

customize!

real people, real consumption, real art. Let's dance!

Customised New York! Graffiti/Graffito has gradually come off the walls and is now walking the streets, coming into your home and residing on your head – check! It's no longer surreptitious – decoration and brazen embellishment is the order of the day. Major! Kenny Scharf has customized and sprinkled most everything in his path (including the new toilets in The Palladium); make-up artist Thom Burns has turned his attention to the customized bonce; and at the recent Danceteria fashion show at Heaven in London, graffitied garments and backdrops reared up again.

In New York's incestuous art scene anybody who picks up a paintbrush and does something a wee bit different is often greeted with unwarranted and OTT praise, adding yet one more name to the already jam-packed list of New York artists and artisans.

Kenny Scharf, along with his peers Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat were the pioneers however who started Pop Surrealism in 1983, and set the tone for what is really happening today. Scharf had his first show at Fiorucci and now hangs his works on the walls of the Tony Shafrazi gallery where his works sell for the price of a small yacht. As well as customizing anything that happens to cross his path (1961 Cadillacs, 70s Ghetto-Blasters), Kenny cultivates his combination of 60s TV junk-mania and cartoon surrealism through garishly coloured 2-D paintings. As Scharf says, "I don't know if people buy it cause they like it or cause they're told to." Put on your red shoes.

WHAT INFLUENCES YOU? ARE THERE ANY OTHER ARTISTS YOU LIKE OR ADMIRE?

Everything around me influences me, especially cartoons. I like commercial and uncommercial things, but when I start a painting, things just happen. It's not conscious, I just do it. Fate guides me, I guess you could call it unconscious chance. I like the work of Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring. I also like the work of performance artist Ann Magnuson, David Bowie, Pop art, and old movies.

WERE YOU SURPRISED TO BE INCLUDED IN THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL EXHIBITION?

As a matter of fact, no. I felt I should have been included in it two years ago when they had Keith and Jean-Michel. This year though they only asked me so that's great.

YOUR CUSTOMIZED CAR IS QUITE A SENSATION, AS ARE YOUR CUSTOMIZED APPLIANCES. WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO MORE THINGS LIKE THAT?

Yeah, I love the customized things. Sometimes I drive around in the car and wave at people. Once I drove through Times Square and stopped traffic for several blocks. I'd like to design more appliances and start designing toys. I'm making rugs and T-shirts from my paintings now but I'd like to go further. I have a long range plan to do a traveling circus where I would drive a car across the country with a trailer attached and stop in towns, having mini art shows.

WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO HANG OUT? ARE YOU A TYPICAL NEW YORK CLUBGOER?

For awhile especially in 1983 New York was really boning. It wasn't fun and most of my friends just stayed home. Lately things have gotten better and Area and Pyramid have started to become great places to hang out again. Restaurants however have taken the place of clubs. Most of my spare time goes to my wife and to my 15 month old baby Zena. Zena's already a born artist and a great dancer and I consider her to be my biggest fan. I'm from California and I love to go out and eat Mexican food – Anything spicy. I'm a spicy person and I like spicy food. I like excitement – period.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WAY PEOPLE PERCEIVE YOUR WORK? WHO DO YOU WANT TO APPEAL TO?

I can't help it if people don't like it. I just want it to be fun and to have fun with it. I used to be very apocalyptic, you know, "let's have all the fun we can, 'cause the world is gonna blow up tomorrow." But I don't think like that anymore. You shouldn't take yourself too seriously. I want my work to appeal to a younger

