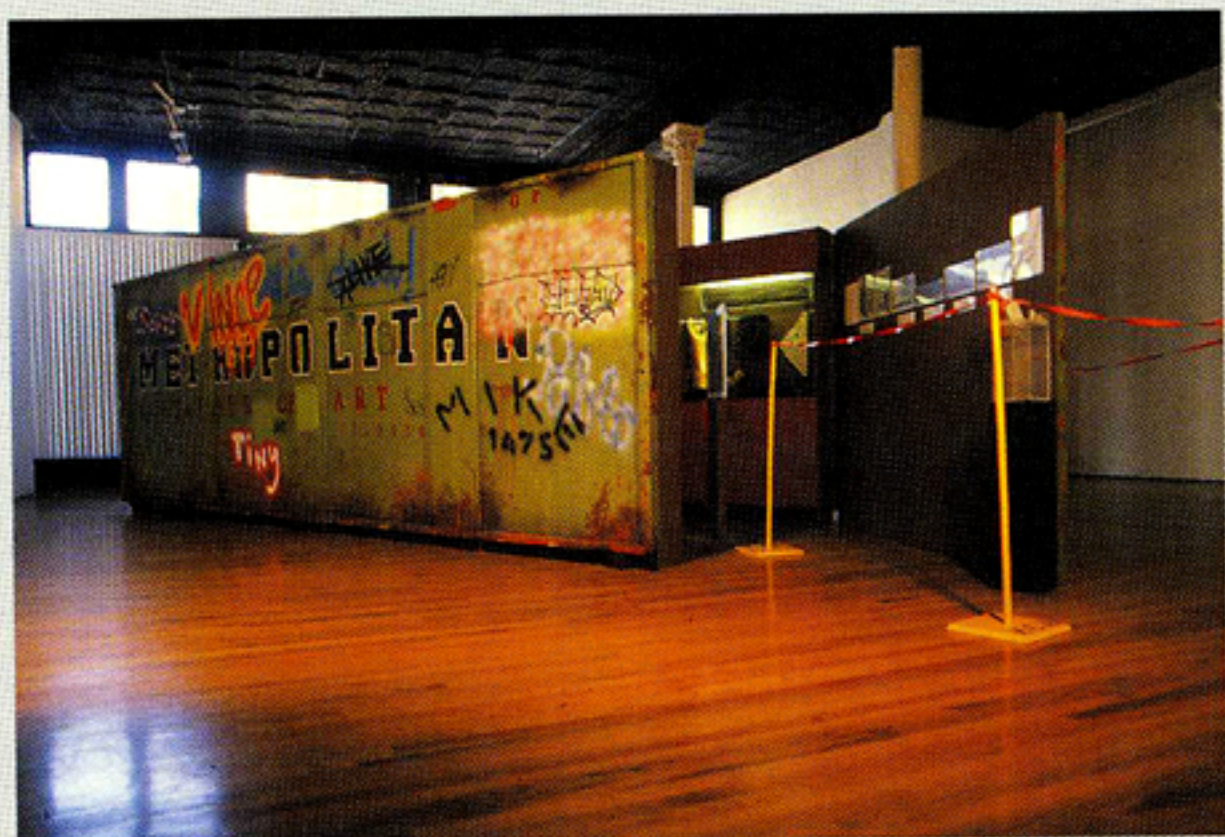


SPLENDORS OF THE SOHITES 1980



The Met at OK Harris Gallery, New York City



With this show, the viewer entered the gallery to see something he doesn't usually see at galleries—lines of people waiting to get into the exhibition, just like at the Whitney or the Modern. The promised exhibition was called “Splendors of the Sohites”; it was being held in a larger-than-life, graffiti-covered dumpster dubbed “The Metropolitan Container of Art”.

On his way inside, the viewer was greeted with a plastic container filled with dollar bills—the Metropolitan Container of Art is a non-profitable organization, and donations were encouraged, just like at the Met. Then came the story, in works and photographs, of Professor Sam Wiener's discovery, in tandem with the renowned artist and archeologist Evangeline Tabasco, of the civilization of SoHo, “a culture based entirely on creative arts”. While engaged in a routine dig in the Southern sector of Manhattan Island (an area previously known as Apple, or Big Apple), Tabasco discovered a “hermaphrodite amulet” from the supposedly lost civilization of the Sohites, who were “wiped out by ever increasing waves of invaders from outside”. Further digging yielded up a dumpster full of plastic-bagged treasures. Inside the Metropolitan Container, these artifacts were displayed in glass cases, with notations indicating

whether they were from the Archaic (ca. 1950-61), Classical (ca. 1962-75) or Decadent period.

What were these treasures? Close investigation proved that the “hermaphrodite amulets” found in ancient SoHo were pop-tops. “Amphorae—Glass, Various Periods”—turned out to be a Coke bottle and a pint jar. One relic was described as “petrified fecal matter”. “Anthropologists”, the catalogue tells us, “continue to be baffled as to the function served by placing fecal matter in the walkways, a practice which Sohites... continued almost to the Decadent period”. There were corroded egg boxes and six-pack holders; patinaed hub caps, dog bones and doorbells; a large cog wheel (“a ceremonial cymbal and its striker”); cans (“food storage vessels”); scraps of denim, classified as “drapery”; and “crooks” (busted umbrellas). The De Soto Krater bore a marked resemblance to the wheel of a certain car.

Not all objects were easily identifiable as contemporary, but there were enough to let us know that this exhibition was all in jest.

And who was the butt of the joke? Notably, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with its “Vikings” and “Treasures of Ancient Nigeria” shows. Ridiculous



Traveling Kit of a Wealthy Sohite Art Collector

as it was, this exhibition was the last word on this sort of show and its audience. And if you were amused enough, there was a “Splendors Shop” at its conclusion, where you could buy postcards, “hermaphrodite amulets,” and Evangeline Tabasco's T-shirts, which bore more than a passing resemblance to those Picasso shirts of the same order. Although a one-joke idea, the joke, from show to shop, was a good one. We may never again be able to look at a historical survey through the same eyes.

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