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Kenny Scharf: *Moodz*  
Impactful, Unexpected and COVID-Reflective  
Deitch Projects  
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by Jody Zellen



In Kenny Scharf 's over-the-top installation *MOODZ*, 250 tondo-shaped paintings each depicting a different cartoon face are installed salon style across the walls of the vast gallery space. Using various colors of spray paint and working in his usual spontaneous manner, Scharf has created an immersive experience comprised of an array of four different sized paintings that take viewers on a roller coaster ride of feelings and sentiments. Scharf 's installation reflects myriad emotional states. None are drab or as simple as happy or sad. The paintings are imbued with and elicit a range of responses that are impactful, unexpected and reflect the powerful up and down mood swings associated with the current pandemic. Scharf's faces express glee, anger, frustration, lust, agony, loneliness, boredom and elation — moods familiar to us all during COVID-19.

Scharf has been spray-painting on exterior walls as well as canvases and other surfaces throughout his career and has a facile hand with this medium. To create an image, he gesticulates wildly, almost dancing as he moves in front of the developing work. He begins with a pristine white tondo, which is subsequently filled and shaded, layer by layer with different areas of color and finished with a series of lines that define the features — eyes, nose, mouth, teeth — of each face.

Some of the images are extremely geometric while others resemble robots or monsters. Despite their cartoony aura, they convey recognizable human emotions. Like evolving moods, Scharf's depictions are changeable and varied, coming about spontaneously and solidifying as the paintings evolve. As the application of spray paint on canvas is direct and unforgiving and there is no room for mistakes— if accidents occur they are integrated within the works. As Scharf remarks, "*there is no lying with spray paint.*"

While there are multiple points of entry into the installation, there is no linear or specific narrative, other than reflecting a huge range of moods and emotions. It is fun to single out individual pieces and think about them in relation to one another. *Fab* (40 inches, 2020), for example is a brown-toned painting depicting a face with a single triangular eye, a V-shaped mouth filled with white teeth and an uneven diamond shaped nose. A criss-cross pattern of sprayed lines fills the background, while the facial features are outlined in black and highlighted

in white.

*Cemento* (40 inches, 2020) is also very geometric— here two quasi-square eyes, a brick-like nose and black rectangular mouth are set against a grey background. *Blounder* (60 inches, 2020) has a more sinister demeanor. Scharf combines oranges and greens to create a monster-like face with a bulbous nose, bulging eyes and pointed teeth inset into an amoeba-shaped mouth. *Kry Babe* (60 inches, 2020) evokes pity and unhappiness. The face in this yellow painting has vertical ovoid-shaped eyes bisected by light green circles with black-dots as centers. These eyes are set against a squashed oval nose which sits above a down-turned line — an inverted smile signifying sadness.

Whether 20 inches or 70 inches in diameter, each painting asserts a presence and contributes to the effect of the whole. Through the duration of the installation, depending on both personal and world-wide events, viewers will likely be able to identify with the dramatic range of sentiments reflected across the 250 works.

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