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MOCA L.A. director Jeffrey Deitch with a city bus with graffiti by RISK



Mural by Lee Quinones on the outside of MOCA L.A.



"Art in the Streets" co-curator Aaron Rose, with a Mercedes customized by Keith Haring, at MOCA L.A.

MOCA Los Angeles ART IN THE STREETS by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

"Spectacle is what Jeffrey Deitch does," explained one visitor to "Art in the Streets," Apr. 17-Aug. 8, 2011, the long-awaited survey of graffiti and street art at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles.

Indeed, the notion of "spectacle" only begins to describe the exhibition, which overflows across the front and sides of the Geffen Contemporary via graffiti and murals by Barry McGee and Lee Quinones. The ticket booth, topped by small subway car, is entirely painted by Os Gêmeos.

A long-time advocate of Street Art, Deitch welcomed visitors to the show while standing in front of a bus painted in lavender swirls by L.A.'s RISK, beaming with an expression that seemed to defy any potential critics. Long ago he surprised his fans by announcing that his favorite art object was a New York subway car covered with graffiti tags, and now he proudly hailed what he called "the first major exhibition of graffiti and street art ever to be installed at a major museum." Though he acknowledged the efforts of associate curators Roger Gastman, Aaron Rose, Ethel Seno and others in pulling off this Herculean project, the vision is undoubtedly Deitch's own.

Despite its edgy reputation, the Street Art inside the museum gives off a message of merry rather than menace. Here is an entire ice cream truck, hand-painted in killer low-rider style by an artist named Mister Cartoon. There is a stained glass window, complete with a kneeling hooded devotee, supposedly the work of Banksy. The bookstore features a striking mural by Shepard Fairey.

Old school New York graffiti artists are on hand, including the legendary TAKI 183, up on a ladder tagging a wall, and subway writer Fab Five Freddy, who shows off the art he now makes for galleries. From the East Village days, the museum boasts a recreation of the Fun Gallery, complete with Jean-Michel Basquiat painting in the window, put together by Patti Astor, who became a Californian long ago.

As for the local scene, photographs galore document the Dogtown days, and the Nike Skate Team warms up on custom built ramps, an homage to Craig R. Stecik III, godfather of skateboard and punk rock culture in Venice.

Needless to say, graffiti and Street Art culture have been avidly embraced by corporate



Mr. Cartoon's decorated ice cream truck in "Art in the Streets" at MOCA L.A.



The mural installation purported to be by Banksy in "Art in the Streets" at MOCA L.A.



The Shepard Fairey mural in the MOCA L.A. bookstore for "Art in the Streets"



sponsors, and so it is at the Geffen Contemporary as well. In addition to Nike's participation, Levi Strauss & Co. is also an exhibitor, outfitting a small studio where visitors can learn about making their own independent films in the manner of Spike Jonze, whose early skateboard videos are being shown.

Veteran L.A. street artist **Chaz Bojorquez** is a highlight of the show, but Fabian Devora, who works with East Los Streetscapers, laments that the well-established group was not included, especially since they made their home in the projects, less than a mile from the museum. "I don't know about the politics of it but if the show is in L.A., there should be more L.A. artists," he said.

Deitch defended his curatorial stance, saying, "This is not a jamboree where everybody is invited, but rather it's a coherent look at the innovators." From the artists featured in **Charlie Ahearn's** 1983 movie *Wild Style*, which chronicles the early days of hip-hop in the South Bronx, to the currently hot French artist **JR**, who won the \$100,000 TED Prize for "changing the world" in 2010, Deitch clearly sees the outlines of a coherent art movement.

Whether history will agree is an open question. In the meantime, expect this fun-filled extravaganza to swell MOCA's sagging attendance, and do the same for the Brooklyn Museum, where it opens Mar. 30, 2012.

"Art in the Streets," Apr 17 - Aug. 8, 2011, The Geffen Contemporary at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 152 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90013.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP writes about contemporary art in Los Angeles.

TAKI 183 at work in "Art in the Streets" at MOCA L.A.



Fab Five Freddy with one of his paintings at "Art in the Streets" at MOCA L.A.



A recreation of Rammellzee's bedroom in "Art in the Streets" at MOCA L.A.