

Art in America

Mark Gonzales

NEW YORK, at Franklin Parrasch

by Sarah Valdez

When Mark Gonzales—affectionately known to his myriad fans as “Gonz”—landed the cover of *Thrasher* magazine in 1984 at the age of 15 for his daredevil, playful brand of street skateboarding, neither the X Games nor the Internet as we know it existed. He pioneered his own genre of “performance art” during an era in which, if you wanted to find people who had cultural inclinations similar to your own, you had to interact with them in person, rely on mail, or lurk in book and record stores and art galleries—all of which Gonzales has done. He not only skates but draws, paints, creates sculptures, makes films, writes poetry and connects with other renegade cultural figures. Titled “Round N’ Round,” this exhibition of refreshingly old-school Gonzales ephemera, dating from the early 1990s to the present, included the masterful *Circle Board* (2009), a sculpture created by attaching nine skateboards end to end so that they form a circle, wheels facing out. Sitting on a plinth in the gallery, *Circle Board* painted with Gonzales’s trademark cheerful doodles—raises the question of functionality.

Two videos in the exhibition attest that, in the right hands, the contraption does work. One, black and white, shot in Midtown Manhattan, and accompanied by Thelonious Monk’s “In Walked Bud,” shows the Brooklyn-based skateboarder/woodworker Anthony “Pops” Pappalardo careening through (and crashing into) traffic on the device. In a color video, Gonzales cruises around on the *Circle Board* in Paris. Not only does he manage to stay on the board, he does so with a balletic grace that defies Pappalardo’s comic mishaps. Though it would take considerable skill for anyone to do much of anything on the *Circle Board*, you get the sense that Gonzales created it because he was after a challenge—which he meets, gliding down a flight of stairs on the 36-wheeler.

“Round N’ Round” also featured works on paper, some of which were blown up on a photocopier, with unfortunate results. Most incorporate text, such as a white napkin on which Gonzales scrawled, Basquiat-style, “The prettiest people to look at our @ the art museam.” (Spelling is not his strong suit.) Some are correspondence, such as a letter from Hudson, director of Feature gallery in New York, thanking Gonzales for his fax art and recommending a Dennis Cooper book (“stuff may be a bit too faggy for you but there is such craft in his writing”). One of several postcards from Gonzales to a fellow skateboarder, the writer and Elk Gallery director Jocko Weyland, is simply covered with blue, black and yellow stripes. Other pieces host random, compelling musings, such as a list of 33 “ordinary unfamous people” and their idiosyncrasies (among them a cemetery caretaker who won’t remove dead flowers from graves, and a bank teller who intentionally mispronounces people’s names), and the wise injunction “BELIVE IN YOURSELF AND TREAT OTHERS KIND BUT KNOW AN ASSHOLE WHEN YOU SEE ONE AND STAY CLEAR.” All ephemera from a life well lived.