

THE TRIBECA TRIB

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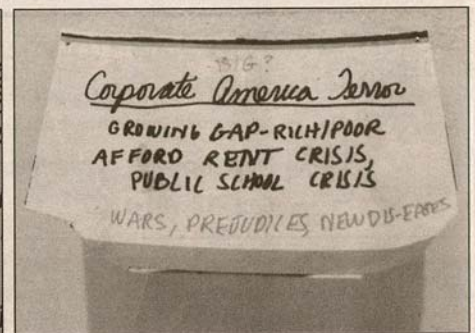
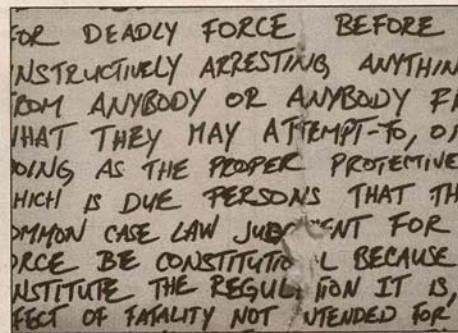
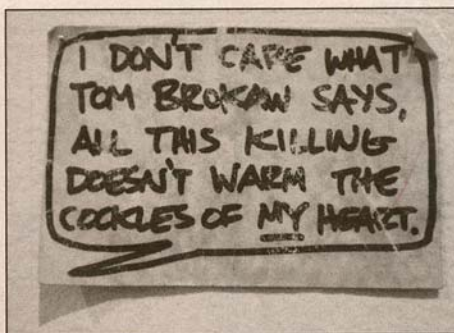
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Gallery Brings 'Scrawls' in from the Street

BY MATT DUNNING

Some time ago, Harley Spiller bought Manhattan Island from a homeless man in Midtown. A part-time curator at the Franklin Furnace Archive in Brooklyn, Spiller paid the man \$1, and received a quitclaim deed for the island, filled out with a black Sharpie and signed by "Kid."

The deed is one of five items Spiller, 49, saved from his encounter with "Kid," and is part of a collection of more than 100 anonymous or pseudonymous declarations he's been harvesting from the streets of New York since 1985.

"I collect this stuff to learn about it, and to be a part of the streets of New York," Spiller explained. "It's one thing to see something in a museum and read their little explanation of it. It's wholly different to actually put your hands on something, turn it around and review it

yourself."

Entitled "SCRAWL," Spiller's collection is on display at apexart until Oct. 11. The pieces come in all shapes and sizes, written on everything from discarded pizza boxes to planks of scrap wood. Some, like a series of leaflets Spiller took from a man on the Upper West Side in 2001, appear to be complex diatribes, but written in a language that does not exist.

Political and philosophical sentiments abound. President Bush, 9/11, and immigration are especially popular. One of Spiller's favorites, written on a blank address label, accuses Rudy Giuliani of having the lowest I.Q. of any New York City mayor.



"There's a distinct mission by the creators of this material," Spiller said, glancing at a piece he took from the side of a building on Church Street in 1995. It appears to be an excerpt of a story about a woman lost in the desert, written in neatly composed calligraphy.

Spiller says he still feels guilty when he recalls watching the woman glue that piece to a wall, waiting until she was gone to pull it down.

By removing the notes and posters from the cluttered streetscapes where he found them, Spiller said he wants viewers to think about the messages and the people who write them. Visitors to the gallery, he said, can decide for themselves the sorts of minds that are at work.

"I'm not willing to pigeonhole any-

body," Spiller said. "[The woman on Church Street] might have been homeless, or she might have had an apartment upstairs and smelled like roses. You form mental ideas about people when you see [their writings]."

What of the anti-immigrant, anti-gay, anti-Semitic messages that drip with hate?

"When I see something like that, I take it off the wall, first to get it out of my sight and out of the public sight, but also to preserve it," Spiller said. "Do I really want to meet the guy who says 'Half of New York's [gay people] have the AIDS?' No...but maybe something can be done to lower the volume of hate by showing it."

Scrawl will be at apexart until Sat., Oct. 11. apexart, 291 Church St. Hours: Tue-Sat 11 am-6 pm. 212-431-5270. apexart.org.