



Steve Joester's Art Rocks at Lawrence Fine Art

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

"Steve Joester: Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll" at Lawrence Fine Art in East Hampton offers one more example of the way that interest in all things '70s and '80s pop culture continues to reverberate throughout the art world.

Maybe it's because those who lived it in their early years are now the ones programming the gallery and museum shows. Or maybe it's because the music and visual identity of the era is still so ingrained in the culture. Music was a major touchstone for the art scene, after all, with an abundance of crossover between artists and musicians.

The recent Metropolitan Museum costume exhibit, "PUNK: From Chaos to Couture," was a controversial smash, as many protested against the perceived mockery being made of a movement they considered political and socially iconoclastic in nature. The punk ethos made a claim for being very "street," with graffiti, DIY outfits, general rebellion and a reordering of the senses called for.

Today, tagging graffiti artists such as Jean Michel Basquiat (who started as a musician), Keith Haring and LA Roc are commanding high prices at auction and selling out international gallery shows. Back in the day, the crossover was dizzying as artists and musicians worked in multiple mediums and did collaborations to play off of each other's work.

Down in the photo pit at the rock and punk shows, British born photographer Steve Joester had a closer-than-front-row view of such acts as the Rolling Stones, the Sex Pistols, Bob Marley and Blondie. After seeing David Hemmings in Antonioni's classic film "Blow Up," he made his way to London, bought a Leica and started snapping thousands of images for album covers and posters and press coverage during the '70s and '80s. He wisely held on to his copyright.



"Stones" by Steve Joester, 2009. 84 x 44 inches.

The tedium of touring—only slightly more fun for the band than the crew and the documenters—eventually wore him down, and Joester spent the next decade in advertising. He kept a studio in Manhattan but spent the majority of his time at his home and work space in Water Mill, NY.

Living with these images he had locked away in drawers for so long, he finally revisited them, deciding to reinvent them by taking a wildly different approach.

Most classic rock photographers produce nice, clean quality, limited signed print editions and books for their works. Joester took the punk route, Xeroxing, cutting apart, painting over and plastering them on canvases using glitter, crayon, markers and paint.

He collaborated on some pieces with resurrected '80s graffiti artist LA Roc to fill in blank space with his signature hyper tags. The result was a reimagining of the images, giving viewers more of a feel of not only the look of a live show but a sense of the sound and frenetic energy as well. He began exhibiting in 2005.



“At The Palace” by Steve Joester, 2009. Mixed media, 30 x 36 inches.

Many of the images have never been published, in some cases by request. When he toured with the band Judas Priest, Joester took some unusual photos after the show one night when he found lead singer Rob Halford out at a gay club with Andy Warhol. At the time, Halford was wearing a shirt with cartoon images of a gay orgy. The next day he asked that the photos of him with his arm around Warhol not be published as he had yet to come out of the closet. He finally did in 1998, and now the photos are part of a large multi-image work.



“3x Andy” by Steve Joester, 2008. Mixed media, 30 x 38 inches.

Joester’s “Blondie” was featured in Vogue magazine’s special edition dedicated to the Met “PUNK” show, a media outlet Joester never thought his wild and rough work would land—just as Debbie Harry likely never thought she’d play inside the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art wearing couture clothes.

What at first can look like mass media appropriation, as in the work of rock star-worshipping artist Richard Prince—who showed a nose cone plastered with images of the band Kiss last summer in East Hampton as well as pictures of Sid Vicious over Jackson Pollock’s photo at his show at Guild Hall—Joester’s work has more in common with Montauk’s Peter Beard, who takes his own photos of endangered African wildlife and uses them as the basis for multi-media collage using mud, blood, feathers and paint. Rock stars as endangered species? There may be a connection.

Joester's work is loud and abrasive, close inspection reveals intricate graffiti scribblings, layers of wax and paint, glitter and cut-apart faces put back together at off angles and different sizes. The Bob Marley paintings have a particular wildness, with dreadlocks flying in multi Rasta colors.



"Bob Marley, Hammersmith Odeon" by Steve Joester, 2008. Mixed media, 48 x 32 inches.

Lawrence Fine Art has had a summer run of street inspired art with a previous show of LA Roc, which in turn led to the Joester exhibit.

BASIC FACTS: "Steve Joester: Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll" is on view from Aug. 22 to Sept. 21 at Lawrence Fine Art. A closing reception will be held Saturday, Sept. 21, from 5 to 8 p.m.

Lawrence Fine Art is located at 37 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937. 631-604-5525; www.lawrence-fine-arts.com

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