

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

Contact: 212/998-6780 or greycastle@nyu.edu

NYU EXHIBITION PRESENTS VITAL SNAPSHOT OF THE DOWNTOWN SCENE

Downtown Pix: Mining the Fales Archives, 1961–1991
on view at NYU's Grey Art Gallery from January 12 to April 3, 2010

New York City (November 13, 2009)—Jointly organized by New York University's **Grey Art Gallery** and **Fales Library**, NYU's repository of rare books and manuscripts, *Downtown Pix: Mining the Fales Archives, 1961–1991* features over 300 photographs and other printed materials from Fales's pioneering Downtown Collection. On view at the Grey Art Gallery from January 12 to April 3, 2010, the exhibition is drawn from the papers of artists, writers, poets, and arts organizations that comprise this important archive. The images presented in *Downtown Pix* create a rich photographic portrait of the creative practices and social protests that defined the Downtown scene as it evolved over the course of three tumultuous decades.

For successive generations of New York artists, "Downtown" has signaled a state of mind as much as a geographic location. The artists, playwrights, choreographers, and political activists who called Downtown home built a lively community that fostered aesthetic experimentation and countercultural rebellion. *Downtown Pix* focuses on the central role played by photographers in capturing the vital but ephemeral practices of a diverse range of artists. Following in the footsteps of the Grey's landmark 2006 *Downtown Show*, *Downtown Pix* maps a multifaceted cultural scene whose influence on the arts is still felt today.

As critic and guest curator **Philip Gfelter** observes, "The photographs in *Downtown Pix* register not so much as moments frozen in time as paused frames from a live-action film. This is due, in part, to the kinetic energy of the period—the live performances in loft spaces that encouraged audience participation, the scene's irreverence and experimentation, as well as a sexual charge that served as a live wire of social behavior—at least until the arrival of AIDS.

Downtown Pix provides a photographic chronicle of the period when formal conventions were abandoned with a kind of nose-thumbing glee. And, for a period of time, photography itself became more authentic, more animated, and more fun.”

The exhibition includes work by renowned artists such as David Wojnarowicz, Nan Goldin, Jimmy DeSana, and Andy Warhol. Three photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, recently acquired as joint gifts to the Grey Art Gallery and Fales Library, will also be on display. Equally important to *Downtown Pix* are the works by photojournalists who reflected the scene as it developed. Fred W. McDarrah’s images of Greenwich Village’s Gay Pride Parade for the *Village Voice* document the annual event’s evolution. Robert Alexander’s iconic images of dancers, commissioned by the *Soho Weekly News*, appear alongside examples from his fine-art practice. Snapshots found among artists’ personal papers point to photography’s role in documenting private obsessions and capturing everyday beauty. Poet David Trinidad is represented by more than 40 color photos of miniature tableaux he made featuring his extensive collection of Barbie dolls and accessories. Martin Wong’s images of derelict cityscapes, made as source material for his paintings, offer a glimpse into the artist’s creative process. Whether records of performances, portraits of friends and lovers, or one-off experiments, the photographs in *Downtown Pix* blur the distinctions between fine-art photography, photojournalism, and amateur snapshots.

Downtown Pix focuses on the intergenerational dialogues and cross-disciplinary resonances that emerge from the archives’ sprawling logic. Photographs of Richard Hell’s concerts at CBGB, Richard Foreman’s experimental plays with the Ontological-Hysteric Theater company, Mabou Mines’s multimedia performances, the happenings at Judson Church, including Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* performance, and the installations at Creative Time’s Art on the Beach series mark explosive intersections of punk rock, art, dance, and drama. **Lynn Gumpert**, director of the Grey Art Gallery notes: “The photographs not only document seminal cultural practices, but also survey the vast ecology of artistic subcultures that flourished Downtown.”

Since 1994, when director **Marvin J. Taylor** founded Fales Library’s Downtown Collection, it has grown substantially to include over 12,000 printed items and 10,000 linear feet of archives. Taking a broad, inclusive approach, the Downtown Collection aims to document the entire scene rather than highlighting individual artists or groups. Among the invaluable materials Fales has acquired, and which are highlighted in *Downtown Pix*, are the archives of Fashion Moda and the papers of Andrea Callard, co-founder of the artists’ collective Colab.

“To truly understand the climate in which key Downtown works were made,” Taylor writes, “requires an archive documenting the culture. All media are included: paper, film, video, and approximately 50,000 photographs from which the images in *Downtown Pix* were selected.”

The breadth of Fales’s Downtown Collection thus allows for individual artists, writers, and performers as well as collective groups to be situated within broader cultural and social contexts. Each photograph bears the indelible trace of its moment: from the pervasive sense of possibility of the 1960s, through the years of urban decay of the ’70s, and to the galvanized identity politics of the ’80s. The bohemian posturing evident in so many images celebrates a sense of personal freedom that was, for each generation, undoubtedly hard-won. The shared triumphs and inevitable failures documented in *Downtown Pix* continue to shape the memory of a scene that, through its many permutations, thrived on an ethics of experimentation, and a commitment to radical forms of urban life.

Sponsorship:

Organized by New York University’s Grey Art Gallery and Fales Library and Special Collections, *Downtown Pix* is guest curated by Philip Gefter. The exhibition has received the generous support of the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; Ronald and Frayda Feldman; New York University’s Visual Arts Initiative; the Grey’s Director’s Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Gallery:

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University’s fine-arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City’s Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on exploring art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art’s environment and its contributions to civilization.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications, many of which are distributed worldwide.

General Information

Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003

Tel: 212/998-6780, fax: 212/995-4024

E-mail: greycastle@nyu.edu

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greycastle>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge