

FIERMAN

19 PIKE STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10002

NORA GRIFFIN / 1999 NYC TEES

NORA GRIFFIN *1999 NYC TEES*,
JULY 6-9

RECEPTION FRIDAY JULY 7 / 5-9
AT FIERMAN, 19 PIKE STREET



For one long weekend, July 6-9, FIERMAN presents a special project by gallery artist Nora Griffin: *N.Y.C 1999 Tees*, over 50 t-shirts in all sizes with the image of the “old” New York City skyline. The shirts are all wearable, but have been newly transfigured with fabric paint, dye, and bleach. All items are sourced by the artist and date from before September 11, 2001. In some cases the Millennium is celebrated in the design, with “1999” or “2001” emblazoned into the skyline in bold celebratory numbers. The borderline between kitsch and pathos can be found in a 2001 shirt with the twin towers cartoonishly embraced by the date. Their destruction a mere months away, the tee becomes a poignant reminder of a literal before time. The 1999 Tees are a paean to the night before the party ended—the Y2K fashion bug that is making a comeback was a very strange time—an in-between world that was not beholden to technology but was waiting in awe for the future to arrive. The city was still a conceivable skyline, as if drawn by a child, rectangles and ziggurats, like a petroglyph ruin, it could be communicated so quickly—the Empire State, the Statue of Liberty, the Chrysler, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Twin Towers. The fluid paint is a kind of colorful stain on the shirts—Nora favors cloud-like camo

patterns, wavy grids, and color blocks that reference the design sensibility of the 1980s and '90s. There is a natural softening and wearing down that occurs with all garments, and this is part of the ephemeral beauty of the pieces. Like the city itself, they are at one with change, sparkling for a moment, inciting ideas and happiness in their wearer, and then moving into an unknown future as their skyline fades and the colors wash into each other.

As a child and teenager living in Downtown NYC from the late 1980s to 2001, I would see art being made, sold, and worn on the streets. The boundaries between what was being marketed as tourist swag and what was street art/fashion was blurred in those days: carnival like street fairs, sprawling vintage markets, and street art (before its reification into high art) were all in the mix of a distinctly urban visual celebration. The ubiquitous image of the twin towers, seen everyday by people who lived downtown as complex totems of wealth (but also as pleasing pillars of geometry) were featured as subjects in many artists' work of the day. The goal with this tee shirt project is to bring the past—the emotional past of a New York City that has changed many times over—into the future, with a joyful, colorful burst of energetic marks and patterns that bear similarity to my paintings.

-Nora Griffin, June 2023

