

Studio Visit: Painter Kenny Scharf on the Superfood That Fuels His Work, and Why He Can't Stand Art About the Art World

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Kenny Scharf discusses life in the studio ahead of the opening of his new exhibition at Almine Rech Gallery in New York.



Kenny Scharf may be sheltering in place these days, but he's got a major presence on both coasts. In Los Angeles, the artist covered the walls of Jeffrey Deitch with more than 250 unique tondos of expressive faces for the exhibition "MOODZ" (through October 31). In New York, he is preparing to unveil his inaugural solo show at Almine Rech: 18 new paintings and a sculpture that reflect the East Village graffiti scene veteran's latest take on anthropomorphized droplets, twisted trees, and grimacing faces. The forms—which the artist first began exploring during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s—take on new resonance now.

As he was preparing to hang his New York exhibition, which opens September 10, via Zoom, Scharf checked in with Artnet News to offer a peek at his life in the studio in Los Angeles.

What are the most indispensable items in your studio and why?

My studio itself—the walls and the roof. I'm very grateful that I have a place, and when it comes down to it, that's all I need. I could make art out of dust, but a place where I can be alone and do my thing is indispensable.

Is there a picture you can send of your work in progress?



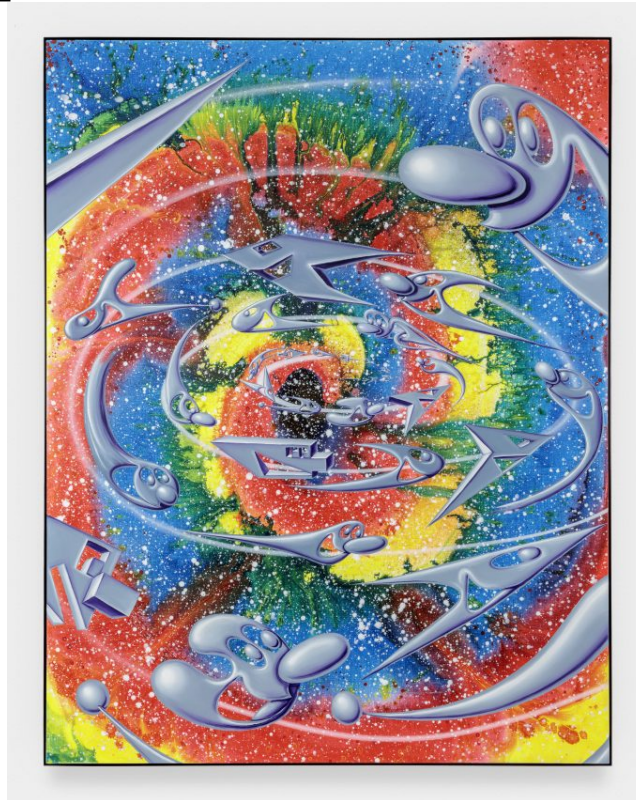
Kenny Scharf's work in progress, courtesy of the artist.

What is the studio task on your agenda tomorrow that you are most looking forward to?

Hanging my show via Zoom at Almine Rech Gallery in New York.

What kind of atmosphere do you prefer when you work? Do you listen to music or podcasts, or do you prefer silence?

Music always keeps me going, keeps me up, keeps me dancing, keeps me painting.



Kenny Scharf, Spin Out! (2020) on view at Almine Rech Gallery.

What trait do you most admire in a work of art? What trait do you most despise?

I'm always attracted to real emotion. I despise art that takes itself too seriously and art about art-world politics.

What snack food could your studio not function without?

Avocados.

Who are your favorite artists, curators, or other thinkers to follow on social media right now?

Greta Thunberg, Michelle Obama, Sarah Cooper.

When you feel stuck in the studio, what do you do to get un-stuck?

I never get stuck.

What is the last exhibition you saw (virtual or otherwise) that made an impression on you?

It sounds kind of self-centered, but the truth is it's been so many months since everything shut down that the only show I've seen is the one that I just hung at Jeffrey Deitch gallery.

If you had to put together a mood board, what would be on it right now?

Anger, despair, hope.