

McCLAIN
GALLERY



DOWNTOWN

Collage Culture In The East Village

NOVEMBER 1, 2018 - JANUARY 5, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION

Thursday, November 1, 5:30 – 7:30 pm

McClain Gallery and Pavel Zoubok Fine Art invite you to *Downtown: Collage Culture in the East Village*, a group exhibition celebrating the hybrid clash of cultures, materials, aesthetics and personalities that flourished in the art world of New York City's East Village during the 1980s.

In a decade marked by conspicuous consumption, conservative politics, AIDS and a newly booming market for contemporary art, the East Village art scene exploded into a bona-fide phenomenon, a perfect storm of genuine creativity, mainstream media attention and undervalued real estate. Drawing from the social movements of the generation that preceded them, the artists and dealers who brought the scene to life positioned themselves as the brash, young and decidedly edgy alternative to the more firmly established gallery districts of SoHo and 57th Street. The parallel lines of Post-Punk, New Wave and Rap brought forth a flourishing bar and club scene where artists, performers and socialites mixed and mingled into the wee hours of the morning in raw spaces that were often decorated by artists. More affordable rents and the patronage of adventurous collectors looking for the next "big thing" gave an unprecedented platform to young artists, making the neighborhood a darling and feeding ground of the culture industry. The intimately scaled galleries and collectives of the East Village witnessed a decade-long boom that foreshadowed the mania for "emerging" art that would soon follow.

These homespun storefront galleries and artist-run collectives introduced Street Art, Neo-Geo, high kitsch, post-Pop and a host of new styles and ideas into the lexicon of contemporary art with a heady mix of ambition, reverie and an alternative brand of glamour. Galleries like Gracie Mansion blossomed from tiny exhibitions in an East Village bathroom to the front pages of *Artforum* and *Art in America* magazines. The names of the galleries said it all....The Fun Gallery, Civilian Warfare, Nature Morte, etc.. As they did during the 1960s, European galleries and collectors drew from their programs and collected their artists in depth.

While the scene most notably gave birth to art stars like Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Jeff Koons, there is a deeper and more eclectic story to be told about this heady time in downtown New York City. Depending upon who you ask, the events and players can be radically divergent. The current exhibition is by no means a survey, and makes no claim to a comprehensive study of the period. It is, rather, the aspect of East Village art (if one can call it so), that most inspired its curator, Pavel Zoubok. It is, if you will, a piece of the story--one that glitters with unexpected materials and juxtapositions, cries out in protest and vibrates with the raw energy and class consciousness of punk.

Looking back, there are several forces that brought the East Village scene to a close. The most deeply felt was without question the devastation of the AIDS crisis, which brought the untimely passing of countless artists such as critic-turned-artist Nicolas Moufarrege (whose life and work are being celebrated at CAMH), sculptor Arch Connell, Keith Haring, painter, filmmaker and activist David Wojnarowicz. The confluence of this devastating disease, the inevitable gentrification of the neighborhood and the financial downturn of 1989 quickly brought the party to a close. Three decades of historical distance has brought renewed interest in the East Village scene by a new generation of curators, collectors, critics and art lovers who will find much to rethink and discover among its ranks.

Downtown: Collage Culture in the East Village features the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Sarah Charlesworth, Arch Connelly, Buster Cleveland, John Evans, Al Hansen, Keith Haring, Frank Moore, Nicolas Moufarrege, Elaine Reichek, Eric Rhein, Kiki Smith, Paul Thek, David Wojnarowicz and Rhonda Zwillinger.

For images and additional information please contact info@mcclaingallery.com.

Image: Buster Cleveland, *Bad*, 1992, 11 x 13 inches