

# Art in America

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Kenny Scharf: *Vivid Vision*, 1990–91, acrylic, oil and  
102½ by 184 inches; at Tony Shafrazi.

## Kenny Scharf at Tony Shafrazi

Kenny Scharf seems intent on practicing a kind of ecological Pop art. Many of his new paintings take as their subject the plight of planet earth, as documented by a barrage of newspaper clippings silk-screened on canvas to make dense webs of alarmist verbiage. "Tropical Forest Is Found Worse Than Thought" warns a headline that recurs in several works; "U.S. Urged to End Opposition to Ozone Aid" reads another. Over this resonant ground, Scharf paints all manner of pulsing squares and rectangles, bouncy colored balls and whizzing planet forms. In addition, the new canvases display a rich repertoire of photo-silk-screened visuals advertising early 1960s merchandise such as Coke in a glass bottle, Hi-C drink, old-fashioned TV sets, record players, even three varieties of weed killer. The relentless repetition of this commercial-product imagery contrasts effectively with the political

protest implicit in the use of newspaper headlines. From Scharf, who is well known for his fund-raising efforts on behalf of the Brazilian rain forest, these new works come as a dramatic foray into contemporary history painting—hardly what we would expect from the early '80s appropriator of Flintstones and Jetsons cartoons.

Scharf's new, large canvases can be understood as ambitious extensions of New York School painting: he makes us see the Hans Hofmann in early Warhol and the Ab-Ex organization in Johns's '70s cross-hatchings. With canny insight, Scharf grabs the recent scholarly revelations of anarchist iconography in Cubist collages and brings them thrillingly up to date, as well as up to monumental scale. In *Zamaron*, he juxtaposes pink and yellow images of '50s and '60s car headlights and vignettes of bouffant-haired beauty queens with a superimposed black line

drawing of two colossal dinosaurs breaking out of their eggs. Not only does the oval shape of the eggs rhyme with the ovals of the photographic vignettes, but the circular headlights play off the shapes of overpainted planets, not to mention the round yellow buttons on the outrageous green vinyl-upholstered frame. Such a mix of high and low allusions, politically correct and downright silly subject matter, organic dyes and nonbiodegradable plastics all makes for a heady sensation of an image bank lost in space.

Scharf's works on paper often suggest that the '60s child is coming of age in the newly self-conscious '90s. In *Survival*, two dinosaurs are seen fighting on top of an open icebox that is chock-full of '60s junk food, picked out in bright red and yellow. This drawing is framed in silver Mylar that has a tacky, Op art effect. Scharf is clearly jockeying for the Andy position with such brazen graphics, and even if he seems a bit too explicit on the global issues, his work shows every sign of succeeding.

—Brooks Adams