



A Moveable Beast

Beware the hair-dryer throne! The Art Parade returns for its third year.

by **Tricia Romano**

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Once a year, the streets of New York are returned to the freaks and geeks. Last year, the Whore Cops—a troupe of ersatz bad-to-the-bone police officers wearing hotpants—walked down West Broadway in Soho, weaving past inflated balloons of limos and bobbleheads. A gaggle of girls in nude suits rode by on bicycles, making the dancing troupe the Dazzle Dancers—who are normally naked—seem almost demure in their body glitter and equally glittery outfits. Somewhere amid the manic street preachers, there was an actual marching band.

The occasion was the Art Parade, the brainchild of downtown's most ardent art supporter, Jeffrey Deitch, whose gallery, Deitch Projects—along with Creative Time and *Paper* magazine—sponsors the annual event, which turns three on September 8. The parade (which begins at 4 p.m. this year) started as a too-short romp down Grand Street in 2005, and graduated last year to the stretch of West Broadway south of Houston, snaking down and around to Deitch's Wooster Street space, where an after-party commenced. Though the gallery owner says this year's event won't be capped with a bash, the parade is larger than it's ever been. With 800 participants (up from 450 the first year), the event offers a rare opening for aspiring artists to get their foot in the door of the downtown scene. Should their application be accepted, they'll be showing pieces in the parade, joining some of downtown's most notable names—including Asuka Ohsawa, Tauba Auerbach, Steve Powers, EV Day, Assume Vivid Astro Focus, and Kenny Scharf, who's serving as the parade's first king.

"Every year, we can only work with maybe three new people [in the gallery]," says Deitch. "So this is a way to open up and work with some of the interesting artists we encounter." Last year, the Art Parade led to Deitch's discovery of Yale M.F.A. student Bob Snead, who has since been invited to show in the gallery.

Deitch points to 19th-century Dadaist and surrealist parades as one inspiration for the Art Parade. Pop artist Steve Powers, who also works under the moniker ESPO, says he's seen a Doo-Dah Parade in California—an event that was a partial nod to the Dadaist tradition and a partial jab at the WASP-y, patriotic Tournament of Roses. And during the gallery's first year in 1996, Deitch had a project called "Shopping" in which 26 different Soho shops hosted an art installation, which included a mini-parade of models.

"That's the thing I really love and admire about Deitch Gallery," says installation artist EV Day, "that they do things like this that are asking, 'What does art mean in the community at large?' You take a very conventional format, which every culture in the city uses—whether it's the St. Patrick's parade, the Puerto Rican parade, the Macy's Day Parade with Batman and Bart Simpson. And then you say, 'Here's a whole art community—what would your parade be?'"

A parade format presents a challenge to the artists: It's not their usual mode of operation. But artist Kenny Scharf had no problem figuring out his piece. For the first go-round, he entered a Cadillac that he painted 20 years ago. This year, it's his late father's golf cart, which will tow a throne created from a 1950s beauty-salon hair dryer.

Deitch has as much affinity for performance as he does for more traditional works. One recent Deitch project was a collaboration with the Scissor Sisters, which included a re-creation of the first location of the infamous gay bar the Cock. The culmination of the event was a performance on top of the bar, just like the old days.

"Jeffrey's an event guy," says Powers. "He pulls off events beautifully."

"I've always been interested in this total work of art where you have performance, sculpture, music, all combined," Deitch says.

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A former art manager for Citibank, Deitch has been an art-world fixture since the '80s. From the opening of his twin galleries in 1996 (he's debuting a third this fall), he's dedicated himself to the downtown community, following in the footsteps of Andy

Warhol, continually committing himself to pushing what he calls "radical art." He's featured everyone from unknowns to up-and-coming stars to big shots—including Mariko Mori, Vanessa Beecroft, Barbara Kruger, Yoko Ono, Kehinde Wiley, and David LaChapelle—and has been known to make waves by hosting controversial, attention-getting shows like Terry Richardson's "Terryworld," which featured Richardson's arguably pornographic photography blown up to mural size.

Yet Deitch was also the first to host a show featuring burlesque performer Julie Atlas Muz's initial foray into fine art (she was part of the recent "Womanizer" exhibit), and frequently gives a platform to performers normally found in seedy nightclubs. In many ways, the Art Parade is the culmination of the Deitch galleries' 10-plus years in the city a chance for the galleries' greatest hits to get together in one big shebang.

"I have known Jeffrey since the '80s," says Scharf. "I have been watching how he's taken over and created this role for himself, this niche which he's filled, having a lot to do with the performance-art world. He gets everyone going and provides a great forum for all these fun people to let it fly. He's the perfect guy to do it."

"You've got to like people," says Powers, who first started working with Deitch in '99. "I know Jeffrey gets a bad rap for being kind of unapproachable and maybe a little cold, but he loves people, man—he loves just watching it go down and making it happen."

One of Powers's pieces (making a repeat visit) is a blow-up, floating limo sculpture called *No One Rides for Free*. "Yeah, the limo's a perennial—forget it," says Powers. "The limo's like the Rocky and Bullwinkle blimp for the Macy's parade."

"For two years, we had Yoko Ono's 'Imagine' peace banner," says Deitch, "which is really important. Certain terrific projects, we've asked for an encore."

Muffinhead and Amber Ray, costume designers turned human sculptures, are two of Deitch's parade favorites. And few pieces can top the 2006 Fischerspooner float featuring a pile of people dressed in London designer Gareth Pugh's silver, gold, and black outfits.

"It's really something we take very seriously, the tradition of radical art performance," says Deitch. "We're always trying to break ground, but art is also about connecting to a great tradition. It has a lot to do with the past as well as the present, so I embrace the tradition of Soho as the center of where artists lived and created. If people don't make an effort to keep all this going, then it's just going to become homogenized and a big suburban mall. But it doesn't have to be that way."

As EV Day says: "My favorite part of the parade is that it actually exists."