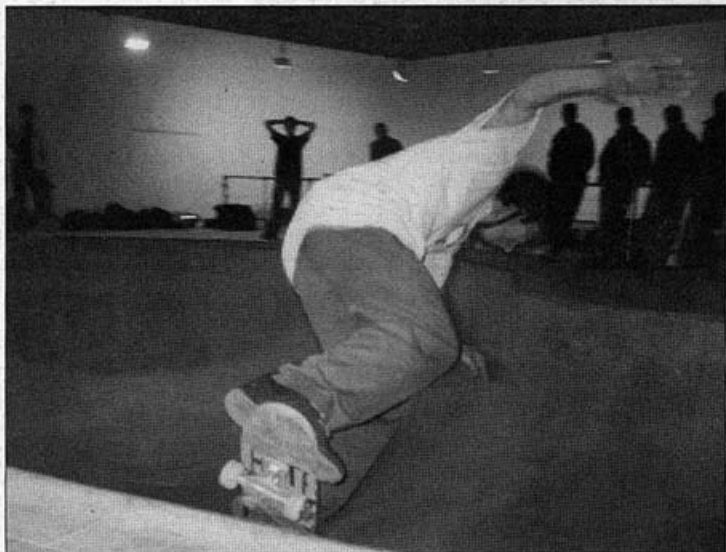
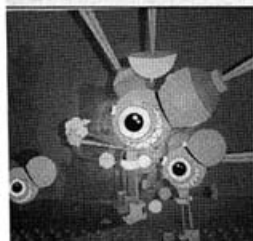


feature

SESSION IN THE UNDERWORLD

A "free basin" and an art subculture



Photos by **OMAR SOMMEREYNS**

FREE GRIND: Skaters dove in the "Free Basin," while viewers explored a special brew of art at Deitch Projects in NYC.

By **Omar Sommereyns**

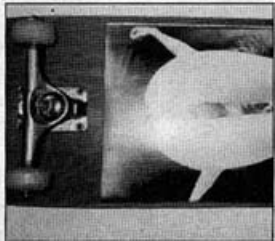
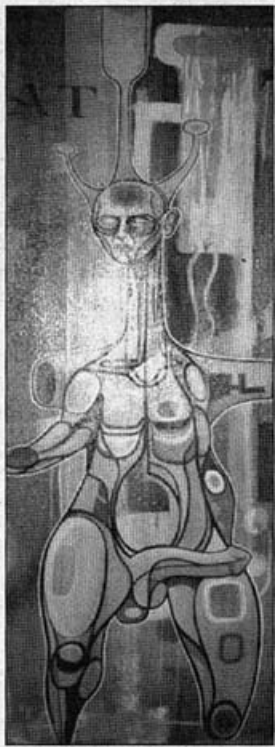
Life & Art Associate Editor

In conjunction with the coverage of South Florida, *Life & Art* endeavors to provide readers with more widespread exposure to the abstruse world of art. Accordingly, we probed into the bustling scene in New York to excavate the goods on an alternative, yet flourishing art scene.

Seemingly frustrated and disenchanted by highbrow intelligentsia and caviar-and-cocktail art openings, young creative brewers in cities such as NYC and San Francisco spurned the superciliousness and snobbery of traditional art gala and rather chose to open doors to a modern generation of youthful subculture—i.e., influenced by graffiti, skateboarding, hip hop and street life. Embracing the gritty verve of the street and city with depictions inspired from political satire, television and video games, media imagery and advertising bluffs, porno and drugs, psychedelic cartooning, fashion with subversive flair, '60s Pop art

and surreal settings, these artists attempt to dissect the urban disarray with painting, photography and mixed-media productions, therein illuminating their specific lifestyle and culture.

Assembled at the warehouse-like space at Deitch Projects in downtown New York is *Session the Bowl*, an exhibit of 30 of these burgeoning artists, yet the hub of activity is centered around a massive functional sculpture: entitled "Free Basin," this kidney-shaped skateboard bowl is free for anyone to use and intervenes with an environment usually allocated to quiet, unobtrusive viewing. Hand-made by the architectural collective Simparch, the piece was shown in other spaces such as the Hyde Park Center in Chicago (2000), at the Wexner Center (2002) and recently at Documenta. "Free Basin" may exude the relation between skateboarding and pavement (here, it's wood) in concordance with that of paint and canvas or it



Art that grand-ma wouldn't approve of

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may disorient the onlooker, who climbs up the strange structure and looks down into an empty pool, yet it coincides well with the nature of art that is exposed along the rest of the walls in the gallery.

As skaters catch air or show off their skills in noisy sessions, others observe the numerous pieces on display. Shepard Fairey's faux-propaganda stencils show portraits of public figures such as celebrities (e.g., Johnny Rotten smirking) or political faces (Richard Nixon with portrayals of Asian "commies" in the background), always with his signature, ironic "OBEY" sign. Chris Johanson, in his typical minimalist, yet colorful renditions,

paints a backyard where friends are bar-b-cuing and skating a vert ramp, while the next door neighbor complains: "What the fuck is up with those fucking kids making fucking noise! I'm calling the fucking authorities! Oh wait, I don't want to draw attention to my lab..." The heavy cursing and mention of a drug lab here is wryly tongue in cheek.

Moreover, rapper Dalek provides a cartoonish painting finely composed with ambiguous shadows in the backdrop and Barry McGee's floating heads with oversized mouths and miniature ears in a red psychedelic setting hangs high upon a wall on a huge rectangular surface. Ed Templeton's racy photographs of youth (a teenager flashing his dick or another with

a swastika drawn on his chest) and Dash's series of polaroids illustrating debauchery among young friends-capricious close-ups of bruises, nudity, vomiting, whimsical pictures of wild partying, drug-taking, lesbianism, girls spreading their legs, a guy sniffing another one's penis and, randomly, a nice old couple in a diner-all shed light on the excess and wantonness of urban youth.

A legendary graf artist, Futura, places a sequence of mini-skateboards adorned with skeleton figures and international newspaper clippings, while Jo Jackson, on a creamy, peaceful light blue background, paints skeleton heads mounted on top of each other, admonishing an impending doom. Director of the cult flick *Kids*, Larry



Clark poses a blatant skateboard piece (decorated with a luscious picture of a nude bent-over woman exposing her genitalia) concurs with the "Free Basin" being used right in front of it, all the while using barefaced, unabashed humor.

While one can wonder if the presence of a skate bowl in a gallery can distract viewers from paying attention to the art, it's a genuine installation with a welcoming title-it may be an open invite for anyone to come see and discover-or even an interactive performance piece that supplies the space with enhanced dynamics. Although the pervasiveness of this artistic "movement" (if it can be so-called) is

rather limited and may attract a certain kind of viewers (young hipsters, skate aficionados, counterculture devotees, city bobos...), it is nonetheless an artistic rejuvenation that may deliver a fresh, new perspective for the young and old alike.

Session the Bowl is on view through February 1 at Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St., NYC. Call 212-343-7300 for more info.

Check out OBJEX Artspace in Miami for a similar brand of this art "subculture." Visit their site at www.objexartspace.com.

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