

NOTES ON CLAYTON PATTERSON'S PYRAMID PORTRAITS

Although there were a great many interplaying scenes in the East Village in the mid-1980s, none was more remarkable than what was transpiring at the Pyramid Club.

This long, dark rectangular room inside a rather shabby three-story 19th century building at 101 Avenue A was invariably packed with cross-dressers, trannies, handsome Brooklyn and Queens boys, butches from the Bronx and Staten Island—not to mention the square tourists who somehow found their way to *the* stage for creativity in the period. Showtime was always a grand treat: Emceed on a narrow stage by Hapi Phace, any given show might feature the inimitable International Chrysis, who brought Uptown glamour to the East Village, or the award-winning performance artist Ethyl Eichelberger—or literally hundreds of others. Here, individuality reigned supreme, while outside, people clamored to get in. Video artist Nelson Sullivan, one of the first people to document the madness of the club, would tape the action on a nightly basis for his now-classic archives.

Music always played at the Pyramid Club, and it wafted out onto the streets. Sometimes performers like Lypsinka, who professionally lip-synced to recorded music, performed splendidly, and sometimes live groups played. It was a virtual smorgasbord of talent, a sampling of all types from around the world. Each individual somehow managed to become a part of the whole, which kept this rich scene developing each and every night. You never got bored here.

Like the street photographer Weegee, Canadian artist Clayton Patterson was fascinated with this panorama of people. He quickly understood the inherent value of capturing a scene that would soon disappear forever, ravaged as it was by the AIDS and crack epidemics. Society in general paid little interest to the machinations of the East Village, but Clayton knew its worth and photographed the tinsel-glamour that was taking place right in front of his eyes.

Soon enough, night fell and the Pyramid Club ended its lively run. What we have with these photographs is a captivating testament to Clayton Patterson's ability to recognize the remarkable. These are indelible images from a very lively past that isn't likely to repeat itself. Like Elvis, the East Village/Pyramid Club has left the room, forever.

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