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Vandalism as Art

Graffiti on subway trains may have receded, but the glorification of graffiti as a form of art continues apace.

Recently, a Manhattan auction house put pieces of graffiti on the block. And a gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is hosting a month-long retrospective of graffiti called, "The Painted Word: Classic Works of Urban Art."

Devoting gallery space, auctions and retrospectives to graffiti garbs urban vandalism in the trappings of art.

Elevating graffiti only encourages further defacement of public property. Its presence signals to a community that blank walls or subway cars are fair game for destruction — and that no one cares about it.

It is for good reason that the removal

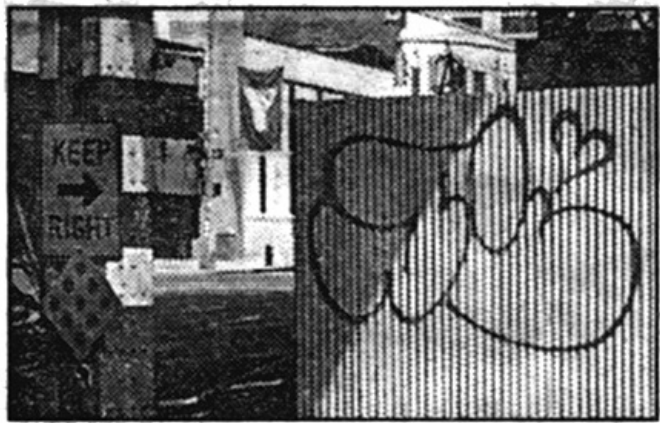
of graffiti plays a key role in the "broken windows" theory: the notion that leaving one broken window unrepaired inevitably leads to more broken windows and community decay.

But after the crackdown on sprayed graffiti, vandals took to scratching their names into subway windows, later dubbed "scratchiti." At one point in 1997, the Transit Authority found that 98 percent of subway cars had scratched windows.

Given the glorification of graffiti, this city will probably be subjected to "scratchiti" retrospectives 10 years from now.

The bottom line is that graffiti — no matter how colorful or intense — is vandalism. And exalting its practitioners is a recipe for lawlessness and chaos.

Graffiti vandals face writing on the wall



UNIQUE: "SI's" telltale sign. Joey Newfield

By ROCCO PARASCANDOLA

Authorities have taken a unique approach to fighting graffiti — making arrests based on the notion that vandals' tags are as unique as their handwriting, The Post has learned.

For years, police only busted graffiti vandals if there were witnesses to their crimes, or if they were caught nearby with spray paint or magic markers in their possession.

But in the past year, cops and prosecutors — particularly on Staten Island — have taken a different approach.

If cops spot fresh graffiti and recognize the tag from previous acts of vandalism, they arrest the suspect — even if they did not witness the crime.

This approach has secured guilty pleas in two Queens cases and 10 on Staten Island, where District Attorney Bill Murphy has launched a graffiti crackdown.

In the first case on Staten Island last year, a judge's ruling added teeth to the new policy.

In that case, David Stehle, 19 — known by the tag "SAG" — was charged with defacing a train at the Tottenville station.

Officer Anthony Mottola, graffiti coordinator for the Staten Is-

EXCLUSIVE

land Task Force, testified before Justice Eugene Schwartzwald that vandals' tags "become their name and only their name."

Mottola also said Stehle was arrested because the tags on the train matched those he previously had put on a mural.

Stehle pleaded guilty and was fined \$1,000 and forced to pay \$250 in restitution to repair the damage.

In a similar case in Queens, David McIntosh, tag name "Nato," was charged with causing an estimated \$23,000 in "scratchiti" damage by using acid to carve his name onto the windows of subway cars.

McIntosh, 25, pleaded guilty to criminal mischief and faces up to a year in prison when he is sentenced next month.

In the other Queens case, Tomaslov Mirkovic — an 18-year-old vandal known in the graffiti world as "SI" — pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three years probation and 20 days of community service after police familiar with his "work" on subway cars and buildings charged him for five separate acts.

ShortList

ART

'BOUNDLESSLY VARIOUS AND EVERYTHING SIMULTANEOUSLY'

In 1997, artist Peter Nagy resurrected the legendary East Village gallery Nature Morte, in New Delhi. Now he curates an impeccable show of work by eight very contemporary artists "from and inspired by India." Anita Dube's psychosexual and Hindu array of velvety black iconic objects with teeth and hair and Jeffrey Schiff's Ayurvedic soap and granite plinth installations are standouts. Nicola Durvasula's evaporating miniatures, Vivan Sundaram's *Great Indian Bazaar*, Sandra Hirshkowitz's embroidery-hoop orchids, Jayashree Chakravarty's floor piece, and Lyndell Brown & Charles Green's photo works are smart and subtle, too. **THROUGH JULY 20**, BosePaciaModern, 508 West 26th Street, 989-7074. (Levin)

'THE PAINTED WORD: CLASSIC WORKS OF URBAN ART' So you couldn't make the grand graffiti auction last week. No problem — there's an even hotter exhibition of the art that dare not write its name. Curator Franklin Sirmans,

in collaboration with the Martinez Gallery, presents an authoritative retrospective of New York City graf from 1970 to the present. This show will make you understand the downside of Rudy Giuliani's quality-of-life campaign. **THROUGH JULY 16**, the State of Art, 113 Franklin Street, Brooklyn, 718-349-7250. (Goldstein)

JULIA SCHER Investigating yet another site of power, the ultimate surveillance artist brings us *Microwave*, in which she works her own mutations on the electronic hearth and plays on our insecurities. With lulling music and voices, humming machines, and warnings about underwire bras and radiation, she creates an ominous laboratory of customized pink microwave ovens on steel tables. From within their glowing innards, video monitors surveil us and small, pink wax figures mutate and revolve. The live video projection, vacant circular steel plate in the center of the gallery, and mirror opposite suggest that we're next in line to be molecularly excited and rearranged. **THROUGH JULY 14**, Andrea Rosen Gallery, 525 West 24th Street, 627-6000. (Levin)

GREENPOINT



Artist-Run Galleries Open on 'Next Frontier'

When four art galleries opened within four weeks and several blocks of one another in the vicinity of Franklin Street late last year, their founders were mystified.

"It was crazy," said Rebecca Smith, an artist and one of four directors of Bellwether, a gallery in a Franklin Street storefront that also houses her studio.

But Greenpoint is next to Williamsburg, which has a growing arts scene. With rents rising, Greenpoint has become "the next frontier," said Arthur Arbit, associate director of another new gallery, the State of Art.

Many local artists and residents consider Greenpoint and Williamsburg essentially one neighborhood, but agree that Greenpoint is far sleepier when it comes to the arts. While Williamsburg is easily accessible from Manhattan via the L train, Greenpoint is a little harder to reach by public transportation.

Yet as word has spread about the new galleries there, big crowds have turned out for the openings of their shows. "We're packing them in," said Matthew Keegan of Bellwether, who said openings are drawing at least 150 people. To encourage visitors, Bellwether offers hourly shuttle service using a van, on weekends from 2 to 6 p.m. from a cafe at Bedford Avenue and North Seventh Street, near the L train station.

Greenpoint's artist-run galleries

seem to thrive on idealistic spirit, and their focus is on emerging artists. "Our philosophy is that we want to do something for the artist, not that the artist should do something for the gallery," Mr. Arbit said.

While some of those who have opened galleries in the neighborhood have lived there for months, others have been there for years. Il Lee, an artist and the director of a new gallery called im n iL, has lived in Greenpoint since 1986. He said he was inspired by the influx of artists into the area and opened his gallery in the building he owns on Franklin Street at the urging of friends.

Eung Ho Park, who was curator of a recent exhibition at im n iL, said:

"It's very interesting what's happening here. It's wonderful and not-so-wonderful at the same time." Some artists, he said, are worried about gentrification in Greenpoint, historically a blue-collar community.

Laura Parnes, a director of Momenta Art, which has been in Williamsburg for five years, said she thought that section's arts climate "can transpose itself to Greenpoint."

"It's really common for artists to feel like what's being shown in Chelsea or SoHo has nothing to do with them and they're completely alienated from it," she said. "This is a way for them to empower themselves and really have an impact on what's being shown." GENIA GOULD



Rebecca Cooney for The New York Times

One new gallery, im n iL, is owned by a longtime Greenpoint resident.

SPOTS

Art by the Block

The Franklin Street area is home to a cluster of new galleries:

Bellwether
150 Franklin Street
(718) 389-3213
Sat.-Sun. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

GV/AS
(Specializes in video and photography)
140 Franklin Street
By appointment
e-mail gv-as@yahoo.com

Goliath
117 Dobbin Street
(718) 599-1263
Sat.-Sun. 1-5 p.m.
and by appointment

im n iL
213 Franklin Street
(718) 349-6510
Sat.-Sun. 1-6 p.m.

The State of Art
113 Franklin Street
(718) 349-7250
Wed.-Sat. noon to 6 p.m.
and by appointment

Splendid
(Bar that doubles as a gallery)
132 Greenpoint Avenue
(718) 383-1900
Open daily from 6 p.m.

Night Scrawlers Have Their Day, Though Prices Disappoint

By NINA SIEGAL

The gallery at the Puck Building was filled last week with people who don't get out much. At least not out into the light, where they might be recognized, and arrested.

Some call themselves artists, others boast that they are true vandals. Some, who have retired to the comfort of suburban homes and respectable careers, or who now show their work in galleries, carefully spell out their names for reporters. Others, who still prowled city streets, rooftops and subway tunnels, don't dare give their names.

They are part of a subterranean fraternity born more than three decades ago when the first of them began scrawling their names on walls, but many had never met until last week, when two concurrent graffiti events drew them to New York or out of their concrete city hideaways. On Wednesday night Guernsey's Auction House put the work of some 100 graffiti writers, as they call themselves, on the block; and on Saturday night two galleries in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, State of the Art and Bellwether, in collaboration with the Martinez Gallery in Manhattan, opened "The Painted Word," a retrospective of graffiti art since 1969, to run until July 16.

"This isn't only a gathering, it's a historic occasion," said Wicked Gary, who was a member of the Experienced Vandals, otherwise known as the Ex-Vandals, a graffiti crew formed in 1970.

The work sold poorly at the auction, with pieces expected to go for at least \$10,000 selling at \$3,000, and a painting by Lady Pink, one of the few women who have become famous graffiti writers, going for just \$750. Arlan Ettinger, president of Guernsey's, declined to sum up the profits, and said only that sales were "up and down." Although some of the artists milled about the room wearing grim expressions, many sloughed it off, saying the important thing was that everyone had come together for what was the first unofficial graffiti reunion.

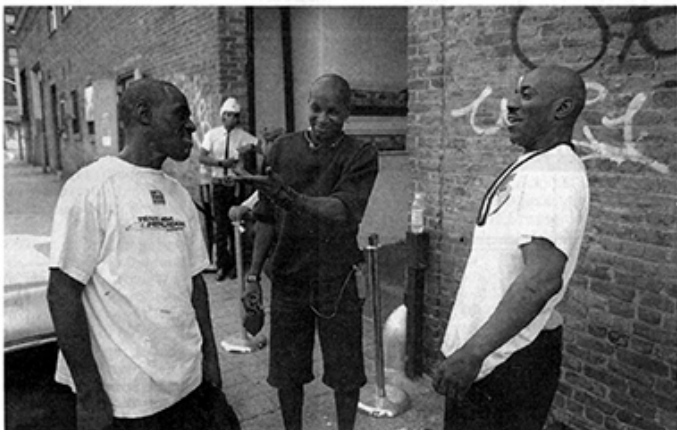
But even though there was clearly much admiration among some artists, who traded auction catalogs collecting one another's signatures, or tags, many of the artists spent the week settling old scores and trying to validate their places in the graffiti pantheon.

"It's like cleaning shop," said Michael Tracy, or Tracy 168, who wrote "wild style" graffiti starting in 1969. "Now that we're all in one room, you can't say this guy innovated this, because I can say, 'Oh yeah?' and walk across the room and see if they did it."

Both the auction and the gallery shows feature the work of several "old school" train writers, like Taki 183, Case 2, Flint 707 and Bama, as well as pieces by artists who achieved gallery fame in the 1980's, like Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat. And there is also a significant



Works of 100 graffiti writers, as they call themselves, were auctioned last week. The artists attended in force. Below, Bama, center, reintroduced Case 2, right, to Stay High 149, friends who had not seen each other for 25 years.



representation of work by new, young graffiti writers — like Mósco, Giz and Nato — who are still trying to redefine the genre on city streets.

Many of the older writers, who started painting trains when hippies were still a novelty, said the auction — in which the four pieces by Kenny Scharf failed to sell at all — would help put the work of "art stars" in perspective. Some felt they were overlooked in the 1980's, when a small coterie of art school graduates became the toast of the downtown gallery scene without first paying

their dues in the train yards.

"In the 80's the work was redefined by galleries and some of the artists and curators started creating this terminology, like 'iconoclastic panderism' and 'post-graffiti,'" said Roberto Gualtieri, 43, who started writing his name, CoCo, on the backs of city buses in 1969. "It's a lot of hype. Part of the criteria of being a writer was street credibility. Whoever doesn't have it is worthless."

But those who spent years selling work in galleries said it took a different set of skills to make it there.

"It's like two different spheres," said Aaron Charles Goodstone, also known as Sharp, who has shown in galleries, primarily in Europe, since 1983. "There are some people who have been able to eke out a living on canvas and have had the wherewithal to be in the public arena. You have to be able to travel, and talk about your work articulately and show up. Anybody who is a working artist in the context of the studio has a whole different set of expectations."

These arguments tend to bore younger graffiti writers, who have tried to stretch the form in recent years under increasingly harsh conditions. The Giuliani administration now spends about \$25 million a year fighting graffiti, and 10 years ago the Transit Authority instituted a "clean car" policy, which dictates that no train leave the yard if it is marked. And while in the 1970's those caught vandalizing subway cars were given a couple of days in jail and required to clean up their scrawls, a graffiti writer caught today faces felony charges.

"I've come to realize that's just the graffiti ego: no matter how you write, whoever wrote just before you is the best, and the people who write just after you are the worst," said Kunle Martins, a 20-year-old from the Bronx who writes Earsnot, which he said stands for "Extravagant Artist Renovating Styles Not Orthodoxed to Taggers." "It's like as soon as you get a tiny little bit of fame you think everyone else is toy," or someone who copies other's hieroglyphics.

Teenagers carrying backpacks filled with spray cans and artist's black books lined up agog in front of legendary writers like Case 2 and Mico, who are now in their 40's. And though there was clearly admiration here, the younger generation, which paints on rooftops, trucks and walls inside subway tunnels, was skeptical about the nature of the event, arguing that even the pioneers had lost the true spirit of the genre.

"This is nice and all, but it's not graffiti," said Giz, 23, who paints "throw-ups," or his name in bubble letters, on the sides of trucks, stores and police stations. "A lot of people forget that graffiti is street art, it's not gallery art. This is the first time that graffiti is starting to get civilized, but you still got to keep it on the ground, otherwise it's not worth anything."

But Rich Admiral, who has been known as Bama on the street since 1969 and has sold paintings in galleries since 1973, said that graffiti had always struggled between those two poles. He looked around the gallery, watching his compatriots, three generations of night scrawlers, gather and debate.

"You realize that everyone in this room is insane," he said affectionately. "It's not normal to want to go out in the middle of the night and write your name on a wall. We all have our personal ghosts, and we all have our dirty laundry and rivalries. But it's like any family, and this is my family."

This Week

EVENTS

Starry Nights



The setting is a 100-acre Westchester estate whose features include a rambling Mediterranean villa, an exceptional collection of Renaissance and Asian art, the Venetian Theater and the Spanish Courtyard, where concerts are held outdoors in the summertime. This is Caramoor in Katonah, N.Y., where the eight-week Caramoor International Music Festival 2006 begins on Saturday night at 7. The cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Edward Arron will join Peter Oundjian, Caramoor's artistic director, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, in a program of Vivaldi, Elgar and Stravinsky. Coming attractions include the pianists

Misha Dichter, Alicia de Larrocha and Leon Fleisher and "Il Parata" by Bellini. Information: (914) 232-1252.

Evening in Paris

Since 1981 summer in France is greeted on June 21 with the Music Festival. Towns and villages reverberate with concerts of every type. This year Paris will be the scene of PériphèreRock, billed as the most ambitious festival event yet. From 8 p.m. till dawn, the périphérique, the more than 20-mile ring road that circles the capital, will be transformed. Setting off from the 10 gates of Paris, dozens of music floats will guide crowds toward concert sites in Paris and the suburbs to listen, dance and fraternize to performances of rock, rap, groove and techno. Information: 011 33-1-44-94-98-00.

On the Horizon

He loved "Moby-Dick," Norse sagas and



paintings of dramatic, isolated landscapes. Beginning on Saturday, more than 90 of Kent's paintings, prints and drawings, inspired by his wilderness experiences and assembled from around the world, will be exhibited through Oct. 29 in "Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent" at the Nor-

man Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass. Information: (413) 298-4100, extension 220.

man Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass. Information: (413) 298-4100, extension 220.

Poet's Corner

The Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet William Butler Yeats will be celebrated in prose, poetry, song and music in the annual tribute of the W. B. Yeats Society of New York at 7:30 tonight at Frederick Lowe Theater of New York University at 35 West Fourth Street in Greenwich Village. Rare home movies will be shown; the actress Celeste Holm will read her favorite Yeats poem, "The Three Bushes"; Irish music will be played; and there will be a re-creation of a 1925 Irish Senate debate in which Yeats delivered a famous speech against a ban on divorce. Information: (212) 780-0605.

LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

INSIDE

Artists? Outlaws? Both?

New York events draw graffitiists in from the cold, or maybe into the light. Page 3.

Television Review

From Britain, comedy of the strange in "The League of Gentlemen." Page 5.

Rap Review

Rappers get together for a tour, fully staged and wholly on time. Page 5.

Theater Review

"Straight Jacket" finds much to mock in 1950's Hollywood. Page 5.

Books of The Times

"The Life of Schubert" examines the darkness behind the brilliant music. Page 8.