



The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984

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Downtown is more than just a location, it's an attitude--and in the 1970s and '80s, that attitude forever changed the face of America. This book charts the intricate web of influences that shaped the generation of experimental and outsider artists working in Downtown New York during the crucial decade from 1974 to 1984. Published in conjunction with the first major exhibition of downtown art (organized by New York University's Grey Art Gallery and Fales Library), *The Downtown Book* brings the Downtown art scene to life, exploring everything from Punk rock to performance art.

The book probes trends that arose in the 1970s and solidified New York's reputation as arbiter of the postmodern American avant-garde. By 1974, the hippie euphoria of the previous decade, with its optimism, free love, and paeans to personal fulfillment, was over. In its place emerged a new kind of experimentation--in art, sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The seven essays featured here examine from different perspectives how Downtown artists constantly pushed the limits of both traditional media and the art world. Art critic Carlo McCormick addresses the energy, power, drugs, and nonstop erotic motion that propelled the scene. Music historian Bernard Gendron explores how minimalism, loft jazz, and Punk all occupied the same Downtown spaces. RoseLee Goldberg, the noted scholar and critic of performance art, looks back at ten years of its ascendancy Downtown. English professor Robert Siegle casts a critical eye on the literature of the Downtown scene. Librarian and archivist Marvin J. Taylor surveys Downtown as both geography and metaphor, and grapples with the question of how best to organize and preserve materials that often challenge the very notion of the archive. The book also includes seminal essays on the critical theories underlying Downtown art, by Brian Wallis; and on Downtown film, by Matthew Yokobosky.

The essays are intercut with personal reminiscences by such renowned pioneers

of the Downtown scene as Eric Bogosian, Richard Hell, Lydia Lunch, Ann Magnuson, Michael Musto, and Martha Wilson. More than 150 striking photographs feature Downtown denizens and galleries; works by Cindy Sherman, Keith Haring, and many other artists; and hotspots such as CBGBs and Club 57. Hip and provocative, *The Downtown Book* provides a rare glimpse into the cauldron of the New York artistic counterculture--and the colorful characters who inhabited it.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

Grey Art Gallery and the Fales Library

New York University
January 10 - April 1, 2006

The Andy Warhol Museum

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Mid-May to September 4, 2006

Austin Museum of Art

Austin, Texas
November 11, 2006 - January 28, 2007 (tentative dates)

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Editorial Review

Review

Honorable Mention for the 2006 Museum Publications Design Competition, Books Category, American Association of Museums

"*The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984* celebrates the era's creative commotion, much of it scattershot and under the mainstream radar."--*New York Times Style Magazine*

"For readers with an interest in New York's art history, the detailed chronology alone makes the book essential source material."--**Kenneth Baker, *San Francisco Chronicle***

From the Back Cover

"This is a terrific and important book. It brings an interdisciplinary view to one of the most fecund decades in the history of avant-garde art."--**Peggy Phelan, Stanford University**

"In the late 1970s, when Gregory Battcock and I were both writing art columns for the *Soho Weekly News*, he divided Manhattan into two kinds of people: the Downtown Slouches and the Uptown Swells. This is a book filled with facts and anecdotes, told by astute eyewitnesses and not detached scholars, about the Downtown Slouches--and the wonderful crazy things they did, and made, over a remarkable ten-year period. All of the contributing writers and artists emphasize one crucial issue: for everyone living and working below Fourteenth Street at that time, identity was synonymous with geography--urban space was our mental space. We were refugees from the America of the 1950s and 60s, outcasts of the suburbs and the shopping malls. We wrote, painted, performed and played music in grateful homage to our spiritual home--and our offerings have borne fruit, as this book makes abundantly clear, by illuminating the history of American art."--**Shelley Rice, New York University**

"After the Vietnam War we thought we could change the world with a cultural revolution. Read this book and find out how we did it: Art and more Art and lots of Art."--**Karen Finley, Visiting Professor, Tisch School for the Arts, New York University**

"A magnificent, groundbreaking, blinding bright, really important book."--**Dennis Cooper, author of *The George Miles Cycle***

"This is history still alive. More than memory, it is our identity. Did we know what we were doing? Yes. We were coming in on energy. And creating the ultimate conflagration. Some kind of end-times party. It's all over because it's all over everything we see, hear, and do now. These writings overflow with exquisite passion for a juiced time. Eventually they swept the streets. But we were already out of there."--**Thurston Moore, singer and guitarist for Sonic Youth**

About the Author

Marvin J. Taylor is Director of the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University. In 1994, he began the Downtown Collection, which documents the Downtown New York scene from 1974 to the present. Lynn Gumpert is Director of the Grey Art Gallery at New York University. Carlo McCormick is a popular-culture critic and curator in New York City. Bernard Gendron teaches at the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee and writes on jazz, Punk, and the avant-garde. Matthew Yokobosky is a freelance film curator and the director of exhibition design at the Brooklyn Museum. RoseLee Goldberg is founding director of PERFORMA, a nonprofit organization founded to support and develop new visual art performance, and author of "Performance Art from Futurism to the Present". Robert Siegle is Professor of English at Virginia Tech, where he teaches courses in contemporary culture and theory. Brian Wallis is Chief Curator and Director of Exhibitions at the International Center of Photography in New York.

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