

BRONX MUSEUM

Henry Chalfant: Art vs. Transit, 1977-1987

The definitive exhibition of photographs documenting subway paintings to receive a long awaited homecoming at the Bronx Museum.



Henry Chalfant. *Dust Sin*, 1980. Courtesy of Eric Firestone Gallery.

On View: September 25, 2019—March 8, 2020

(Bronx, NY — June 19, 2019) — The **Bronx Museum of the Arts** is pleased to announce **Henry Chalfant: Art vs. Transit, 1977-1987**, the first U.S. retrospective of the pioneering photographer, on view from September 25, 2019 to March 8, 2020.

Recognized as one of the most significant documentarians of subway art, Chalfant's photographs and films immortalized this ephemeral art form from its Bronx-born beginnings, helping to launch graffiti art into the international phenomenon it is today. The historic exhibition looks back at a rebellious art form launched in the midst of a tumultuous time in New York City history. Chalfant's graffiti archives are a work of visual anthropology and one of the seminal documents of American popular culture in the late twentieth century.



Left: Henry Chalfant. *Mattress Acrobats Ready to Go*, South Bronx, NY, 1985. **Right:** Henry Chalfant. *Shoot the Pump*, South Bronx, NY, 1985. Courtesy of Eric Firestone Gallery.

Starting in the early 1970s, graffiti became a cultural movement, along with hip-hop and breakdancing, created by teenagers and young people who used the infrastructure of the city, its streets and subway cars, to circulate their tags, murals, and radical visual expressions. Through the lens of Henry Chalfant, the public will be able to see the now largely disappeared works of legendary subway writers, including **Dondi**, **Futura**, **Lady Pink**, **Lee Quiñones**, and **Zephyr**, and Bronx legends including **Blade**, **Crash**, **DAZE**, **Dez**, **Kel**, **Mare**, **SEEN**, **Skeme**, and **T-Kid**.

Chalfant developed an immediate interest in this burgeoning culture when he moved to New York in 1973, and began to explore the uptown stations where the trains ran outside on elevated tracks. By 1977, he had developed a technique of capturing exposures in rapid succession on his 35mm camera from different positions on the platform, documenting the entire train in multiple, overlapping shots.



Henry Chalfant, *Smily, Ebony Dukes, BS119. Pod and others, Intervale station on the 2's and 5's, The Bronx* (1979). Courtesy of Eric Firestone Gallery.

Curated by the world renowned Spanish street artist **SUSO33**, *Henry Chalfant: Art Vs. Transit, 1977-1987* is a long awaited homecoming that celebrates a global art movement that was born in the Bronx and upper Manhattan. Chalfant's subway car photographs constitute the centerpiece of the exhibition—life-sized prints of train cars simulate the experience of a graffiti writer standing on the tracks and looking up. These prints display the different styles of graffiti: from “burners” to iconic full-car murals. In addition to the monumental prints, over 100 of Chalfant's smaller photographs will also be on display.

The exhibition also includes significant and rare historical ephemera from Chalfant's personal archives, as well as his more anthropological photographs capturing the birth of the hip hop movement. These include

black book drawings and outlines by subway writers, objects from various art exhibitions and hip hop shows, as well as over 200 photographs of icons like SEEN and the Rock Steady Crew, along with lesser-known DJs at park jams in the Bronx, and graffiti artists at the writer's bench on 149th street.

Many of these artists were mainstays at Chalfant's SoHo studio throughout the 1980s, where they would browse through the photographer's photo albums, comparing their works with their friends and rivals. A section of the galleries will be transformed into a recreation of Chalfant's studio. The installation will be paired with a soundtrack of subway sounds, as well as archival videos, including *All City* (1983) and a video produced in 1982 by Kodak about Henry Chalfant's technique for capturing subway art.

The exhibition is produced in consultation with Eric Firestone and Sacha Jenkins, as well as additional advisors.



Henry Chalfant. *Style Wars*, 1982. Courtesy of Eric Firestone Gallery.

About Henry Chalfant

Starting out as a sculptor in New York in the 1970s, Chalfant turned to photography and film to do an in-depth study of hip-hop culture and graffiti art. One of the foremost authorities on New York subway art, and other aspects of urban youth culture, his photographs record hundreds of ephemeral, original artworks that have long since vanished. His archive of over 1,500 photographs is represented exclusively by Eric Firestone Gallery, New York and East Hampton. He co-authored the definitive account of New York graffiti art, *Subway Art* (Holt Rinehart Winston, N.Y. 1984) and a sequel on the art form's world-wide diffusion, *Spray Can Art* (Thames and Hudson Inc. London, 1987). Chalfant co-produced the PBS documentary, *Style Wars*, the definitive documentary about Graffiti and Hip Hop culture and directed *Flyin' Cut Sleeves*, a documentary on South Bronx gangs, in 1993. He produced and directed *Visit Palestine: Ten Days on the West Bank* in 2002. His film *From Mambo to Hip Hop* was featured in the Latino Public Broadcasting series, *Voces* in 2006-2007, and won an Alma Award for Best Documentary.

About the Bronx Museum of the Arts

The Bronx Museum of the Arts is an internationally recognized cultural destination that presents innovative contemporary art exhibitions and education programs and is committed to promoting cross-cultural dialogues for diverse audiences. Since its founding in 1971, the Museum has played a vital role in the Bronx by helping to make art accessible to the entire community and connecting with local schools, artists, teens, and families through its robust education initiatives. In celebration of its 40th anniversary, the Museum implemented a universal free admission policy, supporting its mission to make arts experiences available to all audiences. The Museum's collection comprises over 1,000 modern and contemporary artworks in all media and highlights works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry, as well as artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their development. Located on the Grand Concourse, the Museum's home is a distinctive contemporary landmark designed by the internationally recognized firm Arquitectonica.

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