

# George Schneeman

POETS HOUSE

I HEARD THE VOICE OF THE PORK CHOP SAY, COME UNTO ME AND REST. This block-lettered gospel fills two opposite corners of *Pork Chop*, 1970–73, a collaborative collage by the painter George Schneeman and the poet Larry Fagin. An upside-down, ochre-colored sofa sectional hovers in the bottom-left corner, while in the top right, a cartoon-strip cel captions a high-speed car crash: WHUMMP!

A fixture on the scene at St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, Schneeman (1934–2009) thrived on these kinds of freewheeling collaborations, churning out myriad collages, book covers, and paintings of and alongside second-generation New York School poets such as Fagin, Ted Berrigan, Peter Schjeldahl, and Anne Waldman. His graphic sensibilities sampled heavily from pop culture, with an audacity and deftness that suggests an East Village answer to Eduardo Paolozzi. That Schneeman's own oeuvre is not better known is a testament to his generosity; in a market that placed an imperative on individual authorship, Schneeman worked within a close network of friends, with whom the majority of his paintings, collages, and works on paper have remained.

Titled "A Painter and His Poets," this recent survey of one hundred paintings and works on paper was organized by two of Schneeman's closest confederates, Bill Berkson and Ron Padgett. As the title indicates, the exhibition (which will remain on view until September 20) emphasizes the artist's relationships to those around him, setting up his status as both a center of gravity for the community (his studio served as a hangout for poets) and its chronicler. While the bulk of the works on display are collaborations from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the first gallery delivers a roll call of the scene, filling a series of vitrines with samples of book covers and portraits. Poets such as Eileen Myles, Edwin Denby, and Allen Ginsberg appear on a series of cinder blocks, painted between 1977 and 1979 using the fresco technique Schneeman had picked up while living in Italy in the late 1950s and early '60s. A second set of portraits from 1980 offers deadpan odes on Grecian urns, with profiles of

George Schneeman and Anne Waldman, *Imaginary Relish*, 2005, mixed media on paper, 19½ x 26"



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poets Rene Ricard, John Godfrey, and Schjeldahl (gamely portrayed as Hamlet) starkly outlined in black and white on ceramic vases. Elsewhere, larger canvases bear near-life-size nude portraits of Schneeman's inner circle, alone or in groups, their self-consciousness shed in a palette of blanched pastels, the colors of beach towels strung up in the sun. Schneeman's style prioritizes presence over precision: Arms are unrendered, legs left as loose sketches, landscapes rarely filled in.

Within the collaborative works, language is deployed fast and loose, functioning self-sufficiently as a formal device (as in *Pork Chop*), but also charging the seemingly nonsensical combinations of elements with the humor of a purported (albeit often mystifying) purpose. One image collages two newspaper headlines to advertise the FIRST NAME OF RITA HAYWORTH'S THEORY OF RELATIVITY, while in another, a horde of helmeted marauders pauses to ponder this urgent question: HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE PARTAKE OF SUPPER? A spread from *Yodeling into a Kotex*, a 1968 artists' book created with Padgett, shows two women in mod dresses adjusting their hats under a slip of a cigar and the (misspelled) word LINEOLEUM. The overall impression is one of terrific coincidence, as if all of these elements had been floating in space, only to be corralled in place for that one chance instant.

Schneeman's later collaborations, while perhaps more structured, find the artist indulging a similar whimsy. *For Example*, 2006, made with Padgett, sends its title sailing across two horizontally aligned sheets, suggesting the words have been buffeted off their axis by a sudden gust of wind (which has taken a sparsely formed fedora along with it). A 2005 collage with Waldman, *Imaginary Relish*, builds off an image of a Vargas girl, plopped like a scoop of vanilla ice cream atop a yellow sheet of steno paper, inscribed with a potential poem: THE IMAGINED RELISH IS SO SWEET, IT INTOXICATES THE SENSES.

Concurrent with "A Painter and His Poets," Pavel Zoubok Gallery presented "ZIG ZAG JAG," a selection of Schneeman's late works. Taut odes to desire, rejection, and denial, the paintings and collages would look at home amid those by the Independent Group, but as "A Painter and His Poets" suggests, Schneeman may have been at his best when with friends.

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