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CULTURE

A Violation

by **Semmi W.** | Posted February 19, 2014

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Mint&Serf's "Paradise Lost." Source: bsacny.com

In the world of fine art, the pressure to intellectualise and explain away the depth of any piece or collection can be stifling. This need often leaves little room for experimentation between contemporary styles and artistic processes. In the case of graffiti art, however, the message has always been as mixed as the medium.

Mint&Serf, the groundbreaking graffiti duo who spent much of the late 1990s through to the 2000s spraying and tagging their way through New York, has provided the concrete metropolis with a constant supply of raw, inventive imagery. Their latest exhibit at the Bleeker Street Arts Club, *Support, Therapy and Instability*, is further proof of how expression through paint is a necessity. Not just for the artists, but for New York itself.

As Mint explained to Rachel Small at *Interview* magazine, "If you go to certain stations in the outer boroughs of New York, sometimes you'll come across a station that's been painted for decades. You'll see the paint cracking. When it's really hot, the cracks start spreading... and you'll start [to] see all the layers of paint. It's kind of like history: you'll have like 30 years of just paint, painted and painted and painted. Sometimes you'll see some spray paint from the '80s... we want to shine through, to show a little bit of a narrative."

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Their exhibit, titled 'Support, Therapy and Instability' and running until 22 February 2014, is the result of a two year creative process where friends and fellow graffiti artists of Mint&Serf, including Jacuzzi Chris and Pablo Power, were invited to party and contribute in a free-for-all of experimentation.

Held in Mint&Serf's studio, these collaborations took place for no other reason other than to fuse ideas with the insolent spirit of graffiti culture. Both their process and use of mixed media reflects a complete rejection of political correctness. They, like their paintings, are not here to entertain or amuse. It reminds you that graffiti is a lifestyle, a way to assert your power - not just over property or commercialism, but over your world.



Mint&Serf's "Dusted And Chillin'"
Source: bsacny.com.

Each canvas in the exhibit is painted with a bombastic flare; layers of bright colours illustrate dark, almost criminal thoughts. Working with markers, paint, and paper, Mint&Serf used their years of experience with graffiti-writing and street art techniques to express everything from crude jokes to their thoughts on the Occupy Wall Street movement. After friends contributed to paintings, Mint&Serf would return to each piece and add their own layers of colours and textures.

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When confronted with their abstract manifestations of aggression and bleakness, the viewer is left wanting to know more. You want to strip back each painted and pasted layer in the hope of revealing what lies beneath the grittiness. Even in a controlled environment like an art gallery, the sense of danger and anxiousness, the fear of being caught, remains. As a collective, the paintings establish a story of misuse. You almost feel like you are the property being vandalised as you contemplate the ways in which they have caused you to reinterpret how you imagine and assess art.

The paintings come with the release of a new art book also titled, *Support, Therapy and Instability*. The 136-page hard cover highlights each of the paintings featured in the exhibit at Bleecker Street Arts Club. Critical reflections by writers like Cat Marnell and Carlo McCormick also appear in the book, providing a way for readers to connect with

graffiti culture, and interpret Mint&Serf's approach to compositions beyond rich visuals and colour play.

"Mint&Serf see themselves as graffiti artists rather than street artists because there are a lot of street artists who like to prepare their work before they go out on to the street and they sort of paste it up... with them it's much more in the moment, a really more gestural level of expressionism," says Jessica Hodin, Art Director of Bleecker Street Arts Club, when speaking with *The Genteel*.

The idea of even presenting work in a controlled space or venue like the Bleecker Street Arts Club means that 'Support, Therapy and Instability' as an arts project is technically not graffiti in the traditional uncontrolled sense. Rather, the images function as contemporary paintings that capture the essence of vandalism. Mint&Serf step outside the confines of premeditated murals and their own history of corporate commissioned projects (such as those for Marc Jacobs, Red Bull, Ace Hotel, and Nike) to create canvases that hark back to the seedy underbelly of 1970s and 1980s New York - a narrative that in many ways has since been scrubbed clean.

"I think that's what [is] inherent to the act of graffiti is the fact that it's being done in this illegal setting," adds Hodin. "When you separate that it doesn't really have the right context for graffiti... so they were able to recreate it in a completely authentic way, the energy of going out in the street and illegally tagging things."

In one painting, 'Coke Sluts and Dustheads, Winos and Thieves, these are a few of my favorite...', the words "Nap times over" are discreetly scribbled in electric blue among tangles of lettering and motifs; a testament

