

## FABIAN DEBORA

Fabian Debora is dedicated to art as a vehicle for education and communication. Born in El Paso, TX and raised in Boyle Heights, CA, he joined the East Los Streetscapers in 1995 and has since created murals and paintings. Debora began exhibiting his work in 2008 and had solo exhibitions at Homegirl Café in 2011 and 2012. In 2010, his work was included in "Forces from the Past" at Greenlease Gallery, Rockhurst University, Kansas City; and in 2011, his work was included in the exhibition, "Bridging through the Arts," at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 2012, Debora was a recipient of the prestigious California Community Foundation's Visual Arts Fellowship. He has worked in collaboration with Otis College of Art and Design as a liaison between artists in Boyle Heights and Otis students since 2008.

## ALEX KIZU

Alex Kizu's paintings derive from a longtime interest in street art, Japanese iconography, and his knowledge of hundreds of calligraphic alphabets. Kizu joined the burgeoning street art movement in the 1980s at the age of twelve. He went on to pursue an AA degree in Art at Santa Monica City College and a BA in Art at California State University, Northridge, where he graduated with honors in 2011. Kizu's work has been included in exhibitions since 2003, including "Rustic and Urbane" at Claremont Graduate University in 2005; "SCOPE International Contemporary Art Fair" in Miami in 2008; "Millon & Associates" Art Exhibition and Auction, Paris, France in 2009; and "Street Cred: Graffiti Art from Concrete Walls to Canvas" an exhibition that began at the Pasadena Museum of California Art and then traveled to Longmont Museum in Colorado in 2011-12.

Alex Kizu  
*Adversity Breeds Strength*, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 48 inches

## JUAN CARLOS MUÑOZ HERNANDEZ

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernández's bronze sculptures and mixed media paintings are influenced by the sprawling urban landscape of Los Angeles, the human form, and graffiti art. He received his first official mural commission from Father Greg Boyle in 1991 for Homeboy Industries and has since been commissioned to paint ten murals throughout Los Angeles. In 1992, Muñoz Hernandez began an 18-year apprenticeship with the artist Robert Graham during which he worked on numerous public projects across the nation. His work is represented by Timothy Yarger Fine Art, which presented a solo exhibition of his work in 2012 at POP UP Gallery, Venice, CA. In 2011, Muñoz Hernandez was included in the exhibition, "Street Cred: Graffiti Art from Concrete Walls to Canvas" at the Pasadena Museum of California Art; the exhibition then traveled to the Longmont Museum in Colorado.

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez  
*El color del espíritu*, 2012  
Acrylic and marker on wood panel, 60 x 60 inches  
Courtesy Timothy Yarger Fine Arts, Beverly Hills

Fabian Debora  
*Distinctions*, 2012 (detail)  
Graphite on paper  
Eight drawings, 11 x 8 inches each

## OTIS

Otis College of Art and Design

Otis prepares diverse students of art and design to enrich our world through their creativity, their skill and their vision.

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Edition: 1000  
Design: Anne Predock Swett  
Printing: \_\_\_\_\_

### BEN MALTZ GALLERY

Otis College of Art and Design

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### THANK YOU!

Father Greg Boyle and Homeboy Industries. The printing of this publication is made possible by the generosity of Alice Buckley.

## OTIS

# BRIDGING HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES

FABIAN DEBORA

ALEX KIZU

JUAN CARLOS MUÑOZ HERNANDEZ

JANUARY 2 – MARCH 23, 2013

BEN MALTZ GALLERY

“ It has been indeed a singular privilege for me to have known these three artists, Fabian Debora, Alex Kizu and Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez for over a quarter of a century. I met them when they were quite young and only beginning to discover that they had this remarkable gift. Like many young people in my community, they struggled with the odds and found it difficult to imagine a future. Violence, drug abuse, and the daily dread of unspeakable trauma was part of the air they all breathed as they sought to find the truth of who they are. They found their truth in their gift, in an ability to create something beautiful and powerful and soulful on the canvas, in the sculpture, on the wall. Their truth is our truth: we are all exactly what God had in mind when God made us. To watch these three men fully inhabit their truth is an inestimable gift to us all. I’m proud to know them. ”

GREG BOYLE, S.J.,  
Founder and Executive Director, Homeboy Industries



## BRIDGING DIVIDES, SPEAKING IN TONGUES, BEARING WITNESS

**THERE IS NO SINGLE AESTHETIC TO DEFINE ART THAT GROWS OUT OF URBAN GRIT OR PAINTINGS MADE ON THE FLY. NOR IS THERE ONE WAY THAT INDIVIDUALS OVERCOME CHALLENGES INCLUDING POVERTY AND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE. AS THIS EXHIBITION REVEALS, FABIAN DEBORA, ALEX KIZU, AND JUAN CARLOS MUÑOZ HERNANDEZ EACH DEVELOPED DISTINCT ARTISTIC PRACTICES.**

What these artists share are roots in Boyle Heights, a mentor in Father Greg Boyle, founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries, and a commitment both to their art practices and to giving back to their communities. When we began planning for this exhibition, each of the artists told a similar story of growing up in and around the projects; art played a prominent role in each of their lives, as did the nurturance of a neighborhood priest. Reflecting on his youth, Kizu explained a time when, “I got into a lot of trouble, but Father Greg, no matter what I did, was always encouraging me to do my art.” This encouragement extended to hiring these and other youth to paint murals instead of graffiti. Muñoz Hernandez recalls that working on community murals led to the opportunity to apply as an apprentice to artist Robert Graham, a life-changing experience. Debora sums up what each has explained in his own way, “Father G was the first one who taught me to see my art not as a path towards delinquency and incarceration, but rather as a path out of the violence and hopelessness of gang life.” At an artists’ meeting prior to this exhibition, I was moved when each artist stated that his primary goal for the show was to inspire youth. Their commitment to giving back—through art and by mentoring others—evidences a powerful connection between art and community.

Among the artists, Debora remains more strongly tied to Homeboy Industries. After overcoming a battle with addiction, he received accreditation as a drug counselor and joined the staff at Homeboy in February 2007. During this time of transformation, art remained a constant source of motivation and focus. Lacking a formal education, Debora actively sought out artist mentors, including the East Los Screenshotscapers and artist Vincent Valdez. As a result of his perseverance, his work developed rapidly. But even as his style changed, Debora remained committed to depicting narratives from his life and community. Representational paintings such as *Pay Me No Mind* and *Rest in Peace* (both 2010) are characterized by a dramatic use of light—not theatrical, but something more like sunlight or a mystical ray—which serves to cast both hope and authenticity on images with painful undertones. Writing about the body of work, “Duality of Women” (2012), Debora stated that he hopes his paintings “provide a voice to those who have been silenced by society, violence or circumstances.” This statement provides an apt lens through which to view all of his art.

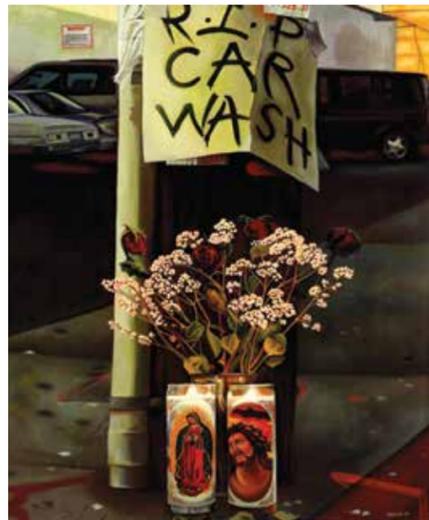
I first encountered Alex Kizu’s work in 2010 while serving as a juror for the student show for the Art Department at California State University, Northridge, from which Kizu graduated with honors the following year. At the time, Kizu’s small canvases stood out; and when Debora mentioned his work to me a few weeks later, I immediately recalled his fiery dragons and oceanic waves. Kizu integrates dynamic imagery inspired by Japanese iconography and a layering of words and letters that draws on his expansive knowledge of the scripts and alphabets used in street art. The first works he showed me for this exhibition expressed a transformation that mirrored his own—from turbulent adolescent to successful student and artist—but viewed from an expansive and reflective point of view. In *Eternal Warrior* (2012), a powerful but ethereal tiger, seen in profile, gazes out from a layered group of works rendered in

deep blues and blacks. Suggestive of a quiet, internal force, this and other works provoke questions about how we define strength as a society. Kizu’s art tends to derive from a spiritual place; his most recent paintings feature ornate lettering made via an intuitive process akin to visually speaking in tongues.

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez left Boyle Heights nearly two decades ago, when he began an 18-year apprenticeship with the artist Robert Graham in Venice Beach until Graham’s death in 2008. Muñoz Hernandez’s passionate and prolific practice embraces painting, sculpture, and public works and is inspired by diverse influences ranging from the human form, the urban landscape, and maps of California. From his “Urban Hidden Literature,” paintings on the streets of East Los Angeles, to “Lexicon,” miniature sculptures embodying graffiti letters in bronze, Muñoz Hernandez shifts and disrupts the expectations of street art. For this exhibition, he created bronze sculptures and paintings in larger scale. In “The Witness Edition” (2012), boxy “witnesses” (structural supports used in the lost wax process that are typically discarded) remain intact among the otherwise sinuous lines and open spaces, metaphorically connecting to the artist’s supporting role in Graham’s studio. These works bear witness in a broader sense, too, questioning accepted notions of who and what we choose to discard and value.

ANNIE BUCKLEY  
Curator of the Exhibition

Buckley (Otis MFA ’03) is a Los Angeles based interdisciplinary artist, author, art critic, and Assistant Professor of Visual Studies at California State University, San Bernardino.



### Cover

Fabian Debora, Alex Kizu and Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez  
*Transformation of Spirits Exposed*, 2012. (detail)  
Acrylic, spray paint, paint markers on wood panel, 120 x 120 inches

### This page

#### Top

Alex Kizu  
*Sand Storm*, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches

#### Bottom Left

Fabian Debora  
*Rest in Peace*, 2010  
Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 43 inches

#### Bottom Right

Juan Carlos Muñoz Hernandez  
*Relax*, 2012  
Bronze, 4.75 x 13 x 7 inches  
Courtesy Timothy Yarger Fine Art, Beverly Hills, CA