

CENEDELLA'S FINEST "HAPPY HOUR" — The bad boy unveils his gift to Soho

The long awaited debut of painter Robert Cenedella's gift to the Soho art community finally took place several weeks ago, and the event had about it the unofficial lunacy that has always surrounded the career of this brilliantly satiric artist.

The occasion marked the end of the saga of an oil painting originally planned to be hung in the *Whatts Happen Inn*, one of Cenedella's favorite imbibing emporia. The joint had been the target of enemy Regentrificators, and the local printing community wanted to immortalize their memories of the place. They came to Bob Cenedella, who likes to paint bars, among other things like subways, traffic jams, hysterical mobs, and assorted visions of urban Armageddon. The artist agreed to preserve the bar in oil.

The sponsors of the painting also underwrote the cost of making signed and numbered prints of the projected work. The proceeds from the sales of these prints will be brought back to the community with sponsored group shows of artists who live and work in Soho. This is Cenedella's way of telling everyone he loves it down here, and loves his neighbors, too.

Not surprising coming from someone whose subject matter is quintessential New York, and who has been called "a modern Breugel". A native New Yorker, the artist forged his craft at the Art Student's League where his snipes at the sociology of city living and reactionary politics derived from his teacher and inspiration, the exile German expressionist, George Grosz.

The result of the commission is "Happy Hour", a celebration of Soho bar life, done to a delicious turn. The original *Whatts Happen Inn* has since closed, so it seemed inevitable that one of the areas oldest and most venerable institu-



tions — the Broome Street Bar on West Broadway — would become the painting's home. And since this was no ordinary painting, but a tribute to Soho and it's denizens, a kind of gin mill year-book on canvas, the unveiling took on a special character. It was an opening featuring only one work. But such a work! It would attract not only the local art community, but the uptown people as well, devotees who have followed the artist's work since the 60's when he tweaked the noses of Warhol and Castelli and practically everyone else who were darlings of the art scene with his revolutionary "Yes Art" show.

Life in the Broome Street Bar continues as usual as the event gets underway — the beer and the burgers and the chat. With all the frivolity of it, the silliness, the local bar shenanigans of it, even the hype of it, a reverant seriousness reigns, though no one of the artist's invited guests will admit to it. They muster in the center of the room, forming a second tier behind the row of regulars nailed to the bar. You can spot them easily, because they are there to see something, not just to drink. Occasionally they glance up at a large draped rectangle positioned in a prominent place above the bar and at the entrance to the back dining room. Sardonically, Cenedella fits in easily with this largely uptown crowd. He is well turned out in a perfectly regulation Brooks Brothers suit, but when he turns

around you see that he has his name embroidered across his shoulder blades in 3 inch letters. In this cocktail party atmosphere, the artist is a cross between a neatly-pressed businessman and a quarterback for the Chicago Bears, or perhaps even a pro wrestling star in street clothes. Despite this, the mixed bag of friends, promoters, wellwishers and fellow painters generates a sort of high-toned seriousness.

The event climaxes when the red velvet drapery, worthy of a Medici Prince's lounging robe, is lowered, only to reveal (gotcha!) one of the artist's early ('60's) posters, a photograph of a lady with a pneumatic bosom of extraordinary dimensions, freakish and pendulous, like two Oldsmobile Cutlasses, under the headline, "The Spirit of '76".



St. Patrick's Day 34" x 46"
Oil on canvas - 1979