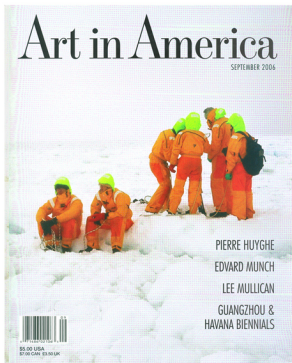


REPORT FROM HAVANA

Within the Revolution, Everything—A Little While Longer

The 9th Havana Biennial brought together work from 52 countries this spring, proving once more that art need not be commercial to thrive.

BY SARAH VALDEZ



Not all graffiti included in the Biennial had such problematic connotations, however. On the contrary, most of it took on an air of public outreach and was much appreciated by Habañeros, who were happy to see their timeworn walls receive fresh paint, a commodity scarce in their country. New York's Martinez Gallery doesn't exist as a physical place but as the brainchild of Hugo Martinez and his stable of roving, crafty graffiti "kings" and "queens," who have collaborated on such enterprises as renovating apartments in the projects and decorating dreary doctors' offices. Three of Martinez's artists, Robert Gualtieri,



Coco 144, Kez 5 and Mico painting graffiti in Old Havana, 2006.
Courtesy Martinez Gallery, New York.

Nestor Sánchez and Jaime Ramírez—all from the U.S.—were invited to participate. Known by their tags, Coco 144, Kez 5 and Mico, respectively, the trio worked together in one of the worst neighborhoods of Old Havana, painting their tag names (of course), as well as imagery honoring Che and the revolution. Residents started making specific requests, as did one young boy who wanted and got a bird painted by a particular window, commemorating a deceased pet. Residents even attempted to convince the Martinez stable to paint more than the space apportioned them by the Biennial committee.