

HIS CANVAS IS A WALL

BY SAXON HENRY

Alejandro Vigilante, of Miami, takes on the laws of color

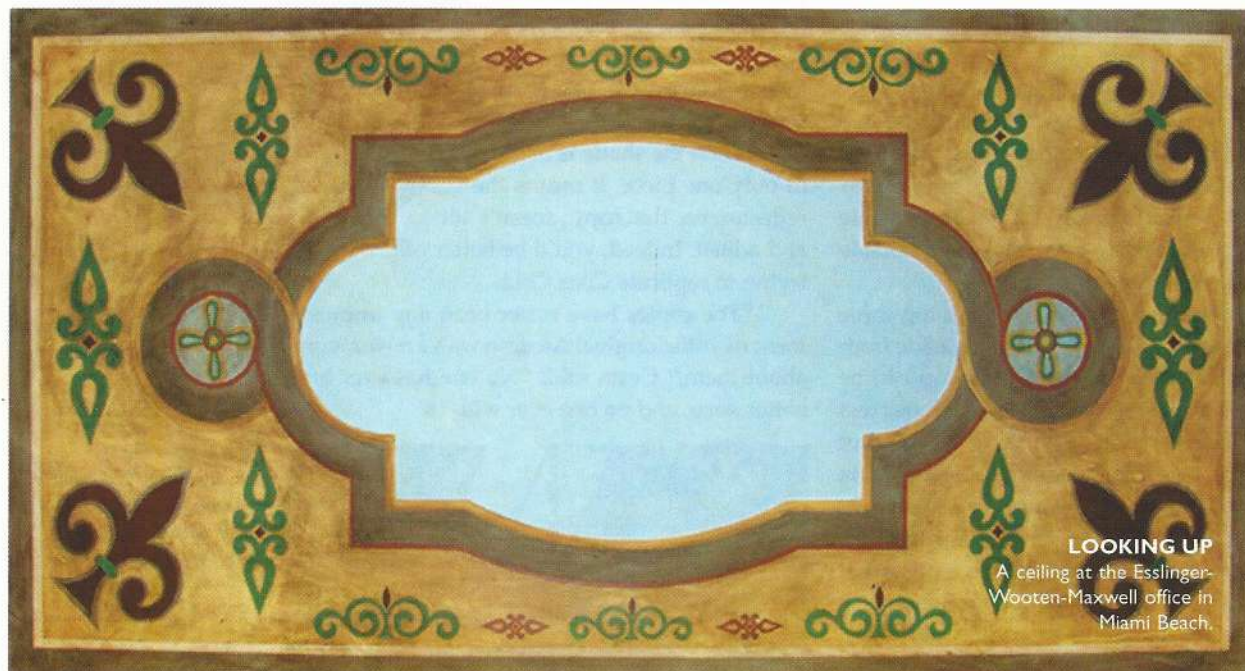


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Alejandro Vigilante wants one thing made certain: he is an artist who does decorative interior work, not the other way around. In his world, the line separating fine art and decorative interior treatments is almost nonexistent: "A wall or a ceiling is to a room what a canvas is to a work of art, only larger," he said. His ability to transform an interior space into a work of art has made him a highly popular artisan.

Vigilante, a native of Argentina who currently resides in Miami Beach, shuttles between Miami, New York and Buenos Aires tending his clients. He began painting at age 5 when his father passed away. Juan Vigilante was an architect and a painter, and his young son confronted the loss by emulating his father's passions. "At first, I thought I was getting to know my father when I painted," he said, "but over time I realized I was getting to know myself."

The Art Miami Show in 1995 drew Vigilante, then 30, to the United States, where an exhibition of his work resulted in a handful of private commissions. One thing was immediately apparent: people responded to his use of color. One of his first clients was Patricia Frost; she and her husband, Phillip, were

building a home on Star Island. Frost commissioned Vigilante to redesign a portico ceiling. He corrected the proportions of the panels on the coffered ceiling, chose the colors and painted the panels free-hand. "This was my first experience as a decorative artist," he said. "It

occurred to me that using color in interior design was similar to using color in a work of art." As a painter, Vigilante works in an abstract vein, but as a decorative artist he displays a range of styles. He has painted ceilings to look like mosaics and walls to look like linen. And he has done realistic work on wall and ceiling murals.

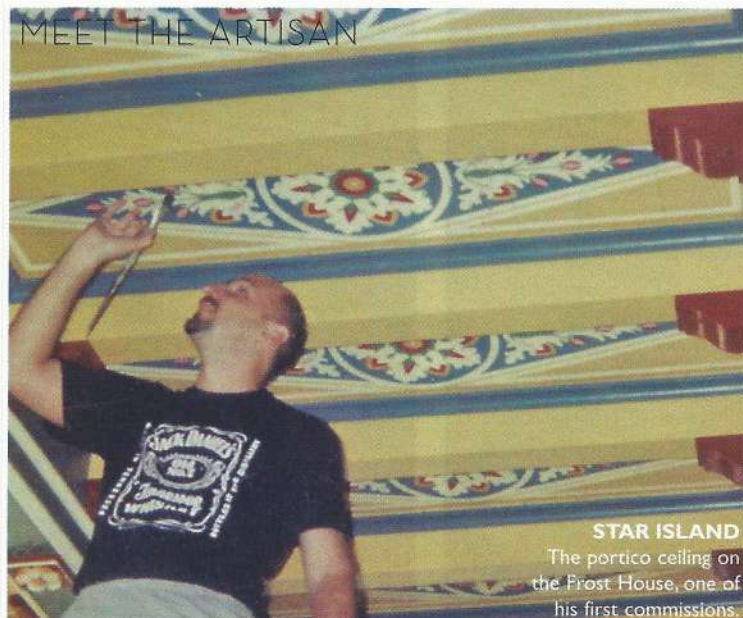
When Esther Percal, senior vice president of the realty firm Esslinger-Wooten-Maxwell in Miami Beach, renovated the company's offices on Arthur Godfrey Road, Vigilante painted murals for the entryway ceiling. "I wanted the offices to feel like a fancy Cuban home with chandeliers and colorful tile floors," Percal said. "Everyone loved the outcome, and they still look fresh and current six years later."



Alejandro Vigilante and one of his paintings.

Vigilante's reputation grew when Fabian Shoffer, an Argentine journalist, introduced him to the music producer Emilio Estefan. Estefan commissioned him to create a series of Art Deco murals for the Cardozo Hotel on Ocean Drive in South Beach. "Alejandro's art has

MEET THE ARTISAN



STAR ISLAND
The portico ceiling on the Frost House, one of his first commissions.



AT WORK
Handpainted tiles, to offer to a client.

'I was amazed by his ability to create something that was uniquely tailored to the space—Art Deco with a twist.'

— Emilio Estefan

had a significant impact on the vibe at our hotel," Estefan said. "He's a very gifted artist and I was amazed by his ability to create something that was uniquely tailored to the space—Art Deco with a twist, I would say. We get compliments on his work at the hotel regularly."

Vigilante has designed a ceiling in Gables Estates, painted a portrait of Al Pacino from the film *Any Given Sunday* for the director Oliver Stone, created faux-finishing on the walls of another Gables Estates home and added decorative paintings to Club Med in Port Saint Lucie. Lilia Gonzalez was the interior designer in charge of the Club Med project, which was overseen by Spillis, Candela & Partners in Coral Gables. "He has an innate understanding of spatial aesthetics and proportion," Gonzalez said. "I never hesitate to recommend him for a project that requires the hand of an artist."

Vigilante's biggest strength is his palette of bright, vibrant colors, which have a Moroccan/Tunisian feel. He is inspired by travels, images, books and the work of others in his field. "I don't approach any project with a preconceived notion," he said. "I let each situation inspire me." He would hate to be pigeonholed. But he does avoid kitsch whenever possible and bucks trends if he can. Sometimes he mixes wild hues like purple and red to surprising effect. "There are certain laws of color," Vigilante said. "But sometimes they must be broken to achieve incredible and unusual effects."

But such effects are not cheap; his rates start at \$30 a square foot for very basic work. Depending on the location and the difficulty of

the work, costs can quickly escalate. Interested parties can reach Vigilante by phone at 917 385-8143, by e-mail at Vigilan9@aol.com or via his Web site, www.vigilanteart.com.



INSTANT AGING

A sample of Vigilante's work, decorated with gold leaf and then distressed to look old. Vigilante recently used this pattern to decorate a client's ceiling in Coral Gables.

nonetheless, still white. "I want to do my own walls and ceilings," he said. "It's just finding the time." He has just returned from Argentina and is putting together samples for a large Key Biscayne home. He's also doing strié for a home on Fifth Avenue in New York. Strewn about his home are brightly colored wood and Masonite squares, part of his ongoing research for a client. But Vigilante wished he had more time for his own work.

Fine art, he said, is less controlling. But, he said, "every time I decide to concentrate solely on my fine art, one of my clients brings me a project that I can't resist!"

He has, however, managed to increase the percentage of time he spends on his own art. Someday, he said, "I will definitely trade my rags and trowels for Grumbacher brushes and a palette knife." ■

In Manhattan he has done the interior of Azul, an Argentine-Italian restaurant on the Lower East Side, the strié (a painted finish that looks like linen) walls of a Tiffany jewelry salon and faux finishes and Venetian plaster in a number of private residences. He enjoys working in New York but says that in Miami, "people are generally more comfortable with color," he said. "For me, color is the soul of art, so I like to use it as much as possible."

The walls in his South Beach studio apartment are,