

Neke Carson

Glam Conceptualism, Interventional Performance, et aliis rerum A Survey: 1949-2018

January 12 – February 24, 2018

Entrance:

Drawing from Neke Carson's sophomore year at the Rhode Island School of Design, 1965

Gallery, clockwise from entrance:

Rectal Realism (1972)

Rectal Realist Portrait of Andy Warhol, 1972, oil on canvas, 20 x 18 inches

Documentary photographs of Neke Carson painting Andy Warhol's portrait at The Factory, New York, 1972

Rectal Realist Portrait of the Audience, 1972, oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 36 inches

Documentary photograph of Neke Carson painting the audience, New York, 1972

Neke Carson on Rectal Realism

Eventually I was approached by gallerist Joe LoGuidice to do a show at his Broome St. Gallery. I felt if I could do a performance that created an object I could have a pretty interesting show. I began looking for inspiration. A few blocks down from my loft on the corner of Canal and Broadway was a Chinese movie theater and for a couple of bucks you could watch 3 or 4 Kung Fu Movies for the whole day, the kind where they would fly around and attack each other with swords and things.

One movie in particular really grabbed me. It was about a master who had given up the sword. The villagers would come to him and beg the Master to stop the bad guys who were destroying their village. The Master refused. Finally the bad guys kills one of his daughters. The Master is in his house when he gets the news and is so mad he thrusts his arm into the wall all the way to his arm pit and pulls out his sword. He had hidden it so far in his wall that only if the situation was so totally out of control he would gladly wreck his house just to get his sword. He was beside himself to say the least. Very impressive indeed.

So I wanted to embed my pencils and brushes in the wall of the gallery and I would have to be so upset that I would have to punch a hole in the gallery wall if I ever wanted to paint or draw again. But if you entered the gallery you would see nothing on the walls. Everything would be inside the walls. Eventually I realized I didn't think I could pull this off.

So I was going around the house with pencils in hand saying over and over "Where can I stick these?" "Where?" Finally Eileen my wife at the time said, "Hey just stick them up your butt and be done with it!" I said, "You got a point!" And an art movement I called "Rectal Realism" was born. I began doing portraits in this fashion. One of my subjects was Andy Warhol. He liked the idea. We set up a time at the factory so Andy would sit for me. The video machine was set up with Glenn O'Brien and Vincent Fremont doing the honors. It took about 40 minutes. and it came out looking like him. He liked it. I liked it. And it ended up in the show that I did at the LoGuidice Gallery. Also Included in that show was a half-ass painting done half with my hand and half with my ass. It was called "The Mark of Zorro". It was a big 5 feet by 6 feet "Z".

Video

- Neke Carson painting Andy Warhol's portrait at The Factory, New York, 1972
- Clips of the fashion show in Slava Tsukerman's 1982 movie *Liquid Sky*, starring LaRocka supermodel Anne Carlisle and featuring LaRocka Modeling Agency models. Neke Carson starts the proceedings.

La Rocka Modeling Agency (1978-1982)

Framed photographs, promotional materials and announcements produced by and for Neke Carson's LaRocka Modeling Agency and LaRocka Night Club, c.1978-1982

Photograph of Neke Carson by Mario Van Peebles

I decided I was crazy to carry on this behavior (attempting to become a professional horse jockey) and came back to the city and founded a New Wave modeling agency called LaRocka Modeling Agency. I started putting on shows at the Mudd Club and found a lot of interesting faces there.

Display table with Neke Carson/LaRocka Modeling Agency ephemera, catalogs, photographs, fliers, etc. including first editions of *Art Therapy for Conceptual Artists* and *Works on Art and Rectal Realism*, 1972

Miscellaneous projects, cartoons, (1968-1978)

Art Therapy for Conceptual Artists

At this time artists were doing a lot of crazy things. Having themselves shot and crucified etc. So for me this show fit right in. Then I decided to offer artists a way out of this behavior. So I created a six week course that was called "Art Therapy for Conceptual Artists" and would help them to get back to making simple objects like paper mache' crocodiles, big wooden spoons as a way of finding peace within themselves. To me like it says on the poster. "Art and Therapy go together like Art Therapy". It was a viable alternative. First it was a 6 week course but it eventually became a one off book (20) then was published 30 years later by Rollo Press. At the moment the book is completely sold out. I am waiting for a second edition.

Atomic Bicycle

For some reason the atomic and sub-atomic world became a great interest to me. So I created the first and only "Atomic Bicycle." The Atomic bicycle was based on the old style and out dated idea of what an atom actually looks like. And it was made for those people who like to ride around in an obsolete concept of the universe.

Bite me and drink what you love

One of my favorites from this series – my drawings of vampires and the races of man – was a blood filled cross that had stamped on it "Bite me and drink what you love". It was an invitation to vampires to destroy themselves. They were drawn to the blood but couldn't get past the shape of the packaging. Namely the cross.

Win a Place to Show

Now I grew up in Texas riding horses, mainly quarter horses. But my next idea had to do with race horses. I got this idea that I would do a series of drawings and become a jockey, wear the drawings under my silks, win a race and produce a winning drawing. I would then put the winning drawings in an exhibition entitled "Win a Place to Show". Of course I did not realize what a dangerous idea this was. Horses and riders put themselves in tremendous danger at every turn. I began as an exercise boy. I would take the horses around the track early in the morning just to warm them up. I never got to the level of jockey. I was pretending to be a young kid doing this and after going through a few railings and getting caught atop a runaway horse in a complete fog at the Atlantic City race track.

Assassination of Vaughn Meader, Presidential Mimic

Original art for a cartoon published in the National Lampoon Magazine, October 1972, Vol. 1, No. 31

Conceptual drawings: meditations on existence and devices enabling meditations on existence, including:

Womb Baby Beauty Contest, 1969; under water, 1969; Untitled (Bubbles and Garters), n.d.; Hung Man Trampoline, 1970; Pumping Hot Blood, 1969 (And then there was the chair that pumped blood, warm blood. I wanted to make living furniture. Furniture that was alive.); Race of Man History and Ethnic Background, 1969; Beat the Cross, 1969; True cross going to church, 1969; The Race of Man Vampire turns to fire and gives his Blood to you, 1969; Certs is a candy mint, Certs is a breast mint, 1970

Fictitious Fruit (2015 – 2018)

Recently I moved from NYC to Sag Harbor. It is a very peaceful and creative place. I started out stacking dimes and then eventually started to paint again. This time a series called "Fictitious Fruit". Oil on canvass 24 x 18 inches. TFictitious Fruit got its name because some are real, some are plastic, and some are not fruit at all (they're vegetables). You decide if you can tell which is which.

Portraits from the Closet (2007 – 2009)

here, the closets of Billy Name, Debbie Ullman, Susan Oetgen and Max Blagg

In 2008, after a show at the Warhol Museum show I continued to explore photography. I created "Closet Portraits." I would go into someone's house and go into their closet and put my camera on the floor and put it on a timer. The camera looks up and takes a picture after I have shut the door the camera has an up shirt or up skirt point of view that few have seen before. It looks very intricate but in fact that is just how the clothes are. They have been waiting for their close up for so long. I had a show of Closet Portraits of people like John Waters, Debbie Harry, Brigid Berlin and Billy Name among others.

Conceptual drawings: meditations on existence and devices enabling meditations on existence (continued)

True Cross doing Yoga, 1969; The war between the Clean and Dirty People, 1977; The rain has just started, 1969; Presidential Scalp Skirt, 1970

Dead Birds Fly Again

I became excited about the world of kinetic art, and created a piece called "Dead birds Fly again". This is where I would take a dead bird and tie a wire around its neck and attach the other half of the wire to a motor and turn it on. The bird would literally fly again.

Suicide Eggs For People Who Want To Be Born A Splat On The Ground

Continuing to investigate the dual nature of life and death I came up with the "Suicide Egg". This is where you would take a large light weight plastic egg and climb to the top of a tall building secure the egg to the building, get inside and break it open and be born a splat on the earth.

Works on Art/Interventional Performance (mostly 1970–1975)

Photographs taken by Eileen Carson

Sound Off Art; Dandruff Exorcism; The Longest Carrot in New York; Don't Rain on My Parade, Bango Bango; Rags to Riches (An interpretive ballet); Retrospective;

Eventually I decided that as I was living in Soho where all the galleries were, that it was time to take a more active role in using what the galleries had to offer namely art. If someone could find art in a hardware store surely one could find art in a gallery as well. At least that was the theory.

Sound off Art

In "Sound off Art" I hit art with a tuning fork and amplified the sound.

Bango Bango

I also performed a Rags to Riches interpretive Ballet entitled "Bango Bango." I wore old clothes and would take them off to reveal a tuxedo underneath. After a while there was a spirit of cooperation with the galleries. Sonnabend would flick the lights off and on to let people know the show was about to begin. The events themselves only 2 to 3 minutes.

Dandruff Exorcism

Eventually I made it uptown to the Betty Parson's Gallery on 57th St but the director was too busy to waste time with me. This taught me a very valuable lesson. I decided to stop wasting time and start doing events in these galleries. The first one was called "Dandruff Exorcism" where I would make a pattern of dandruff on a piece of black paper at 7 galleries and 3 museums.

The event was announced in the papers and flyers were posted around town. I made sure I included the Betty Parsons Gallery. When I got there the director was very excited to see me. It seems someone had called up and wanted to buy my dandruff. And he was only too happy to sell it. So on the third Saturday of each month I would do a different event in the galleries.

The Longest Carrot in New York City

Another event was called "The Longest Carrot in New York City." The carrot was displayed on a Dan Flavin Florescent light piece or near a Picasso and other art work in a gallery.

Sold!

I would put up posters etc. to get the word out. I enjoyed working with the art in the galleries. When 420 West Broadway opened which was a building that housed Castelli, Sonnabend, Weber and Emmerich Galleries I did an event called Sold! I placed red dots near all the art work indicating they were sold. My part of the work was the red dot. I eventually sold some red dots. So I felt it was a success.

Retrospective

In another event I danced on top of Vito Acconci's "Seed Bed" at the Sonnabend Gallery. Vito was underneath and I was dancing around on top.

Consumer Products (unrealized exhibition at O.K. Harris, 1970/71)

Letter sent to major American corporations requesting products to be exhibited in an art exhibition with their replies to this request.

Early Drawing

Photograph of Neke Carson's mother, mid-1940s

Spiders on Mommy's Dress, 1949

This is my first work of art, a pencil drawing entitled "Spiders on Mommy's dress". Here is my mother screaming for her life while spiders crawl towards her open mouth. I was 3 years old at the time. I still have vivid memories of doing this drawing.

Office:

Barbara Rosenthal, *Surreal to Conceptual (Bird in Montreal Window; Under London Bridge; Berlin Grafitti Doorway)*, photo-print-collage, 40 x 26 inches; *Wafting Berlin Hallways; Wafting Red House, Germany*, photo-print-collage, 20 x 16 inches

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In 1968 Neke Carson and his Rhode Island School of Design classmate Martin Mull formed an art rock band that opened for Janis Joplin when she played at the school. The following year, after graduation, Carson moved to NYC where his RISD thesis project, Double Bubble Bath or Moon Man Fountain – a large sculpture where two people could sit inside plastic bubbles surrounded by water – was photographed by Philippe Halsman for an article on “Fun Art” in the autumn 1969 issue of Horizon magazine.

Interested in kinetic art, Carson began producing conceptual drawings for apparatus that could directly address existential problems, particularly those surrounding signification and mortality. His Suicide Egg is a large plastic egg to be affixed high on a building that once crawled into would release its emergent, human, embryo to “be born a splat on the earth.” Bite me and drink what you love is a blood-filled cross to be placed alongside cold cuts in a supermarket freezer inviting vampires to destroy themselves in order to obtain their desire. Pumping Hot Blood is a clear plastic chair plumbed with tubes circulating warm red dye providing a relaxing external cradle that echoes internal physiology in both form and function.

Living in the then-developing gallery scene in SoHo, Carson decided to jump right in and document the time he wasted showing his slides to art dealers. Given the continuing futility of this endeavor (it took four years before he was finally offered a show, terminating the piece) Carson decided to turn the Duchampian imperative on its head mounting interventional performances in galleries where, rather than turning readymades into art, he could turn art into readymades; dancing on Vito Acconci’s Seedbed; placing red Sold! sticky dots on Gilbert and George’s Singing Sculpture or Carl Andre’s brick Equivalent sculptures; walking into galleries canoodling with a dog amidst the art (Crimes Against Nature); photographing a large carrot placed on work by Dan Flavin, Robert Rauschenberg, or even Picasso (The Longest Carrot in NYC).

Perhaps Carson’s most notorious invention/intervention is Rectal Realism. Here the artist produced paintings holding a paintbrush in his ass. Carson’s Rectal Realist painting of Andy Warhol was made at the Factory in truly circular and collaborative fashion with Warhol filming Neke, while Neke observed and painted his subject.

In the late 1970s, ensconced within the burgeoning downtown New Wave scene Carson decided to gather its most visually intriguing denizens to start the La Rocka Modeling Agency. This project was surprisingly successful, obtaining high-profile modeling assignments (for Henri Bendel, for example), working with the likes of Stephen Meisel, Anna Sui, Betsy Johnson, and Michael Kors, doing runway shows for Kansai Yamamoto, and receiving lots and lots of press. The La Rocka Agency was central to the production of Slava Tsukerman’s 1982 cult classic Liquid Sky, providing both significant cast and presiding over a fashion show that established the film’s defining New Wave aura. La Rocka supermodel Anne Carlisle played both the male and female leads and co-wrote the script.

Neke Carson went on produce photographs of phosphorescent figurines, Closet Portraits of

friends (John Waters, Debbie Harry, etc.) made by placing a camera on their closet floors and shutting the door. Other projects followed, the most recent of which is Fictitious Fruits, paintings of real and artificial fruits and vegetables, thirteen of which are being shown here.

On the side, having taught himself to play the piano, Neke Carson curated and hosted a performance venue at the Gershwin Hotel from 2001 to 2014 presenting Jared Harris, the Poet Laureate Billy Collins, Nina Hagen, and Debbie Harry, among other downtown celebrities. Carson has also given piano recitals at the Andy Warhol and Rubin Museums.

Neke Carson (b. Dallas, Texas, 1946) is the youngest of three extraordinary and eccentric brothers. The oldest, L. M. Kit Carson (1941-2014) was an actor and screenwriter whose breakthrough came writing the screen adaptation of Sam Shepherd's novel *Motel Chronicles* for the 1984 movie *Paris, Texas*. He was married at the time to Karen Black, and their son Hunter was one of the movie's stars. Kit went on to write screenplays for the remake of *Breathless* with Richard Gere, as well as the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. The middle brother, Reverend Goat Carson (1945-2018) was a Grammy award winning lyricist (in 2008 with Dr. John), Cherokee Medicine Man and professional eccentric, running for president in 1992 on the Blues Party ticket and adopting the campaign slogan "We want our money back." Neke Carson lives and works in Sag Harbor, NY.