



## INSULTS: AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY ARTURO VEGA

Opens At Howl! Happening: An Arturo Vega Project



Howl! Happening is pleased to presents **INSULTS** by Arturo Vega, a Mexican-born artist who lived and worked in New York City from 1971 until his death in 2013. Known worldwide for his designs as artistic director for the band The Ramones, Vega explored his fascination with the power of the printed word in hundreds of paintings and prints throughout his prolific career. **Opening Reception Saturday, March 5, 6–8 PM.** The exhibition runs through March 31, 2016. Visit [howlarts.org](http://howlarts.org).

**INSULTS**, a series of paintings emblazoned with phrases like, “HEY YOU FAG,” and “YOU IDIOT BASTARD,” were part of a larger body of work that Vega described as “sentence” or “word” paintings.

First shown in 1992 at CB's 313 Gallery, and subsequently in 1994 at Raleigh Studios in Miami, Vega continued to revisit these themes throughout his career with *Love, Life, Lust* and *Lie, Cheat, Steal*—additional series of paintings based on his sense of humor, acutely attuned ear for language, and attraction to words as art. His final large-scale commission was a text-based collage that reads “Life Isn’t Tragic Love is Just Being Ignored.”

***No one could insult you quite like Arturo Vega. And because he was brutally honest, fiercely intelligent, and spoke several languages, you knew that he meant it. And it was true. Then he would laugh. . . . Ah ha ha ha.***

—Sandra Shulman, curator, writer

In his designs, painting, and print work, his choice of a simple bold typeface is evocative of newspaper headlines from Mexico and New York in the 60s and 70s. From a headline declaring “Murderers” in the October 1968 independent Mexican paper *¿Por qué?*, to a *New York Daily News* headline from the same year, “Actress Shoots Andy Warhol.” we see the same Franklin Gothic font that Vega used in the Ramones logo.

“Arturo Vega believed in the inculpatory urgency of a sans serif headline, as if the honesty of unembellished text was the most direct way to communicate a message or idea,” says How! Happening gallery director Ted Riederer in his essay for the catalog. “These Insults may have been hurled at Arturo Vega as he walked the streets of Mexico City, a young gay hippie during a period of repression in late 60s Mexico, or overheard between a shop owner and a vagrant on the Bowery during the 70s.”

The word paintings were also influenced by supermarket window signs, which were ubiquitous in shop windows in the Lower East Side. Living in the East Village at the height of its blight during the 70s, Vega watched the supermarket windows as new texts were regenerated weekly, while the neighborhood faded and crumbled.

Insults and other word paintings are one way Vega laughed at the life he led and the absurdity of the world around him. “When things were at their worst, which was quite often, Arturo would laugh and say, ‘Happy, happy, happy,’ like some twisted mantra until everyone was in a good mood again,” says “Legs” McNeil in his essay for the catalog. “If you wanted to get in a good mood, you hung out at Arturo’s.”

## ABOUT THE HOW! HAPPENING ARCHIVE

***Art is everywhere but there is never enough Art. Art has stopped being a chronologically correct string of schools and isms and is being born all the time, everywhere; Art connects to the eternal demanding fast changes and a reckless appetite for truth, justice and a better way of life.*** —Arturo Vega

This exhibition, the second in a series at How! Happening from the Arturo Vega Archive, sheds light on his extensive body of work. The How! Archive contains the full range of Vega’s artistic production. It also houses the Estate of Tom Murrin, aka the Alien Comic. The Archive aims to preserve and protect the intellectual history and property of artists and performers who have made their home on the Lower East Side. How! Happening takes inspiration from Vega’s artistry, generous spirit, and heart.

*Photo above: To Hell with You, 1991*

*Photo attached: You Idiot Bastard, 1991*

How! Happening: An Arturo Vega Project  
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# NEWS ALERT

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Gallery Hours: Wed-Sun, 11–6 PM

## ABOUT HOWL! HAPPENING

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