

TOTAH

Kenny Scharf
MYTHOLOGEEZ

September 4th – November 9th, 2024

TOTAH presents *MYTHOLOGEEZ*, an exhibition of new paintings by Kenny Scharf. *MYTHOLOGEEZ* will open on Wednesday September 4th, and run through November 9th, 2024. This is Scharf's third solo exhibition with the gallery.

Bridging the crepuscular span between Surrealism and Pop, Scharf's playground of imagination addresses the zodiacal year of the dragon (2024), along with our renewed election cycle. As *MYTHOLOGEEZ* makes clear, Scharf's visionary imagery has proven indomitable. Like hieroglyphs, the message he has come to express through his figures has transmogrified into a kind of sacred writ, transcending conventional pictorial values and drawing to themselves a host of associations and meanings.

Paintings like *DRAGONÉ BeBONGO* (2024) have a foreboding, archetypal quality—at once highly stylized and numinous. Scharf traces his dragons back to their ancestral meaning, where, etymologically, the word for "serpent" combines with "one who sees." Like graffiti spacecraft made up of tapestries of words, these paintings indirectly comment on the sacred and auspicious aspects of dragons. Other works, such as *L R R L* (2024), carry more politicized connotations—with the yin/yang contrast of red and blue elements veering in tangential directions. In a crucial election year, however many allusions Scharf's works might suggest, they're able to accomplish this because they exist in their own paradisaal rondure, with their own language and symbolism.

In *MONSATO!* (2024), Scharf's unique handling of surreality elides into trompe l'oeil elusiveness. Here, the biological aspect of his motifs comes more to the fore. The exuberant energy of the work charts a state of perpetual emergence, as the viewer's line of sight sees at one moment individual figures, at another the holistic gestalts these figures give way to. Whether we're situated at the center of the earth, or at the core of a kaleidoscopic sun, makes little difference. The point is to collapse the distinction between microcosm and macrocosm, the popular and profound, avant-gardism and kitsch.

In part, what makes Scharf's iconography so universal is the way it parallels familiar aspects of pop culture, without actually reproducing it. Far from being didactic, his paintings intrinsically speak to matters concerning ecology, consciousness, and being. Scharf's entities, attached to visages that suggest human feelings, are neither germs nor cells, properly speaking; and their cosmic adventuring moves past anything that can be encompassed by human sentiment. Using his otherworldly figures as vehicles, he flies past the outer limits of our culture, revealing an animistic universe that is utterly joyous.

Kenny Scharf (b. 1958, Los Angeles, California) attended Manhattan's School of Visual Arts and came of age in the 1980s New York downtown art scene alongside his contemporaries Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. A painter and performer inhabiting the visual worlds of both street art and popular culture, Scharf's graffiti paintings gained him notoriety and established a vernacular language all his own. Often working with improvisation, he creates playful, gestural pieces that blend stylized motifs with references to the surreal, science fiction, and icons of popular culture. Many of his larger works still adorn New York streets to this day. Scharf was included in the 1985 Whitney Biennial and again in their show *Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s* in 2017. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York; the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; the Miami Center for the Fine Arts, Florida; and the Queens Museum of Art, New York, among others. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Broad Foundation, Los Angeles, and The Jewish Museum, New York, in addition to others worldwide. Scharf lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

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