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Paper Products

This thorough and wide-ranging show of works on paper is a museum-quality exhibit



Roy Lichtenstein's "Wallpaper with Blue Floor Interior"

BY JOE BENDIK

Sometimes there is the rare case of an exhibition that virtually encompasses all of modern art history; something that is so complete and varied that it transcends the mere term "exhibition,"

Such is the case for *Big Paper Winter* at Woodward Gallery. As stated in their press release, it is the "Ninth Annual exhibition of works on paper," which seems standard enough. But the list of names is jaw-droppingly astounding and includes originals and prints by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Hugo Bastidas, Rick Begneaud, Norman Bluhm, Susan Breen, Alexander Calder, Deborah Claxton, Darkcloud, Willem de Kooning, John Evans, Sam Francis, Sybil Gibson, Red Grooms, Richard Haas, Richard Hambleton, Keith Haring, Sarah Hauser, Sonne Hernandez, Hiro Ichikawa, Robert Indiana, Paul Jenkins, Alex Katz, R.B. Kitaj, Franz Kline, Roy Lichtenstein, Mark Mastroianni, Craig McPherson, Richard Merkin, Ander Mikalson, Philip Pavia, Jaggu Prasad, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, James Rosenquist, Mel Ramos, Larry Rivers, Matt Siren, Frank Stella, Jo Ellen Van Ouwerkerk and Andy Warhol. It's as wide-ranging as this eclectic crew of renegade artists might seem, with one theme tying it all together: "works on paper." It is a veritable lesson of art history.

Some of my favorite pieces were Andy Warhol's early series of "shoe paintings" from 1955. Among those, "My Shoe is Your Shoe" (offset lithograph, watercolor on paper) hints at his future Pop Art style, but in a more human way than what we're used to seeing. The man really could paint. It's easy to forget that after all of his work using found images, but the crux of what he

later did was always based on his early days as a painter/illustrator.

Another stand-out is Jean-Michel Basquiat's "Untitled, St. Mark's Church, 1981." Painted soon before his fame, Basquiat was homeless, sleeping in Tompkins Square Park (near St Mark's Church) at the time. He is depicted as a devilish figure hovering over the gates of the church. One wonders if he is being kept out, or held in. At that time, he used to attend church services with Warhol.

Then there is Roy Lichtenstein's massive, five panel work "Wallpaper with Blue Floor Interior" which takes up most of one of the wall-spaces. You almost feel as if you're entering a real room, since it is so close to life-size, yet so graphic, since the room is made of lines and spaces. The mirrored image in this 1992 work adds yet another dimension, as it makes the interior appear twice as large.

Willem de Kooning's paintings on newspapers (*New York Times*) are another history lesson. One of the works, "Wow" from 1969, features an article about landing on the moon. De Kooning's masterful sense of texture completely transforms this into an abstract sense of progress and history at the same time. What impresses me about this work (and really, all of his paintings) is that element of "it," where you can't really put your finger on why it's so great, but the sense of greatness abounds.

Overall, attending this exhibition is like going to a museum without the stilted atmosphere. ☒

"Big Paper Winter" through Feb. 27. Woodward Gallery, 133 Eldridge St. (betw. Delancey & Broome Sts.), 212-966-3411.