

Grffiti Art

Whether on trains, subways, abandoned tunnels or street walls, it is evident that graffiti is prevalent and ingrained in Los Angeles' vibrant culture. It represents a distinct artistic expression that uses infinite styles to create awe-inspiring paintings and carry out the creator's message to the public. Through graffiti art, artists not only showcase their talent, but raise awareness to the important social and political issues of our society. Graffiti art unravels a world of different perspectives and ideas that have great influence over our lifestyles.

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Features Editor

History

Graffiti began as acts of public defiance, yet has evolved into its own art form. The earliest documentation of graffiti dates back to between 13,000 and 9,000 BCE in Santa Cruz, Argentina. Since it was before written language was formulated, images of hands adorn the walls of the Argentinian cave. The Ancient Greek city of Ephesus, more specifically modern-day Turkey, used the carvings of a foot, heart and hand as advertisement for popular brothels. Romans documented the earliest depiction of Jesus Christ through graffiti art in 200 AD.

Modern graffiti was redefined in the late 1960s when spray paint became a primary tool among new artists. This was popularized by artist TAKI 183, Taki being short for the Greek name Demetraki and the latter being his home address. He spray painted his tag on buses and buildings across New York. The 1970s and 80s brought the widespread use of spray paint to create "masterpieces" expressing social statements after New York mayor John Lindsey sparked the "war on graffiti." This oppression urged the boom in graffiti across the state, different tags littering building walls, doors and canvases.

In addition to tags, the first use of stencil art was noted in 1981 by French artist Blek le Rat in Paris. Graffiti began depicting images that became staples for each artist. This graffiti art stencil also became a part of 80s hip-hop culture, with many MCs implementing graffiti stylistics in the cover art of their albums.

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Famous Locations

Graffiti art has grown to become a part of mainstream culture in America. From fashion districts to media districts, graffiti has earned its very own areas designated for this unique form of art. Wynwood, located in Miami, is one of the most well known and visited places for graffiti.

Once known for its gang crime and illegal activities, the city of Wynwood is now the place to see the work of mainstream and underground graffiti artists. Many that have been in the outskirts of Miami have seen a dramatic change in real estate prices and the stigma of graffiti art. Homes that were seen as vandalized and worthless decades ago, are now valued in the hundreds of thousands. Now known as the Museum of the Streets Wynwood continues to draw in tourists and artists from all over the world who have not only brought life to the buildings but the neighborhood as well. Artists from the streets and world renowned artists can come together to work on a canvas that is normally seen as just a wall. The beautiful artwork can be seen all over the streets and countless businesses have opened up along with the boom in popularity that this area has rightfully earned. Private galleries and public sidewalks all showcase the forbidden art.

Crews like Miami Style Gods, the founding fathers of graffiti, are still in action but are no longer appreciated with the rise of artists who legally spray paint on private and public property. Many may see the rise of legal graffiti as an insult to the culture of graffiti and contradicting to the core of graffiti being a statement. However, the fact still stands that Wynwood is a city that has recovered from poverty and brings smiles to many faces as they pass by such an iconic place in Miami. Regardless, Wynwood is here to *spray* for the years to come.

CURTIS LEE

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Paintings

Although it can be viewed as vandalism, many choose to say graffiti is art. In fact, it has been used to express an artist's perspective on life, politics and ideas. Some graffiti art pieces, however, have been recognized and even made famous for their deeper meanings.

A famous example would be a work created by graffiti artist Banksy called Balloon Girl. It displays a girl letting go of a heart shaped balloon. This graffiti represents various things, like a child letting go of her innocence, dreams or even aspirations. Recently, Balloon Girl was sold at an auction for 1.4 million dollars but was immediately destroyed by a shredder that Banksy had hidden in the frame.

Another famous graffiti work is a mural called Crack is Wack. It was made by an artist called Keith Harings and is one of his most iconic works. He was inspired to make this mural after his studio manager became addicted to crack. This mural is a anti-crack graffiti which is still up today. It is an example of how graffiti can go beyond simple street art. It can also be used to advocate or dissent for causes and issues affecting our world.

But this graffiti art was not always around, it started growing mainstream in the 1980s. The Graffiti Art movement was a huge success with audiences and even opened up more opportunities for artists. It was especially positively received in New York, where the style continues to grow. In fact, the art was such a big hit that a Museum of American Graffiti was even opened in 1989.

Graffiti art can be seen as outright vandalism but it is also a platform for artists to express their views on life, politics and more. From the 1980s to present day, it remains relevant and has even continued to grow.

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Prominent Artists

One of the first known women that began to paint for women rights through graffiti art was Sandra Fabara. She started her career in graffiti in 1979 under the alias "Lady Pink" and began to paint New York subway train stations. Fabara, a Latin American woman, was quick to rise in popularity with her all-female graffiti crew Ladies of the Arts (LOTA).

Shepard Fairey, the founder of the OBEY Clothing, started off his career through graffiti art, which ultimately led to his success. He became widely known during the 2008 presidential elections, which resulted in him becoming inspired to create a poster of the presidential candidate Barack Obama that he titled Hope. Through this poster, it was quick for organizations to take interest in his works. Today, his collections are held in a variety of museums, like the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

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Fun Facts

1. Graffiti originally started in Ancient Rome.
2. Los Angeles cleans more than 30 million square feet of graffiti each year.
3. Toy is a term used to refer to novice graffiti artists.
4. Modern graffiti started in Philadelphia in the late 1960s.
5. Some graffiti artists tag their work with their own unique signature.
6. In order to preserve time graffiti artists make graffiti stickers made out of paint.
7. The dome of spray paint cans have changed in sizes from one and one-fourth inches to half an inch to let artists get closer to the walls to paint.
8. When a large graffiti piece is set up, it is called graffiti bombing.
9. During the 1980s, subway graffiti became less popular due to higher security.
10. Most graffiti is made in order to compete with other graffiti artists.

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MOOR graphic by ANTHONY DOLLENTAS