



Cat burglars & hustlers

The graffiti artist's creed

From a conversation between journalist Katie Haegele and Buford Youthward, a graffiti writer and monthly columnist for Art Crimes (www.artcrimes.com). The topic: the mainstreaming of graffiti.

On the mainstream media's tendency to equate graffiti with hip-hop culture:

It's really a historical, cultural and social *faux pas*. Many people feel that getting that media attention is all that matters, and if that's the case, then the false relationship between graffiti and what the media lumps together as "hip-hop" is a good thing – it generated a lot

of press and publicity. But becoming "public" per se is not a healthy

or accurate setting for graffiti – it's almost like the mafia, in that members want the acknowledgement of fame but know there is a consequence for violating the code. And the true graffiti writers don't talk the game, don't walk around rapping into microphones, or screaming their intentions into megaphones. They don't spin on their heads when they are creeping around at night nervously. They are at heart cat burglars and hustlers – sometimes literally. They are criminals and proud of the fact, boasting about their adventures in trespassing, vandalizing, engaging in petty and retail theft.

They aren't break dancers and MCs. Graffiti just isn't hip-hop. That's the pill the world has to swallow.

On what consumerism and the media have to gain by this deception:

If we take graffiti out of the hip-hop equation, does it affect hip-hop much? No. But look at how it affects graffiti – it becomes much harder to grasp and absorb. It becomes what it truly is, *sui generis*. Graffiti is a unique phenomenon capable of presenting and defending its own arguments.

I would rather read an honest article, an honest book; consume an honest record; view an honest film than endure a false statement splashed on an urban surface. But every time we

commune with a corporate billboard we are welcoming a false gesture. It's an imposition that denies the individual, that denies the human spirit.

On graffiti as a response to the corporate messengers:

These are in fact little men, non-adults guilty of administering blind agendas. It's much more than individuality denied when one takes a 10,000-foot view of society. What we now have in fact is the real New World Order – the conforming classes versus the non-conforming classes – and graffiti acts as the trumpet to arms, a harbinger of great apathy and frustration made visible.