

# Biennials and Beyond— Exhibitions That Made Art History

1962–2002

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Introductory essay and chapter introductions  
by Bruce Altshuler





12

EXHIBITION

# The Times Square Show

LOCATION

41st Street and  
7th Avenue, New  
York

DATE

1–30 June 1980

former massage parlor on the corner of Seventh Avenue New York City, "The Times Square Show" was hailed by the first major exhibition of radical art in the '80s." The show was organized by the artists' association Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), and then artists, rather than institutions, organized the central display. The display was cacophonous like that of the 1920 Bauhaus, similarly connected art and politics and embraced the street, and here the street was part of the show, which was open for the entire month of June in an area of tawdriness and

in 1977, and its members' early projects focused on video, including a cable television program. But in January 1980, sponsoring theme exhibitions in lofts and storefront spaces. "The Home and Wealth Show," "The Doctors and Dentists Show" and "The Manifesto Show," the year culminated in Colab's "The Real Estate Show." In December 1979, Colab occupied a New York City-owned building on the Lower East Side to protest about the politics of real-estate development. It opened the building to city authorities the next day, and reoccupied by Colab in 1980 in the targeting of landlords in "The Real Estate Show," after Otterness found a building in Times Square for the group's "The Real Estate Show." Colab allowed Colab to use it without charge.

Hundred artists answered a call for pieces that related to the lives of many women and artists of color. On the street-level first floor, music, and film and video screenings were featured on Friday, June 1st. There was also a souvenir shop organized by Kiki Smith, and artist-made objects. Christy Rupp's rats led up the stairs to the second floor, including a gallery of portraits. Much of the show was on the third floor. On the fourth floor, Tom Otterness had a huge chalkboard for public use. Otterness also prepared a list to identify the artists, as there were no labels and few signatures. The show being free, more than \$32,000 was spent on the exhibition. Advertising in newspapers, magazines, and on television, along with a radio show, there was also an animated billboard in Times Square. In addition, a card monte, a street hustler's card game, designed by Jane Rupp and provided to Colab at no cost. But three-quarters of the show was funded by grants from government agencies and foundations, as Colab was a nonprofit corporation in order to garner such funding. Colab's connection to the show with the Bronx-based organization Fashion Moda, which was itself from the alternative space movement.

Views appearing in major newspapers and national art magazines. "The Times Square Show" sat on the cusp of change. The next year, Colab had an opening in the East Village, and in the institutional space. Colab had organized the first Colab-sponsored exhibition, which presented almost a thousand works in "New York-New Wave." Colab's controlled display at P.S. 1 and the unruliness of "The Times Square Show" foreshadowed the impending transformation of what had been a marginal



Filling all four floors of a former massage parlor on the corner of Seventh Avenue and West 41st Street in New York City, "The Times Square Show" was hailed by the *Village Voice* as "the first major exhibition of radical art in the '80s." The show was assembled by the artists' association Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), and it evoked an earlier time when artists, rather than institutions, organized the central exhibitions of the avant-garde. The display was cacophonous like that of the 1920 Berlin Dada Fair, and Colab similarly connected art and politics and embraced the grungy life of the street. And here the street was part of the show, which was open twenty-four hours a day for the entire month of June in an area of tawdriness and urban decline.

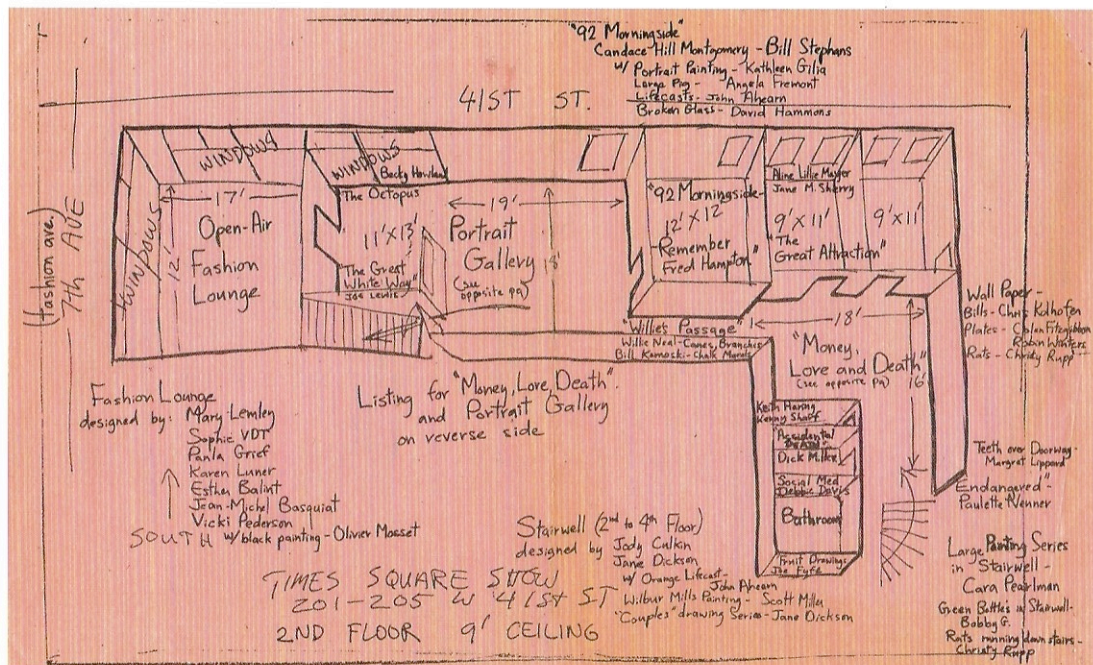
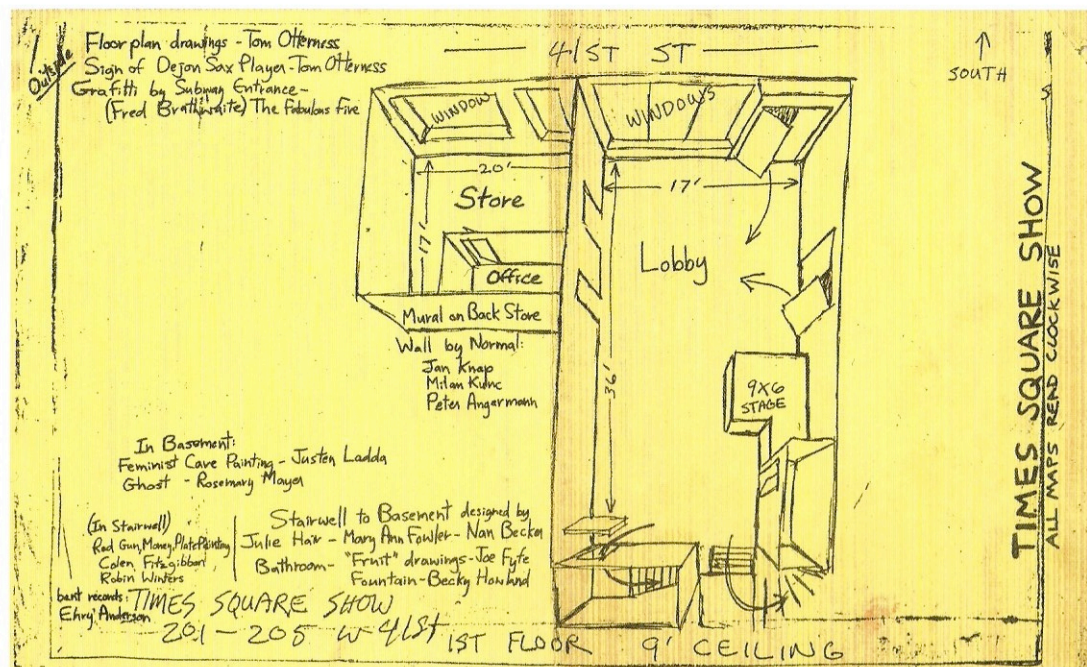
Colab was formed in 1977, and its members' early projects focused on publications, film, and video, including a cable television program. But in January 1979, the group began sponsoring theme exhibitions in lofts and storefront spaces. With such titles as "The Income and Wealth Show," "The Doctors and Dentists Show" (art for reception rooms), and "The Manifesto Show," the year culminated in Colab's most well-known effort before Times Square, "The Real Estate Show." In December some Colab members occupied a New York City-owned building on the Lower East Side to mount an exhibition about the politics of real-estate development. It opened on 1 January, was closed by city authorities the next day, and reoccupied by Colab a week later. Ironically, given the targeting of landlords in "The Real Estate Show," after John Ahearn and Tom Otterness found a building in Times Square for the group's largest exhibition, the landlord allowed Colab to use it without charge.

More than one hundred artists answered a call for pieces that related to Times Square, including many women and artists of color. On the street-level first floor, music, performances, and film and video screenings were featured on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. There was also a souvenir shop organized by Kiki Smith, which offered inexpensive artist-made objects. Christy Rupp's rats led up the stairs to six small rooms on the second floor, including a gallery of portraits. Much of the graffiti art was concentrated on the third floor. On the fourth floor, Tom Otterness hung a boxing bag and a huge chalkboard for public use. Otterness also prepared a detailed floor plan to identify the artists, as there were no labels and few signatures.

Despite the space being free, more than \$32,000 was spent on the exhibition. Most of this went for advertising in newspapers, magazines, and on television, along with posters and flyers. There also was also an animated billboard in Times Square of hands playing three-card monte, a street hustler's card game, designed by Jane Dickson and John Ahearn and provided to Colab at no cost. But three-quarters of the expenses were covered by grants from government agencies and foundations, for Colab was registered as a nonprofit corporation in order to garner such funding. Yet despite its collaboration on the show with the Bronx-based organization Fashion Moda, Colab distanced itself from the alternative space movement.

As indicated by reviews appearing in major newspapers and national art magazines, "The Times Square Show" sat on the cusp of change. The next year commercial galleries began opening in the East Village, and in the institutional space of P.S. 1, Diego Cortez, who had organized the first Colab-sponsored exhibition ("The Batman Show"), presented almost a thousand works in "New York-New Wave." The contrast between the controlled display at P.S. 1 and the unruliness of "The Times Square Show" suggested the impending transformation of what had been a marginal youth and artistic culture.





⌂ Floor plan of “The Times Square Show,” drawn by Tom Otterness, showing the first (street-level) floor, including the lobby with stage for performances, the shop selling artists’ work, and the office.

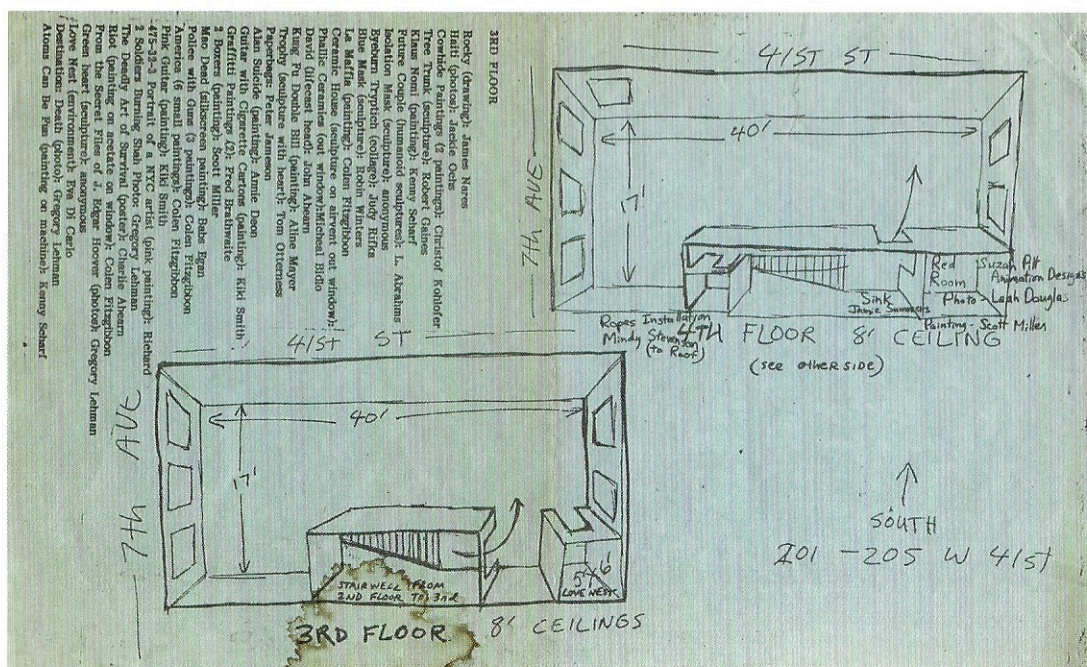
← Floor plan of the second floor.

⌞ Floor plan of the third and fourth floors.

Three TV advertisements were created and paid for by Colab to announce its upcoming "The Times Square Show," to be broadcast on the popular cable television station Channel 5, WNEW.

John Ahearn's poster for "The Times Square Show" featured two hands playing a card game (three-card monte). The motif also appeared in his and Jane Dickson's giant Spectascope billboard above Times Square.

→ Poster for "The Times Square Show," which plays on the fact that the exhibition was housed in a former massage parlor.











↑ Overlooking New York's Times Square, Jane Dickson and John Ahearn's Spectacolor billboard announced "The Times Square Show" exhibition with text and a pair of animated hands playing three-card monte.

→ Sidewalk view of "The Times Square Show" with signs by Tom Otterness advertising the attraction inside, June 1980.

↗ "The Time Square Show" was located in an abandoned massage parlor at 41st Street and 7th Avenue. This photograph, by Lisa Kahane, was reproduced in Kim Levin's report on the show in *Art in America*.

→→ Entrance to "The Times Square Show." The window of the souvenir shop is visible above the subway entrance.











↑ "The Times Square Show," on the first floor (street level), looking out at West 41st Street.

← The cutout Amazon Lady figure in the lobby was contributed by the Amsterdam Theater.

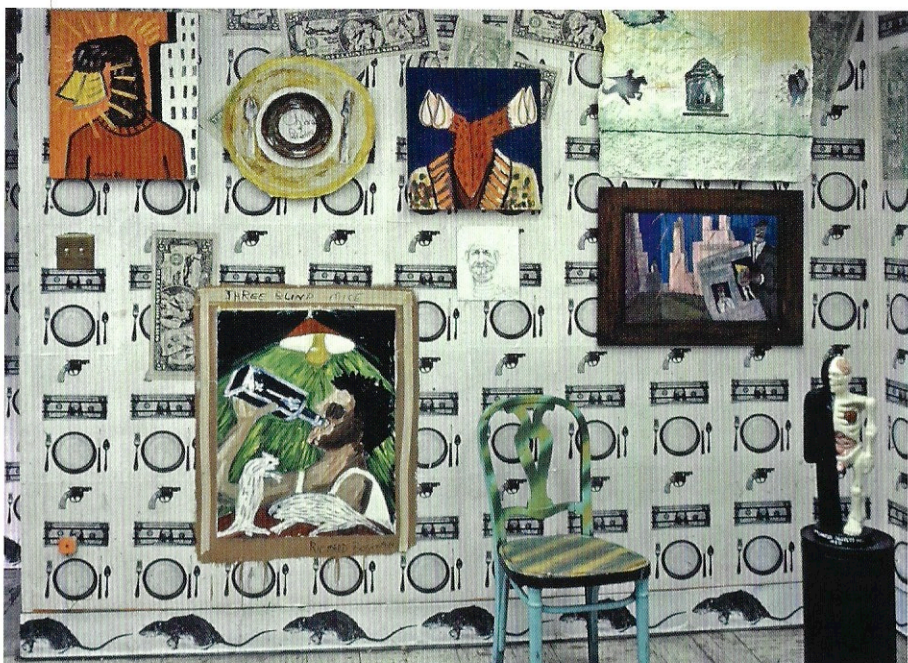
↗ In the lobby on the first floor (street level), with Andrea Callard's *Ailanthus Leaves* (wall painting), Rigoberto Torres's *Man in Blue*, and John Ahearn's *Man in Red*. Ahearn and Torres had first created their cast portraits of local people in the Bronx for their exhibition "South Bronx Hall of Fame," at Fashion Moda in 1979. For "The Times Square Show," they cast portraits of passersby and visitors on the sidewalk outside of the show.

→ In the lobby on the first floor looking toward the stairwell, with Christy Rupp's rats (on the stairs) and an air-conditioning unit painted by Kenny Scharf (on the right).









← The "Money, Love and Death" room on the second floor, showing Christy Rupp's rat posters and Colen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winter's *Gun Dollar Plate* (wallpaper), Christof Kohlhofer's *Billion Dollar Bill*, Candace Hill Montgomery's *Idi Amin Plate*, Scott Miller's *Sky Falls*, Richard Mock's *Hoof-Headed Portrait*, Richard Bosman's *Three Blind Mice*, and Tom Otterness' *Man with Visible Insides*.

↓ View from the "Money, Love and Death" room into a space on the left with works by Aline Mayer and Jane Sherry, and the "News Room" on the right. On the "News Room" door are works from Jenny Holzer's *The Living Series*.

↓↓ The "Portrait Gallery" on the second floor.





### THREE-CHORD ART ANYONE CAN PLAY

Richard Goldstein  
*Village Voice*, 16 June 1980

Everything about "The Times Square Show" says "this is not an artist's space." The floor is ankle deep in sawdust and sludge. The windows are paneless and open to the street. On a ripe afternoon, damp wood and cracked plaster complete the illusion that you've wandered into a haunted house off some obscure interstate and will soon be asked to pay to see Siamese twins in a jar of formaldehyde.

The environment is overpowering and chaotic, the work crammed together injudiciously—video on fresco, performance over portraiture—very little of it signed. The art suggests a certain fondness for cheap shots: a rack of old coats painted gray, a sink overflowing with rock salt, a corridor lined with shards of glass, walls affixed with rats and dollar bills.

"Nothing is too obscure, I don't think, in this show," says John Ahearn, a sculptor, "there's no art-about-art type thing." Yet "The Times Square Show" is rampant with aesthetic notions, none more traditional at this point than the determination to make artless art. What makes the show work is the extraordinary variety of conclusions it is possible to draw from that age-old assumption. If art ought to be about something other than itself, we see how decisively the "something" depends on the artist's education and experience.

The artists were given scant instructions: to present work that comments on the Times Square environment. Among the men, a typical response is cautious and remote. "Across the street we swam to Peepland, to the live nude girls," reads the text in a Brechtian peepshow, "we put in our silver dollars and could see the girls." But the women confront the issue and seem to revel in its possibilities. Jane Sherry, who works in a woman-owned bar in the area called Tin Pan Alley, has gotten together with Aline Mayer to install a crèche of old clothes and negligees, inscribed with graffiti like "Cunt," "Whore," "Heat." Militance is everywhere—

and women make up nearly half the show—but so is a reluctance to condemn the sexual response. In the lobby, Chi Chi (aka Erika Van Dam) does a classic Times Square strip. O'Keeffesque genitalia surround the working urinals.

There is a good deal of grumping—especially among the women—about work that is "politically incorrect," but no one demands that any of it be taken down. The cry to suppress offensive work may be raised when an art gallery (or film studio) excludes the opposition. This time, the artists have assured that every thesis will be accompanied by its antithesis, through the simple expedient of inviting anyone and everyone to show, and then piling the works upon each other in the indiscriminate splendor of a flea market. Mimi Gross's busts of men who died in the abortive hostage-rescue attempt seem oddly whimsical next to John Ahearn's plaster casts of South Bronx residents, printed over to look like objects in an Orozco botanica. Ann Marie Rousseau's utterly earnest portraits of homeless women in the Times Square area face an anonymous piss and enema shots. A motorized James Brown shakes against a gift-wrap screen, while a figure representing Joanne Chesimard—chicken wire on scorched bedsprings—reads a Bible open to the prayer for the dead.

Of nearly one hundred artists in the show, twelve are Latin or black, a diversity unheard of outside specially sanctioned Third World events. Most of the black artists are as hostile to minority galleries as the white artists are to alternative spaces—though for very different reasons. "I don't support apartheid in South Africa, and I won't support it here," says Joe Lewis, co-director of Fashion Moda, a fine-arts space in the South Bronx. Lewis wants access to the mainstream as much as most white artists his age (twenty-six) want out of it. For him, that means downtown, so despite "the virulent racism practiced by the art community," he shows downtown. Of the Aunt Jemima school of Punk, Lewis says, "It's their ass that's on the line, not mine." But later, while setting up a collage in broken glass, he confides, "You don't know how out you are until you're in."

"The Times Square Show" lets a certain class of artists in for the first time. Some of them have never shown except on the street—in Bobby Ganes's case, 125th Street, since the cops kicked him out of Greenwich Village. Ganes carves and varnishes chunks of wood on the terraces of his Harlem apartment. For a living, he polishes stainless steel at the World Trade Center, which is where he met Colen Fitzgibbon, an artist who earns her living programming computers. They got talking about art, and he accepted her invitation to "show on the inside" for the first time. Are there other places where an artist can take his work? he wanted to know. Can you just go up to a museum, and if they like it, do you have to pay?

There is a moment when artists who choose to show on the street are like artists who must show on the street, a point at which their aesthetics touch. David Hammons, a black artist who collects empty wine bottles and "recycles" them into shards of glittering glass ("you know, like when we brush snow on the sidewalk and it becomes a path") belongs with Christy Rupp, a white artist whose iconography of rats is meant to suggest the ecology of city life ("if rats don't survive, neither will we, because they need much less than we do"). Samo [Jean-Michel Basquiat], the graffitist, seems perfectly at home amid the poststructural scribbling on the walls. John Ahearn's South Bronx torsos do resemble botanica art, and David Wells's mock-up of James Brown does resemble a record store display. The less art becomes sanctioned, the more like art the object it imitates becomes, so that we must look again at botanica and the record store, and that double take enhances the original. [...]

Yes, folks, it's three-chord art that anyone can play, and like punk rock it aspires to be sold at a price commensurate with its value as labor. "I notice a lot of artists making things for sale," [Mimi] Gross says. "They buy the parts for \$1 and sell it for \$10." "The Times Square Show" has a store in the lobby, with multiples for sale—rats and pornographic fans. "It has an edge to it," Gross observes. "It's not oriented to Fiorucci." Yet.



A lot about this group reminds me of Fluxus, the legendary 1960s collective that staged guerrilla shows in storefronts and on the street. Its members settled in illegal co-ops along the neglected stretch of Lower Manhattan now known as SoHo. In the end, they were driven out, along with their founder, George Maciunas, who died hounded by the attorney general and blinded by a scuffle with the Mafia. There may be no way this new wave of artists can stick it out. Wealth beckons, and obscurity still nags. Already, Colab is talking about a collector's night, a black-tie affair at which Tom Otterness can meet Ivan Karp over wine and cheese (or dogmeat on toast?).

It may well be, as Christie Rupp suggests, that there is a moment between negligence and control, a moment of uncertainty when art flourishes. In five years, Punk may be too pornographic for Midtown West. So catch "The Times Square Show." While you can.

#### REPORT FROM TIMES SQUARE

Jeffrey Deitch

*Art in America*, September 1980

Times Square is New York's behavioral sink, the place where people go to do all the things that they can't do at home. Art appreciation does not generally fall within that category. This past June, however, the hordes of half-wild, half-crazed, and fully degenerate individuals who keep pouring out of the 42nd Street subway had occasion to check out a whole building full of art that was just as raw, raucous, trashy, and perhaps even as exciting as some of the more notorious attractions of the tenderloin. Carnival music and hawkers' chants lured the curious toward a ramshackle four-story structure on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 41st Street covered with midway signs, banners, and subway-style graffiti. A motley collection of ragged looking and aggressively fashionable characters leaned out of the open holes that had once been windows and stood talking on the sidewalk, mixing with the street people who wandered by. Those adventurous enough to ask were told they had stumbled

upon the "Times Square" show, a month-long party, business enterprise, and loosely curated exhibition of art, film, fashion, and exotica.

Inside, this former bus depot and massage parlor had been transformed into a sort of art funhouse. Just beyond the door, a motorized James Brown cutout [by David Wells] danced and jerked to one of his records spinning on a plastic phonograph. To the right, a souvenir shop was stocked with all sorts of bizarre trinkets. Movies, video, or live performances were often in progress in the first-floor lobby. Those who wandered upstairs and then down to the basement were astounded by a startling variety of paintings, peep shows, sculpture, statues, model rooms, bundled clothing, and even a punching bag set up for practice.

Several dozen of the organizers, participants, and hangers-on virtually lived at the site for the show's duration. The ensuing interchange with the neighborhood, the active involvement of both blacks and whites, and the many unlikely friendships that resulted were part of the exhilarating energy that even casual visitors to the show experienced. The show itself was an illustration of that elusive process by which artists with a certain affinity somehow band together to form an unstructured but synergistic association which might almost be called a movement. [...]

Whether or not the "Times Square Show" was pre-lib or post-lib, it did represent the breakthrough of a truly postmodernist art. It proposed not just a change in imagery, or even structure, but also a change in intent. Most of the art in the show had a concrete rather than an abstract purpose—be it entertainment, sexual expression or communication of political messages. In contrast, something like pattern painting, which has been heralded as a post-modern manifestation, is really just a holding pattern for modernists in search of a new way to paint.

The show's success in breaking through the gridlock of the contemporary art marketplace demonstrates how much presentation—the "marketing"—of art works and art ideas affects their meaning and their

perception by the public, and how important it is for artists to take this into their own hands. A large group show of the "Times Square" artists at an institutionalized "alternate space" wouldn't have had half the impact, and probably would have neutralized its aesthetic. The "Times Square Show" was a challenge to dealers and curators of advanced art who continue to feel that the discreet display of a few pieces in an elegant gallery is enough. But it was even more of a challenge to artists who think that their work stops when a piece leaves the studio, and who leave its presentation to others. Art must come to be marketed with the kind of imagination displayed by this exhibition's organizers—not simply in order to reach the general public, but to cut through the glut of mediocre material and touch the art audience itself. [...]

#### THE TIMES SQUARE SHOW

Kim Levin

*Arts Magazine*, September 1980

Postmodernism? "The new-fangled philistines of advancedness," railed Clement Greenberg last winter. "Born in 1978 and died in 1979," joked a cynical artist last spring, during a season of Late Modernist last stands and neo-modern revivals, a season that masked its fears with decoration and its despair with pretenses of naïveté, disguising Minimalist grids as patterns or cloaking archaic conservatism in the myth of spontaneity. The apotheosis of Picasso to signature T-shirt status and the appearance of a war-weary German savior preaching "social sculpture" marked the antipodes of our boredom. We were ready for something else.

And just as the summer started, some of the freshest art around came slouching in off the streets—from unlikely outposts like the South Bronx and the Lower East Side—and installed itself defiantly in an abandoned massage parlor in Times Square.

The "Times Square Show" radiated genuine energy. The work of one hundred artists, it was irreverent, raw, rebellious, messy, and had the makeshift, casual, carefree air of



an amateur endeavor, as if nothing were at stake. The spirit of anarchy, exuberance, and celebration announced itself from the street: tinny carnival music blared from a loud-speaker on Seventh Avenue, setting a tone of fun-house bedlam, and the second-story windows had been removed, as if to make the exhibition accessible to the city. "Four jam-packed floors!! More than you bargained for," proclaimed a little blue Xeroxed leaflet, mimicking the media and the merchants, and mocking the art-world.

Inside, every space and surface of the dilapidated four-story structure was utilized and transformed. There was art in the dank basement and in the stairwells, in toilets and closets. It was painted onto electrical switches and telephone wires, sprouting from urinals, hanging from corridor ceilings, lurking in odd corners. Look out a window and you might see a tiny cabin lashed to an air vent. Venture into the depths of the cellar to find a gauzy Ghost haunted by memories of classical sculpture. Not far away a crudely outlined human figure sprawled across the floor and up a wall, while a pattern of white footprints paced the gritty floor and the whitewashed ceiling was covered with black handprints. The figure seemed to be inscribing itself in a circle with a stick and its crooked legs appeared straight when you stood in another circle marked out on the floor. Was it a magic cave painting or a perceptual puzzle? Leonardo's measure of man or a measured illusion of two dimensions and three? A reinvention of fixed-point perspective, a comment on boundaries, or the declaration of a weird new humanism?

There was so much art you could hardly tell where one piece left off and another began. There were walls papered with patterns of dollar bills, guns, and dinner plates like Warhol's wallpaper, with a border of rats running around the floorboard. Graffiti-like narrative artworks scrawled on the walls coexisted with a stairwell of genuine subway graffiti by Samo [Jean-Michel Basquiat] and a blackboard of spectator comments. Stairways were ornamented with plastic ruffles, cheap flowered fabric, and Xmas lights as if to go straight to the source of decora-

tive art, and one of the messages on the wall declared "Fashion as Shield." There were macho drawings, comic-book melodramas, and feminist tableaux, and mirrors scattered throughout the building were emblazoned with the lipsticked words: "women—take back the night." There was a Portrait Gallery and an Open Air Fashion Lounge, and a gift shop with cheap art and free giveaways. And if you were there at the right time, there were video works, performances, dance events.

Like Schwitters' Merzbau, the building was a total environment, but it was inner-city art, an art of plastic and rags, broken glass and garbage, celebrating squalor and urban decay. Like the opening show at P.S.1 a few years ago, where the art and the architectural decay of the old schoolhouse were sometimes indistinguishable, this was art that merged with its surroundings, melting into its sleazy Times Square context like camouflage. In retrospect, the P.S. 1 art was smart. This show, subverting the gallery system, played dumb: the exhibition space was like an amusement arcade, containing art that couldn't be defaced because it embodied defacement, incorporated the debris of an over-ripe city, embraced TV inanity, 42nd Street come-ons, and other assaults. It was an environment in which somehow the tree limbs studded with marbles by Willie Neal, a street artist, seemed more relevant as art than Mimi Gross' shelf of neo-constructivist planar faces.

While artists have been talking within the art world about accessibility and context and content, about alternate spaces and temporal art, a newer generation—like an unexpected mutation—had gone farther, creating a collective and semi-anonymous, inclusive not exclusive, social and anti-social art outside the environs of the art world. While critics have been disputing the survival of art, an aggressive delinquent style emerged that has mastered the art of self-defense. It was truly accessible to the public. One day there was an exuberant streetwise youth unleashing excess energy on a punching-bag artwork. The next day a local bum asleep on an old plastic couch—across from two futuristic mannikins on a science-fiction chair—

became part of the show. And the mannikins had changed position from the day before. [...]

It wasn't so much that the individual artworks were radically new, but that the whole was more than the sum of its parts. The context created a new sensibility, a collective statement.

The history of art in our century can be seen as an inexorable march toward abstraction and reduction, but it can also be seen as a series of efforts at incorporating the realities of modern life into art, with each new movement claiming to capture a more essential aspect of reality than the one before. Each was an effort to bridge some gap between life and art. And if we look at it this way—if the "Times Square Show" presents the newest realism—modern art has come full circle, for New Wave art exults not in progress but in its littered aftermath, and thus relegates the modernist dreams of a utopian future to the past.

Perhaps the events of last season can be fitted neatly together after all: at the start of the 1980s, Picasso and modernism were admitted into public heaven, a born-again Beuys emerged from hell with modernist visions of a future in which everyone would be an artist, and in the wake of a flood of escapist surface decoration and archaizing fantasy art the grim realities of the present—the entropic metropolis and the aftermath of progress—have been shown to contain the most vital signs of life, absorbed into the vocabulary of the most accessible, alienated, and artless new art as if to demonstrate that everybody already is an artist. People used to look at a Picasso and say their three year old could do better. In the "Times Square Show" the hand writing is on the wall, declaring "I am not an alien," or "Atoms can be fun." It's like a Last Judgment. Or the ultimate stopgap.

Apostles of destruction or harbingers of a brave new world? And we are left to wonder whether New Wave art is proto-millennial fin-de-siècle depravity or the second coming of early modernism, or if the postmodern salvage [of] art we've been anticipating is already here, unexpectedly making its debut in derelict guise, swathed, as it were, in rags.



JACK SMITH, "EXOTIC  
LANDLORDISM OF THE WORLD,"  
TIMES SQUARE SHOW

J. Hoberman

Artforum, September 1980

The inclusion of Jack Smith in the "Times Square Show" may be a tribute to his capacity for inspiring successive waves of New York artists, but the three performances he gave were proof of his ability to alienate even sympathetic audiences. From the underground filmmakers of the early 1960s through Warhol to the Playhouse of the Ridiculous and beyond into performance and punk, Smith has been a tangible influence. As a subterranean artistic force and an eccentric personality, he is the closest thing we have to an American Alfred Jarry. Smith makes no distinction between his life and his art and his subject has often been the failure of both. He typically gives his most sublime performances to near-empty houses and the "Times Square Show" gave him more visibility than he has had in years. The almost predictable result was that Smith precipitated a bewildering degree of chaos and artlessness into an environment dedicated to both.

The initial midnight performance of *Exotic Landlordism of the World* was packed to overflowing. The audience sat listening to a tape of kitschy "tropical" mood music, staring at an impoverished set (two lamps, a hanging sheet, a drape made from a plastic poncho), while the Brassiere Girls of Baghdad—a pair of garishly punk belly dancers—cajoled them to part with the requisite four dollars. It was 1:30 a.m. before Smith descended the stairs at the rear of the performance space, wrapped in a bur-noose and carrying a container of coffee. He was joined by another dancer, Coral Ups, and a Brassiere Boy, called Steve Adore, whose spectacular costume—a blue and silver loincloth and plush pillow bikini—might have been fashioned from a couch in the Fontainebleau lobby.

Smith's performances are often "rehearsals" pushed so far beyond the limits of endurance that they come to seem

like quasi-religious rites. "I don't ask people to act. It should be more like reacting to stimuli," he once told an interviewer, while a press release for a never-performed work declared that "memorized speech is possibly the least dramatic thing that can happen on the stage... So it was with *Exotic Landlordism*. After converting his coffee container into an incense burner, Smith rummaged around in a plastic shopping bag and finally produced a hefty manuscript. The bag was marked "Trick or Treat," but this performance was not going to be the latter. Smith's usual strategy—handing his performers an unfamiliar script and directing their reading of it on stage—was soon torpedoed by the crass heckling of the obstreperous Brassiere Girls. His initial indulgence soon turned into vague embarrassment, and after a while he retreated upstairs. At this, the B-girls and the two other performers burst into an energetically lewd display of free-form dancing, grabbing artworks from the show to use as props. The utter breakdown of the piece was sad and frightening. [...]

SEX AND DEATH AND SHOCK  
AND SCHLOCK

Anne Ominous (Lucy R. Lippard)

Artforum, October 1980

Overheard in downtown art territory: "Have you seen The Times Square Show?" "Not yet, but I hear it's the best thing around." "That's not what I heard."

THE SHOW

Well, by now everybody's heard something about "The Times Square Show"—a sleazy, artist-organized extravaganza in a deteriorating former massage parlor on 41st street and 7th Avenue in New York City. Abundant press coverage has been as contradictory as the show itself. Word of mouth to mouth has often been tongue in cheek. What makes TTSS noteworthy, no matter what one thinks of the art in it, is the levels it offers. TTSS is an organizational feat—an object lesson in object-organizing by artists. It is a weird kind of cultural colonization that worked because colonizers and colonized had something in

common, an exhibition of "unsalable" works accompanied by a gifte shoppe that managed to sell just such works—cheap; a constantly changing panorama of aesthetic neuroses; a performance and film festival; a throwback to the early 1960s happenings-and-storefront syndrome; a sunny apotheosis of shady sexism; a cry of rage against current art-worldiness and a ghastly glance into the future of art. It's also a lot of knives and guns and money and dirt and cocks and cunts and blood and gore housed in four wrecked floors (plus basement) donated by the organizers, by the landlord. [...]

The studied crudity that is so much a part of TTSS is also a part of the pervasive level of political naiveté. Whether self-consciously critical or manipulative or innocent or consciously critical, it is the cutting-edge these mostly young artists are looking for (in sex as well as art and politics, it seems: one participant suggested that the best review of the show might be from an informed psychosexual viewpoint). I keep coming back to the way "politics" floats so politely in this iconoclastic but still "art" context. I've complained before about the assumption that style alone (as opposed to image) can make a political statement—the idea that badly printed photos and harsh tabloid graphics attached to no matter what kind of irresponsible or undigested imagery is "political." And after three years of the "punk" posters that paper SoHo, Tribeca, and the Lower East Side, I'm getting sick of all the guns and skulls and racist-sexist slurs. (The latest is something about "Japs" and was included in TTSS events; it is presumably by someone for whom World War II only existed in the comic strips.) Even though these posters are often witty and eye-catching and an improvement on the Hallmark variety, it doesn't seem to me that the world situation is such that games around war and killing and race and hatred are very funny. (Maybe it's just gallows humor, or shallows, or callow humor?) I'm angered that the urgency of so much of this art, in and out of TTSS, is being wasted on superficial fantasies—which is why Times Square is a sadly apt location. [...]