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STREET ART & GRAFFITI ART: DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING

by

MELISSA HUGHES

Under the Direction of Dr. Melody Milbrandt

ABSTRACT

While graffiti is revered as an art form to some, it is often seen as an unwanted nuisance by others. While vibrantly rich in history, graffiti has a controversial past, present, and future that will likely continue to be the subject of debate, especially with the insurgence of street art, an art form that often overlaps graffiti art in subject matter, media, aesthetic appearance, and placement as a public form of art. Distinguishing between street art and graffiti art proves quite challenging to the undiscerning eye, yet through a series of interviews and thorough investigation, I questioned the contexts of street art and graffiti art. By introducing non-traditional forms of art that are engaging to adolescent students, street art and graffiti art can expand the secondary art curriculum by helping students become more cognizant of current social, visual and cultural aesthetics in their own visual world.

INDEX WORDS: Art Education, Graffiti Art, Street Art

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MELISSA HUGHES

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art Education

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Georgia State University

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2009

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my close friends, family, and students, for offering inspiration and support. Furthermore, I am deeply indebted to the educators in my own family that have worked to make a difference…the tradition continues.

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Many thanks to the multitude of great artists that helped inspire this manuscript. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Melody Milbrandt for her sound advice and endless feedback, as well as Dr. Teresa Bramlette Reeves and Dr. Melanie Davenport for guiding me though this process with composure and insight. A big thanks to Dr. Richard Siegesmund for encouraging me when I thought I didn't want to be an educator in the first place. Finally, I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Pope, the absolute definition of a master teacher—an individual that was not only ready to educate but also one prepared to instill values, confidence, and determination in me as a young lady in Dalton, Georgia.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As an artist I always felt compelled to investigate my interest in street art and graffiti art. Though I am not a practicing street artist or graffiti artist, I have always admired the art forms from afar, often attempting to decipher the message, motive, and meaning. I have always felt that there is a certain mystique regarding street and graffiti art that aroused a curiosity, begging further investigation, and yielding a more educated understanding for their being.

Need for the Study

Graffiti art has historically been viewed as a form of vandalism, a curious enigma, and a menace to society. Infused in the emergence of the hip hop culture, the graffiti revolution primarily took place in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, urban youth began extensively spray-painting subway cars, trains, and walls, providing a voice to the disenfranchised, anti-authoritarian rebels seeking an identity to be seen, felt, and heard by all. It seems that this style of graffiti-inspired art is still present, yet transformed and altered such that it now blurs the boundary between it and another art form called street art. Close cousin and successor to the graffiti revolution, street art has a foothold into contemporary, mainstream urban culture, yet still maintains its roots in graffiti art, with influences that are unmistakable. While graffiti art is traditionally seen as an art form emphasizing self proliferation of a namesake via use of creative, bold lettering with spray-paint, street art knows no boundaries, often incorporating lettering but also using stenciling, painting, wheat pasting, and sticker “bombing” (making and pasting stickers) as art forms that share a similar aesthetic.

Street art and graffiti art continue to slowly gain notoriety within the walls of famous galleries and museum spaces, yet still take a back seat to that of traditional, mainstream accepted art forms. Street art and graffiti art styles are increasingly used in mass media outlets, from advertisement to product placement, in an attempt to appeal to young consumers worldwide. The importance and prevalence of street art can be seen easily within our daily visual culture, from the largest cities worldwide to smaller rural areas on a lesser scale. Today, it seems increasingly difficult to distinguish between street art and graffiti art, as the two are so closely related and often overlap in subject matter, media, aesthetic appearance, and placement as a public form of art. Differentiating between street art and graffiti art is vital to this study, as the two contain a variety of differences that are not understood by an undiscerning eye.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive research study is two-fold. First I plan to investigate the contexts of street art and graffiti as a part of the visual culture found in urban areas, aiding in the identification of street art and how it differs from graffiti art. As street art gains popularity worldwide, it continues to borrow influences from the graffiti art revolution, but is also increasingly recognized as a distinct art form. While the general acceptance and understanding of street art is in an indeterminate state, this study intends to describe the position of street art and artists by investigating their varying status in the art world, both problematic and successful. By conducting library research and interviewing local Atlanta street artists and graffiti artists, I will gain a first-hand personal perspective yielding a better understanding for motivations and perspectives of this genre. The second aim of the study is to broaden the secondary art

curriculum by incorporating new forms and styles of art that may be highly engaging to adolescent students, yet unfortunately are often overlooked in traditional art instruction. I hope that my interviews with street and graffiti artists will reveal information that will be engaging and meaningful to my high school students. Based on this information I hope to develop art lessons that will be particularly engaging to urban students and help them become more cognizant of current social, visual and cultural aesthetics in their own visual world.

Methodology/Participants/Timeline

I will collect data through three artist interviews conducted via telephone, email, or face-to-face dialogue. Each participant will be asked a series of questions that attempt to locate commonalities. All three participants are Atlanta-based street and/or graffiti artists. The interviews will be scheduled between April 2009 and May 2009, depending on availability of participants. After interviewing the artists I will construct a lesson plan about street art and graffiti art that I believe will best meet the needs of my urban high school students.

Research Questions

How and why are street art and graffiti art different?

What are the artists' motivations to create street art and graffiti art?

What can I learn from the experiences of street artists and graffiti artists that might be beneficial to my teaching urban high school students?

In what ways might street art and graffiti art be incorporated into secondary art curriculum and instruction?

Definition of Terms

- **Bombing**—tagging or spray-painting multiple surfaces within a location, often using quick tags
- **Crew**—a group of writers, or graffiti artists
- **Pieces**—large-scale, labor-intensive works of graffiti-style art, slang for masterpiece, often earning writers much respect if well-done
- **Tag**—a quick, stylized signature composed of letters and/or numbers
- **Throw-up**—a quickly executed statement that is in-between a piece and a tag as far as time and effort used to create it, often using one single color
- **Wheat pasting**—the practice of adhering a paper form of art or poster to another surface by using liquid adhesive
- **Writer**—an individual that practices or creates graffiti art

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Differences in Street Art and Graffiti Art

The street itself has become an explosive platform by which artists can express themselves, often transmitting their personal visions, values, and opinions on a daily basis. Artists such as James de le Vega "…like the idea of the artist going out in the world and creating a dialogue. So I try to write something I think people need to hear, or rehear. Something to make them think, to be in that moment" (Fleming, 2007, p.98). This form of communication has, inadvertently or not, become part of our daily visual culture and comes by way of two different forms of art: *street art* and *graffiti art*.

Manco (2002), suggests that, "Graffiti art, as an idea, has always existed alongside other artist endeavors, the difference being that it is a mode of self-expression using methods that are seen as criminal, or outside the conventional art world, rather that specifically sanctioned or commissioned art" (p. 9). While many graffiti artists gain experience by experimenting in forms of vandalism, some do not consider their art work to be defacing public or private property, but rather see it as bringing a voice to the disempowered (Howze, 2008), beauty to an unsightly locale, or developing one's identity through a pseudonym (Othen-Price, 2006). However, there are also individuals who simply view street art as vandalism by another name (MacMaughton, 2006). Either way, it is imperative to develop a more informed understanding of street art in contrast to graffiti art as the two share many characteristics but are distinctly different.

The understanding and definition of street art as we see it today begins as a subculture of graffiti art, often crossing over and borrowing from one another. Merely

identifying street art is never a uniform, effortless task as it does not have one singular definition. Street art, originally coined by Allan Schwartzman in 1985 (Lewisohn, 2008), is an all encompassing varied artistic expression against an urban backdrop, deriving directly from the graffiti revolution, in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional state. Often referred to as *post-graffiti* (Bou, 2005, p.7), it carries a new set of aesthetic ideals, media, and techniques that were not witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s graffiti art movement in New York City.

Tagging, as it is called in graffiti art society, is considered the root of graffiti, and the most common way to mark one's territory (Bowen, 1999). Simplified forms of quick, stylized signatures composed of letters and/or numbers (Gomez, 1993), tags contain a highly stylized form of typography and lettering that is usually illegible by outsiders (Gross, D. & Gross, T., 1993). Lewisohn (2008) contends that, "Graffiti writing has a very specific aesthetic: it's about the tag, it's about graphic form, it's about letters, styles and spray-paint application, and it's about reaching difficult locations" (p. 23).

Curwen and MacGillivray (2007) suggest that tagging is a social practice whereby literacy permeates with intent and meaning, allowing an individual graffiti artist the opportunity to shape an identity, belonging to a specific community, group, or "crew," yet conforming to a set of rules and codes. Among these rules and codes, "bombing" (tagging or spray-painting multiple surfaces within a location, often using quick tags) is one way to maximize exposure as a tagger, thus gaining the respect and prestige among other graffiti artists. Its appeal to youth is seen in it's novelty within the language and "visual representation with a unique and holistic aesthetic" (Kan, 2001, p. 21).

Quantity of tags can become a source of recognition (MacGillivray and Curwen, 2007), and as Tim “Con” Conlon, of Washington, D.C., describes: “Graffiti is based on choosing a name and making it as prolific as possible” (Blumberg, 2008, p.28). It is, however, imperative to understand that the tag is central to graffiti art culture; without it graffiti would cease to exist. Almost like a rite of passage, it is understood within the graffiti subculture that if graffiti artists do not tag then they shouldn’t “piece” (creating large-scale, labor-intensive works of graffiti-style art, slang for masterpiece). Respect must be earned, and in order for a graffiti artist to piece, then they must first tag. Tagging and “piecing” go hand-in-hand and are not separate entities. Graffiti writers must prove they are worthy of piecing by showing that they also tag different areas. Street art, on the other hand, adheres to no hardened set of rules, and is open to interpretation, as all artists are open to work as they please. German-based street artist Nadine explains that she, “…never understood graffiti writing, with all its rules…spraying the same name everywhere…Street art is much more open and varied” (Walde, 2007, p.83).

Street art, unlike the majority of graffiti art, varies in the media used. In addition to spray-paint, permanent pens, or markers typically used by graffiti artists, street artists have free range to include whatever media best serves their artistic style. Street artists have typically behaved as mixed media artists avidly using one or more forms of media such as charcoal, paint, collage, spray-paint, pens, markers, airbrushing, and wheat pasting. The variety of products on the market today is far superior in quality and quantity than those of the 1970s and 1980s. Not only are there several spray-paint companies but there are also varieties of caps (nozzles) for spray-paint cans to provide

different effects from thin to thick lines. Occasionally, even the artists get creative and introduce new products of their own designed for specific effects. For instance, the graffiti artist KR introduced the highly successful Krink product line which is designed to deliberately drip, lending an expressionist feel to a drawn line (Walker, 2008).

Variations of stickers and stenciling are the primary forms of media that tend to be used the most by street artists versus graffiti artists who stick to “throwing up” (painting) pieces. Sticker art can appear on many city surfaces and can come in the form of “pre-made mailing labels, name tags, appropriated stickers, purchased pre-made stickers, and/or multiples of original designs to contribute to street artworks” (Keys, 2008, p. 98). Postal stickers and the common “Hello My Name Is…” stickers continue to be some of the favorites used by street artists. The strong appeal of stickering (the act of placing stickers), is due to the fact that stickers can be dispersed quickly, minimizing the risk for getting caught by the authorities for illegal placement of bills (Walde, 2007). Paper graffiti takes place in the form of stickering as well as collaging, wheat pasting, and stamping as well. Spray-painted graffiti is difficult to remove, while wheat pasted images and stickers, generally have a very short life expectancy due to weather exposure and clean-up attempts to eradicate this form of transient art. Noted New York City street artist Swoon developed a complex cutting technique that incorporates life-size human figures made from large sheets of paper. Her complex works of art begin as woodcuts or linocuts embellished with layers of paint and/or other materials. Her unique works of art often transform a street scene, but only last temporarily due to the nature of the material. In 2005, six of Swoon’s works of art were purchased by New York’s Museum of Modern Art.

Within the street art world, artists take into account a specific location for the installation of the artwork, whereas a “writer” (graffiti artist) has no specified location predetermined. In this sense, street artists create the bulk of their work as a preparatory process inside the studio (Lewisohn, 2008), working by way of a stencil or sticker, for example. Stenciling is a favorite among street artists who seek to create high quality works of art in the privacy of their own studio, thereby creating a very short amount of work time on the street when “installing” their artistic statement. Street artists spray-paint through the stencil, marking territory with an image similar to a tag made by a graffiti artist. Considered a preferred street technique to many artists, stencils yield a high contrast image loaded with expression (Walde, 2007). Among the most renowned street artists to date could possibly be Blek le Rat or Banksy. Banksy, a graffiti-trained artist who now primarily practices street art, like several others artists, made the switch to street art from graffiti art because his elaborate freehand pieces were too time consuming (Lewisohn, 2008). This polarizing artist is well known for his juxtaposition of subjects, and for rebelliousness that bucks authority. Though his actual identity is concealed to maintain his anonymity from authorities, this UK-based artist continues to make headlines in the media for earning top dollars.

Though they are currently a minority, artists like Swoon and Banksy are gaining recognition, fame, and fortune by selling works of art for thousands of dollars at auction houses like Christie’s. Inclusion into the mainstream art community is not desirable to all street and graffiti artists, however. Many street and graffiti artists seek to retain the exciting, outsider, rebellious spirit that originally helped define the graffiti art revolution in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s as it is part of the enigma surrounding the street

art and graffiti subculture. Lewisohn (2008) however, describes what a disservice it is to see museums with very few examples of street art or graffiti art within the permanent collections:

> This is unrepresentative of the effect that these artists have had on culture as a whole and visual culture particularly: many of the paintings and sculptures in contemporary art museums have the look of graffiti and street art—the influence is everywhere—but it's still very rare to see quality examples of the real thing in these institutions. Museums may be failing to recognize street art and graffiti because it's hard to exhibit ephemeral art. But they also have a responsibility to keep a record of what's happening in the world, beyond the slim mainstream view of art. (p. 131)

In accordance with Lewisohn, in the summer of 2008 the Smithsonian Institute acknowledged the importance of graffiti art on the contemporary art scene with the exhibition "Recognize! Hip Hop and Contemporary Portraiture," which featured art seen through a hip hop lens. Identifying contemporary stylistic changes in art and life, the show included two artists, Tim "Con" Conlon and Dave "Arek" Hupp who had both tagged trains in the traditional graffiti-style since their teenage years. Both Conlon and Hupp have been recruited by corporations such as Coca-Cola and Delta Airlines to create work for advertising campaigns (Blumberg, 2008). Their unique, hip graffiti-inspired spin on commercialization and marketing is not uncommon today and can be used as a segue into pop culture. Street and graffiti art influence can reach a youthful demographic though various avenues of mass media outlets that penetrate commercial mainstream society.

Why Include Street Art and Graffiti Art in the Secondary Art Curriculum

Within urban secondary art education pedagogy, street and graffiti art can be included into the curriculum as a form of our daily visual culture and part of a visual language spoken by all. Street and graffiti art are occasionally avoided in the secondary curriculum, yet they have the power to foster new and different ways of learning for all students by encouraging students to explore notions of creative expression in urban, public areas including spaces not traditionally reserved for public art. Keys (2008) contends,

> Such practices may broaden notions of visual culture and increase careful looking and analysis of diverse aesthetic systems. The result of which is compelling and challenging inquiry that enriches and questions both students' definition/s of art and re-considerations of art production and consumption in our world. (p. 99)

This type of critical thinking encourages students to question the definition of art, broadening their own personal definition. For educators at the high school level, an art lesson on street and graffiti art can bridge the gap between daily visual culture and life, and the world of art. For urban secondary students, street and graffiti art is an unavoidable part of their daily visual culture (Whitehead, 2004). Simply going to and from school, urban students are bombarded with numerous opportunities to view a variety of street and graffiti art forms via the interior and/or exterior of public transportation cars and trains, street overpasses, fencing, on walls of buildings, sidewalks, or simply on street signs. The unpredictability of street and graffiti art add to

the allure of the media as the unsuspecting viewer knows not where or when they will next be pleasantly surprised.

Characteristics of Street and Graffiti Artists

While Miller (2002) suggests that many street and graffiti artists are primarily adolescent males from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, this is not always the case. For example, there were several practicing street and graffiti artists featured in the 2006 book *Graffiti Women: Street Art From Five Continents* by Nicholas Ganz. Female street and graffiti artists are gaining notoriety and not only are making a name for themselves in the streets but also in gallery and museum spaces.

Many adolescent street artists or graffiti writers, male or female, use graffiti writing as an experiment in identity, working to develop a sense of “self” as the writer progresses artistically and developmentally, aiding them from adolescence into adulthood (Othen-Price, 2006). Though there are strict rules and codes that street and graffiti artists must follow (Lewisohn, 2008), there is an immense amount of peer pressure to stay within the group, and when the writer chooses to depart from the group, an “adolescent rite of passage has been completed and entry into the adult world has begun” (Othen-price, 2006, p.10). Street artists have far fewer rules and codes to adhere by, however.

Commonly, blanket stereotyping can associate street and graffiti artists with the gang subculture, placing them into more contradictory relationships (Bowen, 1999). To the undiscerning eye, street artists and graffiti artists are easily coupled with gangs as both subcultures often practice tagging, view themselves as outsiders, and often wear a clothing style based on a developed street persona (Chalfant, 1987). Street artists and

graffiti artists differ from gangs in that gangs strictly focus on establishing territorial limitations, whereby street and graffiti writers are more interested in developing a reputation through self-proliferation, earning street fame regarding their art (Curwen, M. S. & MacGillivray, L., 2007). For street and graffiti artists, pieces are considered contributions to society, enhancing a much-needed aesthetic appeal to the urban scene (Bowen, 1999). Tagging, seen as an unwanted nuisance, is a rite of passage and must accompany pieces as they are the first step for a writer before creating a piece, and without tagging, subsequent exquisite pieces cease to exist.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

The participants were interviewed from April 2009 to May 2009. Each interview question was generated with the objective of gathering new information on street art and graffiti as art forms. The lists of questions and the transcripts of the answers are included in this document as Appendix A.

Analysis of Data

1. Do you consider yourself a street artist and/or graffiti artist? Why or why not.

   The majority of the participants did not fully consider themselves to be street and/or graffiti artists. The participants describe street art and/or graffiti to be a difficult term(s) to grasp. Participant GASA1 said, “I think I’ve always considered myself a graffiti artist in the sense that I was following a tradition…”

2. What inspired your interest in street art and/or graffiti art?

   The participants credit their interest in street art and/graffiti art with the vibrancy of the subject, the variety of colors, unique stylization of lettering, and exposure to graffiti as young adults. Street art and graffiti art created a sense of curiosity for a few of the participants that enticed their interest in this art form, like participant GA2, who described graffiti it as “an anonymous freedom.”

3. What was your first street art and/or graffiti art experience like? In general when and where was it?

   The first street and/or graffiti art experiences were experimental in that the participants did not have any training or practice, and therefore, they primarily considered their first experiences to be uncomfortable and not quite successful.

Participant GA1 referred to the first graffiti art experience as a “disaster” in that starting and completing the artwork was a colossal challenge.

4. What differences do you perceive between street art and graffiti art?

While the participants all recognized that there are differences between street art and graffiti art, the range of answers for this question was vast. The participants determined that graffiti art is traditionally centered on proliferation of a tag name that incorporates a similar aesthetic or style. Rooted in more traditional tags, bombs, and pieces that display the tag name or crew, graffiti art differs from street art, which commonly is more open to a variety of media and subject. Though street art still makes use of tags, bombs, and pieces, there is more variety and choice of media used to create the art. One participant, GA2, pointed out that graffiti art is closer aligned to a specified set of rules that are not seen in street art, however. Two of the participants stated that there are many similarities, resulting in a significant amount of cross-over between the two forms of art. Additionally, both street art and graffiti art often carry the negative perception that they are affiliated with gangs when they are often not. Participant GA2 describes the difference by saying, “It seems that graffiti carries such a negative persona being tied to gang affiliations while street (art) is more or less reserved for artist types.”

5. Do you believe that other people have any misconceptions about street art or graffiti art?

The participants universally agreed that there are some misconceptions about street art and/or graffiti art. The participants stated that graffiti is not always related to the gang culture and society despite that perception. Two participants pointed out

that graffiti art and street art are often seen as integral forms of art with aesthetic value while people outside of the graffiti or street art subculture view it as an act of vandalism. Participant GA2 said that, “Some graffiti is purely an artistic avenue and has zero to do with a gang.”

6. How have you seen street art and graffiti art change or evolve generally speaking?

The participants agreed that speed used to create a work of art, as well as speed in ability to learn a new media for new graffiti writers has been the primary change in the street art and graffiti art community. The participants indicated that the internet has helped younger graffiti writers learn and develop their craft, introducing them to new styles, ideas, and tactics for creating their art. Participant GASA1 described this change by saying that, “Now people in 6 months or a year are where I was after nine years,” while participant GA2 said that, “Material change, concepts change, and styles definitely change.”

7. Are the risks involved with street art and graffiti art worth the consequences? Why or why not?

The participants all initially stated that the risks were indeed worth the consequences. However, two of the participants, GASA1 and GA2, stated that they have faced criminal charges in their past and that they now minimize the risks they take to create their street and/or graffiti works of art. All of the participants said that the law enforcement was a deterrent for creating these works of art as they would likely face criminal prosecution if caught. Participant GA1 believes that without laws there would be no graffiti.

8. What messages are important for you to communicate with your work?

The participants determined that the basic message they attempt to convey is a message of dominance and superiority intended to tell other writers that they are the best and their work will always be better, more prolific and more skilled. Participant GASA1 described this message of superiority as, “Mostly I’m talking to the community of graffiti writers and I have no message outside of that (other) than ‘I’m better than you’ or ‘My crew is better than your crew.’”

9. What is street art and/or graffiti art about? Would you say it is about personal recognition or something more?

The participants agreed that personal recognition and respect is the primary importance to street art and/or graffiti art. Gaining a sense of pride in the street art or graffiti art subculture is important as well. Participant GASA1 described this personal recognition by saying, “…its about branding yourself, and gaining some type of fame, mostly within the community of writers and hopefully within a broader community that people will take notice.”

10. Do you have a specified audience you try to reach with your work? If so, who? Why or why not?

The participants stated that there is no direct, specified audience. One participant, GA2, suggested that the community of other graffiti writers and/or street artists would be somewhat considered the audience. It seems that proliferation of a name is the key and whoever saw the result became the audience for the artist. However, participant GA1 said, “ I don’t want to be popular among the people…just gain and maintain respect.”

11. Have you ever studied art in a course or class?

Two of the three participants have taken an art class or had some art training. One participant has a Bachelor's degree in art while the other had some formal art training in college as well as high school. The third participant had no formal art training.

12. If not, in what ways do you think art training might have altered your path as a street artist?

Only one participant, GA1, answered this question and stated that graffiti art is innate, something that motives you artistically and is not a learned behavior. GA1 described it by saying that, "No matter how many courses you take, it won't be in your heart to be a graffiti artist." GA1 did not suggest that any further art training would alter the pathway to becoming an artist.

13. Do you think street art and graffiti art belong in the traditional, mainstream art community? Why or why not?

The answers provided to this question were a bit conflicting and it appeared the participants could not come up with a firm decision. Two of the participants stated that while inclusion into the mainstream community can be beneficial from an educational standpoint, it can also be a detriment, however. When these art forms are brought into the mainstream art community via galleries or museums, for example, the illicit nature of street and/or graffiti art, as well as context and message of the art is totally altered in a negative way, losing some of the initial allure to the art forms. Participant GA2 described it as, "…once you take graffiti out of the streets, it becomes something it's not. It has a very fake feeling when it is placed up on a

museum wall or in a gallery." The third participant thought that street art and graffiti art do not belong in the traditional, mainstream, art community as it is just a frivolous, meaningless act that has no use in the mainstream culture.

14. Do you think street art and graffiti art belong as a part of a high school art curriculum? Why or why not?

Two of the participants agreed that street art and graffiti art can have a place in the high school art curriculum provided that the circumstances are aligned with parental understanding of the instruction, for example. One participant argued that this type of instruction in a high school curriculum can be beneficial in that it can open additional doors to show students more opportunities through the arts, such as self-expression, for example. Participant GASA1 described the opportunity as beneficial in that street art and/or graffiti art can be, "…a really positive thing for young graffiti writers because a lot of young writers are confused or do it out of this feeling from a lack of social identity, or social anxiety, or wanting to rebel against something."

15. In what ways do you think people should appreciate street art and/or graffiti art or would you prefer that people are unappreciative of your work or find it disturbing? Please explain.

The participants primarily want to be appreciated for their art but understand why their work may not be appreciated by an outside perspective audience, understanding that their work is often highly subjective. Participant GA2 said, " I think I would rather be appreciated but it is also the nature of the best to be hated also."

16. Is anything as far as subject matter or content “off limits” to a street artist or graffiti artist? Are there specific physical places that are “off limits”?

The participants all agreed that there is no subject matter or content that is considered to be “off limits” to street artists or graffiti artists. A few of the participants stated that they avoid writing in a few specific locations, and would not personally vandalize private property such a house, a fence, or a car, for example. Participant GA2 said, “I know there are places I avoid just due to getting caught,” while GASA1 said that, “I would say, in my own opinion that it doesn’t belong on private property.”

17. Have you ever felt guilty after piecing, pasting or tagging? Can you give me an example of why you felt that way?

Two of the participants admitted the felt some guilt or remorse after piecing, pasting, or tagging their work. Two of the participants stated that the adrenaline rush is overwhelming and creates a sense of excitement that encourages the continuation of this act. Participant GASA1, however, said that, “I never felt guilty. I was always excited and I wanted to go back and see it again and again and take pictures of it.”

18. Is there an artist age limit to the production of street art or graffiti art? Why or why not?

All three of the participants agreed that there is no age limit for practicing street artists or graffiti artists. One participants indicated that the age of street artists and graffiti artists has increased over time with a few limitations in that these older artists aren’t necessarily taking the same kinds of physical risks to proliferation their name, for example. Participant GASA1 said that, “…the age limit has gone up over time. Now I know graffiti writers and I’ve painted with graffiti writers that are close to fifty.”

19. What do you think the future holds for street and/or graffiti artists?

While each of the participants agreed the change among street artists and graffiti artists is eminent, each of the participants held different opinions about the future. Participant GA1 predicts the future will hold, “A new world of sensations…” while participant GASA1 sees that the line between street art and graffiti art will be blurred, yet becoming more mainstream. Participant GA2 thinks that there will be more products introduced into the market “that will change the face of graffiti,” opening the door for the future of street art and graffiti art.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

In an attempt to learn more about street art and graffiti as art forms, I sought information from three practicing street and/or graffiti artists. Initially finding willing participants for this study proved a bit more challenging than anticipated. Over a period of four weeks, nine participants were invited to take part in this study. While the reasons vary from person to person, many of these invited artists simply would not participate in the study despite my guarantee that they would remain anonymous. While a few of the artists blatantly said they didn't have the time or desire to participate, two others agreed to participate and then change their mind at the last minute. It seems, however, that the primary reason these artists were hesitant to participate in the study was that they feared the information they revealed would eventually expose their identity and too many underground secrets or codes. The street artists and graffiti artists that did choose to participate also voiced concern regarding anonymity, stressing that they didn't want to later face any criminal prosecution or trouble down the road. These artists revealed a great deal of information that can be incorporated into the high school art curriculum. The participants had similar responses to approximately half of the questions.

In gaining information about the participants regarding their background, the participants state that they were initially drawn to street art or graffiti art as adolescents. The mere aesthetic structure of this art form, from the bold color usage to the unique, stylization of letter, street art and graffiti art became a new-found form of interest that was enticing, yet illicit to these young adults. Some of their first street and/or graffiti art experiences originated in middle school or high school, and often they were experimental initially with a poor outcome. Despite the unsuccessful result, each of the

participants continued to work on this art form, developing it and gradually improving over time.

The participants agreed that there have been some important changes to street art and graffiti art over the past several years. Specifically, the speed and accuracy used in the creation of a piece today is much faster than it was even ten years ago. The participants all agreed that the training of a younger graffiti writer is now much quicker in part due to the internet and the ability to watch videos, view photos, and see similar works of art from all over the globe at just a click of a mouse.

When asked about the misconceptions held regarding street art and graffiti art, the participants unanimously responded by saying that many people outside of the street art and graffiti art subculture cannot distinguish between the art forms and gang graffiti, therefore placing it all into a large group that carries a negative connotation. While the participants stated that graffiti in general is indeed a form of vandalism, it is not always practiced by gang members, and these artists do not want to be affiliated and categorized as gang members as there are many graffiti writers and street artists that are not gang members.

The participants unanimously agreed that there was vital importance in conveying a message throughout their work. Proliferation of a name, or tag name, is key to gaining a sense of accomplishment in this subculture. In piecing, pasting, and tagging your name prominently and profusely, you are letting the world know that you are a dominant, omnipresent graffiti writer or street artist. Gaining this respect is part of gaining personal recognition, a vital aspect that takes precedence in street art and graffiti art.

There was a wide variety of educational backgrounds among the participants from little to no high school art experience to some master's level art studies. When asked about street art and graffiti art belonging as part of the traditional, mainstream art community, there was also a wide variety of opinion. One participant firmly believed that street art and graffiti art do not belong in the mainstream art community, yet the other two participants found this question to be a grey area in that no exact definition could be determined by the participants. While these two participants agreed that these illicit art forms traditionally best thrive outside of the mainstream art community, they also identified some benefits to including these art forms in the mainstream art community. The participants stated that inclusion could help advance the understanding of these art forms, especially regarding an art education background. The participants thought that street art and graffiti art have a possible place in the high school art curriculum as it can lead to something positive, opening doors to other options and opportunities through the arts via future careers or furthering their education through the arts, for example.

CHAPTER 5: LESSON PLAN

Stenciling: Social or Political Statements in Art

Grade 9-12

Lesson Theme: Creating a stencil that comments on a pertinent social or political statement

National Standards:

Visual Arts (grade 9-12)

--Content Standard: 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

--Content Standard: 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

--Content Standard: 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

--Content Standard: 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

--Content Standard: 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Objectives:

Students will:

--Analyze, compare and contrast street art and graffiti art versus traditional, mainstream forms of art, discussing how they differ

-- Identify and correctly use street art and graffiti art vocabulary

--Create a two-color stencil that expresses a form of social or political commentary with spray paint evenly applied, without overspray or smudges

--Compose a written artist statement in response to street or graffiti art

Resources:

Images, posters, and/or books to use as visual aids for artists reproductions

Examples of political statements used throughout history

Examples of stencils

High contrast images

Websites: http://obeygiant.com and http://www.banksy.co.uk

Figure 1: Grenade by Shepard Fairey from http://obeygiant.com

Figure 2: Banksy from http://www.banksy.co.uk

Introduction/Motivation:

Begin a class discussion by asking the students to define graffiti and street art. Ask the students to define any differences between graffiti and street art by comparing and contrasting the two art forms. Other questions to ask the students: Where have you seen graffiti and/or street art? Why would someone create graffiti and/or street art? How is graffiti and/or street art made?

Content & Procedures:

Classes are 90 minutes long.

Day 1: Define social and political topic commentary by discussing examples of social and political commentary as seen in current events. Ask the students to consider a political topic or event that resonates within them personally. Students could choose a local or global community topic, or just one that is important to them personally. Have the students individually write down one or two social or political topics on a sticky note (Post It, for example) and then place them all on a designated space in the classroom, creating a larger class-wide list. Read all social or political topics aloud to the class. From the group list, ask the students to choose one political or social issue that is pertinent to them individually.

Ask the students to research their social or political topic on the internet or using magazines and newspapers. Also ask students to research topics such as: Chinese Propaganda, Posters of War, Guerilla Art, Political cartoons, and/or Social Movements and Culture to provide more examples of political commentary via activism. Students should choose two or three images that they find appealing from this research and print them out to use as visual aids.

Day 2: Students will be introduced to Shepard Fairey and Banksy, two prominent and practicing street and graffiti artists. The teacher will discuss how each artist uses social and political commentary effectively within their respective works of art. Students will compare and contrast the artists and engage in a group discussion.

The teacher will demonstrate how to create a stencil using paper and an x-acto knife, stressing the importance of bridges (areas of the paper that must be kept intact and interconnected to provide stencil stability). When stencil is complete the teacher will demonstrate the spray painting application in a well-ventilated area with proper mask and gloves. (If necessary the students may need to work outside for better ventilation.) The teacher should also explain overspray (when spray paint “drifts” outside its designated or intended area, or literally an excessive/heavy application of too much paint in one area), and techniques for preventing overspray. Students should be reminded to incorporate quality craftsmanship in their final work that illustrates a clean, high contrast image, no accidental overspray of spray paint, and proper use of bridges (if necessary), and free of smudges.

Students will begin to compose sketches using their internet visual aids to create a bold, graphic image that will later be transformed into a stencil. Students should select high contrast subject matter to create a high impact, bold visual statement. The teacher will show the students examples of high contrast imagery to aid in this understanding. The stencil will be a two color stencil. The first layer will be lighter in value and the second, final layer will be black or dark in value as seen in the artwork of Shepard Fairey. Finally, students will have the option to include text in their artwork if they choose.

Day 3: Students should complete any final sketches and then select the best sketch. From the sketch design chosen, students will then transfer the sketch to the tag paper and begin to create the stencils carefully by cutting out the design with x-acto knives.

Students will be given options for the background paper, such as mat board, maps, wallpaper, textured paper, and various other papers.

Day 4: When the stencils are complete, students will choose a background paper and begin to spray paint the first layer or two in a lighter value color of spray paint. If students are using background paper that is printed the first layer of spray paint should be very light or almost translucent. Students should provide 5-10 minutes in-between layers so that the spray paint can adequately dry. Students will then apply the stencil over the first and/or second layer of spray paint to complete the piece by using a darker value spray paint.

Materials and Materials Management:

Items may include but are not limited to the following:

9”x12” Tag paper for the stencil

X-acto knives

Variety of spray paint (Montana brand preferred followed by Rustoleum, then Krylon)

Masks

Gloves

Tracing paper

Background papers: mat board, maps, wallpaper, textured paper, & various other papers

Closure/Review: Students will reflect on their chosen social and/or political topic and then compose a two paragraph (minimum) artist statement and reflection. Students should create a statement using complete sentences and correct spelling. The class will prepare for a class critique and students should be ready to present their individual artist statements as well as the visual work of art. Finally, each social and/or political statement will be presented together as a class-wide exhibition locally within the school building.

Assessment Questions

Did the student participate in class discussions by analyzing, comparing & contrasting street art and graffiti art versus traditional, mainstream forms of art?

Did the student identify and correctly use street art and graffiti art vocabulary?

Did the student create a well-crafted two-color stencil that expresses a form of social or political commentary with spray paint evenly applied, without overspray or smudges?

Did the student compose a minimum two paragraph written artist statement in response to street or graffiti art using complete sentences and correct spelling?

Extension Idea

Students can continue to study street art and/or graffiti art by delving into a variety of different lettering styles, such as wildstyle, a complex lettering style that uses interlocking letters.

Assessment Points						
Student Name:						
Assignment: Stenciling: Social or political statements in art					Due Date:	
Artwork is based on the following 4 criteria:	Excellent	Good	Average	Needs Improvement		Teacher's Rating
Criteria 1 – Participates in class discussions by analyzing, comparing & contrasting street art and graffiti art versus traditional, mainstream forms of art	10	9 – 8	7	6 or less		
Criteria 2 – Identifies and correctly uses street art and graffiti art vocabulary	10	9 – 8	7	6 or less		
Criteria 3 – Creates a well-crafted two-color stencil that expresses a form of social or political commentary with spray paint evenly applied, without overspray or smudges	10	9 – 8	7	6 or less		
Criteria 4 – Compose a minimum two paragraph written artist statement in response to street or graffiti art using complete sentences and correct spelling.	10	9 – 8	7	6 or less		
Total points: _____/40 possible points						Total grade:

Figure 3: Assessment Points

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The interview research yielded results that support the information outlined in the review of literature. Based on my review of literature and interviews with artists I found answers to all of my Research Questions. I will revisit each of my research questions in the following discussion below.

Final Analysis

How and why are street art and graffiti art different?

While there is a significant amount of cross-over between street art and graffiti art, there are differences as well. Collectively, street art and graffiti art both aim to convey a message and seek proliferation of a name. While graffiti art is rooted more in the traditional tags, bombs, and pieces often with a set of rules, street art is more open to interpretation from an artistic stand point. Street art makes no boundaries in media, rarely has ties to rules like that of graffiti art, and is closer aligned to that of conventional art versus mere tags. However, both street art and graffiti art are often mistakenly identified as belonging to the gang community. Street artist and graffiti artist participants agreed that their work is all too often affiliated with the gang community when in fact, it is not intended to be. The aesthetic value of street and graffiti art is not always appreciated by the indiscriminate eye of mainstream society as it is often placed under the blanket categorization of vandalism. While some street artists and graffiti artists view their work as blatant acts of vandalism, not all of them do.

What are the artists' motivations to create street art and graffiti art?

The interviews revealed that the street artists and graffiti artists do not collectively consider themselves to be artists. The participants did, however, admit that the allure to street art and/or graffiti art was, in fact, the artistic elements often seen within street art and graffiti art. The array of color, exciting use of line, and diverse, bold use of lettering was enticing to the participants. The artistic elements were engaging enough for the participants to not only delve into these art forms, but also for them to continue to develop their skills, improving enough that they maintained working on this craft for a few to several years or more.

Proliferation of a name is fundamental to street art and graffiti art, creating a sense of pride and recognition not only within this subculture but also within mainstream society. This sense of importance, dominance and egotism is the most integral message to street and graffiti artists as it conveys a sense of superiority to others, who thereby serve as their audience. The street and graffiti artists want their work to be seen by the largest audience possible, as often as possible. Though there is no universal audience, the participants said that whoever sees their work inadvertently becomes the audience.

What can I learn from the experiences of street artists and graffiti artists that might be beneficial to my teaching urban high school students?

The participants noted that there are apparent changes occurring in the world of street and graffiti art on a couple of levels. One, while the artists continue to feel passionate about their work, the participants suggested that as they age and mature personally, the risks involved with creating these art forms are no longer worth the

consequences they were willing to face as younger adults or teens. The consequences of unforgiving jail time or costly fines to them appear more severe as adults. The participants also suggested that access to the internet, books, magazines and technology have also resulted in apparent change. These new avenues serve as resources to aid in the growth and expansion of street art and graffiti art knowledge by introducing new techniques, styles, and ideas to a multitude of young writers and artists worldwide. These resources have each contributed to advances that have helped changed the face street and graffiti by providing access to information on a world-wide basis. With these new sources of information, street and graffiti artists no longer need excessive mentoring or guidance by an elder, experienced street or graffiti artist as they once traditionally did. Virtually everything a young artist needs to know can be learned via the web by a video, blog, or a how-to website. Young adolescents can now gain access to street art or graffiti art information not only in urban areas but also rural areas. Internet access, books, blogs, videos, and magazines each serve as an outlet to disseminate information with a number of these still growing and being added almost daily, lending legitimacy to the importance and permanence of street and graffiti art.

In what ways might street art and graffiti art be incorporated into secondary art curriculum and instruction?

Street art and graffiti art undoubtedly have a presence that is known and felt in our present visual culture. Unfortunately, it seems these art forms are rarely infused into the secondary art curriculum. In learning more about street art and graffiti art, art educators can broaden and enhance their secondary art curriculum by adding these art forms that are decidedly appealing to many adolescent students. The participants in this

study generally believe that street art and graffiti art do have a place in a high school art curriculum as these art forms can serve as beneficial learning opportunities, opening the door to positive experiences in the arts. While the tradition of street art and graffiti art is built on a strong egotistic impulse, secondary art students could also be introduced to these art forms as a means to communicate a message, communicate one's cultural heritage, or create art for arts' sake, not unlike many of the modern masters like Picasso and Pollack. Street art and graffiti art could also be used in creating a lesson about the significance of self expression in developing one's identity, a subject of interest to young adolescent students who are trying to define themselves as individuals in a complex world. Finally, street art and graffiti art can and should be integrated into the classroom to show that the mainstream, traditional forms of art are not the only forms of art, that there is a wide range of art that exists in and around us on a daily basis in our visual culture.

Enabling students to think critically for themselves is unquestionably integral to their development as young adults, and it is this type of critical thinking can take place inside the art classroom. The artistic process offers infinite opportunities for creative thought, personal expression, and problem solving. When students are deeply engaged in constructing meaning by looking at art, discussing, or constructing it, they grow artistically and personally.

Recommendations for Future Research

Art educators must continually search for exciting opportunities to engage students in art lessons that foster artistic development and motivate students to look more critically and reflectively at the images in the world around them. Opening new

avenues for art learning is not only important for student engagement but also for teacher rejuvenation and renewal. Street art and graffiti art can easily serve as an exciting, innovative resource for engaging students if it is currently not being incorporated into the classroom.

For street art and graffiti art to become better infused into the secondary art curriculum a few actions can be taken. First, communicating the importance of these art forms to parents and school administration is the first step as it opens the door to street and graffiti art, if this is foreign territory, thereby avoiding any later confusion or misunderstanding. Next, explaining and defining vandalism to the students would be fundamental so they are aware of the illicit nature of street and graffiti art. It is imperative that students understand local policy and legal ramifications regarding street and/or graffiti art as it is often considered vandalism. Students should also be aware that many artists have paid the price via jail time or hefty fines, for their participation as street artists or graffiti artists. Third, offering a street art and/or graffiti art in-service for teachers that offers an instructional resource would also help introduce teachers to these art forms. The in-service could offer suggestions that help introduce street art and graffiti art into their own curriculum. Finally, infusing street art and graffiti art into classroom resources from textbooks, magazines, books, and posters would also provide more learning opportunities for students. Just as students experience a wide variety of artistic elements in their visual culture, they should also experience a wide variety of art forms within the secondary art classroom.

An arts-based education unquestionably provides the opportunity to enrich the minds of our youth. Including street art and graffiti art into secondary art curriculum aids

in developing a multifaceted arts-based education that diversifies how adolescents see the world. Considered either an artwork or an eyesore, street art and graffiti art play into our contemporary visual culture, and will continue to impact the lives of many students far beyond the classroom, extending across a lifetime.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

Questions

1. Do you consider yourself a street artist and/or graffiti artist? Why or why not.
2. What inspired your interest in street art and/or graffiti art?
3. What was your first street art and/or graffiti art experience like? In general when and where was it?
4. What differences do you perceive between street art and graffiti art?
5. Do you believe that other people have any misconceptions about street art or graffiti art?
6. How have you seen street art and graffiti art change or evolve generally speaking?
7. Are the risks involved with street art and graffiti art worth the consequences? Why or why not?
8. What messages are important for you to communicate with your work?
9. What is street art and/or graffiti art about? Would you say it is about personal recognition or something more?
10. Do you have a specified audience you try to reach with your work? If so, who? Why or why not?
11. Have you ever studied art in a course or class?
12. If not, in what ways do you think art training might have altered your path as a street artist?

13. Do you think street art and graffiti art belong in the traditional, mainstream art community? Why or why not?
14. Do you think street art and graffiti art belong as a part of a high school art curriculum? Why or why not?
15. In what ways do you think people should appreciate street art and/or graffiti art or would you prefer that people are unappreciative of your work or find it disturbing? Please explain.
16. Is anything as far as subject matter or content “off limits” to a street artist or graffiti artist? Are there specific physical places that are “off limits”?
17. Have you ever felt guilty after piecing, pasting or tagging? Can you give me an example of why you felt that way?
18. Is there an artist age limit to the production of street art or graffiti art? Why or why not?
19. What do you think the future holds for street and/or graffiti artists?

Transcriptions

Graffiti Artist 1(GA1) on 04.20.09

MLB Q1: Do you consider yourself a street artist and/or graffiti artist? Why or why not.

GA1: No... Because I still have a lot to learn…

MLB Q2: What inspired your interest in street art and/or graffiti art?

GA1: The many different colors and the way that you can express your self with it...

MLB Q3: What was your first street art and/or graffiti art experience like? In general when and where was it?

GA1: It was a disaster… because I felt short in knowledge of this art and had almost no idea of how to start or finish…

MLB Q4: What differences do you perceive between street art and graffiti art?

GA1: It differs by the line, the style, the shape and so on...

MLB Q5: Do you believe that other people have any misconceptions about street art or graffiti art?

GA1: Yes, because they do not know the difference between vandalism and graffiti, even though graffiti can sometimes fall in that category.

MLB Q6: How have you seen street art and graffiti art change or evolve generally speaking?

GA1: In the way that everyday this art changes with new tactics and speed.

MLB Q7: Are the risks involved with street art and graffiti art worth the consequences? Why or why not?

GA1: Yes, because of the adrenaline rush that it gives you… with out laws, there's no graffiti.

MLB Q8: What messages are important for you to communicate with your work?

GA1: No answer given.

MLB Q9: What is street art and/or graffiti art about? Would you say it is about personal recognition or something more?

GA1: To create your own style since your style is the key to everything. I would say that it is for personal respect.

MLB Q10: Do you have a specified audience you try to reach with your work? If so, who? Why or why not?

GA1: No because I don't want to be popular among the people… just gain and maintain respect

MLB Q11: Have you ever studied art in a course or class?

GA1: No… I have no training.

MLB Q12: If not, in what ways do you think art training might have altered your path as a street artist?

GA1: No… because no matter how many courses you take, it won't be in your heart to be a graffiti artist. It is not something you can learn but something that is within you.

MLB Q13: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong in the traditional, mainstream art community? Why or why not?

GA1: No, because it's just simply graffiti...

MLB Q14: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong as a part of a high school art curriculum? Why or why not?

GA1: No because like I've said, it is not something that you learn, but something that you have in your heart...

MLB Q15: In what ways do you think people should appreciate street art and/or graffiti art or would you prefer that people are unappreciative of your work or find it disturbing? Please explain.

GA1: I think that that criteria should be left for every single person. It is only up to them to appreciate it or disagree with it...

MLB Q16: Is anything as far as subject matter or content “off limits” to a street artist or graffiti artist? Are there specific physical places that are “off limits”?

GA1: Nothing is off limits... when you talk about graffiti, you talk about illegal doing… so with that in mind nothing is off limits…

MLB Q17: Have you ever felt guilty after piecing, pasting or tagging? Can you give me an example of why you felt that way?

GA1: Yes, because I tagged a statue that represented the foundation of the state that I lived in...

MLB Q18: Is there an artist age limit to the production of street art or graffiti art? Why or why not?

GA1: No... because graffiti is forever…

MLB Q19: What do you think the future holds for street and/or graffiti artists?

GA1: A new world of sensations…

Graffiti Artist & Street Artist 1 (GASA1) on 05.04.09

MLB Q1: Do you consider yourself a street artist and/or graffiti artist? Why or why not.

GASA1: I think I've always considered myself a graffiti artist in the sense that I was following a tradition or something that was started initially anyway that was never considered art but the participants. Maybe some of them did consider it art but it was more about proliferation of your name and getting your name up as much as possible in a city or in a couple of cities.

MLB Q2: What inspired your interest in street art and/or graffiti art?

GASA1: I think as a really small child in the early 1980's…I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota…I saw it and I knew it was different than the gang graffiti in the neighborhood I grew up in. There was a lot of gang graffiti, which I wasn't interested in. I was interested in it before I even knew that it was other kids writing their names and I think I was just drawn to the stylization. Just the way it looked I think the irreverent act, though I think at 9 or ten I know I didn't fully understand it at that point, but even before I

knew that it was other peoples' names I was emulating it. My notebook and notes in elementary school.

MLB Q3: What was your first street art and/or graffiti art experience like? In general when and where was it?

GASA1: I think the first places I ever wrote my name was inside of my elementary school and on the playground at my elementary school. There was a lot of graffiti on the playground at my elementary school. I remember stealing markers for the art classroom and doing it in the art classroom on the tables, which seemed really safe, and then on the playground, which seemed a little less safe. As it continued it was around the neighborhood I grew up in and then it continued from there.

MLB Q4: What differences do you perceive between street art and graffiti art?

GASA1: I think there is a lot of cross over. I think it would be impossible to say that one is one and the other is the other. I think in general a graffiti writer's main message is proliferation of his or her own name and a street artist I think has some of those intentions of proliferation but it takes different forms than that of a graffiti writer. And I really don't think there is a difference but the street artist's intent has more of a message to it. There is more of a conceptual consideration going on in the street artist's work that isn't consciously taken into consideration in the graffiti artists' work. However, I have known lots and lots of graffiti writers who are also street artists that do both, stencil work, wheat-paste….that were not specifically that persons' name but I think it is

an impossible distinction. I think you can distinguish but the grey area is much greater than one or the other.

MLB Q5: Do you believe that other people have any misconceptions about street art or graffiti art?

GASA1: Absolutely. I think that the majority of people have the perception that all graffiti is gang related and also that a lot of middle class people's perception is that this is a crime perpetrated by you, urban minorities, which is not the case at all. I would say that at least fifty percent of the time graffiti writers are white, middle class, many times suburban, and potentially that has changed over time but at this point I would say that at least at this point in time, considerably more than fifty percent of street artists are middle class and white. I'm sure there are other misconceptions and I'm sure many people don't see any aesthetic value in graffiti art or street art but that they see it as a destructive act of vandalism.

MLB Q6: How have you seen street art and graffiti art change or evolve generally speaking?

GASA1: In 1986 when I started doing it, graffiti art was very localized. Before the internet, there was a huge boom of graffiti magazines in the early 90s. Before that the access to information could only be passed on from kids moving from one city to another, or adults that had written graffiti and moved to another city, and mentoring other, younger writers. In the early 90s, every crew or every city had graffiti magazines that were distributed across the country. Some of the first ones were by CBS crew

called can control and there were European ones. Before that the only information available to young writers were Henry Chalfant's *Spray Can Art* and *Subway Art*, and those were had to find in Minnesota. Information like that was scarce. If someone went to another city they may come back with 15-20 pictures. The difference now is that you can get on the internet and have infinite access to images of graffiti. Stylistically it has changed several ways. Stylistically the progress the young writer makes from the beginning, the toy stage, or the inexperienced stage, is much faster. It took me almost 9 years to get good at it…from '86 until about '93, '94, '95 when I started getting good at it. Now people in 6 months or a year are where I was after nine years. Also because of the internet there has also been a complete breakdown in the mentoring system where you had to be mentored by an older writer to gain access to the culture. Now anybody, suburban or anybody has access to that information. Writers used to be unwilling to share styles. It use to be one of the highest offenses to bite or steal someone else's style which often times ended in some type of fight or beef that would go one for years for copying someone else's style. There has been a widening of access and a speeding up of the process from inexperienced to experienced, or at least the appearance of that. Also there has been a proliferation with so many people doing it the quality in some ways has been lost.

MLB Q7: Are the risks involved with street art and graffiti art worth the consequences? Why or why not?

GASA1: In my teens and early twenties I would say absolutely it was worth it. I got caught and arrested several times and it wasn't until my son was born that I realized it

wasn't worth it. At this point in my life I would say that the risk isn't worth it. I still do it from time to time but I try to minimize the risk of my actions at this point.

MLB Q8: What messages are important for you to communicate with your work?
GASA1: Mostly I'm talking to the community of graffiti writers and I have no message outside of that (other) than 'I'm better than you' or 'My crew is better than your crew I'm more up than you, I'm more prolific, I'm more skilled, and I go to greater lengths to do it than you do. There are lots of unconscious messages that writers have in their work and they aren't very aware of the social implications…

MLB Q9: What is street art and/or graffiti art about? Would you say it is about personal recognition or something more?
GASA1: I think it is about personal recognition, its about branding yourself, and gaining some type of fame, mostly within the community of writers and hopefully within a broader community that people will take notice.

MLB Q10: Do you have a specified audience you try to reach with your work? If so, who? Why or why not?
GASA1: Predominantly it would have been the community of graffiti writers for whatever city I was at and also nationally and internationally with the rise of the internet and magazines and stuff it went from being a localized phenomenon to a national and global phenomenon where graffiti writers were going from city to city to city and putting their name up and also going across seas and getting recognition that way.

MLB Q11: Have you ever studied art in a course or class?

GASA1: Yes, I have. I have a Bachelor's degree in drawing and painting, and I am currently working my Master's degree in drawing and painting. I have also taken non accredited courses at classical drawing studios and other types of courses. I have done a lot of classes in drawing, painting, and sculpture.

MLB Q12: If not, in what ways do you think art training might have altered your path as a street artist?

GASA1: Let's skip twelve since I pretty much answered it…

MLB Q13: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong in the traditional, mainstream art community? Why or why not?

GASA1: I think that they absolutely don't except that…maybe street art belongs in the mainstream. I think that graffiti art does not belong in the mainstream. However, I think that it will be assimilated, and it is and has been assimilated for the last twenty-five or almost thirty years into mainstream gallery scenes. I think that it doesn't belong in that I think when you take it out of the context of it being vandalism it ceases to be what it was. Reading about the early shows in the eighties where graffiti writers were painting on canvases and putting them on the walls as opposed to seeing it on the subway train in New York—almost seeing a picture of graffiti it felt trite or kitsch, it almost felt neutered, whereas when you see it, it has a power when it is an illegal act on a moving subway car that is moving across the city. It becomes a powerful symbol or act whereas

in the gallery it kind of has its balls cut off. It is kind of a façade of the real act of vandalism.

MLB Q14: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong as a part of a high school art curriculum? Why or why not?

GASA1: I don't know…I have gone into quite a few high schools and elementary schools and done demonstrations and programs with high school kids. I think that for some people it could be a gateway for something positive. I've also taught a mural class for young graffiti artists in Minneapolis. I think it can be a really positive experience, not to say that this is bad, or this is good, or we condone this, or reject this…but to say that when you do this and when you are done with this you have these other options. I think that is a really positive thing for young graffiti writers because a lot of young writers are confused or do it out of this feeling from a lack of social identity, or social anxiety, or wanting to rebel against something. And to show that specifically in my own case , I grew up doing this and now I have a career in art and I teach art an now I'm getting my master's degree. That graffiti can be a transitioning into some other thing in your life that is more positive. Not to say that graffiti art isn't positive, but there were several times when I could have died doing it running across freeways and stuff, including being arrested.

MLB Q15: In what ways do you think people should appreciate street art and/or graffiti art or would you prefer that people are unappreciative of your work or find it disturbing? Please explain.

GASA1: I don’t know. I think I always wanted to people to appreciate the graffiti murals or productions but I don’t think I ever cared what people thought when I just wrote my name on the side of a building. In fact, I think I wanted people to call me an asshole or something like that. I don’t think I wanted to be appreciated positively.

MLB Q16: Is anything as far as subject matter or content “off limits” to a street artist or graffiti artist? Are there specific physical places that are “off limits”?

GASA1: I would say no all the way across the board. I would say different groups have different limits. The crew I grew up in didn’t write on private property, we didn’t write on your house, your fence, churches, however, that is not true for all graffiti writers or street artists. I would say, in my opinion that it doesn’t belong on private property.

MLB Q17: Have you ever felt guilty after piecing, pasting or tagging? Can you give me an example of why you felt that way?

GASA1: I never felt guilty. I was always excited and I wanted to go back and see it again and again and take pictures of it. I was always self-affirmed I guess that I’d written my name over thirty feet long on top of a building and I could drive by on the street and see it.

MLB Q18: Is there an artist age limit to the production of street art or graffiti art? Why or why not?

GASA1: Not anymore. I think in the 80s at least in Minneapolis, and I can only speak for Minneapolis in the early 80s is that usually by the age of 21 graffiti writers were done. I

think by the mid nineties people were starting to write around twenty-one—I think I was eleven years old the first time I did it—but I think the age limit has gone up over time. Now I know graffiti writers and I've painted with graffiti writers that are close to fifty. They are still doing and their not necessarily climbing rooftops and billboards and stuff but they are still piecing under bridges and on legal walls and stuff like that. I think its really become a community where even though I said the internet as destroyed the structure of hierarchy of passing it on but they only thing you have as an older writer is kids of this recognition from younger writers that you did something as their predecessor and they give you respect as their predecessor. So, being a graffiti writer is a large part of your self-identity as a writer, the greatest thing you have is the appreciation of the younger writers.

MLB Q19: What do you think the future holds for street and/or graffiti artists?

GASA1: I think they will simultaneously continue to become more mainstream and I think it will never be completely be accepted as mainstream, at least not in the U.S. or in most cities in the U.S. I think people will continue to do it. It may die out, I'm not sure, it will definitely will continue to change. More and more graffiti writers are getting degrees in art and other fields and that will add to the legitimacy in a lot of people's minds. There is more and more literature being written about graffiti artists by graffiti artists and I think those things will add to it. As people start to realize it, and this is kind of unfortunate, that this is more of a middle class and upper-middle class white and upper-middle class black phenomena than it is a phenomenon of poor minorities—it is going to gain legitimacy in a lot of people's minds and I think that is unfortunate. The first innovators

of writing graffiti were black, Hispanic, and white folks from inner-city areas that were just vandals.

Graffiti Artist 2(GA2) on 05.13.09

MLB Q1: Do you consider yourself a street artist and/or graffiti artist? Why or why not.
GA2: No. I feel that my art is just from my subconscious and therefore we are all artists. I'm not sure what street art or graffiti art is or is not.

MLB Q2: What inspired your interest in street art and/or graffiti art?
GA2: The versatility and ambiguity of its nature was alluring. Just seeing it around the city was a draw for me. I didn't know where it was coming from but it was exciting and generated a curiosity in me. Graffiti created such an anonymous freedom…that was a nice surprise for me.

MLB Q3: What was your first street art and/or graffiti art experience like? In general when and where was it?
GA2: Ugly, embarrassing, awkward! Next question…

MLB Q4: What differences do you perceive between street art and graffiti art?
GA2: I guess if I were pressed to define one or the other I would say that it's all about labels. People want to label everything. It seems street art uses more of the street to take on different definitions of art without the bullshit old school rules that graff used to

carry in the ‘80s and ‘90s. Street comes from graffiti by way of knowing no boundaries but it takes on more, varied media and it appears to be the future since it is more flexible and open-ended. Graff and street are both tools used for communication, motivation, inspiration, and getting a message out. It seems that graffiti carries such a negative persona being tied to gang affiliations while street is more or less reserved for artist types.

MLB Q5: Do you believe that other people have any misconceptions about street art or graffiti art?

GA2: Like I said above, graffiti is more tied to the gang issue while street art is not. Graffiti writers are not always gang members. Some graffiti is purely an artistic avenue and has zero to do with a gang.

MLB Q6: How have you seen street art and graffiti art change or evolve generally speaking?

GA2: The biggest difference is the speed writers use now more than ever before. You have access to the internet to see what people are doing all over the world which helps in learning about graff but it also hurts because people can bite your work. I think as far as speed, many writers are getting faster so they don’t get caught by the authorities, too. Materials change, concepts change, and styles definitely change.

MLB Q7: Are the risks involved with street art and graffiti art worth the consequences? Why or why not?

GA2: Depends on who you ask and on what day you ask it. All of my crew, myself included, have faced some criminal charges. Consequences are a deterrent but people, the general public, fail to remember that many times graff artists are creating works of art.

MLB Q8: What messages are important for you to communicate with your work?
GA2: It's all about creating a name for yourself. Throwing yourself up and telling everyone else that you were there, you hit that spot, and that you made you mark on society…like, "I'm here and I'm better than you!!"

MLB Q9: What is street art and/or graffiti art about? Would you say it is about personal recognition or something more?
GA2: Personal recognition for sure. Again, piecing and pasting are ways to show other crews that you were present. Messages are important but adding your stamp to the world's canvas is super important to artists that practice in the streets.

MLB Q10: Do you have a specified audience you try to reach with your work? If so, who? Why or why not?
GA2: Straight proliferation of my name is the key and whoever sees my name becomes the audience. I guess the audience is more or less the group of graffiti writers since we are the ones that are actually looking the most.

MLB Q11: Have you ever studied art in a course or class?

GA2: Yes in high school and some in college…

MLB Q12: If not, in what ways do you think art training might have altered your path as a street artist?

GA2: No answer given.

MLB Q13: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong in the traditional, mainstream art community? Why or why not?

GA2: That's a tough question because once you take graffiti out of the streets, it becomes something it's not. It has a very fake feeling about it when it is placed up on a museum wall or in a gallery. From what I have seen and read, many graffiti writers have, and are continuing to, dip their toe into that aspect of the art world. While I think it can be beneficial for the public to be aware of street art, I think it is also still good that the public has a limited knowledge of it. It's good in the sense that I hope people can see the difference between gang graffiti and graffiti as an actual form of art… if it is a form of art.

MLB Q14: Do you think street art and graffiti art belong as a part of a high school art curriculum? Why or why not?

GA2: If you aren't learning about graffiti on your own in high school as a student already, then you probably have no desire to learn it already. Most of the writers I know starting writing in middle school. I think it becomes an outlet of creativity, a rebellious form of expression that is a little edgier. So do I think graff should be included in high

school? Maybe in some areas. I think the white, suburban kids wouldn't necessarily be less interested than students of other backgrounds but I think the parents of those white kids wouldn't approve. It seems like the parents would be bitchin' all the time about the garbage the kids are learning if graff was taught in school but who knows? I think it definitely has a place in some schools but maybe not all of them.

MLB Q15: In what ways do you think people should appreciate street art and/or graffiti art or would you prefer that people are unappreciative of your work or find it disturbing? Please explain.

GA2: I think they have to appreciate it or loathe it. There is no middle ground on the love/hate dilemma revolving around graff. I think I obviously would rather be appreciated but it is also the nature of the beast to be hated also. I don't really want people to find graff disturbing but then again I don't tag up somebody's house or car like the do over in Europe.

MLB Q16: Is anything as far as subject matter or content "off limits" to a street artist or graffiti artist? Are there specific physical places that are "off limits"?

GA2: I think every writer has his or her boundaries. I know there are places I avoid just due to getting caught but I mean…I don't know…I think for me at least, there are places that are off limits.

MLB Q17: Have you ever felt guilty after piecing, pasting or tagging? Can you give me an example of why you felt that way?

GA2: Yea but you also get a rush when you do it and I think the rush is what takes over you, driving you to do it again. It's like the devil on one shoulder with the little, cute angel on the other. Guilt sets in but joy overtakes that pain.

MLB Q18: Is there an artist age limit to the production of street art or graffiti art? Why or why not?

GA2: No way. I think Blek le Rat is one of the oldest dudes still in the game. There are several guys around that age that are still piecing and taggin'. I don't know if I will be one but you never know.

MLB Q19: What do you think the future holds for street and/or graffiti artists?

GA2: I think there will be more products on the market that will change the face of graffiti. Already you see different styles and products but I think that will continue to grow.