

Graffiti Manifesto

Graffiti has been described as the voice of the voiceless, but the voice that we hear is that of our ancestors, who have been rendered voiceless through thousands of years of colonization and genocide. Our ancestors speak to us through all traditional art forms: drumming, painting, carving, ceremonies, dancing, etc. These expressions of our cultural heritage have been outlawed and the practitioners have been prosecuted because practicing your cultural identity is antithetical to global hegemony. So it is natural that graffiti has been associated with resistance. For the global empire, the freedom of creating your artwork anywhere is subversive, especially when it requires other violations of their "laws" in order to create it. But one must realize that these so-called "laws" are enacted to protect the interests of the dominant minority and that the real "vandalism" has been the erecting of fences, barriers, and borders on illegally and immorally confiscated land. To have one's private property "vandalized" by graffiti is really to receive a reminder that other people have existed in the area before you imposed yourself and that some still remain despite all efforts to exterminate them.

Graffiti as an act of expression alone has no limits to where it can be expressed and what can be expressed through it. Even without any cultural or historical context, graffiti forces an acknowledgement that someone has been there, that they exist, regardless of what they have to say or where they are from. Graffiti is proof of existence. I was there, and you know because I bombed it. We do graffiti out of boredom and disconnection from our current society, in dull drill-and-kill classrooms designed to assimilate us into a singular mind-state, or in the abandoned alleys and forgotten streets of old growth ghettos. It is as mindless as any doodle; yet it can evolve to be a conscious statement.

Graffiti is an instinctual act, something engrained into our genetic cultural make-up. We have been forcibly disconnected from our tribal traditions, yet those traditions remain inside of us, despite being "lost" for thousands of years. We are drawn to graffiti or grow up doing graffiti without really understanding why we do it, but the truth is, many of us have attempted to write on walls and all surfaces since our birth. Writing on paper, painting only canvas is something that we are conditioned to do. These forced limitations are not natural to humans. Limiting the surfaces and locations where we can create art is a further attempt on the part of the global imperial society to control us.

Graffiti without cultural significance is like a star in the night sky, certainly beautiful but overwhelmingly distant. When the writer understands the role of graffiti in reclaiming her/his humanity, the glow from that star leaves the sky and radiates within them. Even when our artistic instincts come out through graffiti, our assimilation is obvious. We mainly use the phonetic alphabet instead of our traditional symbols. Sometimes, even the traditional imagery that is employed is often taken out of context or painted without fully understanding what it means. Thus, there is a continuing colonization of imagery even within our instinctual attempts to allow the voices of our ancestors to be heard. While graffiti can help define us individually, it also reflects the loss of our collective tribal identities. The ancestors are still communicating through us, but how many of us still speak their language anymore?