

# downtown express

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 47

THE NEWSPAPER OF LOWER MANHATTAN

APRIL 6 - 12, 2007



Downtown Arts, pp. 21-28

## Sweet street art

BY KAIJA HELMETAG

Never has graffiti covered as pristine and sweet-smelling a surface as chocolate — until last week, when chocolatier Alison Nelson debuted a new line of bars designed by ten of New York City's most legendary graffiti writers. The series, now on sale among the other specialty sweets at Nelson's tiny West Village shop Chocolate Bar, is a project to showcase graffiti art and to benefit the communities where the pioneering artists grew up.

Of course, graffiti hasn't always been regarded so sweetly. Mayor Edward Koch's crack-down in the early 1980s sought to rid the city of graffiti completely and Mayor Rudy Giuliani's Anti-Graffiti Task Force, instituted in 1995, was one of the most comprehensive in American history.

"It never once dawned on me that graffiti is seen in a negative light," said Nelson, who grew up in Rockaway Beach during the 1970s, when graffiti covered the elevated trains. "To me it's such an important part of urban culture."

Graffiti artists Blade, Crash, Cranchee, Crime 79, Dondi, Dr. Revolt, Iz the Wiz, Lady Pink, Spar One and Voice of the Ghetto (Stay High 149) designed the wrappers for the bars. Most feature the writers' unique signatures and all are an homage to New York graffiti styles of the 1970s and early 1980s, when crews of writers regularly "bombed" bold designs on subway cars.

Crime 79, who started writing in East New York in the late '70s, designed the wrapper for the caramel bar. In the '80s he was part of community of artists who called themselves The Soul Artists, at whose gatherings Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat could often be spotted.

"I didn't want to do just straight-out graffiti," Crime 79 said. Instead, he painted like he was a teenager in the '70s, using bright yellow, red and bright blue lettering.

Mitch Weiss, a.k.a. Crauchee, who designed the Dark chocolate and coffee bar, grew up in the Parkside Projects of the Bronx and was a member of a group of writers called The Crazy 5. Today, he is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Designing his bar was a way for him to reminisce about his



Ten graffiti artists designed the wrappers for a new line of candy bars at Chocolate Bar in the West Village.

childhood, New York City and graffiti writing. "I made it look as retro as I could," he said. "It was like stepping back in time — just to go back and design that made me feel like I was fourteen again." He recently completed a novel about growing up in the Bronx.

All of the artists wanted to give back to the neighborhoods that they came from, Nelson said. A portion of the profits from the bars will benefit the All Stars Project, a non-profit organization that creates performance-based programs for lower-income kids in neighborhoods like the South Bronx, Bed-Stuy and East New York.

"The young men and women who created the memorable grafs on buildings and subway cars were producers of street culture at a time when there were few if any cultural programs for poor youth — programs in which young people could express themselves positively and creatively," Gabrielle L. Kurlander, president of the All Stars Project,

wrote in an email. "All Stars was created in 1981 to give the young people of New York an opportunity to grow, to be creative and to build something positive that was theirs."

Nelson has developed other creative lines of chocolates with key lime pie, caramel apple and other classic American flavors; chocolates "printed" with skulls and crossbones to benefit CBGB before it closed; and a set of bars designed by local designers and artists.

"You can only do so much with chocolate and I really wanted to keep finding new, interesting things to do that are really about what New York City is," Nelson said of her latest series. "They're great little pieces of an with chocolate inside."

Chocolate Bar is at 48 Eighth Ave. between Jane and Horatio Sts. (212-366-1541; [chocolatebarnyc.com](http://chocolatebarnyc.com)).