

The
Public



AN INTRODUCTION TO:

SPRAY PAINTING



The Public is an activist design studio specializing in changing the world.

This zine, a part of our *Creative Resistance How-to Series*, is designed to make our skill sets accessible to the communities with whom we work. We encourage you to copy, share, and adapt it to fit your needs as you change the world for the better, and to share your work with us along the way.

Special thanks to Skittlez Gunn of Oasis Skateboard Factory for developing this zine on behalf of The Public.

For more information, please visit thepublicstudio.ca.

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Introduction to spray painting

THE HISTORY

Spray paint has a vibrant, if notorious, history. It's suspected that ancient cave paintings were made with an early form of spray paint, involving ink made from flowers and blown through a hollowed bone to make shapes. The first serious documentation of graffiti as we know it today was in ancient Rome.

What we know for sure is that modern spray paint was invented in 1949 by Edward Seymour. He combined paint designed for aluminum with already existing Aerosol technology.

It's hard to say where graffiti started, but it's easy to see that it thrives in places where people are struggling and feel they have no other way to express themselves. Graffiti covers as many themes as there are people, but all of it has two things in common: spray paint and an artist dissatisfied with the other forms of expression they're offered.

When people hear the words "spray paint" and "graffiti", they often think of New York, but spray painted war murals have been common in Ireland for decades and are

growing as a form of visual protest all over the world.

In Belfast, you can hardly walk three blocks without seeing a mural. Most of these were painted during the Troubles (1960-1998) and depict war heroes and soldiers. In recent years, many of these war-themed murals have been covered with new murals depicting famous Irish figures, including soccer players and authors.



The present

From Bristol, England, street artist Banksy has been raising his protest on walls all over the world for years. With such iconic images as *Mona Lisa* holding a machine gun and the characters of *Pulp Fiction* holding bananas instead of guns, he has made a huge impact on the street art world and risen to be one of the most popular artist in the entire world. Many of his pieces protest capitalism, sexism and war, and in spite of remaining anonymous—or perhaps because he chose to remain anonymous—he has become quite famous and gotten thousands of people thinking about street art and their world in a new way.



BANKSY PAINTING, CHAIRS, ON THE WEST BANK WALL

In Toronto, many of the street artists are less political, but you still find messages like “Occupy Toronto” and “Idle No More” scrawled on walls alongside

the beautiful murals painted in the graffiti alley, “Rush Lane,” that stretches from Bathurst to Spadina just south of Queen. After the long line of scandals and his crackdown on graffiti, former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford also became a popular image, with paintings that range from straight up demented versions of him to satirical stencils of his face labelled “Remove Me”.

SPRAY PAINT MOVEMENTS

Graffiti movements in Syria and Egypt have risen alongside the recent political unrest. Egypt’s graffiti movement grew exponentially after the uprising in 2010 and ranges from simple messages demanding new political leadership to depictions of angel winged martyrs who have died in the political conflict. In Syria, a group of teenagers



PALESTINIAN MURAL BY DAIRI

wrote their protests on a school wall and it was their detainment and executions that brought the political tensions there to a head and sparked the revolution.

Other countries involved in the Arab Spring have also formed graffiti movements of their own, including Pakistan and Tunisia, but spray painting isn't just about raising the political roof. Spray paint is great for almost any art project and is also a great way to refresh furniture that's starting to fade or lose your interest.

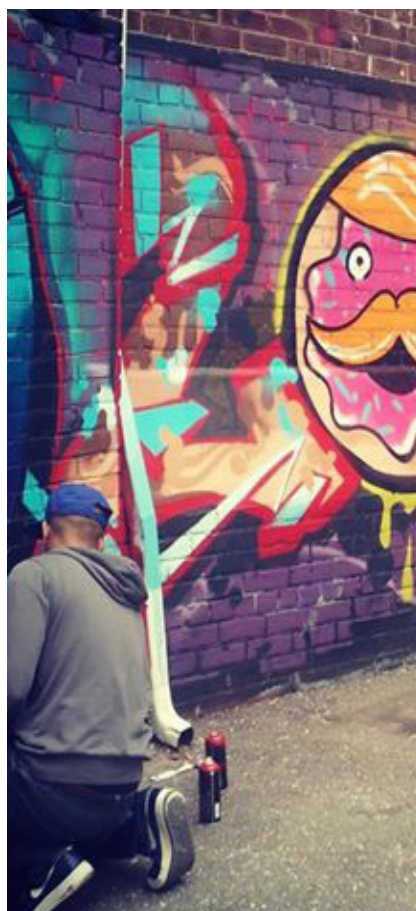
Whatever you're planning to do with spray paint, this zine will provide you with all the information you need to get started with spray paint.

Spray paint can be used on:

- Wood
- Metal
- Some plastics
- Fabric



OASIS SKATEBOARD FACTORY STUDENT'S
FIRST LONGBOARD



Finding inspiration from artists

If you're new to the world of spray painting and graffiti, it's a good idea to look around and see what others have done to get inspiration. You can either search images on Google or go for a walk through your favourite graffiti covered neighbourhood and take notes while you walk. Your notes can be words or sketches of your favourite pieces, whatever you're most comfortable with. We've left plenty of space to accomodate your creative needs. As you research different artists, fill in the blanks below with your favourites:

Artist name: _____

Time period: _____

Your favourite piece (describe or sketch below): _____

Where you found the image: _____

What you've learned: _____

Additional notes: _____

It's a great idea to keep a camera or sketchbook with you at all times so you can photograph or sketch out the best pieces you see while adventuring through your town and take notes on what you enjoyed and what you didn't enjoy about each piece.

Spray paint safety

Before you even think about starting a spray paint project, there are some important safety concerns you need to consider. Many of the chemicals which make spray paint work are toxic, and it's crucial to protect yourself.

THE RISKS

The toxic chemicals in spray paint can cause anything from a headache to long term liver damage, and can be absorbed through your skin, eyes and nose. Some of the chemicals may even have a part to play in cancer, and it's entirely possible that we don't know all the side effects of these chemicals, so make sure you always wear your safety gear.

THE EQUIPMENT:

Gloves: any gloves will work, keeping your hands safe from toxins and what some call "vandal finger". Dollar store plastic gloves are the most popular option. Thicker gloves will make it harder to control your can and probably aren't a good option for your first spray paint project.



Goggles: these are just regular plastic safety goggles, like the kind you had to wear in high school chemistry labs. You can find them in any home hardware store. They're not very expensive and will keep your eyes safe through dozens of projects.



Respirator mask: this is the most important part of your safety gear for a large spray paint project, because your lungs can absorb a large amount of the toxic chemicals in spray paint. Make sure you pick a respirator mask designed specifically for spray paint. Dust masks are great for sawdust, but they don't shield you from air born chemicals.

Keep in mind that the filters in these masks are replaceable, and that they wear out after twelve hours. That doesn't mean twelve hours of work, either; it means twelve hours of exposure to the open air. These filters are always working, so to preserve them keep them in an airtight plastic bag between uses.

If you're not sure what the right kind of mask is, ask an employee at your local hardware store.



Safety tips

Do not wear a bandana in place of a respirator mask or underneath your mask. This can actually absorb the chemicals and hold them, exposing you to a higher concentration of the chemicals than if you wear nothing to cover your face.

Remember that larger projects demand more precautions. If you're quickly spraying a small piece of furniture one colour outside, you might not want to bother with the respirator mask, but you'll want your gloves for sure. If you're working inside or on a large project, it's crucial that you wear the mask and goggles to keep yourself safe.

Special note: spray paint isn't just dangerous to you, it's dangerous to the space you're painting in, and overspray can infuriate even the friendliest property owner, so make sure to cover nearby surfaces with cardboard, plastic or painter's tape.

Planning your spray paint project

Planning a spray paint project can be as simple as picking a colour and buying paint to refinish your furniture or as complicated as several long group meetings to plan a mural. If you're creating a mural or another artsy project with your spray paint, there are several important things you need to consider before getting started.

Who is this project for?

- If you're working for a client, how specific are they about what they want? How deeply do they want to be involved in the planning process? Make sure you talk clearly about what they want and keep them updated. You'll also have to sit down with them and figure out a timeline and a budget for your project.
- If this project is for a cause, who needs to see it most? If your message is aimed to make rich business people think more deeply about their privilege, for example, there's no point painting it in one of the marginalized neighbourhoods in town—instead go for your local financial district or something similar if you can do so safely. If it's related to current events, that means you should paint it sooner rather than later so your message isn't lost.
- If it's just for your personal enjoyment, you get to make all the decisions, but that can

be hard and you might want to bring some friends in to help you.

What will it look like?

- What design most suits the person that this is for and best displays your intended message? You want to make sure that the message isn't lost in trying to please someone aesthetically, or end up with an ugly piece that focuses solely on your message.
- There's a psychological meaning for every colour, so think about what you want people to feel when they're looking at it. Every colour also requires a new can of spray paint, and if you're working on a large surface, you'll probably need at least two cans of every colour. It's also important to remember that too much colour can detract from your message and even hurt the eyes. If you're unsure, black and white always makes

for strong imagery and can be used for any project.

- If you're including text, remember that fonts influence people's thinking too. Serif fonts are formal and usually bring corporations and official business to the mind, whereas Sans Serif fonts are more informal and based in graphic design.
- How complex is your project? Make sure you only agree to projects you can actually complete. Complex projects are made much easier with stencils, whereas something simple with just a couple colours lends itself more easily to free hand painting. If you're out of your league, see if you can find someone more experienced with spray paint to help you.

How much will it cost and who's paying?

- A single can of high quality spray paint will usually cost around \$8-10. One can will paint a lot of skateboards, but might only paint a third of a mural. Make sure you write down the exact colours you're using so you can easily replace your cans, as colours often have specific names.
- Caps for your spray paint cans—the nozzles that

actually emit the spray—may be included when you purchase spray paint, but may cost a little extra money, so check with the store you're buying your paint from. These shouldn't cost more than a dollar or two.

- Your first project will be more expensive than later projects as you also need to purchase safety equipment.
- Remember that filters in your respiration mask need to be changed after twelve hours of exposure to air, so long projects will cost more.
- If you're paying for this yourself, make sure to calculate the costs before you finalize your design—you might end up realizing that you can only afford three colours of spray paint, not four.
- If you're working for a paying client, you might want to add a little extra money to



your fee—even just rounding up to the nearest ten can be helpful—just in case something happens to some of your equipment or paint or there are other unexpected expenses.

- There's a pretty good chance you'll mess up at some point and if your piece is outdoors there's a good chance someone will tag it, so buying extra spray paint is always a good idea.

LEGAL CONCERNS

Laws around spray paint and graffiti vary greatly from place to place and change all the time. If you're just re-painting an old picture frame in your backyard it's probably not a big deal, but it's never a bad idea to check your local laws. If you're spraying on a wall, even for a business owner who's paying you to create a mural, you absolutely must check your local laws.

Here are some examples of laws which might get in the way of your project:

- In Toronto and London, Ontario, you need to be over the age of eighteen to buy spray paint unless you're accompanied by a parent or legal guardian
- In Toronto, anything that "looks like graffiti" can be ordered away by the city. Property owners are expected to personally cover the cost of graffiti removal, and if it's a mural they have to go to a tribunal and let the city decide if it's graffiti or not.
- In the UK, offenders caught in the act of illegal graffiti can go to jail for up to ten years
- In New York City, it's illegal for art stores to openly display spray paint, though they are allowed to display reasonable facsimiles, and it is also illegal to sell spray paint to anyone under the age of eighteen.

Laws about graffiti vary in different countries—in some places you can do up to ten years in prison—and even from city to city, so brush up on your local laws before you get started to make sure you know the risks and are doing your spray paint project in the safest way possible. Some cities have "free walls" where you are allowed to legally paint graffiti, and a quick internet search can help you figure out if there are any nearby for you to throw your project up on.



ROLLER DERBY HELMETS SPRAY PAINTED BY OASIS SKATEBOARD FACTORY



ALTERNATIVE TENTACLE WINDOW DISPLAY
OSFXJOHN MARRIOTT

Using politics in Graffiti

If you need inspiration, try taking it from politics. Political figures such as Toronto's Mayor Rob Ford, who has cracked down heavily on graffiti has in turn been painted by many local graffiti artists, from Spud—a well known Toronto artist—to students at Oasis Skateboard Factory who painted the image above with John Marriott. You may not want to take on such a popular image, but it certainly can inspire you to create something political.

Remember, graffiti is the message you send out to the world--what are you going to say?

Project planning checklist

This list contains everything you'll need to complete your spray paint project, and we've left enough room for you to add in the details. Keeping inventory of your paint and safety gear (and keeping track of when you started using them) will help you have a smooth creation process. This is particularly important if you plan on selling your spray paint projects, so you can keep track of how much you need to charge to make your money back.

MATERIALS

- ☐ Spray paint and caps for the spray cans—Caps come in different varieties so make sure you get some for wide strokes and some for skinny lines
- ☐ Cardboard or plastic/painter's tape to prevent overspray
- ☐ Stencil materials: fine X-Acto, acetate/tape/cardboard, and a cutting board
- ☐ Spray adhesive for acetate stencils
- ☐ Gloves
- ☐ Respiratory mask and fresh filters
- ☐ Record of time spent using air filters
- ☐ Goggles

If you don't know what method you're using to create your project, figure out what's best for you by reading ahead and come back to this page when you're ready to get started.

PLANNING

- ☐ Finalized design and budget:
- ☐ Researched similar projects for inspiration and tips:
- ☐ Current local laws around graffiti:
- ☐ Found people to work with (if necessary):
- ☐ Known start date and end date:

Spray paint methods

There are two main ways to spray paint, stenciling and free hand painting. Each has advantages and disadvantages, so take a look and decide which is best for you and your project.

STENCILING

Stencils are great for people who are new to spray painting or who often struggle with art projects, and can be made from almost anything. A stencil is essentially a cut out of your image designed to help you paint in all the right places. If you're using a colourful design, you'll need to create separate stencils for each colour, which come together to form a multi-layer stencil.

Creating a stencil is cheap and pretty easy, but there are some materials you'll need to make one:

Stencil Surface: you'll want something to make your stencil out of. This can be anything from a pizza box that you've cut open to almost any type of plastic. Acetate is commonly used as it's durable and makes a stencil that can be reused, ideal for creating a stencil you plan on using in multiple projects. This is the same stuff used for overhead projectors and can be found at any office supply store. If you're spray

painting something fairly small like a skateboard, you can even cover the surface with painter's tape and cut your stencil directly onto the tape, though again you'll need a new layer of tape for every colour.

Cutting board: unless you're cutting the stencil directly onto what you're working on, you'll want to use a cutting board so you don't damage your favourite work table. You can find a cutting board specifically for stencil creation at any art store or just use your kitchen cutting board or another surface you don't mind marking up.



ACETATE STENCIL IN PROGRESS

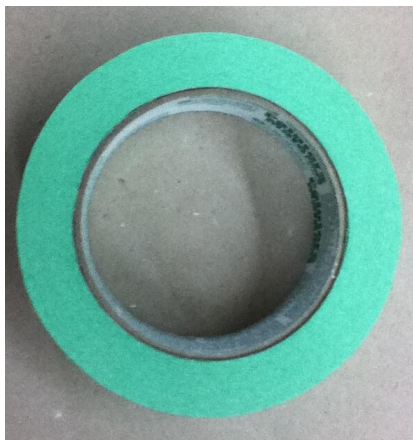
Fine X-Acto: you can use almost any knife to cut a stencil, but a fine X-acto blade (or a scalpel) allows easy control and will cut through almost anything. These can be found at any art store.

A print out of your design: this will be used to create your stencil. If your image is a digital file, print out a copy to work with. If your image is only on paper, make sure you photocopy it before you start because you don't want to wreck your original. Unless you're doing a tape stencil, you'll also have to create islands and bridges to keep your stencil strong(see image.)

Tape: you can make stencils entirely out of tape for one time use, and if you're making one out of acetate or cardboard you'll want to tape it to your cutting board so it doesn't move around while you're working. Green painter's tape works best for this, though it can be hard to use. Make sure the tape you get is low tack (less sticky) or it will take paint with it and be difficult to get off the surface you're working on.

Steps to creating a stencil:

1. Get your image onto your surface—you want the image to be clearly visible on your surface so it's easy to cut out. If you're using clear plastic, you can simply place the image underneath it and



PAINTER'S TAPE

cut directly into it, and if you have a lot of thin lines in your image, you'll want to take the time to thicken them so they're easier to cut out.

2. Cut out your image—be careful when you do this. If you're doing a tape stencil, be extremely careful as you can completely ruin your surface with scratch marks. Beyond that, if you don't take your time you can end up with rough edges and cuts on your hand, neither of which is desirable.
3. Fix it with tape—sometimes you'll end up cutting too deep or with an image that's hard to turn into a stencil. If you're missing any pieces of your finished stencil, you can re-attach them to your surface with tape. Tape the bottom

first and then fold the tape around the top to make sure it's completely secure.

To learn more about creating stencils check out our zine, An Introduction to Stencils.

FREEHAND SPRAY PAINTING

Free hand spray painting is how most people do tags—with no tools but their hands and a spray paint can, and if they're smart some safety gear. If you're already experienced with spray paint, you can't do a stencil on the surface you'll be painting on or you're simply determined not to rely on a stencil, then this is the option for you.

At first spray painting free hand seems deceptively simple. You don't need any extra tools, just yourself and a spray can, but in reality it's much harder than spraying with a stencil. Spray painting well requires experience, practice and careful control of your body movements and the spray can itself.

The only way to become a spray painting pro is to practice--it takes years to become a master--but there



TAPE STENCIL IN PROGRESS

are some tricks you can use to make it easier. We've compiled a list of tips for spray painting both freehand and through stencils so you can skip some of the learning process.



ZINE COVERS SPRAY PAINTED FREEHAND

HTTP://OASISSKATEBOARDFACTORY.BLOGSPOT.CA/2013/10/OSF-X-CANZINE-PICK-UP-OUR-BACK-ISSUES.HTML

Spray painting tips

GENERAL ADVICE

- Several light coats will look better than one heavy coat as one heavy coat can cause a weird texture.
- Spray paint works best in warmer temperatures and sometimes cracks in the cold.
- Heat and light help spray paint dry faster.
- Watch out for vapour bombs! Freshly painted objects will stink with the toxic chemicals from spray paint. If possible, leave items outside to dry. If that's not possible, go for a well ventilated room and open as many windows as possible.
- If you're working with wood, you'll want lacquer to seal the paint so it doesn't flake. You can find this at any hardware store.
- Paint with your shoulder, not your wrist—long fluid movements provide best results.
- When you're done, turn the can upside down and spray until the paint comes out clear to clean your cap. If you skip this step your cap will clog and your paint may come out stringy or not at all.

Graffiti Crews

Graffiti crews are groups that paint together and learn from each other, often led by older artists who take on youth as mentors. The best way to get involved is to get out there, get painting and earn respect from other graffiti artists.

Most crews won't even look at you until you've earned your place by painting some amazing pieces in your city, but there are community centers and arts organizations which run graffiti classes. The Art Gallery of Ontario sometimes offers such workshops, and if you're near Belleville you can check out the John Howard Society for classes too.

If you're struggling to find other local graffiti artists, don't despair. By nature graffiti artists are hard to find and careful with their identities, so it's bound to take a while, but if you keep painting you're bound to run into some like-minded artists eventually.

STENCIL TIPS

- If you're not doing a tape stencil directly on your surface, tape your stencil to the surface you're painting on to ensure the stencil stays in place
- Spray light! Spraying too intensely can cause fuzzy lines and a weird texture, called 'bleed' by those in the know
- If you're using acetate stencils, use a spray adhesive such as Easy Tac to keep each layer in place—it smells worse than regular spray paint but works like a charm
- Store stencils carefully so they don't stick to anything important (they'll be sticky for a few hours) or get anything covered in paint—any dry warm place with a surface you don't mind getting dirty will do. This allows you to reuse the stencil
- Cut gently when doing stencils to save yourself from repetitive strain injury and, if you're doing a tape stencil, cut lines on the surface you're painting on. Always use a cutting board unless you're doing a tape stencil, as it keeps your knife sharp



Dangerous Stencils

For most graffiti artists, sneaking is a life skill. Nobody wants to get arrested for writing on the walls, but most artists do. Banksy is one of the only artists in the world who's never been caught. He painted the above image on the West Bank Wall, one of the greatest feats in graffiti history. These artists have risked serious jail time and even their lives to get their message into the world.

You don't need to put your life in danger to be a valued member of the global graffiti community, but if you need some inspiration, start by studying these brave artists.

Selected resources

HISTORY OF SPRAY PAINT & GRAFFITI

- **The Daily Telegraph:** *What can we learn from Roman Graffiti?* www.telegraph.co.uk/history/10336768/What-can-we-learn-from-Roman-graffiti.html
- **Web Urbanist:** *Beyond the Troubles: Murals of Belfast* www.weburbanist.com/2007/08/03/beyond-the-troubles-murals-of-belfast-northern-ireland/
- **Bog Side Artists:** www.bogsideartists.com
- **The Guardian:** *Makeover for Murals in Northern Ireland* www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/sep/01/northern.ireland.murals
- **About.com:** *The History of Spray Paint* www.inventors.about.com/od/astartinventions/a/aerosol.htm
- **Inquire:** *Political Activist or Prankster with a Spray Can?* www.inquirelive.co.uk/comment/article-3961/political-activist-or-prankster-with-a-spray-can/
- **Noise and Colour Mag:** *Banksy, The Artist, The Criminal, The Political Activist* www.noiseandcolormag.com/banksy-the-artist-the-criminal-the-political-activist/
- **Slideshare:** *Mr. Larose: Graffiti was used Primarily by Political Activists to make Statements and Street Gangs to Mark Territory* www.slideshare.net/Mr.Larose/graffiti-was-used-primarily-by-political-activists-to-make-statements-and-street-gangs-to-mark-territory
- **France 24:** *Syrian Activists Fight Assad regime with Spray Paint and Stencils* www.observers.france24.com/content/20120417-syria-activists-fight-assad-regime-spray-paint-stencils-graffiti-art-peaceful-protest-arab-world
- **TED Blog: My City:** *An Artist Spray Paints Cairo's Uncertain Future* www.blog.ted.com/2013/10/31/my-city-an-artist-spray-paints-cairos-uncertain-future/
- **WiseGeek:** *What are the Origins of Graffiti?* www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-origins-of-graffiti.htm

- **The National:** *Cairo's Walls of Graffiti Trace History of a Colourful Revolution* www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/culture-comment/cairos-walls-of-graffiti-trace-history-of-a-colourful-revolution
- **Global Times:** *Graffiti a Meaningless Form of Protest that Covers up the Real Message* www.globaltimes.cn/content/799177.shtml#UnP9lxaffzU
- **Smithsonian Mag:** *The Story Behind Banksy* www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/The-Story-Behind-Banksy-187953941.html

SPRAY PAINT TIPS & TUTORIALS

- **Live Love DIY 10 Spray Paint Tips:** *What You Never Knew About Spray Paint* www.livelovediy.com/2013/07/10-spray-paint-tips-what-you-never-knew.html
- **Popular Mechanics:** *10 Tips for Better Spray Painting* www.popularmechanics.com/home/improvement/outdoor-projects/10-tips-for-better-spray-painting-15474314
- **Jen Selk:** *Simple Spray Painting Project Gone Wrong* www.jenselk.com/1/post/2012/08/simple-spray-painting-project-gone-wrong.html
- **Centsational Girl:** *Spray Paint FAQs* <http://www.centsationalgirl.com/2010/10/spray-paint-faqs/>
- **Sassy Style Interior ReDesign:** *Spray Painting 101* www.sassystyledesign.com/2011/07/spray-painting-101.html
- **Granjow.net:** *List of Different Spray Caps* www.granjow.net/sprayCaps.html
- **Thesite.org:** *Graffiti and The Law* www.thesite.org/homelawandmoney/law/yourrights/graffitiandthelaw
- **New York City and State:** *Anti-Graffiti Legislation* www.nyc.gov/html/nograffiti/html/legislation.html
- **City News:** *Youth Breathe New Life Into Expired Subway Ads in TTC Art Project* www.citynews.ca/2013/09/06/youth-breathe-new-life-into-expired-subway-ads-in-ttc-art-project/
- **Asharq Al-Awsat:** *Graffiti Art from Berlin to Palestine* www.aawsat.net/2013/08/article55315233



