



## Did You Ever See a Rosson Crow?

### *Bowery Boys*



**Roslyn Bernstein**

*Contributing Writer*

Rosson Crow wore four-inch heels to the opening of “Bowery Boys,” her new exhibit at Deitch Projects’ SoHo space. The blonde haired, 27-year-old artist was hard to miss in her flowing red chiffon print gown, created by her friend Zac Posen out of fabric that she had designed.

On the walls were ten massive oil paintings all produced in three months in her studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Crow returned to New York City from LA in the fall, determined to do a *very New York show*. “New York history is so vast,” she laughed. “I had to narrow it down a bit!” Inspired by Luc Sante’s book *Low Life*, Crow decided to focus on downtown culture. To research the subject, she and several girls from the gallery roamed the city visiting restaurants, bars, and clubs. She spouted the names of many of New York’s iconic places she had read about, including The Mudd Club at 77 White Street, which closed down in 1982, the year she was born. “It probably wasn’t as exciting visually inside,” she said.



After wandering the city, she “put things together,” drawing upon her research and her imagination. She knew that she wanted to do a painting of Andre Balazs’ Boom Boom Room, the rooftop bar at The Standard Hotel in the Meatpacking District. Crow loves the idea of night clubs — the cachet of being cool enough to get in and the reality that the club won’t be cool in a few months. At the same time, she was researching sex clubs in the 1980s, especially Plato’s Retreat, and obsessing over Bruce Nauman’s gay sex neon, *Run from Fear, Fun from Rear*. In a moment of inspiration, she merged the three in her new painting, *The Bang Bang Room*.

A visit to The Cock, a gay bar on the Lower East Side, inspired another Crow painting. She incorporated Terrence Coe’s white version of their logo, a red neon rooster, Spencer Sweeny’s disco ball, and an upside-down cop car into the work. The result: “a sort of weird gay bar prison. It’s a little over the top,” Crow admitted. Crow visited the bar with its male go-go dancers several times, but she never told them why she was there. “I don’t know if they like women coming there,” she said.

Elsewhere in the exhibit, the stained glass windows of the old Bowery Mission are superimposed on the interior of its new neighbor, the New Museum, and Allen Ruppersburg's texts from MoMA appear magically in an 1800s barbershop. On the back wall, *Bowery Station*, 1982, 2010, a 9 x 25 feet oil, acrylic and enamel on canvas painting anchors the exhibit, its white subway car bearing the destination sign, South Ferry.



As a female artist, this is not the first time Crow has been drawn to masculine subjects. "I want to take them on," she said, "to make them my own." For her LA show at the Honor Fraser Gallery, "Night at the Palomino," Crow researched the history of spaces that no longer exist: The Ambassador Hotel, Coconut Grove and the Palomino. She is a big fan of country music, and especially of Dwight Yoakam, who often performed in the club. For the opening of the exhibit, she dressed up in a vintage Las Vegas showgirl outfit.

Crow traces her passion for history back to her childhood. Although she was raised in a suburb of Dallas where everything was new or faux (the strip malls were faux Tuscan or Greek revival), she always had a fascination for historical periods. As a child, when she played House, it was set in Victorian England and she loved dressing up in vintage clothes.

From Texas, she traveled to New York City where she spent four years at The School of Visual Arts — the first year stuck in a miserable 8 x 10-foot dorm room with horrible blue carpet. Eventually, she moved out, first to Astoria and then to an apartment in Chelsea. Always an over-achiever, she did not spend her time at clubs. Instead, she started working for galleries and for artists, including a stint interning at Deitch and work at Metro pictures.

Crow studied painting at SVA, where, for her senior show, she began to paint interior spaces. She visited the Met weekly, hanging out in the period rooms. She loved the art, but she also loved the idea of fake history — the fake recreations of a moment in time.

Critical of SVA's academics ("it's a school of idiots!"), Crow headed straight to Yale for an MFA degree. Yale fed her brain. She could take any courses she wanted to, and she did: Harold Bloom's Shakespeare class (she loves Shakespeare), the History of English landscape gardens, the Fantastic in Italian literature... After New Haven, it was off to Paris for a residency. Always restless, she found herself in Paris thinking of moving to LA. "I love to move. I love to be challenged by a city." Although she is happy in New York and has many friends here, she is not sure where she will travel next.



Crow has been earning her living from her art for several years now — a feat that few under-30 painters achieve. No wonder — the paintings in "The Bowery Boys" show are huge in size, but they also, at \$45,000, are not priced for the current recession.

Still, however successful she is financially, she's a rebellious spirit. While her latest show celebrates how gangs, graffiti, gays, drugs and illicit sex shaped New

York City's cultural landscape, Crow can be traditional in her tastes. She lists Goya and Brueghel, Francis Bacon and De Kooning among the artists whose work she most admires. And, in a moment of intense confession, she explains that she loves F. Scott Fitzgerald. "There's something romantic, decadent, and nostalgic about his writing," she said. "I feel like we are the same person."

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