Fabian Debora

Fabian Debora is dedicated to art as a vehicle for education and communication. Born in El Paso, TX and raised in Boyle Heights, CA, he joined the East Los Streetscapers in 1995 and since then created murals and paintings. Debora began exhibiting his work in 2008 and had solo exhibitions at Homegirl Café in 2011 and 2012. In 2010, his work was included in “Forces from the Past” at Greenlease Gallery, Rockhurst University, Kansas City; and in 2011, his work was included in the exhibition, “Bridging through the Arts,” at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Alex Kizu

Alex Kizu’s paintings derive from a longtime interest in street art, Japanese iconography, and his knowledge of hundreds of calligraphic alphabets. Kizu joined the burgeoning street art movement in the 1980s at the age of twelve. He went on to pursue an AA degree in Art at Santa Monica City College and a BA in Art at California State University, Northridge, where he graduated with honors in 2011. Kizu’s work has been included in exhibitions since 2003, including “Rustic and Urbane” at Claremont Graduate University in 2005; “SCOPE International Contemporary Art Fair” in Miami in 2008; “Millon & Associes” Art Exhibition and Auction, Paris, France in 2009; and “Street Cred: Graffiti Art from Concrete Walls to Canvas” an exhibition that began at the Pasadena Museum of California Art and then traveled to Longmont Museum in Colorado in 2011-12.

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez’s bronze sculptures and mixed media paintings are influenced by the sprawling urban landscape of Los Angeles, the human form, and graffiti art. He received his first official mural commission from Father Greg Boyle in 1991 for Homeboy Industries and has since been commissioned to paint murals throughout Los Angeles.

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Men fully inhabit their truth is an inestimable gift. We are all exactly what God had in mind. Although we are all unique in our own way, our truth is powerful and soulful on the canvas, in the studio, on the stage, or in the space we are, and it exists in the ability to create something beautiful and significant. They found their truth in their gift, in an ability to contribute to the world in a way that matters, that is meaningful, and that has the power to heal, inspire, and transform. They found their truth in their gift, in an ability to contribute to the world in a way that matters, that is meaningful, and that has the power to heal, inspire, and transform.

Trauma was part of the air they all breathed. Violence, drug abuse, and the daily dread of unspeakable trauma were part of the air they all breathed as they sought to find the truth of who they are. They found their truth in their gift, in an ability to create something beautiful and significant. They found their truth in their gift, in an ability to contribute to the world in a way that matters, that is meaningful, and that has the power to heal, inspire, and transform.

Rest in Peace, Fabian Debora
Top
Acrylic on wood panel, 120 x 120 inches
2012

Transformation of Spirits Exposed, Fabian Debora, Alex Kizu, and Juan Carlos Munoz Hernandez each developed distinct artistic practices.

What these artists share are roots in Boyle Heights, a mentor in Father Greg Boyle, founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries, and a commitment both to their practices and to giving back to their communities. When we began planning for this exhibition, each of the artists told a similar story of growing up in and around the projects; art played a prominent role in their lives and in their ability to find their truth. Reflecting on his youth, Kizu explained it this way: “I got into a lot of trouble, but Father Greg, no matter what I did, was always encouraging me to do my art.” This encouragement extended to being there for other youth and past pupils instead of graffiti. Munoz Hernandez recalls that working on community murals led to the opportunity to apply as an apprentice to artist Robert Graham, a life-changing experience. His apprenticeship with Graham draws on his expansive knowledge of the scripts and alphabets used in street art. The first works he showed me for this exhibition expressed a transformation that mirrored his own—using diverse influences ranging from the human form, the urban landscape, and maps of California from his “Urban Hidden Landscapes” paintings on the streets of East Los Angeles, to “Lexicon,” miniature sculptures embodying graffiti letters in bronze. Munoz Hernandez shifts and disrupts the expectations of street art. For this exhibition, he created intricate sculptures and paintings in larger scale. In “The Witness Edition” (2012), quirky “witnesses” (structural supports used in the lost wax process that are typically discarded) remain intact among the otherwise intricate lines and open spaces, metaphorically connecting to the artist’s supporting role in Graham’s studio. These works bear witness in a broader sense, too, questioning accepted notions of who and what we choose to discard and value.

Among the artists, Munoz Hernandez remains more strongly tied to Homeboy Industries. After overcoming one personal trauma after another, he received accreditation as a drug counselor and joined the staff at Homeboy Industries in February 2007. During the process of transformation, he maintained a constant stream of motivation and focus. Leading a reformatted education, Debora actively sought out other mentors, including the East Los Soundsystem and artist Vincent Valdez. As a result of this new energy, his work developed rapidly. But even for his style changed. Debora remained committed to depicting narratives from his life and community. Representational paintings such as Peonía Muerte/Inoculación/Place Body (2009) provide a dramatic use of light—not theatrical, but something more like sunlight or a mystical ray—which serves to cast both hope and authority with iconic paintings and works in larger scale. In “The Witness Edition” (2012), brittle “witnesses” (structural supports used in the lost wax process that are typically discarded) remain intact among the otherwise intricate lines and open spaces, metaphorically connecting to the artist’s supporting role in Graham’s studio. These works bear witness in a broader sense, too, questioning accepted notions of who and what we choose to discard and value.

Anne Buckley
Curator of the Exhibition

Buckley, Anne (2012). Los Angeles: Downtown cultural strategy, author, and art
curator. In Anne Buckley & Hannah E. Whitford, California: University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Times.

There is no single aesthetic to define art that grows out of urban grit or paintings made on the fly. Nor is there one way that individuals overcome challenges including poverty and community violence. At this exhibition, reveals, Fabian Debora, Alex Kizu, and Juan Carlos Munoz Hernandez, each developed distinct artistic practices.

Four decades ago, when he began an 18-year apprenticeship with artist Robert Graham in Venice Beach, until Graham’s death in 2008, Munoz Hernandez’s passion and skill in fabricate paints, sculpting, and public works and is inspired by diverse influences ranging from the human form, the urban landscape, and maps of California from his “urban hidden landscape” paintings on the streets of East Los Angeles, to “lexicon,” miniature sculptures embodying graffiti letters in bronze. Munoz Hernandez shifts and disrupts the expectations of street art. For this exhibition, he created intricate sculptures and paintings in larger scale. In “The Witness Edition” (2012), brittle “witnesses” (structural supports used in the lost wax process that are typically discarded) remain intact among the otherwise intricate lines and open spaces, metaphorically connecting to the artist’s supporting role in Graham’s studio. These works bear witness in a broader sense, too, questioning accepted notions of who and what we choose to discard and value.

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