

“Max Kansas City was the exact spot where Pop Art and Pop Life came together in the sixties” (Andy Warhol) New York in the sixties and seventies was obviously among the world’s most dynamic cultural centers. While the period was one of fundamental upheaval, both within individual art forms and in the culture in general, there was also interference among individual art forms, the role of the artist changed and the sharp division between life practice and art came under attack. Max's Kansas City was a legendary spot in New York, a restaurant and bar decorated by artists of the day and expanding, for a period, with an upstairs stage where unrivalled, pioneering concert activity unfolded. The nightclub was founded in 1965 by Mickey Ruskin and it functioned with him as its vital core for 10 years as a meeting place for artists, musicians, superstars, photographers, fashion people, writers and actors. Warhol held court at Max's; Lou Reed, John Cale, and Philip Glass were regulars, as were Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Smithson, Robert Rauschenberg and Frosty Myers, to name just a few. High on Rebellion, a book about Max's Kansas City, quotes the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, “I think that a lot of very important conversations that constructed the discourse of the art that was to have a major effect in the next thirty years, really took place at Max's — the big battles, the great intellectual struggles. Nobody takes into account those kind of institutions in which real human life goes on, and you know it's this kind of interface between one's other aesthetic battles, that is, between your eating, your drinking, and your sexuality that goes along with your ideas, and the rest of the thing.” This quote indicates the tremendous significance of the nightclub as an intense developing ground for aesthetic debate, while also describing the singular character of this unorthodox academy that was grounded in life practice. Many photographers were part of daily life at Max's. A large volume of largely unpublished material exists, not only documenting events but also conveying the ambience of the legendary nightspot. This presentation of Max's Kansas City has at its core a large volume of pictures by Anton Perich and Billy Name, supplemented by pictures by a string of other photographers. Furthermore, the exhibition includes

examples from Max's art universe: Dan Flavin's light installation which dominated Max's back room; works by Warhol and Rauschenberg from the period; Malcolm Morley's painting of the Ruskin family; Brigid Berlin's tit prints; a variation of Frosty Myer's laser installation, which ran from his studio and around several city blocks before ending up on a mirror on the jukebox loudspeaker inside Max's Kansas City; paintings executed by Anton Perich's painting machine; as well as works by other Max's artists. An exhibition about Max's Kansas City will almost by definition be more than just a focus on a specific period of American history, it will also reflect developments since then in wide areas of the visual arts and rock music. A warm thanks to the artist Jacob Fuglsang Mikkelsen for taking the initiative for a show about Max's Kansas City, and for his huge curatorial effort in realizing it. Likewise, I want to thank Yvonne Sewall-Ruskin for going out of her way to facilitate our plans for this exhibition. Thanks to Anton Perich for his invaluable help and for graciously making his photos from Max's Kansas City available to us — which naturally extends to the other contributing photographers, as well. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge the private persons and public institutions that loaned works to this exhibition: Birthe Rokkedal, Yvonne Sewall-Ruskin, Anton Perich, Jessica Ruskin and the Orlando Art Museum. Finally, our thanks to Vincent Fremont and the Rauschenberg Studio for assisting in the preparations for this exhibition.