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Background:

Birth: San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1976;

Residence: Lives & works in San Juan, Puerto Rico;

Education: School of Plastic Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting 2005, San Juan, Puerto Rico;

Mediums: Painting and Sculpture

Timeline of Pivotal Events:

- Art critic and fan Manuel Álvarez Lezama attends an exhibit of his painting in Puerto Rico in 2004. He purchases a painting which he described as being a pivotal piece. "A small painting rendered with shades of red, which included an incision that looked like a scar and, underneath, a shiny fabric that was also red ... *I loved this work and bought it from him at a reasonable price. This small work became the link that would eventually lead Martínez to begin painting his extraordinary and controversial paintings: dramatic compositions created with glitter on paint and resins; compositions that established a dialog with many of the leading painters of the New York School—specifically, with Jackson Pollock and other masters of drip painting—compositions full of lights, rhythms, and depths; compositions where colors and textures complement each other as they create singular visual sensations*".
- Martinez graduates from art school in Puerto Rico in 2005 and is awarded a prestigious prize in the same year. He receives recognition internationally through this award from Castellon County Council in 2005 (the sum of 60,000 euros). He receives International Association of Art Critics Prize for his outstanding representation of Puerto Rico the next year in 2006.
- Martinez whole life changes. He achieves international recognition and is regularly invited to participate in exhibitions like ARCO-Madrid in Spain, CIRCA in San Juan, and in the exhibition entitled Kitsch Utopia, in Dusseldorf, Germany. Later on, he exhibits in Art Basel Miami Beach and in several European capitals. He also exhibits in Art LA and Art Chicago. His sales take off. Melissa Morgan Gallery described him as a "hot young artist".
- He has his 1st Solo Exhibit USA, Fresh Paint at Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York in 2007; followed by a 2nd Solo Exhibit USA, Melvin Martinez: Demo-Gracias, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami in 2008.
- However the financial world crisis shakes up the entire art world and affects the sale of his works, along with other established and emerging artists and their gallerists. It is then that he begins working on the project The Material, a socially conscious exhibition from an entirely different perspective.
- Opening of The Material, Trailer Park Projects in San Juan in 2011. Here Martinez uses his now everyday painting material of glitter as the subject matter in an exhibition that also showed the correlation between art collecting and drug addiction. Martinez supplied a limited edition of 250 drug baggies filled with green (weed), white (cocaine) and yellow (heroin) glitter which sold for \$1 each to ordinary people who could not otherwise purchase his art. Larger amounts, such as a brick of heroin, were sold to art collectors for a larger price tag. Martinez is the "drug lord" and door to door deliveries can be made for an additional fee. The exhibition is also a commentary on the brutal drug trade in Puerto Rico.
- Opening of most recent work "Mucho Gusto", Casa Maauad, Colonia San Rafael, Mexico, April 12 to May 11, 2013. Artist and curators in residence non-profit. New direction for his art. Black White Silver sculptured striations.

Solo Exhibitions

2013 David Castillo Gallery

2011 The Material, Trailer Park Projects, San Juan, Puerto Rico

2010 Melvin Martinez, Flying Circus Gallery, Mexico City, Mexico

2008 Melvin Martinez: Demo-Gracias, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami Beach, FL

2007 Fresh Paint, Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York, NY

2006 Melvin Martinez, Cultural Institute of National Gallery of Art, San Juan, Puerto Rico; Melvin Martinez, Alcorcon Art Center, Madrid, Spain

Selected Group Exhibitions

2012 Dark Flow Lurking, David Castillo Gallery, Miami, FL

2011 Global Caribbean, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Juan, Puerto Rico

2010 Spirit of an Epoch, Museum of International Contemporary Art, Lanzarote, Spain Group Show, Flying Circus Gallery, Mexico; Global Caribbean, Musee International Des Arts Modestes, Sete, France

2009 Global Caribbean, Haitian Cultural Art Center, Miami, FL

2008 Nature Morte, Rohrer Fine Art, Laguna Beach, CA Expanded Painting, Space Other Gallery, Boston, MA En Sus Marcas, Cultural Institute, Puerto Rico

2006 Tribute to Cezanne, Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York, NY

2006 Group Exhibition, Alcorcon Art Center, Madrid, Spain

Kitsch Utopia, 2006 Quadriennale, Dusseldorf, Germany

2005 Graduate Exhibition for School of Fine Arts, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Museum of the Americas, Denver, CO

2005 VI National Prize of Fine Arts, Museum of Contemporary Art Puerto Rico; Espai D'Art Contemporani, Castellón, Spain

Selected Collections

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

Museo de Bellas Artes, Castellón, Spain

Espai D'Art Contemporani, Castellón, Spain

Museum Collection Lambert, Avignon, France

Museum of Ponce, Puerto Rico

Museum of Contemporary Art, Puerto Rico

Valencia Arte Contemporáneo, Valencia, Spain

Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA

The Rubell Family Collection and the Carlos & Rosa de la Cruz Collection

Selected Bibliography

Alvarez Lezama, Manuel, "The Way In – contemporary Art in Puerto Rico." Arte Al Dia, No. 140, November 2012.

Schwabsky, Barry, "Material Sensations and the Artificial Flesh of Color," Art Pulse, 2011.

Schwendener, Martha, "Melvin Martinez at Fresh Paint," The New York Times, June 22, 2007.

Panera, Javier, "Melvin Martinez: Painting as libidinal mechanism," Art.es, No. 17, September 2006.

Influences:

Impressionism

- *I am drawn to these because of the colors, the application of which also seems quite impressionistic. Then another layer is added by the patterns giving a harlequin type effect. I like the merging of two styles here.*
Manuel Álvarez Lezama

Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock

- *"I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass or other foreign matter added. My painting does not come from the easel. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting."* Jackson Pollock
- Like Pollock, Martinez uses the pouring and dripping of paint but here it is mainly squeezed from tubes of paint attached to what looks like a pressurized gun handle as you would see in a caulking instrument, an underlying grid, paints to the edges of the canvas, the addition of his signature glitter to intensify the color. As well he approaches the canvas energetically from all four sides either on the floor, on the wall, or on a flat table positioned in the center of his studio.

Other

- His Fresh Paint exhibition in NY 2007 caused critics to liken his work to color field painters like Joan Mitchell. *"His palette at times conjures Joan Mitchell; at other moments, Peter Halley; his devotion to discount-store materials, Jessica Stockholder; his Puerto Rican-inspired, more-is-more aesthetic, the installation artist Pepón Osorio".* Martha Schwendener, NYT Review of Fresh Paint at Yvon Lambert Gallery NY, 2007.
- The David Castillo Gallery website describes Martinez as not owing a debt to these early abstract expressionists anymore because he has taken his painting beyond *"the optics of Pointillism, the anarchy of Abstract Expressionism, the resplendence of color field painting (Good Morning Mr. Rothko), and the embodied summons of gestural abstraction"*

Technical Elements:

- **Underlying Grid:** Describe video of Martinez preparing the grid for multiple large canvasses. <http://melvinmartinez.me/VIDEOS.html>. Multiple canvasses prepared at one time.
- **Layering of the Canvas:** Merging of the grid with textured paint, resins, glitter and other materials.
- **Other Materials:** "*canvases adorned with fake roses, feathers, butterflies, Christmas bows, plastic tulips, bagsful of glitter.*" Martha Schwendener, *NYT Art Review*.
- **Tools:** Looks like a caulking gun. See photo in email.

Shanghai, Melvin Martinez, Mixed Media Canvas, 2010

- In my first impressions of this painting I needed to see an image in order to relate to the work and created a story of curtains of textured color and glitter being drawn to reveal the streetscape of Shanghai beneath with a shadowy lone figure. However after reading more about the painting and reviewing it I realized that the outpouring of spectacular color and the sophisticated compositions of this painter were not created merely to offer us an image or a story.
- Martinez' complex paintings and his unique style is a full blown performance event. Full of energy and dynamism they perhaps conjure the impression of a sensuous Caribbean festival or a Mardi Gras with its intense and oppositional colors set off by the signature glitter, beads, fake roses, etc. However the sheer density of the tactile, sensuous, bold painting actually causes waves of color to release themselves from the canvas and reverberate outward. These vibrant colors clash against each other and prevent our eye from focusing on any one spot. There is no concrete image to be seen except by the randomness of imagination as stimulated by color itself. The glitter acts to increase the intensity of Martinez' already vibrant canvas. The abstraction of this painting prevents our eye from finding a truly defined form.
- Conclusion: We must relax our brain and just experience his painting with its flow of pulsating energy. In making a story or identifying an image alone we miss feeling the real power of Martinez' painting: Its sensuality, tactility, emotionalism, and its multiple opportunities for us to react to the sensations of floating color. Incidentally, in referring to Pollock, Francis V O'Connor writes, "*The mesh of drips and dashes, often textured by the addition of sand and other materials, created a floating spatial rhythm*".
- Barry Schwabsky in his article *Melvin Martinez: Material Sensations and the Artificial Flesh of Color* puts forth some of these ideas. He also makes the case, alongside other critics, that not only does Martinez extend the legacy of abstract expressionism and Jackson Pollock in particular; but also that he has uniquely opened up new possibilities for painting in the future.

Shanghai, Melvin Martinez, Mixed Media Canvas, 2010.

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Touring Script for Kids:

- What does this painting remind you of? Frequent answers include a Pinata or Mardi Gras.
- What colors does the artist use in his painting? Are they hot or cool colors?
- What materials do you think the artist uses: bagsful of glitter, decorative roses and ribbons applied with a pastry bag, sweeping textured swashes of color applied with a palette knife or pastry bag.
- What shapes pop out at you?
- Can you see the paint on the edges of the canvas? Why do you think the artist painted to the edges of his canvas?
- Can you see the pattern of colored rectangles beneath the textured paint? This is called a grid. Mr. Martinez makes a grid and begins many of his paintings with this colorful grid to which he applies sculpted layers of paint, glitter etc. How do you think he makes the grid? Explain.
- Standing back from the work what does this painting with its grid below bring to mind? We have seen paintings of landscape and seascape. Could we call this a streetscape?
- Are there any images in the painting that you can recognize? Point to possibility of man entering the streetscape from beneath the luscious curtain of color. Do you see others?
- Are these scenes real or imagined? Is this part of the artist's intent or simply part of our own imagination?
- Why do you think the artist called his painting Shanghai instead of Mardi Gras or Pinata or Untitled? Show photo of Shanghai at night illuminated with "neon" flashing lights?

Touring Script for Adults

- Does this painting look like anything we may have seen before in life or even in a photograph?
- What materials does the artist appear to be using in this painting. How does the temperature of its color dominate the painting?
- Can you make out any shapes that are familiar to you in it?
- Can you see a grid of colored rectangles just below the surface of the painting?
- Point to possibility of man entering street/grid and textured curtain of color being drawn to reveal the streetscape beneath.
- Did the artist intend for you to see any images? Why? Why not?
- What kind of energy does this painting project? What other words come to mind to describe this painting?
- Would you hang this painting in your personal space? Why? Why not?
- Why do you think the artist called his painting Shanghai? Has anyone ever been to Shanghai or seen a photo of Shanghai? Show photo of Shanghai at night illuminated with "neon" flashing lights?