

## Charlie Ahearn

### *Scratch Ecstasy*

May 18 – June 24, 2017

Opening Reception: May 18, 6-8 PM

**P·P·O·W** is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by artist and filmmaker Charlie Ahearn. Since the 1970s, Ahearn has documented street culture and the rise of hip hop in New York City, capturing the excitement and raw energy that infused the movement through photography, films and slide shows. His super 8 kung fu movie, *The Deadly Art of Survival* (1978) was shown throughout the Lower East Side, at Fashion Moda, and in *The Times Square Show* (1980). At *The Times Square Show*, Ahearn met Fab 5 Freddy, leading him to direct his iconic film *Wild Style* (1983), which is recognized as the first and most beloved movie in hip hop history. The exhibition reflects the culmination of 25 years of Ahearn's work mounting shows, publishing books, and making films, offering unparalleled insight into the people who defined the movement and its current influence on contemporary society.



Ahearn will exhibit a new series of silkscreen paintings and videos that reflect his ongoing interest in hip hop culture. These paintings, which will be exhibited for the first time, are made from slides shown at the Ecstasy Garage. The brightly colored, exuberant works are a window into the nascent years of the hip hop community, capturing the expression and energy of a particular moment in time.

The centerpiece of the exhibition will be "Scratch Ecstasy," a 20-minute slide show circa 1980 accompanied by an original mix by Grand Wizard Theodore, who is credited with inventing the Scratch technique. One of the first documentations of hip hop culture, it is made up of images screened by Ahearn at the Ecstasy Garage Disco in New York. The slides, many of which Ahearn and Fab 5 Freddy have scratched, celebrate the pioneers of the movement who later appeared in Ahearn's film *Wild Style*.

Among the new video works on view will be *Bongo Barbershop* (2005), *Dirt Style* (2014), *Dancing Industry* (2016) and *Five Grand Masters* (2014), hardcore, punchy films that represent the spectrum of hip hop today. Opening with the ubiquitous subway call "It's show time!" *Dancing Industry* captures the way hip hop still pervades New York City, with wild subway dancers The Waffle Crew on a crowded J train. With *Five Grand Masters* Ahearn documents the Ultimate B-Boy Championship at a martial arts school. The raw, fast-paced film mirrors the cinematic language of kung fu, a genre that Ahearn has been deeply influenced by, as five B-Boy grand masters battle for a \$5,000 cash prize. The work features a synchronous, live scratch mix by Grand Wizard Theodore, underscoring Ahearn's longstanding interest in capturing the narrative of live performance.

Charlie Ahearn lives and works in New York City. In addition to his seminal films documenting B-Boy and hip hop culture, Ahearn made documentary shorts with artists such as Martin Wong, Kiki Smith, Jane Dickson, and his twin brother John Ahearn, and features such as *Jamel Shabazz Street Photographer*. Ahearn produced a radio series with hip hop artists such as Rammellzee and Biz Markie on WPS1.com, later artonair.com, and published a number of books including *Yes Yes Y'all*, coauthored by Jim Fricke. His work has recently been screened and exhibited at The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn.; The Wexner Center, Columbus, Ohio; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; MoMA PS1, New York, N.Y.; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles. In 2015 P.P.O.W presented Ahearn's Paris metro Graffiti film *Dirt Style* at The Moving Image Art Fair, New York.