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When a South Bronx Collective Went International

By Susan Hodara



Marc Blane, Glass Wine Bottle, 9"H

A BRACELET made from brightly painted cardboard, a generically packaged can of beets and five 30-year-old T-shirts are among the eclectic array of items in **"The Fashion Moda Stores, 1982: Selections from Documenta 7" at the Neuberger Museum of Art of Purchase College.**

It is a small show, but the works on view invoke a vibrant and significant movement in the New York City art world one that linked the early days of hip-hop, the recognition of graffiti writing as an art form, and a lively exchange between Manhattan's downtown artists and those working in the then-burnt-out South Bronx.

One of the hubs of this activity was Fashion Moda, an artists' workspace that opened in 1978 in an abandoned storefront on Third Avenue near 147th Street in the South Bronx. Described as a "cultural concept" by its founder, Stefan Eins, an Austrian-born artist who now lives in SoHo, Fashion Moda was the site of exhibitions, performances, film screenings and creative collaborations for more than a decade.

Many of its Manhattan participants were part of Collaborative Projects, Inc., an artist-run collective known as Colab whose members included Mr. Eins along with Jenny

Holzer, Kiki Smith and others who went on to notable careers. Fashion Moda and Colab shared the goal of making art accessible to a broader demographic, in contrast with mainstream galleries and museums.

By 1982, Fashion Moda had attracted enough attention to be invited to participate in the seventh Documenta exhibition, a curated, international contemporary art show held every five years in and around the stately Fridericianum museum in Kassel, Germany.

In response, Mr. Eins and Ms. Holzer (who also showed her own work at Documenta 7) organized three stores on the Documenta campus and stocked them with multiples created by approximately 40 artists, many from Colab. Reflecting Fashion Moda's two-pronged intention of exposing the artists' work to an international audience and at the same time commenting on the elitism of the art market represented by Documenta, everything in the stores was priced from 50 cents to \$200.

At the Neuberger, "The Fashion Moda Stores, 1982" presents 28 pieces from the Documenta 7 stores. They occupy two walls by the museum's entryway with works by 16 artists including wearable items, found objects and sequin-adorned clothespins.

There are selections from Ms. Holzer's "Inflammatory Essays," which she had reproduced on colored paper and sold in packets of 20, and two works by Tom Otterness: a sculpture, just under six inches tall, of a headless father with his equally headless young daughter seated on his lap, and a small plaster plaque made specifically for the Documenta stores, in its center an eye with a dollar sign where the pupil would have been.

The T-shirts that hang on the walls above the show's vitrines were also produced specifically for Documenta 7. One reads, in red uppercase italics, "Abuse of power comes as no surprise," from Ms. Holzer's "Truisms" series; another features one of Christy Rupp's life-size rat drawings, which were plastered around New York City during the garbage strike in 1979. A red shirt designed by Mr. Eins carries Fashion Moda's logo: the word "fashion" written in Chinese, English, Russian and Spanish, and in this case, German.

Rounding out this offbeat collection are Marc Blane's "Glass Wine Bottle," from his series of singed black-and-white photographs of dilapidated South Bronx buildings displayed inside empty green bottles that had once held cheap wine; and a pair of plaster earrings made by Ms. Smith: severed fingertips cast from the artist's own hand and tinged a faint green. (In "Visionary Sugar: Works by Kiki Smith," at the other end of the museum, some of the recent pieces by Ms. Smith depict a woman whose fingers bear a passing resemblance to those 30-year-old earrings.)

The idea for "The Fashion Moda Stores, 1982" was sparked last summer in the basement of the Neuberger, where Gabi Lewton-Leopold, who curated this exhibition, was searching through the museum's collections. Ms. Lewton-Leopold, 26, is a curatorial fellow at the Neuberger.