

Graffiti as an Art or Vandalism

Have you noticed the colorful drawings on the walls of an **abandoned** building? All the words written and figures as well in a wall near sidewalks, and the heavily **tagged** subway trains too. How would you **categorize** these works, an art or vandalism?

Let's discuss what Graffiti is and what Vandalism is. **Graffiti** (noun) writing or drawings **scribbled**, scratched, or sprayed **illicitly** on a wall or other surface in a public place. While **Vandalism** (noun) action involving **deliberate** destruction of or damage to public or private property.

The term "graffiti" comes from the Greek "**graphein**," meaning "to scratch, draw, or write," and thus a broad definition of the term includes all forms of **inscriptions** on walls.

We can **trace** back that the first drawings were seen on the walls of caves thousands of years ago. And as evidenced by the Lascaux cave paintings in France and other historic findings globally. Researchers believed the images of hunting scenes found at these sites were either meant to honor past hunting victories, or were used as part of ceremonies intended to increase hunters' success.

Ancient Romans and Greeks wrote their names and protest poems on buildings later on. In an ancient Greek city of Ephesus, located in modern day Turkey was the first known sample of "**modern style**" graffiti can be found. It has the drawing of a heart, a foot (pointing in a direction where to go), a jug of wine on the table, and a woman's face. The local guides say it is an advertisement for a famous **brothel** at that time.

In the early 1960's in Philadelphia, modern graffiti appeared and by the late sixties it had reached New York. The new art system really became popular in the 1970's, when people began writing their names, or 'tags', on buildings all over the city. In the mid-seventies it was difficult



to see out of a subway car window, because the trains were entirely covered in spray paintings termed as ‘masterpieces’.

In the early 70’s the writer TAKI 183 (“Taki” it was short for his Greek name, Demetraki, and 183 was the street he lived on) took it to another level by covering much of New York City with his tag or writing TAKI 183. He lived on the 183rd street in Washington Heights and he worked as a messenger who traveled all throughout the city.

In the late 1960’s, this was the period where Contemporary (or "hip-hop") graffiti started, and generally said to have arisen from the Black and Latino neighborhoods of New York City together with hip-hop music and street subcultures, and **catalyzed** by the invention of the aerosol spray can paint. The early graffiti artists were normally called "writers" or "taggers" (individuals who writes simple "tags," or their stylized signatures, with the objective of tagging as many locations as possible.)

Later on, art galleries in New York began buying graffiti but it was also around that time when Mayor John Lindsey of New York at that time, declared the first war on graffiti in 1972. A few die-hard artists refused to lose their **artistry** and kept the art form alive during this period.

An by the 1980’s it became much harder to write on subway trains without being caught and more graffiti artists went into the streets and used roofs of buildings or canvases.

Up to this date, graffiti continues to improve and Graffiti style is **constantly evolving** and street artists like Banksy, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring transformed their work into mainstream art gallery fare.

Basquiat **initiated** spraying on the street in the 1970s and he became a respected artist in the 1980’s.

In the early 1980s, a new stencil graffiti **genre emerged**. Blek le Rat created some of the first examples in 1981 in Paris. Few years later, stencils had appeared in other cities including New York City, Sydney, and Melbourne.



In your personal opinion, is Graffiti a form of Art or Vandalism?

Vocabulary:

Abandoned – nobody lived

Tagged – marked, labeled

Categorize – classify

Scribble – writings, lettering

Deliberate – done consciously and intentionally

Inscriptions – impressions, writings, engraving

Traced – map out, found

Brothel – a place where men can visit prostitutes

Catalyzed – started

Artistry – skills

Constantly evolving – continuously developing or improving

Initiated – started

Genre emerged – category appeared





Parrots Kun Eikaiwa