

THE RADAR ART

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PORTRAITS BY DALE BERMAN

WALL PLAYERS

From alley to gallery, L.A.'s brightest muralists hit the big leagues

L.A. mural culture—long the exclusive province of graffiti-tagging gangbangers and civic-pride-hocking officialdom—is experiencing an influx of serious, high-minded cool. Four upstarts are bombing the city with styles that synthesize the clean, studied line work of high-end graphic design and the often clever self-referentiality of the contemporary art scene. In this age of Shepard Fairey, when the galleries and the streets have never seemed closer, this quartet is proving that the city's most eye-catching artwork can still be found on its exterior walls.

CHASE: Based in Hollywood, the 30-year-old Belgian artist fields assignments from Adidas and Converse, while taking on smaller-scale projects for the likes of Yoga Works in Santa Monica and Kin Boutique in Sunset Plaza. Plus, he's about to release his self-produced art film, *On Purpose*, which explores the meaning behind his work, particularly the recurring mantras like "Remember Who You Are" and "Believing is Seeing." So, why the affirmations? "All these triggers are intended to get people to start conversations. And then out of those conversations maybe comes a change of mind or a redefining of one's inner voice." Signature Style: Murakami-esque eyeballs and toothy old-folk caricatures About The Name: Nothing too deep. While still living in Belgium, the artist was flipping through an English dictionary, looking for a word with the letters "c," "h" and "s"—simply his faves to scrawl.

MAN ONE: Aside from running L.A.'s ground zero for graffiti culture, Crewest Gallery in downtown's Old Bank District, this longtime graf artist has transitioned into taking corporate gigs for big brands like Nike and Coca-Cola in Inglewood and Koreatown. He was recently summoned to the Getty to sound off on the local scene, and CONTINUED...



MURAL DETAIL PHOTO COURTESY OF MAN ONE



Clockwise from top left: Mr. Brainwash in front of his Britney-Madonna *Freedom Kiss* mural on La Brea, just south of Wilshire; *Don't Be Cruel*, on the southern side of the same La Brea location; *The Digital Virgin Mary*, Retna, 2006; detail from *Art of Happiness*, Retna's collaboration with muralist El Mac at the northeastern corner of Western and Monroe.

...CONTINUED he's currently in the midst of sketching a immigration-themed piece, due to debut early next year, for the lobby of the Pasadena Civic Center. "I'm inspired by what's going on in the world," says M1, who scored his first solo show in 1994, the same year MOCA featured him in its *Urban Revisions* exhibit. "The great Mexican muralists like Rivera and Orozco—they made statements that still stand today." Signature Style: Bold, colorful portraits About The Name: It's a shout-out to '80s hip-hop group Mantronix.

RETNA: The large-scale works of this former tagger, who cites Mucha and Klimt as primary influences, have been seen in the alleys of Hollywood, on the white walls of Art Basel and even on Broadway, for the recent revival of *Xanadu*. The Mid-City native originally gained acclaim for his graffitied appropriations of fashion ads, as well as his use of—*gasp!*—paintbrushes mixed with the traditional spray can. "Even though I was still doing the same style, I was using a different tool. People looked at it a lot differently." Signature Style: Intricate line work and highly modeled faces About The Name: An allusion to a Wu-Tang lyric using the word retina. "It really resonated with me—I guess because I wore glasses."

MR. BRAINWASH: The Parisian transplant has been hitting L.A. sidewalks to ever-spiraling art world buzz with his *Famous Faces* series—stencils, posters and murals that feature Wayfarer-wearing icons, like Monroe and Hitchcock, posing candidly, paparazzi style. In recent months, MBW's also been gaining blogosphere attention for rotating a wave of monolithic murals on the sides of several buildings along La Brea, Melrose and Pico. Subjects, including Miles Davis, a post-Oscar-win Marion Cotillard and the infamous Britney/Madonna VMAs make-out session, have all slowed traffic. On the docket for June: *Life is Beautiful*, his first-ever solo show, sprawling 200 works across 16,000 square feet at the former CBS Studios on Sunset and Gower. Signature Style: Tinseltown effigies digitized as black-and-white silhouettes or bar-code-style stripes About The Name: Taking matters into his own hands, he says he's brainwashing the city into positive thinking. 

