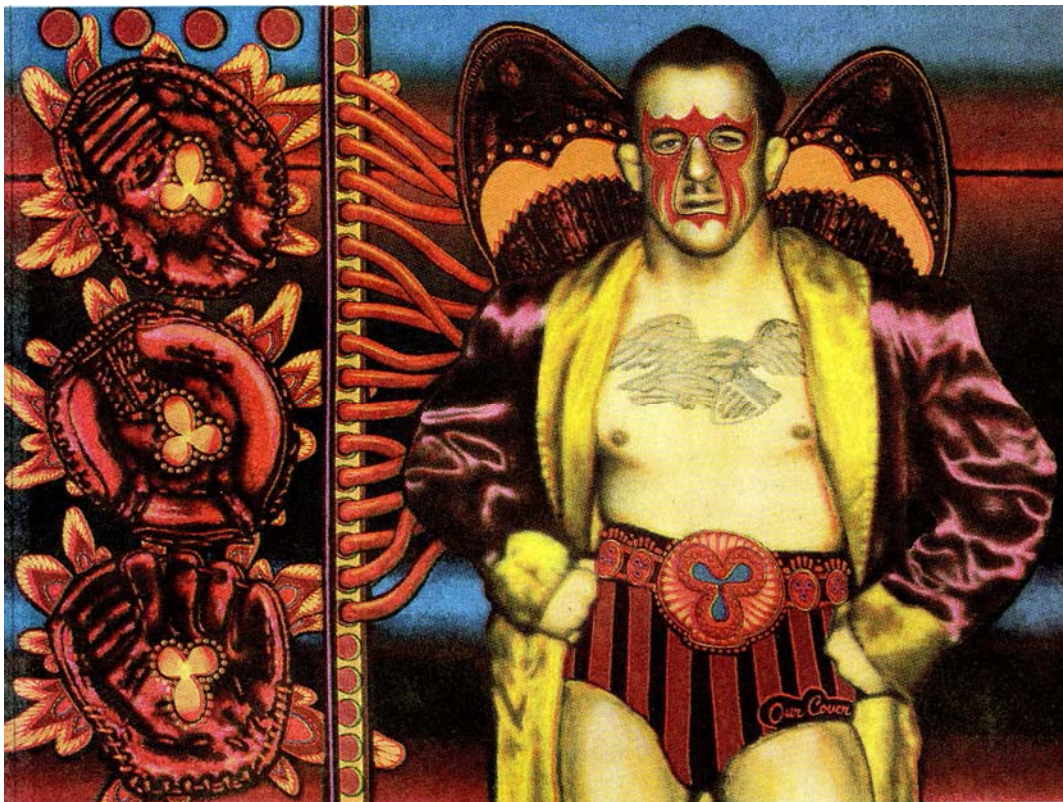


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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Art in Review



Ed Paschke

Gagosian Gallery
980 Madison Avenue, at 77th
Street
Through April 24

There he goes again — Larry Gagosian, that is — putting on a show that a New York museum should have done. This time the subject is Ed Paschke (1939-2004), whose toxically glowing paintings of circus freaks, extreme dandies, tattooed ladies and hairy, wingtip shoes explored the dark side of Pop Art. Along with Jim Nutt and Roger Brown, Mr. Paschke was one of the strongest talents to emerge from the Chicago Imagist school of the 1960s.

Although he was included in the Whitney Biennial as recently as 2006, his career never achieved much traction in New York. But he did have admirers elsewhere. One was the young Jeff Koons, who, as a student in Maryland in the early '70s, was galvanized by his discovery of Paschke's work and transferred to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he submitted himself to that master's tutelage and worked as his studio assistant. Now Mr. Koons has paid off his debt by organizing this stunning exhibition of more than 40 works from 1968 to 1987.

Imagine a phosphorescent underground peopled by pimps, strippers, hustlers, wrestlers, fetishists and other lavishly accessorized miscreants from the lower depths of American society. Though clearly derived from photographic sources, Mr. Paschke's portraits of such outsider luminaries are simplified, irradiated from within and cast in sickly colors, as if he'd envisioned them in fever dreams.

In the late '80s Mr. Paschke began painting images that looked as if they were broadcast by a television on acid, with lines of neon-bright visual static coursing over the ghostly heads of vaguely menacing men. Few painters have captured the shifty, electric spirit of postindustrial capitalism so vividly. KEN JOHNSON