encapsulates a world of smooth sailing.

Greg Bowen, Curator of Exhibitions



Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide

January 14 through February 23, 1997
University Galleries of Illinois State University

Artist presentation and reception:
Tuesday, January 21, 1997 at 7:00 p.m.

Information:
phone: 309.438.5487 - email: glbowen@ilstu.edu
web: <http://www.orat.ilstu.edu/cfa/galleries>

Gallery Hours:

Tuesday: 9:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Wednesday - Friday: 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Saturday, Sunday: 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.

128-page color catalogue available March 1997.

Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide is partially funded through grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the Art Knowledge Corporation.



University Galleries
Illinois State University
110 Center for the Visual Arts
Campus Box 5620
Normal, IL 61790-5620

web - www.orat.ilstu.edu/cfa/galleries
email - glbowen@ilstu.edu
ph. - 309.438.5487
fax - 309.438.5161



U.S. POSTAGE

0.32

METER 512815

