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Creative Spaces: Dada or Derelict?

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For a long time, graffiti has been associated with gangs, crime, and social unrest. Just think of the images of graffiti-covered subway cars that illustrated so many magazine articles about New York City's financial crisis in the 1970s. Though such notable artists as [Keith Haring](#), [Jean Michel-Basquiat](#), and [Banksy](#) began as graffiti artists, cities have budgeted tens of thousands of dollars to clean up theirs and others' "vandalism." But that's beginning to change. While some mayors -- like Toronto's controversial [Rob Ford](#) -- have intensified their battle against graffiti, Los Angeles, London, and other cities have taken to celebrating it. Recently, [Art in the Streets](#), the first major U.S. museum survey of graffiti and street art, was showcased at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles.

For some, graffiti makes a neighborhood feel dangerous, but that perception is changing as celebrated artists like [Shepard Fairey](#), creator of the Obama "Hope" poster, [Ryan McGinness](#), and [Kenny Scharf](#) are hired to hip up and beautify urban neighborhoods. Take Miami's famed Wynwood walls, the brainstorm of the well-known community builder and place maker [Tony Goldman](#), who transformed a once barren urban wasteland into a lively area filled with coffee shops, mom and pop stores, and emerging galleries. "Wynwood's large stock of warehouse buildings, all with no windows, would be my giant canvases," he said. With the help of Jeffrey Deitch, now the Executive Museum Director of MOCA Los Angeles, he curated those eyeless walls, inviting world renowned graffiti artists to splash, spray, and brush their visions onto them.

Other cities have followed suit, celebrating, and encouraging this fundamental human impulse to protest, to re-possess, to transform, and to beautify public places through art. With the help of my colleague [Steven Pedigo](#) at the [Creative Class Group](#), we've scoured the streets of cities in North America and the UK to bring you the most compelling graffiti projects we could find.

Art or Abuse? You decide!

Wynwood Walls - Miami, FL



As noted above, an international who's who of taggers—from Os Gemeos to Kenn Scharf, from FUTURA 2000 to Ara Peterson, avaf, Ron English, Jole Grillo, Neuzz Swoon and Brandon Opalka—have turned this warehouse district into a Mecca for urban street art.

Photo credit: Flickr user wallyg

JR in L.A. – Los Angeles, CA



The 27-year-old Parisian street artist known as “JR” photographs the faces of elderly poor people, Xeroxes and enlarges them to the scale of billboards, and mounts them on the sides of buildings in the neighborhoods where they live. His “Wrinkles in the City” project began in Shanghai; it has now moved to LA, financed in part by his \$100,000 2011 TED Prize.

Photo credit: Flickr user Romany WG

Phlegm - Sheffield, England



Phlegm is a Welsh-born comic book illustrator and street artist whose intricately executed fantasy drawings and paintings can be seen on crumbling factory walls all over Sheffield, England, where he now lives. "I love to get run down urban spaces and factories and play with the space," he writes. "A painting in the street becomes part of the city's architecture, influenced by what's around it rather than being some awkward canvas in an art gallery."

Photo credit: <http://phlegmcomicnews.blogspot.com/>

Kelburn Castle – Scotland



The thirteenth century Kelburn Castle, family seat of the Boyles, provided an astounding canvas for four Brazilian graffiti artists, who were invited to create a temporary mural. Landmark officials at Historic Scotland were persuaded to approve the project on the understanding that the walls would soon be re-limed—and were dismayed when the family changed its mind.

Photo credit: Flickr user Steven.Maclaughlin

Krog Street Tunnel - Atlanta, GA



This century old tunnel beneath the tracks of the Atlanta-Decatur railroad line joins upscale Inman Park with the scruffier Old Fourth Ward, Cabbagetown, and Reynoldstown districts. Its walls are a gallery of Atlanta's best street art, from classic graffiti and tattoo-like images to an iconic portrait of Robert Mitchum

Photo credit: Flickr user ryotnlpm

SPUD's "Rob Ford" – Toronto, Ontario



When Toronto mayor Rob Ford declared war on graffiti in April of 2011, the Toronto graffiti artist known as SPUD fired back, spray-painting dozens of portraits of the mayor on the sides of buildings. This month, his show "Censored" opened at the gallery "Don't Tell Mama." "People walk down the street and see a sloppy SPUD tag on a building or their garage and get pissed off and think it's ugly, but then they walk another block and see something by me that affects their feelings or changes the way they look at things," he says. "What they don't know is it's the same artist."

Photo credit: Flickr user bella.m

Reverse Graffiti Project – San Francisco, CA



Paul Curtis, the English graffiti artist who calls himself “Moose,” creates his art by scrubbing the grit and grime off of urban surfaces. For his “Reverse Graffiti Project” in San Francisco, he decorated walls with natural forms—plants, trees, and flowers. The project is subsidized by the maker of Green Works, a plant-based cleanser.

Photo credit: Flickr user fog city fog

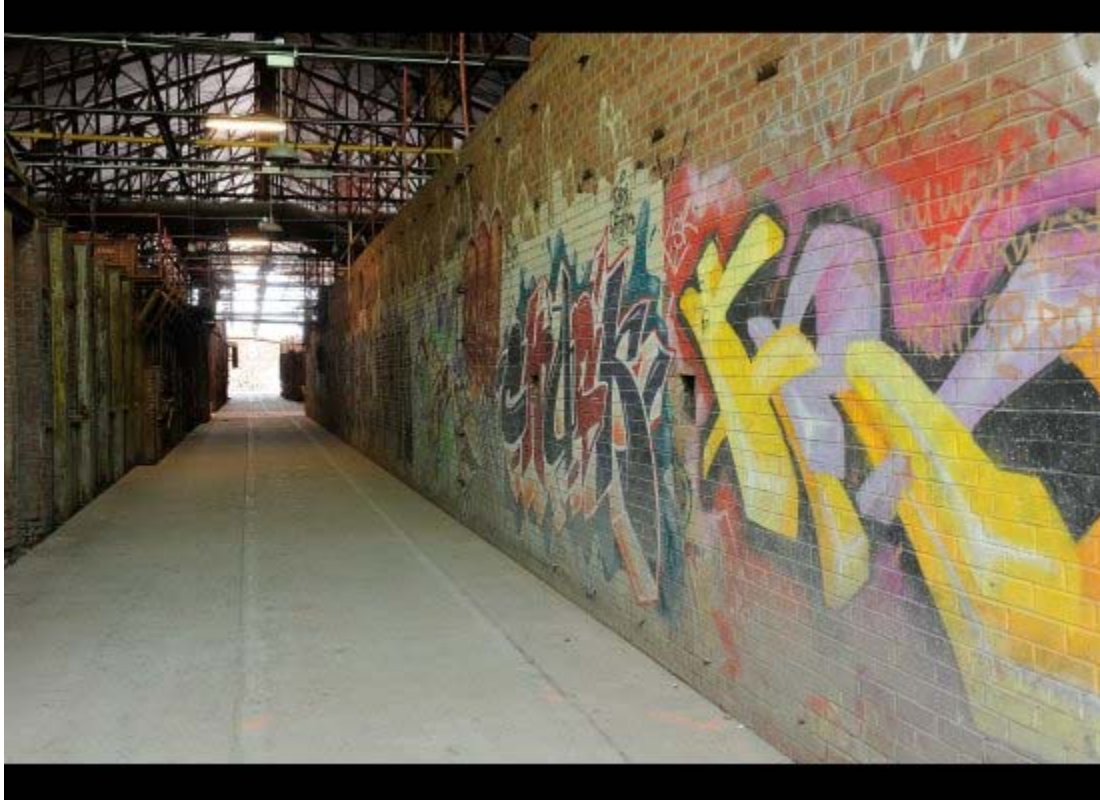
Tate Modern – London, UK



In the spring of 2008, six world-renowned graffiti artists, Blu from Bologna, Italy, the artist collective Faile from New York, JR from Paris, Nunca and Os Gemeos of Sao Paulo, and Sixeart from Barcelona, were commissioned to cover the façade of London's Tate with 45 foot tall murals. They did and the results were astonishing, if short-lived. The paintings were removed that summer.

Photo credit: Flickr user bixentro

Evergreen Bricks works – Toronto, Ontario



The oldest buildings at Toronto's Evergreen Brick Works were built more than a century ago. Renovated to the greenest, most sustainable standards, the historic factory buildings now house a farmer's market, a gallery, and a variety of educational and environmental programs, as well as the newly built Centre for Green Cities. During the 1980s and 1990s, when the factory was abandoned, many of its walls were covered by graffiti, which was preserved as artifacts of the site's past. Last spring, municipal authorities ordered its managers to remove the graffiti. They didn't and the battle goes on.

Photo credit: Nikkol Ro