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MEDIA PREVIEW

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EAST VILLAGE USA AT THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Reviving the scene that shaped the art world in the early 1980s

December 9, 2004 – March 19, 2005

New York, New York (October 25, 2004) – On **December 9, 2004**, the **New Museum of Contemporary Art / Chelsea** will open the highly anticipated exhibition ***East Village USA***, a focused overview of the art and cultural scene of New York's East Village neighborhood in the 1980's, presented almost a quarter century after the scene first became visible. *East Village USA*, which will be on view through **March 19, 2004**, includes painting, sculpture, photography and video from the period, as well as an extensive selection of film, music and performance presented in a variety of public programs. More than 180 works by over 75 artists will be included in the exhibition. *East Village USA* is organized by New Museum Senior Curator **Dan Cameron**.

East Village USA represents the first major attempt to examine the diverse remnants of an era rarely explored, but which served as an integral part of the recent cultural development of this neighborhood of New York. The interdisciplinary nature of life and work in the East Village during this period provided a strong legacy for later generations of artists searching for the same community effort to produce art and live freely. *East Village USA* provides visitors of all ages with insight into this lively period of artistic production that molded one generation of artists and can begin to be seen as an important influence on members of the current generation of young artists.

In the late 1970s the East Village began to develop into a cohesive alternative to the mainstream art scene of 57th Street and Soho. Artists' collectives were organized throughout the East Village and Lower East Side, many of which explored street art, community-based projects and programs focused on the neighborhood. **ABC No Rio, Bullet Space, CoLab, Fashion Moda, Kenkeleba House, Group Material, PADD (Political Art Documentation and Distribution)** and the **Rivington School** were among those organizations that together laid the foundation for the East Village as a hotbed of cultural activism.

Graffiti Art was the first distinctive genre from the East Village to catch the eye of the art world. Though its popularity was short-lived and it was quickly discarded as a viable art form, graffiti art was nonetheless one of the most important stylistic movements of the period. Graffiti artists such as **Crash, Daze, Dondi** and **Lee Quinones** became widely recognized for their individual "tags" that

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pervaded the city's subways, as seen in **Martha Cooper's** photograph *Blade* (1981), which captures a subway car completely covered in Dondi's graffiti signature. *East Village USA* includes prime examples of such works that have otherwise remained virtually unseen in recent years.

Charlie Ahearn's film *Wild Style* (1981) can be seen as both documentary material for the exhibition and a work of art in itself. It is this film, which cast **Patti Astor** as a downtown nightlife queen opening a gallery to promote her new hip-hop and graffiti friends, which truly captures the East Village lifestyle of the era. Shortly thereafter, fiction turned into reality as adventurous collectors and dealers began heading downtown to purchase graffiti art, shown in new East Village galleries alongside other emerging artists working with new forms of painting and mixed media. **Astor** and partner **Bill Stelling** put themselves on the map as dealers when they opened **FUN Gallery**, whose diverse crowd and freestyle, party atmosphere served as a model for other East Village galleries. As graffiti art made its way into FUN Gallery, other artists began to take it seriously as an art form. The late artist **Martin Wong** amassed the single-largest collection of graffiti art, which he later donated to the Museum of the City of New York, examples of which are included in *East Village USA*.

Gracie Mansion had arrived on the art scene after exhibiting the work of **Buster Cleveland** in a parked limousine on West Broadway, and later excited the art world by dealing through her apartment's tiny bathroom, known as the **Loo Division**. Her eclectic aesthetic worked well with her offbeat salesmanship, however, and she was able to successfully show a diverse stable of artists including **Rodney Alan Greenblat**, **Peter Hujar**, **Stephen Lack**, **David Sandlin** and **Hope Sandrow**. These artists created work ranging from carnivalesque installations like Greenblat's *Ark of Triumph* (1984-1985) to large-scale black and white photographs like Sandrow's *Every Hero Needs a Woman*, *World Trade Center Plaza* (1984).

As the East Village art scene grew, so did its nightlife, where there was a continuous overlap between art and performance. Neighborhood nightspots as diverse as **Club 57**, **P.S. 122** and **Pyramid Club** gave artists places to engage their interdisciplinary talents. **Patrick McMullan's** candid shots (1985) of **Kenny Scharf**, **Keith Haring**, **Ann Magnuson** and others partying and performing in East Village clubs, as well as photographs such as **Ande' Whyland's** portraits of **Lypsinka** (1987) and **Craig Vandenberg** (1985), capture the outrageous, anything-goes atmosphere found in these clubs, which fed the media and word-of-mouth frenzy over the East Village scene.

This prevalence of emerging talent, splashy media attention, low rents, and the surge of collectors eager to buy art at more reasonable prices drew many young gallerists to the neighborhood in the early 80s. As more and more galleries opened, a distinctive style began to emerge in the art being produced throughout the East Village – Neo-Expressionism. The gallery **Civilian Warfare** opened in 1982, and the influence of German artists was suddenly visible in this overwrought aesthetic that came to identify the East Village movement early on. **Luis Frangella's** *Narcissus* (1984), **Judy**

Glantzman's *Untitled* painting of a woman smoking (1983) and **Stephen Lack's** *Strip Search* (1985) are three examples of Neo-Expressionist style at its best.

A more conceptual, counter movement had been developing during this period, represented by **Nature Morte** and **International with Monument**, among others, which would eventually leave the most lasting impression on the art world. While painting had been the definitive medium for most of the work produced in the early 80s, neo-conceptual art, especially photography and sculpture, moved into the spotlight in the mid-80s, and the artists working in this genre still command attention today. **Peter Halley's** radiant *Blue Cell with Triple Conduit* (1986) and **Jeff Koons's** bronze sculpture *Lifeboat* (1985) helped to usher in a new set of stylistic concerns that were to influence much of the work of the next decade.

By the end of the 1980s, the East Village scene was all but forgotten. The cultural movement of the early decade had turned the neighborhood into desirable real estate, and the subsequent gentrification of the neighborhood priced many artists and alternative gallerists out. Many of the artists whose careers later prospered chose to disavow the impact that the era had on their artistic development. The prevalence of AIDS and the resulting deaths of many leading figures created tragic associations with the era. **Nan Goldin's** seminal work *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1979-2001) is a lasting and poignant testimony to this. *East Village USA* will culminate in a memorial room devoted to the work of several of these artists, including **Keith Haring, Peter Hujar, Nicolas Moufarrege, Paul Thek** and **David Wojnarowicz**.

East Village USA places exhibition visitors in the center of the early 80s East Village art scene in a series of rooms that differentiate the stylistic sub-genres that occurred. While *East Village USA* covers much of the artistic production that occurred during the period, it does not attempt to serve as a definitive historical overview of the era. *East Village USA* will instead shed light on the artistic positions that occurred during this period and have since been forgotten or pushed aside. Taking advantage of the perspective created by a 25-year time lapse, this exhibition makes the case that this short-lived era in a previously inconspicuous neighborhood influenced some of the most important artists of the past two decades during their formative years. Lastly, *East Village USA* will demonstrate how attitudes and practices that germinated during this period may become increasingly relevant to artistic production today.

Please see supplementary press material for a complete list of works and artists included in the exhibition.

EXHIBITION FUNDING

Generous support for *East Village USA* has been provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Producers Council of the New Museum. Educational Programs for youth are supported in part by the Keith Haring Foundation.

Public programs for *East Village USA* are made possible by Altria Group.

The New Museum of Contemporary Art receives general operating support from the Carnegie Corporation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, JPMorgan Chase, and members of the New Museum.

CATALOGUE

East Village USA is accompanied by a fully-illustrated book published by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, including essays by Dan Cameron, Liza Kirwin and Alan W. Moore, with contributions by Penny Arcade, Patti Astor, Julie Ault, Mitch Corber, Lydia Lunch, Carlo McCormick, Calvin Reid, Mark Russell and Sur Rodney (Sur).

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

A list of public programs including lectures, panels, radio programming, film screenings and performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, is included in the press kit or available at www.newmuseum.org.

About the New Museum of Contemporary Art

The New Museum of Contemporary Art, founded in 1977, is the only museum in New York City dedicated exclusively to contemporary art and shows artists from around the world. Over the last five years, the Museum has exhibited artists from Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Germany, Poland, Spain, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom among others. The Museum has also mounted ambitious surveys of important but under-recognized artists such as Ana Mendieta, William Kentridge, David Wojnrowicz, and Paul McCarthy. The Museum's Media Lounge, launched in November 2000, is the only museum space in New York City devoted to presenting new media art.

In 2006, the New Museum will open a new home at 235 Bowery at Prince Street. This 60,000 square foot facility, designed by the Tokyo-based firm Sejima + Nishizawa/SANAA, will greatly expand the Museum's exhibitions and programs, and will be the first art museum constructed in Downtown New York's modern history. For the most up to date information, visit www.newmuseum.org.

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New Museum of Contemporary Art / Chelsea**General Information**

Interim Exhibition Location as of 9/18/04	556 West 22 nd Street, New York, NY 10011 (at 11 th Avenue in Chelsea)
Telephone:	212-219-1222
Fax:	212-431-5328
Web Site	www.newmuseum.org
Email	newmu@newmuseum.org
Museum Hours	Tuesday – Saturday: noon – 6:00PM Thursday: noon – 8:00PM* Closed Sunday and Monday
Store Hours	Tuesday – Saturday: noon – 6:00PM Thursday: noon – 8:00PM
Admission	\$6.00 general; \$3.00 students/seniors Free for members; visitors 18 and under free *Thursday 6:00-8:00PM, \$3.00
Directions	Subway: C/E to West 23 rd Street, 1/9 to 23 rd Street Bus: M23 to 11 th Avenue
Administrative Offices	210 Eleventh Avenue, 2 nd floor (at West 25 th Street) New York, NY 10001

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For more information please contact the Public Relations Office at 212-219-1222 ext. 217 or email press@newmuseum.org or visit the press office online at http://www.newmuseum.org/Press_Office/index.html. Information about the New Museum's exhibitions and public programs is also available online at www.newmuseum.org.