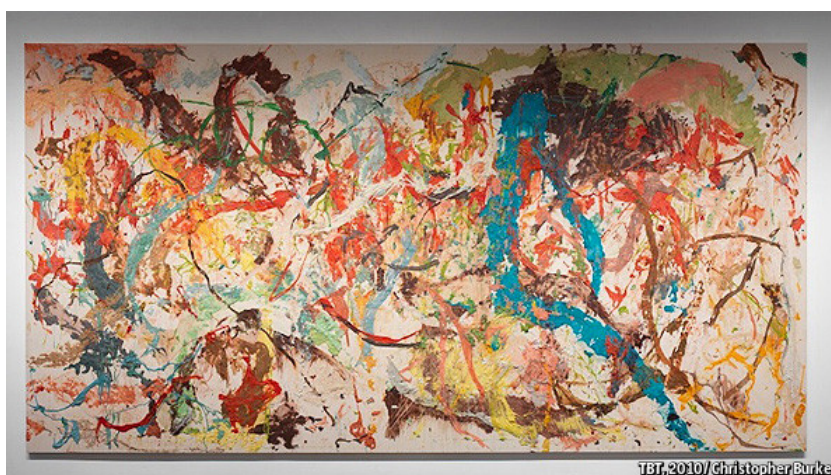


## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The  
Economist

### Something to chew on

A.M.B.



ONE evening in 2005 an American artist named Dan Colen holed up in a hotel room with another artist, Dash Snow. The friends filmed their drug- and alcohol-addled night of debauchery, and duly referred to the trashed room as a “hamster's nest”, because they filled it with the shredded pages of the telephone books they found there.

Four years later, Snow died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27, and now the video of that night, titled “The End Is Near”, is among the 85 or so works making up "Help!", an exhibition of Mr Colen's work at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center in Greenwich, Connecticut. Many of the pieces make reference to Mr Colen's friendship with Snow, the latter's death and its effect on Mr Colen.

The friends were part of a group of artists including Ryan McGinley, Nate Lowman, Terence Koh, Rita Ackermann and Hanna Liden, who dominated the downtown New York art scene of the early 21st century. They were christened "Warhol's Children" by some, but Mr Colen dismisses the name as a "silly thing" and says their movement has yet to get an official title. “Sometimes people say the Bowery School," he remarks, "but I'm not quite sure where that came from.”

After partying their way through the first decade of the century, many have sobered up and now have thriving art careers. The story of the 34-year-old Mr Colen is a case in point. He was once considered something of a joke by many critics, because of his heavy partying and penchant for covering canvases with chewing gum (see picture) and bird poo—the former real, the latter made

from oil paint. Today's collectors, however, think otherwise. A work from 2008 made of chewing gum and paper on canvas fetched \$1.09m at Sotheby's last year. And on May 12th an oil painting from 2006, of a candle inspired by Disney's "Pinocchio", sold for \$3.1m at Christie's.

Gum and bird poo show up on several works in the show, along with paintings consisting of crushed flowers on linen, and a seascape whose title gives the exhibition its name. Twenty-three canaries fly around one room—yellow dots that hark back to the colourful pieces of bubble-gum—their nest a mess of wire and rubbish. An ode to Mr Colen's recent past, a curtain made of 135,000 crack pipes filled with tiny roses, keeps the birds contained. "I'm turning it into this really kind of beautiful, mysterious thing," says Mr Colen of his curtain. "Most of what I do is about that, trying to transform these things."

Snow's name surfaces numerous times. "Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future)" is a life-sized rendering of a collage from Snow's apartment, covered with New York newspapers, school photos and stickers. Even the exhibition's centrepiece, two lorries buried head first in the ground up to their middles, with their back doors open to allow in rain, dirt, debris and wildlife, acts as a homage. Named "At Least They Died Together (After Dash)" it recalls a collage Snow once gave to Mr Colen.

While the show makes clear the affection with which Mr Colen looks on his past with Snow, his death certainly marked a turning point in Mr Colen's life, both in general and specifically artistic terms. Snow wasn't the first friend that Mr Colen had lost, but he was one of the closest. "It was the first time that it had occurred to me that it was totally unromantic and just a waste," says Mr Colen. "There was so much more for him to do, and I think it really made me question everything." Five months later he sobered up, and now is no longer the bad-boy artist who happens to make things during all-night parties or in a drug-induced haze. It's well worth a trip to Greenwich to see the results.

*"Dan Colen: Help!" is on display at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center in Greenwich, Connecticut, until September 2014*