

Eighties Art Gets Another Look in “Fast Forward: Paintings from the 1980s” at The Whitney

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by Pat Rogers

Art in the eighties is examined in The Whitney’s new show “Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s.” The exhibition offers a focused look at painting made in this decade through art selected from the museum’s collection. The exhibition opens to the public on Friday, January 27, 2017 and continues on view through May 14, 2017. The show is located in The Whitney’s eighth-floor Hurst Family Galleries.

“Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s” features 100 works by 40 artists who are typically connected with 1980s art. Included on this list (and in the show) are [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#), Sherrie Levine, [David Salle](#), [Julian Schnabel](#) and [Eric Fischl](#). The exhibition features a wide swath of painters from the decade including Moira Dryer, Peter Cain, Kenny Scharf, Terry Winters, Julia Wachtel, Robert Colescott and others.



“Count No Count” by Ross Bleckner, 1989. Oil and wax on canvas, 108 x 72 1/8 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee, 89.28. © Ross Bleckner; courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

The eighties represent a cusp of change in the art world and the New York City art scene specifically. Digital possibilities presented themselves and traditional art methods and mediums were being challenged. In painting, many artists found freedom in a medium declared as dead and ended up pushing boundaries as they explored. A time of both social and political unrest, visual art and music from this era are increasing catching the interest of curators.

Current interest in the New York City art scene of the eighties seem to first bubble to the surface in 2015 through the exhibition “Greater New York” at MoMA PS1. Artwork was selected by four curators with the survey presenting a show heavy from the early eighties and late seventies, [according to art critic and artist James Croak](#). Also in 2015, [New York photographer Marcia Resnick](#) released a book of her photographs and essays by Victor Bockris from the era, “Punks, Poets &

Provocateurs: New York City Bad Boys, 1977-1982," pointing out an interest in the unique period of art and music that unfolded in New York City.

In 2016, there were two museums capturing different aspects of this era on Long Island.

In The Hamptons, paintings in the '80s decade received a closer look through the art of Eric Fischl, David Salle and Ross Bleckner at the Parrish Art Museum's "[Unfinished Business: Paintings From the 1970s and 1980s by Ross Bleckner, Eric Fischl, and David Salle.](#)"

Through the friendship and careers of the trio of artists—all who live and work in The Hamptons—the exhibition explored paintings made and the intersections and divergences of each of their art practices during this time period.

Kenny Scharf's work filled the Nassau County Museum of Art for his self-titled solo show "[Kenny Scharf](#)," who also painted a new mural for the Long Island museum. Exhibited simultaneously was the group exhibition "Glamorous Graffiti," that focused on the New York graffiti and street art movement of the 1980s. [Jean Michel Basquiat](#)'s work was included in the group show.

Presenting yet another point of view from the era can be found currently at MoMA in "[Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency.](#)" Featuring nearly 700 snapshot-like portraits sequenced with a soundtrack, the exhibition is an intimate and sometimes disturbing personal journey experienced by Goldin revealing her own experience set around Boston, New York, Berlin and elsewhere in the late 1970s, 1980s and beyond. The show opened on June 11, 2016 and remains on view through April 16, 2017.

Opening on January 27, 2017 at The Whitney, "Fast Forward: Paintings from the 1980s" promises to provide a front row seat to the different ways visual artists responded to the ear to both the traditions of art making and the social and political issues of the times.

Through exuberant works that sometimes engage the heroic gesture or make use of pop imagery, artists explored the traditions of figuration and history paintings and offered new interpretations of abstraction. Many addressed fundamental questions about art making while others took on political issues including AIDS, feminism, gentrification and war.



"When the Worlds Collide" by Kenny Scharf, 1984. Oil and acrylic spray paint on canvas, 122 5/16 x 209 5/16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from Edward R. Downe, Jr. and Eric Fischl, 84.44. © 2016 Kenny Scharf/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Taking the tact that painting was far from being dead, artists renegotiated their commitment to painting in the face of a new media environment. Painting became almost radical and came to represent a new intersection merging fresh ways of seeing and traditional methods of art making to rediscover, and reinvent, a medium rift with possibility and enlivened with artists actively re-imagining what painting could be.



"A Visit To / A Visit From / The Island" by Eric Fischl, 1983. Oil on canvas, 84 x 168 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds

from the Louis and Bessie Adler Foundation, Inc., Seymour M. Klein, President
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BASIC FACTS: “Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s” is on view January 27 to May 14, 2017 at The Whitney Museum of American Art. The show is located in The Whitney’s eighth-floor Hurst Family Galleries. The Whitney is located at 99 Gansevoort St, New York, NY 10014. www.whitney.org.

“Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s” is organized by Jane Panetta, associate curator, with Melinda Lang, curatorial assistant of The Whitney.

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