

## Quintín Rivera Toro Interviews Carlos Jesus Martinez Dominguez / FEEGZ

**QTR:** Can you identify a lineage of graffiti art(ists) that you are a part of? What about them is it that you identify with?

**CJMD:** I was that tagger known in my school and neighborhood, not at all someone who would be considered “all city” by any means. I was also known as a “Black Book Bomber” which wasn’t necessarily a compliment. In terms of fame, I think it would be fair to have called me a “toy”. I actively wrote from roughly 1986-1997. I am actively involved in a project documenting Dominican Americans in the Graff movement with the Dominican Studies Institute at CUNY. Puerto Ricans obviously are widely recognized as pioneers in Graff history. Although you don’t necessarily need a cultural connection to love graffiti, that link has played a big part. So I identify with Graff Culture, but especially as that “Toy,” “Black Book Bomber”, “Tagger” or even “Hispanic” Graff writer”

**QTR:** Do you run with a crew or solo? Why?

**CJMD:** I work with many artists and educators; most notably a young filmmaker named Marie Jimenez and printer Pepe Coronado. Dister Rondon is also someone who has been instrumental in my evolution as an artist. Collaboration is essential to some of my more ambitious projects and working with others who enrich me with knowledge just makes s#\*t better.

**QTR:** Would you consider making an art practice outside of NYC? Why?

**CJMD:** I have thought of practicing in the Zona Colonial in the DR and recently Santurce, PR (which has supplied another fantasy). Two other locales I have ties to are Austin, TX and Atlanta, GA, although I feel like I never want to be disconnected from Washington Heights, NYC on a permanent basis. I’m not the type of person who could live or work without a link to family and my cultures.

**QTR:** How do you relate (existentially) to the political status of the Island of Puerto Rico?

**CJMD:** To visit my direct Puerto Rican family I travel not to Borinquen but to Killeen, TX. This is due to coming from a largely military based family on my Puerto Rican side. So my romanticizing of the Independence movement was not popular to say the least. I have always been told that I shouldn’t speak on the issue, that I do not understand and am not a real Puerto Rican (which I’m always told by Dominicans also). I have always found the issue a bit ironic. My

mother who grew up in PR for a bit was the romantic “revolutionary” and would tell me stories of interviewing “independentistas” for her school newspaper. My dad, on the other hand, would tell me stories about people like Generals Pedro del Valle, Salvador E. Felices, Governor Luis Muñoz Marín and Boxers. I tend to take after my mom in that regard. My heroes include Bentances, Lebrón, Albizu Campos, and Big Pun. I would love to see a sovereign Puerto Rico, however it doesn't seem most Boricuas do according to the evidence or my personal experience.

**QTR:** How has the role of protestation evolved for you over the years, as you get older?

**CJMD:** I've never been much of a protester in the traditional sense. I have probably been to less than 5 protests in my life. I consider myself more of an activist than protester. I protest through my art mostly, by volunteer work in my communities and outside of my communities with organizations such as Grito de los Excluidos, Comité Pro Niñez Dominico Haitiana and past work with I Love my Hood. Lately what has been peaking my interest as an activist is my concern with the state of the arts in Washington Heights. My area's arts organization, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, has failed to meet the demands of the community when it comes to inclusion, except if you're into theatre. We have a couple of websites that claim they are the "voice of uptown" but seem to think the only artists we have up here are rappers, and the other site almost exclusively covers stuff going on outside the hood. It's a sad state when a bookstore has more visual arts than the only gallery space we have in the area, Shout out to Word Up Books!!!! If it wasn't for them and Rio Penthouse Gallery there would be no space to show art up here. Yes we have local bars, restaurants and commercial spaces that try and fill the void but it shouldn't come to that when we already have an institution collecting public funds in our name.

**QTR:** Is there a dilemma between the wall or the canvas for your art production?

**CJMD:** Not at all. Unless you're illegally bombing or burning, there's always room for some purest to say you ain't doing it right. A lot of the burners we see are legal, which kinda makes them murals in a Graff style. Back then they would almost all be illegal and you would think to yourself how did the artist/vandal/athlete/daredevil do that with a spray can, in the cold, with the danger of being beaten or locked up. At first I only used street signs to try to create a compromise or to make a comment on the conversation of what constitutes true graffiti but I really don't give a f#@k about that anymore.

This interview is part of *Crossfire*, a project conceived and edited by Nicolás Dumit Estévez for El Museo del Barrio.