

Artist Resources – Kenny Scharf (American, b. 1958)



Scharf in New York, 1982

[Kenny Scharf website](#)

[Scharf on Instagram](#)

[Scharf at Honor Fraser gallery, Los Angeles](#)

“I think a lot of the magic happens when you don’t know what you’re going to do. You just let fate guide you and the use of magic. You depend on another kind of energy or something outside of yourself. It’s kind of a scary thing and it’s really exciting. I really believe spontaneity and magic come together.” Scharf told [Art21 Magazine in a 2012 interview](#) covering the artist’s solitary, spontaneous, and eternally optimistic process.

Scharf began transforming rundown spaces into immersive installations in the 1980s, creating art out of his love of collecting found objects and making something unexpected out of trash. His dayglow blacklight installation, [Cosmic Cavern](#) was born from his former studio and living space in Brooklyn, which he [transformed into an art installation](#) and party space. In 2014, Scharf led a group of students in creating their own cosmic caverns at [The Modern](#) in Fort Worth, Texas, and the [Portland Art Museum](#) recreated the cavern in 2015. Scharf also led *Art in Focus* through the space in a [2016 video interview](#).

Though painting is Scharf’s primary medium in his mature practice, he still creates sanctioned graffiti in the form of [murals](#), which can be seen enlivening streets in [New York](#) and [Los Angeles](#), and even the [interior](#) and [exterior](#) of parking garages.

In 2014 Scharf entered the fashion industry, adapting his dayglow graffiti aesthetic [for Louis Vuitton](#), creating apparel and shoe designs [with Jeremy Scott for Adidas](#), and producing limited addition body lotion sets for [skin care experts Khiels](#). In honor of their new collaboration, community streetwear brand, The Hundreds, visited [Scharf’s studio](#) to chat about their [2015 clothing line](#).

For his [2015 show at the Honor Fraser gallery](#) in LA, Scharf repurposed found artwork, inserting his neon cartoons into picturesque nineteenth century landscapes and regal portraits in a characteristically surreal interior installation.

“I connect to the chaos and spontaneity, but also the flow,” Scharf reflected in a [2015 video interview](#) while at work on a [mural in Coney Island](#). “Once I start something, there is some kind of energy beyond me that kind of enters me, and just comes out. And that’s what I’m always looking for. I’m looking for not too much thinking, and not too much analyzing...I want the audience to feel that flow, this connection to this out-of-control living that’s alive.”

Scharf visited [Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai](#), in 2018 for his first solo exhibition in the UAE, using his unique blend of optimism, humor, and pop-surrealist aesthetic to comment on environmental issues and an increasingly dystopian, off-kilter world.

[Galerie Magazine spoke with Scharf](#) in his Inglewood, California studio in 2018 as he prepared for upcoming installations at [Baik Art](#) in Seoul and [Honor Fraser in LA](#). In 2020, Scharf continued to debut work at [Almine Rech](#) and [Jeffrey Deitch, LA](#).



Scharf in Inglewood studio, 2018

Photography: Roger Davies



Kenny Scharf (American, b. 1958)

Spumoni, 2020

Spray paint on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:117.1

Los Angeles-based artist Kenny Scharf continues to produce the sarcastic, occasionally critical, perpetually optimistic visual commentary for which he became known in 1980s New York alongside friends and fellow artists Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Like Haring and Basquiat, Scharf found inspiration in street culture and graffiti, embracing the medium of spray paint to navigate the boundaries between public and private, “high” and “low” art. Scharf frequently moves between painting, sculpture, murals, performances, and installations that merge pop culture reference with psychedelic animation in a stylistic rhetoric he calls “pop-surrealism.” **Spumoni** comes from a recent project in which Scharf painted 250 cartoon portraits in the *tondo* format (a circular form of painting or sculpture popularized in the Italian Renaissance). In a vivid display of color and expression, each tondo represents a mood or facet of the artist’s personality and celebrates the immediacy and potential for play in his chosen medium.

On view January 20 – April 25, 2021

Extra Resources

Scharf [MOODZ exhibition](#) of 250 tondi at Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles