

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The New York Times

Art That's Made Not to Last

Randy Kennedy



Roy Lichtenstein and his "Greene Street Mural" at the Castelli Gallery in 1983. The Gagosian Gallery will recreate the mural. Estate of Roy Lichtenstein, Bob Adelman and Gagosian Gallery

In an era when art is toppling gold and joining high-end real estate as a preferred instrument for storing wealth, ephemeral works tend to flummox the system. A piece that burns bright for a few weeks or months and then exists only in memory, or photographs?

But this summer, the system — or at least a major hub of it, Chelsea — is playing around with impermanence. The Mike Weiss Gallery has opened a show of work that will be painted over. Gladstone Gallery has, too, with "Hello Walls," a group show of works made on the walls, some of which will cease to exist after the run of the show. And the Andrew Edlin Gallery, which is moving to the Bowery, is bidding Chelsea a fond farewell with a show of wall works that will be destroyed when the building housing the gallery is demolished.

The painter Roy Lichtenstein, who died in 1997, was intrigued by the idea of evanescence, too. And in a show opening on Sept. 10, the Gagosian Gallery will recreate his "Greene Street Mural," a 96-foot-long wall painting he made in 1983 at the Castelli Gallery at 142 Greene Street in SoHo, where it was on view for six weeks — spooling out crisply colored explorations of everything from Art Deco to the Great Pyramids to Swiss cheese — before becoming a white wall again.

Dorothy Lichtenstein, the artist's widow, said that he had been interested in painting directly on walls at the time for several reasons, among them the boom in the contemporary-art market, which began in earnest in the 1980s.

“It was the first time when people really started to become conscious of money and prices, and that was something Roy thought a lot about,” she said. The full-scale painted replica of the original work, based on documentation from Lichtenstein's studio, will last only until Oct. 17.

The main difference this time, Ms. Lichtenstein said, is that the artist's friends will most likely not participate in quite the communal way they did in 1983: “Almost everybody who came through when Roy was working on the mural grabbed a brush and put a brush stroke on it.”