

## Introduction *Cristina Grajales*

I first experienced José Parlá's work not through his paintings, but through his ceramics; specifically his collaboration with the Ichi-Yo Gama family-owned Bizen-yaki factory in Okayama, Japan. I was immediately attracted to his pieces, and to his deep interest in the culture and techniques involved in creating these thousand-year-old ceramics. His own work plays with the subtle tones of the clay, which provides a rich backdrop to the inscriptions he carves into the surface, creating an energy caused by the tension between the ancient tradition and his unique urban style. As I became more familiar with his work, I appreciated his daring in leaving painting to experiment with a completely different medium.

José's work with Bizen-yaki is indicative of his fascination with ancient traditions and techniques. He has traveled around the world from China to Cuba to the jungles of Colombia studying artistic practices that he has assimilated into his pieces. His appreciation for other cultures, stems from his being raised by Cuban exiles in Puerto Rico and Miami. In an increasingly global world, his work glorifies cultural uniqueness.

What strikes me most about José is his sense of place. He depicts unique urban panoramas that are a testament to the human condition and celebrates an "in-the-moment" quality of the writing on the wall. José's photographs, paintings and collages are a collection of details and observations that capture the essence of a city and the people who live in it. The layers of paint in his work represent the layers of life, with each layer documenting the passage of days.

The written word is paramount to José's visual expression. His paintings include journal entries, snippets of songs, and glimpses of the world at large through appropriated posters. He uses words to express emotions, whether in a political or a poetic way.

José has a warm and generous spirit that is greatly manifested in the richness of his work. His honesty and the truth of his emotions play out on his exuberant canvasses. We experience both his joie de vivre and the lyricism of the urban experience.

For José Parlá's first solo show in New York, *Layered Days* is an exhibition that celebrates life and documents the accumulation of experiences through daily recordings.



*Shoreditch High Street, London.*  
2008  
Photo, José Parlá



*Bizen clay carving.*  
2007

*Bizen Palimpsest.*  
2007