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NEIGHBORS

Mixing Art and Activism

By JOANNA MOLLOY

At 6' 3", gallery owner and preservationist Hal Bromm looks as though a ten-gallon should be among his many "hats." "The height is a great advantage at muse-

ums when there are crowds," says Bromm. "I just look right over their heads."

It could be said that Bromm has been seeing above the crowd for a long time. He moved to a former

cheese warehouse on Beach Street in 1970 ("when there were about ten people who lived in loft buildings in Tribeca"), and in 1976, opened the district's first contemporary art gallery.

Bromm, a graduate of Pratt, tried to showcase new talent, including Rosemarie Castoro, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Keith Haring, and Jody Pinto, and continues to do so, even though he represents a stable of successful artists.

In "Works by Soviet-American Artists," the current show at his gallery in the Gerken Building at 90 West Broadway, the exhibit includes a raccoon-fur hammer and sickle by Leonid Sokov, Sokov's painting of a Molotov cocktail made from a Coke bottle, and Alexander Kosolopov's prints resembling Russian Marlboro boxes.

Bromm's foresight can be detected in the art which fills his living loft in the same building, including a painted crib from Keith Haring's found-furniture days and primary-colored table and chairs by Russell Sharon that were featured in the film *Slaves of New York*.

The place is filled with color. The elevator bank is a modern Sharon landscape, with grass and trees and a swirling sun; his Day-Glo orange figures greet visitors at the door; Grace Graupe-Pillard's

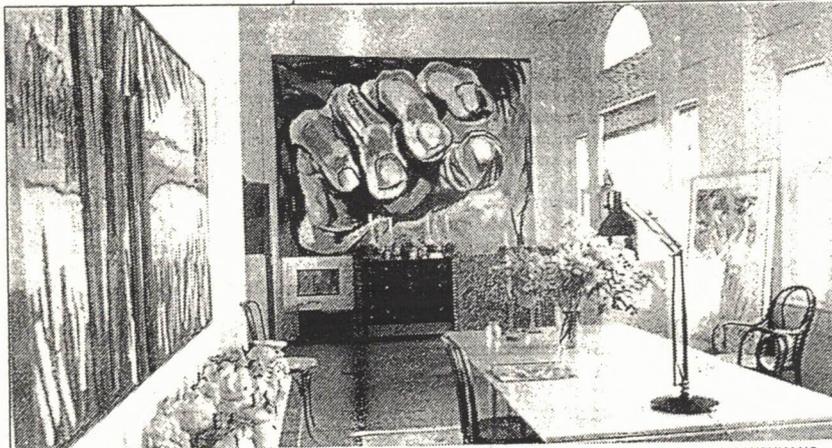
free-standing pastel of a skateboarder called "Balance" does a flip in the living room.

Bromm has "views of the Hudson, Tribeca, the Brooklyn Bridge, and, perhaps to his consternation, City Hall.

Bromm, 42, was an early activist in the preservation movement in Tribeca, which he calls "a living history—an encyclopedia of 19th-century urban mercantile architecture."

Bromm has been involved in most of the key turf battles in the neighborhood over the past decade, helping to prevent such projects as: the city's plan to move the Parole Board to the district; a landlord's idea to build a 33-story "lollipop" tower above 55 White Street; and the city's proposal to let Drexel Burnham Lambert build its headquarters adjacent to the area's only park.

Bromm is presently concentrating on the community's efforts to get the Landmarks Commission to give much of Tribeca historic district status (slated for the Commission's calendar on June 13th). He



LARRY CUSUMANO

Dining area in Bromm's loft features "Early Seduction" by Luis Frangella on the far wall; "Untitled" (Minnesota landscape) by Russell Sharon, left; cookie jar collection, bottom left.

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LARRY CUSUMANO

was one of the organizers of a silent auction, which raised more than \$50,000 for the cause and drew the support of such luminaries as actor Robert DeNiro and playwright Edward Albee.

Bromm first got involved when, he says, "I sensed that this neighborhood, because of the vacant land that had been created by the demolition of Washington Market—and by all the half-empty loft buildings, was going to be a target for development. As things started to change I thought, I really ought to get a little involved in this."

That "little involvement" led to his role as chairman of the Commu-

nity Board 1 Landmarks, Arts, & Cultural Affairs Committee, and as chairman of the Tribeca Community Association's Committee for the Washington Market Historic District.

Bromm has garnered praise from some and raised the ire of others. Supporters point out his dedication, his doggedness, his ability to navigate bureaucracies and stay on top of myriad details.

Critics have said Bromm is reluctant to compromise with the city, unwilling to "play the game." A Bromm sampler:

On Koch: "We're living with an administration that is simply

burned out."

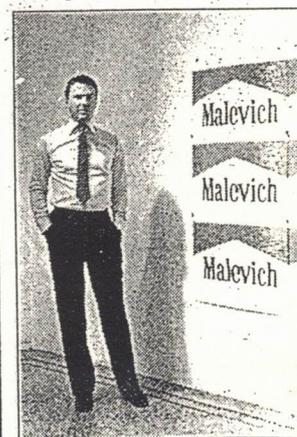
On the Public Development Corporation: "I don't know what they're there for except to do great tax-giveaway deals to major corporations."

On City Planning: "If you want to turn New York City into a place that has no communities and just high-rise office buildings wall-to-wall, then their behavior is appropriate."

Bromm admits he's outspoken. "I'm very honest. I have a big mouth."

But, he adds, "If you're going to get anywhere with this administration, that's how you have to be."

Meet Your Neighbors:



Hal Bromm
Gallery Owner and
Preservationist