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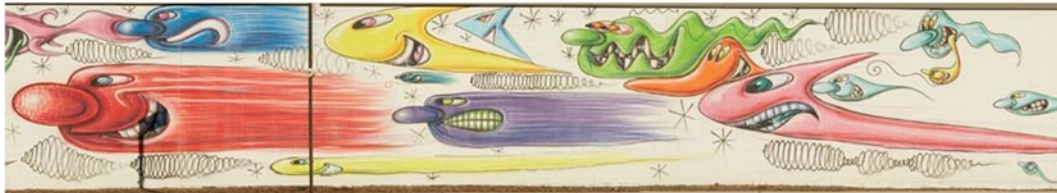
ARTISTS

Kenny Scharf

Victor Matthews

[Kenny Scharf](#), carrying a DeWalt tool bag reconceived as a man purse and dressed in an outfit that might be described as bohemian yacht wear by way of Hunter S Thompson, paused in front of a bulbous pair of alien blobs twisting themselves into a semblance of a yin-yang. “It gets a little religious,” he offered, dissecting the sprawling narrative of a newly unveiled, 400-foot mural gracing the exterior wall of Krinos Foods in the Bronx. Elsewhere, it depicts a slaphappy brontosaurus, a smiling volcano that seems inordinately pleased to be erupting, and an endless array of Scharf’s signature squiggly, wide-eyed creatures — “They have a sperm quality,” he admitted.

The artist got his start alongside Keith Haring in the 1980s, although he’s now equally known for his gallery-ready paintings — the man [paints a mean donut](#). He’s since decamped to Los Angeles, leaving behind a rapidly gentrifying New York that bears little resemblance to the one he fell in love with. Still, Scharf found much to celebrate in the Bronx during the days he spent spraying the Krinos mural. “It’s still real over here,” he said. “I had the kids, the gangsters, the graffiti writers, people hanging out doing fashion shoots in front of the mural. I was so touched. The Bronx reminds me of when I was here. The New York from the days when I arrived is gone, but I feel that it’s still *here*, a little bit.”



On the other side of the Greek food importer's headquarters, a similarly long wall has been adorned by [Victor Matthews](#). The two artists have been friends since the '80s; they're co-godfathers of Francesco Clemente's daughter, a responsibility they assumed from Haring following his death in 1990. Matthews's mural took nearly a month to complete, since, unlike Scharf, he favors traditional brushwork. In the midst of working on it, he was also juggling a solo show of new paintings, on view through July 9 at [KM Fine Arts](#), the gallery instrumental in facilitating the Krinos project. A typical Matthews canvas is white and nearly monochromatic, with figurative elements elaborately jigsawed together, but the outdoor project needed a more dramatic visual punch. In the Bronx, Matthews's familiar autobiographically inspired imagery — white Converse sneakers, bicycles, and snippets of New York's architecture — float over a multicolored background applied by blasting the wall with an industrial spray gun attached to five-gallon buckets of paint.

Matthews, a Brooklyn native — though he, too, recently moved to Los Angeles — said that his almost ghostly rendering of urban elements is the result of “envisioning New York as if it was in the quietness and stillness of Antarctica.” The artist hasn't worked on the streets since the mid-'80s, when he made a series of wall works in SoHo, an experience whose hardships he recalls fondly (“I'd be eating my little Blimpie's sandwich . . . getting attacked by a dozen rats . . .”). Although he studied illustration at art school in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Matthews credits his unofficial apprenticeships alongside a generation of New York artists for his real training. From Brice Marden he learned “patience, the time he takes”; from Haring, canvas-stretching chops; from Donald Baechler, “simplicity”; from Ross Bleckner, “beeswax — I asked so many questions about beeswax.” After the splashy opening of the Krinos murals last week, this quintessential NYC artist was due to fly back to Los Angeles to start on a series of monumental paintings for a September show in Luxembourg. “The light is nice in L.A., but New York is New York,” he said. “I'm always going to come back and have a place here. Your home is in your DNA.”