

FLIP THE SCRIPT

A Guidebook *for Aspiring
Vandals & Typographers*

Christian P. Acker

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Gingko Press

Acknowledgements

Every page of this book is a thank you and acknowledgement to the artists who so generously shared their talent, art and histories with me. Without their encouragement, passion and involvement this project would not have been possible.

More than thanks goes to my wife, Emma and our children, Finley, Gillian, and Patrick, who not only generously shared time with my passion and put up with my preoccupations, but encouraged and believed in the vision of this project for many years. My parents and grandparents, especially my grandfather, Donald Burley; who inadvertently, and perhaps just by his presence, helped instill a love for books and history from an early age, one which helped guide my circuitous route to this place and this subject. Lastly, I want to thank and acknowledge my mother, Jane who as a child encouraged me with art and craft of all sorts. She gave me my first Speedball Calligraphy manuals. Many influences I cannot isolate, remember or recognize, but these stand out as ones that gave me a vocabulary and methodology to view art and letters through.

I would also like to thank the innumerable people who played an integral role in sharing and connecting me to many other people. Too long to list here, I'm afraid it would take another volume, but I trust those people know who they are and accept this as my sincerest thanks. In particular though I would like to acknowledge two different writers that started me thinking through these ideas: HENCE was the first writer to encourage me to think of graffiti systematically, and MESK, who opened my eyes to the distinctly indigenous differences in regional city-styles.

Christian Acker
New York, 2013, 2023



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Foreword

For me, "indigenous culture" generally tends to conjure up images of remote South American tribespeople and old women doing embroidery in the depths of Eastern Europe—always something historical, never anything contemporary. Growing up pre-internet in rural New Hampshire, I wasn't exposed to a lot of urban culture, so it never crossed my mind that there could be an indigenous tradition of lettering in American cities.

In a way, Christian Acker has done for handstyles what ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax did for folk music in the 20th century. By taking "field recordings" of different styles from original sources, and interviewing the people who were there when these styles originally evolved, this book is not just a record of what existed, but a story about influences, rivalries, and flashes of inspiration. The amount of research that went into this book is staggering: hundreds of hours of interviews have been transformed into a narrative, with connections drawn between them. Such a wide-ranging collection of alphabets would have been impressive enough on its own, but the first-person narratives bring the story to life with depth, poignancy and humor.

I was trained as a graphic designer but got sidetracked by letters early in my career, and I've been working exclusively as a type designer for more than 10 years. On the surface, graffiti and type design seem to have little in common except at the most basic level. After all, spontaneity and illegibility (to all but a select audience) are rarely the aims of a typeface. However, I was fascinated to see just how much back and forth there was between the two, both in the influence of blackletter, and in turn how influential some of the L.A. styles appear to have been on advertising lettering from subsequent years. Many of the writers' descriptions of their reverence for history, of their struggle and experimentation to come up with a new twist on a style that would transcend just ripping-off someone else, also sounded very familiar to me from my own work.

Over the years, I've seen a lot of bad typefaces based on graffiti, mostly watered down versions of early '80s New York styles, and I once declared in an interview something along the lines of "I've never seen a graffiti font that works, and everyone trying to make one should probably just give up now." A few months later I met Acker, who told me he'd like to prove me wrong one day. With the rich history to draw from in this book, I won't be surprised when that happens.

Christian Schwartz
Type Designer, *Commercial Type*
New York City, 2013



This book was originally released in 2013, after more than ten years of research, interviews and relationships graciously made it possible. In the 20 years since its inception (and the 10 years since its initial release) the culture, art form and community of graffiti handstyles have continued to grow and evolve. The sophistication and skill of some of today's generation is stunning. Thanks to those who contributed, respect to those who have passed on, and peace to those pushing us forward.

The first editions of this book noted several writers who passed away between the years this project started and the book's release, with notes of R.I.P. Since then we have seen several more of our community pass on. Rather than continuing to add R.I.P. to their names with this edition we have decided to remove the suffix from all contributors names—Shifting the focus of the artists and their contributions to a living legacy of their work and influence vs memorial of their names cast in stone.

The culture of documenting and canonizing our history continues to grow as well. Yet, as our narrative grows, today more than ever we are skeptical of canonization that might include hidden points of view or worse, agendas embedded within our histories. Many of the artists involved were concerned from the start. A project like this risks accusations of exploitation, selective focus or even misrepresenting the importance of some included or downplaying the importance of those who are excluded (intentionally or unintentionally). Except in minor cases of legibility, factual errors, new information for context or aesthetic edits I have resisted much of the urge to edit or add to this book to make it more definitive. Instead, as time goes by it becomes more and more unique as a time capsule. This is a unique cross section of what styles were like in the United States from the '60s to the 2010s and how they vary and compare by time and place. They were brought together at a time just slightly before our current experience of global convergence, when locale was more of a driving force than it is today.

In 2003 we created a website and started creating and selling digital fonts designed with graffiti writers. Social media was relatively new when this project originated. Our first (possibly the first) handstyle video of Sabe KST was uploaded to YouTube in July of 2006. YouTube had just launched one year and five months earlier in February of 2005. When we met in the now gone St Marks Bookshop in NYCs East

Village, Sabe was the first writer to see the vision of this project, before I even had a proof of concept. I hope books and book stores survive the shifts of our current societal moment. They allow for a wonderful dichotomy of both intentional timelines, overlapping storylines and the haphazard discoveries that this project represents in so many ways.

But our analog times had limitations too. The advent of social media made it possible to track down writers from different eras in different cities. Without the early days of *artcrimes*, *12oz*, *Prophet*, *Flickr*, *Youtube*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and more – I doubt the connections, credibility and context could have made this project possible. And yet, I knew we were racing the clock. The internet was starting to merge and conflate styles (and other things) more quickly than analog means and geographic limitations were able to in previous generations. And in today's environment of echo chambers and polarization I have personally withdrawn pretty drastically from social media. A new crop of archivists are doing a killer job of documenting the art forms of tags, throwies and pieces. My hats off to them—almost as much as it is to the archivists who came before us like Jon Naar, Martha Cooper, Henry Chalfant and Charlie Ahearn. Their works of archiving this culture became meditative tools for so many artists that followed. Maybe this edition of *Flip the Script* will help some to do the same. Maybe we can unplug, to become more intentional, like those masters of handstyles in the far east or the middle ages who meditated over illuminated manuscripts or chased the perfect ensō. We might have something we can learn from those modern day wanderers we call vandals who continue to adorn our cities' streets. In our quest to quell our existential angst and make a mark, some are more concerned with ephemeral, tactile practices. Could those practices seen as antisocial for so many actually help make us more human?

Christian Acker
New York City, 2023

Introduction

A decent handstyle is an essential skill in the arsenal of artists and designers. Yet deft execution of hand-crafted letter forms is a nearly forgotten art in the age of a million-and-one free fonts. We tap keyboards far more frequently than we touch ink to paper. Graffiti may well be the last great execution of highly practiced penmanship in popular culture.

The skill most true to the raw beauty of skeletal letter forms is that most persecuted form of graffiti: the tag. Tagging is, to outsiders, by far the least-respected form of graffiti—and not without reason. It's often a writer's entry to graffiti, and consequently there are a lot of bad tags hastily strewn about our streets. Along with the bad, well-executed tags are buffed from our cities' walls within days, or even hours, preventing young practitioners from learning from their surroundings anything like as easily as writers of the 1970s and 1980s. In true 21st century fashion would-be vandals now go online to seek influence; picking and choosing styles *à la carte*, few fully learning how to wield the skills they acquire; like practitioners of a religion or a philosophy divorced from its history. This volume seeks to contextualize, for the first time, the tagging styles of American graffiti writers from different periods and regions in a visual history.

Just as calligraphy was the inspiration for type designers of generations past, today's urban glyphs are the inspiration for a new typography of tomorrow. Graffiti does not lend itself well to laymen's lettering and fonts if the designer is not truly familiar with the art form. For many designs the problem lies in the lack of understanding of just how disciplined good graffiti writers are at their craft. Surely there is an appropriate place for freestyle forms and expressive renditions, just as there is room for expressive freestyle forms in calligraphy? But these forms that are so beautiful when shaped by hand, prove to be the very nuisance that faults a font. Thus type designers of the past, when working from a calligraphic inspiration understood it as such, an inspiration. The work of Nicholas Jensen or Claude Garamond does not lose its touch of humanity when it regulates the letter forms. On the contrary it makes these letter forms more legible and harmonious when the font is set in lines of text. Since the mid-fifteenth century, when Gutenberg first developed the process of

printing with movable type, the art of typography has undergone incredible changes. These changes were, and continue to be, mostly driven by changes in technology and, more recently, by shifts in the cultural aesthetic. Shifts and changes in philosophies and aesthetics are visible in the evolution of letter forms and subtleties of design.

Throughout the history of the written word, letter forms have developed with different aesthetics at different times within given geographic and cultural centers. Different forms or “hands” of calligraphy arose in different cultures, with further variations arising within those cultures over time. These forms were not merely individual expressions, as today’s handwriting has become, but lived within families such as Gothic, Uncial or Chancery. Individual expression and style in today’s handwriting has become increasingly prevalent within the last few generations, most likely due to the fact that so much written communication today is filtered through the technology of computer and cellular phone keyboards—it becomes typographic in nature by the time it reaches its recipient. Technology has allowed penmanship to become much less formal than it ever has been before; handwriting of ages past had a tradition of very well defined forms and cultural norms. From the scribes of ancient times to the Palmer Method of the early twentieth century, structured and regulated letters were integral to handwriting. With this loss of educated penmanship, it is very possible that today, formal calligraphy and urban graffiti are the only writing forms that still follow such highly developed aesthetic norms as to how to draw letterforms.

Like most of Western civilization and culture, typography too looks to the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. The Romans had their capitals, standing straight, with elegant serifs tapering ever thinner until they disappear into the next letter. Roman capital letters were most likely designed for inscription, the most common form in which we encounter them today is most famously, carved into the Trajan Column in Rome. But just as the established and notable practice of Roman typography has been handed down throughout history so has the practice of the subversives and vandals of Rome.

The very practice of graffiti has Latin roots tracing back to early Rome. Graffiti, from the Latin word *graffito* (writing), has been preserved in the city of Pompei, on walls underneath years of Mount Vesuvius's dust. It has been preserved in the catacombs beneath Rome, where early Christians worshipped in hiding, scrawling prayers on the walls. In fact, graffiti has been found in almost every civilization with some sort of urban culture. Where there are walls, there are defacements—of varying artistic merit.

Just as the art of calligraphy developed different cultural norms throughout history, traveling from place to place, so graffiti has always been there in the local backgrounds of art and design history. Today, as we look at the history of calligraphy and type design, we can see trends in letter forms that have intrinsic geographic, or specific historical implications even for those observers unfamiliar with the history of design, typography or lettering. For example, Gothic lettering conjures up Northern Europe during the middle ages, specifically Germany, and England. Humanist italics bring to mind the values of the Renaissance. Uncial and half-uncial have a very Celtic feel in our collective memory. As with calligraphic lettering, contemporary graffiti has the same associative power.

The worldwide popularity of contemporary graffiti has its roots in the cities of the American North-East. There was something about the early 1970s; every kid who could get his hand on a can of spray paint was putting their nickname on every wall, train, bus, billboard and mailbox in almost every city on the East Coast. It was a phenomenon that was being born simultaneously in multiple cities, and each had its own style that would develop over time. Today, we can look at these letter forms and see a time and a place inside them. Tall and skinny forms hail from Philadelphia. Round and wide are the mark of New York. California graffiti predates the rest of American graffiti—always contending with the Cholo or Mexican-American influence of square, angular letters, practiced by gangs that trace roots at least back to the '40s and '50s. Traditionally, Baltimore writers use letters with a startlingly aggressive leftwards lean. DC, and other cities of graffiti's second and third generation, have produced exciting new hybrids of historical letter forms. As the art form has spread you can see developments on almost every continent. In each new place the art form travels, historical knowledge precedes it, and yet a distinctive style emerges.

To the outsider, to the person who isn't familiar with the culture of graffiti, it may come as a shock to hear that there is a discipline to the letter forms that grace and curse the cities' walls. But be assured that these artists/vandals develop their hands via the repetitious writing of these letter forms thousands upon thousands of times, often before even approaching a public space.

A word of self-defense for the amateur historians amongst us. This is, by and large an anecdotal history—by no means definitive. There are many important people and many important developments that have been left out of these pages for numerous reasons. A number of individuals have been included in acknowledgement of their influence, but without their full involvement. Alas, with an underground culture whose oral history is often times hearsay, anecdotal is as close to the bull's eye as I could hope to get.

For the student, our goal is not to simply imitate the scripts, fonts and alphabets of these masters' writing. Imitation of each letter will not do. Our goal is to take our knowledge of contemporary graffiti culture and give it greater context by applying principles learned from calligraphy and type design history. The artists showcased in this book were chosen for a variety of reasons; they each represent the fine practitioners of their individual geographic styles, some more famously than others, but they are all innovators who have their roots in the histories of their respective cities as well as an understanding of what's going on outside of their hometowns.

Be forewarned: the alphabets and exercises found in this book are meant for the practice, education and edification of your hand and mind. Imitation is a good first step, but imitation of the forms will not immediately result in the desired effect, for *flow* is equally important. And the flow will only come with time. The kung-fu mysteries of a letter's negative space, or a word's bounce will not come immediately, and are often the mysteries that cannot be spelled out for a student through a step-by-step instruction. This is my attempt to lead the horse to water. Only by practice and repetition will the missing pieces of the required knowledge come within reach.

Historical Context



① Colossus Of Roads

Keeping the tradition alive in the 20th century. Writing since at least the 1970s, a classic hobo cowboy tends to carry different punch lines.

② Palm Tree Herby, 1979

According to The Solo Artist, Herby is "The grandfather of boxcar art." With reportedly hundreds of thousands of monikers, seeing his art on boxcars around the country was not uncommon many years after his passing.

③ Bozo Texino

Filmmaker Bill Daniel released a brilliantly enigmatic film in 2005 entitled *Who is Bozo Texino?* In 2018 the Massillon Museum (Ohio) presented *Moniker: Identity Lost and Found*, unearthing details previously obscured. Bozo Texino was born James Herbert McKinley in Kentucky, 1893 and started writing his moniker by 1919. He worked for several railroads through the 1910's and 20's. In 1939 he claimed to have marked more than a quarter million freight cars. In an interview with *The San Antonio Light* he explained "I just took the [the nickname] 'Bo' and added a 'zo,' so it would rhyme with Laredo," McKinley said. "I used to sign it 'Bozo Laredo' until I came to San Antonio, then kind of shortened Texas and Mexico to get 'Texino.'"

Contemporary graffiti's origins, like so much of 20th century youth culture, seems to have emerged in the wake of the economic boom that followed WWII. Changes in income across socioeconomic lines led to more free-time for youths, who, a generation earlier would likely already have been working. This allowed for greater educational opportunities, as well as more time to explore self-expression, art and music—or to get in trouble.

Like most popular art forms today we can trace graffiti's roots to a folk art tradition of the poor and working classes. As gospel and blues predate rock 'n' roll, monikers predate modern tags. The earliest iterations of graffiti in the United States preceded this post-war growth, and stood in contrast to it; hobo signs and monikers that occurred a generation earlier as men traveled the country seeking work during the Depression. Just like pre-war folk music and bluegrass gave birth to post-war country and rock 'n' roll, these ancestral forms of vandalism morphed and changed and eventually emerged in different forms in different cities.

By the late 19th century, traveling vagabonds were already known as hobos. Unlike tramps or bums, hobos were migratory workers, wandering from job to job, with a set of specific community standards and particular ethics. Hobos acquired, or developed, two distinct forms of graffiti. One was the moniker, a signature often accompanied by a pictogram and serving the same purpose as contemporary tags, simply stating, "I was here." The second was a set of signs, signals or pictograms meant to help other traveling hobos in deciphering a new town upon first approach. Hobo signs could range from warnings of neighbors with barking dogs to whether a place was safe enough to set up camp. Signs even designated doctors who were friendly to hobos, or whether work was available. During the Great Depression thousands of men left home to search for employment. These freshly minted migrant workers, traveled across the country primarily by boxcar, increasing the profile of monikers and other graffitos in the national consciousness in the process.



①

In the margins you can see multiple, contemporary freight monikers. Many of these monikers have been around for several decades, continuing the tradition of hobo graffiti up to the present day. The pictogram will typically stay consistent, but the name may change; sometimes they are dated, or have additional punch lines or notes.

Although historically any implement would do—monikers were scratched in paint with tools, written with chalk or charcoal—the tools of a contemporary moniker are typically a solidified oil-based marker, able to mark industrial and worn exterior metal.



②

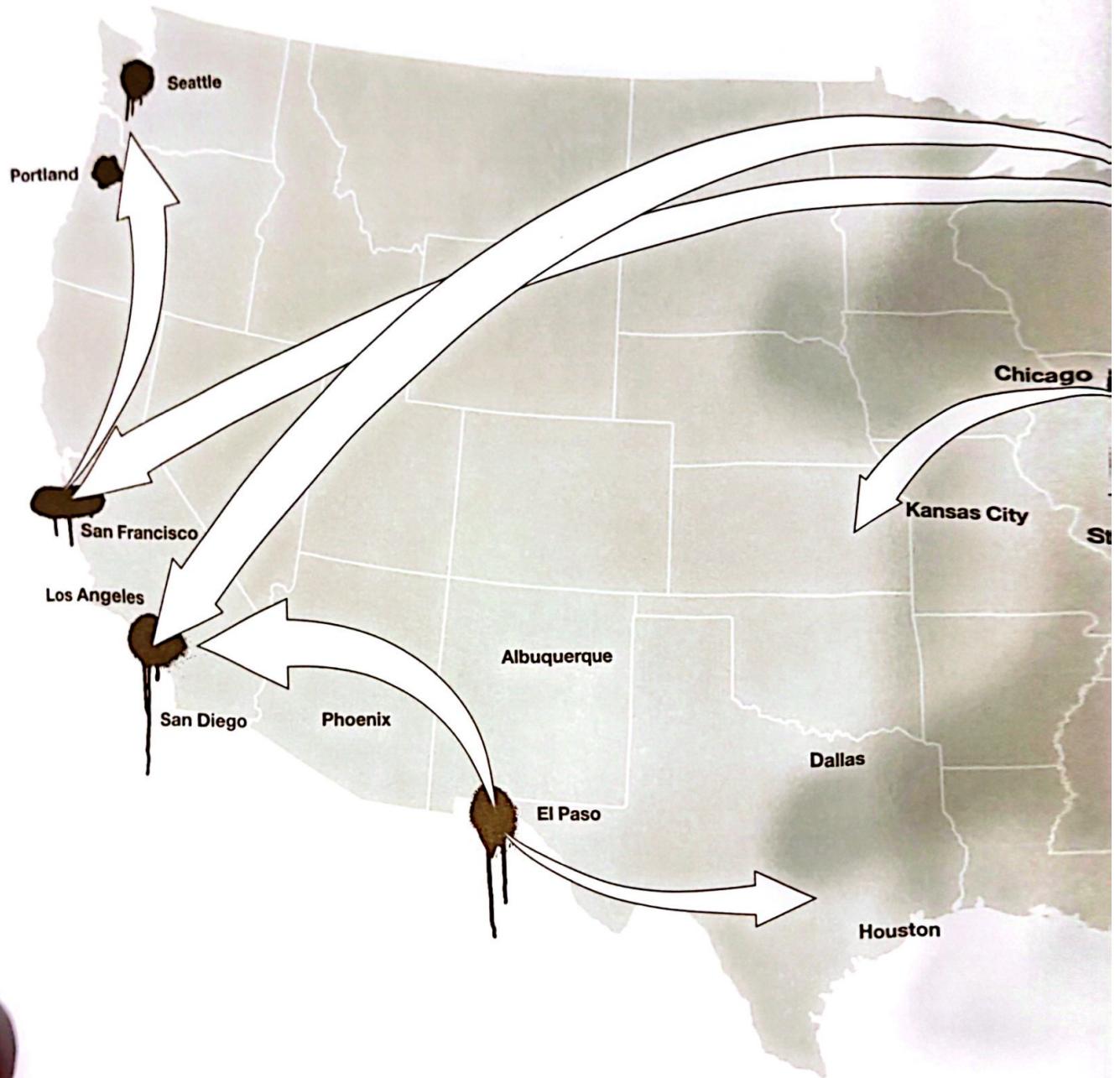
- ① Smokin' Joe
- ② The Solo Artist, 2010
- ③ Kilroy Was Here



For many years Kilroy's origins have been debated. In Great Britain, the character is known as "Mr. Chad," and the Australian version of the phrase is "Foo was here." "Foo was here" might date as early as World War I, and the character of Chad may have derived from a British cartoonist in 1938, possibly pre-dating "Kilroy was here." There is film evidence of its existence in a 1946 US Government film at the Bikini Atoll nuclear tests. The most detailed version of the Kilroy story appeared in 2010s publishing of *The History of American Graffiti* by Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon who tracked the legend (via several 1960s newspaper accounts) of James J. Kilroy, a former sign-painter and rate-setter who worked in a Quincy, Massachusetts shipyard inspecting

work coming out of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding operation during WWII. Kilroy would mark his inspections in chalk or grease crayon. These ship parts would make their ways around the country by freight or ship to the European theater, where they would be seen by scores of soldiers. Whether by first hand accounts or by seeing endless imitators, his presence was known to the majority of servicemen of WWII and Korea. Wherever GI's would end up, the ubiquitous scrawl seemed to predate their arrival. Many of the GI's would continue the practice across Europe and bring it home with them after their discharge. And if you didn't participate personally you could purchase it on a variety of trinkets, mementos and other merchandise by the 1950s.

Migration of Styles





❶ L.A. & Southwest

Photographic evidence suggests brush-and-tar tags first appear in the L.A. River at least as early as the 1930s. Usually inspired by blackletter, first called Olde English, later just called Cholo. Gang graffiti evolves up to a crescendo by the '70s. There are dozens of different styles for each neighborhood gang, before larger city-wide and more organized gangs, drugs and violence take hold in the later '70s and '80s. L.A. sees a wave of hip-hop styled writers in the '80s, and by the '90s they start appropriating gang-style letter forms into their repertoire, creating a hybrid style that has worldwide influence today.

❷ Chicago & Midwest

Many of the early Olde English handstyles can be traced back to the early Chicago gangs, who would use regal letter forms on their sweaters, jackets, business cards and walls. Toasts and jail poems, precursors to rap, are the first visually artistic art forms passed around from hand to hand by prisoners, which may have been the link from city to city.

❸ Philadelphia

'60s and '70s gang graffiti starts to move throughout the jail system. Olde English becomes known simply as Gangster style in Philadelphia. ESPO and KAD think the style seemed to be most prominently used by groups of gangster-youths who hung out under the Frankford Ave El Train in North Philly. By the late '70s the Gangster print starts getting taller. By 1980 the style known as wickets were developing and is often credited to RA RA, ROY COOL and NB and his crew SAM (Sly Artistic Masters).

❹ New York City

By 1969 TAKI 183 is already in high gear with all city block print tags. The New York Times takes notice by 1971. Writers started adding more style to their tags to differentiate from the glut of writers. About that same time, 1971-72 TOPCAT brings Philly gangster prints to New York. Particularly influential on the Broadway subway lines of Manhattan's Upper West Side, it becomes known as Broadway Elegant. It also becomes the stylistic start to the published time line—a stylistic moment caught on film for the book *The Faith of Graffiti*.

❺ Baltimore & DC

COOL DISCO DAN is one of the first prominent writers to awaken Washington DC in the mid '80s. A gangster-styled print DC called Go-Go reminiscent of earlier Philadelphia styles. In the early '80s REVOLT moves to Baltimore, bringing NYC influences. By the mid to later '80s Baltimore has created a hybrid style all of their own by taking Philly styles, 'whipping' them out long and leaning them backward.

❻ Boston & New England

The B-boy phenomena of the early '80s hits Boston and early connections to New York bring graffiti up north. There is an early movement to bomb the elevated train line, that is subsequently torn down, forcing graffiti to street-level creative outlets. Many styles are created by prominent writers who have family ties to New York and travel back and forth with their interests and influences.

❼ Bay Area & Northwest

In the early 80s, bus-hop styles evolve from the unique transit systems that enable its proliferation. One-liner styles, executed as quickly as possible, sometimes without looking, so that you can catch tags on seat backs of en route busses. Visiting writers from Seattle eventually bring these styles back home. Transplanted writers from New York and Boston bring East Coast styles to the generation of S.F. writers who hosted them.

❽ Southeast Handstyles

B-boy culture, and *Style Wars* are eagerly imported by South Floridians of the early 80s, creating a starting point. Whipping the letters and slanting them back, similar to Baltimore's rendition of Philly style, becomes the signature style from the mid '80s to early '90s. NY transplants continue to bring a new sensibility to the mix.





Tools

With enough practice, anyone who can write the alphabet can learn to write in any of the styles in this book. You are in a unique position to benefit from the talent and passion of generations who have come before you. The more patience and time invested in practice, the more your investment will yield rich returns. Once mastered, your own innovations will begin to emerge and become your own. Do not forget from whence you came.

The first lesson is often overlooked; your tools can and must inform your technique. Let your tools work for you; don't work against them. Solid techniques are not acquired easily but take hours to hone, and many years to develop. Don't worry too much about being original yet, just work at being good. Building confidence from mastering the basics will start you on the best footing.

A few basic principles borrowed from the worlds of typography and calligraphy can be applied to your efforts, no matter their artistic or vandalistic merit. For instance, consistency in the size and angle, or lean, of your letters will go far toward giving them a professional appearance. When writing with a chisel tip, keeping the angle of your nib consistent will ensure that your letters and words have a mixture of thicks and thins balancing your words in the right proportions. A larger, or extra-juicy, marker or "mop" lends itself to styles that are more open and round, with larger counter spaces inside. This gives tags a greater legibility when the letters flood with ink and drip.



Getting to know your tools

Sharpie Ultra Fine Point



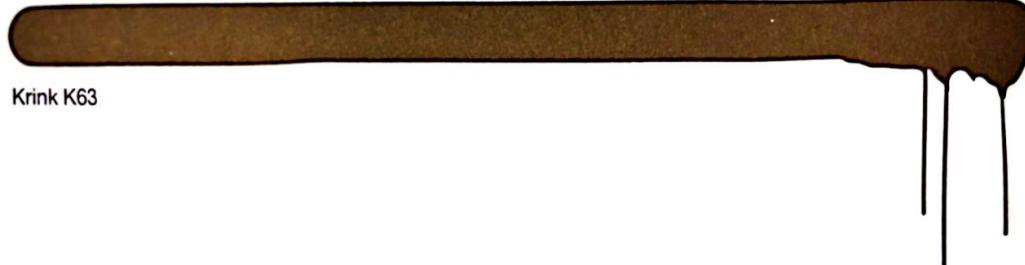
Pilot Super Color Fine Point



Pilot Medium Point



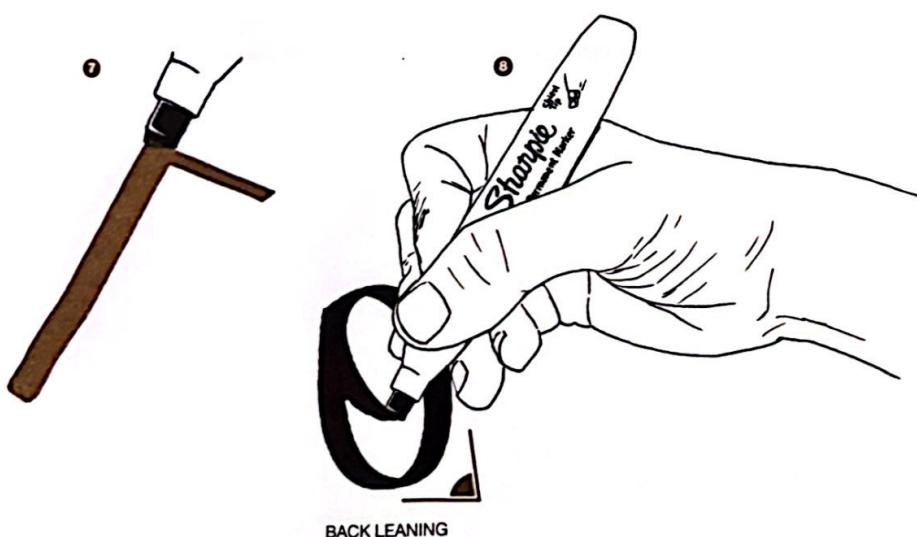
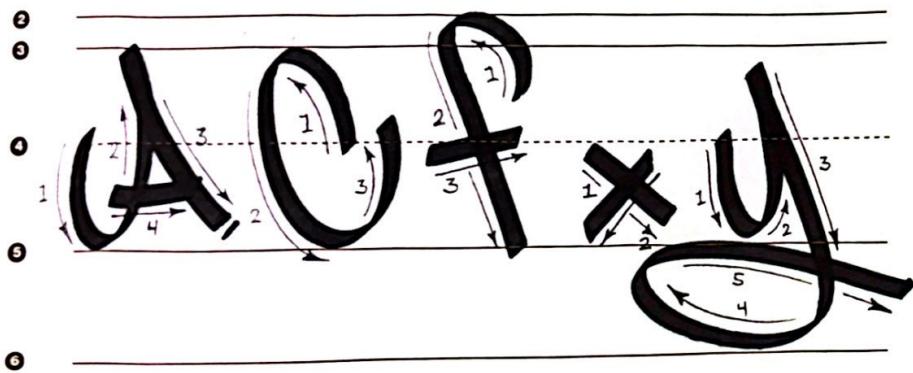
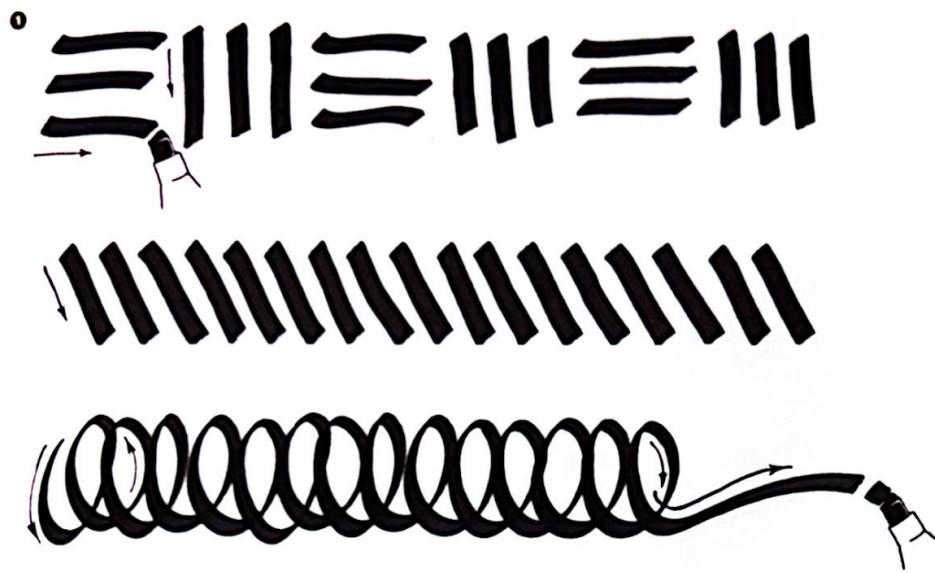
Krink K63



Giving your letters consistent baselines and heights creates **strong lines of soldiers**, keeping your words together to form single thoughts, both aurally when read aloud, and visually strong. Occasionally you will see some writers employ a playful bounce, but this is best left to experienced writers who have mastered the basics.

And finally, the spacing of your letters: some are tighter, some are looser, some even overlap. Depending on the city and style of origin, intentions change. In some, tags are individual and meant to be seen as signatures or logos, while other cities have a much more regimented use of modular letter forms that combine for any number of words, phrases or placas (roll calls).





① Exercises

Especially if you are new to a tool, it is a good idea to practice the basic strokes of pushing and pulling strokes, angles, curves and arches as seen here.

② Ascender

③ Cap Height

④ x-Height

⑤ Baseline

⑥ Descender

⑦ Angle of the Nib

Be sure to keep your chisel angles consistent. Rarely will you need to twist the pen or marker in your hand.

⑧ Angle of the Letter

Be sure to keep your letter angles consistent. If it is italic and leans forward, it all should continue consistently, if it leans back keep the grade of lean the same. Doubtless you will see exceptions that break the rule; but the only golden rule is to learn the rules before you break them. In handstyles, as in most martial arts, you learn by repetitive action, not by reading and acknowledging a given rule a single time.



Getting to know your tools



This is a starter list of classic marker tools that were available for most of the history this book covers and at the time of its first release. Many more brands and tools, specifically created for graffiti (including spray paints) have been developed and are available with a little searching.

① Pilot Paint Marker
Chisel tip. Oil-based ink. Good for most surfaces. Japanese market and specialty art suppliers.

② Pilot Super Color Marker
Wide & broad. Permanent ink: black, red, blue and green. Good for smooth surfaces.

③ Pilot Medium Point
Silver, oil-based marker. Available in multiple color options.

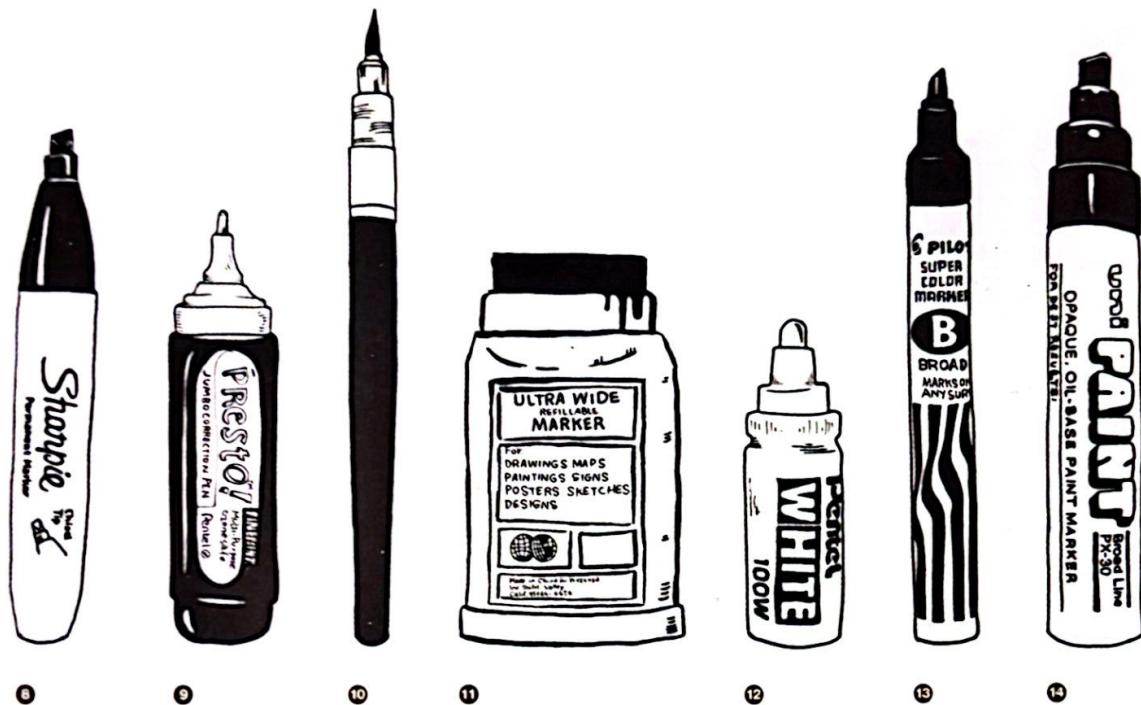
④ Krink K63 Ink Marker & K60 Paint Marker
Squeeze bottle for controlling drips. Dye-based ink markers: red, purple, blue, green. Paint Markers available in over a dozen variations including metallics.

⑤ Krink 4oz. Mop
"Shoe polish-styled mop" for large scaled and drippy tags. Available in Krink Super Black Opaque ink. Also a long-used tool for original silver Krink tags. Writes on most surfaces, but the soft sponge tip is best used on smooth surfaces.

⑥ Mini Wide
The junior-sized, subway-era classic. Fill with Pilot or homemade inks. Best used with dye-based inks, as opposed to oil-based paints.

⑦ Krink K70
Fine-point tip with valve action that lets you control the ink's flow. Dye-based inks in translucent colors are water resistant and include: black, red, blue, cyan, magenta, yellow and purple. Writes on most surfaces.





❶ Sharpie Permanent Chisel Tip

Chisel tip nib. Permanent ink marker. Best for practice use on paper and other smooth surfaces.

❷ Presto Correction Pen

Metal, roller-ball nib. White only, squeeze bottle. Writes on most surfaces, with a nice wispy effect, but it takes a lot of practice to master.

❸ Brush Pen

Brush-effect. Black ink. Squeezable barrel for controllable ink flow, replaceable ink reservoir. Best on paper. Japanese market and specialty art suppliers.

❹ Uni Wide/Ultra Wide

A NY subway-era classic. Fill with pilot or homemade inks. Best used with dye based inks as opposed to oil-based paints. Writes best on smooth surfaces.

❺ Pentel White 100W

Round nibbed paint marker, only available in white. The paint has a not-quite opaque, translucent quality. Shake well for best results. The small size always seems to be in your pocket. Good for small tags on smooth surfaces.

❻ Pilot Super Color Marker

Broad, chisel-tipped marker. Permanent ink in various colors. Good for paper and small tags on smooth surfaces.

❼ Uni Paint Px-30

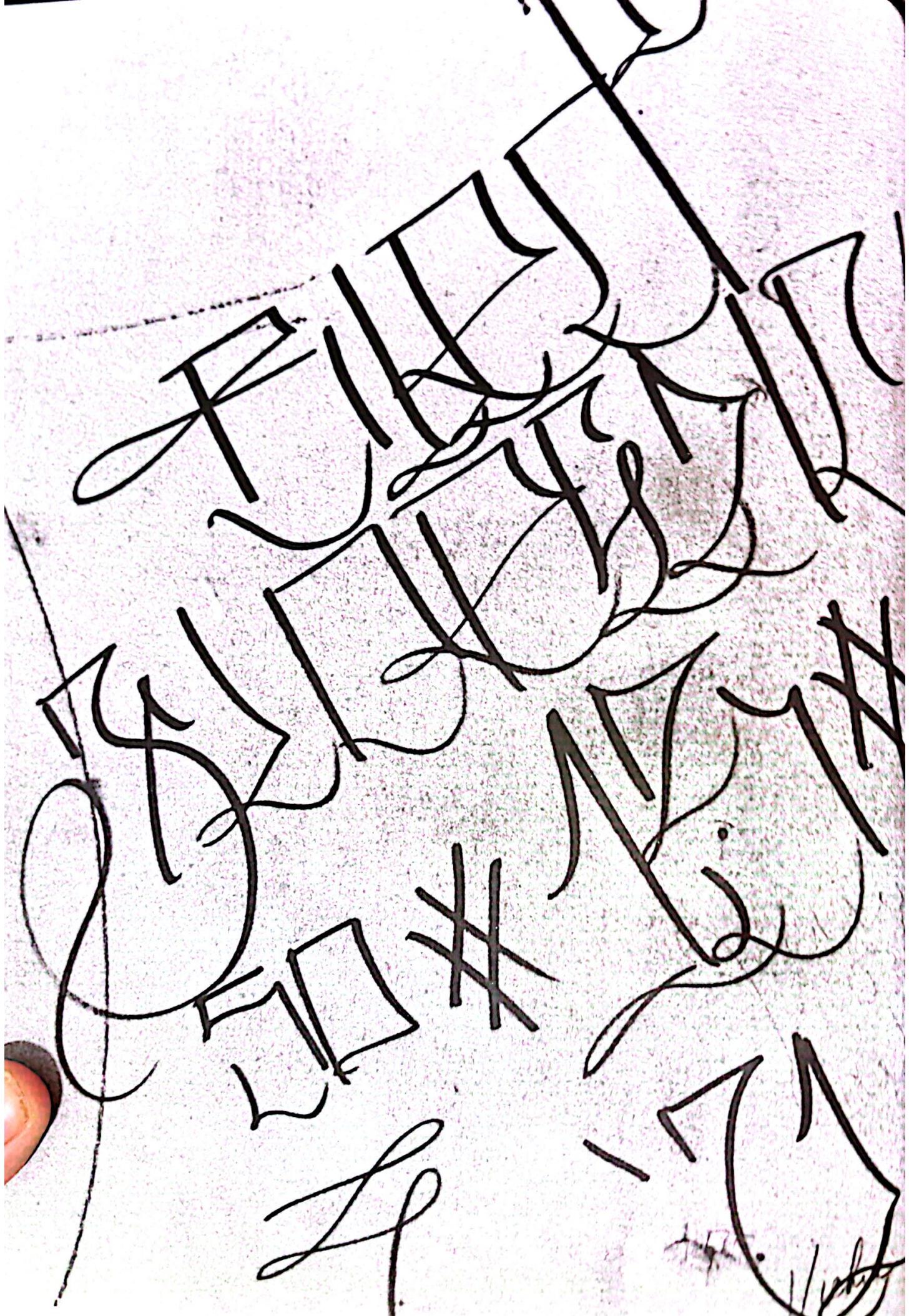
Broad-line, chisel-tipped paint marker. Thick and painty. The *Toyota Corolla* of vandalism; well available, reliable, not too pricey. May drip but not as nicely or controllably as other products.

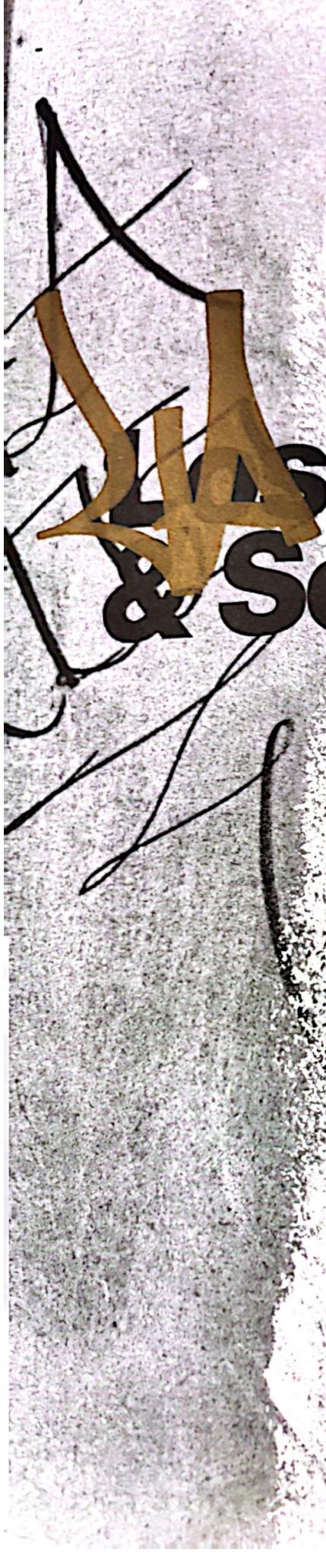


Getting to know your tools









Los Angeles & Southwest

Cholo, Los Angeles and Southwestern handstyles have histories that can be traced back in photo records at least as far as the late 1930s. Cholo writers had their own world of styles and rules several decades before contemporary graffiti emerged.

Mexican-American graffiti seems to have reached its artistic height in the 1970s, during the twilight between the Chicano cultural movement and the rise of the present day Cholo youth-culture. Handstyles were captured like mosquitoes in amber in the photos of Howard Gribble, like the one at left. Back then, dozens of writing styles covered neighborhood walls. In the '50s and '60s, before the rise of drug culture, gangs were smaller, localized crews of friends and neighbors. The drug trade (and the war on drugs) fostered violence and subsequent incarcerations and eventually created larger networks of organized crime. That rise in crime and incarceration led to a new commons in which styles converged. Before that, styles were handed down in small, local communities. These styles collectively became known as Olde English. In contrast to most other styles of graffiti there was an emphasis on entire systems of alphabets, most likely because, when a practitioner wrote in this style, they more often than not were writing a roll call or *placa* for the entire gang. A *placa* is a list of each member's name, or more often, nickname. Well executed *placas* are straight, well measured and centered or fully justified lists of names (the names line up flush on both left and right). Often they would follow the natural lines of the grid created by cinder block or brick walls. Spray paint was patented in 1949, and come the '50s, widely available in hobby and model shops. By then, however, Cholo writing,

L.A. & Southwest Handstyles

and the tradition of its letter forms, was already established with brush. Chaz Bojorquez traces the practice at least as far back as his father's generation and Los Angeles' shoe-shine boys of the '30s and '40s who, some believe, created their early tags with their shoe daubers, rather than brush and bucket.

This combination of the tools utilized, and the cultural influence, seems to point inherently to Olde English typography as a natural extension of their time and place. Gothic types have long been a staple of the visual landscape in Mexico and Mexican-American culture. They abound in hand-painted signage throughout the country to this day, and with good reason. The very first printing press in the new world was established in Mexico City in 1534, imported from Seville, Spain and stocked full with the metal types of the day, mostly from Dutch type foundries. Chaz has a fascinating take on the reasoning behind the use of Olde English. Black-letter type has a connection, he asserts, not just to the past, but to the "official" past. It feels heavy, regal and official. This is the type choice for newspaper nameplates, monuments, documents, even the Catholic Church. For early gangs, Bojorquez believes, Olde English was a show of strength. Even the format of placas imitated newspapers' layouts of headline, subhead and body copy. Straight and clean, justified to both sides, each character carefully measured.

When asked about the difference of styles in New Mexico compared to L.A. Mike Giant says:

"It's damn close. The Aztlán nation, from El Paso up to Albuquerque, maybe as far north as southern Colorado and all the way across to Los Angeles, and then it kind of trickles up to San Francisco through El Espana too. [The styles differ slightly from place to place.] That's the thing. It's still like a tradesman's tradition. It's passed on by hand, by showing someone. But you had to have interest to even have access, by asking about it. It's one of those things, and it's still that way. Even my access to it in my own experience was limited by the people who had it, because they didn't think I was down and didn't understand it. They didn't want me to be able to read it, but then once I had proven myself to people in the graffiti circles it then became, 'Oh, we should show him, because he really does love this shit.' And [by that time] they didn't even care about it anymore. It's something they were doing when they were little [kids]."

By the time breakdancing, hip hop and New York-styled graffiti made its influence known on the walls of southern California, in the early 80s the artistic gene pool was already deeply steeped in the history of Cholo writing. For the best



L.A. & Southwest Handstyles

CHAZ—Los Angeles
Circa early 2000s



SABER—Los Angeles
Circa mid 2000s



RISK—Los Angeles
Circa 2009



TLOK—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



TEMPT—Los Angeles
Circa mid 1990s



MOUSE—San Diego
Circa mid 2000s



DIE SLOW—San Diego
Circa late 2000s



WENT—ALBUQUERQUE
Circa late 2000s



L.A. & Southwest Handstyles

BIG SLEEPS—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



2TONE—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



EKLIPS—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



GUER—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



GEAR—Los Angeles
Circa early 2000s



BUKET—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



HAELER—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



WISK—Los Angeles
Circa late 1990s



GKAE—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



PASTE—Los Angeles
Circa 2010



TEAR—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



L.A. & Southwest Handstyles

REVOK—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



CHAKA—Los Angeles
Circa late 1980s



SKREW—Los Angeles
Circa mid 2000s



AUGOR—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



ATLAS—Los Angeles
Circa late 2000s



part of two decades, there were two styles of writing coexisting in the region, but trying to retain separate identities. The influence on each side was more than subtle, but the influence of Cholo culture was too great. The combination of Cholo, surf and car culture eventually became the potpourri of the surf and skate aesthetic. This was later distilled and visible in the logos of Dog Town, Rat Bones, Powell Peralta, and Thrasher Magazine's iconic Skate and Destroy—all by



C. R. Stecyk III. And with that the Cholo aesthetic became a mainstay for the community of skaters and surfers around the world. Stecyk explains:

❶ Los Angeles
Graphic for Stussy
2003. By Chaz Bojorquez.

"Los Angeles has an outdoor mural culture extending back through Siqueiros, from the Spanish to the indigenous First Nations people. The Tongva and Chumash did a lot of pictographic things. We would go back into the canyons and mountains that abutted where we lived to see the outcroppings and caves adorned with indigenous petroglyphs and shamanistic images. Really powerful pictorial and geometric art was in place long before any of the interlopers arrived here. And when the Spanish came, they did these amazing "we were here" markings in beautiful, florid calligraphic script. Their religious art also decorated the missions and the casas of the rancheros. Around town, in Venice, Santa Monica and all parts of L.A., everybody had their own individual hand. Someone who was inculcated in the aerosol arts could make a single mark and it would be identifiable as their own. I was aware of that hand and diligently studied the archetypal forms."

By the mid 1990s a new, hybrid style was emerging that has helped define the L.A. style to this day. Led by crews like AWR, MSK, CBS and TKO—to name a few of the most influential—these writers sampled the best of both worlds with tags and a mentality rooted in SoCal history, and murals and masterpieces to rival New York's hip hop culture; they were creating a Cholo 2.0 tagging style, one whose influence is found the world over.

Olde English. New World.

• *Ihsu is: ut cognosc
tā. Elij q̄ nascet et
narrabit filiis suis*



• Los Angeles Times

Contemporary critics have often pointed to Mayan and Aztec indigenous art as inspiration for Cholo graffiti, which was obviously a large inspiration in the height of the Brown Pride, Chicano movements of the 1960s and '70s and of artists aware of it since. But Olde English has deeper roots in the Mexican-American zeitgeist. As early as 1534, printing was established in Mexico City. According to *A Short History Of The Printed Word* by Robert Bringhurst and Warren Chappell:

"Mexico had a printing press a full century before the first in the British colonies, at Cambridge, Massachusetts—and along with the press had a substantive culture of publishing. Printing was introduced into Spain, at Valencia, in 1474. In Spain as elsewhere, the spread of printing was carried on by itinerant northerners. At this date, printers who were not themselves northern Europeans had at least been trained in the north. Regardless the nationality of the earliest printers in Spain, their works rapidly assumed a recognizably Spanish style... (Spain's first printer) [Lambert] Palmart's first font was a roman, but the Spaniards quickly asserted their preference for blackletter type, especially rotundas."

• Rotunda Example

Detail of manuscript, 15th or 16th Century. From the collection of Paul Shaw.

"A rounded gothic hand mainly found in Italy and Spain. Letter styles often continued in use well beyond the decades or century in which they evolved. In the case of Rotunda, it continued in use in Italy into the 16th c. and in Spanish colonies (eg Mexico) well into the 17th c."

• Hand Painted Signage

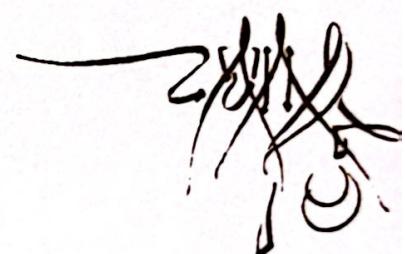
Mexico City, 2008. From the Collection of Kimou Meyer.

• LA Times Nameplate

Designed by Jim Parkinson.

HISPA-NIC-A-F-F-E-O-
G-U-G-A-N-D-O-P-U-E-G-T-O
G-I-Q-U-E-N-D-O-H-I-S-P-A-N
G-S-P-A-N-I-S-H-A-M-E-E
I-C-A-N-S-A-L-V-A-D-O-G-E
E-N-D-O-A-F-F-R-O-G-U-A-T-I-N
G-U-E-R-A-N-A-M-E-E-I-C
A-N-W-E-E-X-I-C-A-N-A-M
E-C-L-I-C-A-N-C-H-I-C-A-N-O-S
G-U-E-R-A-N-D-O-L-A-T-T-I-N
M-E-S-T-I-Z-O-L-A-T-T-I-N
A-M-E-R-I-C-A-N-H-I-S-P-A-N

ROLL CALL
Year unknown.
Chaz Bojorquez.



"That was the only graffiti that was happening. And only the ganangs were doing graffiti. And it wasn't a cool face."

"There were more styles in the '50s and '60s than there are now. Taking the square shape and tipping them back a bit. Real gor-gous. You don't see that [as often] now."

"It comes from the Latino gang tradition and that tradition still goes on. It lives—not in the streets but in the prisons. There is adding some lower case and some hip hop styles like more Old English on skin than there is on concrete."

"A placa would be almost a sign to show respect but also a symbol of allegiance for the group. It wasn't just about the person's name, but had to be something like a document. So it would have a heading, body copy, logo. Really flush left, flush right, really nice, stylized, really clean nice straight lines, caps, all the letters had to be the same height. The cleaner the better."

"It's a real old style."

"Traditional, it was all uppercase. Now I see them stars or dots or an outline or something like that."

Chaz Bojorquez

tor or young kids, it was only the kids who were getting into the gangs. There weren't that many writers. It was still underground."

"There was a tear drop [style], real thin up top with a bottom belly, but still Olde English square letters."

"There was a lazy letter [style]. They would make the letter like a triangle and they would tilt it back so the letter E would be sitting on its back, facing upwards. Or resting on top of each other at an angle, every letter was resting on the letter before. But you don't see those at all [on the streets anymore]. I haven't seen those in 20 years. People who were into the old Cholo letters, they were really into it. There was more style, but

now everything is all about hip hop or wild style. That old Cholo style is only done deep. The real gang members, the real tattoo artists, the prison guys. The Blacks have picked it up a bit, but they don't use Olde English [as much]. They use Western style. Still all caps, still all black paint. But they don't write a roll call about themselves like the Latinos' gangs. The Blacks write a roll call of their enemies. If they are writing it about the Bloods, they'll write a list of all the Bloods' names that they are against. And every word that has a B in it, like maybe 'Bob.' They'll cross the B out. Anything that's related to Blood, they'll X out. So you get this big list of Western style letters with X's through it. Which is really incredible, but it's pretty rare."



ROLL CALL
Chaz Bojorquez.
Year unknown.

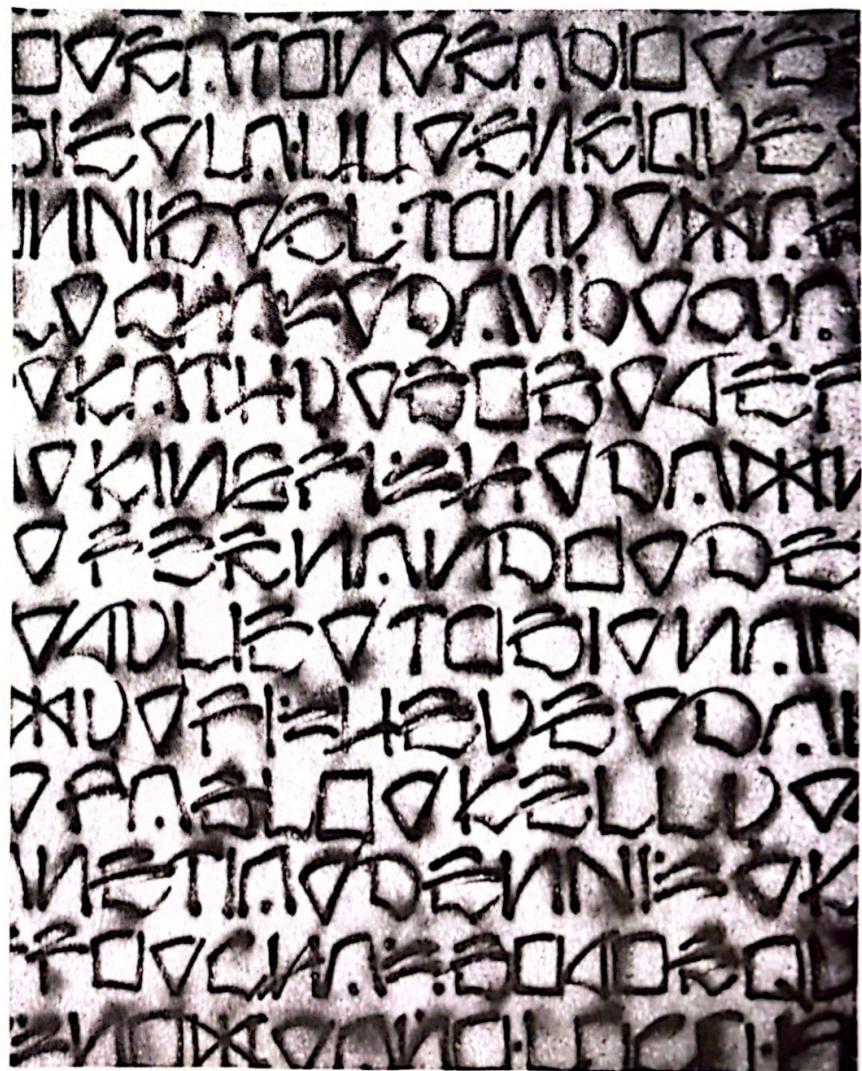
Chaz Bojorquez

"I started some classes at a local Asian museum, it wasn't that I wanted to learn Asian calligraphy. I wanted to learn how to approach a letter. I wanted to learn Asian mastery. What's the mental mastery of approaching a letter? L.A. is very influenced by the Orient. Even as a kid I would see these ancient scrolls, and even though I couldn't read the letter shapes or what they meant, I could infer by the style and by the waterfall or the eagle or the chrysanthemum blossoms. I could infer the feeling of what they were trying to say in an image or letter shape. I could almost feel it—an intellectual connection, something with culture, something ancient and profound."

"And at those times, kind of coming in was the kung fu, and all this oriental mentality, and Taoism, and the sacred writings and all that. It was real hippy, but it made me look deeper and try to make connections from abstract images and abstract letters, especially ones I couldn't understand. And I said, you know, what they are trying to do here is the same thing that the Cholos are trying to do. Empower the letter shapes that didn't only represent the community but also they represent strength and history and tradition. I wondered how you might convey pride through your letters. By making them straight. Just keep them block. Keep the announcement, flush left, flush right, and this formal presentation."



Placa / Roll Call (detail)
Chaz Bojorquez. 1980–
Collection of American
Museum, Smithsonian
Institution.

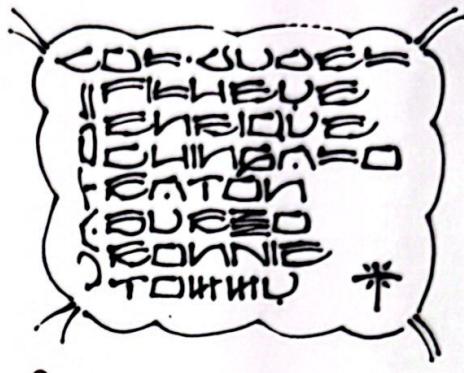


4

Chaz Bojorquez Placa



①



②

① Chingaso y Blades, 1983
Chaz Bojorquez. Zolatone paint,
acrylic, spray paint on canvas.

② Roll Call, 1975
Chaz Bojorquez.

"I started seeing all these similarities between modern advertising, Cholo graffiti presentation and Asian respect and pride. You could promote an ideal through the way you do your formatting. That's when I started seeing graffiti as art, art as advertising and advertising talks about culture. So I saw the language thing; the letters turn into words and the words turn into meaning. I started getting the bigger picture, so I said if I could understand the tradition of Cholo graffiti and master it then I might be able to take it and create a language out of it—project my feelings of what I think graffiti is, that goes beyond just the gangs or just the letter-image itself. I wanted to really get a true, meaningful understanding out of the letter shapes."

"The Asian influence reinforced the idea that the Cholo letters had true meaning. The only people who were writing were the gangsters, and there was only one guy writing for each gang. So there were not that many writers, and to be

a writer wasn't the point of the whole graffiti thing. The only real people who were dealing with calligraphy and taking it to a very spiritual and mental place were the Asians. So when I explored that avenue I said, this is exactly what the Cholos are trying to do. But they haven't taken it all the way."

"I just used that reinforcement of the Asians' writing, Asian letters and what they thought about it. And how they presented themselves to the paper. Because they would say fifty nine minutes of contemplation, 1 minute of execution and there's no erasers. You've got to know what you're gonna write ahead of time—and if I took that mentality and went back to my Cholo letters, then I was actually really saying something. One letter can make your career if it's done right."

"How much is a learned tradition versus created by me?
About 80% tradition, 20% innovation."

The Three Line E

1 Chaz Bojorquez on First Seeing the Skate And Destroy Slogan

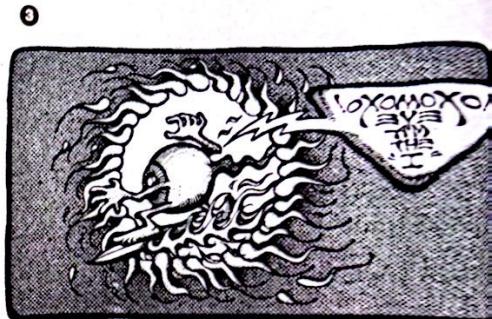
"(I thought) they bit my letter E, which was three lines. But looking back on it I really can't claim it. I think I picked it up from Rick Griffin. In some of his Zap! comic books he was doing some old style Cholo letters. But it was kind of common right at that time."

2 C.R. Stecyk III

Skate And Destroy slogan for Thrasher Magazine, 1981. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

3 Rick Griffin

1944–1991. Influential artist in the Rock, Psychedelic and Surf Art movements of the '60s and '70s. Griffin's art—his letter forms, characters, 3-Ds—was a huge influence on early graffiti writers. He was there a generation beforehand, blazing trails.



Stecyk and Destroy

1 C.R. Stecyk III

Dog Town Skates original logo/graffiti, mid 1970s.

2 Wes Humpston

Fully evolved Dog Town Skates original logo, 1977. Notice the letter forms still keep a brush quality, a calligraphic influence.

3 C.R. Stecyk III

Powell Peralta, Vato Rat, 1983.

4 C.R. Stecyk III

Bones logo, 1983.



MR. WENT

Albuquerque, NM | Late 1980s – 2010s

Handstyle

"All the Cholo stuff that I learned is all rooted in LA. By the time I moved out to New Mexico I was already doing that style. I started at 12 years old. Before that I was just learning letters. I got [interested in] NY style when I met AGREE [who moved out to NM in the '90s from NY] When I met AGREE is when I started breaking off of all the [Cholo] stuff. This one's got a really old late '70s style of Cholo writing with a little bit of a twist. It's more stylized because of the pen I was using, a chisel tip brush pen. Its funny, after doing a New York handstyle, it kinda' gets morphed in there, the way you hold the pen. With this style, you'd usually see it in a roll call. Very seldom would you see a guy get just one name up. You'd always see 2–3 names or a whole neighborhood."



A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z

L/S.

❶ Con Safos (With Safety)

"The C/S is a real sacred mark. I think the roots of it is El Paso. That's where most of the first Pachucos came out of. I've seen it since I was a kid, and never knew what it stood for. Now I understand it to be 'back off' or blessing the lettering. 'Stay away.' Its like blessing the piece in a weird way, but it also means beware, whatever you do to this ten fold to you. That kind of deal."

❷ "For the Pachuco cross you'd usually see a three dash illumination more in reference to the Trinity. This one has no significance really, I just think it looks cool to get [shine] from all angles. But the cross has been around for a very long time."

"WENT used to tell me stories about 18th Street graffiti and all that kind of thing. And he's the one that had all the old *Teen Angel's* magazines. And he had the first few issues of *Low Rider* magazine too, which I got a lot of fonts from. In one particular issue, I think it's number one, they hand wrote all the contents page with the page numbers. I just extracted a whole font from that. That's just super classic."

—MIKE GIANT

12345
= 67890 =

Teen Angel's

From the collection of the author

- Teen Angel's #2
- Teen Angel's # 8
- Teen Angel's # 13
- Teen Angel's # 118
- Teen Angel's, tattoo flash



Teen Angel's magazine was started in 1979 in Southern California as a vehicle for expression and communication for underprivileged inner city youths, who frequently wound up in gangs and eventually in the criminal justice system. The magazine served as a vehicle of exchange for art and letters, for acquiring new pen pals, for publishing one's art, or looking to find inspiration in other people's. Often the smaller squares of the interiors were filled with letters submitted to the magazine, or with roll calls of gangs and their members' names, providing vast inspiration of alphabets and styles. These magazines have long attracted writers, including outsiders, who would tap into them for inspiration. Writers from the low-rider scenes, tattoo artists and eventually graffiti writers from different cities drew on Cholo art and culture, despite having no first-hand knowledge of where it originated.

"Teen Angel's was a magazine that I would occasionally catch glimpses of when I was in Albuquerque, when I was just a little kid. Probably like, early teens [in the 1980's] I would think.

It was Latino and Mexican kids that had them. And because I was a white kid from New York, and a recent immigrant, they hid that shit from me. It wasn't until a few years later that I started to see them a little bit more among friends in high school. Once I was a graffiti artist after high school I started to run into those guys again, and because they respected me as a graffiti artist, they started to feed my curiosity a little bit. Mr. WENT from Albuquerque, he really dropped a lot of that stuff on me. In particular—all the basic Cholo handstyles I have are derivatives of things he gave me."—MIKE GIANT

"I remember in the 1970s there used to be a couple of gang magazines, actually printed in the prisons. They were large scale, 20 inches high by 15 wide, and nothing but poems and letters to their girlfriends, all from prison. They had, like, chain link all the way around the letters. All the letters in there were all in Olde English. All in Cholo. Some being really hard to read and were just gorgeous."—CHAZ

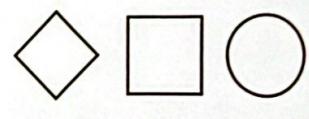
Signs of the Times

① THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER
=THE=
LADY DOG
半

② =THE QUICK =
BROWN FOX
JUMPS OVER
THE LADY DOG

③ THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER
=THE LADY DOG=

④ THE QUICK BROWN FOX
JUMPS OVER THE
— LADY DOG —



1960s & '70s 1980s 1990s

Historic geometric styles
researched and reproduced
by compositing writing examples
found in the photographic record.

① 1960s & '70s Styles
Number one is based upon the
Howard Gribble photo found
on page 22 of *Bird 1, Florencia*,
1972

② 1980s Styles

③ 1990s Styles

"In the 1980s you didn't see too
many of the diamond bottomed
tips. That was more 1970s to
me. You started seeing the early
1980s were more squarish, and
then it started getting to the really
round and curvy (in the late 1980s,
1990s)." —WENT

GIANT ONE



"It's a lineage. As you come into anything new, you kind of assume that it's new as well. Then as you get older, and you research it more, you realize that pretty much everything is really **ancient**. Graffiti is nothing new. How old are the cave paintings in France? It's the same with any kind of lettering, in particular the Cholo stuff, but its history isn't all that long."

"If you are thinking about lettering that has some dignity and power and history, it's those **old**, black-letter fonts. As people want to associate their own organization with that same power, then of course they are going to use that kind of font. Mr. CARTOON told me that they were into **Olde English** fonts because that was at the top of the newspaper. That was the hot shit. OK, then let's work with that, but of course they fuked it out a little. It's because of that history. The **association**, the power of a font. It can tell a much greater story. And in graffiti circles it tells an **individual story**. Each individual writer needs to have their own style. That's super-heavy to me."



❶ Note the angle of the Chisel tip remains constant throughout this entire alphabet. Horizontal strokes are uniformly thick. Vertical strokes show the angle the pen is held at. A slight arch in the vertical stroke creates a thickness at the entrance to the line and a thinner stroke where the marker exits the line.

Calculated Looseness

❷ "There's kind of a haphazardness to it, that just comes from experience and knowing what you can and can't do. It's a technical thing, to do a wiggly, horror font I don't really draw a line, I make little tiny circles, and just wiggle it out. And once people see me do that it's totally demystified. Oh, he's just doing it wiggly, he's just doing it loose. They think it's real particular, but it's not."



"That [wiggly line work] happened in the studio. It's just [repetition], and there are lots of different ways that you can treat a line or an edge. And I like that horror-font stuff from the old horror movies, and it just seemed to fit with the way that I was drawing the simplified Cholo letters. So it became a detail that was associated with me. That horror font has been around, but I really

hadn't seen anybody do that effect with the Cholo, and now it's pretty standard."

"I think I started skating in like '84. Pushead's work was way up there for me. He was really the best as far as I was concerned, and he always did those kind of rough treatments to his lettering. The way he renders was really influential too. It's like a calculated looseness."

Handstyle



•АВСДЕГБНІЛК>ПИ
ДРФРГСΩИУИХИЭ
=1234567890=

"That diamond style is one that I particularly got from an old Low Rider magazine, and I tried to keep it pretty damn close to the original. You can see the variations between the Ns and Ms based upon what's next to it. There are a lot of things about that font that don't make any sense. This one is really straight too. If I was going to recreate this again, I think they would be more consistent.

They all have all diamond bottoms on them. Maybe I didn't have that [technique] at the time. I know how to do that now. The A, the B the way the I is; the W is stupid-weird too. I think of this as just a classic standard. Nobody has really laid any real claim to it. It's derivative of so many neighborhood styles, especially in Los Angeles. This style is very Southern California to me."

Handstyle

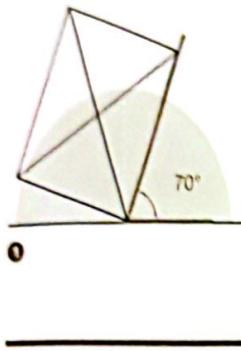


BIG SLEEPS



"As years go by, you kind of grow into what you're surrounded by and I kind of picked up a love for the lettering, and as I got involved with gangs, I took it to that level and got really good at it. I think every gang has their good and bad writers, and the ones that really excel at it. I would vandalize everything. It was mostly the name of the gang and a list of members or members who passed away."

"Once I was incarcerated I started picking it up. I always loved to draw, but I started practicing more elaborate styles and really fancy script. I started incorporating some of those real rare handstyles and L.A. gangster writing with fancy calligraphy, and trying to mix them together. I try to use it in a way that I can really stand out from everybody else. That's how much that lettering meant to me."



"I would've used this style in the late 1980s. It was used at that time in L.A. late 1980s early 1990s. They were obviously used by Hispanic gangs that put up their sets or whatever."

Unicase

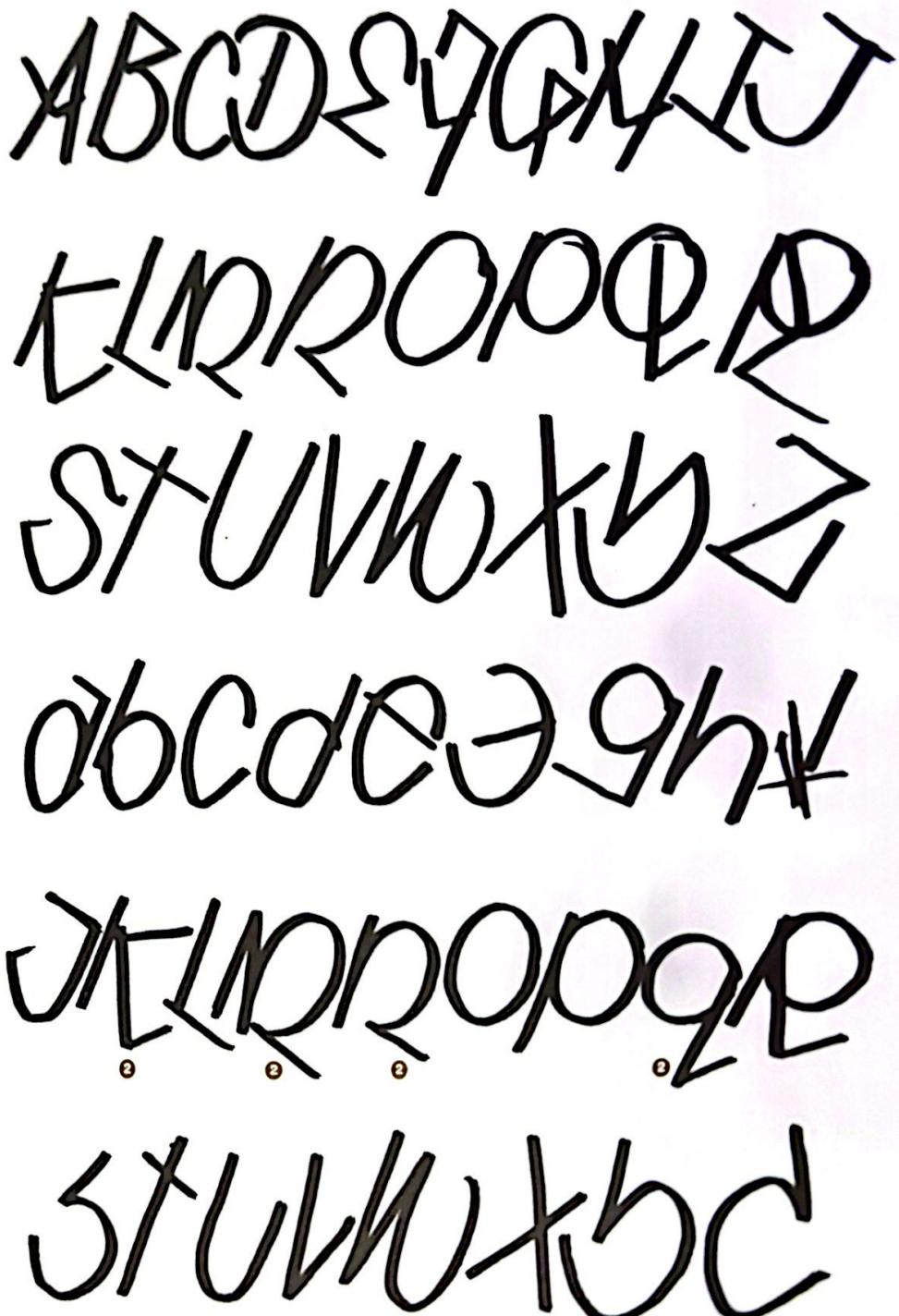
The upper and lower case are sized to the same character height. Some characters are uniformly similar, some alternate.

❶ Consistent Lean

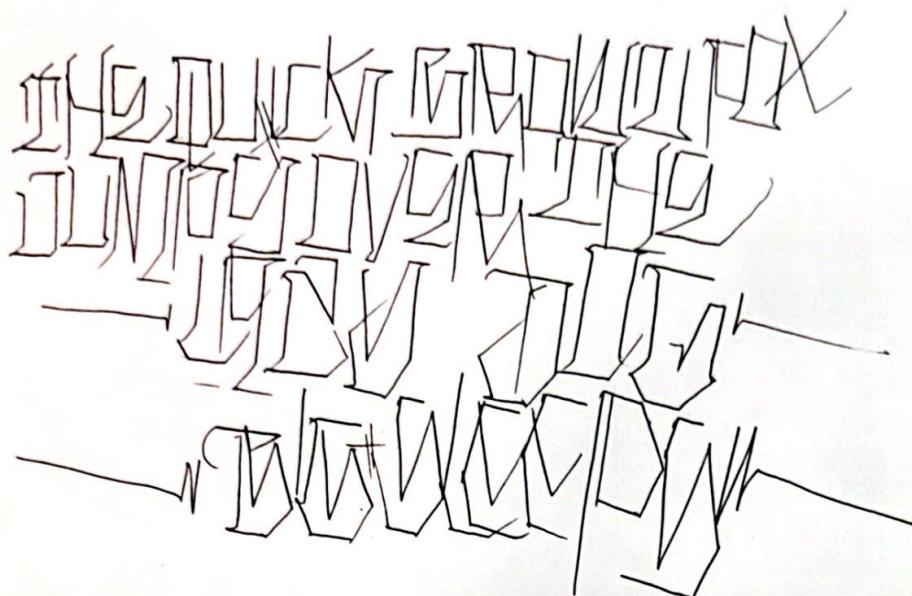
When leaning your letters to the right the hardest part is keeping your lines of text straight.

❷ Best Foot Forward

Notice the descender or 'foot' on certain characters emphasizes the bottom angle of the letter. Some, like the E, terminate at the baseline, while others descend below the baseline, helping to create an optical balance, particularly with letters that have a round curve on the right side. See K, M, N, Q, & R.



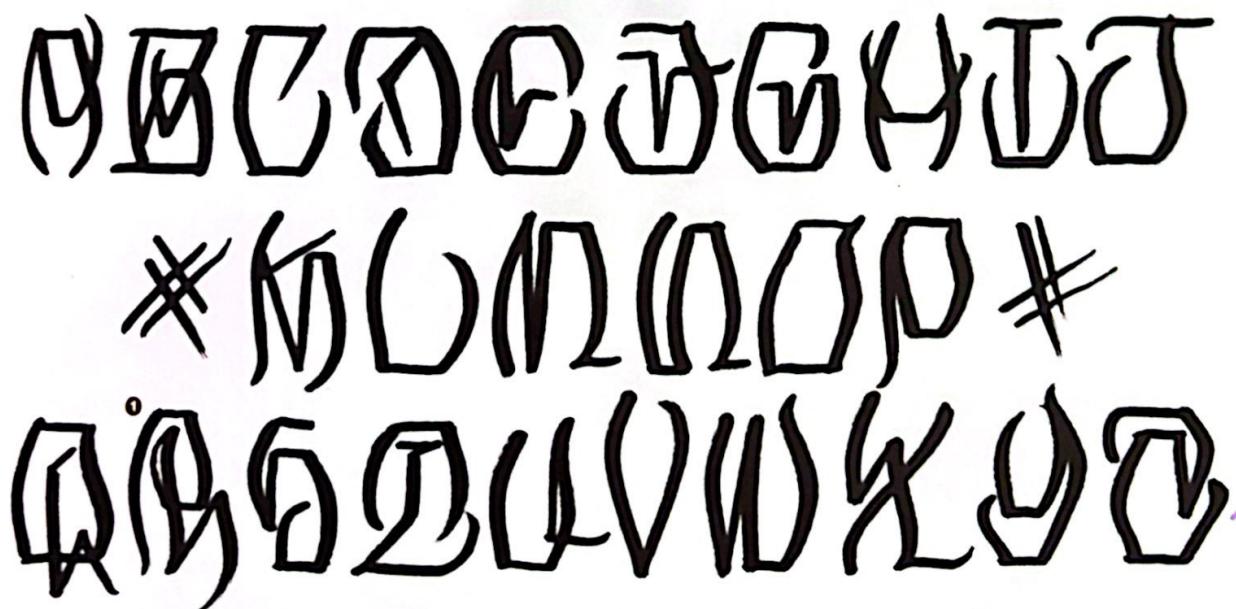
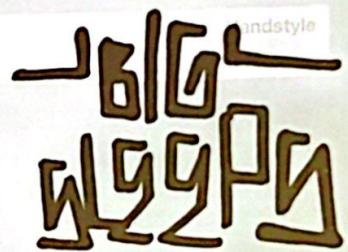
BIG SLEEPS Roll Call



BIG SLEEPS Placa
Here SLEEPS displays a lock-up common for a placa, or roll call. This one is a pangram. Normally it would consist of the names of your crew, followed by gang members or friends. The artist's name is typically signed at the bottom.

Of the many handstyles SLEEPS has in his artistic arsenal, this one is his most personal. According to him, it's his signature style. It is more commonly "seen in the Rampart district of LA, especially Pico and Union to 6th and Union"

0 "These are the late 1980s. By then there was a mixture of round and square letters. I started using these Rs in the late 1980s. I'm not saying that's when they came about. Because there were other people who were doing similar but different stuff. Maybe some people didn't get exposed to it until later."



SLICK



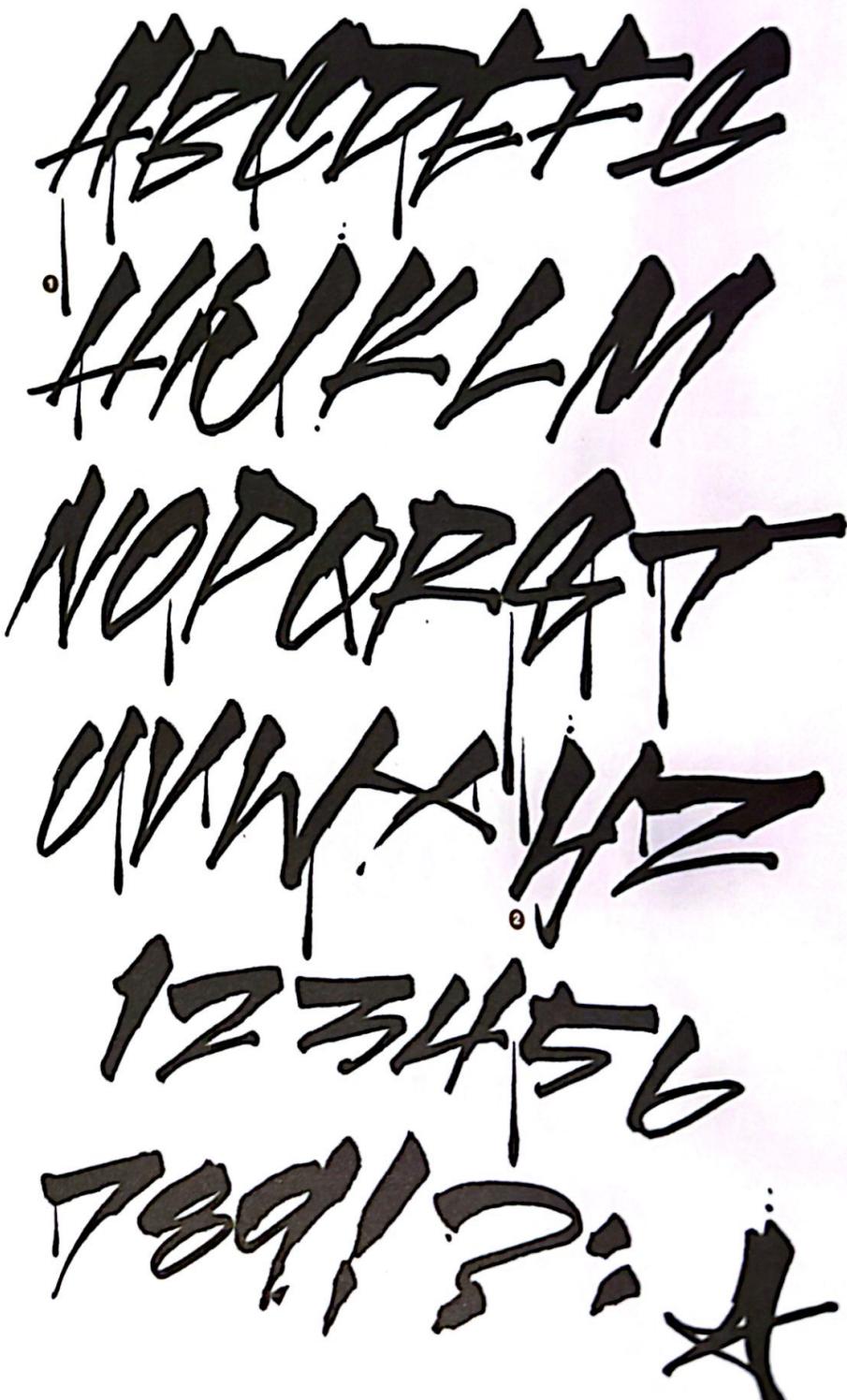
"It wasn't until I moved [from Hawaii] to L.A. to go to school [that I started writing graffiti]. I went to Art Center to be a commercial illustrator, but first I had to take some foundation courses just to learn how to draw. Class was across the street from Westchester Park and the band shell. They were doing graffiti down there and I would go out on my lunch break and see these cats bombing this shit, and that's where I met my crew, K2S. What really got me open to cats in my crew was they were doing that more blocky, geometric kind of shit, unlike the traditional, more wild style things, like letters that were flowy, [compared to Hawaii where the New York style was prevalent] whereas L.A. and K2S were doing futuristic geometric style pieces. They weren't stringy letters, they were real heavy, super-super clean, and a lot of the guys in my crew had a heavy gang influence, like TEMPT for example. That's one dude who mastered both. He had that East Coast style, but if he had to do some gang shit he had that down too."

"I trip when DOZE (NYC) hits my book. It feels so natural. I strive for that but I guess at a certain point I stopped trying to be that and just did my own thing. But I guess my writing is more influenced by a script. I guess that FUTURA shit is still in me, you know the way he just writes. And my more recent handstyles are like that, but I really like using the fat to thin. And that comes from doing flare tags with a fat cap."

"Sometimes there is a Ralph Steadman feel to some of my stuff. You can't control the bleed. Sometimes it bleeds out more or sometimes not enough and I'll touch it up [slightly]. That's why I love using Chartpaks, because they have that chisel where I can go as fat as I want and leave that marker on there and let it bleed and absorb or go real quick and let it be real fine. I think there is something to the nature of materials that becomes part of your tag or your art."

❶ "I fake drips sometimes, not so much to cover an ugly letter but just to balance it. That marker doesn't drip. Maybe it's just to fuck with people a little bit."

❷ "Y's for me are the hardest. I don't write them that often. To this day Y's and X's—sometimes I'm not that thrilled about them. Sometimes they fuck me up. You can disguise that sometimes with the Cholo style, because they add the same elements even though they aren't part of the letter. Like if it's an X they'll make it like an H so it still has that same boxiness, but that's hard with what I'm trying to do."



MOUSE

San Diego | Early 1990s – Mid 2000s

Handstyle

"I'm a southeast native of San Diego from Lomita Village, Seven-Ohs. My writing was influenced early on by calligraphy. It taught me to use different line weights and natural curves allowing me to design letters that 'flowed.' I think it speaks a lot for a neighborhood when you see good writing on the walls, so it was imperative that I get my letters down before I started 'hittin-up.' Good writing on the walls lets you know you're dealing with a force to be reckoned with. Unlike a lot of other neighborhoods we didn't have 'tag-bangers.' You were either bangin' or taggin' it was one or the other.....never both."

MOUSE
HUGO
70S

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

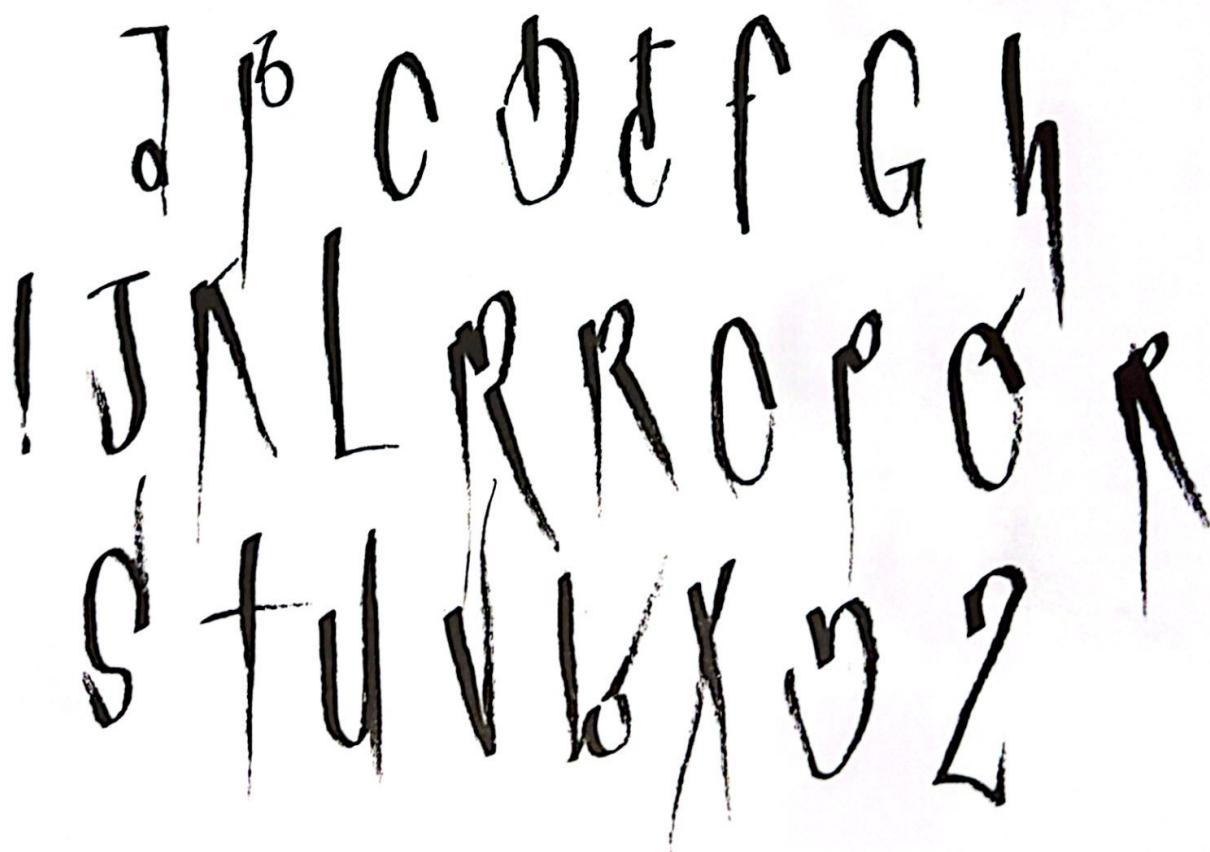
MOUSE

Handstyle
MOUSE
1990s

"Mouse's style is a really raw classic old school Cholo handstyle. He has a lot of different variations of this style; the round steez, the more square style, the leaning diamond bottom. He's been at it for well over 20 years." —KYZER



MOUSE Style C



MOUSE Style D

a b c d e f g h i j
k l m n o p o' r
s t u v w x y z

MOUSE Style E

A B C D E F G H ! J K M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



DIE SLOW

San Diego | Early 1990s – 2010s

"DIE SLOW's older brothers are all like [involved with gangs]. Die Slow is like the OG from TV Crew and he was just on some weird shit because he grew up with his older brothers, thugged out. They had the strictly wicked gangster style. His brother was into graffiti and was one of the first dudes in TV Crew, and then he got out of it. And then instead of turning into more of a gangster, DIE SLOW turned into more of a graffiti writer, doing pieces and shit."—HEROIN

A B C D E F G H I
J K L M N * P Q
R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i
j k l m n * r q
s t u v w x y z
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Olde English with a Comic Quality

"DIE SLOW, he's a mellow cat. He's more of a character, dude."
—KYZER

"[There are] a lot of younger guys who started out tagging gangster style, KYZER and DIE SLOW, are trying to get those dudes into piecing. There is definitely a difference between the two, but it crosses over." —HEROIN

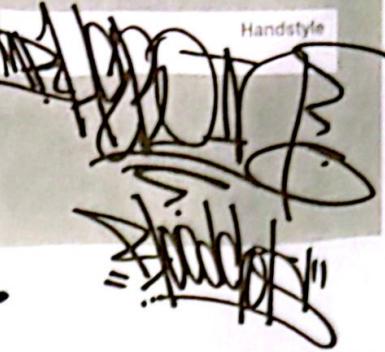
• Note the Olde English influence that is still apparent in certain characters. DIE SLOW's alphabet has a much more round and open characteristic to the overall balance, but it still has a sharp cornered characteristic to characters like S, V, W, the lower case R and S.

HEROIN

San Diego | Early 1990s – 2010s

Handstyle

"You just wanted to write pretty simple. Straight, but you want to throw a little flair in there. It's just like a real freestyle. It's hella' loose. Loose and readable I would say would be the best way to describe it."



A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i
j k l m n o p q r
t u v w x y z
\$13456,189.00 \$

A Respect That Transcends Worlds

"We were kicking it with this crew... they're like the illest tagbanger crew. They just roll on fools. We're talking to some little homies, who were like 'Yeah dawg, we go over everybody except TV, holmes.' Because it was always legible and was like a print, and that's the thing. It's like there's two different things, there's like graffiti and then gangbanging, but like both fools are writers. Because a lot of the gangs in San Diego are like—there's fools who are in them, just as writers, like how they had that fool in [the movie] *The Warriors*. There's a lot of shit where they'll have one kid go out and do the placas and the fucking roll calls of the gang and shit."

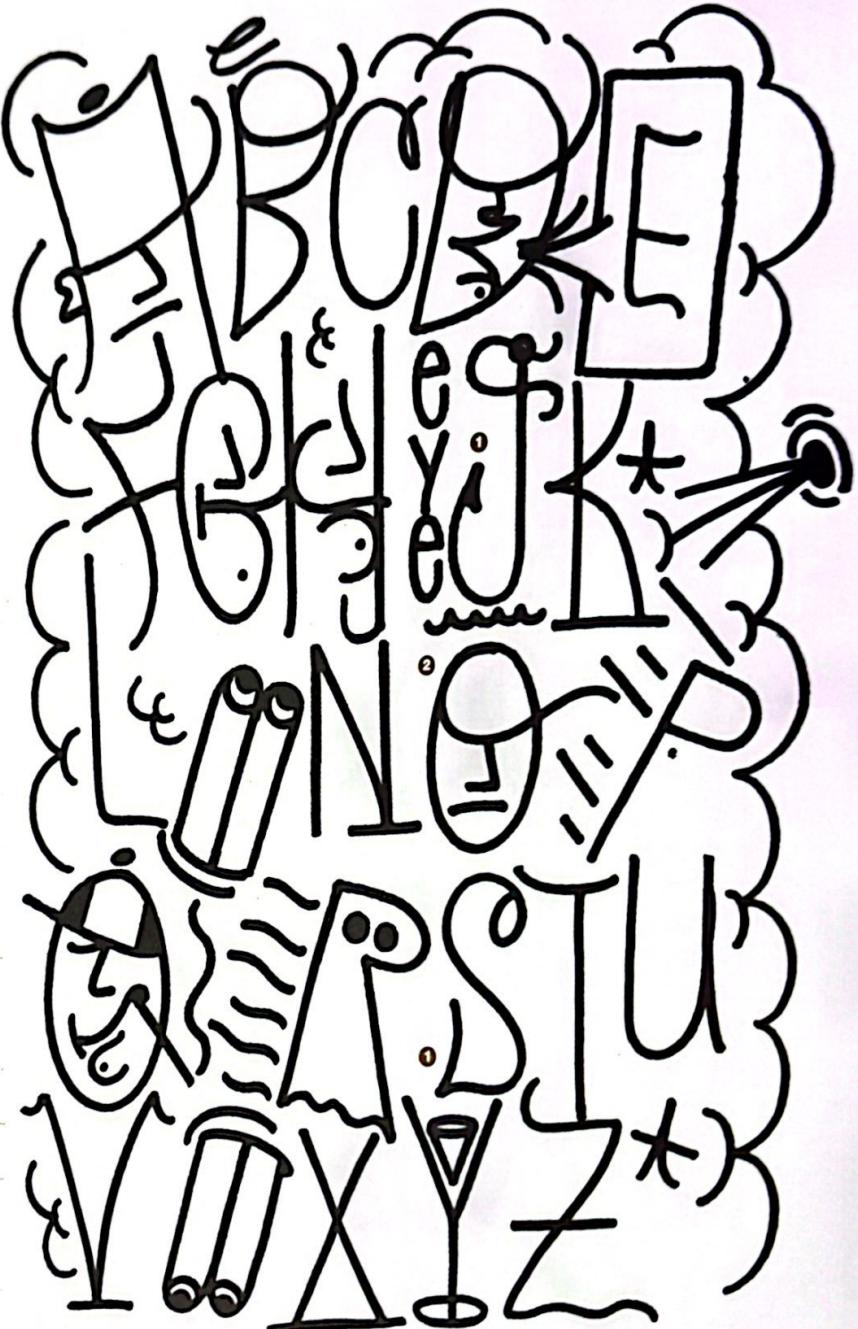
KYZER Upper Case



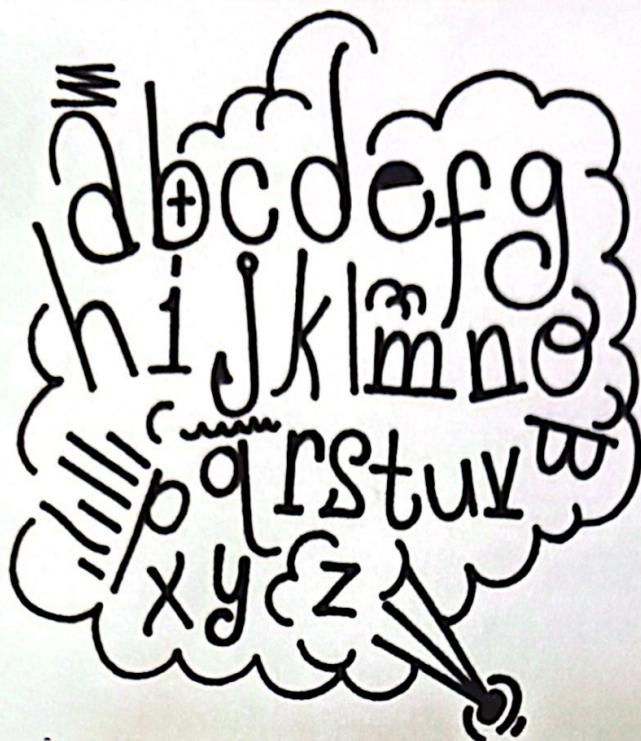
0 "My shit's more funky. It's some playful shit. Then there's that Cholo influence. That's how San Diego is, there's either Cholos or you write graff. There are a few funky heads from our crew, or whatever. It's just raw. It's a little in-between."

0 "Like the O—I'll throw a little hat on it and a little mouth in it and it'll have the punch line."

"The thing with San Diego is, if you look at a lot of old flix, KYZER is one of the OG fools. He's been writing graffiti since he was a real little kid, basically. And the thing about him is it was just straight soft-ball tags—just straight line print. There wasn't even really a name for it, but it was just readable shit. And the gangsters didn't trip because we weren't trying to do their shit."—HEROIN



KYZER Lower Case



"Mid 1990s, I was more on letters. That's my shit, but, lately though, I've been doing all characters. I do character mash-up scenes."

"HEROIN influenced me a lot too. All he does is characters. And TWIST back in the day, seeing him bugging out in Thrasher magazine."

RONIE

San Diego | Mid 1990s– Mid 2000s

"I skated back in the day pretty hard with RONIE. We just like clowning. Heads are so serious. We like just doing some funky shit— weird letters, flip it. Our style is probably way different than a lot of San Diego. San Diego is really a lot of tagbanging influenced by L.A., and it's between Cholo and [regular] graffiti."—KYZER

Handstyle



ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 0123456789%#*





Chicago & Midwest

Chicago has a history of gangsters, corruption and street crime that goes back at least to the prohibition of the 1920s. It's no surprise that the greaser gangs and car clubs of the '50s, so common across the nation, became a super-strain in the hothouse of Chicago.

Chicago is a divided city, with numerous ethnic enclaves and distinct class lines. Earlier white gangs like the Gaylords or the Simon City Royals might not have formed because of, but certainly were bolstered by, the perceived threat as Blacks moved north from the southern states and Puerto Ricans began immigrating after WWII. Irish, Italian and Polish gangs now had plenty of chances to tangle with the new gangs of Latin Kings or Blackstone Rangers. Marking a gang's turf was not just an offensive act, it could keep the peace—just as a One Way sign warns of oncoming traffic.

In the 15 or 20 years following the emergence of youth gangs, enough members had found their way behind bars to justify new alliances. By the late 1960s, the influence of Chicago's own Nation of Islam, the Black Power movement and civil rights clashes began to make an impression on the youths in the street as many gangs mimicked the style, language and symbolism, adding "Almighty," "Disciple" or "Nation" to their names. Many of the smaller gangs were swallowed up by, or brought into the fold of groups formed within the penal system. People vs. Folks Nations

Chicago & Midwest Handstyles



**NORTHSIDE
WRITER**



**SOUTHSIDE
WRITER**

“That was the first war that Chicago saw. It started with lining people out or whatever, but then in '85 or '86 the writers started adopting the gang mentality [of flipping]. It was so funny, because it wasn't even crews. The North Side would do circle-N's and the South Side would do circle-S's. And when the North Side would see any South Side writers, they would just do a big-ass circle-S, backwards over their name, or cross them out, or flip their name entirely. It was the ultimate way to diss somebody.” —SIVEL

became the primary divide. A new influence of symbols combined with **hierarchical** gang politics to create a complex system of symbols and icons borrowed from **Black Power**, and the Nation of Islam. The five-and-six-pointed stars, representing the Peoples and Folks Nations began merging and clashing with the earlier **symbols of greaser-gang jackets, war sweaters and calling cards**. Earlier gangs may have used symbols such as knights' helmets, but by the time the ethno-oriented **symbolism** reigned, the Gaylords were using klansmen and swastikas as symbols, maybe simply as shocking symbols of outsider culture—like the bikers and One Percenters—but more likely in reaction to the symbols of black and brown pride by which **they felt** surrounded. These jackets, cardigan sweaters and business cards were a gang's **pride**, and ground zero for the aesthetic of symbols and lettering styles that would **make** their way onto city walls. Often the art would transfer as spoils of war, confiscated from rival gangs beaten in battle. The common thread throughout, though, was the use of **Olde English** typography.

By the time the influence of hip hop and New York-style graffiti reached Chicago in the late 1970s and established a foothold in the counterculture of the early 1980s, the gang graffiti of Chicago had its own world. Most of the **newer** writers were of a different breed, and used a different style of lettering—leaning away from the gangs' use of Olde English toward a more printed or scripted New York style of lettering. Only in retrospect do we see certain shared elements and traits that seeped through the filter to end up on both sides of the divide. Occasionally, writers and gangs intermingled on the same streets, but their graffiti was always seen as distinctly different activities, looked upon with **mutual respect**, but from a distance. By the mid-1980s, Chicago's graffiti crews started taking inspiration from the gangs by flipping letters when they battled each other. In a creative twist on battling, they wouldn't just cross out rivals' tags, they would spend extra effort to write their opponents' names upside down or backwards, sometimes instead of their own, which increased many a writers' dexterity. The North Side—South Side battle of the mid-1980s is when flipping first became prevalent. To this day flipping rivals is uniquely Chicago and is still in use by younger generations who may be utilizing more of a melting pot of lettering styles in the **early twenty first century**.

Chicago & Midwest Handstyles

RONE-Chicago
Circa 1980s

"RONE"

SLANG-Chicago
Circa mid 1980s

SLANG

POLACK-Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



CASPER-Chicago
Circa 1980s

"CASPER"

OY ONE-Chicago
Circa late 1980s

OY ONE.

P.LEE 1-Chicago
Circa 1980s

P.LEE
1

DEEP-Chicago
Circa 1990s



FACTOR-Chicago
Circa 1980s

"FACTOR"

Chicago & Midwest Handstyles

TRIXTER—Chicago
Circa early 1990s



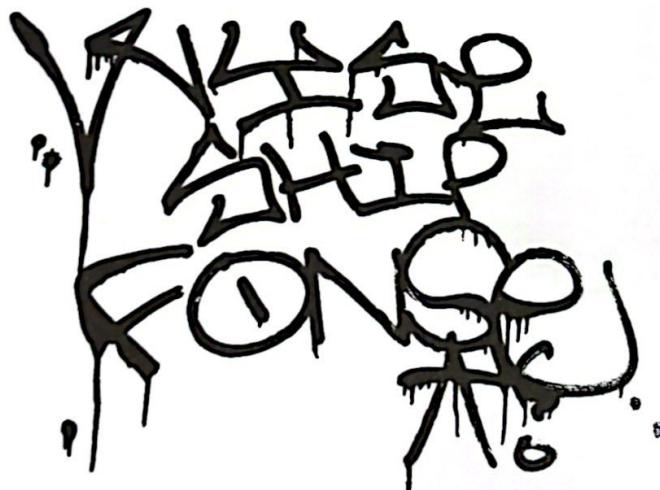
ABRA—Chicago
Circa 2000s



FINER—Chicago
Circa 2000s



WYSE, SHIP, FONSE—Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



CEBL—Chicago
Circa 1990s



MAYOR—Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



DISCK—Chicago
Circa 1990s



SHIP—Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



DEFSKI—Chicago
Circa 1980s



GRAB—Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



SEGE—Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



Chicago & Midwest Handstyles

WEE - Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



DEEST - Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



PEE - Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



NICK SALSA - Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



WEE - Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



KAUSE - Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



KEEP - Chicago
Circa mid 1990s



KEFA - Chicago
Circa mid 2000s



Chicago Compliment Cards

From the collection of an anonymous photographer who goes by the name CHICAGO'S COLD WAR:

"Compliment cards were used by old-school gangs to represent their mobs; there was competition over 'best' design between members within the same gang, as well as between rival mobs. Cards were traded, captured from enemies, left at rival corners and hang-out spots, and became an important piece of Chicago's gang history."



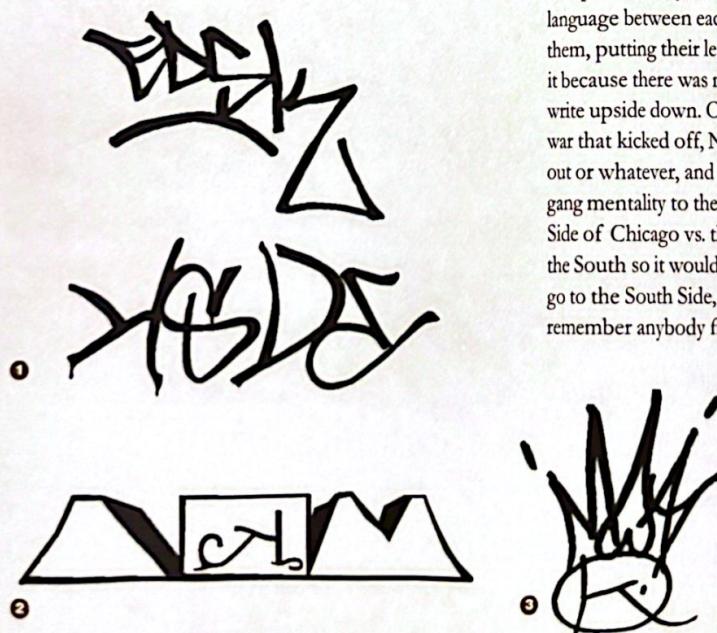
War and Party Sweaters



Traditionally, Chicago gangs had war and party sweaters. Prized booty to be gained in fights with rival factions. They were a subversive riff on letterman sweaters of 1940s & '50s universities and private schools. They spoke with a shared visual vocabulary of gothic typography, chenille embroidered patches and chain stitch scripts with their own symbols and verbiage.

- ❶ Gaylords
- ❷ C-Notes
- ❸ Imperial Gangster Warlords
- ❹ Latin Kings

The Chicago Flip



"Even in the late '60s the gangs were doing it. It's a disrespectful thing to flip somebody, because here it's all about the symbolism—the actual language between each other on the walls. It's the ultimate disrespect to them, putting their letter backwards. That's why writers incorporated it because there was no bigger insult. It's really difficult, obviously, to write upside down. Obviously it first was a gang thing, but the first big war that kicked off, North Side vs. South Side, started with lining people out or whatever, and it was about '85 to '86. The writers just grafted the gang mentality to the graff mentality, and then it was literally the North Side of Chicago vs. the South Side. Our trains run from the North to the South so it would be getting crushed on the North Side and then go to the South Side, and that's how it started. That's the first time I can remember anybody flipping." —SIVEL

Example from the notorious war Between EDSK & AOM

- ❶ EDSK flip to KSDE as a "dip" or a disrespect.
- ❷ AOM with a backwards K
- ❸ AOM flipped to MOA. Circle K.

Signs & Symbols—Folk Nation Selections

Commentary and insights provided by
CHICAGO'S COLD WAR:

① Gangster Party People Nation

"They were 'Party People' before the Folks/People alliances came up, but they sided with Folks. They honored their lineage by keeping their name intact."

② Gangster Party People Nation

③ Almighty Simon City Royals

"The upside down three point crown is not specifically a Royal symbol, but it is a version of the LK crown that was dipped in that tag."

④ Maniac Latin Disciples

"The heart, horns, and barbed tail is a symbol that is used by most of the Disciples gang, but that version of the swastika is used exclusively by the Maniac Latin Disciples and their close allies. The MLD's founder was nicknamed 'Hitler.' Even though he was Latino, he was fascinated with the Nazi history and the charisma and power of Hitler. The symbol also means 'Young Future,' which refers to the new generation of MLD's as being the "future" of the gang, and also another meaning which is kept secret within the gang's literature."

⑤ Almighty KGB'z

⑥ Almighty Harrison Gents

⑦ Maniac Latin Disciples

"The pitchfork is used by different Disciple gangs and has different meanings, but I've heard the Maniacs refer to the three points as "Love, Honor, Respect."

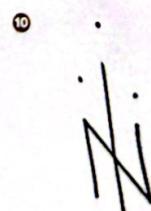
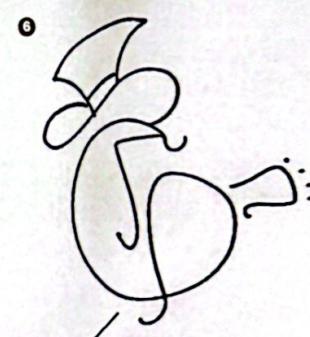
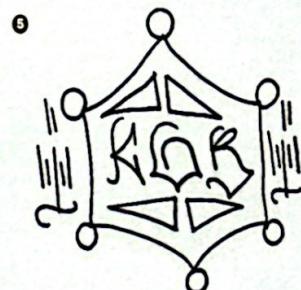
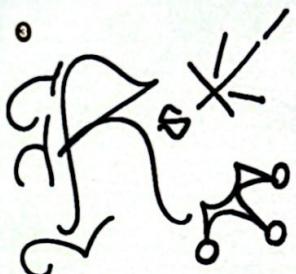
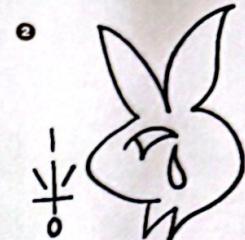
⑧ Almighty Latin Eagles

"The Teardrop on the Latin Eagle is a dipped Spanish Cobras' diamond."

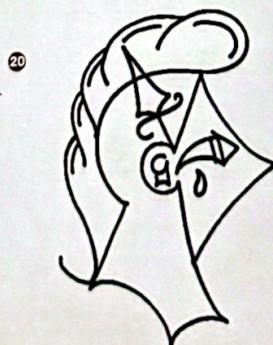
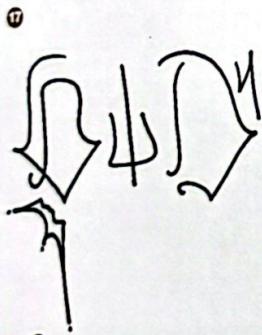
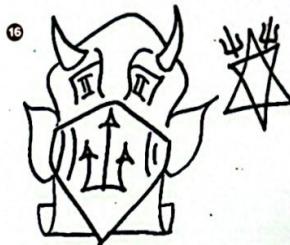
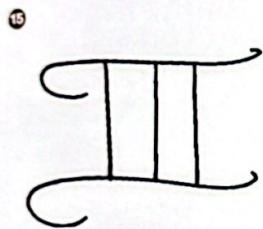
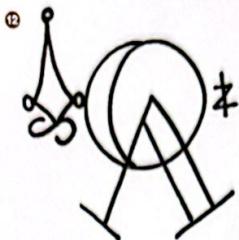
⑨ Almighty Imperial Gangsters

⑩ Universal Insane Latin Lovers

"That symbol is known as the 'Universal' symbol. I was told that there was an alliance known as LED, and all used that universal symbol in addition to their own. After that alliance disintegrated, the Lovers were the ones who continued to use it as their primary symbol. You will sometimes see the Two Six use that as a variance of their 'Maniac lines' symbol, even though there is no association between the Lovers and the Two Six."



Signs & Symbols-Folk Nation Selections



Commentary & insights provided by
CHICAGO'S COLD WAR:

⑪ Insane Deuces

⑫ Insane Orquestra Albany

⑬ Gangster Two Six

"The upside down/broken crowns are not
Two Six symbols, but a dis to their rivals
the Latin Kings"

⑭ Insane Ashland Vikings

⑮ Black Disciples

⑯ Insane Gangster Satans Disciples

⑰ Gangster Disciples

⑱ La Raza

⑲ Insane YLO Cobras

"The round symbols they are dipping there
are Spanish Lord staff's, which is a People
mob. They are not Cobra symbols, just
included in this tag to dis their rivals."

⑳ Almighty Ambrose

Signs & Symbols-Peoples Nation Selections

Commentary and insights provided by
CHICAGO'S COLD WAR:

① Almighty Gaylords

"One of Chicago's oldest gangs, whose roots go back to the 1950s."

② Almighty Insane Latin Counts

③ Almighty Black P. Stones

"I have been told that the Stones were heavily influenced by the Moorish Science Temple, but their leader, Jeff Fort, at one point converted to Sunni Islam. It's been said that the reason why the Stones are referred to as 'Moes' is because it's an adaptation of 'Moors'. The name "Black Stones" refers to the true "Black Stone" of the Kaaba in Mecca."

④ Almighty Latin Angels

⑤ Almighty Bishops

⑥ Almighty Latin Kings

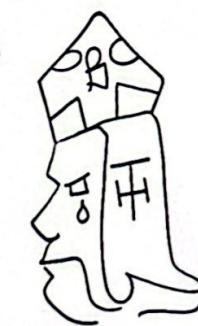
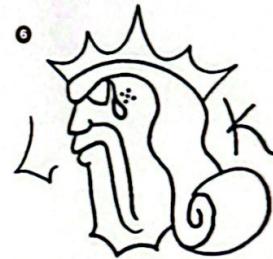
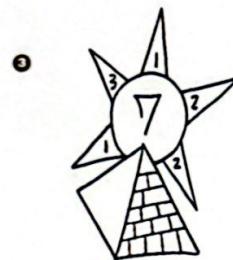
LK "Master." Notice the five dots on the face to represent the People's alignment of the Kings.

⑦ Almighty Bishops

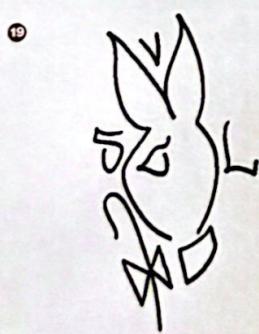
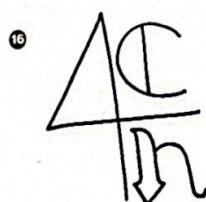
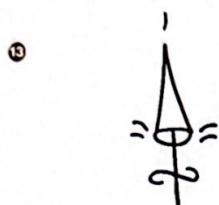
⑧ Almighty Latin Pachucos

⑨ Almighty Party Players

⑩ Almighty Latin Pachucos



Signs & Symbols—Peoples Nation Selections



Commentary and insights provided by
CHICAGO'S COLD WAR:

⑪ Insane Latin Brothers

⑫ Almighty Black P. Stones

⑬ Insane Latin Brothers

⑭ Spanish Lords

⑮ Almighty Renegade Saints

⑯ 4 Corner Hustlers

⑰ Almighty Renegade Saints
"The Saints' Stickman symbol and name were taken from a 1960s TV show of the same name."

⑱ Mafia Insane Vice Lords

"Note the 64. That signifies it as 'Mafia Insane' Vice Lords."

⑲ Spanish Vice Lords

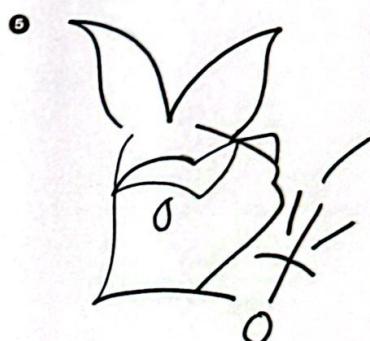
⑳ Insane Unknowns

Saints, Kings, Knights & Playboys



➊ Bunny Heads

Designed in Chicago by Art Paul in 1953, the Playboy Bunny is an international icon and by the '60s was becoming co-opted by local gangs. The lifestyle *Playboy* projected was obviously the height of a street gang's fantasy.



➋ Almighty 12th St. Players

- ➌ Spanish Vice Lords
- ➍ Imperial Insane Vice Lords
- ➎ Gangster Party People



➌ Suicide Kings & One Eyed Jacks

Many gangs referenced heraldry and coats of arms (see the gang cards on pages 56). Many gangs used kings, knights and dukes. Most likely referenced from the available stock imagery from local shops that provided the sweaters and varsity jackets to gangs, and/or local sports clubs and high schools, but most likely the influence on the formal drawings of the regal heads came from common playing cards. Earlier greaser gangs like the Gaylords and Simon City Royals were immersed in symbolism of royal ancestry.

➍ Latin Kings

The LKs call this symbol the Master.

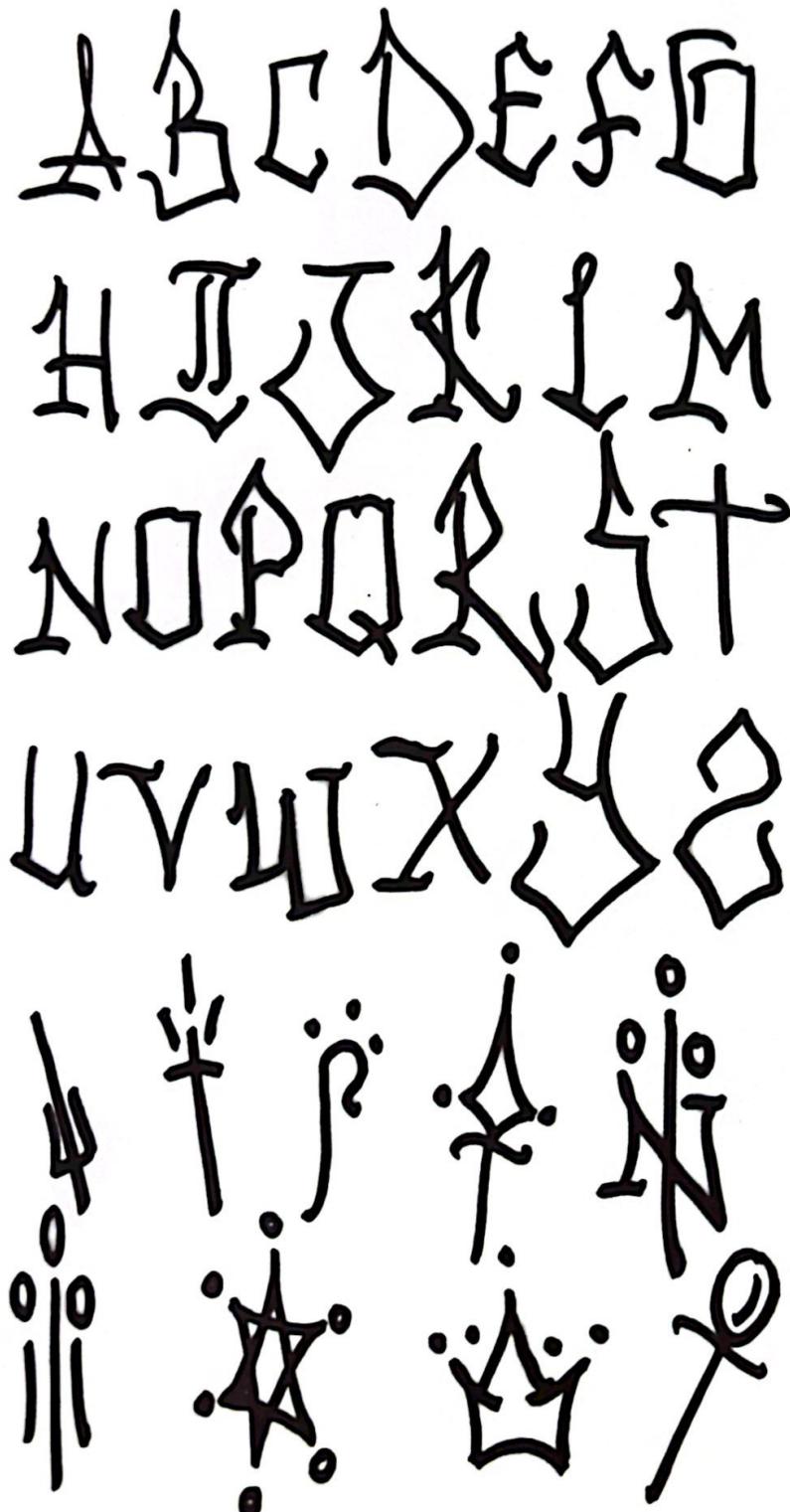
➎ Almighty Bishops

Note the Bishop's hat, or 'mitre' in place of the crown.

➏ Almighty Insane Latin Counts



"My first experience was gang graffiti in 1983 or '84. Basically, I just grew up in this neighborhood that was multicultural—black, Spanish, White, Hindu, Jewish, Asian, the whole nine. At that point, the gangs were just stopping their racial differences and the crack game took over. It went from racial alliance to business alliance, and since I was a young kid, and pretty well liked in the neighborhood by my peers, I didn't even join the gang, it was just something that happened. That's how I got started. I was watching some of the older kids do graffiti. I was a younger kid and I liked the symbols on the wall and I started emulating it on paper, and they gave me a can of spray paint and told me to go deck the hood out. That's how it started."



"It looks official, definitely what you would see in the street. That's definitely all from the bangers here who took all their shit from Olde English. They would do these quote-unquote 'murals' with roll paint and with dudes in robes and shields and [other] sick shit, but pre-hip hop, gang card shit, but on a wall." —POSE

"We call that 'Royal Olde English.' The Royals' whole thing is about royalty. We're all a royal family. If you ever look at the royal families of the world, they always use really killer Olde English for their logos, identities, stuff like that. So I guess the older guys, back in the '50s and '60s, they were emulating any other royal family's calligraphy, and just put their own little dap to it. Now each generation changes it up a little bit. There were better and worse. I'm not saying mine's the best, but when you deck a wall out with it, it gets the message across. Olde English letters just look sinister. There's just nothing happy about them." —SIVEL



"It's something that definitely comes from that Olde English gang style, for sure. It's definitely got roots in that, but it's a hybrid style like that happy, hip hop thing. We're gonna take the regular alphabet, take the gang alphabet, hybridize them, throw a little hip hop bubble in there and see what we come up with. I didn't even know where the style came from or anything, I just was taught it as a little kid. It took me a long time to figure out where all that stuff came from. I was picking it up from a guy named CAVE, and he got it from TRIXTOR, ORCO and SLANG. FACTS got it from me. It's just a torch that's been passed down from generation to generation."

❶ "I always thought of the letters S and E as the two letters that really identify the Chicago style. That E is a home town thing for us, but not too many people rock it (anymore), so I feel like it could get lost in the shuffle, so that's why I do it."

❷ "That E was bit off of ORKO, TRIXTOR, and SLANG. That E is a straight-up Chicago Bite. I just looked at what my peers were doing and tried to emulate it. I copied them exactly and that E is so identifiable I feel like I have to do that E every now and then to represent my tag because it encompasses the whole Chicago flavor." (See P.LEE's tag on page 53 or EETEE and KAUSE on pg 55.)

❸ "When you're doing tags, you start realizing the quicker you do them, the less chance you have of getting caught. I noticed my swirl style is quick, and I try to do that in order to do the least amount of strokes possible. A lot of them come naturally out of my hand, just trying to be quick."

A B C D E F G H

I J K L M N O P Q

R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h

F G K L M N O P Q

R S T U V W X Y Z

"We used to take the train from our neighborhood downtown to Marshall Fields when Swatch watches and Jams and OP were big. I remember about '85, I saw this guy SHAGGY and TRANE and this guy SCARCE and some other guys like EPOK. I really liked their fill-ins and pieces. My older cousin was hanging out with some taggers and they found out I was writing in books and were like, 'Let me show you some style,' and from there I never stopped."



A B C D S

F G H I J

K L M N O

P Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

❶ "I would say that E comes from AGENT, he's always been interacting with his crews in New York, RIS, AOK, IBM and whatnot. I think he was influenced by those guys a bit and in turn I was influenced by him. I definitely learned a lot about handstyles from AGENT and he learned from a lot of New Yorkers."

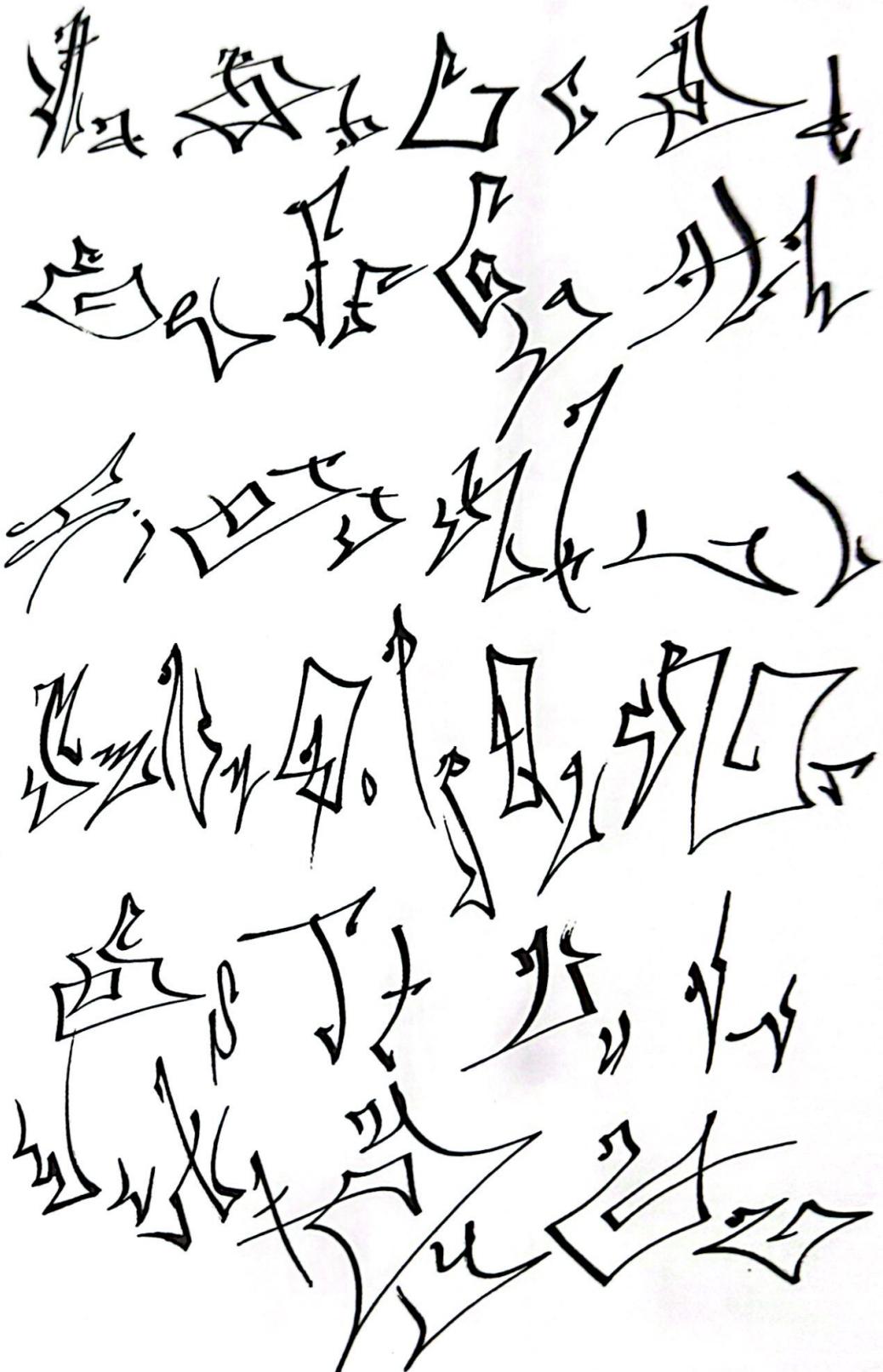
❷ The Upturned Foot
"That's totally from the gang stuff. That little whip is just in my hand."



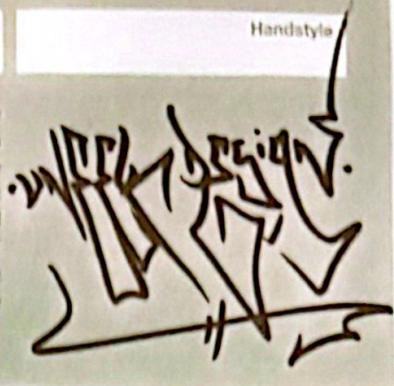
"Mock style was invented by SCARCE, the leader of CAR Crew. Mock style is dark graffiti, expressing written acrobatics, each letter equipped to kick or slash competitors. The spikes throughout are weapons for both defensive and offensive strategies, where most graffiti artists use arrows. Free flow, smooth transitions and vicious cuts to rival 'run of the mill' wildstyles. UNE / UNEEK / CAR Crew Challenging All Rivals"

"SCARCE was a hard-core b-boy. He was one of the first breakdancers in the city, and he was always kind of into the darker side of things, dragons and fantasy art and shit like that. To him—Graffiti and Hip Hop was something that was unlimited. He was way ahead of his time. He always kept a fairly small crew and taught most of them this style. A lot of people were rocking that New York style—doing that hip hop-bubble style. He had all that shit super-fresh down, but he was more into drawing creatures than bboy characters and bridged a correlation between the letters and the characters. 'Mock' style is somewhat dark and evil yet natural and organic. It was inspired by reptiles, insects and animals. This ain't no happy commercial style. More like we're at war and these are the minions in our arsenal."—SIVEL

"SCARCE was such a hard core dude. If you even bit his style he would track you down and fuck you up. The only people who were even allowed to rock that style were people who were down with him or his crew."—SIVEL



"I would say a couple letters form the style of this alphabet. The prominent letters are gonna be the S, the R and the E. They're most prominent and kind of form the flow. You can do so much with these letters. The tag style is meant to be fluid and something you can flow together fairly simple but it kicks off with lines to a point. If I was tagging on a wall, 9 times out of 10, it would look like this page. If I had a bit more time I would throw a tag up like the 'Mock' style, which is kind of the difference between writing your name in print and in cursive. It's always meant to flow as if you're writing your signature, but you can still put your hooks in, add those loops and twists. I like to bring the pen completely out when I write. I don't like to have any fat, flat lines just die in the middle of nowhere, so the flow is outwards."



a b c d e f g h i

t x b m n o p q r

s j j j y w k j z

f b c d e f g h i j k l m

7 0 1 9 5 f u v w x y z

• "SCARCE's tags always use the S and the E [at opposing ends] Those were the two letters that he showed us balancing around. Then if you take the hook of the R with those 3 letters—with the R you could put together the B, the K, the P, numerous other letters, following those hooks and flows. You would always start with your base letters."

"I learned a lot from SCARCE but by the same token I have my own style of writing that kind of twisted what he taught me. If you were to see SCARCE's alphabet next to mine, it would be slightly similar, but you have your own writing and that's what it means to learn and not just be a biter or a product of somebody else—taking what you see and twisting it up in your own manner."

FACTS



1 "The D, W and R come from early Latino gang writing—Olde English. Growing up there were a lot of Latin Kings [in my neighborhood]. It's like Cholo style lettering, but it's definitely Latino style—not so much the Black gangs. Some White gangs used it too, but I feel like it stems from the Latin gangs—definitely with the D's and R's. It's that solid sharp... people explain it like a sword, it has to look sort of hard. It's just a tough, street style. It would look like good handwriting, but with style, with a good flow."

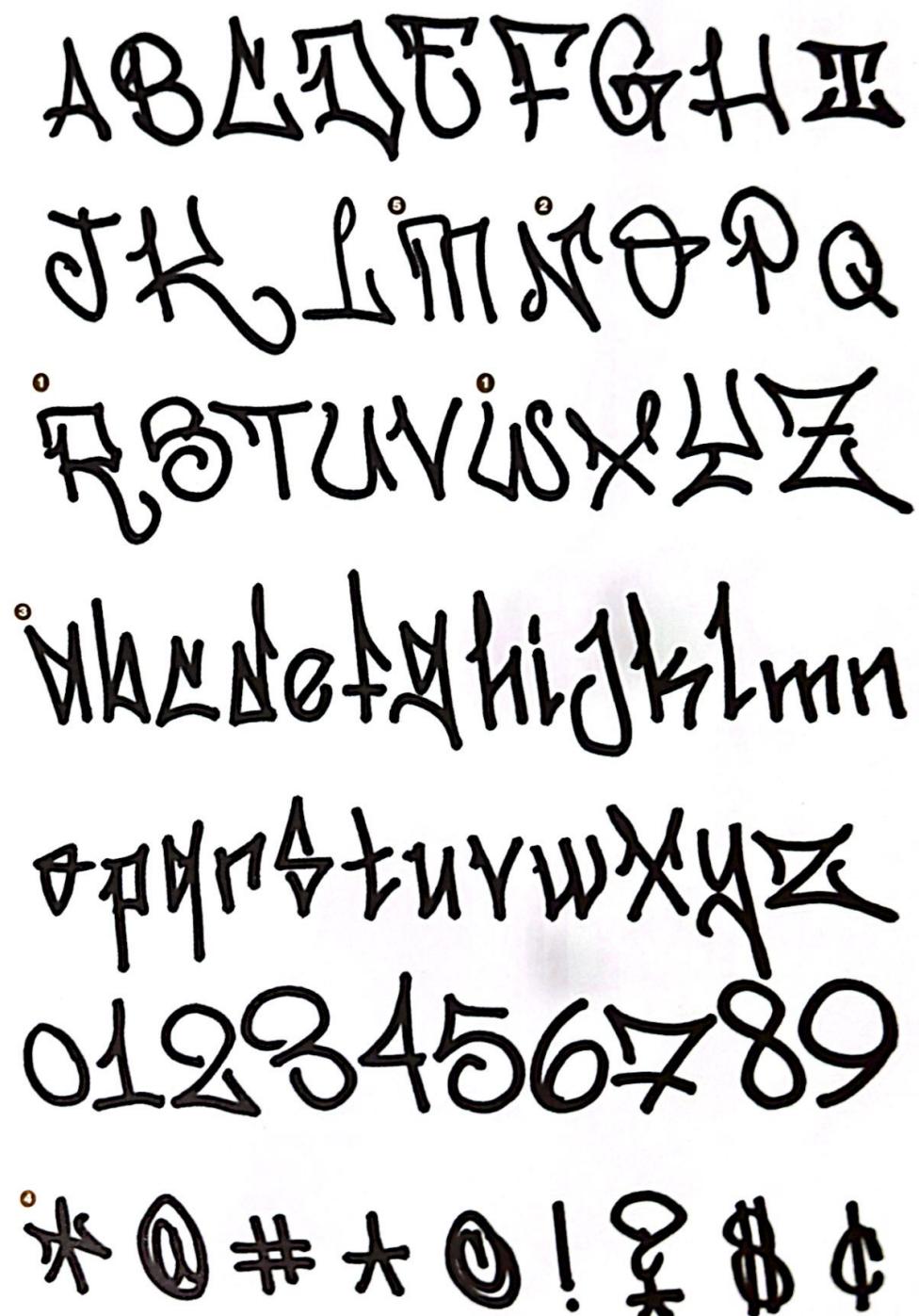
2 "The N comes from the [New York based] X-Men crew tag, and you can tell, from KEO and TATU's tag. It comes from the same place. The early pioneers brought it here. It really is an X-Men thing."

3 "That lower case A is definitely a letter SLANG might have used in his tag, and that also comes from early X-Men who came from New York. These dudes PLEE (See pg 53), FRESH and STAIN, had another crew called TCP. This style may come from a little bit of that."

4 "That star—I don't know who else does that. It might be a Chicago thing; I might be wrong. The star where one arm goes down and one arm goes up." See *STAY HIGH* on page 104 and *Renegade Saints* on page 61

5 For comparison see Seattle writer, WERL's alphabet and M on pg 199

"There was definitely some New York influence because that's what was going on at that time. And then there was also a little bit of gang influence from Chicago, and some pioneers—mentors and influences like SIVEL, SLANG and TRIXTER. I'd call it a new wave. It was kind of a sharp style. You can kind of tell on the lower case letters. It's kind of an early Chicago style, definitely influenced by TRIXTER and SLANG. Because we're in the middle, we're influenced by Cali and New York. But then a lot of the people that stick out, [there] are the cats who keep it original and don't do all the weird [trends] that everyone else is doing—kind of keeping it simple. It sucks to not innovate too much. But [it's also important] to keep the traditional Chi-town style, with our own flavor."



TEST

Chicago, Northwest | Late 1990s–2010s

Handstyle

"In high school I was introduced to the quintessential '90s Chicago handstyle. It was swift, energetic and started from a small point exponentially growing as you moved through the tag. I'm sure it has roots from something earlier than I ever experienced personally, but as far as I was concerned, that explosion was what it was all about. What's beautiful about that style is it's hard to fake without a lot of practice, because you need to move the tool fast to get organic, dynamic marks that identify the style. Over time, what I ended up losing, was a real sense for the letter forms because I was focusing on speed and dynamism. It became more of an abstraction, which is great; but I developed more of a desire to control my handstyle overall, and not just stamp out a specific few letter combinations over and over. Over the years, moving around a bit I ended up being influenced by a lot of other sources, from the different writers and 'zines. Ultimately, my letters are a mash up of influences but there's still some Chi roots to the way my hand instinctually flows."



A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i
j k l m n o p q r
s t u v w x y z

❶ "The letters that were in my actual name(s) were the most difficult for me. That B went through a lot of unnatural iterations before I was able to get my head around whipping letters out at the beginning of the letter—something I'd always intuitively do at the end of a tag or letter. I just needed to apply it to the beginning of the letter. It's a head game with me, but if that B is at the beginning of a word, you can throw that out as hard as you want and it ends up being weirdly liberating and also guides the style of the rest of the word. It loosens me up right from the beginning."

❷ "This particular alphabet is a mash up of so many different influences. But there are a few letters in here that I can call out as being very Chicago influenced. I think the E definitely originates from tags that I remember seeing growing up like DEEP (pg 53)."

Compare the E to SIVELs on pg 64.

❸ The lowercase A has tightened up and evolved and doesn't much resemble what I can see in my head but I know that originated from a style that I'd see in early CYA tags. That A had a long hook that made a rounded right angle down with a wide body."

❹ "That R comes in so many different forms, depending on how I'm flowing that day, but the termination of this particular R comes from what some Chicago writers were doing in the late '90s/early 2000s. That R starts off pretty basic and then you go wild with it—throw it back up on itself with like four triangles. I feel like that wild termination shows up in a lot of other letters at the end of tags."



"I started writing the super-old way. You're 12, the other guys around are kinda' putting you on and hazing you and shit like that. And then, obviously, things heated up real crazy as far as trying to smash lines and take over the purple line, or the red line, and try to go all city; that was more mid '90s. That's when we were running into tons of issues with guys like SIVEL and those dudes. They were the kings when we were coming up and we were obviously young, dumb, disrespectful bombers. My crew from back then warred with every single crew on the North Side: X-Men, UAC, Teamsters, all the heavy king bombers. And we were trying to take over and shit was getting really out of hand and crazy. Then the fucking buff came and just destroyed our whole history. I was fortunate to get a really good couple of years, a really solid run."

❶ Lineage & Missing Links

The Olde English letter forms prevalent in the gangs' styles can still be seen here, several steps removed over many generations with writers who are not directly part of that culture. Note the "sweep" or "hood" over the B, D, P and R.

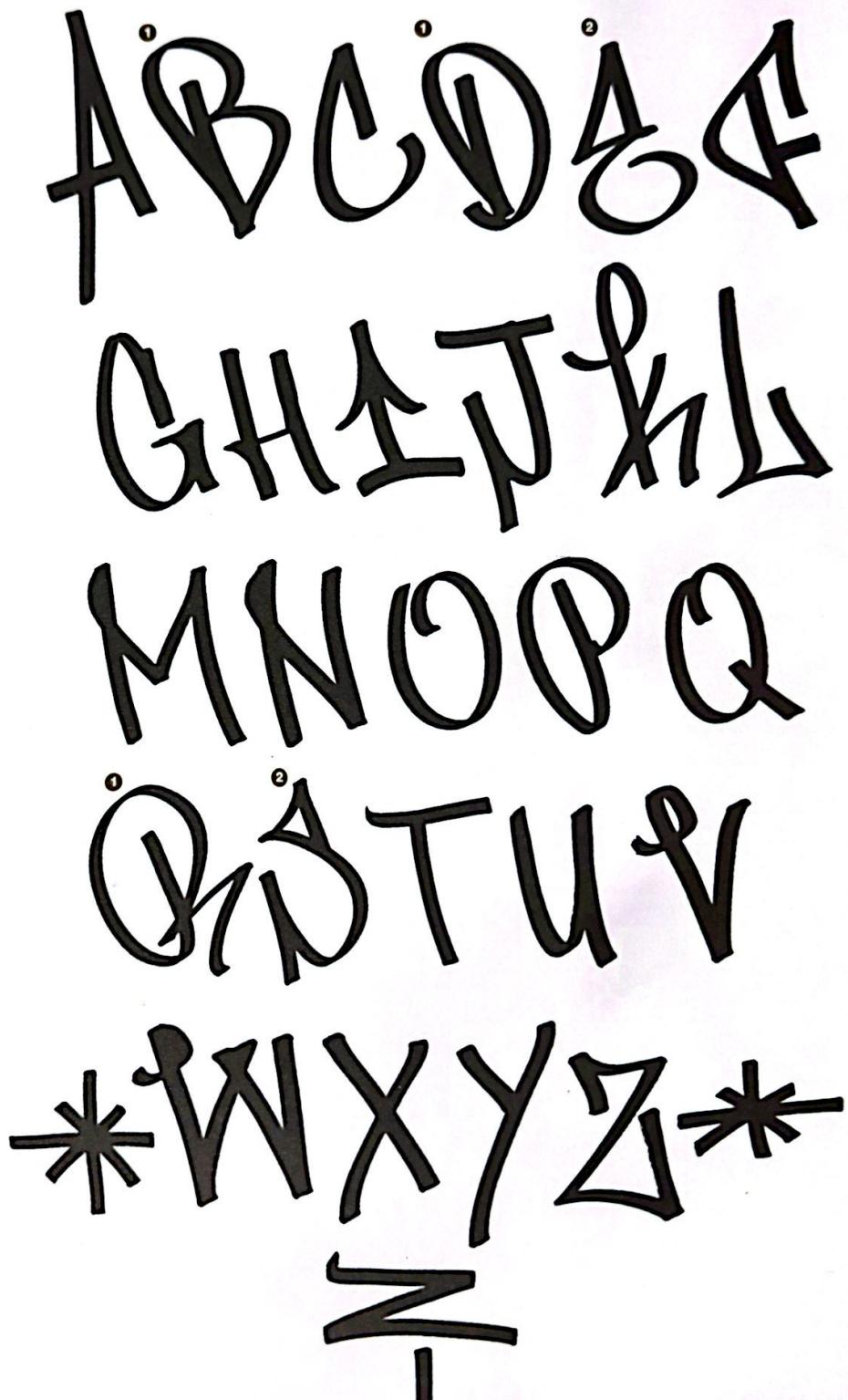
Note the same characteristics in alphabets by TEST, FACTS, and SIVEL in previous pages—particularly SIVEL's first alphabet, truest to Chicago-gang-styled writing. Then back to see WENT's alphabet on page 35 or flip forward to the Philadelphia chapter for KOOL KLEPTO KIDD and NOPE (pgs 82 and 88), and the New York chapter to compare the alphabets of STAN 153 and CECS (pgs 107 and 120).

❷ Chicago Small to Big Flow

"There's all sorts of little things that can be flipped. Every writer has a different kind of flair for a certain chiseled out S or an extension off an R or an E or something but the shit we grew up on, it always grew from left to right, started small, grew [in scale] towards the right, everybody tried to get an E, so they could do a blown out E, like that CASPER tag (pg 53). That was just a real basic tag."

The Straight & Narrow

"I remember when I was first exposed to guys [outside Chicago] like TWIST or shit like that, I wondered why do they write so straight? It's almost like they put a ruler on the top and the bottom; it's so printed. All of the letters are the same size. Certain regional styles were so foreign to me because I grew up on shit like that [small to big Chicago style]."

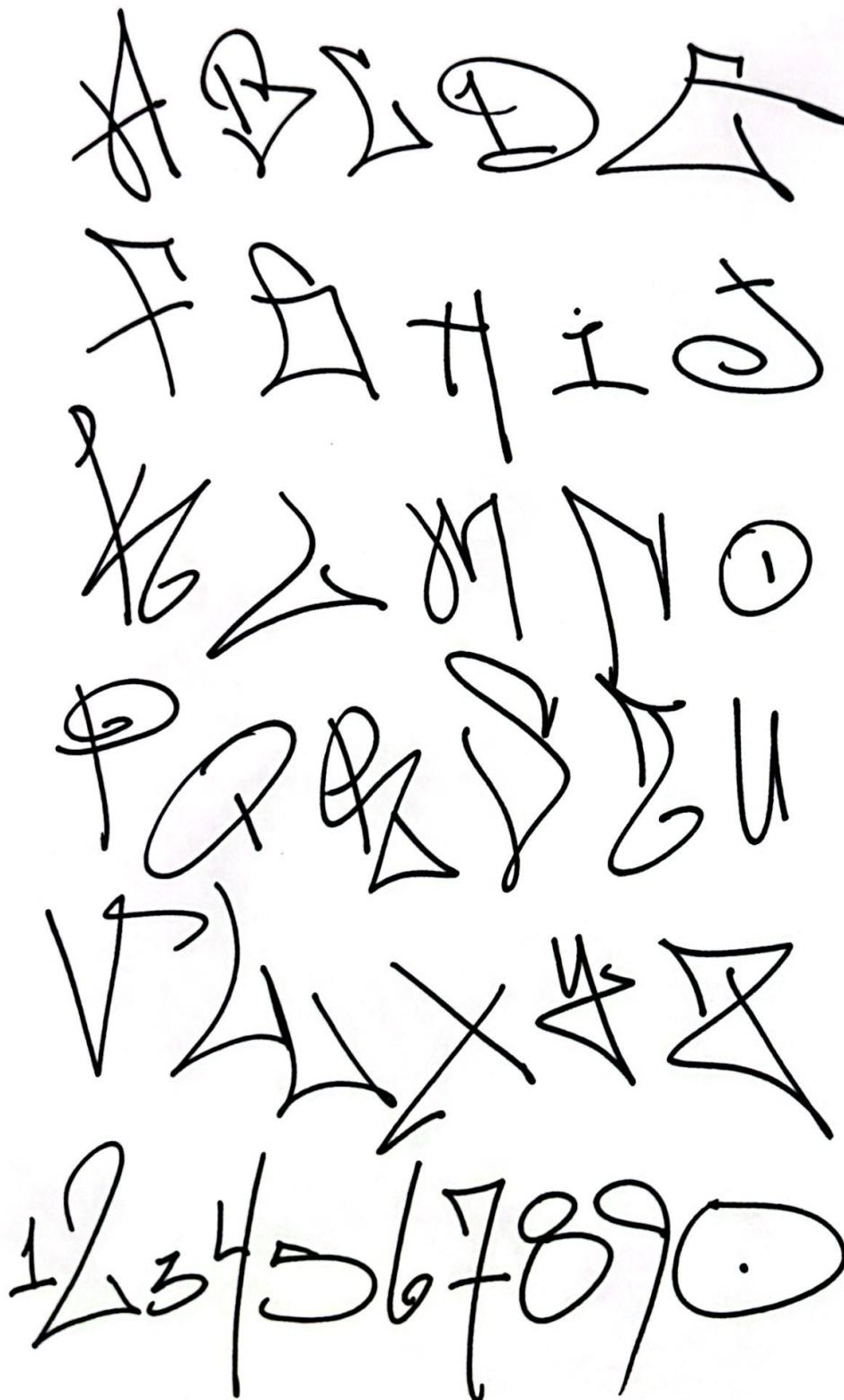


AMUSE

Chicago, North Side | Early 2000s–2010s

Handstyle

"Olde English is one of the biggest things that inspired me when I was younger. Back in the day in Chicago, gangs used to have gang cards—almost like a business card—and there were all sorts of dope logos and images and especially lettering. My dad is a Chicago police officer, and he had a huge collection of them and that was something I was able to look at early on. Supposedly the punishment for even possessing gang cards was pretty severe—with stories of kids getting a separate count for each card they had on their person. Chicago has a very close relationship to gangs. It's something you kind of grow up on, seeing and being aware of."



"Most of the graffiti you see in Chicago now is extremely tainted by the internet. You have everybody with influence from around the world."

"I'm greatly influenced by MORGAN. He's one of my closest friends and [one of the] most influential writers I know; I can't even explain how he does his letters. There are so many loops and [so much] flow to it. [It's counter to] my upbringing of straight letters and legible styles. To take what I've learned and mix it into this stylized script with Olde English flair... There is a lot of loopy, curvy stuff that has been a huge influence in my development."

"I try to make each letter look like it's from a different background, like they are all different people. Everyone has something different but they all work harmoniously together and flow."

"I focused on tags when I began, just because my time in Chicago, that was the way to really do it. Because I saw all these burners on these train tracks, but then by, like, '99, they were all buffed. And then painting these piecing spots wasn't even chill anymore, so I came up in a time when I didn't have any place to do pieces; it was just tags only."

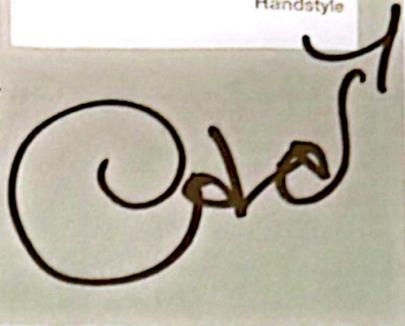
"I'm influenced by almost everything because I saw Chicago graff and tags from J4F crew. That was the Chicago style that I could relate to the most. After that, I was hardly seeing any graff 10–15 years ago, and not a lot of people were painting, so a lot of influence started coming from everywhere, magazines, New York, West Coast, Europe. That's where I'm probably different from most people from Chicago; I really try to draw influences from everywhere, and a lot of people in Chicago never got that kind of exposure in other cities, or know writers in other places."

"I'm really quick even when I'm painting with cans; I move really fast when I paint with other people, and I watch them go really slow cutting their shit. [A practice of editing graffiti murals by layering and relayering colors on top of each other to get cleaner lines]. I'm really fast and fluid. It's almost like I'm ADD. I can't slow down—ever. I [purposely] make myself slow down sometimes."

"I've always been into one-liners, ever since the beginning I always focused on my tag being a one-liner."

"I think things have changed, because when I was coming up tags were the first thing you learned. Now I think people can do pieces, but they can't really tag anymore. Somebody just asked what happened to style? When did non-style become the style? Before they could do throw-ups, they got their tags, and now that isn't the case anymore. People who can do these burners, they really don't have much tagging style."

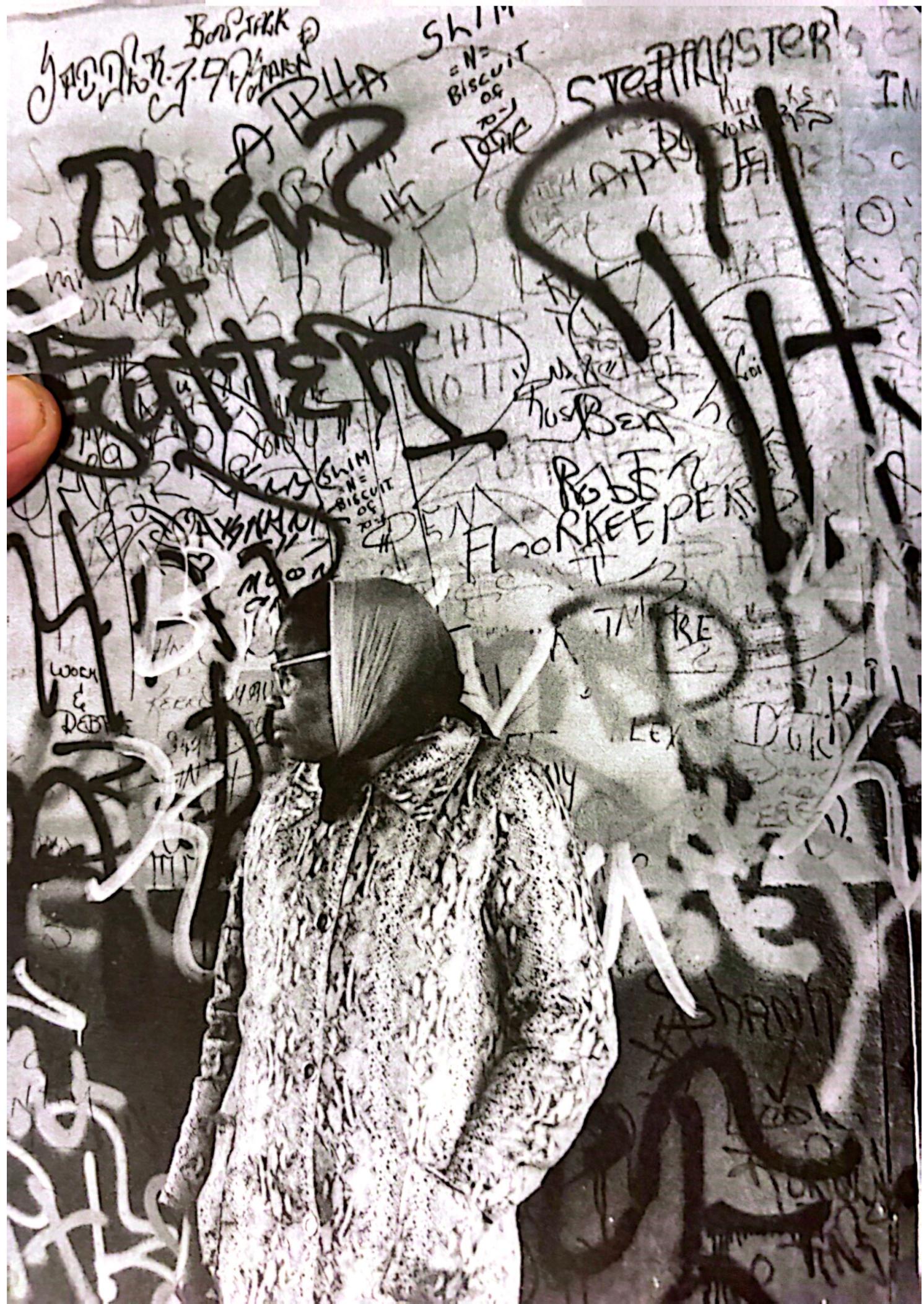
"I think this style is definitely particular to me; so many don't make that their priority. I learned how to tag before I could do anything else, so that was always important to me—having style—and people who have style are real important to me."

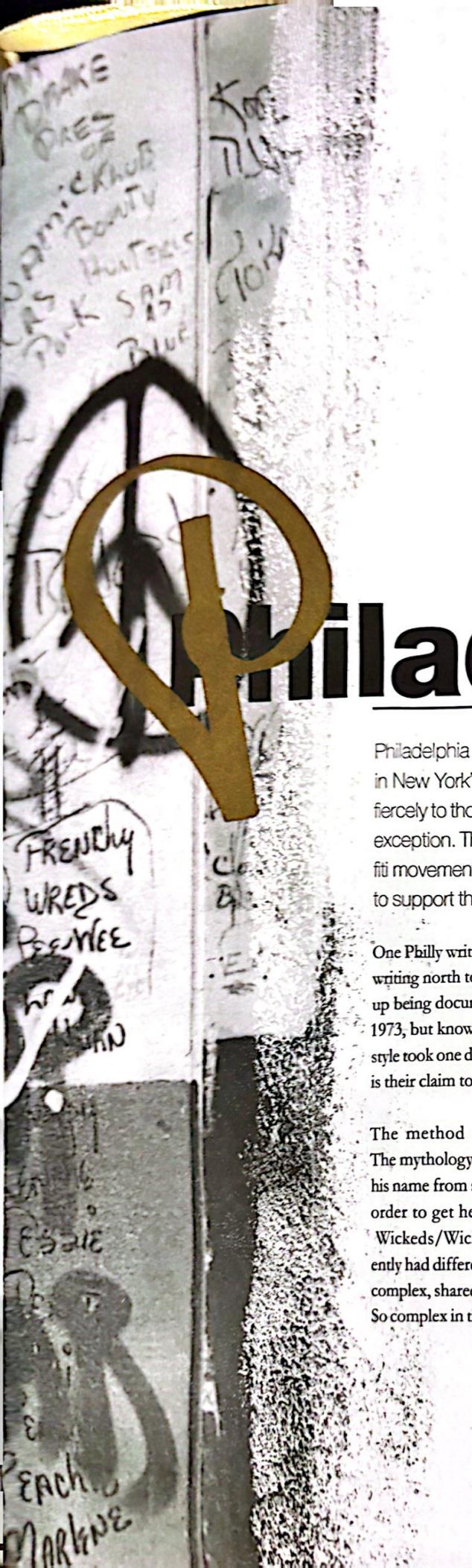


❶ "[The looseness is influenced by] a lot of the old gang graffiti. In Chicago, every gang is against every other, and for every gang the other is a 'whatever-killer' and they would write K after that tag. The idea of leaving that triangle shape in the back, some of that—those guys weren't the best taggers. There were some guys who knew how to use a spraycan and some were obviously scared and the can or the style looked a little sloppy, but then it looked a little better or looser for some reason."

❷ "Not so much the Olde English influence, but the letters come off a little harder, a little threatening, maybe? That's not always the style I'm looking for, but it's pretty cool."

❸ "That's me hitting up the crew if I circle the Y. In Chicago, there's a bunch of crews that will circle a letter. We're CYA. We're Circle Y. I'm surprised more people don't do that. I'm surprised it's only in Chicago—not necessarily the first letter—because there was already a crew called CAR crew that was circling C, and there was another crew circling A, and so by default we ended up with the circle Y, but it worked. We made it work."





Philadelphia

Philadelphia has always been one of those smaller East Coast cities in New York's shadow. That might explain why it has always held so fiercely to those cultural aspects that have made it distinct. Graffiti is no exception. There has been a long-standing claim that the modern graffiti movement started in Philadelphia. The photographic history seems to support this pretty strongly.

One Philly writer in particular, TOPCAT, has been credited with bringing a style of writing north to New York, dubbed Broadway Elegant by the time the style ended up being documented in Mervyn Kurlansky & John Naar's *The Faith of Graffiti* in 1973, but known as Gangster Style to Philadelphians. In New York, that common style took one direction, in Philly another. The Philly tradition of Wicked or Wickets is their claim to fame today. A unique hand, practiced by any writer worth his salt.

The method of writing in Philly is the practice of walking bus routes. The mythology of Philly graffiti starts with CORNBREAD, who apparently wrote his name from sidewalk to sky along the bus route of his high school sweetheart, in order to get her attention, even if it didn't gain her affection. Gangster Prints, Wicked/Wickets, Diamond Prints or Pyramids—different generations apparently had different names for the same styles. Philadelphia has almost a dozen highly complex, shared styles that are executed with baffling uniformity by the city's writers. So complex in their stylization, and yet systematized enough that every graffiti writer

Philadelphia Handstyles

worth his matte black Krylon has to know how to execute the basic core styles that all kings share. Graffiti has changed and evolved as it's spread around the planet like a game of visual "telephone," and, for whatever reason, for over 40 years, Philly's styles have stayed pretty close to home.

Most of Philly's styles grew from the influence of the gangster related graffiti of the 1960s. There were some hard-core gangsters hanging out under the Frankford El-Train in North Philly, and their influence was felt on the streets long after their threat disappeared. Gangster style influenced a lot of civilian kids. ESPO theorizes that the roots of Philly gangster prints might go back to the precursor of early Olde English handstyles of Chicago. The question then arises: how could these aesthetics migrate in the pre-internet era, and when interstate travel wasn't as easy or common?

"I don't know. I'm only guessing. The only thing that seems to make sense is jail systems, [which] connect people better than schools, or interstate bus lines. Maybe the drug traffic or the pimp game or... I don't think it was sports. I don't think it was intercollegiate spelling bee tournaments that brought this handstyle together. They had these *toasts* that were long, epic poems that were just passed around jails. They were pre-cursors to rap, in that they were really urban. They were really ghetto, and they were really fresh, hip and slick. They were really fast and they really illustrated a life that straight people just didn't know. I think handwriting went hand in hand with toasts and card games and all this other hidden knowledge that nobody gave a shit about. It was just a way that people in a certain time and place would talk to each other and deal with each other and promote who they were, and explain who they were to the next block over or the next tier over, the next neighborhood over. So you have to understand that CORNBREAD kind of unlocked all of these things. All of a sudden, all these kids wanted to get in the game."

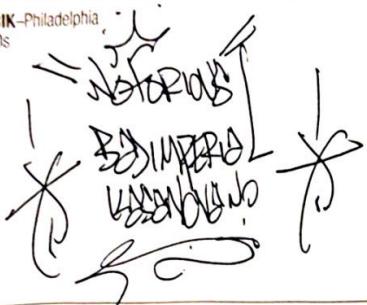
Take a close look at the elements that make up the earlier Philly hands in this chapter and compare some of the elements to early Chicago, New York, and Cholo alphabets in the other chapters. The details of individual practitioners' hands, and local flavors by city give it distinctive differences for sure, and yet a shared heritage and even a possible common genetic code or skeletal structure is visible when viewed side by side by side.

Philadelphia Handstyles

COOL EARL—Philadelphia
Circa late 1960s



NOTORIOUS BIK—Philadelphia
Circa late 1970s



MANIAC—Philadelphia
Circa late 1970s



TOBER -W- APE—Philadelphia
Circa late 2010s



CHEWY—Philadelphia
Circa late 1960s



NOTORIOUS BIK—Philadelphia
Circa late 1970s



MANIAC—Philadelphia
Circa late 1970s



DJ JAZZY JEFF—Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s





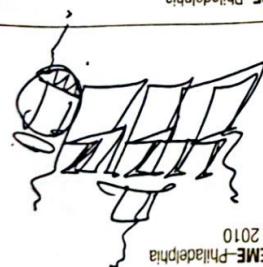
AGUA-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



AGUA-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



SECE-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



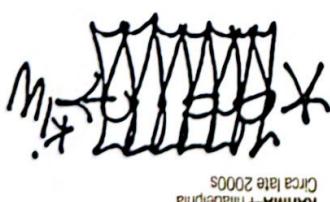
ESTME-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



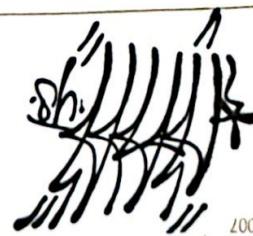
ESTME-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



ESTME-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



KARMA-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



NAW-Philadelphia
Circa 2007



BADAN-Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s

Philadelphia Handstyles

Philadelphia Handstyles

KADISM—Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s



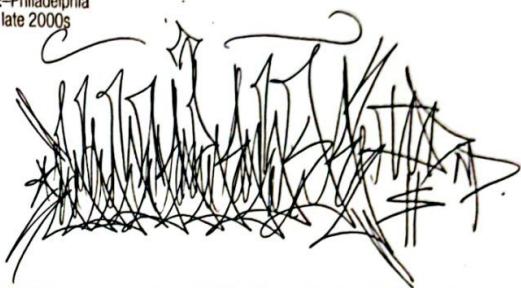
KADSTER—Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s



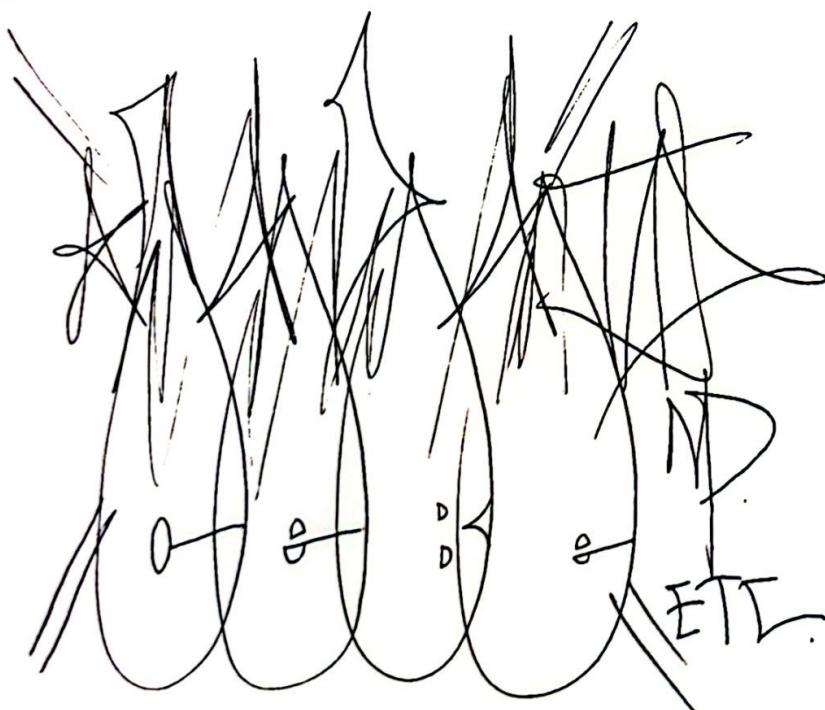
CEBE—Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



CEBE—Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



CEBE—Philadelphia
Circa 1988



I MADE this
UP
A WICKET
W/
A THRON
UP IN
IT!!!
1988..

Philadelphia Handstyles

PRIDE-Philadelphia
Circa 2010



PRIDE-Philadelphia
Circa mid 2010s



PRIDE-Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s



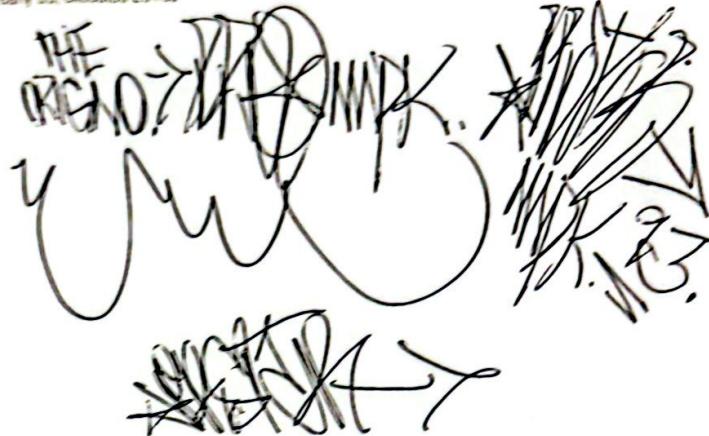
CURVE-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



CURVE-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



PR STAR-Philadelphia
Circa early 90s, executed 2010s



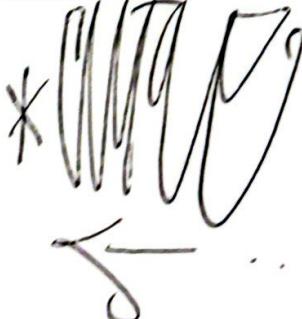
SABOTE-Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s



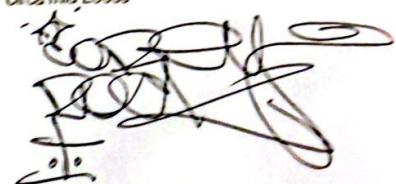
CURVE-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



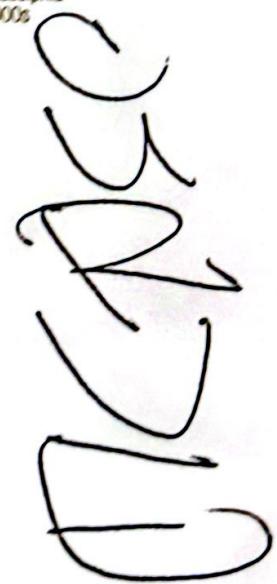
CURVE-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



COREY-Philadelphia
Circa mid 2000s

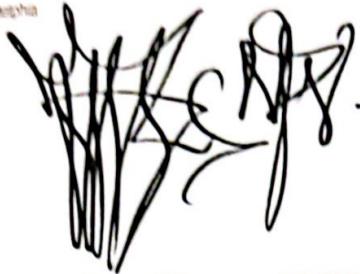


CURVE-Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



Philadelphia Handstyles

ENEM - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



PR STAR - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



KLARK - W - ENEM - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



KLARK - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



KLARK - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s

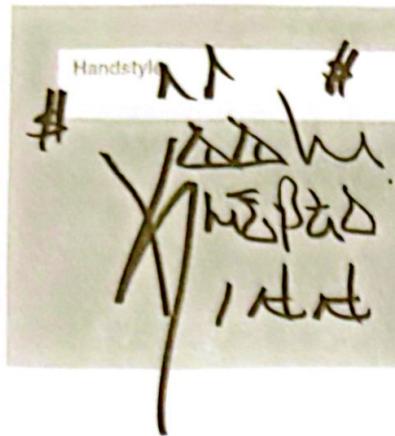


KLARK - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s



KLARK - Philadelphia
Circa late 2000s





KOOL KLEPTO KIDD

Philadelphia | Late 1960s – Early 1970s

"We started out with just a regular, conventional handwriting, and it just evolved. Before we knew it, we had different handwriting. I can remember, matter of fact, in the movie *Trick Baby*, when I wrote on that wall it was an old style because I kind of steadily looked at it when I saw the movie, and then it just took off and just kept evolving—just like with the Ds, when I was writing just regular Ds, and then I just came up with my own style of Ds. And also the K with curl and the slant down and the long part of the K drops all the way down. [That overlap] was my thing."



Gangster Print

Not so much for Kidd and his generation, but for generations after, this squared style has become known as a gangster print. Every self-respecting writer from Philly today has this style in their back pocket.

❶ Platforms & Serifs

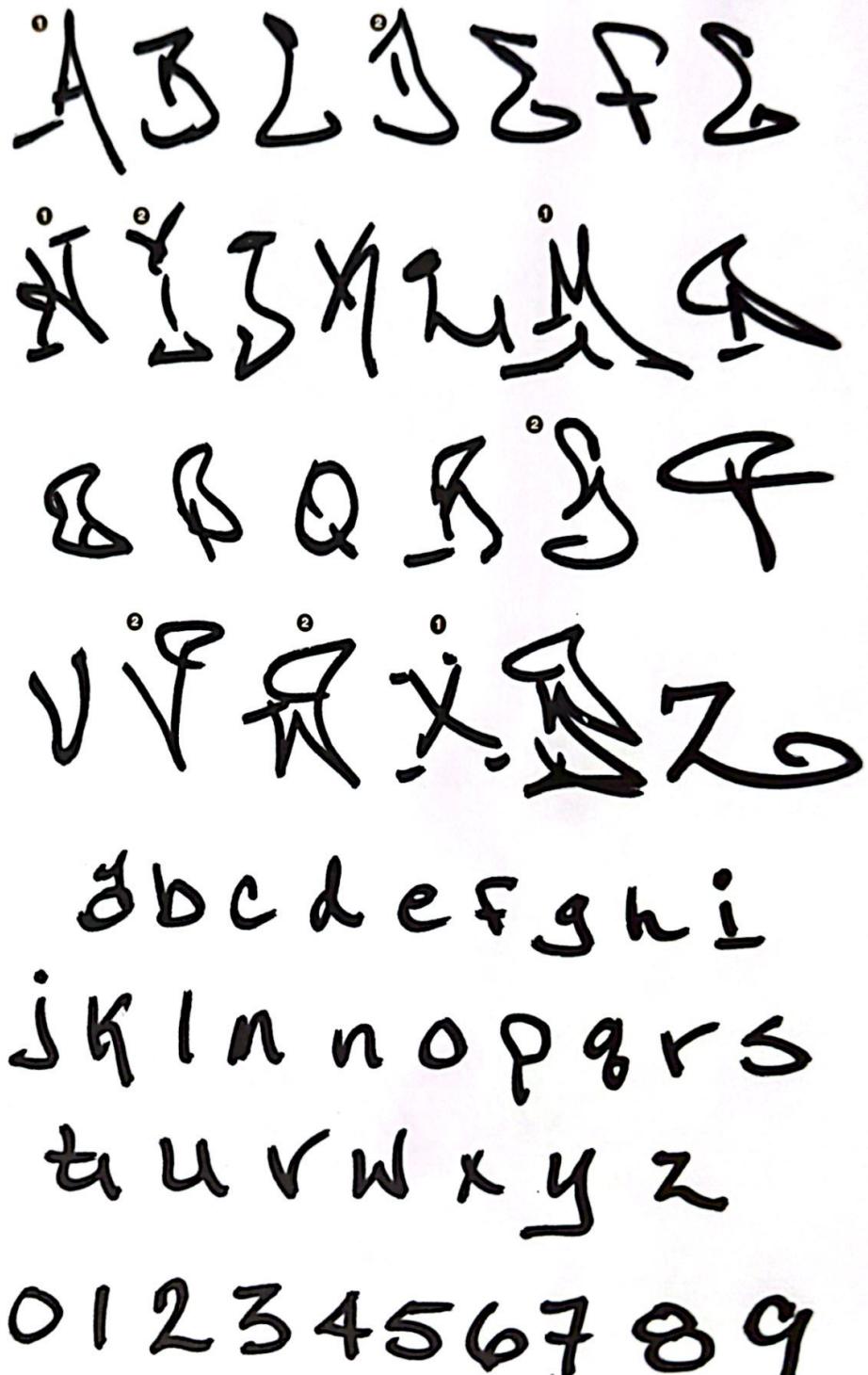
Notice the "serifs," or what a lot of the writers called "platforms" on letters such as: A, H, I, M, N, W, & X. Some were meant for the baseline while others begin to loop and swoop off the tops of the letters, giving rise to what would become the characteristic of the wicked. See the breakdown of NB's N evolution on pg 84.

❷ Shared Attributes

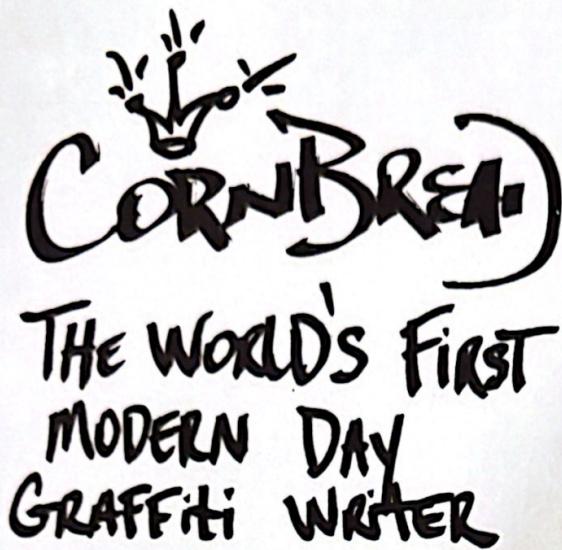
Notice the similarities between Kidd and NB's Letters on the following page. Specifically note the forms of: D, I, S, V, W.

❸ SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Note: The I's side by side (above). The similarities are remarkable considering the one at right, by NOTORIOUS BIK was almost ten years after KIDD retired. Ten years is more than a few generations in graffiti – a lifetime in the street. Proving that the tradition of keeping true to form in Philadelphia is exceedingly important.



The Kings Crown

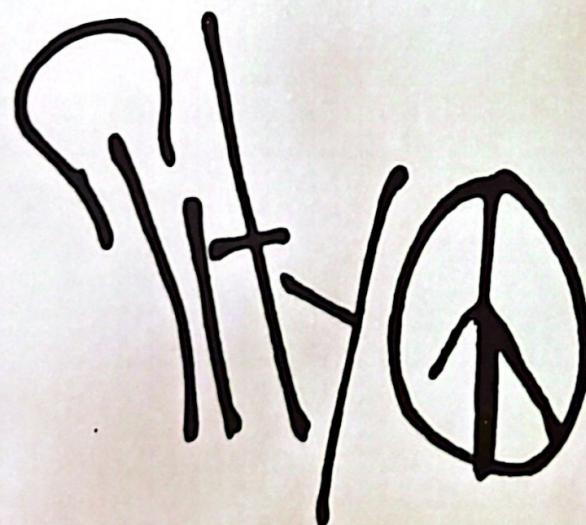


CORNBREAD was the first to popularize the symbol of the crown and the self proclaimed title of "king." This substantial symbol is one that transcended the locale of Philadelphia and became an international icon and symbol of graffiti and the braggadocio that became aligned with hip hop.

"CORBREAD used a crown because he was constantly proclaiming he was the king. All of us from West Philly didn't acknowledge it at the time. He might have been king over the North, but he wasn't king in the West. He couldn't come into West Philly 'til we brought him there. We would see each others' hits and leave messages on walls. Meet us at so and so. But there was no animosity, it was just a thrill to meet each other. Because we were from different sides of Philadelphia, we had never met." —KOOL KLEPTO KIDD

"CORNBREAD made his tag legible. That's the thing—I never liked a guy's tag if you couldn't read it. You gotta' stand there for ten minutes trying to figure out what the hell it says. What good is that if people can't make it out?" —STAY HIGH 149

TITY Peace Sign



Originally designed for the British nuclear disarmament movement by Gerald Holtom in 1958, the symbol is a combination of the semaphore signals for the letters N and D, standing for "nuclear disarmament."

Widely used by the hippies, TITY was the first to popularize it on walls during the Vietnam era of the late '60s, but it became a Philly staple, imitated by hundreds or thousands of writers ever since.

Popcorn & West Philly Style

West Philly Style

"POPCORN [aka TAB] had what was called a West Philly style [sometimes now called a tall print]. It was kind of plain and simple, but it was tall and skinny. It became a West Philly thing—the way POPCORN wrote—when I say he had a West Philly style, it was plain but it was a little more stylish than CORNBREAD. It was easy to read, which was basically a West Philly thing. Now you start to get more style as you get to North Philly. You know they started changing up their letters a little bit. They added more decorations, like hearts and stars and arrows. What we did as Sly Artistic Masters, we were bending and twisting the letters up."—NB



The Evolution of NB's Wicked

① Evolution Of N

"What I did was I rounded off a typical N, and put a little loop on it, which is kind of taken from KEN. Then from having the 'ism,' you develop your own certain steps where it eventually becomes [your own]."

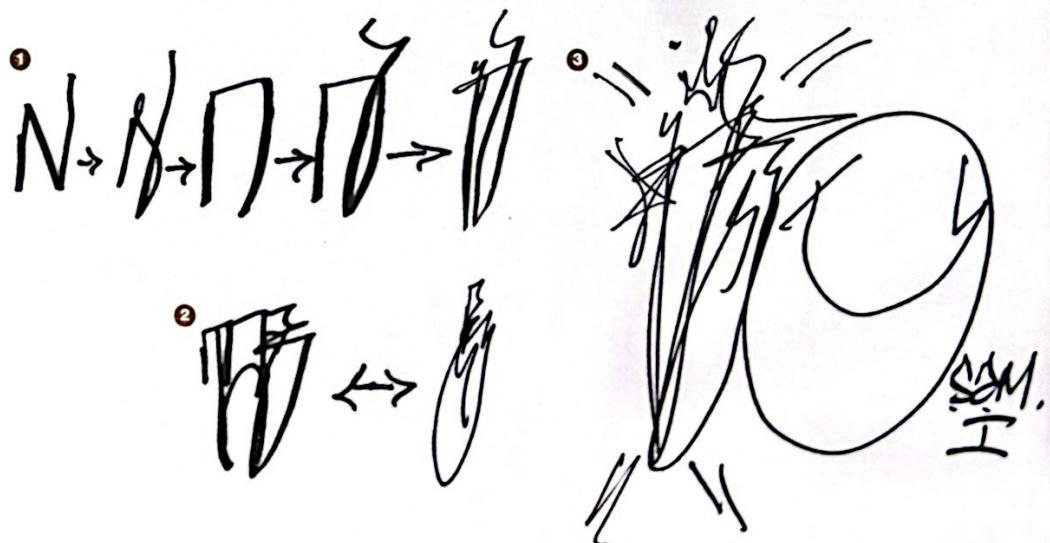
② Evolution Of B

"My B came from POPCORN. He also used to write TAB. I took his B and just jazzed it up. It's the 'ism.' You either got it or you don't. Patting myself on the back, I'm loaded with it."

③ NB's Tag

In addition to the letterforms, note all the final elements:

- Quotes on all four corners
- Star
- Crown
- Smiley
- Crew (SAM I)

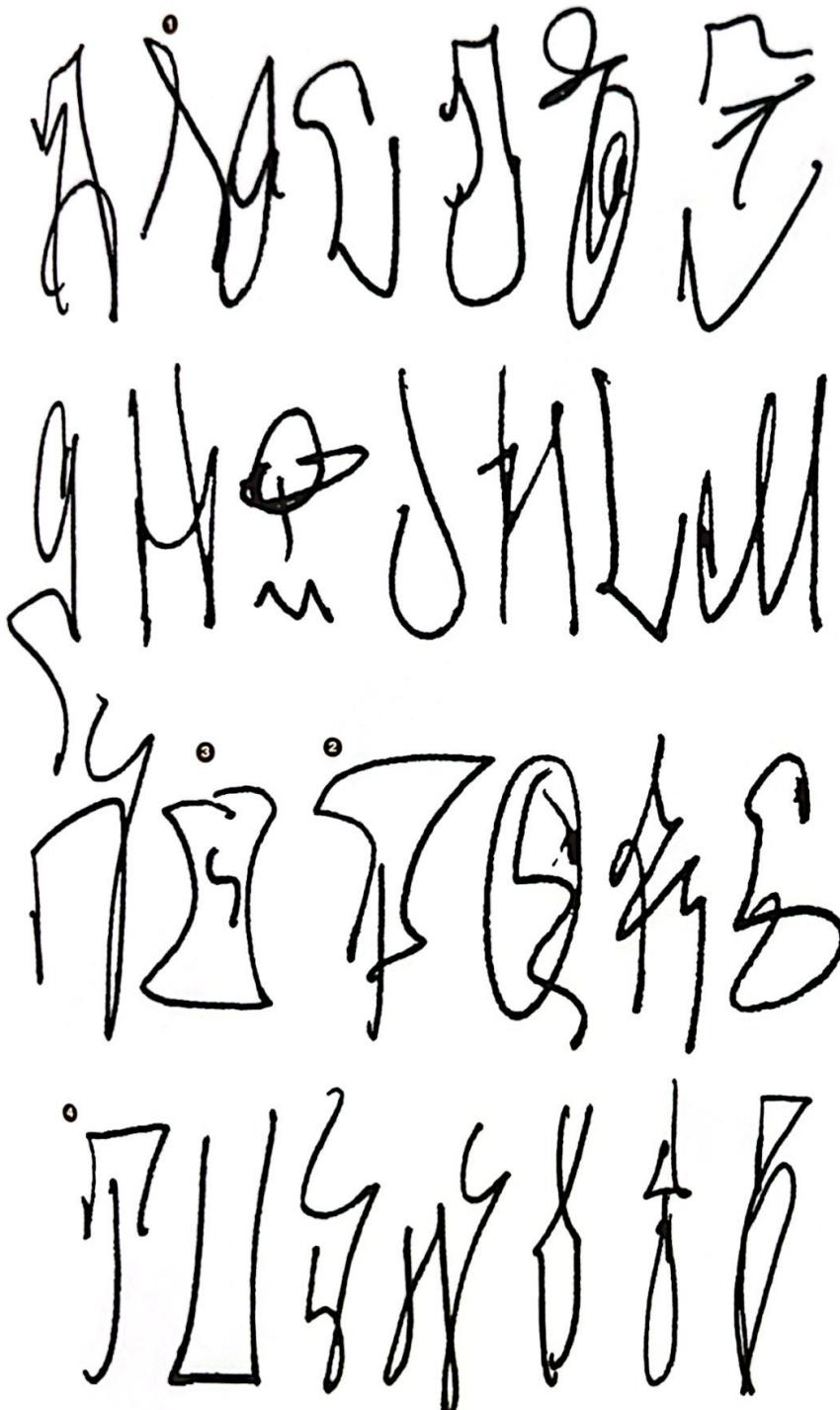
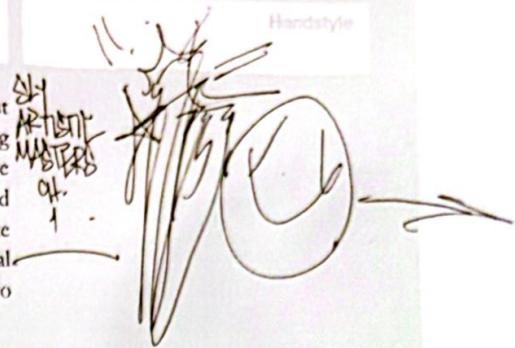


NB/ Notorious BIK

Philadelphia | 1976 – 1979

Handstyle

"I've seen a lot of so-called wickeds and they kind of insult me. Some people feel that if they put a lot of scribbles together and end it with a smiley face that they have a 'wicked.' That's like saying if you throw a whole bunch of food in a pot that you're a chef. It doesn't work like that. You're insulting chefs all over the world, and when you call yourself a wild-styler, you're insulting me and my crew. See, in order to be a true wild-styler, you have to develop your regular style first. Just like you can't be a surgeon without going to medical school, you can't have a real wildstyle or do real wickeds without being able to have a certain proficiency in Graffiti 101. There's just no way to do it! It's been proven time and time again."



"I was actually from West Philly, but people thought I was from North Philly because of the way I wrote. You know that threw everybody off. You could tell what part of a city they came from by the way they wrote. I just flipped that whole thing around. They didn't know where I was. They thought I was from Uptown."

❶ "That B is from a guy in South Philly, his name was BOO, B-O-O, and that was his B. I saw the way people would write different letters, and I was always fascinated by it, because I can see how it's a lower case B [which was rare]."

❷ "POET. That's similar to a POET P. That really came from an old Gangster style. You had POET doing that. And a dude named HIP—he'd do his own thing on it. You had a few dudes...It stemmed from that."

❸ "You don't want [a squiggle in] all your letters. See, I got two letters, NB. If I used a name, let's say like CAPTAIN with a squiggle in every letter that would look retarded. I didn't do that on purpose. The way that got there was that when I was finishing the B, the paint got stuck. Sometimes your paint leaks because it's cold. It wouldn't stop, so I turned it into a squiggle. I kept the paint going by making the whole squiggle into a smiley face on the outside of the B. After that incident, I started putting it in all my Bs. Then, after that, everybody started using the squiggles."

❹ "TITY's T was more rounded, but then in 73', 74', you had a dude named TANK who did it sharper, and then from there you had TAP, and TIZ. You had a lot of guys coming out with T names who were blatantly copying TANK's T, who's was sharper."



NOPE

"I started doing graffiti in the early '90s and Philadelphia was just destroyed with graffiti then. Even graffiti from the '70s was still around so I was seeing all this stuff and then I really started writing in like 1992. And then by 1994–95 all these writers from the '70s and early '80s had this full on comeback, just doing tons and tons of tags. We really didn't even understand it when it first happened. It was just crazy. There were so many people that we thought were so cool, from our generation or from the generation before us. There was this style that we were really into with the fat cap fading tags that were really prominent, and these guys were coming out with this crazy stock cap, just like, crazy writing, and we really didn't know how to process it. And then we sorta' started to meet these guys and learn about it and learn the bigger scope of it."

"My tag is influenced by people like KAD, DANE, ESPO, people who were up when I started to write."

"One thing I should preface this with, is this alphabet isn't really how I tag. It's just something I developed from learning about it later on. This is just an old style kind of mixed with a new style thing. I wouldn't even do this same thing today if you asked me. It's just what I did that [particular] day."

❶ "It's just me trying to take NB's A one step further. Instead of drawing that post, just trying to make it one line. That A is like standard. Totally standard."

❷ "The C part of the E is very old looking, but the crossbar is a new kind of look."

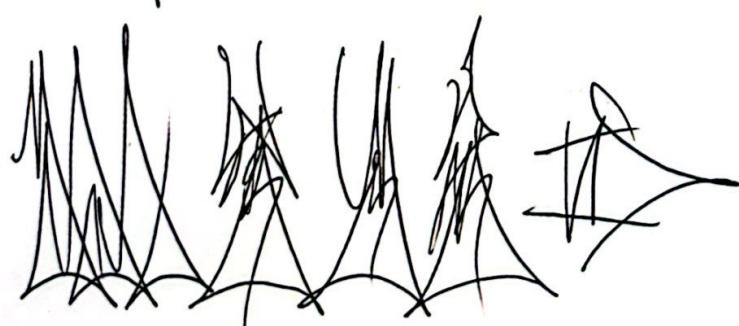
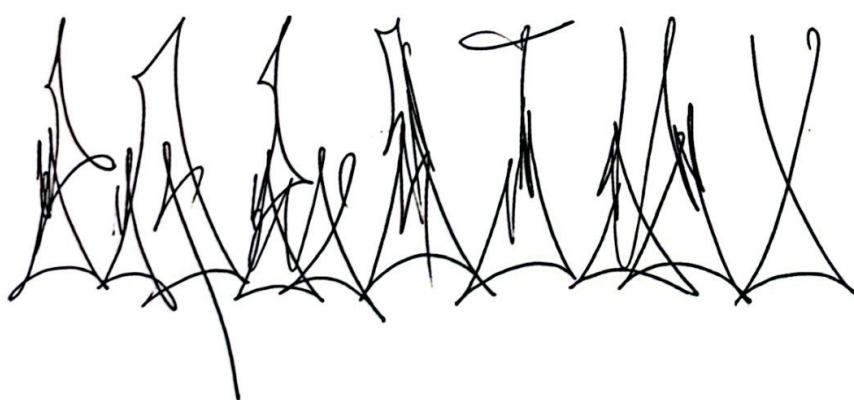
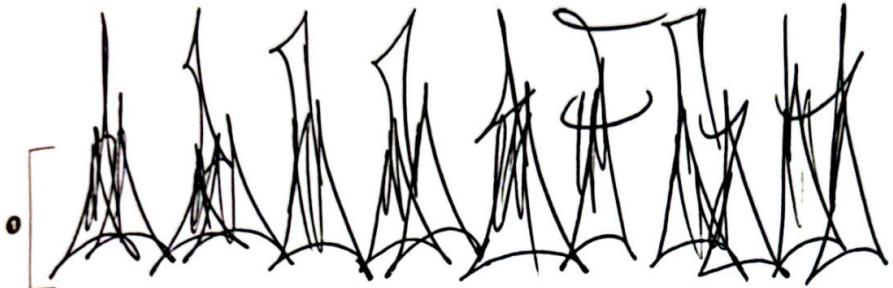
❸ "This alphabet has a lot of old and new, kind of mixed together. Even the R that almost looks like SACER or KSER (IRAK crew–NYC writers) or something like that. Philly '70s, or California now. I'm looking at all that in this alphabet. This isn't just Philly."

❹ "The Q is like [NYC], QUIK's throw up or MQ or something."

"There's a lot of pressure from the community for you to still possess that Philly hand. People don't want to see you writing like you're from New York. You can flip it up a little bit, but they're gonna call you out quickly."



"This style is a Triangle Wicket, circa 1985. It was a new style. It probably came from a dude that wrote 'RA RA,' who was doing Wickets, and then sorta maybe stumbled upon a triangle thing at the bottom, but then a dude named FAR, Funky Ass Ray, he was the one who really put that triangle at the bottom and really made it look the way it is now. I was taught the wicket from KARAZ and a dude named KAPE, and if you talk about any Philly wickets, those two names will always come up in any discussion. They were writing from the early '80s to the late '80s—a couple years older than me."



"There were a lot of Black dudes writing a certain way, and then there were Puerto Rican guys in North Philly writing a certain way. This wicked with the triangles was definitely from a Puerto Rican style. It was like KADISM, KARAZ and KAPE, FAR, all these dudes, they all wrote the same way, and they were all in the same crew together. It was definitely something that not everybody was doing, but now that you see what kind of influence those guys had; yeah, they started that shit."

❶ "They're all wickets—anything with the loopy-loops at the bottom. Starting back with like [Notorious] B.I.G. Tall prints with no wicket—nothing in there is a tall print. Anything wicket is still a wicket. Dudes got wickets with hearts in them, these are wickets with triangles at the bottom. That's all, nothing more."

Flossing

"People would always put money signs at the end or at the beginning. I don't know. [Maybe] People want you to think they got money, but it's just a doodad. People put crowns at the top of their names who barely ever wrote, but it's like a little doodad."

Outside The Box

"There's box-top wickeds or box-bottom. Some people call them 'jungle wickeds.' That kinda' zig-zag, boxy bottom, that kids overlap to create that pattern. They would call that jungle wickeds, but then older dudes would make fun of us for calling them that."—NOPE



ESPO

Philadelphia | Mid 1980s – 2000s

"It's really hard because, on some levels, I'm living by the rules that were created years and years before me. I would love to pull something off that was uniquely mine, but I guess a lot of hands are all a mish-mash. When you formulate a tag, you formulate four letters and it's usually a combination of like 18 different elements. It's so liberating to just have to create a handstyle on four letters. Getting four letters to work together is a piece of cake, [but] getting 26 to work together, and then [all] the possible combinations to work together."

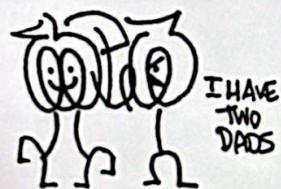
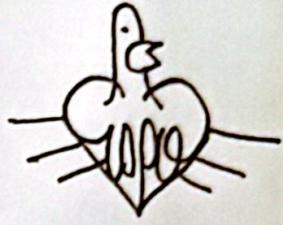
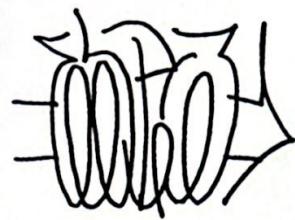
Ballpoint

When not executed in Rusto or Krylon flat black with a stock cap, most Philly writers opt for a Wite-Out pen or the good old fashioned Papermate rolling ball. The wispy tendrils of sticky ink it leaves behind seem to accent the "clicks" in the connections.

Capitals

"In the '80s, when I was first coming up, the first thing I had was *Subway Art*. My neighborhood is almost the suburbs. So I'm biting all that shit and I got pretty good at that, and even handstyles I was doing were kind of this weird combination of New York and Philly handstyles, I think it was more New York. You just got to a point where you're like this isn't that hard. What's really hard is that KADISM slam and that DANE slam. Those things are just really another level. They're deeper and stranger and more powerful. You could sit there and do your piece and it's perfect, and in terms of strength, it's interesting and colorful and kind of cool, but then there's this black tag next to it. It's like two inches high and in black marker, and it's just so rugged looking. I started writing in '84 and was really good at doing pieces by '87. By '88 I was trying to do Philly tags, and a lot of it was meeting other writers, and them clowning me because they thought I was just some suburbanite doing New York styles and they were giving me a hard time about it. So, part of it was peer pressure to fall in line and have those hands down, and that goes across the board."

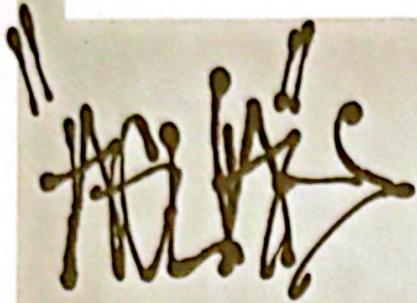
Evolution of ESPO's Tag



Spice of Life
A sampling of ESPO's tag and its variations from the mid-1980s to 2010.

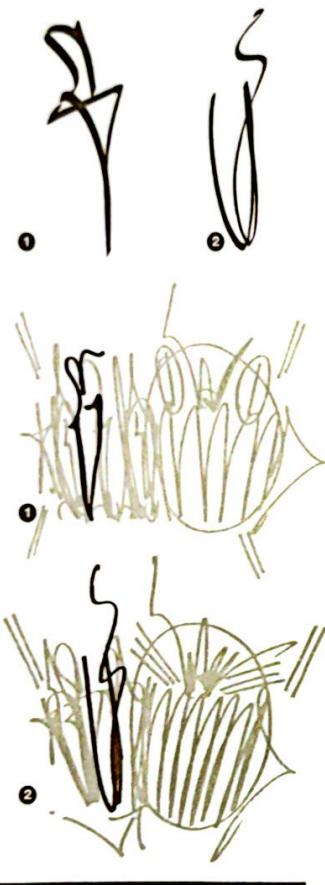
ESPO is humble about his ability to execute traditional Philly styles. Instead he is known more for his witty innovations, merging punchlines within his styles like the ones shown here.

❶ Before leaving Philadelphia to conquer bigger lands, ESPO had a brief stint as RAIN, seen in row 3. He partly picked the name because its letters worked so well for wicked style tags.



"Beanie Sigel [Philly rapper] was sitting in his purple Bentley packed up with his driver and some chick on South Street (the Bentley had BEANS airbrushed on the front). I approached and asked about SMACK and CHAKA from DA 5-South Philly Kings who are supposedly Beanie's old heads. Beanie also used to rep DA 5 (Da Almighty Five or something). Beanie then asked to see my hand and handed me an invitation, to Eve's birthday party, to write on. I started showing him these wickets. He started showing me love and then started doing all these BEANIE MACK and BEANS tags. Then fans rushed the conversation asking for autographs and to sign their shirts. Then Beans starts doing tall tags on this person's shirt; like it was a wall. He just turned and laughed at me."—AGUA

"And that's the way it is in Philly—it's like jazz. It's like being able to pick up a guitar and just do it—it's one of those things. You can be from anywhere. Like a secret handshake—if you really pay respect to the tradition, and take time to learn that, it opens up all those doors."—ESPO

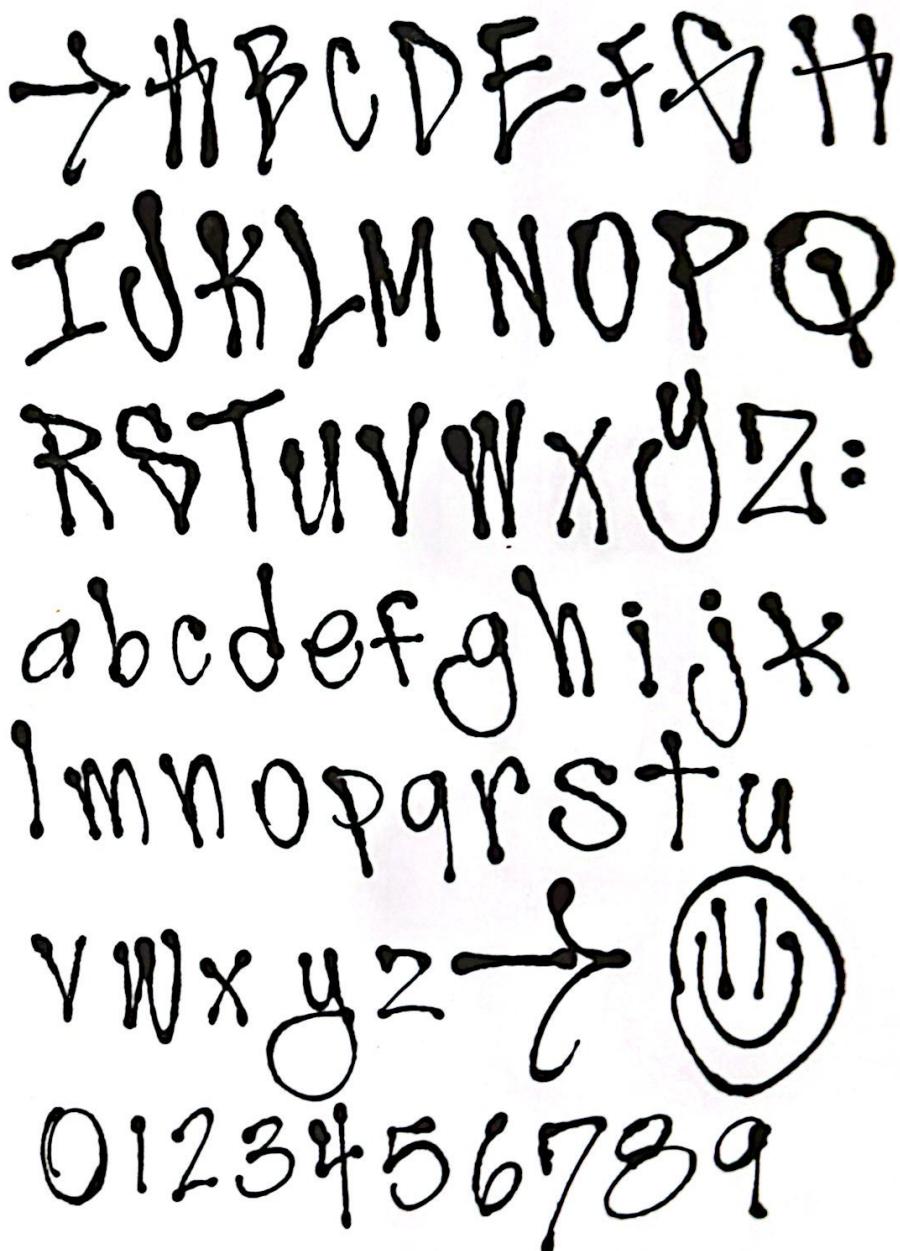


① Original G-angsta

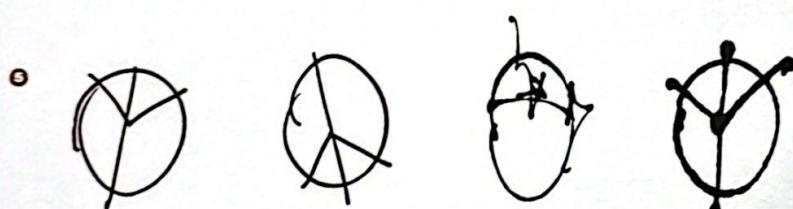
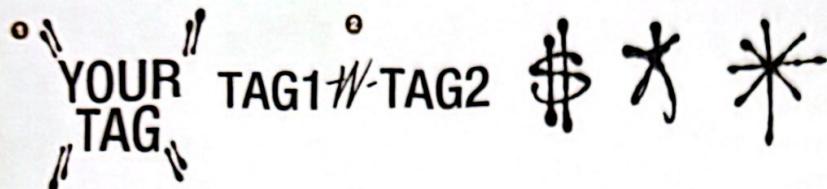
"The G is my creation. Not a lot of writers had Gs in their names, so it took me years to create Gs that flowed, have whip and are easy to read."

② The Whip

"The second line of the U is whipped up like a lightning bolt. Older writers with the letter N used to whip it the same way. I took the whip for my U. The pen never leaves the paper. This is an easy way to spot an amateur"



Philly Doo-Dads by AGUA



With its deep history and home town pride, it's not just Philadelphia's lettering style that makes it unique, but also a whole arsenal of accoutrements.

① Four Corner Quotes

Whereas most of the contemporary graffiti world utilizes traditional quotes as visual accents, Philly habitually does four corner marks.

② -W-

Used when writing with partners as in 'with.'

③ Arrows

While New York and the rest of the graffiti world has long used arrows, the two stroke stem and the scribble fill is a uniquely Philadelphia trait.

④ No. 1

"There used to be a guy with CORNBREAD who'd write DR. COOL No 1. He could have been the first one—if he wasn't the first one, he was one of the first ones to put No. 1."—NB

⑤ Peace Signs & Smileys

See pages 83 & 92

⑥ Crowns

Credited to CORNBREAD, the first all-city Philadelphia king, the crown is known throughout the graffiti world; but Philly is known for a typical style and proportion, typically 3 points, with a high arch underneath.

⑦ Repping Your Hood

Initials for your neighborhood often accompany Philly tags.

Smileys by AGUA

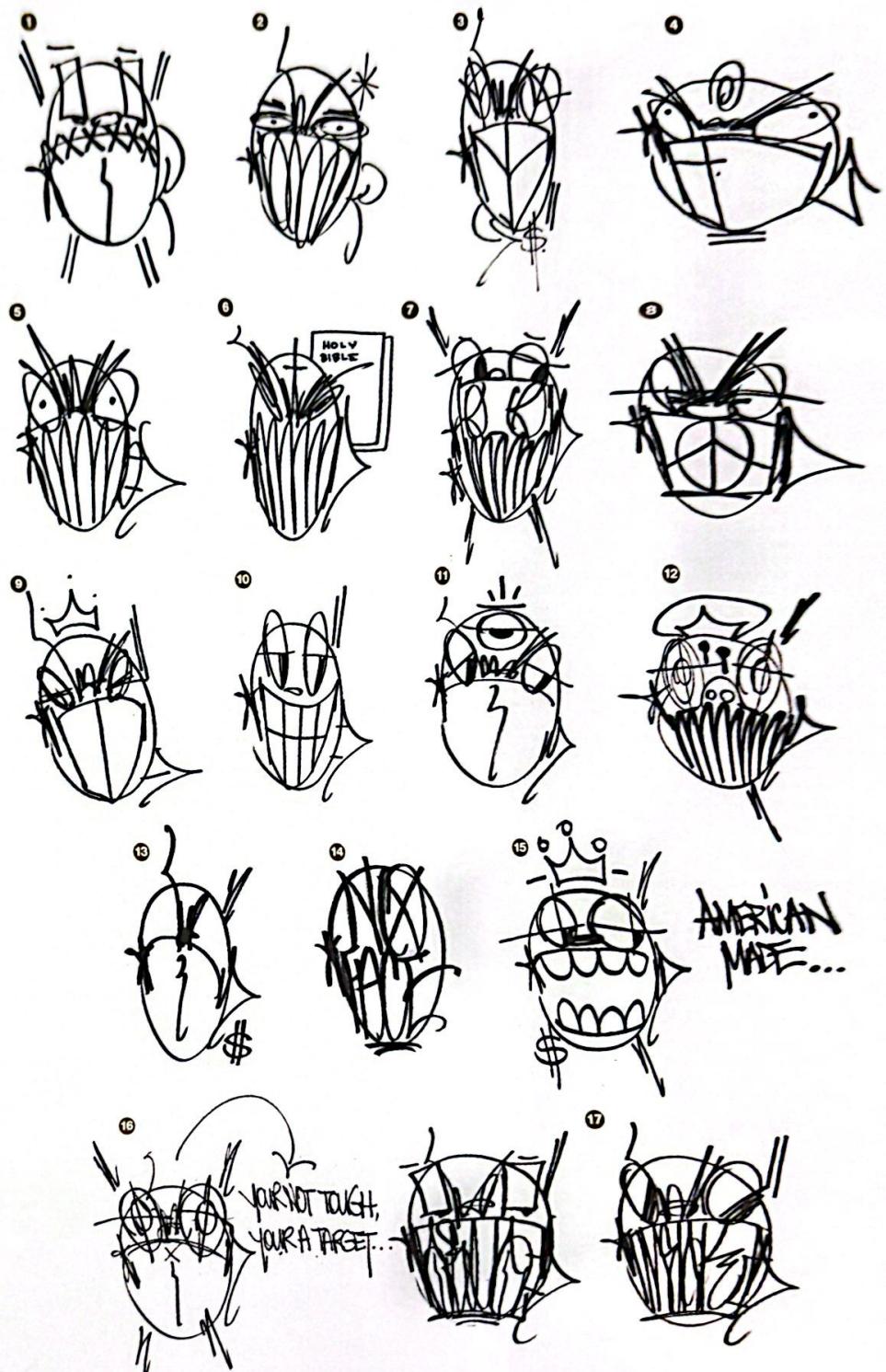


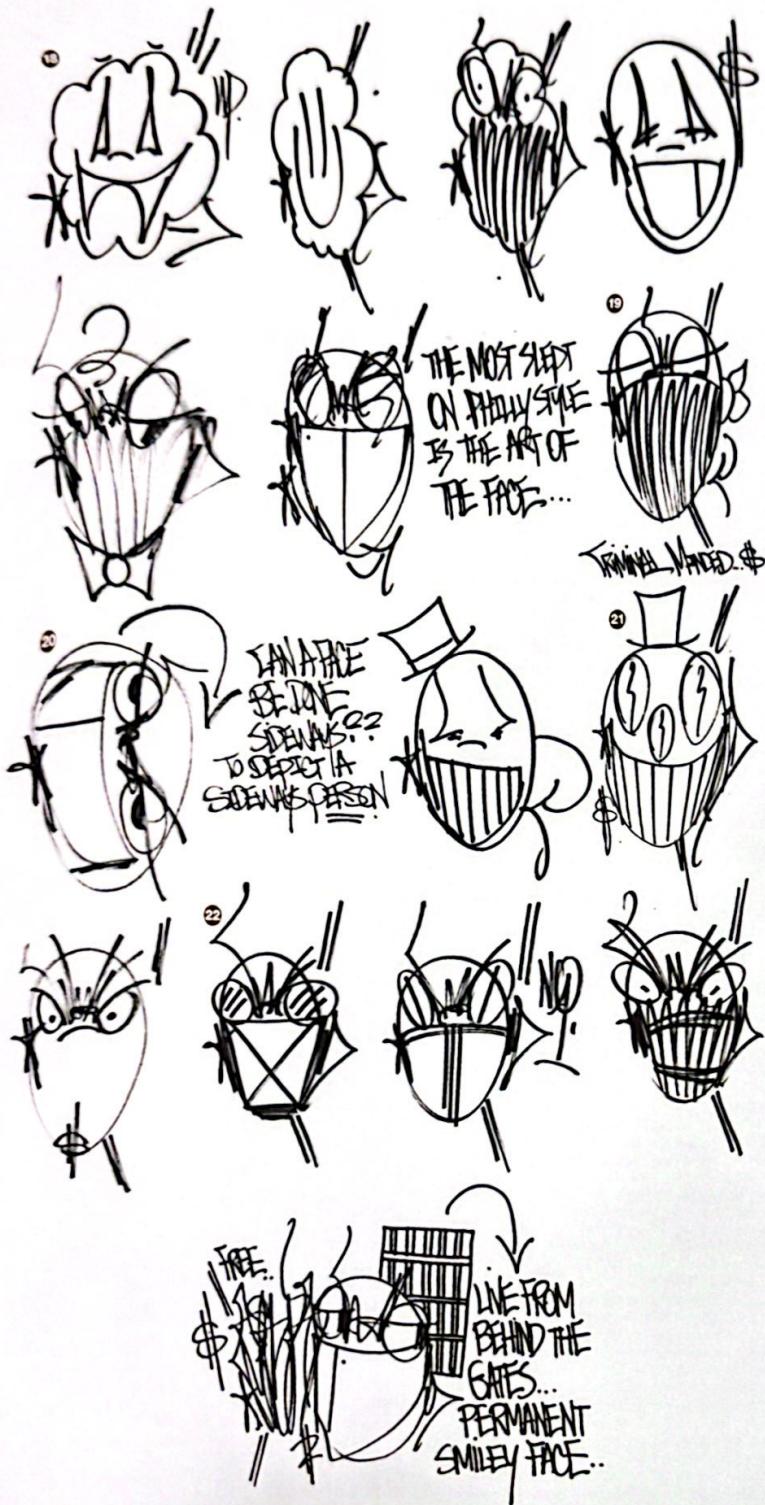
The first smiley face, is credited to Harvey Ball who designed it in 1963 while working at State Mutual Life Assurance Company as a freelance artist. However, as early as 1948 a smiley can be seen in Ingmar Bergman's film "Hamnstad."

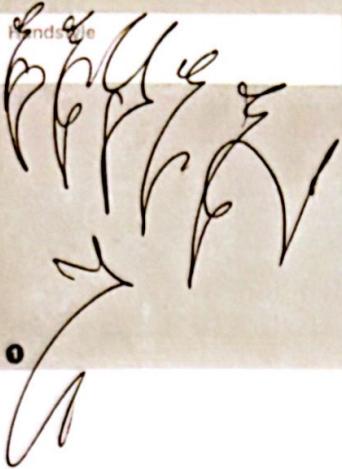
The graphic became ubiquitous by the early '70s when Philadelphia brothers Bernard and Murray Spain, began to sell buttons, coffee mugs, t-shirts & bumper stickers with the symbol and the phrase "Have a happy day" which evolved into "Have a nice day." It's said 50 million smiley badges were produced by 1972.

By the '70s, the smiley face usurped the symbol of the peace sign from the previous decade (made popular in graffiti by TITY-PEACE SIGN). Essentially the Smiley replaced the earnestness of the hippies' message of free love with an almost snarky irony of the post-modern '70s. As if "Have a nice day," were a way of saying "Go fuck yourself." Which makes perfect sense to anyone who has spent time in Philadelphia ;)

"I heard that TAP was the first one to do a smiley face. COOL EARL used to decorate his "COOL" [with eyes and a face]. Or it could have just been that time period when the smiley face first came out. It was like a disco-type thing. You know he just took it from there. Graffiti is heavily influenced by music. They go hand in hand."—NB







SEYCE

Philadelphia | 1999 – Late 2000s

"For whatever reason, Philly can be a pretty isolated city—in kind of an awesome way. It's one of those things that's a gift and a curse. There's always outside writers either getting run out of town, or having serious problems real fast, which can be kind of ignorant and destructive; but in some ways, I guess, that attitude is pretty good for keeping a homogeneous, home town style. I don't know why it has maintained for so long; there's just a lot of reverence and respect for it—to the extent that older writers are willing to sit down and teach somebody alphabets and styles for hours on end. But it's a weird era now, with the inclusion of the internet and other influences becoming so far reaching. When it first started happening and Philly writers were getting on these forums

❶ Tag Above

"Nine times out of ten, if I go to the wall, that's what I'll do—I guess that's my most recognizable, original style. I first started doing Es in that likeness from FEV, but it was more like a smooth leaning E; a little more graceful. Then I slowly started bending the letters every which way. After writing the same letter thousands and thousands of times, strange things start happening to it. A lot of it comes from mistakes, but sometimes that's best."

❷ Stick and Move

"BATE and I would both end on Es and I would end my E nice and neat and curl it in, and BATE would be like 'No, you want that E to look like it's upper-cutting somebody.' BATE, SANK, LARON (CAN)... those guys taught me you wanna be able to feel something from a tag. You want your arrow to feel like it's stabbing somebody."

Arrows in your Quiver

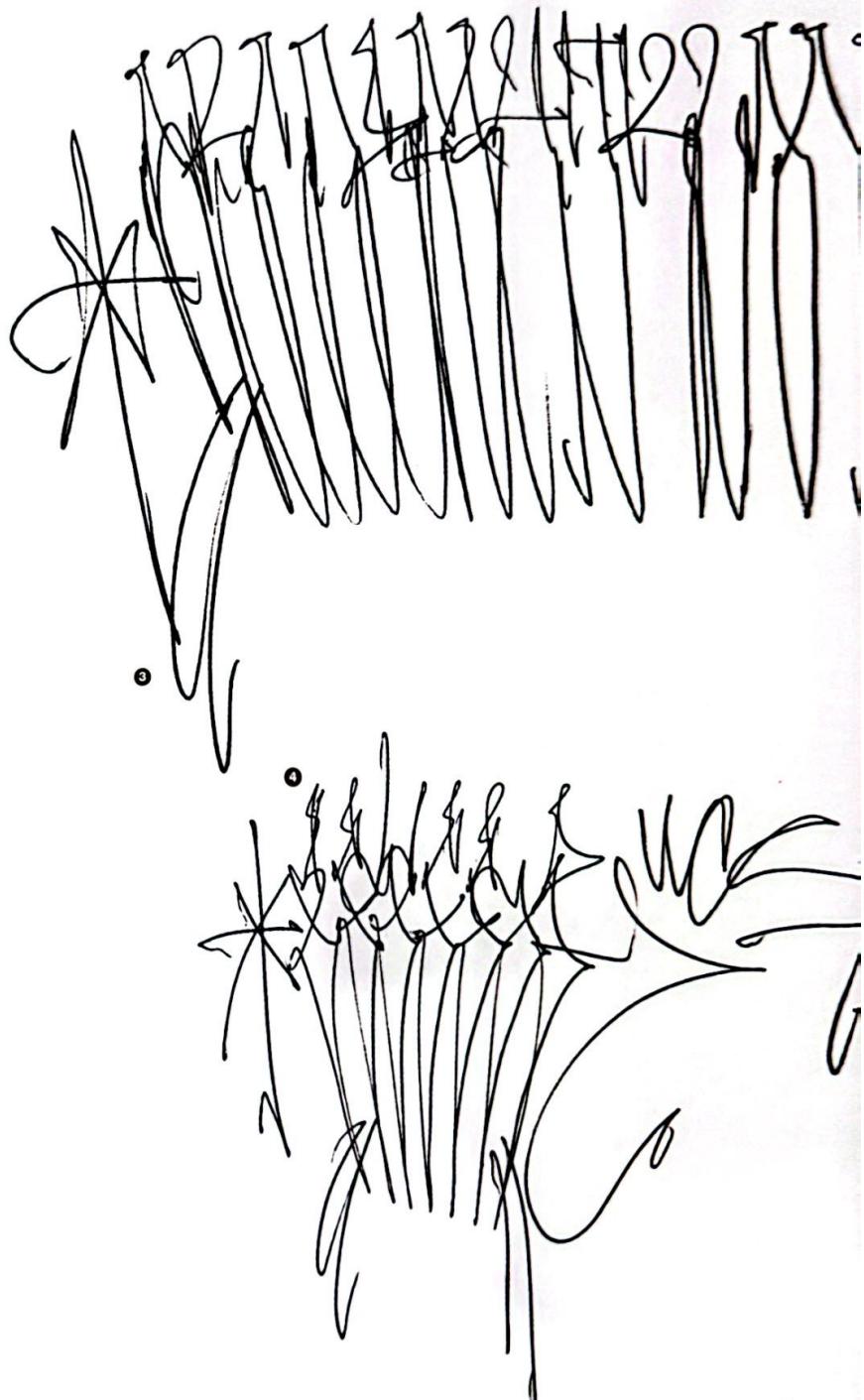
"There's box bottoms, box tops, round tops, diamond wickets, straight hands, tall hands, scripts; everybody has their slightly different names. It comes in handy when you're on route with someone and want to make sure you match up styles on a wall properly. Like, 'What do you think, top-to-bottom box tops or bogey straight hands?' type of thing. That way you get a nice solid pairing."

"A lot of a wicked is about the little wisps too, where the pen doesn't quite pick up off the page."

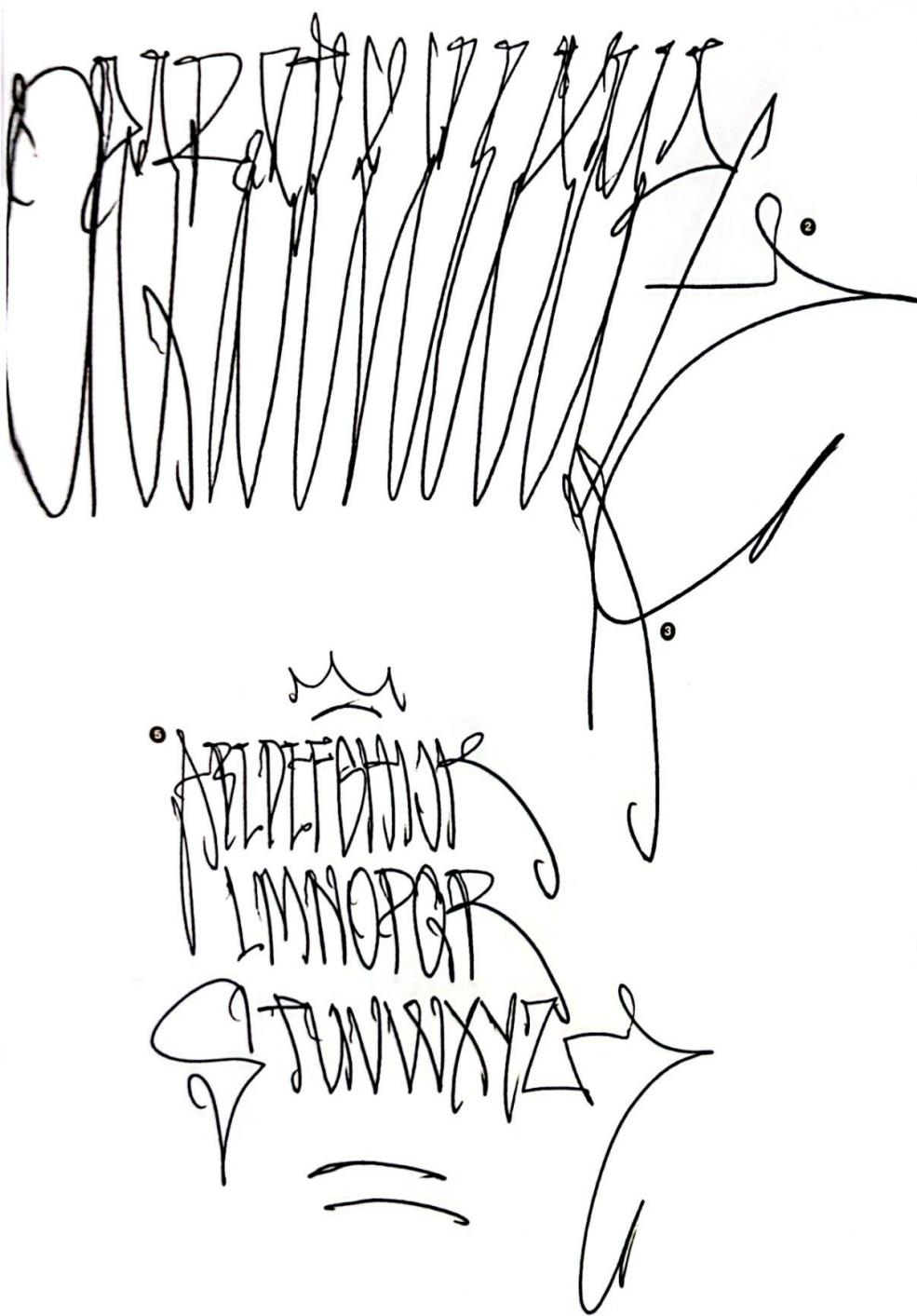
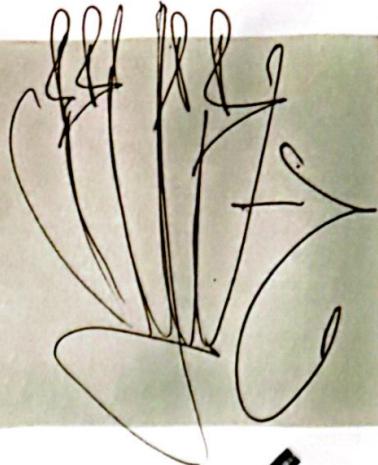
❸ On The Record

"Not many people do quotation marks just on the tops, at least not in a wicked. It's usually either all four corners, or just bottoms. I like the bottoms because I like the weight of the hand to be [heavy] just flopping down."

❹ Diamond Bottom Style



and blogs, I was kind of concerned that the local style and flair was gonna dissipate, gonna go to the wayside and outside styles and influences would start seeping in. But maybe it's the opposite, maybe if, anything, it's helped. So much of the actual history is buffed and gone and you can't just walk down the street and see those tags on a wall anymore. Now, everyday people are posting flicks of 25 year old hands online, and these are styles that newer guys may not have been exposed to otherwise. I mean, I probably learned just as much stylistically from looking at pictures online as I did from the random shoebox full of photos you'd come across from time to time. It might not be as romantic, but it's probably true. And I feel like even though you could have styles from Australia or Serbia or wherever the fuck at your fingertips, Philly kids probably mostly look at Philly graff online. That's all I really did anyways."



Schooled

"By luck of the draw, the guys I first met were predominantly North Philadelphia writers, so that's probably where most of my style comes from. The first crew I was in was called IMC, and it was a new crew, but it had some older writers, and others who had grown up surrounded by top-notch hands and writers. The first guys that I met, that I really started to get down with, were PR STAR (who is an older writer from North-West Philly) CEMENT, FEV, KRAV and BE. Those were the guys that sort of took me under their wing and showed me the ropes."

⑤ "This is more of a contemporary print style. A lot of the letters might look regular, but it's all the little details, and the wisps, and the connections."

⑥ "I like old dead stock of the *Papermates*, in blue. When they used to be all solid blue—before they went white and blue—they were always the inkiest and sloppiest. Especially when you're doing really fast letters and clinks and whips, you need a pen that can keep up with the hand [and wisp well]."

"The tagging thing always appealed to my sensibilities because I'm generally too nit-picky and particular. With tags there is no fixing, it's the type of thing where you can put in your work in a book and do the same hand fucking thousands of times and you feel prepared and you go to the wall and it's one shot. One and done; three to four seconds and it's a wrap."

136 PHASE

age 136

136 BARRON

SANTOS 136



New York

There have been dozens of books and hundreds of articles to cement the history of New York graffiti in the collective pop-history. If you had enough interest to pick up this book, you've probably heard it all before.

What we do know is this: the practice was building up steam by the late '60s when the first tags started appearing on the outsides of trains. Many writers have acknowledged that Manhattan had a scene of writers before the Bronx really picked up on it by 1969. The New York Times article about TAKI 183 was written in 1971. As the popular history goes, sometime around '71 or '72, a writer named TOPCAT moved from Philadelphia to 126th Street, and brought with him the Philly Gangster print. Mixing the style of Philadelphia Gangster prints with the New York practice of adding your street number behind your tag, the Broadway Elegant style was born. TOPCAT must have made quite the impression, because you can see dozens of tags from the era that started to utilize the Philly style platformed bottoms and the horizontal strokes, disconnected from the verticals hovering over them. Although TOPCAT's work has not been widely preserved in photos, almost any writer from that place and time can teach it to you. See a couple in the following pages by STAN or MALTA. That Broadway style from the Upper West Side became the standard, the starting point—a basis on which to build. Many of the pictures of that time show a wider ranging experimentation from New York writers than their Philly counterparts. The Bronx and Brooklyn writers were partial to more swooping, curling letters, utilizing accoutrements like arrows, stars and halos, which seem to be what eventually differentiated Broadway from Philly Gangster writing.

One of the first book of photos, *The Faith of Graffiti* by Mervyn Kurlansky, Jon Naar and Norman Mailer, was published in 1973. The movement was strong, and by that time had local scenes everywhere. However, an outside eye looking in for the first time helped to preserve the Broadway style, like a prehistoric specimen in amber. Most of the documenting took place through Central Park and along the routes of the 1 and 9 trains on the Upper West Side, of Manhattan. Apparently, there were stylistic differences between the boroughs, if not each neighborhood. As graffiti

New York Handstyles

grew in scale and complexity and moved to the outside of trains, the styles grew too—shared in a linear manner along the train routes and the extreme ends of each line. Styles were shared from The Bronx to Brooklyn at the ends of the city—and everywhere in between.

In most histories of graffiti, New York's outer boroughs have usually gotten short changed, but there's no denying the influence of: PHASE 2, STAY HIGH 149 or LEE 163D from the Bronx; UNDERTAKER ASH and FRIENDLY FREDDIE from Brooklyn; and many others from Queens and Staten Island played just as significant a role as their Manhattan counterparts. LEE 163D has long been credited with the first interlocking letters; moving tags away from print or script styles towards a lockup, or logo treatment, that in many ways still characterizes New York tags to this day.

By the mid 1970s, the game became about the influence of writers gaining more and more caché—sometimes for style, sometimes for the vastness of exposure. Small innovations, one at a time, pushed the scene into a competition-laden fast forward. New York breeds competitive innovation like nowhere else on the planet, and that competitive nature is amplified in graffiti to the point where imitating or “biting,” another writer's style can be hazardous to your health. It demands a code of ethics that requires a physical and mental dexterity.

STAY HIGH once reasoned that COST's stick figure character was acceptable because it faced left, the opposite direction of his own. Apparently STAY HIGH had purposely faced his character to the right, differentiating it from the stick figure logo in *The Saint* television show of the 1960s where he drew his original inspiration. As it turned out, STAY HIGH had such influence that writers were stealing details from his tags for decades, as an homage: the arrow in his S; the halo hovering over the tag instead of a crown; even the use of a phrase “*Voice Of The Ghetto*,” instead of a tag, which he popularized when writing it as a back up name before that became a standard practice.

Styles developed based on tools and placements. Spray Paint is better suited for large-scale, outdoor tags. A whole different world of artists focused on the insides of subways—making their own inks by dissolving transfer papers in alcohol, or becoming kitchen chemists, making markers from shoe polish containers or hollowed out batteries. The metal panels inside certain trains were perfect for more calligraphic, chisel-tip tags. Drippy tags necessitated a big, round style of letter that would still be somewhat legible when ink flooded the counter spaces.

New York Handstyles

JUNIOR 161—New York, NY
Circa 1971–1972



Tracy 168—Bronx, NY
Circa early 1970s



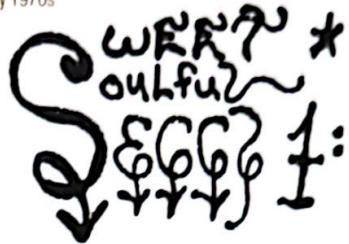
Stan 153—New York, NY
Circa early 1970s



MALTA—New York, NY
Circa mid 1970s



Seggi—New York, NY
Circa early 1970s



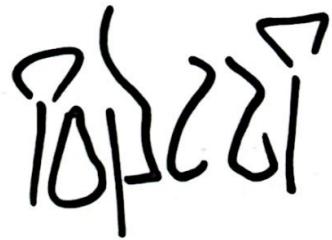
RAT—New York, NY
Circa early 1970s



TOPCAT 126 (as remembered by Stan 153, 2013)—New York, NY
Circa early 1970s



TOPCAT (as remembered by MALTA, 2013)—New York, NY
Circa early 1970s



New York Handstyles

MINT—Brooklyn, NY
Circa late 2000s



SPARK—Brooklyn, NY
Circa mid 2000s



DEAR—New York, NY
Circa late 2000s



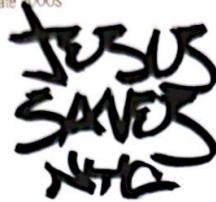
HUSH—Queens, NY
Circa mid 1980s



SANE (BY SMITH OR JA)—New York, NY
Circa late 1990s



JESUS SAVES—Brooklyn, NY
Circa late 2000s



SMASH—New York, NY
Circa late 2000s



LEFT ONE—New York, NY
Circa late 2000s



VEEFER—New York, NY
Circa late 1990s



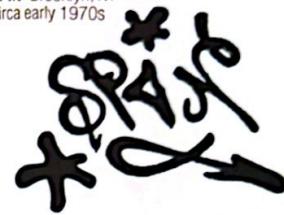
JA ONE—New York, NY
Circa early 2000s



SENZ—New York, NY
Circa late 2000s



SPIN—Brooklyn, NY
Circa early 1970s



COPE 2—Bronx, NY
Circa early 1990s



VFR (VEEFER)—New York, NY
Circa 2008



AUDIE—Brooklyn, NY
Circa mid 1980s



New York Handstyles

SEEN—Bronx, NY
Circa mid 1980s



GUESS—New York, NY
Circa late 1990s



EARSHOT—New York, NY
Circa mid 2000s



JESTER—Brooklyn, NY
Circa mid 1970s



REVOLT—New York, NY
Circa mid 1980s



ZEPHYR—New York, NY
Circa mid 1980s



SACER—New York, NY
Circa late 1990s



DESA—Queens, NY
Circa mid 2000s



TAKI 183

"If you really look at that first generation of writers, they wrote the way they learned it in schools, like in first grade and second grade, where you wrote your letters big and then small. MC XONE 106 said the idea was that you wanted to write your name as strict as possible, so that people could read it as quickly as possible. Style didn't come into it until about '71. The first generation was late '69, and suddenly by, 1970, there are 50 more writers from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, all trying to be like TAKI 183."—FREEDOM

A B C D E

—
F G H I J

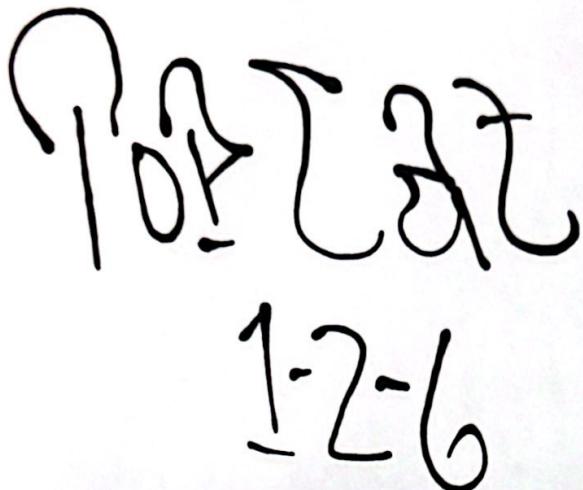
K L M N O P

Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 0

STAN 153 on TOPCAT & Broadway Elegant



"[Before the publication of *The Faith of Graffiti* in 1973] basically—Broadway and Manhattan—everyone was making stuff up on the fly, you know, like lettering, tag styles, or writing somebody else's name—stuff like that. Everybody was making everything up, and biting off everything... pop culture, iconic culture... each other, boroughs, other teachers, like PHASE, me, RIFF. Once the legend started, everyone was trying to learn it [and meet TOPCAT]. Lucky me, I ended up hanging out with him about a week before he died [in the mid '70s]. He used to come up to my house and get drunk a lot and curse everybody out."

"TOPCAT gave me everything as an alphabet. I said, 'everything doesn't fit,' and he said, 'make it fit.' In other words, if you had to modify—modify. But I didn't, and everything I'm doing now is just pure." —STAN 153

LSD Om

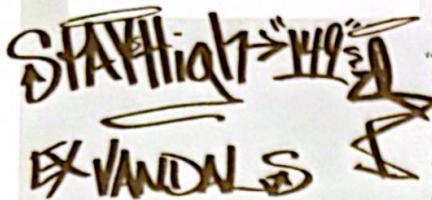


"I was writing CHAD, my real name starting in 1968. I started writing CHAD [the Weathermen sign], which was a radical group in the late '60s, but they were too violent for my tastes after a while. So, I switched to the Om sign in 1970—I was 14—and nobody did that. That is when I transitioned from "CHAD OM" to "LSD Om." In 1973, I met FDT 56 and he brought me into the whole world of graffiti. I didn't know STAY HIGH or DEAD LEG for the first year they were writing. We knew each others' tags, but hadn't met yet."

❶ "In 1972, I adopted a definite influence from STAY HIGH. I really dug his style and his tag, and that's why I first incorporated the S. The L and the D were still plain."

❷ "And then I saw DEAD LEG's L, and he had a fancier D. But the 3 [Om] was from nobody. I think that's the only original thing from my tag—other people copied it after me. I never heard anybody say 'you bit STAY HIGH's S.' I'm not gonna lie. We were kind of from the same spot. What writer hasn't written other writers names? Just out of appreciation for their style; it's a love for the penmanship."

STAY HIGH 149



"Living in Harlem, before I moved to the Bronx, there were guys like JOEY 139, he used to be on a lot of buses up and down Harlem, CLYDE, TOPCAT 126, SNAKE 131—got up a lot too in Harlem. My friends gave me the name. When I moved to the Bronx, I started smoking a lot of pot and hanging out, and the guys started calling me STAY HIGH; and I liked it and it stuck. And I liked that Saint show from the '60s; then I came up with my version of that character, and my name design, and how I put it together. Now that I look back at it, its amazing the way the STAY HIGH is hooked together with the H; as a joint going across the crossbar of the H. And I was proud when they wrote about that in *New York Magazine*."

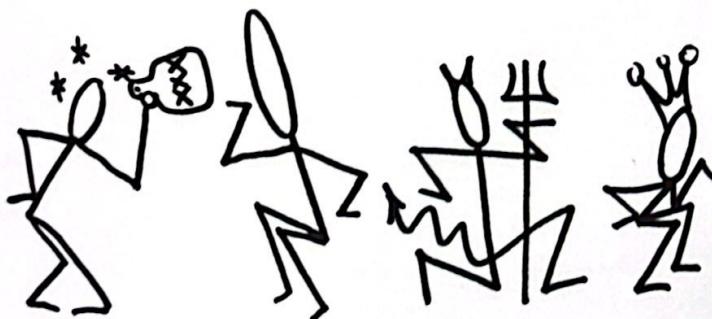
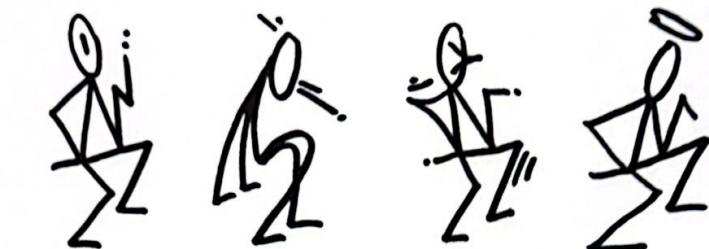


"STAY HIGH invented a whole slew of icons that are used to this day, including: the halo, which was so big for so long; the smoker, obviously, and any variation thereof; the heart under the name. When STAY HIGH had to give up the name STAY HIGH 149, he took on VOICE OF THE GHETTO, and he put a heart under his name, and that was it. Everybody had a heart under their name. He also was the first to use quotation marks."

—FREEDOM

A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R
 S T U V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i
 j k l m n o p q
 r s t u v w x y z
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Saints & Stick Figures



• The Saint

A character developed in dozens of books by Leslie Charteris, published between 1928 and 1963; made most famous by a television series, starring Roger Moore, that ran from 1962 to 1969.

From Depression era boxcar tramps to Kilroy's peeping tom, characters have always played a part in the writing on the walls. But, STAY HIGH was the first writer, in contemporary graffiti culture, to use one. His reappropriation of 'The Saint' into 'The Smoker' was hugely influential. Imitators and homage-payers alike have been riffing on the stick figure for decades. And not just stick figures; today's writers use halos above their names instead of crowns, and many 1970s writers used joints and smoke lines in their tags (See the MALTA tag on pg 99). Even today, the squiggles seen emitting from stars trace their roots here. The arrow on his S, and the way his tag linked up, were incredibly ahead of his time. Numerous other graffiti artists followed suit with their own versions of the stick figure character, including STAY HIGH's early partner DEAD LEG, and COST with his resurrection of the character in the late 1980s.

• The Smoker

"I just thought it was a great idea, but I changed him up a little bit so I wouldn't have any problems with the people that produced the [TV] show."
—STAY HIGH 149

PHASE 2, Bronx-Early 1970s

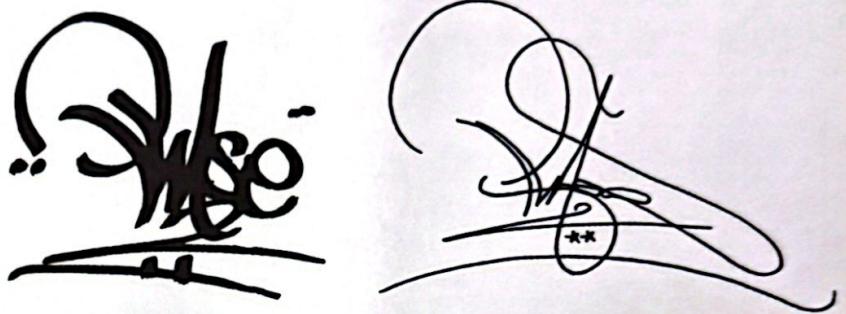
TWO for Forever

Style pioneer, PHASE 2, was first to combine an Arabic number with the Roman numeral.

"Two for Forever—ongoing. To me, one is a beginning and two is another step. Two means forever, spelled another way." —PHASE 2
(from *Videograf #1*, 1989)

"PHASE 2 started out as a mess. He knew he wanted to do something with arrows, and literally within less than a month's period, he had it all figured out. I think he had one of the greatest tags ever, that continues to challenge them all to this day. If you look at early PHASE 2 tags, he only had like a one month period as a toy. He's just trying to do too much. He had arrows going every different direction and he can't quite figure it out. And then he figures it out; obviously, he's the most pivotal person, style-wise in the movement." —FREEDOM

Phase 2
Phase 2



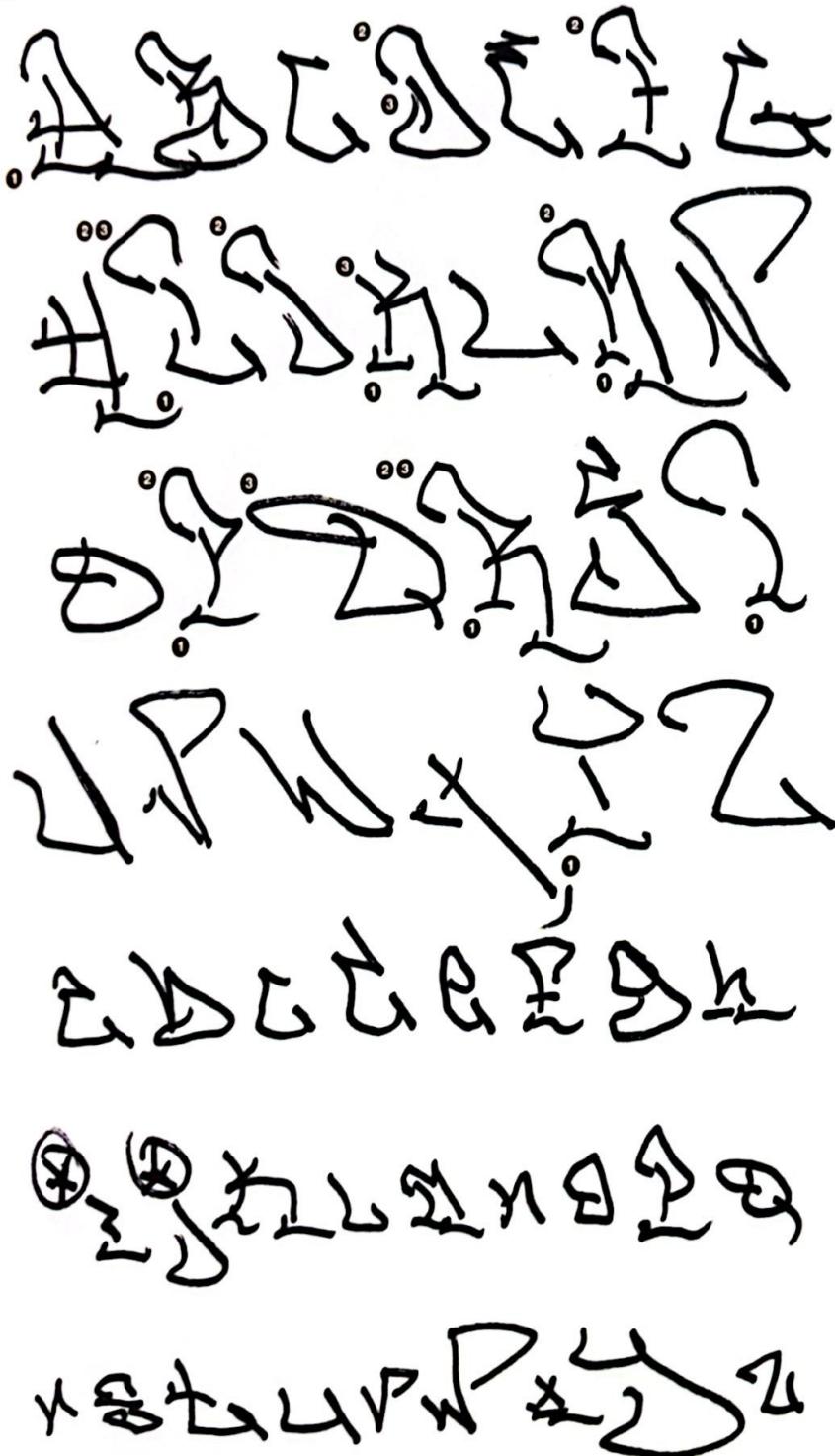
FUTURA 2000

Six different FUTURA Styles
Photo: Matt Weber.

One of New York's most influential graffiti artists, FUTURA, had several styles in the early years, from prints to the eventual script he is so known for today.



"The first styles I saw were up on Broadway, TAKI 183, and JOE 182, basic prints. Nobody in Manhattan really had any style. At the same time everybody in Washington Heights, down in Harlem, and Broadway—all these guys were doing Broadway style, like TOPCAT. TOPCAT had family over in North Philly, and he went over there to visit and he met Philly folk and learned the style. After he came back over here, he changed it slightly by leaning it and opening up the letters and stuff, but basically, [it was a] Philly style—long elegant, stretched out. He taught it to T-REX, KNEE HI, STAN 103...in other words, he was like Godfather of Broadway style, back in the day. If you wanted to learn it, you had to learn it from him, or someone like him."

**❶ Platforms**

These 'feet' on the bottoms of many letter forms are the common characteristic to Broadway Elegant handstyles and their predecessor, Philadelphia Gangster style. Compare to KIDD on pg 82 or NOPE on pg 86.

❷ Disconnected

Another indicator of the style is the swooping top strokes that hover over the vertical strokes. Compare these to the Olde English influence in Cholo or Chicago hands. See Went on pg 35, Sivel on pg 63, or Test on pg 69.

❸ Bend Over Backwards

Many of the vertical bars, bend each character back and to the left. While characteristic to Broadway Elegant, the backward lean is a shared idea seen across the United States in early graffiti. See several old Cholo Styles (Chapter 4), Baltimore (Chapter 8), or Bay Area and North West (Chapter 10) styles in their own unique ways.

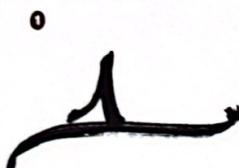


"Nobody in Manhattan really had any style. Brooklyn on the other hand, they were tagging too—Ex Vandals [an influential graffiti crew]. This style was basically like early Brooklyn, 1972. You know, hearts, arrows, stars, smiley faces and all that stuff. And everybody was 'KOOL'. [In the] Bronx I didn't really see [style like this] till 1973. Bronx style had arrows, stars and pitchforks. But it wasn't as pretty as Brooklyn style."

STAN 153 Brooklyn Style | 1972–1973



The Ones and IIs / Spitting Bars



Numerals, Roman, Arabic & Otherwise

➊ The practice of putting your street number behind your tag was limited to Manhattan writers; many writers numbered their tag with a ONE, claiming to be the first of that name. Early writers commonly used Roman numerals, which evolved into a stylized one-stroke Arabic number. But there is also a ubiquitous style of writing out the word ONE, with a scripted interconnected style.

➋ "The one-liner style of writing 'one' was from Queens. On the 7 lines and the F lines, there were two partners, called SON and PRO. And SON connected his whole name. They influenced a dude named FUZZ, who was already writing in the Bronx, but when he moved to Queens he adopted that one-stroke. The Zs went right into his ONE. And then MIN ONE started. And then everybody and their momma was doing it. And now it's in Japan. But that is particularly Queens."—KEO

Bars, Underlines & Overlines

➌ The stylistic influence of the early use of Roman numerals seemed to be widespread enough that many writers incorporated the top and bottom bars into their tags, even when not using actual Roman numerals.

Run DMC's logo was one of the most commercial, and long lasting hip hop graphics of the era, and seemed to be part of the zeitgeist as well. The logo first appeared in 1985 on the 'You Talk Too Much' single. For years it was influential but went uncredited, until 2013 when Red Bull Music Academy dug deep to discover the designer was Stephanie Nash of Island Records' in-house design team.

"I remember listening [to the music] and thinking how visually typographic it was. 'Rap was very inspirational for me at that time: large, meaningful, hard-hitting words used with such power that I had not heard before."

"At the time we had a limited number of fonts available, and Franklin Gothic was 'tough' and forthright without being old-fashioned or faddish. [It's a] good, solid, no-nonsense font. Run DMC's name helped in having two sets of three letters."—Stephanie Nash

➍ See pg 118 for Haze's perspective on the evolution of thought that lead to the creation of the EPMD logo.



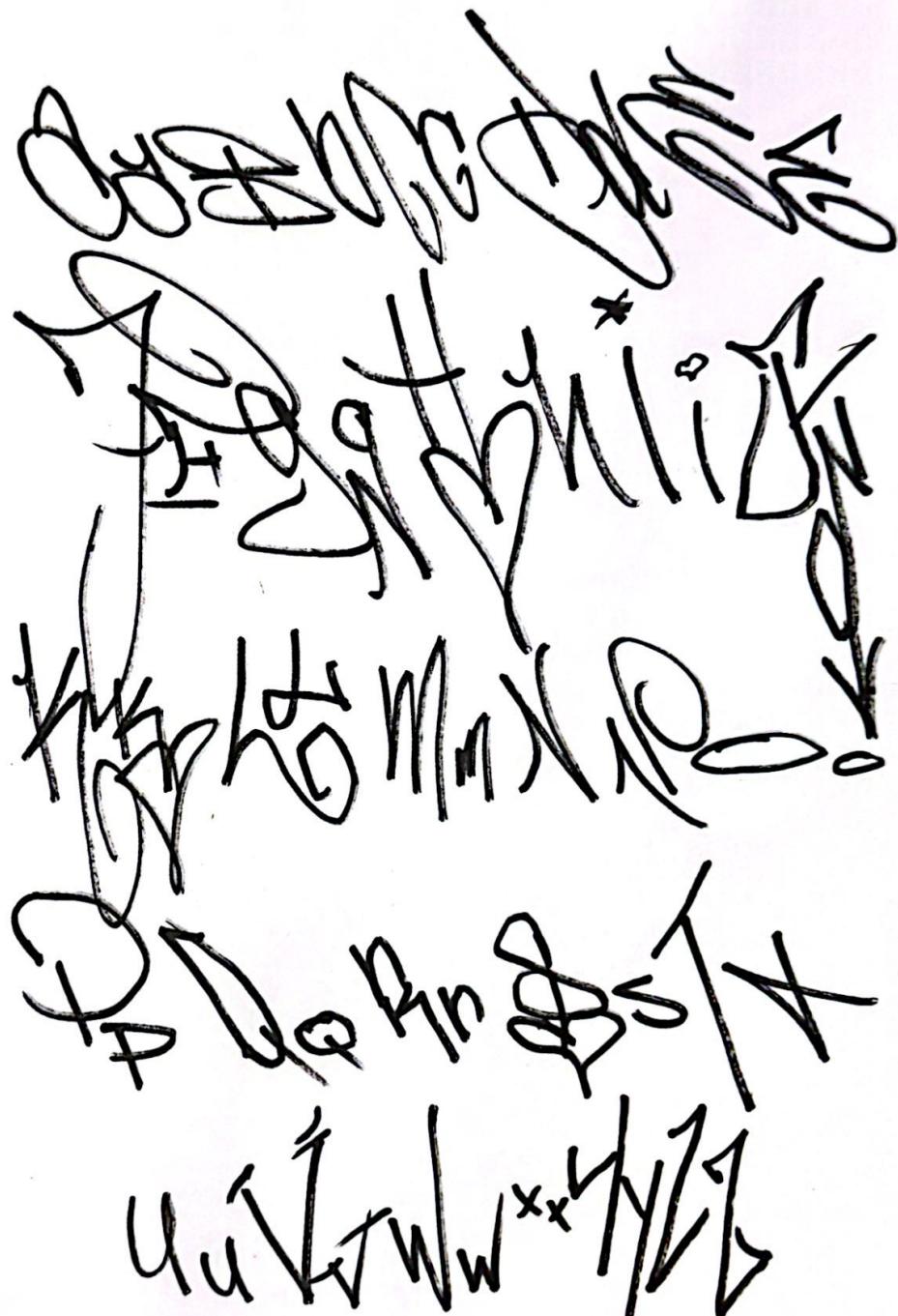
"I started around '69-'70. Graffiti was totally markers at that time. Nobody had Pilots or Uni-Wides or anything like that. You had dry markers and El Markos. The first styles I saw were up on Broadway—TAKI 183, and Joe 182. A basic print style. Everybody was making everything up, and biting off everything... pop culture, iconic culture...each other, other boroughs, other teachers, like PHASE, me, RIFF. I started [a little] after PHASE. I started about the same time, but nobody knew who I was till the beginning of 1971."

—FREEDOM

"Broadway style is very distinct. Brooklyn style is very, very distinct. It's interesting trying to figure out why the Bronx style didn't really catch on."

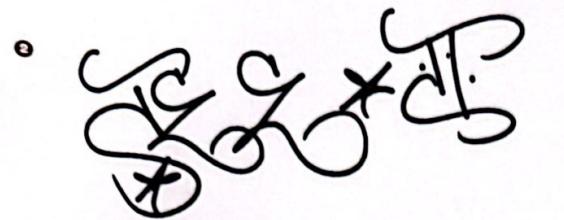
—FREEDOM

One possible explanation is that some of the more prominent and influential Bronx writers, like PHASE 2 or STAY HIGH 149, seemed to be ahead of the trend by developing unique logos, or lock-ups, more than alphabet systems. Concerned with the unique links and accents of their individual tags, they were creating recognizable tags as shapes or symbols by themselves, more than a style of lettering strung together into words.



STAN 153 BRONX N.Y. 1972 -

JAMES TOP: Tag Evolution



❶ "I started writing about 1972 and my handstyle is a reflection of that era in Central Brooklyn, just like the big stars back then; BLACK DICE, DEGREES, GHETTO CHILD, & KATO. As those stars faded, we became the new stars. Our style was not as fancy, but much easier to read. My J remained the introduction from my past to my present."

❷ Late 1972

❸ Early 1973

❹ 1975-77 IND Style

"Myself and JESTER (See pg 101) would rock the same styled J during this era, and we would often battle on who was most seen on the A-line with it on the insides. Who came up with it first? Who knows? But I'm sure we influenced a generation of writers with it, like others influenced us."

❺ 1973-1976

Advanced Brooklyn style. Note the hooks, loops and hearts.

❻ 2010

Contemporary, simple print style.

MALTA

New York | 1973 – 1976

"When I was a kid, there was no one greater than MALTA. He didn't get up a whole lot—he hit the 1 line—but he was highly respected. He did some highly evolved pieces, no more than 10 of them. He had this excellent handstyle that was completely illegible. We were blessed if we caught a MALTA tag. He always wrote with a Uni-Wide. He understood line weight. That was a big thing with him."—FREEDOM

❶ MALTA was the first to really popularize the minimal triangle A—similar to the Greek ALPHA. When tagging the SA, for his crew the Soul Artists, the cross bar would often become an arrow or a joint.

❷ "That was COCA 82's C. He was a Soul Artist. Yeah, he basically stole it [from Coca Cola's logo]. He had a good style."

❸ "It's corny [but we often imitated] the little roach [joint] coming out the H. We used to do that, but it was obviously a tribute [to STAY HIGH]. It was obviously a bite, but also a tribute."

❹ "I couldn't help myself. This is JULIO 204's J. He'd get loose with the swoops."

❺ "K is obviously another Broadway [style]."

❻ "This M was used in my [alternative] MALTA, a lot. My favorite M—with just the three lines."

❼ "N was a chance to do another curlicue."

❽ "What could you do with an O, but make it a peace sign? Because hippies would always do that."

❾ "Q is more of a teardrop."

❿ "R was another one that came off very nice, like the [swash on the C, E, J, L or Y]."

⓫ "S, once again I'm biting [STAY HIGH] but who cares? It made him feel good. Nobody ever came up with a better S."

⓬ "T is straight from TOPCAT. It was a good T. What was I going to do? I liked his Top hat."

⓭ "And the Z would be, bing-bing-bing! ZEE73. And she was a tagger out in Queens in 1973. Kinda' cute, went to Music and Art."

⓮ "I went and stole from PHASE 2's combination Roman numeral. Couldn't help that."

⓯ "The 3 is from LSD Om, who people often mistook for LSD 3s."

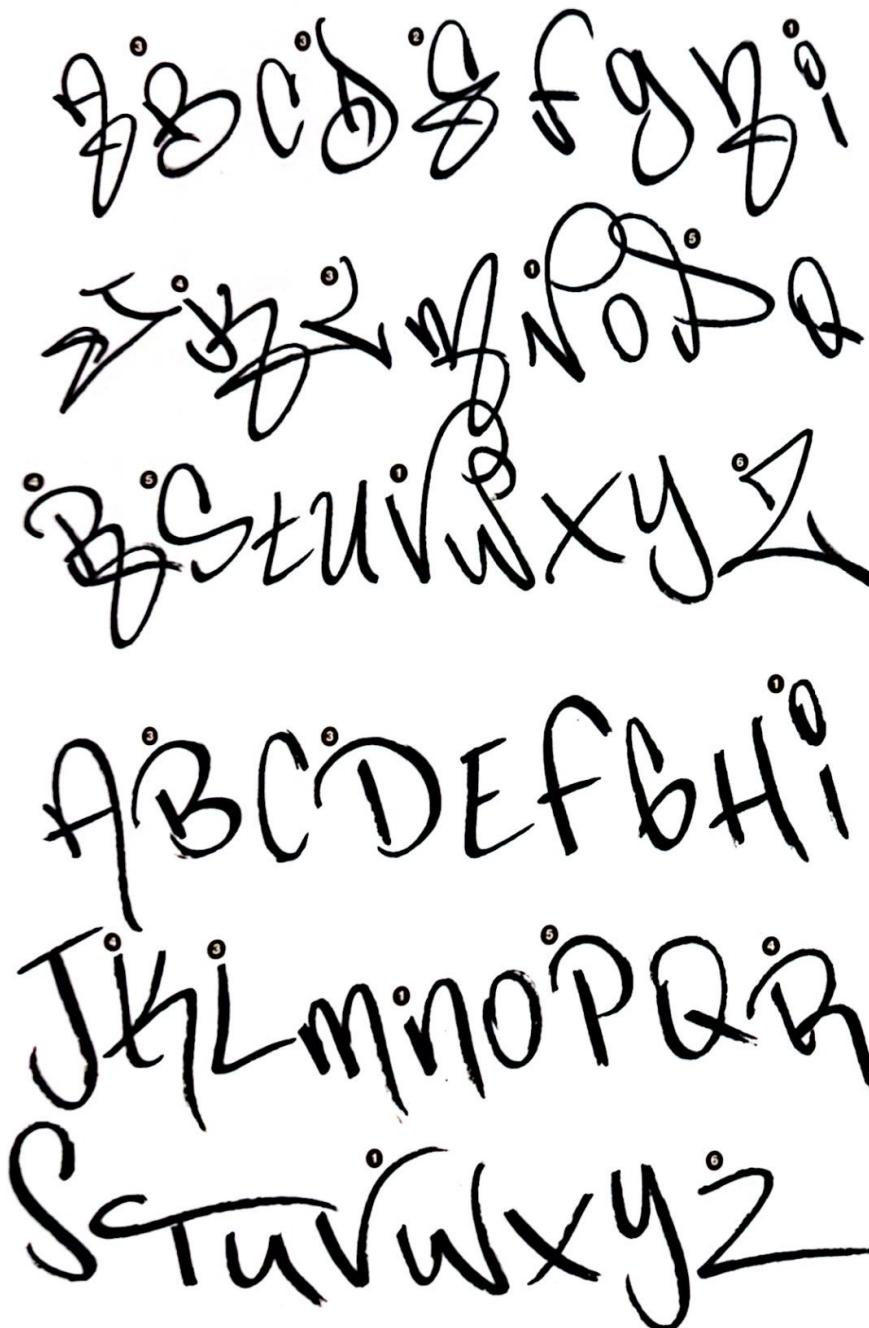
⓯ "The 8 used to flow nicely into a 2, for tags reflecting 82nd Street."



SOLO

Queens | mid 1970s – 2010s

"One of the biggest influences on me, without a doubt, was VINNY; one of the most prevalent mid to late '70s subway kings. Even before I started writing, I noticed his work. Practically any time we were within view of a subway station, we could see his stylish yet readable lettering. The curves and swirls, at the tops and/or bottoms of his letters, remain ingrained within my memory to this day."



❶ VINNY

"I think his influence is quite noticeable in the V, I and N, but also, to some extent, in most of the letters in general."

❷ OE 3

"The influence of OE 3 is quite strong in the E, and I'd say his style still ranks as one of the top in history, to this day."

See pg 113 for more on OE 3's influence and an image of his tag.

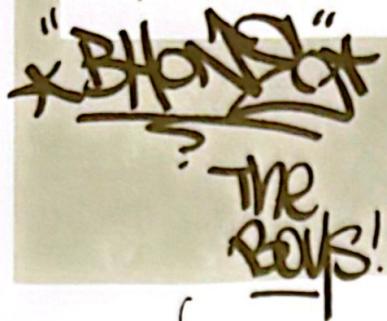
❸ "The B, D and L are all reminiscent of the early-mid '80s NYC letter styles that were most popular and prevalent at that time, and were a very strong influence."

❹ "The K and R are a combo of late '70s and early '80s influences, with people like Astoria's KB, as well as my old partner TORCH, definitely having a lasting impression on them."

❺ PRO & SON

"The P and S both have aspects from two of my earlier influences, PRO & SON-Partners At Large, from Flushing. Also in the S are influences from my first days of writing in the Kew Gardens area of Queens; late '70s, people like SN, STOCE and SAR, with the top transitioning from having points back then, to a smoother, rounded curve—with the influence of SON taking hold a little later."

❻ "I don't think there are many Zs out there that haven't been impacted, somehow or somewhere along the line, by ZEPHYR, and that certainly includes my own as well."



BH ONE

"Canarsie had a good graffiti history because you had guys like PRO I, and some other old cats. I remember when HATE 168 came in. That's when I started riding the trains and seeing what was going on. You had OE, P13, TYRONE from TOP—they were taking over—HURST, DEAN BYB. I met KADO in junior high school, and I didn't realize just how extensive he was until a few years later. But these guys—KADO, SARO, SMAC—that took on the TB [Crew] when HATE retired, for the years of '78 and '79 they would burn the BMTs."

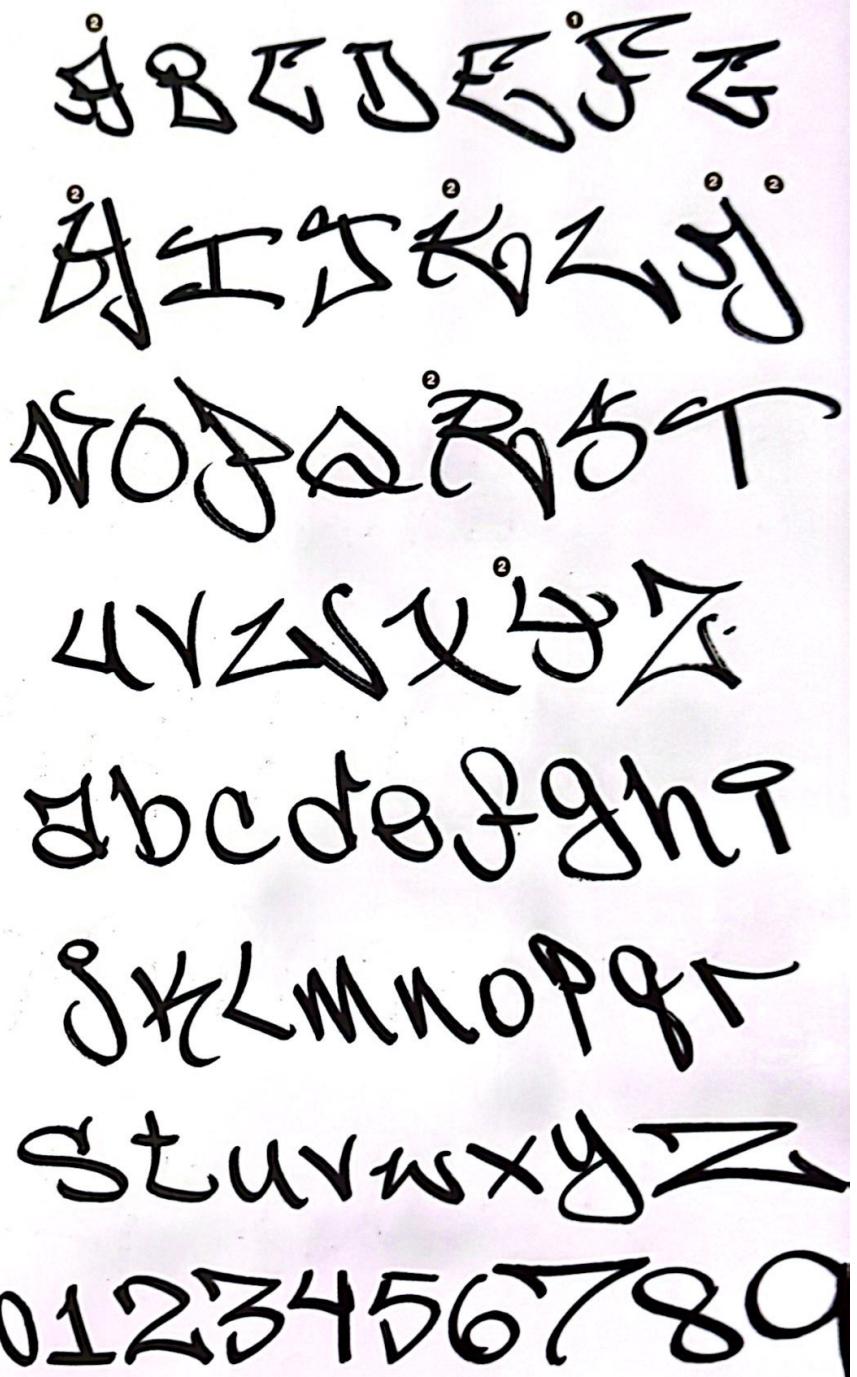


❶ "FISH was just as good as anybody running. He had great handstyles. He just didn't hit the trains, he hit a lot of buses. You can see just by his handstyle that he knew what he was doing. These were the guys that influenced me—SARO tags and KADO tags. These were the people that we copied. These were the people we looked up to."

❷ Hooks

"I picked that up from SARO and SMAC. SARO first showed them to me. And then at one point, SMAC came back for a while and the tags that he was putting up in 1982, they were great, [in] a blue Marvy. I would say he had the best handstyle going at that time. I noticed it much later on. DON 1 [MAFIA]—I saw early tags of his and I think TB was actually influenced by him, just based on the style. I know at one point he was hitting the BMTs hard. The connection would probably be Fresh Pond Road lay ups. And there were guys like SIKO—'77, '78, '79, SIKO was king."

For comparison, see a similar "hook technique" in the Olde English influenced work of WENT from Aluqrque (pg 35) or SIVEL (pgs 63-65) or UNEEK (pgs 66-67) from Chicago.



KR ONE

Queens, New York | Mid 1970s-2010s

"This tag style is a combination of 1975 to 1980. This style did not really look like that when I got it... I changed it [enough that it's now] my own. But in that 5 year period I just fucking chomped on everything and it just stuck in my brain. Even my pieces are a neat version of that piecing style. I am more into the funky, loopy soft edged pieces, although I do like the more complex shit [too]. I love that seventies funk."



A B C D E F G H I J

• **Don1**

"When I was very young, I used to see DON1 on the insides and be like, 'This guy can't be from this neighborhood. He's got to be from the Bronx—or some place that graffiti writers came from when I was a kid.'"

"People tell me I have a very nice script writing. I used to practice handwriting as a kid because my sister-in-law used to tell me, 'You got good handwriting, you'll have a job where you wear a suit.' I was like seven years old and I remember my sister-in-law telling me that. I was like, 'Really? I say, OK.' Now I never even want to wear a suit. It comes from script cursive writing and, I guess, Celtic art."

• **Don1**

"It's definitely a JESTER J—the capital one. I don't think JESTER did the line on top though, he might not have." See pg 101.

• **Don1**

"I think that my style definitely comes from a Brooklyn-Queens tag style, and also with a little bit of RTW thrown in, because I was very into the way ZEPHYR wrote... and ZEPHYR is basically a derivative of JESTER, so I saw a lot of JESTER when I was growing up [and] that's why I was attracted to ZEPHYR's tag style."

• **Don1**

"My Ss come from, two dudes prominent in Astoria. This guy that wrote SAVAGE1, and his crew was the Super Squad, and then there was this other guy who wrote SMOKE. And they just had these vicious Ss. I saw this stuff growing up and it just looked wicked. Their tag style was just like what I call 'Burner' tag style."

• **Don1**

"That T comes directly from a guy who used to write T-59. It stood for TROUBLE 59. Him and his brother, AS2, they both are in the movie, *The Warriors*—that T-59 throw-up that pulled into the station. Those guys killed the insides. They didn't have a lot of outsides. They had a crew called TBB, The Bad Boys. That T is T-59's T."

• **Don1**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

KAVES on Influence



① RR

"My tag was given to me by the celeb writer in the hood, RR. He was the freaking John Travolta graffiti writer of the neighborhood. He came on my block. He was dating this girl, Maryann. He'd seen me doodling in the street with chalk, you know just bugging out. He says, 'you know, you got talent, blah, blah, blah.' And I was trying to write something, like Zip or Zap. It's always something when you start out as a toy, you know Z-names. He's like, 'No. I got a tag for you. It was my brother Frankie's. Frankie don't write no more.' It was KAVS. I liked the letters, so he gave me the tag. Under the Verrazano was where everyone used to practice—and under the bridge was this place called 'The Caves'."



② "At the same time, there was RS III across the street as another part of TBR, and he had loops on his Ss. He had a great penmanship style. And he would do the three with the Roman numeral."

KAVES

Brooklyn | Early 1980s- Mid 1990s

"When it came to the tagging style of that day, there were cats from Sunset Park and there were guys from Bay Ridge. Bay Ridge guys liked to use different colored inks. Unlike the IRTs, there was a lot of black Marsh ink. BMT writers had all these colored markers; white opaque, with purple store ink and hot raspberry, mixed Flowmaster inks."



ABIDEF
GOTHIC
KLYMAN
OFAR
JESTER
WEXHUS

❶ Boxes and Swooshes

"This boxier style that has these curves and a lot of loops, this Bay Ridge style had a lot of loops. It usually started with a little loop before you made your letter. It was like a little kickback. [This was popular with] cats in Sunset Park."

❷ Scorpion S

"A big influence on me was this SES tag. SES had this 'scorpion' S—it was very evil looking. The influence in my 'devil-style' came from those guys, but I gave more of my southern Bay Ridge style to it. So, I rounded off my letters more. SES, ERB and ROACH; the influences came from there."

"So my style was changing and evolving, but the thing with those devil-style tags, that SES invented, was that I could piece them. So, my style in piecing started copying my tags. So, I was starting to put the piece together with the tag."

"And the buses that came through this neighborhood would go to Staten Island. So, Staten Island writers were bombing those buses. And Brooklyn writers were bombing them back."

❸ JOE NUTS

"This J, that looked like a 5, was influenced by a 1970s Bay Ridge writer, JOE NUTS."

Many Brooklyn writers credit JESTER (pg 101) with one of the most influential Js of the 1970s and 1980s. Compare to JAMES TOP's J (pg 111) or KR One's J (pg 115).

❹ AC NYC

KAVES credits the under bite on the bottom of the C to Bay Ridge writer, AC.

GRAFFITI vs. GRAPHIC: HAZE's Sketchbook



① Cold Chillin'
1986. Original sketch.

② Headbangers Ball
1987. Original sketch.

③ Strictly Business
1988. Original sketch.

"When I created the EPMD logo, I was not only trying to push a cleaner harder edge to my work, but also wanting to define the emerging style of hip hop beyond the predictability of just graffiti tags and pieces. At that point, aside from mostly break beat albums with corny covers and a few slept on logos like Mantronix and BDP, The RUN DMC logo was the most recognizable image in rap music, but it was still just straight typesetting out of the box. In the original hip hop spirit of sampling, I took a cue from the heavy weight power of its thick rules, but handstyled the lettering from scratch while staggering the characters to give them a different rhythm and identity of their own. Beyond simply creating a logo, it was also important to me to begin establishing that, [as] with the musical form itself, there was an underlying visual method to the movement that was built on solid craft and technique.

"When I learned the fundamentals of graphic design, I was taught the grid system. You have to learn the rules so that they become instinctive, then you can start breaking them down while still maintaining an underlying sense of order. I think the same is true of graffiti and the modern language that has emerged from it. Whether it is wild style, block letters or Broadway style tags, there is a tradition which anchors everything, no matter what else it may borrow, or how much it breaks down into abstraction. After decades of evolution it has grown into a much more complex form, but at the same time it has always remained true to its original, very basic roots."



FREEDOM

New York City | 1974 – Mid 1980s

"Even though I wrote GEN II from '74 to '76 I was kind of a toy, but I got to meet a lot of great writers and hang with them. At least I learned the foundation of a lot of styles, 3D and everything else. That was the important thing. STAN 153 was a huge influence; ALI was a huge influence."

Handstyle



A B C D E F
G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S
T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h
i j k l m n o p q r

‘s t u v w x y z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

"ALI"
Soul artists
of
ZOO YORK
©1979

Draftsmanship

"I learned this style from ALI (President of the Soul Artists). He was studying urban planning, so it's sort of an architectural style. And he was about to go to Columbia [University] when he was in a horrible explosion, while painting graffiti in the subway tunnels. That and the Broadway Style are my two main influences. Particularly the lower case is all ALI. It's all from his urban landscaping, architecture type handstyle. I would say that there were flourishes or things that he added to it, but I kind of shied away from that because I didn't want to bite him that extensively."

① Sharp Corners

"That R is distinctly ALI and I did swipe that. His straight letter tags were just a thing of beauty. The J, T and U are probably taken from him, because of the sharpness of it. Now if this were more authentically architectural lettering, or blue prints, these things would be more squashed and a little broader."

"ALI's K was just like the R. In fact I'm sure, because he did that when he did ZOO YORK tags."

② Classic Comics

"Broadway Style and comic books were my other main influences. The S probably comes from Alex Toth's lettering. He was a comic artist from the 1940s and 1950s. He did a lot of animation and this lettering style is similar to that. Even back then I was trying to do comic stuff. And that would have been the guy I was swiping my letters from."

Handstyle



FREEDOM

New York City, Broadway style circa 1973 | 1974 – Mid 1980s

"I don't know how much sense it makes to people anymore, but it's like when the first 'candy-cane' piece came out and suddenly there were hundreds of them. What an amazing thing that was. It was just this little sliver in time and then the next thing happens, and then that's gone. And that's kind of what happened with Broadway Style."



• Significant Characters

"In Broadway Style, the J and the R here become very significant in terms of styles. For a year or so JUNIOR 161's R [was very influential]. [It was] eventually bastardized by JESTER and then eventually made its way into ZEPHYR's tag."

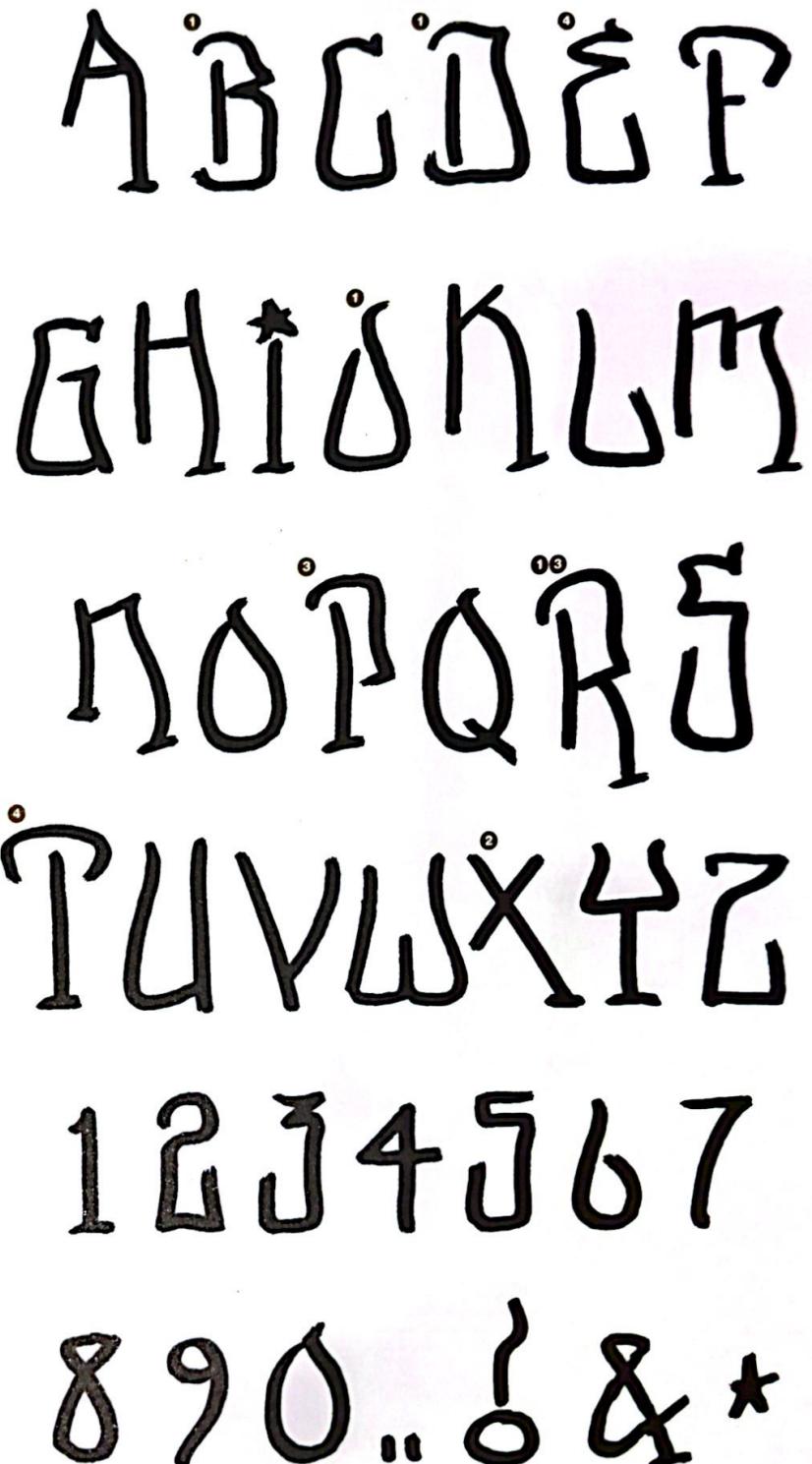
"Broadway generally went from small to large. I think we take a bit of license over the years [remembering what these styles were like in the '70s]. But one thing you get a sense of is how in STAN's Broadway Style you'll see how they go from small to large in the lower rows. That was always the heart of a Broadway Style tag, they got bigger as they go along."

• "I would credit that X to T-REX. I don't know if TOPCAT gave that to him or not, but I would tend to think he didn't. I tend to think that T-REX developed that himself."

• "I would think that the P, which is also disconnected, would be definitive. Not just because of the TOPCAT tag, but T-REX had that same T that disconnected. He didn't have a gap in his X, but he did in his R. So the P and the R and the T all have those gaps."

"There were only two really big practitioners of it and that was T-REX and TOPCAT, but I could think of 50 neighborhood toys, including guys who went on to be real writers, who used Broadway Style. If you are a kid in junior high school, and you can write out this sort of alphabet. OK... that means the style has evolved. You're down, you understand! The style has a certain pay off. It's almost like you were part of the game."

• "The TOPCAT T is the definitive Broadway Style letter. That's the one that just about everybody knew. And some people just bit that. The E was used by a lot of people, including HAZE who used it in his SE 3 tags. That E was very prevalent back then, that E was so famous, everybody used that. Even people who didn't know graffiti would use it. I like that, when things transcend the movement—like school kids would use it and not know why."



KEO's Tag Evolution



• "I was influenced by a dude named SAKE ONE from the Fs. [He had a] sharp S—which is a Brooklyn/Queens thing. So I kind of took my KEO out of the middle of his name. I first started writing BLAKE1 and I wanted to be like SAKE ONE. I just took the best letters out of it, which didn't really mean anything, but I like the way they connected and flowed."

• "I wrote MERGE [for a while] and I had a pretty cool tag because it connected lowercase. Sometimes I would really Brooklyn it out by going like this... Bringing back that old curlicue. This was influenced by ROTO, and that was the first handstyle I had."

• "My first tags were either [with] a huge halo, or just the concave and convex top and bottom."

KEO

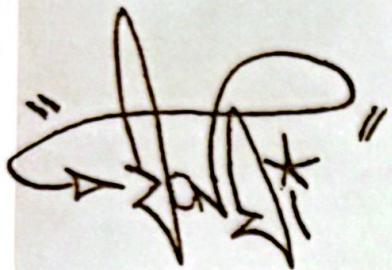
Brooklyn, style circa 1982 | Late 1970s – 2010s

Handstyle

"In 1980, I went to Music and Art High School, which was in Harlem, and I met writers from all over the city. The two biggest writers in my school at that time, were MACKIE and SKEME—dudes that were hitting the 3 line and the 1s. That's where my style was influenced, from them. There was a general consensus among dudes who hit the IRTs that the letter lines were for toys. 'Ding-dongs' or 'ridgies'—they weren't as conducive to panel piecing, they were more for insides or floater throw-ups. And it made me take a step back, and reevaluate because I thought I was a king on the Fs. And dudes were like, 'What the fuck are the Fs?' If you live in Brooklyn or Queens, it goes the whole arteries. Ds, As, Fs—those were the longest lines in the system, with the most ridership. To me the 1s or the 6s didn't even come to Brooklyn. To these dudes, Broadway—the 1 line—was the be all and end all. So, I incorporated a lot of that style when I started hitting IRTs. And that's just what was in vogue at the time. You had writers like SHAMAN, and dudes like that who were really bringing back a kind of Broadway influence—but updated. Like TACK 147, who was SKEME's partner. He used a modernized version of a Broadway C."



DONDI White

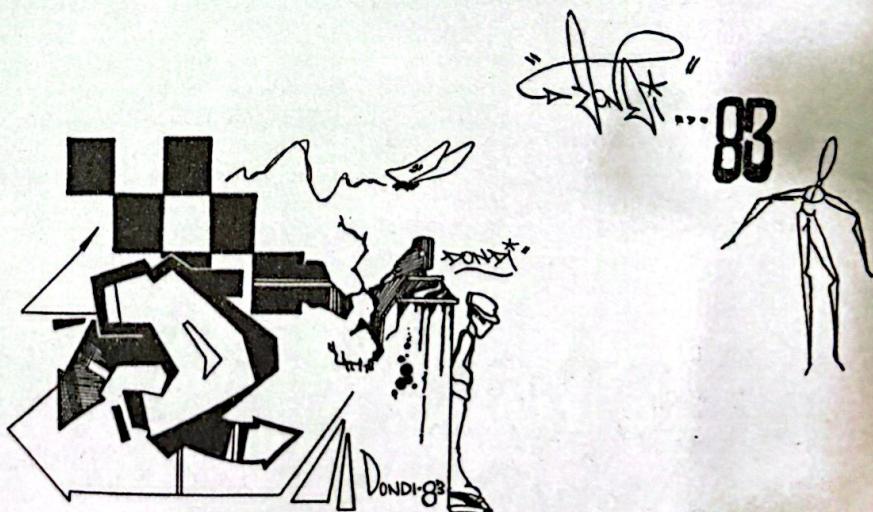


'Battle Above Ground'
for a 51X Gallery Show. 1983.
Courtesy of Michael White,
& the Dondi White Foundation

Influence

"One of my biggest issues with some of the guys that pieced the best, was that their handstyles usually sucked and I know it's a generalization, but there are a lot of guys out there that can really piece and are amazing at doing pieces, but when it comes to signing their piece, their tag style isn't that sophisticated. Or maybe, anything beyond their tag style isn't that sharp sometimes. And a lot of these guys don't or can't do throw-ups either. But DONDI's signature is just as perfect as his pieces are. DONDI is one of those people who could rock a straight letter and still burn you. He's also the same dude who can do an amazing wildstyle piece and has pioneered so many things. Arrows, and connections, and pumps and bits. It's very fitting. It makes him a very well rounded artist in my opinion; the fact that his tag style is as clean, legible and as stylish as it is and his piecing is equally effective."—CHINO

ONCE AGAIN ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE NEVER ENDING BATTLE ABOVE GROUND. A ONE MAN EXHIBITION OF YOURS TRULY "DONDI". I WELCOME YOU TO THE PLACE TO BE, FOR YOU AND YOURS TO OBSERVE A UNDER GROUND WAY OF LIFE NOW ABOVE GROUND. CONTINUOUS REFLECTIONS OF THE MOTHER LAND MAYBE BETTER KNOW AS THE SUBWAY YARDS AND PLENTY OF ENERGY IN HAND THESE WORKS HAVE BEEN CREATED. MY MEDIUM REMAINS THE SAME NOTHING BUT SPRAY PAINT. THE TRADITIONAL TOOL OF A SUBWAY PAINTING CULTURE. IDEAS ORIGINATING FROM THE INNOCENT DAYS OF EARLY GRAFF WRITING. I BRING TO YOU THESE IMAGES IN MY NEW YARD, THE GALLERY. PAINTINGS ON VIEW WILL BE NEW WORKS COMPLETED DURING THE COURSE OF THIS HIGH POWERED SUMMER. THIS SHOW WILL BE CALLED "STYLE CONTINUATION?"



"Growing up in downtown Brooklyn, any bus that left Brooklyn I could kind of take home. Most of the buses were parked at Fresh Pond Rd., and SIKO and KIK were hitting the buses really hard, so they were really some of my very first inspirations. They were also BMT guys. Most of the graffiti that we see in the books and magazines are the 2 line, the 3 line, the 4, 5 or the 1s. There are very few letter lines in most of the books published before '84 or so. Maybe 2 or 3 BMTs in all of Subway Art. But most of my heroes were BMT or IND guys from the letter lines."



Chino's handstyle is a bold, fluid, and expressive form of graffiti lettering. The letters are thick and rounded, with many connecting strokes and variations in height. The style is highly personal and dynamic, reflecting the energy and movement of street art. The letters are rendered in black ink on a white background.

❶ Not Just Boys' Fun

"In the very beginning, my tag style was really influenced by SS and CHIC. They were both females who tagged insides. They are very underrated and get very little credit today. You can't really say they got up for girls, they just got up, period. The two of them destroyed stuff. CHIC and I shared similar letters, C–H–I in our tags. One day she took a tag in Brooklyn Heights, and her I came out of her H, and I was like 'I could probably save time if I could figure out how to connect my letters.' My very first tag style was a play on that Bay Ridge style and it was inspired by CHIC. I borrowed her H–I connection. It's fluid. I can kinda' do it fast, and when I'm doing gates I can kind of just continue to walk and write."

❷ The Arrow N

"I'll [credit] it to SOE X-Men. The X-Men guys had a huge presence in my early graffiti career. They were a big influence for me. They were from Wyckoff, Gowanus, Boreum Hill, Cobble Hill. The one thing I really liked about SOE's signature was he had so many names. I noticed that guys who were really good at piecing or tagging were quick to pick up other names that they liked to flip. The one thing he did, that I didn't see other people do so much, was sometimes you would just see a bold X-Men tag on the wall with no name attached to it. And [I borrowed] the arrow coming out of his N, and learned to make it mine. His tag was narrow and taller than mine, which tended to stretch horizontally."

MESH ONE AOK



"That was an era of breakdancing. The whole mood of the era affects the shape of the letters and when you're a kid you want to be rebellious, and both me and COST were kind of rebellious kids, so you try to put that in your letters. And you go through tons of paper practicing. And, in general, at first when you're doing letters, you want them to look mean, like you're a mean little rebel. So your letters can be a little over the top, they're not three dimensional in a way, they're just jagged or trying to make some kind of a statement and then, through the years, as your personality becomes more three dimensional, you add more character to them—a little humor to parts of your letters, while still being tough and mean, because this was a world still about toughness. It's just a competitive field. So your letters evolve, and in the end, I would say, the through line is every letter has a personality to it, like a caricature almost. I almost think of letters like faces."

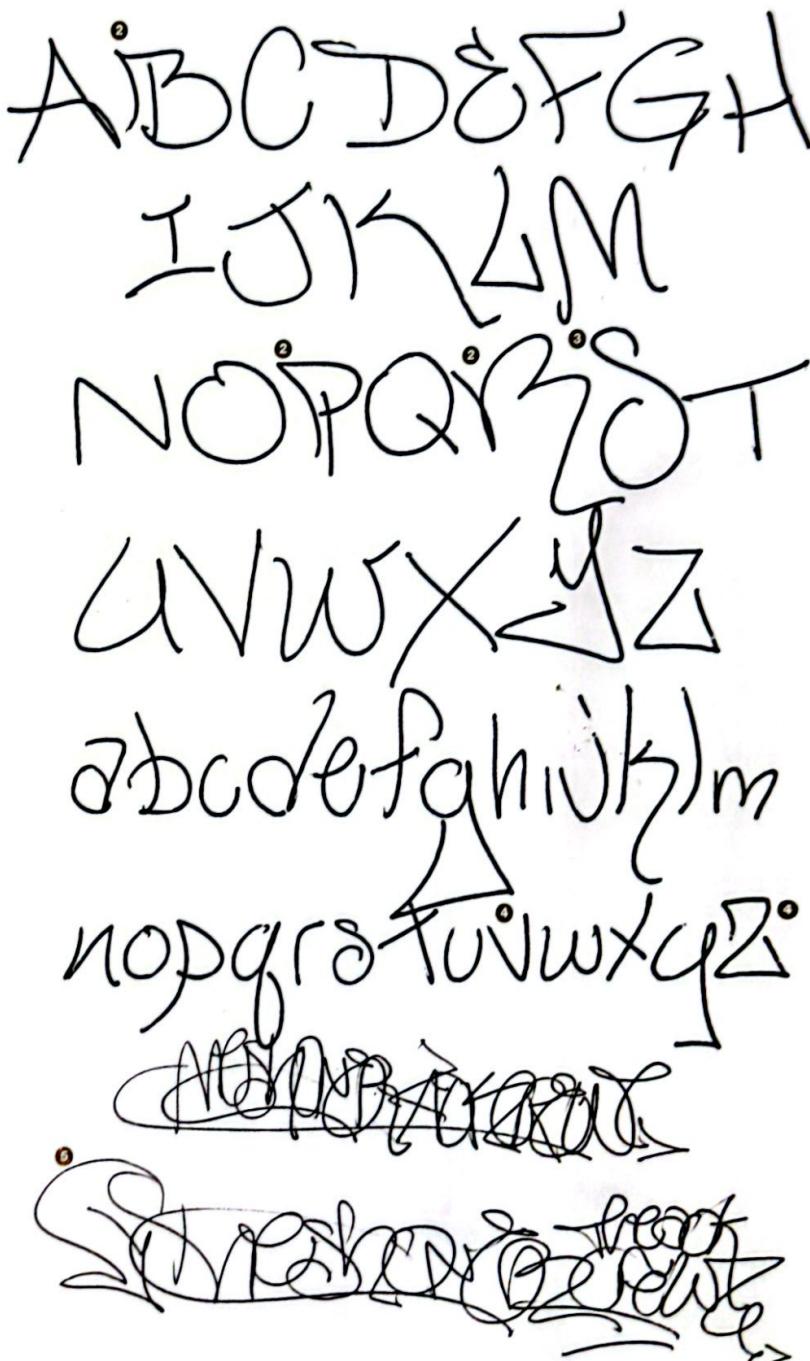
1 "That tag at the top—I made a rule—I'm just doing this once. However it comes out; so be it. First thought, best thought. I'm not sure how it's going to come out; based on all the history you've done, you have a confidence that it's going to fit together. That last E, I really like the way it came out, but other parts I didn't. And that's how it is. A lot of people want it to be exactly the way they planned it, like a printing thing. And in my era, we didn't have home printers; this idea of super-replication wasn't there."

2 "When you look at the R, it's moving more modern, because where the B and the R have the same top, here the B has that little covering to it that is more 1970s/early 1980s. But the R is more 1990s, where you are flowing it more into a one-stroke and putting a rounder smooth corner."

3 "I purposely did a little vintage treatment to the S. The way it tucks in and curls under. I'm referencing 1970s there. And that was the feel of the 1970s things were kinda' groovy and laid back."

4 "When you have enough control you can do a bend in a letter that is a corner, but also round at the same time. So, I like that because you aren't committing to a full point or a full round corner, you're implying both."

5 "I like to do it quick and make it look quick because then action comes off it. And this is one definite difference between my generation and modern writers. They like doing things really slow and having the result look like they did it quick, but it's not truly quick. With graffiti, I feel like it needs the truth, you can tell if it has no real underlying [truth to it]. Like, you weren't really confident enough. This is just one of many alphabets I could have come up with along the same theme. Because every time I will improvise."



Pangrams by SP ONE



❶ SP ONE—Pangram
Style circa late 1980s
Executed 2010

❷ SP ONE—Pangram
2010



“Two of the main guys who influenced my handstyle would be SIKO TB, who had a very elaborate and loose style; the other would be MIN RTW (see pg 109), whose style was very crisp and clean. When I was coming up, there were lots of guys who influenced my handstyle, but as my own style developed over the years, I can definitely trace specific elements of it back to those two writers.”

❸ “I don't know who started it first, but one of the things that was interesting to me was a curve, not really a serif, a little starter stroke—it was part script and the tags usually got bigger from left to right. You could see this mainly in letters that all started with straight lines on the left side like Ks, Bs, Ps, Hs and Rs.”

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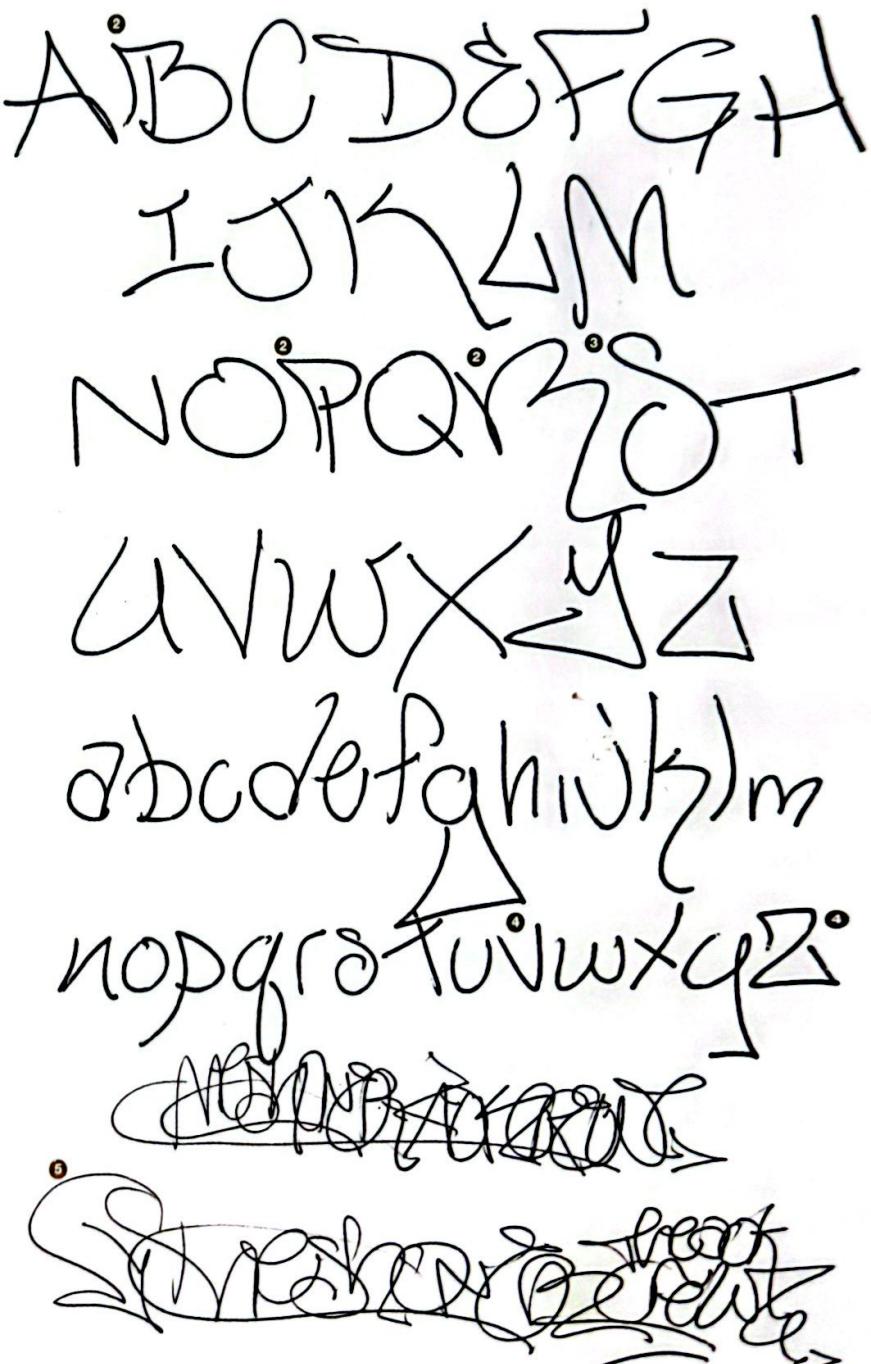
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❶ SP ONE—Pangram
Style circa late 1980s
Executed 2010

❷ SP ONE—Pangram
2010



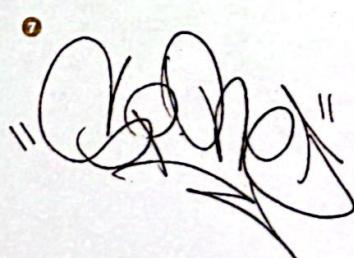
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Tag Evolution by SP ONE



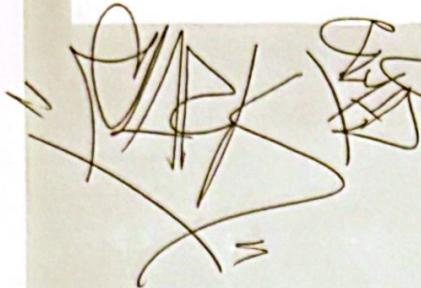
- ① 1981
- ② 1982
- ③ 1983
- ④ 1984
- ⑤ 1985
- ⑥ 1986
- ⑦ 1987
- ⑧ 1988
- ⑨ 1989
- ⑩ 1990
- ⑪ 1991
- ⑫ 1992
- ⑬ 1993
- ⑭ 1994
- ⑮ 1995
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"Most of the early BMT [subway line] guys' influence was still felt in Queens and Brooklyn years after they quit. SIKO, KIK, and other guys from around the M yard were writing during the mid to late '70s, well before my time, but their handstyles would be emulated by younger writers and continue to evolve over the years. They had what I would consider a very BMT style, which was different from say the way people wrote on the number trains. When I started writing in the early '80s, I was looking at writers like KP, PG, PEAK and RISCO, to name a few. They were the generation after SIKO and KIK and other local writers like TK and DRAGON, and they too put their own spin on the styles that came before them."

"In my neighborhood there were older writers like DIME 139 and STOE SSB who both had very unique tag styles, they also had a big impact on me. There were these guys called The Killer Squad who hung out at Hoffman Park on Queens Blvd. They also influenced my handstyle early on. They were mostly neighborhood writers, heavy metal, dust-heads, but to me they had really great, and somewhat evil, tag styles. There was a guy who wrote PANIC and at the time I thought his tags were amazing. No one ever taught me how to write, so I would see all kinds of tags and try to figure it out for myself. When I was a toy I played around with a lot of different styles before I got the hang of it. That said, I still practice all the time."



"I started writing in 1977–78. I was around 7–8 years old. I came up with CLARK around 10 [years into writing]. I wasn't writing with spray paint or nothing. Just chalk on the floor, whatever I could find. Whenever I stepped out of my building I'd look to my right and the number 6 train would pull up into the station. It's burned into my memory seeing the DUSTER and LIZZY top to bottom. When I saw that I was like, 'Yo, that's what I want to do.' So there was an empty lot next to my building and I went into there looking for something to write with and there was a Santería statue. I broke it some more and used the broken pieces to write with. I came up with the name MAG. Then moved to the name KIRK (like Captain Kirk, for a little while) and then I came up with the name CLARK. It was actually CLARK KENT, because all the guys from my block snapped on me because I had glasses."

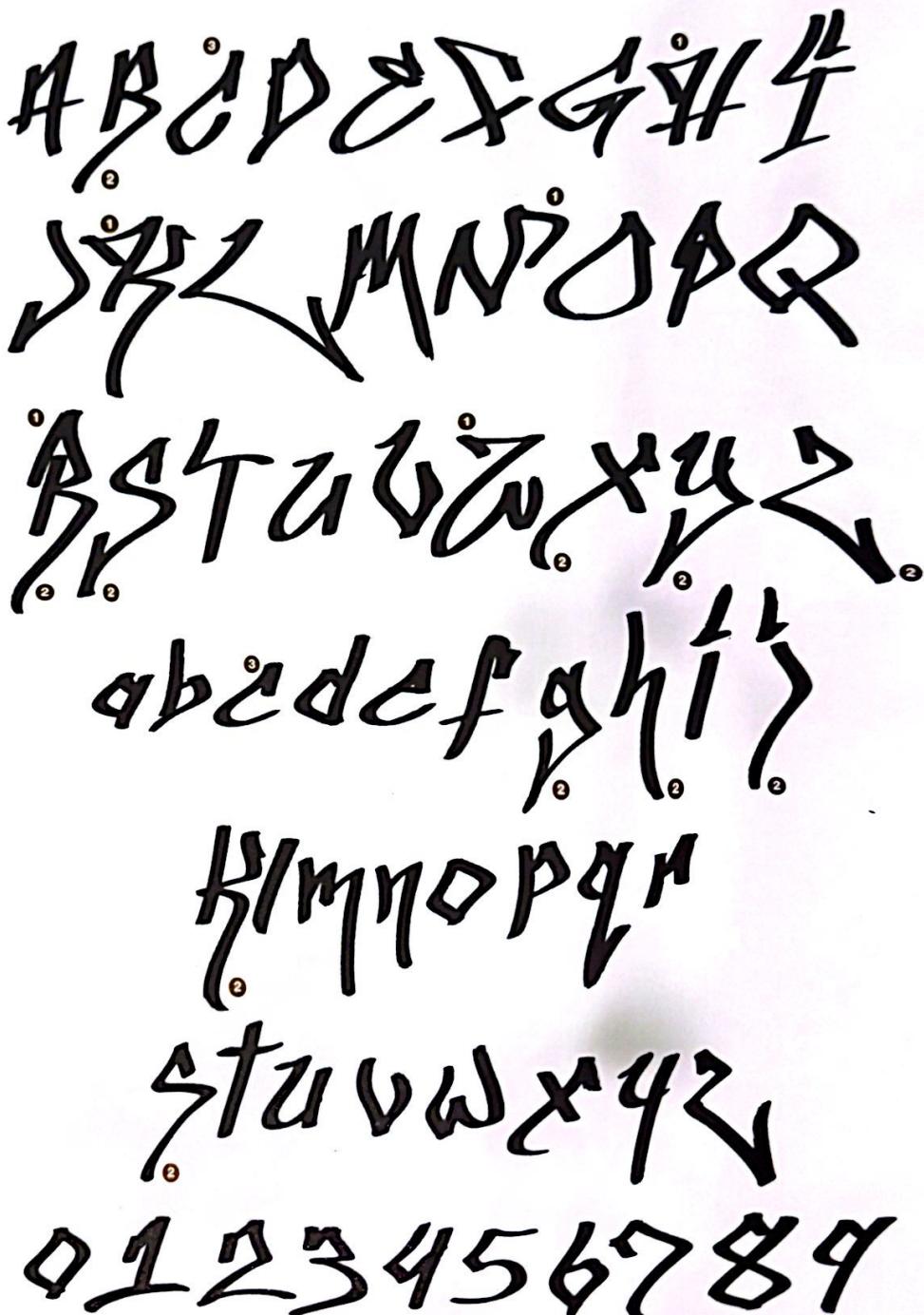
"[The tool] depends on the look that I want to have. This style works best with a chisel tip."

❶ "Those arms and hooks work well when you translate this tagging style into a piecing style. I would use those in the beginnings or maybe the ends. Kick it off the right side."

"Sometimes you just can't help [being influenced by others]. I help everybody in my crew and give them advice. Like, swing your letter, this way or that way."

❷ CLARK uses a very vertical energy, accented by the tails that descend below the baseline on a number of letters.

❸ "The C has changed a little bit. I stretch it out a little more than that now to make it a little more open."



DUEL

Queens | 1983 - 1994

Handstyle

"I'm originally from Brooklyn and we moved to Queens when I was younger. We had contacts from a church in Brooklyn, so we used to drive down there every Sunday and afterwards we'd go into Chinatown and into Manhattan's Lower East Side. When my parents used to drive around on the freeways, or when we'd walk around and the gates would be down, or just riding the subways, or when I'd visit my dad in Manhattan when he'd work on Lexington, I got to see a lot of different handstyles and stuff like that."

"Queens
×
Duel's
Handstyle
Org."

ABCDEF
GHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
OPQRSTUVWXYZ
0123456789
ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
mnopqrstuvwxyz

❶ Hooked Bottom J

"We had a guy in my neighborhood who used to write CJ. He never really got up but he had a really nice style. The C was almost like the J backwards. They kind of overlapped each other. He had a hook on the bottom of the J. I always liked the way it looked. He used to bomb the shit out of supermarket trucks. There was a dock of them in the back where they loaded their stock, and he had like every single one of them. When I was a kid I used to see them. I used to like the way he would do his Js. I added that to my collection."

❷ "Usually my 2s look like a backward Z almost. I would write it a whole bunch of different ways; it was like a regular 2, it would curve in the center, it would point all the way down. I would bring it all the way around and have a hook-swirl at the end. Or, I would put the Roman numerals on there, or put a star on the end, or a star in it." See PHASE 2 tags (pg 106).

❸ Goal Post Y

"I don't know who came up with that one, I just used it. Most of the time I use a lower-case Y, like a U, but then I bring it down and it loops around. Or, sometimes I do a plain print Y with two lines intersecting into a bar. My letters change depending on where they are placed. If it's at the end [of a word] I might not use that. It looks better if it's symmetrical; if it's the third letter of a five letter word, that would look cool in the middle. I would not use that in 'New York City,' where the Y is on the end [of a phrase], I wouldn't use it there."



GOUCH

"It took about 10 years until I nailed something down that I'd want to stick with forever. I always traveled up and down Flatbush Avenue for work. I would constantly study all the styles. Everybody put an ER at the end of their tag. To me that's what Flatbush writing was all about. It was common other places too, but it was abundant in Flatbush. Flatbush flow is speed and precision. You're literally on the busiest avenue in Brooklyn. You have no time to think and the window of opportunity is minimal; you gotta be fast. It's also the connections of the letters and the styles that have a distinctive flow. You can tell when you see a ONER at the end of a tag, that it's based out of Flatbush."

❶ Kicks and Bumps

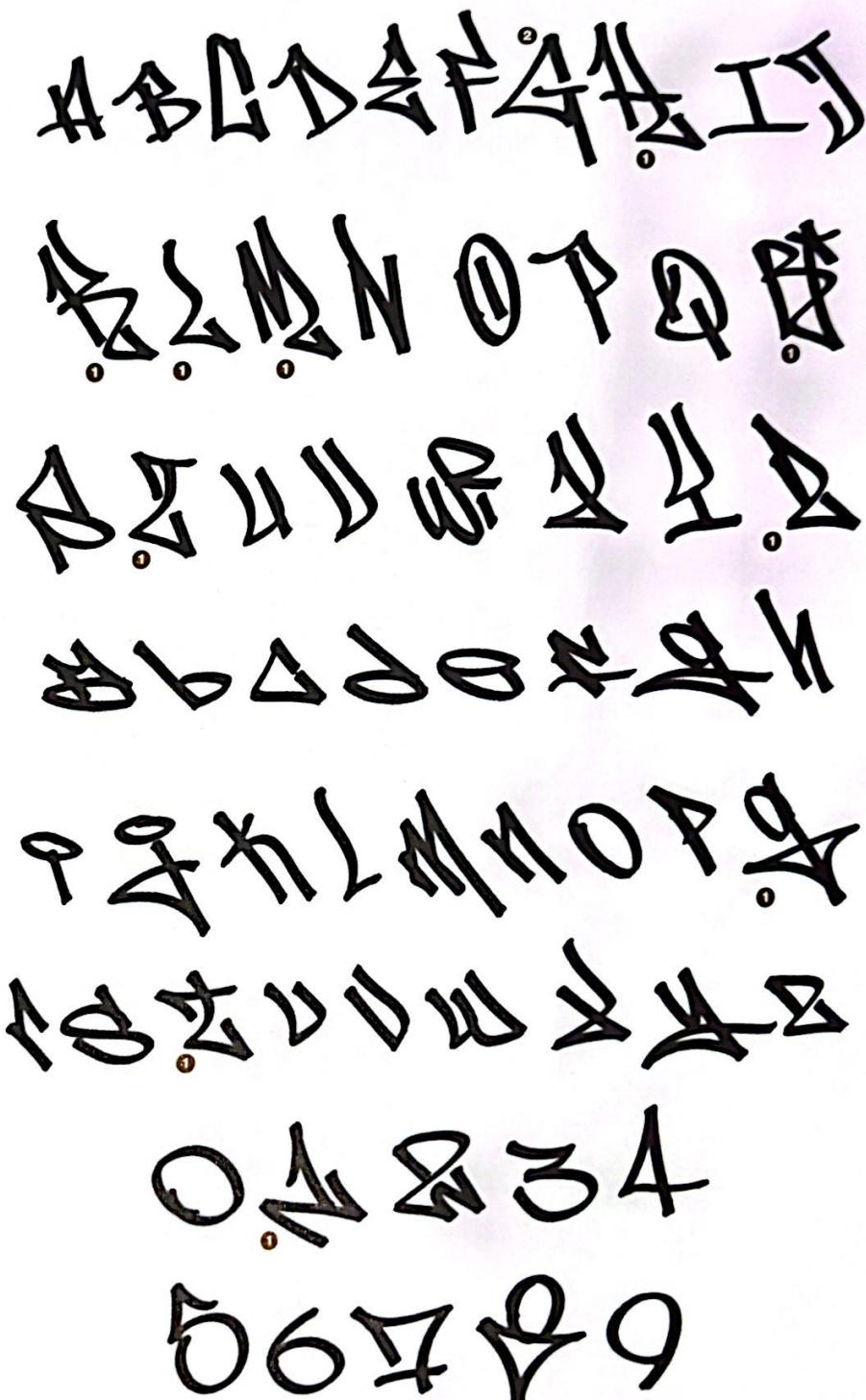
"The kicks and bumps on my letters are inherited from Flatlands, further down the Ave. Flatbush Ave is long, it spans from the Manhattan bridge all the way to Riis Beach. I'm from dead smack in the middle of the Ave, but I used to work all the way down at the edge of Flatbush Ave, by Mill Basin. I wound up meeting some of the writers in Flatlands; they were influenced by writers such as SUPER DEZ (SD), DC, FIB and CANE. Those guys were highly influenced from the Flatbush pioneers known as TEKAY (see pg 135) and MAGOO2. There was one dude out there who I became really cool with and he schooled me in a lot of my style. True Brooklyn cats know of him. He wrote FASE or sometimes FASEZ. His crew was KOS, Kings Of Swing. That's who I did my early blockbuster stuff with."

❷ One Stroke G

"My letter G starts from the top. The crossbar gets connected in one continuous flow. That's a big aspect in the Flatbush Flow. Everything is connected in one way or another. There is a distinctive way that the Flatbush style is connected that is different from anything else. It's hiding the connections because it's such a one continuous flow that you can't really see what is connected. And that comes from having to tag so fast."

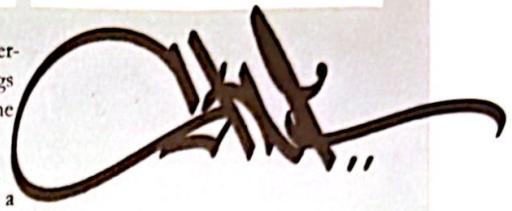
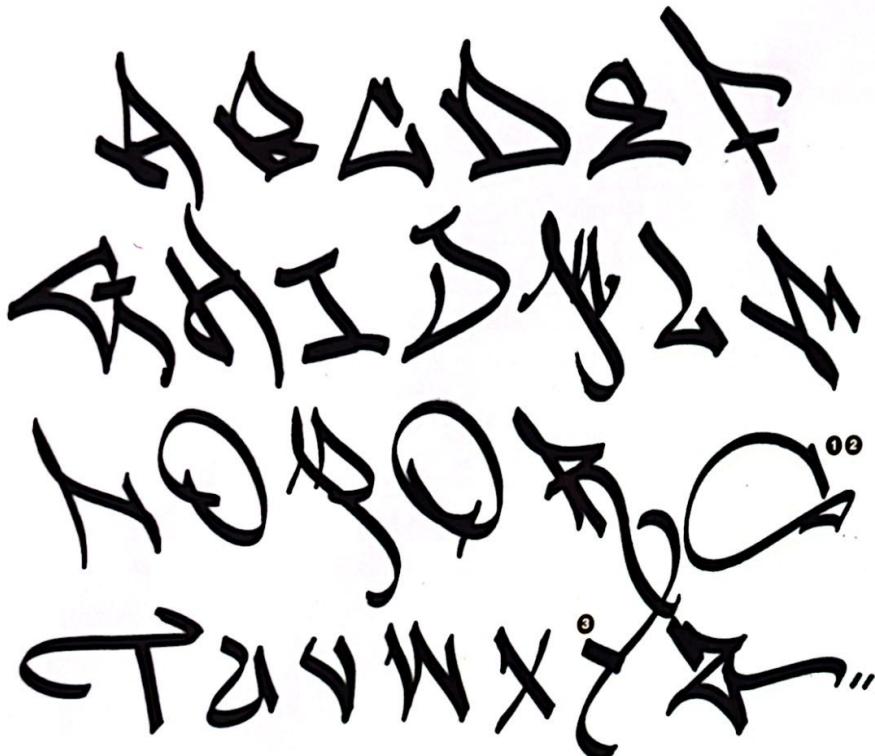
Letter Lean

"I put my own spin on it—not all those bumps and hooks are coming out of Flatbush. It's me gathering a bunch of styles that have been crafted through the years of traveling through Brooklyn. I was also highly influenced from the unconventional styles that came out of the FLIPSIDE squad in Park Slope. I basically mixed some of their handstyle elements with Flatbush Flows and made it my own. If you see a big GOUCHER tag living on Flatbush Ave, it's blatantly obvious the flow was bred from that part of the Flatbush hood. That's the hood I rep, and always will..."



"The goal of the YKK crew, which KEZ5 started with us [SKUF and NOXER], was to be different, and the goal was for everybody to be unique. And at the same time, there are certain things that we all share [in] each others' style—we develop it and we evolve. You know, try to break the rules. That was the goal."

"I appreciate the round, bubbly, happy style. So, I'm trying to find a place in between [that and a harder, more aggressive style]. I was able to appreciate so many different styles. To label an age, or a group of styles, to me, it's something I can't do—because I saw so many different styles. Now, the early 1980s and late 1970s all the sharp skinny-cap styles? I love that."

A large, stylized, handwritten signature of the word "SKUF" in black ink on a light background. The letters are fluid and rounded, with a bubbly, happy style. The "S" is particularly prominent with a large, rounded top and a pointy bottom. The "K" has a long, sweeping tail. The "U" is a simple, rounded shape. The "F" has a vertical stem with a horizontal bar at the top. The "U" and "F" are connected by a curved line.



A smaller, stylized, handwritten signature of the word "SKUF" in black ink on a light background. This version is more compact and has a more aggressive, harder style compared to the large one. The letters are more angular and have sharper points.

❶ STAK

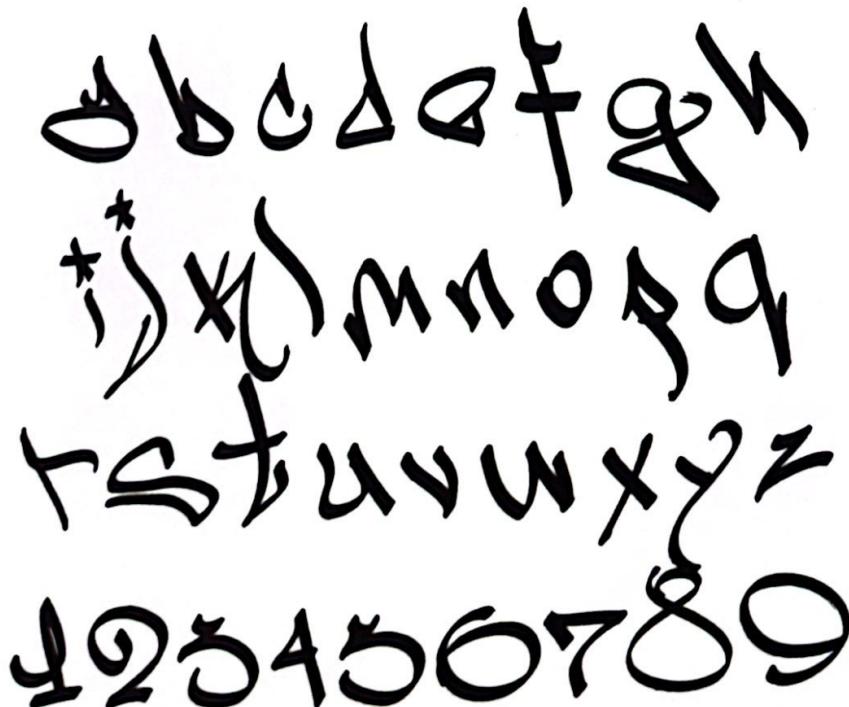
STAK was a mentor to SKUF. His tag utilized a combination of curves and points. SKUF remembers the proportion was [usually] bottom heavy. And wanting to add something he reversed it by flipping it, creating a round top and a pointy bottom.

❷ Top Heavy

"SKUF's S although very much his own is part of a longer lineage that is derived from a hand-style that was pervasive in the late 70s into the early 80s by writers like SIKO TB, (among others). Over the years different generations of writers have adapted and reworked this style to make it their own while continuing to maintain some elements of the original style that was very much unique to Brooklyn/Queens." —SP ONE

❸ Goal Posts

"A lot of people started doing that Y. KEZ, the founder of YKK, was doing a [goal-post looking Y - See Gouch's Y on the opposite page for comparison] and I wanted to do something totally the opposite of this field goal post, so I did it smooth."

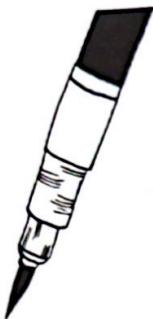


A large, stylized, handwritten signature of the word "SKUF" in black ink on a light background. This version is more angular and has sharper points compared to the first one. The letters are more defined with more vertical and horizontal strokes. The "S" has a sharp, pointy top. The "K" is more vertical and angular. The "U" and "F" are also more angular and have sharper points.

SABE



"A lot of the changes in my letters have always been environmental. I moved around a lot, all over the city and out of the country, so the influences have always come from my immediate surroundings at the time. I lived all over the city, all over New York. I lived in Japan for a year and a half, on and off. I lived in Beirut for two months; I studied Arabic while I was there. I would read all the signs while I was out walking or on a bus. It's a hard language to learn, like Japanese, because one hyphen or dot will change the whole sound of the word. Speaking it is not that hard but reading it is more difficult."

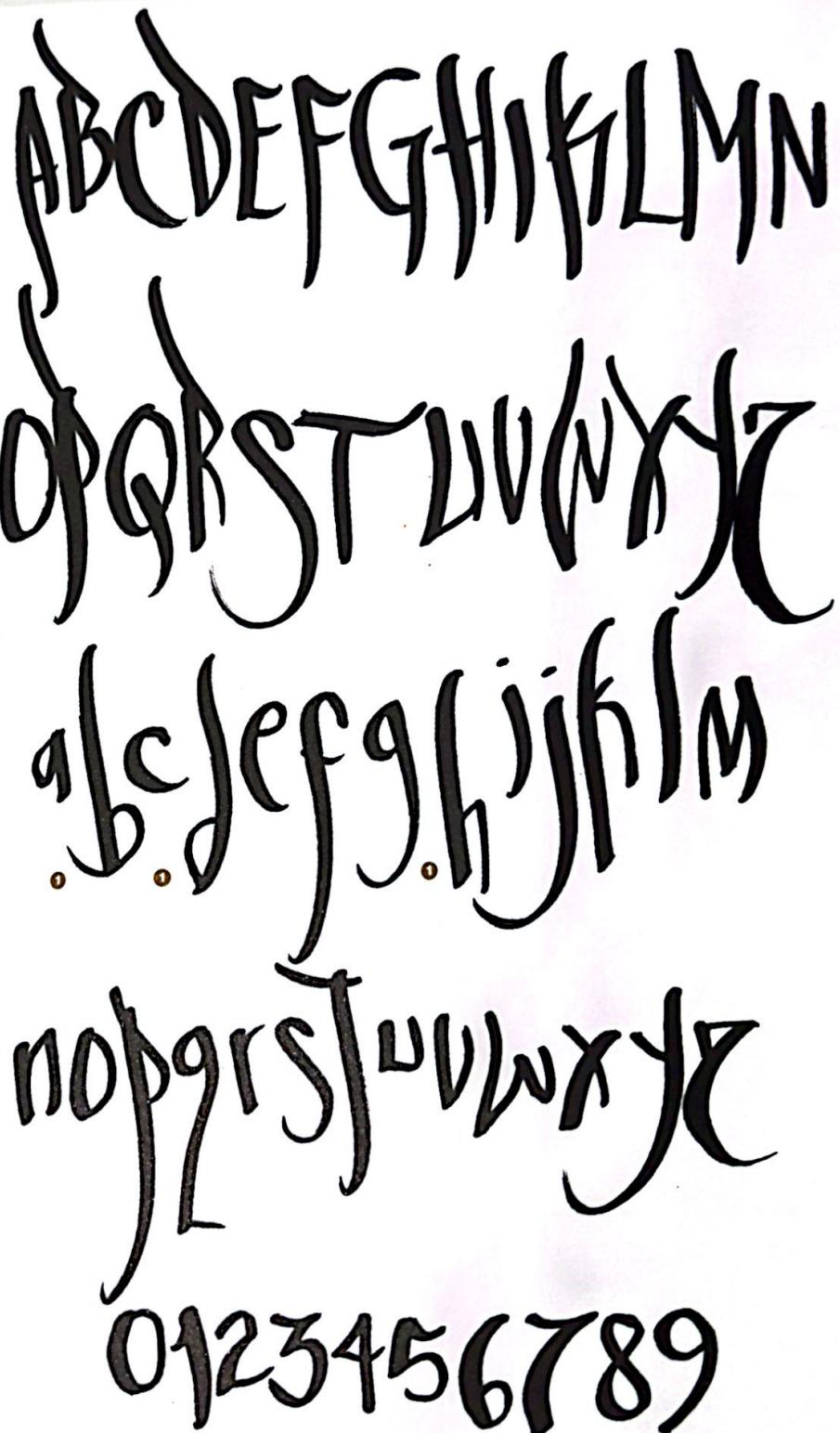


"When I was writing, I really took to JOZ and EASY. (Not just the way they were writing—one liner styles, but where they were placed). Their tags were placed on the gates as if they were always there. There was a lot of emphasis on style, but now it's all about placements."

"I started working [brush pens] between 2003 and 2004, when I was in Japan. I started experimenting with them and I really took to them, [more than] the chisel tip. The curves were easier to work with a brush than with a chisel tip. I did stickers with those. The ink is not permanent so it's hard to work with those on the street; you gotta work with a chisel tip, or just one of those paint markers."

• "[The lower-case letters like the B, D and H] almost resemble musical notes, the way they drop, and the way they go from thick to thin."

"[I was really influenced by] Hassan Massoudy, an Iraqi calligrapher based out of France. It was a postcard that I first came across, then I stumbled across his books."



"I hung out with HUSH (pg 100) a lot in the early 2000s, developing a notion of writing, named after our crew, IS.' We were both interested in breaking down styles into an understandable way, and having terminology to describe style variations. Our idea was to teach a progression of handstyles from the simplest straight letter to more complex styles. Straight and block are the basic foundation. We can create interesting variations on these basics by leaning, bending, spacing and overlapping letters within a tag. For a while we were on a kick of filling up books with our tags in repetition from cover to cover, a practice we got from JON ONE and the idea of wallpapering."



ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890&.,!?

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

HENCE Block Letter

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz



"The street bombing in Sunset Park was great because you had a lot of writers; you had the N line, the F line [subways that passed through]. Coney Island was one of the areas that had a lot of writers, compared to Bushwick and Sunset Park. [Sunset Park's style was] more simple, but the lines and the curves were definitely complex. You could tell somebody's style, their neighborhood, who they roll with. You could tell what was important. It was a lot of the letters—like the K with the little arrow,"

"I did a lot with the cans, but I'm all about everything. I did a lot with the marker tags. I did the Manhattan marker tag scene for a minute. I'd swing from Brooklyn to Manhattan and got involved with stickers [which was a distinctly different practice and scene]. I love doing stuff like that."

• Foot On The T

"It just came out like one flow—I try to be neat with it. That's definitely a Brooklyn, a faster-guy type of T, kind of a bent style, you know?"

• The P Is Free

"I just started doing that P, as I came out with a flow like that. Probably seeing other new styles, my style just came up, but that P is a twist to my own."

"[No one ever] really taught me, but hanging out, you pick up the best flow. The flow is the hardest part to teach. You could do that one flow, but when you start to do something else you get stuck to it. After a while, by being with a good writer, you get good. There's no going bad once you hang out [enough]."

A B C D E F G H I
 J K L M N O P Q R
 R B T U V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o
 P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

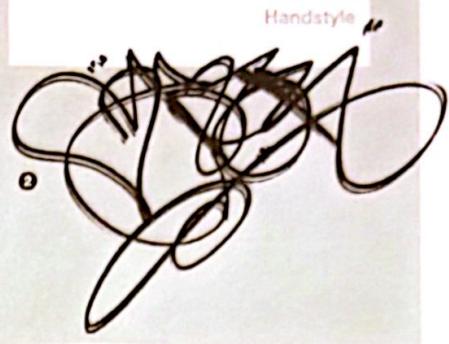
ADER

Brooklyn | Early 1990s–2010s

Handstyle

ADER came of age in a very diverse area of Brooklyn, a very diverse borough of one of the most diverse cities in the world, at a time when neighborhoods were based more upon ethnic enclaves than bank account credentials. Graffiti tends to cross class and culture lines more than most outsiders assume.

"With some handstyles you can tell people's ethnicity—that's what REVS would tell me. By the way a person writes, you can tell how they were brought up. And you can read through their handwriting what their nationality is."



A B C D E F G H I J K L
M N O P Q R S T U V
W X Y Z

g f g n i d * y l m n o p
q r s t u v w x y z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

• ~~SKAY~~
• D

• TEKAY (Reproduced by ADER)

"My [lower case] A came originally from this dude from my neighborhood, TKAY TNR. When people see an ADER tag, I want that shit to jump off the wall. I would stretch [the tag] when I was walking; that made my letters walk [too]. With the big A and the rest of the letters smaller."

• Heart-Shaped A

"Where other people do that [same] A, they do it tall; I think that's like a Philly thing. STAK does it tall. But I'm known for bringing the bump to it. So people could say 'Oh, ADER does the big A.' But in the last few years I added the heart to the A to be able to claim it a bit more."

• "My E might have a bit of a Broadway influence. For the most part I had a lot of influence from OE. [But I use an] E in the middle of my name. It's kind of hard for me to use the [exaggerated extension of] the middle point. His elongates far out. [I imagine] that's where SKUF got that part of his F, where his F elongates (pg 131). OE was an influence on him and he was able to adapt it perfectly. But me, I like that flow, of the craziness of the E without doing the round top, without bringing it in. So, that's how I used that influence. REVS told me that OE kind of paved the way for street bombing. OE and this dude AS2 were bombing tunnels hard, which never really gets mentioned."

Smart Crew



International Influence

"Smart Crew started as a Queens based graffiti crew, circa 1997. Throughout the years, they have acquired members from Brooklyn, Staten Island and even internationally in London and New Zealand."

"Handstyles are probably the most important element of graffiti because it is/should be the first step to getting into graffiti. Catching tags (illegally) should also be the one thing done the most in your graffiti career. With that said, we're not saying we have the best 'freehands' out there but we do realize the importance of a quality handstyle."

"While everybody brings their own flavor and influence to the crew, we like to think that the overall style is a NYC-centric style. Overall, the goal is to keep graffiti fun, on the streets, and out of galleries."

- ① TOPER
- ② MARX
- ③ GOAL
- ④ NUTSO
- ⑤ ACTION
- ⑥ SHAZ
- ⑦ TRYBE
- ⑧ HUESO
- ⑨ MARTY
- ⑩ DCEVER
- ⑪ VYELS
- ⑫ ELMO



"My first influences were the Long Island and Queens highways—they were totally crushed—so just seeing the graffiti on the highway walls as I was driving around the city. I'm influenced by everything I see, architecture, nature. Specific graffiti writers? I guess classic Queens writers, like SP, have had a huge influence on me. I'll spend hours going through old train flicks, just soaking it all up. They had really dynamic motion to them, captivating to look at. FREEDOM is definitely a huge influence on me, too. The underline hearts that I do, I kind of got those from SP, but I think he got those from FREEDOM."



"[I was into] kitschy little do-dads that would catch peoples' eyes. Really large, recognizable shapes that would draw your eye to them—huge circles or huge hearts. Shapes that everybody sees in every day life to draw your attention to it to frame my tags."

"I'd like my stuff to have a lot of soul and energy in it. You'll find that old school graffiti had that. [This alphabet is] based on [that '70s Broadway style]. I've added some more flair to it—arrows. I try to give a little boogie to it, a little boogie and a little lean."

"Nobody really writes Broadway style anymore. It's kind of a shame, it's some of the best handwriting."

❶ "I went through this phase where I was trying to take tags and add throw-up elements to them, or take throw-ups and add tag elements to them. Everything is broken up—it's either a tag or it's a throw-up or it's a piece. But what if you were to combine all three? You could make it one."

"The difference between the alphabet [and my tag] is those letters were drawn very carefully and very slowly. They were pieced together. To go out tagging is a very spontaneous act. When I go out tagging I like to capture that energy. That is why all my tags are done very quickly, like one motion, maybe two motions."

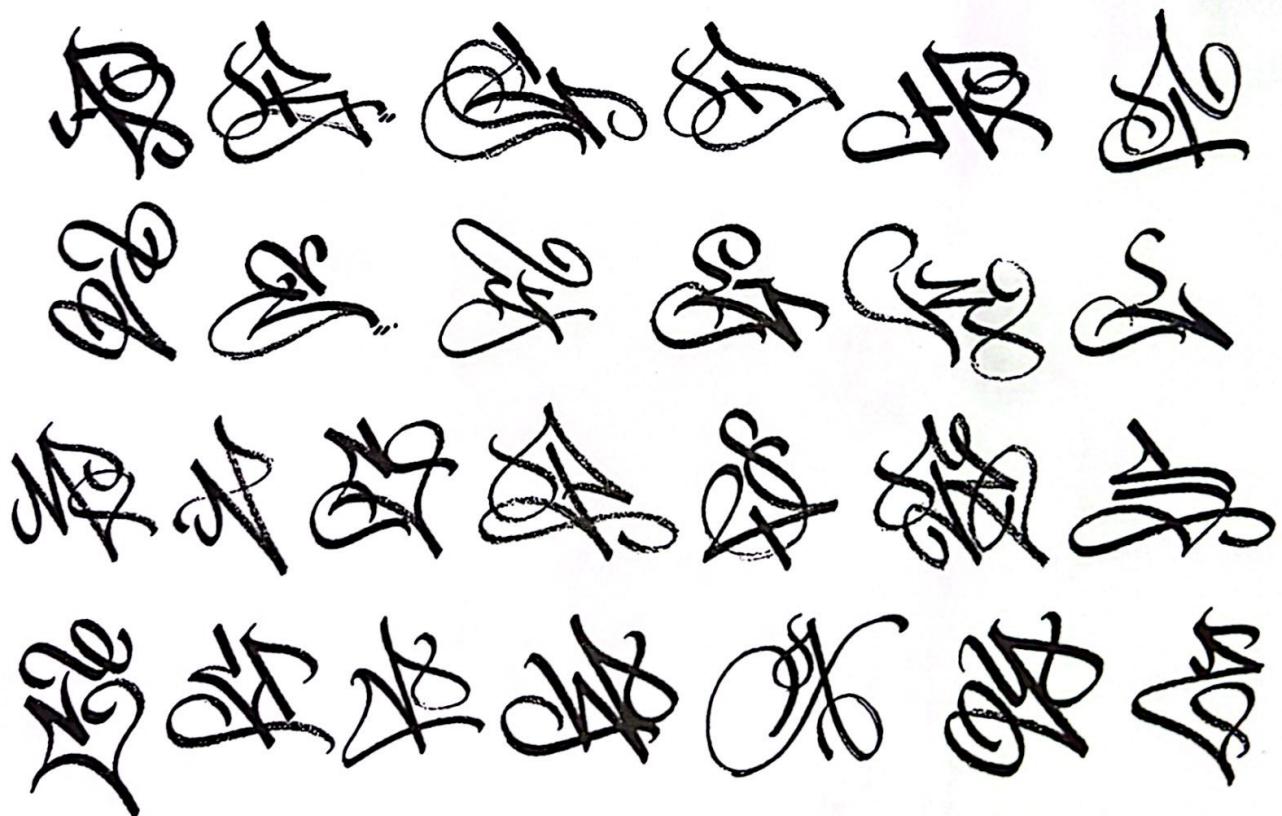
❷ "I was trying to make everything top heavy. There is a lot of movement at that level, I threw the kink in the J there to match."

SURE

"In our case, the influence was the whole TC5, FC type handstyle, and then it was fused with a whole lot of West Coast Gothic letters and gangster letters. So that's why when we use our chisel tip the angle is sort of different. We never really end on a flat end. We end on a thin end. FAUST holds his very different; his letters are more solid. He [creates the downstroke] of a letter, very traditional—calligraphy—like. I hold mine as if I were holding a pen. Thinning it out [the exit stroke] is our big thing. And that influence is what we got from the West Coast."



FAUST Swash Caps



FAUST

New York City | 1996 – 2010s

"When I started, I worked hard to get good on paper before taking anything out into the streets—and I really promote that idea and I think that people should practice and develop their skills before they make their mark. Since I'd been practicing for so long, when I started writing, I did it very regularly, and vigorously, and everything from typical stickers and tags on the corners, to painting walls in the south Bronx and trains in Jamaica, Queens. I used to pack a bag every weekend and try to find a [new] spot—I think I came into it more focused on quality over quantity."



Handstyle



"There was somewhat of a symbol tag that I'd developed early on that I pretty much stuck to. Around 1999, 2000, maybe 2001—that was the only handstyle I was doing. I think it might have been derivative of some other stuff around New York in the end of the nineties, but I guess I was pretty happy with how it all flowed and the shape that it took. I'm happy that my handstyle keeps developing and that I look back at stickers that I did even a year ago and feel that I've gotten so much better, even since that point. Stuff that I may have been doing and felt really good about, and felt was really progressive and stylish, then, a year later, I'll return to and completely feel the opposite. I love and I'm excited that I'm constantly developing and improving, and then I look to some other experienced writers and I see them hit a black book and I feel that they hit a perfect chisel tag effortlessly, whereas I might take some more time and require much more effort. And I feel like one of the virtues of doing so many stickers was that you get so much practice under your belt, and you go through those gestures and I can really feel myself improving."



Mid Atlantic

In 1979 a New York transplant, DR. REVOLT, moved to Baltimore to go to art school, predating the wildfire of a cultural influence that *Style Wars* would become when it premiered on PBS in 1983. Baltimore was close enough to be influenced by Philadelphia and small enough to feel the impact of a New York transplant with a fire under his ass to put in a lot of work. Early apprentices of REVOLT had a very New York styled way of writing, but the fast and angry energy of punk and the influence of the ligatured scripts of Philadelphia to their north eventually combined to create a shared handstyle seen the whole city over.

Many writers to this day believe that the extreme left lean is a credit to a left-handed writer's influence. AREK believes it may be credited to a particularly influential writer called ZEKOIZ:

"A lot of these dudes, like this dude SHAKEN, had a little bit more upright [style]. But still Baltimore-esque, so to speak. Back in the day, SHAKEN used to go to Philly and just snap flicks, (like '89, '90). At the time, his Ns were close to Philly cats' Ns the way it loops at the bottom. Then, at the same time, some west-side dudes were leaning. ZEK; he was left handed, and his slanted to the left. ZEK started in the early '80s, but it wasn't leaning at the time. He just started gradually to lean [more by the late '80s, early '90s]. [He] was one of the reasons why people copy that lean. Even though I'm left handed too, I got it from the west-side dudes that I knew."

Mid Atlantic Handstyles

In addition to the leftward lean, many Baltimore writers employ an energetic growth in their letters as they grow larger toward the end of their tags. STAB explains that aspect of the local handstyle:

"That style was a Baltimore thing; it got wound up, warmed up and then you'd just whip it off. It was like Philly hands start out [wild] from the get. In Philly you were ass-kicking from the beginning of your wickeds; they started out with a crescendo and we would build up to that—the height of the letters getting bigger, wider, longer—and then we'd put a big tail of excitement on it, and an under-arrow or a finishing action. And that is a hard thing to put in a font because it's about an action. It's about being able to use that font in its proper place, and so, when it comes down to that translation of style, there are [only] some places you can do that."

With the premier of 1983's *Style Wars*, the phenomenon started hitting any number of American cities with walls looking for adornment. Through PBS re-runs and the occasional transplant from an experienced city, graffiti started flourishing in DC. The precursor to the surge was the graffiti of the Go-Go scene. Go-Go was DC's local musical answer to hip hop—an offshoot of Funk from the '60s to the late '70s and even early '80s. Go-Go was lo-fi, percussive party music performed by live bands, and its scene had a variety of writers doing styles that were similar to Gangster style in Philadelphia, or Broadway Elegant in New York. That style seemed to persist in the Go-Go scene several generations after Philly and New York moved on to more complex styles. No single Go-Go writer was more infamous than COOL DISCO DAN. DAN was the overlap between the older generation and the newer in DC. The city's wide ranging influences, post *Style Wars* came from suburbanites, university transplants and the offspring of parents working government jobs. The styles came from all over. DC-by-way-of-the-Bronx transplant, DAH, explains, "MESK, for instance, he had big influence [on DC, stylistically] by [looking to] Philly so there's a lot of Philly/B'more kind of [style]. DC didn't really have [its own] style. Then, the introduction of CYCLE, and his whole George Washington University circle: He had his Connecticut people, so EMIT would come down, GAZE would then come down." DC became a petri dish of East Coast influences by the early 90s and beyond.

Mid Atlantic Handstyles

DRAZ—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



AMEN—Washington DC
Circa mid 2000s



BLOKS—Baltimore
Circa 2011



FELON—Washington DC
Circa early 1990s



ANDER—Baltimore
Circa early 1990s



DAVE—Baltimore
Circa early 1990s



EVER—Baltimore
Circa mid 1980s



BORF—Washington DC
Circa mid 2000s



Mid Atlantic Handstyles

REVOLT—Baltimore (via New York)
Circa mid 1980s



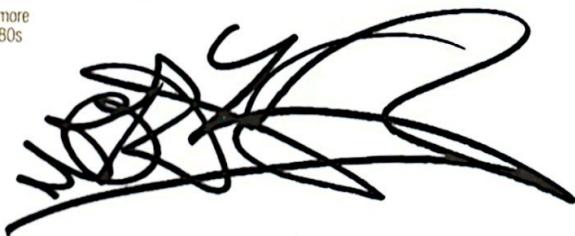
SAET—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



VAEK—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



MASK—Baltimore
Circa late 1980s



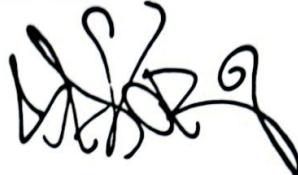
CYCLE—Washington DC (via Connecticut)
Circa early 1990s



SCHAKEN—Baltimore
Circa mid 2000s



SAVOR—Baltimore
Circa late 1980s



JAZI—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



PEAR—Washington DC
Circa late 2000s



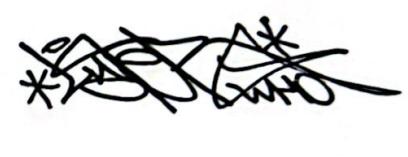
ASHAR—Baltimore
Circa 1989



ASHAR—Baltimore
Circa late 1980s



LATER—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



Mid Atlantic Handstyles

WHY—Baltimore
Circa mid 2000s



REZIST—Washington DC
Circa late 2000s



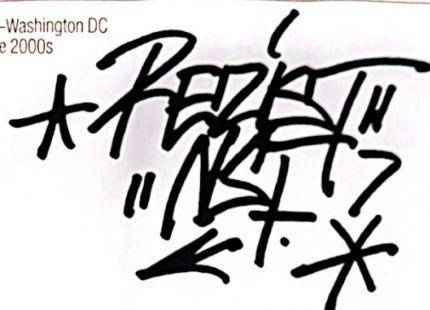
SAETS—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



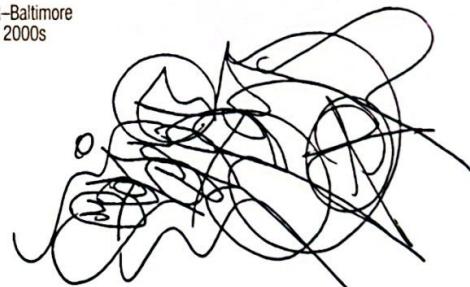
NEPAL—Baltimore
Circa mid 2000s



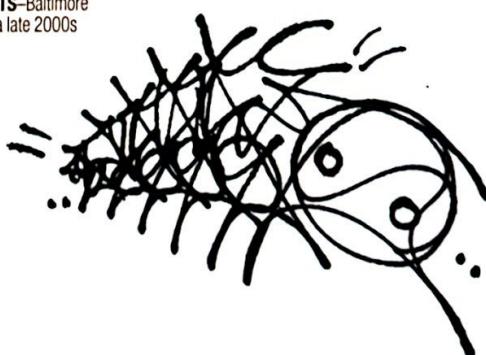
REZIST—Washington DC
Circa late 2000s



MENCER—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



SAETS—Baltimore
Circa late 2000s



Handstyle



COOL DISCO DAN

Washington DC | 1983 – Mid 1990s

By all accounts COOL DISCO DAN was a pioneer and king of Washington DC. From 1983 to the mid 1990s, DAN had DC on lock. Before him were few. But, he had predecessors and heroes, such as R.E. RANDY and SIR NOSE 84, but DAN took it farther—much farther—than any of them. At one point, the Washington Post's Style Invitational asked, "What two people's help will Mayor Marion Barry need to clean up Washington, DC? COOL'DISCO' DAN and God."

Go-Go Style

DAN's handstyle had a retro feel to it—similar to the Philly gangster print from 10 years prior. It consisted of squarish forms with sometimes rounded corners. Note the platforms or serifs on the bottom of the A and ends of the N of his tag above. It is similar to the 1970s Philly or the Broadway Elegant in New York. It was like a Jurassic period of graffiti that thawed out in a different decade.

Like gangster prints in Philly, or Broadway tags in '70s New York, you would often see tags with a larger first letter that doubled for two or three word tags, like SUPER STUFF in New York or SWEET SOULFUL SEGGI [as seen on page 99].

"DAN kept the Go-Go graffiti style of DC alive and brought it to the 'traditional' graffiti world."
—Roger Gastman

"[At the time] I hated DAN's handstyle. I was fascinated with trying to make things look as beautiful as possible while still being vandalism. That was my thing, I wanted to legitimize things as much as possible. To me, DISCO DAN's [hand] was too gangster, and raw, but I learned to appreciate it, especially after I met him." —MESK

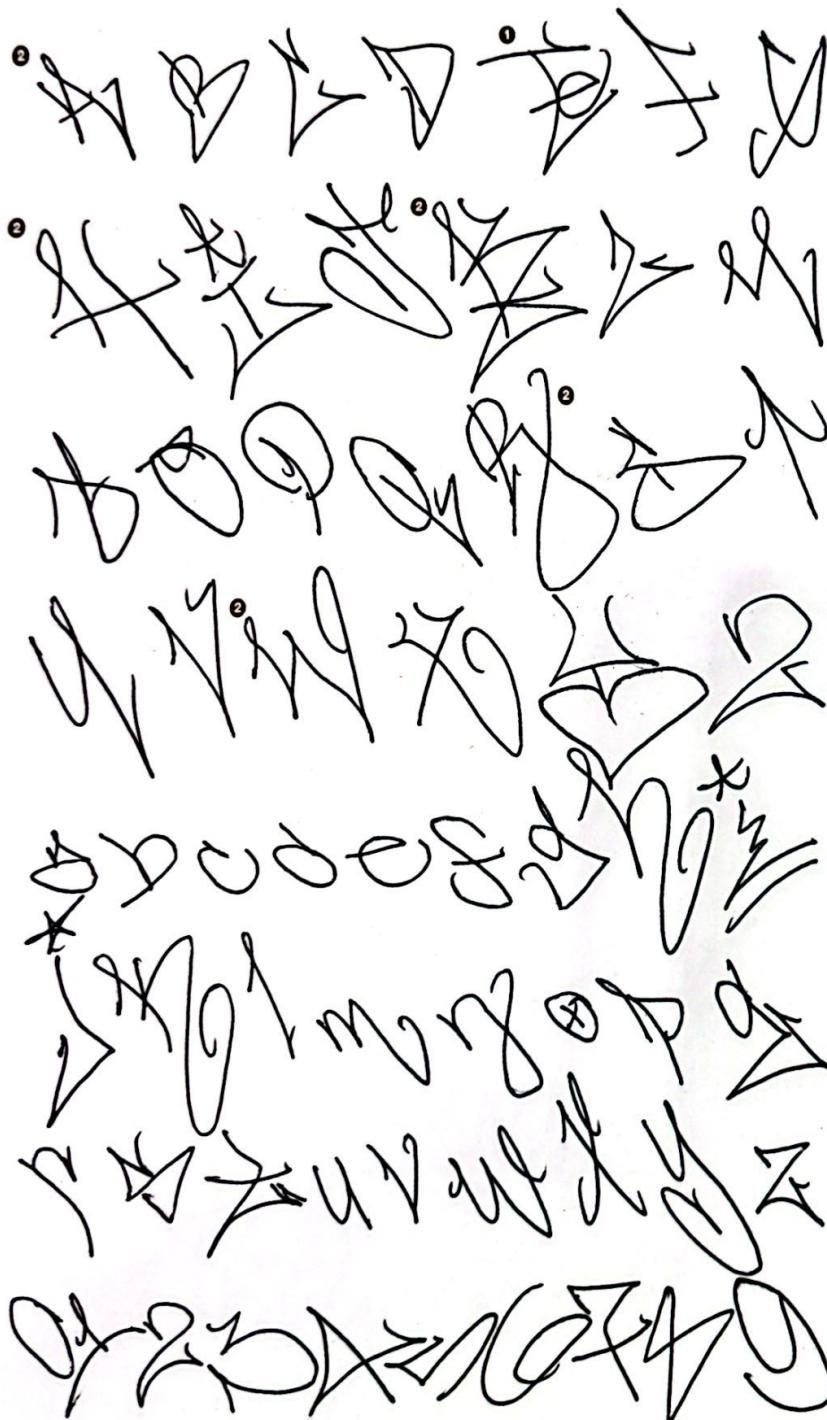
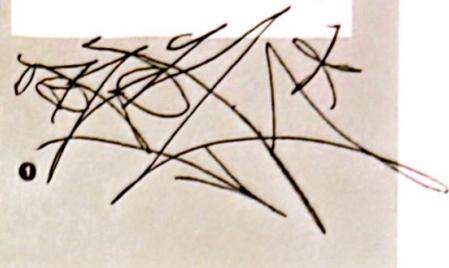


AREK

Baltimore | 1987 – 2010s

"In 89–90 I started writing ARE, and then I added the K because in Baltimore it was cool to have some kickable letter, R or K. So I met this old school dude SEK, he had the K and I was like, wow, I want that K. The crew was TFD – Tuffest, Freshest, Deffest—but he was a west side black dude. Prior to that, my shit was a little more upright, [but eventually I] added the K on it, got a one-stroke tag, and just over the years started leaning it. At the same time some west side dudes were leaning, and ZEK (ZEKOIZ) was left handed, so his stranded to the left, and that was one of the reasons why a lot of people copied that left-hand lean."

Handstyle



1 Double or Nothing

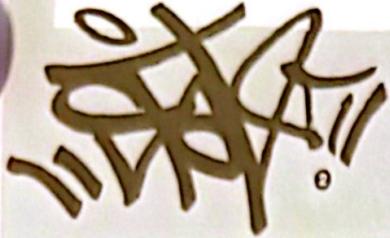
Note the double E and A (in the tag above)—upper and lower case in a single letter. "Since I've been doing it—I've also now seen it in Philly, but I got it from a dude [in Baltimore] who wrote FASE. He was in our crew, DST, back in the early 1990s. He had a ridiculous hand—all kinds of little gimmicky stuff. That's where I got that from."

2 Links and Ligatures

Similar to Philadelphia, 100 miles up the Interstate, Baltimore scripts make the most of their letter connections; often creating one-liner tags, necessitating extra upstrokes or looping serifs. Note: A, H, J, R. The V and W particularly are reminiscent of old Philly hands like KIDD's (pg 82) or NB's (pg 85), with the loops at the exits of the letter.

Fan It Out

Not visible in a freestanding alphabet, but very noticeable in the tags, Baltimore writers have a habit of leaning their letters backward very aggressively. Tags start small and grow rapidly from left to right.



• Post-Baltimore Influence

"This style certainly has some HOD crew influence, on the change ups, the letters being a little more font-like [modular]. But it has a [typical] Baltimore follow-through, whips and angles, a sharpness that I added to the caps in particular. It has a west-coast influence [too], not a lot of letter connection as much as letter repetition and separation, and this weighted balance and evenness of how the letters interact, which I got living in Atlanta, where there is a strange West Coast connection. A lot of my crew are connected to or from Portland, Oregon. Having spent my whole career in the Northeast, under the influence of Philly and New York, and our own kind of one-liner style, it was a real refreshing thing, like, 'Hmm... letters look good when you break them apart.'"

• Criss-Cross Wildstyle

"I was one of the people who developed that style and [influenced] its becoming the common style. The guys I directly learned under in the Mob Town Crew, AMOCK, AMUCK, DILLINGER, were the R and the K guys. I was writing MONSTER when those specific styles were developed. TEASER started when I was working on a geometry that based itself on a specific, really hard traditional Baltimore lean, but then it was counteracted in the opposite direction—there was a criss-cross X-pattern that then crescendoed with the [final] R and everything would be really energetic. That's the start of that energy. The same sort of thing I use on my B [in the tag above] where there's this jump-inside-and-then-back energy; but at the time it started from first letter to second and in and out, and then came to a crescendo pattern. I actually don't do that sort of involved wildstyle tagging anymore. Sometimes I do STABROCK tags [in that style] and really retreat into super-old-school Baltimore handstyles (especially when I'm using spray paint—much more than markers). It's not the same process when you don't have to rack, [you] don't put as much drama and crescendo into what you're doing. So my writing has calmed down. In my age, it has gotten a little bit more simplistic, reverting back to what I love the most about REVOLT and ZEPHYR. Their writing styles are really easily read, really straight, perfect math and just a little bit of flair; that gave it personal style."

"I got into [writing] here in Baltimore. I started writing in '83. I'm not originally from Baltimore. I was from New York, but began writing here in Baltimore by seeing graffiti here. It got so progressive to the entirety of the alphabet where you're changing up words. I began writing STAB early on in my writing career, but it was interspersed between writing MONSTER, and TEASER, and CREO. But it surfaced as my name—what people knew me by. By the late '80s, it was what I was concentrating on, into the '90s."



JASE

Baltimore | 1984 – 2010s

Handstyle

"[Around] 16, I started going downtown and seeing handstyles, and I started tagging down there. Baltimore handstyles have always been different. Some of the [more prominent] writers back in the day were left handed, so the styles kind of leaned to the left, and they got bigger as the word [went] on and flared out the letter at the end—like an R or K. And the styles weren't really influenced from other cities at that point. There was no internet and there were no magazines. So Philly had a really strong style, and so did Baltimore. It had its own style. DC had a lot of writers from different cities going to school there, so theirs is a little more commingled. But I moved to S.E. in '92, '93, and started picking up on their styles a little bit more, then I started traveling a lot and I started getting up in Baltimore and DC, San Francisco and Oakland pretty much on a regular basis."



A B C D E F G H I

J K L M N O P Q R

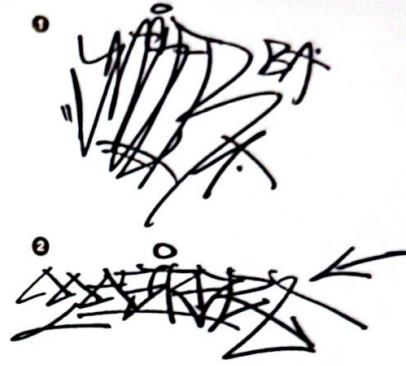
S T U V W X Y Z

3 B C D E F G H I J K L M

1 0 9 Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 9 * # - - - .



❶ "That [style] came from JOKER from Transcend crew. He spent a lot of time in DC, Philly & Pittsburgh. That stretched out R. I tend to press down really hard when I write on things other than spray paint. I really tear through markers. The pressing of it becomes part of the style."

❷ "I was writing [that style] in DC around '94. A lot of the DC kids couldn't read that. I wrote MASTER [and often] MASTORE. When I met CYCLE and a couple other kids, they were like 'Who's MASTERX?' And I was like, 'I have no fucking idea,' and then they all called me that afterwards. Okay, I guess it says MASTERX now."

Compare to the Criss-Cross Wildstyle STAB describes on pg 148.

❸ "That J [in my tag] is because it looks like it's leaning over on its side to the left, which would be a Baltimore thing. The J in my alphabet doesn't look like it because when I do that style J without other letters next to it, it's not recognizable."

"The main [Baltimore style] guy is ZEK. His handstyles were bad ass, and he had this strange lower case Z that looked like a lowercase A turned upside down. I think he's the [first one to influence the left lean] because he's left handed. If there was anyone who later put a spin on it, it was SHAKEN—probably '90, '91. [He was one] of the first influences that I had. He had a real long word that flared out on the end and leaned to the left a little bit."



"I started looking at Baltimore in like '89. Relatively early. JOKER and I were super thirsty for any style. I don't remember how, but we got to Baltimore and tried to find as much graff as possible. We walked along the train lines and took pictures. We saw a ton of SHAKEN, AREK and MASK. They all had a 'spaghetti-style.' They all had the same idea of one big continuous line—really cool. Kind of like their tags, but as pieces—which is interesting because that's the premise for ESPO. He's always said that a good tag should be the basis for a good piece and vice versa—that you had to be able to break down the letter forms and have them work as a tag to create a solid piece. I wonder if he didn't do many wildstyle pieces because of this idea. So, I think that's an interesting thing because the dudes from Baltimore were able to make these crazy pieces and they did look like their tags."

❶ Letter Structure

"It's interesting, the letter structure of Philadelphia and Baltimore is very, very similar. It's just that Baltimore is so far angled that it looks totally different. Both of them tend to have a very strong baseline that they work off of. In B'more it has a strong base-line, but it grows in the shape of a megaphone. I dug that because you have this sense of building energy, and then they would end with these huge tails, like SHAKEN or MASK, with his K, but if you stood that thing up, you're getting into very similar letter forms as Philly."

"In Philly, SATER and ENEM were like 'It's all about the handstyle. You have to have a good handstyle.' When I was in Philly, I was still working at my tall print. I ran the gamut, as I was out there, just trying to refine it, refine it, refine it."

❷ Pointy Bottoms

"The points are a definite Philly thing. The point comes from DENSKE from Philly—KAD, ESPO, RASAN, KAZAN, EXEL, ENEM, ERX—all those guys, they had great hands, and it was all about the [upward] flare; so you would make the bottoms of your letters be pointy. And it just looks tough, it looks violent."

❸ Downstroke

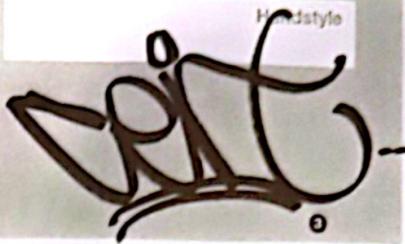
"I think SHAKEN (Baltimore) for instance would do his S in reverse, and some Philly cats do that as well. Typically, though, you start with the downstroke with a Philly tall print or even with wickets, and that kind of sets up your parameters of baseline and midline of your letter. It's because Philly is very, very structured in their lettering."

❹ Upstroke

"That's my nod to MSK, and SKREW and all those guys. I wanted to create a typeface that would just kill all graffiti typefaces. The one that just shouldn't work but does. The one that would be not any of them, but all of them. With that, I think it's clearly an East Coast script, just because of my experience, but if I had gone to school in L.A. instead of Philly it would have had a more CHAZ influence."



"You had a lot of different styles here in DC. At that point you had a lot of people coming from different places. The DC style is kinda on its own. MESK had a Philly style but he also had a Baltimore style in there too. It's kind of like a mixture. It's a lot of mixtures, but it's a little bit more distinctive now."



ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NØPØQRST
uvwxyz
abcdefghijklm
uvwxyz

① Downstroke

"That's a MESK influence—a Philly influence. All those tall prints that come down first, then come back up. I grew up looking at MESK's shit. He had a lot of shit up when I was coming up. I could see the similarity between the two having the same K with the hard line that comes up and comes back down, but I think I started going through that style more recently; my style changed in the last five years but I came up looking at a lot of MESK's shit."

② Sharp Steel

"That's a DC style. I think MESK's Ss are like that, and so are my homeboy SMK's. He's an old school DC guy who's put in a lot of work. He put me on to a lot of shit too when I was younger. Those Ss, those Rs, and those Ks are kinda' trippy. That's DC's style, right there."

③ Signature

"That's one of my signature things to bring the R and cut [to] the T. I put a lot of those tags in the city. I get recognized a lot for that lowercase tag. That could contribute to how my lowercase is, because that tag was pretty much all lowercase; it was clean and it was quick, basically only lifting your can once."

"I was born and raised in DC, 'till my Mom moved to Reston, Virginia. A lot of good writers actually came out of Reston. After I graduated, I did a short stint in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, then I moved up to Pittsburgh, and then to Philadelphia to go to school at the Art Institute. Pittsburgh is when I really started to get a lot of work up. After Pittsburgh, I moved back to DC for about a year, then to the Bay Area with a friend. Got a good job and moved around with them for a bit, doing stints in San Diego and the Bay Area. Eventually, the same job led me to Portland."



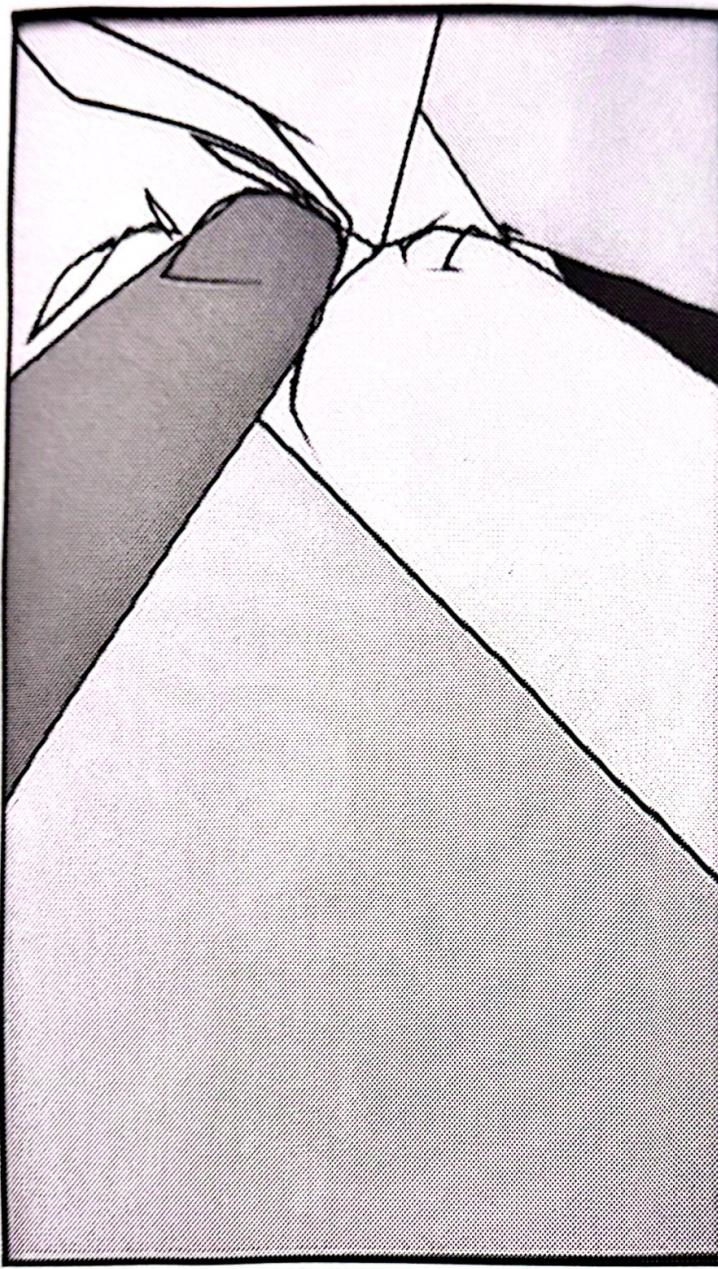
ABCD**E**FGHIJKLMNOP
JKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
ABCD**E**FGHIJKLMNOP
JKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
ab**c**defghijklmnoprstuvwxyz

JOKER Script

"[JOKER always had a] very refined aesthetic. I love his draftsmanship and how that carried over into his art is just amazing. He just has a great understanding of crafting letters. I [was] very emotive [loose compared to technical]. I always found JOKER one or two steps stylistically ahead of me, but he was always really nice about it. I was always trying to push hard to do something beautiful, and he would do something as intricate as he could. At one point, we said 'screw it, let's go back to straight letters and hard lines,' just block letters, all the way back to the simple style. When we did that, I was pissed because his letter forms were amazing, even then... But I tagged more than him, so I win."—MESK

The quick brown fox
jumps over the lazy dog
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Architectural Letter forms



"Architecture was definitely one of the first things that I started to look to for ideas and inspiration. The penmanship [architects] have is incredible."

"The handstyle I'm currently using is a product of when I first started going more abstract with my pieces. When I left the traditional world of graffiti behind and looked ahead, toward my future, the handstyle I was using at the start of my abstract styles was a little more upright, and not so spread out. It was actually a good mix of graffiti hands and traditional architectural penmanship."

"Architecture was definitely one of the first things that I started to look to for ideas and inspiration, and the penmanship [architects] have is incredible. I worked for days and hours to get that down. Now it just comes out naturally. It seems so simple and clear to me when I look at it, but I always have people asking me if such and such is an A or if that's a 1 or a 7. Sometimes I get so frustrated because most people

read chicken scratch all day long with no problem, and here I come with this clean line stuff and they can't read it."

"Chisel tip pens are ideal for tags. Maybe that's an old school mentality, but I still believe that. Of course, there are always exceptions. For example, Philly hands. They look good no matter what the hell you're using... if they're done right. But yeah, I would say whatever tool I have in my hand will sway what kind of style I go with. Normally with a pencil or ballpoint pen I'll do some sort of cursive style tag. A Sharpie or something thick like that, and it's definitely going to be a simple funky style. Chisel tip is for my normal style tags. Some tools just give a better effect for the style, and I think playing around with those tools is what sets you apart."



RUST

Washington DC | 1988 – Mid 2000s

"I always thought handstyle was the most important thing in graffiti. It's something broken down into a simple one line thing. You can't really hide the style as much. With piecing, you can add stuff and make it more complex. With a tag, it's just very broken down [and bare]. I liked handstyles and throw ups more than piecing, and I didn't want to be that guy who tried to do fancy pieces and had a terrible handstyle and throw up."



A B C D E F

G H I J K L M

N O P Q R S

T U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 \$ ¢

❶ "I don't know where I was getting that spike type of stuff. It's probably from, looking at 'zines and stuff [in the early '90s]. For a long time, I did the R with the curve like that. Then I used to do the S with the [spike]; that was like a New York thing. The little things—the hooks like that. I always tried to lighten up on the spikes. Keep it, really roundish. I feel like the spikes got too serious. [I like a] lot of humor."

❷ "I've been doing that stacked tag going on 10 years now. Pretty much that same tag, but the S has slowly evolved. The S used to be a lot more equal and flowing, then I started doing a little more of a kick on it [more space on the bottom]. There was a trend in those Ss where you make them really big. I think it's based in New York, but then TWIST was kind of doing it a lot. Anything he does influences a lot of people. Once you start doing a certain S, it's hard to go back."

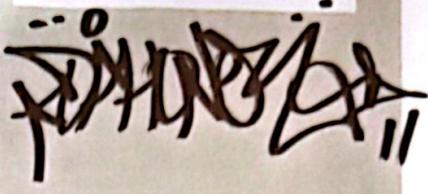
"I always liked COST's tag. I was super into COST's C-O-S—the spaced out lettering and stuff like that. The C where it's almost completely disguised. I always liked [NYC writer] YES 2's stuff. He did a bunch in the '90s, and [I loved] his Y-big and quick. The Y was so unique."

DAH ONE

Washington DC (and New York) | 1987 – Mid 2000s

Handstyle

"I kind of bounced around. I lived in California for a while. I went back to Maryland, went [back] to New York, then back to Maryland. I went to high school in Maryland, and then stayed a solid eight years and then eventually came back [to New York]. I was exposed to graffiti early on, but I really didn't succumb [until 1988/89]. I had a cousin. He and I were so influenced by the old train graff then, and through the publication of *IGTimes* by PHASE 2, those were the kind of cool things I could take from New York, to wherever I was, and always kind of be close to that. For the most part, I was a bus tagger for a long time, kind of solo, and I had a few friends who kind of picked up where I was leading the way. But then I started seeing other cats in the DC area and I was like, 'Oh, OK.'"



A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9

The Quick Brown Fox Jumps
Over the Lazy Dog

"[When I was in NYC] For the most part, the 2 to 5 line was what I would follow and FC Crew, IBM crew, 1-9, and WEST were always something I kept an eye out for. From that point, I kind of had a set style [before] connecting with some DC writers. Most of those guys were influenced from other places too. MESK, for instance, had been influenced by Philly, so there's a lot of Philly/B'More [influence]. DC didn't really have [its own] style, per se. Then there was the introduction of CYCLE, and his whole George Washington University circle. He had his Connecticut people, so EMIT would come down, GAZE would come down. I had never painted with a piecing cap before—ever. It was fat caps for bombing and straight stock caps for piecing so I got put on through those guys. I guess, the whole time I was down there I was yearning to get [back to New York]—in on the action; and by the time I got here, it was done."

"I've been an illustrator by nature since I was a kid. I wanted to be a comic penciller. My lines, my sketching style, has always been loose and fluid. It's funny—I actually admire videos of cats with their handstyles, and, you know, their very precise movements. Sometimes the tag doesn't come out as nice. It's just raw; it's what I feel at the moment."



Boston & New England

New England has had very separate graffiti scenes, mostly centered around Boston and its suburbs. Most notably, Boston and Cambridge, Lynn to the north and Providence to the south. The first wave of writers in Boston were catching wind of the hip-hop movement brewing south of them in New York. By the early 1980s, cousins MAZE and CLICK were importing graffiti and hip-hop from their road trips to visit family who lived in Jamaica, Queens. They may have been some of the first writers with connections to the NY style, but were not the only ones. RYZE, SR ONE, and surely dozens of others, also had family in the New York area, and had plenty of opportunities to see New York handstyles in full bloom, and take some of that knowledge back to Beantown. SR ONE remembers:

"Around '86, I'd say, New York style was more refined compared to the Boston style. It had more of a balance to it. It was more functional, probably because it came off the trains. There was one major handstyle movement that came out of Brookline and spilled over into Boston. It was started by DRONE, and some others from Brookline High School. They kinda pioneered this intricate, free flowing style. It was very unorthodox and uniquely Boston."

"I remember seeing SP ONE tags in blackbooks. RELAX 1 from Brooklyn really mentored me by exposing me to these styles. He let me borrow his book from Brooklyn—that was '87 I believe. And I always remembered SP's handstyle. He kind of represents the Brooklyn handstyle stuff that influenced me very much. Simple, flowing. It was almost like a martial art, and you do what you're exposed to. And somehow I just adhered more closely to the New York stuff. I have a [lower case] E that is triangular, and I think that is a pretty New York thing."

Boston & New England Handstyles



By the late '80s, and early '90s, a few New Yorkers went up north and spent enough time in Boston to make an impact. KR and SP respectively ended up living there for a time, and writers coming through town to visit, including DASH and TEO, had some influence on Boston's street bombing and handstyles. Eventually, Boston played a stepping-stone role as a connection for New York handstyles traveling to the West Coast. Going north to Boston, and then west from Boston to San Francisco, KR brought a lot of New York methodology with him, including the subway era homemade markers and inks for which he became famous by the time he made his name in the Bay Area. By 1989, Bostonian SR ONE found himself in San Francisco, crashing with a writer named TWIST. SR impressed Twist with an East Coast, chisel-tip print that contrasted with the 'one-flows' San Francisco was known for. At the same time RYZE and ALERT were coming into their own back home in Boston. ALERT developed a style where each letter is separate and unique. The style gained notoriety—both hatred and admiration from Boston's younger generations. These little innovations helped move local handstyles in a new direction. Today, these styles are notably seen in the tags of OD Crew, who have helped to take Boston a little further out of New York's stylistic shadow, establishing their own flavor and, in an ironic twist, eventually bringing it down to New York.

By the early to mid 1990s, Providence, RI was building its own small but dedicated local scene. With Brown University and RISD, there was a good combination of local and imported talent in the form of students always looking to get into some sort of trouble. The city provided a great playground with an Amtrak hub, city streets, highways and old derelict industrial buildings. LEAD explains:

"That was the most saturated area in the North East for graffiti on the tracks. It had more than Philly or Boston. That was the hot area. When Amtrak put in the Acela in '99, 2000, that was their main focus for buffing. And, being from there, I know the guys who were doing good handstyles indicative of Providence, completely separate of Boston or anywhere else in the area. CRICK, the Providence EMIT, BLAMER, SAY, and BESTER (who was from NYC) would either go from small to big, or the R at the end would really kick out. It was all derivative of that."

Boston & New England Handstyles

JAY ROC-Boston
Circa late 1980s



CLICK-Boston
Circa mid-late 1980s



ALONE-Boston
Circa late 2000s



AVES-Boston
Circa late 1990s



OWL-Boston
Circa early 2000s



BARE-Boston
Circa late 1990s



REZENT-Boston
Circa early 1990s



Boston & New England Handstyles

SPEK—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



COAST—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



OCEAN—Boston
Circa early 1990s



BLAST—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



PERL—Boston
Circa mid 1980s



GROE—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



DAN PLASMA—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



HISTO—Boston
Circa 2008



MASS—Boston
Circa mid 1980s



SEX—Boston
Circa mid 1990s



FONSE—Boston
Circa mid 2000s



LOBE—Boston
Circa 1998



Boston & New England Handstyles

SEAZ—Providence
Circa mid 1990s



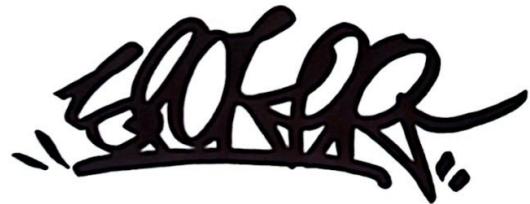
REAKER—Providence
Circa late 1990s



SLOE—Providence
Circa 2008



SPOKE—Providence
Circa mid 1990s



CRICK—Providence
Circa mid 1990s



ASED—Providence
Circa early 2000s



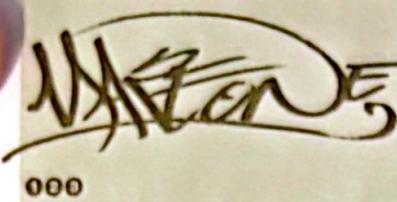
RESTO I—Providence
Circa late 2000s



GRE ONE—Providence
Circa mid 2000s



MAZE ONE



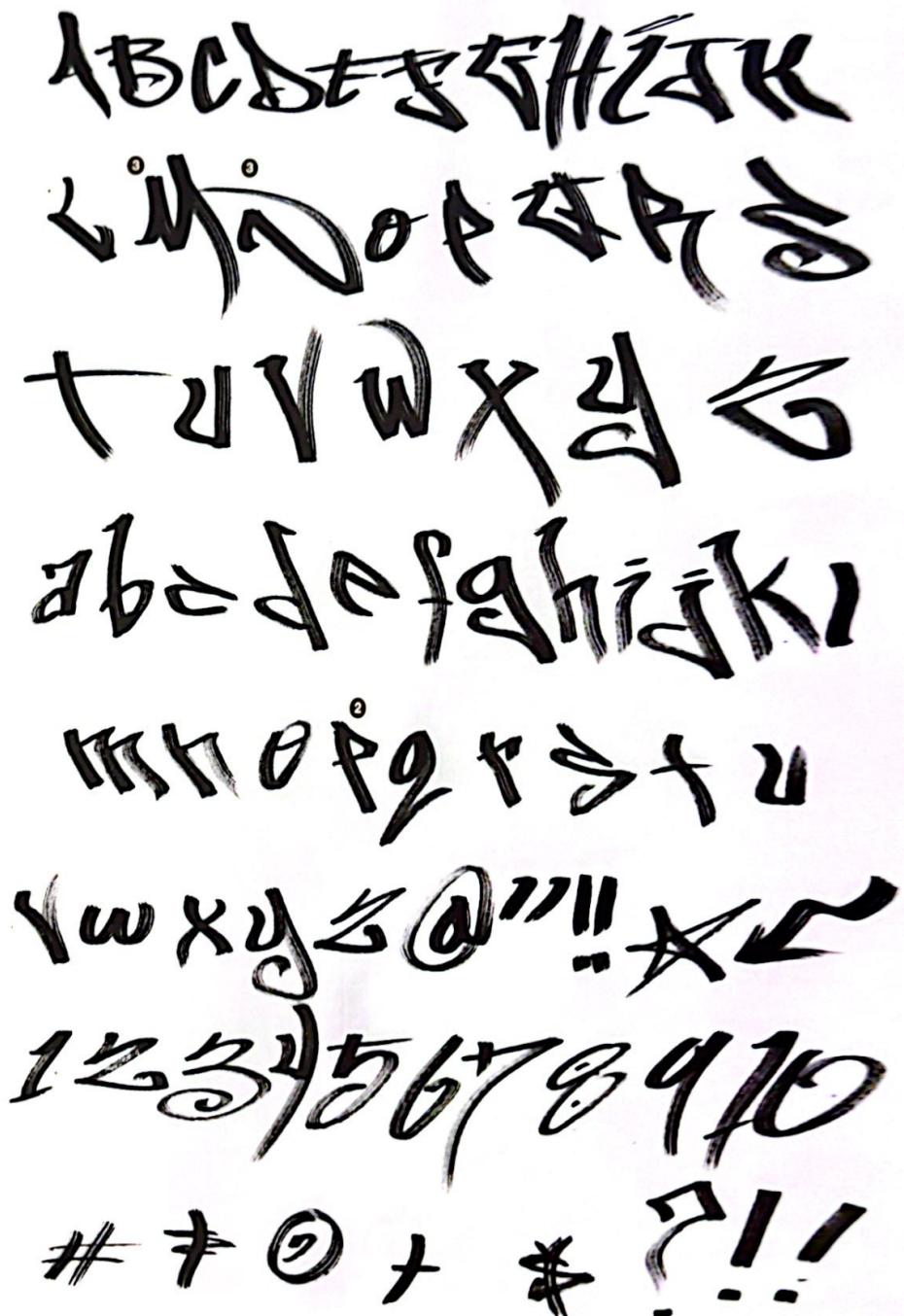
"I started writing with CLICK back in the day. He's my cousin. He basically got me into it. We had another cousin who lived in Jamaica, Queens, so we would come out and visit him and see all the graffiti in New York. So we took it back to Boston and started bombing. There was barely any graffiti in Boston, and then we started getting up, and we started to see other kids start to get up and we formed a crew in Mattapan, which was the really gangster neighborhood; it was called 'Murderpan'. So we were the first ones to hit the Red Line trains. CLICK and I pieced the first running Red Line train in Boston, and that was our little claim to fame when we were younger, and then I ran the circuit, later [in '91] I moved to New York and started doing rooftops."

❶ "This is my 1980s style. New York graffiti writers have their own little swirly style. Boston graffiti writers had more of this choppy, tilted, I don't know, a little bit more legible [style]. It was a little more calligraphic. At the time, a lot of people started making their own markers out of chalk erasers, and so we had these huge calligraphy markers and our letters would come out very... I would hate to say L.A. gang style, but they did come out very calligraphic—sharp lines. I think that my alphabet speaks to that—it evolved from creating legible words heavy on the tagging."

❷ "Usually, the beginning of a word would lean to the beginning and the end would lean to the end. And that was [part of] giving the letters enough space to breathe. If there were two letters leaning one way the next one would have to lean the other way, just to tip it off."

❸ "This is [my] second generation M, but I wanted a creepy M that could just stand alone and that was like my 'bat-M.' It was more of a scary bat flying across. So I would really sweep it out and put it at an angle—so it looks like the beginning of the N is tilted back and the end is cutting forward to lean taller. And the N was part of MAZE ONE. Instead of how everybody puts their little swirl underneath with the arrow, and the star... I wanted to do that, but not on the bottom of the letter, because I think the bottom of the letter should just sweep in, but have the N sweep atop the whole word basically."

"MAZE is one of the most creatively energetic people I've ever met in my life. Creativity is like fighting to get out of him. Whatever he's working on is going to change into his own thing of the moment."—RYZE



DRONE

Boston | 1984 – 1987

Handstyle

"It's hard for me to articulate something that is sort of driving the style exactly. I guess, for me, I never really focused on the individual letters so much as the aesthetic of looking at a tag as its own kind of thing. I think that's how I have always wanted to see it. I try to look at a tag as more of a mark in itself. Not really a combination of individual letters but more like a script."



A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N T
O P Q R S
V W X Y Z
S V C D E F G H I
J K L M N O P Q R S
T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

① "I think that evolved pretty slowly. I think in the beginning, when I was tagging, it was always just sort of emulating other things that I had seen, and then the more that I wrote [the more opinionated I became]. The only thing was, that when I was tagging I would have a pretty fluid style, but I remember that from back in the day just trying to be sort of quick and fluid. I did mix my tag up with writers in different ways. It wasn't always the same. I definitely worked on that. I had a tag for a little while where everything was sort of... all the letters were articulated like that, and I guess at the time I thought it was original."

"New York style was more refined, it had more of a balance to it. I would say it's more functional, probably because it came off the trains. It was nothing too weird. It was creative, but had a certain functionality to it. And I can compare that to one major handstyle movement that came out of Brookline, Massachusetts, and kind of spilled over into Boston—I can say that was kind of started by this guy DRONE. There's some other kids from Brookline High School, they kind of pioneered this like intricate kind of extravagant, kind of fluid style. But it was very unorthodox. Very uniquely Boston."—SR ONE

SR ONE

"From '83 to '87 I would visit New York and then I eventually moved to New York in '88, when I went to school there. So from '83 to '87 I would be visiting there and getting influenced. I would be influenced by stuff on the delivery trucks and also the Brooklyn—Queens Expressway and the Long Island Expressway, like all the crazy throw ups and stuff there, and stuff around Manhattan. It was like a renaissance."

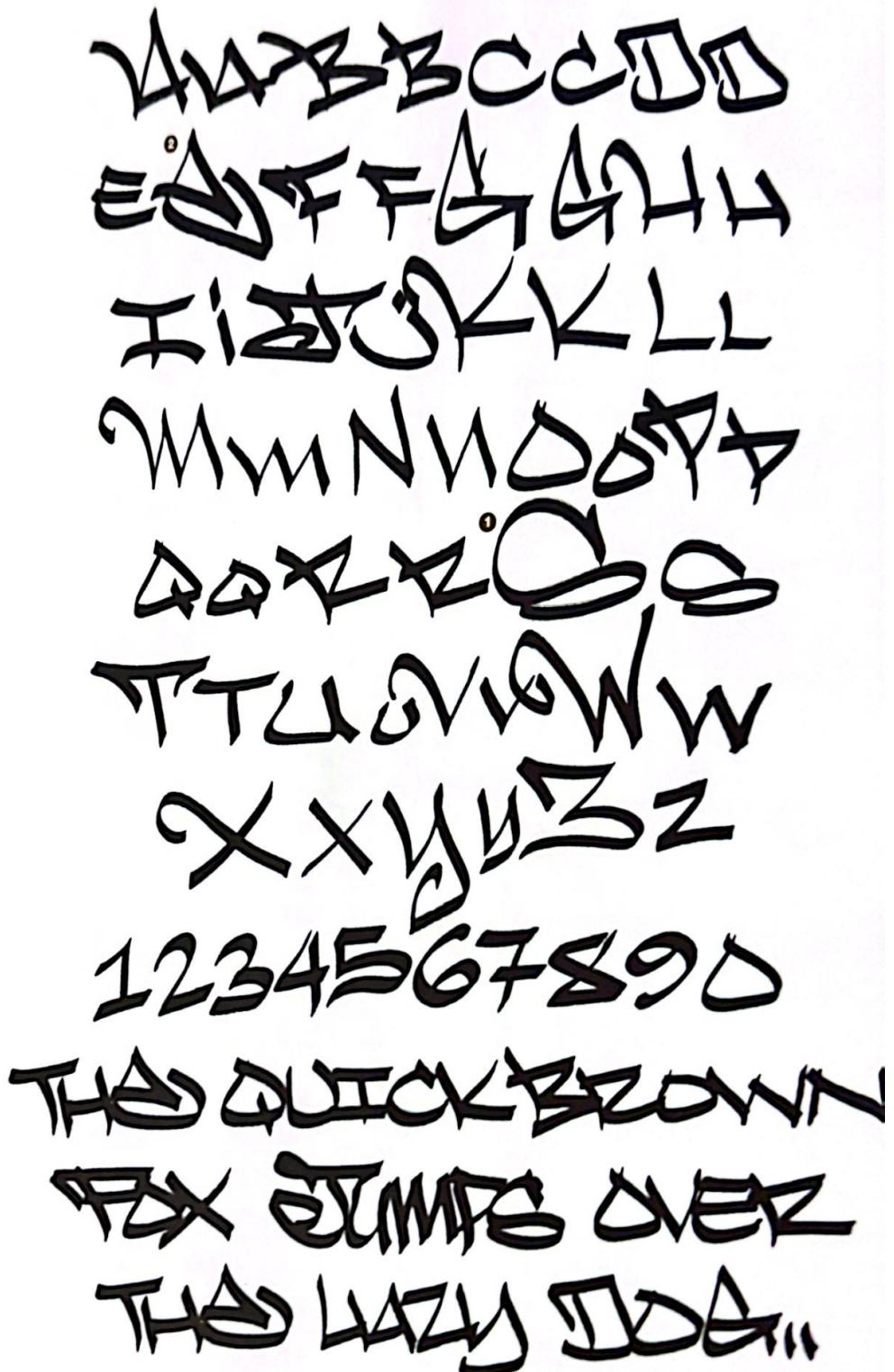


TWIST

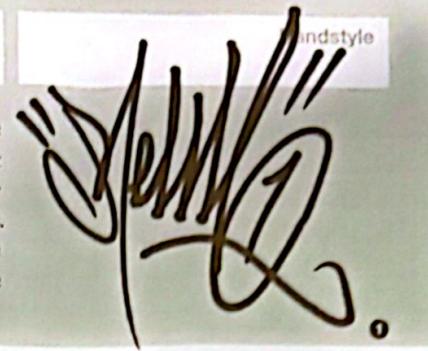
❶ "Around the late 1980s SR ONE's Ss were very stylized. When I went out to San Francisco in '91–'92 I saw TWIST up everywhere and there was that same S. At first I even thought it was SR ONE. It was really weird for me to see something SR ONE was doing around Cambridge and then hyperspace out to S.F. and see it in TWIST's tags, amongst many other S.F. writers who were not writing like that. I felt like the only person on earth who could possibly see the connection. Then I found out they had been roommates."—RYZE

"TWIST and I were roommates in S.F. (circa 1989). On one occasion, I came back home after being out of town to discover that he had raided my red Marsh ink supply when I saw a bus stop totally mop tagged up. Fast forward: RYZE told me in passing in 1996 that I really influenced TWIST's handstyle, but I didn't think much of it [until] I picked up the book *Mascots and Mugs* (by REAS & CHINO) and TWIST is quoted saying 'SR from Boston and KR from NY' influenced him a lot. I was flattered to find out it's actually true."

❷ "I think it was just what I was exposed to; it just influenced me a lot. It was almost like a martial art. Like, there's many different styles and, somehow, I just adhered more closely to the New York stuff. Even nowadays, I have an E that's just, like, triangular. Not many people are doing that nowadays, but I think that's a pretty New York thing."



"Early on, I would say Lynn was really influenced by writers from Pittsburgh, who in turn were really inspired by writers from Philadelphia. It was a sort of weird, mixed hybrid of writers that influenced Lynn. But it definitely had a whole different flavor than Boston, without a doubt. My particular handstyle wasn't really so much influenced by Boston writers as it was specific writers. TEMP, HATE, RIVAL, SEAZE—these guys all had an early influence on my handstyle. Before that, you had Boston writers doing their thing. But these guys around us day-to-day were more of an influence for sure."



A B C D E F G H I J K

"This particular style is a bit of a hybrid. It hasn't changed much [since '93], except for maybe a few twists and turns. For the most part, the bulk of what is here is the style I was doing back in '93."

L M N O P Q R S

"I can remember back in the late 1980s and early 1990s you had a lot of people who were doing a lean back style, and we used to lean the whole tag back to the left. And usually the letters would start small and end big."

P Q V W X Y Z a b c

❶ "As far as leaning to the right, that is probably something I developed more through doing cursive lettering or hand lettering for commercial [sign painting] jobs."

❷ f g h i j k l m n o

❷ "The Y with the dot in the middle—I've been doing that forever. Honestly, I think I picked that up from Baltimore. I got a lot of people in Baltimore. In '92 I went to Baltimore and spent some time with DST Crew and KARROC."

g r s t u v w x y z

"[The lower case] probably comes more from my commercial lettering more than anything. I don't do lower case for the most part. I had a little bit of difficulty with the lower case alphabet. Back when I used to do tattoos, I actually developed a whole uppercase alphabet. Uppercase has always been my thing, for the most part."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

"I had heard that TEMP and HATE were schooled by this dude BUDA who was from Pittsburgh. He's in *Spraycan Art*. They were separated from Boston in an interesting way. I don't know that there's a huge style difference [between Lynn and Boston], but those guys could piece really well."—RYZE



• "That's an alternate S. It swoops down from the top. Instead of that horizontal line being below the curve; it's in the curve. Sort of like hijacking the letter form if you will."

"It's all kind of custom. Everything I do is sort of in the moment. So, if I were to do this again it would probably look completely different. [But, for my tags] I definitely have a certain paradigm, within that there's something different about each one, like the swoops or the doodads. The halos and doodads are always factored in for me. I feel like they're not just floss or decoration; I feel like they have a part, they're sort of like punctuation."

"They have their own little life and personality and work together as a team of characters I guess. They definitely have a relationship to each other. Going back to the tradition—a lot of people make the mistake, when they start, of trying to make it as illegible as possible to kind of hide the fact that they're not that great at it yet. But, at a certain point, I felt the letters communicated more if they were legible and fun with an organic flow and rhythm. All of that personality just comes through time and you connect with the viewer instead of creating a scrawl—that just makes them angry at it."

Circus Music

"ALERT's handstyle practically changed every week. Boston was definitely heavily influenced by New York, but there was a lot of originality there too. ALERT might be the biggest example. He's clearly had a huge influence on the generation that came after us because there are kids up there who still emulate his styles. They tag and piece in his crazy style. At a certain point, he stopped looking at anybody else's stuff and only looked at his own and that's how it happened. When I look at his styles I hear circus music."—RYZE

Hindsight is 20/20

"It's funny, around '91, he had this most awkward style and you can definitely tell that he was trying to do something totally different and totally unique and at the time, it didn't have any flow really. I mean it was fresh. In retrospect it was dope, but at the time when you're active and in it, you're critical of everyone's shit. I didn't like it, to be honest with you. Now, in retrospect, I think it was genius, and ahead of the time because in the late 1990s it seemed like everyone was trying to do awkward letters, tags and throw-ups with like funky dots and shit."—REMOTE

"I started out doing a kind of traditional, scripty style for maybe five years. And then you get to a point where you catch up to the technique and then it's your personality starting to go into the art and the writing and, at that point, it's more signature, if you will. I'm influenced by life—just everything. And looking at a lot of graphic design, back in the '50s, '60s and 1970s. I get a lot of inspiration from life, not necessarily just graffiti."

A B C D E F G
H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T
T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i
j k l m n o p q r s
t u v w x y z
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
The Quick Brown Fox Jumps
Over The Lazy Dog...

"I would come down to New York in the mid 1980s to hang out with my aunt on East 95th Street. I was probably like 13 or 14 and already conscious of, but not informed about, graffiti. Up in that neighborhood I first noticed RD's many silver, fat-cap tags. That's when it sunk in. 'Oh I get it! Every fucking gate on the whole block!' I also remember seeing JOZ and EASY smashing a lot of gates with big fat cap tags. I liked how HEC and SUE always stood out because they hit the highest part of the gate. When I started getting up, I was thinking about all of those guys' techniques."



A B C D E F
G H I J
K L M N O
P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

"I never had any mentor-type writer actually school me. Boston was in a low activity period when I got going so I had to put together bits and pieces of influences from multiple sources. I think that made me part of a generation of writers that relied more on the graffiti magazines and trips to New York. That changed for me when I met ALERT though. He was already getting up a lot when we met. He had a lot of insides on the Red Line that I saw daily. His attitude and approach fit me like a glove."

❶ "I do that Y the most. It just came out of doing that line fast and with a curved start and finish. I actually like this Y better, but I usually just forget to do it by the time I finish the R."

DEFUNCT

DEFUNCT

"Boston has never had a single handstyle that defined it, but DEFUNCT's flat-top tags were unique even within the amorphous families of tags that you could find here. The way I look at them now, they seemed to pull from the mid 1980s Elevated Orange Line guys, add more whips, and then stretch the top out in a single line like a sign in Bengali or Hindi."

—Caleb Neelon

On Some Weird Shit

"Boston is a 'What-are-they-doing-in-New York? kinda town.' And then there's a certain [contrarian] element of like 'yeah, fuck that.' Like DEFUNCT—I don't know where he gets his inspiration from. [Most of us were looking to New York.] He was always on his own weird shit, from the beginning."—RYZE

❶ The I's Have It.

An I converted to an upward pointing arrow is not uncommon in many cities. In contrast, DEFUNCT points his arrow down with a looped point.

❷ N

Note the squiggle, or lightning bolt, in the righthand vertical stroke of the N. You can compare this to the action of many Ns in the Philadelphia chapter.

❸ Diamond Points

Another unique characteristic to this alphabet is the diamond bottom characters on C, E, S and others, but the diamond thought is fully realized in the O and Q.

❹ Starting Strokes

Many characters have a small hook-shaped serif off the upper left side where the motion of the letter form starts.

MONK

MONK came on the scene in Cambridge and Boston at a time when there was an increasing openness to stylistic exploration. Having traveled a bit, and gotten involved in the early freight train scene at a time just predating the explosion of graffiti online, he was able to capitalize on and alter different styles, and change his aesthetic all the time. Coming up right after ALERT made his presence felt, there was an idea that writers could change their tags annually, or seasonally, and MONK took to that inventiveness. ALERT would basically re-brand his tag every year, which signalled a creativity that encouraged younger writers to experiment.



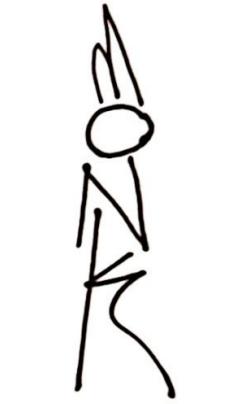
ABCDEFGHIKLM
MNOPQRST
UVWXYZ

OVERDAYS

bcdedegh

REMEMBER

STUVWXYZ...



Character
“MONK has apparently been drawing rabbits since he was a little boy, and he’s always been able to master many styles of lettering from tag to piece. Seeing these walking cat MONK tags made me smile.”—Caleb Neelon

Reatched

"I came up in Brookline and I was writing INK. DRONE and TAME were the two guys who sort of took me under their wing initially. Before I was running with [peers like] MASS and TALE, TAME and DRONE schooled me initially—DRONE on handstyles, and TAME just on painting in general. TAME tried to be different and he was sort of the first wild man in graffiti that I experienced. I just remember watching DRONE doing his handstyles and seeing how it flowed, and that was when [I was] young and into it and, it's like, you look at a shape and you're like, 'Man how did he do that?' Knowing TAME and looking at SR ONE's tags [were my biggest influences]."



Modular Letters

"I think that could be a Boston thing because if you look at ZONE and CLICK, especially if you look at CLICK's tag, and SR ONE as well, all those tags, you can take any one of those letters and you've got a dope shape all on its own."

• "My first Es were most definitely from DRONE and TAME."

"I would think that as far as handstyles go, it would be the squiggly underline—the fadeout, squiggly underline. HANG did it and KRONIC did it. Not so much arrows. To be honest with you, back in the day I didn't use those much."

"I would say he kind of exemplifies a polished kind of Brookline style that spilled into Boston. REMOTE had very well proportioned tags."

—SR ONE

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1234567890

The Zeitgeist E



❶ "In the mid-1980s everyone was doing these Es [best typified by JEST, TAME, FUME and others]. And you would see that in everyone's tag, which is just how trends go, especially if you're new. That's what you know. That's what you're going to use. Once that got old, it was just a choice of bringing it in. There was a light bulb moment, like you found something, and then you start seeing it [on the street]. And that's where I think there is that common sensibility—that it was on all our minds at the same time. I think there are two feelings when you find out you're not the only one. You're like 'Oh, I'm in on it, I'm glad I had that thought as well.' And then the other side of that is nothing is exclusive. It's gonna happen, no matter what."

❷ "That early E, that REMOTE was initially doing, was definitely the stock Boston E. I came later on and never used it, probably because I thought I had to do something different. Now when I see that E it makes me think about stealing my mother's car to go check out graff spots on Sunday mornings, during my solo explorer period, before I met any actual writers."—RYZE

MES Tag Variations



❶ Lower Case with Drop S

❷ Contemporary One-liner

❸ Classic with Upper Case E

❹ Classic Lower Case

❺ Classic with Lower Case E

❻ 1990s Style—Capital M

❼ NY Bastard One-liner

❽ Classic Lower Case, Underlined with Crew

❾ Classic, Arrow with Crew

❿ NY Bastard One-liner

❻ Circled

❽ 1990s NY Bastard Style, Upper Case, Connection E with Lower Case S



"[In elementary school] my art teacher was named Mr. Pendleton, probably around 1st grade in 1985–1986; he showed me *Spray Can Art*, and *Subway Art*. When I think about tagging, I think about the rush. I think about the chill moments, when you have a million years in you—everything, all the doodling that goes into it, that goes into a handstyle. Mr. P started me; because of him, I started looking around my neighborhood and the first tags that I noticed were PRANK, DECEIT, SECRET, SEJ, and BLAME. That was in about 1986. You're lucky to have a guy take the time to show you about something in graffiti. They got handed down to me from what I saw around my neighborhood—not from any one individual but always from what I saw, locally. All these cats coming up now have too much information being flooded into their heads. You don't even have to leave your house to figure it out. You don't have to walk the tracks, or put in the work to find out what's up. I think you should have to have a real ill style and be able to defend your style."

❶ "Where the stroke breaks and the line comes back on the tip—I think that's important in graffiti to have shown where you went with that idea. How the fuck did that dude make that connection? Oh, you see that line kind of goes up like that, and up like that. It's all a fucking sequence, those lines where you show it. They don't take away from the tag at all. Those lines show; they're motion lines."

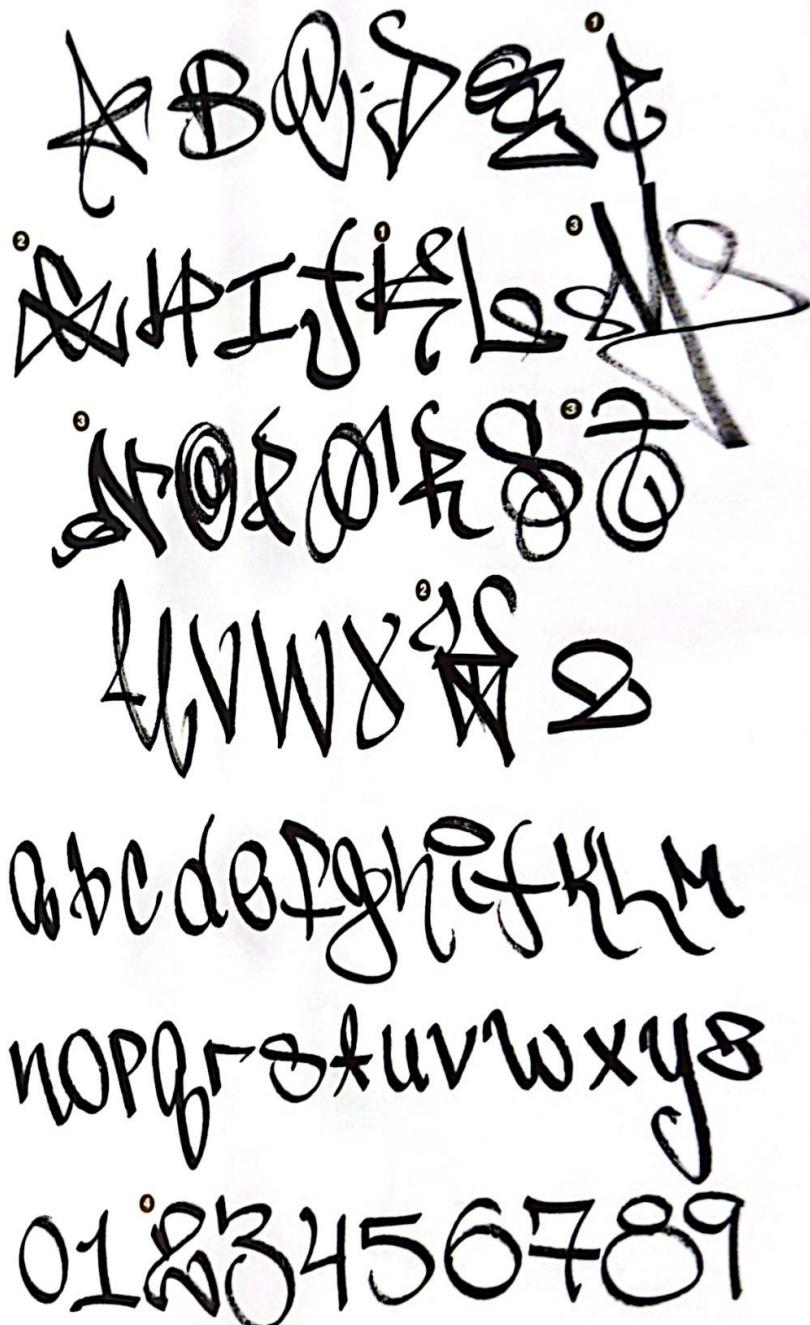
Bow Ties

❷ "I wanted [people to recognize], 'That shit was handed down from CAYPE,' it's kind of like a recognition. This is their thing and you know this guy and that's our thing, so fuck it. Kind of like a connector. Because I knew in New York there's a lot of stuff that's signature. COST's C, RD's R to the D. All funky letters, big, small, chunky, like fucking SOBER. A lot of cats, you know, KEZ, SKUF, it's like cats have to have original alphabets. Or, just the way that they write is tough and you can tell by their strokes. Any idea I come up with, [if] you're down with me, it's yours too."

❸ "Sometimes a stroke is like a 'think stroke,' it might be slower in your tag, but in your mind... I try to figure it out. My mind knows exactly what the fuck it's doing. I don't know what my mind's thinking though. When I go up to a wall, it comes out tight and I fucking rock it and rock it with 100% confidence."

"Little things change things amazingly. Like that little bowtie might turn into something else. Little variations—it's just all evolution. And the real shit, the real tags, can be like knowing where that shit came from, knowing where their tags come from. Knowing the people that fucking designed it, why they did it, how they did it. This is what was cool when I was growing up. I looked up to this guy, COAST. You know, influences on my style were all those early 1990s writers. All OD crew."

❹ "That 2 is from TUMER. Props to TUMER for holding me down financially when I was in New York. And that 2 looks like his 2. That's why RFC."



"The first markers I got my hands on were in 1990, but I didn't know what I was doing, up until around '95, when I really started painting and [got into] the whole history thing. And a lot of guys that I grew up looking at had stopped. RYZE and ALERT lived near me, so I would see a lot of their stuff. [I was influenced by] them and SP. [By the mid 1990s] ALERT and RYZE had taken off. So, after that I hooked up with CAYPE, and some other guys. It kind of took off from there."



A B C D E F G H I J

K L M N O P Q R

S T U V W X Y Z

g h c d Ø S g h p

Ø K I M N O P Q O

Ø E T U V W X Y Z

* @ # ? 0 . Ø

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ..

❶ "That lowercase E, I think I started doing that in '96 and, basically, I think it was around the time TWIST was in town and linked up with RYZE and ALERT, and kind of dropped the bomb all over the place. I had been kind of fooling around with another S that had a long bar at the top with a swoop, and used the fat cap to kind of flair it, and I wanted to stop doing that, for whatever reason back then, and I started to do those lowercase Es that swirled in. Basically, if anything, that came from TWIST and RYZE because my neighborhood was saturated with that, and I was probably 16, anywhere between 16 to 18 years old so I just jumped on it. Basically, I've been doing that lowercase E since then. So, if it came from anywhere, it was from TWIST and RYZE. TWIST had a show one year in '95. RYZE and ALERT did a lot of damage in my neighborhood."

❷ Starting Stroke

"The first one I saw do that [was] ERACE. He would do that extension bar in his E and in his C. Then connecting the dots, years later I would see RYZE doing that with his Z. SR would do that as well, looking back, and then a lot of New York guys. As far as who did it first, I have no idea. If anything, what I get out of it is speed. It's just something that I've been doing for years. [I can't really] pinpoint it. It's just something that I saw really early on. It just kind of flows, it's like a habit now. At certain times it just feels right."

❸ "With those big tops—that lowercase A—I have seen kids in Boston doing [that]. ALERT was doing that A back in '89, I probably picked up on that. There were other kids who were up here, within the crew that I was in from Cambridge, like CAL TWO, who did that A. If there was anyone it was him—I just screwed around with it. Getting into the internet, books—looking back I can see the whole Broadway influence [From New York]. Eventually, you figure out where it really came from, [but at the time] it was mostly from people in my neighborhood."



"The main educator in my career was CAYPE. He was the one who really put me on and he really knew where a lot of things came from. He was an older dude and he was really able to connect me with a lot of people who I had always seen. We went on a bunch of graffiti history missions, flicking things. He'd point out the old school writers I was interested in learning about. And he broke them down by neighborhood, and by style, small to big; that traditional Boston whip style, like if you've ever seen anybody tattooing, they have that fade out at the end of the line. That's what I came to appreciate in Boston's styles, where it's all in the wrist."



ABCDEFHJKL

JKLMNOFG

PQRSTUVWXYZ

ghcdeFG

RPJSKLMR

OOPQRSTU

WXYBZ

❶ "My favorite tool that Boston writers used back in the day—and still use today—is what we called the 'banana marker,' the little Pentel Whites. They smell like bananas. In my tags you can see the pressure is all applied at the top of the stroke of the letters. And then when you come down, it's all about just whipping it out. It gets a little tapered at the end. It's all about speed, more flavor, more directionality."

❷ "It's all about maintaining a straight wrist, when you are doing the handstyle, and using the motion of your shoulder to whip the letters around; where the M is two straight bars, and then you would have the whip on both ends of the bars connecting with the u-bend."

❸ "It's all about speed and direction. Maintaining the directionality, the flow of the letters. When you end like that it's an extension of the whip, creating that boot."

"Most of the Boston handstyles have a backward lean, and I guess that all came from the train writers in the 1980s."

HORNS

Boston | 2005 – 2010s

"I hung out with CAYPE a lot, walking through the neighborhood, looking at tags, picking out what's good and what's bad. Over the years you decide, I won't do this because too many people do it, or, I'll use this because not a lot of people do it—just picking things up in the neighborhood. REMOTE, PRANK, SECRET—seeing things they did back then that aren't done today. Take something that you like in the letter and then add [to it]. There's only so many ways you can change a letter."

Handstyle



1 Script vs. Print

"I have a classic sensibility, like Edwardian text, because I've done tattoos, so [it's influenced by] basic script, with a little bit of style added to it. But the handstyles that I do admire [from Boston] are CAYPE, ALONE, VAULT, LOST, ALERT. They all have really good styles. Pretty much all of OD Crew. They're the innovators of spaced-out legible letters in Boston."

2 OD Crew

"You can take any of their letters—and it could be the first letter, the middle letter, or the last letter—any way it would be perfect. Every letter has so much style in it. It doesn't matter which way it flows, it's just the aesthetic of the letters."

3 Swoops & Swirls

"CAYPE does the bow tie and the heart. Mine was just the carry around, over and under, like underlining your script."

4 "That nautical T is definitely a thing I thought of though."

Some [of my] letters have many variations and some have few. I like the anchor T the most because it's on something else along with the umbrella R. 'Rainy days and watery graves.'"

"Boston's a lot angrier than any other city. I've always liked Boston handstyles because they're a little bit more fierce. They look fun but not friendly. That's what I like about Boston handstyles."



"A lot of people were doing stuff that was really indicative of this area, like Es that looked like backwards 3s or Rs that had a particular swirl in the middle of them and then a kick down the back. It seems like with time, and how graffiti changed with the internet and all that stuff, a lot of the local flavor and style was lost. I can still do tags with a bit of a Providence flavor to them but I just don't. My style is more indicative of classic graffiti writing. But Providence did have a really cool handstyle, with guys like BESTER, CRICK, EMIT, BLAMER, and TROOP. A lot of that is lost. The late 1990s was the tail-end of seeing some of that stuff. It seems like it's just been lost. It missed a generation. As the times changed, and the internet evolved, kids had other stuff to look at. So, their influences came from other places, from work that they liked or admired. So, I think that changed the face of the handstyles in Providence because writers weren't looking at what they were seeing in the streets. And now with kids like me, or SLOE, and SEAZ in the streets, it's a different type of style and it's not really indicative of Providence. If they are going to emulate something they are going to emulate that, and it kind of loses all touch with all the old stuff."

"I went to school in Boston. If I was catching any influence back then that I might have carried to now, it would be that guy, ALERT. I really wasn't getting anything from anybody in Boston except for him. He was by far the dopest dude around."

"It's less architecture and just more flow. Like, how can I do this the quickest."

❶ Rock, Paper, Scissor

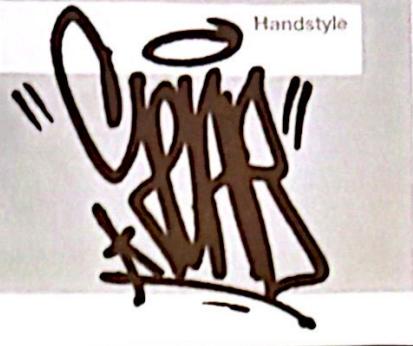
"[I was] messing around with the E on paper one day. I kind of do that because it's just one stroke and I can connect it to the O, because I usually write ROCK after my name and my C and my K are one stroke. I do an E with a top like that, and I come up from the bottom—anything that can limit the amount of times I have to lift my hand."

❷ Give 'Em 'L'.

"That's a serif. It's definitely not upside down. [It is a lower case 'l'] There's no bar on the bottom because I think it would look goofier, like a shitty Z. I think it's funny that people would think that it's an upside down L. I just do that because I've never seen anybody else do it. It's kind of hypocritical to do it in a tag, and I've always done it, [but generally] I never mix lowercases with uppercases in anything that I write. It just offends me. I don't mind when other people do it, but [normally] I just can't do it."



"When it came to catching a tag it would almost be like a signature—like how you write your name on a day to day basis. [With] graff, you kind of have an accent or flair to it, but when it came to writing anything else, whether it be crew or quotes or anything else, I think it looked better just to keep it standard, not too stylized—something people can pick up on and read. It was sort of weird when I was asked about the alphabet, because I didn't feel like there was something really [unique]. I kept it more clean and straight forward."

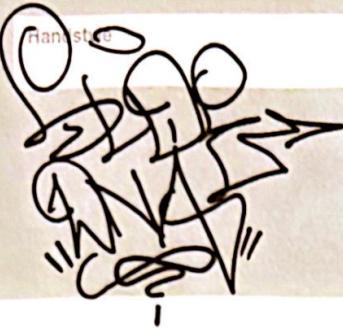


ABCDEFQ
HIJKLM
NOPQRS
TUVWXYZ
abcdefq
hiijklmn
opqrstuvwxyz

"Things have changed in the 15 years since I got into it. Right now, as far as influences it's pretty diverse. I don't think there's anything that I can say is distinctly Rhode Island. I think early on when I got into it, in the early to mid 1990s, there were some distinctions as far as some of the handstyles you wouldn't really see outside of that area. But it didn't become like a big thing, let's say like in Philly, how it carried on. Some people had influence. I think there was a lot of influence from people coming from other places."

"I'm left handed, which is actually a little bit unique because my handwriting, whether it's with a pen, or a marker, or brush or whatever, is all usually done left handed but anything that's done with spray paint I've always done with my right hand. So I kind of have this weird—it's almost like a double thing—where it's hard to stay consistent because if I try to learn a tag one way and then I try to go with the other hand... It's kind of strange that way, but as far as handwriting, it's always been left handed."

"Early on, I think there were some basic interests or influences. I took in stuff, and a couple years into it you travel and there's so much [more] to take in. You lend yourself to one thing. I'm kind of trying to pull from many different places. In the last few years, I have definitely slowed down. I don't write as much as I used to and when I do, I prefer to go for more straightforward, bold lettering."



SLOE

Providence, RI | 2000–2010s

"I think that very early on one of the first people to really get me heavily into graffiti was a writer by the name of USE, from Pawtucket. He was a really imaginative guy. He would always paint with all these really crazy styles, and I think that stuck with me. There's never been an incredibly strong, local style, but there's an aesthetic and I think it's been lost. I think that I more ran with his playfulness, or inventive nature, than creating letters like that."

"Around the early to mid 1990s a lot of New Bedford kids were being influenced by Boston and they were painting up there a bit. There was a lot of that 'no-neg' stuff going on [pieces without negative space] and kind of the very loopy—I call them swooping—tags, where they are just softer and they have large interior loops, that made their way down here. I think that style has always been pretty close, or what we've associated ourselves with closely. But I think that there was something different that kind of happened here at some point. There was an existing style but I don't really know what happened to it."



❶ Wavy Bottoms

"That's something that has kind of come along recently. Mostly by accident and partly by intention. You see people doing that almost calligraphic underline."



"You have those calligraphic underlines, say a cursive Y and you will loop back under it and it has that back and forth flowing quality to it. It lends balance in that way, and you can do them that way in a number 1. Add them to the underside of the Y and it's kind of in that too, and making the S a little bit more anchored and giving it a tooth. Kind of like a spike to hang on. I just kind of started adding that to some of the letters and it does create that wave quality, and it is also kind of a claw, or anchor, holding that first letter in. It sort of has that forward right motion. It's something that I saw—I'd say it came from the Pixação stuff (Brazilian graffiti)—when it started to be a bit more publicised. And I started noticing that. I think OS GEMEOS did it a lot and some of the THR guys, Bay Area guys, picked up on it. I don't really know where it went from there."



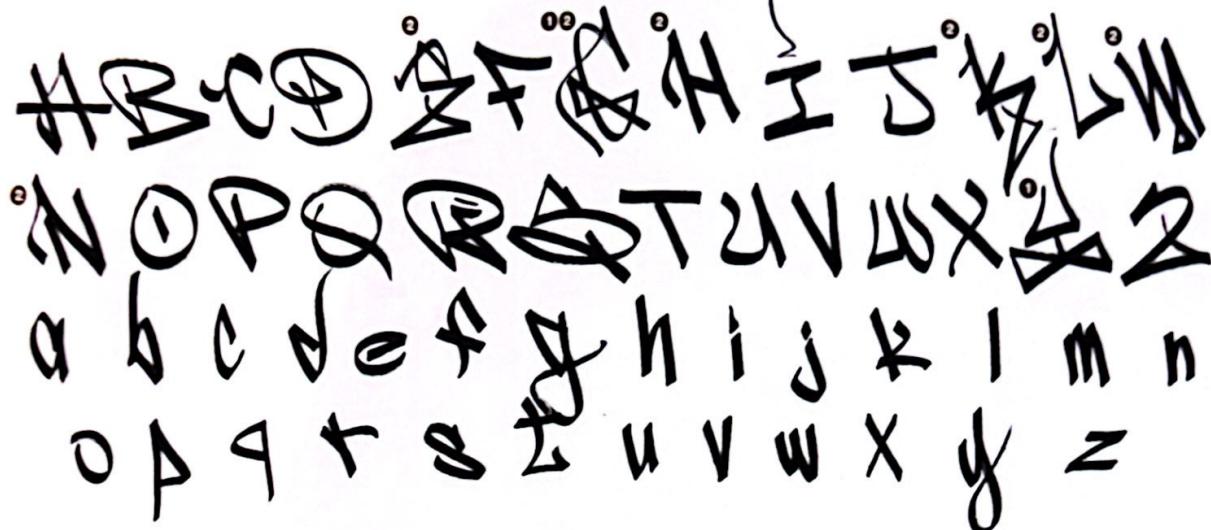
GYER

Boston | 2004 – 2010s

Handstyle

❶ "That [bow-tie stroke is] from Boston—that dude CAYPE actually. He was a big influence of mine—real cool guy. He's a clever motherfucker and he kicks styles to all his boys and his crew. I don't like biting other people but I take other influences from my friends."

❷ "[That serif is] just with uppercase letters. Often times, the first letter you are starting with, you can pull it up. On the last letter, you know, it's pretty typical to kick off on some wild shit and then an arrow would come off, so on the first letter I try to balance that out with a nice flourish."



HUNCH

Providence, RI | Mid 2000s – 2010s

Handstyle

"My style definitely has more humor. I basically try to make each letter have its own character. Yeah, just straight up humor for the most part, and fun. Simple enough that I can improvise and get loose is the idea. I think I've been privileged with, you know, sort of a different generation. At first I played it safe for a while, and definitely had a tougher style, and especially painting pieces and simples I tried to keep it more rugged. But as I've met older guys, and have sort of networked, I feel like I've gained the privilege to sort of do whatever I want."







Bay Area & Northwest

San Francisco has three styles of graffiti: a gang or Cholo style from as early as the 1970s; a New York style imported during the '80s boom of break-dancing; and a homegrown style known as one-flows, or bus-hop. It seems that while all Bay Area writers are familiar with each other's work, the scenes and practices have largely been seen as separate but coexisting activities. DUG ONE describes it:

"In a nutshell, [that one-flow style] started with SLIM and SLIME, and then BISARO, from our crew, who kind of picked it up later on. He would abbreviate his name in a one-flow to BZR. And early on he was in our crew. Right around the time of TMF Crew going for theirs, he had hooked up with a lot of other really younger kids of the city. That was starting maybe '85, and then by '86 it started to spread out to other kids. And then it was also around the same time DAZZLE and ZINC started getting up a lot of one-flow styles... kind of signature styles. From there it started really spreading (by '87-'88) to a lot of notably younger kids. And it's really funny that people think of that as the San Francisco style, because even among the guys who started it, it was always regarded as kind of a toy style. Never as something for people to look at [with pride] like, this is our shit. San Francisco. The better writers thought that was just for the toy kids who wrote on buses. Which is funny, because we thought it came from our crew and our surroundings, but they picked it up and ran with it."

Bay Area & Northwest Handstyles

The One-Flow style suggests that it was meant to be executed almost blindly. It was common practice to sit in a car, even locked in the driver's rearview mirror, while catching tags on the seat backs below. Influenced by the taghanger phenomena in L.A., kids grew more brazen and gangs of kids in the Mission would ride BMX bikes up to a bus if traffic is broad daylight. They'd block the buses, or as some of the older writers go, actually knock the trailer armatures off the power grid. While one person obstructed the buses in traffic a slew of others would tag the exterior frame, backs and sides as far as they could. In broad sweeping motions they would tag exterior panels of the bus. WERL deserved that being on bikes made for quick getaway, but while straddling a bike, you are unable to be as free-moving in the *mode of the action*. This forced writers to lean to the extremes in order to maximize coverage. This can cause your letters to stretch, haste can cause your letters to lean, and your pen tends to flare as it reaches past its sweet spot. No matter the origin, the style persists to this day. One-flows are now the established and indigenous style, but there are also a fair number of writers influenced by Cholo and East Coast styles as well. North East styles were brought West by New York and Boston writers, to mature with writers like SP1F, TWIST or AMAZE, and become the standard for younger writers to emulate.

In the early 1990s, SECT 949 moved home to Marin County after a stint in the Seattle suburbs. Between the BTM crew traveling down from Seattle to visit, and Bay Area writers like AMAZE, ORFN, BISEE and the US crew going up north in the summers, the one-liners made their way north to Seattle. The Seattle writers took to the influence of one-liner graffiti styles in a way that surprised their Bay Area friends. BISEE breaks it down:

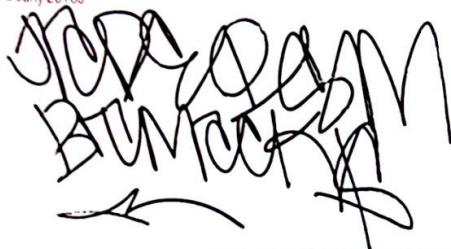
"The Seattle guys seemed to have more of an appreciation for one-flows from an aesthetic perspective. I was like 'Really? You like what I consider to be our wackiest shit?' In hindsight, I can appreciate it for what it is. But if WERL doesn't exist that [transfer of style to Seattle] doesn't happen. The only other connection was SECT. But SECT was real concerned with trying to be original with his tags. He had influence, as people would hire the things that worked and caught on, but he wouldn't have been one to really push that bus-hopper style anywhere like WERL did."

Bay Area & Northwest Handstyles

TWIST—San Francisco
Circa mid 1990s



JADE—San Francisco
Circa early 2010s



AMAZE—San Francisco
Circa early 2000s



SMOKER—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



GREY—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



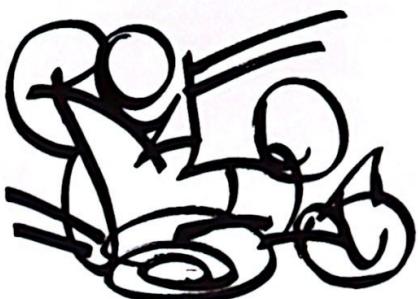
DREAM—San Francisco
Circa early 1990s



AMAZE—San Francisco
Circa late 1990s



REYES—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



Bay Area & Northwest Handstyles

JOR ONE—San Francisco
Circa 2005



KERSE—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



ASKOT—San Francisco
Circa early 2010s



KELN (REPRODUCED BY WERL)—San Francisco
Circa late 1990s



GREY—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



ADEK—Seattle
Circa early 2010s



HONKE—Seattle
Circa early 2010s



KELN (REPRODUCED BY WERL)—San Francisco
Circa late 1990s



ADEK—Seattle
Circa early 2010s



SOBER (REPRODUCED BY WERL)—San Francisco
Circa late 1990s



MKUE (MQ)—San Francisco via New York
Circa late 2000s



SNORE—San Francisco
Circa late 1990s

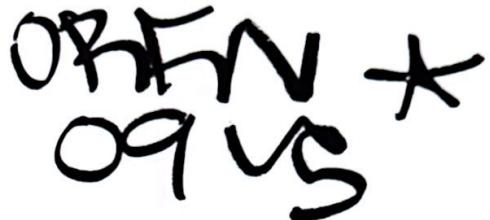


Bay Area & Northwest Handstyles

SECT—San Francisco
Circa 2010s



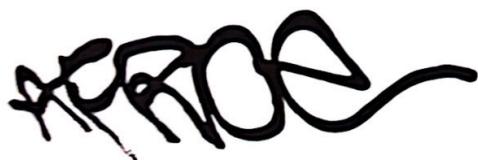
ORFN—San Francisco
Circa 2009



WERLONEROCK—Seattle
Circa mid 1990s



AFROD—San Francisco
Circa 2010



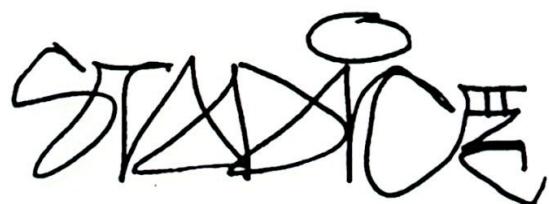
REYES—San Francisco
Circa late 2000s



SECT (REPRODUCED BY WERL)—San Francisco
Circa mid 1990s



STADIC (REPRODUCED BY WERL)—San Francisco
Circa mid 1990s

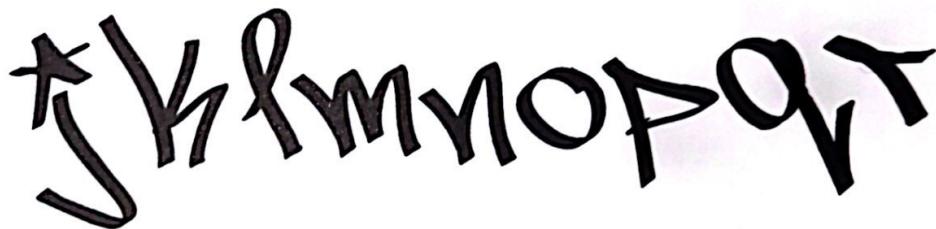




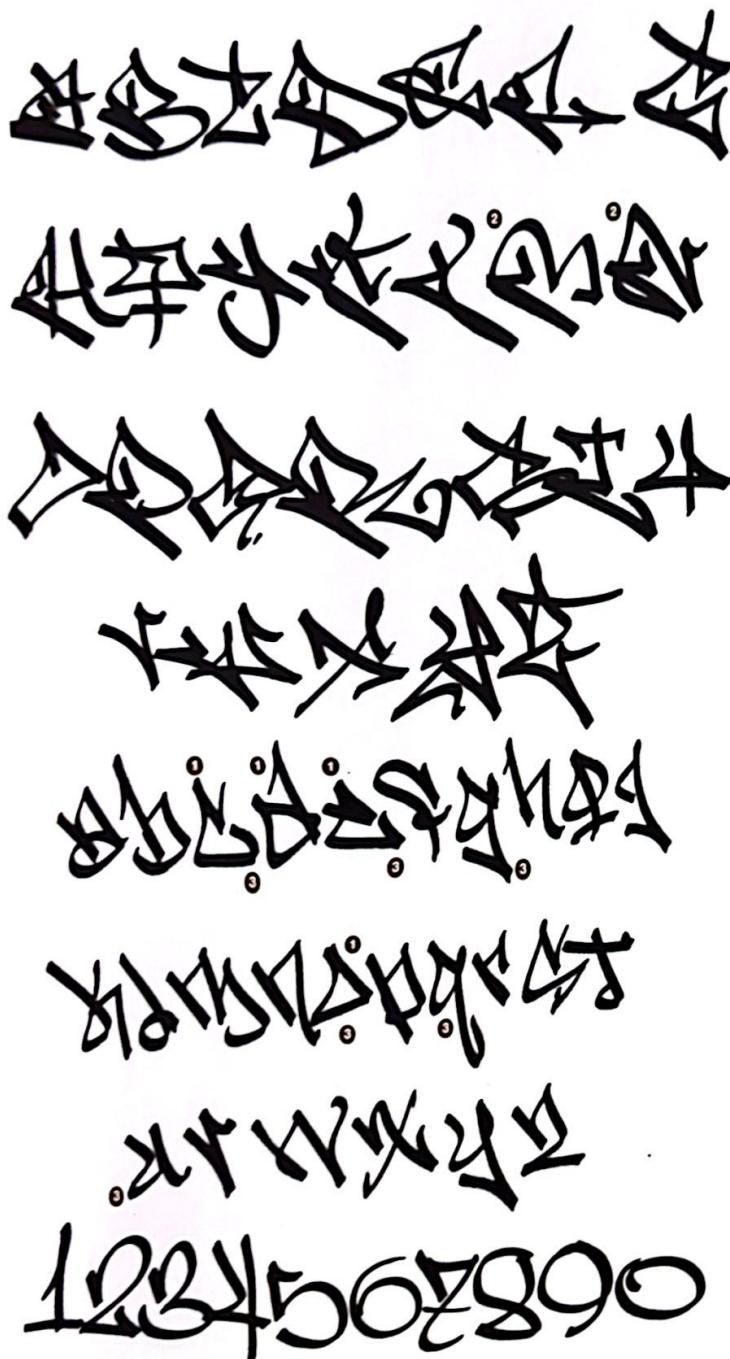
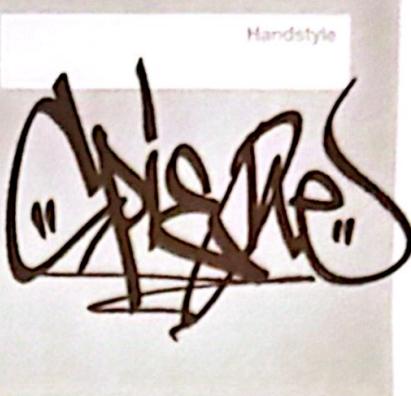
"People have always written with that chisel tip style, from the beginning of graffiti coming to the West Coast. In some respect, we were always trying to decipher what was going on in New York, from that West Coast understanding. There was no internet, and it was before magazines. It was just glimpses and then *Subway Art* came out. As a lot more information became available people started seeing what was up in New York, and the rest of the world. In a weird way, so many things kind of became standardized. Everybody has their own style but some things became very similar across the board."








[Regarding the styles of bus-hop and street level], it was two different movements. There are different eras, and people talk about the bus-hopping movement of the 1980s, up to about '89, '90. And after that it was still happening, but there was a different transition going on as far as the scene. I like to attribute it to the general societal, cultural thing that was happening all around with hip hop, where there was a commodification of music in '90, '91. It was a real changing point. In '92, '93, the underground started coming back. You had underground rap and dance crews coming back, graff went along with that. I was still pushing during those years, but I saw a lot of folks that I was bus-hopping with step out of the game and get into other stuff. [The] interworkings of social groups weren't there anymore, like they were in the 1980s."



"[With the rise of] more street bombing that style really was much more [influential] around '93. After the yards were taken away from [bus writers], writers started hitting the streets. There was more emphasis on it."

① “A lot of the time my stuff looks real spiky. But then I also like some long lines and legs, and I think that comes from a lot of different influences. I’m down with FC now (a Bronx, NYC based crew). And I would learn about the long letter bar-style of FLITE and how he would do his pieces. WEST’s stuff comes to mind, and I guess subconsciously that goes back into my lettering.”

"I also attribute it to just straight heritage of the people. It goes back to Mayan and Aztec glyphs carved out of stone. They're very blocky, very definite, chunky, spaced out—very intentional. It's a trip that our writing would look like some of that old Meso-American stuff. When I went to Mexico City and saw all that stuff in the museums or at the pyramids—look at some of the characters in the glyphs—it just made me want to start popping and locking. The lines made my body start to contort and tic. And it translates to the writing itself too."

② The Swooping M & N

"That particular letter form is really something that I just made up that day. If you asked me to recreate it, I probably couldn't. I'd probably just invent something else. I don't like to stay stagnant— in one place. I try to mix it up. My style still comes out in whatever I do, but it's still my intent to make something challenging for myself and try something new all the time. My influences come from so many different places. I'm not limiting myself to just one way something is done."

③ The Lower Case Teardrop

"When I think of that particular form—the E, O, or the C, I think of the letter O most because of *Subway Art* and that one piece by POEM and understanding train writing and 'window-downs,' with droopy letters."



"More than originality, these [bus-hopper] kids want to get it 'right' in that context, whether there is any right or wrong. That's the thing—it's such a weird style, because it just morphs. The older dudes were doing a more fancy, elegant, more TWIST-based kind of hand; they were working more towards that—a fine hand. And TEMPT was definitely a key player in that whole [chisel-tipped handstyle]. And it might have been that dude COSM, he might have played into that a bit too, and then there was SOEL from New York who was out in S.F. for a while too."

❶ Southpaw Lean

"A lot of it was done with *Ultra-Italides*, which kind of get credit for the left-lean slant. In order to get it to look right, you've got to hold it at a slant. So, I think that's where that came from and then it flared further. Ultras were the main tool that everybody used, and then streakers, and then eventually fat caps, and then the style morphed with fat cap flares around the mid '90s."

❷ New York Influence

First seen widely in S.F. by TWIST. RENOS says, "It's got that OE, E (pg 135). A different shape to it, but that same concept. With the big center 'nose.' The curly tip and the big center nose."

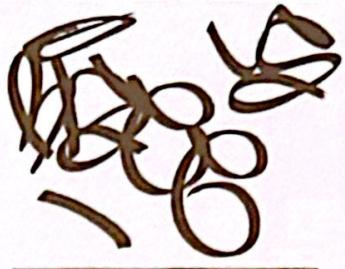
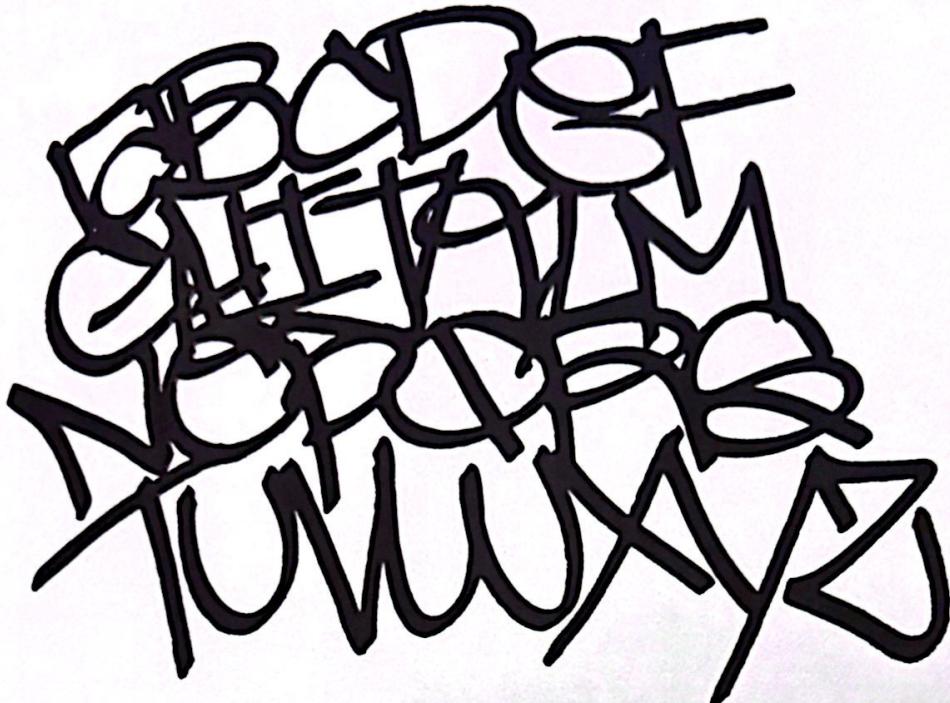
"We kind of got an inside track on [one-flow styles], because there was this dude ATAK, who was in a kind of juvy-school, and there was a kid from the city in there with him and he used to come home with these sketches. I was doing my interpretation of biting from what I saw in the city and in my neighborhood, and then me and a dozen other dudes in the neighborhood—we were little kids, but we did our hybrid interpretation of it."

Prehistory

"RENOs was one of the forefathers of this other South Bay style that is more in the bus-hopper genre. He used to write another name in the late '80s and influenced this whole generation of kids on the Peninsula, but then he got better and kind of left that style behind. It influenced a subsequent generation that then had a huge influence on me and AMAZE. A lot of that started with RENOS."—BISEE



BISEE Bus-hop/One-Flow, 1991



"Bus-hop (or one-flows) are inherently about functionality and knocking it out really quick, but there's a lot of it, too, that wasn't connected. For instance, I wouldn't connect my Ss because I didn't like crossing out the S. A lot of people would do that for the sake of connecting but I thought it looked wack so I would never do it. But a lot of times people would create tags based on what was an easy one-flow. Your last pen-point is a point of reference for your next letter."

BISEE "Standard" Chisel Tip, Late 1990s



"In graff culture, you can't be a biter, but then you have to stay within certain style constraints in order to stay cool. It's kind of hypocritical. Sitting around, writing in blackbooks, it was very rare that we came up with our own stuff—we were all just trying to get good. And the aesthetic that appealed to people the most was the TWIST (pgs 164, 183) aesthetic; so, as we span time you see people evolving to that form more, evolving away from stuff with more originality."

"This style isn't dependent on it, but I really prefer to write with a chisel."



"Throughout a good portion of my career I feel my handstyle was appropriate enough to hit up anyone and make it look good. It's kinda like a tradition in graffiti if you are out with someone you know, if you climb up a trestle you kind of hit everyone up. You gotta make it look good. I'm not one of those guys that has a logo, but when you ask them to do a roll call they freeze up and don't know what to do... I'm pretty comfortable in my ability to hit up whoever and make it look good. I feel like there is a difference between drawing a tag and tagging. I think that's the biggest flaw in tagging: when people draw their tag instead of actually developing a flow; they take a piecing style approach to their handwriting and to their tags, and it just leads to bad form."

GREY Style A

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789*#@+=,.

GREY Style B

GREY Style B

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789*#@+=,.

GREY Style C

ABC Ø =
=FGH I J=
M N Ø Ø
P Ø R G T
U V W X Ø C

=GREY=

=PVE

"TWIST (pg 183) was the go-to man for me in S.F. as far as getting hip to what was up. He had roughly a decade on most of us, as far as writing and life experience. I've always just luckily linked up with good people. GESO was only 15 and he was all-city in S.F. and just killing it. I took my first take at the city at the same time."

"TEMPT (pgs 164, 183) came up to S.F. from L.A. and I think he had a pretty good influence on TWIST's hand. WEST's tags also had a big influence. KR came out and brought a lot of New York stuff to the Bay but he pretty much just wrote his name, and when he hit someone else up it was pretty much just like [normal] writing. He didn't really bring that Brooklyn slanted back style that I would say TC5 kinda had or some of the FBA guys had; he didn't really bring that. SP ONE - I don't know if he came to S.F., but he had a HUGE influence on me and my stuff just from seeing it in magazines, and flicks, and books and folk lore. I would say the main people that I kind of sculpted my style from were TWIST, SP, TEMPT, WEST, and my boy AGREE AOK who passed away."

GREY Style D

ABC Ø =
=FGH I J=
M N Ø Ø
P Ø R G T
U V W X Ø C

GREMIO
=DOM=

"What a lot of people don't know is I was brought up [pre-graffiti] on Cholo graff, because that's all I saw when I lived in New Mexico, in high school. When I learned how to write, at first I was mimicking what I saw. I wasn't in any gangs or anything; I was just kind of drawn to it."

"Most of [that style is] L.A. and then that migrated itself to New Mexico. Northern California doesn't have a whole lot of gangster tags, but spending time in L.A. I took a lot of photos of freeways, and in gang neighborhoods, and just studied a lot of that stuff. I like the fact that their alphabets are pretty strict. With the graff alphabet it's harder to write the whole alphabet without connecting it."

АВСДЕГБИҲНҶНЛМИ
ДРДҶЯЛШИҲХУЭ
#1123456789

NUMBERS-USUALLY ROMAN="XIV" DOUBLE ALPHABET-NO UPPER & LOWER.

GREY Style F

"The square styles have a lot to do with scribing, like in jail, scribing into metal. You have to go one way or the other; there isn't a whole lot of room for curves. That has a lot to do with it."

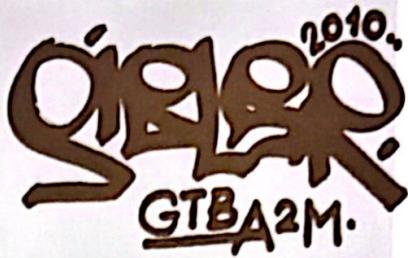
ΑΒΓΔΕΖΕΡΑΝΤΙΠ
ΚΖΜΗΔΔΕΖΕ
≡Δ Δ Δ Δ Δ Δ =

SIBLER

San Francisco | 1993–2010s

Handstyle

"S.F. was like a big bowl of soup. We'd get a lot of stuff from all over the place, especially when *Psycho City* was around. You could go there and paint legally. I'd meet people from Germany there. I remember seeing LOOMIT paint there. You'd see all this stuff coming together right there in downtown S.F. So yeah, you'd have the bus-hopper style and then the New York style was definitely there and the Boston handstyle came through, and then the DC guys came through. So it was a really exciting time to be in San Francisco. I'm glad—I was very young, but I took a lot of pictures and I had it well documented. When I saw DOMS that pretty much blew my mind, as far as what that guy could do. DOMS and RYZE came through and wrecked this area, a lot of East Coasters would come through. There was a Boston connection, and a DC connection with FELON and SMK."

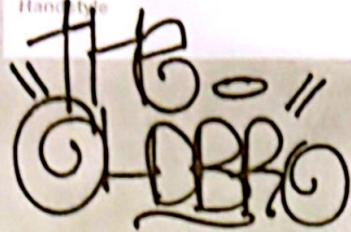


"I was definitely into the one-flows and the bus-hopper stuff 'til about the year 2000. Then, when I started to piece I started to change up the handstyles a little bit too. It's not like a bus-hopper or necessarily a quick tag."

"I just wanted to boil down my alphabet into just simple circles, lines and squares and just really boil it to its simplicity. I like the interlocking rings. I think they have a decent flow to them, just trying to get down to the bare bones."

"Within the negative space where the letters meet, there's additional form, like a collision where the two circles form a tinier oval, and then I'm more into the negative space of things, where I can fit things into those circles, like sayings or years."

"It's influenced by what's going on today but I definitely try to give it a little bit of an individual touch. It's part graff, but it's also just getting more into calligraphy and whatnot."



OLD BRO

San Francisco | 2006 – 2010s

"I grew up on both coasts, in Brooklyn and S.F., with more of an S.F. influence. I got into writing, more street-bombing stuff, I'd say: BTW Crew, 3A. READ MORE was a huge influence. That guy is awesome. I'm also influenced just by typography and graphic designers, Hoefler and Frere-Jones, and Chris Ware. ESPO is another huge influence."

"I take each tag letter by letter. I don't really think about it as, like, a complete tag with different letters connecting. I try to make each letter as fun to draw as possible and as quick as possible. I can combine them and it also means if I'm doing a tag on the street I can do a couple letters and stop if someone is coming by and continue again, instead of being in the middle of some big flourish and it looks bad after that."

A B C D E F G
 H I J K L M
 N O P Q R S T
 L V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g
 h i j k l m n o p
 q r s t u v w x y z
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

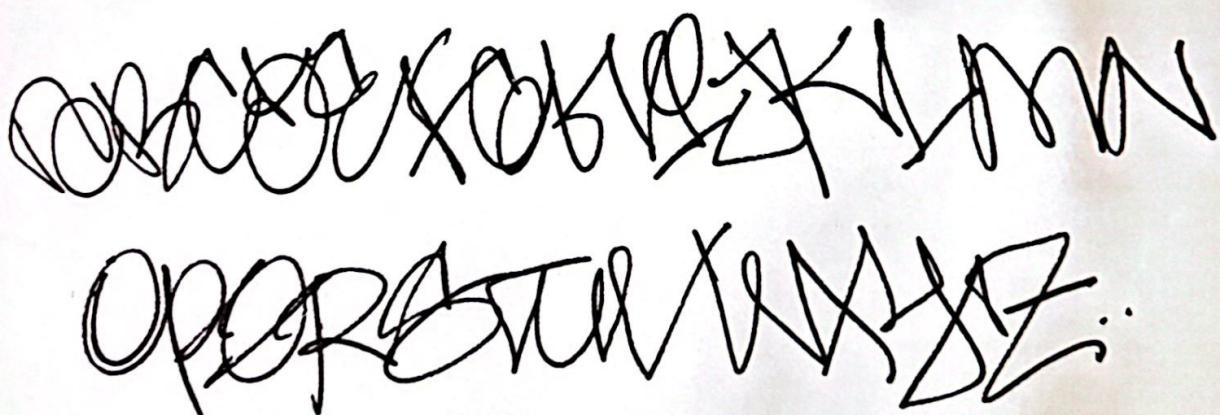
WAGER on Seattle One-Flows



• ZEEB Handstyle
Recreated by WAGER

"The history of handstyles in Seattle, especially one-liners, should include a nod to ZEEB. He was the most up in the city around '87 to '90 (I'm a bit foggy on the timeline) and pretty much put one-liners on the map for Seattle. He was up everywhere, all city, with everything—paint, pens, window scratches—he killed it. Then one day he stopped completely, at least that's what it seemed like since his impact on the scene was so strong but short lived. Seattle didn't get hit that hard by one person for a few years to come."

SMOKER Seattle One-Flows



Handstyle

SMOKER

SMOKER

Bay Area (via Seattle) | 1991 – 2010s

"I'm from Tacoma, Washington. I started writing when I was 11 years old. I was in Seattle from 18 to 22 and from then on I have been in S.F. and Oakland. I learned that [basic alphabet] out of *Spray Can Art* that's just like classic funk-style letters, classic graffiti."

Dedicated to
SACE, IRAK

"There were a lot of styles in Seattle that were influenced by San Francisco. SECT pretty much brought a lot of the influence from the Bay Area up to Seattle in the early '90s. WERL definitely had a lot of influence—he got that shit from SECT. WERL had an influence on me when I was younger, but all that came from SECT. He moved up [to Seattle] for a while and he brought all that style from down in Marin, in the Bay Area, and all that bus-hopper one-flow. It was really big in the early '90s in Seattle. It was all these bus-hopper one-flow tags, but they didn't call it bus-hopper in Seattle, it was 'one-flow.' It's kinda just the basic form of tags,—like structured. You start out with that and then from there everything evolves from that basic structure."

ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
QRSTUVWXYZ
ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
QRSTUVWXYZ
ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
QRSTUVWXYZ

SMOKER

Bay Area (via Seattle) | 1991 – 2010s

"I got that influence from my friend SERIO. He was from Long Beach originally, and he had moved up to Tacoma, and then to Seattle. He had a really gangster, Cholo style. He was showing me a lot of letters from his friends in prison, and it was done with a pencil, and it had that thickness with the pencil. He would press harder at the top and fade it down. I was really fascinated by that control with the pencil and the control of that letter, so I started doing that, learning Cholo styles. From there I went to ball point pen, just pressing harder at the top, then I figured out I could do it with the chisel tip really easy, and it looks real sharp. I just took that Cholo style and made it a little more graffiti, rounded the edges here and there, and just made it my own and ran with it from there."

Handstyle



A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z
A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

Dedicated to
PLUS, TNK

❶ Dotted Capital I

"That's just a little extra flair, [bringing] L.A. tag bangers style into normal graffiti, pretty much just SERIO and me. Really, nobody was even doing it. I just brought that from the letters of the homies in prison and made it into my graffiti."

❷ Squared off Y's

"That's kind of like an old NY or old PHILLY thing. I've seen it in those type of styles and used the chisel tip to make it mine."



"When Seattle really started seeing graffiti it was the skateboarders for the most part at West Lake Center. It was a good skate spot and at that time it was the crack era, so all the kids would group together. ATV was probably the first skate crew—CORE and PROVOK and a guy that wrote TRED. The link of style was definitely SECT 949. He was from the Bay, and came up to the suburbs of Seattle, but he would come stay with all of us in the city, probably '91. SMOG 172 was the LA influence. I was probably the Portland influence even though I wasn't really from there. I would just go back and forth a lot. Portland also had this whole other world of just super gang graffiti. It was more tagbanger, L.A. styled."

"As far as that real discernible Seattle style, it all comes from the BTM houses. All the kids would use these crash pads up and down the coast on racking missions, and styles were born there. Up until that it was all guys trying to write like Beat Street. We really didn't even know, or care, that anywhere else existed, and always made fun of the older guys for biting New York. LEKES (BTM) was always on this organic thing that was a truly Seattle-indigenous thing that made the shapes look like plant life, super organic. SECT 949 (BTM) brought up the Bay Area stuff, the one-liners. SMOG 172 (BTM) brought the tagbanger stuff up from L.A.—the Cholo letters and the roll call stuff."

"By 1992 all of the crews were sort of integrated: US from San Francisco; WOW crew from Portland; and of course BTM from Seattle."

"When I was growing up, I would see WERL out a lot and he was always doing his own thing in terms of style—a real style innovator. Mostly because he always rode the ride between very classic styles and still trying to keep it innovative. His stuff was always clean. His crew LF, they always had such clean and nice tags—especially WERL, these fat cap tags with perfect fans on the tops. Just beautiful."—CEASR

ABCDEFKLM

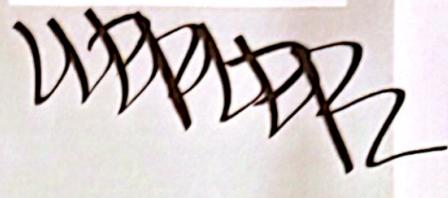
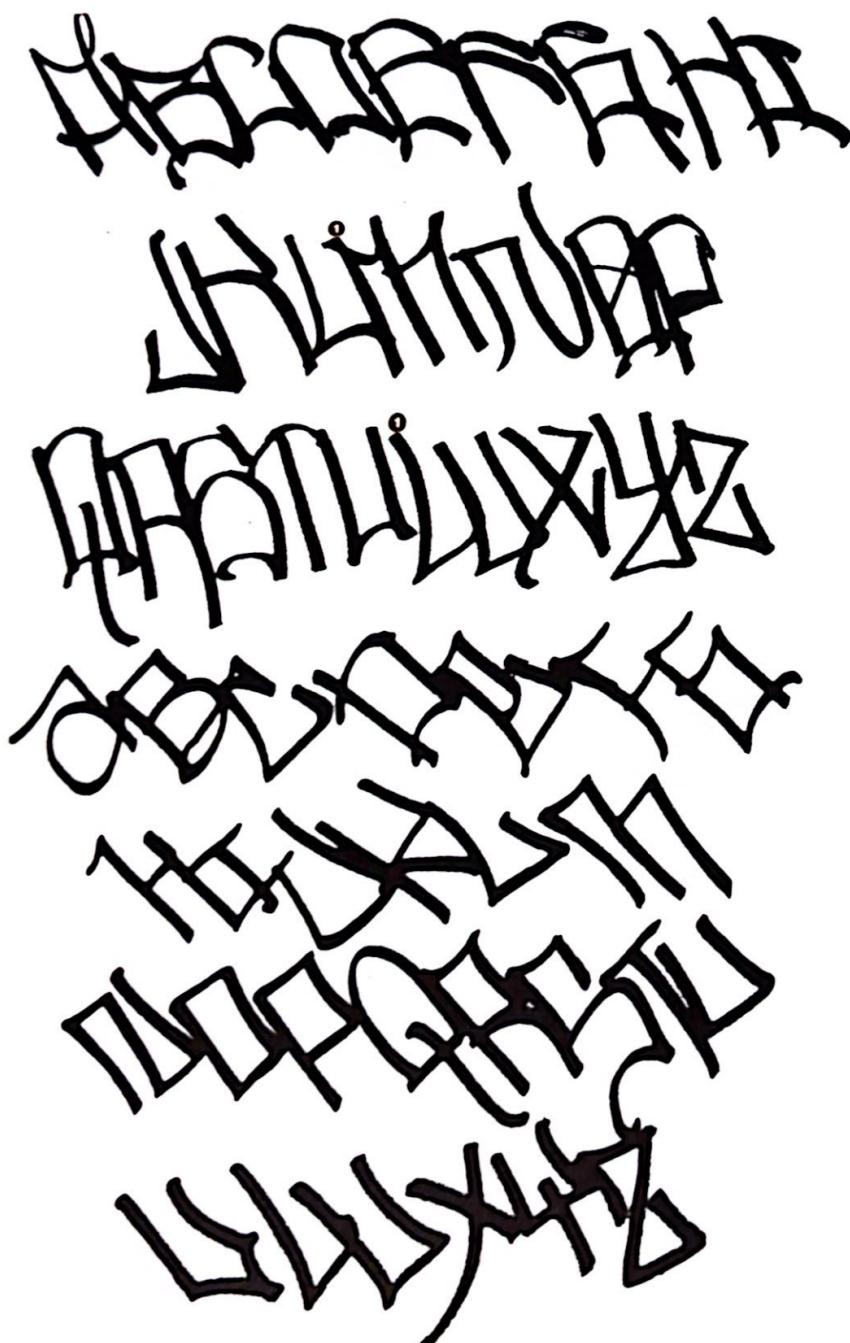
IJKLMNOPQR

STUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

NOPQRSTUVWXYZ

"Probably the square [styled alphabet] is more based off of Black Gangster Disciples' styles. They had all kinds of pitchforks and real squared-out letters. I couldn't be sure, but I think it might have been SPRO who may have come from Chicago. There was a generation of mid 1980s writers in Seattle, who for the most part, were all brothers and God only knows where they came from. They were all a lot older than us. Their style was totally different; non-connected single letter stuff. There were probably only 5 dudes before our crews started, so it's kind of hard to say. I came to Seattle in maybe 1990. And sometimes the older writers would roll up to a yard and be like 'let me get a can.' They'd take a tag and then roll out, but they were like criminals, they weren't like hip hoppers. They were rolling around in Cadillacs and pretty much looked like Sir Mix-A-Lot."

"The square one is way more recent. It used to be you wrote your word from a really small letter to a really big letter. You grow your tag. It would look like it was popping out at you."

❶ Gangsta Gangsta

Compare the one-stroke M and W to the same characters in SIVEL's gangster alphabet, in the Chicago chapter (pg 63), to see the influence of Chicago gang styles like the BGD's WERL mentions above.

"The square stuff—I might say that CEASR had something to do with that too. When he was writing in Seattle it was pretty new. I don't know who to give that credit to. I couldn't say it was any one person."

"The lean would probably be mostly due to SMOG 172. He came from L.A., probably around '91, and he showed us a ton of stuff. He actually brought old black books from other guys. All the L.A. stuff came from him. And he had special ballpoint pens that he would use. They had to be counter-weighted on the back end. Like doctors' pens, he would go rack those. You can like flare them and shit. He was real into flaring ballpoint pens."

WERL: Starts & Stops

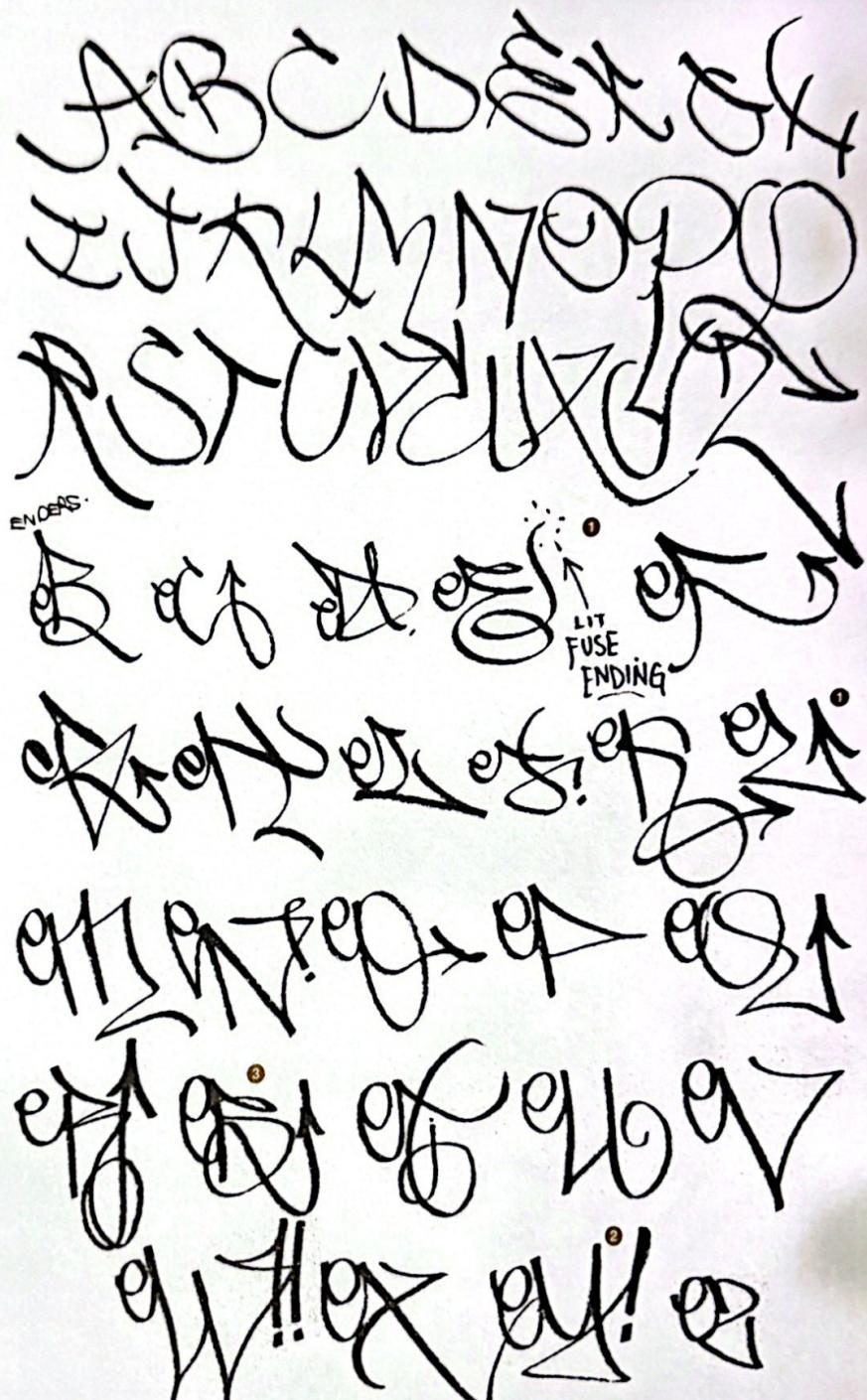


"All the flourishes we were doing were probably a reaction to the fact that there was really just one alphabet for all of Seattle. And we even treated it like that was the established 'good' alphabet. And the flourishes were just a way to make yours look a little different from the guy next to you. But then we would just bite each other's flourishes anyway."

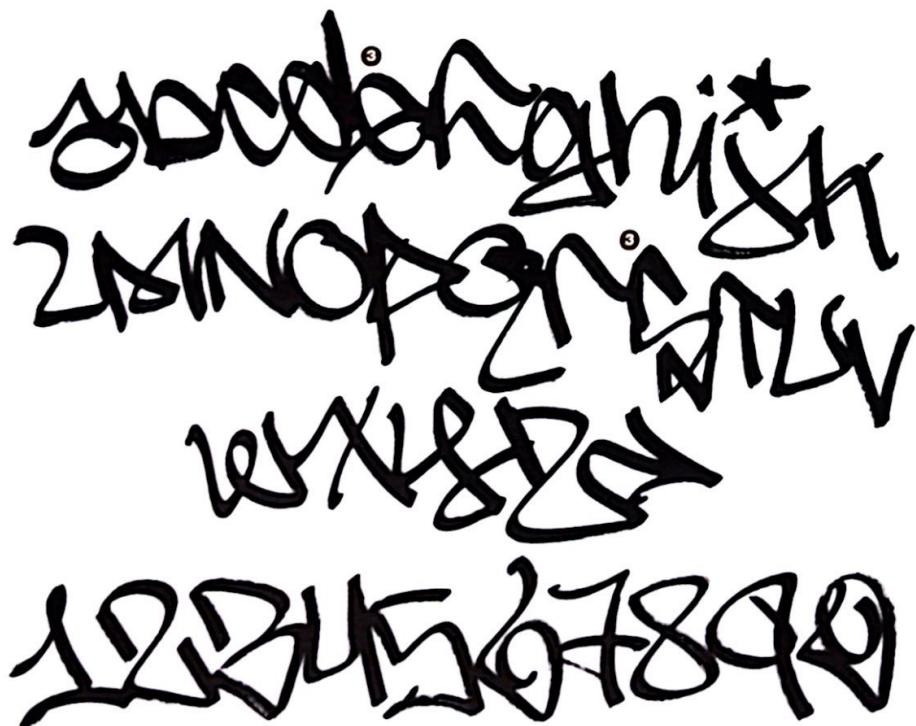
① "That's a pretty standard thing across the board. There was always some sort of flourish to end with. I'd like to take credit for a few of them, but we borrowed from each other all the time."

② "The E-Y for example that's REY EDK."

③ "The S was probably a US rip-off, BISIE, or ORFN, or RVRS maybe."



"I grew up in Seattle and came up into the writing thing in the early '90s. I got into it via skateboarding; at that time there were a lot of skaters into writing and it was pretty interchangeable, especially in Seattle. You'd go to the skate park, and it would rain a lot because it was Seattle and everybody would go under the ramps, wait for the rain to pass over, hitting up under the ramps, and it was a little pow wow. The older cats would tell you when your shit was wack. Then in downtown Seattle, near the mall, was a park called West Lake, which was the closest thing Seattle had to a writers' bench, where everybody came together. All the buses from all the different neighborhoods would come right by that stop. So everybody would grill those windows doing backwards tags, so you could read it from the outside of the bus."



❶ Loopy M & R

"As far as I know, that started with the BTM guys. Especially that M. If you were to trace the style, my vibe tells me that's a combination of the one-line stuff and the more blocky, Cholo stuff that came up from L.A. Because you're blocking, but you're allowing some of those loops to show, and that was very emblematic of Seattle's style. I think Seattle let a little more of the loops show compared to the S.F. version of the one-liner."

"SECT and PROVOK started BTM. I could probably give that to him. Probably from an old MVK tag, which was a Marin county crew. He also was the guy who would bring us down to S.F. to meet ORFN, RVRS and AMAZE."—WERL

❷ One-Flow

"The one-stroke was definitely the dominant style when I was there and that was one of the things you had to learn first. From what I understand, a lot of that came from S.F. S.F. and Seattle have always had a tight connection culturally. The most obvious connection for us was the US crew. You had guys like BISEE and ORFN, and the whole freight hopping scene too, because that was an easy trip. So, it was this whole crust-punk, straight edge, skater, vegan, all-manner-of-thing. And that affected some of the styles too."

❸ Letter Connections

"You wanted to hide your connecting strokes within the letters. S was a big one for me. The big influence on that was BERST. Es were a big one too, there was a time when everybody was doing lower case double-Es. There was a guy who wrote MR PHEEN. When it was doubled like that it was always lowercase, which probably worked better with the one-stroke. He wasn't necessarily a style master, but he was up. He was more of a gangster type of writer. But that was one of those letter trends."





Miami & Southeast

Miami has long had a connection to New York, mostly through the shared Caribbean and Latin cultures of Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban immigrants that made both cities home. And these immigrants' children and grandchildren were there at the right time and the right place for the birth of hip hop, putting Miami only a half-step behind New York by the time break-dancing hit the scene.

Most of the early generations of writers in Miami started to emerge in the early '80s around the break dancing culture. DASH says, "When I got to Miami (from New York) in the summer of '84, *Beat Street* had just come out. My cousin moved there in '83 and he was already writing, and it was basically revolving around the B-boy scene. And there were a lot of B-boys who knew how to write their name and they would tag and do characters on windbreakers."

By the late 1980s Miami tags started evolving into their own style, and were prevalent with slight personal, crew or neighborhood variations. RAVEN says, "(In the beginning) it was still appropriating styles from other cities. You can almost see (in the earlier tags) this idea of these big long loops that pull up. STYLE did a lot of that, KV did it."

Miami & Southeast Handstyles

When asked about the origin of a unique Miami style EASE explains:

"I wouldn't say we originated a style. It was certainly influenced by New York and Philly, but Miami had its own whipping of the letters. Like styles were flying by quick in the wind. South Miami, I remember, had a flat, long style and of course traditional NY style that would remind someone of FBA or TC5. But as you went in through mid-Miami, the crews were whipping the bottom of the letters in a unique style I've only seen in Miami. After a while, I called my style of writing the Flagler slant. No one really knew that name though, it wasn't famous. A few of us were mostly from the West Flagler area of Miami. Flagler is the main street that divides Miami from the North and South Sides, so it's basically the center."

Many later Miami writers started to refer to versions of that handstyle as a wildstyle tag—not to be confused with New York's wildstyle pieces (or more elaborate murals). The other deciding factor of Miami styles was the spread out neighborhoods and car culture that were connected by the boulevards of the city. Many of the choice spots dictated a vertical style of tags that worked perfectly on the poles, metal electrical boxes, crosswalk signs, hurricane barriers and traffic walls.

The practice of trading flicks with pen pals and self-publishing zines was already widespread. By the '90s the use of the internet became commonplace and RAVEN & Co. raised the bar with *12oz Prophet*, which eventually became the leader and one of the web's largest graffiti chat rooms. By the time *12oz* was established the local style in Miami started changing again. RAVEN said:

"KVEE started to become the older generation in Miami. The generation OIL was a part of—You can see by KVEE's style that he still maintained those distinct Miami roots. Whereas, dudes like OIL, by the time he hit his stride, you had the internet and you start to see styles become diluted and more heavily influenced by styles outside of your immediate surroundings. Before that, all kids traded styles by taking a road trip, meeting writers and if you were real tight with somebody you'd loan them your [film] negatives [so they could print copies]. But you'd guard those originals. Or you'd trade and duplicate whole rolls of film. Even so, you weren't exposed to that enough to be so heavily influenced by it. It wasn't so one-to-one, the way the internet is, where you're just bombarded. It would still maintain the integrity of your local style. The internet kind of fucked all that up. But magazines definitely ushered in that era of diluting styles, creating a method for people to copy. And that opened up a world of stealing instead of learning from someone older than me and better than me. And the internet just sealed that fate."

Miami & Southeast Handstyles

SINER—Miami
Circa 2004



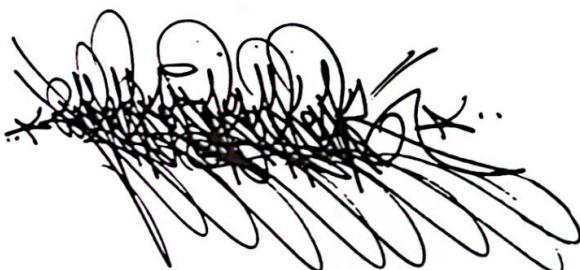
RAVEN—Miami
Circa 2009



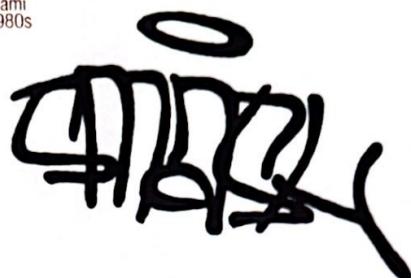
EASE—Miami
Circa late 1990s



KVEE—Miami
Circa late 1990s



SMASH—Miami
Circa late 1980s



TAME—Miami
Circa 1987



ICEY—Miami
Circa mid 1980s



MELO—Miami
Circa 1993



Miami & Southeast Handstyles

JIVE ONE-Miami
Circa mid 1990s



POE ONE-Miami
Circa early 2000s



DEEP-Miami
Circa mid 1990s



COINA-Miami
Circa early 2000s



STYLE-Miami
Circa late 1980s



INK-Miami
Circa 1990



DOSE-Miami
Circa late 1980s



SENOR-Miami
Circa 1990



ASTRO-Miami
Circa 1994



SCAM-Miami
Circa late 1980s



TEEZ-Miami
Circa 2010



DZEE-Miami
Circa late 2000s



Miami & Southeast Handstyles

KRAVE—Miami
Circa 2007



EDEC—Miami
Circa late 2000s



RASTERMSTERONER—Miami
Circa late 2000s



WAY—Miami
Circa 1990



TERM FIVE—Miami
Circa late 2000s



ATKM-Style According to DEMO



❶ ATKM (All The Kings Men)

"It was founded in 1978, in Brooklyn & Manhattan, N.Y. (originally called TKM) by SONAR, MERO, SPEER and ATUM of BYI. Born in Miami (Culter Ridge/Perine/Homestead areas) 1980 to '81 with MERO and MICRO as the leaders. There were only a handful of members at the time. A few years later many more joined including myself, ICEY (who became the second generation Prez), SCAM, MEEN, REECH, SANE, EASE, FAZ, LEE/EXCEL, NEED, MACE and RENER. And presently RAGE, CEZR and TAKE5. From the beginning, it has always

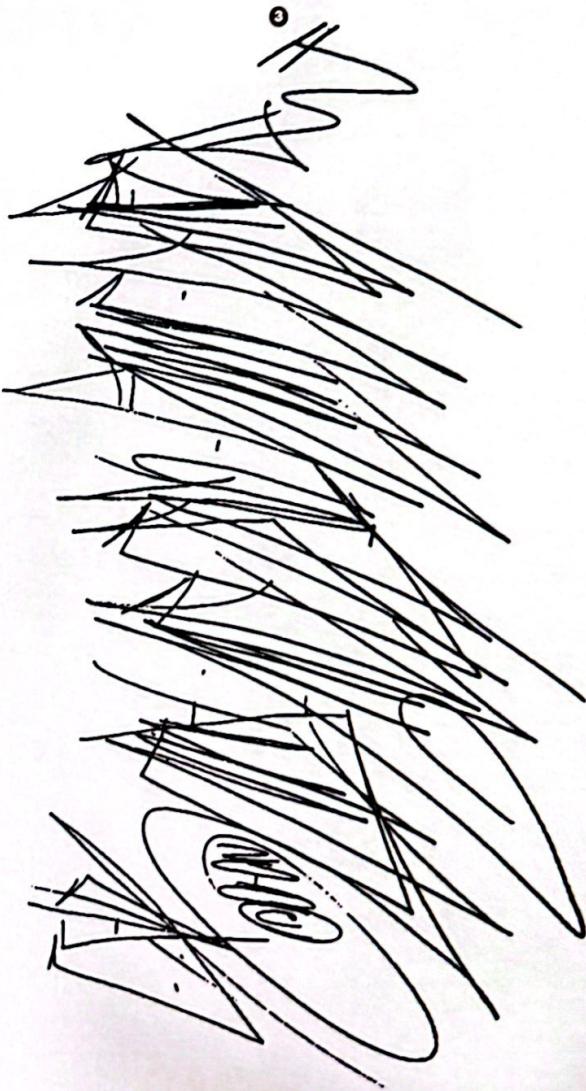
been drilled into our heads to keep our styles original-pass down what we've learned traditionally as a crew. Each member has always specialized in one thing or another (letters, characters, handstyles etc.) and whatever it was we molded that together with the crew's foundation as a whole. Your individual style may progress and become more advanced but it will always keep the crew's flavor. When I joined ATKM, I decided I wanted to become the best at something that our crew didn't have; a handstylist. It was difficult because handstyles weren't seen as something you specialized in. But it ended up working out because Miami had so very few who did, which gave more rise to my own fame as a handstyle king. But moving back and forth to NY as a kid, I could really see I was only a peon in the main game."

❷ Alphabet

"It goes downward. We used that style always downward, and that's what we were known for. It's got a very hard look to it. Very pointy. The middle branch of the M is squared off and it's slanted, almost left to right, but it goes downward. We were always [reaching] very high, extending upward and going down with our tags a lot. This style is the one we were known for the most. The whole crew used it."

❸ Roll Call

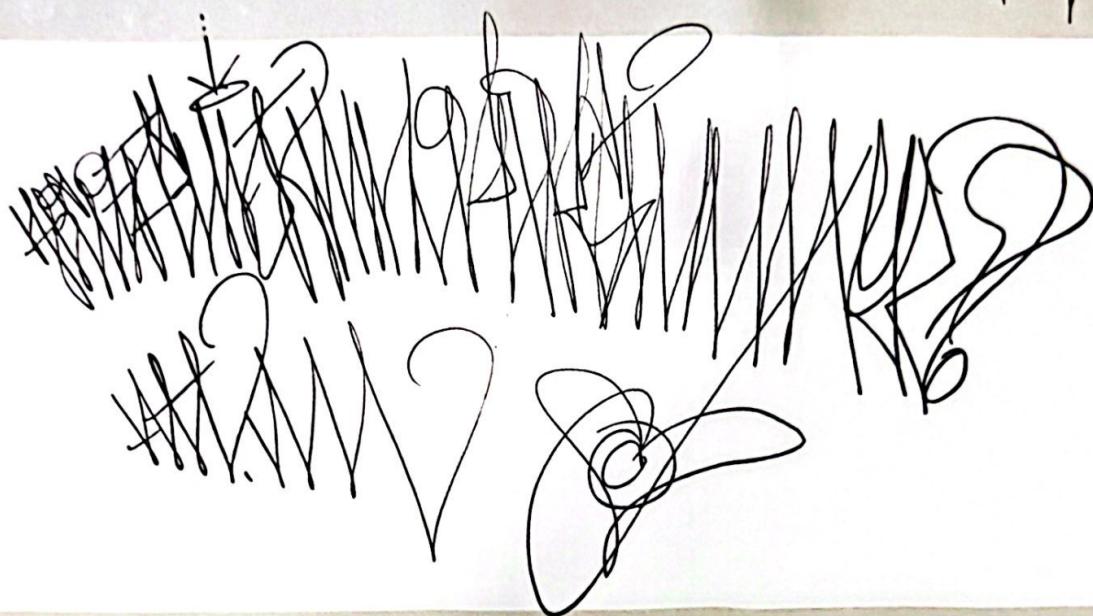
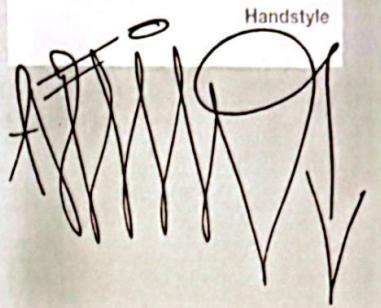
DEMO, NEED, SCAM, ICEY.
2010© ATKM



DEMO

Miami | 1981 – Late 1980s

"I developed [this] style probably [around] '83, '84. Other people called it a Philly style because they said it looked very similar to Philadelphia handstyles. People were calling me and another writer, named BONES, 'the kings of the Philly-in-Miami.' It's all about the flow going straight across, up and down. I put it on the wall a few times, but I stopped, honestly because a couple guys were just biting off it. So I stopped putting it up and went back to the old ATKM handstyle that was based off of MERO's style. And we started using his style again to keep it traditional."



NEED

Miami | 1983 – Mid 1990s

Handstyle

"In '84 [you had] the area where I was from, [and] the Northwest area, where VO5 is from. And then you have Southwest Miami, where ATKM is from. I was in the middle of those two areas. There's a style that a lot of people have, [consider a VO5 style], like where it says NEEDSTER. Those Es are considered box-top [or] roof-top style Es. VO5 was kind of ending or branching off, everybody was going their own way and I was hearing rumors. So I pretty much stuck with ATKM. And my style branched from NERO and from DEMO. Actually, I learned a lot of my handstyle from DEMO. I went ahead and I combined my style with some of DEMO's style, and some of the things I'd picked up from looking at SEAM's style and learning from him and from SNAIR."



❶ "That R. A lot of people used that. RENS used to use it. SNAIR used it, and I just put a twist on it and I added my own thing. I combined my Swift style with that style."

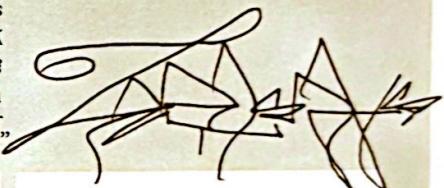
"That [kick] pretty much defines it. To me that style there, using that R or that K and those Es—the box-top/rooftop style. That's a Northwest area kinda thing, to me. [Guys] from VO5 to TNSB."

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

"J-Ski's parents moved down here to Miami [from New York] and he ended up in the ninth grade at the same high school I was at. That guy excelled in hip-hop. He was so color coordinated, with Kan-
sape outlines, and his rags were amazing I met him in '83, '84 and only later did I realize—some
you would put up on a train. And he didn't piece, he didn't do wild style, he did simple letters and
goals and hell roses, painted jacket, the big oval glasses. He looked like a B-boy character that
of these R's and K's, those aren't mine, they come from this cat in New York."



Miami 1983-1984

SAE

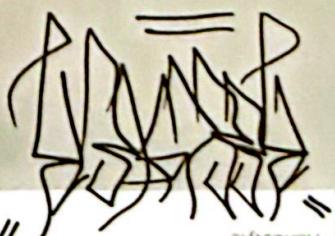
Handstyle

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

Z P C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T V W X Y Z

"This was my first tag style, and this guy J-Ski was my source of inspiration. He was the only cat I knew who was writing in such an eloquent, free-flowing manner. It was through him that I learned a lot of the traditional B-boy language, the whole SAE STEPS MONTE STREOCKS. He had a shit load of suffixes that he would append together to create these complex words from a simple name. Like CAZ, Crazy and Zooted. He had his own vocabulary from New York that he passed on to us."



Miami 1984-Early 1990s

REEL aka SAE

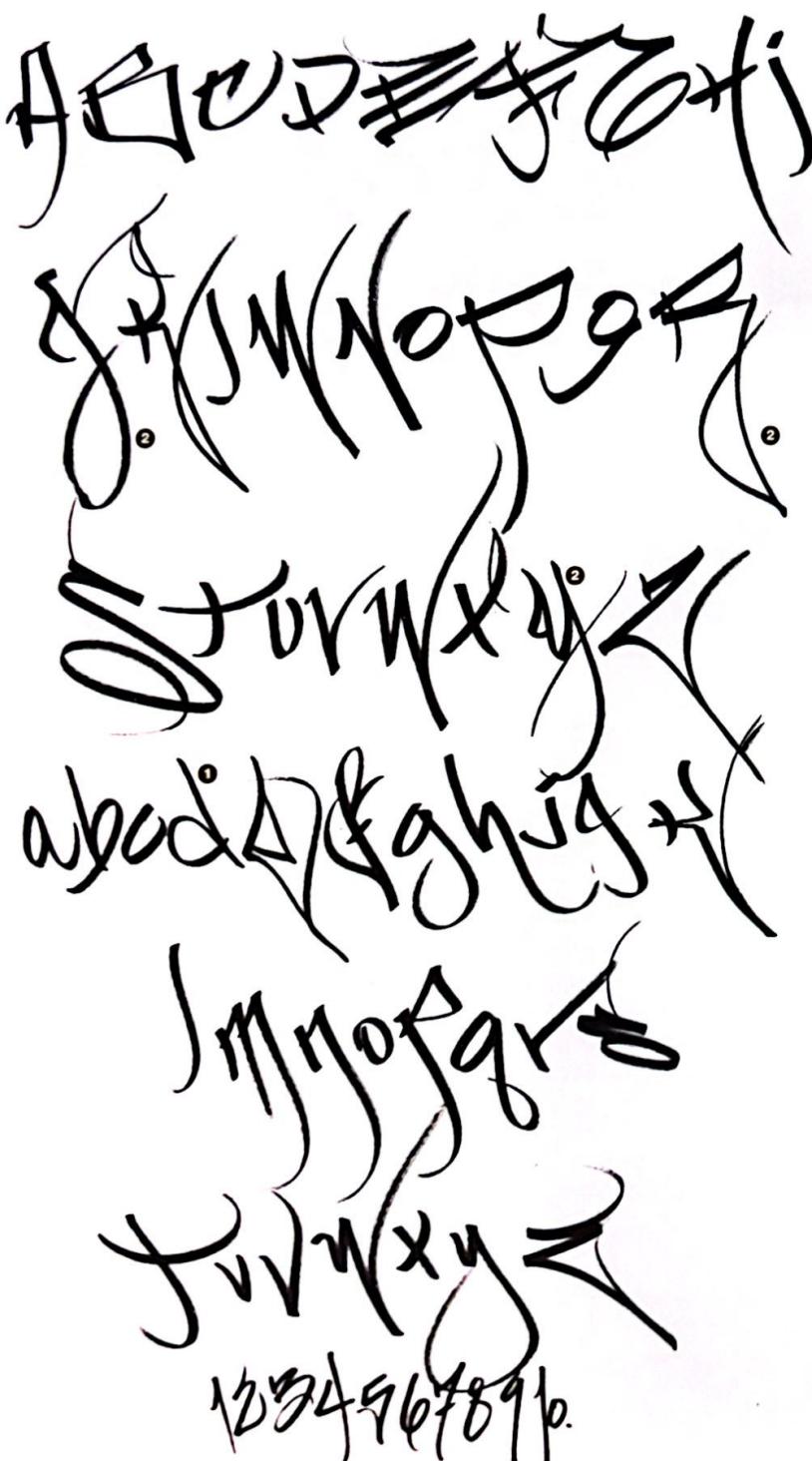
Handstyle

STYLE

Miami | Early 1980s–Mid 1980s

"This was the early '80s and a lot of people were using block style lettering, the little halo, the stuff that migrated down from New York. [Those books were] all they had back then. And [by '85, '86] we just decided, let's mix it up a little bit and let's [create] our [own] influence of the whipping and the wild style and carry over the wild style from the pieces to the writing; I would say it's a Miami thing. We all picked up on it, and we all called it wildstyle writing, but it was very readable. It's just the whipping around made it very confusing for people to read. Then, since 1987, I haven't seen it, as much as I would like to see it."

Handstyle

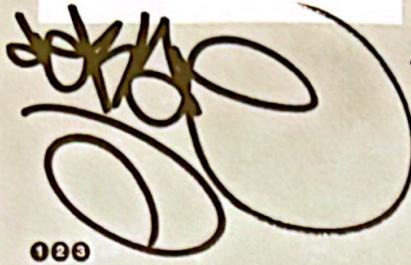


Dedicated to EZEE1 (Julio Monpopo)

❶ "When we used to write a lot, one of our biggest things was our Es and we had so many Es, for my name on the end, so many Es it was incredible. [The basis was that] square blockhead E with a little tail coming down and whipping up, but then we all added our own little take on it. But I would credit that E to SEAM and SNEEK. SNEEK had two Es in his name and SEAM had an E in his name, so they were constantly working on Es and then of course they sucked me into their little crazy world. At school, we would sit together and play with those Es all day. We would make them long, very narrow, we would whip them around a lot."

❷ "Something else you'll notice in the writing styles of the 5 (VO5 Crew), we were very heavy into the calligraphy–wild–style of whipping the lines around because we just liked that artistic look of the writing. It was pretty difficult to do with a can, but we used to do it every now and then. Some writers would pull it off. I used to love doing it with spray paint because it was like a claim to fame to be able to say I could hang with the can and do that with the letters. But to be honest with you, if you had markers, it was heaven to do with markers."

"SEAM [was the best at that style]. He was a mentor you know. And he was one of the guys who showed me how to get creative with it, a true mentor. No ill will from that guy, no hate from that guy. Always very positive, like an older father, just very willing to teach. Not one of these guys that's like, 'Oh this is my style, you guys can't touch it.' This guy was like, 'Hey, I made up this E, you want to try it, you want to use it? Run with it dude. Let's put it up.' That type of guy."



"I'd say my handstyle started off super Miami traditional and then I just kinda picked up influences because I traveled a bunch. I had a pretty good little network of guys that I used to ship photos to, back and forth. You would meet somebody in some city and end up keeping in touch with them. I was up with KING 157 for example, on the West Coast, and me and KING would send each other packages all the time. At some point, somebody was at KING's house and saw some flicks I sent him, and they sent me a package and then I sent stuff to them. And the network kinda grew that way. It used to be really cool to go see somebody's albums, like I had a really good West Coast freight album and I lived in Georgia and people really never understood that. They were like, were you out there? Nah, it's the network or whatever, prior to the internet."

"In about '87, STYLE's dad kicked him out of the house and my mom was like, 'you can live with us.' So, he would sleep on the futon and we shared a bedroom from ninth grade through twelfth grade. He was a huge influence [on me]. He was way more established and a little more worldly. He was down with the crew VO5, which was like the top crew in Miami, and he had learned a lot from them, and he kinda passed it on to me. Prior to him it was mostly old school like [the crew] Free Agents, guys like MEGA who probably were my biggest influences."

❶ "From STYLE, I started learning the single stroke handstyles. If you look at the way he writes his name, it was pretty much a single stroke the whole way, except to cross that T, and I kinda took a lot of that from him."

❷ "Miami had a very traditional small-to-big thing. Like your first letter was always real small."

"I still keep up with what's going on in Miami, and unfortunately the internet and everything just kinda killed the regional handstyles. You see dudes from Miami do straight [styles] like L.A. now. I'm [thinking] 'where the hell did you get this kinda' thing?' It seems like the old school kids in Miami, the dancing crew guys, and all those guys, definitely have a very traditional Miami handstyle."

❸ Lower Case E

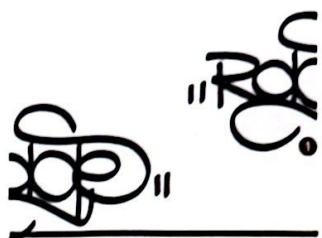
"As far as I knew it was just like a very widely used Miami E. I could think of a million writers who used that E in Miami. It's just one of those things where you kinda picked it up from there, I'd say mid to late '80s. If you look at the one cutout in my tag, at the top of the page, the little lowercase Es just, like, connected it. It seemed like everybody had two Es in their name. They would rock those little lowercases connected to each other."

RAGE

Miami | 1984 – Mid 2000s

"I started writing as a toy in 1984, at the age of 12. I wasn't driving then, obviously. And Miami was so spread out that it was impossible to know what was going on outside my bubble. Whatever path my parents took me is what I was exposed to. But every neighborhood had their own powerful and unique style and the writers that got up the most were usually copied. I'm basically a product of the B-boy culture and *Style Wars*. I'm a *Style Wars* baby."

A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R S
T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z
? € ! × @
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 , "



❶ "The thing about comparing my tag with the writing is my tag is more of a symbol, not a handstyle. I was burnt out after so many years, I wanted to do something different and to stand out from the rest. In '87 it all changed when I was introduced to skating and the punk scene. Even when I do my tag in halves people still can recognize it."

❷ "I feel like that stem came from the slanted style that was popular back in '84... See the A? I feel like that's where you [might] put a Uni-Wide chisel down first to get the juices flowing. It's a perfect starting point on a smooth surface, like signs and electrical boxes that were popular bombing spots. This all just came to me, but it makes a lot of sense."

❸ "Without those hooks and loops it's very basic and simple. Even the norm could do. It would have no punk and no hip hop. Miami definitely adopted that style early on. It really hit hard when writers started adventuring out of their neighborhoods, like in '87 to '89. (Maybe when they got driver's licenses or started stealing cars.) It just became a Miami thing that ended up being universal. VO5 and ATKM were mostly known for it. I have no idea where it really originated from though. Forever, we've been trying to figure this out. It's an ongoing debate, but to me it looks like a cross between a New York and a Philly style, but what do I know? Around that time I was watching *Bones Brigade* and listening to *Youth Brigade*."

VO5-Style According to DASH

① "JAVSKI, the president of VO5 in Miami, moved to Miami from Brooklyn in '84 or '85. He was from Bay Ridge, but originally from Flatbush. He called his handstyle the Brooklyn Swift. It was a print/script hybrid where the letters were connected in a cursive form. Even the VO5 tag was done in one continuous stroke. By the time I met them in 1986, everyone in VO5 basically handled a minimum of 4 styles: a standard personal print style; the Brooklyn Swift script style; the still unnamed post-modern Broadway VO5 style (with the swash underlines); and a hybrid of all of the above."

② "SEAMSTER and SHAKING were the top handstylists in the crew and were among the most prolific. They were the ones who really rocked that VO5 style the best. They always made it look real sinister, like some futuristic, evil calligraphy. That style spread among the whole crew and it made a powerful impact. I have always said that from these guys, many, many writers in Miami got their style."

③ "That E is a variation of SKEME's E, which is really an old-school Broadway Elegant C that he turned into a lower case E. There's so many ways of doing that E. How that E made it down to Miami has been the topic of much debate among Miami writers. It's funny because it's in *Subway Art* a little bit, but it's not really prominent enough for people to have gotten it from there. SEAM and I have traced it back to my man FATE VO5, who also introduced the VO5 swash underline letter attachment. FATE was from Brooklyn and was another one of those guys that split his time between New York and Miami. Although that E was very en vogue in New York at the time ('84, '85), FATE was the first to rock it in Miami. He didn't do it rounded like SKEME, he did it with a straight crossbar and rounded top."

④ "FATE's tag also had the swash extending back from the bottom of the spine of the F, and again extending to the right from the terminal of the E. People thought it said FATER. That swash was just the opposite of his F—like a design for him. He used to bomb with his cousin RENS VO5, who was from the Bronx. RENS had that swash [like FATE] too, but it was attached to the bottom of his lower case N. He also had a fancy loop on the top left of his R, people thought it said ORENS. Everyone in the crew had their own variation of the E. SEAM used to do it squared in the front and kinked in the back, or sometimes with a rounded forehead and kinked in the back. SNEEK used to do it the other way, kinked in the front with the back straight and an underbite at the end."



"When I was really young my mom bought me a calligraphy set. It had one of those old school [books], the little one, [with] the pens. It was way before I wrote graffiti, but I kept it around through the years, so when I first came across a chisel tip marker, I was already familiar. It's not like that made me run out and write typography, but it gave me the idea of how to hold the marker, and do things that I didn't see my friends doing. I was like, okay, well, there's the 45 degree angle and the 60 degree angle, and the direction of the strokes, etc. In my mind it all related to graffiti. When I first started writing, I would tag on the maps on the inside of the train."



...ABCDEFHI

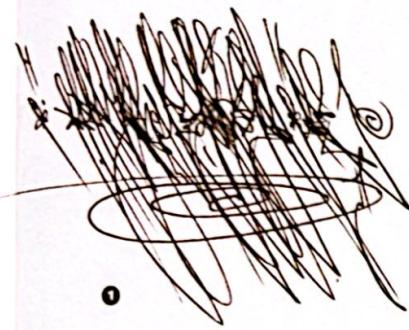
o e e e
x e e
✓ e e

J K M N O P Q

R S T U V W Z "

❶ "One of my pet peeves was the layering of the strokes in my tags and other people's tags. Say you wrote a lower case E for example, naturally the cross bar ends up behind the loop. That used to bother me, so I would start a lower case E from the bottom up, cause I *needed* to see the crossbar in front of the loop. It sounds ridiculous now, but I guess that was just my twelve-year-old mind at work. So, I guess I can blame my OCD on that little calligraphy book."

KVEE-MIAMI WILDSTYLE TAGS



1 KLEVER

"I grew up on the outside edge of Little Havana. In Little Havana the style was more up and down and what STEM and PHRASE and those dudes were doing was more side to side. The dudes who schooled me on wildstyle were TERMS and KLEVER. The dude who got me really into writing in '86 though was KOEL. He originally came from New Jersey, and had lived in Philly, so he had mixed New York handwriting with Philly, and he was doing a couple of pumps and little swirls and shit coming off of letters."

"What people don't understand about Miami handstyles is, subconsciously, we were creating movement to a handstyle that was on a dead wall. Most people who understand writing, it was designed for a moving platform. It was designed on a train (in the New York subway era). So even certain stiff tags, just by leaning them a certain way, you had movement on a train, subconsciously you look at that and, whether you understood it as a kid or not, when you go to do that on a wall you gotta add movement because it's on a still surface. A lot of Miami handwriting starts small on the left and starts opening up to the right. And it gives the impression that the tag is moving, and then once we caught on to that in the late 1980s, we played to that and gave it more movement."





- ② KAE ONER
- ③ PRO3IST
- ④ KVEE
- ⑤ KVEE
- ⑥ KAEONEROCKER
- ⑦ KAE ONER
- ⑧ PRO3
- ⑨ PRO3IST
- ⑩ KVEE
- ⑪ KVEE
- ⑫ KAEONEROCKER
- ⑬ KEONER



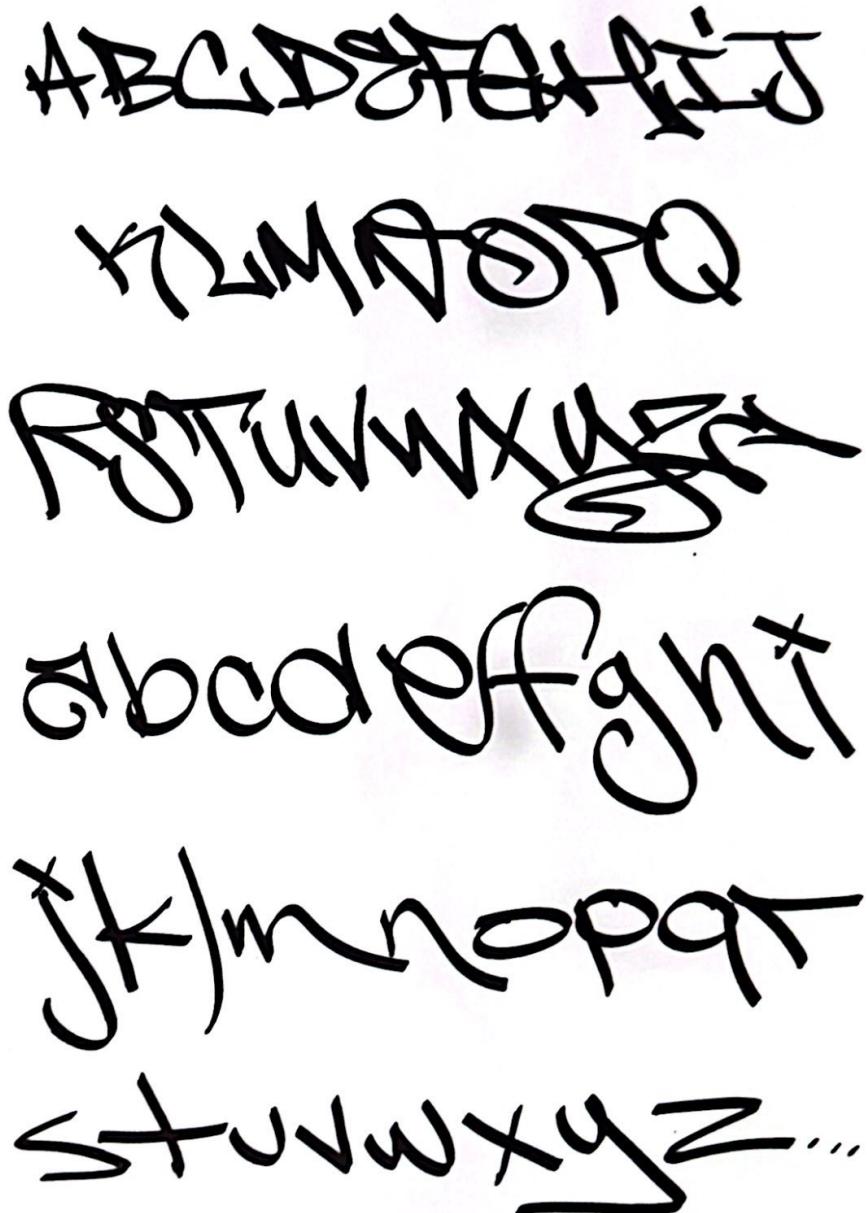
"I moved to Ft Lauderdale in '91. I'd catch the train down to Miami. I'd go in for hours and look at all the handstyles and throw ups on the Metrorail and abandoned warehouses. I then met a lot of the same guys and befriended them. We started some crews together. I actually learned some of my handstyles from the people I'd seen in New Orleans and with the influence of Miami's style of writing, I just try to keep mine simple but effective. Then later, some of the same guys I had met in Miami ended up having such great handstyles, it kept us on our toes. Some of these guys are so advanced in the art of writing and handstyles. You really had to try to maintain one, or get some pointers and help from the guys that were strong in the crew, like this guy KV and of course OILER, he had great penmanship and handstyles. He was influenced by some of the same people and he had people he traveled with. He was a younger cat and studied and practiced a lot."

Influences

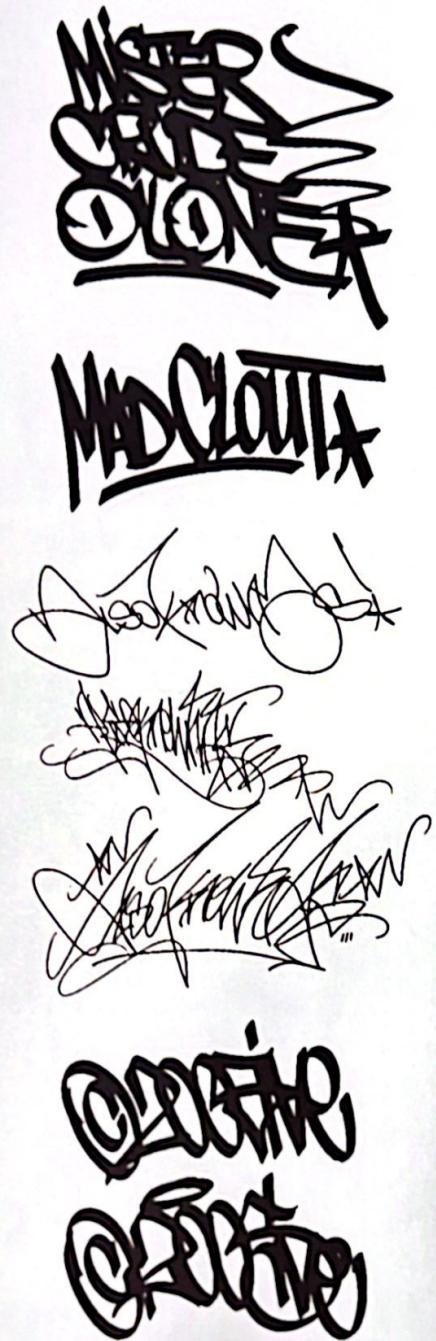
"A good friend of mine, BUGS, he wrote in the early '80s in New Orleans, I kinda learned from him. I was never formally sat down and schooled, but I would definitely credit him in my early learnings. Besides him, I learned from KV and OILER; their shit looked so right and so good, it looked like what I wanted my stuff to look like. Luckily, I was friends and crew-mates with them and also TERMS and my partner SMASH 74. I always wanted my stuff to look simple and effective and clean and neat. When I moved to Atlanta, I was already an established writer, but my buddy SB1, I was influenced by him at a later point in my career. I already had my own combination of Miami influences, but I added some pizazz to it from his influence."

Miami x NYC

"A lot of New Yorkers had friends and family in South Florida and traveled back and forth, so I definitely saw a lot of New York influence. That was the fun part of being in Miami. It was coming on its own but it also had a good strong history of influence from the motherland of all writing, New York. Every time I did go to New York my friends would take me to the hall of fames all over the city, because New York was still bombed a lot. It seemed like everybody that was writing in New York had mastered writing. It wasn't a lot of random kids that didn't know how to write. I saw a lot of good writers, that's what amazed me the most. Every signature, every tag, for the most part was good and stylistic, had flow, had good connections—the whole nine. And a lot of younger kids didn't do their homework and didn't study. I think that kinda shows in later eras."



OILER



From the collections of RAVEN and BASER, used with permission.

"OIL was just a prodigy in terms of style. He was a kid that just naturally inclined towards a nice handstyle. He didn't get distracted by bullshit. He knew exactly where to pull his influence from and he knew how to duplicate. He was like a parrot. He could mimic any style you put in front of him."

"From discussions I had with him, he said he developed his style because he sucked at school so bad that he did nothing but just draw on the back of paper. In public school they give you a lot of handouts and so he would just sit there first with a highlighter, then with a pen, then a black pen or a marker, and just do handstyles 6 hours a day, every fucking day. And he started out by copying handstyles until he eventually found his own rhythm with it and started adding his own contribution back to it. So, he kind of took those handstyles much further."

"I remember some of the earliest influences. There was a kid—I think from Frisco—that used to write SUNDANCE, and that was the beginning of the Bay Area, before anyone outside that area knew who TWIST was. This kid had a very nice chiseled style. And then of course, TWIST's handstyle. And then later, drawing influences from New York. I know DASH kind of mentored him quite a bit and opened him up to the history of graffiti and handstyles. He soaked shit up like a sponge and just had a knack for it."—RAVEN



"I grew up in the Bronx and moved to Florida in '87 (about 13 years old). I had been writing for about a year and a half, looking around, taking pictures, trying to get together with kids in my neighborhood riding the trains. When I got there, I was like, 'Oh, shit! There is graffiti here.' But I didn't really piece, I just started tagging and taking pictures. Later on, I met this kid JUNIOR and then EASE and a bunch of other old school guys. Everything starts little then big so it had almost like a Philly style, but a New York kind of flow."

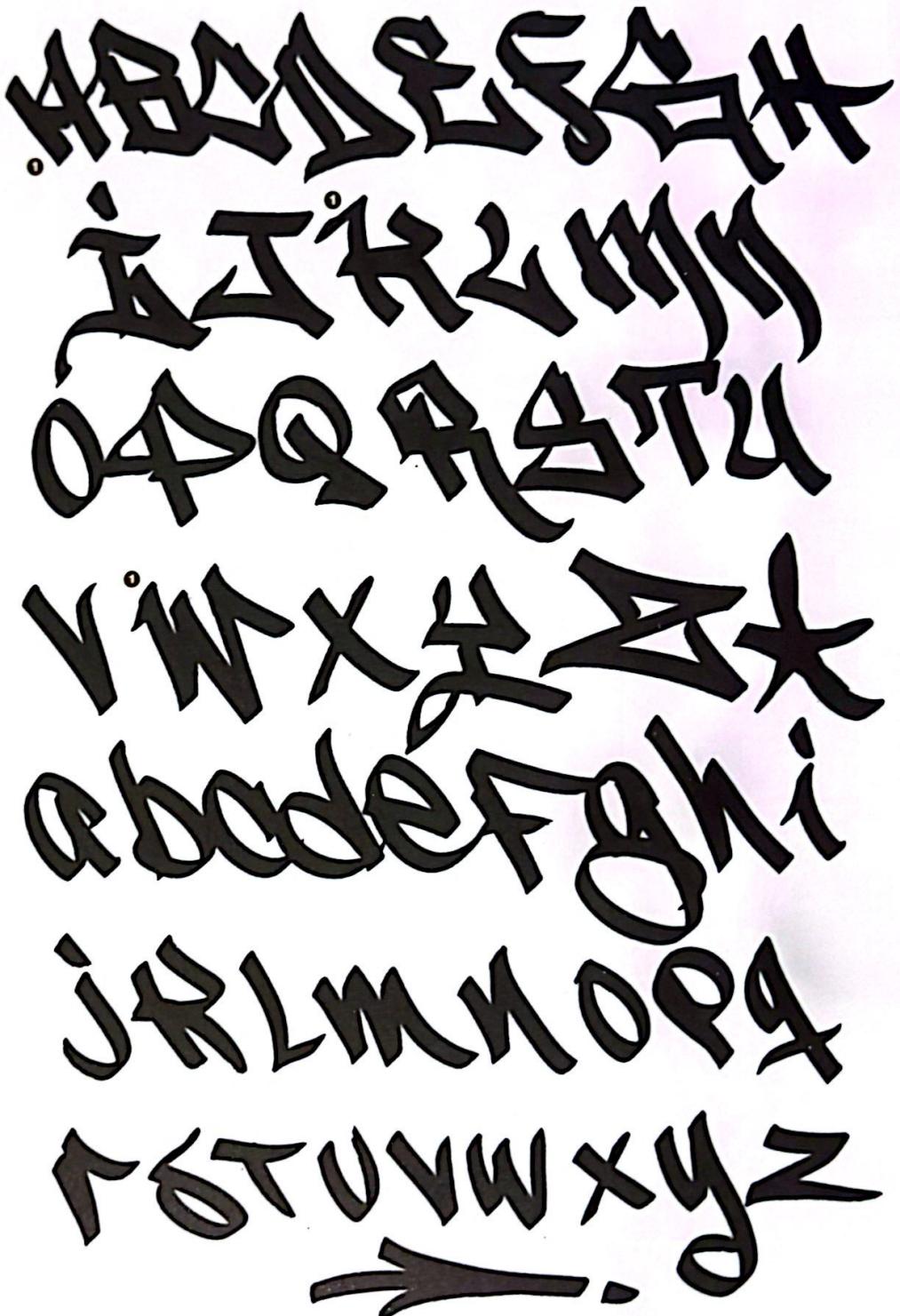
❶ Starting Serifs

"Of course that's the beginning. It's sort of like influence [via the] architecture; you see columns and poles, you have a starting point that starts connecting to the next, like construction. It's like a foundation, every letter has a foundation, you loop it around, you do the waves, the tails, the chips, all that stuff."

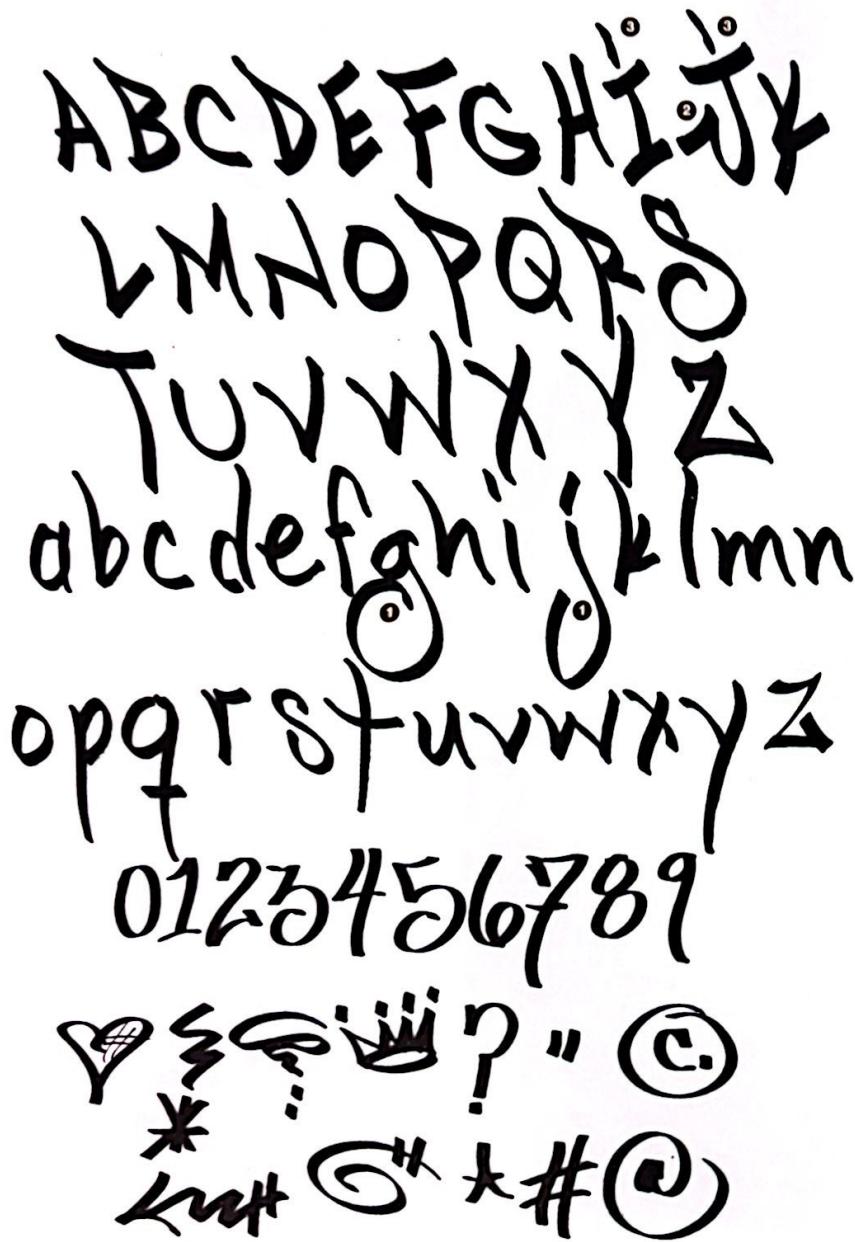
"[This style is] kind of italic. I get influenced from architecture and growing up in the Bronx, looking at old tags. I started taking pictures of old '70s tags that were fading away and I had the honor to meet a lot of '70s writers. Checking out their style you get the whole influence and flow, and you get your own identity from learning from all that stuff. It's really blocky and mechanical."

❷ Can't Stop. Won't Stop

"You don't want to stop when you are doing something, it's a full direct flow. You keep the pen or the tool on the surface until it's completed; if you stop you're not gonna get the same quality or the perspective of the tag. So, I tend to keep going, sort of like ancient calligraphy or characters when you do sumi or the Mayans or Aztecs—they kinda' keep one thing from beginning to the end."



"In '88, '89, I was in 5th grade going to 6th grade, [I met] DEED. He had his tag all over the school. He inspired me to start tagging. Around '91, '92, '93 I did most of my pieces. Then I got down with the Ink Heads [crew]. Most of the writers at that time, their style was more of a [typical] Miami style, similar to what José Parlá does nowadays. He calls it Flagler style but it's a very '80s Miami handstyle. My handstyle is kind of simple. I like for mostly everyone to be able to read it and enjoy it. Not only to get fame within the culture, but just regular civilians. I guess I was the new generation, my style was mostly just trying to make a simple handstyle with a little bit of flavor. DEED and I call it Concord-West Chester style. A lot of history from Miami was done on the roof of the Concord Shopping Center. After all the writing and pieces were done up there, me and some new guys started going up there and started seeing all this. It was like a new world for me. We started to do our own handwriting and our own styles. It was more like the next chapter."



"The handstyle is the same with cans. Chisel style is mostly on stickers and blackbooks, but that same style applies in cans. Back then, we didn't know how to get the fat caps, so we would get a regular stock tip from a Krylon and slash it with a razor blade down the middle, then it would give you a fat cap that sprays sideways like a chisel."

"Back then, the cans came with so much pressure that when you were slashing and you would spray, it was a mess. We would usually use that. Most of the writing was done in the daytime. Where it was actually me and DEED, we would go out on bike and 90 percent of the writing was done in the daytime using those caps."

❶ Loops

"I like to do the loop kinda like a traditional high chest tag. Most of them have that loop. It's like that for these chisel tip tags so you have that room."

❷ Serif On The J

"There was this crew, 7UP, and this guy KV had his tag up on all the boxes. His K; the main stick going down would curve out, kind of like a J. I got influenced by that but I didn't use it completely. The handstyle is not the same, it's just how I envisioned it."

❸ Dotting The Uppercase I & J

"That's just experimenting on paper trying to incorporate both lowercase and upper case."

"In school I had a graphic design class. I had to do the alphabet. You would have to get the ruler and measure out the paper like an architect, so the letters had to nice and straight. I was always a big fan of that nice and simple style. [I started adding some] flavor with my hand."



"I started writing in Jacksonville about '89, '90, moved to Atlanta for college, and was there about 10 years. Atlanta was built off the railroad and it's a very transitory city; that's why DELTA and FED EX have hubs there. And with all the colleges there it makes it even more transitory, because you have influx and outflow of people all the time. In my opinion, that makes it a perfect melting pot for graffiti. I got a lot of East Coast influence and lot of West Coast influence all in the same place. CHASE UCA is one of my biggest influences, and he's a west coast kid who moved to Atlanta."

"I definitely think I had a combination of east and west coast influence, from just a general state of mind, from being open."

"I met this dude in FS crew named CLEAR, and he used to write CLEAR, THE LETTER ENGINEER, or he used to write LETTER BENDER and I loved the idea of that, of engineering letter forms and bending words, and tweaking it and distorting it, experimenting with legibility. He had a bit of an influence on me in pushing myself to experiment more."

● "I would often mix upper case and lower case."

"I was into freights later. When I first moved to Atlanta I was into street bombing, and I was hitting the yards and stuff like that. Then we started hitting the highways and to my knowledge, IDEA and I were the first to make a hardcore run at the highways in Atlanta, from what I've been told from other people. A lot of the older guys did off the highway stuff but we were on the highway consistently all around metropolitan Atlanta. We did that for a while and then what drove me to freights—along with the fact that Atlanta is freight-fucking-central, it's beautiful—but beyond that I got caught twice in the same year. And the second time was very difficult to deal with legally, and I was running my own design business, and the first time I got popped I had to deliver files for a client and was like 'I can't disappear for days!' So it drove me to be way more cautious and methodical. And then I found a lay-up for freights near my house, and that's where I really started getting busy on freights, and eventually got SB's attention and got put down on Network. That's my family."

A B C D E F G H
 I J K L M
 N O P Q R S T
 U V W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j
 k l m n o p q r
 s t u v w x y z
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

QUAKE

Miami | 1995 – 2010s

Handstyle

"Miami pretty much has a style of its own. A little bit of New York influence comes in because of the history of Miami. There were a lot of New York writers that came down in the early '80s, and they brought black books. I know that style has permeated Miami because of those humble beginnings. But Miami flipped its own thing. Geographically, we're cut off. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, those are just a bus ride away from each other. Miami isn't a bus ride from anywhere, really, no metropolitan area. There are a lot of cultural influences. But graffiti sort of had to be imported so to speak."



A B C D E F G H
I S K U M
N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j
k l m l o p q r t
t u v w x y z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

"I think my handstyle is influenced mostly from a down South Miami style. MSG Crew was a bit more North, so I guess it's a combination, but I grew up in South Miami. [Specific] handstyles that influenced me were people like SEAM, RAGE, EASE, and EDEC. Inkheads crew was putting in a lot of work when I was starting out."

"My favorite of the wildstyle taggers would be SEAM, followed by DNEEE, (aka MORK) and EASE. They're all early writers from the 80s. A lot people credit SEAM with grandfathering a lot of those early Miami styles. Those guys still have that old Miami flair. But it never got old though. The thing is, those guys are from different neighborhoods than I'm from down in South Miami, I feel it was always font-like, script vs individual letters. I feel the Southern end of the city had a little more emphasis on the individual letters."

"With RAGE's style (pg 213) you can actually break down the letters individually. His tags were like logos. With that G curving underneath and that E curving above. It was a signature and it was so perfect. It wasn't like a scribble. It was like a logo had been stamped on the wall. Then he got a little creative and started running it off the wall, because he had branded it so to speak. It became so recognizable, it didn't have to be spelled out anymore."

"The goal is to straddle that line. You don't want something to look too static and you don't want something too fluid either, like a chiseling of the fluidity that you're looking for. You want it to look freehand, with motion and energy, but you still want it to look tight and really perfected."

"I got into graffiti through skateboarding. And there is something to be said about keeping up with what's going on. You don't want to write the same way you did 10 years ago. It's about keeping up and evolving without changing it per se."



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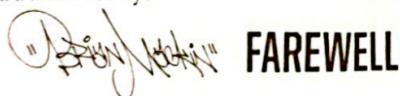
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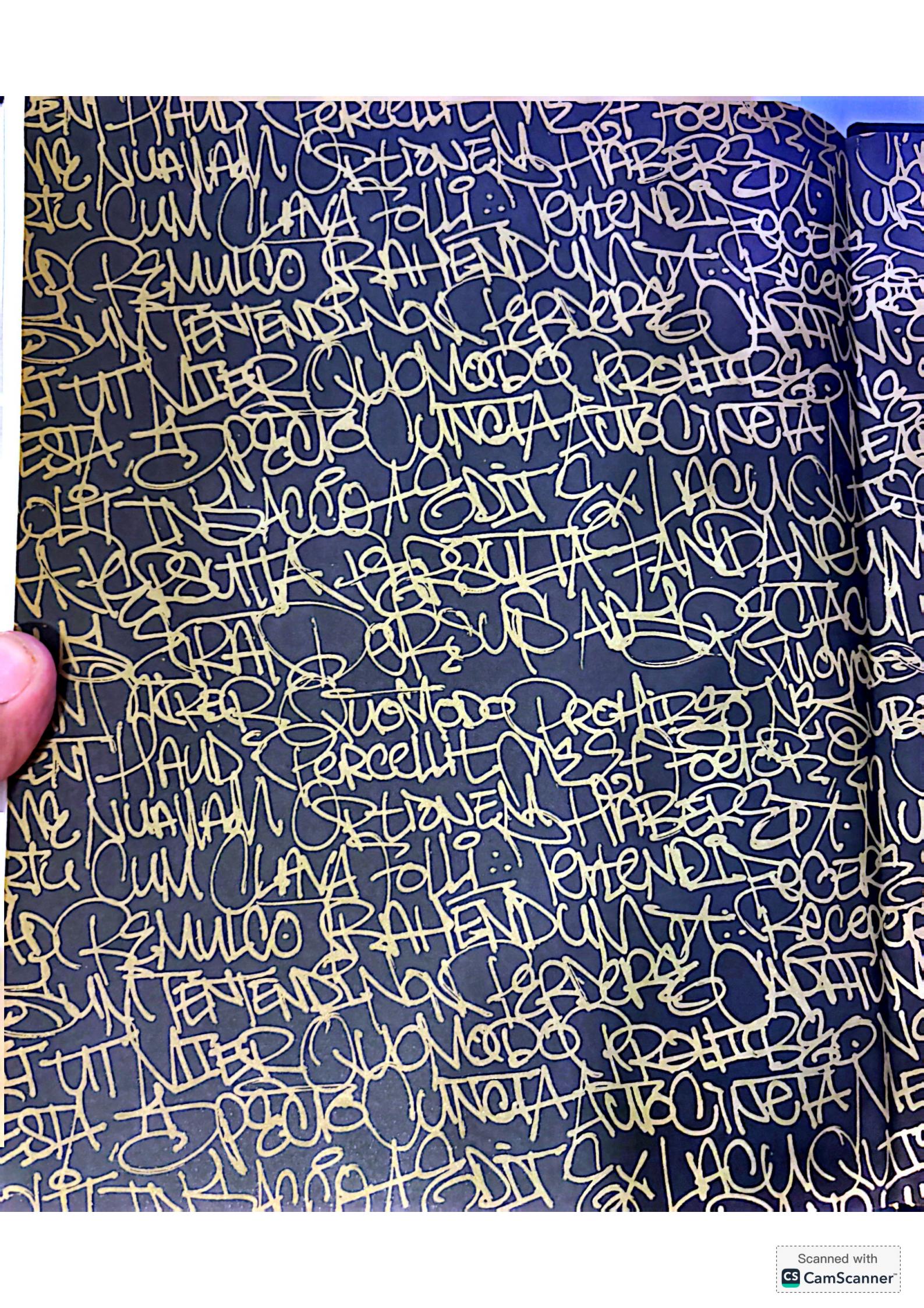
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Page 115
Photo: Joe DON1 Palattella. Louie "KR.One" Gasparro. *Don 1 The King From Queens: The Life And Photos of a NYC Transit Graffiti Master*.



The image shows a dense, abstract artwork. It consists of a repeating pattern of a single Latin phrase, "QUAM QUILAM PECUNIAM AD EXTEN- TURES IN FRONTICIS FATIGA IN POSTICIS", written in a stylized, graffiti-like font. The text is in white, with some variations in thickness and style for different letters. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly black or dark blue, which provides a strong contrast to the white text. The overall effect is one of a high-contrast, layered, and somewhat chaotic visual texture.

Graffiti is one of the last strongholds of highly refined penmanship. The most reviled and persecuted form of graffiti, the tag, is seldom appreciated for its raw beauty, balance, and skeletal form. Within these pages, some of the most accomplished writers offer their complete alphabets. Christian Acker presents these lettering samples in a clean, formal manner, evoking classic type specimens and calligraphy manuals.

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