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ART REVIEW | ART PARADE

The Creative Spirit, Strolling Through SoHo With Its Fringe Flying

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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

The Dazzle Dancers at the third annual Art Parade, featuring more than 800 artists and some 82 mobile works of art — carried, worn or performed — in SoHo.

If you've got it, flaunt it. And there was a whole lot of flaunting going on in the third annual Art Parade on Saturday in SoHo. It was like a mini-Rose Bowl pageant, but with men in heels, a ukulele orchestra, trash-bag attire, a no-nukes float, a nonstop food fight and the director of a major New York museum, hair dyed blue, barreling down West Broadway.

As pageants go, this one was short (about four blocks, one hour) and friendly in a fringey, attitudinous way. It's hard to imagine its happening in uptight, cash-rich, chutzpah-poor Chelsea, and it didn't. And there was nothing not to like.

The first Art Parade was organized two years ago by a SoHo gallery, Deitch Projects, and was crammed into a few blocks on Grand Street. Everyone had a ball, so it was repeated last year, but at twice the size and length and in a different location: down West Broadway from West Houston Street to Grand. This year's version took the same route and added still more participants: more than 800 artists who conceived, constructed, carried, wore or performed some 82 mobile works of art.

You know an event has arrived when the New York City Police Department turns up to close streets and control crowds. And so it was on Saturday. Art Parade 2007, now jointly produced by Creative Time and Paper magazine, with Deitch still organizing, was an official traffic stopper.

Veterans of the 2006 parade returned. The Malcolm X Shabbaz High School marching band from Newark once again kicked things off, this time with the help of its chapter of the R.O.T.C. Nick van Woert's Bobble Head Collective, with its giant crazed stockbroker masks, was back. So was Steve Powers, also known as Espo, reprising his 2005 inflatable black limousine, a salute to celebrity gas guzzling.

The Dazzle Dancers, with their colossal "DD" float, always make a memorable impression, both for their anarchic choreography and their continuing commitment to battle, as their online manifesto says, "the forces of blandness, fear, and isolation so common in our clenched culture of coffee franchises, fear marketing and money worship." The manifesto also emphasizes that they prefer to work nude, but they dressed up (sort of) for this occasion.

I was happy to re-encounter Corinne Doll, a.k.a. Coco, with her foam core cut-outs of female muses, Cleopatra, Louise Brooks, Pocahontas, and Courtney Love among them. And it was a pleasure to welcome the first-time parader Assume Vivid Astro Focus, an artist who is also an art collective and which contributed a floating Macy's parade-size portrait of Jayne County, transsexual hero, glitter-punk idol and author of the must-skim autobiography "Man Enough to Be a Woman."

New talent is the life of any enterprise, and the Art Parade was refreshed again this year through an open call for proposals. Rumor has it that certain proposed works changed dramatically, which is to say beyond recognition, between acceptance and realization. But no one's complaining. Everything's art, even the Brazilian Sisters, a performing trio who may or may not be related, are almost certainly

not from Brazil (someone at Deitch thought Miami but wasn't sure) and didn't do much but model bikinis.

Among other debutante work I very much liked a ballet of the abstract paintings in motion by Arden Sherman, Ralph Bishop, Christine Baldizzi and others who go by the name Algorithm Nation. The John Erickson Museum of Art held the eye: a portable museum out of Chicago, with miniature galleries carried, as if on trays, by its curators. One gallery held a solo show by Arnold Mesches, a political painter whose work made a splash in the East Village '80s and whom somebody should bring back to New York.

Perhaps that somebody could be the highly irregular Brooklyn Museum. It was the only traditional institution to make the scene on Saturday, its staff turning out in force, led by the museum's director, Arnold Lehman, cerulean-haired and cheering like mad.

Of pieces by solo artists, some of the quietest were best. I was particularly taken with one called "Siameze Rapunzels: The World's Longest Multi Human Hair Braid" by the New York artist Hrafnhildur Arnardottir, a.k.a. Shoplifter. It consisted of several young women whose long hair was indeed braided together, encouraging them to walk with dainty, tiptoe steps.



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Work from the Dennis McNett project in the Art Parade.

Tom Bogaert's "Canary Space Ship," a kind of multiplex bird cage, was sweet. So was Matthew Blair's "Kafka Helmet," beak-shaped and pointed at the ground, and Matthew Rodriguez's spectacular piled-up "Sir Shaully Van Snooten Haufer," a sculptural tour de force.

Not all was sunshine and light, however. The parade had its share of heavy-metal gloom. Kembra Pfahler's band of blue-skinned furies, the Girls of Karen Black, moved down West Broadway at a funereal pace, bloody dolls clutched in their arms. Dennis McNett flashed fantastic death's-head prints, while Tlizza Jaurique and Marcus Zillox carried the figure of Death dressed as the Virgin of Guadalupe on a litter.

And here, as in other ways, the parade is ahead of the news. Death is going to be big in art this year. With Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull in the news, and Goth whatnots still in fashion, mortality is shaping up to be a thematic mini-trend of the kind cooked up to keep sales moving through the season. Or at least that's apparently the hope, although frankly, if the economy keeps shape-shifting, Chelsea could power down fast. Would this have any effect on the Art Parade, with its here-today spirit and throwaway work? Would it become the larger, even fringier, truly go-for-broke event it has the potential to be? Can't wait for 2008 to see.