



“SHELL,” 2009, **Kadir Lopez**
 MIXED MEDIA, 48" x 48"
 PHOTO: COURTESY WILLIAM TURNER GALLERY

LOS ANGELES

Kadir Lopez “Signs of Cuba” and Mikel Alatza “Portraits of Martin Kippenberger, Other Artists, Madmen, Fish Heads, Fake Fruit, and Sundry Clowns” at William Turner Gallery

Though the works of Kadir Lopez and Mikel Alatza seem to very have little to do with other—Lopez restores vintage signage from pre-Communist Cuba and Alatza is fascinated by the celebrity and non-celebrity—each artist is in fierce negotiation with the past and is trying to reclaim it in the present. “Signs of Cuba” is an assemblage of vintage marketing signs recovered by Kadir Lopez from the streets of Havana after Castro imposed his Communist regime. The metal signage that promoted American companies such as Wells Fargo, Coca-Cola, and Esso gasoline are distant reminders of the close ties between the United States and Cuba. In piecing together history, Lopez began purchasing signs that had been burned and shot in junkyards throughout Cuba, and collaged each one with an archival photograph. In *Shell*, the outline of the Shell logo houses an image of an overthrown car seesawing on its roof. *Tome Coca-Cola* is a battered sign that has sustained multiple bullets; etched into the fiery red Coke logo is an image of the Club de Cantineros de la Republica de Cuba. By juxtaposing car companies like Ford with images of dilapidated vehicles and ruined urban streets with “delicious and refreshing” Coca-Cola, Lopez reveals the irony of pre-Castro Cuba and the façade of commodities.

From 1989 to 1990 the late German Contemporary artist Martin Kippenberger commissioned Mikel Alatza, and thus a large portion of Alatza’s work celebrates the elusive figure revered equally for his talent and the air of mystery that cloaked his persona. Alatza presents the variable visages of Kippenberger rendered in oil on linen in a six-panel series titled *Kippenberger, Pageant Quality Series*. Mounted on plywood and held in place by wire and stucco, the series adopts richness through the rough use of materials. The sculptural properties of each panel highlight a specific area of the face (nose, eye, mouth), as if Alatza is providing the viewer with a magnifying glass through which to further investigate the subject. Adjacent to the *Pageant Quality Series* is a large-scale portrait titled *Prize Winner*, which depicts Kippenberger with a rose in his mouth and a piercing gaze looking off into the distance. Cursive text arches around his head and beneath his chest; the top reads “dead success” and the bottom reads “still life.” Alatza seems to have taken a cue from Kippenberger as “still life” can refer to the style of painting, or that “life” trumps Kippenberger’s own death.

—A. MORET