



YOUTH CENTER
PERSPEKTIVA
DURRES ALBANIA

HATE FIGHTERS
NETWORK HFN
NIS SERBIA

BEYOND
BORDERS ETS
ORTA NOVA ITALY

OBOJENA KLAPA
SARAJEVO
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA



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Graffiti ABC: A Guide to Combat Hate Speech

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Graffiti ABC:
A Guide to Combat Hate Speech

Authors:

Luis Bekteshi, Youth Center Perspektiva, Durres, Albania
Vladimir Timotijevic, Hate Fighters Network, Niš, Serbia
Maria Luigia di Pierro, Beyond Borders ETS, Orta Nova, Italy
Draško Mikić, Obojena Klapa, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Editor:

Luis Bekteshi, Vladimir Timotijević, Marisa Luigia di Pierro,
Adna Muslija, Rijad Hadžić, Benjamin Čengić

Graphic Design:

Ljubomir Todorović

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Introduction

A few words about the project

Youth Centre "Perspektiva" from Albania, in partnership with Hate Fighters Network (HFN) from Serbia, Beyond Borders from Italy, and Obojena Klapa from Bosnia and Herzegovina, is undertaking the capacity building initiative entitled "Creative Canvas". This project is designed to address critical issues such as discrimination, hate speech, cyberviolence, and gender-based discrimination and violence. The approach centres on the application of creative tools and methods in youth work to effectively confront these challenges.

The project aims in identifying, consolidating and promoting existing best practices of using art as a tool for activism, as well as, creating and enabling an environment to develop new approaches to countering, preventing and fighting cyberbullying, hate speech, discrimination and gender-based violence.

By prioritising innovative and artistic methodologies, the project seeks not only to provide immediate solutions to the problems of cyberbullying, bullying, and hate speech, but also to cultivate enduring advocacy and active engagement among young people.

Through collaborative actions involving organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, and Serbia, this project aims to establish a regional and cross-border network of youth activists. These individuals will be equipped with the necessary tools to challenge societal issues and to promote a culture characterised by tolerance and mutual respect.

"Creative Canvas" initiative is structured around a series of workshops, training sessions, and creative events designed to nurture the artistic and activist potential of young participants. By bringing together diverse perspectives and experiences from across Europe, the project encourages intercultural dialogue and understanding, fostering a sense of solidarity among youth from different backgrounds. The participating organisations each contribute

unique expertise, blending approaches from arts education, youth advocacy, and social inclusion to create a holistic framework for action.

Central to the project's methodology is the belief that art can serve as a powerful catalyst for social change. The project also invests in capacity building by equipping youth workers and volunteers with the skills and resources necessary to facilitate ongoing activism within their communities.

In addition to its creative focus, "Creative Canvas" actively seeks to develop sustainable strategies for addressing cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse. This includes the creation of educational materials, peer-support networks, and digital awareness campaigns designed to empower young people to respond effectively to online threats. By integrating both online and offline activities, the project ensures that its impact extends beyond temporary interventions and contributes to long-lasting positive change.

Ultimately, the project aspires to influence policy and practice at both local and regional levels, advocating for the recognition of art-based activism as a vital tool in youth work and community development. By documenting and disseminating best practices, "Creative Canvas" aims to inspire further initiatives and partnerships, strengthening the resilience of young people and their capacity to foster inclusive, respectful societies. The combined efforts of all partner organisations are set to leave a legacy of empowerment, creativity, and collaboration throughout the region.

DISCLAIMER

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Meet the Organizations

YOUTH CENTER "PERSPEKTIVA"

Youth Centre "Perspektiva" is a non-governmental organisation headquartered in Durrës, Albania, dedicated to youth empowerment and the advancement of human rights. The Centre uses artistic and non-formal educational methods, which are developed by and for young people, with a emphasis on those from vulnerable groups.







Operating at local, regional, and international levels in the Balkans, Youth Centre "Perspektiva" organises a range of activities in Albania and the Western Balkans to raise awareness of human rights issues, promote intercultural dialogue, facilitate peer-to-peer education, and empower young people to become active and responsible members of their communities.

The primary beneficiaries of Youth Centre "Perspektiva" are children and young people up to the age of 30, focusing on those from vulnerable backgrounds, including young people with disabilities, from impoverished and rural areas.

By leveraging creative forms of expression and non-formal learning, the Centre supports youth in developing critical skills, self-confidence, and awareness of their rights. These methods - ranging from artistic workshops to innovative educational programmes - are tailored specifically to the experiences and needs of local youth, especially those from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds.

Through its wide-ranging activities, Perspektiva fosters intercultural dialogue, encourages peer-to-peer learning, and builds bridges between communities. The organisation's projects often centre on themes of discrimination, hate speech, cyberviolence, and gender-based violence, addressing these issues with creative and collaborative solutions. By partnering with international organisations, Perspektiva can amplify its impact and cultivate a network of youth leaders who are equipped to challenge social injustices and advocate for tolerance

and respect. Perspektiva's approach is blending arts education with activism and practical skill development. Workshops, campaigns, and community events provide platforms for young people to express themselves, share their stories, and contribute to lasting positive change. Perspektiva's mission is not only to respond to immediate social challenges, but also to empower young generations to shape their own futures, build resilience, and become active participants in the development of inclusive and respectful societies throughout Albania and the Balkans.

-  www.perspektiva4youth.org
-  [perspektiva4youth](https://www.facebook.com/perspektiva4youth)
-  [perspektiva4youth](https://www.instagram.com/perspektiva4youth)
-  [perspektiva4youth](https://www.tiktok.com/@perspektiva4youth)
-  [youthcenterperspektiva](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)
-  [Perspektiva_AI](https://twitter.com/Perspektiva_AI)






HATE FIGHTERS NETWORK (HFN)

Hate Fighters Network (HFN) is an international youth organization based in Niš, Serbia, dedicated to empowering young people to actively combat hate speech, discrimination, and violations of human rights. The organization's mission is to support young people in becoming active agents of change within their communities and beyond, promoting values such as equality, diversity, inclusion, and democratic participation. Its vision is a society in which young people are empowered, connected, and actively contributing to peaceful and intercultural environments. Through its work, HFN encourages the development of critical thinking, mutual understanding, and respect for human rights among youth from different cultural and social backgrounds.

HFN implements a wide range of activities focused on education, youth engagement, and international cooperation. The activities include training courses, seminars, workshops, youth exchanges, and local initiatives that address key

social issues such as hate speech, discrimination, social exclusion, and gender inequality. Emphasis is placed on non-formal education as a tool for learning, allowing participants to gain practical skills, share experiences, and participate in shaping solutions to societal challenges. A distinctive aspect of HFN's work is the use of creative and innovative methods in youth engagement. The organization integrates art, storytelling, digital media, music, photography, and visual communication into its activities as tools for expression and awareness-raising.

HFN has significant experience in the implementation of international projects supported by European and global funding programs, particularly in the field of youth development. Through these projects, the organization has built strong expertise in capacity building, partnership coordination, and the development of educational resources and methodologies. It works closely with a wide network of partners, contributing both as a lead applicant and as a partner organization in initiatives that aim to strengthen the role of young people in society. The organization's team consists of experienced youth workers and experts who have been actively involved in addressing social issues through education and community-based initiatives for many years. Their work has consistently produced meaningful results, contributing to increased awareness, stronger youth engagement, and the development of inclusive practices across different communities.

-  www.hfn.org.rs
-  hetefighters@gmail.com
-  [hatefightersnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/hatefightersnetwork)
-  [hatefighters](https://www.instagram.com/hatefighters)
-  [HateFighters](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

BEYOND BORDERS ETS






Beyond Borders ETS is a non governmental organisation headquartered in Orta Nova, in the

region of Puglia, Italy. The organisation was legally established in 2014 and is dedicated to youth empowerment, active citizenship, social inclusion, and the promotion of human rights through non formal education and intercultural learning. Its activities focus on providing young people with opportunities to develop skills, participate in international mobility, and become active members of their communities.

Operating at local, national, and international level, Beyond Borders ETS organises youth exchanges, training courses, workshops, seminars, and research activities within the Erasmus+ Programme, the European Solidarity Corps, Creative Europe, and other European initiatives. The organisation promotes intercultural dialogue, European values, participation in democratic life, and the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, especially those coming from rural or disadvantaged areas.

The primary beneficiaries of Beyond Borders ETS are young people between the ages of 16 and 35, with particular attention to those facing geographical, social, economic, or educational obstacles. The organisation works to strengthen their competencies, increase employability, and support personal and professional development through international experiences, peer education, creative methods, and community activities.

Beyond Borders ETS has extensive experience in European projects as coordinator and partner in Erasmus+ KA1, KA2, Capacity Building, European Youth Together, Creative Europe, Erasmus+ Sport, and European Solidarity Corps projects. The organisation also holds the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label and regularly hosts and sends volunteers in international mobility projects.

-  www.associazionebeyondborders.it
-  associazionebeyondborders@gmail.com
-  [beyondbordersitaly](https://www.facebook.com/beyondbordersitaly)
-  [beyondbordersitaly](https://www.youtube.com/beyondbordersitaly)
-  [Beyond Borders Italy](https://www.instagram.com/Beyond_Borders_Italy)

OBOJENA KLAPA

Obojena Klapa was founded in 2016 as the first non-governmental organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina dedicated to street, contemporary, and film art. By bringing together artists and cultural workers, Obojena Klapa seeks to establish new conditions for the production and perception of contemporary and urban culture, and to use public spaces, streets, and galleries as arenas for initiating discussions on socio-political issues.



Through its two strategic projects – FASADA Festival and the Manifesto Gallery of Contemporary Art – Obojena Klapa prioritizes production, affirmation, and education in the fields of street and contemporary art. Functioning as a platform for the development of cultural industries, Obojena Klapa advocates for the creation of socially relevant cultural policies and legal frameworks that support the arts. By insisting on practices of connection, networking, and collaboration, Obojena Klapa has positioned itself as one of the key actors on the regional cultural scene.

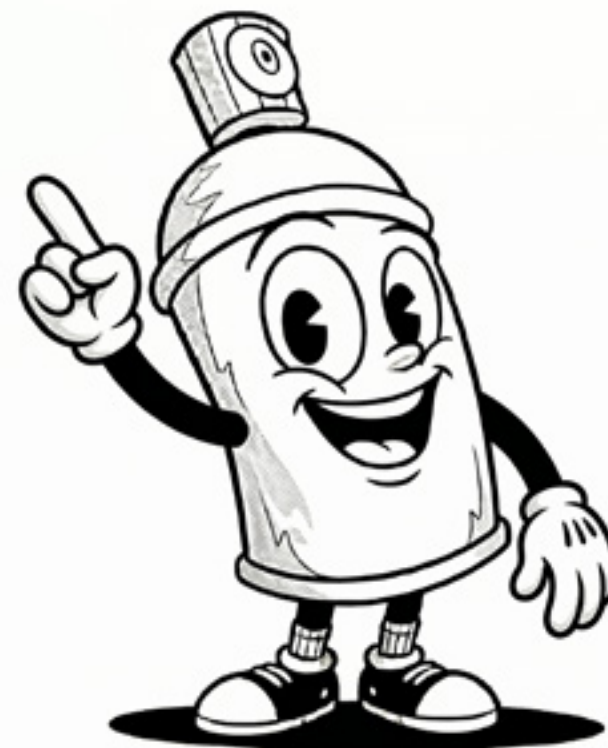
Obojena Klapa is the author of over forty murals painted in Sarajevo and other cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, dozens of exhibitions and music-performative events, as well as numerous workshops, lectures, and discussions. The work of the organisation has been supported by many foundations, international organizations, and legal entities, including: Creative Europe, BHRI, IOM, USAID, UNDP, Goethe-Institut, the Delegation of the European Union to BiH, British Council, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in BiH, the Spanish Embassy in BiH, French Embassy, French Institute, Foundation for Art Initiatives, Porticus Foundation and others.

Obojena Klapa envisions a vibrant and inclusive cultural landscape where contemporary, street, and film art are recognized as essential tools for social transformation. By activating public space and fostering dialogue through art, Obojena Klapa aims to shape a society grounded in creativity,

critical thought, and shared values.

The mission of Obojena Klapa is to create sustainable conditions for the production, education, and affirmation of contemporary and street art in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through its projects FASADA Festival and Manifesto Gallery, the organization serves as a platform for cultural workers and artists, advocating for socially relevant cultural policies and legal frameworks that support artistic expression in public space, while fostering regional collaboration and exchange.

-  www.obojenaklapa.com
-  info@obojenaklapa.com
-  [obojenaklapa](https://www.facebook.com/obojenaklapa)
-  [obojenaklapa](https://www.youtube.com/obojenaklapa)



Meet the Donor

ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. Education, training, youth and sport are key areas that support citizens in their personal and professional development. High quality, inclusive education and training, as well as informal and non-formal learning, ultimately equip young people and participants of all ages with the qualifications and skills needed for their meaningful participation in democratic society, intercultural understanding and successful transition in the labour market. Building on the success of the programme in the period 2014-2020, Erasmus+ strengthens its efforts to increase the opportunities offered to more participants and to a wider range of organisations, focusing on its qualitative impact and contributing to more inclusive and cohesive, greener and digitally fit societies.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of the Programme is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship. As such, the Programme shall be a key instrument for building a European Education Area, supporting the implementation of the European strategic cooperation in the field of education and training, with its underlying sectoral agendas, advancing youth policy cooperation under the Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and developing the European dimension in sport.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

The Programme has the following specific objectives:

- Promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training;

- Promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth;
- Promote learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

WHO IMPLEMENTS ERASMUS + PROGRAMME?

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission is ultimately responsible for the running of the Erasmus+ Programme. It manages the budget and sets priorities, targets and criteria for the Programme on an on-going basis. Furthermore, it guides and monitors the general implementation, follow-up and evaluation of the Programme at European level. The European Commission also bears the overall responsibility for the supervision and coordination of the structures in charge of implementing the Programme at national level. At European level, the European Commission's European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is responsible for the implementation of a number of actions of the Erasmus+ Programme.

More information about Erasmus + Program at: https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en

THE NATIONAL AGENCIES

The implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme is mainly implemented as Indirect Management, meaning that the European Commission entrusts budget implementation tasks to National Agencies; the rationale of this approach is to bring Erasmus+ as close as possible to its beneficiaries and to adapt to the diversity of national education, training and youth systems. National Agencies promote and implement the Programme at national level and act as the link between the European Commission and participating



organisations at local, regional and national level. It is their task to:

- Provide appropriate information on the Erasmus+ Programme;
- Administer a fair and transparent selection process for project applications to be funded in their country;
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Programme in their country;
- Provide support to project applicants and participating organisations throughout the project life-cycle;
- Collaborate effectively with the network of all National Agencies and the European Commission;
- Ensure the visibility of the Programme;
- Promote the dissemination and exploitation of the results of the Programme at local and national level.

More information about Erasmus + Program at:

https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en

MOBILITY PROJECTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE "YOUTH EXCHANGES"

Under this Action, organisations and informal groups of young people can receive support to carry out projects bringing together young people from different countries to exchange and learn outside their formal educational system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTION

Erasmus+ supports non-formal learning mobility of young people in the form of Youth Exchanges, with the objective to engage and empower young people to become active citizens, connect them to the European project as well as to help them acquire and develop competences for life and their professional future.

More specifically, Youth Exchanges aim to:

- foster intercultural dialogue and learning and

feeling of being European;

- develop skills and attitudes of young people;
- strengthen European values and breaking down prejudices and stereotypes;
- raise awareness about socially relevant topics and thus stimulate engagement in society and active participation.

The Action is open to all young people, with a special focus on those with fewer opportunities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

Youth Exchanges are meetings of groups of young people from at least two different countries who gather for a short period to implement jointly a non-formal learning programme (a mix of workshops, exercises, debates, role-plays, simulations, outdoor activities, etc.) on a topic of their interest, seeking inspiration from the European Youth Goal. The learning period comprises preparation phase before as well as evaluation and follow-up after the exchange. The following activities are not eligible for grants under Youth Exchanges: academic study trips; exchange activities that aim to make financial profit; exchange activities that can be considered as tourism; festivals; holiday travel; performance tours, statutory meetings, training courses by adults for young people.

SETTING UP A PROJECT

A project is implemented by at least two organisations. Organisations involved in a project should benefit from their participation; the project should therefore be in line with their objectives and fit their needs. Organisations involved assume the roles of "sending" participants and/or "receiving" i.e. hosting the activity. One of the organisations takes also the role of coordinator and applies for the whole project on behalf of the partnership.

A project consists of four stages: planning, preparation, implementation and follow-up. Participating organisations and young people involved in the activities should take an active role

in all those stages enhancing thus their learning experience.

- Planning (define the needs, objectives, learning outcomes, activity formats, development of work programme, schedule of activities etc.)

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Who is this manual for?

The Graffiti ABC: A Guide to Combat Hate Speech has been thoughtfully developed for a diverse community of individuals and groups who are passionate about creating positive social change through art. This guide is intended to empower creative youth, young activists, and students, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to challenge hate speech and discrimination using artistic expression - especially graffiti and murals. The guidebook is based also in the best practices of the organizations involved in the project and thorough research and interviews conducted with campaign managers, influencers, artists, etc. Therefore, below you may find a description of different groups this guide is developed for.

YOUTH WORKERS AND EDUCATORS

Those working directly with young people - whether in schools, youth centres, or informal education settings - will find this guide invaluable for facilitating workshops and discussions around combating hate speech. It offers practical advice, creative inspiration, and trainers approaches to address discrimination through art, as well as approaches from experts, artists, etc.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

Organisations dedicated to social justice, inclusion, or youth empowerment can use this guide to enhance their programmes, outreach, and campaigns. It provides a framework for using urban art as a powerful tool for advocacy and awareness and can facilitate do's and Don'ts when implementing graffiti or other forms of art in public spaces.

INFORMAL COLLECTIVES AND GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

Community groups, artistic collectives, and informal networks striving to foster tolerance and respect will benefit from the guide's practical tips and examples on organising artistic interventions in public spaces.

STUDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Whether in secondary schools, colleges, or universities, students interested in activism or art can use this guide to initiate projects, collaborate, and make their voices heard in creative ways. They can also reach out to organizations from the Creative Canvas project and network with their peers who are already engaged in such initiatives.

ANYONE PASSIONATE ABOUT ART AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The guide welcomes all individuals who believe in the transformative power of art to counter hate speech - regardless of their formal affiliations. It encourages artistic innovation, collective action, and the celebration of diversity.

In summary, The Graffiti ABC serves as a practical and inspirational resource for a wide spectrum of people - be they established organisations or informal groups - who wish to use graffiti, murals, or other creative mediums to foster inclusivity, challenge prejudice, and build stronger communities.



How to use this guidebook?

This guidebook is designed to be accessible and flexible, catering to a diverse audience and a range of learning and engagement styles. Below is a detailed description of how you can make the most of it, based on three core approaches: reading sequentially or modularly, facilitating educational workshops, and undertaking independent action.

READ SEQUENTIALLY OR MODULARLY

You may choose to work through the guidebook from start to finish, building your understanding step by step. This linear approach is ideal if you wish to gain a comprehensive grasp of the subject, following the logical progression of ideas, concepts, and practical advice. Alternatively, the guidebook is structured in a way that allows readers to dip into specific sections or chapters as needed. If you are interested in particular topics—such as graffiti techniques, organising community art events, or strategies for countering hate speech—you can select relevant modules and focus on them independently. This modular reading style suits busy professionals or those seeking targeted inspiration for their projects.

EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

The guidebook serves as a valuable resource for planning and delivering educational workshops. Youth workers, teachers, and facilitators can use its content to design interactive sessions that encourage participants to explore social issues, express themselves creatively, and collaborate on artistic interventions. Each section offers practical exercises, discussion prompts, and case studies, making it easy to adapt materials for different age groups, skill levels, and learning environments. Whether you're working in a school, youth centre, or informal community setting, the guidebook equips you with pedagogical strategies to inspire critical thinking and collective action against hate speech and discrimination.

INDEPENDENT ACTION

For individuals or groups who prefer to work autonomously, the guidebook provides clear guidance for initiating independent projects. Whether you are a student, artist, or member of a grassroots movement, you'll find step-by-step instructions, creative ideas, and real-world examples to help you launch your own artistic interventions. The guidebook encourages experimentation and innovation, empowering you to take initiative—be it painting murals, organising public art installations, or running social media campaigns. By following the advice and inspiration contained within, you can make a meaningful contribution to building inclusive communities and challenging prejudice, even outside formal organisational structures.

In summary, this guidebook is more than a manual—it is a toolkit for change, adaptable to different needs and ambitions. Whether you prefer structured learning, collaborative workshops, or solo ventures, you'll find the resources and support to use art as a powerful means to promote tolerance, respect, and social justice. Its flexible format ensures you can tailor your engagement to suit your context, making it an indispensable companion for anyone committed to positive transformation through creative expression.



Hate Speech: Definition and impact

According to the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers)¹ of Council of Europe, "Hate Speech is understood as all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation."

The concept of hate speech encompasses a multiplicity of situations: (Weber, 2009)

- Firstly, incitement of racial hatred or in other words, hatred directed against persons or groups of persons on the grounds of belonging to a race;
- Secondly, incitement to hatred on religious grounds, to which may be equated incitement to hatred on the basis of a distinction between believers and non-believers;
- and lastly, to use the wording of the Recommendation on hate speech of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, incitement to other forms of hatred based on intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism.²

One of the biggest challenges when addressing hate speech is identifying it. Hate speech does not always manifest in obvious or overt ways; rather, it often appears in subtle, ambiguous, or coded language, making it difficult to distinguish from other forms of expression. This complexity arises because the boundaries between hate speech, offensive speech, and legitimate criticism are not always clear-cut. For instance, statements that incite hatred or violence against specific groups are usually easier to recognise, but other forms may be disguised as jokes, satire, or seemingly innocuous comments. Context, intent, and the impact on the targeted individuals or groups

What is hate speech?

all play crucial roles in determining whether something constitutes hate speech. Therefore, when we refer to hate speech, we cannot state that hate speech is black and white and easily identifiable. It is a spectrum, and its identification often requires a nuanced understanding of language, social context, and the experiences of those affected. That is why it is imperative that people understand that not all forms of discrimination are hate speech. While all hate speech is discriminatory, not every discriminatory act or statement meets the threshold of hate speech as defined by legal and institutional frameworks. Understanding this distinction helps ensure that responses to harmful language are proportionate, targeted, and effective, and that freedom of expression is balanced with the need to protect individuals and groups from harm.

A very important distinction that should be made is the difference between freedom of expression and hate speech. While freedom of expression is a fundamental human right protected by various international conventions and the constitutions of democratic societies, it is not absolute. As defined by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights³ freedom of expression and information is: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers." (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,)

This right allows individuals to voice their opinions, share ideas, and participate in public debate, even when these views may be unpopular or controversial. However, hate speech falls outside the boundaries of protected expression when it incites, promotes, or justifies violence, hatred, or discrimination against individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, religion, nationality, gender, or other protected attributes.

Actions taken to combat hate speech may also engage certain human rights, because freedom

of expression is a fundamental human right, and so is the right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion. Those who are accused of promoting 'hate' often appeal to these rights. A proper understanding of human rights can help in resolving this apparent conflict. One of the key challenges in working to combat hate speech is being able to identify the best balance between allowing free expression, while still protecting other rights which may be engaged by its more violent forms (Keen & Georgescu, 2020).⁴

The challenge lies in striking a balance between upholding freedom of expression and preventing harm caused by hate speech. Not every offensive or disagreeable statement constitutes hate speech; the intent, context, and impact must be carefully considered. Laws and guidelines are designed to ensure that the suppression of hate speech does not inadvertently silence legitimate criticism or restrict open discussion. In this way, measures to combat hate speech are not about limiting free speech, but about safeguarding the dignity and rights of those targeted by harmful rhetoric, while still respecting the principle of open democratic dialogue.

When talking about hate speech the place where it occurs mostly is online. That is also why the debate between freedom of speech and hate speech is relevant. Hate speech nowadays is mainly an online phenomenon. However, be it off- or online, when people's views and comments are no longer confirmed, they become less likely to continue making hateful statements. (Ullmann & Tomalin, 2023)

Hate Speech in public spaces

Hate speech happens not only on the internet, but also in public spaces across Europe. There are many examples showing that hate speech in public areas can be just as harmful as online hate speech, affecting how people feel and act in society. To understand this issue, it is important to know what a public space is. According to The Charter of Public Spaces, Public Spaces are “all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all. This definition favours public ownership because “such ownership guarantees more stable access and enjoyment over time. for free and without a profit motive” (UN HABITAT, 2020) Therefore by this definition, public spaces are places open to everyone, no matter their background or beliefs. These include parks, streets, squares, buses, and trains—places where people meet and interact in daily life. Because these spaces are open to all, they can easily become places where hate speech takes place. Hate speech in public spaces often targets minority groups and can appear as verbal abuse, hateful graffiti, angry signs, or hostile gatherings.

Cases of different forms of hate speech can be found all over the world.



Figure 1 - Hate Speech case in SAN LEANDRO, California ⁵

The effects are serious: hate speech can make people feel afraid or excluded, stop them from taking part in community activities, and weaken respect and tolerance in society. By reacting to hate speech it protects those who are vulnerable

and help keep communities peaceful and welcoming. By understanding what public spaces are and how hate speech affects them, people and organisations can plan ways to protect public conversations and respect everyone's dignity.

Just because a place is open to everyone does not mean people can use it in any way they want, especially if it hurts others. Public spaces are meant to be safe and welcoming for all people, regardless of their background, beliefs, or identity. Using these spaces to display hate messages, violent symbols, or any form of expression that encourages hatred or violence is not acceptable. Such actions not only damage the physical environment, but they create fear and discomfort for those who see them.

Hate speech in public spaces often takes physical or visual forms. This can include graffiti, stickers, posters, vandalism, offensive symbols, or slogans that discriminate against certain groups. These messages can stay visible for a long time, which makes their effects stronger and more lasting. If no one speaks out against these hateful expressions, they might start to seem normal, especially to young people who see them every day. It is important for communities to challenge and remove hate speech in public areas so that everyone can feel safe and respected.

The presence of hate speech in public spaces doesn't only harm those directly targeted—it also impacts the broader community by creating an atmosphere of fear, division, and exclusion. People who witness hateful messages, even if they are not the intended victims, may feel uneasy or unwelcome in those areas. This can lead to reduced participation in public life, as individuals might avoid certain parks, streets, or transportation routes where hate speech is displayed. Over time, this undermines the very purpose of public spaces, which are meant to be inclusive and accessible to all.

In addition, the normalization of hate speech through constant exposure can desensitize

individuals, making it harder for communities to recognize and address more subtle forms of discrimination. Young people, in particular, are at risk of internalizing these messages, which can influence their attitudes and behaviours toward others. This is why it is essential for local authorities, community organizations, and everyday citizens to take action. Promptly removing hate-filled graffiti or posters and replacing them with positive, inclusive messages sends a clear signal that such behaviour is not tolerated and that everyone's dignity is valued.

Furthermore, educational campaigns and public discussions can help raise awareness about the harmful effects of hate speech and empower people to respond safely and effectively when they encounter it. By fostering dialogue, schools, youth groups, and neighbourhood associations can build resilience against hate and strengthen community ties. Encouraging bystanders to report hate speech and supporting those affected demonstrates collective responsibility and care for the well-being of all members of society.

Ultimately, protecting public spaces from hate speech is not only about removing harmful words or symbols—it is about defending the core values of respect, equality, and open dialogue. When communities unite to confront hate and promote understanding, they help ensure that public spaces remain welcoming and safe for everyone, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Why walls matter?

When discussing public spaces, it is essential to recognize that walls located throughout the city play a significant role in shaping the character of these shared environments. Walls are not simply physical barriers; they act as highly visible surfaces that thousands of people may pass by every day, whether they are walking to work, using public transport, or enjoying leisure activities. Because these walls are seen by so many people, they can become powerful platforms for expressing ideas, values, and messages to the wider community.

In many cities, walls have historically served as canvases for artists, activists, and everyday citizens. Murals, advertisements, and public notices are common sights, but unfortunately, walls are also sometimes used to display graffiti, symbols, or words that promote hatred and discrimination. These types of messages go far beyond mere decoration or artistic expression—they can send signals that certain groups are not welcome, or that someone is claiming ownership over a particular area. In this way, walls can become tools for making hypothetical territorial claims, especially when the images or words used promote exclusion rather than inclusion.

One of the main risks associated with hate speech on walls is the possibility of normalizing discriminatory attitudes. When hateful symbols, slogans, or images remain on display for a long time, people—especially young individuals who are still developing their beliefs—can start to see these harmful messages as part of everyday life. The effect is even stronger than hate speech found online because the visual impact is more direct and persistent. Online hate speech can often be removed quickly, but graffiti or vandalism on public walls may remain visible for weeks, months, or even years before it is addressed. This constant exposure can make it more difficult for people to recognize when discrimination is taking place, leading to a gradual acceptance of harmful behaviours or ideas. Beyond the immediate impact on those who are targeted by hateful messages, the presence of hate speech on public

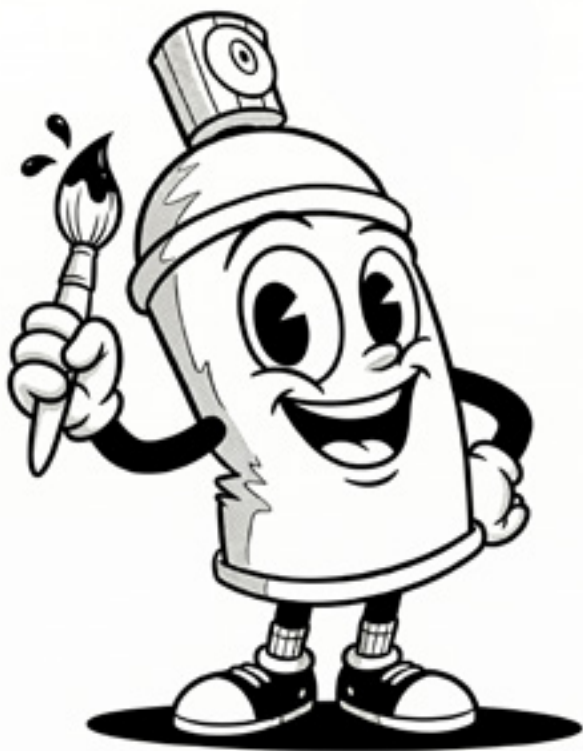
walls affects everyone who comes into contact with these spaces. It creates an atmosphere of fear, division, and discomfort that undermines the purpose of public spaces, which should be safe and welcoming for all.

People who witness these messages may feel uneasy, discouraged from participating in community activities, or may even choose to avoid certain routes or places altogether. Over time, this can reduce social interaction and weaken the sense of community that public spaces are meant to foster.

The danger is not only in the content of the messages displayed but in the lasting impression they leave on the minds of passersby. Hateful graffiti or symbols can act as a bridge to more serious forms of violence, encouraging others to act on prejudices or discriminatory beliefs. If these messages are not quickly removed or challenged, they may embolden individuals or groups who wish to spread further hate or intimidation. This is why prompt and decisive responses are necessary to prevent the normalization of hate speech and the escalation of its consequences.

The responsibility to address hate speech on public walls does not fall to one group alone. It is important for local authorities, community organizations, and ordinary citizens to work together in maintaining the integrity of public spaces. Removing hate-filled graffiti, stickers, or posters and replacing them with positive, inclusive messages sends a strong signal that such behaviour is not tolerated. This not only restores the physical environment but also communicates the community's commitment to respect, inclusion, and the dignity of every person.

Cases where communities react to hate speech can be found all over Europe and not only. Such is the case in Swindon, where communities reacted by not accepting hate graffiti's in their community. Ms Begum, who is also a councillor, said the graffiti "is a way to put fear in people" and seeing it means "you don't know what kind of hate



lurks around the corner". "I feel like it's my duty to remove any kind of hatred designed to divide us," she said. A British Muslim, Ms Begum, said people challenged her British heritage at a recent anti-asylum protest in the town, where she was part of a counter-protest. She said: "This is the only home I know, and I'm going to do everything I can to protect it and the people in it." (Morgan, 2025)



Figure 2 - Taken from the BBC Article which shows Rhys Williams, an activist for Swindon Stand Up to Racism who organised the clean-up⁶

In addition, educational campaigns and public discussions play a vital role in helping people understand the harmful effects of hate speech and empowering them to respond effectively. Schools, youth groups, and neighbourhood associations can organize workshops or meetings where participants discuss the importance of tolerance, equality, and respectful communication. By fostering open dialogue, communities can build greater resilience against hate and strengthen the bonds between their members.

Reporting incidents of hate speech and supporting those who are affected are further key actions that individuals can take. When bystanders speak up or notify authorities, it demonstrates collective responsibility and care for the well-being of all members of society. Encouraging people to be vigilant and proactive in responding to hate speech helps ensure that public spaces remain welcoming and inclusive.

Such is the case of Irmela Schramm, 70, spray-paints hearts over neo-Nazi and racist graffiti in Berlin. Schramm, who describes herself as "polit-putze" or a "political cleaner," has been doing this for 30 years. She estimates that she has removed or painted over more than 130,000 signs and stickers – and she has the receipts to back up the claim. (Wanshel, 2016).



Figure 3 - Taken from HuffPost News - Irmela Mensah-Schramm paints over Nazi symbol on a recycling bin in Berlin's Lichtenberg. John Macdougall via Getty Images

Ultimately, protecting public walls from hate speech is not only about removing harmful words or symbols—it is about defending the core values of respect, equality, and open dialogue. By coming together to confront hate and promote understanding, communities can create public spaces that are safe and welcoming for everyone. This effort is necessary to preserve the social fabric and maintain public areas as places where all individuals, regardless of their background or beliefs, can participate and feel respected.

In conclusion, walls in public spaces have a profound influence on the atmosphere and spirit of a city. Their misuse to promote hatred must be met with strong, unified responses that prioritize the values of diversity and mutual respect. Every person has a role to play in challenging hate speech, supporting victims, and contributing to the ongoing effort to build peaceful and inclusive communities.

It is very important to emphasize that responding to hate speech plays a vital role in reducing its negative effects. When people or groups actively stand up against hateful words or actions, they send a strong message that such behaviour will not be accepted or allowed in the community. This kind of response protects those who are targeted and shows support for fairness, inclusion, and respect for all individuals. By refusing to ignore hate speech, the community demonstrates its dedication to creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming atmosphere for everyone, no matter their background or beliefs.

The power of visual interruption

Visual interruption is one of the fastest and accessible forms of counter-speech available to communities. Rather than waiting for official processes or institutional responses which can be delayed depending on bureaucracy, visual interruption empowers individuals and groups to directly challenge and counteract hate speech by transforming the public space it occupies. When a hateful symbol or slogan is covered, altered, or reframed through art, the message changes – not only for the original target, but for every person who passes by. This section explores what visual interruption means, why it works, and how it can be deployed responsibly as a tool for social change. This being said, it does not mean that we advise to not go through the proper channels when you see hate symbols, language, or messages in public spaces. Relevant authorities must always be informed and the necessary steps must be followed otherwise you might risk getting fined or even face serious charges. During this section we will explore what visual interruption means, why it works, and how it can be used responsibly as a tool for social change.

WHAT IS VISUAL INTERRUPTION?

In regards to having an official definition for the term visual interruption, according to our research, there was not a specific definition per se. In terms of how we perceive visual interruption and use it, we will refer to it, as deliberate use of images, murals, stickers, paint, or other visual means or creative art which aims at disrupting, neutralize, or counter hate speech displayed in public spaces. Unlike verbal counter-speech – debates, statements, or social media responses – visual interruption acts directly on the physical environment. It removes or transforms the hateful message at its source, in the exact place where it was meant to cause harm.

This approach takes many forms. It may be as simple as painting over a racist slogan with a solid colour, or as elaborate as commissioning a large-scale mural that transforms an entire wall into a statement of inclusion and community



pride. Sticker campaigns, wheatpaste posters, and artistic overlays are all examples of visual interruption in practice. Furthermore the message is common logic which states that the original hateful content is denied its platform and something new, visually pleasing has taken its place.

WHY IS VISUAL INTERRUPTION AN EFFECTIVE METHOD?

The effectiveness of visual interruption is rooted in the psychology of public space and the way hateful messages function. Hate speech in physical environments is particularly damaging precisely because it is persistent and unavoidable – unlike online content, which can be hidden or reported, a symbol painted on a wall confronts people every day until it is physically addressed. Visual interruption directly responds to this persistence.

Why visual interruption is effective:

- **Visibility:** A transformed wall is seen by hundreds or thousands of people who pass everyday which makes the counter-speech (counternarrative) very public. It gives the counter-speech even more visibility especially if passersby are aware that it covered hate speech and/or hate symbols.
- **Community in action:** It allows communities to organize and do public reaction and the act of painting over a hateful message together builds bonds and signals collective commitment to inclusion.
- **Normalizing prevention:** When hate speech and/or hate symbols is quickly covered or countered, it signals to the community – and to people drawing hate messages and/or hate symbols – that such content will not be tolerated or ignored.

FORMS OF VISUAL INTERRUPTION

Community mural projects are among the most powerful forms of visual interruption. By replacing

a hate-filled surface with art that celebrates diversity, local culture, or universal values, these projects do more than erase harm – they create something meaningful in its place. Murals invite people to pause, reflect, and feel pride in their shared space. They send a message that the community is not defined by the voices of hate, but by the creativity and resilience of its people.

Smaller-scale interventions – such as covering individual slurs with painted hearts, flowers, or positive words – can be equally effective. These acts, sometimes called “overpainting” or “jamming,” require minimal resources and can be carried out by individuals. Irmela Mensah-Schramm, a German activist who has been overpainting neo-Nazi and racist graffiti in Berlin for over 30 years, is a prominent example. By replacing hate with simple, human gestures – a painted heart, a word of welcome – she has transformed over 130,000 hateful messages across the city.⁷

Sticker and poster campaigns offer another accessible entry point. Grassroots organizations often produce counter-stickers designed to be placed over hateful material or displayed in public spaces as statements of solidarity. These campaigns can spread quickly and generate wider public awareness, connecting local action to broader social movements.

PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE ACTION

While visual interruption is a powerful tool, it should be carried out with awareness of both legal and ethical considerations. Where possible, individuals and groups should seek permission from property owners or coordinate with local authorities. Acting transparently – and documenting actions – can strengthen the legitimacy of the intervention and make it easier to organize follow-up efforts. Collaboration with local organizations, schools, or youth groups also multiplies the reach and impact of any visual counter-action.

It is also important to approach visual interruption as part of a broader strategy rather than a standalone solution. Removing or transforming a hateful image does not automatically address the attitudes behind it. Visual counter-action is most effective when combined with education, community dialogue, and ongoing support for those who were targeted. The goal is not only to change the wall, but to shift the culture – to make clear that this community stands for the dignity and safety of every person within it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Visual interruption is not only about erasing hate – it is about affirming belonging. When communities act together to transform spaces that have been marked by hatred into spaces of dignity and welcome, they demonstrate that public space belongs to everyone. Every covered slur and every painted mural is a declaration: this community refuses to be defined by division.



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Who, What, Where and How

A Short History of Activism

Activism has never been only about protests or public speeches. It has always been about communication and the search for ways to express ideas, challenge injustice, and reach people in meaningful ways. Long before the internet and social media, people were finding creative methods to make their voices heard. Art has played a central role in this process because it has the power to speak directly to emotions, often more effectively than words alone.

A powerful image or a simple message placed in the right space can stay in someone's mind for a long time. It can inspire questions, start conversations, and sometimes even push people to take action. Because of this, creativity became one of the most important tools for activists across different periods of history. As technology and society evolved, so did the ways in which people expressed their ideas. However, the purpose remained the same: to make people aware, to challenge what is accepted, and to imagine something better. This chapter shows how different generations used the tools available to create change, from printed materials to street art and digital platforms.

through pamphlets. These were small printed texts that could be produced relatively cheaply and distributed in public spaces such as streets, markets or gatherings. Because they were accessible, pamphlets allowed individuals and smaller groups to express opinions that were not always supported by those in power.



Figure 5 - Frontispiece, An Admonition to the People of England (London, 1589); Pamphlet Great Fire in Boston! and the Ruins. Over 30 Illustrations . November 1872



Figure 4 - © John Englart via Wikimedia & Creative Commons

FROM PAMPHLETS TO POSTERS

In earlier centuries, when communication channels were limited and often controlled, one of the main ways people shared ideas was

Pamphlets played an important role during major historical events like revolutions and political reforms. They helped spread new ideas, question authority, and connect people who shared similar beliefs. In many ways, they created an early form of public dialogue outside official systems. However, they required time and attention to read, which limited how quickly messages could reach wider audiences.

As societies became more urban and fast paced, the need for quicker and more visible communication grew. With improvements in printing technology, pamphlets gradually evolved into posters. Unlike pamphlets, posters did not require people to stop and read long texts. They combined short messages with strong visuals, making them easy to understand at a glance. By the twentieth century, posters had become one of the most effective tools for activism. Cities

turned into communication spaces, where walls and public areas were used to share messages with large numbers of people. A well placed poster could reach hundreds or thousands of viewers in a single day, making it a powerful way to raise awareness and mobilize action.



Figure 6 - 1943 Rosie the Riveter - We Can Do It! - Poster created by J. Howard Miller for the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company.

What made posters so impactful was their simplicity. A bold image and a clear slogan could communicate a message instantly and leave a lasting impression. Activists began to understand that design itself plays a key role in communication. The way something looks can be just as important as what it says. Posters were used across many movements, addressing issues such as workers' rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and public health. As their use expanded, artists and activists started working together, forming collectives that produced posters collaboratively. These groups

often operated independently, which allowed them to experiment with styles and express ideas freely.



Figure 7 - "The Pregnant Man" - Ogilvy Group Advertising

Over time, posters became more than just tools for sharing information. They became symbols of resistance and collective identity. Even today, the influence of posters is still present. Their visual language continues in street art, digital campaigns, and social media. The shift from pamphlets to posters shows how activism adapted to reach people more effectively, while keeping the same goal of raising awareness and inspiring change.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT VISUALS

During the mid twentieth century, the Civil Rights Movement showed how powerful visual

communication can be in shaping public opinion. This movement, focused on ending racial segregation and discrimination, relied not only on organized protests and speeches but also on strong and memorable imagery that made injustice visible to a wider audience.



Figure 8 - Free Wally Nelson - Circa 1965: Americans demand racial equality on a civil rights demonstration.

Photographs played a crucial role in this process. Images of peaceful protesters facing violence were widely shared through newspapers and television, allowing people who were not directly involved to see the reality of the situation. These visuals created strong emotional reactions and made it difficult for society to ignore what was happening. They helped shift perspectives and brought international attention to the movement.

At the same time, simple visual messages became a key part of protests. Signs carried by demonstrators often used short and direct statements that expressed dignity, identity, and resistance. Alongside these, walls and public spaces also began to be used more actively. Early forms of spray painted messages and hand painted slogans appeared in some cities, allowing activists to communicate directly in urban environments without relying on organized events.

Artists and designers contributed by creating posters and visual materials that supported the movement, but these were often complemented

by more spontaneous methods such as writing messages on walls or creating quick visual symbols in public space. These early forms of street expression were not as developed as modern graffiti, but they showed the same idea, which is that public space can be used to share messages freely and visibly.

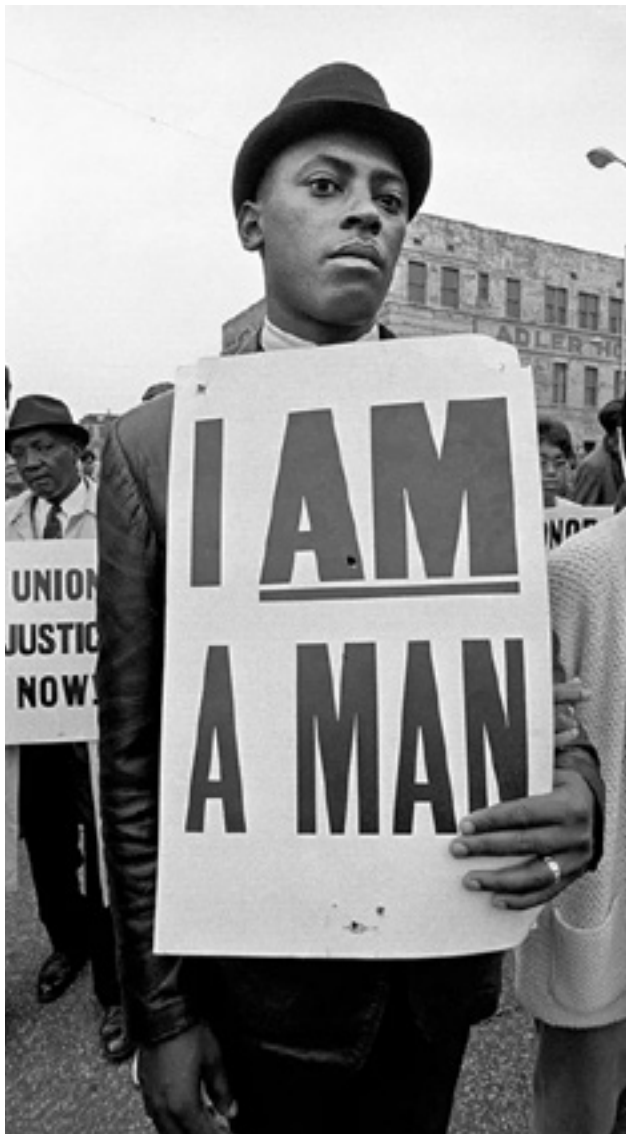


Figure 9 - © Bob Adelman Estate. Mourner with sign at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial service, Memphis, Tennessee, 1968.

The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated that visual expression is not just decoration, but a central part of activism. It showed how different forms, from photography and posters to early

street markings, can work together to influence how people think, feel, and respond to social issues.



Figure 10 - March for Freedom Now! Republican National Convention, Chicago IL. July 1960

PUNK AND DIY RESISTANCE

In the late twentieth century, a new form of activism emerged from youth culture, especially through the rise of punk. This movement developed in response to social and economic frustrations, particularly among young people who felt disconnected from political systems and mainstream culture. One of the core ideas of punk was that anyone could create and express themselves without needing permission or professional skills. This approach became known as do it yourself, and it changed how people engaged with activism and creativity. Instead of relying on established media, individuals began producing their own content using simple and accessible tools.



Figure 11 - A collection of zines and publications from 1980s

Zines (small, self-made publications) became an important part of this culture, allowing people to share ideas in a direct and personal way. Posters and flyers were widely used, but they were often not carefully designed in a traditional sense. Instead, they were raw, expressive, and fast to produce. This same mindset extended into public space, where spray paint, markers, and stencils began to be used more frequently.

Stencils became especially popular because they allowed people to repeat the same message quickly in different locations. A single design could appear across an entire city, creating a strong visual presence. Spray graffiti and tagging also became part of this expression, turning streets into open platforms for communication. This visual style was intentionally imperfect. It rejected traditional ideas of design and focused on authenticity and energy. The combination of posters, stencils, graffiti, and DIY prints created a new kind of visual language that was immediate and accessible.

Punk made activism more open and participatory. It showed that creativity does not require perfect tools or formal training. What matters is the

willingness to express ideas and take space, both physically and socially.

ANTI WAR GRAFFITI

Graffiti has long been connected with rebellion, but it has also played an important role in activism, especially during times of conflict. When people do not have access to traditional media or feel that their voices are not being heard, they often turn to public space as a way to express themselves.



Figure 12 - Graffiti Sign Stop War - Peter Stainer

During periods of war, graffiti became a powerful tool for communicating messages of resistance and peace. Spray painted slogans, quick tags, and simple drawings appeared on walls, bridges, and buildings. These messages were often short and direct, but their placement made them highly visible and impactful. Stencils became an important technique in this context. They allowed activists to create clear and recognizable images quickly, even in situations where time and safety were limited. A stencil could be reused multiple times, spreading the same message across different locations and making it more noticeable.

Graffiti also has the advantage of immediacy. It can be created quickly and often anonymously, which allows individuals to express ideas freely, even in restrictive environments. Because it exists in public space, it becomes part of everyday life,

reaching people who might not actively look for this type of content.



Figure 13 - Vietnamese (1975). Bryant and 24th Street

Over time, graffiti developed into more complex forms such as murals and detailed street art. These works often combine artistic expression with political messages, transforming urban spaces into places of reflection and dialogue. Anti war graffiti shows that activism does not always need organized platforms. A spray can, a stencil, or even a simple message on a wall can communicate powerful ideas and influence how people see the world around them.

DIGITAL ACTIVISM VS PHYSICAL ACTIVISM

In today's world, activism exists both online and in physical space. Digital platforms have made it easier to share ideas, raise awareness, and connect with people globally. Social media allows messages to spread quickly, often reaching large audiences within a short time. Digital activism has opened new possibilities for participation. People can create content, share visuals, and support causes without being physically present. This has made activism more accessible and has given a voice to individuals who might not be represented in traditional media. However, physical activism continues to play a strong role. Street art, graffiti, stencils, posters, etc. create a visible presence in real environments. When people encounter these messages in their daily surroundings, the

experience is more direct and harder to ignore. A stencil on a wall or a graffiti piece can interrupt routine and create a moment of reflection in a way that scrolling online often cannot.



Figure 14 - Graffiti activism symbol

Physical methods also carry a different kind of energy. The act of creating something in public space can itself be a statement. It shows commitment and presence, and it transforms ordinary places into spaces of expression. The most effective activism today often combines both approaches. Digital tools help spread messages and connect communities, while physical expression through posters, graffiti, and stencils creates lasting visual impact. Together, they allow ideas to move between online and offline spaces, reaching people in different ways. This combination shows that while tools continue to evolve, the core of activism remains the same. It is about expression, visibility, and the effort to create change through communication.



Figure 15 - L'arte della ribellione 2020 - Banksy

A Short History of Graffiti

Graffiti is one of the oldest and most continuous forms of human public communication. From markings on cave walls to resistance slogans during Nazi occupation, from painted subway cars of New York to the murals of Belfast, wall writing has served consistently as a medium for identity, protest, solidarity, and dissent. These five key moments in graffiti's history, document how each era defined and expanded writing on a wall



Figure 16 - Graffiti on Trains in New York City

ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS

The practice of marking public surfaces is as old as literacy itself. Archaeological evidence from across the ancient world – Egypt, Greece, and Rome – demonstrates that ordinary people used walls, columns, pottery, and building facades to communicate informally, express opinions, document events, and signal presence. People drew or wrote messages on walls. These messages could be prayers, jokes, political opinions, or just everyday notes. So, from the very start, graffiti was a way for people to talk to each other and share ideas in public. Such is the example below, which is unearthing different graffiti from Pompeii.

The Ancient Graffiti Project, a peer-reviewed digital humanities resource developed by Washington & Lee University and Baylor University, has catalogued and digitized the handwritten inscriptions found in Pompeii and Herculaneum – cities preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. The Project defines ancient

graffiti as “inscriptions incised or scratched into wall-plaster,” constituting “a special branch of epigraphy” distinct from official stone inscriptions in that they are the result of spontaneous, act by ordinary people. Over 11,000 examples of graffiti have been recovered from Pompeii alone. (The Ancient Graffiti Project, 2014)



Figure 17 - Courtesy of the MIC - Archaeological Park of Pompeii, (Sarah Hucal, 2026)

POLITICAL WALL WRITING (WWII SLOGANS)

During the Second World War, wall writing emerged as a critical tool of both totalitarian propaganda and democratic resistance. In Nazi-occupied Europe, walls became contested political terrain – a battlefield between occupying forces seeking to assert dominance and civilian resistance movements asserting survival, identity, and defiance.



Figure 18 - Graffiti declaring “Germany is lost”. Photograph submitted to Yad Vashem archives by Alexander Bernfas. Photo taken by the article “Expressions of Polish identity in resistance to Nazi occupation”



Research drawing on Yad Vashem photographic archives documents extensive resistance graffiti in occupied Poland. Slogans such as "Germany is lost" (Deutschland ist verloren) were written in German specifically to intimidate the occupying force, while others – such as the Kotwica (anchor) symbol of the Polish Underground State – served as rallying markers for organized resistance. According to this academic analysis, "much of the battle for power and control was fought on city walls. Graffiti like this was everywhere, and served either as a reminder of German oppression or hope in the resistance, and neither message served the Nazis well."⁸

1960S–70S NEW YORK SUBWAY MOVEMENT



Figure 19 - Taki 183 - Graffiti writer

In the 1960s and 1970s, modern graffiti started showing up in big cities like New York. Young people, especially those not given a fair chance by society, used graffiti to express themselves and stand out. They wrote their nicknames ("tags") on trains and buildings, making sure their voices were seen, even if they weren't always heard.

1967 / Philadelphia / Early tags by Cornbread mark the birth of Graffiti. After first putting up his name everywhere in a youth detention center, Cornbread continues writing once he returns to the Philadelphia streets. To impress his love interest, he writes his name everywhere along her bus route. He then continues these endeavours on other big bus lines as well. This makes him the

first writer to achieve all-city fame, sparking the idea of 'writing your name everywhere to make it big'. (Blocal & Pope, n.d.)



Figure 20 - Cornbread - Graffiti writer

At first, people saw graffiti as just vandalism, but for many, it was a way to show their identity and rebel against unfair rules.

Graffiti styles got more creative over time. Artists started making bigger and more colourful works, like murals and street art, often with messages about politics, society, or culture. This made graffiti not just about personal expression, but also about sharing ideas and opinions with others. People began to use graffiti to protest things they didn't agree with, like war or racism.



Figure 21 - Freedom Graffiti on New York Train

Eventually, graffiti moved from being just a "subculture" to being a real way to make change. It became a tool for activism, helping people stand up for what they believe in. Now, graffiti is used in official campaigns, school projects, and public art.

Cities even invite artists to paint murals to make neighbourhoods look better or to spread positive messages. But there's still debate about what counts as legal or illegal graffiti, and some people worry it's being taken over by big organisations.

They have now become a well-respected art form through 'street art' – with the New York subway movement representing the generative rupture between these two cultural positions.

Key Takeaway

The New York movement was inseparable from the social conditions of its production: the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, the collapse of public services, unemployment, racial segregation, and the political abandonment of inner-city communities. The subway cars covered in color and elaborate lettering were simultaneously an aesthetic achievement and a political protest against invisibility. The movement established the core technical and cultural vocabulary of modern graffiti – tags, throw-ups, pieces, wildstyle, crews, the concept of "bombing" – which would be exported globally within a decade.

EUROPEAN POLITICAL GRAFFITI

The May 1968 uprising of students and workers in France - a moment that transformed the walls of Paris into what people called "the newspaper streets" - produced a dense examples of wall slogans that have become recognized texts of political opinion. Julien Besançon's contemporary collection *Les murs ont la parole* ("The Walls Have the Floor"), published in July 1968 - while the paint was still fresh - is the primary academic source for May '68 graffiti. It was republished by MIT Press in 2018 as *The Walls Have the Floor*, described by the press as capturing "the defining spontaneity of the events" in a way "no conventional history can." Slogans painted across Paris - "Be realistic, demand the impossible"; "It is forbidden to forbid"; "Under the cobblestones, the beach" - reflected the influence of Situationist theory, Surrealism, and anarchist thought, and were understood as a collectively authored political philosophy written directly onto the urban fabric. (Besançon, 1968)



Figure 22 - Rue de Vaugirard, Paris, France, 1968. Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos. Taken from *The Walls Have the Floor - Mural Journal*, May '68

Exactly this was one of the very beginning of graffiti being used to sent a political message in Europe. Furthermore the city of Stornara, Italy is a perfect example how graffiti is being used for different forms of Activism. According to SWNS, tourist-based revenue has increased 25% since 2020, allowing eight new businesses - including

three bed and breakfasts, two restaurants, and an art supplies shop.

"Suddenly, there were loads of people turning up with cameras and guidebooks. I had to quickly learn to say 'welcome' in five different languages," explained cafe owner Antonio Maglione in an interview with SWNS. "The murals saved my business, but more than that, they saved our community." (Cubbin, 2025)⁹



Figure 23 - Dimitry Vruble mural "My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love" first painted in 1990 on Berlin Wall and restored in 2009 is based on the iconic photograph by Régis Bossu of the Fraternal Kiss in 1979 between Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev and East German Leader Erich Honecker

Key Takeaway

European political graffiti has thus developed two intertwined strands: a tradition of radical political sloganeering rooted in 1968 and anti-authoritarian movements; and a post-1980 aesthetic tradition influenced by New York hip-hop culture, which itself carried political content as an expression of marginalized urban youth.



VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN WARTIME

Visual communication during periods of conflict often takes on roles beyond commercial or aesthetic purposes. Posters, graffiti, postcards, and other printed materials become tools for expressing political opinions, documenting reality, and communicating with both local and international audiences. In such contexts, design operates as a form of visual testimony, capable of reflecting the atmosphere, emotions, and social conditions of a particular historical moment.

One of the most important examples of this approach emerged during the Siege of Sarajevo through the work of the Sarajevo design studio TRIO, founded by Dalida Hadžihalilović, Bojan Hadžihalilović, and Lejla Mulabegović Hatt. Already recognized within the Yugoslav design scene before the war, TRIO became internationally known for its series Greetings from Sarajevo 1993, which used graphic design as a form of communication with the outside world.



Figure 24 - Greetings from Sarajevo 1993 by Trio

The series consisted of posters and postcards that reinterpreted globally recognizable advertisements, film imagery, and popular culture references through the lens of Sarajevo's wartime reality. Works combined irony, appropriation, and strong visual symbolism to create politically engaged messages that were simultaneously critical, emotional, and visually memorable.

POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES WALL MESSAGING

In societies coming from violent conflict, graffiti and murals serve different roles, which differ from peacetime political expression. They usually mark a memory of violence, assert group identity and territorial belonging, communicate with communities that distrust or lack access to institutional channels.



Figure 25 - Mural of George Floyd. From the Article "Why have murals been used in social and political movements?"¹⁰

In these contexts, wall messaging becomes a visual means of narrating collective trauma and sustaining the memory of significant events, both tragic and transformative. Murals and graffiti may memorialise victims, commemorate pivotal dates, or reference key figures from the conflict, ensuring that the stories and sacrifices of the past remain visible in public consciousness.



Figure 26 - Two women in national colors of Ukraine and Russia hugging with the word Mir/Peace, Rome, Italy

Furthermore, the very act of painting on contested or symbolically charged walls can serve as a declaration of presence and resilience by communities trying to reclaim space or negotiate their place in a divided society.

In post-conflict situations, these visual statements also become tools for dialogue and, at times, reconciliation. International and local artists may collaborate on new murals to promote themes of unity, peace, and coexistence, attempting to foster new narratives and reimagine shared futures. However, the tension between competing memories and the ongoing negotiation of identity means that graffiti and murals remain contested, capable of inflaming old divisions as much as promoting healing.



Figure 27 - The Coexist symbol created by Polish, Warsaw-based graphic designer Piotr Młodożeniec

Ultimately, wall messaging in post-conflict societies is not merely decorative or artistic—it is an essential part of the social and political landscape, shaping how communities remember, communicate, and imagine their future together.

What is Graffiti?

The word graffiti derives from the Italian word *graffiare*¹¹ – to scratch – itself rooted in the Greek *graphein* (to write, draw, or scratch). In its broadest academic sense, graffiti refers to all informal inscriptions made on surfaces within a public or semi-public context, without official sanction, and typically by hand. This is the definition used in epigraphy – the academic discipline that studies inscriptions – where graffiti are classified as a subset of informal epigraphic practice, distinct from official commissioned inscriptions by their spontaneity, informality, and often anonymous authorship. (Chloé Ragazzoli, 2018)¹²

We will analyse graffiti in 2 types of definitions:

- Epigraphic definition - Graffiti as any informal handwritten inscription on a surface, including ancient and pre-modern examples. This is the definition used in archaeology, epigraphy, and historical studies.
- Contemporary Urban Definition - Graffiti as the spray-paint and marker-based writing tradition that emerged in New York and Philadelphia in the late 1960s, associated with hip-hop culture, tagging, and the development of “wildstyle” lettering.

Key Takeaway

For this guide we will refer to graffiti as visual marking applied to publicly accessible surface, ranging from simple name tags to elaborate pictorial works, and functioning simultaneously as personal expression, subcultural practice, territorial claim, and political communication.

DIFFERENCES: GRAFFITI/ STREET ART/ MURAL/ PASTE – UP/ STICKER

As difficult as it was to define graffiti, the same way goes for street art, mural, paste – up and sticker as the terms differ in relation to the context that they are being used. The differences are separated in 4 forms: key features, primary intent, legal status, medium/tool.

GRAFFITI

Graffiti is a form of urban visual expression based on tags, throw-ups, wild style lettering, and bombing, often centered around individual or crew identity and subcultural codes. Its main purpose is peer recognition, territorial marking, and asserting presence in public space, functioning as a form of guerrilla street branding. Usually created quickly with spray paint and markers, graffiti is most often unauthorized and exists in a space between tolerated art and criminalized vandalism.



Figure 28 - Cope2 graffiti piece on a subway train

STREET ART

Street art is a public form of visual expression that uses stencils, paste-ups, installations, and painted imagery to engage a wide audience. Unlike graffiti's subcultural focus, it often addresses social issues and aims to transform public space. It exists between illegality and institutional acceptance, sometimes tolerated or commissioned.



Figure 29 - Stencil street art by Banksy



MURAL

Murals are large-scale figurative or decorative paintings, site-specific and visually integrated with architecture and public space. Their purpose is commemoration, beautification, cultural representation, and community expression. Unlike graffiti and much street art, murals are usually commissioned, legally authorized, and created over a longer production process using acrylic paints, rollers, brushes, scaffolding, or lifts.



Figure 30 - MenaceResa's 'Rise Above' Richmond Virginia

PASTE-UP (WHEATPASTE)

Paste-ups, or wheatpaste art, are paper-based posters attached to public surfaces using a flour-water adhesive. Often used for political activism and rapid communication, they allow artists to quickly distribute large-format visuals in urban space. Usually considered a form of street art, paste-ups are typically unauthorized and easily deployed.



Figure 31 - Wheatpaste illustration by Swoon

STICKER

Stickers are small adhesive labels that can be pre-printed or hand-drawn, making them portable, reproducible, and easy to distribute in public space. Often used for name propagation, political messaging, and activist communication, they function as a fast and accessible form of street intervention. Usually unauthorized but low-risk, they are commonly applied by hand on urban surfaces.



Figure 32 - Stickers by The Velvet Bandit

GRAFFITI AS SUBCULTURE VS ACTIVISM

Graffiti has changed a lot over time. In Europe, many young people use graffiti for activism – to share their ideas and try to make a difference. That's why there is always a debate about whether graffiti is just a cool subculture, or if it is something more powerful, like a tool for activism.

When we talk about graffiti as a subculture, we mean a special group of people who have their own rules, style, and ways of doing things. They often use graffiti to show their identity, make friends, and build a strong community. This kind of graffiti is usually more about personal expression and making connections with others who feel the same way. The political impact of subcultural graffiti is slow and happens over time – it helps people feel stronger and more united.

Activist graffiti, on the other hand, is used to send clear messages to the public. People use it to protest, to stand up for their rights, or to raise

awareness about something important. Activist graffiti can be powerful because the message is direct – it tries to make people think or take action right away. For example, graffiti can be used to fight against unfair rules, support equality, or make sure everyone's voice is heard. Both subcultural and activist graffiti can help bring about social change. The best choice depends on where you are, who you want to reach, and what you hope to achieve.

So, whether you use graffiti to connect with others or to speak up for change, remember: it's a tool that belongs to everyone, especially young people.



Figure 33 - Mural of Change Graffiti¹⁴

Why Graffiti?

Graffiti stands out as one of the most effective tools for conveying messages in contemporary society. Its widespread appeal lies in key characteristics: accessibility, speed, emotional immediacy, and the ability to disrupt the visual landscape.



Figure 34 - Taken from Stramurales Festival in Stornara

Unlike traditional forms of communication, graffiti reaches people directly in public spaces, making it both inclusive and impactful. Whether used as a form of personal expression or as an instrument of activism, graffiti's immediacy and visibility enable individuals—especially young people—to share their ideas, provoke thought, and inspire change. As a medium that bypasses barriers of expertise and language, graffiti empowers anyone with a message to make their voice heard, offering a unique blend of creativity and urgency that resonates within communities and across cultures.

ACCESSIBILITY

Graffiti is one of the most accessible forms of self-expression and activism out there, which is why it's so popular with young people everywhere. You don't need fancy equipment, expensive materials, or special skills to start—just a marker, spray can, or a sticker, and you're ready to make your mark. Graffiti can be done almost anywhere, from walls and trains to stickers on street signs

or posters on lamp posts. This means anyone can join in, no matter where they're from or what language they speak, making it a truly welcoming way to share ideas and feelings.



Figure 35 - Taken from Stramurales Festival in Stornara

Graffiti also disrupts the usual look of a place, grabbing attention and making people think. It's not hidden behind screens or locked away in museums—it's out in the open, available for anyone to see. This ability to reach people directly, without barriers, makes graffiti a powerful tool for spreading messages, starting conversations, and inspiring change. For young people and non-native speakers alike, it's a way to belong, be creative, and stand up for what they believe in.

SPEED

What makes graffiti stand out is its speed and flexibility. You can create something quickly, and it doesn't have to be perfect. Sometimes, a simple tag or message can have a big impact, especially when it's seen by lots of people in



public places. Because you don't need to be an expert or speak a certain language, graffiti is open to everyone. It's a way for people to get creative, connect with others, and even challenge unfair rules or express what matters most to them. Whether you're drawing, writing, or sticking up labels, your voice can be heard instantly. This immediacy allows ideas to spread rapidly, making graffiti an ideal tool for spontaneous activism or community engagement. Its adaptability means it can pop up anywhere—from city walls to train carriages—ensuring messages reach a diverse audience without delay. Moreover, when it comes to the speed of graffiti, we mean that it can be a beautiful piece of art, but it can also be something as simple as a tag or a message.

Graffiti can be applied in hours or even minutes, making it one of the fastest available responses to hate speech in physical space. Unlike institutional counter-speech mechanisms — reports to authorities, removal requests, legal proceedings — visual intervention can occur the same day hate speech appears.

EMOTIONAL IMMEDIACY



Figure 36 - Taken from Stramurales Festival in Stornara

Graffiti has a special way of making you feel things straight away. When you see a bright, bold piece on a wall, it grabs your attention and you can sense the emotions behind it—even if the words or pictures are simple. For young people, this is really powerful because you don't need

big art skills or perfect language skill to say how you feel. Maybe you're angry about something, or you want to spread hope, or show love to your friends—graffiti lets you share those feelings in public where everyone can see. It's quick and honest, and sometimes that raw emotion is what makes people stop, look, and really think about what's going on. Because graffiti is out in the open, your message can touch someone's heart or make them smile as they walk by. When you paint what matters to you, others might feel the same, and together you can start conversations or make a change. That's why graffiti is not just art, but a way to connect with others, showing your feelings loud and clear in the city for all to see.

VISUAL INTERRUPTION



Figure 37 - Taken from Stramurales Festival in Stornara

When we talk about visual interruption, graffiti is all about shaking things up and making people notice. Imagine walking down a street that looks the same every day—grey walls, boring signs, nothing special. Suddenly, you see bright colours, wild shapes, or bold letters painted on a wall. It grabs your eyes and stops you for a second. That's what graffiti does—it changes the look of a place and makes you think, "What's this?" For young people, this is exciting because you don't have to follow the usual rules. You can make your own style and say what matters to you, even if your English isn't perfect or you're new to the city. Graffiti is not hidden; it's out in the open, so everyone sees it, and it makes people

pay attention to messages that might be ignored otherwise. Sometimes, graffiti interrupts hate speech or bad vibes with something positive or funny, and that can make people feel safer and more welcome. It's a way to make your mark, start conversations, and change how people see their own neighbourhood. Visual interruption means breaking up the normal and putting your own story right in the middle of where everyone can see it, so even if you're not an expert, your art and ideas can stand out strong and proud.

Graffiti in Activism

ANTI-FASCIST WALL CULTURE

Anti-fascist (Antifa) wall culture operates on the core principle of territorial reclamation and immediate visual resistance. Historically rooted in the opposition to totalitarian regimes in mid-20th century Europe, this form of activism evolved significantly during the 1980s alongside the punk, squatter, and DIY subcultures. In these communities, street art was weaponized to ensure that fascist, neo-Nazi, or ultra-nationalist messaging was never left unchallenged in public spaces.

The fundamental tactic of anti-fascist wall culture is rapid response and denial of platform. Activists understand that if hate speech or extremist symbols are allowed to remain visible on a wall, they create an illusion of public acceptance and can embolden further extremist activity. To counter this, anti-fascist groups mobilize to quickly cover, cross out, or creatively alter these symbols.

Visually, this culture has its own distinct aesthetic. It frequently utilizes bold, high-contrast stencils, the iconic red and black flags of the "Antifaschistische Aktion," and sharp, unmistakable slogans. Beyond simply erasing hate speech, this movement actively claims urban environments as "Nazifrei" (Nazi-free) or "Antifa Areas." By saturating neighborhoods with counter-stickers, posters, and tags, activists create a psychological barrier for hate groups, sending a clear, continuous warning that their presence is monitored, heavily opposed, and entirely unwelcome. This transforms ordinary city walls into an active, dynamic frontline in the ongoing fight against right-wing extremism.

FEMINIST STENCIL MOVEMENTS

Feminist graffiti and street art constitute one of the longest-standing and most globally distributed traditions of activist visual communication, with a traceable lineage from the suffragette poster campaigns of the early

twentieth century through the feminist art movements of the 1970s and the wheat-paste campaigns of the 1980s to contemporary feminist mural activism across Europe, North Africa, and Latin America.

JSTOR Daily's academic overview of the origins of the feminist art movement traces the foundational role of collective action in the 1960s and 1970s – notably Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), which pressured institutional art spaces to include women – in creating the activist infrastructure from which feminist street art later developed. This was the organizing tradition that the Guerrilla Girls would inherit and extend into public space.¹⁵

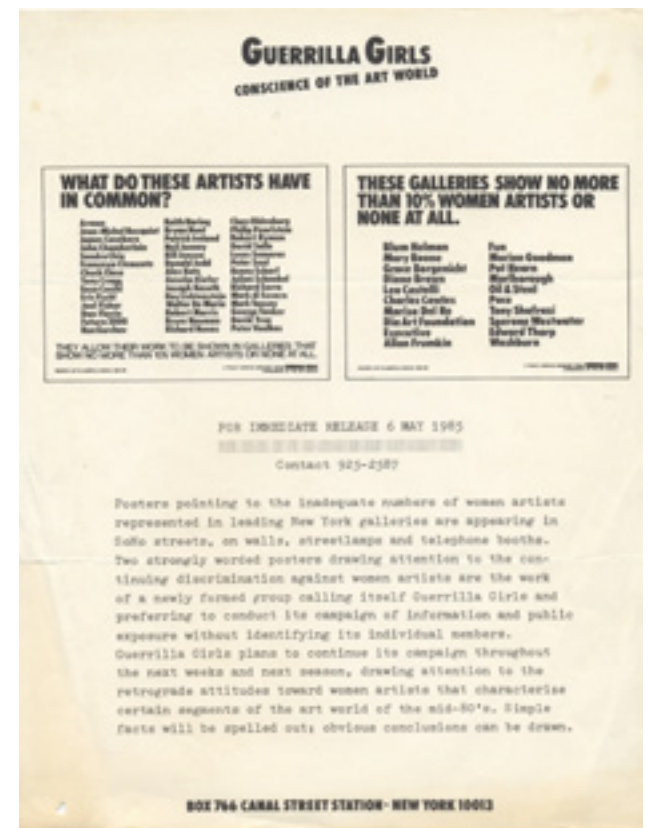
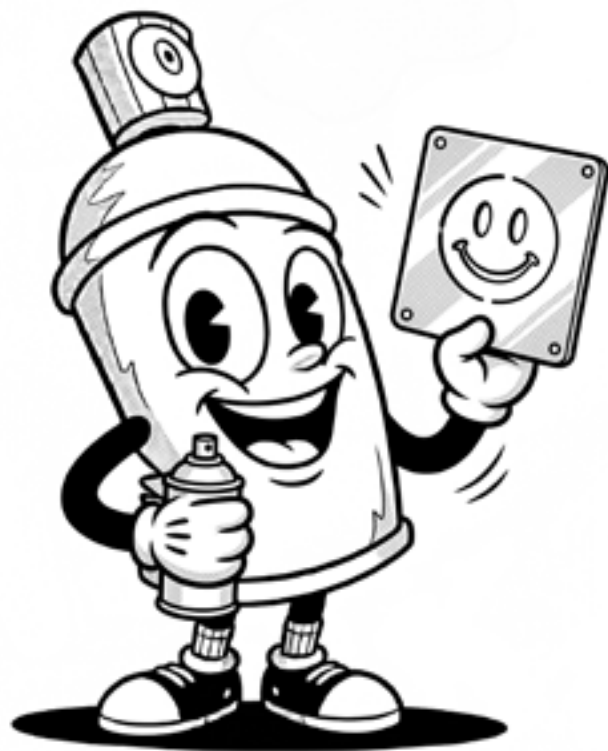


Figure 38 - Image taken from BeyondTheStreets.com blog describing the Guerrilla Girls

The Guerrilla Girls – formed in New York in 1985 – represent the most documented and institutionally recognized feminist street art collective in history. Their founding intervention was simple: wheat-pasting black-and-white



posters across the SoHo gallery district of New York, posing blunt statistical challenges to the exclusion of women from the art world.

The Guerrilla Girls's¹⁶ method was distinct from prior feminist activism: they combined the accessibility of street wheat-pasting with the visual grammar of advertising — bold statistics, sarcasm, irony, and mass legibility — to create what the museum-affiliated publication *Beyond the Streets* describes as “a provocative new type of politicized street art that had an almost immediate effect.” Members wore gorilla masks for anonymity and took the names of deceased female artists — Frida Kahlo, Käthe Kollwitz — as pseudonyms, a practice that directly echoed the anonymous tag culture of graffiti writing.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ visual activism in public space has a rich and evolving history that mirrors the broader struggle for queer liberation. While the current text briefly mentions its roots pre-dating the 1969 Stonewall Uprising, the movement's use of public art took on a crucial, life-or-death urgency during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Collectives like ACT UP utilized striking wheat-paste posters, stencils, and graffiti (most notably the “Silence=Death” campaign) not just for visibility, but as a mechanism for survival, public health education, and political outrage when official institutions turned a blind eye.

Today, while underground guerrilla tactics are still utilized, the movement has increasingly embraced large-scale visibility murals as a primary tool for claiming space. LGBTQ+ visibility murals serve a profound dual purpose: they act as bold, vibrant counter-narratives to homophobic and transphobic hate speech, while simultaneously functioning as permanent monuments of queer joy, history, and resilience. These murals often memorialize key figures from the LGBTQ+ rights movement, commemorate historical milestones, or depict diverse queer relationships in monumental scale.

By placing these towering, colorful artworks in prominent urban locations, communities transform previously hostile or indifferent public spaces into designated safe zones. However, because these murals challenge entrenched prejudices, they are frequently targeted and defaced with hate speech. In response, the act of restoring and repainting these murals has become a powerful ritual of community solidarity. In the face of discrimination, these public artworks send an unmissable message of belonging—reminding everyone that queer existence is a permanent, celebrated, and deeply rooted part of the social fabric.

COUNTER SPEECH AND COUNTERNARRATIVES INTERVENTIONS

The Council of Europe defines counternarratives as a short and direct reaction to hateful messages, different from alternative narratives, which “do not challenge or directly refer to hate speech but instead change the frame of the discussion.” (Latour, Perger, Salaj, Tocchi, & Otero, 2017). Both forms are explicitly recognized as essential tools for addressing hate speech that does not meet the threshold for legal intervention.

Graffiti-based counter-speech and counter-narrative interventions operate at the precise intersection of these two modes: they can directly challenge hateful content (by covering or altering it), or they can assert an alternative visual narrative in the same space (by replacing it with affirming, inclusive imagery). Both functions address the core challenge: that hate speech in physical public space is uniquely persistent and unavoidable compared to online hate speech, and therefore requires a physical response.

Response to hate through graffiti can come in different styles. It can be factual, meaning that it can be based on actual facts countering hate messages. Another style can be humour and satire, meaning deflating the self-seriousness of hateful messaging through mockery or absurdity.

TRANSFORMING HATE SYMBOLS

The transformation of hate symbols — converting them through artistic intervention into something positive, neutral, or humorous — is one of the most powerful and specific forms of activist graffiti. Unlike erasure or overpainting, which removes hate content, symbol transformation leaves a visible trace of the intervention itself, making the act of counter-speech publicly legible. It demonstrates that the hateful message was seen, challenged, and defeated on its own terrain.

Irmela Mensah-Schramm's decades of anti-hate graffiti work, documented by the Council of Europe as a model of community-level counter-hate activism, includes numerous examples of symbolic transformation, including painting hearts directly over neo-Nazi symbols. These interventions operate through a combination of spatial occupation and linguistic or visual wit — meeting the hateful message on its own terms and transforming it from within. The transformation of hate symbols draws on the semiotic principle that a symbol only holds power within a system of collective recognition. When a swastika is converted into a mosaic, an animal, or a flower, it is stripped of its signifying function — not by erasing it but by overwriting its meaning with something incommensurable. This is a more cognitively powerful intervention than simple erasure, because it demonstrates that the symbol's claim to public space has been not merely denied but answered

Key Takeaway

The importance when facing graffiti promoting hate, is that you react in one way or another, to show the authors of hate, that the community does not want them, does not welcome them.



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How to Draw a Graffiti Letter

UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURE

Graffiti letters, no matter how wild or abstract they appear, always rely on a basic, underlying anatomy: vertical stems, horizontal bars, bowls (round sections), and counters (enclosed spaces). Understanding this structure is crucial before you start bending and breaking the rules. If you don't understand how a standard letter is built, your graffiti will look structurally unsound and amateurish. Key points to remember:

Stems and bowls: Start building your letters with firm, straight lines for stems and add geometric shapes consistently for bowls. A strong foundation prevents the letter from looking weak or unbalanced. Think of the stems as the skeleton of the letter, providing the necessary structural support before you add the “flesh” of style, 3D effects, and flair.

Negative space: The holes inside letters (like the center of an ‘O’ or ‘A’) are called counters. Play with their size and shape—sometimes shrinking them to tiny slits makes the letter look more aggressive and stylized, while enlarging them can make the piece feel more open and bubblier. Managing negative space between letters is just as important as the letters themselves.

Flow and rhythm: Use a consistent angle, slant, or curve in all letters across a single word. If your ‘A’ leans right at 15 degrees, your ‘B’ and ‘C’ should follow the exact same rhythm to create visual harmony. This rhythm is what ties a disparate group of letters together into a cohesive “piece” (short for masterpiece).

Balance and symmetry: Even if the overall style is highly asymmetrical and wild, try to balance the visual weight. A heavy, thick element on the left side of a word usually needs a corresponding heavy element on the right side to anchor it. Imagine your word sitting on a seesaw; it shouldn't tip too far to one side.

Checklist for Beginners:

- Begin each letter with a light pencil sketch. Establish a clear baseline (bottom) and cap line (top) to keep heights uniform.
- Use light initial strokes; keep refining the shape until you are happy before committing to ink or dark markers.
- Observe existing typography, traditional fonts, or established graffiti alphabets to study how letters are naturally constructed.
- Practice letters individually, over and over, before attempting to connect them into full words or complex pieces.



Tag Style Alphabet

Tagging is the simplest, most fundamental graffiti form. It uses minimal strokes and is designed to be written extremely quickly. A tag is like a personal, stylized signature or a logo. Mastering the tag is the absolute foundation of all other graffiti styles; if your tag lacks flow, your larger pieces will too. It is the rawest expression of a writer's style and identity, often serving as the first step for anyone entering the graffiti culture.

Essential Materials:

- Chisel-Tip Marker: For sharp, calligraphic lines.
- Mop/Squeeze Marker: For thick drips and flow.
- Blackbook/Paper: For endless practice before hitting walls.

Minimal Strokes

Tags are often created with one continuous line or just a few quick, decisive strokes. Each letter should naturally flow into the next without lifting the pen too many times. Remember: fewer pen-up movements equal much faster tags, which is essential on the street. This motion not only increases speed but also contributes to the signature "flow" that defines a high-quality tag.

Speed Writing

Use a high-quality marker or a pump-action paint pen. Move your whole arm from the shoulder – not just your wrist or fingers – to achieve smooth, sweeping lines. Practice writing your tag on scrap paper at high speed repeatedly to build deep muscle memory. The goal is to be able to execute your tag perfectly in under three seconds without even looking at your hand.

Marker Control

Practice varying your pressure and angle. When using a chisel-tip marker, keep the angle locked firmly at 45 degrees. Light strokes create elegant thin lines; pressing more firmly or changing the stroke direction creates bold, thicker lines, giving the tag a calligraphy-like feel. Mastering the "flare" (a tag that starts wide and fades to a thin line, often achieved with specific spray caps) is a hallmark of advanced marker and can control.

Consistent Style

Tags often incorporate a unique script style, utilizing decorative elements like loops, halos, stars, or underlines. Keep your overall letter size, spacing, and slant highly consistent. If you start leaning your letters forward at a 30° angle, you must maintain that exact slant throughout the entire word. Consistency is what separates a professional-looking tag from a messy scribble.

Step-by-Step: Drawing a Tag

Basic Structure: Start with simple, clean print letters. Focus on spacing.

Add Flow: Slant the letters and let them lean into each other.

Bold Outline: Trace with a thick marker. Add a strong underline.

Add Flair: Add halos, stars, or drips to personalize your tag.

Common Mistake: Over-Styling Don't add too many symbols. It makes the tag unreadable and messy.

Good Practice: Clean Flow (ABC) Focus on consistent slant and spacing. Style comes with speed.

Practice Grids

Use a rule-of-thirds grid (consisting of a baseline, midline, and capline). Practice your A-Z tags repeatedly between these exact same lines to train yourself to keep letter height uniform. Trace the shapes repeatedly until the motions become completely natural and automatic. Keep your letters resting firmly on the solid baseline.



Throw-Up Alphabet

Throw-ups (commonly called “throwies”) are quick, rounded bubble letters filled with a solid color and outlined. They are significantly faster to execute than full, detailed pieces but are more complex and visually heavy than simple tags.

A good throw-up is meticulously designed for maximum visual coverage in the absolute minimum amount of time. They are the workhorses of graffiti bombing, designed to be legible from a distance and quick to paint under pressure.

Essential Materials:

- Fat Cap Spray: For fast, thick outlines and fills.
- High-Pressure Paint: Covers large areas quickly.
- Protective Mask: Essential for safety when spraying.

Bubble Construction

Letters are mostly composed of rounded, overlapping “bubble” or “pill” shapes. You should actively avoid sharp corners or complex intersections. Draw the outer outline (often a double-line for thickness) in a quick, continuous, fluid shape. For example, an “O” is a simple, fat pill; an “E” is a stacked series of bubbles. The goal is to eliminate any negative space inside the letters to speed up the fill process.

3D Depth & Drop Shadow

Many throw-ups utilize a simple 3D effect by adding a thick, solid block-shadow. Draw a second outline slightly offset (usually down and to the left, or down and to the right) to make the letters appear to pop off the wall, giving them a heavy, physical presence. This drop shadow is usually painted in the same color as the outline to save time and maintain high contrast.

Highlights & Shadows

Add crisp white highlights on the top curves of the letters to suggest a glossy, inflated, balloon-like texture. Shadows (painted black or a significantly darker color) placed behind the letter add further depth. Keep it simple and fast – usually just one

highlight line per round corner is enough. Over-detailing a throw-up defeats its primary purpose: speed.

Fill Techniques (Dusting)

Fill the interior with one solid, bright color as quickly as possible. Use a “fat cap” on your spray can to cover large surface areas rapidly. Sometimes writers use a “dusting” technique—a light, sketchy, semi-transparent fill that saves both paint and precious time while still providing color. A “hollow” is a throw-up consisting only of an outline, which is the fastest variation possible.

Step-by-Step: Drawing a Throw-Up

Bubble Outline: Draw rounded, fat letters. Keep shapes simple and overlapping.

Solid Fill: Fill the inside with a bright color. Work fast and cover all gaps.

3D Shadow: Add a thick block shadow to one side for depth and weight.

Highlights: Add small white highlights on top curves to make it pop.

Mistake: Too Much Detail (TOO BUSY)
Throw-ups should be fast. Complex patterns or too many colors slow you down.

Good Practice: Solid Coverage (B)
One solid fill and one clean outline. High contrast is key.



Wild Style Alphabet

Wildstyle is the most complex, intricate, and highly evolved form of graffiti lettering. It features heavily interlocked letters, sharp, aggressive arrows, and dynamic extensions that shoot off in multiple directions.

This style often looks completely abstract and chaotic to the untrained eye, yet it strictly follows hidden, complex rules of balance, weight distribution, and flow. Reading wildstyle is a skill in itself, often requiring the viewer to trace the path of individual letters through a dense thicket of overlapping forms and colors. It is the ultimate test of a graffiti writer's technical skill and artistic vision.

Essential Materials:

- Multiple Colors: At least 3-5 contrasting shades.
- Assorted Caps: Skinny for detail, fat for fills.
- Chalk/Light Marker: For sketching the skeleton on the wall.

Arrows and Extensions

Add sharp arrows, spikes, or blocky chips to the ends of your letter strokes (e.g., jutting aggressively off the top bar of a "T" or the tail of an "R"). These elements give the piece a dynamic, forward-moving, aggressive feel. Crucially, they shouldn't be placed randomly; they must flow logically from the natural stems and curves of the core letters to maintain structural integrity. Think of extensions as the kinetic energy of the letter bursting outward.

Interlocking Letters

Let parts of one letter physically overlap, weave through, or directly connect to another. For example, the extended tail of an "R" might thread under the vertical stem of the next letter, or an "O" might be squeezed between two taller letters. This creates massive visual unity, but you must keep slight separations (using outlines or drop shadows) so each individual letter can still be decoded by those who know how to read it. This weaving technique is what gives wildstyle its dense, impenetrable look.

Controlled Chaos & Balance

Wildstyle looks entirely random to outsiders, but it is meticulously and carefully designed. You must balance the visual weight across the entire piece: if the left side has a heavy, complex extension, the right side needs a similarly weighted element to anchor it. Maintain some negative whitespace between the dense clusters of letters to prevent the whole piece from becoming a solid, muddy, unreadable block of color. The interplay between dense clusters and open space is key to a successful wildstyle piece.

Legibility vs Abstraction

Decide your ultimate goal before sketching. Fully unreadable, highly abstract tags can be incredible artistic statements (often called "burners" when painted with complex colors), but a truly masterful wildstyle balances extreme flair with subtle hints of each letter's true shape. Even leaving just a few recognizable core components (like the distinct curve of an "S" or the crossbar of an "A") helps viewers decode the puzzle. The tension between legibility and pure aesthetic abstraction is the defining characteristic of wildstyle.

Step-by-Step: Drawing Wildstyle

Skeleton: Sketch the basic letter structure with thin, light lines.

Add Volume: Turn lines into thick bars. Overlap letters for unity.

Extensions: Add arrows, spikes, and sharp extensions to the ends.

Final Polish: Add complex fills, 3D effects, and a sharp outer outline.



How to Create and Use Stencils

Stencils are a powerful tool for rapid, repeatable, and detailed street art, allowing complex designs to be applied in seconds. Popularized by artists like Blek le Rat and Banksy, they are especially effective for political activism because they enable the mass reproduction of striking images across urban spaces.

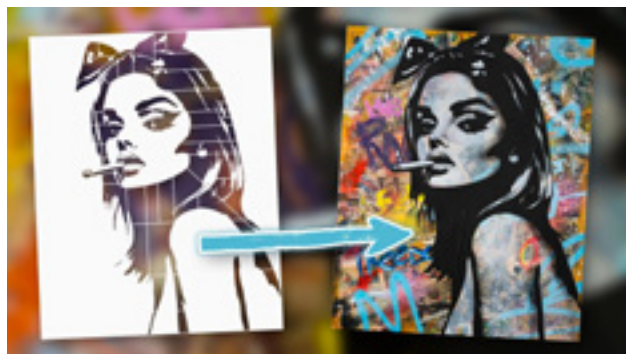


Figure 42 - Example of a Stencils artwork

Essential Materials:

- Precision Knife: X-Acto or scalpel for clean cuts.
- Cardstock/Acetate: Durable stencil material.
- Spray Adhesive: To prevent paint bleed.

THE CONCEPT OF BRIDGES

The single most critical part of stencil design is understanding the relationship between “islands” and “bridges”. An island is a solid area completely surrounded by cut-out space (like the floating center of an ‘O’ or the pupil of an eye). Without a physical bridge of material connecting that island to the main body of the stencil, the island will simply fall out when you cut it, ruining the image.

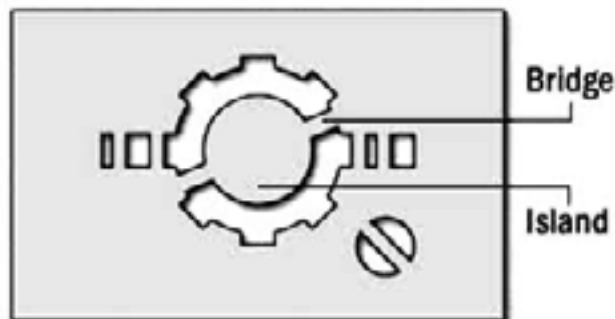


Figure 43 - Bridge and Island - Stencil Principle

MULTI-LAYER STENCILS

For full-color or highly shaded images, you need to cut a separate stencil layer for each individual color (e.g., one for black shadows, one for mid-tones, one for white highlights). You must include registration marks (small, identical cut-outs outside the main design area, usually crosses or circles) on every single layer to ensure they align perfectly when painting them sequentially on the wall.

DESIGNING A STENCIL

Positive/negative space: Your design must ultimately work in pure black-and-white (cut vs. un-cut). Use image editing software like Photoshop (specifically the Threshold adjustment tool) to convert complex photographs into stark, high-contrast, cuttable shapes.

Islands and bridges: Always meticulously double-check your final design for floating islands before you begin cutting. A missed island means a ruined stencil.

Typography choices: If using text, opt for block or military-style stencil fonts (like ‘Stencil’, ‘Army’, or ‘Impact’) that naturally contain built-in bridges, saving you the effort of adding them manually.

MATERIALS AND CUTTING

Stencil sheets: Choose durable materials like Acetate, Mylar, old X-ray film, or thick cardstock. Cardstock is cheap and easy to cut but degrades faster when wet with spray paint.

Cutting tools: Use a precision scalpel or sharp X-acto knife. Change blades frequently, as dull blades tear the material and create fuzzy edges.

Cutting surface: Always use a self-healing cutting mat to protect the table, preserve blade sharpness, and ensure precise cuts.

Technique: When cutting complex curves,

rotate the stencil material itself with your non-dominant hand, rather than trying to twist the knife awkwardly. This results in much smoother, cleaner lines.

SPRAY TECHNIQUES

Pro Tip: Preventing Underspray (Bleed)

The biggest enemy of a crisp, professional-looking stencil is paint bleeding underneath the edges. To prevent this, use a temporary spray adhesive (like 3M Super 77) lightly applied to the back of the stencil to stick it completely flat to the wall. Alternatively, wear a protective glove and press the stencil firmly flat with your free hand.

Step-by-Step: Making a Stencil

Design & Bridges: Draw your image. Add “bridges” to hold “islands” in place.

Precise Cutting: Use a sharp knife. Cut on a mat and rotate the paper, not the knife

Test Fit: Check if all parts are connected. Apply spray adhesive to the back.

Spray & Peel: Spray light, even coats from 20cm away. Peel while paint is wet.

Distance: Hold the spray can about 15–20 cm from the stencil. Too close causes drips; too far creates blurry edges.

Angle: Spray straight on at a 90-degree angle to avoid underspray.

Pressure control: Apply light, quick coats instead of one heavy, wet layer.

Removal: Peel the stencil away before the paint fully dries to prevent tearing.

Wheat-Paste (Paste-Up) Technique

Wheat-pasting involves attaching large paper posters, photographs, or drawings to public walls using a homemade adhesive. Favored by street artists for its speed, it allows detailed large-scale artworks to be prepared safely in a studio before installation. Unlike spray paint, wheat-pasting is quieter, faster, and supports digital prints, photography, and delicate illustrations that are difficult to create directly on rough walls. It also naturally degrades over time, giving it an ephemeral quality.



Figure 44 - Example of Wheat-Paste (Paste-Up) Technique

Essential Materials:

- Wheat Flour: For the base.
- Thin Paper: Newsprint is best.
- Large Brush: For applying paste.
- Bucket: To carry the paste.

1. Mix Paste: Cook a simple mixture of flour and water into a thick, sticky glue.
2. Prep Art: Draw or print your design on thin paper. Carefully cut out the final shape.
3. Apply: Slather paste on the wall, apply the paper, then paste heavily over the paper.

Pro Tip: The "Sandwich"

The secret to a paste-up that stays for years is the double-layer technique. Never just glue the back of the paper.

1. Paste the wall first (Base layer)
2. Apply the poster (Middle layer)
3. Paste over the poster (Seal layer)

Step-by-Step: The Sandwich Method

Prep Wall: Brush off dust and dirt. Porous surfaces like brick work best.

Base Coat: Apply a thick, even layer of paste slightly larger than your poster.

Smooth Out: Press poster from center outwards to remove all air bubbles.

Seal Edges: Saturate the entire front and edges with a final layer of paste.

The classic Wheat Paste Recipe

Ingredients:

1 part flour (standard white wheat flour)

4 parts water

Optional: 1 tbsp sugar (stickiness)

Optional: Splash of wood glue (durability)

Method:

Boil 3 parts of the water in a pot.

Mix flour with 1 part water until smooth.

Whisk and pour mix into boiling water,

Simmer for 5-10 min until thick like batter.

Let cool completely before use.

Storage Tips

If you make more wheat paste than you need for a single session, you can store the leftovers to avoid waste.

Container: Pour the remaining paste into airtight container or a bucket with a tightly sealed lid.

Refrigeration: Store the container in the refrigerator. It will typically last for 2 to 4 days.

Reusing: Stir the chilled paste well. If it becomes too thick, add a little warm water until smooth again.

Warning: If the paste starts to smell very sour, ferments, or develops visible mold, throw it away and cook a fresh batch.

Wallpaper Glue Alternative

While traditional flour paste is cheap and accessible, many artists prefer commercial wallpaper adhesive for paste-ups.

Pros: Stronger, more weather-resistant, quick to mix, and often mold-resistant.

Cons: More expensive and less environmentally friendly due to synthetic chemicals.

How to mix: Whisk the powder into cold water until smooth and gel-like, then let it rest before use.

How to Paste (Application Technique)

Expanding on the "Sandwich Method," effective street application requires speed and proper technique.

Preparation: Pre-fold or roll posters for quick transport and application.

Surface Choice: Smooth surfaces provide better adhesion, while rough walls require a thicker base layer of paste.

The Application: Apply a generous layer of paste to the wall using a wide brush or roller.

Placement: Unroll the poster from the top down and smooth it outward to remove air bubbles and wrinkles.

Sealing: Immediately apply a generous top coat of paste over the entire front of the poster. Pay special attention to the edges—make sure they are completely saturated and sealed to the wall to prevent the wind from catching them or people from peeling them off.

DOs and DON'Ts

Creative Canvas and street art interventions offer powerful ways to engage young people, raise awareness, and challenge hate in public spaces. However, working in open and shared environments also comes with responsibilities. Unlike activities that take place in controlled settings, street-based actions directly interact with communities, urban space, and existing cultural and social dynamics. Because of this, it is essential to approach such interventions with careful consideration of legal boundaries, ethical implications, and the unwritten rules of street art culture.

This chapter provides guidance on how to design and implement interventions in a responsible and respectful way. It outlines key legal aspects that should be taken into account, highlights ethical principles that ensure actions contribute positively to communities, and introduces the basic street code that governs interactions within the urban art environment. By following these DOs and DON'Ts, practitioners can maximize the impact of their work while minimizing risks, misunderstandings, and unintended negative consequences.



Legal Awareness

Understanding the legal context is a fundamental step before implementing any Creative Canvas or street art intervention. One of the key distinctions to be aware of is the difference between public and private space. Even when a location appears to be publicly accessible, it may still be privately owned or regulated, which means that creating artwork without permission can lead to legal consequences. For this reason, it is always important to identify ownership and, when necessary, obtain consent from relevant authorities or property owners.

Another important aspect is the difference between temporary and permanent interventions. Temporary actions such as chalk drawings, removable posters, or paste-ups are generally less invasive and often more acceptable, as they do not cause lasting changes to the surface. In contrast, permanent interventions, including spray painting or installations that alter physical structures, usually require formal approval and carry higher legal risks. Choosing the appropriate method can significantly reduce potential issues while still ensuring visibility and impact.

IMPORTANT

It is essential to be familiar with local regulations. Laws related to street art vary across countries and cities, and what is tolerated in one place may be strictly prohibited in another. Taking time to understand these rules, or consulting local partners and organizations, helps ensure that activities are carried out responsibly and within the legal framework.

Ethical Framework

Beyond legal considerations, ethical responsibility is crucial in shaping meaningful and respectful interventions. Creative Canvas activities should never endanger communities, either physically or emotionally. This includes carefully selecting locations, avoiding disruption of daily life, and ensuring that the presence of the artwork does not create discomfort or fear among local residents. It is equally important to ensure that interventions do not escalate violence or tension. Messages should promote dialogue, inclusion, and critical thinking, rather than provoke confrontation or deepen divisions. Even when addressing sensitive topics such as hate speech or discrimination, the tone and presentation should remain constructive and responsible.

Particular attention should be given to the use of symbols and imagery. Reproducing hate symbols, even with the intention of criticizing them, can be misunderstood if not properly contextualized. Without clear explanation, such visuals may unintentionally reinforce the very messages they are meant to challenge. Therefore, careful design and messaging are essential.

Respect for memorial spaces is another key principle. Locations such as monuments, commemorative sites, cemeteries, and places of worship carry deep emotional and cultural significance. Interventions in these areas should be avoided unless there is explicit permission and strong community support, as inappropriate use can be perceived as disrespectful regardless of intent.

Street Code

Street art is guided not only by formal rules but also by an informal culture of respect known as the street code. One of its core principles is to not paint over memorial murals, as these works often carry important social or historical meaning and are valued by the community. Respecting other artists' work is important. Covering existing pieces is generally discouraged, as it can be seen as disrespectful within the urban art community. An exception may be made when the intention is to remove or replace hate speech or harmful content, but even in such cases, the action should be thoughtful and aligned with positive values.

Another important rule is to avoid tagging over community projects. Murals or artworks created through community engagement processes represent collective effort and identity, and interfering with them can damage relationships and trust within the community.

Protecting anonymity is an important consideration, especially in contexts where street art may be sensitive or misunderstood. Participants, particularly young people, should be aware of potential risks and supported in making informed decisions about their visibility. Ensuring their safety and comfort should always remain a priority.



ARTIN-OPITZ-STRAßE 21,
10177 BERLIN

MOS





A Good Way to Do It: Case Studies

Street art has long functioned as a form of public intervention. Its role in challenging power structures is well documented, yet its impact depends on intention, context, and method. In some cases, it becomes decoration or is absorbed into mainstream culture without retaining its critical force. In other cases, it shifts perception, interrupts harmful narratives, and creates visible counter-speech. This chapter examines examples where street-based artistic interventions contributed to challenging hate speech and exclusion in public space.

The following case studies are presented as applied models. Each one focuses on a specific technique and a defined context. They span different regions and political environments, yet share a common structure. An identifiable form of hate speech or exclusion is present. An artist or group intervenes using a technique suited to the environment. The result produces a visible reaction, either in the form of public debate, replication, or resistance. These cases are not presented as isolated artistic achievements, but as practical approaches that inform campaign design.

Case Study 1: Stencils: Banksy and his interventions on the West Bank Wall

A Banksy trompe-l'oeil painting on a security fence in the West Bank. Courtesy Banksy (2005) Banksy is a British street artist active since the late 1990s. His work appears in urban environments across different countries and addresses themes such as conflict, inequality, and control. The use of anonymity removes personal identity from the work and shifts attention to the message and location. His practice has been documented by institutions such as the Tate and widely covered by media including the BBC. The West Bank barrier became a focal point for international debate in the early 2000s. Reports from the United Nations and Amnesty International describe its impact on mobility, access to services, and daily life for Palestinian communities. In this context, the wall functions as both a physical barrier and a symbol of restriction.



Figure 45 - Banksy - West Bank Wall Mural

The Hate Speech / Symbol

In 2003, Banksy turned his attention to the Israeli West Bank barrier (see "A Banksy trompe-l'oeil painting on a security fence in the West Bank.

Courtesy Banksy (2005)"), a concrete wall stretching hundreds of kilometers that has been condemned by the United Nations and human rights organizations as a tool of separation and collective punishment. For millions of Palestinians, the wall is not infrastructure: it is a daily, physical symbol of occupation and the denial of freedom of movement. The wall itself operates as a structural form of exclusion. It communicates division and control through its scale, visibility, and permanence. While not textual hate speech, it produces a continuous message about who belongs and who is restricted. Its presence reinforces a narrative of separation embedded in everyday experience.



Figure 46 - Banksy - The Walled Off Hotel - West Bank

The Intervention

Banksy introduced alternative imagery directly onto the surface of the wall. The images depicted openings, landscapes, and figures moving beyond the barrier. These visual elements created a contrast between the physical reality of the wall and imagined possibilities of movement and freedom. Among the most iconic images: a young girl lifted into the sky by a cluster of balloons, floating over the top of the wall; a painted hole in the concrete revealing an idyllic beach on the other side; a ladder propped against the wall, reaching beyond it. The intervention did not attempt to remove or conceal the structure. It altered how it was read and photographed.

In 2017, he went further and opened the Walled

Case Study 2: Stickers: Sticker Campaigns Against Far-Right Messaging in Germany

Off Hotel in Bethlehem - a building he described as having “the worst view in the world” where guests slept facing the barrier, surrounded by his work and that of Palestinian artists.

Technique Used

Pre-cut stencils applied with spray paint, using cardboard or acetate sheets. Banksy's technique prioritizes speed: a stencil can be applied in minutes, which is critical when working in politically or legally sensitive environments. Multi-layer stencils create depth and detail without slowing down the process significantly. The technique balances speed, clarity, and repeatability.

Public Reaction

The works gained international visibility and became widely circulated through media and tourism. They contributed to global awareness of the site. At the same time, some local responses raised concerns about representation and authorship. Questions emerged about the role of an external artist working within a context of lived conflict.

Lessons Learned

Speed and simplicity are strategic assets: a stencil can transform a surface in minutes, making it one of the most practical tools for high-risk or politically charged environments. Visual metaphor of hope, escape, absurdity communicates across language barriers more effectively than text alone. And perhaps most importantly: always listen to the community whose experience you are representing. Art made about someone, without their meaningful involvement, risks becoming a projection rather than an act of solidarity. Interventions in politically sensitive contexts require engagement with affected communities. Visibility increases attention, but legitimacy depends on context awareness.

In Germany, the persistence of far-right imagery in public space (on lampposts, bus stops, electricity boxes, and public walls) has been a documented challenge since at least the 1990s. In many cities, particularly in the former East Germany, stickers promoting white supremacist groups, neo-Nazi symbols, and anti-immigrant slogans appeared regularly, designed to make extremist ideology feel visible, normalized, and unchallenged.



Figure 47 - Asylflut Stoppen Sticker, Germany

Civil society groups, youth organizations, and informal collectives developed a practical, low-cost response: systematic counter-sticker campaigns.

Organizations such as the Amadeu Antonio Foundation supported local groups in developing and distributing counter-speech stickers as part of broader community awareness initiatives.

The Hate Speech / Symbol

Far-right stickers often include anti-immigrant, antisemitic, and anti-LGBTQ+ messages. Their design frequently mimics official communication styles, using simple layouts and neutral color schemes. This visual strategy increases perceived legitimacy and reduces immediate resistance from passersby.

The Intervention

Youth groups and activists responded by covering, replacing, and transforming these stickers. Some

used pre-printed counter-stickers with messages such as “Kein Platz für Nazis” (No room for Nazis) or “Refugees Welcome.” Others took a more creative approach - drawing on the hate stickers, adding speech bubbles that subverted the original message, or layering their own designs directly over the content. The act of covering was public, visible, and repeatable: wherever a hate sticker appeared, a counter-sticker could follow. In some neighborhoods, this became a sustained, organized effort coordinated through local youth centers and NGOs.



Figure 48 - Anti Fascist Stickers, Germany

Technique Used

Standard printed stickers, available from organizations or printable at home; weatherproof vinyl for durability; and in some cases hand-drawn stickers on waterproof paper. Stickers are among the most accessible tools in street activism: they require minimal resources, can be carried in a pocket, and applied in seconds. The method allows decentralized participation, with individuals and groups contributing independently.

Public Reaction

In many neighborhoods, the campaign generated strong community solidarity, with local residents and shopkeepers joining in and distributing stickers. It also attracted criticism from some who

Case Study 3: Wheat-Paste: Shepard Fairey and “We the People” poster series

argued that covering stickers simply provoked escalation. In practice, many activists found that consistent, visible counter-action rather than ignoring the hate content, sent a clearer message to both perpetrators and the broader community: this space is contested, and hate does not go unanswered.

Lessons Learned

Stickers are one of the most democratic tools in street activism: they require minimal resources, can be produced and distributed by anyone, and allow rapid response to hate speech as it appears. A single counter-sticker achieves little, but a coordinated network of people applying them regularly can visibly transform a neighborhood's public landscape. Sticker campaigns work best when embedded in a broader community effort, not as isolated gestures, but as part of a sustained, collective presence. Repetition is necessary to counter persistent messaging. Coordination improves impact across larger areas. Visible response signals that public space is contested and actively shaped.

Shepard Fairey is an American graphic designer and street artist who began his public art practice in 1989 with the “OBEY Giant” campaign - a sticker and paste-up series built around the image of professional wrestler André the Giant, designed as an experiment in how images acquire authority simply through repetition and public presence. Over the following decades, Fairey evolved into one of the most politically engaged wheat-paste artists working today. He is perhaps best known internationally for the “HOPE” poster created in support of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, but his broader body of work consistently addresses propaganda, state violence, immigration, and the visual mechanics of power. The “We the People” series was released in 2017 in response to political discourse in the United States during the administration of Donald Trump. Public narratives at the time included strong anti-immigration rhetoric and exclusionary framing of minority groups.



Figure 49 - Obey - Andre the Giant Poster

The Hate Speech / Symbol

The “We the People” series was a direct response to the anti-immigration rhetoric and policies that targeted Muslim immigrants, refugees, and communities of color with explicit dehumanizing language. The hate speech being addressed here was not graffiti on a wall, but official political messaging that had entered mainstream public discourse and legitimized discrimination. The campaign addressed narratives that portrayed

certain groups as threats or outsiders. These messages were present in official communication, media discourse, and public debate. Unlike graffiti, this form of messaging carried institutional authority.



Figure 50 - We the People Posters

The Intervention

Fairey created a series of large-format portraits depicting women of color, immigrants, and Muslim Americans rendered in the monumental, dignified visual language typically reserved for national heroes or propaganda figures. Each portrait used a visual style associated with authority and national identity, and it was paired with a short statement affirming belonging and rights. Critically, Fairey made all the images freely downloadable as high-resolution files, allowing anyone to print and paste them independently. Within days of release, they had been downloaded over one million times and appeared on walls in cities across the United States and internationally. Individuals and organizations printed and distributed them. The intervention moved from a single production point to a distributed network of reproduction.

Technique Used

Wheat-paste applied to large-format printed paper posters. The paste (a mixture of flour and water, cooked to a thick consistency) is applied to the wall surface, the poster is laid over it, and

Case Study 4: Graffiti: Cibo and Counter-Speech Through Food Imagery

a top coat of paste seals and protects the paper. Large-format prints can cover significant wall space quickly, and when properly pasted, are highly durable.

Public Reaction

The series became one of the most widely distributed poster campaigns in recent history, appearing at protests, in windows of homes and businesses, and on walls across dozens of countries. It demonstrated how a street art aesthetic, combined with an open-source distribution model, can scale a campaign far beyond the original artist's hands turning a single creative act into a tool owned collectively by a movement. The images spread quickly across cities in the United States and internationally. The campaign reached both physical and digital audiences. Its open distribution model allowed wide participation.

Lessons Learned

Wheat-paste posters are highly visible, relatively durable, and can cover large surfaces quickly. The most transferable lesson from Fairey's practice, however, is the open-source model: by releasing images freely, the original artist relinquishes control but multiplies impact. For campaigns against hate speech, this means: create the visual, release it, and trust the community to take it further. The technique also demonstrates how inverting the visual language of oppression, using monumental portraiture to depict those who are being dehumanized, can be a powerful act of counter-speech.

Cibo is a graffiti artist based in Verona who began his work around 2015. His practice developed in response to the visible presence of neo-fascist and extremist graffiti in Italian cities. Unlike contexts shaped by post-conflict divisions, this environment is characterized by the persistence of far-right symbols and slogans in everyday urban space. Cibo's work has been documented in Italian and international media, including coverage by BBC and The Guardian.



Figure 51 - Cibo food graffiti intervention over hate speech

The Hate Speech / Symbol

The graffiti targeted includes swastikas, fascist symbols, and racist or xenophobic slogans. These markings appear on walls, public buildings, and infrastructure. Their repetition contributes to the normalization of extremist presence in public space.

The Intervention

Cibo responds by transforming hate symbols into images of food. Instead of removing or covering graffiti with neutral paint, he integrates the original form into a new drawing. Swastikas become pizzas, vegetables, or other recognizable dishes. The intervention does not erase the original mark

completely, but alters its meaning and visual impact. This approach replaces aggression with irony and familiarity.

Technique Used

Freehand spray paint and mural techniques are used to reinterpret existing graffiti. The process requires slightly more time than simple covering, but allows for creative transformation. The recognizable and consistent style of food imagery creates a clear visual identity.

Public Reaction

Cibo's work has received broad public support and strong media attention. The images are widely shared on social media, extending their reach beyond the original location. The transformation of hate symbols into harmless and familiar objects reduces their visual power and changes how they are perceived by passersby.

Lessons Learned

Transforming hate symbols can be more effective than removing them. Visual irony disrupts the intended message. A consistent and recognizable style strengthens impact over time. Using familiar imagery increases accessibility and public engagement.



Figure 52 - Cibo food graffiti intervention over hate speech

Case Study 5: Murals: Tatyana Fazlalizadeh and “Stop Telling Women to Smile” instalation

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh is an American artist and activist who in 2012 began a public art project that would eventually span cities across the United States, Europe, Africa, and beyond. Working with wheat-paste portraits and hand-painted murals, she created large-scale images of women accompanied by direct, first-person statements addressing street harassment. The project, titled “Stop Telling Women to Smile,” emerged from her own experiences of gender-based harassment in public space and grew into one of the most sustained and widely replicated examples of feminist public art activism in recent decades. Reports from UN Women document the widespread nature of street harassment and its impact on access to public space.



Figure 53 - Stop Telling Women to Smile - Instalation

The Hate Speech / Symbol

Street harassment - catcalling, unwanted comments on women's appearance and behavior, threats and intimidation in public space - is a pervasive form of gender-based violence that is routinely minimized, normalized, or reframed as complimentary. The harmful symbol here is not a single image or slogan, but a pattern of behavior woven into the everyday experience of women and girls in public space, one that

sends a clear message: your body is available for public comment; this space is not fully yours. Fazlalizadeh's project named this pattern directly, in the street where it happens.

The Intervention

Fazlalizadeh created large-format portraits of real women (often women she knew personally or who volunteered for the project) looking directly at the viewer with calm authority. Beside each portrait, she placed a statement written in the first person: “My outfit is not an invitation,” “Women do not owe you their time or conversation,” “Stop telling women to smile.” The murals were placed specifically in the streets and neighborhoods where harassment most commonly occurred - the work addressed its audience where the behavior happened. Over time, the project became explicitly participatory: women in other cities contacted Fazlalizadeh to be included, and local artists were invited to create their own versions following the same format. “Stop Telling Women to Smile” has now appeared in over 30 cities worldwide, including Istanbul, Johannesburg, and cities across Europe and Latin America.

Technique Used

A combination of large-format wheat-paste posters for outdoor installation and hand-painted murals for more permanent works. The portraits are hand-drawn by Fazlalizadeh and printed at large scale, or painted directly onto walls. The visual language is deliberately simple and dignified: monochromatic portraits, direct eye contact, clear typography, an aesthetic that conveys authority and presence without requiring elaborate production.

Public Reaction

The project received extensive media coverage and broad public support - and, predictably, was also met with harassment, including the defacing and destruction of murals. This response became part of the work's meaning: the act of vandalizing

images of women asserting their boundaries demonstrated, in real time, precisely the culture the project was challenging. Fazlalizadeh documented these reactions, continued the project, and spoke publicly about them. “Stop Telling Women to Smile” has been discussed in academic research, cited in policy contexts, and adopted as a model by feminist activists and educators worldwide.

Lessons Learned

Murals offer scale and permanence that other street art forms cannot: they transform entire walls and remain visible over time, becoming part of the visual fabric of a neighborhood. Centering real people's voices and faces rather than abstract symbols creates a powerful human connection with passersby, making the message personal and immediate rather than generic. The participatory model, in which other communities create their own version of the same project, allows a campaign to grow far beyond the original artist while maintaining visual coherence and message clarity. And when a piece of counter-speech art is attacked or defaced, that reaction can itself become a form of evidence, a demonstration, made in public, of the problem the work was created to address.



Figure 54 - Women Are Not Seeking Your Validation

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