

The Commercialization of Graffiti: How does this Effect Local Communities?

by

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Introduction

When one thinks of “Graffiti”, what image typically pops into their head? For some, this image may look like a Keith Haring, “Crack is Wack” mural, located on the waterfront in Harlem, New York City. For others, it may look like young adults in black hoodies, running through the streets in Brooklyn or Philadelphia, quickly scribbling their tags on walls. Some individuals may not have any real image at all. They may think of the city’s workers who clean up the “mess” that is left from the acrylic paint, or a teenager in handcuffs for getting “caught in the act”. Regardless of the association that you think of when presented with this topic, this art form has had a significant impact on society.

When you’re walking down most city streets, it is highly likely that you will see some form of graffiti. Ranging from stickers to full-blown aerosol paint markings, street art is bound to catch your eye. Used as a form of expression for some, sometimes the attention to detail is mind-blowing—making it a true form of art. For others, this “medium” is used to “mark your territory”—making it a warning sign, of sorts. Regardless of the reason behind the action, it creates a look unlike any other, on the streets.

Seeing as how graffiti can be a vast, and unknown territory to some, it is important to decipher through some of the “lingo” that is used when describing this topic. According to the city of Wheat Ridge, Colorado’s police department, here are the definitions for commonly used terms in the “field” of graffiti:

- Bomb, to – To cover in graffiti. Most often to cover with tags (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Cans – Spray-paint cans (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Caps – Fat or skinny. The nozzle of the can that creates a thick or thin line of paint (City of Wheat Ridge).

- Crew – A loosely organized group of writers who also tag the crew initials along with their name (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Graff- Shortened term for graffiti (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Krylon – A brand of spray paint easily recognized by the distinctive five-spot logo. Most favored by writers because of its large color selection and cheap price (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Piece – A full color masterpiece done over a significant amount of time with a great deal of planning and usually more than one writer (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Stickers – A form of tagging, most commonly saying “Hello, my name is.” Can be anything from computer-generated, clear, generic blank stickers with the writer’s name on them to elaborate stickers with little pieces and characters (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Tag – Stylized signature done quickly, in many areas, and on many surfaces. The most basic form of graffiti a writer’s signature with marker or spray paint. It is the writer’s logo. His or her stylized personal signature (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Tagger – As opposed to writer, this term is usually used to refer to those who only do tags and throw-ups and who never piece (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Throw Up – An outline of a name or a few letters usually outlines in one color and roughly filled in with another (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Toy – An inexperienced or incompetent writer (City of Wheat Ridge).
- Wildstyle – A complicated construction of interlocking letters. A difficult style that consists of lots of arrows and connections. Wildstyle is considered one of the hardest styles to master and pieces done in wildstyle are often completely undecipherable to non-writers (City of Wheat Ridge).

Starting in the 1960's, America paved the way for graffiti. Since then, graffiti, also sometimes known as street art, has been introduced to many different countries—in big ways. Europe has truly taken this great art form and ran with it. Artists such as Banksy, Above, Mentalgassi, and Vhils, have taken street art to the next level. Creating works of art that span the size of factory and house exteriors—these artists are not afraid of standing out. Even as this art form has traveled across water and land, the desire to still be noticed and appreciated (or sometimes critiqued), has still reigned true.

Another factor that traveled wherever graffiti did, was the local law enforcement's response to this form of art. Since most of the time this work is executed on someone else's property or on public property, that brings about legal issues. It is usually highly unlikely that the artist is carrying out these activities on property of their own. This "boundary crossing", can lead to an outcry from the local population, who is affected by these acts—thus leading to more of an involvement with law enforcement. As the years have gone by, the punishments for graffiti have gotten to be somewhat extreme, and many countries have introduced education to students and parents about the negatives of this kind of activity.

It is a stark contrast when companies use graffiti in their ads, when sometimes, the artists that have work in the photos, have been incarcerated or fined for their stamp on the world. Although these artists' work was illegal, does it give corporations the right to use another artists' work to sell their product? Especially, when they have been wronged for committing the crime? Although there are times when an artist is commissioned for their work with a brand, what about the times where the culture and aesthetic itself has been taken, for pure exploitation to receive more money? At that point, do the trail blazers of this sub-culture deserve credit, or is it just another fad that will work only in the best interest of those profiting?

As all of these separate sectors of this paper are vital to its success, it is important to combine them. To fully understand both the culture, and the art form itself, you must learn the history and the shift in the culture. The legal consequences as well as the social norms have consistently changed throughout the years, thus changing the landscape of the entire sub-culture.

This paper discusses many different news media outlets, companies, and organizations that have a common focus—street art.

The History of Graffiti

Starting in the early 1960's, Philadelphia was the home to the very beginnings of graffiti. Spray Planet, Spray Planet- One of the largest and most trusted, online graffiti retailers, who also post blog posts about graffiti news, describes Darryl "Cornbread" McCray was in Philadelphia's Youth Department Center, and decided to write his nickname on the basement wall. This one-time event ended up being a repeat "offense", that McCray ended up carrying back onto the streets after he was let out (Spray Planet). McCray made a choice after that first tag, that he would put down the drugs and weapons, to devote his life to tagging—to be remembered. Although he eventually got busted for tagging an elephant inside of the Philadelphia Zoo, he will forever remain one of the original artists of graffiti (Spray Planet).

New York City followed this trend shortly thereafter in the late 1960's. Famous for painted train cars, New York City actually started on the same wave as Philadelphia—with tags on walls. Camille Lannert, a graduate of Bellarmine University, who's Undergraduate Research paper, "The Perpetuation of Graffiti Art Subculture," was one of the first written about street art in recent years. In her paper, "The Perpetuation of Graffiti Art Subculture" stated, that it was a part of the New York City "custom" to tag your name or nickname, and then your street number (Lannert). This helped to make your mark and let the local crews and other painters, to let them

know where you hail from. Not to be confused with standard gang tags of the time, these new tags were usually out of pure enjoyment or almost a “performance” of sorts. The escapism that one may feel when partaking in tagging, is like engaging in a “make-believe” scenario with your alter ego. The issue that artists who used this method would later find out is, when you place your name and your street number on public or private property illegally, it is quite easy to find you (Lannert).

Spray Planet talks a lot about the beginning of New York City’s graffiti scene in their article titled, “A History of Graffiti- The 60’s and 70’s”. During the later 1960’s in New York, “Taki” out of Washington Heights (Upper Manhattan) was “The King” of graffiti. He was “obsessed” with tagging (Spray Planet). Complex, a website catering to the ages of 15-30 (usually male), that features articles on style, lifestyle, art, music, pop culture, and sports. Catering to a very “trendy” audience, mentioned Taki as one of New York City’s most famous graffiti writers and had this to say about his career, “the first to turn [tagging] into a 24 hour a day job,” (Complex). He not only tagged street walls and hydrants, but also subway cars—so in a way, him as well as countless others, helped pave the way for major subway car tags that appeared later down the road. In the early 1970’s, artists began to venture onto bigger and better escapades in art (Spray Planet). This meant the painting of the outside of the MTA subways cars in the New York Metropolitan area. Throughout the Bronx, and into Queens and Brooklyn these trains travelled—talk about a good way to get your name (more like tag) around town! Before the outsides were touched, the insides of these train cars were covered in tags. Many photos have surfaced of everyday commuters and police officers at their post, standing among the etched walls of the train cars. The draw of the subway cars came from many artists’ desire to be “famous”. As train painting gained attraction (and publicity), politics soon got involved. Starting

in the mid 70's, the government in New York began fighting back at the train painting, by putting a "graffiti-resistant paint" on the cars (Spray Planet). As an article that Milrose Consultants, a consultant agency regarding real estate and construction (Through their article there was a fine appreciation for graffiti, but also the examples of how it effects their customers.) disclosed, "In 1983, the MTA painted 25% of the cars," with this paint. The crackdown actually helped the local artists come together (Milrose Consultants). As an article by Spray Planet describes, "Using subway system maps and shared intelligence, they warned each other about which spots were safe and which were too hot, ". With community, comes beauty which is quite noticeable through the illustrious pieces that were made by the car painting artists of this time period (Spray Planet).



MIDG Car Passing Through, Bronx, 1982

Archival pigment print, printed 2017

30 x 40 in

Gallery, Steven Kasher. "Martha Cooper." *Steven Kasher Gallery*,
www.stevenkasher.com/artists/martha-cooper?view=slider#5.



Cops on subway, 1981

Archival pigment print, printed 2017

20 x 30 in

Gallery, Steven Kasher. "Martha Cooper." *Steven Kasher Gallery*,
www.stevenkasher.com/artists/martha-cooper?view=slider#5.

Although this signature type of graffiti began in New York, Europe and other countries in the West soon began to participate. David Novak in his publication "HISTORICAL DISSEMINATION OF GRAFFITI ART", wrote "In 1987, the publication *Spraycan Art*, a book written by Henry Chalfant and James Prigoff in 1987 detailing the initial spread of graffiti, reported that trains were painted in the cities of Vienna, Düsseldorf, Munich, Copenhagen, Paris, London and Sydney," (Novak). Even though these countries caught on upwards of ten years after New York City, they came at this new form of graffiti with the same amount of passion. Novak also states, "This influenced the overall direction of the global graffiti art culture and anchored this urban subcultural activity on the edge between vandalism and art...Graffiti art works created on the exterior sides of trains are regarded, by Western graffiti artists especially, as an authentic continuation of the New York type of graffiti art from the 1970s;" (Novak). It is important to

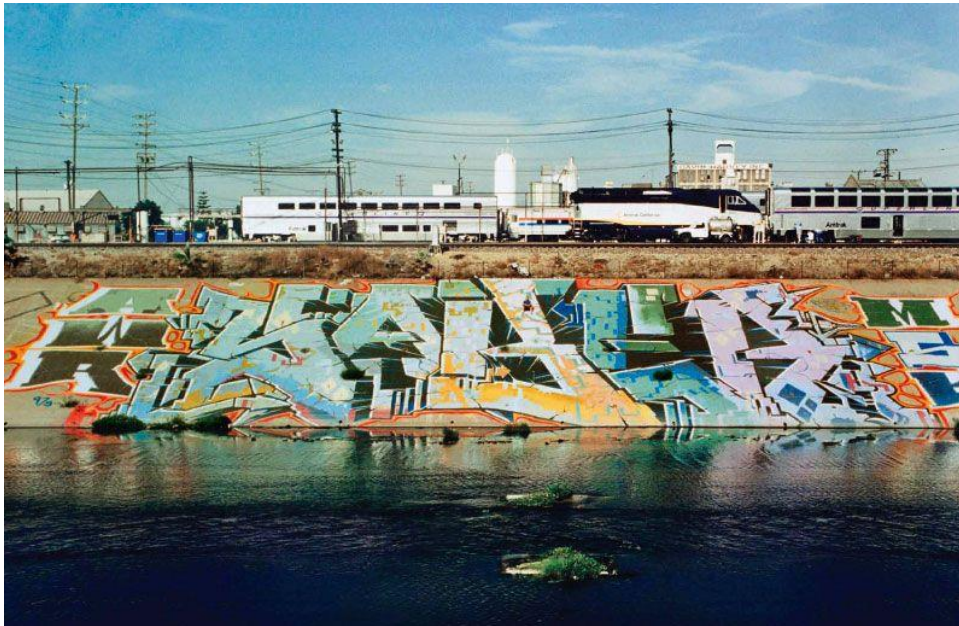
note this as New York City technically engaged in graffiti after Philadelphia, but still receive an immense amount of credit for starting the art form.

With graffiti getting more popular as the years went on, and rap rising in the early 1970's in The Bronx, it seemed natural for the two to go hand-in-hand, says David Dye of NPR, a non-profit media organization that explores news at a local, national and global level, in his World Café article in 2007. In fact, most artists who participated in one of these sub-cultures, usually went on to at least appreciate the other—that is if they didn't completely dive head-first into participating in both graffiti and rap / hip-hop (or even just music in the general sense) (Dye). For example, Basquiat who was a famous painter and graffiti artist, was involved in film and music before he overdosed. It seems that the arts tend to melt together, thus turning visual artists into musicians and vice-versa. As both of these sub-cultures came into the limelight, the interest in both graffiti and rap skyrocketed into the mainstream. There were several films made about the two cultures—two of the most well-received being, “Wild Style”, and “Style Wars”. Both of these films focused on New York City and these sub-cultures in the 1980's (Dye).

History of West Coast Graffiti in the United States

As graffiti picked up on the East Coast throughout the 1970's to the 1990's, the West Coast was experimenting in its own way. According to a *Huffington Post*, an American online news source, article written by Roque Planas, it seems that similarly, to New York City, graffiti started appearing in Los Angeles in the late 1960's, however, most of the executers of this new art form were Chicanos (Planas). Chicanos are described as people of Mexican origin, who live in the United States. In a paper titled, “Urban Graffiti on the City Landscape”, written by Alex Alonso of the University of Southern California, it is described that since the Chicanos were in

very segregated locations, their tags didn't pose a threat to the rest of the Los Angeles city, since they were so disconnected (Alonso). According to SprayPlanet.com, even though Los Angeles writers started at about the same time as New York writers, the scene didn't really take off in L.A. until the late 1980's into the 1990's (Spray Planet). The same way that New York City writers had the subway cars as their staple area to tag, Los Angeles writers took to the more widely distributed bus system, the L.A. river, or even the wide arrange of concrete walls that make up their city (Spray Planet). As the bus routes got more and more dangerous due to armed writers attempting felonies, and more police monitoring of the buses, more and more people flocked to the L.A. River (Spray Planet). At a whopping 51 miles long, this was more than enough space for writers to express themselves—without much police interference (Spray Planet).



Saber. "SABER LA RIVER Giclee." *SABER*, shop.saberone.com/products/saber-la-river-special-release.



Redson, Erich. "Smear, MTA Crew, More Arrested ~ Los Angeles ~ L.A. TACO." *L.A. TACO*, 28 Jan. 2009, www.lataco.com/smear-mta-crew-more-arrested-los-angeles/.

A large part of the graffiti culture in Los Angeles, was the Latin-Influenced Graffiti Style. According to Sprayplanet.com, this style was a blend of pop-culture, fine art, European typography, and Japanese calligraphy. This style was created by artist, CHAZ, starting as early as the 1970's (Spray Planet). According to the gallery, Regime Contemporary, CHAZ (also known by his full name Chaz Bojorquez) started engaging in graffiti in the late 1960's, but takes a lot of influence from the 1940's cholo style of street art and art in itself. Blending this style, with the common gang-influenced style that was commonly found in Los Angeles—he created work unlike any other.



Contemporary, Regime. “Artist - Chaz Bojorquez.” *Regime Contemporary @ The Mayfair Hotel LA*, regimecontemporary.com/artist-chaz-bojorquez.

However, gang writers in Los Angeles did cause huge issues for the non-affiliated writers in the area (Spray Planet). According to James S. McMurray in his paper titled, “A Planned Response to Juvenile Graffiti Vandalism”, most (if not all) gangs, use graffiti to “mark their territory” so to speak (McMurray). The issue with this is the obvious fact that gangs are claiming territory that really isn’t there’s, but on top of that, (although it is usually easy to tell the difference between gang graffiti versus non-threatening graffiti) it makes tagging more dangerous for non-affiliated artists, who choose to “make their mark” in the “wrong spot” (according to the land claim of the gangs in the area) (McMurray).

Graffiti in Films

Style Wars, a film directed by Tony Silver and produced by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver, features many different types of “characters” from the passerby, the New York City Police Department and Min One, Dez, Iz and Seen—all artists in New York in the 80’s, when

this was filmed. NPR said in an article that, the way in which this film impacted in the local communities alone, is vital to the street art and hip-hop community. Especially, for the 1980's, to have a film about graffiti and hip-hop be broadcasted on television, was a way to see that this "sub-culture" was really impactful on society. The film showed many different parts of New York City, featuring interviews with local artists, as well as critics such as city officials and passerbys. The mix of raw footage of graffiti being "shipped across the city" via train car, showed just how this culture was transferred to other boroughs. The interviews with younger artists were a vital part to this film. This is due to the fact that far too many films focus only on "famous" artists, and tend to "neglect" the newer artists, of whom haven't yet made a name for themselves. These interviews helped to show the joy and passion that these newer "artists" felt towards the act of leaving their name across all five boroughs (Barco 2003).

Released in 1983, this film features New York's hip-hop scene, along with its fellow counterpart—graffiti. This film was influenced by one of New York's premier writers at the time, "LEE"—aka Lee Quinones, and the effect that him and a crew called Fab 5 on the graffiti style of "wild style". Wild Style according to Miss Rosen in an article on HuckMag.com, "was the name for the colorful, hyper-stylised letterforms dominating graffiti that most people could not read," (Rosen). This film was a major win for both the graffiti community and the hip-hop community in New York City at the time and for years to come. The way in which this film was a major win for graffiti, was that it was the first time (other than Style Wars, which was a documentary) that graffiti was being shown in a non-negative light in the media. This film showed graffiti in a way of art, rather than the usual media reports of how it was a form of destruction. This was a mainstream form of media that was fictional, that featured graffiti as one of the main hobbies being shown in the film.

In the 2020 film, “Word on the Street”, directed by Cindy Ferrer and Nick Sansone, current and trailblazer writers are interviewed. Many of whom are dressed in a way that their face is hidden, and their voice altered explain their views on different topics that have to do with graffiti. Here are some of the quotes from the film:

- Graffiti writer AJES states, “...if you’re not consistent about graffiti, nobody cares about you and if you are consistent you end up getting arrested,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti writer DIVA states, “I think it’s a lot more accepted you see it in commercials and advertising it’s not as underground as it was where originally it was underground now it’s like everyone’s doing it,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti writer Chris RWK states, “It’s amazing to see how it was almost like not thought of then it was like a major crime to some people to now being accepted into advertising it’s crazy to see that whole progression,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti artist CLAW states, “It’s very difficult to paint now than it was 15 years ago there’s cameras everywhere there’s cellphone cameras it’s incredibly dangerous to paint now... That has changed the whole landscape of graffiti,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti writer MUTZ states, “When I was in my twenties there would be one graffiti show every few months... now there are 10 graffiti shows a week it really grew the gallery scene grew a lot and they became real street art and graffiti friendly,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti artist MERK states, “That street are shit I don’t even know what that is I don’t even know what it is... What is that? Do they use pastels or do they use spray paint? They use spray paint and shit?” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).

- Graffiti writer SILON states, “Like when did it become street art? When did it go from graffiti to street art? Because I always thought that people doing pieces people doing murals burners and stuff like that on the train that’s art and that’s out in the streets but it wasn’t street art it was graffiti,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti writer DSR states, “Seeing graffiti up is street art but it’s a way for them to decriminalize it make it a little more accepted... some people put actual physical art in the street maybe that’s street art but for the most part I just think it’s just a manufactured name just to make acceptance for it and let everybody under the sun start doing it,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).
- Graffiti writer BRAT states, “I think there is a really big different but I think now that it’s become so commercialized that people are not seeing the difference anymore,” (Sansone, Ferrer 2020).

These quotes show the many different sides of the actual faces of graffiti, rather than the viewpoints that are published in the media. Sitting down and having conversations with these artists allows the world to see how the actual creators of the medium feel about different topics that can be controversial.

Graffiti in Other Countries

Even though graffiti started in America, this art form has carried to many far-away places. According to David Novak in his journal titled, “HISTORICAL DISSEMINATION OF GRAFFITI”, in the 1980’s, as graffiti started traveling around the United States, it also went across the ocean to Western Europe, and Oceania (Novak). Also, according to Novak, there were three main ways that people found out about this art form around the world—those being: gallery

exhibitions, cultural media, and interpersonal contact (Novak). As the World Wide Web was created, this also helped spread the word of this art form. According to *The New York Times*, a New York based newspaper, that ranges in covering everything from sports to the arts, “Style Wars”, and countless other films and books were also shown and sold all over the world—thus bringing this sub-culture (and lifestyle) around the world, at a seemingly quick pace.

According to an article written by Andreas Tzortzis for, *The New York Times*, one major city that has truly “fallen-in-love” with graffiti is, Berlin. The “love affair” with Berlin and graffiti, first started majorly at the Berlin Wall, on the West-Facing Side (Tzortzis). This interest and enjoyment in this art form, stayed long after the wall came crumbling down. With the wall coming down, there were even more newly fresh walls for the now artists of Berlin to “leave their mark” on (Tzortzis). Tzortzis explains, like New York, the graffiti situation eventually got “out of control”, so Berlin implemented their own graffiti special task force in the early 1990’s (Tzortzis). However, Berlin’s anti-graffiti task force was no-where close to being as anal about the art form as compared to New York (Tzortzis). In current time, the atmosphere of graffiti in Berlin has remained about the same, if not more! According to an article written by Hannah Ellis-Petersen for The Guardian, a British news and media website, stores line some neighborhoods promoting the lifestyle, and in 2017 a museum titled, “Urban Nation” opened in Berlin to foster an environment for the archival of street art and graffiti (Ellis-Petersen).



Hein, Tobias. “URBAN NATION MUSEUM.” *Graft*, graftlab.com/portfolio_page/urban-nation-museum/.

The Middle East has also grown to love graffiti and Street Art. According to a journal on the “HISTORICAL DISSEMINATION OF GRAFFITI” written by David Novak, once word (or film/book) had spread—the true artistry began. One of the most vital pieces of text for The Middle East (Turkey in specifics), was “*GRAFFTURK: Turkish graffiti magazine*”, which documented the early examples of graffiti in Turkey (around the 1990’s) (Novak). According to Kait Williamson in a blog post on, Brewminate, an online entity/blog that opens the dialogue between historians and the “non-expert” on current and past issues around the world, the main difference between the graffiti and street art in The Middle East versus Europe and the United States, was the implementation of Arabic Script and Arabic Calligraphy into their works and tags (Williamson). Like the other countries participating in this kind of art, artists in The Middle East, also had a strong emphasis on political themes that had been taking place (Williamson). According to artist El Seed, this type of graffiti, is locally referred to as “Calligraffiti”—meaning that this type of writing, “remixes the traditional principles of the Arabic script from years past

with the post-modern perspective of nostalgia and visibility of documented works within society,” (Williamson). El Seed is an artist who uses Arabic calligraphy with his own style to shares messages through his art. He has work all over the world, thus reaching many different artists. (El Seed) In an interview written by Lucas Oakeley for Esquire Middle East, “calligraffiti” artist, Dia’a Allam—better known as “Na7t Designs”, helps to speak to the true beauty and artistry of this art form. In the article, Allam describes how he got into calligraffiti, “...I’ve always been passionate about Arabic calligraphy ever since I was a young boy. I hadn’t ever planned on doing it professionally. It first started in 2011... It’s just grown since then,” (Oakeley). The whole beauty of calligraffiti, is that these artists are taking something that they have been using for so long as a form of communication, and now they are implementing it into their art (Oakeley).

Graffiti transcends the environment, and can evoke emotions, from the born-and-bred local, to the “lowly” tourist. With the invention of the internet and the advancement of cellphones and other media, this has led to exposure, at a rampant pace, of these pieces. This transference of art to other societies, has helped to influence artists in other countries to “remix” these pieces to their own experiences and emotions.

Legal Issues Regarding Graffiti

Seeing as how graffiti is typically implemented onto properties that the artist doesn’t own, this makes this art form very illegal. The high-risk of the art form though, does not deter artists for executing their plans. Many cities have implemented graffiti “special forces”, which

are diffusions from their police force (usually). Since this type of artistry does damage public and private property, some inhabitants of these cities, view these forces as necessary. In a paper by, Camille Lannert, a graduate of Bellarmine University, who's Undergraduate Research paper, "The Perpetuation of Graffiti Art Subculture," was one of the first written about street art in recent years, it is said that, "...Graffiti art usually requires supportive criminality that assists the artist in painting. The most lucrative and convenient crimes include theft and drug trafficking... By stealing what they need or earning money from trafficking drugs to purchase what they need... The deviant lifestyles graffiti artists lead help perpetuate and support their art," (Lannert).

The New York Police Department (NYPD) has spent years trying to "abolish" graffiti in New York. According to Spray Planet, starting as far back as the mid 1970's, New York's mayors at the time, John Lindsay and Edward Koch, made a "vow" to crack down on graffiti (Spray Planet). According to author and playwright Claudia Barnett, an English professor at Middle Tennessee State University, in her book "The Death of Graffiti: Postmodernism and the New York City Subway", it seemed to be that Lindsay and Koch's major point against graffiti, was how it "...depressed people terribly... it truly hurt people's moods" (Barnett). Lindsay said this in response to how some individuals reacted when new cars at the time would be suddenly covered in paint (Barnett). In an article written by Constance L. Hays in 1989 for *The New York Times*, the last of the train cars that were not "graffiti-proof", were retired (Hays). Switching from the white paint (which only 25% of the trains were actually painted with), the Transit Authority decided to switch to completely crimson (Hays). As the New York Times states, this was after "About 1,000 people were hired to clean the graffiti...The cleaners are included in a \$52 million annual budget for cleaning cars... To thwart graffiti painters, the program, known as

the Clean Car Program, assigned transit officers disguised as cleaners on the cars,” (Hays). As the new cars were introduced, the graffiti was still around in the stations and on some train cars—but not nearly at the same rampant amount that was taking place in the mid 70’s (Hays). The streets however, were still running rampant with graffiti (Hays).

Although many Mayors in New York City took efforts to lesser the amount of graffiti in the city, Mayor Rudy Giuliani was one of the first to put an actual fight up towards the street art form. According to Annette Hall in a blog post on cooperator.com, the online edition of The New York Cooperator newspaper-- this publication is for the co-op and condo community, featuring free articles, Giuliani used the well-known “Broken Window Theory” to help him build a strong case, and later to fight against graffiti with the introduction of his 1995 Anti-Graffiti Task Force (Hall 2005). The gist of the “Broken Window Theory” is that if there were any noticeable “defect(s)” on a city street or building, then the whole street (or “block”) would look dismal—thus eventually leading to despair and abandon. Giuliani equated graffiti to that “Broken Window Theory”, in that it creates a negative look on the streets of New York (Hall 2005).

Also, according to cooperator.com, although Rudy Giuliani created the Task Force in 1995, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg was the one who really pushed this Force into action in the city starting in July 2002 (Hall 2005). In the booklet that Mayor Bloomberg’s office published regarding their Task Force they describe it as, “The New York City Police Department in keeping with its pledge to aggressively pursue and apprehend quality of life offenders, is focusing on graffiti vandals. Precinct, Police Service Area and Transit District Commanding Officers will identify the Special Operations Lieutenant as the local Anti-Graffiti Coordinator who will oversee enforcement, clean-up, and education efforts regarding

graffiti,” (Bloomberg, Kelly 2005). As Colleen Long writes in 2008 on Police1.com, an online news source for law enforcement. Reports on training information, researches product, and interacts online, “The unit's 60 officers track and record aliases used in graffiti that are known as "tags." A searchable database has more than 8,000 entries, allowing the task force to track active writers and cross-reference their tags,” (Long 2008). This tracking of the artist’s tags, can more-easily help the Force to catch these “vandals” (Long 2008).

According to Spray Planet, starting in the 1980’s, at the same time that the bus system was being overrun by graffiti artists, the police force in Los Angeles started fighting back (Spray Planet). A common method was to have one whole bus filled with police (this term being a Ghost Bus), that way if an artist tried to “jack” a bus or vandalize it, they would be caught in the act (Spray Planet). According to USC Broadcast student Caleigh Wells’ blog, from 2001 to 2013 Los Angeles had a ban on public murals throughout the city (Wells). The city currently spends roughly \$7 Million dollars a year painting over graffiti (Wells). According the Caleigh Well’s research, in Los Angeles a graffiti writer who causes more than \$400 damage can receive up to \$10,000 in fines, up to a year in jail—or both (Wells).

Looking at New York’s efforts to “rid the city” of graffiti, they may seem hard to beat, but other countries are taking similar action. The Task Force idea for graffiti in specifics, is a common add-on for law enforcement groups around the world. Since graffiti takes place, usually illegally, on both public and private property, law enforcement’s interference is usually wanted or needed by the “victims” of these artistic “touches”.

In Australia, a state-wide Graffiti Taskforce has been set up, with the nickname of “Goodbye Graffiti”, which was set up by the Western Australia anti-graffiti task force. According to Goodbye Graffiti’s website, 15 state-wide representatives have reported that, a

lot of artists have been “found and caught” (Goodbye Graffiti). The website says that there have been over 5,275 charges given out since 2011, and over 1,952 “vandals” have been caught (Goodbye Graffiti). Their website allows citizens to snap a photo and submit the “case”, all in actually quite simple steps (Goodbye Graffiti). According to the “Graffiti Vandalism Act of 2016”, in Australia it is a fine ranging from \$2,000 AUD to \$24,000 AUD (roughly, \$1,513.98 USD to \$18,167.81 USD) and imprisonment if you commit the act of graffiti (Goodbye Graffiti).

The Commercialization of Street Art

Commercialization, as according to Cambridge Dictionary means, “the organization of something in a way intended to make a profit,”. The ways in which this term applies to the commercialization of street art and graffiti, is seen all around us. Ads in the form of murals, marketing and advertising schemes from clothing companies that use graffiti lettering or designs, products that have the brand’s logo in “graff” or graffiti lettering. The list goes on and on. Is this necessarily a bad thing? Most times it is not, unless companies use the lettering or specific design of an artist without their knowledge. According to AmericanBar.org, this was such the case in Hayuk v. Starbucks back in 2016 and later on with Mercedes Benz in 2019.

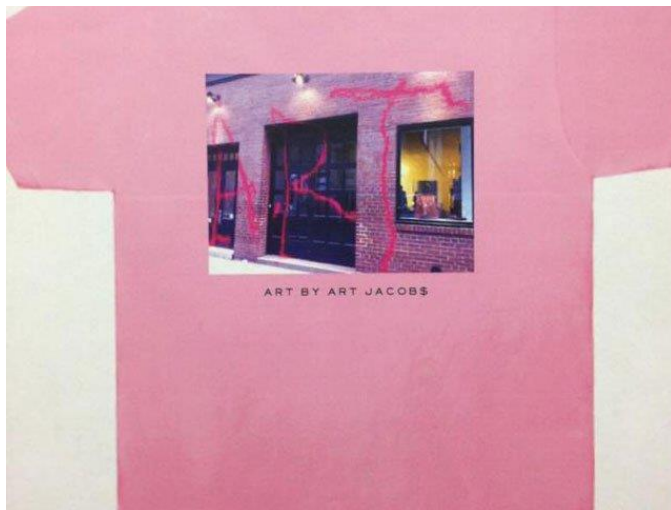
Maya Hayuk, a world-renowned street artist known mostly for her geometric works of art, and murals, was approached by Starbucks to help them release their new at the time, mini Frappuccino. According to an article written by Sarah Cascone for artnet News, the leading online resource for the international art market, selling buying and researching. In 2012, artnet launched a 24/hour global art newswire: artnet News, Hayuk declined, and Starbucks went about with their campaign. In the spring of 2016 when the campaign was shown to the

public, Hayuk (as well as many others) saw many similarities between the Starbucks campaign and Hayuk's work (Cascone 2015). According to Americanbar.org in an article titled, "Hayuk v. Starbucks Provides a Warning to Abstract Artists" written by Marcus R. Chatterton and Michael P. Taunton, the case of Hayuk v. Starbucks rules against Maya Hauk in 2016 (Chatterton, Taunton 2016). The case which was charging Starbucks and their partner 72andSunny for copyright infringement on Hayuk's works (Chatterton, Taunton 2016). AmericanBar.org stated, the ruling on the case, according to the Southern District of New York, was for Starbucks because abstract works (based on their style and/or ideas) are not protected, due to the fact that only certain expressions of an idea can be protected and not the idea itself (Chatterton, Taunton 2016). The similarities were not enough for the court to rule against Starbucks, as the concept that Starbucks used, would have to be exactly similar to the works of Hayuk (Chatterton, Taunton 2016).

Mercedes Benz also ran into some issues regarding street artists and their work in some advertisements. According to Ashley Cullins in an article on The Hollywood Reporter's website, in March 2019, four artists recognized their murals in the background of a series of ads that Mercedes Benz posted on their Instagram (Cullins 2019). The artists, James Lewis, Daniel Bombardier, Jeff Soto and Maxx Gramajo threatened Benz via letter (cease-and-desist) regarding the Instagram post (Cullins 2019). Benz then involved a Michigan judge to check the copyrights on the works, as well as sued the artists who created the murals (Cullins 2019). Also, according to The Hollywood Reporter, the judge then denied the artists motions to dismiss the complaints but that also argued that Benz couldn't sue, due to the fact that the murals hadn't yet registered copyrights in the works (Cullins 2019). The trial is currently undergoing moving forward for the next round of hearings (Cullins 2019).

Examples of Companies using Graffiti in Design

According to Garth Johnston on the website, *Gothamist* in 2012, the Marc Jacobs store located on Mercer Street in New York City was vandalized with the word “art” spray painted on the store front. Marc Jacob is a quirky fashion designer, known for his out of the box ideas and approaches to advertising and products offered (Johnston 2012). This crime was committed on a Tuesday, and a shirt with a silkscreen (a form of printing commonly used on apparel) with a photo of the crime was stocked and sold online for Marc Jacob customers to buy for \$689 (Johnston 2012). The *Gothamist* also speculated about whether or not Marc and the graffiti artist who took credit for this, Kidult, teamed together to create this media frenzy (Johnston 2012).



Johnston, Garth. “Marc Jacobs Turns Graffiti Into \$689 T-Shirt And Somebody Bought One.” *Gothamist*, Gothamist, 11 May 2012, gothamist.com/arts-entertainment/marc-jacobs-turns-graffiti-into-689-t-shirt-and-somebody-bought-one.

As it turns out, the skeptical writer from the *Gothamist* was indeed correct. Back in 2013, Jacobs recreated what he did in New York in 2011, now in Paris. According to AFP Relaxnews in an article on the website LUXUO.com, when approached online regarding the posts of the graffiti and the shirt he invited fans to come out to the Paris shop to see the opening night

installation of the new piece by Kidult, and then finished the statement with “We proudly support the arts,” (AFPRelaxnews 2013). He sold this shirt for the same price of \$686 (AFPRelaxnews 2013).



AFPRelaxnews. “Marc Jacobs Turns Graffiti into T-Shirt.” *LUXUO*, 22 July 2013, www.luxuo.com/style/fashion/marc-jacobs-graffiti-duel-kidults.html.

All over the world, graffiti has been used as a way of marketing as well. According to Greg Ritchie on Bloomberg.com, brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Swatch and Christian Louboutin have hired graffiti artists to make murals for their brands (Ritchie 2019). It is said in the articles that these brands, “...were previously put off by graffiti’s association with trespassing and criminal damage have realized the best street art can go viral on social media,” (Ritchie 2019). According to an article on Snobette.com, in July of 2019, a Lower East Side (New York) Louis Vuitton pop up shop, was tagged by an artist (Snobette 2019). Virgil Abloh, the current creative director at Louis Vuitton, hasn’t commented on it officially, but he did comment on a post of the tag saying, “I would have done the same,” (Snobette 2019). Also,

according to Sophie Ryan on Nzherald.co.nz, back in 2015, Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Prada were splashed with white paint, and tagged over on their exteriors (Ryan 2015).

Balenciaga, a well-known high fashion brand serving both men and women, has come out with many different graffiti bags. These bags feature writing and drawings and pops of color all over the bag in what looks like paint pen ink. According to Balenciaga creative director, Demna Gvasalia, his version of the bag is based on the many individuals before him who have customized their designer bags in a similar fashion (Mull 2017). Called the “Balenciaga City Bag”, it takes that name to heart—with the rough exterior and the tags all over the bag—it almost looks like a city wall (Mull 2017). According to Amanda Mull and her blog post about this bag on purseblog.com, “...the thing I like about graffiti-covered bags is that no two are alike, but standardizing a design to look like those bags means that the trend has simply been commodified,” (Mull 2017). Below is a photo of the Balenciaga City Bag, which is available for purchase for \$1,995 USD.



Mull, Amanda. “Love It or Leave It: Your Balenciaga City Bag Can Now Come Pre-Graffiti'd.” *PurseBlog*, 12 July 2017, www.purseblog.com/balenciaga/balenciaga-city-bag-graffiti/.

Balenciaga is not alone in this trend however. Michael Kors has done similarly with their own brand and products. According to Velvet-mag.com, back in 2018, Kors released a “...capsule collection featuring an original logo graffiti print,” (Velvet Mag 2018). Also, back in

2014 Chanel launched their very popular canvas Graffiti Backpack, worth \$3,400 USD (Kamm 2014). In a blog post by Jennifer Kamm for the website, Haute Living, Chanel described the inspiration for the bag, “Picture a young art student spray-painting the blank canvas of a classic backpack and then personalizing it with loops of haphazardly woven ropes and heavy chains,” (Kamm 2014).

Conclusion

Graffiti and other forms of street art are deeply incorporated in the society today. Even the individuals who are opposed to it, would notice something off if it were not around. Fashion and media would be altered greatly as well. For how much graffiti has given to the world, in forms of media, fashion, influencing music, and design—maybe it is time to reevaluate the legalities of those who create this “urban art”. Some areas seem to be changing by not covering graffiti that is placed, implementing more murals in their neighborhoods, and incorporating this form of art in galleries. Even though these steps seem to be little, they are making strides in the social acceptability and decriminalization of graffiti.

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