

The Museum of Modern Art

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART CELEBRATES CLUB 57, THE FABLED POST-PUNK CLUB LOCATED IN NEW YORK'S EAST VILLAGE, WITH A MAJOR EXHIBITION AND FILM SERIES

Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983

October 31, 2017–April 1, 2018

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater Galleries

Press Preview: Tuesday, October 31, 9:30–11:30 a.m. with remarks to follow.

Remarks will be [livestreamed](#).

NEW YORK, October 16, 2017—The Museum of Modern Art announces *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983*, a major exhibition examining the scene-changing, interdisciplinary life of downtown New York's seminal alternative space, on view from October 31, 2017, through April 1, 2018, in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater Galleries. The East Village of the 1970s and 1980s continues to thrive in the public's imagination around the world. During the pioneering years of the neighborhood's evolution as a center of social life and creativity, Club 57 was a core institution. This exhibition will explore that legacy in full for the first time. *Club 57* is organized by Ron Magliozzi, Curator and Sophie Cavoulacos, Assistant Curator, Department of Film, with guest curator Ann Magnuson.

Located in the basement of the Holy Cross Polish National Church at 57 St. Marks Place, Club 57 (1978–83) morphed from a students' club to a no-budget venue for music and film exhibitions under the helm of émigré entrepreneur Stanley Strychacki, and quickly took pride of place in a constellation of countercultural venues in downtown New York fueled by low rents, the Reagan presidency, and the desire to experiment with new modes of art, performance, fashion, music, and exhibition.

The venue became an early player in the shift of New York's social life from Soho to the East Village. Its practice of collaborative, themed exhibitions aligned the space with art collectives and initiatives such as the pioneering *Times Square Show* (1980), and anticipated the proliferation of East Village galleries beginning with the Fun Gallery and Gracie Mansion. A center of creative activity in the East Village, Club 57 is said to have influenced virtually every club that came in its wake.

The exhibition taps into the legacy of Club 57's founding curatorial staff—film programmers Susan Hannaford and Tom Scully, exhibition organizer Keith Haring, and performance curator Ann Magnuson—to examine how the convergence of film, video, performance, art, and curatorship in the club environment of New York in the 1970s and 1980s became a model for a new spirit of interdisciplinary endeavor. Responding to the broad range of programming at

Club 57, the exhibition presents their accomplishments across a range of disciplines—from film, video, performance, and theater to photography, painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, zines, fashion design, and curating. Building on extensive research and oral history, the exhibition features many works that have not been exhibited publicly since the 1980s and memorializes a generation of artists decimated by the AIDS epidemic.

Multilayered Eighties

The exhibition narrative begins with New York City in the late 1970s, on the heels of bankruptcy, blackouts, and disco. An installation of *New York Post* and *New York Daily News* covers—directly inspired by artists’ collage and performance use of these broadsheets—depict a gritty mix of international crises, sordid urban mishaps, and celebrity deaths. This social and political context is in crucial contrast to the lively colors and energetic club programming activities presented in the galleries. Cold War-era malaise and the decrepit environment of the Lower East Side were the backdrop for the scene’s boundless creativity and avid collaborations that shaped the period’s ideas of “serious fun.”

This notion is demonstrated by Jef Bretschneider’s kinetic light sculpture of the United States—originally a statement on the national debate over nuclear power that came, when it hung of Club 57’s bar, to serve as ironic commentary on the country’s fractured electorate after Reagan’s election. Further illuminating the character of the scene, nine slideshows of work by club participants Lina Bertucci, Robert Carrithers, Katherine Dumas, April Palmieri, Anthony Scibelli, Joseph Szkodzinski, Harvey Wang, Ande Whyland, and Christina Yuin represent the period, featuring photographs of the iconic East Village scene and figures, who together transformed a still-empty section of Manhattan in the early 1980s into an artistic center.

Gender Performed

While a busy mix of art and socializing was present throughout the Downtown scene, Club 57’s intimate and liberated setting was distinctively conducive to its members’ experimentation with identity. As such, the performative expression of gender forms a unique aspect of its legacy. The period’s punk feminist attitude was manifest in the club’s Ladies Auxiliary of the Lower East Side and its playful send-up of female social rituals. Female empowerment was boldly represented in artwork by Club members—from Kitty Brophy’s diaristic ink drawings, to the fierce narratives in Natalya Maystrenko’s collage sketches, to Lisa Baumgardner’s proto-riot grrrl zine *Bikini Girl*.

Affirmation of difference reigned among male performers in the venue’s circle, encompassing John Sex’s accomplished male burlesque, explorations of androgyny through fashion design and performance by Shawn AMMO McQuate and Gerard Little, and proponents of dandyism such as artist Daniel Abraham. With acts by John “Lypsinka” Epperson, Peter Kwaloff, and Stephen Tashjian, Club 57 saw the birth of the drag performance that flourished at neighboring Pyramid Club and the subsequent Wigstock festival. Over its five years, the venue hosted performances by Klaus Nomi, Joey Arias, Ethyl Eichelberger, John Kelly, John Jesurun, Jack Smith, and Minette.

Semiotics and Television

For the generation of artists born in the 1950s, television was ubiquitous—a medium radiating American values and symbols that Downtown artists confronted with creative aggression. TV was present throughout Club 57 programming, from 16mm screenings of vintage primetime series and animation from the 1960s, organized by Jerry Beck, to theme nights enacting satires of televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker or lively tributes to Lawrence Welk. Television held equal sway over club artists as a technological purveyor of codified meaning in the shadows of semiotics and William S. Burroughs's cut-ups.

Keith Haring and Drew Straub were among those exploring these concepts, which filtered through the progressive learning environment of School of Visual Arts and the influential 1978 Beat gathering Nova Convention. Haring tapped into emerging video technology, as seen in his recording of club members' distorted recitations of the alphabet in *F (Phonics)*. In collaboration with Tom Rubnitz, performance artist and club manager Ann Magnuson exorcised a host of media-generated female roles in the channel-surfing *Made for TV*, also on view. Television and semiotics meet in formalist work by club artists, namely Frank Holliday's iterative take on the black box in *TVC15*, and Samantha McEwen's gestural SVA monoprints.

The Club Environment

An in-gallery projection space is central to the site-specific evocation of the basement club in the Museum's T1 gallery, abutted by chromatic silkscreen posters created by John Sex for events at Club 57 and beyond. A wide selection of ephemeral cut-and-paste flyers boasts the club's storied performance history across its various managers: participatory theme nights championed by Ann Magnuson; the queer-themed resident theater embraced by Andy Rees; the brassy cabaret and conceptual performance organized under its last manager, Ira Abramowitz; and the jubilant, grandly satiric first productions of the Broadway/Hollywood-bound duo Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman.

In the spirit of the venue, the gallery will be periodically activated with readings, slideshows, and intimate performances. At its center, weekly rotating programs featuring projection of film and video, largely acquired and preserved by the Museum in connection with the exhibition, will be screened. Included are performance documentation, music videos, Manhattan cable television programs, and Super8 films created by artists and filmmakers such as John Ahearn, Anney Bonney, Tessie Chua, Courtney Harmel, Michael Holman, Julius Klein, Jennifer T. Ley, Eric Marciano, Kestutis Nakas, Kenny Scharf, Jonathan Quinn, Esther Regelson, Tom Rubnitz, Robin Schanzenbach, Barry Shils, and Nelson Sullivan.

Channeling an Exhibition Archive

Little-seen paintings, works on paper, and photographs bring the venue's rich exhibition history to life, demonstrating how it served as an open platform for artists across disciplines before the dawn of the 1980s gallery scene. Among these are the somber figuration of canvases by Duncan Hannah and Paul Bridgewater, hallowed forms conjured by Ellen Berkenblit, and metaphorical environments created by Scott Covert and Raghubir (Nancy) Kintisch. The club's photography exhibitions are represented by Marcus Leatherdale's gelatin silver *Urban Women* portraits of Divine and bodybuilder Lisa Lyon, and the club's provocative

music-and-slideshow event *Pictures You Can Dance Too*, featuring the works of George Haas, Trix Rosen, and Harvey Wang.

Xerography, born as an artistic technique in the 1960s and favored by club artists as a democratic, quick, and social process, is represented with a reproduction of the complete 1980 Club 57 Xerox Art Show, curated by Keith Haring. This black-and-white iteration of copyart is complemented with work by Robin Schanzenbach, Henny Garfunkel, Marlene Weisman, and others that used the decade's newest tool—color Xerox—as an experimental medium. In a more traditional form of expression, Daniel Abraham's small-scale ink caricatures, sketched from the sidelines of the basement club, capture the essence of post-punk club personalities and resonate with unexpected homespun charm, speaking to the social bonds nurtured across the Downtown community in this singular moment of its history.

Found and Urban Materials

New York's devastated streets provided endless source material for those inspired to transform urban detritus into art, sets for club theme nights, or fashions. Kenny Scharf's dayglo assemblage of trash and found objects culminated in his psychedelic *Cosmic Closet* environment, which the artist has adapted in various locations since 1979 (including his studio at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center) and has customized for MoMA's exhibition. The use of found materials extended to virtually all art making, driven by the desire for a direct rapport with the urban environment, and feeding off the energy of graffiti writers in the South Bronx and the widespread practice of wheatpasting performance flyers across lower Manhattan, as well as the essential convenience of its cost-free availability. Featured are expressive Stephen Tashjian self-portraits created on found advertising poster-board, Fab 5 Freddy's graffiti painting on steel, and a cabinet door painted by Keith Haring in what would become his iconic figuration, which is being exhibited publicly for the first time.

Club artists excelled at creating fashions from recycled materials, represented in the exhibition by Daniel Durning's repurposing of plastic sheeting and fiberglass insulation in the coat he named *Self Contained Housing*, and a recreation of Shawn AMMO McQuate's ethereal sculptural dress crafted from hat wire. The city's inhabitants also provided inspiration; responding to its multicultural immigrant neighborhoods, Peter Hristoff silkscreened geometric forms on foreign-language newsprint. In a sculptural likeness of a Bowery dweller, John Ahearn adapted his signature process of casting portraits of friends and neighbors into a humanist depiction of the city's homeless population.

The Body: Play and Pain

Considered as a whole, the lasting legacy of the period and the exhibition's message can be seen in the assembly of bodies on display in featured works, each reflecting, across a range of mediums, an urgency of self-expression and a struggle for empowerment sought by a youthful generation that followed the Sexual Revolution and Stonewall. Paintings and works on paper exhibited at Club 57 and similar venues by Parker Dulany, Brant Kingman, and Sur Rodney (Sur) explore celebratory perspectives on sexuality and desire in Downtown circles. The human figure is dissected and reconfigured, at once playful and vulnerable in Bruno Testore Schmidt's photo-collage and ink drawing; replete with eroticism in the conceptual sampling of

body parts in Donald Baechler's painting; even rollickingly energetic in the photo-cutouts created by M. Henry Jones for his animated Fleshtones music video, *Soul City*. Dan Asher's oil-stick faces exude the raw energy implied by the directness of their medium, similarly present in Edward Brezinski's stylized portraits which suggest the shared, if unsentimental, pathos between subject and maker. Tseng Kwong Chi's signature Mao suit self-portraits, staged at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, explore selfhood through the lenses of sexuality, race, and nationality, while the faux-pearl sculpture *Self-Portrait* is Arch Connelly's tender introspection via queer performance.

The dismembered body took on an ominous dimension with the dawn of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s that began decimating the city's creative community in the club's final year. Robert Hawkins's uncanny snake drawings, Richard McGuire and Richard Hambleton's respective sinister silhouettes, and Stefano Castronovo's unfinished portrait of Klaus Nomi all hint at the grave loss to follow. Two works by Cuban-born Adolfo Sanchez encapsulate the poignant play on the gendered body throughout the period: a 1981 self-portrait montage configures the brave painted faces and fashions of drag as spiritual armor against a disease that was taking no prisoners, a perspective the artist revisited in 1985 with his graffiti-like skull drawing over a Bruce Weber pinup. Like much of the work brought together in the exhibition, it urgently asserts an alternative vision of self-representation.

SPONSORSHIP:

Major support for the exhibition is provided by the Keith Haring Foundation.

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PUBLICATION:

Published to accompany the first major exhibition to fully explore this scene-changing alternative space, *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983* examines how the club environment of New York at this time became a model for a new spirit of unbridled creativity before the dawn of the digital age. The richly illustrated publication boasts a robust plate section of rarely seen artwork representing artists such as Keith Haring, Klaus Nomi, Tseng Kwong Chi, John Sex, Fab 5 Freddy, John "Lypsinka" Epperson, and Lisa Baumgardner; film stills, photographs, and ephemeral documents; and a detailed chronology. The catalogue is edited by Ron Magliozzi and Sophie Cavoulacos, with contributions from Lucy Gallun, J. Hoberman, Laura Hoptman, Ann Magnuson, and Jenny Schlenzka. 184 pages, 225 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$40. ISBN: 978-1-63345-030-1. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK/D.A.P. in the United States and Canada. Distributed outside the United States and Canada by Thames & Hudson.

FILM SERIES:

You Are Now One Of Us: Film at Club 57
October 29–February 2018

Co-organized with guest curator John "Lypsinka" Epperson, this series presents films selected from actual club screenings, reflecting its unruly mix of horror, science fiction, psychedelia and '60s mod, European art cinema, fantasy and sexploitation, film noir, TV programs, animation, artist's cinema, and antiwar documentaries. At the club, this mash-up of genres took on new meaning through collective experience and active spectatorship against the backdrop of postpunk New York.

New York Film and Video: No Wave–Transgressive

December 1–April 2018

Taking the gallery exhibition at its starting point, this survey celebrates film and video created in New York’s post-punk period, including No Wave, Cinema of Transgression, and independent films that grew out of the East Village scene and were first exhibited in area venues like Club 57, New Cinema, Millennium, and others. Filmmakers to be featured include: Anders Grafstrom, Eric Mitchell, James Nares, Becky Johnston, Amos Poe, Vivienne Dick, Harald Vogl, Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, among others.

This Is Now: Film and Video After Punk 1978–1985

Spring 2018

A touring program presented in partnership with LUX and British Film Institute, the series will explore the nexus of Britain’s club culture and its avant-garde film and video as an evocative counterpoint to the New York scene.

For more details, please see the accompanying Club 57 Film Series press release or visit moma.org/film.

Film exhibitions are supported by the Annual Film Fund.

VW SUNDAY SESSIONS:

Alternative 80s: Club 57 and New York's Downtown Scene

With **Strange Party, Adele Bertei, Bob Holman, Man Parrish, and Brant Kingman, among others**
Thursday, November 2–Sunday, November 5, 12:00–6:00 p.m. at MoMA PS1

In conjunction with *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983*, MoMA PS1’s VW Sunday Sessions presents a program of film, poetry, performances, discussion, and music rooted in the counterculture synonymous with downtown Manhattan in the 1970s and 1980s. Club 57, like MoMA PS1 (then P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center) in the same era, was a hive of interdisciplinary creation in which music, performance, film, theater, and art came together. Reuniting legends including Strange Party, fronted by Joey Arias, Adele Bertei, and Bob Holman of the Poetry Project, this program recaptures the spirit of the club scene and celebrates the legacy of New York’s alternative spaces alongside the art and artists they embraced. More information and admission details are at moma.org/sundaysessions.

PUBLIC PROGRAM:

A program exploring gender and performance is planned for spring 2018; more details to be announced.

MoMA CLASSES:

Fall Classes will visit *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983*, including [Gender Trouble](#), [Photography at The Museum of Modern Art](#), and [The Modern Studio: New Directions in New York Painting](#).

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at moma.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, moma.org. Hours: Sunday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m.–9:00 p.m. Museum Admission: \$25

adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00–9:00 p.m. moma.org: No service charge for tickets ordered on moma.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current ID. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA membership within 30 days.