

September 18, 2010

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**Mark Wiener and Linda DiGusta**

Resolve40

Posted: September 15, 2010 02:19 PM

# Being There -- the Artists of Max's Kansas City

*"A bar is place where you're trying to fall in love, even if it's only for one night."*

*Forrest "Frosty" Myers on Max's Kansas City*



*L-R: Tony Masaccio, Forrest Myers, and David Budd; Willem de Kooning; John Chamberlain; Abbie Hoffman. By Anton Perich courtesy Stephen Kasher*

There never was a Max, it was nowhere near Kansas City, but around 40 years ago a place called Max's Kansas City was as "real" as it got. Two exhibitions open in Chelsea this week celebrating the place that was, the art that still is, and the glorious people that made Max's a NYC legend.

Artists and activists, poets and philosophers, and of course musicians, were drawn to restaurateur and art-lover Mickey Ruskin's new establishment in 1965, and it was soon, physically and spiritually, the center of "downtown" -- attracting artists like DeKooning, of the reigning New York School, up from their lair at the Cedar, and waves of younger artists being inspired by the company while changing the paradigm.



*Mickey Ruskin, image courtesy Loretta Howard Gallery*

Ruskin was known and loved for trading bar tabs for art, and Max's soon was hung with such stuff as curators' dreams are made of, works by John Chamberlain, Dorothea Rockburne, Frank Stella, and so many other notables of their generation. A taste of this is on view at Loretta Howard Gallery, and as befits the inaugural exhibition of her new spacious gallery in Chelsea, it is a knockout array of both monumental and intimate works.



*L-R works by Larry Bell, Ronald Bladen, Larry Rivers, Frank Stella, Larry Poons @ Loretta Howard Gallery*

Artist Forrest Myers, whose works appear in both shows, describes the "zeitgeist" of the original Max's (1965-74) as a unique and vibrant time in history -- anti-war, civil rights, women's liberation, and gay rights movements cross-pollinated with the sexual revolution, infusing their meeting place with a "spirited aura." In these same fertile times art movements arising and expanding included: Pop; Colorfield; AbEx; Art & Technology; Minimalism; Conceptual Art and Earth Works.



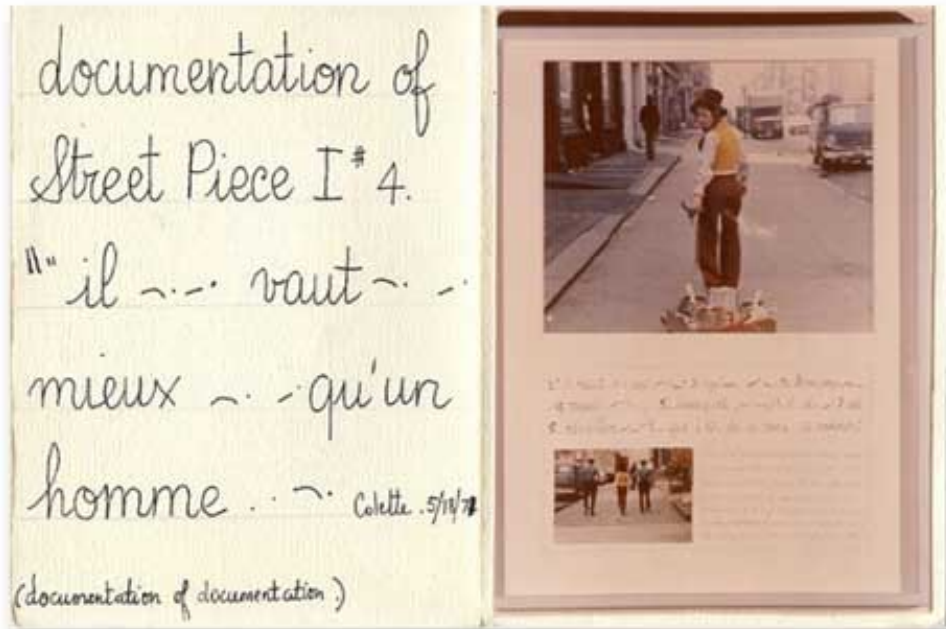
*Frosty Myers, Green T @ Loretta Howard*

NASA's moon missions inspired the artists. Myer's "Moon Museum" project sent drawings by six artists -- Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, David Novros, Claes Oldenburg, John Chamberlain and himself -- all on a computer chip, along on Apollo 12 in 1969. The original remains on the moon, a copy is on view in "Max's Kansas City" at Stephen Kasher Gallery. i

Also at Kasher is Myers' jukebox, transformed into a unique installation by a chance meeting that could only have happened at Max's. A presenter from a laser trade show spent an evening of discussion, and drinking, with the science-savvy artists at the bar. As he left, he handed Frosty his demo laser, saying, "You should have this." Myers set it up in his studio across Park to beam onto a mirror affixed to a speaker on the jukebox, which sent light, pulsing to the music, through

the room.

*Max's Kansas City was my introduction to the art world - as a very young, naïve, but determined artist I found my 'home'." Colette*



*Postcard by Colette, Early 1970's, courtesy of the artist*

The title of Loretta Howard's show, "Artists at Max's Kansas City, 1965-1974: Hetero-Holics and Some Women Too" reflects the testosterone-laden energy at the bar. Nevertheless, female artists found a way into the group -- Lynda Benglis, Brigid Berlin and others...



*Clockwise from bottom center, works by Lynda Benglis, Friedel Dzubas, Dan Flavin, Dan Christensen @ Loretta Howard*

"At that time it was difficult, if not impossible for a young female who wore lipstick and dressed up to be accepted and taken seriously as an artist," said Colette, who made her first art sale to Miles Davis after meeting him at Max's.

I wanted to be acknowledged for my art by those big macho artists that were omnipresent, usually at the bar, and eventually received it [from] most that mattered to me -- Robert Smithson, Carl Andre, Malcolm Morley, Larry Rivers, Al Hansen, Robert Watts, Willoughby Sharp, many more... Robert Rauschenberg was especially open and supportive.



*Robert Rauschenberg, Angostura, @ Loretta Howard*

Colette, who recalls first being treated as a VIP at Max's for her street paintings and performances, said "I also received my tabs from Mickey, who I hardly spoke to but supported me -- not only at Max's but the other places he opened."

*"My memories are of smoky evenings, large crowds and a lot of colorful people. In the front room I would sit feeling isolated, I was a hermit in those days and recognized nothing in common with most who were in the room. Now I know I was with some of the greatest minds of the modern and contemporary art world." Mark Wiener*





*Anton Perich, Nico, Shep Gordon, Authur Kane with Ari Boulon on his shoulders, and Alice Cooper, With the Dan Flavin Neon Sculpture, 1973 courtesy Stephen Kasher*

Mark Wiener was a very young photographer launching his commercial career with his studio near Max's, which was in his words, "unlike any other "local" we haunted, it was this energy that drew us there." He remembers being amazed by the lighting, not realizing at the time that he was viewing the work of groundbreaking artist, Dan Flavin, who today is one of Wiener's favorite minimalists.



*Brigid Berlin, Self-Portrait Polaroid and Artist Book @ Loretta Howard*

Mark was most at home in the back room, with artists like Alice Cooper, Johnny Winter, and Rick Derringer after photo sessions at the Record Plant. Wish you had been there? At Stephen Kasher Gallery, you can glimpse the past and its people through the over 100 vintage photos taken at Max's, and other works by the artist regulars, in the exhibition, as well as the book it is launching: *Max's Kansas City: Art, Glamour, Rock and Roll*.

"Seeing the pictures of David Bowie and Abby Hoffman and the aristocracy of Max's," said Wiener, "stirs memories of wonderful conversation and confrontation."

And what about falling in love? Artist Paula DeLuccia told us Max's "is where I met Larry Poons, to whom I am currently married... in December of 1973, the first time I was there with the painter Sherron Francis."





*James Rosenquist, Floating to the Top, @ Loretta Howard Gallery*

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correction made from "singer Betty Davis (wife of Miles)" to "Miles Davis" as Colette's collector