

KALEIDOSCOPE

by Lola Kramer

Selling Out



ARTCLUB2000, *Untitled (Donut Shop 1)*, 1992–93. Color print, 11 x 14 inches. Image courtesy Artists Space, New York.

Last fall, the Artists Space in New York presented the first comprehensive retrospective of the work of ART CLUB2000. Spanning the group's entire career, from 1992 until their planned dissolution in 2000, the exhibition will travel to Kunsthalle Zürich in September 2021.

On 26 November 2016, Joe Corr., the son of Vivienne Westwood and the late Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, set fire to an estimated £5m of punk memorabilia on the Thames. Addressing onlookers from a barge covered in political effigies and signs warning of the dangers of climate change, Corr. relayed this message, "Punk has become another marketing tool to sell you something you don't need. The illusion of an alternative choice. Conformity in another uniform." Before burning his collection, he urged onlookers to confront taboos and not tolerate hypocrisy. The act was conceived in response to Punk London, a citywide program manufactured to generate tourism that was regrettably tethered to the 40th anniversary of the Sex Pistols' song "Anarchy in the UK." While the performance resonated for many, his tribute to a subculture espousing anti-establishment ethos became muddled by the fact that he was also the founder of the lingerie retailer Agent Provocateur, which he sold to private equity in 2007 for £60m. "People criticized him for burning the stuff rather than selling it to charity," *The Guardian* opined. His anti-capitalist protest was overshadowed by the cashing in he did elsewhere. "Selling out," along with its nuances and associations, has changed significantly from the early seventies to the present. Calling a punk a sell-out punk used to be an oxymoron. By the time Generation X rolled into the nineties, selling out and selling one's soul were still virtually indistinguishable. Grunge emerged from individuals wary of consumer culture packaging the identities and values of a generation of individuals from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, the Internet arrived, ushering in the death of "the subculture," as we knew it. In 2021, people of all ages and life experiences are eager to be associated with brands, effortlessly dropping #paidpartnership like a courtesy for an axiom. Many artworks by the '90s collective Art Club2000 (AC2K) pre-eminently treat, or at least graze, this paradigm shift. Formed in 1992 by a group of seven

Cooper Union students and guided by legendary downtown dealer Colin de Land, "Art Club2000" reflects their unanimous decision to disband by the turn of the next decade. A recent survey organized by Artists Space illuminates the subversive ways in which they sought to court the attention of the commercial forces commodifying their generation's youth culture by overtly embodying it.



ARTCLUB2000, *Untitled (Industria Studios 2/Makeup Room)*, 1992–93. Color print, 11 x 14 inches. Image courtesy Artists Space, New York.

For their debut exhibition *Commingle* in 1993, AC2K presented a series of images featuring its members styled, art-directed, and photographed to resemble advertisements of the time. *Untitled (Conran's I)*, 1992–93, shows them lounging in khakis and plaid shirts; Gap shopping bags are deposited on the floor around them in what looks like a SoHo loft outfitted from a Laura Ashley catalogue. Only the price tags dangling from the furniture reveal they used a showroom for the shoot. As Douglas Coupland aptly puts it, AC2K "knew that a fresh Gap khaki attitude and team spirit were woefully inadequate to guide us through emerging global information systems at the time." (It was only suitable they implemented the Gap's return policy for styling.) The project later included members applying, unsuccessfully, for jobs at the big-box retailer and receiving a cease and desist letter from their lawyer for turning their SoHo gallery American Fine Arts into a lookalike storefront. AC2K member Sarah Rossiter described their goal to Glenn O'Brien in 1994, "To have the reins of power handed over to us and be viewed as generational spokesmodels. We wanted people to view us as a group intent on being observed as well as innocent, dynamic and perverse." Images like *Untitled (Wooster Street/Gap Vampires)*, 1992–93, depict AC2K as if they were a sullen boy-band in a fashion editorial, and express the group's discontent with commodifying strategies that coincided with a rapidly developing metropolitan landscape. (Notably, the year AC2K commenced, downtown youth culture witnessed Marc Jacobs being very publicly fired from Perry Ellis for his grunge collection that sent supermodels down the runway in flannel and Dr. Martens.) For the next seven years, AC2K would exhibit in the US and abroad and have a show every summer at de Land's gallery. During this time, the club began to land magazine features. "We had a strict policy of saying yes to everything," says club member Patterson Beckwith, "and this was a pinnacle." For AC2K, the alternative to widespread consumer culture was to sell in.