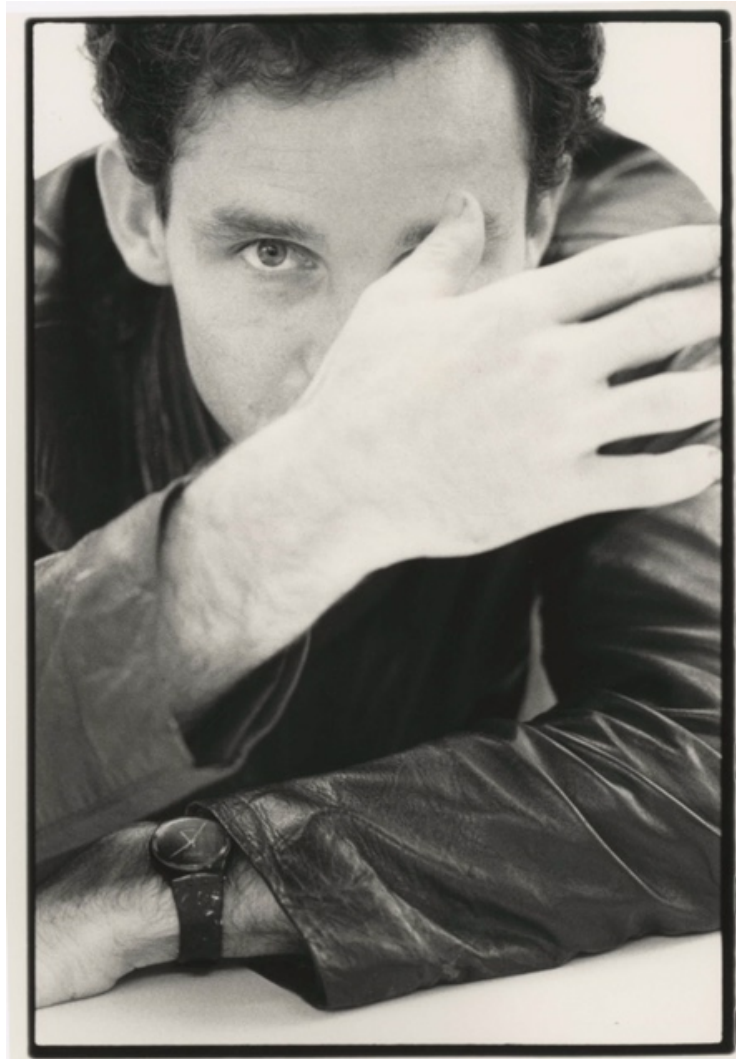

Art World (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world>)

Richard Hambleton, 'Shadowman' Artist Who Mesmerized New York's Downtown Scene, Dies at 65

His work will appear in MoMA's "Club 57" show, opening today.

Henri Neuendorf (<https://news.artnet.com/about/henri-neuendorf-205>), October 31, 2017



Richard Hambleton. Photo: courtesy of Woodward Gallery.

Richard Hambleton, the Canadian street artist that emerged in New York's underground graffiti scene in the 1980s died on Sunday, Woodward Gallery confirmed. He was 65.

The enigmatic artist burst on the scene alongside a group of confidants and collaborators that included Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf. Hambleton soon became known for his signature "shadowman" motif, a splotched, black, leering figure that appeared on the walls of buildings in downtown Manhattan.



Richard Hambleton *Fountain of Youth* (1982). Photo: Courtesy of Woodward Gallery, NYC.

“Richard was a conceptual artist and his art was to evoke a reaction,” Kristine Woodward of Woodward Gallery, which had once represented the artist told artnet News by phone. “In the 1980s he put his large black shadowy silhouette figures on city streets. It was like a repetitive visual icon of different shadowy figures and if you lived here at the time

you became very familiar with them,” she said.

Just as Hambleton’s career took off he started using drugs, including heroin and crack. He relied on the drugs, particularly the heroin, to reach a mental state that he felt helped him depict the sublime. A long battle with addiction would plague him throughout his life.

As he progressed artistically, Hambleton explored different variants of his iconic “shadowman” using different media. The silhouettes appeared on paper, canvas, doors, and found objects; and the figures would engage in different actions: juming, standing, or dancing. “The figures were guardians of the night and they were offering a sense of security to people in the city,” Woodward said.



Richard Hambleton, *Shadow Head* (2014). Courtesy of Woodward Gallery.

As time went on and his friends and collaborators, including Basquiat and Haring, died, Hambleton became increasingly weary of the art business and he began representing himself, deliberately slipping out of the limelight.

A recent documentary by Oscar-nominated director Oren Jacoby, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in April, put Hambleton back in the spotlight and renewed interest in his life and work. It has resulted in numerous exhibitions, including his participation in “[Club 57: Film, Performance and Art in the East Village, 1978-1983](https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3824),” (<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3824>) a survey exhibition opening today at the Museum of Modern Art that focuses on the downtown art scene in the late 1970s and early '80s.

“Right up to his death he was painting,” Woodward said. “We’d never known anybody who lived to paint the way Richard did, he was just such a dedicated artist, it’s all he cared about, he was not a careerist, he just wanted to paint.”

Follow *artnet News* (<https://www.facebook.com/artnet>) on Facebook:

Like 371K

[Want to stay ahead of the art world? Subscribe to our newsletter to get the breaking news, eye-opening interviews, and incisive critical takes that drive the conversation forward.](http://link.artnet.com/join/522/newscta&hash=8e9534fb495110baf97a368037111816)
(<http://link.artnet.com/join/522/newscta&hash=8e9534fb495110baf97a368037111816>).