

Scharf at play in the lounge: Even the pay telephones are part of the fun

## A Garden of Disco Delights

When Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager created Studio 54, New York's renowned disco of the '70s, the most memorable decorative element was a giant spoon that descended over the dance floor, showering the revelers below with sparkling "snow." This week—five years after they sold the club and served 15 months each in prison for tax evasion—the irrepressible impresarios are helping to open an even more extravagant nightspot in Manhattan, the Palladium. Looking for a fashionably contemporary lure, Rubell and Schrager, who are consultants to the group of investors

who own the club, decided to ask several important young artists to decorate the interior.

The Palladium, a 1926 concert hall that has resounded with the voices of both Caruso and Mick Jagger, has been strikingly converted into a disco by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki. He installed a gigantic superstructure to support the dance floor, stairways and other levels without demolishing the building's neoclassical details. But some of these details, under the various artists' ministrations, appear in startling new guises. A patron boogeying up to one of the original stair landings may think he's suddenly stumbled into a Tuscan villa. Francesco Clemente has covered the walls and vaulted ceiling of the small chamber with a garden of frescoed delights—delicate tendrils of roses, muted shells, a menagerie of rabbits, frogs and a placidly gazing donkey—as well as some more ominous icons, such as a huge pair of scissors snipping a ribbon on the ceiling. In the lounge area below the dance floor, artist Kenny Scharf has been let loose, zapping everything in sight—walls, chairs, banquettes—with his trademark Day-Glo colors and cartoon images. Even the pay telephones, caked with plastic foam and dime-store dinosaurs, cars and airplanes, are part of the fun.

Elsewhere in the club, artists have been scrambling to finish work on time for the opening. Jean Michel Basquiat was given a huge wall in a quiet bar area on which to paint his primitive figures, symbols or what-

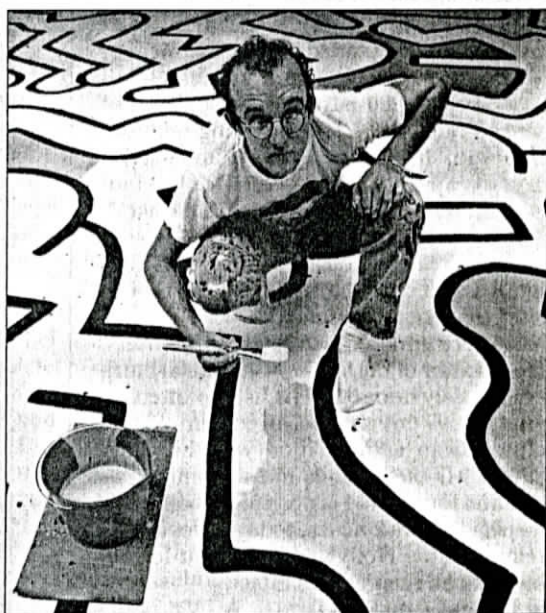
ever else he wanted to conjure up. Keith Haring was working furiously on a 25- by 32-foot backdrop for the dance floor. Filled with his funny silhouetted characters shimmying their hearts out, his canvas sparkles in phosphorescent shades of orange, green, lavender, blue and pink. Above the dance floor will be a series of screens flashing nonmusic videos by the likes of artists David Salle, Laurie Anderson and Eric Fischl. And Andy Warhol is designing the drink tickets.

**Underground Scene:** Not to be outdone, Area, the most fashionable New York club of the moment, solicited contributions or loans from 35 major artists, including Sol LeWitt, Sandro Chia and Jennifer Bartlett, for a temporary installation. When that was unveiled last week, dancers cavorted alongside Michael Heizer's volcanic rocks, a moving mechanical sculpture by Larry Rivers and a real, small swimming pool which David Hockney had lined with big white splash marks. Presiding over it all was a live model in a body stocking perched on a half shell as in the Botticelli painting. "It looks like a funky Whitney Museum," said Haring, who made a work for Area as well as for the Palladium.

Mixing art with dancing and rock has been part of the underground scene for years; Basquiat, Haring and Scharf, for example, all had their first "formal" public



Clemente's frescoes: A vest-pocket villa



Haring: Painting his dancers in shimmery shades

exhibitions in such grungy, now-defunct New York nightspots as the Mudd Club and Club 57. Some small, dark, downtown Manhattan joints continue to display the talents of the artistic avant-garde, and now the Palladium is glamorizing the trend. "We didn't invent this movement," acknowledges Rubell, who has hired guards just to protect the art in the upscale club. "We're just trying to capture it. Young artists today are like rock stars."

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