Parallel Tracks: Three Case Studies of the Relationship between Street Art and U.S. Museums in the Twenty-First Century

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PARALLEL TRACKS
THREE CASE STUDIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STREET ART AND U.S. MUSEUMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Erin Rolfs
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Abstract

An examination of three case studies involving U.S. museum exhibitions of street and graffiti art in the twenty-first century. This thesis covers the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s “Graffiti” show in 2006, Los Angeles’s Museum of Contemporary Art’s “Art in the Streets” in 2011, and the 2012-2015 activities of the Baton Rouge Museum of Public Art. These events offer a chronological and geographical range to provide a broad scope of investigation into the pitfalls and opportunities of museum’s exhibiting graffiti and street art. The heart of this research is not to prolong the debate about whether museums endanger their authority when they show street artists or whether street artists lose their edge by engaging with institutions, but rather, to accept their long-standing relationship as a fact and historicize the challenges that have faced these parties over many years. In each instance covered here, the museum’s objective was to harness and convey the energy and value of street art to new audience. Each museum setting sought to demonstrate the communicative power of graffiti and other forms of transgressive urban art. At some cost to the institution, their efforts had significant, positive consequences on the art form, whether in the art market or in the public domain. The catalog of the obstacles which faced these organizations, as laid out in this research, will enable museums to mitigate those costs in the future and contribute to a roadmap which museums can use to better navigate the parallel paths of subversion and compromise they themselves accept when supporting controversial art.
Introduction

Ahead of Christie’s September 20, 2018 sale of prints — featuring several works created by the rhythmic hand of Keith Haring — the auction house posted on its website a revealing blog. Titled, “Collecting Guide: 5 things to know about Street Art,” the post highlighted “Art in the Streets,” MoCA’s 2011 retrospective of street art, as one of the catalysts for the “skyrocketing” popularity and prices of the genre.\(^1\) Two months before Christie’s auction, a massive independent show of street art, “Beyond the Street,” ended a four-month run in Los Angeles. Billed as the sequel to the MoCA retrospective by Roger Gastman, the co-curator of both shows, this multisite indoor and outdoor exhibition featured one hundred artists, including early graffiti taggers like TAKI 183 and a number of second-generation street vandals like Shepard Fairey.\(^2\)

A decade after the first international museum show of street art at the Tate Modern and the first urban art auction at Bonhams, we live in an era in which street art and graffiti have a sizable impact on the art world.\(^3\) The academic wagons circling around this art practice were slightly slower to take formation, but by 2015 the peer-reviewed *Journal of Street Art & Urban Graffiti* boasted a committee that included early researchers like Richard Lachmann. Previously relegated to the occasional panel, scholarly discussions that focused on urban art have expanded to include a number of conferences fully devoted to this field of study. They carry titles like “Creating the Urban with Art” (2016) and “TAG: Name Writing in Public Space” (2017).\(^4\)

Today, we clearly see expanding platforms from which to sell, experience, and research graffiti and street art. What is more, there exists convincing evidence that museum support for these works increases attendance, engages an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group of artists and visitors, and can answer to genuine needs to historicize and archive an ephemeral art form. Despite all of this, no other major museum in the U.S. has attempted to mount a similar undertaking in the

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seven years since the monumental “Art in the Streets” show. In fact, the follow-up effort to showcase street art by Gastman involved no museum administrators at all. The aim of this thesis is to review three notable attempts by museums to showcase graffiti and street art in hopes of unveiling the challenges posed by these exhibitions. This effort is beholden to the comprehensive surveys of graffiti and street art by Anna Waclawek and noted French curator Magda Danysz, who have woven together the various artists, styles, and sociological concepts surrounding street art, but devoted little attention to role of museums in the art form’s ascendency. Titles which focus on street art’s civic potential and touch on the art’s relationship with all types of institutions, include Alison Young’s Street Art, Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination; and edited collections like Art Against the Law and Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art. These books, in addition to the recent Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art, which includes a single contribution about the art market, give insufficient attention to the complicated relationship between museums and the genre. A series of scholarly efforts have built on the work of pioneer researchers, such as Richard Lachmann and Craig Castleman, to investigate the street artist’s own motivation to participate in or reject art careers “above ground” and how the critical, political, and commercial spheres responded. This type of literature includes articles by Jeff Ferrell, Lynn Powers, and Konstantina Drakopoulou, and books by Joe Austin and Rafael Schacter. Their research intersects with the work of Gillian Jein, Virág Molnár, Rohit Revi, and Ronald Kramer, which reveal the illegal and legal dualism inherent in the practice of street art. Of particular note is the brief work of Jacob Kimvall, who pointed out that

5 Anna Waclawek, Graffiti and Street Art, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011); Magda Danysz, From Style Writing to Art: A Street Art Anthology,(Årsta, Sweden: Dokument, 2010).
graffiti artists’ unions demonstrated attempts to “organize graffiti in an institutional context” as early as 1973.11 The concepts found in these latter texts are critical to a portion of this thesis. Building on their work, this study contributes a hitherto missing focus on U.S. museum exhibitions of street art, which occurred since the turn of the current century, in order to reveal a more nuanced history of the topics surrounding institutional display of the art form. In this sense this research is also indebted to museum and exhibition studies by Peter Bengsten, Victoria Alexander, and Vera Zolberg.12 But whereas these contributions focused on a signal show or synthesized the exhibition trends of museums across many decades, this thesis provides a historiography pertinent to one genre, street art, and covers multiple episodes of institutional support.

In so doing it is important to confront the assumption that museums are reluctant to showcase graffiti and street art because, as a subversive practice, these forms of expressions cannot conceptually or physically exist in the sanctioning space of a museum. Critics and scholars have argued that the very act of a museum showing uncommissioned, public artwork or galleries shaping the practice into something commodifiable runs counter to the anti-establishment narrative that follows this genre. At the same time, the work’s tenuous ties to art historical discourse and its abandonment of conceptual primacy irritates those who wish to preserve the museum’s role as an arbiter of taste as defined by a single metanarrative. As a result, museums that have tried to historicize these works suffer blows from both sides. This paper will show, however, that many notable graffiti and street artists have long been in partnerships with “legitimizing” actors, such as the art markets and museums. Indeed, the assumption that conflict is inherent to the relationship between institutions and street art hides more nuanced facets of this long-standing partnership. In many cases, street artists who work with art and commercial institutions often do so to the benefit of their public practice and a longer career. As we will see, early involvement with galleries in the 1980s may have appeared as a failure in the short-term but these attempts to merge a street practice with a studio practice would prove to be a link to museum opportunities in the twenty-first century.


Gillian Jein has affirmed that when we claim that commodification or “museumification” of street art “signal[s] the end of its transgressive potential,” we cling to a binary choice that artists are either for the people or for the elite. This research demonstrates that street artists have, from the very beginning of the phenomenon, both subverted “power structures through their everyday practices” while participating in legitimizing and money-making endeavors. This premise is important as it allows us to see the myriad of other considerations museums have to take into account when displaying the art form. Likewise, for those concerned that museums can only embrace this genre by abandoning the conventions of art discourse, Nicholas Alden Riggle offers an insightful way of perceiving street art as adjacent to — not outside of — this dialectical tradition. He contends that there are multiple responses to modernism and rather than reside completely outside of previous discourse about art, graffiti and street art “respond to modernism not by hosting the everyday [in galleries and museums]” like Pop Art. Rather, he claims that works by street artists “are typically not everyday objects and, like Modernist works, often retain recognizable visual properties of art [and respond to modernism] by making art in the streets for all to see.” Street art, he asserts is neither “postmodern, nor post-postmodern. It is the other response to the Modern separation of art and life.” To illustrate this point, one can cite a series of instances where engaging in a dialogue with the city, citizens, the museum, and commercial enterprise are far more critical for street artists than instigating conflictual relationships. The heart of this paper is not to prolong the debate about whether museums endanger their authority when they show street artists or whether street artists lose their edge by engaging with institutions, but rather to accept their long-standing relationship as a fact and historicize the challenges that have faced these parties over many years. As a result, I hope such research contributes to a proactive discussion about what museums might learn from previous encounters with an art that embraces “commercial and noncommercial logics.”

To illustrate this aspect I have identified three instances of meaningful museum engagement with graffiti and street art within a twenty-first century framework — the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s “Graffiti” show in 2006, the aforementioned “Art in the Streets” at MoCA in 2011, and the 2012-

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13 Gillian Jein, “(De)Facing” 103-104.
2015 activities of the Baton Rouge Museum of Public Art. These events offer not only a chronological and geographical range to provide a broad scope of investigation, but they are also milestones for street art in America. The first chapter reviews the social and economic backdrop of the 1983 “Post-Graffiti” exhibition at Janis Gallery from which several art works will reemerge in the first major museum showing of graffiti at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2006. By drawing parallels between these two shows we see common concerns about the aesthetic quality of the artwork, its place in the discourse of art history, and questions about curatorial authority. The subsequent section on “Art in the Streets” reveals warmer critical reception to the art and diminishing debates about its unconventional entry into the art world. But the director's background, the territorial nature of graffiti art, and the culture clash between conceptual and populist art introduced new challenges for MoCA. Lastly, a history of the influences and events that shaped Baton Rouge’s Museum of Public Art (MoPA) examines the relationship between an unconventional museum structure and city organizations. Despite being free of the competitive objectives that can exist between board members, sponsors, and curators, the obstacles for this widely-praised graffiti outlet largely stemmed from a mistrust of institutions. From 2006 to 2015, we see an increasing acceptance of graffiti and street art as valid creative expressions, but the challenges for museums highlighting this genre persist. These issues often revolve around local politics and much of the tension surrounding these exhibitions rests on who controls the content and the narrative.

I chose to limit the scope of this research to the U.S. and largely focus on exhibitions hosted in the current century because street art has a very diffuse history. Indeed, the task of outlining this history is one of the struggles still facing curators and historians. As Allison Young pointed out the genre’s historicity “is both easy to establish and to undermine.” What unfolds here are three specific attempts to give graffiti and street art thoughtful attention through the structures of a museum. While I employed theory to help explain the street artist’s fluidity between sanctioned and unsanctioned spaces, this thesis does neither offer a theorizing approach to the essence of the art works nor the public value of museums. Rather I hope to lay out the pitfalls and opportunities as they occurred for deeper practical consideration. Before doing this, however, it is important to historically anchor the research and clarify key terms associated with the artwork.

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Though each case study is situated in the twenty-first century, the starting point for this paper’s focus is necessarily in 1970s New York. The proliferation of subway art at that time captured the attention of the media and the public. Between 1970 and 1973, the phenomenon became a nearly weekly topic for the *New York Times*. *New York* magazine issued the first “Taki Awards” (named after the first New York tagger interviewed by news media, TAKI 183); and the *Wall Street Journal* profiled graffiti writer CO-CO 144 as an aspiring art student.19 Simultaneously, the aesthetics of Hip-Hop and punk culture increasingly flavored the creative output of downtown New York. Places like the Mudd Club in Tribeca and Patti Astor’s Fun Gallery in the East Village pulled in aerosol artists such as Fab Five Freddy and LEE. It was here that they mingled with street artists Jean Paul Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf.20 The youthful hedonism of the moment coincided with an expanding upper-class in the 1980s, which was eager to invest in cutting-edge art. This convergence would best serve the artworks of Haring and Basquiat, which quickly found a place in traditional art discourse, unlike the work of less “gentrified” graffiti writers. It will be the latter’s participation in museum shows that will be a primary interest of this thesis.

In fact, while Basquiat rejected his graffiti moniker, SAMO, as well as the categorization as a graffiti artist, many others have continued to make work under their tag and hold tightly to the association with street culture.21 Based on the practice of other graffiti scholars, artists mentioned in this thesis are referred to by their tag name. But readers can find a roster of graffiti and street artists with their given names, if known, in the back matter of this thesis. In addition to the use of tag names, the lexicon of graffiti art requires some clarification. Obscure to the uninitiated, graffiti terms can be even more confusing when academics introduce additional nomenclature. As a result, two different artists or two different historians can gloss distinctly separate definitions from certain terms. That is why it is important to distinguish or reiterate the commonly accepted differences between graffiti writing, urban art, and street art. *Graffiti writing* and tagging one’s name is the practice first associated with spray-paint vandalism on subways. As the practice shifted to the exterior of subway cars and writers spent more time in rail yards, “pieces” or large mural-like work evolved.22 This represented a turn towards more graphic and fewer lexical elements in their work but

22 The *New York Times* would label the teens “tagging” their names on subways the term *graffiti artists.*
the art form retained the description of graffiti despite the lack of writing or tagging. Another distinction is that graffiti art is not limited to certain media despite its origins. Tagging is often done with a marker, and illustrative graffiti can be created with practically anything, so we must also recognize the meaning of an aerosol artist as someone who works exclusively with spray paint. Urban art can encompass both graffiti art as well as painted work or photographs that are reflective of an urban, usually graphic, ethos. Street art can be a grab bag for illegal or legal, public or private productions, but in its most direct sense the term is referring to the work by artists who were active beginning in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. While it is common, and not incorrect, to use the term to group all vandalistic art, at times it is important to parse out the work of the contemporary group from that of graffiti artists of the 1970s and 1980s, as the reception and histories of the two generations are quite different. Lastly, while the 1983 show at Janis Gallery was called “Post-Graffiti,” contemporary historians often refer to the “post-graffiti” era as concurrent with the advent of social media, career of Banksy, and the expansion of legal opportunities for graffiti artists.

With this terminology employed, I hope to provide a constructive reading of the relationship between street art and museums. In the chapters that follow, I will provide historical information on each venue, summarize the critical response to the art displayed, articulate the dynamics between museum staff, boards, and government bodies, and provide a summary of the artists involved. This research supports the argument that the marriage between museums and this artistic genre does not automatically threaten the ethos of street art and it may very well support its inherent tactics. Moreover, we find new and inspiring avenues for museums to expand reflective commentary about how to negotiate their social relevance.

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The Brooklyn Museum of Art and “Graffiti”

In June of 2006 the Brooklyn Museum of Art opened an exhibition entitled “Graffiti,” which was composed of twenty works of spray paint on canvas created by graffiti stars of the 1970s and 80s. Brightly colored, bombastic, and full of the raw, aggressive vigor found once on subway cars and on street corners, this selection of studio work by the first generation of New York taggers was drawn from a larger collection of art donated to the museum in 1999 by the estate of Sidney Janis [figure 1]. Several of the pieces, which where last displayed in his eponymous gallery in 1983, appeared for the first time as a group in a major museum setting in the U.S.1 Over twenty years after the peak of New York graffiti’s moment in the art market, this show marked the beginning of a series of attempts by American museums in the twenty-first century to mount exhibitions historicizing and contextualizing the genre of graffiti and its artistic offspring. Fittingly, both the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the “Graffiti” exhibition offer meaningful connections to the origins of the artistic practice and the long-standing obstacles confronting museums that embrace transgressive artwork. By tracing the history of the venue and the art, including the public and critical reaction to the artwork in 1983 and in 2006, we not only gain insight into the challenges and complexities inherent in the relationship between museums and graffiti, but also develop a better understanding of the technological, economic, and societal changes that have shaped the art and the museum.

Indeed, the Brooklyn Museum of Art proves to be a nexus of converging definitions and experiences in the post-graffiti era. A year before mounting “Graffiti,” the museum curated this century’s first Basquiat retrospective in 2005. A few weeks prior to the Basquiat opening, Banksy placed a gold-framed portrait of wigged aristocrat holding a can of Krylon spray paint in the museum’s European Art section.2 So, within a matter of months, Basquiat, Banksy, and the stars of subway graffiti would be featured at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.3 This overlap of the beginning, middle, and end of graffiti’s history (up until 2006) illustrates the growing momentum among art

historians and curators to revisit the topic of graffiti and wrestle with the many disparate lines of formal and conceptual lineage that lead up to its contemporary manifestation.\(^4\)

The global reach of street art, aided by the advent of social media in the mid-2000s and the success of online blogs like that of the Wooster Collective launched in 2003, intensified public interest in the art form. At the same time galleries like Alleged and Deitch Projects and auction houses like Sotheby's and Artcurial began to pay closer attention to the demand for street art. This context makes the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s 2006 showing of Janis’s graffiti collection all the more interesting as the gallery’s 1983 exhibition under the title “Post-Graffiti” was to be the last U.S. group show of graffiti artists to attract major art world attention.\(^5\)

In following pages I will provide a synopsis of graffiti art in the context of the burgeoning New York art market of the 1980s, followed by the critical reception of “Post-Graffiti” and several shows leading up to its debut. This overview will be contextualized with the economic and cultural setting of the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2006. In summary, I will show that because graffiti had relied on both transgressive and sanctioned actions — from the beginning — it can be recognized by its protest against as well as its participation with institutions. In addition, we shall see how the reappearance of the Janis works in the new millennium inspired doubts about the legitimacy of this art form and the authority of institutions. These reservations echo concerns that were widely expressed in critical reviews of graffiti gallery shows in 1980s. In both eras, critics questioned whether graffiti had a place in the art world and whether its aesthetic value was worthy of museum attention. The Brooklyn Museum of Art’s “Graffiti” showed connects the originators of street art to the interested parties of the twenty-first century. In so doing, this exhibition provided a stark pivot point from which to assess the difficulties that will face other museums which display graffiti and street art.


Graffiti and the Art Market in the early 1980s

Galleries began to sell graffiti artwork early in the 1970s. But aerosol compositions were most visible in the art market of the early 1980s, when an expanded upper-class began to collect art in an increasingly capricious fashion. The history of how this vandalism turned into a commodifiable art form relies on the eagerness of graffiti artists to engage with galleries and to be seen as career artists. Indeed, their actions would impact the creation and reception of the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s exhibition over two decades later.

As noted in the introduction, the proliferation of graffiti in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s derived from an entirely new subculture. Spray painting public structures inspired both ire and awe. City officials spent more than one hundred million dollars trying to eliminate graffiti between 1970 and 1985. Yet intellectuals, like Norman Mailer, found graffiti and the ghetto teen’s “courage to display” himself before the world as the natural evolution of art.6 During the same period, The New York Times relentlessly covered the topic, ceaselessly alternating between categorizing graffiti as a criminal epidemic and a form of folk art.7 This exposure continued as taggers were driven from train yards and subway stations by a police crackdown. Subsequently, these teen vandals sought alternative outlets for their art and the public continued to take interest in the phenomenon. Graffiti writers that identified as artists sought out safe alternatives, a few forming groups such as the United Graffiti Artists (UGA) led by Hugo Martinez.8 The 1973 show of UGA work is among the earliest attempts to produce graffiti for purchase, a mere six years after the first media report of tagged graffiti.9 A New York Times review of this group show inspired art critic Peter Schjeldahl’s assertion that “connoisseurship [of graffiti] has reached some silly extremes [. . .] and even the best graffiti tends to be so rough and ersatz that appreciation of it can hardly afford to be critically refined.”10 Yet, the UGA show at Razor Gallery took the commercial presentation of graffiti seriously, and put

9 The tag of “Cornbread” was reported as early at 1967 by Philadelphia newspapers.
into motion a cascade of exhibitions that sought to refine graffiti’s value in the context of art history by making links to Primitivism, Situationists, and Abstract Expressionism.\(^\text{11}\) This effort would peak with Janis claiming that artist like CRASH, DAZE, LEE, and LADY PINK, have “join[ed] the grand tradition of contemporary art” by carrying the torch lit by Pop Art.\(^\text{12}\) As we will discover, these assertions skirt the more complicated issue of graffiti’s place in the continuum of Western art.

The constant and dramatic media attention given to illegal graffiti during this period is often cited as a reason for the almost instant, and comparatively short-lived, admiration of collectors who sought out aerosol works of art. In addition to graffiti art providing a fresh contrast to the cold conceptualism of the 1970s, scholars have argued that this genre arrived as a “pre-publicized product” when it entered the fine art market of the 1980s.\(^\text{13}\) Collector’s embrace of graffiti art was also motivated by Reagan-era economic policies, which bolstered corporate growth and reduced taxes for the upper class. This meant that the financial gains of acquiring art from galleries exceeded the benefits of a tax deduction awarded by moving wealth into museums through donations.\(^\text{14}\) These financial considerations, as well as the increasing interest from an international market—notably, in the early 1980s European dealers, like Carlo Bruni and Yaki Kornbilt introduced LEE and RAMELLZEE to auction and museum opportunities in Amsterdam and Rome—would prime graffiti art for a fast and fleeting rise.\(^\text{15}\) This period is also the start of an unprecedented increase in the number of galleries that lined the streets of New York. While the market’s ascent was by no means uninterrupted in the 1980s, by the end of the decade, SoHo would be host to more than three hundred contemporary art galleries.\(^\text{16}\) Their great number and influence would shift some of the legitimizing power away from museums and critics towards the commercial sector. One proposed consequence of this transfer of power was that in lieu of a grand historical narrative guiding the valuation of art, the market of the 1980s “imposed the rule: it is less art that makes the price than it is the price that makes the art.”\(^\text{17}\) It is with this cultural change and economic setting in mind that


scholars debate whether dealers, who relied on the novelty of graffiti art to inflate its value and ignored its formal qualities or historical significance, were not only being exploitative but intentionally leveraging the short-sightedness of a new generation of fickle art collectors. This argument continues to influence the perceived value of the graffiti work produced in this period, the same work that would go on display at the Brooklyn Museum decades later.

**Dealers and Critics**

Even some graffiti artists who took advantage of commercial opportunities questioned the integrity of the dealers who were selling street art on canvas. Fab Five Freddy, who famously spray painted Warhol's soup cans on subway cars in 1980 [figure 2], is quoted in a 1982 *Art in America* article as saying that graffiti artists are “not treated like real artists [. . .] it’s like social work.” A handful of galleries, nonetheless, made a historical impact by rooting graffiti into the mainstream thus establishing a network to support the careers of these artists.

Fun Gallery, Fashion Moda, and Shafrasi Gallery are among the few outlets that encouraged and embraced graffiti as art, either early on or well past the genre’s peak of popularity. Artist FUTURA 2000's initial success connects back, in part, to consecutive showings at Shafrasi Gallery between 1982 -1984, even though Tony Shafrasi’s approach was often a sore spot for other gallery owners [figure 3]. But FUTURA 2000 himself recognizes Hugo Martinez, founder of UGA, as “instrumental” in his move to galleries, which in turn, presented a long list of design and fine art opportunities well into 2000s. Another important venue, Fashion Moda, established by Stefan Eins in 1978, after he closed his trendier studio in SoHo and moved to the blighted South Bronx,

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19 Patty Astor, “Patty Astor Interview Book Excerpt,” 2002, http://www.at149st.com/astor.html, Astor, owner of Fun Gallery stated, “Tony Shafrazi stole away one of my finest artists, FUTURA, and got him to do a show with double-burger canvases, he forced him to do so many paintings they were actually hung one above the other. Thanks to Tony's greedy motives FU-2's career as a fine artist was ruined for a while. I am happy but not surprised to say he is doing quite well now.”

committed itself to an “egalitarian relationship between artist and audience.” Eins’s gallery supported the work of FUTURA 2000, CRASH, LADY PINK and many others. Notably, the Metropolitan Museum of Art bought a work by CRASH for its permanent collection from his exhibition at Fashion Moda. Eins was also critical to inserting these artists into the famous 1980 “Times Square Show,” often praised as the moment when graffiti was introduced the greater art world. It is no surprise that the quality of the relationships between graffiti artists and the galleries varied. The reactions of critics in the 1970s and 1980s, however, were more homogenous and a review of their responses inform whether the critical opinion changed between then and the 2006 “Graffiti” show.

A survey of the reviews from these early exhibitions in the 1980s reveal that most criticism of graffiti’s aesthetics or meaning could only be explained through the Modernist notion of the avant-garde. In other words, critics found it hard to convey the genre’s value without forcing a connection between graffiti artists and another ism regardless of how physically, socially, and ideologically disconnected the two might be. Therefore, we find that many critics tended to tie the efforts of graffiti artists into a narrative of art history that was tenuously connected at best. In a comprehensive review of critical discourse about graffiti art from 1980 to 1985, written in 2013, scholars Konstantina Drakopoulou and Konstantinos Avramidis wrote that:

As outsiders [graffiti artists] did not experience the same situations and dilemmas as the artists of the post-war avant-garde. Thus, unconstrained by the history of painting, writers had formed their own criteria by which they evaluated each other’s pieces. They neither spoke the language of the oppositional avant-garde, nor the exotic primitive.

Indeed, the concern that graffiti art was thriving in the art world despite being completely unaffiliated with the movements, ideas, and discourses that defined Western art was summarized by Suzi Gablik in a 1982 issue of Art in America. Gablik saw graffiti’s presence in the market as both a crisis of commodification and codification:

Does all this produce a conflict of values? Is this just another case of a mass-consumption capitalist economy expanding into a taboo area by transforming private behavior into a commodity? […] Are these artists being encouraged beyond any reasonable evaluation of their talents? How, finally, are we to define the underlying meaning of an experience which,

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to the uninitiated, appears as sheer nasty babble—at best a hermetic Morse code of
hieroglyphs, at worst a violent assault?

These questions were not fully answered in the period book-ended by the 1983 Janis Gallery show and 2006 exhibition at Brooklyn Museum of Art. As consequence, shallow marketing and the genre’s disconnected relationship to the canon of art history meant that the art market would be unable to hold on to graffiti’s value as popular attention waned. These factors, again, color the way the art world would receive graffiti well into the next decade. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the problem of how to present or theorize an art that is not “attached to one set of practices (such as spray painting subway cars), [n]or to one exclusive set of intentions” persists well into the next century.25

The Janis Gallery’s “Post-Graffiti” Exhibition

Sidney Janis’s reputation for marketing acumen had been founded on his championing of European artists like Léger and Mondrian in America after World War II, followed by the successful promotion of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. His brash confrontation of Nouveau Réalisme with the work of American Pop Art in the 1960s also set him apart. In the subsequent years, Janis would embrace a wide stylistic range, from Bridget Riley’s Optic Art to Tom Blackwell’s Photorealism. In the early 1980s, the gallery proved even more eclectic. Before ending 1983 with the “Post-Graffiti” show, Janis exhibited photographer Duane Michals, staged a posthumous show on expressionist painter Gandy Brodie, and mounted the work of postminimalist Valerie Jaudon.26

At the invitation of Janis, “Post-Graffiti” was organized by Dolores Neumann—an early maven of graffiti art and wife of second-generation millionaire and collector Hubert Neumann—after she hosted a well-attended symposium at the gallery during which graffiti writers covered a thirty-six foot canvas in real time.27 Six months later, the December opening of “Post-Graffiti” coincided with a sudden drop in the art market, which would recover just few years later but without

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lifting up again the demand for graffiti art. This circumstance imbued the prefix of “post” with the
feeling of an ending rather the beginning of something new. Galleries were no longer buying graffiti
canvases and a few of the graffiti writers-turned-gallery artists had no plans to go back to illegal
tagging.28 But these facts by no means announced the end of graffiti as a flourishing creative
practice, as subsequent chapters reveal. It is perhaps more useful to recognize this show as a “signal
[of] the relationships between post-graffiti and commercial activity [...] [which] appear somewhere in
between ‘selling out’ of, and ‘buying in’ to, subcultural forms.”29 The interactions between Janis and
the artists in “Post-Graffiti” will enable the art form’s ability to survive the economic downturn and
reemerge in the market after the 2006 exhibition. Yet many accounts of the “Post-Graffiti” show,
either in contemporaneous criticism or in art historical writing, focused on its failure to value the art
on its own terms.30

Big names in graffiti tagging like CRASH, DAZE, TOXIC, A-ONE, LADY PINK, and
LEE constituted the core eighteen artists included in the Janis show, along with Basquiat and
Haring. In response to the exhibition, Grace Glueck named her Christmas Day New York Times
review “Gallery View: On Canvas, Yes, But Still Eyesores.”31 Her disappointment with the show
included dismay that such artwork would be found on the “chaste white walls” of the prestigious of
Janis Gallery. Gluek stated that the notion of “enshrining graffiti” on canvas was “ridiculous” and
that when the practice had inspired artists it was “filtered through sensibilities refined by [an]
esthetic judgment” like that of Cy Twombly.32 While she reserved some praise for the “more
sophisticated and less explosive” works of Basquiat and Haring, Basquiat’s biographer, Phoebe
Hoban, noted that Village Voice art critic Kim Levine called the artist’s work “tame” amid an
altogether scathing review of the show. In fact, Shafrazi Gallery owner, Tony Shafrazi, who had
attended the show and was filmed at the opening saying, “[graffiti] contributes a new gesture, a new
way of expressing a sign.” Yet, four years later, the Village Voice reported that the gallery owner had
no interest in artists who “incorporated graffiti images into their work.”33 Certainly, some of the

28 Richard Lachmann, “Graffiti as Career and Ideology.” American Journal of Sociology, Volume 94, Number 2 (September
of London, 2009), 49.
30 Wacławek, Graffiti, 31.
33 Hoban, Basquiat, 38 - 40.
avenues that were open to graffiti artists started to close after 1983. What connections did survive would enable an interplay between “commercial and noncommercial logics” that afforded graffiti and street artists an unprecedented level of professional and creative flexibility in the coming decades.\textsuperscript{34}

In addition to giving us a point of departure from which to examine the relationship between street art and institutions, “Post-Graffiti” foreshadows problems arise for museums which present the work “as just another painting style without analysis of its subcultural affiliations and illegal status.”\textsuperscript{35} Regardless of whether Janis’s claim that graffiti artists had “made the transition” was critically contested at the time or proved overly simplistic for later historians, it is important that his commitment to graffiti work outlasted that of many of his peers. Continuing his lifelong advocacy for self-taught artists like Joseph Pickett and William Doriani, Janis would give CRASH solo shows in 1984, 1986, and in 1988, one year before the art dealer’s death.\textsuperscript{36} During the late 1980s, he also brought graffiti work to European art fairs in an effort stimulate more international attention.\textsuperscript{37} His dedication to the art form no doubt contributed to its museum debut decades later.

When these works and artists reappeared in the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2006, a range of factors—stemming from technological, social, and economic change across more than twenty years—created a remarkable juxtaposition of old and new, yet the critical doubt that followed when graffiti was placed in an institutional context is no less present.

But before reviewing the reception of the “Graffiti” exhibition, it is important to survey the key artists, galleries, and milestones that contributed to the creative evolution from subway graffiti to street art as it was defined in the early 2000s. While graffiti matured into a global phenomenon during this time, it will best serve our understanding of the interplay between the art and the Brooklyn institution to focus on the events, people, and policies of New York City.

\textsuperscript{34} Virág Molnár, “Street Art and the Changing Urban Public Sphere,” \textit{Public Culture} (2017): 404.
\textsuperscript{35} Wacławek, \textit{Graffiti}, 69.
\textsuperscript{37} “Graffiti,” Brooklyn Museum of Art.
Post-Graffiti New York in the 1990s

Despite New York Mayor Koch’s victory proclamation over the scourge of subway graffiti in 1988, his successor, Rudy Giuliani, would be confronted with a new rash of graffiti found on bridges, overpasses, and blighted buildings. During the 1990s, the political and civic power of graffiti was present on a global scale: on the Berlin Wall, the billboards of London, on the streets Northern Ireland, in communities of Nicaraguan rebels, and along the walls in Palestine. In New York, amid the era of “broken-windows” policing and an increasingly contracting public space, a new crop of graffiti and transgressive street artists began to recalibrate the intent of their work and the resources available to creators. Newly formed galleries with a focus on street art and sanctioned public spaces for graffiti contributed a great deal to the maturity of the art form. Of the commercial spaces, Aaron Rose’s Alleged Gallery on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, which opened in 1992 and closed in 2002, created a gathering spot for a new generation of street artists from the San Francisco area, such as Barry McGee, Margaret Kilgallen, and Ed Templeton. There they mingled with their East Coast counterparts like Steve Powers and Shepard Fairey. But the space also attracted filmmakers, musicians, photographers, and fashion designers who would, much like the network of multimedia Hip-Hop innovators in the 1980s, expand the reach of this particular branch of street art aesthetics. Of this set, Barry McGee would have his first major solo show in 1999 at Deitch Projects, which Jeffrey Deitch opened in 1996. This exhibition marked a “change in direction of the gallery [to become] a platform for the new generation of street artist.” In many ways, these galleries revived the free-wheeling energy of early graffiti spaces like Fun Gallery and Fashion Moda, but in this later iteration artists seemed to use the gallery building with more consideration. A great example of how this era of street art activated the gallery space is Swoon’s Swimming Cities of Switchback Sea, which placed seven handmade floating sculptures (carrying people) in the East River and, once docked, their anchored ropes led from the “boats” to the interior of Deitch Projects and towards

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40 Molnár, “Street Art,” 386.
the exhibition’s central piece [figures 4 and 5]. Once the spectator stepped inside, Swoon’s hallmark intricate paperwork, inspired by her street practice, engulfed viewers in an alternate universe.43

In addition to innovative gallery spaces, sanctioned public graffiti sites like the Phun Factory in Queens (later known as 5Pointz and so called as an open invitation to all five boroughs of New York to “feature their throw-ups here”) revived the practice of apprenticeship on which communities of writers’ corners in the New York subway hubs were based [figure 6].44 From 1993 until 2013, the former water meter factory served as a vital and global epicenter for aerosol artists. Its destruction, at the behest of developers who bought the property, sparked legal controversy over artists’ rights to their artwork and resulted in a 2018 decision awarding $6.75 million in damages to graffiti artists whose work was destroyed.45 Fortunately, other community-sanctioned graffiti meccas, like the East Harlem Hall of Fame, established in 1983, and the Bronx Wall of Fame, established in 1994, are still active. After 2000, additional walls for unpenalized graffiti — tacitly approved by the surrounding neighborhood — sprung up around the city but these aforementioned locations would be constant focal points for collaboration throughout the 1990s.

During this decade, the appeal of these physical sites — drawing in artists from all over the country and the world — was spurred on by innovations in communication media, specifically, the successful launch of niche magazines.46 Many of the publications that promoted street art were based outside of the U.S., but of those produced stateside in the 1990s, Drip, Contents Under Pressure, 12ozProphet, and many more, remain reference points for graffiti artists.47 Juxtapoz magazine was particularly influential in connecting West and East Coast street artists. Launched in 1994 at the instigation of Robert Williams, this San Francisco-based magazine provided access to a mélange of intersecting subjects—from cartoons to custom motorcycles.48 Simultaneously, one of the first attempts at cataloging and archiving street art online took place in 1994 with the start of Art Crimes

43 Waclawek, Graffiti, 174-6.
44 Isabel Bau Madden and Peter Rosenstein, Tattooed Walls, (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2006), 34.
47 Dozens if not hundreds of locally produced independent magazines helped capture the aesthetic intersections of Hip-Hop, skateboarding, and graffiti. An incomplete list can be found at “Zines,” graffiti.org, accessed September 24, 2018, https://www.graffiti.org/faq/zines/gz_a-f.html#daily_bombs_magazine
(graffiti.org). That effort was followed in 1998 with the foundation of Fat Cap (fatcap.com).\textsuperscript{49} The work of the blog Wooster Collective, starting in 2003 (woostercollective.org), would also be critical to raising awareness of street art in SoHo and beyond.\textsuperscript{50} The early 2000s saw indie print zines fall out of circulation; for instance 12ozProphet is no longer in print but maintains a website forum and online shop for graffiti ephemera. The combined impact of this zines would be perpetuated by innumerable other websites dedicated to featuring street art.

Collectively, these communication advances superficially overcame the empherality of street art and the geographic limitations of seeing the work. As these developments opened a creative exchange and encouraged a more robust consideration of street art’s aesthetic qualities, improvements in spray paint production also expanded the formal potential of the medium. The quality and color range of the paint, the customizable variance of air pressure, and the wide variety of caps available by the mid-1990s vastly extended the illustrative possibilities for spray paint artists.\textsuperscript{51} One needs to add to these innovations the proliferation of different materials employed to create street art. Artist began vandalizing structures using stencils, stickers, wheat pasted cut-outs, and fabricated objects. As a result, this transgressive, public art practice expanded to include a dizzying number of media and people in the 1990s.

Artists entering the field were well aware of the lessons learned by the East Village artists from which they descended. Despite some detractors like REV and COST, who insisted on the “danger” of street art and refused to sell work, many 1990s street artist emulated the model of Keith Haring. He establish his Pop Shop, in the late 1980s, as a way to ensure affordable art-derived merchandise while gallery prices ascended. This desire to take control of the commercial potential of one’s artwork was embraced by later generations. In subsequent decades following street artists became directly involved with galleries, magazines, merchandising, and exhibitions.

These artists’ connection to the transgressive art scene of 1980s New York, in fact, connected well to the skateboard culture of the West Coast. Many artists of the 1990s embraced these complementary narratives to explain the countercultural legacy they inherited. On occasion, the story of this bicoastal parentage would allow street artists to cast their pursuits as transregional and transmedia, further obscuring any possibility of finding a firm junction between street art and

\textsuperscript{50} Lewisohn, \textit{Street Art}, 143.
\textsuperscript{51} Ronald Kramer, “Painting with permission: Legal graffiti in New York City,” \textit{Ethnography}, Volume 11, Number 2 (June 2010): 244.
traditional art discourse. Such premises guided the exhibition “Beautiful Losers,” curated by Aaron Rose, which opened at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 2004.\textsuperscript{52} The show became the first museum showcase of this second generation of street artists dedicated to the “studied vocabulary of pop culture iconography, a sense of the absurd, and a strong D.I.Y” aesthetic [figure 7].\textsuperscript{53} The individuals featured included Shepard Fairey, Phil Frost, Mark Gonzales, Chris Johanson, Margaret Kilgallen, Geoff McFetridge, Barry McGee, Ryan McGinley, Clare Rojas, and Ed Templeton, among others. But unlike the Brooklyn Museum of Art exhibition that followed, this show was heavily weighted toward the present. And in contrast to the 2011 “Art in the Streets” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, discussed in the next chapter, “Beautiful Losers” offered a light-weight presentation of historical moments. Moreover, the exhibition pointed toward a small but talented clique of visual artists who came from backgrounds that were very different from those of their graffiti forbearers. Nonetheless, it was amid this onset of new technologies, shifting cultural acceptance, and additional narratives about street art that the Brooklyn Museum of Art welcomed the public to its first art museum graffiti exhibition in the U.S.

**Graffiti Returns to Brooklyn**

The “Graffiti” show, composed of Sidney Janis’s donated works, was announced on the heels of the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s successful run of a self-curated Basquiat retrospective. But rather than make contextual ties to the closing retrospective, critics pointed to the “Graffiti” exhibition as evidence for the increasing populist bent in the Museum’s recent schedule. Reporters linked the exhibition to the museum’s lackluster display of Target-sponsored “Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage,” in 2000, and the commercialized “Star Wars: The Magic of Myth,” in 2002. In contrast, the Basquiat show was praised for the “clarity” and “freshness” of the display that allowed his works to viscerally resonate with the viewer.\textsuperscript{54} The chorus of caution that followed the


\textsuperscript{53} Lewisohn, *Street Art*, 81.

graffiti show perhaps betrayed the U.S. art world’s acceptance of Basquiat and general rejection of more entrenched graffiti writers. Rather than accepted as fine art, the work in “Graffiti,” were often portrayed as anthropological objects by contemporary reviewers. An interview with “Graffiti” curator Charlotta Kotik and comments by CRASH illustrate how much their views deviate from those of critics. Despite these differences, we will see how the decision to mount “Graffiti” ultimately encouraged other venues to reconsider the value of the art form.

“Graffiti” consisted of twenty large-scale paintings from many of the biggest names in the graffiti world, including TRACY 168, NOC, LADY PINK, DAZE and CRASH. The narrative surrounding the show reiterated the subversive beginnings of the art and attempted to illustrate how the work moved into the world of private collections and galleries. Arguably, the highlights of the show were the works that retained the tagging gestures of early graffiti. Such paintings stood out among the graphically-oriented street art of the time and refused associations with the Neo-Expressionism that defined Basquiat’s work. Examples of this type are found in *Son of Kel* by KEL 1ST [figure 8] and *Crazy Tracy* by TRACY168 [figure 9]. Speaking about the efforts to mount the show, in an interview for this thesis, the curator Charlotta Kotik recalled:

During the time [that Sidney Janis collected these works] there was a crackdown on graffiti in New York, and Sidney [leased] a warehouse and tried to give space to graffiti artists to paint in safer conditions. This donation was accepted by the museum in 1999. I proposed the exhibition out of that [. . .] At the time, the Brooklyn Museum was an open-minded institution, and one of the few places that was likely to accept this type of gift. We were the first museum to really show these artists.55

The exhibition included a wall for participants to tag their own name and several programming opportunities for the artists themselves to “address the community around” these works.56 LADY PINK, CRASH, and Swoon (the latter had an installation piece on view in a different area of the museum during the exhibit’s run) presented gallery talks. During one such program, recorded by the museum, CRASH pointed out A-ONE’s *Untitled* [figure 10], proclaiming the artwork to be the epitome of “graff,” as he explained to a bustling crowd:

This is our Jackson Pollock [...] [this piece] was shown in the Sidney Janis Show, the “Post-Graffiti” show, and this piece just rocked everybody [because] it has everything about graff, starting with the subway train, the little tags [...] this painting, to me, is graff [...] to this day.

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55 Charlotta Kotik, email interview with the author, August 12, 2018.
56 Kotik, August 12, 2018.
CRASH’s synopsis of this and other paintings on view contrasted sharply with the tone of published reviews. Of the major national art media, only Artforum eagerly anticipated the revival of these works, noting that the exhibition will “demonstrate that Janis was as prescient as ever,” despite being in his 80s when he acquired these works. Other reviews, like that of the New York Times’s Ken Johnson, while not uniformly negative, proposed that the canvases were “negligible as works of art” and reiterated long-standing concerns that the “mystique” of graffiti dies once it was transferred on canvas. Wishing the museum had tied the work to contemporary street artists like Barry McGee, Johnson issued a challenge that would be accepted by Deitch in the “Art in the Streets” show. But more important were his doubts about the conceptual and technical depth of the work. “The fatal problem,” he contended, “with transferring graffiti from subways and outdoor building walls is that it is just not made for contemplative scrutiny.” These comments were mirrored in the New York Post:

Contrast between [these graffiti artists] and Basquiat [...] is instructive [...] However derivative he was of mainstream modernism, he studied its masterpieces and learned something about composition and paint texture [...] Inadvertently, this show offers a crash course in the difference between mainstream art and marginal art and reminds us that a few years in art school may not be a total waste of time.

Writing with a less sarcastic tone, David Grosz of the New York Sun conceded that the works of aerosol, “displayed considerable skill and imagination,” but they did not “stand up to the scrutiny of museum viewing.” Grosz went on to lament that, unlike the implied distance in BEAR 167’s Sunday Afternoon [figure 11], which provides a “descriptive, wide-angle[d]” view of the ghetto of the past, the exhibition’s lightweight history undermined a “more rewarding experience.”

Coverage of the show was overshadowed by consistent questions, like an echo from 1980s, about whether the work was deserving of institutional attention. In an effort to justify graffiti’s place in museums, several reviewers called for a curatorial intervention to tie the art form’s meaning to...
greater historical threads. Rather than following Mailer’s faith, critics were still looking for some proof of graffiti’s value beyond its pop culture appeal and they were not alone. As we will see in the subsequent chapter, this debate also unnerved museum boards. The Brooklyn Museum of Art’s board of directors, who “ok’d the exhibition, quite positively,” would nonetheless suffer an exodus shortly thereafter due, in part, to dissatisfaction with “populist and contemporary exhibitions.”62 It is also curious that the same year “Graffiti” appeared, seven curators left the museum, which could be attributed to any number of issues with internal dynamics.63

With this observation in mind, it is worth recalling that the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s support of transgressive art had already come at a cost. In 1999, after a very public fight between director Arnold Lehman and Mayor Rudy Giuliani over the content of “Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection,” the city temporarily withheld one third of the museum’s budget. This skirmish set a precedent for financially hand-tying museums who display challenging art and inspired public skepticism about curatorial judgement.64 Amid these challenges, “Graffiti” received several disparaging reviews and was shown amid rumbling complaints of patrons who disliked the growing presence of pop culture in museums. But when we widen the historical scope and look forward a few years into the future the importance of “Graffiti” surfaces despite these obstacles.

In 2000, a highly-publicized graffiti auction at Guernesy’s on the Upper East Side featured photographs by Henry Chalfant, chalk drawings by Haring, and a wide array of work by TATS CRU, Kenny Scharf, and KAWS among many others. It was summarized by ArtNet’s Alan Moore as earning less than what Deitch pulled in during a one-man show for Barry McGee the year before. Moore quoted UGA’s Hugo Martinez, who was in attendance, as attributing the poor results of the auction to a lack of an established “historical sequence” for graffiti art.65 Six years later, the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s presentation of the graffiti vanguard marked the first time in a U.S. museum held such an exhibition. By 2008, Tate Modern organized “Beyond the Streets,” the first international and intergenerational museum show of street artists. Curated by Cedar Lewisohn, it featured work from

http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/mOORE/MOORE6-19-00.asp
the early days of TAKI 183 and FUTURA 2000, covered the fine art careers of Haring, Basquiat, and Scharf, and ended with the work of U.S. contemporaries Dan Witz, FAILE, Shepard Fairey, Brazilians Os Gemeos, as well as Parisian street artists JR, Miss Van, and INVADER, among others. Later that year, Bonhams held the first dedicated urban art auction, which earned British street artists Banksy, Nick Walker, and Adam Neate hundreds of thousands of pounds. Christie’s UK office quickly expanded their contemporary art catalog to include CRASH and KAWS. In an interview with auction house’s contemporary art specialist, Lock Anderson Kresler, he singled out the 2006 Brooklyn Museum of Art’s “Graffiti” exhibition as establishing credibility for the art form. The museum’s historical show also inspired similar exhibitions in Paris in 2009, “T.A.G.: Tag and Graffiti,” at the The Grand Palais and “Graffiti: Born in the Streets,” at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art. Clearly, the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s show prompted further international discussion about the value of graffiti and, in turn, affected art collectors and museums.

Because of Janis’s commitment to the art form, the 2006 “Graffiti” exhibition incited calls for connecting 1980s graffiti to contemporary, graphically-oriented street art. It also spurred discussions about why a museum would legitimize these works and how institutions could historicize an art that exists outside of the institutional frame of reference. Five years later, MocA’s “Art in the Streets” would grapple with these considerations as well as the perceived (or real) threat to curatorial autonomy. A number of other critical issues would emerge from this ambitious and highly attended exhibition, including the presence of corporate sponsorship, censorship, and culture clashes. The Brooklyn Museum of Art’s graffiti art legacy greatly enhanced the art form’s presence in the art world. Its ability to do so was directly connected to the street artist practice of having parallel public and private careers. Whether honing their skills anonymously in train yards and at the Phun Factory in Queens, or pulling together a work for Sidney Janis, these artists developed survival strategies by being visible in both sanctioned and unsanctioned spaces. The following chapter will look at how MoCA tried to engage both subversive and cooperative components in its attempt to showcase this unconventional art in a comprehensive and art historically motivated exhibition.

66 Fisher, “Tate.”
67 Nguyen, Beyond, 69
Los Angeles’s Museum of Modern Art and “Art in the Streets”

In the years following the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s 2006 “Graffiti” show, historians, collectors, and curators identified the need to illuminate the murky timeline of street art. The Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art would rise to this challenge with a street art retrospective — connecting the graffiti world of the 1980s to the internet-fueled careers of twenty-first century street artists. This exhibition, “Art in the Streets,” was the vision of the newly appointed director Jeffrey Deitch. His involvement in this ambitious effort, in many ways, was logical. A Harvard Business School graduate and former CitiBank art advisor, Deitch was the owner and curator of the New York-based Deitch Projects. At his eponymous gallery space, he had a history of promoting performative and transgressive work. His first exhibition in 1996 featured Vanessa Beecroft’s *VB16 Piano Americano-Beige*, a performance piece that foreshadowed the “outrageousness” of future exhibitions, including shows for street artists Barry McGee, FUTURA 2000, Shepard Fairey, Swoon, and Os Gemeos.1 Amid the wild and provocative energy that accompanied so many shows at Deitch Projects, the gallery impresario was successful at leveraging corporate and private support to the benefit of himself and emerging artists.2 Deitch represented the “commercial and noncommercial logics” that street artists had openly embraced, unlike the museum world which seemed apprehensive of this approach.3 As I will show, an appreciation for this difference in perspective is key to better understanding the critical response and inherent value of “Art in the Streets.”

Much like the blend of ideological and moneyed bravado that is associated with Banksy, Deitch’s curatorial choices and commercial prerogatives seem equally beholden to two extremes. In the 1970s, after college, he came into promoting the punk aesthetic of the East Village. Deitch would hold on to that subversive ethos as he worked his way into the blue-chip art market in the 1980s. Given this background, when Deitch accepted a directorial position at MoCA — an

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2 Deitch, *Live the Art*, 425-430.
institution with a long and notable reputation for highlighting Abstract Expressionist and postmodernist works — his appointment itself set the stage for a culture clash.⁴

This tension was nowhere more apparent than at the opening night of Deitch’s first fully realized exhibition for MoCA, “Art in the Streets,” on April 7, 2011. Breaking attendance records for the museum, the show was an explosion of visual chaos gleefully disrupting the normally placid and cavernous Geffen Contemporary building. The work of New York graffiti legends like Fab Five Freddy, LADY PINK, and LEE were shown in tandem with names from the latest generation of internationally known artists like Banksy, INVADER, and JR. West Coast stars who emerged from tagging and tattooing circles, such as RETNA, REVOK, and Mr. Cartoon, were also featured among the sixty artists selected for this retrospective look at graffiti and street art. By many accounts, this show represented a remarkable shift in authority that could have opened up substantive reflections about the art world at large. For instance, the museum director was a former art dealer and some of the artists about to be canonized used to be anonymous taggers. Moreover, the art on the walls sometimes literally came from art in the streets. Outdoor signage, recovered posters, and site-specific installations were displayed alongside graffiti murals and spray-painted automobiles. A recreation of Fun Gallery guided by Patti Astor, a black lit room devoted to the neon-colored world of RAMMELLZEE, and a section for indoor skateboarding added to the energetic setting of the show. Yet, for internal and external reasons, fairly or unfairly, “Art in the Streets” would be immediately marked by its spectacle rather than by its substance.

In the years that followed, academic and news articles went on to cite “Art in the Streets” as proof of the impossibility of institutions to relay the essence of street art and graffiti within the white box of a museum space. Despite the energy and skill evident in the exhibition’s curatorial effort, scholars like Peter Bergsten from Lund University believe that MoCA proved “street art proper [to be] incompatible with the institutional context.”⁵ Bergsten recalls the backlash that came from either end of the political spectrum: on one end, the “conservative” art establishment perceived the show as legitimizing the illegal activity of vandalism and thought it to be a subject beneath the museum’s dignity; and, on the other end, the street and graffiti artists themselves, who believed the museum’s interest represented an adversarial encroachment of its own territory.⁶ Nonetheless, this assessment

⁴ MoCA’s permanent collection is dominated by works of Rothko and Judd as well as postmodernist art by Johns, Rachenburg, and Ruscha.
of divergent priorities does not have to invalidate the scholarly impact of taking a curatorial approach to better understand these long-standing and global forms of artistic expression. The task of researching this ephemeral art form and conveying its disparate historical threads in a comprehensive manner requires significant effort. Arguably, such an endeavor would be best served by the resources available through a world class museum. More importantly, Bergsten’s stance gives weight to claims of incompatibility without acknowledging the long history of interactions between “white spaces” and graffiti artists. The case study of the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s “Graffiti” show demonstrates that there was a precedent for institutional involvement with street art. This involvement often resulted in long term benefits for both the artists and the public. Therefore, it is perhaps more consequential to review how MoCA’s “Art in the Streets” met the scholarly burden posed by such an unconventional art practice.

In order to assess the curatorial and educational success of this show, this chapter offers a review of the many critiques pointed at the museum’s attempt to integrate graffiti and street art into a more comprehensive and legitimizing framework. The criticism is divided into financial motives, territorialism, use of guest curators and corporate sponsorship, and negotiations of street art with the community. In each in section we find that the alarms raised around “Art in the Streets” proved more pivotal for museums than they did for street and graffiti art.

Financial Motives

“Art in the Streets” was unprecedented on a number of accounts. It was the first exhibition fully conceived by Deitch himself during his MoCA tenure, and it would be the first graffiti and street artist retrospective in the United States. Deitch’s untraditional résumé and the presence of such a transgressive art form in a conventional museum space certainly represented a risk for MoCA, Deitch, and the artists involved. With this challenge in mind, we must first examine the museum’s economic and cultural history prior to “Art in the Streets” to better understand critical responses to the show and how those reactions relate to the museum’s objectives.

From its foundation, MoCA’s saga had been inseparable from the life of billionaire Eli Broad. In 1970s, few people possessed more influence within L.A.’s philanthropic and social elite than Broad. At this time, the city was struggling to establish itself as a world-class art mecca and he had the vision and resources to put the newly established MoCA on the map. From the beginning,
Broad envisioned the museum as a “jewel” in an urban, cultural complex that was to surpass anything found in midtown Manhattan. The first step toward this vision was an art collection that would “overfly New York.”7 In 1979, Broad appointed the museum’s first director, Pontus Hultén, formerly at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris. Hultén’s brief, three-year appointment would foreshadow the three-year tenure of another Broad hire, Jeffrey Deitch.8 Although he resigned from the museum’s board in 1984, Broad is a lifelong trustee and personally re-invested himself in MoCA in 2008, when the recession threatened the institution’s solvency. He committed $15 million in matching funds and oversaw the replacement of director Jeremy Strick. Under Strick’s leadership, the museum’s endowment dropped from $50 million to $6 million.9 With the appointment of Deitch, under Broad’s supervision, the billionaire perhaps satisfied an old itch to steal New York’s thunder. Furthermore, Deitch was expected to bring about the type of financial stability a business-minded director might cultivate.

Given this directive, Deitch’s embrace of commerce and art was an asset as a director. In his role as curator, however, his predilection for commercial opportunities uneased critics. In fact, in a *Vanity Fair* article about Deitch’s tenure, journalist Bob Colacello wrote: “If there had ever been a case of a dealer becoming the director of a serious museum, no one could recall it.”10 But to give weight to this perception we must assess how his background affects the museum’s mission of “producing original scholarship” that contributes to the understanding of post-WWII artwork.11 A look at Deitch’s own statements and behavior helps in this effort. In the accompanying catalog for “Art in the Streets,” Deitch wrote in the opening section:

> An artistic movement that was instigated by teenagers and is still being invigorated by teenagers has now leapfrogged over the critical machinery of the art establishment to become one of the most popular manifestations of contemporary art.12

This statement reiterates the popular narrative that claims street art’s legitimacy—its meaningfulness within the continuum of art history—was obtained by using mass communication (be it via mass

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11 MOCA’s mission statement.
transit or mass media) and subversion. Thus, street artists paved their own path toward institutional embrace emphasized by Deitch’s opening of MoCA’s doors to the likes of Banksy, REVKOK, and Miss Vann. As Deitch, in his role as gallery owner and art dealer, commented in an interview in 2008:

I don’t think the creation of a manufactured movement is good for the artists, like what the auction houses are doing now where they have a street art section or an urban art section [. . .] We don’t lump these people together [. . .] We don’t want a situation where street artists can only work on the street, whereas so-called real artists are in the Venice Biennale and collections of major museums.13

Deitch decided that his first significant move as museum director would be to deploy the art establishment’s time-honored means of classification and curate “[the] first major museum survey of the history of graffiti and street art.”14 It is possible Deitch saw an opportunity to make street art “real” art by bringing it into the museum, hoping to raise its status to the same level as the conceptual art so revered by MoCA’s artist board members.15 But critics and patrons of the museum, who were already skeptical of Deitch’s appointment, expressed concern that this “elevation” of street art was motivated by Deitch’s wish to increase the value of his private holdings. For instance, reporters noted that his pivot from collecting and selling the work of street artists like Os Gemeos and Swoon [figures 12 and 13] to orchestrating their first inclusion in a U.S. group museum exhibition threatened to puncture the thin scrim between the market and the museum.16 Likewise, the fact that a few of the show’s installations, including Street Market and Session the Bowl, appear as duplicate efforts of work featured at Deitch’s Projects made the lines between his historicizing objective and personal investment less clear. Yet, his support of the works or artists in question does not negate their importance when contextualizing street art. Moreover, Deitch was neither the first nor last person to align a museum’s interests with the director’s private passions.

13 Patrick Nguyen and Stuart MacKenzie, Beyond the Streets: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art, (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010), 235.
14 Deitch, Art in the Streets, 15.
Nonetheless, “Art in the Streets” ignited a debate in the media and among museum professionals about the impact of private interests on the intellectual integrity of museums. But it was not the first exhibition to do so. Since the end of the nineteenth century, wealthy individuals have shaped the priorities of American museums; the existence of an institutional benefactor historically preceded the “professionalization” of curators. More pointedly, art collectors are often on museum boards and museums use their expertise to strategically grow the institution’s holdings. In turn, the collector benefits by having works of the same artist in her private collection as they increase in value through institutional affiliation. Yet, as multiple museum studies have shown, the philanthropist/board member of a museum often wants to maintain the deference of authority to the curator. In 2014, a large-scale survey led by Richard Lachmann revealed that patron-funded or guided exhibitions “did not increase in recent decades [despite cuts to government funding and the increased allocation of wealth among one percent of the population...]. The autonomy that professionalized museum curators achieved in the 1960s and 1970s to determine the themes and content of exhibitions has been sustained.” Thus, it is possible that the heavy-handed criticism of Dietch’s curatorial choices was motivated not by heretofore unheard conflicts of interest, but by his blatantly challenging the museum-world hierarchy. He served as director, curator, and fundraiser in his management of “Art in the Streets,” combining commercial motives with educational objectives. 

Like in many other museums, several members of MoCA’s board and staff preferred to put some distance between those who educate as a matter of mission and those who advise toward a financial end, publicly privileging the knowledge and tastes of the former. Because Deitch’s directorial appointment presented a dramatic shift away from preserving the image that the market and museums are separate, there is cause to turn a critical eye back on the critics. This is especially important when determining whether “Art in the Streets” failed to meet “curatorial or theoretical strength one expects from an institution of MoCA's caliber.” By evaluating the show’s criticism, which was largely directed at Deitch, positive and negative refrains emerge. Rather than accept “Art in the Streets” as a cautionary tale of street art’s incompatibility with museums, deeper consideration

of the show’s challenges may enable museums to discern how to best incorporate the genre into an institutional context.

**Territory**

The *Los Angeles Times*, *ArtNet*, *Journal of Art History*, and *Art in America* equally questioned the conceptual underpinning of the show and its historical narrative. Christopher Knight from the *Los Angeles Times* offered the most direct criticism, echoing the argument posed by Serge Guilbault’s 1990 book *Reconstructing Modernism*:

Mostly MOCA tells a mythic tale in which graffiti, an Expressionist art form, is largely born in Manhattan, spreads across the country and finally envelopes the world. If the story sounds familiar, that’s because it replays New York School legend, long since discredited, about Abstract Expressionist painting in the 1940s. The generative action has merely shifted from 10th Street and Greenwich Village, stamping ground of Pollock and De Kooning, to the South Bronx and the Lower East Side, hangouts of Crash and Kenny Scharf.

New York was certainly pivotal in marketing graffiti, starting in the 1980s, just as it was for Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. In fact, that’s the real sequence leading from Pop art to street art. MoCA's stylish exhibition mostly extends a legacy of commercial influence, which is the wrong way for an art museum to frame a show.²¹

In later interviews, including one in 2017 with *Artsy*’s Anna Louie Sussman, Deitch partially addresses these objections. He defends the relevance of commercial influence by claiming, “One of the biggest misunderstandings of this is that somehow there’s the art market and then there’s, let’s say, the ‘good’ part of the art world, such as non-profit organizations or museums, with their educational mission.”²² Clearly, Deitch organized the show with the same inhibitions towards commercial involvement that characterized his own career. Indeed, among a wealth of articles chronicling Deitch’s unconventional move to MoCA, tumultuous tenure, and early departure, *New York Times’* Deborah Soloman noted that “it seemed that Mr. Deitch genuinely could not understand why anyone might take offense if he ran the museum as if it were the West Coast branch of his

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gallery.” Both in management and curatorial decisions, Deitch’s break with the conventional divides in the art world proved advantageous for MoCA’s fundraising and attendance, but problematic for its public image, especially among Los Angeles art circles.

Yet, neither Deitch’s actions as director nor the presence of commercial influence in the show’s narrative were in conflict with the philosophy of many graffiti and street artists. Virág Molnár, sociology professor at the New School of Social Research, contends that street art “moves constantly back and forth between noncommercial and commercial engagements, blurring the boundaries between the two,” to the effect that its practitioners combine “establishment and anti-establishment strategies” to their own advantage. For example, Banksy’s artistic contribution to the MoCA exhibition depended on the condition that the museum allow him to cover entry fees every Monday of its run. This requirement enabled the public to enter the museum free of charge at least one day a week. In this way, he could benefit from the prestige of being in the exhibition while affirming the democratic bent of his artworks’ message. Similarly, Deitch may have rightfully curated “Art in the Streets” to include a broad range of ideological and commercial influences.

It is also important to recognize that Art21, LA Weekly and LA Times’ Culture Monster Blog celebrated Deitch’s long history with street art as a key reason why the genre could be brought into a museum context. Deitch was also commended for his ambitiousness, since mounting an art historical retrospective for such an ephemeral art form was inherently difficult. Even in lukewarm write-ups, such as reviews from the College Art Association or Knight’s Los Angeles Times articles, the artistic merit found in the majority of the work was consistently noted. As CAA reviewer, Reni Feinstein proclaimed:

Art in the Streets’ repeatedly demonstrated that works of quality and vision render moot any questions regarding the low and high. Graffiti and street art that is filled with meaning, intelligently conceived, strong in drawing, and that provokes thought and feeling forces definitions of art to expand to accommodate these brave new forms.

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23 Solomon, “Bye, Hornet’s Nest.”
24 This paper does not cover the response to two other controversial but popular shows Deitch oversaw during his time at MoCA, each having a strong celebrity element, “Dennis Hopper Double Standard” (2010) and “Naked Hollywood: Weegee in Los Angeles” (2012).
Given the negative critical response to the graffiti gallery shows of the 1980s and to the Brooklyn Museum of Art’s 2006 show, such praise represented a noticeable shift in tone. Despite a consensus on the superior quality of most of the art work, problems with show’s timeline proved inexcusable for critics. In Deitch’s own words there was always a risk that:

Some people [will] say, ‘You got the story wrong,’ or, ‘You didn’t include this person.’ Well, maybe, but this is unlike when somebody is doing a Pop Art show 30 years after it happened. There you’re dealing with a whole body of exhibition records and books and artists’ archives. We don’t have that here. Things come from different directions — people with good memories or fanatics with pictures, not one central place.\(^{28}\)

The lack of reliable, archived information did not deter many Los Angeles-based academics, critics, and artists from finding flaws with the show’s narrative. They also offered the historical evidence that MoCA seemed to overlook. *Artforum*’s Annie Buckley shared Knight’s aforementioned assertion that “Art in Streets” propagated a myth, according to which that graffiti originated in Manhattan. In her write-up of the Pasadena Museum of California Art’s show “Street Cred,” which opened six months after the MoCA show, she expounded:

This exhibition may initially appear as yet another street art show, but it was, in actuality, announced six months in advance of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art’s major gathering “Art in the Streets.” It also fills a vital gap in Jeffrey Deitch’s extravaganza: the social and cultural legacy of Los Angeles, where *cholos* marked territory with elaborate placas (plaques) as early as the mid-1930s, predating the explosion of style writing on New York subways by more than three decades.\(^{29}\)

This short write-up omits the fact that Chaz Bojorquez, a prominent *cholo* graffiti artist, who was involved in street art as early as the late 1960s, was shown at the MoCA exhibition. Deitch also included several Los Angeles filmmakers and photographers who captured *cholo* artwork in and around Los Angeles. Admittedly, the show did not devote space to the older generation of “*cholo* gang graffiti [which Bojorquez] was *building on*” and it is a legitimate question of whether his exclusion inaccurately preserves New York as the lone site of the genre’s genesis.\(^{30}\)

In a 2012 roundtable on L.A. post-war art, hosted by *Artforum*, Chicano essayist and artist Harry Gamboa Jr. responded to the exhibition’s presumption that graffiti started in late 1960s New York by cautioning that, “gaping holes in Los Angeles are often temporarily fixed by filling them with a lump of hot

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\(^{28}\) Leopold, “Street Art.”


\(^{30}\) Deitch, *Art in the Streets*, 12.
Part of the struggle to agree on a timeline could stem from a lack of consensus on what defines graffiti and street art instead of deliberate exclusion on Deitch’s part. As noted in *Art in America*, as early as 1982, graffiti uses different mediums and signals different intents.32 If graffiti is defined by the use of spray paint, then the hand painted tags of early *cholo* gangs may not be comparable. If defined by intent — perhaps aesthetic, territorial decrees inspired by economic and urban deterioration — then there is a case to be made for a revised timeline that recognizes the early contributions of West Coast artists.

Whether found in public or in a museum, street art takes a part of its meaning from geographic location and territorialism. It is not surprising then that local publications and local artists would call out the assumed primacy of New York and negligence of Bojorquez’s predecessors, even if their own criticism contained questionable omissions. If the art form “takes its power from saying someone was here, regardless of whom,” there is reasonable pressure on curators to give ample consideration to the local history of graffiti found within marginalized communities.33 But MoCA’s ambition to host a retrospective of national and international works make the narrow focus this effort requires very difficult. It is a challenge the Brooklyn Museum of Art did not have to face when it mounted “Graffiti.” The work in the 2006 exhibition and the museum itself had a shared history with New York. With these differences in mind, future exhibitions of street art may require a clearer definition of terms and territorial scope in order to avoid similar criticism.

**Guest Curators and Corporate Sponsorship**

In planning the exhibition, Deitch decided to bypass museum staff professionals and to hire two guest curators: Los Angeles residents Aaron Rose and Roger Gastman. This incited further alarm in the media and from the museum’s board. But the move gave Deitch two assets presumably

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not available in the current staff: someone who had curated street art for museum exhibitions (Rose) and someone who knew how to increase the sponsorship base (Gastman). Rose, a filmmaker and owner of Alleged Gallery from 1992 to 2002, co-curated the 2004 travelling exhibition “Beautiful Losers: Contemporary Art and Street Culture,” which debuted at Cincinnati’s Contemporary Art Center. Gastman, also a filmmaker, as well as an author and publisher, was the creative director of the media agency R. Rock Enterprises. Deitch had worked with both men during his time as a gallery owner. Knight highlighted Rose and Gastman’s involvement as one of many “disturbing developments” during Deitch’s tenure. He added that, “[c]uratorial staff had built MoCA’s reputation as an innovative museum over several decades, but now, guest curators with no museum ties were brought in to organize the program [...] the curators frequently had financial relationships with the art and artists being shown that raised the inescapable specter of conflicts of interest.”

His comments mirror Andrea Fraser’s concerns which were voiced 2001, in the wake of the “Sensations” scandal at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, namely that “[museums are becoming] so identified with administrative priorities that curatorial competence is becoming increasingly peripheral to artistic programs.” And like the Brooklyn Museum of Art, MoCA’s board lost members due to the director’s populist moves, which, at times, overrode the wishes of staff curators. However, conflicts of interest and taste aside, in the ten years preceding the show’s debut, there were only a handful of exhibitions that could have prepared the staff for something akin to “Art on the Streets.”

In an interview for this thesis, Robert Williams, the founder of Juxtapoz magazine, which devoted an entire issue to “Art in the Streets,” viewed the show as a commercial success. But he tempered his praise by lamenting that Deitch failed to “refer back to the old guard” in his approach. Williams noted that Deitch circumvented the curators and artists, who had long-standing relationships with the museum, to realize his curatorial vision. One of the key people the director purportedly sidestepped was head curator Paul Schimmel. Indeed, Schimmel was ousted before Deitch resigned. His departure inspired an uproar among board members, patrons, and the media.

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35 Andrea Fraser, “A ‘Sensation’ Chronicle,” Social Text, 67, Volume 19, Number 2, (Summer 2001):156.
36 Many board members returned to be a part of the search committee for Deitch’s successor in 2013.
38 Robert Williams interview with author, March 9, 2018. Williams, who was shown in the controversial “Helter Skelter” show at MoCA also concluded, “Paul Schimmel was an asshole, but the board loved him.”
alike. By July 2012, artist board members Catherine Opie, Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Barbara Kruger left their positions.

But in defense of hiring outside curators, Gastman clarified that his view of this genre differed significantly from what had been written about the art form up until that point. As he explained in an interview prior to the show’s opening, “I don't think the right term has been coined for this body of work and collection of artists who have come from graffiti and skateboarding and are now working in advertising or nice corporate jobs with fashion brands [...] This category of work is no longer a subculture but a multimillion-dollar business.” Gastman’s livelihood was indeed built on connecting artists with corporate brands. His approach to historicizing street art had often included the historical and the commercial impact of the genre. As the publisher of the pop culture magazine Swindle and the co-author of The History of American Graffiti, Gastman endorsed and authored content that equally valued the genre’s impact on cultural ideas and on areas of commerce. His appreciation for the duality of how street artists engage with the public, through both subversion and cooperation, seems crucial to mounting a retrospective on the subject. Deitch’s decision to involve curators with this perspective, based on more recent studies of the art form, may have enabled a more forthright presentation of the world of street art.

Aside from his curatorial perspective, Gastman’s successful negotiation of corporate brand sponsorship also prompted concern. Art Pulse criticized MoCA for the “gratuitous” corporate presence found in “Art in the Streets.” Reviewer Tucker Neal argued that two prominent sponsors’ history of labor exploitation contradicted the show’s anti-establishment ethos. Neal implicates the artists in perpetuating the power dynamics that street art is noted for challenging:

One major institutional problem with the exhibition is that it is saturated by heavy-handed sponsorship [...] One wonders what Malcolm X would think of Shepard Fairey’s use of his likeness to wallpaper the MoCA gift shop, given that, according to a 2011 report released by the U.S. International Textile Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation, Levi’s and Nike are still using subsidiary companies that routinely engage in union-busting and create sweatshop factory conditions around the world.

This logical criticism has a place in the discourse about museums and street art. But it may be worthwhile to also consider that corporate sponsorship had long been a constant in street artists’

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careers and promotion. Early artists like FUTURA 2000 and LEE were employed as art directors by major music labels. In the early 2000s, companies like Boxfresh partnered with tagger Solo One to mass-produce stickers with his moniker. Graffiti artist Marc Eko turned his own creative production into a full-fledged corporation as early as 1993. When street artists partner with corporations in such a way that their involvement proves contradictory to the socially-conscious message of art, criticism that points out such hypocrisy is justifiable. But when such concerns are raised it is valuable to keep in mind the longstanding interactions between street artists and companies. Moreover, on a practical level, corporate involvement allowed the museum to recover expenses as the entire arts complex recovered from a national recession. Robert Williams, interestingly, acknowledged the exhibition’s ability to generate “one million dollars in the gift store,” noting that MoCA needed additional revenue streams. The presence of highly-visible corporate brands in street art exhibitions could open up an opportunity for curators to address the “legitimate and parallel history” of graffiti artists integrating themselves into multiple modes of commerce that “run alongside the history of [of their artistic] transgressions.” This alternative way of looking at sponsorship could prove more informative and less conflictual than assuming that a commercial involvement always signals a lack of authenticity.

Outside the Museum

Overall, critics praised the artistic value of what was on display in the exhibition. The vitality and freshness of the work in “Art in the Streets” energized museum-goers and conveyed the international importance of street art. One aspect that proved to be more problematic than the work in the museum were the instances of actual “art in the streets” during the course of the show. It is important to explore this final episode in the litany of critiques offered by reviewers of this momentous show. The reactions from artists to offensive street art and graffiti, executed in public during the show’s run, are instructive.

42 Robert Williams interview with author, March 9, 2018.
43 Revi, “Post-Graffiti” 29.
As a part of “Art in the Streets,” MoCA commissioned Italian artist Blu to paint a mural on one of the exterior walls of the Geffen building. The artist began painting the mural while Deitch was attending Art Basel Miami. When Deitch returned the director ordered the completed mural to be whitewashed [figures 14 and 15]. The content, numerous coffins draped in U.S. dollar bills, threatened to offend the Japanese American community that surrounds MoCA, a neighborhood that hosts the Go For Broke Memorial, commemorating Japanese-American WWII veterans as well as the L.A. Veterans Hospital. Condemnation of the censorship came from popular West Coast blogs, like that of LA RAW, Unurth, Good, and East of Borneo, as well as from online forums on other side of the country, such as AdWeek, Blouin Art Info, Brooklyn Street Art, Hyperallergic, Huffington Post, and Vandalog, among many others. Commentary ranged from a slap on the wrist — “Looks like he made some rookie mistakes in his new position as the head of a major public institution of art. And?”— to street art protest pointing to the hypocrisy of Deitch’s actions [figure 16]. This controversy was exacerbated by MoCA’s efforts, along with those of the Los Angeles Police Department, to clean up the rash of graffiti that appeared in the museum’s Little Tokyo neighborhood during the exhibition. As reported in the New York Times, Deitch committed museum resources to help clean up the “illegal work,” but he poetically cautioned: “It’s a language of youth culture, and we can’t stop it.”

Concern over MoCA’s censorship also came from the Wooster Collective, led by New Yorkers Marc and Sara Schiller, who, as previously noted, have been integral parts of the support system for street artists since 2001. Their measured criticism outlined the competing values that can exist between street art and museums:

When we did our “11 Spring” exhibition in December of 2006 […] the show was exactly what we wanted it to be with absolutely zero compromises […] Ironically, immediately after [the three-day run of] “11 Spring” we were contacted by New York City officials asking us to help them to learn how shows like “11 Spring” could be done by public institutions. We told them we didn’t believe that it could be done, for the very reasons why Blu’s wall was removed.

[…] Our hope is that the final outcome from all of the discussion this month about Blu, Deitch, MoCA, and censorship is that it will become a clear catalyst for Deitch, the

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curators, and the artists, to be even more daring with their work and its message INSIDE, knowing now that this will not be the case OUTSIDE. 47

Two days after the work was painted over, Deitch told RJ Rushmore of Vandalog, “Look at my gallery website — I have supported protest art more than just about any other mainstream gallery in the country [. . .] But as a steward of a public institution, I have to balance a different set of priorities — standing up for artists and also considering the sensitivities of the community.”48

Coming to Deitch’s defense, Shepard Fairey proposed that the episode represented an opportunity to leverage the situation into an educational discussion about the nature of street art:

    I think what he should’ve done was go to the VA and Japanese memorial people and say, ‘This wasn’t intentional but this is what we ended up with, but maybe this is a point of departure for a healthy dialogue.’ And then if they said, ‘No, it sucks, paint over it,’ then it wouldn’t be his decision. He then would use street art in the way in which it has always been used, which is a democratic form of expression that irks and inspires but definitely creates a discussion. But I think to call Deitch a hypocrite would be going way out on a limb. It’s a really reductive narrative that I won’t even indulge. It’s insulting.49

When Deitch spoke about the controversy about four months after, in April 2011, he placed the blame squarely on Blu for not “understanding [...] the unspoken rules of participating in a group art exhibition.” He went on to claim that Blu is someone, “who’s basically almost never exhibited in museums, let alone galleries [...] an artist who is in this whole art career system would be unlikely to do that.”50 With nearly a decade of work behind him, Blu was one of a handful of artists who were involved in Tate Modern’s “Street Art” exhibition in 2008. That same year he completed a mural on the facade of Milan’s Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea. Blu was also included in Lazarides Gallery’s first group show at their flagship location in 2009, which included work from JR and INVADER. In addition, Blu had collaborated with fellow street artist Ericailcane several times for festivals and commissions.51 Deitch’s characterization of Blu as an artist uninterested in a career track built on

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50 Leopold, “Street Art.”
gallery shows is accurate given Blu’s spotty participation in such ventures, but casting him as inexperienced and unaware of the nature of working in a group exhibition seems misinformed.52

Finger-pointing aside, here again, as Fairey indicated, there may have been an opportunity to expand upon the social issues, nature of censorship, and political concerns implied by the history of street art. Art historian Hal Foster categorized graffiti as a symbolic “response of people denied a response,” and criminologist Allison Young redefined the importance of street art as a means “to connect with each other […] or through which a spectator can gain a sense of personal attachment within a potentially dehumanizing space.”53 Curators who explore this side of street art may be able utilize moments of conflict as a means to fully realize the dialogic potential of some street art.

Deitch’s decisions to remove Blu’s mural and maintain New York as the birthplace of graffiti rankled many artists; his decision to hire guest curators and showcase artists he represented as a gallery owner frustrated proponents of the museum’s status quo; and to some reviewers, his integration of corporate sponsors seemed contradictory to street art’s social commentary. But his long standing relationship with the genre, his ambitiousness, his fundraising prowess, and curatorial eye were recognized by even by his most vocal detractors. Overall these protests and praises unveil tensions about museum practices in a postmodern age, where the institution struggles to maintain the role “[of] a proactive force: an educator and arbiter of taste, with the work of art [in] focus and [at the] center of the visitor experience,” while adapting to a populist pull that is not only more inclusive, but also threatens to subordinate art “to the accommodation and fluid motion of crowds.”54 Further consideration of whether museums can serve multiple audiences and interests in the wake of MoCA’s “Art in the Streets,” may benefit from recognizing the ways in which Deitch and his curators mirrored his roster of artists. His directorial approach included running concurrent lines of subversion and cooperation. This practice, however, did not render moot questions raised by scholars or critics about ideological integrity or historical accuracy. But investigating Deitch’s curatorial approach to “Art in the Streets” could expand how scholars evaluate efforts of museums which showcase street art.

52 Nyugen, Beyond the Streets, 389 - 392.
Certainly, managing the competing interests of board members, curators, and donors, is difficult for even well-established museums to manage. The next chapter will explore how an unconventional museum approached displaying street art without having to contend with the baggage of tradition, board structure, and art world culture clashes. In the following chapter a look at the regional, open-air Museum of Public Art in Baton Rouge provides an opportunity to review the challenges of a different nature facing such an organization.
Baton Rouge’s Museum of Public Art 2012 -2015

On the corner of South Avenue and Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive in the low-income neighborhood of Old South Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the west-facing facade of Klassic Kuts, a beauty salon, features a mural by Chicago artist Rahmaan “STATIK” Barnes. The artwork, *Women of Color Part 2* [figure 17], depicts the torsos of four African-American women in various hairstyles, each adorned with prominent jewelry, their skin tones ranging from emerald to bronze to gold to purple. The right-hand side of the mural contains a smaller, vertical arrangement of three women tending to the hair of the woman in front of them. This 2012 composition, completed in spray paint, was the second and final revision of a public artwork commission by Dr. Kevin Harris, director of the now-inoperable Museum of Public Art (MoPA). “I’ve worked on many public art pieces and commissioned murals, but there are major differences with the Museum of Public Art, as spearhead by Dr. Kevin Harris, it’s really grass roots,” said STATIK. “It’s no more, I should use the past tense.”¹

STATIK was one of the first of dozens of artists Harris funded to travel to Baton Rouge to realize his vision for the non-profit MoPA, incorporated as a 501(c)3 in 2012 with the mission to create “community inspired murals in... Old South Baton Rouge.”² In some ways, Harris ran the museum in the same manner that artists used the Hall of Fame and Wall of Fame in New York. On those walls, just like on the facades of the MoPA building, the graffiti was consistently painted over by other artists. The artwork for the museum was always commissioned, however. In this way Harris’s model was similar to organizations like Aerosol Warfare in Houston.³ But MoPA would be among the first in the country to incorporate as a museum with a focus on graffiti murals. The

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1 Rahmaan Barnes, telephone interview with author, March 5, 2018.
3 In 2015, Houston-based Aerosol Warfare announced the opening of the Graffiti and Street Art of Museum of Texas. The co-founder, Mario E. Figueroa, Jr. (Gonzo247), claimed the establishment would be the first museum in the country dedicated to graffiti and street art. Its opening has been indefinitely delayed due to Hurricane Harvey; Craig Hlavaty, “Houston 'graffiti museum' would be the first of its kind in U.S.,” Houston Chronicle, September 15, 2015.
national and international line up of graffiti and street artists Harris supported throughout the non-profit’s short history included Spanish artist, Belin, Australia’s SMUG, the Dutch artist DOES as well as the Portuguese artist ODEITH, who received commissions from Coca-Cola and Samsung before taking to the streets of Baton Rouge. Other globally-recognized names included the Czech artist Chemis, whose commissioned work can be found all over the world from Antwerp to Tahiti, and SETH of Paris, France, whose works fetches up to €10,000 at auction. These visiting writers and painters, along with their US counterparts, like San Francisco’s CHOR BOOGIE and New York’s DAZE, who was featured in the iconic 1983 documentary Style Wars, contributed to the more than forty murals MoPA commissioned in Baton Rouge between 2012 and 2015.

With over 250,000 followers on Facebook, to point out one key metric of engagement, the online reach of the MoPA continues to surpasses that of the Baton Rouge Gallery (established in 1965), the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge (established in 1973), and the LSU Museum of Art (opened in 1962) combined. Despite the age and prestige of these institutions, former Arts Council CEO Eric Holowacz claimed in 2014 a interview, “[the Museum of Public Art] is the most extraordinary new arts activity going on, not just in Old South Baton Rouge—it could be in the whole region.” This statement reaffirms MoPA’s quick and profound rise in local and regional awareness.

Praised as exceptional in the regional context of art-making and in national discourse—with coverage ranging from East Coast blogs to The Washington Post—the brief operation of MoPA begs for an explanation, especially given its potential to address many of the criticisms that haunt the relationship between graffiti and institutions. Understanding its impact and its sudden, unannounced dissolution is important to the history and future of graffiti-based art initiatives, as well as the academic understanding of institutional support of this genre. In this chapter, I will discuss the organization’s links to the legacy of community murals and graffiti practice in Harris’s native southside neighborhood of Chicago, as well as that city’s creative cross-pollination with New York graffiti. Thereafter, an evaluation of the growth of MoPA within the historical context of Old South Baton Rouge (OSBR) will introduce the reasons behind MoPA’s momentum as well its recent inactivity. Whereas previous chapters benefitted from the interpretation of art media and scholarship

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7 Soraya Nadia McDonald,“Google continues its push to preserve street art — and adds legitimacy to the form in the process,” The Washington Post, March 19, 2015.
from across the globe, this historical review requires a thorough look at the dynamics between the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge (ACGBR), the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX), the OSBR neighborhood, the LSU School of Art, and MoPA in order to fully understand what hurdles face unconventional, regional museums. Finally, I will return to the Chicago and look at the similar forces that stunted grassroots support for graffiti public art in that city. This discussion, in turn, will provide important considerations for the use of graffiti in cultural place-making. By retracing similarities between Chicago and Baton Rouge, with Harris as an ambassador for this particular branch of street art, one can identify commonalities in the bureaucratic responses to graffiti and uncommissioned muralism. These patterns reveal a common struggle over legitimacy, finances, and authenticity that have national relevance.

MoPA’s Influence at the Intersection of Chicago’s Mural Tradition and New York Graffiti

In order to better understand the motivations and ethos guiding the Museum of Public Art, one can look at the influence of Chicago murals created in the 1970s. These works connect Harris and MoPA to the greater history of public transgressive art in the U.S. The ties are immediate, although their implications will continue to unfold throughout the chapter. The mission statement for the Museum of Public Art references a key phrase from *The Mural Manual*, a 1973 text published by Beacon Press:

> The recent mural movement has been made up to a large degree of artists who have determined to reject the goal of “making it” in the galleries and private collections. These artists, including ourselves, have selected instead a new audience for works of art. The priority audience for which we paint is the audience of our own communities, working people of all ethnic backgrounds. Our subject matter comes from the history and culture, the needs and struggles, of communities. Our art speaks of the dignity of the people and projects a vision of a future free from war and exploitation. The form we have chosen is murals. Murals can be a great way to reaching thousands upon thousands of people, since they are in public spaces, accessible to everyone. They are a wonderful form to educate and inspire.8

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This statement was written by Chicago-based artists Mark Rogovin, Marie Burton, and Holly Highfill. Rogovin, one of the few living muralist who worked extensively in Chicago during the Civil Rights era, was a native of New York. Having moved to Chicago in 1968, after working with Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, his arrival coincided with a burgeoning mural movement.9

Rooted in the southside of the city and instigated by the creation of the momentous Wall of Respect [1967, figure 18], Rogovin also documented this historic time. It was an era when artists adopted “an aesthetic extension of the turf-identifying graffiti scrawled on neighborhood buildings by Chicago street gangs.”10 The Wall of Respect was a collaborative work, led by artist William Walker, which stretched across the eighty foot facade of a two-story, derelict building on 43rd Street and Langley Avenue. It depicted a multitude of faces representative of black culture, from W.E.B. DuBois to Gwendolyn Brooks, and this visual assembly of black cultural prominence not only captured national attention but established that “Chicago’s community-oriented street mural movement [was] the earliest and most developed, aesthetically and thematically.”11

This artistic boon was no doubt shaped and spurred by The Chicago Freedom Movement, one of the first mobilized protests organized by Martin Luther King Jr. in the northern U.S., which was aimed at generating attention for fair housing. By 1967, the Fair Housing Act had failed to pass Congress twice and King would not live to see it enacted into law.12 Given this context, the inclination of Chicago urban muralists to use blighted architecture as a canvas seemed particularly relevant. In this setting, the “renegade spirit” of the Wall of Respect directly relates to the phenomena of New York graffiti artists utilizing, “a variety of urban spaces [...] as if shouting to be recognized against the dehumanizing forces of modern city life.”13 This sentiment can be found in the Mural Manual, and by extension the actions of MoPA. Indeed, the Wall of Respect established the power of public spaces in African-American art. A 1967 article in Ebony magazine underscored that, “The Wall is where it should be — in the midst of the people — as opposed to being in a museum or a special

13 Prigoff, Walls, 40.
out of the way place.” This ethos of “art for the people by the people” permeated the artistic milieu of Chicago throughout the early 1970s. Much like the subway writers of New York, muralists in Chicago engaged in visual modification of the African American “vernacular tradition of call-and-response” that proposed an interplay between the artwork and the audience, conveying how one needed the other to survive.

This artistic approach gained so much traction that Rogovin, along with Eugene Eda, William Walker, and John Weber were invited to show in the 1971 exhibition, “Murals for the People” at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art. This uneasy merging of worlds and ideologies prompted the release of a 16-page artists’ statement that further underscored the terms of their socially-conscious and egalitarian practice:

This past summer, for the first time, grants from federal, state, and local foundations have made it possible for muralists to work on a larger scale. With the increasing press coverage, we came to the attention of Joseph R. Shapiro, President of the Museum of Contemporary Art. We want museums to go out into the communities, to truly be schools for the people. We want the walls of Chicago to be art galleries for the people. We are anxious to encourage more artists in all fields to "take to the streets," to become involved, and to work for the people.

It is worth noting that a premonition of both MoPA’s foundations and its demise can be found in this statement. In addition, this declaration reveals a long-standing parallel between Chicago’s muralist movement and the graffiti artists of New York. Rather than committing vandalism for its own sake, both groups participated in transgressive and cooperative actions in order to build a community through their art.

By the early 1970s graffiti artists made distinctions between taggers and writers capable of more sophisticated “burners” — large scale graffiti murals with figurative elements that spanned multiple subway cars. As noted earlier in this paper, a subset of writers moved from the increasingly policed “writers corners,” or subway hubs, into more formalized groups. A year after the foundation of the Chicago Mural Group, in 1971, the New York-based United Graffiti Artists

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15 Prigoff, Walls, 27.
organization, advised by Hugo Martinez, at the time a sociology major at City College, was launched. It was led by graffiti writer Co-Co 144, who founded it with the intention of creating legal opportunities for graffiti artists to practice their art and therefore grow a career. Martinez would secure the first out-of-state exhibition for New York graffiti artists at the Chicago Museum of Science and Technology in 1974.\(^1\) In an encouraging, if awkward, write up of the exhibition in the *Chicago Defender*, the reviewer asserted that, “[m]ost of the young, contemporary artistic writers have participated in writing colorful messages in script on New York’s subways […] Now the amazing brilliant expressions of designs and figures will be displayed at the Museum.”\(^2\) This formal artistic exchange between the graffiti artists of New York and the Chicago public would be reciprocated when Chicago muralist attended the first National Murals Conference hosted by New York’s CITYarts in 1975.\(^3\) As institutions and granting organizations warmed to urban Chicago’s muralism and New York’s graffiti, they supported more opportunities for the artists of these grassroots genres.

Harris’s own experiences in the southside of Chicago during this remarkable period are documented in series of professional photographs taken by Harris and Jimmy Ellis from 1966 to 1978. The focus of the collection is “The Alley,” an outdoor gathering spot located between St. Lawrence and Champlain Avenues. Within the black and white images depicting a monthly Sunday musical gathering, *The Afternoon Jazz Set*, several attendees are posing in front of a mural by Mitchell Caton [figure 19].

Formerly a canvas painter, Caton was encouraged by prominent muralist William Walker (lead artist for *The Wall of Respect*) to create murals. The *Universal Alley/Rip-Off* mural seen in the background of Harris’s and Ellis’s photos was developed from 1968 until 1973, funded out-of-pocket and through community donations. C. Siddha Sila Webber worked with Caton on this piece and several other murals. He recalled:

As an artist, Caton had extremely high expectations, was extremely gifted, and totally committed to art, art, art. He was very passionate about what he was doing. He looked on much of the system as a rip-off. When we painted this mural, he called it Rip-Off, but I called it Universal Alley. I wrote the poem called “Universal Alley” [on the wall], so more people stuck with that. Over the years, I don’t know which name won out. I had a vision that if we did the mural in a prayerful manner to uplift the community, it would create a

\(^3\) Janet Braun-Reinitz and Jane Weissman, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City*, (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 60.
safe-zone and people would come from all over the world to see the mural. It worked. It went from fifty people celebrating on a Sunday to five thousand. The mural created a vibration.22

The work and philosophy of Caton would be the most influential on Harris when he pursued projects for MoPA, “We were very close, his work are landmarks in the city [...] He didn’t use spray paint but the community involvement and the African-American cultural focus [...] I identified with it.”23 Indeed, a 1973 *Chicago Defender* interview with Caton revealed the artist’s sincere enthusiasm for this work that made such an impression on Harris. When questioned about the future of murals in Chicago, Caton suggested that funds could be obtained from the National Endowment for the Arts, The National Arts Council, and the Community Arts Council. In addition, he hoped, “businessmen and the clergy on the Southside [would] come together in terms of getting matching funds from the government in order to make the murals movement more meaningful.”24 Yet “Canton died penniless,” as Harris recalled. “He got no compensation for the respect and love he received for his work. The people who had the resources never aligned with him.” The failure of the city to compensate local residents, like Caton, for their contributions to the city’s revitalization will also come to color Harris’s interactions with Baton Rouge’s municipal officials.

The celebrations at the Alley dwindled after the mid-70s, but mural projects and non-commissioned “pieces” continued to emerge across the city. Transplanted New Yorkers, like Nick Salsa (known by the tagging name Salsa 1), brought their own experience of “bombing” subway trains to the streets of Chicago. His sanctioned work on the side of a mobile trailer, behind a local high school, arguably became the city’s first legal mural in spray paint, completed in 1980.25 At the same time, local artists also took to the Chicago train system, mimicking their New York counterparts.26 Renowned urban art documentarian Henry Chalfant and mural photographer James Prigoff — who also co-founded The Peace Museum in Chicago with Rogavin — noted that Chicago was a particularly aggressive city in its anti-graffiti campaign and “Chicago’s writers tend to

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22 Prigoff, “Walls,” 68.
23 Kevin Harris, interview with the author, March 20, 2018.
concentrate their efforts on rooftops and along the elevated train lines.” In an interview for the book *Bomb the Suburbs*, native graffiti artist WARP commented on the New York connection and the limitations for Chicago graffiti artists in the early 1980s, as follows:

> I was hoping we would channel and harness this energy and see how to direct it, as opposed to letting it go all over like in New York. Chicago isn’t New York. It’s not as loose a city. We would have to be tighter, more strategically set-up as far as bombing, piecing, racking, bum-rushing. We didn’t have the room to be sloppy...\(^\text{27}\)

Over time, artists moved to several fixed locations to practice and compete. One notorious spot was The Wall of Fame, by the 18th Street railroad. By 1989, it was the graffiti epicenter for about 80 or more Chicago writers on any given Saturday. Similar to the East Harlem Graffiti Hall of Fame and Phun Factory/5Pointz in Queens, neglected properties in unpolicing neighborhoods of Chicago offered space for graffiti writers but not necessarily safety. Another native graffiti artist, ORKO recalled, “In Chicago, graffiti [was] like an addiction, a religion [...] New York and Chicago was where it was kids in the ghetto giving their art for the people in the projects to see and maybe live a couple more days.”\(^\text{30}\)

Within five years of the Wall of Fame’s heyday, the city of Chicago enacted a ban, still active today, on the sale of spray paint. This law was passed after a proliferation of graffiti tarnished the city’s image ahead of the 1994 World Cup and the 1996 Democratic National Convention. Yet the legal move only further encouraged graffiti writers with antagonistic attitudes toward authority. It also illustrated the punitive measures that distinguished Chicago from New York.

Nevertheless, from the 1967 creation of the *Wall of the Respect* to the 1989 rise of the Wall of Fame, Chicago served as an incubator for the convergence of graffiti as art and for muralism as social commentary. This mix would be formative to later generations of Chicago street artists, like Rahmaan “STATIK” Barnes and Desi “DESI” Mundo, who will come to work with MoPA’s Kevin Harris. It would not be until 1994 that Harris arrived in Baton Rouge, after completing an orthodontic residency. Still another decade would pass before he curated a nationally-recognized series of graffiti murals. But the legacy of civil rights protest, community involvement, as well as the struggle for resources, of his native Chicago forbearers, would echo throughout the experience.


\(^{28}\) The Chicago Wall of Fame predates the wall of the same name in New York.


\(^{30}\) Wimsatt, *Bomb,* 113.

MoPA in Old South Baton Rouge

In August of 2012, Harris was approached by his friend Anne Bernice to organize a mural for the Habitat Imports furniture store on 14th Street in Baton Rouge. A year prior, Harris had worked with New York graffiti artists King B and James Top to create a mural in the Bronx. Harris captured these events and the art they produced through photographs. Those images were then used in designs for the orthodontist’s appointment reminder postcards. For Harris, commissioning and photographing this mural was a satisfying way to meet the marketing needs of his dental practice while supporting the arts. Aware of this experience, Bernice was inspired to ask Harris to be a curator for her business’s mural and this one-time experiment would serve as the starting point for almost forty more murals funded and directed by Harris.

“While I was out there [working on the Habitat Imports mural] people from the community told me about the Lincoln Theatre,” Harris explained.32 In 2009, the historic Lincoln Theatre — a venue in Old South Baton Rouge that once hosted Otis Redding, The Four Tops, and Louis Armstrong — had been purchased by the Louisiana Black Hall of Fame. The organization’s founder, Brenda Perry, had hoped the building would be renovated and open to the public by 2010.33 With the theatre still in disrepair four years after the purchase, she invited Harris to consider a mural project that could bring positive attention to the area and inspire investment. As they worked on a plan for the facade of the theatre, Harris identified an adjacent property — a brick building, gutted and roofless — on Myrtle and 13th Streets that became the architectural anchor of MoPA [figure 20]. Displaying the name “Museum of Public Art” in the same Helvetica font found on the signage of the New York subway system, this space became the location of interior and exterior murals by Belin, SMUG, DAZE, ODIETH and many more. Perhaps the most telling image, in the saga of MoPA, is a portrait of Harris on the west-side of this building [figure 21]. He is flanked by two skunks, whose odor is painted in green. The chartreuse waves waft into Harris nose,

32 Harris Interview with the author, March 20, 2018.
33 Chad Calder, “Lincoln Theater deal done, Black History Hall of Fame buys landmark,” The Advocate, March 5, 2009: 01D.
as if he alone seem to smell that something is foul. MoPA oversaw the creation of several other incredible murals dispersed across the OSBR neighborhood, many reflecting the African-American heritage of its residents.³⁴

Just prior to Harris’s initial forays into mural curations, in May 2012, then CEO of the Baton Rouge Arts Council, Derek Gordon, announced his organization’s receipt of $300,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation. The money was to fund a two-year project with the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) to “hold public workshops, hire a national consultant and develop a feasibility study and implementation plan to seed arts-and culture-related businesses, primarily around the shuttered historic Lincoln Theater on Myrtle Walk.”³⁵ This was to be the first step in using arts and culture to revitalize the historically black neighborhood of OSBR, which had suffered from economic decline since the 1960s, when the construction of Interstate 10 cut through the neighborhood, displacing families and businesses. Concurrent with this physical disruption was the advent of desegregation. Policies of this era included the forced bussing of the OSBR neighborhood’s minority children to predominantly white schools at the other end of the city.³⁶ What was once a pedestrian-friendly and close knit neighborhood was thereafter disrupted by construction, dislocated families, and uprooted children.

But as real as the need was for investment in OSBR, Gordon’s appeal to the Kresge Foundation was not the first time community planners sought to establish a path to recovery for the suffering neighborhood. In 2006, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAF), through its Plan Baton Rouge initiative, created a strategic initiative that would provide a list infrastructural needs and blueprint on how to best meet them.³⁷ “This plan really started the conversation around many of the neglected areas in Baton Rouge and set into motion the Redevelopment Authority,” said Rachel DiResto, Executive Vice President of CPEX, in an interview for this thesis.³⁸ As a part of this planning process, several community meetings and workshops were held with community leaders and organizations. Moreover, the Old South Baton Rouge Partnership Board was formed with local

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³⁴ Images of some these works have been cataloged by Google’s Street Art Project but an appendix of the artists and their mural locations is provided at the conclusion of this paper.
³⁵ Chad Calder, "Grant to fund arts study for Old South BR," The Advocate, May 29, 2012: 01B
³⁷ Hendry, Old South, 140-142.
³⁸ Rachel DiResto, phone interview with the author, March 22, 2018. Since this interview DiResto has left her position at CPEX.
residents, who held all of its fifteen seats. This plan was developed with the understanding that the East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority would be created to handle Hope IV funding that would aid in rebuilding,” Diresto added. She clarified that this project already had the money it needed to implement the recommendations of the blueprint CPEX put together. This made their 2006 endeavor quite different from the project initiated by Gordon. In contrast to the federal Hope IV project, which allocated $18.6 million to construct over 100 housing units in the community, at the onset of Gordon’s 2012 study, the Louisiana Black Hall of Fame required $3,000 in closing assistance. Furthermore, that year the Greater Baton Rouge Arts Council received less than $300,000 from the Louisiana Division of the Arts to support arts initiatives city-wide.

Unfortunately, Gordon would never be able to realize this vision since he passed away only five months after announcing the support from Kresge. “Derek Gordon had a really strong vision, really strong ties to the community,” DiResto said. “His successor was from out of town, had never done something like this before, and was difficult to work with.” Indeed, the new Arts Council CEO would find fulfilling Gordon’s vision to be a considerable challenge.

The following summer, Eric Holowacz would take the helm at the Greater Baton Rouge Arts Council. A native of South Carolina, he moved to Baton Rouge from Australia, where he held the position of Arts & Culture Manager for Mildura Rural City Council. Upon arrival, he was immediately tasked with picking up the reigns for the Kresge-funded study. Holowacz, now the director of the Whakatane Museum in New Zealand, reflected on his time working with the project:

With respect to [Derek’s] vision for OSBR, which I inherited, I saw it as my job to preserve, protect, and accomplish what he set out to do. Not having been involved in the origins and initial partnership, and not having grown up there as he had, this was a difficult mandate I put on myself. But I considered it important, and [I] always told my staff and board that we were meant to honour Derek’s intentions and follow through with all funding and community partnerships. Plus I know how the arts, festivals and events, and community creativity can contribute to a place, and make it better, and improve quality of life. I’ve been involved in enough cultural activity and programme management to know that creative opportunities could help OSBR reclaim a cultural and heritage-based identity—even if the economic and civic institutions were failing them.

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39 Hendry, Old South, 143.
40 Rachel Diresto, phone interview with the author, March 22, 2018.
43 Eric Holowacz, email correspondence with the author, March 17, 2018.
As a part of the research process for the development study, the Arts Council utilized CPEX’s prior community connections to ensure participation from the residents of OSBR. Much like the earlier 2006 BRAF initiative, meetings and workshops were held to ensure the community could weigh in on what cultural imperatives should be included in the feasibility study. During the interim period between Gordon’s death and Holowacz’s employment, such meetings were held with non-executive staff and a second grant was awarded to the Council, the Our Town initiative through National Endowment for the Arts, to the amount of $75,000. Lord Cultural Resource, a consulting firm, was also brought in to assist CPEX in “cultural place-making and planning.” Throughout this period, MoPA was also building momentum. This time in the museum’s history was marked by the first visit from Chicago artist STATIK, brought into town for one of four separate murals commissioned by Harris. Other murals that followed relied on Harris’s curatorial eye, investment, and location selection within OSBR. In other parts of the city, the newly founded Walls Project, a nonprofit that strove to “[s]timulate the creative arts economy by delivering public art works that inspire urban and rural beautification, dialogue, and unity,” managed by Casey Phillips, also gained traction after securing $37,000 in funding from a Kickstarter campaign for their first mural [figure 22].

While Harris became more involved in the OSBR community, the online recognition for his murals expanded. Blog coverage of each successive work reached thousands online due to the international and national networks that supported each artist. By 2013, “Smug, Belin, Jimmy C, Chemis, Odeith, TATS KRU, DOES and CASE have all blessed the place,” according to a post by fellow artist POSE 2. As to the strategy behind this visibility Harris said, “I invited artists I liked, people I felt had an intuitive way of feeling out the community.” The murals of MoPA eventually captured the attention of the Google Cultural Institute. As a result, Baton Rouge is one of a few cities, including several bigger metropolises such as Dallas and Berlin, represented in Google’s collection of street art from thirty countries. Google enabled an international audience to see the delicate, juvenile figures of Brother’s Laundry on South Boulevard and Marcellious Lane by SETH

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47 Kevin Harris Interview with author, January 31, 2018.
The images of MoPA’s murals and their online accessibility were critical to the organization’s popularity. These photographs were also used by ACGBR in grant applications, on promotional websites, and in grant reports when communicating the cultural value and potential of the OSBR neighborhood to stakeholders. Specifically, during Holowacz tenure, Lord Cultural consultants and the Council used MoPA images on planning proposals and on an auxiliary website while inferring MoPA’s endorsement of the content therein. In the beginning of 2014, after an early iteration of the feasibility plan was shared with Harris, the MoPA director emailed Holowacz, CPEX organizer Tara Titone, and Lord Cultural associate Joy Bailey Bryant to request they cease using images of MoPA’s murals to insinuate a relationship that did not exist.49 Harris claims that he did not receive a response.

The feasibility study, released by Lord Cultural in November of 2013, included numerous recommendations to support revitalizing the area, including the plan to make Lincoln Theatre the center of their efforts. One section, to which Harris objected, bore the title, “Action 3. Create and fund the ‘Art for Change Partnership,’ a project of MoPA, ACGBR, and LSU”:

Creating a structure to ensure that public art is both high quality and relevant to the community is a unique opportunity in OSBR. The LSU College of Art + Design has named New York based sculptor, Nari Ward, as Nadine Carter Russell Chair, visiting artist/professional. A nationally recognized leader in socially engaged practice, Ward will work with students at LSU and in the OSBR community with a focus on the place-making efforts started through this process. To continue the practice started by Ward, it is recommended that each year a non-local “public art producer” be identified and granted public works funds to carry out improvement projects over the course of five years. They would be responsible for identifying local artists, community groups and members, and other resources that would facilitate the conceptualization, planning, production, activation, and maintenance of public works, and perhaps also other communal art and craft making. 50

At no point, according to Harris, did LSU or the Arts Council confer with him on this action point, which so squarely addressed the efforts in which he had personally invested over the past year. Notably, this proposal inverts his formula (out-of-town curator, local artists) leaving no logical place for Harris in this effort. To add insult to injury, Harris noted that Nari Ward, hosted by LSU, had never been to OSBR at the time the study was released. Yet, the same document touts MoPA as, “contin[uing] to set a very high bar for the quality of the murals it commissions.” In some ways,
Harris’s assessment that his potential to continue executing murals through MoPA would be hampered by this arrangement is supported by the planning document. In multiple instances MoPA is referred to as a key partner in the community, but the function of the MoPA director as curator is muted in the recommendation. His role is instead reduced to administrative duties like “enlist the South Baton Rouge Civic Association to co-lead a series of workshops among key OSBR stakeholder organizations” and “encourage leadership from each of the following organizations to partake in the workshops.”

“How are we supposed to take that?” Harris asked, “They bring Nari Ward into a community and he has nothing to do with it and install birdcages in an empty building. It’s not to insult his work but he’s a sculptor, what does he have to do with the community? All of these people—the Arts Council, CPEX—are hacks.” This affront was soon amplified by additional information about the NEA Our Town grant, about which, Harris claims, none of the stakeholders were fully informed. A Freedom of Information Act Request reveals this grant, submitted by Gordon, only included endorsements from city planning officials. No one from the OSBR community is represented in the support materials and no organization from the neighborhood is reflected in the budget. One can add to this oversight the revelation that Holowacz was appealing to JP Morgan for a $50,000 gift to pay personnel from LSU and the Arts Council to actually facilitate programs proposed by the Lord Cultural plan. Understandably, the possibility of a fruitful collaboration with MoPA and the city quickly dwindled.

After consulting with other OSBR leaders, Harris convinced several of them to stand up against what they perceived was a sly takeover of a budding arts district. On February 5, 2014 Holowacz was sent a cease and desist order signed by Councilwoman Tara Wicker, Kevin Harris, arts administrator Sadie Roberts Joseph, State Representative Patricia Haynes-Smith, and South Baton Rouge Civic Association President Christine Sparrow. Within this document the signers claim:

It has become apparent that plans for upcoming programs have been developed by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge without prior consultation and engagement of the prominent Old South Baton Rouge leadership [...] cease and desist from writing and submitting grant applications for programs to be implemented in OSBR without the consent and review and direction of ALL leaders involved [...] we also find it disconcerting that the names of some of the organization were already used in grant applications as partners

51 Lord Cultural Resources, OSBR Community Dreaming, November 2013.
52 Kevin Harris Interview with author, January 31, 2018.
without their knowledge and consent which resulted in awards given to AC[G]BR. The practice of circumventing community engagement is regarded as a sign of a lack of sincerity and a lack of consideration and community to furthering the goals of community empowerment.”  

The letter goes on to request certified copies of all grant applications from January 1, 2014 to the present which “designate Old South Baton Rouge community the primary beneficiary.”

Holowacz’s reply, dated February 24, 2014, confirmed that ACGBR would no longer submit grants for the neighborhood without involvement from community leaders. He reassures Sparrow (the reply is only addressed to her) that the aim of any funding is to realize the self-directed initiatives of the people who live in OSBR. He continues:

The arts can foster this: bolstering identity and revealing the dreams and aspirations of a community. I know this from many years working with creative people, places, and projects. [...] A robust sense of place and cultural identity makes it harder for outside forces to change the fabric of a neighborhood, to change the heritage of a unique community. The plan we have been dreaming up together, informed by hundreds of wonderful people like you, is really just about providing a blueprint for community preservation and celebration.”

When questioned about the grants concerned, Holowacz confirmed that he felt he was following a plan that was already in motion, and regretted not knowing about previous attempts to pay consultants to help pull OSBR out of a depressed state. Yet, when Rachel DiResto was questioned about the tension between OSBR leaders and the Arts Council, she described ineptitude in leadership rather than consultancy fatigue, “We were contracted by the Arts Council to help, but we almost quit three times.” She also went on to say that the Lord Cultural group provided weak data and a lackluster synthesis of their plan. DiResto also explained that CPEX offered to return the money so it could be put directly into the community and suggested Harris take ownership of those aspects of the planning, which he felt were being mismanaged. Despite the criticism, review of the final implementation plan culled from the Lord Cultural’s research and amended by CPEX, was published in May 2014, after the cease and desist letter was sent. It failed to address the key concerns voiced by the neighborhood’s community leaders. In the section “Action 3.4 – Create and fund the ‘Art for Change Partnership’” the wording was revised to say that collaboration:

Creat[es] a structure to ensure that public art is both high quality and relevant to the community [which] is a unique opportunity in OSBR. MoPA has transformed the corner of Myrtle

55 Eric Holowacz to Christine Sparrow, February 24, 2014.  
Here we see MoPA was removed from the partner level but inserted into the description, which may have been a palliative move. The wording was both reductive of MoPA’s contributions (the corner is one of many locations to find MoPA’s work) and presupposed a relationship between MoPA’s efforts and that of LSU, which infers a synthesis that resulted in something relevant to the community. In addition to this inaccurate description, concerns about how ACGBR was using the funding further unraveled the situation. “We had a meeting with the Arts Council after the cease and desist letter was sent. It didn’t go well. We’d ask them to show us where all the money went and they’d say ‘well this and that.’ They couldn’t show us. I can show you where all my money went, I have the receipts and the work speaks for it.” According to Harris, he largely self-funded all the murals and did not receive funding from the Council for any work. His concern about how the ACGBR was earning and allocating funds inspired him to send an email to the NEA, advising them to cease awarding grants from the ACGBR which claim the OSBR neighborhood as the beneficiary. He even believes mismanagement included payments “under the table” to the Walls Project. Harris asserts that blatant racism was at play since Philips, the Walls Project director, is white and Harris is black. While there’s no material evidence to support this specific claim, a look at the Arts Council’s 2015 financial statement discloses several items that suggest substandard accounting practices. An audit in fiscal year 2015 stated that “[t]he Council does not maintain a system of internal controls over reporting to ensure that external financial statement presentation and footnote disclosures are in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.” The beginning net asset accounts deviated from the prior year’s ending unrestricted net assets by $36,032; salaries and related personnel cost in the amount of $328,529 were not allocated between program and general and administrative expense; and there was insufficient evidence of program expenditures for one payment to recipient organizations totaling $1,785. In addition, the financial statement reveals a temporary “Old South Baton Rouge Programming” line that expended $10,428 in FY15. The exact

58 Kevin Harris Interview with author, January 31, 2018.
purpose for this amount was not specified. By February of the next fiscal year, Holowacz would no longer be with the ACGBR, having resigned or been abruptly fired.\(^{61}\)

Shortly thereafter MoPA also ceased operations. “It was personal,” Harris said, “The Arts Council plan[ned] to install itself as the curator of all OSBR art production without including MoPA in the proceeds or responsibility, in spite of using our art and implying that we are partners. Now I suppose you can see why I do not bite my tongue when talking about these people. After the Kresge grant they smelled money and had no intention of sharing a dime with the community who made it all possible for them in the first place.”\(^{62}\) Given the messy infighting in a community short on resources, MoPA’s story offers disheartening prospects of unconventional museums surviving small town politics despite their freedom from boards, art world judgements, and national media scrutiny. But this struggle over ownership and funding also reflects the *modus operandi* of graffiti and street artists. Such focus on control over content, whether executed anonymously or not, is indeed one way street artists have tried to carve out a career path. Moreover, the lack of genuine dialogue between Harris, the neighborhood, and city officials ran counter to the “call and response” ethos of the artwork. In this scenario, the museum actor could not leverage a partnership to his advantage and the city could not engage in a way that was acceptable to the museum. A trip back to Chicago demonstrates how the difficulties of navigating pots of money, the ambitions of city officials, and maintenance of the integrity of graffiti practice are not confined to small cities.

**Echoes in Chicago**

STATIK and DESI, two Chicago graffiti artists who know and have worked with Harris, reflect on the demise of MoPA with the same refrain, “it happens all time, everywhere you go.”\(^{63}\) The Chicago Mural Group, formed in 1971 as mentioned above, later became the Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG), and STATIK has been a “core artist” with them for seventeen years. He asserts

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\(^{62}\) Kevin Harris, email correspondence with author, March 19, 2018.

\(^{63}\) Mundo, phone interview with author, March 2, 2018.
that the CPAG became the single gatekeeper for securing public projects and accessing funding for public art. In other words, the group founded by those citizens, “anxious to encourage more artists in all fields to ‘take to the streets,’” turned into to the very institution regulating access.  It explained that CPAG had also “type cast itself for only doing mosaic projects,” thus losing credibility among graffiti muralists. Historians agree that mural content, after the 1970s, migrated from civic-minded activist themes to positive expressions of cultural pride. Part of this trend was not only due to the unwinding of the civil rights and anti-war protests, but it was also the result of “attrition of grassroots groups, increased bureaucracy as organizations became client providers, increased competition for institutional funds. . .” and youth programming “compromis[ing] or premt[ing] provocative content.” A look at the history of public art production over the last ten years would indicate a rise in mosaic work, as well as the repeated employment of handful of artists. But these actions were not to the complete detriment of spray paint projects.  STATIK claims CPAG continues to pursue mosaic work because it requires a higher overhead and the group can ask for more money. Moreover, it is easier to manage collaborative community participation with tesserae than with paint. “The Chicago Public Art Group ask us to do something, we said ‘no’ because they have a monopoly. It’s turned into a monolith group with white leadership just like every other successful arts organization,” DESI, who identifies as white and now lives outside of Oakland, elaborated. Indeed, the current director, Steven Weaver, is male and white, but the contention is not with Weaver directly, but rather with the trend DESI perceives in art administrations and the continued attempts to malign spray paint and graffiti writing. “This prejudice towards our aesthetic still permeates all interactions, forty years later,” he added. “When Chicago banned spray paint [...] imagine doing that to any other art material or musical instrument [...] All these folks claiming to care about the art and the community, they just want to enjoy things like what Kevin [Harris] did as a superficial treat. [They] let others do the groundwork and they’ll take it from there.” STATIK not only shares the same sentiment towards graffiti muralism, but extends the focus of his criticism to other city programs which leverage interest in graffiti to superficially engage children and relegate

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64 Rogovin, “Artist statement,” 3.
65 Rebecca Zorach, Ed., Art Against the Law, (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2014), 42.
the limited funding for established graffiti artists to opportunities that amount to glorified babysitting.69

In large part, graffiti art and urban muralism gave the economically depressed a way of resisting invisibility. By transforming the surrounding architecture into something that expressed their own life experiences these artists created a platform for themselves to make claims about ownership and authority. The contemporary episodes described here, whether in Chicago and Baton Rouge, echo complaints from the previous century. They also suggest that without the prestige and financial power of established galleries and museums, unconventional organizations trying to support graffiti art must contend with the politics of city government. Yet, Harris could charge forth in certain areas with total autonomy, unlike Deitch at MoCA and Lehman at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and he managed to inspire truly original and community-oriented graffiti art. Once again, if institutionalized museums can learn any lessons from their previous engagements with street art, it may be to find better ways to reconcile convention and subversion.

69 Barnes, phone interview with author, March 5, 2018.
Conclusion

As shown in this thesis, the challenges facing museums which wish to support graffiti and street art are varied and numerous. But if we choose to equally value both dissent and conservation, disruption and cooperation, these episodes present an opportunity to harness the massive commercial success and localized social power of street art and the benefits to museums they hold.

As evidenced by the formation of the United Graffiti Association in 1972, there was an eagerness by many street artists to participate in the art market early on. In the late 1970s and 1980s, graffiti artists showed at Fashion Moda and Fun Gallery, while continuing to create subway graffiti under intensifying surveillance. This dichotomy of lawlessness and cooperation led to opportunities at Janis Gallery and, in part, enabled the practice to survive despite an economic downturn in the market and shifting tastes of collectors. While Janis’s commitment to the art form made possible the first major U.S. museum show of graffiti at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, artists who continued their street practice during the intermittent decades inspired a massive, cultural shift towards acceptance of the art form. In the years between “Post-Graffiti” in 1983 and “Graffiti” in 2006, sanctioned spaces, like the Hall of Fame in New York or the Wall of Fame in Chicago, sustained the collaborative and competitive practice established at writers’ corners. These “protected” public spaces and new galleries like Alleged and Deitch Projects fed into the parallel tracks of street artists creating both public and private works. As a result of these dual activities, the Brooklyn Museum of Art was able to present early “canvased graffiti” as “real” art even amid growing skepticism about the authority of curators and the populist focus of museums in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thereafter, auction houses, museums, and galleries — in London and Paris specifically — were able to point to the “Graffiti” show as evidence for this art form’s relevance and their engagement with all levels of society.

The Brooklyn Museum of Art’s show also prompted valid questions about street art’s history and its meaning outside the context of traditional art discourse. Five years later, after active, vandalistic street artists attained price levels in the hundreds of thousands at auction and major venues, like Modern Museum of Art, began to acquire this work for their permanent collection, MoCA’s 2011 “Art in the Streets” attempted to address these lingering questions about graffiti’s historicity. In so doing, the museum encountered other issues which provided a wealth of
opportunities to assess the dialogic and participatory nature of street art that could ultimately be to the benefit of future street art exhibitions. The involvement of artists like Banksy and Shepard Fairey, who engaged with the MoCA exhibition beyond just showing their art, demonstrated further how this category of artists consciously participated inside and outside of institutions.

We can also see in the recruitment of global artists who participated in Baton Rouge’s MoPA that collaboration was inherent to the museum’s and the artists’ operations. Borrowing from the grassroots strategy of the Chicago muralist movement in the 1970s, MoPA employed graffiti artists to create spray-paint murals that resonated with the surrounding community. The museum’s interest in uplifting residents and fueling investment in Old South Baton Rouge used the “commercial and non-commercial logics” of graffiti as described by Molnár. Unlike MoCA, MoPA could function without consideration of board members or the burden of institutional history. But the director, Kevin Harris, was unable to tolerate the manipulation he perceived by city officials and, rather than negotiate in a play for power, MoPA withdrew from the scene altogether.

These encounters with street art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, MoCA, and MoPA extend longstanding and ongoing interactions between street artists and the public, institutions, and the commercial sphere. Those interactions can be productive or contentious. But like the Wall of Respect (1967) in Chicago or Swoon’s Swimming Cities of Switchback Seas (2008), the most compelling street art is in dialogue with contemporary life. Therefore, rather than cast this art form as defined by social defiance, it is more instructive to observe that this nebulous group of artists often share a desire to thwart one-way communication as imposed by institutions, corporations, or architecture. More often, these artists tend to work within and outside of those complexes in order to continue to mount a challenge to engage in a dialogue. The debate about how or why museums display graffiti and street art has something to gain from studying the “other response to the Modern separation of art and life.” In each instance covered here, the museum’s objective was to harness and convey the energy and value of street art to new audience. Each museum setting sought to demonstrate the communicative power of graffiti and other forms of transgressive urban art. At some cost to the institution, their efforts had significant, positive consequences on the art form, whether in the art market or in the public domain. Therefore, it is my hope that the catalog of the obstacles which faced these organizations, as laid out here, will enable museums to mitigate those costs in the future. Further investigation may contribute to a roadmap which museums can use to better navigate the

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parallel paths of subversion and compromise they themselves accept when supporting controversial art.
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Illustrations

Figure 1. Photograph of “Graffiti” exhibition on display at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. 2006. Brooklyn, New York.

Figure 2. Martha Cooper. Photography of Fab Five Freddy, “Soup Cans.” 1980.
Figure 3. FUTURA2000. *Love of Color*, Spray paint on canvas 59.84 x 47.24 in. (152 x 120 cm.), 1982. Artnet.


Figure 6. Photographer Unknown. 5Pointz in Queens, New York. Date unknown. Flickr Creative Commons.
Figure 7. Photograph of “Beautiful Losers” Exhibit., Orange County Museum of Art promotional image. 2005. Orange County Museum of Art.


Figure 9. Michael Tracy (Tracy 168). Crazy Tracy. 1984. Spray paint on canvas, 69 1/4 x 69 1/2 in. (175.9 x 176.5 cm). Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn Museum, 1999.57.22_SL1.jpg.


Figure 14 and 15. Caplowe, Casey. Photograph of MoCA whitewashing Blu mural. 2010. Good. https://www.good.is/slideshows/who-s-to-blame-for-erasing-blu-s-moca-mural
Figure 16. Artist Unknown. 2010. Photograph of a poster with the faces of Eli Broad, MoCA board member, and Jeffrey Deitch, director, superimposed over a Barnum & Bailey circus promotion. LA RAW.
https://hyperallergic.com/22234/safest-show-on-earth/


Figure 20. Odeith. Untitled. Spray painted mural on the Museum of Public Art, north-side wall. Photograph by Kevin Harris.
Figure 21. 2013. SMUG and BELIN. Untitled. Spray painted mural on the Museum of Public Art, west-side wall. Photograph by Kevin Harris.

Figure 23. 2015. SETH. Brothers Laundry building at Marcellious Lane and South Boulevard in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Photograph by Hillary Scheinuk. *The Advocate.*

Appendix A. Artwork and Artists Included in Each Case Study

“Graffiti,” 2006 Brooklyn Museum of Art

The Museum has a listing of the artwork displayed for the exhibit, it does not include all of the artwork donated by Sidney Janis.

A-ONE (American, 1964-2001). “Untitled,” Spray paint on canvas, 63 1/4 x 83 5/8 in. (160.7 x 212.4 cm)

Aaron Goodstone aka SHARP (American, born 1966). “Constellation of Events.” 1986. Spray paint on canvas, 47 1/8 x 35 3/8 in. (119.7 x 89.9 cm)


Fab Five Freddy (American, born 1959). “Mr. Potato Head.” 1983. Spray enamel on canvas, 72 x 96 x 2 1/2 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm).
KEL 1ST (American, born 1963). “Son of Kel,” 1984. Spray paint on canvas, 53 x 70 in. (134.6 x 177.8 cm)


NOC (American, born 1961). “Not an Anthem; Appraise,” 1984. Spray paint on canvas, 94 3/4 x 42 1/2 in. (240.7 x 108 cm)


NOC (American, born 1961). “Untitled,” Spray paint on canvas, 77 3/4 x 97 1/2 in. (197.5 x 247.7 cm).

TRACY 168 (American, born 1958). “Crazy Tracy,” 1984. Spray paint on canvas, 69 1/4 x 69 1/2 in 175.9 x 176.5 cm

TRACY 168 (American, born 1958). “Subway Door.” Spray paint on metal door, 2 sided, 73 3/4 x 21 in. (187.3 x 53.3 cm).

TOXIC (American, born 1965). “Ransom Note: CEE” 1984. Spray paint on canvas, 61 1/2 x 52 1/2 in. (156.2 x 133.4 cm).

TRACY 168 (American, born 1958). “Subway Door.” Spray paint on metal door, 2 sided, 73 3/4 x 21 in. (187.3 x 53.3 cm).

Artists featured in “Art in the Streets,” 2011 Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art

A listing of the artwork is not available in the show catalog, but this is a comprehensive listing of all the artists featured in the exhibition either through photographs of work in situ or because they had actual artwork on display on the museum.

Andre (Swedish, born 1972)
Bansky (British, born unknown)
Blu (Italian, born 1981)
Chaz Bojorquez (American, born 1949)
Gusmano Cesaretti (Italian, born 1946)
Henry Chalfant (American, born 1940)
Martha Cooper (American, born 1943)
COST (American, born 1969)
Craig Costello (American, born 1971)
CRASH (American, born 1961)
Bill Daniel (American, born 1959)
DRUGS (Collective of SLAP, OMG, PANDSEX, PERT, SPRAY, REMIO, SAF, OZE108, WWL, RIRI, ENUF, and YOGA, Americans)
Cheryl Dunn (American, born 1960)
Fab Five Freddy (American, born 1959)
Shepard Fairey (American, born 1970)
Stelios Faitakis (Greek, born 1976)
FUTURA / FUTURA2000 (American, born 1955)
Mark Gonzales (American, born 1968)
Steve Grody (American, born 1950)
Richard Hambleton (Canadian, born 1954)
Keith Haring (American, 1958 - 1990)
Hugh Holland (American, born 1942)
INVADER (French, born 1969)
Todd James (American, born 1969)
Spike Jonze (American, born 1969)
JR (French, born 1983)
KAWS (American, born 1974)
Margaret Kilgallen (American, 1967 -2001)
LADY PINK (American and Ecuadorian, born 1964)
Gordon Matta-Clark (American, 1943 -1978)
Barry McGee (American, born 1966)
MISS VAN (French, born 1973)
MISTER CARTOON (American, 1969)
MODE 2 (Mauritian, born 1967)
John Naar (British, born 1920)
Estevan Oriol (American, born 1967)
NECK FACE (American, born 1984)
Os Gemeos (Brazilian, born 1974)
Stephen Powers (American, 1968)
James Prigoff (American, born 1927)
LEE (American, born 1960)
LOOMIT (German, born 1968)
RAMMELLZEE (American, 1960 -2010)
RETKA (American, born 1979)
Jamie Reid (British, born 1952)
REVOK (American, born 1977)
REVS (American, born 1969)
RISK (American, born 1967)
ROA (Belgian, born 1976)
SABER (American, born 1976)
SAMO/Jean Paul Basquiat (American, 1960 -1988)
Kenny Scharf (American, 1958)
Dash Snow (American, 1981 -2001)
Craig R. Stecyk III (American, born 1950)
Swoon (American, born 1978)
TEEN WITCH (American, born 1989)
Ed Templeton (American, born 1972)
Tseng Kwong Chi (Chinese, born 1990)
Artists Commissioned by Baton Rouge’s Museum of Public Art 2012 - 2015

A listing of the known graffiti artists who completed murals financed by MoPA between 2012 and 2015. The artist’s name, nationality, and birth date are provided if known. The exact dates of the artwork’s completion is not known and some of the art created at the locations identified below no longer exists. All cross streets are located in Old South BR neighborhood or North Baton Rouge.

Aniekan Udofia (American, 1976) North Acadian Thruway and Gus Young Avenue.

Antonello Macs (Italian, unknown) 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street.

BELIN (Spanish, born 1979) 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street.

Curiot and Nosego (Based in Philadelphia, born unknown) Interior of MoPA building

CASE (German, born 1979) North side of Eddie Robinson Sr Drive and South St.

CHEMIS (Czechoslovakian, born unknown) at 813 Terrace; St. Joseph Street and Terrace; interior and exterior of MoPA building at 13th and Eddie Robinson Sr. Dr.; and the Lincoln Theatre at 1305 Myrtle Walk St.; Braddock and Louise St.

Dave Bonzai (British, born unknown) 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street

DAZE (American, born 1972) 14th St. and North St.; exterior of MoPA building; and at N. Acadian Thruway East and Gus Young Ave.

DOES (Dutch, born 1982) 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street; interior and exterior of MoPA building.

Erik Burke OU35 (American, born 1978) Three pieces found on Highland Road and Alice Street; Government and S. 17th; and 14th Street and North Street.

HUNTO (Italian, born 1982) exterior of MoPA building; Government St. and 13th St.


Jimmy C (British, 1973) interior of MoPA building.

King Bee (American, born around 1970) 14th Street and interior of MoPA building.

Sabotaje Al Montaje (Spanish, born unknown) Four pieces found on 12th Street; 12th and Julia St.; Eddie Robinson Dr.; and Family Youth and Service Center on Government and 13th streets.
ODEITH (Portuguese, born 1976) 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street; Interior and 2 exterior pieces on MoPA Building (includes portrait of Richard Pryor).

POSE 2 (American, born unknown) at 14th and North Streets; 2 pieces on the Lincoln Theatre at 1305 Myrtle Walk Street including the “History, Music, Art” mural; 10th St.

Rone EVERFRESH (Australian, 1980) Lincoln Theatre at 1305 Myrtle Walk St.

SETH (French, born, 1972) at Alice St. and Highland Rd.; Stewart St. and Calop St.; interior of MoPA building at 13th and Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive; Brother’s Laundry Building and adjacent storage building on Marcellious Lane; Government and S. 17th St.; Brice St south of Government St.; Brice Street north of Government St.; 14th St. and North Street; 6868 Scenic Highway.

SMUG (Australian, born unknown) interior of MoPA building; 522 N. 18th Street, facing North Street.

SOFLES (Australian, born 1986) 12th Street and 552 N. 18th Street, facing North Street.

STATIK (American, unknown early 1980s) 515 Eddie Robinson Sr Drive.

TATS CRU (American group that includes Bio, BG183, Nicer, HOW, and NOSM) interior of MoPA building.
## Appendix B. Given Names and Biographical Information of Artists Referred to by Tag Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tag Name</th>
<th>Given Name</th>
<th>Born - Death</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
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<td>Banksy</td>
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<td>Belin</td>
<td>Miguel Angel Belinchon Bujes</td>
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<td>Chemis</td>
<td>Dmitrij Proskin</td>
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<td>CHOR BOOGIE</td>
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<td>COCO 144</td>
<td>Roberto Gualtieri</td>
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<td>FAILE</td>
<td>Patrick McNeil and Patrick Miller</td>
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Vita

Erin Rolfs earned her bachelor’s degree at Louisiana State University in 2006 with a major in international studies and minors in Italian and mass communication. She works at the scholarly publisher LSU Press as their marketing manager and assistant director. In the winter of 2018 she will join the university press McGill-Queen’s in Montreal, Canada as their marketing director.