

Unsung Heroes

American culture idolizes movie stars for the dramas that they portray on the big screen. In Hollywood, when the day on the movie set is over, actors wipe off the fake blood and sweat. Characters that were jailed are released until the next day of filming, and the actors who were shot and killed get up and go home. Graffiti writers live out these drama's on a daily basis. Graffiti writers are left with real scars from jumping razor wire fences. They serve real jail time and some have lost their lives for their involvement in graffiti.

I have been interviewing and photographing graffiti writers from coast to coast for the past five years in an effort to document the outlaw culture that fuels the most influential art movement of the past thirty years. This book represents an enormous range of writers spanning from pre-subway era New York to contemporary crushers.

They say a picture speaks a thousand words, but not with graffiti. A photograph of a piece of graffiti tells very little about the meaning behind what was painted or the adventure that went into painting the spot. Sometimes the story behind painting a spot is better than what is left behind on the wall. This book tells the stories behind the graffiti we see every day in our urban landscape. As time goes on, as permanent as graffiti writers would like graffiti to be, it is unavoidably temporary. No matter how high they climb, no matter how they mix their ink, it will eventually get buffed or fade away out of existence. This book is my attempt to make graffiti, and the people who dedicated so much of their blood and sweat to create it, shine for years to come.

Two friends of mine passed away in 2005. They were both active and talented graffiti writers in the prime of their lives. This drastically changed the way that I look at this world, including graffiti. This book in part began as a way to document the fading legacy left behind by these two young men. Long after their memories have faded from peoples minds and their pieces have faded off the walls of the city, they will live on in this book. I am grateful to have given a number other people a chance to have the memory of their fallen friends live on in the pages of this book.

Many subversive and revolutionary social movements over the past 50 years have been swallowed up by the pop-culture mainstream and spit back out as commercially viable products. Graffiti seeps into the background of movies. It is used as advertisements and in design. Shepard Fairey of OBEY GIANT fame launched a graffiti campaign to help elect Barack Obama President in 2008. Despite its entrance into galleries, movies, and magazines graffiti culture remains underground.

Graffiti writers are the urban style-masters of the now generation. Graffiti art has been pushing beyond the traditional scope of art and design since its inception. The artists who contributed stories in this book all started somewhere with a feeling, something to say, something to prove. Graffiti has taken them through a rocky world of adventure, pain, and glory and spit them out different people on the other side. The walls that they covered with layers of glowing colors and calligraphic design fade away after a few years of sun, rain and city-buff paint, but the mark that graffiti has left on these individuals has changed their lives forever along with the world around them. Some profess having great regrets because of the life that their involvement in graffiti has led them to. Others praise graffiti as having saved their lives from spiraling into hell. The following collection of stories is a glimpse into the world of graffiti writers, their lives, where they came from, and where they are now. Some are tragedies and others are dreams come true. Graffiti was the path these individuals took for better or worse and this is their story.

