



Images provided by Shantell Martin

Shantell

MARTIN

Words | Daniel Taveras

The antagonist of blank apartment walls, a stark mural of line and character occupies Shantell Martin's bedroom. Bold and merrily, this living piece of ever-expanding art snakes along, telling stories and speaking secrets. The black line against the white space typifies the majority of Martin's physical work.

"There's never a plan before I start," says Martin, whose relaxed nature informs her manner of dress and speaking. "People always ask me what happens if I make a mistake, and I say it's all one BIG mistake!"

With no plan beforehand, Martin's drawings feed off the negative space. The void left between lines becomes a nose or a shoulder, and her hand guided by her keyed-in subconscious creates art in progress. Her lines' existence on the objects adds to the experiential purpose of the art. She adds, "If I'm drawing on someone physically, then that piece of art walks around and becomes its own thing. If I'm drawing on a car, that car will drive around and become its own thing. If I'm doing a projection

show in a space the space becomes the artwork."

In Martin's digital and projected pieces, she collaborates with bands, models, and other artists to generate transient, one-off pieces. These fleeting works exist in the blink of an eye, seconds later becoming wholly something else. In response to the musician or person on stage, she molds and manipulates her images on the fly, fitting the scene and creating something out of nothing. To her, it's a natural process that simply involves walking in, turning on her computer, and starting. As blank and aesthetically simple as Shantell's analog work appears, her collaborative pieces bloom in Technicolor waves of greens, reds, and purples.

"These people had color in their personalities and in their auras and in their energies, and it felt like a natural thing to color them," says Martin, "I am very black and white, but when other people become involved in my work, there's that color that naturally wants to come out and explode and show more of their personality."

This also applies to when she draws on the bodies, arms and faces of living people. In the ultimate exploration of what a canvas can be, her moving bodies of work add a literal human element to her drawing. The black lines still exist, but an absence of color would be untrue to the people who have become part of the artwork. "There is color coming out of people that I see, and I feel like this person feels more blue or red to me, and I put blue

or red on them. I feel like that's just me listening to that space."

London-bred, with stops in Tokyo and now New York, geography has claimed how Shantell Martin works with her art. Tokyo's club scene is quite different than New York's, and it was there that she was given an opportunity to work in front of a crowd. New York has seen her return to grassroots art-making, where her drawings can be permanently experienced, stared at, and remembered. Though she admits it's been a tough transition (going from being well-known in Japan to relatively unknown in America) her goal to become successful and known in New York remains true.

Recently, Martin had a one month installation at hip New York jeans manufacturer 3x1. The space and even staff became part of Shantell's zaggy vision. The work overtook the store, and the genuine existence of her art in a real space excited Shantell. It's a step forward and a move to make a mark in a way she never originally envisioned for herself. "I've come from this point of view of only wanting to do stuff that's experiential and stuff that's only momentary and will just evaporate at the end of a performance. I've come from that almost to a place of acceptance to wanting to produce work which will exist and stay around and stay in someone's home, and there's nothing wrong with that." ■