



ABOVE: *Don't Want to Set the World on Fire*

BELOW: *Underwater Eye*



RACHEL DAVIS FINE ARTS

The Art of Paul Spina

April 15 through June 15

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Seismic shifts afflicted and benefited the Post World War II American art scene; among the most sonorous of these changes reverberated in Lower Manhattan during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The neighborhood was abject and seductive, luring artists, including Paul Spina, into a community that upheld freedom of expression and facilitated creative isolation.

Born in 1937 in Brooklyn, Spina was raised within an extended but tight, nuclear Italian family. His artistic ability was apparent at an early age. He attended the School of Art and Industrial Design, then enroll at the Pratt School of Art and Design where he earned his B.F.A. under the tutelage of Richard Lindner, Phillip Pearlstein, and Jacob Lawrence. He parlayed his degree into a full scholarship at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture for two summers studying under the critique of visiting artist Alex Katz, among others. As a young artist Spina settled in Soho, and quietly asserted himself in the burgeoning enclave. Ever the stalwart contrarian, he was put off by the gamesmanship that insured entre into certain mainstream galleries. With entrepreneurial energy, he organized pop-up galleries featuring his painting and the work of others in the community.

Artistic maturation prompted Spina to enlarge his canvases. This necessitated an expansive, open studio space which he found, moving south from Soho in the mid 1970s, to the Bowery. Almost manically productive, Spina worked on an increasingly impressive scale. The large windows in his Bowery loft allowed New York to enter his space as the unencumbered area allowed him to display found objects from his city wanderings, objects that infiltrated his paintings and collages.

By 1970, an instantly recognizable image appeared in Spina's work, the intensely pink and white, delectable licorice candy, Good and Plenty,



ABOVE: *The End*
 RIGHT: *Till Tomorrow*
 BELOW: *Joseph K 2*



blissfully consumed during Saturday matinees. Rendered with heightened, trompe l'oeil illusionism, the candy becomes a running motif that animates his oils and acrylics. Morphing into multi-colors, the motif comes to consume his picture planes, competing with pentimenti of the past and the physicality of the present; sometimes gently, sometimes with confrontation.

A masterful draftsman with a singular facility in pen and ink line drawings, Paul Spina was a renowned illustrator. As a prolific free-lancer, he worked extensively with the legendary Milton Glazer at



New York Magazine throughout the 1970s. Spina shared his abilities as an educator, serving on the faculty of the School of the Visual Arts, teaching general illustration from 1967 to 1970 and at the Fashion Institute of Technology from 1974-2010.

In 2010, illness causing tremors robbed Spina of the manual control that was a hallmark of his technique. Disability

made life in his beloved New York City difficult, especially for someone who nourished on keen observation. Out of necessity for his well-being, he moved with his partner Esther Trepal to her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio where he spent his remaining years. Paul Spina died in 2017.

—Darlene G. Michitsch, Associate Professor of Art History, Baldwin Wallace University