

TRACY 168

Secondary Meaning: An interview with Tracy 168 By Nicholas Boston

Graffiti writers are by definition contras. They are contra the law that seeks to curb them. Flight from law enforcement is the graf writer's life. Just ask Tracy 168, who has been writing graf for more than three decades. Tracy, however, has seen the inside of a courtroom in a role unfamiliar to most of his counterparts: as a plaintiff.

Last year, Michael "Wild Style" Tracy filed suit in the Supreme Court of Bronx County against: Wild Style, a term the provenance of which he claims as his own.

The courts ruled against Tracy. Their decision was that his name – Wild Style – had not sufficiently acquired what in legalese is called "Secondary Meaning", a publicly known and acknowledged definition which, in its increasingly excessive use, demands protection from theft.

Tracy's true secondary meaning, however, is that, as an artist who stands outside the circle of the law, he comes at last to turn to that law for representation, but finds none.

Tracy explained his thoughts on that double meaning to me.

NB: What's the art all about for you, Tracy 168?

Tracy 168: The art is love. The whole world is based on fear. Fear sells products. We're scared to look different and we're scared of people who look different from us. We're scared of people of other colors. The art that I've done broke down barriers. I've seen a lot of cliquey shit going on. Because of me, some Irish bars that did not welcome black people are mixed now. Not just with blacks: it's Albanians, with blacks, with Irish. And now they tell me, "Get the fuck out", it's a crazy world.

NB: What are some of the things you would say are off-limits, even to the graf writer, some of the things you consider to not be ok?

168: Well, fucking your kids is not ok. Homeland Security. Everything is being monitored and everybody is being watched, and they say it's for our protection. That's not for our protection; they're watching us to make sure we don't overthrow. It's surveillance.

NB: When you're out there writing, is this some of the stuff that you're thinking about?

168: I live what I do. Sometimes I live in my car and I make my art in my car too. My car is the craziest shit on earth. The back of my car is my easel. I put the spray cans on top of the hood. Everybody is flipped watching this shit. I sketch at the wheel. Ideas come up as I'm driving. I'm driving around the city and as I'm driving, I'm picking up all different kinds of energy from all over the city. I go to Brighton Beach and I get all this Russian imagery and machinery and shit. Then, I go up to 136th Street and Amsterdam and all of a sudden, I'm sketching all red from that Dominican energy up there. Next thing you know, I'm in Woodlawn where there's lots of Irish and I'm doing little leprechauns and shit.

NB: What kind of car is it?

168: It's a scary-ass car and when that one moons I get another scary car. It was solid metal. I always get an Oldsmobile, always a square sedan. I've driven with no windows, no breaks. I had to pull the emergency break just to stop the fucking car. Once, a tire fell off while I was on the road. Fell right off, took three bounces and went into the Hudson River.

NB: What about the law? Have you ever been caught?

168: The cops caught me once on the 59th Street Bridge. When I'm on the edge, I don't give a fuck and I was way out on the edge that day, nothing to lose. So, the cop pulls me over because I wasn't wearing a safety belt, but when he turned to see my plates, he saw they were a drawing. I made those shits in Kinko's. He ripped my plates out and I said, "You motherfucker, don't touch my art! You touched my fucking drawings and you ripped them!" He was like, "Did you do these?!" And I said "Yes." He said "You could be arrested." He didn't do nothing. He expected me to lie, but when I hit him with the truth, it took all his energy away.

NB: How do you get away with performing all these huge criminal offenses?

168: Huge criminal offenses? Have I ever bombed a country? That's a

huge criminal offense. Let me ask you a question, what nationality are you, where are you from?

NB: I'm Canadian. You didn't think I was American?

168: Well, America is Canada now. I figured it all out and it fucked me up. All the rich went up to Canada and then New York became this giant cesspool of workers. I tell you what I mean: when I was a kid, I sold that Spanish-language newspaper, *El Diario*, in the hallways to get a couple bucks. That newspaper is being printed in Canada now. *El Diario!* Canada, that's where all the millionaires ran to.

NB: What happened with the whole Wild Style thing?

Tracy 168: I started a culture, long ago. I started this thing called Wild Style. I was approached to use my name. Little by little, they told people it was something else. They took it and they say it's for the good of many people but they're not doing the right thing by people.

Los graffiteros son contrarios. Están en contra de la ley que los trata de controlar. El graffitero se pasa la vida huyéndole a la policía. Pregúntale a Tracy 168, que esta escribiendo graffiti por más de tres décadas. Sin embargo esta vez, Tracy, ha visto la corte como demandante, un papel desconocido a sus colegas.

El año pasado, Michael "Wild Style" Tracy comenzó un pleito en la Corte Suprema del Condado del Bronx por lo que el reclamaba ser la apropiación del nombre que el uso como su firma al mediano de los 70s: Wild Style.

Las cortes decidieron en contra de Tracy. La decisión era que su nombre - Wild Style - no había suficientemente adquirido lo que llaman "Definición Secundaria", una definición públicamente reconocida que, en su uso continuamente excesivo, requiere protección de robo.

Sin embargo, el verdadero "sentido secundario" de Tracy, es, que como artista que vive fuera de la ley al fin, le pide a la ley representación, pero no la haya.

Tracy me explico sus pensamientos sobre el doble sentido.

NB: De que se trata el arte para ti, Tracy 168?168: Amor es el arte. El mundo entero se basa en miedo. El miedo vende productos. Tenemos miedo de vernos diferente y tenemos miedo de la gente que no tienen la misma apariencia que nosotros. Tenemos miedo de la gente de otros colores. El arte que hice rompió barreras. He visto mucha mierda que sale de grupitos. Por mi, algunas barras Irlandesas que no aceptaban gente negra están mezcladas ahora. No solo con negros: son Árabes, con negros, con Irlandeses. Y ahora me dicen, "Largarte", es un mundo loco.

NB: Cuales son las cosas que tu diría están fuera de limite, hasta para los graffiteros, algunas de las cosas que tu consideras no ser aceptable?

168: Follando a tus hijos no esta bien. "Homeland Security". Todo está monitoreado y todo el mundo está vigilado, y dicen que es para nuestra protección. Eso no es para nuestra protección; nos están velando para que

no los botemos de poder. Es vigilancia.

NB: Cuando estas escribiendo, estas pensando en estas cosas?

168: Vivo lo que hago. A veces vivo en mi carro y hago mi arte en mi carro también. Mi carro es la jodienda más loca en la tierra. Atrás tengo mi caballete. Pongo mis latas de aerosol en la capota. To' el mundo se flegea mirando esta vaina. Dibujo encima del guía. Las ideas me vienen cuando manejo. Estoy guiando por la ciudad y mientras manejo, recojo todo tipo de energías de toda la ciudad. Voy a la playa de Brighton y me llegan todas estas imágenes y maquinaria y vaina Rusa. Entonces, voy a la calle 136 y Ámsterdam y de un cantazo, estoy dibujando todo rojo desde la energía Dominicana por allá. Y de momento, estoy en Woodlawn donde hay un chorro de irlandeses y estoy haciendo duendes y vaina.

NB: Que clase de carro es?

168: Un carro espanta-culo y cuando ese se suicida consigo otro espanta-pájaro. Era de un metal sólido. Siempre consigo un Oldsmobile, una berlina cuadra'. He manejado sin ventanas, ni frenos. Tenia solo el freno de emergencia pa' parar el jodio carro. En una, una goma se salio cuando estaba en la pista. Se callo, dios tres brinco y se metió en el río Hudson.

NB: Y la ley? No te han agarrado?

168: Una vez la policia me agarro en el puente de la 59. Cuando estoy a punto de volverme loco, poco me importa y estaba a ese punto ese día, no me importaba un carajo lo que me pasaría. La jara me para porque no tengo el cinturón puesto, pero cuando se viro pa' mirarme la placa, vio que estaban dibujadas. Las hice en Kinko's. Me arranco las placas y le dije "Cabron. No me toques mi arte. Tocaste mis jodios dibujos y los rompiste!" Se quedo pasmao', "Tu los hiciste?" Y le dije "Si." Y dice "Puedes ser arrestado." No hizo na'. Se creía que le iba mentir, pero cuando le di con la verdad, se vació.

NB: Como te dejan cometer estos crímenes groseros?

168: Crímenes groseros? Bombardeo naciones? Esos es un crimen grosero. Déjame hacerte una pregunta, cual

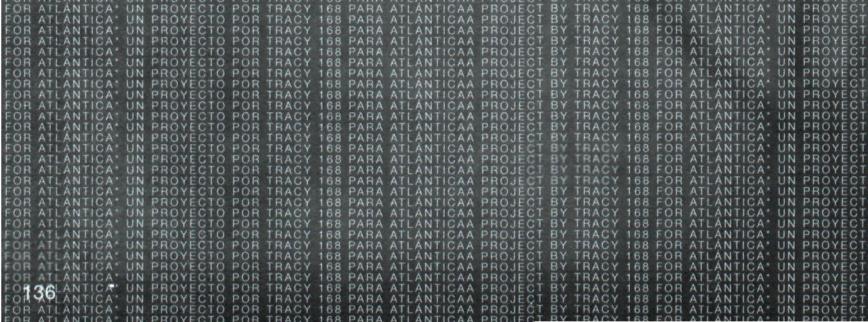
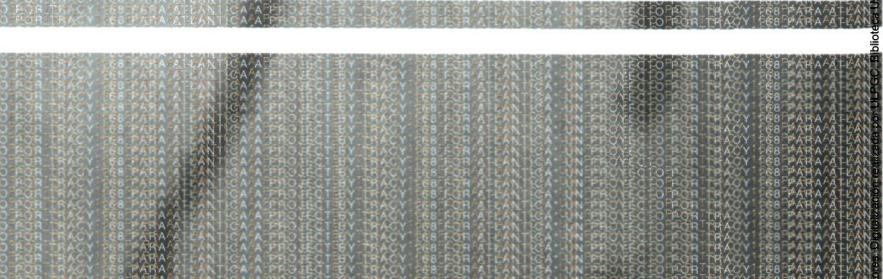
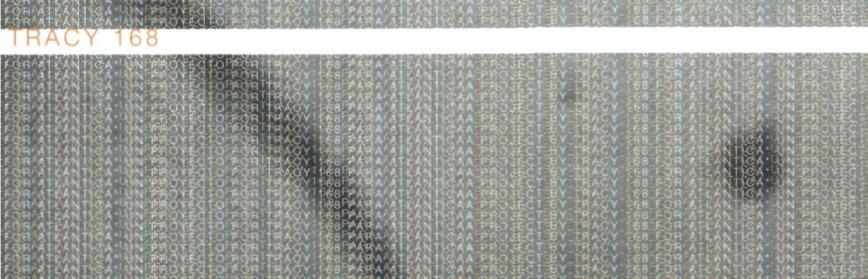
es tu nacionalidad, de donde vienes?

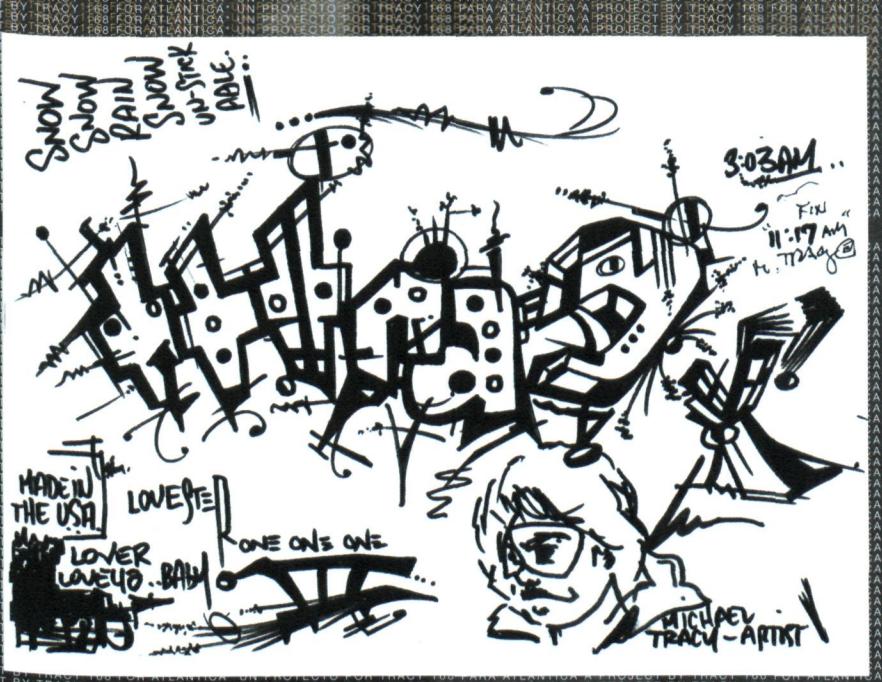
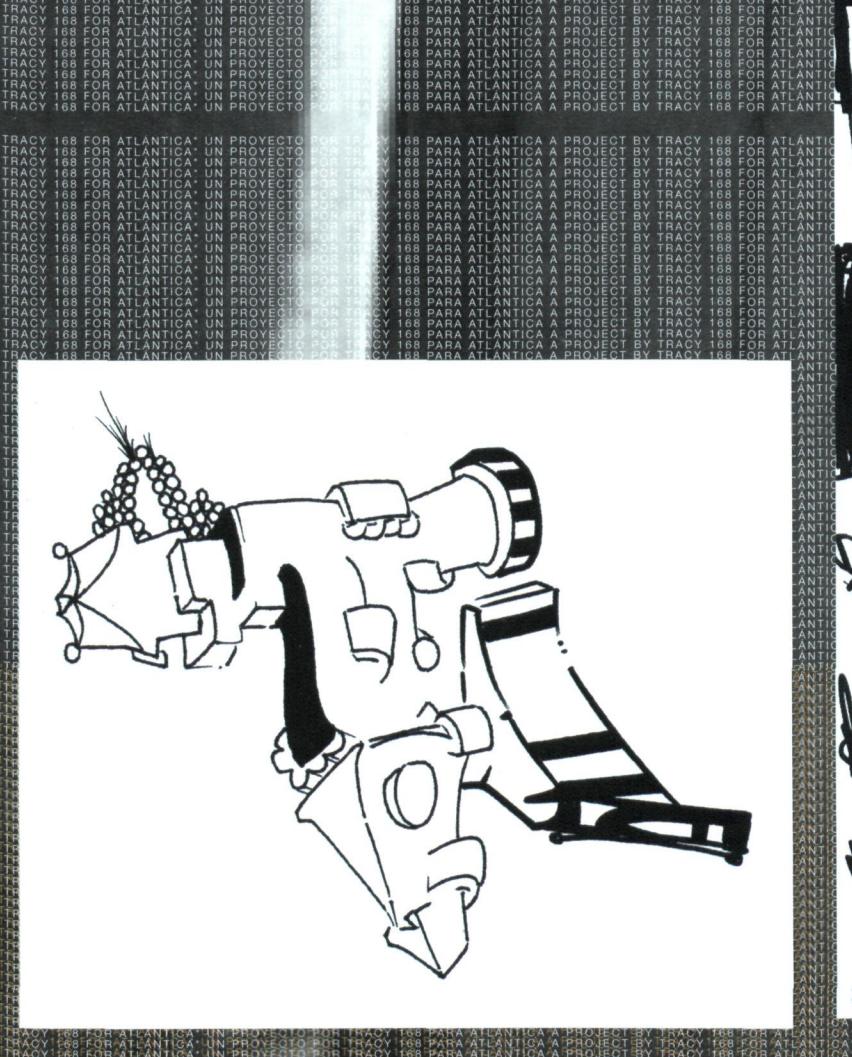
NB: Soy Canadiense. Pensabas que yo no era Americano?

168: Bueno, América es Canadá ahora. Lo pensé bien y me descojono. To' los ricos se fueron pa' Canadá y entonces Nueva York se convirtió en una letrina halta de obreros. Te digo lo que quiero decir: en los pasillos, cuando niño, vendía ese periódico en español El Diario para hacerme un par de dólares. Ese periódico lo imprimen en Canadá ahora. El Diario! Canadá, pa' allí corrieron to' los millonarios.

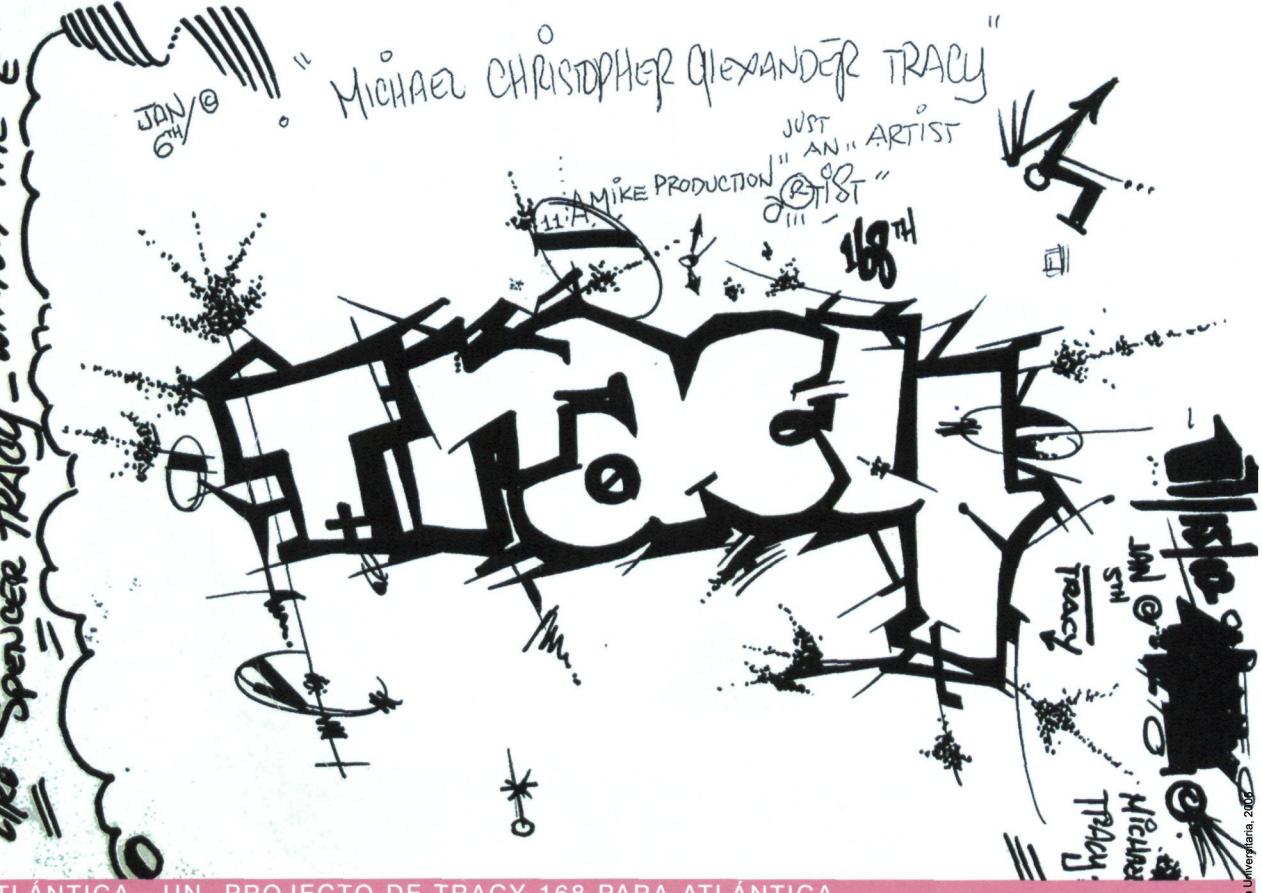
NB: Que paso con todo ese asunto de Wild Style?

168: Hace mucho tiempo empecé una cultura. Empecé una cosa llamada Wild Style. Se me acercaron para usar mi nombre. Poco a poco, le dijeron a la gente otra cosa. Lo cojieron y dicen que es para el bien de mucha gente pero no están correcto con el pueblo.





A PROJECT BY TRACY 168 FOR ATLANTICA UN PROYECTO DE TRACY 168 PARA ATLANTICA



ATLÁNTICA UN PROYECTO DE TRACY 168 PARA ATLÁNTICO

A black and white photograph of a graffiti wall. The central focus is a large, dark heart containing the word "BABY". Above the heart, there is a stylized drawing of a face with a wide-open mouth. To the left of the heart, a speech bubble contains the lyrics: "... A LOVE SO FREE, WILL... NEVER FLY AWAY - (ALWAYS IN MY HEART...)". To the right of the heart, there is another speech bubble with the date "5/03" at the top, followed by the name "MICHAEL TRACY" and the quote "12 ZOOH IT'S LIKE 10 THOUSANDS SPOONS... WHEN ALL YE NEED IS A KNIFE". The background is filled with abstract shapes, lines, and other graffiti elements.

The image shows a complex, abstract drawing in blue and black ink on a white background. The style is gestural and energetic, with many overlapping lines and circular forms. A prominent signature 'M. M. TRACY' is visible in the lower right quadrant. At the very bottom, a red horizontal band contains text in both Spanish and English, which appears to be a title or description of the artwork.

FOR NYPD'S HERO'S THANKX"

= TRACY

MUCH RESPECT

FOR THE
OFFICERS WHO
GO OUT OF THERE
WAM.. TO RISK THEY
LIFE TO HELP
OTHERS..

"GOD BLESS"
Y.S'S .. THANKX"

MUCH RESPECT
TO YOU ...
AND YOURS

TRUE,
HERO'S
FOR THE
PEOPLE.
NYPD.

— PEACE,

TRACY

ARTIST — RM

= MICHAEL TRACY