

THE KITCHEN

CENTER FOR
VIDEO, MUSIC,
DANCE AND
PERFORMANCE

Other Stages, October 22, 1981

DANCE REVIEWS

Graffiti Goes Legit

By JULINDA LEWIS

GRAFFITI ROCK. THE KITCHEN, 10/3.

Performances that truly have an impact on an audience are rare. When such a performance does occur, recognition is instant and a good time guaranteed.

Graffiti Rock was one such memorable event. It combines excitingly three grass-roots art forms that are uniquely suited to one another: breaking, rapping, and graffiti.

In daily battles with the New York City subway system, graffiti has become a mere backdrop to routine horrors. Only its absence is likely to have any appreciable effect on outraged and battered senses.

The works of graffiti artists Dondi, Duro, and Lee, together with the accompanying slides by Henry Chelfant, Martha Cooper, and Wesley, offer an opportunity to observe graffiti from a more positive perspective.

Dondi & Co. have graduated from the sides of subway cars to canvas, murals and set design.

How appropriate, then, that their work should serve as a backdrop for the crews of black and Hispanic youth whose competitions of athletic



Graffiti Rock

STEVEN BEGLEITER

proWess, rhythmic legerdemain, and astounding feats of physical dexterity reflect a similar variety and individuality.

Within a few seasons the energy and spontaneity of breaking, as this activity is called, will doubtless be harnessed by professional dancers. A watered down and commercially acceptable form of this exciting phenomenon will probably gain visibility and earn well-deserved plaudits for some aspiring choreographer. But it just won't be the same.

At The Kitchen, with the assistance of Fab 5 Freddy and D.J. Spy, members of the Rock Steady and Swift Kids crews showed us what breaking is all about.

A smooth, hypnotic rap done to a driving beat activates the limbs and takes possession

of the bodies of the dancers as surely as pressing the accelerator will increase the speed of a moving car.

A swift shuffle of sneakered feet on linoleum is the basic step. What follows is a mind-boggling eruption of flips and slides, snaking hips, and daring dives in which the dancers slam their bodies spread-eagled onto the floor.

Favorite moves include tucking in the head and limbs and spinning on the back like an overturned turtle. Most thrilling of all is when the legs spring or corkscrew into the air and the dancer spins a few turns on the top of his head.

Fired by the desire to outdo their rivals, the two crews took turns showing off their best routines. In their enthusiasm, some of the kids came crash-

ing down awkwardly on a shoulder or, painfully, onto both knees. One came spinning dangerously close to the edge of the stage and another teasingly faked death, then devilishly blew kisses to the audience before bopping off.

Breaking seems to combine the best of dancing, gymnastics and the martial arts. It also borrows from mime. But it is dangerously thrilling in a way that none of these art forms are separately.

"If art like this is a crime," reads one of the graffiti slides, "let God forgive me." Within the respectable confines of The Kitchen, *Graffiti Rock* was certainly not illegal, but anything so exciting and so thoroughly enjoyable just has to be a sin.