

This interview took place on April 24, 2007 at the artist's studio in Laguna Hills.

I: Tell us about the inspiration for the Graffiti Series?



The idea was partially inspired by living and working in Venice, Italy in 2004 and 2005. I made five trips over there during that period to work in the medium of glass and photography. As part of shooting the daily living experience, I took a lot of pictures of graffiti. As with most Italian cities, there is a great deal of street art everywhere. It is always evolving, and I would seek out public areas where you could see it, each trip greeted by fresh blasts of spray-can paint or newly-pasted posters.

This graffiti also serves as a kind of alternative street signage, familiar and highly visible landmarks as I negotiated the daily maze of streets and canal bridges. Most of the Venetian buildings look the same as I ventured into the neighborhood areas away from the tourist haunts. Graffiti helped me navigate.

I used to see a lot of styles there, from New York-inspired hip-hop tags to more complex stencils and personal trademarks. I especially liked the work of Andre, a Parisian “tagger” who left behind these spider-like, long-legged characters.



I: Graffiti is now a recognized art form. Surely, this is not the first time you saw it?

That is correct. I grew up in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles, adjacent to the Mexican/Latino barrios of El Monte, Azusa and East L.A. Most of the original and significant gang-tagging and murals came from those neighborhoods. I was exposed to this at a very early age.

Graffiti is very ephemeral by nature. When the classic free-form “bubble” lettering came out in the 1970’s and 1980’s, it reminded me of the typographic elements of the early rock albums from the 1960’s. I started drawing when I was three; I remember I used to mimic the lettering of *Rubber Soul* by the Beatles. The early forms of tags I saw seemed to feed off this stylistic energy.

From 1971 to 1976, I was very active in jewelry making. It was constructed using the same stencil techniques that graffiti artists use today. I would make a stencil, glue it to a sheet of sterling silver, and cut out the “negative” portion of the image using a hack saw.

The first New York graffiti I saw was by a street artist named Futura 2000. He designed a record sleeve and stage for the Clash, I think back in 1979 and 1980. I was a huge fan of the band.

When I entered Advertising as a profession in the 1980’s, I always tried to incorporate street elements inspired by punk and hip-hop. I did some early work here for Nike and H-P. This aspect of “high-low culture” carried over into *Bad Postcards*, my personal photography series from that period.

I: You previously mentioned a street artist named Andre. Can you name any specific graffiti artists that serve as a source of your current inspiration?

I always appreciated the work by Jamie Reid for the Sex Pistols and the Grunge era poster work by Art Chantry. I liked the “handmade” feel of their work. They are not graffiti artists per se but they have a high degree of street credibility. From a pure graffiti perspective, I love the viral marketing aspects of Shepard Fairey and his *Obey* project.

I: So what was the first Italian work to incorporate these design elements?



I met Pino Signoretto in June of 2004. Pino is considered the greatest living glass blower in Murano. I worked over that summer on generating about thirty ideas for work. I designed a series called *The Cattedrales*. These incorporated tags within their design.

The photography series, titled *Graffiti*, came later, in 2005. My favorites in that series are the ones “drawn” using a full moon as “the brush,” burning an outline by keeping the shutter open and moving the camera around. For example, I “drew” a mother and child as part of the delayed exposure. It was a really magical night. I was having dinner with my wife, Sylvia, and



Veronika Leibetseder, my Venetian gallery owner, at Campo Saint Barnaba. The moon was just cresting over the row of apartments there. I am sure they thought I was a mad man, sitting in the middle of the square and jerking my camera around to create those images.

I: Tell us about the small ink paintings also included in the Graffiti series?



I am really blessed to live adjacent to the Laguna Beach open space. I have been spending a great deal of time hiking the past two years. The rock formations have organic surfaces that mimic many of the stylistic and graphic forms and images of Graffiti.

While most taggers are consumed with the notion of throwing up pieces on bigger and bigger walls, I thought it would be more interesting to go the other way. I have been doing spray-paint work in a miniaturized setting. The *Laguna* series is watching grand open spaces reduced down to final images measuring in the inches, almost like the classic Indian and Persian miniature-paintings. They are very simple in construction. I use stencils and sprayed ink.