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\$1 beyond the greater New York metropol

## Kenny Scharf

Tony Shafrazi Gallery  
119 Wooster Street, SoHo  
Through March 14

Kenny Scharf is neither the first nor the last artist to stick with the tried and true. Still, his new work turns the clock back to the mid- and early 1980's at something like warp speed. He has sought alternatives to his surrealist cartoon universe, with its friendly bug-eyed monsters, Kool-Aid colors and extraterrestrial landscapes. In the late 80's, he attempted a more distanced handling of motifs from popular culture, landing in the vicinity of David Salle; in his last show, he moved toward hyperreal, somewhat sinister treatments of the natural world, similar to Alexis Rockman.

Now the artist is back, safe and sound, in Sharfland. A trailer-size environment recapitulates his black-light installations at the Palladium and the 1985 Whitney Biennial; one of his signature television sets, covered in bright graffiti, appended with kitschy objects, is on hand.

The paintings are much the same as they ever were: exuberant, well-composed, full of amazing riffs and passages (the ghostly faces and details that drift like vapor trails across the lower portion of "Zerevezi," for example).

Around the edges, there are signs that Mr. Scharf is pushing this formula into new, or at least newish, areas: an increased attention to Yves Tanguy's sense of terrain and sotto voce bravura and a penchant for varied backgrounds, including random, elaborately dripped paint, bold plaids and patchworks of 50's-style shapes and colors. But the foreground formula is too much the same, considering Mr. Scharf's talent. If déjà vu and 80's nostalgia appeal, this is a great show.

ROBERTA SMITH