

Beautiful Losers: Street Art and the Museum

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Abstract

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the idea of “DIY” street culture was redefined. This emerging movement was rooted in the popular graffiti and street art of previous decades, but was characterized by a group of young, interdisciplinary artists that lacked formal training, and self-identified as social outcasts. These artists, who included Barry McGee, Mark Gonzales, Ed Templeton, Mike Mills, Spike Jonze, Thomas Campbell, Jo Jackson, Shepard Fairey, Chris Johanson, Margaret Kilgallen, and Harmony Korine, found a platform at the Alleged Gallery in New York, where they were able to collaborate, deface, and create in a singular space. Unfortunately, the Alleged Gallery closed in 2002, and the street art movement developed by these creators was largely left uncharacterized and unrecognized by the art world. However, in 2004, the founder of the Alleged Gallery, Aaron Rose, was given the opportunity to curate an international, touring exhibition, entitled *Beautiful Losers*, which helped to group these artists into a singular, cohesive movement, while also providing them with a new level of exposure and formal museum recognition. The goal of my paper is to explore the accessibility and impact of street art through the example of the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition. In particular, I will examine themes of public versus private exhibition spaces, the commodification of art through corporate partnerships, and the idea of “selling out” as an artist.

Keywords:

Art History, Beautiful Losers, Street Art, Street Culture, Graffiti, Museum Studies

Introduction

In the 1990s and early 2000s, with the arrival of the internet and the ever-expanding idea of “DIY” culture, new concepts relating to art spread rapidly. This quick dissemination can be observed in the emergence of a unique style of street art that was rooted in the youth culture of the time. The multidisciplinary artists associated with this network included Barry McGee, Mark Gonzales, Ed Templeton, Mike Mills, Spike Jonze, Thomas Campbell, Jo Jackson, Shepard Fairey, Chris Johanson, Margaret Kilgallen, and Harmony Korine, among others. Some were painters or graffiti taggers, while others were photographers, filmmakers, designers, or musicians. Few had any formal education and many grew up as social outcasts. However, they were unified in their collaboration and their shared lived experiences. Because of the varying nature of their individual practices, this group of creators went largely unrecognized by the art world as a collective movement until 2004, when a large exhibition of their work toured internationally under the title *Beautiful Losers*. This title, which characterized the group as artistic outcasts, coupled with the later distribution of a documentary film, released in 2008, of the same title, popularized this network of creators and their coming-of-age, referential, absurdist, rebellious art. While the members of this exhibition, affectionately dubbed the “Beautiful Losers” by fans of the exhibition, never represented the pinnacle of high art, their sustaining influence on youth culture as a whole illustrates a movement that has infiltrated areas of society that were previously overlooked. By exploring the impact of the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition and subsequent documentary, we can observe how the 1990s DIY street art subculture grew to attract an international appeal that still extends far beyond the outsiders that were originally participating in the movement.

Historical Background

The historical record of art has shown that different movements, styles, and genres have operated in waves. A time period and place can be identified by the art created in it, and a work of art can be identified in the opposite manner. History repeats itself in this way in reaction to the fluctuation of the past, with one movement in direct contradiction or dialogue with the preexisting state of art and culture. The ultimate objective is always to achieve originality. Within recent history, this pattern can be observed in the post-photographic transition to modernism or surrealism, or the development of pop art in the consumerist culture of the mid-twentieth century that served as a reaction to the works of abstract expressionism.¹ Thus, it is no surprise that the genre of street art that emerged in the 1990s was a direct result of the culture that preceded it. Like their predecessors, these artists were working from an informed outsider's perspective, and their pursuits were frequently discounted, rejected, and ignored by the existing artistic framework.² However, this movement was largely composed of young artists who viewed themselves as misfits and outcasts who were creating art in reaction to the rejection they were already experiencing, and so there was little interest in proving themselves as any form of established unit.³ Although the street art movement of the 1990s was characterized by the snubbing of the status quo, its alignment with other "lowbrow" elements of youth culture, like skateboarding,

¹Haruko Kohno, "New Photography and Painting," in *The Saburo Hasegawa Reader*, ed. Mark Dean Johnson, Dakin Hart, and Matthew Kirsch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 121.

²René de Guzman, "Introduction," in *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*, ed. Aaron Rose and Christian Strike (New York and Cincinnati: D.A.P. and Iconoclast Productions, 2004), 23.

³De Guzman, "Introduction," 23.

surfing, graffiti, and underground punk music made this type of art accessible and understandable to a wide range of individuals who came into contact with it.

The Artists

The majority of the artists featured in *Beautiful Losers* were born in the late 1960s and 1970s, making them members of Generation X. The members of this generation were often characterized as feeling overlooked and undervalued.⁴ However, this generation is also known for its dismissal of formalization which can be attributed to the emergence of counterculture movements that uniquely influenced their upbringings.⁵ The rejection of suburban life during this time pushed many young adults to metropolitan locations like New York or Los Angeles. In these urban centers, which struggled with pockets of crime and corruption during the 1980s and 1990s, the rejects of twentieth-century nucleation were able to embrace their self-identified oddness and expand upon it with like-minded individuals.⁶ This counter-culture allowed for things like skateboarding to develop into a professional sport which served as the source of creativity for such artists as Harmony Korine, Shepard Fairey, Mark Gonzalez, Stephen Powers, Ed Templeton, and Mike Mills. Their level of dedication to a skill that some may view as futile was treated as dance to these creatives -- perhaps as a form of performance art that could be perceived alongside their more traditional

⁴ Swati Agrawal, "Personality Traits and Organisational Commitment of Gen X and Gen Y Employees," *Journal of Organisation and Human Behaviour* 6, no. 1 (2017): 11.

⁵ Agrawal, "Personality Traits," 11, and Aaron Rose, "Least Likely to Succeed," in *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*, ed. Aaron Rose and Christian Strike (New York and Cincinnati: D.A.P. and Iconoclast Productions, 2004), 33.

⁶ Franklin E. Zimring, *The Great American Crime Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2006), 232.

artistic pursuits.⁷ Professional skating sponsorships also allowed for many of these artists to create without catering to a particular audience because their income was being supplemented from outside sources.⁸ It can be assumed that this financial freedom allowed for the creation of controversial or progressive work that otherwise failed to fit a particular demand in the art market.

Other artists' work within this group was rooted in and inspired by more diverse sources. For instance, Barry McGee's style of cartoonish characters and slogans was born after an extensive career as a graffiti tagger. Growing up in the San Francisco anarchist scene, McGee associated artistic creation with chaos and political protest, and thus his art is often associated with transforming or destroying a pre-existing surface.⁹ Even as his gallery art gained a significant following, McGee still preferred the alteration of public property, as he felt it had a greater impact.¹⁰ McGee's late wife, Margaret Kilgallen found inspiration in her upbringing. Growing up in a rural area outside of Washington D.C., Kilgallen was heavily influenced by the imagery of

⁷ *Beautiful Losers*, directed by Aaron Rose and Joshua Leonard (Sidetrack Films, 2008), 00:23:34, https://tubitv.com/movies/512257/beautiful-losers?start=true&utm_source=google-feed&tracking=google-feed.

⁸ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:04:55.

⁹ Alex Baker, "Barry McGee: Chaos and Control," in *Barry McGee*, ed. Lawrence Rinder (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive/D.A.P., 2012), 91.

¹⁰ Baker, "Barry McGee: Chaos and Control," 91.

American carnivals and the hand-painted signs that have become ubiquitous with folk art and Americana.¹¹

By the time of the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition, this group of artists had amassed a network and a following that was nearly entirely composed of non-museum goers. They had nearly no recognition from museums, mainstream gallerists, or art historians, but a cult-like following of skateboarders, designers, and xenophiles. To René de Guzman, curator of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts iteration of the exhibition, the public fascination with this movement and the success of this exhibition was rooted in a failing framework of contemporary art. He states:

The field is failing precisely because of a certain kind of success. The modernist enterprise has run its course and we have won our acres of perfect white cubes in theme park-like museum enclosures. And into these high culture biospheres, we place art that has little meaning in the wild, outside of these artificial environments. We have established a system of art academies that produce trained professionals whose artwork has become increasingly too mannered, too removed from connection with the everyday and too encoded with self-referential knowledge. These works are failing to compete with the compelling raw energy, imagination and speed of material culture.¹²

¹¹ Meghan Bissonnette, "Margaret Kilgallen: That's Where the Beauty Is: Exhibition at Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado, 12 January–9 June 2019," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 18, no. 3 (October 2019): 277.

¹² De Guzman, "Introduction," in *Beautiful Losers*, 23.

American culture has subscribed to an artistic framework that is constantly striving for further refinement and technical skill or conceptual nuance. Even artists working in conceptual art are encouraged to have a foundational or academic knowledge of basic art theory. Yet upon reflecting on the successes of the largely self-taught artists in *Beautiful Losers*, it seems that this didactic teaching structure may be somewhat arbitrary. These artists created from their lived experience, going directly against this accepted process that is supposed to guarantee museum and gallery success.

A Brief History of Street Art and Culture on the Lower East Side

Before expanding upon the street art of the 1990s, it is first imperative to understand the preexisting history of street art in New York City. In the late 1970s and 1980s, graffiti artists began to gain a new level of recognition, with artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring receiving gallery representation and a following that extended beyond those who stumbled upon their work in the streets.¹³ Basquiat and Haring were both operating out of the Lower East Side, which would set the stage for the street artists of the 1990s, who sought out their own creative spaces in the neighborhood.¹⁴ By the end of the 1970s, both Basquiat and Haring resided in the East Village, and by the end of the 1980s, Haring had opened his “Pop Shop” in the neighboring Soho.¹⁵ These artists, helped by the low rent costs of the East Village,

¹³ Gerrit Henry, “Keith Haring: Subways Are For Drawing,” *The Print Collector’s Newsletter* 13, no. 2 (1982): 48.

¹⁴ Carlo McCormick, “Introduction,” in *Young, Sleek, and Full of Hell: Ten Years of New York’s Alleged Gallery*, ed. Aaron Rose and Brendan Fowler (New York and Rome: D.A.P. and Drago Arts and Communication S.R.L., 2005), n.p.

¹⁵ Merrily Kerr, “Keith Haring’s Pop Shop to Close,” *Art on Paper* 9, no. 6 (2005): 16.

established this area of New York as a place for creatives to thrive. The Pop Shop would also have an impact on the style of street culture that emerged with the *Beautiful Losers* artists of the 90s, as these later creatives also saw an opportunity to transform their art into products that could be affordable and appeal to the mass market. The Pop Shop was not a profitable venture for Haring, but it allowed for his art and message to be shared widely, accomplishing a similar goal to creating graffiti as public art.¹⁶

Aaron Rose and the Alleged Gallery

In 1992, in the steps of his artistic predecessors, artist Aaron Rose, who would later co-curate *Beautiful Losers*, opened a creative space on the Lower East Side of Manhattan called Alleged Gallery. In this space, Rose would invite his friends and collaborators to display their work where it would be viewed by other street artists at nightly parties (fig. 1).¹⁷ Unlike a traditional gallery, Alleged was born out of Rose's apartment. He thought it would be humorous to paint a gallery sign for the storefront that served as his apartment and studio. The name, "Alleged," came from the disclaimer found on good luck candles that could be purchased at his local bodega (fig. 2).¹⁸ However, because many of his friends were also practicing artists, the space developed into an actual location for exhibitions and gatherings, as it offered a centralized location for their art to be shown in whatever manner the creators saw fit.¹⁹

¹⁶ McCormick, "Introduction," n.p.

¹⁷ *Beautiful Losers*, 00:00:21.

¹⁸ Aaron Rose, "Alleged Gallery," Aaron Rose, <https://www.aaronrose.co/alleged-gallery>.

¹⁹ *Beautiful Losers*, 00:00:46.

In 1993, Rose held one of his first shows, entitled *Minimal Trix*. This was a collaborative exhibition of skateboard art, which had not been previously explored as a medium worthy of gallery exposure.²⁰ Because of Rose's progressive curatorial approach, skateboard magazines like *Thrasher* and *Juxtapoz* ran articles that popularized the exhibition on a national level.²¹ *Minimal Trix* was a defining exhibition that fused street art and culture and furthered the connection between art and skateboarding that was already emerging at Alleged. Because of the press that the exhibition received, Alleged's reputation drew the attention of more street artists, like Shepard Fairey, who moved from Rhode Island to collaborate with the artists in the gallery and expanded the style of art that was being shown in the space.²²

Because of the Alleged Gallery and its intriguing innovative approach, many of the exhibiting artists garnered a level of notoriety. This minor fame led to sponsorships, official gallery representation, and a new level of funding that allowed for broader artistic exposure.²³ Unfortunately, this change in the market ultimately led to the closure of Alleged, as the DIY style of self-curation and themeless exhibitions was not profitable enough to sustain a New York City storefront.²⁴ Upon the gallery's closure in 2002, art critic, curator, and editor, Carlo McCormick, wrote an essay where he noted the following:

²⁰ McCormick, "Introduction," n.p.

²¹ Shepard Fairey, "Interviews," in *Young, Sleek, and Full of Hell*, n.p.

²² Fairey, *Young, Sleek, and Full of Hell*, n.p.

²³ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:11:05.

²⁴ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:10:43.

Alleged Gallery was all about the nabe - a very specific place and time when Ludlow Street was still just another Lower East Side gutter of low rent tenement dreams that just so happened to have a phenomenally deep demographic of artists, musicians, film-makers, designers, writers and all around hoodlums. Hell, it was a freak show, fueled by every illicit vice- from powders to pills to prostitutes- that your mommy and minister ever warned you about. As much as Alleged was a community project, it was very much a community in exile, a degenerate horde of expats who had fled the American dream machine and the glitter of Gotham for a little piece of paradise that was simply too smelly, dangerous, inaccessible, dirty and dilapidated for the world of the white and polite.²⁵

Although short-lived, Aaron Rose's Alleged Gallery was pivotal for the development of the street art style that would later become associated with the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition.

Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding, and Street Culture, 2004

The first iteration of the official *Beautiful Losers* exhibition, which was originally titled *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding, and Street Culture*, was held in 2004 at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.²⁶ As the title suggests, this exhibition included elements of the wider cultural phenomena that developed at the Alleged Gallery and was intrinsically linked to the art of this creative

²⁵ McCormick, "Introduction," n.p.

²⁶ Sue Spaid, "Beautiful Losers," *ArtUS*, no. 4 (September 2004): 52.

network. Most notably, there was an entire section of the exhibition dedicated to ephemera. This area of *Beautiful Losers* relates to the intersection between skateboarding and street art that was so integral to the success of these creators. Through sponsorships with brands like Nike, DC, and Supreme, the artists were able to reach a wide audience by making objects that could be purchased by a mass-market (fig. 3).²⁷ Things like limited-edition sneakers or skateboard decks served as canvases, which have possessed sustained desirability and remain some of the artists' most collectible creations.²⁸ Not only were these objects accessible, but they also had inherent impermanence, somewhat like graffiti art, but not at all like the work that is typically associated with a gallery.²⁹ The idea that these objects were supposed to be used created a form of collectability that was new to the art world, as although these objects were created in large quantities, they would quickly obtain varying degrees of rarity through their condition.³⁰ Pairs of Nike Dunks designed by artists like Geoff McFetridge and Eric Haze were displayed in cases next to cans of Krink graffiti paint, all while being surrounded by hundreds of skateboard decks, each with a unique design that encapsulated an artist's style (fig. 4). Also included in this section of the exhibition was a selection of zines that were made both individually and collaboratively by the artists. Like the other ephemera, these zines were also encased, so that visitors were

²⁷ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:05:25.

²⁸ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:04:56, and Dylan A. T. Miner, "Provocations on Sneakers: The Multiple Significations of Athletic Shoes, Sport, Race, and Masculinity," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 9, no. 2 (2009): 88.

²⁹ Elizabeth Paton, "The Art of the Sneaker," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/19/style/sneakers-collectibles-design-museum.html>.

³⁰ Paton, "The Art of the Sneaker."

unable to look through their contents beyond the front cover. However, they seemed to serve a greater purpose, similar to that of the sneakers and skate decks, which is to highlight the diffusion of the artists' work through alternative, counter-culture, and DIY mediums.

The overall curation of the exhibition seems to harken back to the early congregation of these artists at the Alleged Gallery in New York City. Like in the DIY gallery space, groupings of artists' work are often organized by visual appeal, rather than by artist or medium (figs. 5 and 6). For example, some walls are covered in a collage-like manner, with frames touching, and paintings, photographs, prints, and writings co-mingling without clear artistic identification. This installation approach emphasizes the rejection of the standard museum format.

In one corner of the exhibition, the work of Geoff McFetridge lines the entire space, floor to ceiling (fig. 7). The walls are covered in layers of wallpaper, all designed by the artist, and there's a mid-century couch that has matching upholstery. The walls are also dotted with posters of his bold, brightly colored graphics that say things like "Hold on to young ideas." At the base of the walls, there are small-scale skateboard ramps and wedges that are decorated with brightly colored patterns and images and cartoon depictions of robots and humans.

In a section that served for screening films by artist Harmony Korine, the walls are lined with posters that layer on top of one another, mimicking the style of wheatpaste art and advertisements that line New York City Streets. Artist Mike Mill's work is displayed in this area, with his graphics reading "Ignore America," and "STOP MAKING MOVIES OUT OF YOUR LIFE" (fig. 8). This tongue-in-cheek response to

Korine's films relates to the interdisciplinary dynamic between these artists, and how their different mediums didn't inhibit their collaboration.

Further highlights of the exhibition include full gallery walls dedicated to the panel paintings of Margaret Kilgallen and her husband Barry McGee. Both artists utilized found materials and similar color palettes.³¹ Kilgallen's work often utilized female subjects, while McGee's work often centered on male figures. This dichotomy creates a dialogue between their works, which speaks to their closeness as partners, both artistically and personally.

Criticism of *Beautiful Losers*

Although this exhibition was triumphant in its innovative approach to the inclusion of street art in the museum, there were still many critics who felt that the exhibition marked the death of this movement. The transition to a privatized exhibition space was perceived by some to be the final sell-out of these artists who had already begun capitalizing off of their work through corporate partnerships. In a 2004 review of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts rendition of *Beautiful Losers*, *Artforum* contributing critic, Glen Helfand, stated that "curators Aaron Rose and Christian Strike can't quite skate around the ambivalence that surrounds notions of crossing over, selling out, and star status versus street cred."³² Similarly, Sarah Valdez, a critic from

³¹ David Pagel, "Art Review; No Time to Waste; as Redcat shows, Margaret Kilgallen Didn't Fuss Over the Niceties," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2005.

³² Glen Helfand, "Beautiful Losers," *Artforum*, August 3, 2004, <https://www.artforum.com/contributor/glen-helfand?page=15>.

Art in America, described the show as a “death-by-mainstreaming of a former underground.”³³

There was also criticism of Rose’s contribution to the curation of the exhibition and his later role in directing the *Beautiful Losers* documentary. Critics felt that his involvement with the artists included in the show, coupled with his nostalgia for the Alleged Gallery, created a biased attitude towards the topic he was trying to objectively present.³⁴ The documentary doesn’t include the criticism or non-linear highs and lows one might expect from a film that covers over a decade’s worth of art that was born from people living in rough, metropolitan areas. Although drugs, alcohol, and violence are referenced in the film, Rose and the artists who are interviewed don’t react to these occurrences with any attitude of regret or even consciousness surrounding the possible outcomes of their previous actions. Furthermore, there is little acknowledgment in the exhibition or in the documentary of the criticism and legal repercussions endured by these artists. As much of their work stemmed from illegal behavior, like public skateboarding and graffiti art, many of these creators were punished by the law, while also being ostracized by the upper echelon of the art world.³⁵

Aaron Rose, while well-informed on the subject matter of street culture in the 1990s, seemed to lack some critical editing abilities in his curation. KAWS, also known as Brian Donnelly, had an extensive range of artwork and ephemera that was included

³³ Sarah Valdez, “Thrashers and Taggers,” *Art in America* 93, no. 1 (January 2005): 59.

³⁴ Carmen Gray, “Beautiful Losers,” *Sight & Sound* 19, no. 9 (September 2009): 58.

³⁵ Nina Siegel, “Exhibit Becomes Opportunity for Arrest,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/10/nyregion/exhibit-becomes-opportunity-for-arrest.html>

in the exhibition, which was a questionable curatorial decision as KAWS' work had already reached a level of mass-production that completely combined art and capitalist production, with his primary subject being widely produced figurines (fig. 9). Although KAWS developed his style of street art alongside fellow graffiti artist Barry McGee, his practice quickly veered from painting and drawing, and by the mid-1990s, he had largely transitioned to manufactured objects and sculptures that he had no role in physically creating.³⁶ Other artists in the exhibition had also previously worked with major companies, but KAWS was willing to collaborate with nearly any company that would pay for his signature "X"- eyed figures.³⁷ KAWS was an indisputably influential artist of this period, but the inclusion of his consumerist-driven work represents a confusing curatorial decision as there was a sense that Rose wanted to make this experience as true to the DIY style as possible, especially since he had such a crucial role in its development in New York during the 1990s.

However, feelings of apprehension regarding the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition were not exclusive to art and film critics. In the *Beautiful Losers* documentary that was released following the conclusion of the exhibition, artists like Barry McGee and Ed Templeton also expressed uncertainty about the production of the exhibition. Their self-cultivated artistic movement was born out of a do-it-yourself mentality that actively challenged established systems, like privatized galleries and museum spaces.³⁸ However, even without the museum-gearred production of *Beautiful Losers*, these

³⁶ "KAWS," *Modern Painters* 25, no. 10 (November 2013): 32.

³⁷ "KAWS," 32.

³⁸ *Beautiful Losers*, 01:20:36

artists were growing an independent following that was derived from their publicly-accessible artwork in New York, as well as the established connections that grew from their communal engagement in spaces like the Alleged Gallery. Regardless of the exposure their work received on the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition circuit, these artists were quickly outgrowing their self-made galleries and were rapidly attracting an audience that extended far beyond the echo chamber of like-minded creators that surrounded them in New York.

Despite the criticism, the global impact of the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition was evident early on, as there was enough demand following the initial show in Cincinnati to warrant an extended international tour, each location adapting the artwork, ephemera, and interactivity to fit the respective venues. The organic nature of the exhibition's curation, coupled with the involvement of the artists, made each iteration of this show completely unique. For instance, at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, a skate-bowl art installation created by the artist-collective SIMPARCH was built in the center of the gallery space to further emphasize the fusion of art and street culture.³⁹ Skateboarding was often viewed as something that verged on the edge of the law and was associated with outcasts and criminal behavior, while museums were viewed as places of high culture that were primarily made accessible, both physically and intellectually, to the wealthy and social mainstream.⁴⁰ This structure is also something that would usually be found outdoors in skateparks, and its displacement

³⁹ Clark Buckner, "Take Two on Beautiful Losers," *Stretcher*, Last modified 2004. https://www.stretcher.org/features/beautiful_losers_x_2/.

⁴⁰ Christian Strike, "The Creators," in *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture*, ed. Aaron Rose and Christian Strike (New York and Cincinnati: D.A.P. and Iconoclast Productions, 2004), 225.

further emphasizes the idea of “outsider” art and culture, and the idea of bringing these outside concepts into the setting of the museum gallery.

The addition of this interactive skate feature to the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts exhibition was perhaps one of the most important developments for this show. Although the other art was progressive in its own right, images of this structure circulated quickly and garnered positive attention from many critics, while also drawing in a crowd of skaters who fit the demographic that the street art was originally intended for.⁴¹ Around this time, during the early 2000s, skateboarding began to be perceived as something that was associated with cutting-edge fashion and art, and it can be assumed that the interactivity and internationality that this exhibit possessed had a large impact on this fusion of cultures and classes.

More recently, *Beautiful Losers* experienced a revival on the tenth anniversary of the documentary’s release. In celebration of this history, Aaron Rose curated a week-long show in the summer of 2018, entitled, *Now & Then: Beautiful Losers, Alleged Gallery & the 90’s Lower East Side*, at The Hole Gallery in New York City. This event was hosted in collaboration with the skateboard company RVCA, which released an entire line of apparel and merchandise that borrowed images and artwork from the artists associated with the original *Beautiful Losers* exhibition.⁴² This event reignited interest in the original exhibition and helped to expose a wider audience to this art as there was no admittance fee. However, the corporate sponsorship was reflective of some of the original exhibitions' largest controversies, such as the inclusion of KAWS.

⁴¹ Buckner, “Take Two.”

⁴² "Now & Then: Beautiful Losers, Alleged Gallery & the 90's Lower East Side," The Hole NYC, Last modified 2018. <http://theholenyc.com/2018/08/13/beautiful-losers/>.

Yet in our contemporary culture, where skateboarding, fashion, and art have become so intertwined, there may be a place for this type of partnership, where street style can be used to help keep the vision of street art alive.

The importance of the *Beautiful Losers* exhibition can be noted in its lasting legacy and influence. Often, we see art that possesses themes from popular culture, but the art created by this group of untrained artistic outcasts has proved to work in the opposite way. By bridging the gap between the unaffected street culture associated with graffiti and skateboarding, and the sometimes inaccessible world of museums and galleries, *Beautiful Losers* showed that there is a space for DIY culture within the larger artistic canon.



Figure 1. Exterior of Alleged Gallery. Photo: Aaron Rose.



Figure 2. Interior of Alleged Gallery. Photo: Cynthia Connelly, 1999. Image courtesy of Sidetrack Films



Figure 3. Installation view, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004. Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.



Figure 4. Installation view, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004. Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.

A large, dense collage of various pop art and graphic design posters, including works by Cyndia Komatsu, Chris Johanson, and others, displayed on a wall. The posters feature a wide range of styles, from abstract and colorful to more representational and text-based. Notable elements include a large black skull with white teeth, a poster with a woman's face, and several posters with text and graphics. The overall aesthetic is vibrant and eclectic, reflecting the diverse influences of pop art and graphic design.



Figure 6. Installation view, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004. Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.



Figure 7. Installation view, featuring the work of Geoff McFetridge, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004. Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.



Figure 8. Installation view, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004. Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.



Figure 9. Installation view, featuring the work of KAWS, *Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art, Skateboarding and Street Culture*. Photo: Tony Walsh, 2004.
Image courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH.

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