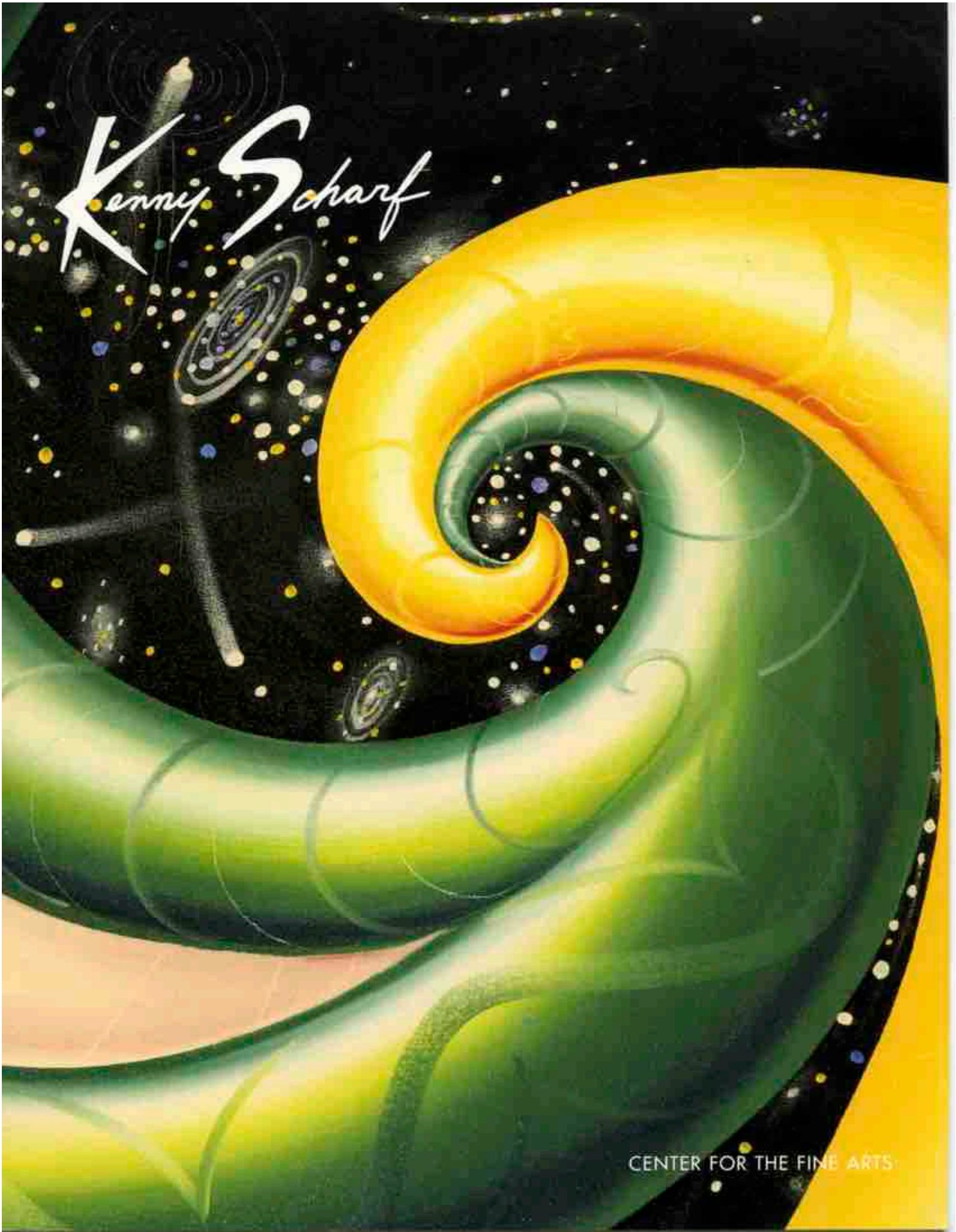
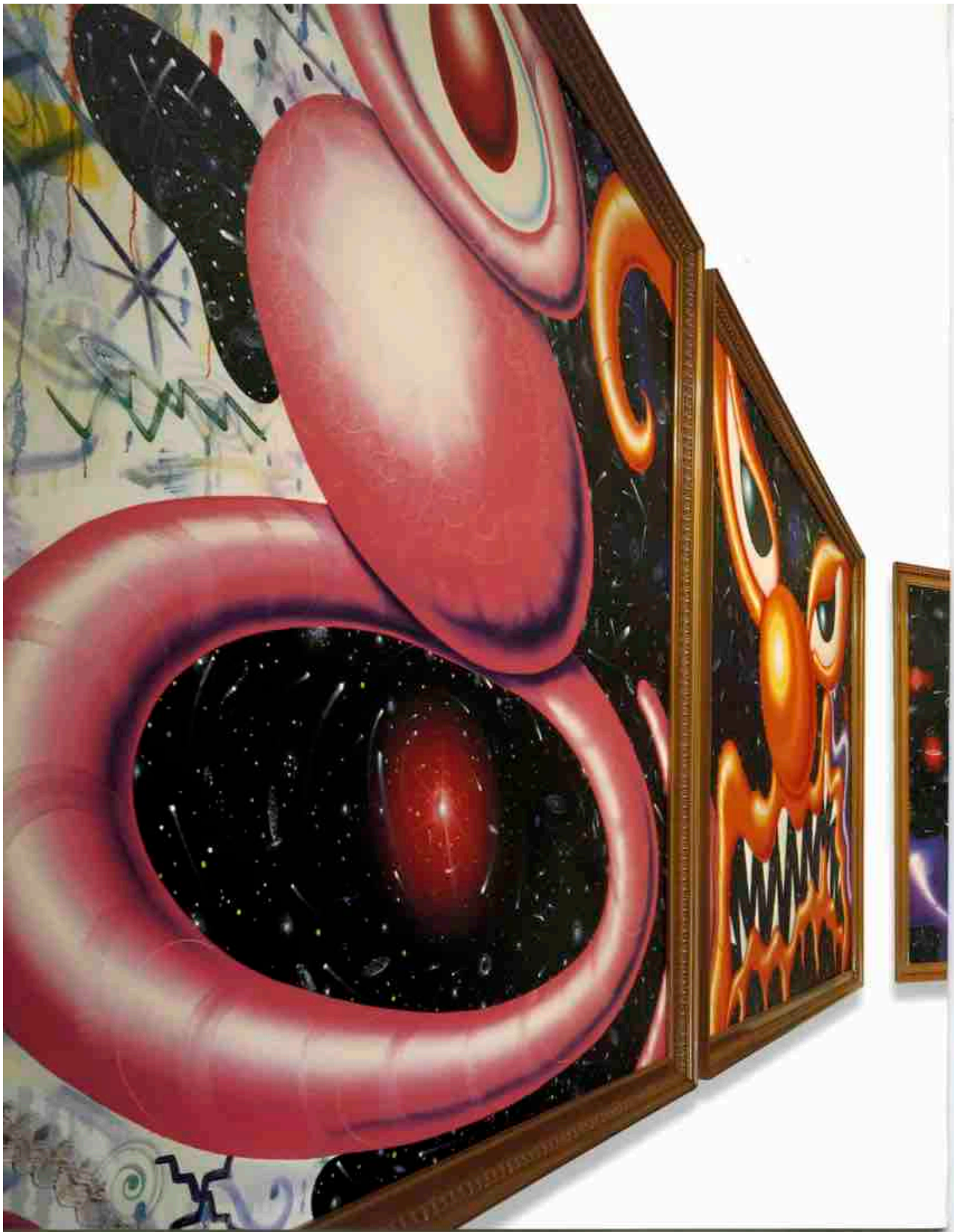


Kenny Scharf

CENTER FOR THE FINE ARTS





New Work: Kenny Scharf **Heads**

In his visually opulent and zany style, Pop Surrealist Kenny Scharf has contributed an extraordinary two-part installation to the New Work series. **Heads** began as a public sculpture project for the CFA's courtyard, but it soon outgrew its original outdoor parameters. Between the functional sculptures outside and the large-scale paintings indoors, Scharf's expanded installation balances the opposing forces of earth and space, nature and artificiality, and the figurative and abstract. Above all, this project vividly articulates the artist's unique dialogue with Pop Art, Surrealism and Abstraction. By skillfully adopting elements of each contradictory style into his work, he draws us into a lush and manic Scharf universe.



The core of the artist's original proposal is an installation of twelve 36-inch fiberglass planters shaped as two-faced and four-faced impish heads. Sprouting live coconut palm trees like primitive head-dresses, the multiple faces grin, scowl and gape in synthetic carnival colors. Two parallel rows of planters form a pathway alongside the outer loggia that extends from the Center's entrance into the public plaza. Although the tableau is brazenly absurd, the bulging, low-to-the-ground proportions of the planters and burgeoning foliage above seem earthy and grounded. The arrangement and the alternating colors of the heads and their waving palm leaves create a visual rhythm that animates the stark plaza and lures passersby into the galleries.

As Scharf's project developed, the sculpted planters evolved into an amusing lead-in for the main installation. Inside, ten enormous paintings measuring 10 feet by 11 feet and 10 feet by 12 feet create a sequential, continuous narrative that flows from one canvas to the next around the entire Gallery One space. While the planters are earthbound and troll-like, the paintings' nonsensical figures loom



weightlessly out of an effervescent background field densely loaded with zooming comets, spinning galaxies and glowing stars. The faces of the paintings are as exaggerated as those of the planters, yet more abstract. Their ballooning curlicues seem to be inflating and metamorphosing before our eyes, as if these mutant characters are spontaneously germinating out of a chaotic, embryonic force field. Their sinuous shapes are often organic, like lizard tails or caterpillars, but the bubble gum colors and plastic textures are highly synthetic, like the vinyl of children's backyard pools.

In **Heads** Scharf demonstrates that painting can be used as installation, creating an environment without any other props. In the past, Scharf has used props prodigiously in his well-known multimedia "closets" packed with kitsch objects, customized appliances, natural and artificial materials, day-glo paint, mylar and black light, often underscored with oddball soundtracks. The viewer becomes a participant by entering into the closet, where he can see, hear and

touch the elements. **Heads** offers the viewer the inverse experience of being inside looking out. Frames constructed of foam household molding, spray-painted with gold car paint, break the wrap-around image into clean rectangles. This presentation creates the illusion of windows in the windowless gallery space, as if the gallery were transformed into a spaceship or space station surrounded by a frenetic and surrealistic cosmos.

Scharf never abandoned the space age fantasy of his childhood in the sixties. "Growing up while the space age was born, I was so excited," he says. "There was this big promise that in 1984 you'll be able to buy a ticket and board a ship and fly up to the moon...I was in love with that whole fantasy." At the time, a mania for futuristic sci-fi permeated mass culture and the public embraced the space program with youthful exuberance and optimism. For Scharf, the images, colors and textures of space age fashion, graphics and car design, as well as movies and television animation, still carry powerful associations with the heightened spirit of those times. Yet,

Scharf's nostalgia is ambivalent, simultaneously encompassing favorite commercial images and a suburban kid's longing for the pure, natural world that lay beyond billboards and drive-in movie screens.

Scharf's vivid style synthesizes these and other fifties and sixties Pop sources, such as advertising design, product packaging and carnival art, resulting in surprisingly rich and painterly work. The artist feels a particular affinity with the saturated hues and glossy textures of billboard painter-turned-Pop artist James Rosenquist. "I love the way he actually paints," says Scharf. "The surface is very enticing with all that shine. It's very luscious." In fact, the splashy colors, overwhelming scale and wrap-around format of **Heads** bring to mind Rosenquist's audacious **F-111** (1965), one of Scharf's favorite Pop classics.

Yet, the wholeheartedly exuberant mood and animated action of Scharf's fantastic world show how the artist wields his Pop techniques with a very different

intent than forebears like Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. According to Scharf, the original Pop artists grew up without television and saw the effects of mass media entering the culture. They consequently took the calculated, ironic view reflected in their work. Scharf, on the other hand, was a TV baby who internalized the barrage of media and consumer images into a subconscious store of visual impressions. Instead of appropriating and distilling existing images, like Lichtenstein and Warhol did, he intuitively draws on this inventory of images to create a vocabulary of eccentric characters. "I'm taking things from my subconscious like a Surrealist does," says Scharf, "yet my imagery is very Pop because **that** is in my subconscious."

Scharf can access these imaginary characters so easily, they become a tool for spontaneity. Confronted with an empty canvas, the artist begins to paint automatically, without sketches or deliberation, using a fluid gesture. Scharf acknowledges the influence of early Surrealists Joan Miró and Paul Klee who also used automatism to uncover a subconscious visual language free of the constraints of rationality and art education. "I feel connected to their belief in and love of the child in the artist," says Scharf, "and in the child's view as being very pure and unencumbered."

While the schematic scribbles of Klee and Miró are flat, cool and cerebral, the giant cartoon expressions in these paintings make an immediate, experiential connection with the viewer. Perhaps because Scharf has maintained his childhood propensity to see faces everywhere — in houses, cars and clouds — he returns to their representations again and again. The face is "very basic," says Scharf. "The first thing that a baby recognizes is a face — two eyes, a nose and a mouth... I'm really getting at the core of [a child's] first visual impact, which is color and faces." By blowing these **Heads** up to massive proportions, they take on an almost symbolic or primordial significance, like totems. In the future, the artist would like to display the planters stacked vertically in a totem pole.

However, the overwhelming scale and reductive simplicity of the prominent



forms in **Heads** push Scharf's essentially representational paintings to the cutting edge of abstract — just a half-step more figurative than his gooey-textured "blob" paintings of the late eighties and nineties. The big areas of color and shape beautifully balance each other in an organic way, their effortlessly curvilinear forms spiraling and interacting. These graceful and animated compositions bring to mind the abstraction of certain early Modernists, as if the biomorphic forms of Jean Arp's sculptures were imbued with the kinetic energy and upbeat spirit of Alexander Calder's mobiles.

Like Jackson Pollack, Scharf allows the formal elements created by his gesture, rather than the subject matter, to direct the painting. In a way, the energetic physicality of his Pop vision is a reaction against the systematic precision of Lichtenstein's Ben-Day dots, as Calder's



free-floating mobiles of the thirties were a response to Piet Mondrian's deliberated squares and rectangles. The fluidity and spontaneity of Scharf's technique contrast with Lichtenstein's cleanliness and perfection, and with Warhol's aloof and mechanical reproduction.

Scharf sheds the ironic distancing of Pop Art, but retains its playful wit and celebration of mass culture. He embraces the childlike, intuitive process and the originality of subject lauded by the Surrealists, but steers clear of their psychological and philosophical aspirations. He shares the Abstract Expressionist immediacy and love of paint, but not the self-absorption. Scharf incorporates a Modernist appreciation of formal aesthetics into a Post-Modern eclecticism. In synthesizing the fluidly organic with the egregiously artificial, he encapsulates the ambivalence of his generation toward technology and nature. The result is an outrageous, hallucinatory experience. "You have to let your defenses down, surrender to it," says Scharf. "I want people to jump in and really be a part of it."

Louis Grachos
Curator Museum of Contemporary Art / San Diego
January 1996

New Work: Kenny Scharf Heads December 22, 1995 - March 21, 1996

NEW WORKS EXHIBITIONS

- 1996 **New Work: Kenny Scharf Heads**, Center for the Fine Arts, Miami
- 1995 **Early Works 1975 - 1979**, Yoshi Gallery, New York
 Gallery Cothens, Krokke-Hodwig Van Impe, Belgium
Full Circle, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
Scharf-O-Rama Vision: Paintings 1978 - 1995, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- 1994 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1993 **Small Paintings and Works on Paper**, Galerie Ekelman, Essen, Germany
 Jaffe Baker Biau Gallery, Boca Raton, Florida
Closet #50, World Gallery, Miami Beach, Florida
Closet #11, Click Gallery, Essen, Germany
- 1992 Edward Tootah Gallery, London
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
 Hokin Gallery, Bay Harbor, Florida
 Galleria Rocca 6, Torino, Italy
 Galleria Sesto, Milan, Italy
- 1991 **Closet #9**, Queens Museum of Art, New York
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
 ACAT Worldwide Corporate Headquarters, Tokyo
 Studio Torino, Naples, Italy
- 1990 Galerie Beaubourg, Paris
 Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf, Germany
 Akira Ikeda, Tokyo
- 1989 Michael Kuhn Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1988 Akira Ikeda, Tokyo
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1987 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1986 Akira Ikeda, Tokyo
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1985 Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1984 Larry Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1983 American Graffiti Gallery, Amsterdam
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1982 The Fun Gallery, New York
- 1981 **Customized Appliances**, Club 57, New York
The Jetsons, The Fun Gallery, New York
 National Studio Artist, P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York
- 1979 **Celebration of the Space Age**, Club 57, New York
Celebrate the New Wave, Fiorucci, New York

OTHER PROJECTS

- 1994 **Fabric Design**, Todd Oldham Creations, New York
Zippo Lighter Design, Germany
Swatch Watch Design, Biel, Switzerland
Carpet Design for Kriener Teppiche, Munich, Germany
- 1993 **City of Miami Lifeguard Station**, designed by Kenny Scharf and Bill Lane, painted by Kenny Scharf
- 1988 **Don't Bungle the Jungle**, fundraiser for the Tropical Rainforest, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1987 **Luna Luna**, Carousels for traveling art museum park, Hamburg, Germany
 Villa Zappi Wine Label, Napa Valley, California
- 1986 **Absolut Scharf**, advertisements for Absolut Vodka
Pop Shop Magnets, Pop Shop, New York
- 1985 Installation in lower level of Palladium night club, New York

WHITNEY MUSEUM

- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
 The Eli Broad Foundation, Los Angeles
 The Ludwig Museum, Cologne
 The Monterey Museum of Art, Mexico
 The Sogetsu Museum of Art, Tokyo
 The Patrick Lennan Foundation, Chicago
 The Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art, Amsterdam
 The Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida
 The Dammeiser Foundation, New York

SELECTED MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

- 1995 **Altered and Irrational: Selections from the Permanent Collection**, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Art, Design, and Barbie: Evolution of a Cultural Icon, Liberty Street Gallery at World Financial Center, New York
Recent Acquisitions, The Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida
A New York Time: Selected Drawings of the Eighties, Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut
- 1994 **New York Unplugged**, Gallery Cothens, Krokke-Hodwig Van Impe, Belgium
- 1993 **About Nature**, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Ohio
Extravagant: The Economy of Elegance, Russisches Kulturzentrum, Berlin
- 1992 **1992**, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Mexico
Salade de L'Amour, Halle de L'Union des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris
- 1991 **American Art of the 80s**, Palazzo Della Alberte, Trento, Italy
The 1980s: A Selected View from the Permanent Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1985 **1985 Biennial**, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Drawings, Leo Castelli Graphics, New York
Investigations, The University of Pennsylvania Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
Vernacular Abstraction, Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo
Art in Action, Sogetsu Museum, Tokyo
- 1984 **Via New York**, Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, Canada
Arte al Frontiera, Galerie de Arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy
Aperto 1984 Venice Biennale, Italy
The Human Condition, Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
New Idioms, Robert Fraser Gallery, London
- 1983 **New Attitudes: Paris/New York**, Pittsburg Center for the Arts, Pennsylvania
Champions, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
Morton G. Neuman Family Collection, Kalamazoo Institute of Art, Michigan
The Comic Art Show, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Back to the USA, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland
Tendencias de Nueva York, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, Spain
1983 Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil
 Salvatore Ala Gallery, Milan, Italy
References, Palais des Beaux-Arts Chalerai, Belgium
- 1982 **Space Invaders**, National Studio Artist/ P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York
 Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1981 **Club 57**, New York
The Times Square Show, Times Square, New York
New York New Wave, National Studio Artist/ P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York
- 1979 **Club 57**, New York

New Work: Kenny Scharf Heads has been organized by the Center for the Fine Arts as part of the New Work series, an ongoing series of one-person, site-specific works by leading contemporary artists.

Artist's Assistant: Oliver Sanchez
 Copy Editors: Pamela Gordon, Miami; Ann Eppen, San Diego
 Curator: Kate Rawlinson, Associate Curator
 Design: Melinda Cowen Design
 Installation: Steve Morgan, Exhibition Designer/Coordinator
 Alberto Hernandez, Installation Technician
 Photography: Ira Victor Photography © 1996
 Printing: Jeff Daugherty Graphics
 Production: Lorie Montes, Curatorial Assistant

The Center for the Fine Arts, which will be renamed the Miami Art Museum of Dade County in Fall 1996, is recognized by the State of Florida as a Major Cultural Institution and receives major funding from the State of Florida through the Florida Department of State, the Florida Arts Council and the Division of Cultural Affairs. The 1995-1996 exhibition programs are sponsored by the Dade County Cultural Affairs Council and the Metropolitan Dade County Board of Commissioners.

Center for the Fine Arts, 101 West Flagler Street, Miami, FL 33130

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CATALOGUE OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches. All works are courtesy of the artist.

Gallery One

All works are oil and acrylic on canvas with polymer frame. Height precedes width.

1. **Poval** 1995, 118 x 142
2. **Scorange** 1995, 118 x 142
3. **Purple** 1995, 118 x 154
4. **Reddy** 1995, 118 x 154
5. **Palletto** 1995, 118 x 154
6. **Haplue** 1995, 118 x 142
7. **Red-Head** 1995, 118 x 142
8. **Greenarama** 1995, 118 x 154
9. **Yellick** 1995, 118 x 154
10. **Zingallet** 1995, 118 x 154

Metro-Dade Cultural Plaza

Works are enamel on fiberglass planters. Height precedes width precedes depth.

- Madglad** 1995, each 36 x 75 x 75 **Surface** 1995, each 36 x 62 x 62