

# ANTI GRAFFITI

## THE WRITINGS ON THE WALL !

Graffiti originally was the term used for inscriptions, figure drawings, etc., found on the walls of ancient sepulchers or ruins, as in the Catacombs, or at Pompeii. It has evolved to include any decorations inscribed on any surface that are considered to be vandalism or pictures or writing placed on surfaces, usually outside walls and public buildings, without the permission of the owner.

The first known example of "modern" graffiti is found in the ancient Greek city of Ephesus in modern-day Turkey and appears to be an advertisement for prostitution, according to the tour guides of the city. It is found near the long mosaic and stone walk way and consists of a handprint, a vaguely heart-like shape, a footprint and a number. It is believed that this indicates how many steps one would have to take to find a lover with the handprint indicating payment.

The Romans carved graffiti into both their own walls and monuments and there are also, for instance, Egyptian ones. The graffiti carved on the walls of Pompeii were preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius and offer us a direct insight into street life: everyday Latin, insults, magic, love declarations, political consigns. One example has even been found that stated "Cave Canem", which translates as "Beware of Dog".

In the 20th century, especially during World War II, "Kilroy was here" became a famous graffito, along with Mr. Chad, a face with only the eyes and a nose hanging over the wall, saying "What No (scarce commodity)...?" during the time of rationing. Twentieth century warfare saw the advent of many new aviation technologies, closely followed by the advent of airplane graffiti, including the nose art made famously during World War II. Most notably the Enola Gay B52 bomber used to drop the atom bomb at Hiroshima.

Starting with the large-scale urbanisation of many areas in the 1950's and the building of tower blocks and large council estates, local gangs would mark walls and other pieces of public property with the name of their gang (a "tag") in order to mark the gang's territory. To many people this became a familiar scene associated with America especially seen in the Bronx. Near the end of the twentieth

century, the practice of tagging became increasingly non-gang related and began to be practiced for its own sake. Graffiti artists would sign their "tags" for the sake of doing so and sometimes to increase their reputation and prestige as a "writer" or a graffiti artist.

Tags, like screennames, are sometimes chosen to reflect some qualities of the writer. Some tags also contain subtle and often cryptic messages. The year in which the piece was created, and in some cases the writer's initials or other letters, are sometimes incorporated into the tag. In some cases in America, graffiti (especially those done in memory of a deceased person) can be found on shopfronts and is so elaborate that shopkeepers have been hesitant to clean it off. In the Bronx after the death of rapper Big Pun, several murals dedicated to his life appeared virtually overnight, the same occurred after the deaths of The Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur.

Other highly elaborate works covering otherwise unadorned fences or walls may likewise be so elaborate that property owners or the government may choose to keep them rather than cleaning them off. The wall in front of Abbey Road Studios in London has been a favorite spot for Beatles-related graffiti ever since The Beatles recorded there in the 1960s, left in various languages by visitors from all over the world. The studio makes no attempt to stop this graffiti, and has the wall repainted regularly to provide a fresh surface for inscriptions.

Other forms of graffiti can be political in nature or even racist and most councils have dedicated teams to remove this within hours. In Britain most graffiti is found on public transport usually done by a lone offender and larger pieces found on buildings and subways but not usually on the same scale as in the United States for instance.

### Council Crackdown on graffiti

Seven teenage girls were arrested in Oldham, Lancashire recently in a series of dawn raids with up to 30 police officers and PCO's taking part in the operation in the South Chadderton area. Township inspector Mike Miskell said: "we want to get these individuals in the same room as the people whose property has been vandalised. We want to try to get over the repercussions of their actions. Ultimately we want them to scrub off the graffiti."

The operation was mounted in response to community feedback and photos taken of the worst instances of graffiti and handwriting experts consulted to track the offenders through their schools and homes.

Insp Miskell described the operation as a success and said "if you come out of your house and go to a bus stop and it is covered in graffiti you feel like you live in a high crime area."

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Nose art on military aircraft.