

feature story

LIVING IN THE 1980s

HVCCA Exhibition Looks at an Extraordinary Decade in Art

by Jim Ormond

In one scene in the 1987 movie, *Wall Street*, Charlie Sheen's character (a young wall street trader) asks Daryl Hannah's character (an interior designer to the rich and famous) how much one of her painting is worth. "\$400,000 dollars," she replies.

"\$400,000 dollars," asks Sheen's character in amazement.

"For that much money you could buy a beach house!" "Sure," she says. "In Wildwood, New Jersey."

"Art Boom" is the first label that is often put on the art of the decade between 1981 and 1991, referring to how such prices for art skyrocketed in such a short span. True, some works sold for astronomical prices at that time, and a handful of the young artists (Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, Jean-Michel Basquiat) became pop culture stars. But a new exhibition at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (HVCCA) in Peekskill seeks to present the 1980s as a time when anything was possible and enduring art works were made.

"It wasn't about the money for these artists," says HVCCA co-founder Livia Straus. "And out of that freedom some really remarkable work was created."

Circa 1986, on view at the HVCCA through July 2012, features 65 artworks by 47 international artists who emerged during the era. The exhibition is curated by John Newsom (a New York-based painter), Nicola Trezzi (US editor of *Flash Art International*) and

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Astrid Honold (Director of OFFICE For Contemporary Art, Amsterdam). The curators selected work from six major collectors of 1980s art.

The exhibition includes work by Damien Hirst, who was making cabinets when the decade started, Robert Rauschenberg, who would set of a firestorm for an NEA-sponsored exhibition, and Jeff Koons. The *Circa 1986* exhibition includes Koon's *50/50 Tank*, which is composed of two basketballs floating in a fish tank of distilled water. "If America loves basketball, that is what I will give them," Koons is purportedly to have said.

The epicenter of the 1980s art scene was the East Village in Lower Man-

hattan, where dozens of galleries that sprouted up overnight lacked the pretentious conventions of galleries in other neighborhoods.

"People would make a gallery out of any abandoned storefront and show the work of their friends," Livia recalls. "It was a party atmosphere...It was an organic and exciting scene."

The AIDS epidemic, which was at its apex in the 1980s, claimed the lives of many of the decade's most well-known artists and was a major factor, along with an art market crash around 1990, closing the curtain on the era.

"Some of these artists are so good that they are due for a rediscovery by the art-going public," adds Livia Straus. "We believe the 1980s was an extraordinary decade for contemporary art, and we hope this exhibition will tell at least part of that story."

For more information, visit www.hvcca.org.

