

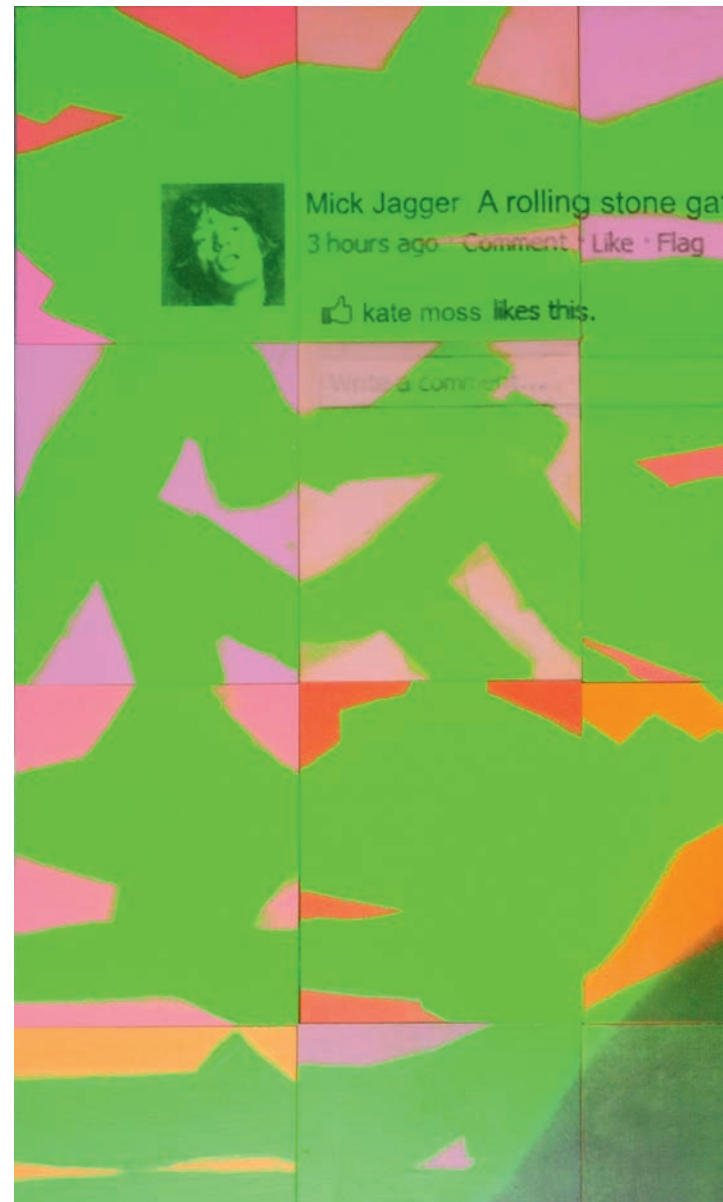


Pop goes the easel

ARGENTINE-BORN ARTIST ALEJANDRO VIGILANTE IS PIONEERING A NEW ART MOVEMENT



Michael Jackson



When American actress Drew Barrymore saw Alejandro Vigilante's art, she exclaimed, "I don't e-mail!" When soccer-great Michael Ballack read a clever dialogue between Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, he snapped up both paintings and had them shipped to Europe. Baseball superstar Alex Rodriguez took Marilyn Monroe home with him to bring a sexy vibe to his swank Miami digs.

"Alejandro's work naturally appeals to celebrities because his themes explore riffs on how iconic superstars might use the Internet to express themselves," says Vigilante's Miami gallerist, Dmitry Prut, owner of Avant Gallery. "The use of his imagination when taking famous quotes or lines from the cinematic world, and fusing them with e-mail- or Facebook-related graphic elements, strikes a deep chord in his audience."

Vigilante is an Argentine-born, New York/Miami-based artist who believes the progenitors of the pop art movement got it right. He believes that beyond execution and



Kate Moss

the medium, the soul of art is the idea. He's prone to asking, "What's more pop than Internet?" then proclaiming, "Nothing! If Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg were beginning their movement today, the Internet would figure as strongly in their works as it does in mine."

Vigilante identifies 2001 as the beginning of his iArt movement because he realized then that e-mailing had brought about a phenomenal shift in the way human beings were communicating. In a daring move, he brazenly proposed which e-mail Marilyn Monroe might have sent to JFK, which message John Lennon would now send to Yoko Ono and which statement Warhol would cheekily have made to Bill Gates. Using a technique perfected by Rauschenberg, he transferred the images onto acrylic backgrounds he applied to wood in a painterly array of colorful and textural treatments.

It was during his first significant solo show in 2007 when attendees' interactions with his

works were exuberant that Vigilante realized he had furthered the advancement of an über-relatable art – a trend begun by pop art's founders. "A common reaction people have when viewing his work for the first time is "WOW!" Prut says. "Then, they usually giggle at the wit of his messages, often calling friends over to share the laughter with them."

When e-mail began to lose its freshness to texting and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, Vigilante effortlessly caught the wave, expanding his repertoire to include departed celebrities posting on each other's walls and tweeting phrases they would likely have typed into their Tweetdecks were they still alive. "Collectors who have a liking for pop art appreciate his work for its simplicity and its genius at marrying things that people use every day: the Internet, e-mail, texting and social media," Prut says.

One can only ask, "What will he discover next?" The answer perhaps lies in the

scrubbed hallways of Silicon Valley where the Internet's elite are, even as you read this, testing their newest advancements. Perhaps it lies in the explosion of information that Google is continually crawling through to provide searchable data. Or better yet, it likely hums in Vigilante's incredibly vibrant imagination.

In his newest adventure, the artist is taking his clever iArt movement to Argentina by staging a solo exhibition at Maman Gallery in Buenos Aires, which will run from September 23 to October 31. When asked whether he believes his work will stand the test of time and someday be considered as significant as pop art, Vigilante remarks, "That will be a question for the art historians to ponder once we have all passed into the mists of time." Though we'll be gone, Vigilante maintains we will not be forgotten because our Facebook posts, Tweets, e-mails and texts will serve as evidence that we existed and that we were a prolific lot of communicators.

Saxon Henry