

Writings on the Wall

Zesta. Jhb 2014 Photo: Cale Waddacor

Once thought of as an art crime, graffiti has been used as a means of communication and self-expression for centuries, the use of graffiti dates back to the Egyptian and Roman empires. As time went on it was an art that was mostly used as a means to challenge, show defiance and influence thinking of society. For many years graffiti had a negative shadow over it, with its growth this shadow shifted.

Nowadays, as one strolls around Cape Town you'll be able to see that it has become one of the most popular art forms to decorate the inner city. If you think graffiti is just art, think again... there is so much more to it. It's unifying; it brings people from all walks of life together. Graffiti can have a very positive impact on society, it informs and challenges popular belief, and introduces new ideas to society. The most common form of graffiti that we all know of is the kind that uses lots of colour and spray cans.

Where and how did it become so popular?

16

jitz magazine january 2015

It started in the 1960s with Taki 183 and a black marker, in downtown Philadelphia, in the United States of America. At that time Taki was a messenger who used to scribble his name on the train station walls and train carriages during his deliveries.

Bold colour, wide lines and eccentric patterns accompanied with a little name scribbled in the corner is what most graffiti looks like. Found around most of the inner city and some suburbs this urban art lends a lot of character to the vibe and energy that makes Cape Town.

Without realising it, he had started a trend, and gained fame in the process, by becoming the mystery man. Soon he had a following and many youngsters were imi-

tating him, and tagging carriages of trains all over the inner city. It became a competition and thrill for them; and gave rise to a whole new underground scene. This is how it stayed for many years, anonymous artists and expressive pieces.

As the years rolled by, the art form started developing into something that was bigger and bolder breaking the silence on issues affecting society. There's something unique about the one from the other, there are many things such as style, skill, detail and creativity that make each piece unique. Those who are familiar with this scene, will be able to tell you that no single piece is similar or expresses the same idea. Most artists are self-taught and have been able to make a career out of graffiti, at one stage there was not an inch of positivity surrounding it but these few have been lifted the negative side of this art.

Documenting and keeping record of South African produced graffiti has been challenging but over the years thanks to technology, it's become easier.



Boa Mistura cpt 2011 Photo: Jenny Hallward



Woodstock 2013 photo Cale Waddacor

Cale Waddacor a loyalist to street art has great passion for documenting all there is on South African graffiti. This photographer, artist and musician started a website in 2011 to preserve works and develop the movement further. Cale has also published a book of the history of graffiti in South Africa. It's good to know that there is somewhere that we will be able to keep the great works that have been created over the years.

I walk around Cape Town and stand in awe of what South African artists have produced. Some exceptional pieces have been created, they speak to our democracy, our history and the social issues that confront us each day. Some really exceptional artists have come out of our streets making waves within and outside our borders, to mention a few Faith47, Mak1One and Falko One.

To catch the latest on the graf scene, visit www.graffitisouthafrica.com