



KENNY SCHARF



TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY 163 MERCER STREET NEW YORK 10012 (212) 925-8732

AN INTERVIEW
WITH
KENNY SCHARF
BY
TONY SHAFRAZI
AND
BRUNO SCHMIDT

May 1, 1983

- T.S. Kenny, we have talked in the past about when you were a kid. Apparently you started painting very early. So how were the first paintings developed? What were they like?
- K.S. I remember finger painting. And actually the finger paintings were a lot like the palette paintings that I'm doing now.
- B.S. When did you start painting more seriously?
- K.S. I was always serious about fun. I used to make these books when I was eight. I have this one book called The Book of Everything, and it was all inventions. I can remember this one thing that was a turtle mop. A picture of a lady with a turtle on a stick. It said, "Here is a turtle mop that you kind of have to have a funny floor." The floor had to have ridges for the turtle's feet.
- T.S. Kenny, you told me you liked watching TV a lot.
- K.S. Yeah.
- B.S. When did you get your first color TV?
- K.S. In 1965.
- B.S. Do you remember it well?
- K.S. Yes, it was one of the happiest days of my life. I must have been about six or seven, and I used to just sit right in front of it. The first color TV sets were colored dots on a black surface, so if you looked really close it was like hallucinating. So I used to just sit and hallucinate in front of the TV.
- T.S. What did you like watching the most?
- K.S. Everything. It didn't matter if you were that close to it, it was just color. I remember watching the Kennedy assassination and my mother screaming all of a sudden. I

remember thinking, Why is she so upset? I see people getting murdered all the time. We always watched people getting shot on TV, and she never did anything.

T.S. When did you start using TV cartoon characters like the Flintstones and the Jetsons?

K.S. Well, I've always been doing Jetson paintings. When I was at school I made this whole Jetson city out of television dials, melted toys, tubes, and dinosaurs. The buildings were all Jetson style. Then I decided, Well, why not do the Jetsons instead of just doing things in Jetson style?

T.S. What made you come to New York?

K.S. 'Cause when I was in school I would hear about these galleries in New York and I knew there was nothing happening where I was. It just sounded like that's where I should be.

T.S. So when did you meet Keith Haring?

K.S. In 1978, when I first got here at school. We immediately became friends because we were attracted to each other's drive.

B.S. And when did you first start having shows? How did it happen?

K.S. I hung out in the East Village and Club 57, I had my first show at Fiorucci, and then I had the first art show at Club 57. Things all started happening from Club 57. That's how I got involved in The Times Square show, PS.1. "New York/New Wave," and The Fun Gallery.

T.S. When did you start doing "The Closets"?

K.S. When Keith and I lived in the loft near Times Square.

T.S. Why did you start making them?

- K.S. I wanted a place where I could go and totally be in heaven. The most beautiful place, totally artificial. You know, you can't get away from everything in New York, so you have to make your own place.
- T.S. The customizing, where did that come from?
- K.S. I started making art from trash. What I liked most were the discarded machines and stuff like that. Then one day I asked myself, Why am I doing only broken ones? Why don't I do working appliances. The one thing I didn't like about the art scene was that it didn't have anything to do with real life. By doing customizing I found out that it was a good way to make art deal directly with life. I think it makes life better if you're using art every day, like talking on a customized phone—A total "Van Chrome" experience.
- T.S. One time you mentioned something about the Greeks.
- K.S. The idea of customizing appliances is the same as what occurred to the ancient Greeks, in the sense that their everyday objects were art. Instead of vases and chairs, we have telephones and disco radios.
- T.S. So you mean to say the art in ancient Greece encompassed everything, it colored their lives, it was pleasure and fantasy...
- K.S. Yeah, that's the "Van Chrome" experience.
- T.S. How did you start doing large paintings on canvas?
- K.S. It's like everything else.
- T.S. So all the paintings you're making are more or less building a world, whether it is in space or under water...
- K.S. Each painting is like changing channels—different models and different styles.

Let's say this is a space model painting, and this is the Renaissance model, and this is the pop model—like this is the telephone.

T.S. And when you start a painting, how do you approach it, with a feeling of making a...

K.S. I don't even know, it's totally stream-of-conscious. After it's done, then I realize what I was doing.

T.S. You say you have traveled quite a lot. Do you like the adventure of traveling?

K.S. Yes, I always see it like a personal test, like conquering something.

B.S. That's how you do your art, something you have to go through.

K.S. It's like Dante's Inferno. You go through all these different levels. It's what I think life is like.

T.S. Kenny, space and these imaginary worlds—do you see them as real? Do you ever want to go there?

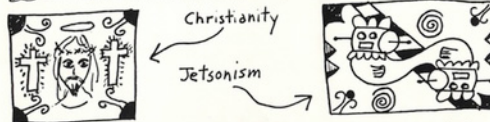
K.S. I want to go to space. I was born in 1958, and it was the beginning of the Space Age. A month before I was born the first satellite went up. The early sixties is one of my favorite channels. Like deltas, the Jetsons, and Space Age architecture. They were all saying to me that, yes, one day we are all going to be able to buy a ticket and get on and go. Everyone was telling us that and I believed it. They weren't only telling us literally, but putting it into our everyday lives, with Space Age designs in our cars, household products, architecture, everything. Then when the Vietnam War came and the boredom of the seventies set in, people stopped trying to sell that dream. I didn't want to stop it, so I continued it. Let's go to space!

Mushrooms + television childhood = Pop Surrealism.

Religion is strong. Mandalas are used in all religions. they all have a center. They can hypnotically bring you to a higher level. Early Mandalas were simple. Simple symbolic shapes.



The spiral is easily understood as a means to other levels (worlds). For example: the tornado, the bathtub drain spiral where entering can take place (air through water). Galaxies are spirals. Suction-black holes? Spirals are universal in space, in nature and in culture. Second degree religions include Mandalas with icons.



The importance of religion in art stems from the increasingly threatening situation of nuclear catastrophe. Will I be all right when I'm dead? Well, hopefully. If you believe in being good you will lift your arms up the mushroom cloud, through a spiral to "heaven".



Heaven being the universal oneness with time equals nature equals god. God equals hydrogen atoms because they are the only things created from nothing. Hydrogen God is

the creator: sun, planets, earth, man. The sun being hydrogen, fusing to helium as an after product. Man plays God by using atoms, destroying himself in the process-nuclear catastrophe.

Jetsonism is Nirvana.

Kenny Schauf
1981

1983

Back in 1981, Jetsonism was at its height, but like time, has traveled through the ages or somewhere between time in the age of Flintjet or Jetstone. Yes, Felix was somewhere in there too. Wilma Flintstone and George Jetson begat "El Fredix."

Well, many other offspring were formed after the time-splat which was caused by some incredible occurrence, like a solar master-mix, nuclear catastrophe, ultraviolet tidal wave, or some other catastrophic superpowered happening. The offspring doubled and quadrupled into a population well into the millions, then billions. Now that so many sects and subsect religions have generated, the future is bizarre, infinite and limitless.



Kenny Schauf
1983













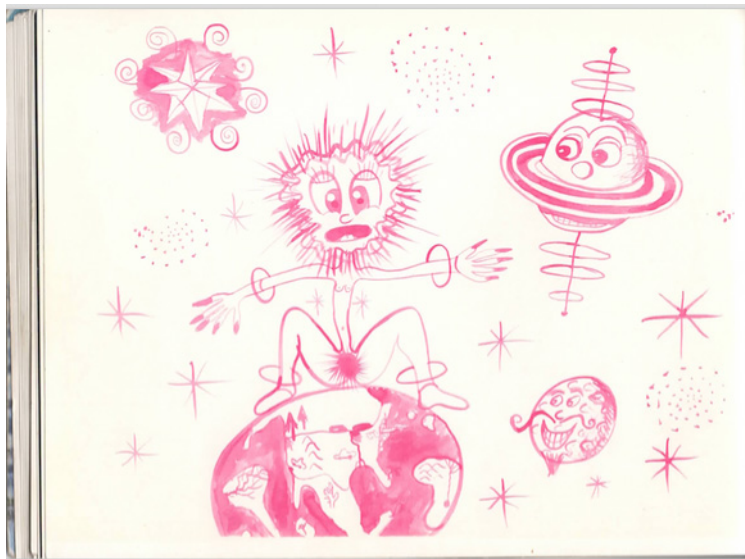


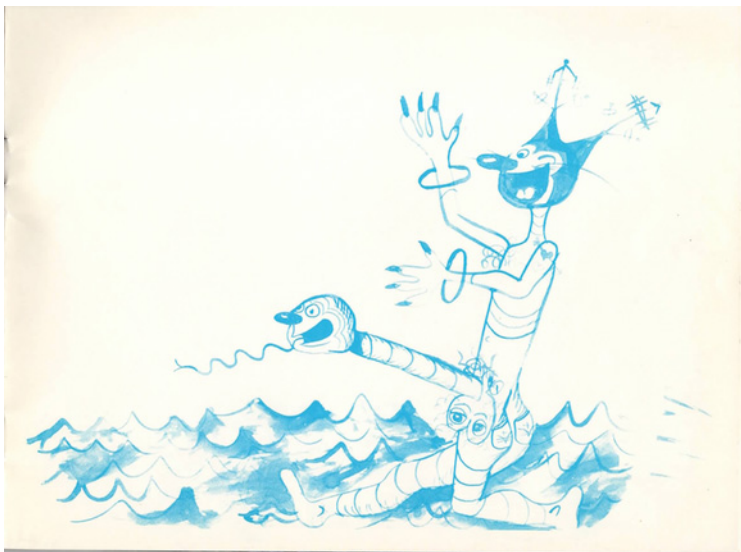






















**IN ORDER
OF APPEARANCE**

"VAN CHROME TELEVISION"
Customized Sony Trinitron 10"
1981-1983
Acrylic and found objects
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"VAN CHROME BOX"
Customized Sanyo tape player
and radio
1982
Acrylic and found objects
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"BOMBS ARE LIKE TREES"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"PAST FRIENDS CHANGE"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"MOTHER EARTH"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"FATHER MAN"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"CAPTAIN FUN"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

**"MUTUAL OF OMAHA'S
WILD KINGDOM"**
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"PRETTY LADY CHUNK"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"SHAKE IT ROCK BABY"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

"CLUNK PACK PLANET"
1983
Ink on paper
23" x 29"
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery

KENNY SCHARF
Photo: Kenny Scharf

I would like to thank the following people for their help and cooperation in producing this catalogue.

Ivan Dalla-Tona and Paolo Sacco our gallery photographers who took all the photographs; my assistants at the gallery Anne Plumb, and Alexandra Sutherland who helped edit the interview; Bruno Schmidt for his contribution to the interview; Hannah H. Alderfer who designed the catalogue; and also Tony Brusco of Fleetwood Litho and Letter Corporation for doing such a good job of printing this catalogue. Finally my thanks go to Kenny Scharf.

Tony Shafrazi

Published by
Tony Shafrazi Gallery
163 Mercer Street,
New York, NY 10012

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Scharf and Bruno Schmidt

Photographs of artworks
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Ivan Dalla-Tana and
Paolo Sacco

Printing by
Fleetwood Press
New York, NY

Catalogue designed
by Hannah H. Alderfer

Edition limited to
2000 copies

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Printed in the
United States of America

Cover: "PIPE DREAM" (detail)

