

## BERTHA AND KARL LEUBSDORF GALLERY

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### Times Square: The Underbelly of New York Culture

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In June of 1980, a mass exhibition took over a pre-tourist trap Times Square. Known as the “Times Square Show,” over 100 artists crammed into what was once a massage parlor to exhibit their work. “We were all trying to pull art out of the galleries and onto the street,” explains Tom Otterness, one of the artists and organizers involved in the original show. “The importance of the Times Square location, I think, goes back to the atmosphere on the street,” Otterness continues. “To walk 42nd Street was to see pop culture at the level of three-dollar movies, blaxploitation films, porno shops, hookers, gangs, and drugs... it allowed us to talk about the underbelly of culture.”

This September, The Hunter College Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery is organizing a TSS retrospective, aptly entitled “Times Square Show Revisited,” and curated by art historians Shawna Cooper and Karli Wurzelbacher. The original show, says Cooper, is “a much discussed and as yet under examined landmark in the development of art in New York City.”

In retrospect, the 1980 show seems like an art enthusiast’s Disneyland; the now-famous participants such as Jenny Holzer, Nan Goldin, Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, and Basquiat were all just beginning their careers, and it was Basquiat’s first show as both the graffitist SAMO and a painter. The mood was one of playful experimentation, the democratization of art with New York’s less desirable areas as the canvas. “We chose Times Square in a momentary flare of ambition. The idea was to make this for all of New York City, to have a location that was the absolute crossroads and central to everyone,” says artist John Ahearn.



It’s difficult not to romanticize the decade that began with Times Square. For musicians, New York’s golden era was the ‘60s and ‘70s—the Chelsea Hotel, Janis and Jimi and young Bob Dylan—but for artists and scenesters, it was surely the ‘80s. “The main thing is to not be nostalgic,” affirms Josh Baer, another artist involved. “It was a down-and-dirty show, with down-and-dirty organization, and that was probably why it was good.”

“The Times Square Show Revisited” is on show from September 14 to December 8 at The Hunter College Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, 68th St. and Lexington Ave. in New York.

<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/the-times-square-show-revisited/>