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CURRENTS

SHOWS

Bringing in the Exterior Decorators

Hugo Martinez (below), curator, gallerist and mentor to generations of graffiti artists, has lately turned over his home — a one-bedroom rental in Washington Heights — to a dozen street artists and a Dutch design team, Kaptein Roodnat. Mr. Martinez gave them a two-part assignment: to renovate the apartment and to incorporate art-work that tackled the masters.

Inspired by Rodin's "Gates of Hell," the artist Kez 5, for example, reworked baseboards and door frames (top and bottom right), embedding them with graffiti-style lettering made of foamcore and objects (toys from a Happy Meal, a laughing Buddha) he had plucked from neighborhood sources like Rite-Aid, McDonald's and a Pentecostal church sale. With the assistance of Skuf, another artist, those embellished trims were slicked in place with shiny gray acrylic paint, bringing to mind a familiar detail in most city rentals that have been freshly "renovated": over-painted molding.

This "intervention," as Mr. Martinez calls the work in his apartment, is not the first he has corralled artists into creating in a private domestic space. In 2005, he took over the apartment of a friend who was living in subsidized housing on the Lower East Side. The result, an installation called "The Project in the Projects,"

nearly landed Mr. Martinez in jail. He was arrested on charges of trespassing, though the case was dropped, he said. His intention, then as now, was to challenge ideas about what a community owes its members — in both cases, decent housing — and to use that community's folk art to enrich private space.

His new project, finished last week (with cabinetry donated by Zale Contracting), feels neither transgressive nor aggressive, but peaceful, meditative and whimsical, which pleases him. "That's where conflict should end up," he said. "In the resolution of ideas, something new happens."

"Mastering the Heights" is open Friday and Saturday, noon to 6 p.m., through Jan. 31, at the Martinez Gallery, 362 Wadsworth Avenue (191st Street), Apartment 44, (212) 619-2149; information: martinezgallery.com.

PENELOPE GREEN



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