

Art in Review

Lee Ranaldo and Leah Singer

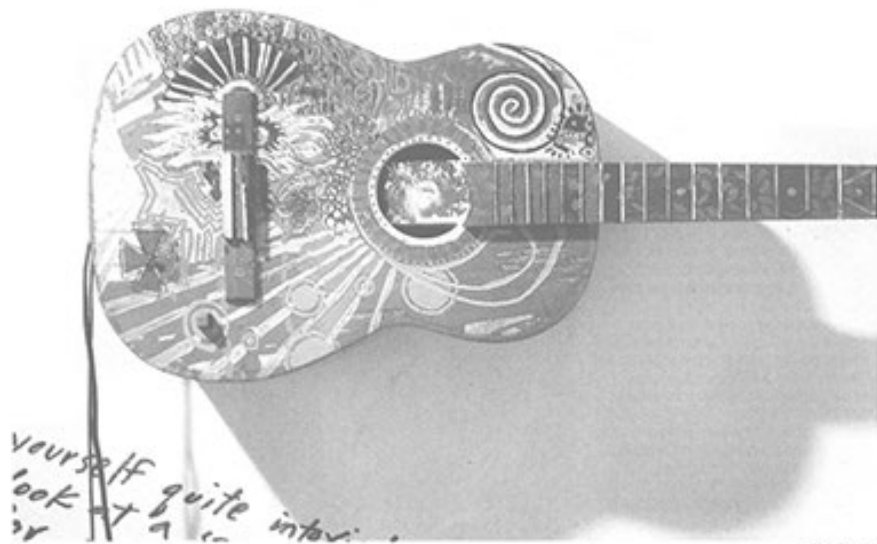
Drift

Gigantic ArtSpace (GAS)
59 Franklin Street, at Lafayette
Street
Through tomorrow

For more than a decade, the poet and musician Lee Ranaldo, a founding member of Sonic Youth, has been collaborating with the artist Leah Singer on a multimedia performance piece involving sound, words and photographic projections. Titled "Drift," the work is to some degree improvisatory, with Mr. Ranaldo reciting his poetry over the drone and clangor of electronic feedback as Ms. Singer projects pairs of images in rapid, percussive succession. Sometimes the pictures and the words connect; mostly they follow separate paths, glancing off each other suggestively.

For their show, the artists committed an hourlong studio version of "Drift" to film. And while this makes sense for exhibition purposes, it has drawbacks. The tension generated by live performance would surely do much to enliven texts and images not especially arresting on their own. And in turning an event into a document, the film is a reminder that work in this multimedia format no longer has the novelty it had when "Drift" was first conceived in 1991. Digital technology, among other things, has seen to that.

At the same time, the handmade nature of "Drift" accounts for much of its appeal, and extended sequences in the film are superb, particularly one in which Mr. Ranaldo delivers a first-person account of living in Lower Manhattan just after 9/11. As he speaks, we see photographs of scraps of paper floating against the facades of buildings in the financial district. The terrible rain of paper that filled the sky after the twin towers collapsed instantly



Colby Ranslow

Left, "Hwy Song 4: Glastonbury Fayre" from "Drift" at Gigantic ArtSpace. Right, detail from "School Zone," a Martinez Gallery project at Urban Academy at Julia Richman High School.

comes to mind. In fact, the images are of Wall Street ticker-tape parades — hero's welcomes for astronauts, athletes and at least one pope — that Ms. Singer filmed over the years that she and Mr. Ranaldo have lived together downtown.

The rest of the show, made up largely of photographs with handwritten poems, spins off from the film. But the film itself, with its genuine beauties, is the reason to visit this nonprofit space, spend some time, and inquire about where and when these artists will next be performing "Drift" live. **HOLLAND COTTER**

Martinez Gallery

School Zone

Urban Academy at Julia Richman
High School
317 East 67th Street, Room 222
Through Jan. 28

Martinez Gallery isn't a place; it's a collaborative network of several artists, two architect-designers, a curator and a dealer. After a brief, stationary stint in Chelsea years ago, the gallery, like the graffiti artists it represents, has kept on the move, periodically working on temporary projects across the city.

Two years ago, the team designed a children's health clinic in Upper Manhattan. Last year they collaborated on a prototype for low-cost art-apartments in public housing on the Lower East Side. The basic ideas behind their work are the ones that inspired graffiti to begin with: to get art out of gallery ghettos like Chelsea and into the world, and to confirm that people don't need art school pedigrees to be artists.

To this end, Martinez recently brought a group of graffiti stars into a public high school. There, old school artists like Tracy 168 and Coco 144, with careers going back to the 1970's, and new schoolers like Rate, VFR, Mosco, Tyke and Mico, are covering the walls and ceilings of a classroom with art and bringing the living history of an urban art form to students. And the students, male and female, are participating in the project, with dynamic results, alternately brash and delicate, exclamatory and introspective.

"School Zone" has hit some bureaucratic snags, with officials questioning the wisdom of including graffiti, a legally punishable offense, in the curriculum. But the work has gone ahead, and the room looks fabulous. A big decision will be whether to leave the art intact when the show

closes or to cover it over. Time will tell. Until then viewing hours are Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m.

HOLLAND COTTER

Guillaume Pinard

Team
527 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 28

Guillaume Pinard's strange, funny and skillfully made black ballpoint drawings on graph paper, often featuring doll- or puppet-like characters developed under the influence of Gumby, the Muppets and Japanese anime, evoke a childlike mind preoccupied by monsters, natural and human violence and surrealistic conjunctions and transformations. Blob-headed figures, tornadoes, flaming comets, exploding pieces of lumber, a volcano made of hair, a woman having sex with an amorphous black monster, burning bodies, a gunshot victim slumped in a corner: these and others evoke a wildly volatile world in which innocence is constantly being tested by things primitive, perverse and evil. The nearly 100 drawings include fragmentary sketches, doodles, studies and cohesive images ready for translation into some other final form.



Martinez Gallery

The show also includes four videos; the most fully realized — an enchanting 16-minute, digitally animated narrative — is in a crisp linear style with bright flat colors. It follows the wordless adventures of a pair of cute eyeballs, each with arms and legs, as they journey through constantly changing landscapes and architectural situations.

This show leaves you wondering what the future holds for Mr. Pinard, who is in his mid-30's and lives in France. He could become a big mainstream success as a cartoonist and maker of animated films, or he could stay in the fine-art world and pursue more idiosyncratic ideas for a smaller but more discerning audience. Or, like the Japanese art star Takashi Murakami, he might do both.

KEN JOHNSON

Katy Grannan

Mystic Lake

Greenberg Van Doren
730 Fifth Avenue
Through Feb. 4

Katy Grannan now gets her non-professional models through referrals more often than through newspaper ads. But she is still getting the

subjects of her grippingly intimate color photographs to reveal themselves in ways that most of us would be too guarded to permit. Because she shot her subjects not in their homes, as she had in the past, but in rural, outdoor situations — around a lake near Boston — and because most seem comfortable with what they are doing, the suspicions of voyeurism and exploitation that her earlier works prompted give way in her new photographs to sympathetic curiosity. Her models are like characters in stories by Raymond Carver or Mary Gaitskill, and the camera seems to love them all.

Each person poses lying down or partly reclining — usually on unkempt grass, sometimes in shallow water — and is identified by first name and year of birth. Some are fully clothed, some naked and most partly undressed. The shirtless boy named Robbie, born in 1994, stares at the camera with feral intensity. In the case of Alan, 1951, a large, heavy man with a hairy body and shaved head, his corpulent, full-frontal nudity is matched by the sweet openness of his face. You can only imagine who and what these people really are, yet somehow it feels as if Ms. Grannan is giving you all you really need to know. **KEN JOHNSON**

ONLINE: PHOTOS AND REVIEWS

Additional images from exhibitions in this week's *Art in Review* column, and additional reviews of current gallery and museum shows from *The Listings* (Page 31 and online): nytimes.com/arts.

The New York Times

Be Sure to Read the Handwriting on the Wall



Photographs by Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Graffiti Artists Move Off the Street and to the Front of a Classroom

By RANDY KENNEDY

In the world of New York City graffiti, the artist who calls himself Tracy 168 is a kind of presiding deity, a founding member of the old school.

So it was somehow fitting the other day to find him in a classroom at his old school, specifically his old high school, Julia Richman, on East 67th Street in Manhattan. He admitted that he remembered little about his time there in 1975, a brief pit stop on the road to full-time delinquency. "Basically, lunch was my best subject," he said.

So even in his wildest, aerosol-enhanced dreams, he never thought he would be asked to return to the school as a mentor, certainly not for what he did best: painting and drawing, usually on subway cars or

other highly visible pieces of public property.

But there he was, sitting in a second-floor classroom, and on the walls around him were classic Tracy 168 pieces, including one of his signatures: a smiling, feathered-haired cool guy who looks like a fugitive from a Hanna-Barbera cartoon. Surrounding this drawing and covering almost every inch of the classroom, from the radiator to the lockers, was an explosion of other graffiti, making the room look as if it had been struck in the middle of the night by a spray-can army.

In fact, all the artwork was legal, and far less indelible, rendered in chalk atop a special bottle-green chalkboard paint that had been used to coat the entire room and make it into an interior canvas for the kind of art that usually shows up outside the

school's doors.

The project — conceived by Hugo Martinez, an art dealer who has long represented street artists — has allowed students of Urban Academy, a specialized high school inside the Julia Richman building that serves sometimes troubled students, to work side by side over the past several weeks with renowned, and sometimes infamous, graffiti artists.

Starting on Dec. 3, and on most Saturdays through the end of January, the school will allow the public to see the re-

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Above, an Urban Academy student whose tag is SAIN; right, a detail from a work by the artist Tracy 168.



Be Sure to Read the Handwriting on the Wall (It's a Lesson in Art)

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sults in the classroom, at 317 East 67th Street, from noon to 6 p.m. At the end of the viewing period, depending on how students and teachers feel, the work will probably be erased — adding it to a long tradition of ephemeral art — and the classroom returned to its previously scheduled institutional color.

The exhibition is part of a series of urban shows in a kind of floating gallery that Mr. Martinez has maintained since he gave up traditional art spaces in Chelsea and Brooklyn. Last year, in his first such project, he and several graffiti artists, along with the Dutch designers Marleen Kaptein and Stijn Roodnat, decorated the inside of a new pediatrics clinic in the Inwood section of Manhattan. Earlier this year, the group took over and redesigned — with the inhabitant's permission — a studio apartment in a public housing complex on the Lower East Side.

In each of these projects, which Mr. Martinez calls "interventions," he and the artists are trying not only to upend the idea of graffiti as an urban scourge but also to use it to question institutional authority — be it municipal, educational or aesthetic.

The goal, he said, is to use the work of graffiti artists, quintessential outsiders in the art world, to teach students who often feel themselves to be outsiders, too. And in the process, in a slightly more theoretical vein, to "challenge even further the seemingly sacred character ascribed to art and to education," he said.

Antonio Zaya, the Urban Academy show's curator, citing the examples of Rimbaud and Antonin Artaud, said that one important lesson to impart to students was that "much of the great art of the 20th century has flirted with illegality, with attacking authority."

In some cases, it is a lesson that New York City students may have already internalized. Many public-school educators, especially those at schools like Urban Academy, which serves primarily low-income minority students, know that some of their students are already part of graffiti crews that go out and paint illegally at night.

"You can't act like it doesn't happen," said Roy Reid, an Urban Academy teacher who has created a class that centers on street art. "You have to try to direct it and channel it instead of just saying, 'Don't do it.'"

Herb Mack, Urban Academy's principal, said that when Mr. Martinez first approached the school about the project earlier this year, he and his teachers were unsure. "We talked several times about whether we wanted to do this," he said, but in the end they felt that it was not glorifying or encouraging illegal work.

"I'm not sure how it's going to be seen by Klein or Bloomberg," he added, referring to Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein and the mayor. (A spokeswoman for Chancellor Klein and the Department of Education said the department supported the project, but added, "We would expect the school to make clear both the importance of appreciating art and re-



Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

The artists known as Tracy 168, left, and Rate have contributed to a class project and exhibition at Urban Academy on the Upper East Side.

specting property.")

Mr. Mack, one of the founders of Urban Academy, said he had watched it develop into an unlikely collaboration. "It's enriching for the kids to be able to see legitimate artists at work and to critique it," he said. "They see some of these guys as the da Vincis and van Goghs of their world. They know who they are, and they're excited that they're here. In fact, they can't believe they're here."

The other day, with both Tracy 168 and another graffiti legend, known as

CoCo 144, present in the classroom, a kind of reverential silence had descended over the handful of students who were working on their own art, including a girl who was writing, probably ironically, "Stay Sweet" in pink letters at the bottom of a wall.

In a corner of the class, high above the lockers, another well-known graffiti artist, Rate, had drawn huge, elliptical rats, which have become his calling card. Asked where he usually painted them, the artist, a thin young man wearing a baseball cap, smiled

and did not exactly answer the question.

"The cliché is that the two things you're supposed to stay away from are churches and people's cars," he said. "Other than that, I guess everything else is fair game." (He has been arrested at least twice for vandalism.)

The biographical blurbs written by Mr. Martinez for the veteran graffiti artists in the show are not the kind of restrained prose usually found in the gallery world or a classroom. One artist, Case 2, is described as "a demon god of the oldest of the old school pieces." Another, JA, is called "the most savagely prolific bomber in the storied history of graffiti."

"Simply put," the blurb adds, "JA is a beast."

Ryan Kierstedt, 17, an Urban Academy student, agreed, and as he wrote his own elaborate, bubble-lettered tag — Noah 6 — in chalk on a radiator cover, he said that he still could not quite believe that his work would adorn the same walls.

"It's crazy," he said. "I didn't think it was going to be this big. I can't compete."

But then he flipped open his cellphone, whose screen displayed a picture of a huge piece of graffiti not drawn in chalk, and not on a classroom wall. It was in paint, on the side of what looked like a defunct factory in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

"That's mine," he said, smiling. "And has he ever been caught?"
"Been chased," he said, "but nobody's caught me yet."