

# The Evolution of Graffiti

by Caitlyn Meagher



*This photo shows graffiti art on the wall of a building.*

In many major cities, you can sometimes spot art on the walls of public buildings. These art pieces can beautify gloomy city walls. They bring color to city streets. Some of this artwork may be murals, paid for by building owners and city institutions. But a lot of it is a different kind of art... graffiti.

Graffiti is made of writings or drawings that have been scratched or sprayed on a public surface. Graffiti artists can use different materials such as spray paint and stencils to express themselves and comment on the society around them. It is often illegal to graffiti a public surface. And some people think of certain kinds of graffiti as an eyesore. But some graffiti is starting to be seen as an art form. Many people appreciate the style of graffiti and find it beautiful, even though it is still illegal in many places. How did this form of art become popular?

Modern graffiti became popular in Philadelphia and New York City in the 1960s. During the 1960s and 70s, many people "tagged" (spray-painted/wrote) their names on buildings and subway cars. Many of these young individuals were in gangs. They would claim their territory

by "tagging" certain areas of the city. As time went on, young artists began drawing inspiration from these spray-painted "tags." Many of these artists were not trained in schools, but they had a lot of talent.

Creating graffiti art was a rebellious act during these decades. Graffiti was illegal in most places. Many people thought graffiti was just damage to public property. But many artists saw graffiti as an opportunity to make art available to anyone. Unlike art in many galleries and museums, art on the street can be seen by everyone, rich or poor.

One of the most popular graffiti artists was George Lee Quiñones. He began painting graffiti on New York subway cars in 1974. People recognized his incredible skill. Quiñones would often write poetic messages in his art such as, "Graffiti is an art and if art is a crime, please God, forgive me." Today, his work hangs in galleries across the United States.

Now, graffiti art is all over the world. A lot of graffiti artists risk their safety to create art because it is still illegal in many countries. Graffiti artists take this risk to express issues affecting their community. Some topics of their art include injustice, the wealth gap between the rich and poor, and human rights abuses.



*This photo shows a graffiti artist using spray paint.*

Sometimes, graffiti art brings political and social issues to a large audience. Other times, this art entertains viewers and decorates city walls.

Can you remember a piece of graffiti art you have seen in your city or town?