

ALMINE RECH

BlackBook

Opening: Kenny Scharf's 'Vaxi Nation' Exhibit at the New Almine Rech Paris Gallery

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Kenny Scharf, Tree Peepz, 2020, Oil and acrylic on linen with powder coated aluminum frame, 152.4 x 121.9 cm, 60 x 48 in, Courtesy the artist and Almine Rech. Photo by: Kenny Scharf Studio

It's reasonable to posit that the 1980s were the last great epochal period for New York art, when Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Richard Prince and Jeff Koons (the list could go on) all got their start in the galleries of a still insalubrious SoHo.

Kenny Scharf (who was actually from LA), brought a sort of wild, fantastical pop-cultural free-spiritedness to the scene, with his extravagant, humor-laced paintings (even *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* showed up on his canvases), defying any attempts at constricting classifications. He gained early notoriety via his *Cosmic Caverns* series, the first installation of which – appropriately titled *Cosmic Closet* – took place memorably in the Times Square apartment that he shared with Haring. He went on to extend his artistic purview to sculpture and performance art, and even collaborated with the fashion world.

These days, he's back residing in Los Angeles – which, considering the escalating COVID numbers in Southern California, is probably now as dangerous as was Times Square in the early '80s – and working as diligently as ever. But he is about to at least somewhat overcome the oppressive conditions the virus has imposed on the art world community, with a new exhibit in Paris, wittily titled *Vaxi Nation*, at the new Almine Rech gallery on the Avenue Matignon (located in the 8th arrondissement).

However, in keeping with the bizarre new reality imposed by travel restrictions, Scharf will not actually be present at the opening of his own show this Thursday, January 21 – though he has very much made peace with it.

“It’s always very exciting for me to show work that’s so recent,” he says, “and even though I can’t be there, the viewers will see how new it is.”

As has been his artistic mission for some time now, the new work exhibits a kind of kinetic, frenetic explosion of emotion and ideas, and seeks to convey some sense of joy and whimsy in these near-apocalyptic times. The manic energy of the paintings also betrays the influence of one Jackson Pollock, in the sense of needing to fill up space, to cover up the void, so to speak.

“He marked the beginning of the expansion of another space,” Scharf explains of the brilliant but troubled Abstract Expressionist. “All-over painting confirms the extension of a world. It’s a background I can use, and sometimes I even throw paint on the canvas. I also like the way every detail reveals itself as a little window onto a huge universe, which could escape outside the [frame]. I perceive my paintings as fragments of unlimited bewilderment.”

And perhaps a bit of magical bewilderment is exactly what we need right now.

Vaxi Nation will be on show at Almine Rech Paris until March 6.