



## Rapid Enamel

The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago



# Rapid Enamel

Paintings and Drawings by

A-One  
Blade  
Daze  
Duster  
Futura 2000  
Koor  
Lady Pink  
Phase 2  
Quik  
Lee Quinones  
Rammellzee  
Kenny Scharf  
Toxic  
United Graffiti Artists

Photographs by  
Henry Chalfant

The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago

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at The University of Chicago

Cover: "Greg," 1977  
Photo credit: Henry Chalfant

# Acknowledgments

This publication was produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Rapid Enamel* held at the Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, from October 7 through November 10, 1984.

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We are appreciative of the generosity and co-operation received from collectors Dolores and Hubert Neumann, and Norman Dubrow in New York, and Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson, and Lewis and Susan Manilow in Chicago. We thank Henry Chalfant for his loan of photographs documenting the work of artists represented in the exhibition by canvases and drawings, and are grateful to *Artforum* for their loan of a rare Robert Smithson/Robert Fiore photograph and to Scali McCabe Sloves Inc. of New York for making available a Volvo ad from 1974.

Above all we are appreciative to our Board of Directors, Advisory Board, members and friends for their continued direction, advice, encouragement and support.

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Susanne Ghez  
Director  
The Renaissance Society  
at The University of Chicago

October 7–November 10, 1984



LEE, *Three Deaths on a Hill*, 1984, 99¼ x 87 inches

# Rapid Enamel

I am in a trance, the trance of love. I want to write and cannot. I can write in a trance, and this trance is called *wisdom*. Every man is a responsible being. I do not want unreasonable beings and therefore I want everyone to be in a trance of feeling. I am in a trance of God. God wants me to sleep. People will say that all that I write is stupid, but in reality it has deep meaning.

— Vaslav Nijinsky,  
*The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*<sup>1</sup>

Almost from the beginning, those who generated graffiti were known as “writers.” Somehow, that designation continues to make sense insofar as the writers chronicle both their personal history and that of their communities. They “write” from a passionate need to belong and, if their need is being accommodated, it is because it is too vital to be denied — because their history must also be acknowledged as our history. And because their writing is art.

Graffiti was created and has been sustained by outsiders. It is a form of self-expression which remains illegal in the city with which it is most closely associated — New York. It is an act of renegade self-assertion that has grown into a visible movement which has been given aggressive cultural credibility in Europe (as in “Painting is now repeating the phenomenon that at the beginning of the century gave us jazz and the blues.”)<sup>2</sup> but rather timorously avoided at home. Critically and curatorially, it has been left to mature or die in a handful of commercial galleries and on the walls of a few passionately committed collectors. It is suspect because it makes people uncomfortable for some pretty understandable reasons and because, somewhere along the line, dollar valuation reared its nasty little head and, with it, commercial speculation. This is nothing new with art but, for something suspected of being culturally aberrant, the issue of valuation grew all sorts of warts. Had the makers of this work been graduates of any one of the hundreds of art schools flopped belly-up on the shore of creative endeavor, the skepticism would have been less assertively passive. Since, for many of the makers of graffiti-evolved work, academic articulation is supremely irrelevant, that vertical daisy chain which winds into institutional acceptability will not be broken to make room for the degreeless. Yet, to deny these artists is to deny the digital superiority of those children we are rearing to replace ourselves. Indeed, the mind/body coordination which signifies those rapidly maturing children who rule computer strategy is dominant in the mind/body coordination of those art makers who are channeling the jet stream of spray





TOXIC, *Let's Lose Your Mind*, 1984, 72 x 74 inches

enamel. Encased in a corona of pressurized fumes, they work with a choreographic agility that caught Twyla Tharp as early as 1972 when she choreographed *Deuce Coupe* for the Joffrey Ballet using a chorus of graffiti artists to materialize a backdrop in synch with her metronomic dance experiment.

How nice it is to be superior!  
Because really, it's no use pretending, one *is*  
superior, isn't one?  
I mean people like you and me.

Quite! I quite agree.  
The trouble is, everybody thinks they're just as  
superior as we are; just as superior.

— D.H. Lawrence, from *To Be Superior*<sup>3</sup>

Graffiti has a way of getting people crazy. It bends their sense of proprietorship into a nagging vulnerability. It threatens the fragile skein of urban order — the kind of order that allows one to plummet into the subterranean abyss without fear of meeting Charon rather than a Broadway local. All those hyperkinetic tags and speeding murals have a way of psychically scuttling the hallucinogenic cars which come hurtling from the forbidden zone into midtown. Clearly, for the innocent commuters, graffiti is a kind of coding to which they are not privy. That cacophony of names scrawled in fat marker and spray enamel evokes a reaction which challenges Mr. & Mrs. Doe's most exalted concepts of liberalism. Graffiti is *the* sign that the other is gaining — may even be winning. Graffiti has become a new kind of Pig Latin, only the children's linguistic

game has a tinge of implied violence because the semantics of exclusion are being played out in front of millions — millions of taxpayers. And the taxpayers don't like it — will never like it — have consistently legislated against it. (The anti-graffiti struggle is exhaustively documented.) Now here comes another negative signifier: the people who like graffiti are essentially up a class on those who don't. Suddenly, the "them" we want to be is embracing the "them" we came from. No amount of "Nuestra casa es su casa" - politics is going to smooth that over. No way.

(Kilroy comes into the plaza. He is a young American vagrant, about twenty-seven. He wears dungarees and a skivvy shirt, the pants faded nearly white from long wear and much washing, fitting him as closely as the clothes of sculpture. He has a pair of golden boxing gloves slung about his neck and he carries a small duffle bag. His belt is ruby-and-emerald-studded with the word CHAMP in bold letters. He stops before a chalked inscription on a wall downstage which says: "Kilroy is Coming!" He scratches out "Coming" and over it prints "Here!")

— Tennessee Williams,  
stage directions from *Camino Real*<sup>4</sup>

For me, graffiti awareness started with "CORNBREAD" scrawled in two-foot-high letters across a railroad trestle in Philadelphia back in the late sixties. Today, CORNBREAD is part of graffiti's folklore — like a Big John Henry with a can of spray paint. Then, he was a regional mystery. He was also inextricably linked, for me, with *Camino Real*'s doomed Kilroy, with a "heart as big as a baby's head." During that tragic period of forced conscription and complicit deferral, Cornbread was a liberated successor of Kilroy. The name itself wound aromatically through Southern summers into the steamy political realities of a North American nightmare. It smelled like something almost as clearly as it decoded itself as a tag — as a guy making his mark in a world that has sustained maybe one too many genocidal wars and needed a legend or two as clean as Kilroy. For me, Cornbread became an anthem — the promise of solipsistic freedom in the middle of the cattle drive to Viet Nam. I realize that this is a very small, rather dated piece of autobiography but, during that period, graffiti's poetically rude assertion of self meant a lot — continues to mean a lot. Once you've been "them," you don't rest all that easy with being "we" ever again.

He hangs in the hall by his black cravat,  
The ladies faint, and the children holler:  
Only my Daddy could look like that,  
And I love my Daddy like he loves his Dollar.

— William Jay Smith, from *American Primitive*<sup>5</sup>



Now, obviously, popular culture is synonymous with American culture. It is, to borrow a fantasy from George Lucas, the Force. Racing to the end of the limb, I am tempted to assert that Popular Culture is *the* great American invention. Without it, we would be consumers of a Chautauqua circuit large enough to stuff a black hole. Popular culture, not coincidentally, is superbly available in Manhattan's graffiti. Here, chorusing out of the blitzed horrorscape of the other New York is a brand new art form — one which has the power to redefine some major esthetic parameters. It is a movement which draws virtually nothing from the sacrosanct patrimony of high art. It has been collaged from what America has made available to those whom it refuses to assimilate — who have been forced to

DAZE, *Anger*, 1983, 90 x 48 inches



piece their world together through the funhouse mirrors of media and commerce.

...All hail

You people with the cleverer hands, our supplanters  
In the beautiful country; enjoy her season, her  
beauty, and come down

And be supplanted; for you also are human.

— Robinson Jeffers, from *Hands*<sup>6</sup>

While, in the mid-sixties, graffiti was little more than some very literal handwriting on the wall; by the mid-eighties, it has become an established form of expression for an emergent urban culture. From the isolated evidence of one man's dominion, there formed a cloud of names that gave birth to an alphabetic din drifting south from the Bronx Badlands to Kantor and Ebb's "If I can make it here, I'll make it anywhere"-fantasy of *New York, New York*. The initial litany of names — Taki 183, Julio 124, Sly II, Phase 2, Topcat, Ali, Futura 2000 — grew until the names weren't enough anymore and the "style wars" began. In the tunnels and on the elevated, Philadelphia Style gave way to Broadway Elegant and Bubble convulsed into Bar. Soon, the increasingly complex calligraphy demanded ever larger presentation and graffiti writers plugged into narrative accessories which expanded on and complimented the lettering. Ultimately, narratives of conscience and aspiration took over the entire subway cars which, previously, ran unpropagandized to yet another unremarked Johannesburg from yet another uncontested Soweto.

Have you ever seen an inch worm crawl up a leaf  
or a twig, and then clinging to the very end, revolve  
in the air, feeling for something to reach something?  
That's like me, I am trying to find something out  
there beyond the place on which I have a footing.

— Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert P. Ryder*<sup>7</sup>

As the haze of paint continues to stream from aerosol cans onto canvas, something shifts in the art world. A new medium and a range of colors (colors that simply weren't in the world before) demand signification. The writers were always artists, only now they have conjuncted with a moment in history where appellation signifies new aspiration. Something truly remarkable has come into the art world with graffiti. Where it ends is speculation; where it is, is exciting. I think Claudio Bruni had it right back in 1979 when he asserted that the graffiti writers were "the new protagonists of American art".<sup>8</sup>

Richard Flood

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Vaslav Nijinsky, *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky* (edited by Romola Nijinsky), 1968, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 32.
- <sup>2</sup> Claudio Bruni Sakraischik, *The Fabulous Five*, catalogue for Galleria La Medusa, Rome, 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> D.H. Lawrence, "To Be Superior," from *D.H. Lawrence, Selected Poems* (edited by Kenneth Rexroth), 1959, New York: A Compass Book, p. 103.
- <sup>4</sup> Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real* from *Famous American Plays of the 1950's* (introduced by Lee Strasberg), 1962, New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., p. 147.
- <sup>5</sup> William Jay Smith, "American Primitive," from *Poems of Protest, Old and New* (introduced by Arnold Kenseth), 1969, London: Collier Macmillan Ltd., p. 46.
- <sup>6</sup> Robinson Jeffers, "Hands," from *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, 1938, New York: Random House, p. 264.
- <sup>7</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert P. Ryder*, 1959, New York: George Braziller, Inc., p. 22.
- <sup>8</sup> Claudio Bruni Sakraischik, *The Fabulous Five*, catalogue for Galleria La Medusa, Rome, 1979.

The title of the exhibition was suggested by Lee Quinones's designation of himself as a "Rapid Enamelist."



LAK, *Untitled*, 1984, 30 x 29 inches

## Selected Bibliography

An enormous amount of material has been written on graffiti. The following bibliography is far from complete but should provide a viable starting point for the interested.

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Castleman, Craig. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 1982.

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*Classical American Graffiti Writers and High Graffiti Artists*. Galerie Thomas, Munich. April 5–June 2, 1984. Essay by Raimund Thomas.

*New York Graffiti Writers 1972-1984*. Gallozzi-LaPlaca Gallery, New York. May 19–June 6, 1984. Essay by Duncan Smith.

*Graffiti*. Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam. October 22–December 4, 1983. Groninger Museum, Groningen. January 14–February 26, 1983. Essay by Edit DeAk.

*Post-Graffiti*. Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. December 1–31, 1983. Introduction by Dolores Neumann.

*The Fabulous Five, calligraffiti de Frederick Brathwaite and Lee George Quinones*. Galleria La Medusa, Rome. December, 1979. Essays by Claudio Bruni Sakraischik and Adriano Buzzati Traverso.

*United Graffiti Artists*. Artists Space, New York. 1975. Essay by Peter Schjedahl.

### Articles

Atlanta & Alexander. "Wild Style, Graffiti Painting." *ZG 6* (Spring, 1983): n.p.

DeAk, Edit. "Train as Book." (Culture is the most fertilized substance.) *Artforum 37* (May, 1983): 88-93.

DeAk, Edit and Diego Cortez. "Discorsi infantili." *Flash Art 107* (May, 1982): 34-38.

Goldstein, Richard. "The Fire Down Below." *Village Voice 25* (December 24, 1980): 55-58.

\_\_\_\_\_. "This Thing Has Gotten Completely Out of Hand." *New York 6* (March 26, 1973): 35-39.

Greenfield, William. "Spraycan School." *Print 36* (January/February, 1982): 33-45.

Ricard, Rene. "The Radiant Child." *Artforum 20* (December, 1981): 35-43.



BLADE, *In Memory of ...*, 1984, 32 x 44 inches

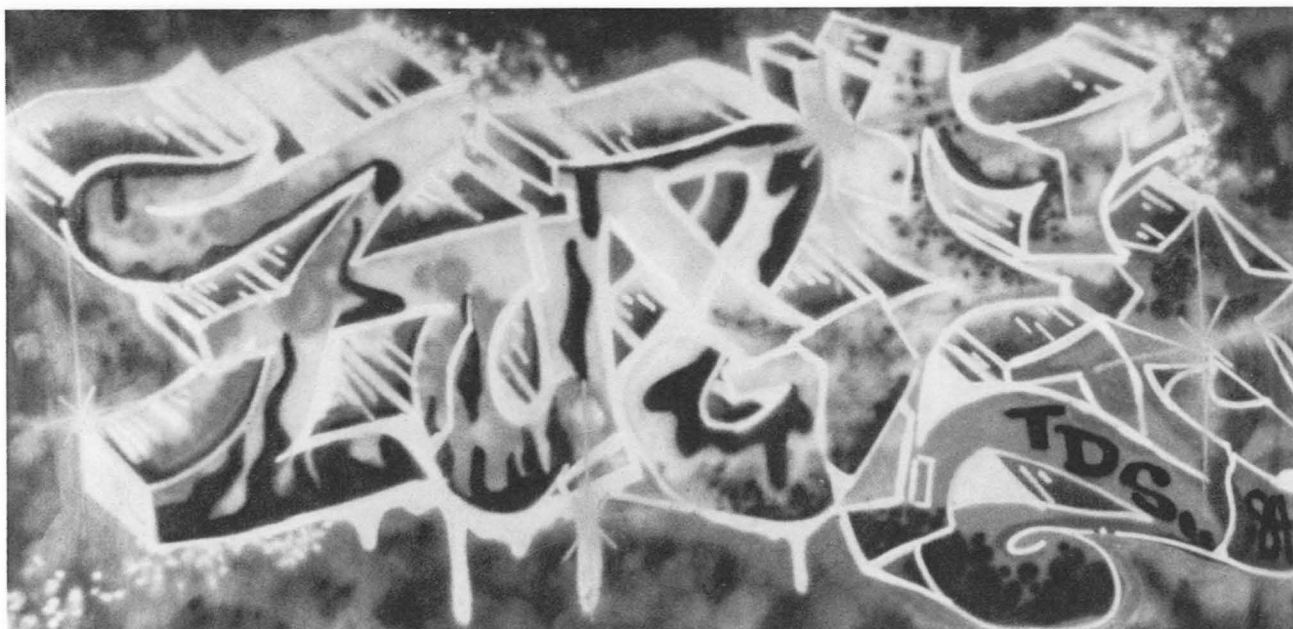


FUTURA 2000, *Interkosmos*, 1984, 108 x 84 inches





Kenny Scharf, *Double Bubble Emotion and Trouble*, 1983-84, 84 x 69 inches

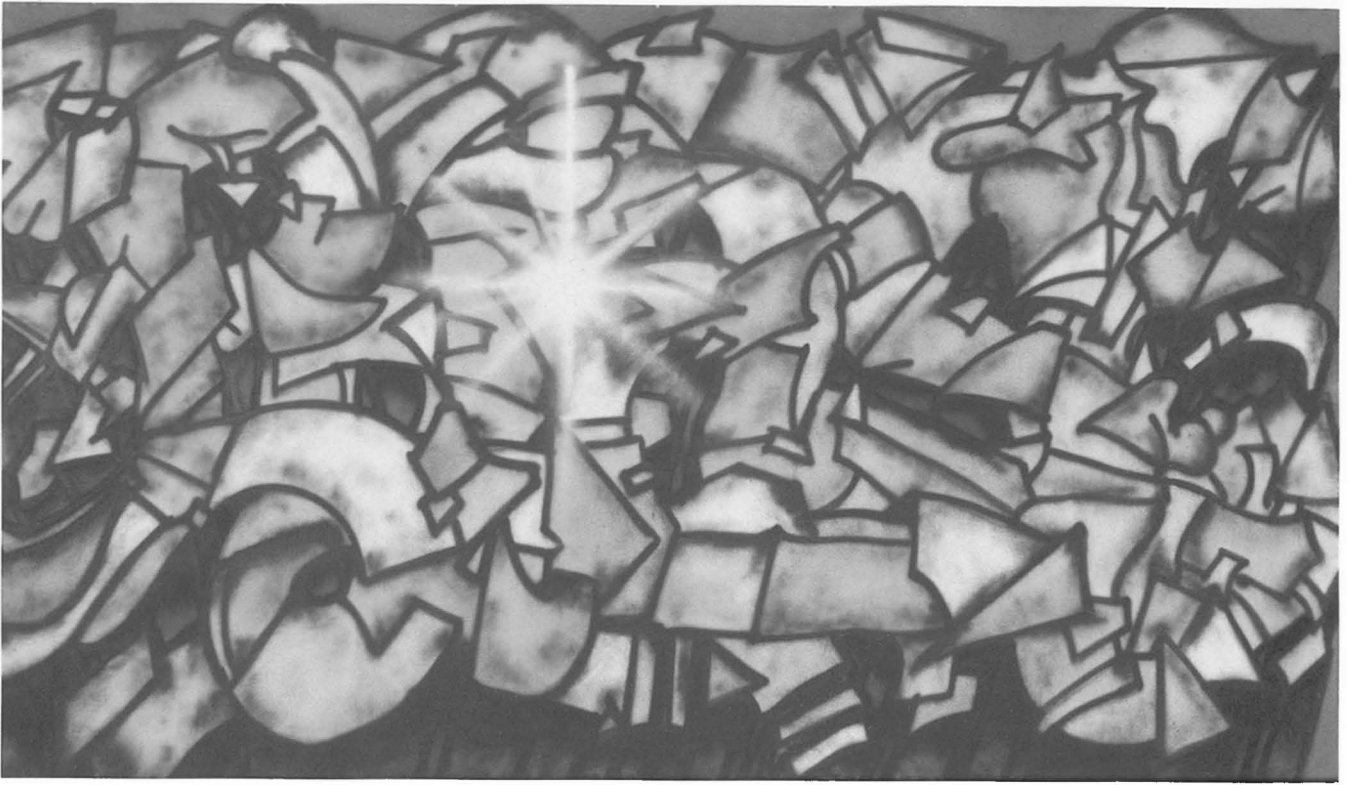


PART, *Fudge*, 1984, 96 x 204 inches





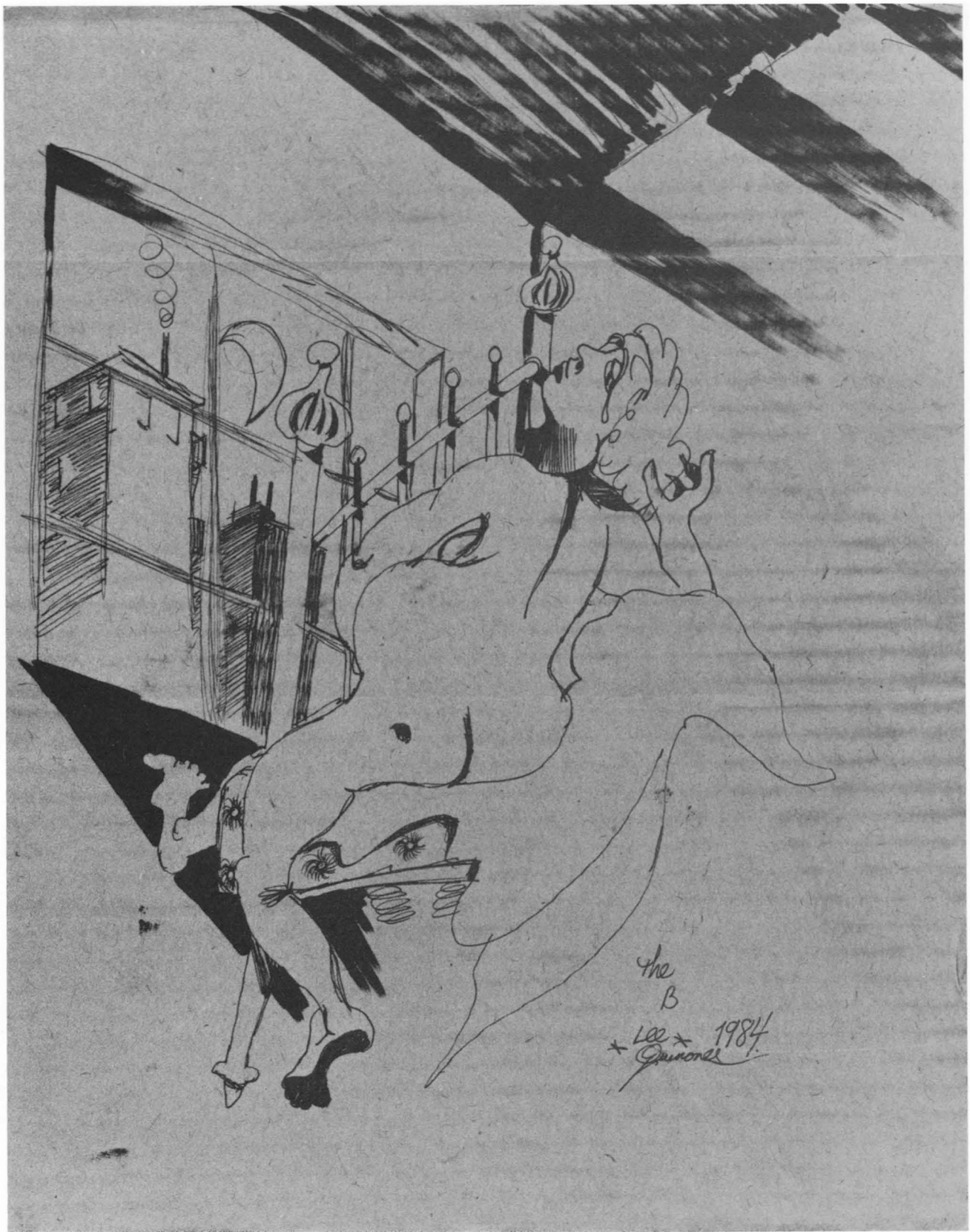
A-ONE, *Liquid*, 1983, 60 x 126 inches



PHASE 2, *Crystal Phase*, 1984, 96 x 132 inches



LADY PINK and Jenny Holzer, *The Breakdown Comes When You Stop Controlling Yourself and Want the Release of a Bloodbath*, 1983, 120 x 120 inches



LEE, *Study for "The Bearer,"* 1983, 14 x 11¼ inches

# Catalogue

## Paintings

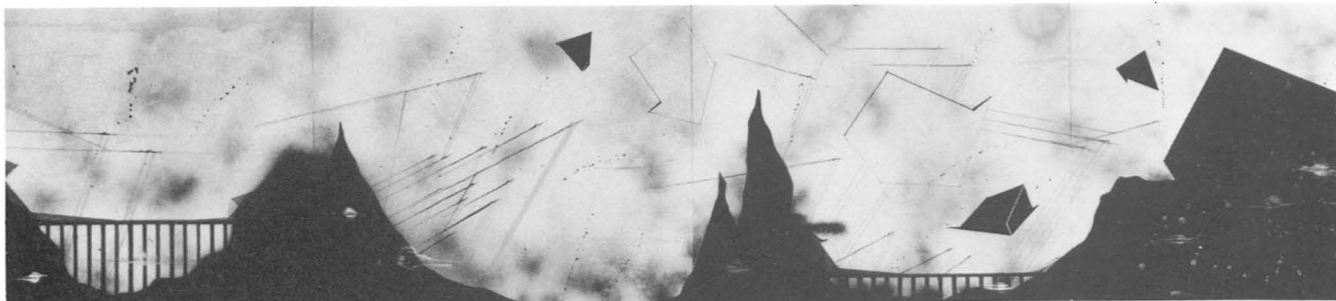
1. A-ONE (Anthony Clark)  
*Liquid*, 1983  
Spray enamel on canvas  
60 x 126 inches  
Lent by Hubert and Dolores Neumann, New York
2. BLADE (Steven Ogburn)  
*In Memory of ...*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
32 x 44 inches  
Lent by Stellweg Seguy Gallery, New York, and the artist
3. DAZE (Chris Ellis)  
*Anger*, 1983  
Spray enamel on canvas  
90 x 48 inches  
Lent by Hubert and Dolores Neumann, New York
4. DUSTER  
*If I Were in the Art*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
53 x 156 inches  
Lent by Hubert and Dolores Neumann, New York
5. FUTURA 2000 (Leonard McGurr)  
*Interkosmos*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
108 x 84 inches  
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
6. THE ARBITRATOR KOOR (Charles William Hargrove, Jr.)  
*Through the Columns KOOR's Remanipulator*, 1983  
Spray enamel on canvas  
72 x 128 inches  
Lent by Hubert and Dolores Neumann, New York
7. LADY PINK (Sondra Fabara) and Jenny Holzer  
*The Breakdown Comes When You Stop Controlling Yourself and Want the Release of a Bloodbath*, 1983  
Spray enamel on canvas  
120 x 120 inches  
Lent by Lewis and Susan Manilow, Chicago, courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
8. LEE (Lee Quinones)  
*Three Deaths on a Hill*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
99 ¼ x 87 inches  
Lent by Herbert and Lenore Schorr, Briarcliff Manor, New York
9. PART  
*Fudge*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
96 x 204 inches  
Lent by Gallozzi-LaPlaca Gallery, New York
10. PHASE 2  
*Crystal Phase*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
96 x 132 inches  
Lent by Gallozzi-LaPlaca Gallery, New York
11. QUIK  
*R. I. P.*, 1984  
Acrylic spray paint on canvas  
60 x 82 inches  
Lent by Stellweg Seguy Gallery, New York, and the artist
12. RAMMELLZEE  
*Untitled*, 1983  
Spray enamel and marker on board  
32 x 160 inches  
Lent by Herbert and Lenore Schorr, Briarcliff Manor, New York
13. Kenny Scharf  
*Double Bubble Emotion and Trouble*, 1983-84  
Oil and spray enamel on canvas  
84 x 69 inches  
Lent by Edlis/Neeson Collection, Chicago
14. TOXIC  
*Let's Lose Your Mind*, 1984  
Spray enamel on canvas  
72 x 74 inches  
Lent by Gallozzi-LaPlaca Gallery, New York
15. United Graffiti Artists  
*Collaborative No. 1*, 1972  
Spray enamel on canvas  
24 x 36 inches  
Lent by Gallozzi-LaPlaca Gallery, New York

## Drawings

1. A-ONE (Anthony Clark)  
*A-ONE*, 1983  
Spray enamel and marker on paper  
3½ x 12 inches  
Lent by Norman Dubrow, New York
2. THE ARBITRATOR KOOR (Charles William Hargrove, Jr.)  
*Three Dimensional Letter "K"*, 1981  
Marker on board  
3⅞ x 10¾ inches  
Lent by Norman Dubrow, New York
3. LADY PINK (Sondra Fabara)  
*M. T. A.*, 1983  
Marker on paper  
10 x 7½ inches  
Lent by Norman Dubrow, New York
4. LAK (Ricardo Lakenpool)  
*Untitled*, 1984  
Ink and marker on board  
30 x 29 inches  
Lent by Jerry Kearns, New York
5. LEE (Lee Quinones)  
*Study for "Three Deaths on a Hill,"* 1984  
Ink and pencil on paper  
11 x 8½ inches  
Lent by Norman Dubrow, New York
6. LEE (Lee Quinones)  
*Study for "The Bearer,"* 1983  
Ink on cardboard  
14 x 11¼ inches  
Lent by Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

## Photographs

1. Henry Chalfant  
*BLADE*, 1980  
Color photographs  
6½ x 29¾ inches (image)  
10½ x 34⅜ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
2. Henry Chalfant  
*DIEN ROLIEO*, 1982  
Color photographs  
10 x 46 inches (image)  
14 x 50½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
3. Henry Chalfant  
*DOC*, 1980  
Color photographs  
6½ x 41⅜ inches (image)  
11¾ x 47½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
4. Henry Chalfant  
*LEE*, 1979  
Color photographs  
8½ x 33 inches (image)  
12¾ x 37½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
5. Henry Chalfant  
*LEE, MONO*, 1980  
Color photographs  
6 x 40 inches (image)  
11⅞ x 46¼ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist



RAMMELLZEE, *Untitled*, 1983, 32 x 160 inches





THE ARBITRATOR KOOR, *Through the Columns KOOR's Remanipulator*, 1983, 72 x 128 inches

6. Henry Chalfant  
*NOC, Stylewars*, 1981  
Color photographs  
5¾ x 31 inches (image)  
9¾ x 35⅞ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
7. Henry Chalfant  
*QUIK*, 1980  
Color photographs  
8½ x 34 inches (image)  
12½ x 38½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
8. Henry Chalfant  
*RAUL, Wayne Sach*, 1982  
Color photographs  
8½ x 43½ inches (image)  
12½ x 47⅞ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
9. Henry Chalfant  
*SAB, Kaye*, 1982  
Color photographs  
8 x 40½ inches (image)  
12 x 45 inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
10. Henry Chalfant  
*SEEN, Hand of Doom*, 1980  
Color photographs  
5¼ x 29⅞ inches (image)  
9¼ x 33½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
11. Henry Chalfant  
*SEEN, Mitch*, 1980  
Color photographs  
8¾ x 41 inches (image)  
12¾ x 45½ inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
12. Henry Chalfant  
*T-KID, Booze (Cocaine)*, 1983  
8 x 40½ inches (image)  
12⅞ x 45 inches (frame)  
Lent by the artist
13. Robert Smithson, Robert Fiore  
*Untitled*  
Black and white photograph  
6½ x 9½ inches (image)  
Courtesy *Artforum* 6 (February, 1973): 63.
14. Volvo Advertisement, 1974  
Malcolm Kirk (photo)  
John Danza (copy)  
13¼ x 9 inches  
Courtesy Scali McCabe Sloves Inc., New York

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