

Susan Eley

Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Coney Island in Transision: Paintings and Photographs by Gary Schwartz
and Jay Hochheiser**

March 12 – April 23, 2009

Opening Reception Tuesday, March 12, 6-8pm

About the Exhibition

Coney Island is many things to many people, now more than ever as the City, the Municipal Art Society, community and civic organizations and various developers clash about the future of this legendary amusement and resort Mecca.

For artists Gary Schwartz and Jay Hochheiser, boyhood friends growing up in the Luna Park apartment complex in the 1960s, Coney Island was home. Vacant lots and seedy, crime-ridden areas coexisted with remnants of spectacular amusement rides such as the stately Parachute Jump and the exotic bathing pavillions. The boys sensed Coney Island's magical past in the aroma of Turkish Taffy and cotton candy and lived its present riding the Wonder Wheel and Cyclone.

When Jay was 10, his family left Coney Island and the boys lost touch. They reconnected in 2006 when Gary invited Jay to attend his first exhibition at this gallery. One sunny day last summer, the two returned to the old neighborhood to visit old haunts, walk the boardwalk and enjoy a Nathan's hot dog. Jay's color photographs were created during that day. They at once provide a path into a glorious, exotic history of a place, while also bearing witness to the creeping decay. The vivid, hot palette and the energy of the people pictured communicate a sense of hope as a new community of Coney Islanders makes the landscape its home.

For the past several years, Gary has been painting scenes based on his own photographs of Coney Island, taken in the 1980s and 90s. After running the images through various Photoshop filters, Gary paints the scenes in Photorealist style. Yet, in a departure from pure Photorealism, Gary invents color and creates composites of actual sites, as if these filtered memories are more real to him than the places themselves.

This exhibition reflects an unearthing of a shared boyhood history, a revitalization of the past, not merely a nostalgic look back.

About Coney Island

Coney Island, a five-mile strip at the southern end of Brooklyn, began as beach resort in the 1850s and soon became known as the "Playground of the World," offering millions of urban dwellers seeking fun, sand and spectacle all manner of curious diversions, theatrical and musical entertainments, amusement rides, hotels, restaurants and bathhouses. Coney Island's Golden Era in the opening decades of the 20th century saw the rise of the Steeplechase Park, Luna Park and Dreamland, each outdoing the other in terms of

spectacle and exoticism.

The steady decline of Coney Island began in the 1950s, a result of urban renewal initiatives, suburban flight and the New York City fiscal crisis. While many of the legendary rides—the Wonder Wheel, the Cyclone, the Aquarium and the famous Boardwalk—still exist, it's impossible to visit Coney Island without being impacted by the dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. Today we reminisce about its once glorious past and wonder if Coney Island's mystique will live on in a new, revitalized form.

Please join us for a Special Panel Lecture

Thursday, March 12 at 7 pm

Why Coney? Why Now?

A Legendary Amusement Mecca at a Crossroads

Speakers:

Jasper Goldman, Senior Policy Analyst, Municipal Art Society, coordinated the MAS "Imagine Coney" campaign, a global initiative to seek new ideas for the future of Coney Island; MA, City Planning, MIT

Juan Rivero, PhD candidate, Rutgers University School of Planning & Public Policy; former Senior Policy Analyst, NYC's Department of Housing Preservation & Development; MA, Urban Planning, Columbia University; JD, University of Chicago