

EMERGING: Jel Martinez

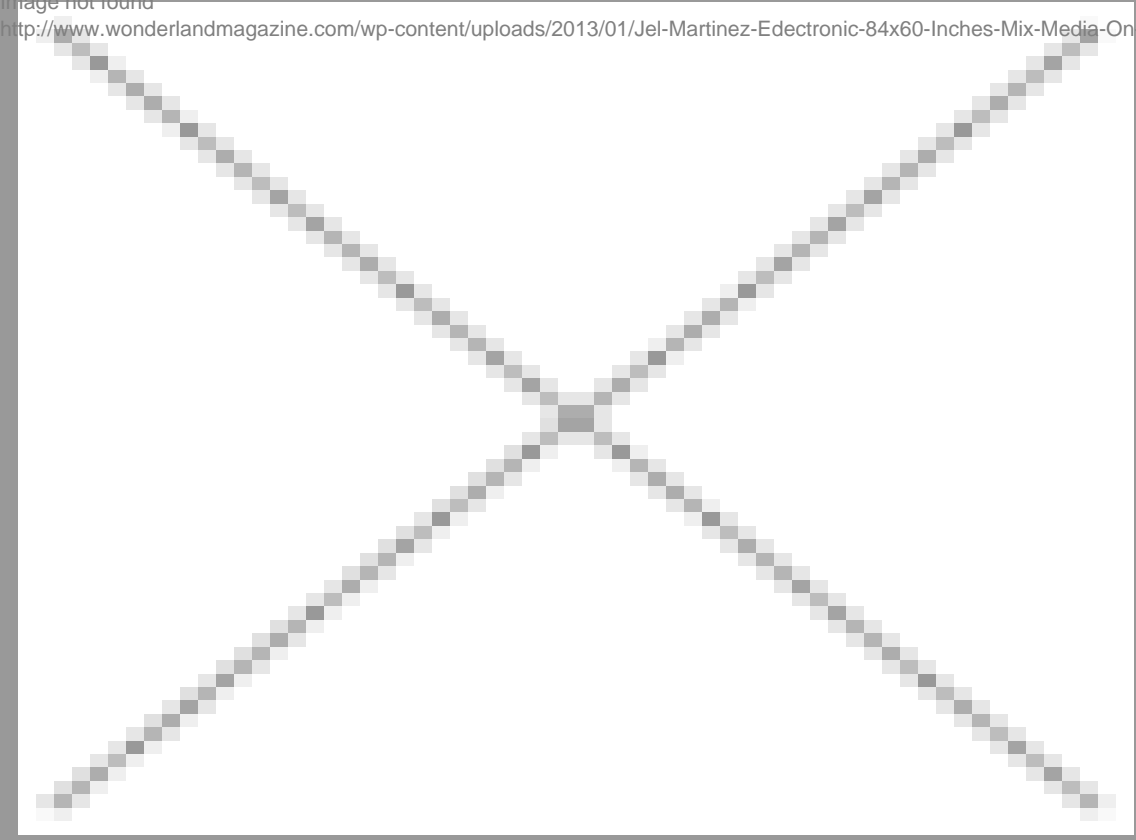
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WONDERLAND MAGAZINE

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Jel Martinez is part of a breed of street artists approaching graffiti through the prism of conceptual art. He replicates the clumsy buffing and removal techniques of council workers tasked to remove street art, and in the process makes a meta-comment on how people perceive graffiti.

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Where are you based? I was born in

Miami in 1976 and have always lived in Miami. **When did you decide to become an artist?** Art has always been a part of my life, since I was a young child I was always drawing something, when I was 11 years old is when I started sketching pieces of graffiti. But it wasn't until 2008 that I finally transitioned into the fine art world. **What attracted you to graffiti?** Mostly my surroundings, seeing other writers work in the streets of Westchester and Hialeah and wanting to evolve and see my own work in the streets of Miami. **You make your work by buffing and removing the surface texture of graffiti. What first interested you in graffiti removal?** I was really introduced to the removal in 1994 when the Summit Of The Americas was held in Miami, Florida. The streets of Miami were completely cleaned up and the buff [the mark left behind when graffiti is scraped and 'buffed' off walls] was everywhere. That was a drastic moment for me! I then continued to piece and continued to get buffed until 1998. The buff has always been a part of my world but in 2008 I decided to recreate a part of history, a part of my life, which is recreating the removals that surround us and go unnoticed. **Could you tell us more?** My work first starts from documenting the removals through photographs I capture in the streets. I then become 3 different characters, the construction worker who creates the wall, the vandal who defaces the property and the city employee who removes the graffiti. My work consists of multiple layers which are a reenactment of what is happening in our surroundings and all have a story and memory behind it. I try to give the viewer the opportunity to visualize and understand a movement that previously went untold and unnoticed by the general public. **What is the graffiti scene like in Miami?** The graffiti scene has changed in many ways, from the style to the rules of the game. It has changed in ways that are also for the better such as graffiti writers not respecting the rules of graffiti but conflicts between crews don't seem as common – or it may also just seem that way to me since I'm from another generation. Your work has been in many gallery shows. Do you focus solely on gallery work now or do you also do street art? Within the last 4 years I have focused on the gallery public but I also have done street art within those years with several artists such as NUNCA, OsGemeos, Finok, Joe Grillo, Shie Moreno and Chris Mendoza. **There is an increase in street art presence in the fine arts and more shows about graffiti and urban art. What has changed?**

I feel that the whole graffiti world has changed. It was an underground movement then but now it is accepted not only in galleries but also in the streets. It was very different in the 80s and 90s. **What do you have planned for 2013?** My plans for 2013 are to work hard, have my work noticed and understood by those who don't understand the history of the removal.

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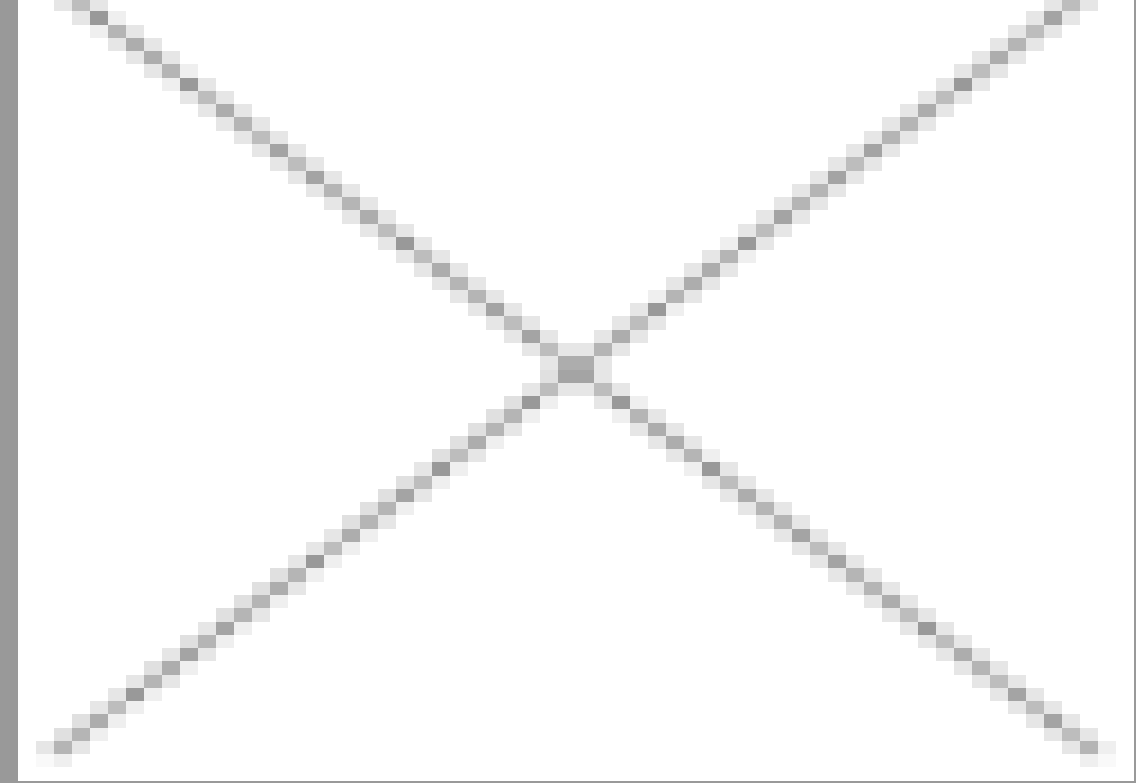
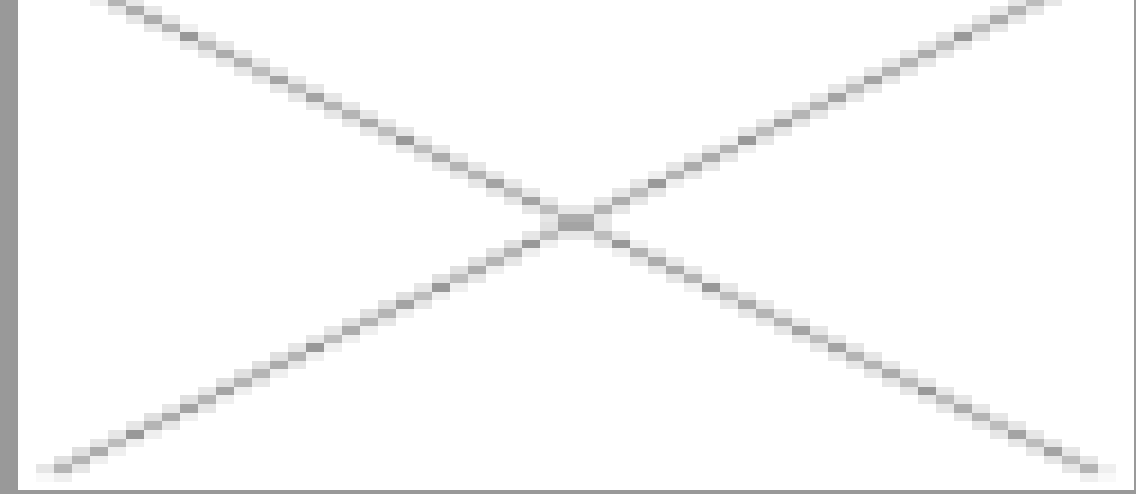


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jelmartinez.com Words: Heike Dempster

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Tags: Artist, Emerging, graffiti, Heike Dempster, Interview, Jel Martinez, profile, Q+A, street art