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INSIDE ART

Carol Vogel

Restored Glory At Coney Island

The hand-painted signs that have been a crucial part of Coney Island's landscape for decades have sorely deteriorated and have often been replaced by computer-generated signs or flat and lifeless marquee.

On a recent visit to Coney Island, the graffiti artist Steve Powers was looking for inspiration but instead found business and amusement signs weather-worn, missing or poorly replaced. So he volunteered to paint signs for some of the shopkeepers. At first he was turned down; then he did one for the Eldorado bumper car concession.

"Once I did it, everyone else wanted a sign, too," Mr. Powers said. "It went from 0 to 60."

His project coincided with a meeting he was having at Creative Time, a nonprofit public art agency. The minute Creative Time's executive director, Anne Pasternak, heard about his Coney Island initiative, she decided that it was just the kind of thing she wanted Creative Time to become involved with. So Mr. Powers asked about 20 emerging artists to join in. Ms. Pasternak then raised about \$80,000 for the project from foundations and private sources.

Calling itself the Dreamland Artist Club, the group has reinvented the tradition of colorful hand-painted signs and advertisements for businesses, rides and amusement backdrops. Missing signs, marquees and backdrops from the 1920's have been replaced with the work of young 21st-century artists. At one spot on Jones Walk there is a string of about 12 concessions where a lot of these new works can be found — on everything from the Wally Arcade to the offices of a spiritual reader. "We're celebrating that grimy, hustling, bustling commercial end," Mr. Powers said.

The project has a formal opening on June 12. Ms. Pasternak said most of the works would stay up indefinitely, although Creative Time has set a closing date of Sept. 6.

"A large percentage of them will be up forever," she said. "We've been getting requests from other businesses in Coney Island who have seen the work. We're hoping this is just the first installment."

\$40 Million Giveaway

Joseph and Sylvia Slifka, Manhattan philanthropists with a passion for



A sign by the team Gents of Desire, part of the Dreamland Artist Club's spruce-up project at Coney Island.

art, purposely kept a low profile. Mr. Slifka, a real estate developer who died in 1992, and Mrs. Slifka, who died in April 2003, spent a lifetime collecting 20th-century European and American art by masters including de Chirico, Giacometti, Matisse, Miró and Pollock.

"They traveled for fun, and while they were abroad, Dad got bitten," said their daughter, Barbara, one of the estate's executors. "He had a good eye, and he enjoyed meeting artists and collecting their works." The Slifkas did not buy without seeking professional advice. William S. Rubin, a former chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, helped them build the collection.

While the couple gave the Modern some works over the years, the bulk of their collection remained intact. Recently, however, 65 works of art valued at more than \$40 million have been given to 19 museums in the United States and Israel.

"We tried to figure out who could use what," said Barbara Slifka, who teamed up with Thomas Padon, deputy director of the American Federation of Arts, who advised her about the holdings. (Mrs. Slifka's will stated that any works of art deemed to be museum quality should be given to museums.)

Ms. Slifka and Mr. Padon purposefully selected a wide range of museums,

from large institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Modern to smaller regional ones like the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Ky.

Often the gifts filled gaps. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum received one of Pollock's signature drip paintings, "Untitled (green silver)," from 1949, valued at \$5 million.

"This is a significant gift," said Lisa Dennison, the Guggenheim's deputy director and chief curator. "Pollock had a long history with Peggy Guggenheim. She discovered and supported him and gave him his first solo show." That relationship ended in 1947, the year she stopped giving him a stipend, and so do the Guggenheim's great Pollocks; most are in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. In addition, the Guggenheim had only one late Pollock, reflecting the artist's turn to figuration, and until now none from 1949, a particularly important year in his work.

Rembrandt in Houston

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has acquired its first Rembrandt, one well known to auctioneers. Sotheby's tried to sell the work, "Portrait of a Young Woman" (1633), in London in July 2002. Painted in Amsterdam, it is an oval on panel that some experts believe was cut down from a

horizontal, an example of a fashionable practice in the late 17th and early 18th centuries that some experts think might devalue the work today. At the time, Sotheby's estimated the portrait would sell for \$15 million to \$23 million, but bidding stopped at \$13.6 million. After the auction, Otto Naumann, a Manhattan dealer, bought the painting, then sold it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for \$13 million.

"Our visitors can stand in front of it and see the genius Rembrandt was," said Edger Peters Bowron, curator of European art at the Museum of Fine Arts. "It has a pictorial intensity to it."

The painting has been cleaned since it was at Sotheby's, and Mr. Bowron said he had asked two conservators if they thought it had been cut down. Neither believed it had. "The brush strokes around the edges follow the curve of the oval," Mr. Bowron said. "They wouldn't have had it been cut down."

Cincinnati Appointment

The Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati has appointed Linda Shearer as director. Ms. Shearer was director of the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Mass., for 15 years. She succeeds Charles Desmarais, who will become the museum's curator at large.