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America Martin in her studio. Photo by The Art Minion.

AMERICA MARTIN'S SOUL GOLD

A Studio Visit with LA's Painting Anthropologist

by Bianca Collins ·

April 4, 2019 · in



America Martin, the young Colombian-American artist known for her bold use of color and line in primitive, abstracted images of humans, is gaining recognition with growing momentum. With commanding forms that call to mind Picasso's portraits and Basquiat's energetic brushstrokes, collectors and enthusiasts alike are tuning in to her adoration of and devotion to the human form – strong and beautiful, but unidealized.

THE MAGAZINE



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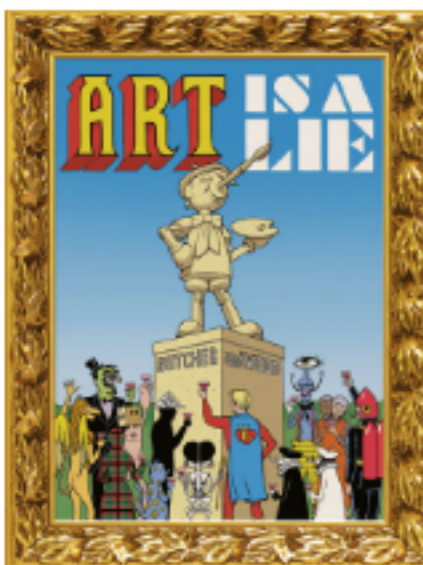
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America Martin in her studio. Photo by The Art Minion.

I visited Martin at her 10,000-square-foot former drapery manufacturing warehouse studio in Los Angeles to talk about her obsession with the female form, what it means to be a “painting anthropologist” and her determination to share her soul gold.

“I am fascinated by people,” gushes Martin. “The why and the stories of a people, and the reason why they do things... When you look at a bus stop with a collection of 8 people, and they’re not talking to each other, each going someplace different, I’m just like, ‘That’s so perfect! That’s a painting!’”

It’s these sort of everyday Genre scenes that make up most of Martin’s oeuvre and justify her self-given title of “painting anthropologist,” but she has a way of romanticizing the quotidian in a way that make these moments feel monumental. While men and still life images certainly find their fair share of the limelight in her work, many of her larger-than-life paintings feature another form found throughout art history – the nude female figure. “I’m doing what art has been doing forever,” Martin says with satisfaction, “though I’m able to have more real estate – when I say “real estate,” I mean, scope of joy and confidence in the way that I portray women – because I am a woman.”

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Artwork by America Martin in her studio. Photo by The Art Minion.

However common the subject may be, Martin's portrayal of women as a reflection of her own identity aren't hyper-sexual or idealized, like Manet's *Olympia* or Ingre's *Grande Odalisque*. Instead, Martin brings power to womanhood through her large contemporary figures, rendered with strong strokes to bestow strong shapes; a love letter to the modern woman – impervious to the male gaze. They are anything but demure, relishing in their manifestation provided by a self-assured, independent woman. "I'm amazed at how beautiful people are," Martin says, "Real shapes. Big bodies. That's pleasurable for me; to draw and see confident strong figures."

For Martin, creating art is the daily ritual through which she translates life, and so her studio is filled to the brim with paintings, sculptures, and drawings. "What do you even do when you see all this beautiful stuff out there? I want to join in 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic'! I want to run into the field and make stuff, too."



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Artwork by America Martin in her studio. Photo by The Art Minion.

This has been Martin's *modus operandi* as long as she can remember. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Martin was lucky to have a strong support system to help refine her natural artistic talent from a young age. "There was nothing that was gonna make me not paint," Martin remembers. She went to college but quit almost immediately to return to Los Angeles, save up money by bartending, and live in her mother's garage for a year so she could do nothing but build a body of work by painting every day. "You have to figure out a way to carve out time to create because no one will do it for you," she insists. "No one will give you that time – but it does exist. You can't listen to all the reasons why not."



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Martin recognized her hometown as an incubator of talent from around the world that would hopefully also honor her work ethic and indulge her dreams. “[People in LA] are the sparkly or black sheep; the ones that had a different idea and came here to give it a shot... It’s like the reverse gold rush. Everyone’s got gold in them, and they come to this place to pawn it, to see if someone will buy it.”

She surrounded herself with other young artists hustling to show their work and achieve the holy grail of gallery representation. “I actually asked an artist friend of mine, Alex Prager, who is now a huge photographer. She had just made a little pop-up show. I was like, “I wanna have a pop-up show.” She was like, “You just need to get booze and some walls.” And that’s all we did, just a bunch of artists having pop-up shows in Los Feliz and Echo Park and Silverlake.”



America Martin in her studio. Photo by The Art Minion.

This pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps approach worked in Martin’s favor. She found representation with JoAnne Artman Gallery in Laguna Beach, who has presented Martin’s work steadily and successfully for the last decade. “The lines, all about those lines!” says Artman, who appreciates Martin’s willingness to always try something new. “New materials, new directions... always experimenting.”

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The Photography of Kwame Brathwaite



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Martin hopes the same freedom to explore will be instilled in the next generation of young people. “We’re not teaching kids that expressing themselves or being able to look at and engage with someone else’s expression is of value or has worth. People don’t think that they need art until they are in a place where there is no art, and they feel the lack. I like the idea of not being why or for any particular thing besides inspiration making.”

As we know now, access to art is an indispensable presence with measurable benefits in any society. Murals that replace graffiti-covered, decrepit walls and reduce local crime is a perfect example. The effect is subconscious; powerful. The same is true on a smaller scale, within the individual, as the osmosis of art inevitably ignites empathy and paradigm shifts in thinking.

Martin encourages everyone not to ignore the impulse to create. “Those are the moments where your artist insiderness – your muse – is going ‘Hey, come here, let’s do this!’ And if you say, ‘No no no,’ or you listen to other people say, ‘No no no,’ it gets flattened. It’s really hard to build that up again... it takes faith.”

Make sure to catch America Martin’s show “America To Me” at JoAnne Artman Gallery, up through mid-April 2019.



Tags: abstract painting, america martin, figurative painting, painting, studio visit

