

**Education Kit**

**Years 7-12**

# The Writing's on the Wall - A Short History of Street Art

The word *graffiti* comes from the Italian language and means to *inscribe*.

In European art graffiti dates back at least 17,000 years to wall paintings such as are found in the caves of Lascaux in Southern France.

The paintings at Lascaux depict animals from the Paleolithic period that were of cultural importance to the people of that region. They are also believed to be spiritual in nature relating to visions experienced during ritualistic trance-dancing.

Australian indigenous rock art dates back even further to about 65,000 years and like the paintings at Lascaux, Australian indigenous rock art is spiritual in nature and relates to ceremonies and the Dreaming.

The history of contemporary graffiti/street art dates back about 40 years to the 1960s but it also depicts images of cultural importance to people of a particular region, the inner city, and their rituals and lifestyles.

The 1960s were a time of enormous social unrest with authority challenged at every opportunity. It is no wonder graffiti, with its strong social and political agendas, hit the streets, walls, pavements, overpasses and subways of the world with such passion.

The city of New York in the 1970s was awash with graffiti. It seemed to cover every surface. When travelling the subway it was often impossible to see out of the carriage for the graffiti.



Lascaux, Southern France wall painting



Ancient Kimberley rock art



Graffiti on New York City train

# The Writing's on the Wall - A Short History of Street Art

In 1980 an important event happened. A young 21 year old Keith Haring drew his first *Radiant Baby* in white chalk onto the unused advertising panels in New York subway stations.

Four years later in 1984 Keith Haring came to Australia and produced two temporary wall-works one at the water wall at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and the other at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney.

Like many contemporary street artists Haring worked without preparatory drawings. He drew directly onto the surface working his way up and down and along the wall.

Other artists famous from this time who used street art and graffiti in their art were Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf.



The legacy of artists like Haring, Basquiat and Scharf can be clearly seen in *MAYS: the May Lane Street Art Project*. It is apparent from this exhibition that the artists who have created works at Mays also have their own special vision that still makes the street art movement exciting and relevant.

Street art has many influences including graffiti, surrealism, photorealism, pop art, manga comics and cartoons to name a few.

The street art movement, like most important art movements, is a global phenomena and can be found in most cities including Paris, London, New York, Mexico City, Sao Pãulo, Berlin, Melbourne and Sydney.

An important element in this exhibition is that it contains works not only by Australian artists but also major works by artists from Japan (Kenji Nakayama), Indonesia (Taring Padi Collective), USA (Chor Boogie) and Mexico (Peque).



Keith Haring *Radiant Baby*



Jean-Michel Basquiat *Tenor*



Kenny Scharf *Felix on a pedestal*

# The May Lane Street Art Project

The works in the MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project exhibition were created on removable panels fixed to the walls of a Sydney factory in May Lane, Marrickville adjacent to St Peters Railway Station and across the road from the heritage brick kiln towers in Sydney Park.

The factory is leased by Tugi Balog for his framing business Graphic Art Mount.

Balog says: *When I moved to this location, to this factory, the lane was pretty trashed and wild and I found these guys who claimed the lane as their turf, painting everywhere. I knew they could probably come up with something more interesting or better. So I started to ask neighbours to give us the walls so people can paint freely.*

And that is how the May Lane Street Art Project began in 2005. Balog allowed artists to use the walls of his factory as their canvas. The result is a remarkable collection of street art. Bit by bit over the years street art in all its forms has legally taken over most of the surfaces in May Lane.

*A formerly dark and neglected laneway had become alive with colour and people stopping to talk about the latest work appearing on the walls.* (Tugi Balog, Curator's statement, MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project catalogue 2010)

Balog is an archaeologist by training and a visionary by inclination. Without Balog's vision in 2005 to have the street art painted on removable panels this exhibition would not have occurred. While Balog no longer practices archaeology, the May Lane Street Art Project is a remarkable project in contemporary archaeology. These works are a precious record of an important period in the history of street art.

*Today we are not aware of all the street subcultures that existed in the part for the simple reason they were not documented. That is one of the reasons why we at the May Lane Arts Association Inc. document not only the walls but the language, stories, rules and any other part of the creative culture that we have the privilege of discovering in May Lane.* (Tugi Balog, Curator's statement, MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project catalogue 2010)



# The May Lane Street Art Project

Some artists at May Lane paint only on the removable panels which cover a roller door (360 x 276cm) and/or two smaller windows (each 235 x 160cm) so that the works become framed by the walls on which they 'hang'. Other artists not only cover the removable panels but also continue to paint and totally cover the walls of the laneway so that the removable panels become fragments of a bigger work.

Once the works are completed an informal opening is held in the lane to which the artists, their friends, neighbours and commuters are invited. It has been estimated that on average 4,000 people walk through May Lane every day. The works are displayed for a month, then taken down and stored. New panels are put in place and the process of creating new street art starts again.

What distinguishes work in the May Lane Street Art Project from most street art is that the works are portable, created in a legal space and developed over a period of time. These last two elements are important and it is due to them that the work created is of a very high quality and involves considerable artistic skill.

This exhibition of 25 works is drawn from over 100 works in the collection of the May Lane Arts Association Inc. The works selected for this exhibition span the life of the project to date (2005-2010) and provide a cross section of the artists who have created work in May Lane. The works span a broad range of street art styles: New York graffiti, spray paint, paste-ups and stencils.

The exhibition is a BRAG initiative in association with the May Lane Arts Association Inc., that will tour in 2011 and 2012 to Mackay (QLD), Adelaide (SA), Lake Macquarie (NSW), Belconnen (ACT), Gosford (NSW), the Morwell (VIC) and to a youth arts festival on Cockatoo Island in Sydney.



# Some points for discussion with the students

## Street Art: What is it good for?

Most people go to a gallery to see art. May Lane is a gallery space that breaks with this convention. It is a gallery in an unexpected space, a laneway traversed by thousands of commuters every day. It is a gallery of urban art which cannot be ignored and is accessible to all.

The May Lane Project was started by Tugi Balog as a way of recognising the quality of the artists and giving artists a safe, legal place to work.

Q: What is graffiti?

Q: What are some of the differences between this kind of street art and the graffiti you see in public places and around your school?

Q: What are some of the problems associated with graffiti?

Q: What is the difference between legal and illegal street art?

Q: Is there a legal graffiti wall in your neighbourhood? Do you think there should be one?

Q: Does street art change when exhibited in an art gallery? Does it become mainstream?





# In the gallery - student worksheet

## Watch the DVD

Experience at first hand what street artists think about their work and find out how the *May Lane Street Art Project* was established. DVD runs for 11 minutes.

## Look at the work

Look at the works in the exhibition and read the labels to find out more about the artists. From the label you can also find out about the artists style, the technique they have used and the medium in which the works were created. Note the size of the works.

Does the size of the works have any effect on you? Do you see something different in the work when you look at it close-up compared to looking at the work from a distance?

## Some activities for you to do

### Activity 1

Many of the MAY'S artists have a tag name e.g., Phibs, Numskull, Nails, Mini Graff, Dmote and Spice. What do these tag names suggest to you? What name would you choose for yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Activity 2

Street artists such as Phibs, Kenji Nakayama, Cultural Urge and Nails have been commissioned by businesses to create designs for a wide variety of products e.g., skateboard decks, clothing, sneakers etc. What other products do you think a street artist could create designs for?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Activity 3

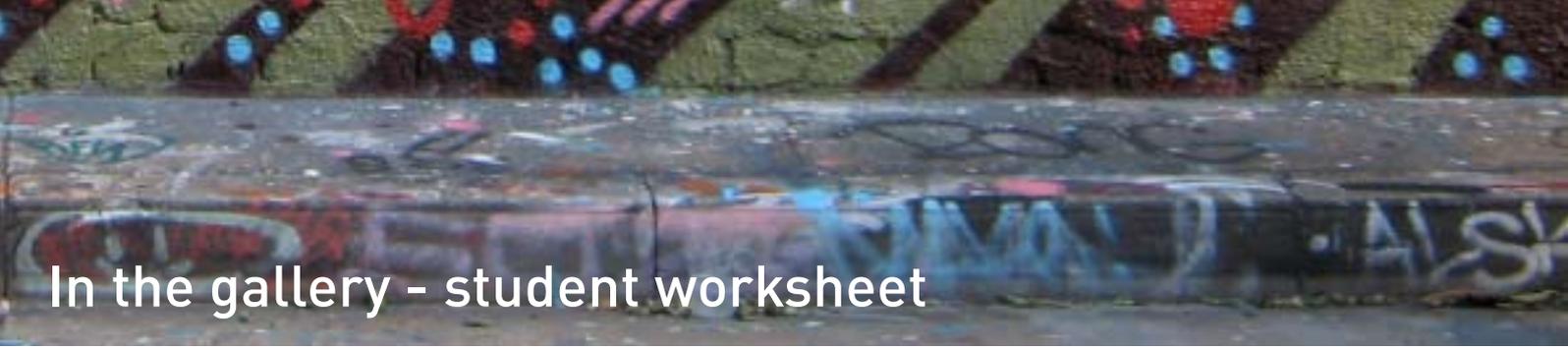
Select your favourite artwork in the exhibition. What styles and techniques does it use? Why do you like it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Activity 4

Now sit in front of your favourite work and using its style create a street art design for either a skateboard deck or a pair of sneakers using the templates provided.





# In the gallery - student worksheet

## Activity 5

There have been a range of influences on artists in this exhibition. By reading the label, match the influence to the artist below by drawing a line from the influence to the artist. Compare your choices with your fellow students.

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| Interstate trucks                          | Adam Hill               |
| Comics                                     | Mini Graff              |
| Renaissance and modern artists             | Kamion                  |
| Anti-establishment                         | Jumbo and Zapp          |
| Love, hate, mystery, fantasy, false heroes | Chor Boogie             |
| Social commentary                          | Deb                     |
| A hunger to explore new ideas              | Taring Padi Collective  |
| Life experiences and a fantasy world       | Numskull                |
| Political and social justice               | Die Laughing Collective |
| Trademark and ownership                    | Nails                   |

## Completed this and looking for something else to do?

Street art has been closely associated with contemporary music e.g., hip hop and rap, and artists like Public Enemy and Run DMC.

## Activity 6

Select a work in the exhibition and think of a song or piece of music that best relates or connects with the work. How does this piece of music relate to the artwork? \_\_\_\_\_

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# In the classroom - activities

## Activity 1

### Arthur Stace - an early Australian street artist?

Arthur Stace was born in Balmain, Sydney, in 1884 and became well known as 'Mr Eternity' because he wrote the word 'eternity' on pavements all over Sydney. This occurred soon after he had a personal epiphany which converted him to Christianity. He grew up in poverty and made a sparse living from illegal methods until his conversion. Arthur's writing of the word Eternity is so iconic that the word written in his style was lit up on the Sydney Harbour Bridge for the 2000 Olympics.



Find out more about Arthur Stace. Can you make any comparisons between Arthur Stace and any of the May Lane Street Artists?

If you could write one word over and over again like Arthur Stace, to leave a positive message to the community, what would that word be? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## In the classroom - activities

### ACTIVITY 2

#### Street Art - Art for Rebels – True or False?

Street art has a reputation as being an 'art for the rebels'. Write a persuasive essay about this statement using the following quotes and articles to help your argument.

#### Quotes & Articles

*I set it up so that the artists in the lane could do better than what they were doing illegally, in a rushed state.* Tugi Balog, founder and Director of the May Lane Arts Association Inc. and curator of MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project

*We're giving something to the neighbourhood. We're supplying them with a visual entertainment in a way, something to try and make them think.* Jumbo MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

*It is an experience that sometimes you have to immigrate to another country and it's very satisfying to arrive somewhere else and see that they respect you more as an artist than on your own turf. Sometimes there are organisations such as May's that help that.* Peque, MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

*It's grown into a big kind of industry, if you can call it that. It's like the street art industry, there's money and there's advertising and all that sort of stuff.* Numskull MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

*Street art could easily be a sell-out art form by the practitioner but as long as he's doing it for the right reasons, as long as you maintain that dignity about what you do then there's no problem about it.* Jumbo MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

*It's sort of like an urban art form that's here to stay. It's not going to go away, you know what I mean, it's pretty much world-wide these days and it's just getting bigger and bigger.* Phibs MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

*It's just a global art form, it's just a continuation of the sorts of different practices such as graffiti art, environmental art, poster art and, the sort of things they were doing in the 50s, all sort of different things emerged into one and it's an evolutionary form.* Jumbo MAY'S: The May Lane Street Art Project DVD.

ALSO Read the article from the Sydney Morning Herald dated 19 October 2010 *Graffiti gallery filth earns spray from residents.*



Art versus eyesore ... ugly "tags", above right, are an unwanted byproduct of the legal art in May Lane, above, say residents, who are calling on the council to act against the vandals. Photo: Dales Kippen

# Graffiti gallery filth earns spray from residents

**Louise Schwartzkopf**

WHEN Mary Drum moved to St Peters, she loved the vibrant display of street art in May Lane, near her home. Three years on, after spending hours painting over illegal graffiti, she has changed her mind.

As the legal street art gallery grows more popular, the area has become a hub for graffiti writers who spray unwanted tags and obscenities on private property. Residents and business owners

have called on Mairckville Council to control the vandals, but street artists say tighter regulations could put legal art at risk. As well as graffiti tags, Ms Drum has cleaned up human faeces, empty spray cans, beer bottles and food scraps left by vandals who work at night.

"Most of us love the art," she said. "The problem is the taggers. One guy spray painted penises all over a lady's back wall. When she tried to stop him, he told her to get f---ed."

Mairckville Council credits the May Lane Art Project with a fall in bag-starching and drug use in the area.

Since the project's director, Tugi Balog, began inviting artists to paint the walls outside his framing business six years ago, artists from around the world have participated. Mr Balog was in Bathurst yesterday with an exhibition of the project's best work, and was unavailable to comment.

Residents have reported

asthma attacks caused by paint fumes and access problems when the narrow lane is blocked by artists on stopladders and those who come to see their work.

"You have all these people walking through a bottleneck, where it gets to be a metre wide," said resident William Meldrum.

"The artists have this terrible sense of entitlement. They think they can do anything in the area because they've heard they can." At a meeting next month, Mairckville councillors will

decide whether to provide a regular graffiti removal service and improve street lighting.

Street artist Mimi Griffin has been creating legal work in May Lane since the gallery opened. She worries a regular clean-up could endanger the legitimate work.

"Who judges what is considered vandalism and what is considered street art?" she said. "You have to let it manage itself. The graffiti artists paint over the work that isn't great and the cream rises to the top... It

would be a shame if two or three residents helped to destroy a beautiful thing."

The council has no plans to ban street art from the lane but if the tagging continues, it may install security cameras.

"That's something that would be on the table if the other measures don't work," said Councillor Mary O'Sullivan. "As long as we can solve the problems that have been going on unattended, the street art can continue. If not, we'll have to look at it again."

## FORMS OF STREET ART

- ▶ **Tagging** A tag is a graffiti writer's signature written in spray paint or marker pen.
- ▶ **Throw-ups** (aka bombing) Typically an elaborate tag painted at speed using aerosol paint in two or three colours. A more complex form is "wildstyle" designs featuring interlocking letters and connecting points.
- ▶ **Sticker art** (aka slap tagging) Images or messages displayed on stickers.
- ▶ **Stencil art** Designs made by spraying paint through a stencil typically made of cardboard.
- ▶ **Wheelpasting** American Shepard Fairey is just one street artist who pasted his printed poster art directly onto city walls.
- ▶ **Street installations** Three-dimensional art "installed", often without permission, in city streets. British artist Banksy's twisted telephone box is a good example.





# Glossary of graffiti terminology

Listed below are some terms used by graffiti and street artists. You may have heard of others terms that you could research and define to add to the list.

<b>Aerosol</b>	A container used to hold a substance packed under pressure with a device for releasing it as a fine spray.
<b>Bomb</b>	To 'bomb' or 'hit' is to paint as many surfaces in an area. Bombers often choose throw-ups or tags over complex pieces, as they can be executed more quickly.
<b>Capping</b>	Covering up another artists work with ones own work.
<b>King</b>	Male artist who has the best work with the most style such as throwup, line, stencil etc.
<b>Mural</b>	A painting executed directly on a wall
<b>Paste-up</b>	A piece prepared for gluing on to the walls.
<b>Pop Art</b>	A form of art that depicts objects or scenes from everyday life and employs techniques of commercial art and popular illustration.
<b>Queen</b>	Female artist who has the best work with the most style.
<b>Stencil</b>	A thin sheet of plastic, metal, card etc. in which a pattern or lettering is cut used to produce a corresponding pattern on the surface beneath it by applying ink, paint, etc.
<b>Stickers</b>	A form of tagging most commonly saying: "Hello, my name is". It can be anything from computer-generated, clear, generic stickers that have the writer's name on them to elaborate stickers with little pieces and characters.
<b>Tag</b>	The most basic form of graffiti, a writer's signature with marker or spray paint. It is the writer's logo, his/her stylized personal signature. If a tag is long it is sometimes abbreviated to the first two letters or the first and last letter of the tag. Also may be ended with the suffixes "one", "ski", "rock", "em" and "er".
<b>Throwup</b>	Over time, this term has been applied to many different types of graffiti. Throwups can be from one or two letters to a whole word or a whole roll call of names. There is often an exclamation mark after the word or letter.
<b>Wildstyle</b>	A complicated construction of interlocking letters. A hard style that consists of lots of arrows and connections. Wildstyle is considered one of the hardest styles to master and pieces done in wildstyle are often completely indecipherable to non-writers.

# The works



DEB, / See You... and Raise You One



KAMION, Smoke Carrots, Not Drugs



NAILS, Troubadours



PHIBS, Temple



ZOMBIE, Untitled



CULTURAL URGE, The Odious



JUMBO & ZAP, Monster City (Panic Attack)



MINI GRAFF, Suburban Roadhouse no. 5



PETER BURGESS, (1718)



ZAP, Untitled



CHOR BOOGIE, The Colour of Sydney



DMOTE, Untitled



MARE, Untitled



PEQUE, Ya Llegamos Carnal



TARING PADI COLLECTIVE, Demolish Our Borders



BUG.A.U.P., Write of Reply



DLUXI, dlux boneyard



LUNA & PERU, Untitled



OTIS & PERU, Untitled



SPICE, Cosmic Slop



ADAM HILL, In 'K's of emergency



DIE LAUGHING COLLECTIVE, Sic Semper Tyrannus



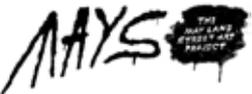
KENJI NAKAYAMA, Brooklyn Train Track



NUMSKULL, Killer Zombies of Surrey



SCRAM, Untitled



# Resources

## Surf the web to find out more about the MAY'S artists

[www.bugaup.org](http://www.bugaup.org)  
[www.chorboogie.com](http://www.chorboogie.com)  
[www.culturalurge.com](http://www.culturalurge.com)  
[www.dielLaughing.com.au](http://www.dielLaughing.com.au)  
[www.deb.net.au](http://www.deb.net.au)  
[www.fatcap.com/artist/dmote](http://www.fatcap.com/artist/dmote)

[www.harrisongallery.com.au/artists/adamhill](http://www.harrisongallery.com.au/artists/adamhill)  
[www.mays.org.au](http://www.mays.org.au)  
[www.minigraff.com](http://www.minigraff.com)  
[www.nails.com.au](http://www.nails.com.au)  
[www.phibs.com](http://www.phibs.com)  
[www.undergrowth.org/user/taring\\_padi](http://www.undergrowth.org/user/taring_padi)

## Additional sites of interest

[www.banksy.co.uk](http://www.banksy.co.uk)  
[www.lazinc.com/artists/vhils](http://www.lazinc.com/artists/vhils)  
<http://thepostpost.wordpress.com/2010/10/18/mays-art-out-of-context/>

## Films

Style Wars (1983)  
Wild Style (1983)  
Exit Through the Gift Shop (2009)

## Books

Martha Cooper & Henry Chalfant, *Subway Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1984  
Henry Chalfant & James Ratliff, *Spraycan Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1987  
Melinda Vassalto, *Street Art of Sydney's Inner West*, Firelive Design, Sydney, 2009

## Tour Dates for May's: The May Lane Street Art Project

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, Bathurst NSW	15 October – 28 November 2010
Artspace, Mackay, QLD	11 March – 1 May 2011
Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide, SA	13 May – 1 July 2011
Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Lake Macquarie, NSW	29 July – 11 September 2011
Belconnen Arts Centre, Belconnen, ACT	24 September – 22 October 2011
Cockatoo Island, Sydney, NSW	5 November – 27 November 2011
Gosford Regional Art Gallery, East Gosford, NSW	4 February – 1 April 2012
Latrobe Regional Gallery, Morwell, VIC	28 April – 24 June 2012

