

- People who make graffiti are expressing themselves, just like other painters.
- Just like classic art, some graffiti makes viewers feel strong emotions.
- Famous graffiti artwork attracts tourists to cities just as big museums do.

**YES**

Grffiti is art. Here's why:

- People who paint graffiti without permission are harming others' property.
- Some gangs use graffiti to mark their territory or to threaten other gangs.
- Graffiti is expensive, difficult, and time-consuming to remove.

**NO**

Grffiti is not art. Here's why:

**READ BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE AND DECIDE.**

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**Is Graffiti Art?**

Some people think it's beautiful. Others say it's a crime.

A group of abandoned buildings in New York City used to be a swirl of color. It was called "5 Pointz." People went there for years to spray paint graffiti on the walls. The buildings' owner, Jerry Wolkoff, allowed the graffiti. But in November, he decided to paint over it. He plans to tear down the buildings. "I could not believe it," says Evan Grey, 14, who often painted at 5 Pointz. "Why would anyone destroy so much art?" Evan and many others say that graffiti is a true and valuable art form. "Just because

it's not on canvas, that doesn't mean it is not art," states Evan. But while Wolkoff says he respects graffiti, he doesn't think he did anything wrong. He points out that people who make graffiti paint over others' work all the time. Other people say that graffiti isn't really art anyway. They note that violent gangs often use graffiti to mark their territory and that most graffiti is done without permission. It is illegal, hurts the value of property belonging to others, and is expensive to remove.

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## Graffiti: Art Form or Vandalism? : Expression: Officials in O.C. and elsewhere find a way to let the 'aerosol art' continue while controlling the other work--oft related.

August 24, 1991 | ZAN DUBIN | TIMES STAFF WRITER

Huntington Beach officials are agonizing over it. Los Angeles' Cultural Arts Commission is wrestling with it. Orange County officials aren't a The issue is the growing Southland debate over the distinction--if there is one--between graffiti art and graffiti vandalism, and how--if at all while eliminating the other.

"All cities have an obligation to ensure that there are public spaces for what is one of the most vibrant and interesting art forms in Southern Michael Davis, an architect and author who has written about Southern California urban-design issues.

"Almost anyone would recognize the difference between graffiti art and the simple tag," Davis said.

Huntington Beach is apparently the only city in Orange County that allows aerosol artists to paint in certain areas, despite laws on the book illegal. But while city officials seem to acknowledge that there is a difference between so-called "aerosol art" and simple spray-can vandalism wrestling to find a way to let the art continue while controlling the other graffiti that are often gang related. That's no simple task, said Ron I director of community services.

"The problem is (that as) soon as you allow someone to write on a public wall, how do you tell someone else they can't write on the wall--or right next to it?" Hagan said this week.

Orange County staff handling graffiti cleanup in flood control channels and county buildings and facilities, in addition to one official associa committee concerned with graffiti, said no such line is drawn. That is, when they see graffiti, they clean up the graffiti.

"When I looked into the graffiti issue and how we were handling it, that (distinction) never arose, so I'm not sure anything could be characte Robert Sayers, manager of the Environmental Management Agency's management services, which did the research for a county committee : methods of graffiti eradication.

That viewpoint is shared by many city officials throughout the county. "All graffiti, regardless if it is artistic or otherwise, is removed," said E superintendent of public works for San Juan Capistrano.

Complicating the matter even further is a belief by some who work with gangs that to legitimize distinctions between aerosol artists and van serve to exacerbate underlying social problems.

Because graffiti are illegal, officials should be looking at what causes youths to engage in illegal activities--however artistic their expressions Southern California arts administrator who works with gang members and who asked not to be identified.

"We're not addressing the problems the kids are facing," said the administrator. Citizens and city officials should be looking at "finding out if disenfranchised people can find a way to work within the system."

Architect Michael Davis thinks the answer might be found if "the system" were to embrace aerosol artists. "There are a lot of derelict and un that could be brightened and enlightened."

Further, Devon Brewer, a UC Irvine graduate student who has studied the retaining walls in Huntington Beach and advised city officials, as art is a positive alternative to drugs and gang violence that "saves lives."

"It's nice to have a wall around here because you can express your art form to a whole different branch of people and help graffiti art get acc aerosol artist Drez, who preferred not to give his last name, a 19-year-old Orange Coast College student who paints on concrete seawalls alo Huntington Beach.

There have even been gallery exhibitions of aerosol art, one of which opened at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco this May. Walls in Lo Beach and other cities have been set aside for the colorful outdoor artwork.

Recently, the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs began a new program to try to define differences between graffiti art and what nea classify as criminal defacing of property, public or private. Next month, department officials will hold a conference to seek common ground--between graffiti artists and graffiti abaters to find ways to provide legal spaces for street artists.

One solution proposed in Huntington Beach would involve a sort of "public exhibition space," Hagan said, in which painting would be allow removable canvases hung along the retaining walls, which stand between Pacific Coast Highway and the surf and stretch north of the pier fo

Inexpensive permits would be issued to painters, and the canvases would be taken down during off hours, probably every night. Restricted p required permits would allow greater control over the area. With the help of police and other city officials, the costly burden of patrolling th day or engaging in a constant whitewashing battle could be avoided, Hagan said.

The canvases would ease the problem of gang "tagging"--a way of claiming territory--because the tagging is done as a way of laying claim to aerosol artists, he said. Remove the canvas and "you can't claim something that's not there," he said.

"So now we're looking at the cost and feasibility (of this alternative) and we're trying to get feedback from (the aerosol artists) to see if they v space and get the word out that if you continue to write on the stairwells and port-a-potties, you'd lose that space altogether," Hagan said.

He said there are problems with the removable-canvas idea, chiefly that it works against the key desire of aerosol artists to leave their mark public surface. Graffiti artist Mike Krampach of Cypress, who uses the name Fear One when he paints, agrees.

"It wouldn't work," he said. "It defeats the whole purpose" of painting for fame and recognition.

Admitted Hagan: "I don't know if there's a social answer (to the problem) or not. There may not be." (He added that the retaining walls may parking lot to be built beginning this fall along Pacific Coast Highway but won't know to what extent for a few months.)

Any solution that eliminates all forms of spray-paint expressionism would be a loss to the community, according to at least one Huntington authority. "It's one of the few places (in Orange County and neighboring areas) that people doing spray-can art feel they can go," said Naida cultural services supervisor.

Osline would like see the walls used as an open forum for all kinds of expression and discourse, not just as a place for spray-can artists. She ideas for a wall-art program that would make the area something of a "community bulletin board" as well as an art space, she said.

"We can always paint it out beige and create a program of punishment and surveillance and control," Osline said, noting that someone has r "Save Pee Wee," referring to recently arrested children's television star Pee-wee Herman. "But it's interesting; there's a kind of democracy t there: If you want to make a personal statement, you can."

Community members, however, are sometimes less sympathetic when they see gang members' personal statements.

Huntington Beach resident Wendy Mello complained about the matter at a City Council meeting earlier this week. "I went down there and e (marked with) graffiti, from the portable toilets on the beach to the telephone booths at 13th Street on PCH," she said in an interview.

Hagan said that the possibility of whitewashing the wall and forbidding graffiti of any kind is remote. But the possibility has been discussed involving his department, aerosol artists and the police.

"If I were to give the order to take it all off, and the city had the money to do that, it would just be back on again by the next day, and we don resources to wager that kind of (ongoing) battle. . . . We hope to come up with a compromise, but it will take a little more time. There's no e

*Staff writer Allan Parachini contributed to this article.*