



John "Crash" Matos BRINGING IT FORWARD

January 26 - March 23, 2024

In the vast universe of the urban art, one figure stands as the very embodiment of creative genius and modern heroism, a visionary capable of transforming the streets into canvases pulsating with life and energy, and thus reinventing the very concept of artistic expression. The protagonist of the story, whose painterly gesture is transformed into a spray can capable of releasing light and color, and consequently availing himself of instinctiveness as a tool to shape a new kind of art that has in the street and the metropolis its origin and principle, is John Matos in art "CRASH." His name is not just a simple pseudonym, but even a real artistic manifesto, which holds a profound meaning: in it the sudden sound of a violent impact is recalled, a metaphor for an explosive energy and a force that breaks artistic and social conventions. It is an evocation of a moment of upheaval and transformation that reflects the boldness and determination with which the artist ventures into the territory of the urban context, leaving an indelible imprint on the contemporary cultural scene. Here the stage name is transformed into a true symbol, a representation of the artist's modus operandi through the movement and placement of letters: this is one of the first manifestations of the contemporary tag, that is the means by which the graffiti artist is able to leave a mark on the world, inheriting exactly the same function that cave graffiti managed to have for prehistoric man. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the artistic pseudonym depicted on subway trains rather than on the murals of scruffy New York City neighborhoods in various styles thus absolves itself of a true self-portrait function: in addition to establishing an identification system about the hierarchies of membership in certain crews (these were groups formed by young people from urban communities who used the graffiti technique in groups and in different styles, thus creating an extremely diverse landscape), it also becomes a great sign of authenticity and recognizability. To echo the authoritative opinion of Margo Thompson, who in her book *American Graffiti* draws on the legacy of a purely Duchampian matrix, the tag conceptually becomes a true ready-made, an immediate artistic creation, ready to be delivered to and devoured by a new audience even hungrier than previous generations for new artistic innovations that, to recall Arthur Danto's philosophy¹, are able to evoke a specific historical context.

¹ Arthur Danto è stato un critico d'arte e filosofo, celebre per le sue teorie contenute nell'opera *Che cos'è l'arte*



It was precisely in this way that in the late 1970s CRASH, still torn by the rawness of that harsh and austere decade, began at a very young age to appropriate spray cans as a medium to give additives to his most intimate urges and to use the street as an open-air museum, thus making "like a rushing and boiling geiser the impetuous current of the underground resurface."²

The technical-artistic graffiti revolution, however, was only able to find full consecration from critics and collectors thanks to a decisive phase, which transformed the "American Graffiti" movement into "Post-Graffiti": street artists, who were certainly no longer satisfied with the democratic and immortal nature of their urban works, began to bring their way of painting trains and murals to the canvases now on display in the major galleries of Soho. One of the earliest exhibitions of the movement thus presented, perhaps the most famous in historical terms, is "Post-Graffiti," organized in 1983 at New York's historic Sidney Janis Gallery. As the landlord himself, the legendary dealer Sidney Janis, had occasion to testify in the exhibition catalog: "The title of this exhibition is not to suggest that these artists no longer work in graffiti, but rather to attribute their transition from the walls of the subway to the canvases a conceptual and visual extension of their universe of spontaneous images..."³

The year following the "Post Graffiti" exhibition, it was the turn of the solo exhibition of CRASH, who would be represented by Janis until the late 1980s when he died after leaving an indelible mark on the history of the twentieth-century art market. The representation by such a prominent gallerist had a significant and decidedly relevant impact on the artist's career, which also began to be recognized by major museum institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum in New York, where one of his greatest masterpieces (**Aeroplane 1, 1983, Spray paint on canvas, 181.0 x 261.6 cm**) is now preserved.

At a time when the art world embraces the concept of hybridization and the street environment becomes a canvas for creative expression, CRASH stands as a great innovator, a modern alchemist who skillfully blends typical graffiti elements with symbols of the pop world. As Baudelaire had occasion to observe, "Modern art is almost always somewhere between tradition and innovation." In the works of the graffiti pioneer, this road becomes a crossroads in which the popular iconographies of comic books and the intrinsic force of the art of graffiti art converge, giving rise to a new and unprecedented archetype: the modern man, the hero of our time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

² Alinovi (a cura di), F., *Arte di frontiera*, Mazzotta Editore, 1983, p. 13

³ *Post-Graffiti*, Sidney Janis Gallery (New York), 1983



Born John Matos in 1961, "CRASH" grew up in the Bronx, New York; at the age of 13, he began following the older teens from his neighborhood to the train yards and began bombing. From the late 1970s, his art name in the form of tags began to appear on trains running throughout New York City. In 1980, he curated the groundbreaking "Graffiti Art Success for America" exhibition at Fashion MODA, launching the Graffiti movement now enshrined in art history. CRASH's career took off starting in the 1980s and his popularity was immediate throughout Europe and America, and then in Asia. CRASH has participated in numerous exhibitions and retrospectives in museums and galleries around the world, such as the Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Because of his visually iconic style, he collaborated with many global companies and brands such as Absolut Vodka, Fender Guitars, Levi's, and Medicom Toy. He continues to work and exhibit around the world. He is currently co-owner of Wallworks New York contemporary art gallery and Wallworks TWO brand, a local retail boutique, both in the Bronx.

John "CRASH" Matos is considered one of the fathers of American graffiti art and one of the most important urban artists of his generation. His technical skill and artistic innovation have influenced many other artists, and his focus on the superhero theme is a significant contribution to modern popular culture.

The exhibition "Bringing It Forward" will run from January 26 until March 23, 2024

Mucciaccia Gallery London
21 Dering Street, W1S 1AL
Opening hours: Monday to Saturday, 10am to 6pm