

Art Now LA
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Kenny Scharf
Go Wild
A Place Dedicated to Fun
Honor Fraser
June 19 - August 24, 2024
by Jody Zellen



More often than not, it seems that Kenny Scharf “*goes wild*,” filling gallery and museum spaces from floor to ceiling with paintings, sculptures, site specific murals, sound, plants and even discarded toys. He has enjoyed overwhelming viewers throughout his long career by creating rooms with no resting place for the eye. His immersive installation *Go Wild* at Honor Fraser Gallery delights and surprises as his latest iteration of an over-the-top presentation. Because this gallery has multiple rooms, it gives Scharf the opportunity to present both discrete objects and his iconic installations.

To discuss the relative calm (before the (visual) storm), it makes sense to mention a suite of recent tondo paintings installed in one of the main gallery spaces. These are large, colorful circles filled with air-brushed squiggles and cartoony sci-fi faces that have wide-eyes and protruding noses — examples of Scharf’s celebrated cast of characters. For the tondo *Loopy* (2024), he intersperses purple and pink faces with undulating and swirling lines against a blue-yellow spray-painted and mottled background. Placed in different locations within the tondo, *3 Amigos* (2023), are three smiling cartoony faces each with bulging black and yellow eyes and wide smiles positioned amidst a galaxy of linear stars and spirals. Spanning a single wall, each of the five large tondos displays an array of overlapping and abstracted whimsical faces.

No Kenny Scharf exhibition is complete without Flinstones-esque characters and painted utilitarian objects. Here, he presents both painted cars and surfboards. Over many years, Scharf has decorated vehicles for numerous Los Angeles drivers as part of his *KARBOMBZ!* series: a few of these are shown as photographic documentation, surrounded by several painted surfboards. Always full of surprises, Scharf includes new works that reference the L.A. landscape and its environs — brightly painted and somewhat anthropomorphic oil rigs, in addition to works depicting colorful cell phone towers — places where Scharf can apply his pop sensibilities to transform structures and locations into something unexpected.

The highlight of the exhibition is the site-specific immersive installation, *Go Wild*. Here, Scharf has covered the space with a backdrop filled with rainbow-colored drips over which he has painted larger than life size flowers and tree-like characters that emerge from between the vertical lines of the murals to create a circus-like atmosphere. Scattered on the floor are numerous giant clay pots holding live trees and decorated with exaggerated and oversized cartoony facial features looking out in multiple directions. Appearing in random locations, dilapidated chairs and couches covered with spray-painted marks offer a place to sit, relax and take in the surrounding chaos.

In a previous exhibition, Scharf installed a huge entanglement of discarded rideable toys in all shapes, sizes and colors that cascaded down from the roof and over the facade. In his current show, smaller toys dangle in clusters from the ceiling and are placed so that they form a train along the perimeter of the walls — in essence creating a fun house environment. This immersive and dizzying installation elicits smiles while simultaneously confounding expectations. With so much “bad news” happening across the globe, Scharf offers a place dedicated to “fun” — where there is a bit of everything for everyone.

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