

Street and graffiti art

Street and Graffiti art can be controversial. But it can also be a medium for voices of social change, protest, or expressions of community desire. What, how, and where are examples of graffiti as a positive force in communities?

Street and graffiti Art have remained a very raw form of expressive Fine Art, which have shunned all class barriers and have emerged as a separate thread of work. Graffiti is derived from the Italian root meaning, "**scratched out.**" Technically, to narrow down its scope would be to define it as a surface art on the surfaces it is "not meant" to be displayed. For example, you would not define a ramshackle wall, or a car, or a window as a canvas to any artist worth his/her salt. For Graffiti Artists however, that would be a perfectly normal platform to present their body of work.

In many cities, graffiti is associated with decay, with communities out of control, and so it is outlawed. In some cities, it is legal, within limits, and valued as a form of social expression. "**Street art**", graffiti's more formal cousin, which is often commissioned and sanctioned, has a firmer place in communities, but can still be an important form of "**outsider**" expression.

Street and Graffiti Art so boldly lie on the border of **vandalism** and art that it is difficult to eulogize them without feeling a bit like singing Paeans to LSD or Morphine. However Graffiti and Street Art, even though pursued doggedly by law and order have steadily metamorphosed into an important mouthpiece of rebel expression. Simply put, **Graffiti and Street Arts** are art pieces by artists with no inclination or the wherewithal to resort to the conventional forms of display, who though are bubbling with a strong urge to express themselves.

Graffiti art can be categorised in three common forms: **Tags, Pieces** and **Labels**. All of us have walked down a street and seen various walls covered with graffiti, but can we differentiate one item of graffiti from another? The most common and the easiest to recognise is a tag.

A tag is usually a simple one-coloured design (though it can be more complex). Put simply, it is a depiction of a writer or artist's nickname or message, and its aim is to send a message to other writers.

A piece or masterpiece is a more complex form of graffiti art where a writer usually starts with some kind of pre-conceived plan or sketch. A piece tends to take graffiti art more in the direction of character art, which has a big fanbase. People will often be able to distinguish a writer's work by their character designs alone.

A label is when a writer's tag or character design is printed on posters or stickers. Labels can be found in most cities around the world. This can be a great way for all kinds of artists to promote their art far and wide; usually tags are quite hard to see and they are only going to draw the attention of people interested in street art. You often see labels plastered on the back of street signs, lampposts, and anywhere with a smooth surface that can have something stuck to it.

The profiles of **Graffiti and Street Art** closely follow an underground, anti-law route because of the angst they carry. They are art forms, usually generated in ghettos and tough neighborhoods, where there are few rules and therefore explosive creativity. **Graffiti Artists** are people, seething inside to stamp their territory, on walls, buildings, bridges, and yeah toilets too.

Street and Graffiti Art took a long time to come out of the ghettos, and be recognized as art. Although they are omnipresent phenomena, **Graffiti and Street Art** came onto the forefront only towards the development of the Hippie Culture in 70's. This was a time when people broke out of conditioning to see **Graffiti & Street Art** as art. The first opening of Graffiti was at Rome by Fab5 Freddy and soon other artists flooded the New York, London, and Paris art scenes.

Graffiti Artists are most often nameless persons who treat art as a hit and run (often from the police and anti-graffiti squads). The process of claiming a patch of property (a wall, a car, a piece of tin, rooftops, and so on) is called "**tagging**" and it is a cross between turf war and creativity. Often gang wars have erupted on claims to turf. This also is where **Graffiti and Street Art** connect with rap as an underground culture which is always at odds with the civilized society. However, this edginess is what has given this art form a spontaneity that "designer" arts lack. The nervous energy is almost visible in the stark graphics and bold designs that spring out from the most unlikely of spaces. It is difficult not to appreciate this "**vandalism**" art form despite the gore and anger it carries.

Apart from the aesthetics of art, this art form is a visual documentation of grassroots societies, especially in western and Japanese sub cultures. Since **Graffiti and Street Art** are more a form of youth rebel art, the message that they seek to convey is at once in your face and subtle. There are subtexts that can be read from these Graffiti and Street Arts. For example, Graffiti Arts in Roman times is an important source of the study of society at that time (there is a Graffiti Art on the crucifixion of Jesus found in ancient Roman ruins).

Street and Graffiti art is the new cool, with hundreds of companies in the last few years jumping on the street art bandwagon. Graffiti is no longer just a shunned art form, yet it still manages to stay true to its origins by remaining accessible to the younger generation. Graffiti it seems is here to stay.