



The Art of Andre

André Saraiva was one of France's first graffiti artists to use a character logotype as his signature, tagging it in the neighborhoods all around Paris in the 1980's. Born in Sweden and raised in France by Portuguese parents, he took a page from the gritty work that originated in the streets of New York. Graffiti was one of the first styles André used to express himself and put a mark on the world. While he's branched out by opening international hotspot Le Baron, he's never strayed far from his artistic roots.

Saraiva's first solo show in China focuses on his iconic graffiti signature: Mr A., a round-headed figure with long limbs and a circle and a cross for eyes. The character has a wide, grinding toothy smile, the style having evolved from mere line into a more conceptual practice.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a huge

portrait of Mr & Mrs A. that demands your attention as you walk into the gallery. The characters appear to be dancing with each other. This piece was made in Shanghai and is painted on ceramic, paying homage to traditional Chinese techniques. "I've also done Mr & Mrs A. on some tiles," says Saraiva "as art on tiles can capture the tone of color perfectly and it's a style of art from my native Portugal."

Some of the pieces touch on André's graffiti roots. "I found a door at a Shikumen neighborhood and did a piece on it," he says, Mr A. seemingly popping up from a hole in the ground, waving and flashing his grinding smile.

Next to that is a Mr A. painted on a piece of cardboard, mounted on a piece of wood, which could have been lifted from a derelict Shikumen, a perfect place to find street art of all kinds.



There are also a few examples of André's brilliant conceptual series "Dream Concerts" where he makes fake concert posters in the style of 1950s boxing promotion cards.

"I do this to create a buzz or a sensational feeling within people when they see it," explains André. Who can argue with this when you see a poster with the names of various heavy-hitting rap artists of today on one bill. But then you realize it's a construct of André's imagination.

This show presents a chance to see street art, a form traditionally relegated to the outskirts of society, preserved proudly on the walls of a gallery, like all art, no matter its origins, should have the chance to be.

*** Misha Maruma, cncreate.org**

Andre at the Gallery Magda Danysz, through Saturday, September 16, www.magda-gallery.com

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