

ARTslant

In the Windows
by Natalie Hegert

PANTHEON: A history of art from the streets of New York City

Group Exhibition

Donnell Library Window Space

20 W 53rd St, New York, NY 10019

April 2, 2011 - April 17, 2011

On view until April 17th in the windows of the old Donnell branch library opposite MoMA on 53rd street, *Pantheon NYC*, curated by Daniel Feral and Joyce Manalo, is an exhibition of graffiti and street artists' work spanning three decades. Featuring work from New York street art pioneers, like John Fekner and Richard Hambleton, to artists you'd encounter today on any given street in the city, like Darkclouds and UFO, *Pantheon* locates these artists in a broad art historical, generational and geographic continuum.

Many passersby might be a bit confused because a lot of the work on view won't conform to their idea of what street art is supposed to look like, but that's one of the reasons why *Pantheon* is so interesting, in that it offers the opportunity to look at these two often generalized art forms in a completely different light. The commonality between all the participating artists is the fact that they have created art on the streets of New York City, but *Pantheon* is successful by not succumbing to the display of one overarching aesthetic, not presenting graffiti as a monolithic movement, and not showing just the usual suspects or the most popular or most hyped artists of the moment. It focuses on what might be termed "post-graffiti" or "graffiti art"—the studio art side, not the stuff that you find in the street—but makes a real effort to show a representatively diverse array of art objects that street artists create in the studio, from paintings, to photographs, mixed-media assemblages, installation, and sculpture.

That said, the show has its challenges, mostly due to the limitations of the installation. Part of the Windows Program of the non-profit organization [Chashama](#), which puts on exhibitions in disused spaces around the city, *Pantheon* was awarded the 20-foot-or-so tall, 140-foot long window display along the front of the library. But while the window

display allows the show to be accessible to viewing twenty-four hours a day, it also unfortunately prohibits any closer inspection or interaction with the pieces. Half of the artwork had to be hung high above street level, somewhat obscured by reflections in the windows, and was regrettably hard to see properly. The library's location opposite MoMA couldn't be better, and the provisional nature of the show seems quite appropriate, but a more traditional venue would have served the artwork better. Maybe if the entire library space was open. It's wishful thinking, I know.

There weren't any there when I visited, but *Pantheon* apparently features "guerilla street librarians" and "incognito street docents" at certain times of the day to offer more information to viewers, which seems like not only a brilliant discursive move, but a crucial aspect of the show directly addressing the shortcomings of the space. A catalogue of the show will also be released soon, which promises to be a "hybrid of a scholarly journal, magazine, and a graff'zine." Updates on that and an upcoming closing party will appear on their [website](#).

--Natalie Hegert