



# Retna (Marquis Lewis) b.1979 Los Angeles

## Summary

Born Marquis Lewis on March 24, 1979 in Los Angeles, CA, RETNA joined the Los Angeles mural scene as a teenager. As a youth of African-American, El Salvadorian and Cherokee descent growing up in Los Angeles, Retna was mesmerized by the gang graffiti that surrounded him. He began practicing the art form, and adopted the name Retna from a Wu-Tang Clan song. In the mid-nineties he began making murals on walls, trains and freeway overpasses throughout the city. Retna transformed from a street artist to a break-out star in the contemporary art world. He garnered attention from Usher, an R&B artist, who commissioned the artist to create a portrait of Marvin Gaye, and MOCA director Jeffrey Deitch, who wrote in the September 2010 issue of Juxtapoz “one of the most exciting exhibitions...this year, anywhere, was Retna's exhibition at New Image Art.” MOCA also featured Retna's work in the major “Art in the Streets” exhibit, the first major U.S. museum survey of graffiti and street art.

At first glance, the work looks like an undiscovered ancient script: a series of hypnotic symbols—complex, beautiful and captivating. But Retna has created an original alphabet, fusing together influences from ancient Incan and Egyptian hieroglyphics, Arabic, Asian calligraphy, graffiti, blackletter, Roman lettering and Hebrew script. Each piece carries meaning, conveying an event or dialogue that the artist experienced. The writing does not belong to a particular language. Retna explains, “I want my text to feel universal. I want people from different cultures to all find some similarity in it—whether they can read it or not.” He also stated that “it is important to have art in the streets as a cultural fabric that is woven into the city for the upliftment of civic pride.”

His works are in the private collections of Jeffrey Deitch, Swizz Beats, Usher, and Dave Chappelle, among many others. Retna's large-scale mural across the eastern exterior of Restoration Hardware's new gallery in West Palm, Florida, which was valued at \$500,000 by the city's Art in Public Places program. He has collaborated with major fashion brands including Nike, Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Helmut Lang and designed the artwork for Justin Bieber's 'Purpose' album cover. RETNA also acted as the artistic designer for the San Francisco and Washington National Opera's production of “Aida.”

## Group Exhibitions



2019

*We Were Here: East Coast x West Coast*, Chase Contemporary, New York, NY