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November 2010, Max's Kansas City @ Loretta Howard Gallery & Steven Kasher Gallery

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Anton Perich, "David Johansen, Dee Dee Ramone and Alan Vega in the Foreground at Max's Kansas City", 1974
 Courtesy, the artist and Steven Kasher Gallery

Artists at Max's Kansas City, 1965-1974: Hetero-Holics and Some Women Too
[Loretta Howard Gallery](#)

525 W 26th Street
 New York, NY 10001
 September 10, through October 31, 2010

Max's Kansas City

[Steven Kasher Gallery](#)

521 W 23rd Street
 New York, NY 10011
 September 15, through October 16, 2010

The historic phenomenon of Max's Kansas City, from 1965 to 1974, is alien to today's de-centralized art community, where everyone pursues different paths in search of "the scene." In many ways, Max's Kansas City was the beginning of an end – a time when pluralism was beginning to shift the focus away from Abstract Expressionism. Max's Kansas City became the place where artists from different genres could meet and debate ideas. As Lawrence Weiner states in a video by Bill Maynes: "When you have a real bar culture, many people and things that look seemingly antithetical, in fact are not, because there is a common ground to deal from. And it didn't have very much to do with the market. It might have had something to do with prestige, but prestige in those days had very little to do with financial success." Much of the bar's history was revived by two of New York galleries this fall. "Max's Kansas City," at the Steven Kasher Gallery presented an array of photographs by Bob Gruen and Anton Perich which captured the many now-legendary faces that populated the bar's back room. However the

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Loretta Howard Gallery's exhibition titled, *Artists at Max's Kansas City, 1965-1974: Hetero-holics and Some Women Too*, focused on work made by those artists who became regulars in the bar's front room, entertaining discussions about a diverse number of genres such as Land art, Conceptual art, Abstract art, and Pop art. While artists were intent on expanding their ideas beyond the flat surface of painting, their meetings were key to New York City's status as the capital of the avant-garde.

This show opens with Dan Flavin's *White Around the Corner*, (1965-67) a play on words that refers to a move away from the confines of the square canvas. Neil Williams' colorful zig-zag painting titled, *Pop*, (1961) weaves gray, pink, green, blue and black paint across a cut canvas and clearly deconstructs the traditional idea of the painted surface. The cut canvas became an argument that was both for and against symmetry, as seen in *Konskie IV*, by Frank Stella and *Untitled*, (1965) by Larry Zox. By adjusting the shape of the surface, the art object sought a new dimension even though paintings of this style were limited from moving completely away from the wall. Lynda Benglis, however, disposed of the canvas entirely and threw paint on the studio floor in different layers. Her bronze-cast sculpture titled, *Come*, (1969-74) appears on the floor of the gallery's first room and renders frozen drips of liquid that stack up. This piece serves as an emblem of the body politic that was brewing among both women and gay artists during the protests that swept the country during the 1960s.



Brigid Berlin, "Self-Portrait Polaroid," (c.1960)
Polaroid, 4 x 3 1/4 inches
Courtesy, the artist and Loretta Howard Gallery

Robert Rauschenberg's *Angostura (Carnal Clock)*, (1968) expounds further on the body as a site of physical desire. The title references angostura bitters tonic - a mixture of water, alcohol, and gentian root that is used as a cocktail flavoring - and ties it to the carnal object, evincing a clever but poetic use of language and innuendo. Through a combination of mirrored plexi-glass and silkscreen ink on plexi-glass in a metal frame, Rauschenberg passionately argues for the framed picture, the photograph. In this case, a light box depicts a collage of images portraying various male genitalia. Two small dots of light rotate slowly as time goes by. In stark contrast, both *Black Triangle*, (1966) by Ron Bladen and *Green T*, (1973) by Frosty Myers stand as two abstract structures that continue to break away at the foundation of the standard square form.

Additional drawings by Robert Smithson, William de Kooning, Donald Judd, Alice Aycock and Dorothea Rockburne appear on the gallery's second floor. However, Brigid Berlin's Polaroid portraits that appear between the first and second rooms anchor the various parts of this show together. As a fixture of Warhol's Factory, Berlin used this moment as a chance to step outside of the spectacle that fomented in the backroom of Max's Kansas City. Random and unassuming images, taken mostly outside of the bar's context, depict those already mentioned as well as Vito Acconci, John Chamberlain, Larry Rivers, Larry Poons, Andy Warhol and Joseph Kosuth. These unstaged photographs capture the faces of those who were part of a common context, the early stages of art theory. Berlin's documentation also reaches further into a series of audiotapes that contain the sounds and discussions once heard throughout the bar's interior space, capturing the sound of art.

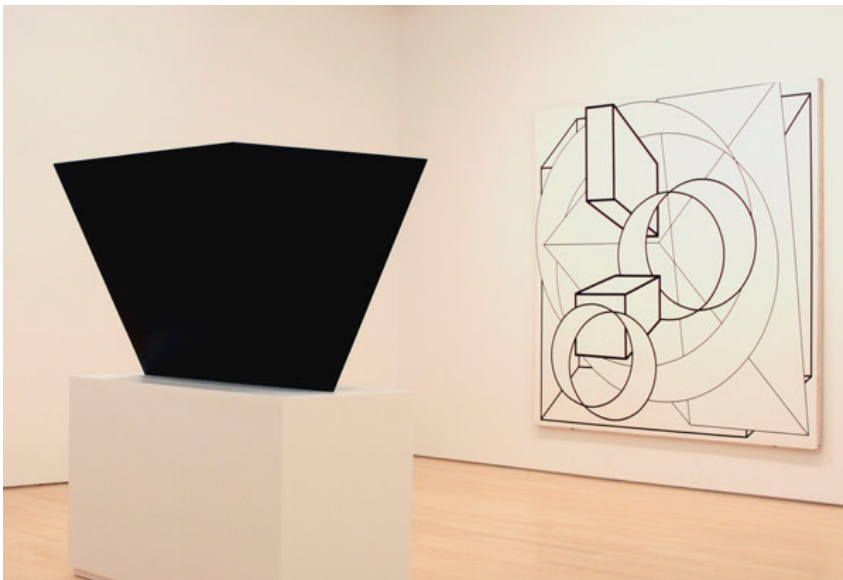
To wax romantic about this era would be a mistake. The military draft altered the population as soldiers were sent to Vietnam. The photographs on display at the Steven Kasher Gallery capture brief moments of hubris, far different from the uncertainties faced daily. The protests of Angry Arts Week during the winter of 1967 echoed the Dadaists of Switzerland who had performed their objections to World War I. But the American art market took a defensive line against these objections by turning individual artists, like Andy Warhol, into overnight superstars. Max's Kansas City went one step further and made everyone a star, whether they were known or not.



*Anton Perich, 'Iggy Pop at Max's Kansas City', ca. 1970
Courtesy, the artist and Steven Kasher Gallery*



Brigid Berlin, "Artist Book," (c.1969)
 Polaroid Photographs, 12 1/2 x 12 inches
 Courtesy, the artist and Loretta Howard Gallery



"Max's Kansas City", 2010, installation shot with:
 "West," (1972), Al Held, Acrylic on Canvas, 90 x 90 inches &
 "Black Triangle (Garden)," (1966), Ron Bladen, Painted aluminum, 37 1/3 x 40 x 52 inches, Edition 2 of 3
 Courtesy, the artists and Loretta Howard Gallery



Robert Rauschenberg, "Angostura (Carnal Clock)," (1968)
Mirrored plexiglass and silkscreen ink on plexiglass in metal frame, with concealed electric lights and clock movement, 67 x 60 x 18 inches

Courtesy, the artists and Loretta Howard Gallery



Jill Conner is an art critic and curator based in New York City. She is currently the New York Editor for Whitehot Magazine and writes for other publications such as Afterimage, ArtUS, Sculpture and Art in America. jill.conner1@gmail.com

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