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John Ahearn with two of his cast sculptures

JOHN AHEARN REVIVAL AT FRIEZE NY

New York artist John Ahearn, who famously put a face on the South Bronx with his painted plaster life casts of neighborhood residents in the early 1980s, has spent the last several decades making murals and public sculptures around the world, often with collaborator Rigoberto Torres. Ahearn and Torres first made their mark, however, in 1979 with the "South Bronx Hall of Fame" at Fashion Moda, one of the alternative gallery's first major exhibitions. The show was a real community event, and highly interactive, with Ahearn and Torres making portraits on the sidewalk outside the gallery.

Now, more than 25 of those original 30 works are being brought together for a reconstruction of that exhibition at Frieze New York, May 4-7, 2012. Organized by Frieze Projects curator Cecilia Alemani, the show is designed to pay homage to the pioneering alternative art space founded by artists Stefan Eins and Joe Lewis, which officially shut its doors in 1993. Fashion Moda's original location is not far from the Frieze New York setting on Randall's Island. "John seemed to be the perfect artist to illustrate that famous space," she said. Plus, "the South Bronx is quite active now."

To accompany the event, the nonprofit Frieze Foundation is producing a black-and-white newspaper broadsheet. The 5,000 copies include images of the original exhibition, pictures of Ahearn and Torres at work on the casts, a selection of criticism from the time and a new interview with Ahearn.

But the project's real highlight is that Ahearn and Torres are going to be on site to make a new series of commissioned casts. For just \$3,000, a few lucky visitors (no more than three or four per day) get to lie down, be wrapped in goop-coated bandages, breathe through two straws up their nostrils and wait for 25 minutes for the stuff to dry. After the fair, Ahearn and Torres plan to carve and paint the sculptures and have them ready for delivery about a month or so later.