

LES. Ugly Painting
Featuring Ft.OKER & DESA
Martinez Gallery
3332 Broadway at 135th Street, New York
October 16-December, 2017
www.martinezgallery.com

Martinez Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of LES, featuring Ft. OKER & DESA. This show is something of a comeback for LES, after he was severely injured falling from an elevated J train station 10 years ago.

The work is fresh and strong, and, in many ways, it proves that you can have writing and bombing (in the graffiti sense) inside the gallery walls and still maintain the same intensity, impact, and meaning that you would have on the streets or trains. That could be, perhaps, because our gallery, devoted mainly to writing and graffiti art, is located within the context of a clinic for youth in West Harlem, an environment that seems natural for this kind of artistic intervention, still a public display and still free for all to see. Perhaps, in addition, the collaboration with Ft. OKER & DESA contributes to this vitality and creativity. Whatever might be the case, LES feels at home here, and his painting seems vibrant and current.

So what is "ugly painting" about? Perhaps you have read these days that many hyped and highly marketable artists whose work follows trendy contemporary styles have rejected the "commonly held notions of beauty." Some of them have openly defied or challenged the making of any art that fulfills the fussy criteria of beauty and taste held commonly by the public or by critics. Oddly enough, they are being inspired now by what many graffiti artists have been doing for decades. Of course, even today, they have trouble acknowledging any graffiti influence, preferring to trace their "tradition" to Tristan Tzara, the theorist of the Dada movement, who, in 1918, discarded beauty as "a boring sort of perfection, a stagnant idea of a golden swamp." Such a turn is already long familiar to LES and

other graffiti artists.

LES started painting in 1990. His street and subway writing was known for its aggressive approach to bombing and for its characterizations and portraits of people, inspired by the animations of Hanna Barbera and by Matt Groening's cartoons. There has always been an element of stereotyping in LES's works that attests to what Groucho Marx famously asserted: "The problem with stereotypes is that they're usually true." You can still feel those interests and influences in his murals and in the works he has developed with Ft. OKER & DESA. You can still enjoy the pulsating color combinations that often emphasize painterly and spontaneous qualities over the realistic values that other writers retain.

LES is not afraid to use non-naturalistic colors and vivid lines in his paintings, without concern for three-dimensional space, although invested in creating a space that can be shaped or defined by the movement of the colors. That is usually the way LES attracts people to his works, to which he adds the other essential element of his talent; humor. With color and humor, LES knows how his impetuous style, in combination with his subtle sarcasm and stereotyping, can be shared with the public, and how he can keep them laughing in this world full of suffering and stupidity.