

To paraphrase Brecht's 'Book of Changes',
the nation that would draw from its own written
histories has much to gain.
That same advantage falls upon those who
would record their own personal histories.

self-portrait

from **JUNE 29** thru **SEPTEMBER 3**
opening: 6 - 8 PM, **JUNE 29**

New York - The Martinez Gallery is pleased to present **SELF-PORTRAIT** a groundbreaking new exhibition that puts the artists behind the graffiti movement on display, challenging stereotypes about both the form and its practitioners. This collective self-portrait, which includes the work of **twelve** contemporary graffiti writers, exposes a history that the institutional art world and politicians, ignore and even censor. But the real legend of New York graffiti is a three-decade's old story that never is truly and honestly told, one that reminds us, as critic Charles Merewether says, 'the past is not finished'.

SELF-PORTRAIT consists of the work of **CASE 2, COCO 144, EARSNOT, GIZ, JA, KEZ 5, NATO, NOXER, RATE, SKUF, TRACY 168** and **VFR** displayed within the confines of a theatrical forum and instead of delivering the predictable punchline of graffiti as received in popular culture, these artists produce a wildly varied, unexpected and nakedly honest portrayal of themselves and their form.

Their appearance in this unexpected venue aims at what is perhaps the most unique, central, and misunderstood, element of graffiti: authorship. A strange breed of narcissism, authorship adopts, replaces, substitutes and obscures the name itself, a game played with destiny through illegal means. Although the graffiti writer does not reveal his 'real identity' in his clandestine works, what he has done, what he does and what he will do to establish a different, equally real, real identity. And that identity is jealous; it consumes the artist, devours him, removing him from both his old life and the official lists of 'power art', making of him a delinquent in more ways than one.

Thus the themes so common to graffiti:

- Is one's identity that which he creates or that which others create for him?
- Is one's identity invented or that which we are allowed to see?
- Is it what one learns or what he rejects that defines a person?

The graffiti writer concerns himself, constantly, with identity; always he dwells on his origins, race, barrio, popular culture; the mirrors that society holds up to him. His deal with the world is a cruel one: the city walls are his picture of Dorian Gray, his mirror and his youth spent. Faced with power that seems to always cast him out, he reacts with exhibitionism, dissidence, resistance, pride, survivalism, folly, crime and repentance - a passionate, painful life of social invisibility. He is today's Invisible Man.

In **SELF-PORTRAIT**, the graffiti writer is lost in himself, like fragments of a shattered looking glass, a prisoner of the reality he has defined. His identity can only be found in the shadows, corners and limits of society. But the lingering question is one that Brecht proposed in critiquing supposedly 'bad' art: why do we need such medicine? Why do we need graffiti?

Beyond thinking about authorship, one of the objectives of **SELF-PORTRAIT** is to eradicate the line of thinking that associates graffiti only with spray paint. In this show, graffiti looks at itself through photography, video, drawing, installation and performance, exploring its very real, if seldom seen, body, context, action and lasting mark. Artists spanning 36 years of the history of a form born in New York and adopted by the entire world, despite endless repression, gather to make themselves evident.

hours: fridays & saturdays 12 - 6 PM and by appointment
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for more information call 212-619-2149