

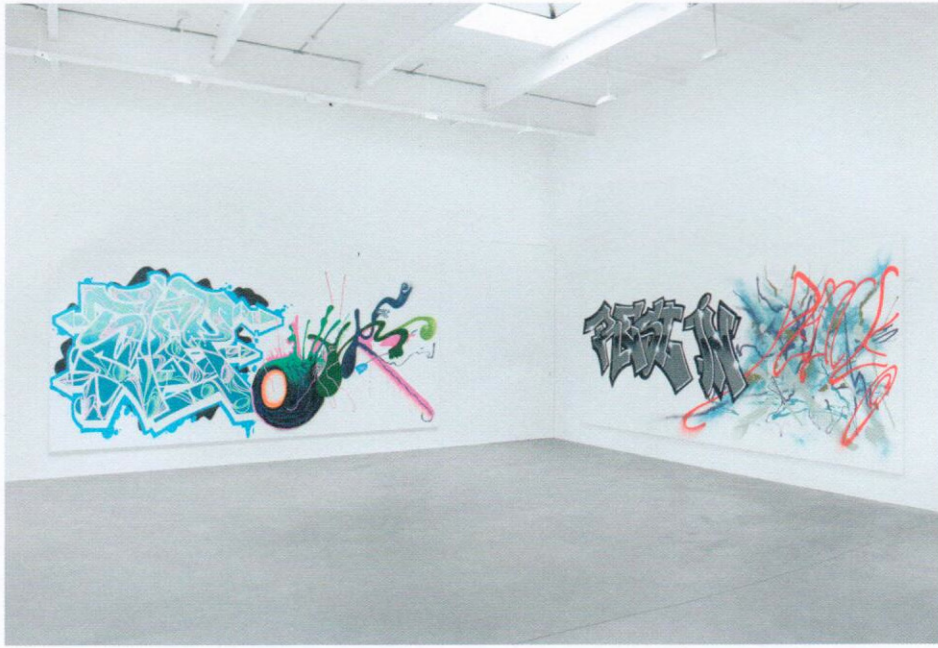
Blagojevic, Bosko. "Miko, Vena, Walczak", *Flash Art*. October 2014

Flash Art

Miko, Vena, Walczak

Albus Greenspon / New York

In a risky but carefully executed exhibition, Dave Miko and Ned Vena present a previously unexhibited part of their practice as painters. Miko and Vena — two friends, one known for sly, subtle compositions bordering on abstraction, the other for systemic, serial abstraction — engage their long-standing practice as graffiti writers to create a set of five oversize canvases. To produce each, the artists spontaneously chose restive and slangy phrases ("Bust This," "Step Off" or "Sick Enough?") and rendered the words in a combination of the two's signature styles. Vena's words in enamel exhibit the kind of late 1990s influence that will be visually familiar to kids growing up in Giuliani-era New York (this writer included) — big chunky type clustered to elide immediate legibility, often shimmering with simulated chro-med-out bling and bright, shifting color patterns. Miko, who was most active as a writer in early 1990s New York, presents his letters in a trickier, more abstract style. His language limps across the white canvas, dripping and morphing as it articulates junk-sick hues and pointed, thorny edges. The two exemplify historical moments in graffiti writing: for Miko, a radical approach to a singular style, refuting reference and grasping at the unknown. For Vena, a kind of search for "graffiti" in a pure sense — a search for origin, less concerned with radical inventiveness and more with a play of form. The collision on each canvas creates a curious effect: this is neither a show about post-Deitch "street art" elevated in the gallery sphere, nor is it an exploration of the artists' past, pre-gallery selves — in fact, both chose not to disclose their tag names or sign works. Rather, the paintings seem to hint at questions of cultural legibility and what power pure visual form can sustain (if any) untethered from the context where it does its usual job. The exhibition's third rail is a wall text by Antek Walczak that, in funny and absorbing language, presents the problem of being admired and half-understood ("cool") as a kind of impetus to create, at odds with the radical (and fictitious, sour) alterity demanded of artists seeking to develop a "critical" practice.



"Dave Miko, Ned Vena, Antek Walczak: Collaborative Painting & Text," installation view at Albus Greenspon, New York (2014)
Courtesy of the Artists and Albus Greenspon, New York