

## STREET TEXT

## **Art From the Coasts**

Curated by Andrew Connors
Curator of Art, The Albuquerque Museum of Art & History

## The Populist Phenomenon

Curated by Francesca Searer, 516 ARTS

October 2 — December 11, 2010

A two-part exhibition in conjunction with

STREET ARTS: A Celebration of Hip Hop Culture & Free Expression
a collaboration organized by 516 ARTS in partnership with ACLU-NM



516 Central Avenue SW Downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico www.516arts.org 516 ARTS is an independent, nonprofit arts venue offering programs that inspire curiosity, dialogue, risk-taking, and creative experimentation, showcasing a mix of established, emerging, local, national, and international artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Our mission is to forge connections between art and audiences, and our vision is to be an active partner in developing the cultural landscape of Albuquerque and New Mexico. Our values are inquiry, diversity, collaboration and accessibility.

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## Writing about Street Writing: Art From the Coasts

by Andrew Connors

By "writing on the wall" the Old Testament Book of Daniel describes an ominous message of impending doom writ large by the hand of God. This warning proposes graffiti as a clarion of critical consequence. The phrase itself has come to signify pending peril. For many people, the unkempt, messy look of graffiti continues to inspire feelings of decay, danger and criminal presence. This interpretation, however, reflects only one side of the issue, and ignores the rich meaning some graffiti expresses for its writer and her or his community. While graffiti is often dismissed as simple vandalism, it is useful to look more deeply into the communities which expressed themselves this way and try to discover lessons to be learned from the writing on the wall.

In the past two decades, numerous publications have examined graffiti as an art form, primarily looking at it as a youthful outburst against societal structures that exclude voices of the underprivileged. Most of these publications have relied heavily on the groundwork laid by Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper through their seminal publication *Subway Art* of 1984 which documented the New York style, *Spraycan Art* of 1987 which Chalfant wrote with James Prigoff following the worldwide spread of this aesthetic, and *Style Wars*, the PBS documentary which first aired in 1984. All subsequent publications, films and documentaries owe significant debt to these works. Perhaps because of these widely distributed, full color publications, the New York style of colorful words, occasionally embellished with figurative elements, came to dominate international street aesthetics, and the aerosol form, codified in New York and Philadelphia in the 1970s and 1980s, became synonymous with the word graffiti itself.

Although outside the scope of this exhibition, smaller scale, more localized wall writing has also appeared frequently as the subject of scholarly

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and fictionalized essays. Most of these studies focused on the issues of identity inherent in the written expression, for the most part ignoring the development of aesthetics and refinement of regional lettering styles.

In 1973 John Cheever published in *The New Yorker* his short story *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* which followed an American expatriate recently returned from Paris as he discovered and eventually sought out the profound literary content in public toilet graffiti.<sup>2</sup> The fictional adventurer considered this informal and anonymous social commentary to be more significant than the equivalent texts distributed by American print media. His equally fictional friends dismissed his celebration of the message of graffiti as the influence of corrupted European thinking. Beyond fiction however, beginning in the mid 1980s and continuing to this day, commercial galleries and museums in Europe and Asia (particularly Japan) have been far more engaged with, and committed to graffiti artists and their work than the equivalent organizations in the United States.

Norman Mailer published *The Faith of Graffiti* in 1974 placing the young writers of New York City within the performative context of Robert



Rauschenberg's "Erased de Kooning" and Chris Burden's self-destructive performance art.<sup>3</sup> However in the street-scrappy, boy's jungle of Mailer's vision, the writers appear closer to Giotto and Michelangelo in their iconic status, and their work reminds the author of Matisse, Picasso and

Pollock paintings at the Museum of Modern Art. Within this context, Mailer neither claims the street painters knew of these other, more mainstream

4 Photo courtesy of John Lorne 5

artists, nor does he discuss any aspect of the aesthetics these writers shared with the city. It would take Chalfant and his colleagues to introduce these elements to the discussion.

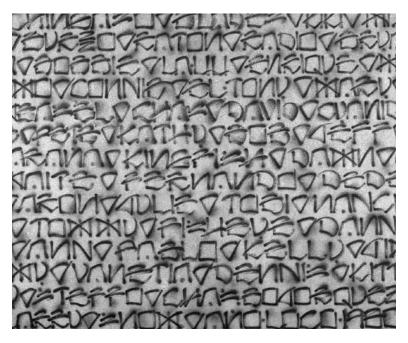
On the other side of the nation, of earlier origin, but much less widely understood and documented, was the imagery of wall writers based in Los Angeles. This style, dating back according to the oral tradition at least to the mid 1930s, is rooted in neighborhood boundary delineation and gang claims to territory. It is supposed that this tradition may have roots in Mexican-based gangs in El Paso, Texas relocated to Los Angeles with the rise of industrialization and agriculture and the national perception of better jobs to be found in California. Until the early 1970s this California mark making was primarily localized within the urban confines of Los Angles and the surrounding communities.

In 1948 Beatrice Griffin published *American Me*, an account of Mexican-American culture in Southern California.<sup>4</sup> Throughout her semi-fictionalized documentary, Griffin refers to the names of gangs and occasionally individuals written on neighborhood walls. By 1970, the academic community had come to appreciate the sociological impact of community focused communication, when Pomona College Museum of Art near Los Angeles produced the first exhibition of graffiti imagery. In order to emphasize the temporal nature of the writing, and its locational specificity, the exhibition examined L.A. gang graffiti not with original paintings, but with documentary photography by Robert Alikas.

Gusmano Cesaretti, having arrived in L.A. from Italy in 1970, became fascinated by wall markings in his new home and sought out Charles "Chaz" Bojórquez as a guide to the cryptic symbols and messages he encountered. Armed with his camera to capture the wall imagery, and his notebook to record the perceptive observations of his guide, Cesaretti attempted to identify the refined calligraphic nature of these bold markings and published the exquisite little book *Street Writers - A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti* in 1975. His work was followed by the carefully researched and considered book *Los Angeles Barrio Calligraphy* in which Jerry and Sally Romotsky place the content, symbolism and aesthetics of wall writing into the localized context of identity, territory and style. Their research started

and ended with extensive interviews with the writers themselves and their intended audiences, and explores the varieties of lettering fonts and their modifications from both an historical-aesthetic perspective, as well as the perspective of localized meaning. They also explored the crucial significance of stylistic illegibility which provides aesthetic richness and a veil of exclusivity to the mark making.

L.A. marks on walls, first created with simple materials such as chalk, pencil, grease pencil, shoe polish, house paint and brush, and cigarette lighter smoke, was intimate in scale and time consuming to produce. With the arrival of refillable insecticide sprayers such as those produced by Black Flag beginning in 1948, writers quickly determined the proper mixtures of paint, stain or ink and began spraying larger text on walls. (Commercially produced aerosol spray paint first appeared in 1949 but was not widely available until the mid 1950s.) Although color could have easily been mixed for pump sprayers, until the arrival in 1984 of the New York influence of aerosol lettering, California graffiti was dominated by black letters on light colored walls, or white on dark walls, with rare metallic or colored accents.



Chaz Bojorquez, *Placa/Rollcall*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 68.25 x 83.125 inches Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

"Here's the difference: gallery art can't go in the street, but street art can go in a gallery. Gallery art is taking on a pallor, while the art of the street is changing for the better."

—Dave Hickey

In 1969 Chaz's imagery burst into Los Angeles' collective consciousness when his signature image *Señor Suerte* first went up on a concrete pier along the 110 freeway heading east towards Pasadena. His distinctive combination of elegant calligraphy (usually created with a brush) and bold figures has since appeared in Hollywood films and educational documentaries, in mainstream art magazines, on gallery walls in Milan and Osaka and Madrid and in museums. However it was only when his icon began to appear in prison tattoos, and in other graffiti artists' piece books that Chaz felt he had really made a difference, that his imagery and writing was speaking to and within his community. For many writers, this respect from peers remains their only relevant measure of success.

Some artists who developed their aesthetics on the street continue to make work for widespread public consumption while others produce for museum and gallery exhibition and sale. Many have managed to work in both worlds. Occasionally public artists condemn those who have found a home in the gallery and museum setting. Taking an approach rooted in relevance and



Gajin Fujita, Study of "CA" Text, spray paint and pencil on paper,  $13 \times 22.5$  inches Courtesy of LA Louver

There has never been a battle of the coasts, instead there was more of a tsunami of East wiping out West emboldened by the additional attraction of the new Hip Hop culture...

innovation, Dave Hickey wrote recently, "Here's the difference: gallery art can't go in the street, but street art can go in a gallery. Gallery art is taking on a pallor, while the art of the street is changing for the better." 6

The original L.A. aesthetic remains viable in neighborhoods throughout East Los Angeles and is equally recognized, understood and relevant throughout the United States in Mexican-American neighborhoods as disparate as New York City, Kansas City, San Antonio and Tucson. However, it is the New York style that has conquered the globe, both within the world of the artists themselves and the popular media. There has never been a battle of the coasts, instead there was more of a tsunami of East wiping out West emboldened by the additional attraction of the new Hip Hop culture (spoken word, music and dance) that accompanied the wall writing. It is sobering to ponder what other localized forms of writing around the world may have similarly been overwhelmed by the rise of the aerosol aesthetic and what may never have been written about those traditions before they were subsumed by internationalism.

Andrew Connors is the Guest Curator of Street Text: Art From the Coasts. He is Curator of Art at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History. Previously he served as Chair of the Visual Arts Department at Albuquerque Academy, as Senior Curator at the National Hispanic Cultural Center and as Associate Curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Kohl. "Names, Graffiti, and Culture," *Urban Review*, April 1969, p. 24-37; and, with photographs by James Hinton. *Golden Boy as Anthony Cool: A Photo Essay on Naming and Graffiti*. New York: Dial Press. 1972.

<sup>2</sup> John Cheever, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," The New Yorker, April 27, 1963, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Mailer with photographs by Mervyn Kurlansky and Jon Naar. *The Faith of Graffiti*. New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Beatrice Griffin, American Me. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> Gusmano Cesaretti. Street Writers – A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti. Los Angeles: Acrobat Books. 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Dave Hickey, "The New Modern Art," Playboy, January/February 2010, p. 146-152.

# Ghetto Celebrity in the Global Village

by Henry Chalfant

In America, the best music, art and dance always comes from the grass roots. Delta blues, jazz, motown, salsa, doo wop, hip hop, all came up in isolated, backwater, neglected places. The roots were in slavery, hardscrabble lives of sharecroppers, immigrants, and strivers in the cities. In New York City in the 1970s, the misery of people living in the poorer neighborhoods gave birth to Hip Hop. Popmaster Fabel in describing how this happened said. "I believe that typically people that grow up in an oppressive type of society are always lookin' for medicine, and for us, cultural expression is the medicine." The surprising thing is that the latest art form to spring from the ashes was visual. It's also important to note that while graffiti emerged in a city in decline, it was still the Big Apple, home of Madison Avenue, the media and advertising capitol, and the center of the art world.

A good way of getting attention, it turns out, was writing on walls and trains. *The New York Times* published a little article about Taki 183 and his ubiquitous tags in 1971. All the kids noticed that in our media and celebrity saturated culture, Taki became famous. The subway system was transformed overnight into an amazing, new mass medium. If you painted on a moving steel ticker tape 600 miles long weaving through the city used by 3 and a half million people a day, you made a lot of people sit up and take notice. Writing your name on a train, saying, "we exist" and we now have a voice, was a brilliant way to overcome the faceless anonymity of contemporary urban life. Kids had rediscovered the virtues of public art, and they were enjoying these benefits to the hilt. In the immortal words of the Sugarhill Gang, "scream it out and say I am somebody, and now you know you're hot."



Graffiti began to appear at the end of the sixties and it didn't spring up out of nowhere. It was a time when the hopes aroused by the civil rights movement had been dulled by disappointments and setbacks, the endless war in Vietnam and growing economic hardship. The kids coming of age in the cities were the children and little brothers of Young Lords, Black

In America, the best music, art and dance always comes from the grass roots. Delta blues, jazz, motown, salsa, doo wop, hip hop, all came up in isolated, backwater, neglected places.

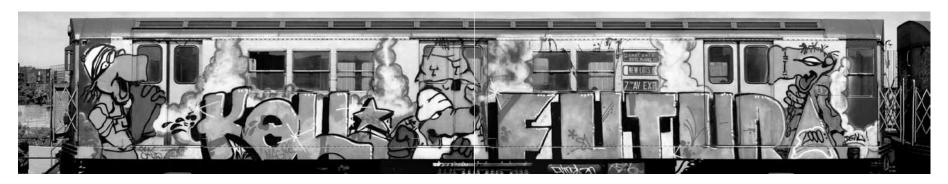
Panthers, hippies and other progressives with anti-authoritarian ideas. Warrior gangs who modeled themselves on national liberation and anti-imperial movements were running in the streets. The Hippies were painting their buses. Vaughn Bode, an artist and comic book creator whose style was was rooted in sixties psychedelia, had a tremendous impact on graffiti artists. Writers from the mid-seventies on drew upon Bode's imagery. The kids painted thousands of his lizard characters on the trains. The lizards spoke street slang with Brooklyn accents and they made ideal alternative identities for young adolescents forging a new persona for the streets.

A technicolor big bang occurred and set off expanding waves of cultural activity that haven't yet begun to ebb. What started as a trickle of tags on walls and trains had become a deluge by the nineteen eighties when articles, photos and films about graffiti and Hip Hop began to spread the news. Kids worldwide were inspired when they saw what their peers in American cities were up to. They identified with what they understood to be their liberation from oppression and they set out to learn how to do it. These seeds took root in fertile ground engendering a vivid and energetic movement that promised to light up the drab gray reality of contemporary urban life all over the world. The idea that you could claim public space as your own was born and it was contagious.

These seeds took root in fertile ground engendering a vivid and energetic movement that promised to light up the drab gray reality of contemporary urban life all over the world.

The backlash was quick to follow. But, as we learned from the experience of New York's attempts to combat graffiti, for years haphazard police work encouraged the game of cops and robbers which added to the fun. People, including myself, still get caught in the Art vs. Vandalism debate and have trouble keeping two ideas in their head at the same time. I remember riding the subway and seeing the names that people I knew had tagged up using homemade markers which were wet and drippy. I once sat opposite a beautifully turned-out elderly woman right out of the '30s, wearing white gloves and a hat with a veil, in the middle of this mayhem, on this bench that was covered with ink and I thought, "maybe this is a little out of control." It reminded me of what William O. Douglas' once said about freedom, "My freedom to move my fist must be limited by the proximity of your chin."

Twenty years ago, the enlightened mayor of Barcelona hosted a panel made up of a sociologist, an official of the local transit authority, a couple of young graffiti writers and me. The city was trying to reach an accommodation with the writers to allow them to paint on some walls in return for agreeing not to paint illegally. The younger kids were enthusiastic, the prospect of getting up with impunity was very appealing. Coming from a city that had taken a harder line against it's young people, I was impressed by Barcelona's effort to bridge the generation gap. But then a young man from the



Henry Chalfant, Kell, Futura, 1980, Ultrachrome photograph on archival paper,  $10 \times 40$  inches Collection of the artist

We love the street artist who vandalizes a commercial billboard subverting the message, a kind of Robin Hood stealing the words of the rich on behalf of the poor.

audience stood up to say in very emphatic terms that the writers should reject the city's offer of walls because by accepting it, they would give up their autonomy and freedom to paint whatever they felt like painting. He said that if writers were painting under someone else's authority, it was inevitable that those in authority would try to control the content of their artwork. He was probably just old enough to have been alive during the last years of Franco's dictatorship, so he knew what he was talking about. Most street artists would agree and they feel strongly about keeping the art real, by which they mean outlaw.

The issues raised by graffiti writing and street art have called into question our accepted notions of the social contract. How is is possible for people who are powerless, disenfranchised and marginalized with no access to normal media to have a voice? Why, for instance are we deluged with visual ads whether we want to see them or not? We love the street artist who vandalizes a commercial billboard subverting the message, a kind of Robin Hood stealing the words of the rich on behalf of the poor. Law-breaking as in civil disobedience is sometimes a necessary step to transform the relationship of people to their government. In fact, graffiti and street art have opened up new, legitimate forums. Beyond so-called vandalism and the appropriation of public space by illegal means, now there are many opportunities that didn't exist before, as galleries and museums have opened up their doors to Street Art, and as public spirited enthusiasts have helped provide spaces for people to paint. The lines have become blurred, sometimes allowing for more opportunities. Accepting the proposition to paint legally can mean losing the most valuable attribute of illegal graffiti, the freedom to paint what you want. But many artists have a foot in both modes. And for those who paint legally, there is a new challenge. To retain the freedom of illegal painting it may be necessary to engage in a battle with sponsors or the authorities over content, freedom of speech and against censorship. The first gauntlet thrown by graffiti artists was to make people notice. Thirty Thirty years later it's time to take full advantage of the public forum that has been won for public art and we will have to be vigilant to keep this newly won freedom.

years later it's time to take full advantage of the public forum that has been won for public art and we will have to be vigilant to keep this newly won freedom.

The art movements that were born in dislocated and alienated urban communities of America in the second half of the twentieth century are an inspiration to people in a world that is increasingly urbanized. Here is fertile soil for street art. These communities have amazing creative potential and a deep need to express themselves. Street Art, the natural heir to graffiti, is evolving and flourishing. The style is "in your face", anti-authoritarian, irreverent, irrepressible, wise, ironic; a voice for the powerless and the have-nots. The worldwide trend is to concentrate more and more people in huge cities while they become voiceless, powerless. Street art is the medicine and it has the potential to spread like wild-fire through a world exploding with favelas.

—Henry Chalfant, New York City, September 6, 2010

Henry Chalfant is an artist, filmmaker and renowned documentarian of the graffiti movement. His work has been shown in galleries and museums in New York and across Europe, and his photographs are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. He has co-authored the definitive account of New York graffiti art, *Subway Art* (Holt Rinehart Winston, N.Y., 1984) and a sequel on the art form's world-wide diffusion, *Spraycan Art* (Thames & Hudson Ltd. London, 1987). Chalfant co-produced the legendary film, *Style Wars*. One of the foremost authorities on New York subway art, he has published articles and lectured internationally on this and other aspects of urban youth culture.

14 15



Harlem Wall, © Henry Chalfant and James Prigoff, *Spraycan Art*. Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 1987.



Gajin Fujita, Sky High, gold leaf, acrylic, paint marker, spray paint & Mean Streak on panel,  $16\times48$  inches, Courtesy of LA Louver

Following page: Shepard Fairey, Sunsets, silkscreen print, 18 x 24 inches Courtesy of OBEY GIANT ART

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Right: SWOON, *Irina*, 2-layer screenprint on hand-dyed magenta fabric, 25 x 10 inches

Following page: Thomas Christopher Haag, Hypnotize, mixed media on panel, 66 x 84 inches Photo by Margot Geist





# The Invariant Need of Human Expression

by Francesca Searer

Speak softly, but carry a big can of paint.
—Banksy

Standing at 17th and Broadway, heading north from Union Square I was struck by a sudden image. It hit my imagination the way Kathe Kollwitz' drawings do, the way her line quality seduces me and makes me hungry for ink. An Icelandic horse head stared at me from atop a tensed man-body and flooded me with feeling, transporting me far away from my droid-like work routine. (I later found out the artist was a sixteen-year-old going by the name of Gaia). Having wearied of the art school myths and the carboncopy aesthetic trends (that inevitably come with a hefty helping of pre-fab rationalization), I found this honest street image like a bolt from the blue, a fulfillment of my sincere artistic yearnings.

That was years ago. Since then, Street Art heroes with otherworldly names like Banksy, Blu, JR, Blek le Rat, Invader, Shepard Fairey and SWOON have taken me over mind and body, instilling in me an undeniable craving for art. Their raw, gutsy work calms my fears about the art market's seeming insularity, restores my confidence about the role art plays in our society, and fortifies my belief in image making. It tracks our social geography using



Street Art is synonymous with experimentation and its inherent dissidence asks us to question our materials, the "truth" of art history and the role art plays in society and human interaction.

motifs, symbols and systems of mark making that hearken back to mankind's earliest attempts at visual communication, drawing fearlessly upon anything and everything: cave paintings, hieroglyphs, medieval knights' banners, roman sculptures, baroque stylizations, Impressionism, Nouveau Reálisme, Dada, Symbolism, Minimalism, Pop and Contemporary art. Wherever these artists go, unsuspecting surfaces find themselves transformed and given new meaning through the lightning-fast application of vibrant colors and symbols. Each move, jig, calculation and function of the piece thought out beforehand so that when the time comes to execute, it can be done in mere minutes. These artists don't stand on ceremony, and advances in markmaking technology play a key part in the production of such work; as such, they unapologetically avail themselves of quick printing processes, aerosol paint, stencils, stickers, anything that works.

Street Art is synonymous with experimentation and its inherent dissidence asks us to question our materials, the "truth" of art history and the role art plays in society and human interaction. Slinkachu, a London-based artist, tests our observational skills by editing train model miniatures into scenes of everyday life, then putting the resulting tableaux back on the street. If we're paying attention, these tiny acts of prostitution, murder, pleasure, natural disaster and reenactment of social norms can be encountered in the nooks

and crannies of the larger urbanscape; if we're caught up in our everyday routine, they go unnoticed. Sculptor Mark Jenkins tests our emotional barometers with his eerie, tape-wrapped human forms which may make us start with surprise, scratch our heads or even dial 911.



Street Art has been called an "honest art form," and the foundation of its honesty as well as its strength is its non-traditional process and presentation.

Printmaker SWOON uses common wheat paste and traditional Chinese, Indian and Mexican paper-cutting techniques to introduce us to characters of her own making, people like ourselves doing everyday things, talking, shopping or sharing a tender moment. Both American artist Shepard Fairey, through his Obama campaign imagery, and Dutch artist Hugo Kaagman, through his mind-blowingly graphic constructs, aggressively investigate the connections (both the known and the unexpected) among material, process and meaning.

Street Art has been called an "honest art form," and the foundation of its honesty, as well as its strength, is its non-traditional process and presentation. Found on walls, on sidewalks, on skateboards, on the tails of airplanes, on magazine covers and on t-shirts, it's accessible in a way Fine Art often isn't and speaks to our intellect, our instincts and our deepest held emotions. Given a chance, it can talk to us, comfort us, show us new things, maybe even restore our faith in art.

Francesca Searer is the Exhibition Curator of *Street Text: The Populist Phenomenon* and the Project Coordinator for the new murals for STREET ARTS in Downtown Albuquerque. She currently serves as the Program Coordinator on the staff of 516 ARTS. She is a working artist and holds a B.F.A. degree from Pratt Institute in New York. Editing support from Neilie Johnson.



## CHAZ BOJÓRQUEZ Los Angeles, California

"If the city was a body, graffiti would tell us where it hurts. By cutting out the pain, you risk damage to the whole. No one part is more important than another."



Chaz Bojórquez began his personal involvement with graffiti during the late 1960s in East Los Angeles working with the placa, the unique script or markings that symbolize territory or neighborhood allegiance. Being more interested in the script for its own sake and not its relationship to a gang presence, he stylized the text and experimented with new imagery and iconography and incorporated this aesthetic into his work as a graphic designer for commercial clients and Hollywood films. As a young artist he traveled around the world studying calligraphy styles, and continues to exhibit and paint in Japan, Mexico, Italy and New

Zealand at museums and graffiti gatherings. Almost single-handedly, Bojórquez continues to reinvigorate the West Coast style of wall writing, differentiating it from the Hip Hop imagery of the East Coast. His paintings, prints and sculptures are in the collections of many museums including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, National Hispanic Cultural Center and the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago.

## GUSMANO CESARETTI Los Angeles, California

"A Chicano kid grows up with walls of many kinds around him. When somebody is born into that situation there are several things he can do. He can ignore the walls, and sink into apathy. Or he can become violent and try to blow up the walls. But there is a third way, a way that people have used for centuries. And that is to perform a kind of ritual magic to neutralize the force of the walls by decorating them with signs, symbols and art. Chicano street writers choose this third way."



Gusmano Cesaretti, born in Lucca, Italy and a resident of Los Angeles since 1970, has been capturing the sound, light, and even emotional tenor of his adopted city through the lens of his camera. He has published two books: Street Writers- A Guided Tour of Chicano Graffiti, and Physical Graffiti-4x4=24 and is a contributing photographer to the book, 24 Hours in the Life of Los Angeles. His photographs have been exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and are included in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

## HENRY CHALFANT New York, New York

"The kids who painted the subways of New York, turning deferred-maintenance wrecks into brilliant canvases and infusing the faceless grid with their own identity, planted the seeds of an art movement that has inspired people the world over to say, 'we are here and we won't be ignored anymore.'"



Henry Chalfant is an acclaimed photographer and one of the foremost authorities on New York subway art. He has published articles and lectured extensively on this and other aspects of urban youth culture. His photographs are exhibited in New York and major galleries and museums in Europe and are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. He co-authored the definitive account of New York

graffiti art, *Subway Art* in 1984 and a sequel on the art form's world-wide diffusion, *Spraycan Art* (with James Prigoff) in 1987. Chalfant co-produced and did the background research and photo-documentation for the ground breaking film *Style Wars*, first shown on PBS television in 1984. Chalfant calls himself an 'unofficial archivist' of the graffiti art movement in New York. He says "My studio was a focal point not only for graffiti writers, but it was also a postmodern archive and museum for scholars, filmmakers, authors, sociologists, anthropologists, photographers and historians."

## GAJIN FUJITA Los Angeles, California

"I kind of look at myself as a hip-hopper, the way a DJ would sample all sorts of great music from the past—sounds and beats—I'm just doing it with visuals."



Gajin Fujita grew up and still lives in East Los Angeles where he was a founding member of graffiti crews K2S (Kill 2 Succeed) and KGB (Kids Gone Bad). He was born in 1972 to Japanese parents and holds an M.F.A. degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a B.F.A. degree from Otis College of Art and Design. His work has been widely exhibited at galleries and museums such as Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City and SITE Santa Fe. He is represented

by LA Louver Gallery. Fujita blends Asian techniques such as animé, partitioned screens and scrolls, Japanese subjects including geishas, warriors and demons, with Western, urban imagery in a way that is stunning and vibrant, yet harmonious. His works embody the cultural and class contradictions that are an integral part of urban Los Angeles.

### LADY PINK New York, New York

"Underground, you can't call mommy or the cops."



Lady Pink was born in Ecuador, but raised in Queens, New York. In 1979 at the age of sixteen she started writing graffiti and soon was well known as the only female capable of competing with the boys in the graffiti subculture. Pink painted subway trains until 1985 and is considered a cult figure in the Hip Hop subculture since the release of the motion picture *Wild Style*, in which she had a starring role. While still in high school she was already exhibiting paintings in art galleries,

and at the age of 21 had her first solo show at the Moore College of Art. As a leading participant in the development of graffiti-based art, Lady Pink's canvases have entered important art collections such as those of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum, all in New York City, and the Groningen Museum of Holland. She also shares her more than thirty years of experience by conducting youth mural workshops and lecturing and serving as visiting artist at colleges and universities. In the coming year her paintings will be included in exhibitions at the Addict Gallery in Paris, Opera Gallery in London, and in the *Art in the Streets* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

## JOHN LORNE Albuquerque, New Mexico

"As a thirteen year old, growing up in the Bronx, some boys' right of passage was to receive a bar mitzvah, mine was painting my name on a train."



John Lorne was born in the Morris Park neighborhood in the Bronx, New York. As a child, John's interest in art developed while watching television and cartoons of that time period and he began by emulating those colors and characters. At the age of thirteen in 1977, Lorne and a few friends started the writing group called MPC (Morris Park Crew). Working under the tag 'Slip', Lorne's work was featured in most of the major publications on the early graffiti movement in New York including the film *Style Wars*, and numerous

books by Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper. After moving to New Mexico in 1988, Lorne has continued to create murals throughout the community and support youth programming and community development.

Above: Lady Pink, Pink in 1980s Graffiti World (in progress), aerosol & latex on canvas, 84 x 180 inches

Below: John Lorne, "Slip" Graffiti on Wall, aerosol

Above right: Ernest Doty, Photo courtesy of www.streetstylealbuquerque.blogspot.com

Below right: Shepard Fairey, Hope, Courtesy of OBEY GIANT ART

## **ERNEST DOTY** Albuquerque, New Mexico

"How did I get here? Lying on the sidewalk in front of my brother's house, dying. Shot from less than ten feet away. Benjamin Tellez born 04-10-1981, murdered 06-04-2010 by Officer Sgt. Gerald Espinoza. Who will speak up for me?... This is my story and the story of those around me I paint for all of you, for myself and for all of those who have been silenced. Hold fast and hold on. Love will lead the way to change."



Born in Albuquerque in 1979, Doty's artwork reflects a life-long devotion to an authentically fresh and artistic vision. A natural autodidact, his technique expands on a unique process of artmaking that allows the spray-paint medium greater expressive latitude in developing a perspective on urban art genre. Doty's artistic imagination speaks to the wisdom of nature while maintaining its connection to his own urban roots. Line and value emerge slowly and precisely as Doty maps each element of the painting onto the canvas in a synthesis of technique, creativity, talent and personal expression. From his earliest inspiration of learning art from his stepfather, to graffiti in ditches during his youth, the maturation of his current style and form offer us a window into an emerging spiritual vision of the urban art form.

## SHEPARD FAIREY Los Angeles, California

"For me, there has always been a disconnect with the sort of elitist structure of the high-art world, and my distaste for that is at odds with my feeling that art should aspire to do great things. But there's something powerful about seeing art in public spaces that has a function other than just advertising that's selling a product. I'm not saying I'm above any of this, I'm a part of it. But one of the things I love about doing what I do is that I am in the mix with people."



Shepard Fairey is the man behind OBEY GIANT, the graphics that have changed the way people see art and the urban landscape. The OBEY GIANT campaign is rooted in the DIY counterculture of punk rock and skateboarding, but it has also taken cues from popular culture, commercial marketing and political messaging. In 2003 Fairey founded Studio Number One, a creative firm dedicated to applying his ethos wherever art and enterprise intersect. Fairey's art reached a new height of prominence when his "HOPE" portrait of Barack Obama became the iconic image of the presidential campaign and helped inspire an unprecedented political movement. The original image now hangs in

the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. In 2009, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston honored him with a full-scale solo retrospective.

## JAQUE FRAGUA Jemez & San Felipe Pueblo, New Mexico

"The spirit of transforming a space into a vision that exists internally, is a form of prayer that no religion, government or person can stop. It is a storm that strikes lightning, and if They do not hear the thunder, They will definitely feel the rain and realize the power of this Art once it clears the sky and leaves behind water to drink."



Jake Fragua is an emerging artist from the Pueblos of Jemez and San Felipe. From his background, he has developed a yearning for creativity and for the intrinsic process that begets growth. He experiments with various media, such as aerosol, found-objects, earthworks, poetry and music, to explore messages of civil unrest, social justice, emotional introversion, personal healing and his unique perspective on life and death. Education has always been a priority for Fragua, both in academic and non-academic settings. He has studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts, and has taught many community art workshops and studio classes.

## GAIA Baltimore, Maryland

"Growing up in New York, I personally felt like I never had a connection to nature; it was so distant and idealistic. There is also the feeling that the trajectory we are on is not sustainable, yet I feel bound to this monstrous system."



Gaia is a Brooklyn and Baltimore-based street artist with a background in Printmaking and Sculpture. He is currently enrolled in his final year at Maryland Institute College of Art with a major in interdisciplinary Sculpture. At the age of 21, Gaia has built an impressive resume having exhibited in art fairs and galleries throughout Brooklyn, London, Washington D.C., Miami and Los Angeles. His work has appeared alongside contemporary Street Art legends such as Blek Le Rat, Shepard Fairey, SWOON, Matt Small, D\*face, Sweettoof, Brian Adam Douglas, Lucas Price, Nick Walker, Slinkachu, Imminent Disaster, EVOL, Pisa 73, Oliver Vernon and Dalek, just to name a few.

## STEVAN GUTIERREZ Albuquerque, New Mexico

"Everyday is a clean slate and with that comes the opportunity to realize responsibility, as beings of this physical plane."



Sometime in the winter of 1987. Stevan emerged from the time portal that is his mother's belly womb into this land called home. As his eyes adjusted to the artificial lights of the hospital, he remembers thinking "Lord, what have I gotten myself into?" As the months turned into years, he was amused by various cartoons, candy bars and creatures of all shapes and sizes. He and his best friend Spike took refuge in karate chopping zombies daily to keep all the bad guys away from their mothers. However, one day a trickster slipped through the cracks of their defense and sent them into a twelve-year downward spiral trying to deflect his lethal blows of negativity. It wasn't until he met the Angel Gabriel, that he started to really realize that love and light were the only way to overcome the android zombie race that was ruining the hopes and dreams of billions of people. He drilled it into his head to "praise his creator" and to "practice his creation." Then he ran into the Loch Ness monster who helped him share his vision with a wider audience. Since then he has been painting, traveling and dreaming of new ways to set humanity free.

## THOMAS CHRISTOPHER HAAG Albuquerque, New Mexico

"Painting, among other things, is asking the viewer to consider an abstraction, a figment, which is asking a lot. And it can make us cry a little."



Thomas Christopher Haag was born in Wichita, Kansas into a family as vast as the sea. He took pre-med and math classes at the University of Kansas and then he quit that and started hitchhiking. He has lived in Southern Mexico, Switzerland, India, the Pacific Northwest and the Great American Southwest. When he has had to work, he has been a commercial diver, a propman, an art director, a low-volume smuggler, a curator and a gallery owner. He also once worked in a dog food factory where they made Kibbles 'n Bits. But he prefers to paint.

## Mark Jenkins Washington, D.C.

"I think my point is that visual outliers are what's needed to keep the environment stimulating, but unfortunately the only visual content that's updated with any real frequency are commercial advertising spaces. This is why the ephemeral nature of Street Art is so essential, because it creates a visual heartbeat in the city by people who are living in it, rather than just marketing to it."



Mark Jenkins is an American artist most widely known for the street installations he creates using box sealing tape. His work has been featured in various publications including *Time, The Washington Post, Reuters, The Independent* and on the street art blog *Wooster Collective*. He has shown indoors in galleries in the U.S., Europe, Japan and Brazil and is represented by various galleries including Lazarides Gallery in London. He maintains the Website tapesculpture.org and teaches his tape casting process in workshops in the cities he visits.

## **ALEXANDRE ORION** São Paolo, Brazil

"What really would have prevented me from continuing [my work] would have been their removing all the soot which was the raw material used for work. The State's intention was to just remove the intervention. They annulled the message by creating a huge clean area and leaving the rest of the sooty tunnel as it was. So this was another crime: censorship!"



Alexandre Orion (born 1978 or 1979) is a Brazilian graffiti artist and photographer. He gained attention for his exhibition *Metabiotics* in 2006, a graffiti/photography project in which he painted graffiti pieces with white and black latex paint and photographed people interacting with them. The exhibit's style, which the *San Francisco Chronicle* called a distinctive blend of painting and photography that looked nothing like the American conception of graffiti art, interested French and American galleries, gaining him exhibits in Paris, New York, and San Francisco. In

a 2007 reverse graffiti project, he drew a mural of skulls in São Paulo's Max Feffer Tunnel by scouring away parts of the thick layer of soot on the walls; the city later removed the mural by cleaning off the rest of the soot.

## ALBERT ROSALES Albuquerque, New Mexico

"Struggle is necessary to make your wings strong enough to fly."



Albert Rosales is a Chicano graffiti artist who is passionate about improving and enriching the Albuquerque community, and the lives of the youth who live here. Through his artistic efforts, he strives to spread a message of positivity and the importance of education and culture. His journey with art began as a graffiti artist and he grew to become a well-known artist in the Albuquerque community, exhibiting his work in gallery shows such as *Solo Chicano* at the Harwood Art Center

in 2002, at Santa Fe's El Museo exhibition in 2007 and numerous shows at the Cirq Urban Art Gallery, as well as murals at community centers, health clinics and restaurants around Albuquerque.

## **SLINKACHU** London, England

"I got thinking about the world under our feet and how, in a city, you rarely pay much attention to the ground as it is generally barren and covered with concrete, not full of interesting bugs and plants. A few weeks later, the 'little people' project just popped in to my head and I liked the idea of creating a hidden world of overlooked city dwellers."



Slinkachu is a mysterious street artist, who either has amazing eyesight or is going to go blind very, very soon. His *Little People* project involves him leaving painstakingly detailed tiny plastic models around London and photographing with a really good macro setting. Violent, alienated or just plain crack whore-ish, Slinkachu's *Little People* project throws modern life into a darkly comic light and is probably a savage indictment of something-or-other as well... Maybe giants or bricks or something. Who knows?

## CHRIS STAIN New York, New York

"As an artist, my work falls into the genre of the American social-realist movement that was popularized in the 1930s and 40s by artists such as Ben Shahn and Jacob Lawrence. Although I come from a traditional graffiti background, stenciling and screen printing have been my media of choice for their graphic strengths and simplistic methods that allow me to convey exactly how I feel about particular issues. I am most inspired by the simple human need for survival with dignity. I find myself drawn to imagery that expresses that struggle"



In the summer of 1984 the art of graffiti writing spread throughout my Baltimore neighborhood like an epidemic. It captured the imagination of many pre-adolescent youth looking for ways to express themselves outside the norms of school and mundane playground sports. I was one of those kids who became infected by graffiti's bold color, striking form, and independent nature. As time went by I investigated other avenues of art such as printmaking and graphic design. In high

school I learned screen-printing, a fundamental element of stencil print making. For the past eleven years my medium of choice has been aerosol paint, an X-Acto knife and Dura-Lar. My objective is to bring to light the stories of the often overlooked individuals of society.

#### **SWOON** New York, New York

"Thinking you can do anything helps you go ahead and try to do everything."



SWOON is a Brooklyn-based artist whose lifesized woodblock and cut-paper portraits hang on walls in various states of decay in cities around the world. She has designed and built several large-scale installations, most notably *The Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea* at Deitch Projects in 2008. Her pieces have been collected by The Museum of Modern Art, The Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Tate Modern. SWOON is also an instigator and a collaborator. She founded the Toyshop Collective and the

Miss Rockaway Armada, and is a member of Just Seeds and the Transformazium. Since 2006 she has organized four large-scale raft projects and floated down the Mississippi and Hudson rivers with them. Most recently, she and her collaborators designed a flotilla of sea-going rafts that invaded the 2009 Venice Biennale. Although SWOON's aesthetics can be seen as an outgrowth of street art, her engagement with ethical living and making art share a close kinship with the idealism of off-grid, barter-based cultures and economies based on sharing. She uses scavenged and local materials and embraces print media as a potent means of action for social change.

## CHIP THOMAS Navajo Nation, Arizona

"It's not a competition. It's about personal growth and the journey with the art form as the medium. My journey has been incredible so far. So, to my peers, here's to moving forward together."

A native of North Carolina, James "Chip" Thomas moved to the Navajo Nation in 1987 to work as an Indian Health Services physician. He continues to work and live there and during this time he has taught himself black and white photography, developing the images in his homemade darkroom. His work as a photographer is greatly inspired by the photographers Eugene Richards and James Nachtwey, with whom he studied in 1992 and 1994. In the mid 1990s, he began doing a public art project in Flagstaff, Arizona, placing 5 x 7 or 8 x 10 inch black and white photographs of images from the Navajo Nation in public spaces where flyers announcing shows were posted. This project, titled *Urban Guerrilla Art Assault*, ran for several years. More recently, during a three-month sabbatical in Brazil, Thomas was deeply moved by the work of Blu, Os Gemeos, Banksy, Judith Supine, Alexandre Orion, Gaia, JR and several Brazilian street artists he met during his travels. In June 2009 he decided to start enlarging photographs from his library of negatives and wheat pasting these images onto bead stands, water towers, unfinished and abandoned buildings and other structures dotting the roadside on the Navajo reservation.



#### MURALS



516 ARTS presents a series of new Downtown murals on and near Central Avenue in conjunction with *The Populist Phenomenon* exhibition. Organized by curator Francesca Searer in partnership with the Downtown Action Team, Albuquerque MainStreet and Downtown businesses, these new murals feature selected local and international artists whose work is also featured in the gallery exhibition. The mural project focuses on artists work-

ing in the Street Art genre, giving them the opportunity to create works in more long-lasting, high-profile locations.

#### SATELLITE EXHIBIT



As a satellite exhibit to *The Populist Phenomenon* at 516 ARTS, The 5G Gallery presents *Within/Without: Works by David Polka and The GroundScore Collective* (Ernest Doty, Stevan Gutierrez and Thomas Christopher Haag). The exhibit features artists from the 516 ARTS exhibition in a collaborative installation exploring abandoned and forgotten objects, places, and the urban experience. The artists focus on surface, material and technique,

working with materials other than aerosol, including found signage and objects from the urban environment.

#### Within/Without:

#### Works by David Polka & The GroundScore Collective

November 5 - 26, 2010

The 5G Gallery, 1715 5th St. NW, 505-977-9643, www.factoryon5.com open Wed — Sat, 10am-5pm & Sun, 10am-2pm

#### **MURAL LOCATIONS:**

#### 1st Street: Santa Fe Pacific Trust

123 Central Avenue NW, east facing wall

Artist: Chip Thomas

#### 2nd Street: Santa Fe Pacific Trust

123 Central Avenue NW, north facing wall

Artist: Chris Stain

#### 2nd Street: HDIC Theatre Building

100 Central Avenue SW, west facing wall, on 2nd between Central & Gold

Artist: Thomas Christopher Haag

Co-sponsored by HDIC, Farina Pizzeria, C. Dimery Antiques, Guerrilla Graphix

#### 2nd Street: Francis Tinnin Park

Pocket park corner of 2nd Street & Gold Avenue, east facing wall

Artist: Chip Thomas

Co-sponsored by Downtown Action Team & TinMil, LLC

#### 5th/6th Street: 516 ARTS

516 Central Avenue SW, between 5th & 6th, front entrance east facing wall Artist: Thomas Christopher Haaq

#### 5th/6th Street: 516 ARTS Allev

516 Central Avenue SW, back alley between 5th & 6th Artists: Warehouse 508 youth artists responding to 516 ARTS exhibitions with mentoring artists Juli Cobb, Mitchell Olson & Albert Rosales

#### 7th Street: PNM Substation

West side of 7th Street between Central & Gold, all 4 walls Artists: Amy Biehl High School youth artists from Bret Aaker's art class Co-sponsored by PNM

#### 7th Street: El Rey Theatre

620 Central Avenue SW, on 7th, west facing wall Artists: Chris Stain & Jaque Fragua with Lichiban Co-sponsored by El Rey Theatre

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