

THE GALLERIES

LA CIENEGA AREA

Kenny Scharf is the latest New York graffiti artist/cartoonist to exhibit his work here. Credited with naming the East Village's Fun Gallery and known for painting outer space and the Flintstones in colors bright enough to set your teeth on edge, Scharf has established himself as one of the darlings of Manhattan's irreverent vanguard.

Odd, then, that his new work, in a show called "Customized Fun," looks so quaint. Maybe we've just seen too many reproductions and essential shock value has been lost. Maybe in a city that bred the glittering excess of East L.A. low-riders and Nudie's customized chariot, it's impossible to be impressed or surprised by "Suprema Ultima Deluxa," Scharf's 1961 Cadillac.

The car is painted, inside and out, with sprayed swirls and cartoon faces, and it's festooned with plastic toys—predominantly dinosaurs. Painted flames greedily devour the hood, the trunk is done up like an underwater scene and toy soldiers march upside-down on the ceiling inside. Scharf also shows a TV set, a stereo cassette recorder and a telephone—all outrageously painted and decked out with kitsch. Eight paintings on view are called such things as "New Frontier" and "Jungle Juice." They depict googly-eyed blobs cavorting on graffiti grounds or one-eyed purple people arriving in spaceships.

The show is fun, but in a rather nostalgic sense. Scharf returns to Pop Art's sources while exchanging its equivocal irony for an apocalyptic romp. The only thing that saves his art from being a '60s rerun is his cheerful warning that our society is about to become as extinct as his Mesozoic reptiles. (Larry Gagosian Gallery, 510 N. Robertson Blvd., to June 2.) —SUZANNE MUCHNIC