

ABOUT THIS BOOK



I've always been fascinated with the term urban jungle. But it wasn't until I attended the High School of Music and Art in upper Manhattan that I understood what the term really meant. It took a bus and three trains to get me and my best friend at the time from our quiet neighborhood in southern Brooklyn all the way uptown to the base of the stairs in the park at 135th Street and St. Nicholas avenue. At the top of those crazy, steep stairs stood our school, an imposing, Gothic-style stone building, complete with towers and gargoyles. The only way to get there was up those stairs, and so up we trudged every morning. The park was especially beautiful in winter, cold and stark. There were lots of big, grey boulders to sit on and procrastinate on the way up. We always tried to come up with excuses for why we should turn around and go home, but there weren't any good ones, and so up we went. I can still see my smoky breathe hanging in the crisp air.

What burned that trip to Harlem in my mind so indelibly were the gazillions of graffiti tags. They were everywhere. On the insides of trains, on the outsides, on the stations, on the street lights, on buildings, in doorways, in notebooks, and on jackets. Just about everywhere I looked, they were there. At that time I didn't understand tags at all. I thought they were kind of weird and ugly. But I didn't mind them either. They were wild and untamed, an extraordinary feature of the colorful yet unfamiliar terrain of uptown Manhattan. It felt exotic and kind of alien. I liked the feeling a lot to tell you the truth. Sometimes those tags reminded me of primitive cave drawings or Egyptian hieroglyphics. Eventually I got so used to seeing them that I began to ignore them completely. But I never quite got them out of my head.

Fast forward to the year 2000. One day I was standing on a subway platform waiting for a train and starring absentmindedly at a tag scribbled on a station pole. I turned my head sideways and suddenly realized to my amazement that I could read what it said. I could make out letters. And a name of sorts. It was like a bolt of lightning hit me. My mind flashed back to all those crazy tags I'd seen on my way to school all those years ago. I finally understood what it all meant. The tags were names. Nicknames mostly. Or aliases. How could I have missed it? They were logos, identifying markers, messages to anyone who saw them, a statement, a visual record of someone's having passed through that spot if only for a second or two at some point in the past. It made perfect sense now. What a revelation. It was epic!

From that point on I set out to learn everything I could about graffiti tagging. I bought books. I researched everything I could find on the subject which wasn't much at that time. I studied the tags I

saw around the city and taught myself how to draw graffiti lettering and tags. I didn't know any graffiti artists back then, so it took a long time to learn. Graffiti was and still is kind of a secret art form. My best friend (different one) was fascinated by what I was doing and wanted to learn, so I taught him and he got hooked, too. Together we built our website, Graffiti Diplomacy, and wrote our first book "Learn To Draw a Graffiti Master-Piece", which covers a broad range of graffiti letter building techniques. It has sold many thousands of copies worldwide. Go Figure!.

This is our second book. The focus of this book is on graffiti tagging only. This book will teach you how to tag. It demonstrates in detail the techniques that we use to design our tags. It's not the be-all and end-all of graffiti tagging books, it's just the methods that work for us. If you follow the instructions in this book, you will learn to create your own, unique graffiti tags. Through the repeated process of drawing tag letters and alphabets, you will learn to read graffiti tags for yourself. Learning to read a tag is kind of like unraveling a secret code or solving a puzzle. My sister, Jill, refers to deciphering a tag as "visually unwrapping it". That's a great metaphor. There are still some tags that we just can't read even after all this time.

The ultimate goal of a graffiti artist (or writer) is to design a tag that has style. Style is that magic something or other that makes a tag flow. It's like rhythm in a piece of great music. Style is not something we can teach you. It is a quality you will develop for yourself over time with lots of repetition, practice and patience. And just so you know, we are only interested in legal tagging here. That means only writing tags where you have permission. We want to be really clear about that. This book was created to present graffiti tagging as an art form only.

And it really is an art form, full of expression and creativity. I totally love designing new tags, even if I feel like pulling my hair out sometimes. Tags are a real challenge. I never know where I am going to end up and the finished tag is always a surprise. Obviously not every tag is a great work of art just like not every painting is a masterpiece. But a well designed graffiti tag becomes a kind of glyph, an ornament, a symbol or character that identifies and distinguishes you. It's kind of like a logo or a brand. It's brand "YOU".

We have come to appreciate and view graffiti tagging as a high art form, just like Calligraphy. Not everyone gets it right away. Some people never get it at all and that's okay, too. But if you love graffiti tagging like we do and want to learn to design your own tags, this book will show you the way. We often hear people argue about whether or not graffiti, especially tagging, can ever be considered art at all. We believe it is as much an art as drawing, painting or sculpture. A well designed graffiti tag appreciates in value over time. As you modify it, refine it, fine-tune it, apply it, and live with it, you ultimately come to cherish it, like a precious gemstone. A well designed graffiti tag is just that special! Yup!

- Graffiti Diplomacy