

apexart

SCRAWL

This proposal is for an exhibition at apexart of writings originally posted by unknowns on the public walls and surfaces of NYC. SCRAWL will consist of a straightforward installation of c. 80 palpably urgent and captivating messages that largely went overlooked in their original context. The impetus to build this collection, and propose it for exhibition, is the desire to reach a better understanding of the creators of this unique body of material.

The collection began on a cloudy afternoon in 1985, when a cryptic note flickered in the corner of my eye as I walked up Broadway. Regretting that I had not read it in its entirety, I returned to the weathered page a few minutes later. Barely clinging to a Times Square lamp post, the bold and bizarre message proved indelibly fascinating. I took it down, and thus began a collection of similar public postings that continues to this day.

SCRAWL covers the gamut of human interests, from personal expressions to multi-layered amalgams of mathematical figuring to dense philosophical posturing. There are frank statements of a sexual, psychological, political and/or biblical nature, in penmanship ranging from impeccably-drafted and utterly unique calligraphy to the illegible. Once I encountered a man holding a stack of elaborate and mysterious hand-cut word/text messages akin to some already in my collection. He was quietly and selectively distributing photocopies in front of Zabars in November 2001, when I dared to ask, "what's it all about?" "They're pictures not sounds so I don't talk about em," he murmured in reply. The collecting continued in earnest.

The objects range in size from 1" square to placards roughly 2x3' and have never been exhibited. Most of the 30 artists represented do their work with pen or marker on paper or cardboard, but it is difficult to generalize about the collection. Many are photocopied, presumably to facilitate greater distribution. One prolific "publisher" scrawled on lengths of masking tape he adhered to the tiles of Grand Central Station, while another scratched into wood with a ballpoint pen, placing a message in a semi-hidden spot at eye level.

The actual method of posting can also be revealing. Most of the material is stuck to walls with tape, but one ultra-political scribe pastes entreaties onto the glass of Upper East Side bus stops in a variegated lattice of adhesive labels. Another has been posting in city buses for decades – his series of neatly-Sharpie'd multi-color statements are on perforated cardboard ovals removed from tissue box tops. He also pens his messages on dollar bills and puts them back into circulation.

The subject matter of SCRAWL tends to the fragile and fraught, leading to queries about the creators and their state of mind. Who is to say these difficult-to-decipher messages do not contain not workable solutions to our postmodern urban woes? Not intentionally pouring water through sieves, these denizens of New York yearn to publish, to be heard, to stop wriggling along like eels and do something to right wrongs both personal and universal. They take risks, they make sacrifices, they stand up to better their/our lot in life. These determined creators richly deserve recognition as artists.

I understand the intellectual and structural content of the collection as an existential and undiscovered art form, and exhibiting these nearly invisible artists working in the public eye is perfectly in line with apexart's stated commitment "to cultural and intellectual diversity." An exhibition like this will present, promote and preserve these unsung voices as an integral part of the human cultural tissue that connects us all, regardless of circumstances. As such, apexart is the place to install SCRAWL and begin a public dialogue about these heady, provocative, and artful human expressions.

On behalf of the nameless people who post their innermost thoughts in an infinite variety of formats on every conceivable surface of New York City, thank you very much for your consideration.