

Graffiti: History, Definition and Entrepreneurship in Urban Art.

Graffiti:
History, Definition
And Entrepreneurship
In Urban Art

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Graffiti: History, Definition and Entrepreneurship in Urban Art.

FACULTY APPROVAL

Graffiti: The History, Definition and Entrepreneurship in Urban Art

Approved for the Faculty

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Abstract

This thesis' main objective is to give the general audience a better insight of what exactly graffiti art is and to show that there is a demand in the market for the art form. How this thesis portrays this is by giving a brief history of the art form; providing examples of the customs that are affiliated with graffiti art, by defining the different styles that are commonly used by graffiti artists and to provide examples of companies and urban artists either using this art on their product or urban artists finding ways to assimilate their hobby into a profession.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

*Why did people carve the rocks, you know what I mean? And put the presidents on there you know, Mount Rushmore, why did they do that? Did they get a big kick out of doing big faces or did they want to leave a mark? They wanted to leave a mark! You see these people right here, they are our founding fathers. So we are going to put there big faces on this mountain, and f*** who don't like it. So they got up there and started chiseling out their f***ing nose and eye and all that s***. Who gave them permission to mark that s*** up? You know what I mean? Maybe Indians, had a problem with him putting that fools face on that mountain. How come he didn't get arrested? It ain't no different man. It ain't your f***ing mountain that you scribed your name on. (Pray, 2005)*

Background

Graffiti has played a defining role in my life; I also feel that graffiti has saved my life. A renowned graffiti artist summed up these feeling with this quote, "I think graffiti brought me my work ethic and respect. I thought these were just graffiti skills and later I learned that they are life skills" (Pray, 2005). I chose to write my thesis on this form of art for a number

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of reasons. One reason is to help people to have a better understanding of the graffiti form from a truly authentic graffiti artist's point of view. Next, is to briefly discuss the origins of graffiti and define the different styles used by graffiti artists and what those styles' purposes are. The last reason is to explain how entrepreneurship is the newest trend in graffiti and to give examples of companies using graffiti art to promote their product.

I became affiliated with graffiti art beginning fourteen years ago. When I was twelve years old, my friends were mimicking some of the older graffiti artists that were writing their graffiti names in spray paint and permanent markers around town. We admired this because whenever we would walk home from school or around town, we would see these artists' names written all over our city in a creative, artistic way.

We saw how much attention they would get from their peers and media, and we aspired to be like them. We wanted that kind of attention, especially since most of our families couldn't afford to give it to us. My friends and I came from troubled households. Some of our parents were addicted to narcotics; others' parents were not present because they had to work long shifts or just ran out on their family prior and left a single parent to raise a group of children. So a majority of us really lacked a strong family background and looked to our older peers. At first I wasn't interested in being affiliated with graffiti. I thought it was just the latest trend for people in our age bracket. However, after seeing so many people doing it and how creative it was I became very interested.

One of my friend's older cousins, a well-known artist around our area, decided to give me my graffiti name. After receiving my name, I started working on different styles to write

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it and started to do what a graffiti artist is supposed to do: mark my name around town as much as possible so that you become well known. However, being new to graffiti I thought that was all there was to graffiti. Later, I found out that graffiti is so much more than that.

After a few months of doing this all around town, I was arrested twice for vandalism and had to pay a \$1000 fine each time and go to juvenile detention for thirty days. These were not the only offences that I had gone to Juvenal jail for. In my teenage years I went to Juvenal hall thirteen times and also grew heavily addicted to narcotics and was administered into drug treatment centers on numerous occasions. However, after truly learning about what graffiti art is all of these past mistake stopped and I quit going to jail.

After a couple of years, some friends of mine and I decided to start our own graffiti crew. Throughout the years my crew has changed. Most of the older artists that were affiliated with my crew ended up becoming addicted to drugs, imprisoned or even dead. Some led normal lives, but most went down this road. Now, only a few of the older artists are still practicing the art form and a new, younger generation of artists is more involved with our crew. In the past our crew's objective was to write our names and crew's name in quantity around town as much as possible; however, our purpose now is to create art that has quality and hopefully one day to be financially prosperous.

How we have been taking these steps is by asking businesses or home owners that have been targeted for vandalism on their property if we would be able to paint something that is graffiti-oriented and artistic on their wall. Currently we are working on putting together a portfolio consisting of pictures of walls with "before and after" photos to show these

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property owners. The before photos have images of walls with vandalism; the after photos are images of murals that we have painted. The portfolio also contains a list of estimates for prices of these walls depending on wall size, hours spent outlining the mural on paper, hours spent actually painting the mural on the wall and customization, along with supplies. These home and business owners will also have an option for free work that will consist of work of our choosing, meaning that we will re-paint their wall and paint a mural on it; however, we will choose the art that we want to do.

This method serves a few reasons: one, it cleans up the walls that are targets for vandalism; second, our aim is to place a piece of art that is relevant to that community's youth so that it is not targeted again for vandalism.

My purpose is to help other graffiti artists make a career out of their art and to help my community. I plan to start up a community center that will provide the youth in my area with the necessary tools to become professional artists. I would also like to have an art program that would help parents, schools and police officials understand that graffiti is an art form and can also be a profession. At this center I would also like to have a catalog of programs consisting of art classes, gang-prevention, college preparation and extra curricular activities that would keep students busy and on the right track towards going to an art school and taking a more professional approach towards graffiti art.

Chapter 2

Review of Selected Literature

Overview

*L.A. is the gallery, the streets of New York is the gallery, the streets of Chicago is a gallery. You can go to some places in L.A. where there is railroad tracks and crazy-a** walls your gonna see that art. For free! You might pay for being in the wrong place. (Pray, 2005)*

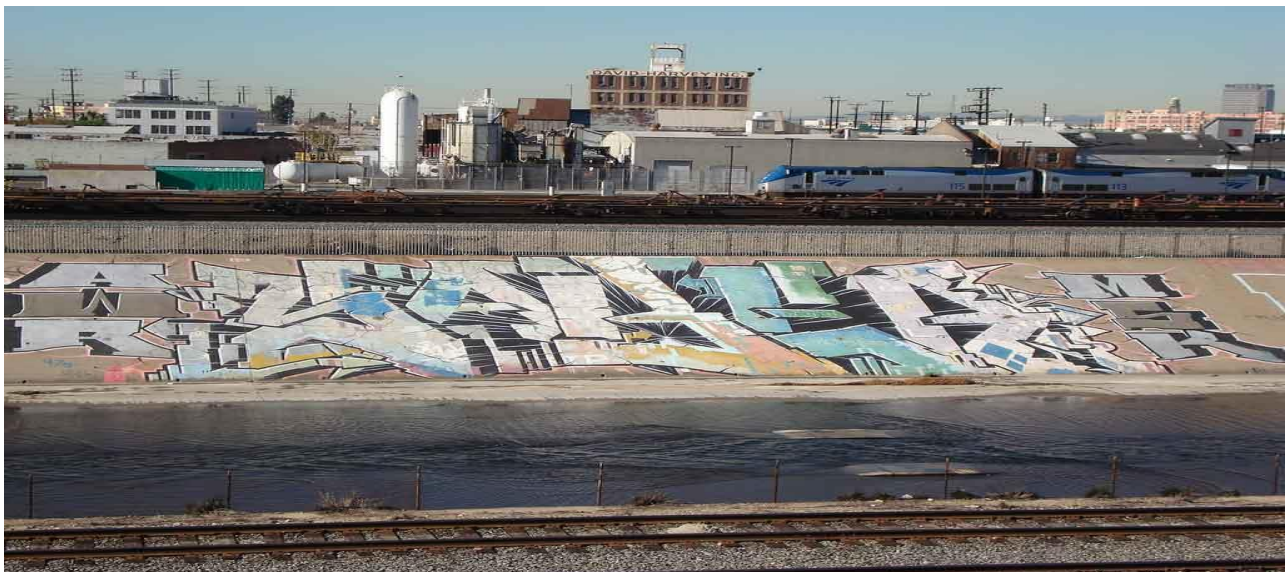
Infamy (Pray, 2005) is a documentary about six individuals who all (except one person) are graffiti artists. Each person gives his past experiences and current thoughts about the art form. All of the artists in this film had come from unusual backgrounds but became associated with graffiti. What is remarkable about this documentary is how the artists turn a form of art that is viewed negatively into a prosperous business venture.

The publication *History of Marc Ecko Unlimited* (Clifford, n.d.) gives an example of a graffiti artist who has turned illegal street artistry into a multi-million dollar industry with his art form. Marc Ecko's beginnings stem from his love of graffiti art as a teenager. He later came up with an idea in his parent's garage where he and his friends would practice graffiti and make music: to make urban clothing that reflects graffiti art. In the 1980's urban clothing was not available in clothing stores as it has been recently. Ecko started creating shirts with graffiti art on his clothing designs out of his parent's garage. After a few years of

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doing this Ecko's clothing became more in demand. Even though Ecko had a rough beginning in starting up his company Ecko Complex, he still managed to overcome some of the production hurdles that business comes with. Ecko later expanded his business by moving from creating only men's t-shirts, to creating women's and children's clothing and also into the video game industry. Ecko has also collaborated in creating clothing lines for hip hop artists like 50 Cent and Eve.

Saber: Mad Society (Gastman, 2007) is a book based upon the stories about a graffiti artist legend Saber. Saber was already an infamous graffiti artist in his teenage years. However, in his twenties, Saber completed a painting that was so big and impressive that it could be seen clearly from satellite images (See picture below). This piece of work elevated Saber to be one of the greats in his field of art. He has moved on to work on innovative metal and wood sculptures and works in many other media.



Art Completed by, Saber. This Piece of Work is One of the Largest Pieces of Graffiti Art in the World. Notice the Trains in the Upper Right Corner Compared to Masterpiece.

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Piece by Piece (Hill, 2005) is a documentary based on San Francisco graffiti art. This film focuses on the differences between Northern California's *graffiti* art compared to other major cities' graffiti by defining San Francisco's Graffiti. In particular *Piece by Piece* is about the differences between New York and the Bay Area's graffiti style. The beginning of the film describes some of the fundamentals of art from San Francisco by describing "Cholo" writing, its origins, and how it entwined with San Francisco graffiti style. It also details the artists' confessions of their love and addiction to graffiti art and typographic lettering, instances of their social activism, and the short life span of their work. The final segment of *Piece by Piece* explores the wide range of public opinion towards graffiti by giving voice to citizens of San Francisco and representatives of the San Francisco Police Department.

"Custom-Made Clothes to Match Your Kicks" (Gonzalez, 2010) is an article that speaks about how graffiti artists are moving towards becoming entrepreneurs. Artists Beond 69 and Sen 2 are creating shirts, shoes, and hats that match expensive sneaker shoes with identical colors and finishes that customers brings in. This article also speaks about how both artists, Beond 69 and Sen 2 have seen large clothing corporations exploiting graffiti art by selling clothing that use their art form in their fashions. This article gives examples of how Beond 69 and Sen 2 run their operations. These artists have found a way to maximize their profits by not only selling clothing that match their sneaker, but to also sell exclusive sneakers and graffiti supplies.

History of Graffiti Pt 1 (Cia & One, 1998) is a web article about how graffiti art got its beginnings in Philadelphia and then moved to New York in the late 1960's. Authors Deal

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and Spar write about the time periods between the 1960s through the present and write on some of the innovators that helped make graffiti what it is today; most notably Taki 183 and the 1980's graffiti artists known as the "Die Hard Artists." Deal and Spar write about how graffiti started as an anti-politic strategy and for gangs to mark their territory but later moved towards an art form. The article also speaks on how graffiti also grew in size and range along with how cartoon characters intertwined with urban artistry.

Sacred Cows Make Great Hamburgers: The Rhetoric of Graffiti (D'Angelo, 1974) is a journal entry about how graffiti has integrated allusion, puns, irony, alliteration, rhyme, antithesis, parallelism, apposition, and parody into the art form. Many graffiti artists apply these to give their murals/pieces a theme. On occasion, these sayings are offensive to viewers who are not affiliated with graffiti art; however, that is not their intent. This article gives an example of each of these and then defines the meanings. (See picture below)



Art Completed by "Aerub", Pun, "A good cop... is a dead one! Notice the Dead Police Officers Incorporated into the Masterpiece.

Chapter 3

History of the Art Form and Definition of Styles

The reason why people started graffiti was, your name is your brand, and writing your name is like printing money. Quality (aesthetic style) and quantity (the number of trains and walls you've hit) are the primary ways that the brand gains market share. If you're the biggest name on a line or in an area, then you're the king (Pray, 2005).

History of the Art Form

Sometime in the late 1960's graffiti was born. The origins of graffiti began as a form of political activism by gangs to mark territory. However, the art form progressed in the early 1970's. Artist Cornbread is known to be one of the earliest writers in graffiti history. New York is thought to be the birth place of graffiti by many; however, Philadelphia is where its true origins start. In the early 1970's graffiti expanded to New York. Artists like Taki 183 and Tracy 168 were some of the first artists to write on subways so that their art would travel around New York making New York City their own gallery. Graffiti soon merged with hip hop culture and is considered to be one of the four elements (Rapping, DJing, Break Dancing along with Graffiti).

Taki 183, known for incorporating his real name (Demetraki) and street number, is considered to be one of the innovators in New York graffiti. The reason why Taki 183 is considered to be so inspirational is because he himself began street bombing which is writing

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your graffiti name on as many areas as possible so that the artist will become well known.

Taki 183 began street bombing due to being employed as a foot messenger. Along his routes

Taki 183 began to write his new found name along his travel routes.

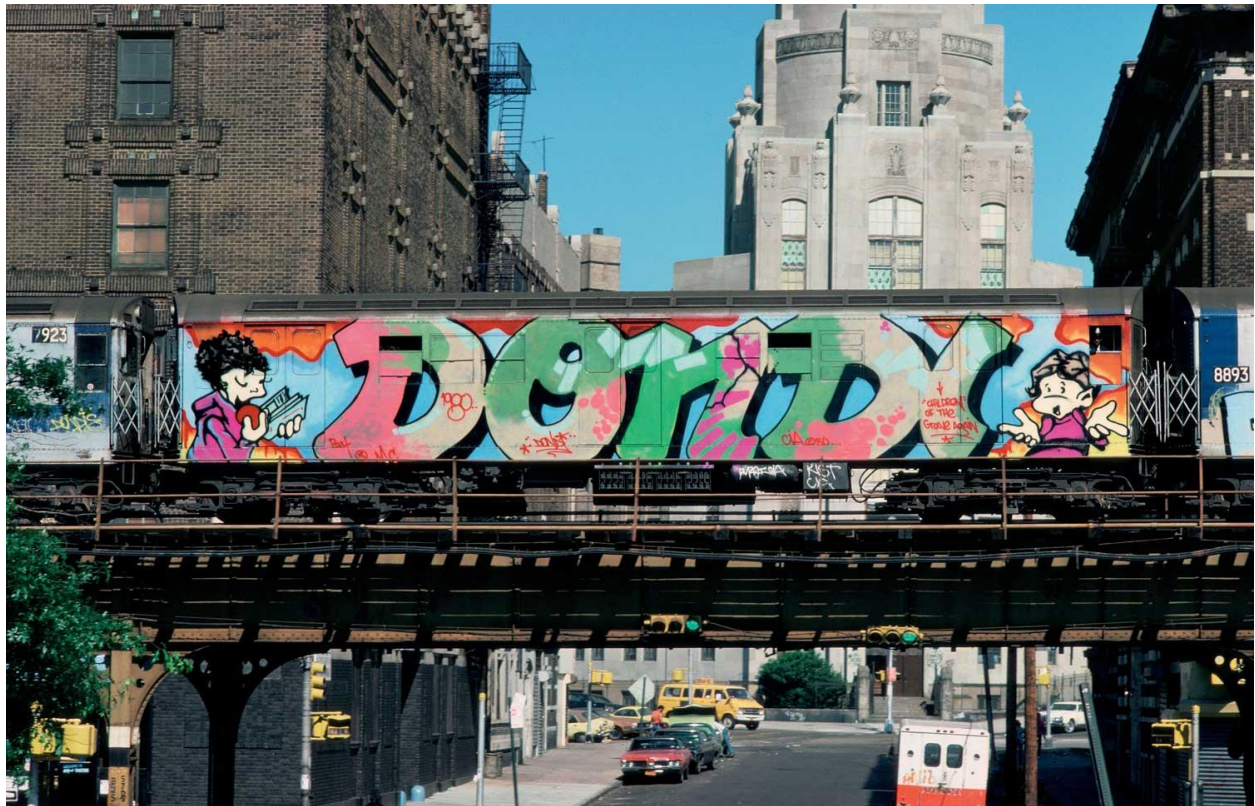


Art by Taki183. Example of How Graffiti Started in the Early 1970's. Artists in this Era Only Using Signatures/Tags.

Graffiti started to become more daring, and a new breed of graffiti artists emerged and started to place their art on more visual areas. Because these artists wanted to paint these visible areas, this also made them vulnerable to being caught by law enforcement, thrown in

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jail and facing legal consequences. Due to a large increase in graffiti artists, people needed a way to distinguish themselves. To do this, graffiti art started to grow in size and range. (See picture below) Instead of just doing signatures, artists began to do throw-up (formally known as bubble letters) and Master Pieces. In the mid 1970's people started to incorporate cartoon characters into their master pieces on trains.



Art Completed by Dondi. Example of Graffiti Art Growing in Size, Range and Implementing Characters in the Late 1970's to the Early 1980's.

Graffiti was able to sustain for a long period in the 1970s, and many new artists started to emerge. Graffiti was so popular in the 1970's due to a number of reasons. Artists were not only writing on street walls, they were also writing on subway trains. Graffiti artists began to target trains and paint murals that would cover top to bottom and left to right of these

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subways. Officials had never encountered a problem like this in that time period, and no funds were set aside to clean these trains. Another reason was that because of the growth spurt of artists due to a lack of clean up on both city walls and subways, graffiti artists grew extremely competitive to write their names on as many spots as possible. However, the MTA (Metro Transit Authority) took on a new role and made graffiti their number one problem. The actions they took to fix this problem were to paint over vandalized trains on a regular basis and to secure common areas where graffiti artists would normally trespass into.

In the 1980's graffiti art started to decline almost to the point of extinction. New graffiti artist numbers were dwindling. This era of graffiti is called the "Die Hard Era." As the population of artists started to decline so did crimes of vandalism.

Government officials began to enforce strict penalties for acts of vandalism. Areas that were popular to painting grounds began to be heavily guarded, and cleaning up graffiti became mandatory, or else property owners that did not rid their buildings of graffiti faced expensive fines. Also businesses were not allowed to sell spray paint to minors, and lastly, the crack epidemic made the streets extremely dangerous areas to be. Many graffiti artists, however, chose to see the new problems as a challenge rather than a reason to quit. Artists became territorial of good painting areas. In this era the artists that remain were considered to be "Die Hard Artists" (Cia, One, 1998).

Graffiti Customs

Graffiti art has been around for over forty years now, and people still have many misconceptions about it. Many believe that urban graffiti art and gang graffiti are associated; others believe that graffiti is nothing more than just an act of vandalism.

In graffiti there are different categories of artists. Some artists are strictly pro vandalism. To these artists, vandalism is an art form in itself. Another category of artists is street bombers. They don't believe so much in the vandalism portion of graffiti but rather the artistic part. However, these artists paint as many visible spots around their town as possible so that they can make a name for themselves. They tend to use only Signatures/Tags and Throw-ups. Then there are muralists who tend to paint legal walls. These artists do master pieces and add extensive detail to their work. These artists also understand that painting on walls, trains, etc, *illegally* is the very soul of graffiti; however, these artists have taken a different approach due to caution about legal problems or may have grown older and want to keep performing their art but in a legitimate manner (Lederman, n.d.).

Artist Saber sums up this idea in his book, *Mad Society* with this quote about him and his graffiti crew, "We have a crew etiquette, we avoid [historic] murals and glass etch — we're not about flaming personal property or acting out of malicious intent (Gastman, 2007)."

Train writers are another category of artists and tend to only paint on trains. Train writers have categories themselves. Certain groups of train writers only post throw-ups on trains while the other portion paints master pieces. Finally, there is a group of artists that

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practice all of these categories of art. They feel that a graffiti artist must be multi-dimensional and practice all forms of graffiti (Gastman & Rowland, n.d.).

In the graffiti culture, there are many customs and rules that a graffiti artist must abide by. One of these rules is common in writing: never plagiarize another artist's work. In the graffiti culture this is called **biting**: if labeled a biter this will ruin an artist's reputation. Biting is frowned upon in graffiti; however, every graffiti artist in one way or another has had to do some biting to progress their art form.

The internet has become a tool for graffiti artists to becoming more well-known. This has both negative and positive effects: A graffiti artist's reputation should be based on the work that he has done street bombing and how creative that work is. However, there is a group of artists that just take pictures of walls that they have done legally and post them on the internet. People do not know this artist personally and may believe that the picture that he had taken may have been done illegally—that's the impression they wish to make. Graffiti art is meant to be done illegally, and after you have put in work for so many years then you are allowed to start doing legal work.

*To be a graffiti writer man, I feel that you have to hold down your f***** name. That's it! Not just write on a wall and be a piecer, or painting your backyard and send a picture to a magazine. To me graffiti belongs illegal. That's what it is. You know you go to a zoo and see a tiger but it's domesticated in a way. You know, so graffiti on a canvas it belongs in a alley on a train or somewhere where it can go wild (Pray, 2005).*

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A “**toy**” is an artist that is new to graffiti, or an artist for one reason or another that cannot develop a quality graffiti style. A graffiti artist can also be labeled a toy if he is caught biting another artists work. To be considered a toy is the worst thing in graffiti, however, if you are a toy because you are a new to graffiti, that is understandable and forgivable for a while. Many experienced artists take it upon themselves to help new artists become better by giving them their first graffiti style as well as their graffiti name. This is common in graffiti and one of the reasons why it has been hard to eliminate graffiti (*Bowen, 2010*).

It is established for an experienced artist to give a new artist a graffiti name for a number of reasons. One, the name has to fit the characteristics of the person that it is being given to. Next, an experienced artist has to give a name that is not in circulation around the area you live or are going to be writing in. If a name is being used by another graffiti writer, people may have a hard time distinguishing which artist had been posting up work around that community. Another reason why artists use graffiti names is summed up in this quote from the film: “You have a name uhh, 'cause obviously you're not going to go putting your government name up on walls. You might as well add an address to it “ (*Reaves, 2010*).

Lastly, this concept is going to be hard to comprehend for a person that does not practice the art form; the letters in a graffiti artist’s name are the letters that he is practicing to write in an artistic manner for as long as he keeps that name. So an artist has to find a group of letters that he/she will be able to write artistically with some ease. In the film *Infamy*, artist Jase sums up why someone may want to start this art form and choose a graffiti name with this quote, “It’s someone’s alter ego and it's telling its own story” (*Pray, 2005*).

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Starting up your own crew benefits yourself for a number of reasons. One reason is if you start up a graffiti crew that is known as a crew for having talent, other artists will want to join you and help promote your crew by writing the crew's name around town. If successful, more and more talented artists will want to join. The more you are surrounded by good quality graffiti artists the more your art will flourish and become defined. The originators of a crew must be selective in who they choose for their crew. If you have an artist that has not developed their style and begins to write your crew's name around town, people may get the impression that your crew lacks artistic talent (Stowers, 1997).

Many artists also use puns as a foundation for their work (See Pictures Below). Using puns makes for a creative piece if done well. At times, people who are not involved with graffiti may find offence with some of the puns that are involved with these artists work, but veteran artists find this type of work real and creative. There are also artists who use this method for political issues, and this tends to have more acceptances with a majority of people (D'Angelo, 1974). See picture below.



Art Completed by Erosket. Example of Master Piece that Includes Puns. Notice the Characters and the letters in the Master Piece. Cereal Killers.

Defining Graffiti Styles

Signatures/Tags are the foundation graffiti. A signature/tag is used for a number of objectives in graffiti. Signatures are the quickest way to write on a wall compared to throw-ups and masterpieces. Signatures are widely disliked by many people outside of the graffiti community for a number of reasons.

People tend to compare gang graffiti with signatures. In the article *Los Angeles 'CHOLO' Style Graffiti Art* (Bojorquez, 2010) artist Tloks explains the difference between gang graffiti and urban graffiti, “Gang graffiti is gangs marking their territory. Graffiti is marking your name everywhere to let everybody know, this is me, I was here” (Bojorquez, 2010). West Coast graffiti artists have been implementing gang graffiti fonts into their

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graffiti. Not because they wish to be affiliated with a gang but because they feel as though

“Cholo” writing is an art form in its self (See picture below).



Example of Gang Graffiti, “SS F13” The SS stands for South Side F13 stands for Florencia 13. The 13 represents the 13th letter in the alpha bet. “M” for Mexican or Mexican Mafia.

Overall signatures/tags are the foundation of graffiti, and without them the more artistic portion of graffiti would not be possible.

*You know some people come up to me while I’m doing a mural and be like, “this is beautiful, I like the colors and I like these animals you put on there, and how it’s incorporated into this whole theme. I just hate that damn tagging s*** though.” And I tell them, “hay, it’s the same thing, I mean it starts with a little tag. And from a little tag, it turns into a burner, a burner turns into a piece, a piece turns into a mural. And if I didn’t do that tag I wouldn’t be able to do your building. (Pray, 2005)*

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Many artists stick strictly to signatures and throw-ups. They feel as though Masterpieces are not an important part of graffiti. In the film, *piece by piece*, artist Earsnot is a street bomber (Stowers, 1997). In the film he states his ideas on tagging,

*Tagging is like the very essence of f***** graffiti. You know wherever you put a tag, especially in New York someone is gonna see it. The tag is like your John-Hand-Cock, fill-ins ok, pieces ugh, and murals bluhh! Go get a graffiti coloring book or something. But tagging is where it's at (Hill, 2005)*



Art done by RekOne. Examples of Signatures/Tags.

Throw-Ups/Throwies formally known as **bubble letters** are meant for numbers rather than quality. The term “throw-up” is derived from a piece of work that you can throw-up on a wall quickly and move to the next area to paint. A throw-up/throwie stems from a signature, and is an artist’s name in bigger portion of letters. Throwies tend to have a simple outline, or to make it stand out, artists add color and designs in them also (known as fill-in).

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A throw-up is an art form in its self. Throw-ups are a graffiti artist's stamp meant for mass production and not generally changed artistically; they are considered the bigger the better in proportion to the wall (See pictures below).



Art Completed by Colt45. Example of a Throw-up Without a Fill-in Used Numerous Time. Meant for Taking Up as Much Space as Possible in the Quickest Amount of Time. (Without Fill-In Colors)



Art Completed by RekOne. Example of a Throwie/Throw-Up with Color Detail and Outline.

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Piece, short for Masterpiece, is a graffiti artist's best work. Pieces often incorporate several factors: 3-D effects, many color schemes, and many other interesting artistic effects. The piece considered to be a labor-intensive form of graffiti which requires more time to paint as compared to a throw-Up. A piece is meant to show off an artist's talents. Artists also incorporate characters, portraits, and other works of art into their masterpiece, and a piece usually tends to have a theme behind it (See picture below). However, their graffiti name is often the most important portion of the piece. Most times pieces are done on legal walls; however, this at times is looked down upon by many graffiti artists. A *true* graffiti artist should always be willing to paint illegally (Manohar, Uttara, n.d.).

If you don't bomb then you can't piece. Don't bother.

If you can't support your name then you have no business writing graffiti because graffiti is not just the pretty part.

Piecing is kinda the glossy exterior. Its like, "look, we're artists." But to get to that level you have to spend a couple of years on the street creating a name and a rep for yourself.

(Pray, 2005)



Art Completed by Augor. Example of a Masterpiece with, There Will Be Blood, Incorporated Into It. A Masterpiece that is still on an Illegal Wall.

Chapter 4

Entrepreneurship in Graffiti

My whole career is the ultimate form of graffiti. There are going to be people that hate just like there are the skaters that hated on Tony Hawk, but there are also these artists out there that the broader part of pop culture should be honoring. There's not a set aesthetic that has had more influence on popular culture than graffiti over the years.... I'm taking this culture and putting it on a pedestal. Yeah, I'm making a commercial product, but I'm bombing the system.... I make blazers and woven shirts—to me, getting my name inside that label is the same ... high that I used to get when I tagged the backseat of a bus. It's the same hustle and swagger that a kid has, to want to make something from nothing (Clifford, n.d).

Entrepreneurship in Graffiti is a growing trend amongst graffiti artists. Graffiti artists are growing older, maturing; however, they are still interested in the art form. A majority of these artists are starting to have families or have other life obligations, and cannot afford to continue to go through the legal system. Many graffiti artists are taking a more professional approach towards graffiti. These artists are doing this by working with clothing companies that want to incorporate graffiti art onto their clothing lines to appeal to today's youth, by working with property owners that are targets for vandalism and hiring artists to cover it up with graffiti art, and recently, by even moving into video games and video documentaries. Artist Eklips states in the article, Interview with Eklips / 7th Letter Spotlight, “Why let a junior

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designer in an ad agency attempt the crew's style when the real guy can do it better and faster and offer the product a little credibility?" (Yves, 2008) Graffiti art is becoming more popular amongst today's youth, and with its popularity it is also becoming more financially lucrative.

The Seventh Letter Crew is a leading example of a group of graffiti artists who have taken graffiti art and turned it into a profitable employment opportunity. The leader of this crew, Ekliipse, has taken a group of talented artists from the surrounding Los Angeles areas and created a graffiti crew whose sole objective is turn their art into a profit and to pass down graffiti art to the youth so that graffiti art will continue to grow. The Seventh Letter Crew has collaborated with companies like Adidas, Boost Mobile, Nike and Scion and they have also traveled to other countries and painted murals.

Amongst the artists from The Seventh Letter crew is Retna, who has created a business that helps business owners with vandalism on their property. Instead of continuing the same cycle and painting over graffiti over and over again, Retna provides another option;

When talking to a property owner about a space, I never once told them it would be graffiti I'd be painting on their wall," he says. "I try to become the solution to their [tagging] problem. I try to make a culturally important piece for the neighborhood that no one destroys. These artists want to respect the historic murals in their cities however they feel those murals are applied towards the older community. (Shelley, 2007)

Another example of graffiti artists turning to entrepreneurship with their art is the artists from the film, *Infamy*. This film is about six graffiti artists that have had rough

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backgrounds, but have emerged as professional artists. Earsnot is a homosexual graffiti artist which is uncommon in the graffiti culture. Coming from a domestic violence home lifestyle Earsnot turned to graffiti as relief from his home environment. Earsnot has become a legendary graffiti artist in the New York graffiti scene and even started up his own shoe store business.

Claw, is a female artist, another irregularity in graffiti who came from a Jewish background. Claw is also well known for her street art that incorporates feminism into her work. Claw has become very successful through creating and collaborating with her own clothing line.

Toomer is a Los Angeles graffiti artist, known for starting up one of the elite graffiti crews in the United States. Coming from a gang infested part of Los Angeles, Toomer manages to overcome the hurdles that gang life has pressured him with and has become one of the most well-known graffiti artists. Toomer art has been in music videos, movies and video games. Toomer has also traveled to other countries to paint and made a living off of his art; something most graffiti artists strive for but never achieve.

Saber, also a Los Angeles native, came from an artistic background. Both of his parents are art teachers and raised him around their art school. Saber is known for not only his great talent in graffiti art, but also for doing extremely large pieces of work. Saber too has made a living off of graffiti by traveling abroad and painting, selling canvases, and even wrote his own memoirs in a published book. Saber is considered to be the best artist in graffiti and is one of the main members of The Seventh Letter Crew.

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Jase, the name stemming from his actual name Jason, came from a single mother background due to his father's death in a war. He explains a goal that he has in the film *Infamy* to try to leave a piece of his art on every train in the United States. Jase is the most active artist in this group of artists; however, he still manages to be a full time employee at a major spray paint distribution company (Pray, 2005).

In the article "Custom-Made Clothes to Match Your Kicks" there is another example of artists making a profit with graffiti art. New York artists Beond69 and Sen2 came up with an idea: to start a clothing company that incorporated graffiti art into clothing like shirts and hats, and sell them out of their stores. The main motivation behind this was that they had seen there was a demand for shirts and hats that matched exclusive expensive sneakers that were coming out on the market. Beond69 and Sen2 had seen large clothing corporation's chains implementing graffiti on their clothing but the art was not authentic.

Beond69 and Sen2 started the process of starting their own company. Their vision was to use their own genuine art and employ it on their clothing. What made their company unique was that you could also bring in a pair of sneakers, and Beond69 and Sen2 would come up with an art and shirt design that would coordinate with each other (Gonzalez, 2010).

Marc Ecko, also known as Marc Milecofski, is one of the more acknowledged graffiti artists of the last decade and is well known for starting Ecko Unlimited, a clothing company that had a modest beginning in the mid 1980's. Ecko began graffiti art as a teenager and saw that there was not a clothing company that was releasing merchandise with a hip hop experience behind it. Soon Ecko came up with a plan to start creating T-shirts with a graffiti

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experience behind it (See picture below). How he started doing this was by converting his parent's garage into a music studio and a place to display his clothing. Ecko started to see a growing demand for his clothing and asked his sister and friend for a business loan of a few thousand dollars. He then created six shirt designs and mass produced them, and the shirts became well known and sold, even being broadcast on *Good Morning America* in 1993. Some of his success was due to major hip hop artists and movie directors like Spike Lee wearing Ecko's clothing. Ecko's most creative design came from inspirations from rhinos.



Example of Ecko Unlimited Shirts with Rhino designs.

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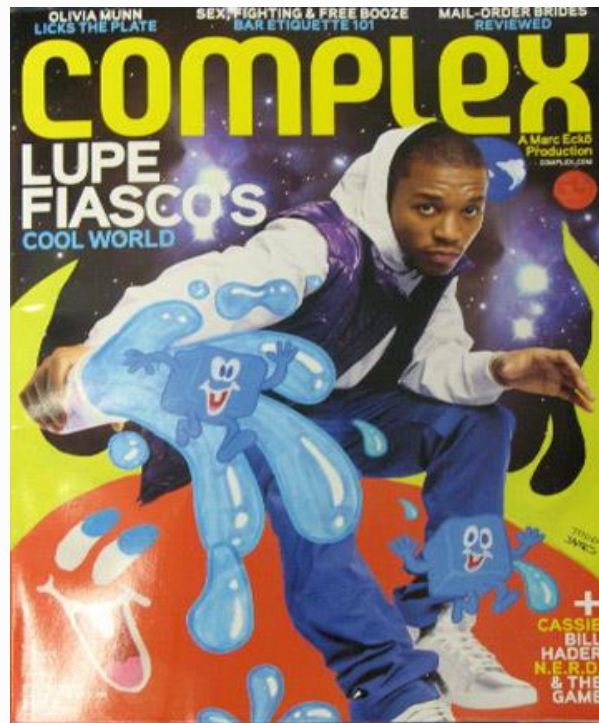
Ecko Unlimited faced many financial difficulties between 1993 and 1998 due to Marc Ecko trying to create all of the clothing himself. However, after some changes in the company and hiring other artists to help create new designs retail companies started to grow interested in Ecko's clothing line. During the 2000's, Ecko unlimited was worth over half a billion dollars mostly due to Marc Ecko Expanding his company to women and children's clothing. Also establishing his clothing company under Ecko Unlimited he became associated with music rap artist 50 Cent; they called their merger G-Unit, making clothing for people in his age bracket (See picture below).



G-Unit Company is a Merger between Rap Artist 50 Cent and Marc Ecko's Ecko Unlimited Company.

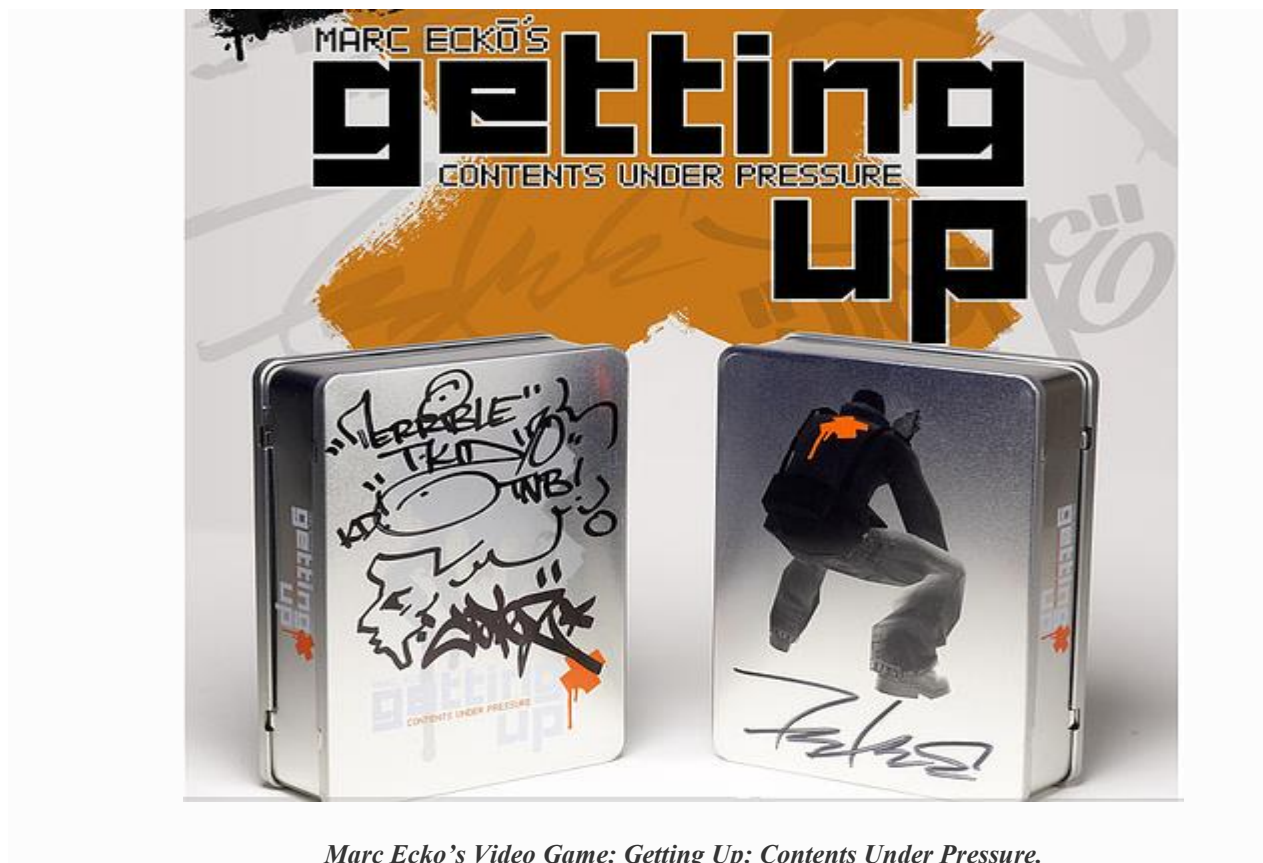
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Ecko's company started to expand in 2002 by starting up a magazine company called "Complex". Complex has over 325,000 subscribers and is focused on young men between the ages of 14-28 and has articles based on skateboarding, graffiti, fashions, hip hop, and music (See picture below).



Complex Magazine Owned by Ecko Unlimited Company.

Ecko Unlimited also broadened their company in 2005 by getting into the video game industry and teaming up with Atari. Getting Up-Contents Under Pressure (See picture below) is the first ever graffiti video game that is about a graffiti artist whose main objective is to paint as many areas as possible with other elite graffiti artists while dodging law enforcement. The game was a major success in the video game industry (Clifford, n.d.).



Marc Ecko's Video Game: Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure.

The article, “Tag, Your It! Graffiti is Appearing Everywhere and on Everything” (Meyer, 2008) gives other examples of graffiti art showing up on everything from furniture and designer luggage to art shows etc. The products that are shown in this article are proof that “*artists have traded in walls for canvases*” and are trying to take a more financially sound stance with their art form. The article gives many examples of this by presenting photos and information about artists. An example of a company integrating graffiti into its product is Louis Vuitton. In 2001 designer Louis Vuitton collaborated with graffiti artist Stephen Sprouse to design luggage that incorporated graffiti and luxury (See picture below).



This Louis Vuitton bag sold for \$2,300 each and sold out in 2001.

Another Example of graffiti being used in the market is Angel Ortiz's artwork on furniture. Ortiz had started from modest beginnings in New York City as an up-coming graffiti artist. However, in 2006 Ortiz thought to apply his art form in a more creative way and started to situate his art on furniture and sell at an art auction (Meyer, 2008).

(See picture below)



Above: Angel Ortiz, L.A. II, Birch armoire with two doors and three drawers decorated with graffiti designs in black and silver marker. Signed and tagged throughout. 72" x 32" x 17" Sold for \$3,000.00



Above: Angel Ortiz, L.A. II, Birch plywood six-drawer dresser decorated with graffiti designs in black and silver marker. Signed and tagged throughout. 30" x 48" x 16 1/2" Sold for \$2,640.00

Chapter 5

Recommendations for Further Research, Summary and Conclusions.

I deal with the consequences; I'm not one of those dudes that blame it on society or people. I did it, I went to jail, I came out, did it again, went to jail, came out again, I do it again, get killed, die, go to heaven, catch some spots. (Pray, 2005)

Recommendations for Further Research

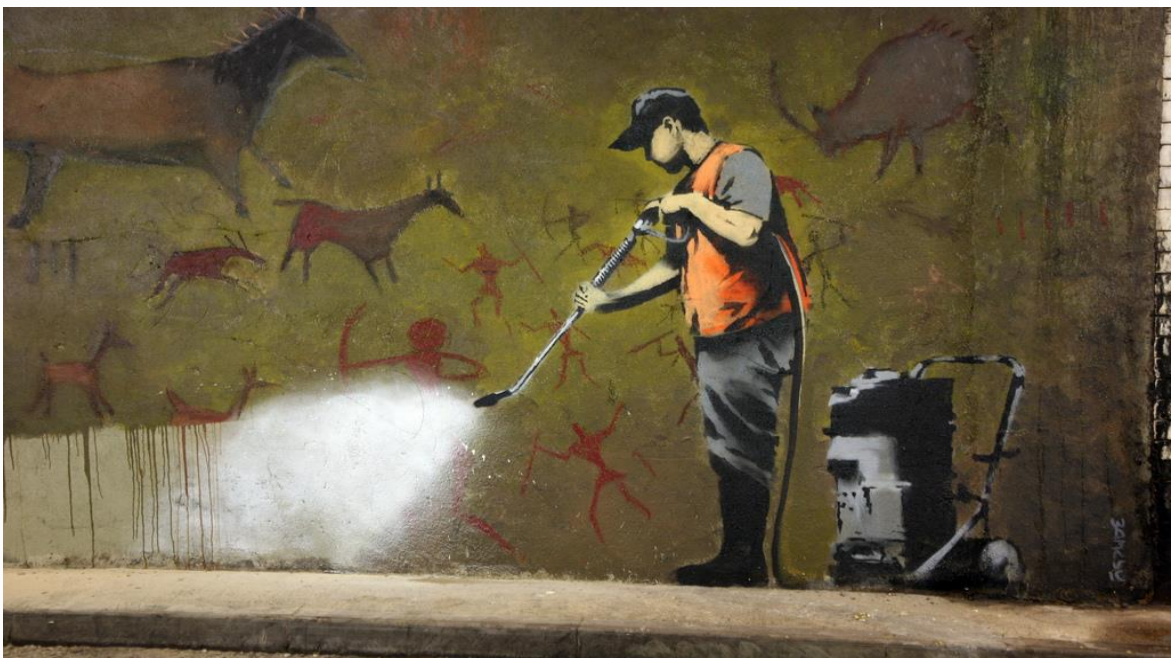
For further research, I recommend viewing the website Artcrimes.com which provides sources, interviews and photographs globally of various artists. This website is updated monthly with graffiti artists work and write blog discussions with a mixture of urban artists from around the world. (*Art Crimes, 1994*)

An additional recommendation would to be look up sources on graffiti artist Banksy. Banksy's art is well-known in both the United States of America and Europe and has even been purchased for hundreds of thousands of dollars by celebrities such as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. At many times Banksy's street art has been cut out of walls and auctioned off to the highest bidder. (See picture below)



Example of Banksy's graffiti being cut out of a wall and auctioned off.

Known for his contempt for the government in labeling graffiti as vandalism, Banksy displays his art on public surfaces such as walls and even going as far as to build physical prop pieces. (See picture below)



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Banksy also directed a film called *Exit Through the Gift Shop* which is about a French immigrant in Los Angeles and his obsession with street art. The film maps the immigrant constantly documenting his every waking moment on film, from a chance encounter with his cousin, also a graffiti artist, to his introduction to a host of street artists with a focus on Banksy. The ending of the film shows the main character gaining fame as a street artist himself. *Exit Through the Gift Shop* was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature at the 83rd Academy Awards. Banksy created 10 street pieces around Park City and Salt Lake City to tie in with the screening. In February, The Whitehouse public house in Liverpool, England, was sold for \$114,000 at auction. The side of the building has an image of a giant rat by Banksy. In late January 2011, *Exit Through the Gift Shop* was nominated for a 2010 Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Banksy released a statement saying,

This is a big surprise... I don't agree with the concept of award ceremonies, but I'm prepared to make an exception for the ones I'm nominated for. The last time there was a naked man covered in gold paint in my house, it was me.

Leading up to the Oscars, Banksy blanketed Los Angeles with street art. Many people speculated whether Banksy would show up at the Oscars in disguise and make a surprise appearance if he won the Oscar. *Exit Through the Gift Shop* did not win the award (Collins, 2011).

Lastly, another recommendation is to view the film *Infamy*. This movie is ideal for anyone who is not familiar with graffiti and has a one-sided perspective on the art form. *Infamy* provides an alternate viewpoint of this art form from these six graffiti artists' standpoints and also provides in-depth interviews each artist. This film also serves as a motivational tool for anyone wanting to make the transition from just a street artist to making a career out of their art (Pray, 2005).

Summary/ Conclusion

To reiterate what had been written, this thesis' main objective is to give the general audience a better perceptive of what exactly graffiti art is and to show that there is a demand in the market for the art form. How this thesis portrays this is by giving a brief history of the art form, by providing examples of the customs that are affiliated with graffiti art, by defining the different styles that are commonly used by graffiti artists and by providing examples of companies and urban artists, either using this art on their product or urban artists finding ways to assimilate their hobby into a legal and profitable profession.

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