



Associated Press photo

Kenny Scharf, seen in his Miami studio, is enjoying his first solo show in a U.S. museum.

Art darling Scharf resurfaces

By NICOLE WINFIELD

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MIAMI — If ever there was a darling of the 1980s New York art craze, it was Kenny Scharf.

Young, hip and fresh out of art school, Scharf went from East Village obscurity to Madison Avenue celebrity almost overnight with his wacky cartoon-inspired paintings.

The hype didn't last. By the end of the decade, the art world crashed, Scharf was trashed and AIDS had claimed his best friend, Keith Haring. Labeled a fleeting fad by critics, Scharf left New York with his family, moved to Miami and regrouped.

Now with his first solo show in a U.S. museum, a retrospective at the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, a collection of new works at his longtime New York gallery and two museum shows slated for 1996, Scharf is getting a second wind.

"I haven't felt these kind of feelings since the '80s," Scharf said recently from his sun-filled studio. "I think I'm returning to a lot of the joy — a lot of the early, unbridled joy — and embracing that."

There certainly was a lot of joy back then.

"He was one of the big incandescent stars of the '80s," said Eric Gibson, executive editor of

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Kenny Scharf

ARTnews, which devoted a 10-page spread to the young Scharf in 1985. "He sort of personified the '80s frain of art that was very illustrative, very rooted in pop culture sources. But he really dropped out of sight towards the end of the '80s."

Scharf had retreated from the criticism — a victim of both the stock market-induced art world bust that no longer tolerated the \$100,000 pricetags for his paintings and what his mentor and idol Andy Warhol might have called the end of his 15 minutes of fame.

"Whenever the media takes somebody, or a movement, and adores it, of course they've got to trash it four years later, because that's the cycle of things," Scharf says now.

"Well, I think the cycle is coming back. They've trashed me long enough. Now I think I'm going to get a little bit of..." He catches himself and laughs. "Respect," he whispers, smiling, realizing the silliness of his own cliché.

These days, Scharf is reveling in silliness — the sort of fun and frivolity that defined the art world in the early '80s and his early pop-surrealist works. Products of his television-intensive childhood in Los Angeles in the 1960s, the paintings pitted Elroy Jetson in Fred Flintstone's world, and vice-versa.

Now 36, Scharf swims every day in the ocean, tends to his garden, plays with his two young daughters, and paints.

With his wife, Tereza, he also is tending to a new venture, the "Scharf Schop," a South Beach boutique that sells everything from a \$2,000 Scharf Jewel, a small egg-like acrylic, to a \$12 set of refrigerator magnets featuring some of Scharf's weirder creatures.

He's set to open a "Scharf Schak," a newsstand selling Scharf-ish T-shirts, magnets and computer mouse pads, in New York's SoHo, not far from Keith Haring's "Pop Shop," which obviously served as an early inspiration.