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Press release

“RICHARD HAMBLETON AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES”

Artists

**KEN HIRATSUKA
SCOT BOROFKY
AL DIAZ
RICHARD HAMBLETON**

Location , 9 west 8th street

**Time , 7/10-7/24 (closed for 7/11,12,13 and 7/18,19,20) 2-6pm,
And by appointment**

This show dips right into the height of the 1980's New York City street art scene.

The four artists included each represent major developments in the thought process inside the flowering of illegal public art. Each of these artists risked arrest time and time again as they made their statements directly into the NYC environment. And if they were arrested, they were never deterred.

Each of the four played a distinct role in fleshing out the conceptual implications of a type of art which was just coming into existence and beginning to display signs of future potential. By following the singular voices of these risky mavericks the public can begin to understand how all of the implications of Modern Art at the time: conceptual art; political art; performance art; earthworks; and site-specific installation, along with "neo-expressionism" were woven into a new world of artistic expression: STREET ART.

But the four were not just in the alleyways, on the brickwalls and on the sidewalk. They are all excellent studio artists with highly developed and consistent styles of personal artistic exploration.

One worked with the human figure; one works with text; one with symbols and one with an improvised expressive line that recalls the most ancient human expression.

While representing the ultimate goals of modernism, street art also takes us back to our earliest expressive urges as human beings.

"At first art tried to recreate the natural world.

Next, artistic expression became what we called the "art world."

Finally art came out of the gallery and out of the museum and into the real world."

-unknown street artist

THE "INVENTOR OF STREET ART"

Preceding the activities of Keith Haring in the subway, of Jean Michel Basquiat (with Al Diaz) and of any other artists who had, by 1975, not made more than a few outdoor urban art installations, Richard Hambleton cannot be disputed as the inventor ("Godfather") of street art.

Graffiti art had not yet become a gallery phenomena by 1975, so it's safe to say that Hambleton was not emulating graffiti by bringing his work outdoors but was rather, putting together all of the implications of Modernist thought and it's unexplored insinuations about the potentials for public art.

The artist, who was born on June 23, 1952 in Tofino, Vancouver Island, British Columbia graduated from Vancouver Art School in 1975.

From 1975 to 1978, he traveled to different destinations in the United States and Canada, beginning in California and ending up in New York City while making his first series of street art pieces. These were figurative outlines drawn on the surface of sidewalks and splattered with red paint simulating a murder scene and police investigation.

In 1979 Richard Hambleton took up residency on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and began creating a new, also figurative, street art series in the city. Hambleton had a photo of himself taken and reproduced somewhat less than life size which he adhered to surfaces around the city. This outdoor series was called "I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR YOU".

Finally, in 1980 Hambleton began to make his well known "shadow figures".

On hundreds of dark and lonely surfaces, in a city always on alert, he painted life-sized expressive, surprising and sometimes frightening figures in black paint. They were rendered quickly and expertly, showing off his knowledge of figurative gesture and anatomical movement with jet black paint which sprayed and splashed as it was roughly thrown or gesturally carressed onto a wall, in a doorway or on other architectural surfaces.

Like the Romantics at the beginning of the 19th century Hambleton believed that art should evoke an emotional response. But as an outdoor neo-expressionist at the end of the twentieth century, he followed his public out of the museum and right into their doorway. And that's where he frightened the heck out of 'em. In Hambleton's studio works he explored the implications of his vision, first concentrating on painting technique. In the studio he could take time to build his rendered figures in glazes and layers of splashed action painting. Then he added iconic figures such as cats and horses to his vocabulary and also used found materials such as stop signs and Marlboro cigarette advertisements. In a late group of paintings he opened up his work to horizontal formats and larger scale composition in landscape-based pieces he called "The Beautiful Paintings".

At the end of his life he returned his top early figurative ideas with the mature hand of a master of expression and figuration. He died in N.Y.C. on October 29, 2017.

THE YOUNG CONCEPTUAL "TEXTUALIST"

Al Diaz is a native New Yorker who grew up on the Lower East Side, he was born on June 10th, 1959.

Beginning at the age of twelve years old, the young artist immersed himself in what was, at the time, the newest thing on the street: spray paint graffiti culture.

Hanging out with kids in the Bronx he encountered the phenomena, and adopting his own moniker, "Bomb One", began writing his new "tag" in the streets of New York. Al brought the new art form to his own neighborhood of the Lower East Side, introducing his friends to the activity.

Already established as a downtown "writer" (graffiti artist), Diaz, who had attended the High School of Art and Design, transferred to CityAs A School, where he met and befriended (now well known) Jean Michel Basquiat, whom he introduced to the New York graffiti and hip-hop scene.

Diaz was able to think about art and expression on a conceptual level at a young age.

Using a "tag and caption" approach already being used by the tagger called "Flynn", Diaz invented the "SAMO" style of text-quip, block letter graffiti writing (not unlike block-letter text in newspaper cartoons) which was then used by Diaz and Basquiat as they riddled downtown Manhattan with their cryptic, yet poetic, text bites. Yet beneath the humor and sarcasm of their messages were serious issues dealing with spirituality and politics. Their humor caught the eye a society in transition.

After a youthful dissolution between the two high strung and motivated teenagers, Jean Michjel Basquiat claimed credit for the SAMO phenomena in interviews without ever mentioning Al Diaz.

Diaz, the artist, continued to grow personally in his expression, withdrawing from previous activities to work in and concentrate on music recording and performance.

With time to reflect on the cultural developments of his native city Diaz eventually re-emerged as a contemporary visual artist.

He moved his thought first, from a stylized sp[ray]painted single tag, to complete social and political statements in spray paint, and finally to well-crafted collage and mixed media works, using physical elements of the city environment on paper and canvas. He has connected all the dots between Graffiti and mature contemporary art.

He currently works with WET PAINT signs used throughout the New York City subway system. After cutting out individual letters to create clever, surreal and sometimes poignant anagrams, he hangs the finished works

in subway stations throughout New York City.

Al has been the ultimate graffiti-street art insider since anyone thought of anything.

His studio works are visual textual equivalents of decades of conceptual development in the illegal New York underground art scene.

THE "SYMBOLIST OF THE STREETS"

Like the French Impressionist movement of the 19th century, the street art movement also had it's "Gauguin". Scot Borofsky was born on Oct. 16, 1957 and grew up in the green mountains of Vermont.

After studies in sculpture and painting at Rhode Island School of Design he graduated in 1981 and came to NYC on a Max Beckmann Memorial Painting Scholarship awarded by the Brooklyn Museum.

Moving into the Lower East Side in early 1982, Borofsky soon became a fixture at the Life Cafe, a gathering place for East Village artists, unemployed jazz musicians and local beats. Borofsky participated in the cafe's popular poetry readings and made two exhibitions of collaged constructions in the cafe.

The young artist made his first outdoor work in the Summer of 1982, called "Single Pattern" before traveling to Mexico to camp for the Winter. This habit of creating outdoor work in New York during the warm months and traveling South to Mexico to camp near the Mayan ruins of Palenque became a way of life for Borofsky, lasting through the eighties.

In the shade of a grass-roofed hut at the edge of the rainforest and within a mile of the Mayan pyramid called "The Temple of Inscriptions" Borofsky created small symbols on paper which were later translated into large outdoor installations in the wrecked and rubble strewn vacant lots of the Lower East Side.

The artist, who had come to the city from a simple country setting, would work for hours on end illegally at night in the empty lots East of Avenue B, in one of the most dangerous parts of the city, creating ancient looking large scale symbols and long horizontal patterns in contrasting colors. He claims to have learned to be quietly unnoticed from stalking deer in the forest as a boy. In New York he was never caught or arrested, in the making of over thirty large scale outdoor works.

A large painting of a wild-eyed and ribby dog across from the Life Cafe became an icon representing the East Village art scene in numerous articles describing the new art district.

The painting, titled "Dog-O-D", was also featured along with "Single Pattern" and another of Borofsky's "Angels" in the movie "Mixed Blood", directed by Paul Morrissey and released in 1984.

Scot's street art vision, using modern urban ruins and spray paint to emulate ancient ruins, climaxed in the creation of a one block sized out-door installation called "The Pattern Walk". The project took the artist three years to complete.

It qualified as a true urban earth-work and site-specific installation, as it physically defined an actual area of land and connected the local Hispanic population with their indigenous cultural roots. It can now be completely experienced in its original state as an interactive "virtual installation" on the web.

The young artist took spray-paint in a totally different direction than graffiti, paralleling but not copying the calligraphic street writers. His spray-paintings explore Rothko's fuzzy edge and saturated color fields.

Scot Borofsky carried "street art" up to a formal level in modernist conceptual thought, involving site-specific installation principles and by creating a one-block sized urban earthwork. He also formally explored spray paint as an expressive and conceptual medium.

He continues the exploration of the implications opened up through his use of invented symbols by overlapping and deconstructing them into their constituent lines and parts and composing on canvas with oil paint in his studio in Brattleboro, Vermont. And Mexico remains in his life.

THE "LAST STONE AGE MAN"

Born in Shimodate City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan on October 25, 1959, Ken Hiratsuka graduated in 1982 from Musashino University of Art in Tokyo, where he studied painting and sculpture. In the same year he traveled to New York City and soon after his arrival received a fellowship from the Art Students League.

His first sidewalk carvings were made in Brooklyn, near his first studio, in 1982.

Moving to the Lower East Side he began tattooing the downtown landscape of Manhattan, using the city's sidewalks as his medium, working illegally and deliberately at night. The nature of his work, carving into the stone or cement with hammer and chisel was difficult to conceal and some pieces took months to complete as he was chased away by police and unfailingly returned to work on them over and over.

In fact, Ken's work embodies the words "street art" more exactly than any other artist.

As residents and visitors to the city now discover his urban petroglyphs underfoot in their meanderings

around the downtown area they are seeing the places important to the artist way back in the eighties. Where he worked, where he lived, where he ate his food and stopped for a beer. And of course, also, the spots he found special enough to incise with his drawings in time.

Hiratsuka found a direct connection between contemporary conceptual urban art and the very beginnings of human expression. His carving incorporates a never ending line of designs which never cross over themselves or end independently, so that one may imagine all of his life's artistic output as one never-ending line in stone.

After the East Village art scene had wound down at the end of the 1980's Hiratsuka focused on creating pieces all around the world. He has created work on all continents save Antarctica thus far. His "endless line" now extends around the entire planet.

Ken may be considered in time to be the ultimate and greatest of all the street artists, as he is the only one whose work will remain as long as the cities do and, indeed, beyond that point in time for the life of the planet, Earth. His work has already been mistaken for actual ancient art by professional archeologists and written about in published articles, so imagine how long his creativity may remain an enigma to humans studying their past!

Hiratsuka uses lines and patterns which can be found in all types of design common to all cultures at their artistic formative stages. His work unites all of our genetic memories and creates a common human visual language of expression.

The artist himself is just as his work is, singular, focused, obstinately permanent and conceptually zen-like. And he loves to fish.

In New York, Ken's career as a public artist has (thus far) culminated in the completion of a large (20 x 100 ft.) commission from urban developer, Tony Goldman, (now deceased.) It can easily be found on Bond Street between Lafayette and Bowery.

Ken's studio work embraces the study of all types of stone using hammer and chisel. Hiratsuka's work does not "create form" as does traditional western sculpture, instead it embraces "found forms" in stone.

Nowadays he carves at his farm in Andes, N.Y. where the property and monstrous barn highlight and house the hundreds of carved stones his life has produced.

He travels and carves ONE LINE on new rocks in the world to make the earth as one big sculpture.

See Photos below.

Photos:

Ken Hiratsuka - 25 bond street NYC 2008



Ken Hiratsuka Crystal park Holmes NY 2021





Richard Hambleton 1984?

Scot Borofsky 1983-84



SCOT BOROFSKY





AL DIAZ



Al Diaz the original SAMO with Jean Michjel Basquiat



Al Diaz the original SAMO with Jean Michjel Basquiat
