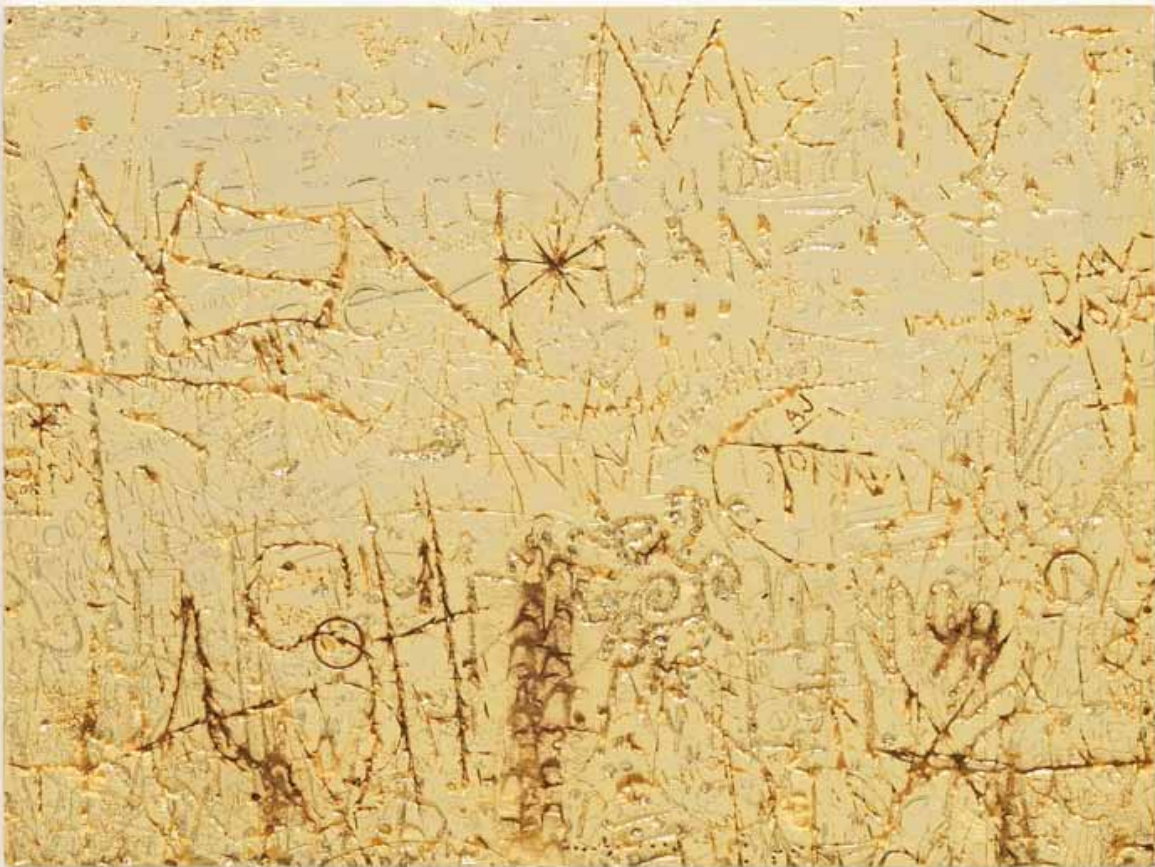


*RUDOLF STINGEL FROM 8,000 MILES AWAY (or, "All Gold Everything")*  
*Esteban Jefferson*

I'm here, at home in New York, this time sitting in a laundromat on Nostrand Avenue. I'd rather be there, in Hong Kong, to see Rudolf Stingel's show at Gagosian for myself; instead, I'll have to settle for the 2" x 2" picture in my Instagram feed in front of me.

In Brooklyn, what I see out of the window of the B44 everyday, from the brick walls to concrete ground to green scaffolding, is graffiti – which is what Stingel is currently showing in a white cube half a world away. In a pre-internet age, I probably wouldn't have become aware of Stingel's show while it was occurring. But what a time to be alive - now I can be physically here while mentally there, and back again, to consider the socioeconomic situation posed by this show from my stiff plastic seat next to the dryer.



From the press release:

Stingel's recent panel paintings are a new form of opulent abstraction born out of humble materials and banal gestures... In each of these participatory works, he transformed the exhibition space by covering the walls in a layer of reflective aluminum-faced Celotex... Viewers could scratch, write, and mark the pristine surface at will, their individual traces accumulating into a mass of anonymous marks... The works in the current exhibition are selected fragments of the inscribed walls cast in copper using a procedure that captures even the most faint surface detail. The cast base is then electroplated with gold, an alchemical transformation that imbues common graffiti with a new, anonymous, and eternal abstract beauty.

Hip-hop loves gold. Stingel loves gold. Gagosian loves gold. I love gold. I recently bought a fake gold watch off eBay. The watch in question is an HMT – a state-owned Indian watch company that recently closed its doors. India's national misfortune is my opportunity, and I found these watches circulating on eBay for \$5, which, considering my combined studio and apartment rents is \$1300, seemed like a bargain.

The watch is gold plated, just like the paintings. Gold plating creates a façade of value, but at a minimal cost. This reduced price is passed on to the consumer, who can wear a watch that looks every bit as gaudy and expensive as its 18K counterpart, but at a fraction of the cost. I wonder if the same price reduction holds true for these paintings, but I doubt it.

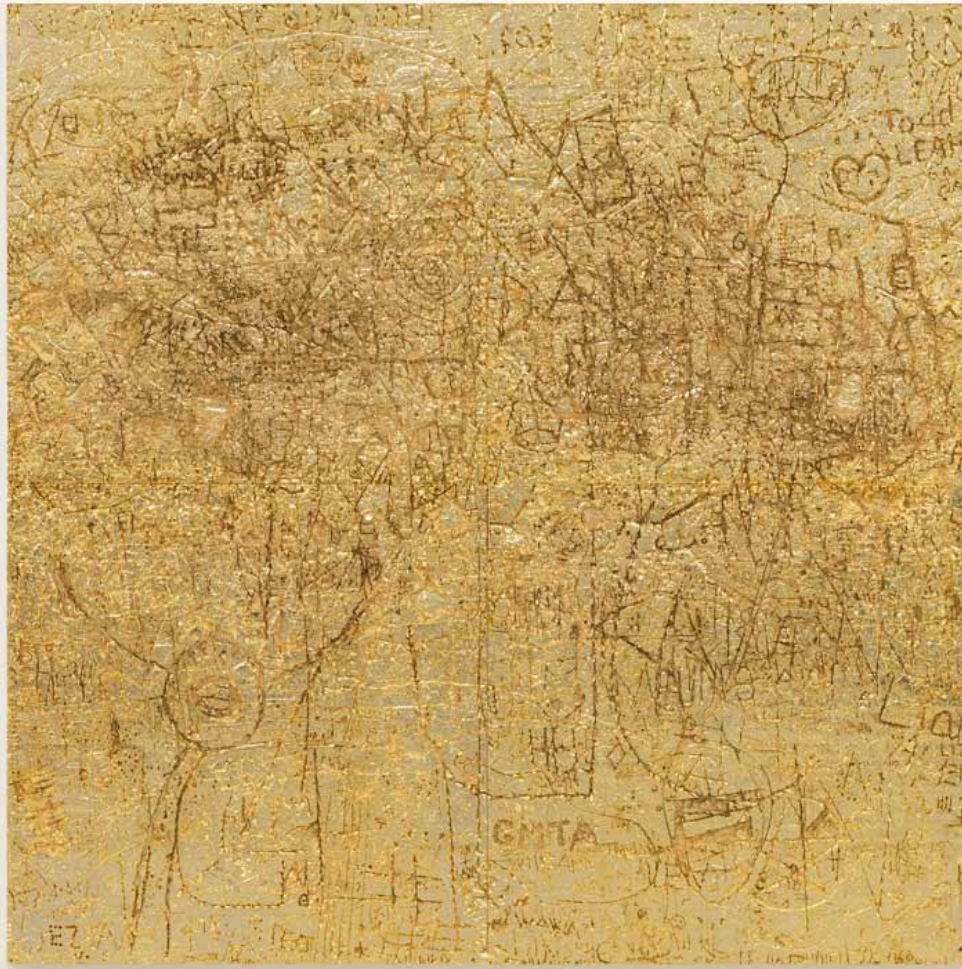




When Kidult tagged Supreme, the graffiti was removed the next day. But when Banksy tags a wall in East New York, a poor and sidelined neighborhood becomes a tourist attraction. The bourgeoisie love street culture in controlled, sanitized doses. The bourgeoisie also love signifiers of luxury. Rudolf Stingel is giving the rich what they want on one easily consumable package. The shiny surface is the piece, because what lies underneath is ugly.



*Above: East New Yorkers charging Manhattanites \$20 to see a Banksy; life goes on in front of the vandalized Supreme store on Lafayette St.*



The ideas and aesthetics of street culture are clearly being coopted here and turned into a product for the rich. An audience of anybodies is given participatory authority to interact creatively with a wall, mimicking graffiti born out of protest, in order to create an ornament / investment meant to live on a wall or in a storage unit. But within that action there are two possibilities. On the one hand, urban street culture takes another loss at the hands of the capitalist vehicle. On the other hand, Stingel may be sardonically creating these works to blatantly mimic the more subtle ways that the power structure, which continually pushes the poor more and more to the brink, absorbs and flips the tools of the oppressed, such as graffiti. What makes this show interesting and distressing at the same time is that most likely both of these things are happening simultaneously. The work is “good” if it is criticizing the system that it takes part in, but either way Stingel is going to make a shitload of money off of these paintings, which means that we’ll really only be able to get a full picture of what happened in this show posthumously. So ultimately I’m left in this laundromat wondering where these paintings will be in 20 years, when Nostrand Avenue might not have much graffiti on it anymore. Will Stingel’s gold rub off, like the gold on my watch? Will the paintings be ruined if it does? Or will they become better?