

JUICYHEADS

[blog, 2015]



RICH GARR IN FRONT OF KENNY SCHARF PAINTING

Rich Garr is a Cleveland-born NYC artist who uses walking and bike tours as both a means and an end for his collage art. Every tour is unique, interactive, never scripted, and highly curated. Sadly neglected during his extensive formal art education, street art has obviously played an important part in the development of contemporary art and culture... especially in New York. These snapshots from the "Street / Art, Lower East Side" walk provide a sample of the rich and varied visual culture of one neighborhood. It winds through the streets of Lower Manhattan's art galleries and outdoor art- both legal and illegal-- meeting art world players along the way. A similar tour will be available to the public this summer in Gowanus, Brooklyn. It will be adjusted to highlight artist studios instead of galleries. It will retain a focus on public art, but reflect the industrial creative character that took root in the 19th century and still thrives today.

JUICYHEADS

What prompted you to start Gotham SideWalks?

RICH GARR

A like-minded friend, beer and a 2008 Bob Dylan concert were the immediate prompts for Gotham SideWalks, but versions of the idea had been brewing well before then. I had a background in art museum programming and education, and I wanted to bring that type of experience outdoors. My own studio practice is pretty anti-social, so Gotham SideWalks was built to fulfill my healthy social appetite and keep me exposed to different people and fresh ideas. And to make it viable, I saw a gap between the tourism and education market here in New York. I wanted to exploit that.

JUICYHEADS

What differentiates the legal from the illegal art on the street?

RICH GARR

Sometimes it's impossible to tell visually, but there's usually a more decorative element or commercial message in legal art on the street... especially for commissioned work. And many street artists have some kind of formal art background, and it reflects itself in street pieces. The illegal stuff tends to be letter-based graffiti with its roots in a subculture of rebellion like Punk or Hip Hop. The kids who first wrote graff in the 60s and 70s did it for thrills and self-expression. They saw signs and ads all over the streets--or just plain crappy streets--and wanted to create their own messages for themselves and their friends. That's why many graffiti pieces usually have tags of their crew, or others writers who help or inspire them.

JUICYHEADS

How do you think the murals, fragments, or signatures on buildings impact the architecture and the experience of city life?

RICH GARR

It's the same answer I would give if you asked about walking around an art gallery or museum. There's art for everyone on the street. A genre, a style, a technique, a philosophy... it all has value. Personally, I like when street artists make it a point to respond to their surroundings- both architectural and otherwise. Even the junky looking tags are usually ok by me... usually. I occasionally cringe in the streets at signs of disrespect amongst street artists and graffiti writers. Though I probably cringe just as often at bad art in galleries.

JUICYHEADS

Which tour does your group respond to the most? What aspects of the street art resonate most with your audience?

RICH GARR

The "Street / Art, Lower East Side" walk is my most popular (and where all these pics come from). A couple years ago I made a conscious decision to concentrate on a series of Street / Art tours in communities where I'm an active participant. I've been teaching art and giving tours on the Lower East Side for almost a decade, and my relationships in the community are a huge factor in the tour's success. And my audience varies greatly. I just has 3 young graffiti writers who loved finding and hearing about the street art. Street Art Is now a global phenomena, and locals and visitors alike have fun finding it amongst the quirky streets of this old neighborhood. I find groups responsive to the way I couch it with the roots of graffiti culture, and amongst music and a thriving Downtown Manhattan art scene.

JUICYHEADS

How has your artwork transpired since you started the tours?

RICH GARR

Honestly, it's been a struggle to balance the two worlds. There is a place for walks as art, but right now my walks could not be considered serious art. I create them like I create collages, but that doesn't mean they're art. I'd like more time in my studio, but the way I work demands peace-of-mind and concentration. Since I moved my art studio into my apartment, it's been tough to make art. I have a one and two year old, and the tedium of childcare unfortunately doesn't stop at my studio door. It's tough.

front page credits:

Centre-fuge Public Art Project

Sanctioned street art on construction trailers, graffiti on lamp post.

Bradley Theodore

Legal street art of controversial fashion photographer Terry Richardson by Bradley Theodore (for Williamsburg Pizza).

Jaye Moon

Lego street art by Jaye Moon referencing a NYC literary classic by Betty Smith.

El Seed, with graffiti

NYC graffiti writers reminding Tunisian street artist El Seed of the ephemeral nature of art on the streets.

Cope2

NYC graff legend Cope 2 giving props to other writers and artists... including his wife, Indie 184.

Cope 2

Dylan Egon wheatpaste, etc.

Most every mode of street art has marked this building on Bowery at the western border of the Lower East Side. It was sold in 1966 for \$102,000, and just sold again (2015) for \$55 million.

Gallery stairwell tile photo by Eugene Gannon

Old architectural detail, like this staircase landing tilework, occasionally overshadows art in both gallery and street.

Russell King, TV with Cheese, etc.

Street art layering and the evolution of certain nooks and crannies of NYC can be fascinating.

Royce Bannon

A Roycer figure elivens an old tenement doorway.

Cope2

My daughter, Kate, at 1 year old learning shapes on the street.

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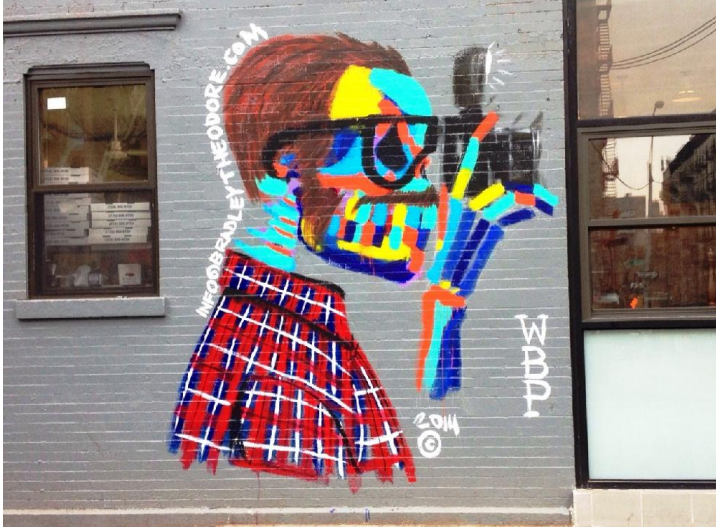


OLD GERMANIA BANK ON BOWERY

Various street art / graffiti

Legendary downtown street art spot.

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BRADLEY THEODORE

Legal street art of controversial fashion photographer Terry Richardson by Bradley Theodore (for Williamsburg Pizza).

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CURIOUS DELIVERANCE

Collage by Rich Garr

Mixed media collage on a halved kids puzzle panel

16" x 20"

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ENZO & NIO, ETC.

2 wheatpastes and some tagging.

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