

Graffiti has moved out of the streets into the  
art galleries of New York and Paris.

# GRAFFITI

Photography by Allan Tannenbaum/Sigma  
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*enny Scharf surrounded  
by his Day-Glo art.*

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*Kenny Scharf's childhood Saturdays, spent watching Felix, The Flintstones and The Jetsons, have influenced such works as his Romulus and Remus (right).*



Kenny Scharf grew up in the western metropolis of Los Angeles with eyes glued to a television set and nerve cells agitated. The American dream of fancy appliances and electrical gadgets floated through his mind. His religion was one in which the Flintstones and Jetsons were prophets and disciples. These cartoon characters became Scharf's heroes: Jane, George, Leroy and Elroy Jetson; Fred and Wilma Flintstone. Lost in time, perplexed in space, they became Scharf's signature, which he placed somewhat indiscriminantly on wall surfaces around New York. Scharf appropriated graffiti; his

paintings led to the walls, not the opposite. Images rather than writing, these are always a narrative — readable, euphoric, explosive and exhilarating.

Scharf's language is that of the epic poet. He interrogates the history of the planet. Mushrooming into a dark space, life ceases to be what we know it, and matter is reduced to its basic structure of protoplasm, molecules and atoms adrift in psychedelic orbits. A black light installation depicts the objects of our daily lives, which are turned into schlock and kitsch with day-glow paint, tinsel, glitter, chiffon and lace. In one painting, the Mamma Roma wolf feeding Romulus and Remus is now nursing Leroy and Elroy Jetson. In others, Judy is turned to sphinx and Hindu goddess. There is little land in view; occasionally a volcano or masses of strangely colored waters are depicted. But in Scharf's most recent works, the scenario takes in space, dark and constellatory, enlivened with swoops of berserk spray-paint patterns.

Despite the threat of extinction, hope is ever present. Graffiti is an expression of one's being alive and bursting with energy. The blend of legend, memory and childhood pleasure creates images of yesterday, today and tomorrow. The experience grows with artists' lives, enigmatic and boundless.

Graffiti is not a new beginning. It comes from a basic source: the need to communicate. Full circle, it is this new which is bringing back the old.







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charf with his painting *Wooooaa Nelly*, inspired by his childhood fascination with *The Jetsons*.





