

BARNSTORMING

In 1985 I started writing SKWERM on chicken houses and tobacco barns in rural North Carolina. A few years later I moved to Brooklyn and spent the next decade expanding. I made paintings, sculptures, and short film searching for something evolved yet on par with the realness of those early barns.

To make a long story short I began returning to N.C. a couple years ago with groups of my favorite artists, intent on transforming this stretch of road into a outdoor museum of sorts, filled with the finest living art I know. To date this quest has forged

some fifty or so works on the sides of everything from 18-wheelers to chicken manure spreaders, all just outside of Cameron, a town of 241 people.

Thus, the Barnstormers affiliation begins and continues with the likes of Kami, Kenji, MikeMing, Cheljen, Oats, Mazz, Hela, Blust, Plus, Plenty, Espo, Stereotype, KR, Jest, West, Shas, Cycle, Memo, RoStarr, Doze, Ease, Revs, Ryan, UFO, Wello, Geology, K Lyons, Ewok, Filet-o-Fresh, myself and others. An oddball crew to say the least. As we grow, we come up with new ways for our crew to work collectively. A lot of factors come into play- live

painting, layering, Jazz, Big bands and Hip-Hop. Last year I was commissioned to create a touring projection and landed on the idea of using time-lapse photography to capture a floor painting as it became layered over and over by different artists. The result was The Barnstormers film, "Watching It Grow" as part of an application for a new studio space. The film was shown at SmackMellon Gallery in Brooklyn. Kathleen Gilrain, the owner, immediately offered a show in the main space.

I decided to call it, "No Condition is

mass appeal

October 2001

LIVE!

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEADZ

Lights, camera and ... Action: Joey Garfield a.k.a Filet-o-Fresh looks on as Mr. Steve ESP Powers does his thang during Barnstormer's No Condition is Permanent event/installation at the SmackMellon Gallery in Brooklyn. In the back, UFO and the author, SKWERM (David Ellis), make sure nothing goes unpainted

Photos-Ki

Permanent" Based on a slogan I saw on a bumper sticker from Ghana. I proposed to shoot the Barnstormers continuously for 7 weeks, inviting a different artist each day to paint the entire floor. A camera and G3 were mounted to an I-beam 30 feet above the floor and were synced up daily to a video projector covering a huge wall in the main room. We invited guest musicians to score the footage live and were blessed to get down with The Kolabs, DJ Signify, Johnny Juice, and The Charlie Hunter Quartet. As the weeks rolled by, the momentum built to a point where no surface in the gallery was safe from paint. Block letter words, trees, throw-ups and a gigantic mammoth with loud speakers wrapped around the entire room. I basically had to sign in blood that the gallery would be returned to the way we found it. I

guess some conditions want to be left a little more permanent than others. About 2 weeks before the show was to end I received a call that a lot of folks got on this particular day. It was the morning of September 11th. I was finishing my coffee, about to leave for the gallery when, Chelen called telling me to turn on the TV. I spent the day dazed. The two biggest towers of the skyline struck by commercial airplanes collapse killing thousands inside. What the fuck? The next day I was back at the gallery. Maybe out of habit, maybe out of that fever you get from O.D.ing on special coverage TV and radio. Nothing in the gallery was the same. All the paintings done prior seemed different. What was going on? On the first week, Oats, for reasons unknown painted a bathtub with four jet engines in it. A week later, Jest draft-

ed a huge American flag paved over by a construction site by Cycle. The night of the 10th Doze painted a scene with over 40 similar looking characters, one of them carrying a concealed knife. What the fuck?? On the other side of the terror, I felt this growing joy to be alive. Those who painted in the last two weeks did so fervently, trying to make sense of the senseless. The work and public response to it was intense, somewhat awkward and emotionally charged. I kept hearing all these Stevie Wonder lyrics in my head. I wrote, "LOVE IN NEED OF LOVE TODAY" across the middle of the wall in big pink block letters. There was a great release from just being in the gallery. We saw by far, the busiest days of the entire show during the week following the 11th. We saw this gentle open flowing communication

between complete strangers in New York. What the fuck??? As bugged out as it was, we were really lucky to be a part of something positive and open to the public on the days following the tragedy. NPR interviewed us. The reporter asked some really good questions. Her piece was on artists who had been working before, during and after the attacks, and how they were responding. I left the interview believing more than ever that the best thing I can do for society is keep making the things I feel inspired to create. I believe more than ever that what we have as artists is a gift and a responsibility. The work artists create in love is needed to counter all the things out there being destroyed right now in hate. What else can we do? -SKW-

The Barnstormers - No Condition is Permanent at SmackMellon Gallery, Brooklyn NYC 8-6 through 9-22-01. The videos *Watching Paint Dry* (17 minutes) and *No Condition is Permanent* (30 minutes) will be available at the New Museum book store and Alife starting Jan. 2002 b-stormers.com



All shot before the 9-11-01 events, clockwise from top left: Jest, KR, SKWERM, EWOK and Shas.