

# THE ART OF BREAKING THE LAW

**Banksy, Mr. Brainwash and Shepard Fairey are three of the artists making vandalism mainstream, but if you want to see the really good stuff, you need to look to the streets.**

*By Brian Benton*

## ***Graffiti is illegal. It's vandalism. Don't do it.***

But, all things considered, sometimes its art, and art is always a good thing.

When I say graffiti, I don't mean scribbling your name in black Sharpie on a wall. That's not coo. But spending days planning a piece, carefully figuring out what colors will go where and how each letter will connect with the next, then gathering cans of paint and dark clothes and sneaking out into the darkness to make something beautiful, that's cool.

NOVL is the pseudonym for a graffiti artist from Fremont. He started painting in 2007, as a high school student, after seeing his friends doing simple graffiti in their free time on paper with markers.

"I never really liked art until I stated seeing my friends from summer camp drawing letters," NOVL said. "Now, I think about graffiti from the moment I wake up until the moment I go to sleep."

To NOVL, graffiti is more than just a way to leave his mark on a wall. It's more than just an art form. It's a passion. It's what his life revolves around.

"I just got back last week from every Central American country. I was on a graffiti spree for a month," he said. "And I leave for South America again to do more art in three weeks."

NOVL's love isn't unique. Another Bay Area artist, Reck Nasty is the same. Unlike NOVL though, Reck Nasty's love for graffiti started at a much younger age.

"I have been drawing since as long as I can remember," he said. "I think we are all born as artists and dreamers and slowly lose sight in that as we 'grow up.'"

Although he wasn't always a graffiti artist, it quickly became the style he most connected with.

"The town I live in is small and vandalism and forms or artistic expression were only displayed in murals depicting farm laborers and Hispanic culture," he said. "I've seen graffiti here and there throughout the city, but it wasn't until a friend of mine suggested it to me that I fully embraced it. I've been doing it on a daily basis ever since."

The process of creating a piece differs for everyone. Usually graffiti is done with spray paint in cans because of the color variety it can provide, but most artists don't limit themselves to that. Spray paint in stores can be expensive and can run out fast. Graffiti artists have to be creative.

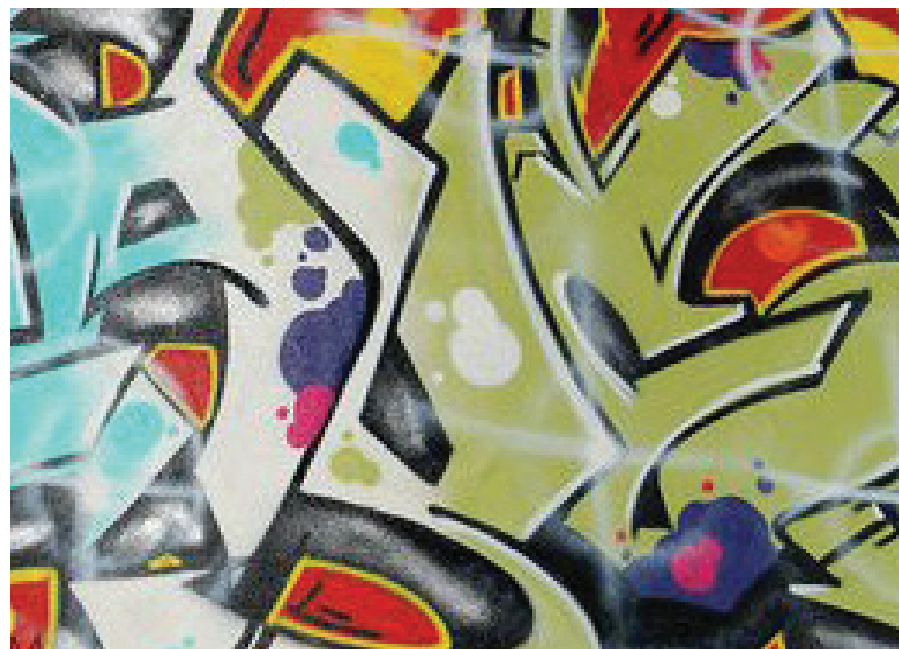
"I've made my own ink, markers and spray cans before," NOVL said. "I've used bucket paint, spray paint, markers, pens, stickers, keys, rocks, shoe polish, paint sticks, grease pencils, white-out, you name it."

Once a medium is picked, an artist decides what they want their piece to look like.

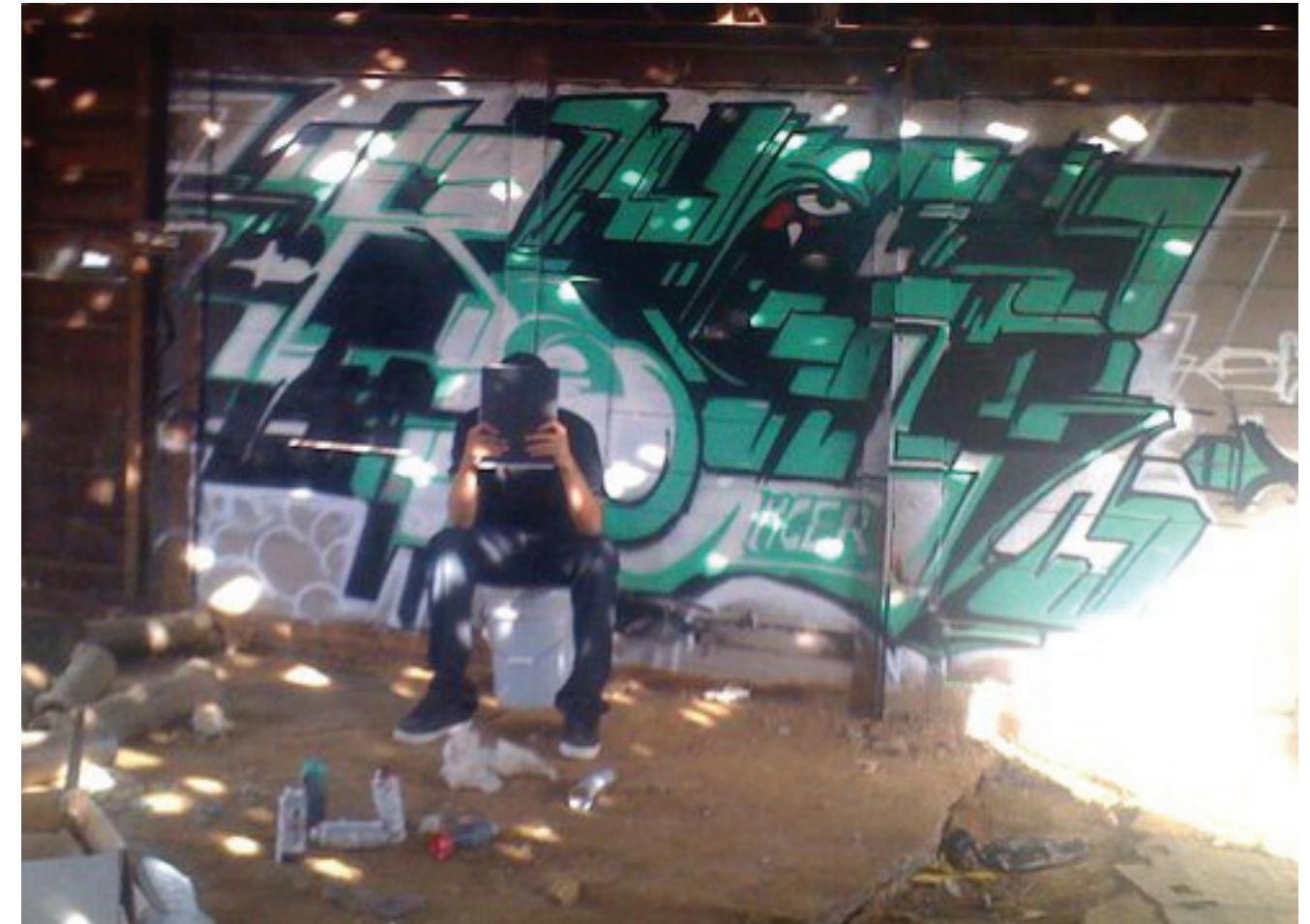
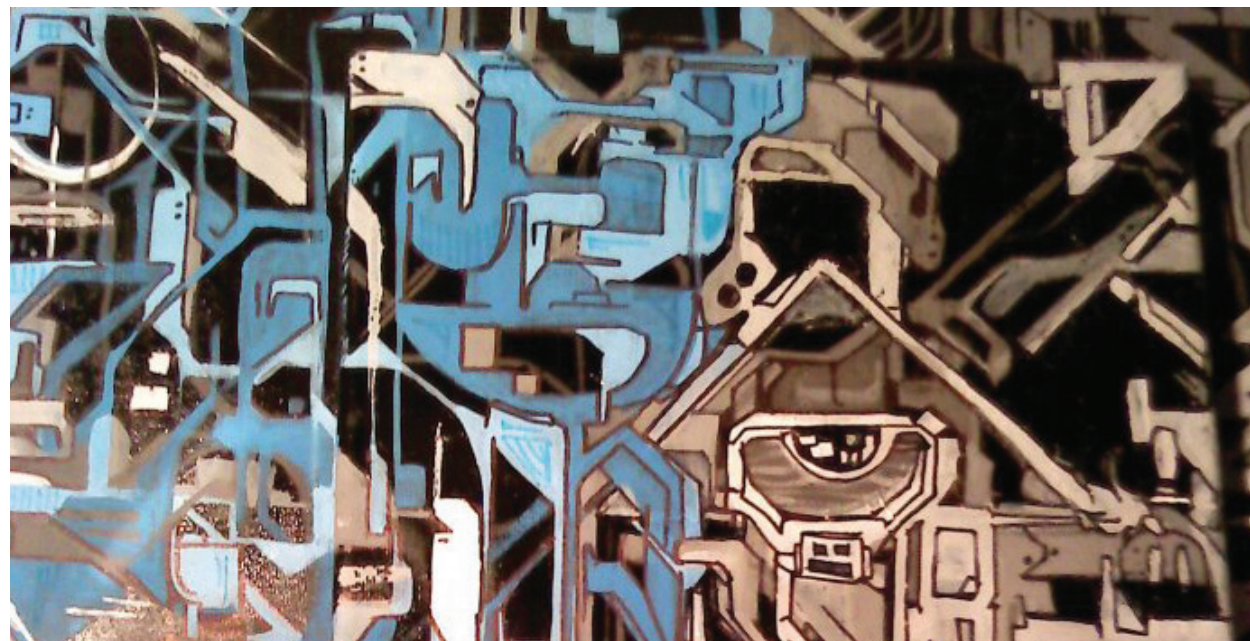
"The word graffiti comes from graph (the Greek root meaning 'to write') so you have to write," NOVL said. "If there are no letters its not graffiti."

If there are no letters, the art is a mural, or more generally, street art. Street art - that's what Banksy or Mr. Brainwash or Shepard





The work of NOVL (top and middle) and Reck Nasty (bottom). “My style is sci-fi-fantasy- robotic gore with tons of symmetry and visual distractions,” Reck Nasty said.



***“If you don’t like the way my piece looks on your building, take some paint and do something better.”***

***Reck Nasty (above)***

Fairey do - is an entirely different style of art. People often call graffiti street art, but they aren’t the same.

“Most people don’t know that there is a difference and it’s not their fault,” NOVL said. “But to me, the term street art is offensive.”

Graffiti artists have pseudonyms - pen names, or paint names, if you wish - that they go by to avoid identification. Most graffiti is just the artist’s name, but to avoid repetition artists choose different colors or designs for each piece and try to avoid using stencils.

“I hardly ever paint the same thing twice,” Reck Nasty said. “I’ve found that [using stencils is] not something I enjoy, so I always freehand everything I create.”

Graffiti has its drawbacks though. Getting caught can result in a charge for trespassing or destruction of public property and a \$1,000 fine or prison sentence of up to 90 days. But that’s part of it. Life has struggles, and for some graffiti is life.

Reck Nasty has been caught in the act of painting, but he says that this in no way defers him from getting back on the street to do more

art. Having to pay for the “damage” he did gets discouraging, and when he gets discouraged, the first thing Reck Nasty thinks to do is paint.

“If you don’t like the way my piece looks on your building, take some paint and do something better. No use in crying over spilled milk,” he said.

There’s also the route of getting commissioned for work. Both NOVL and Reck Nasty have done it at times, and although it can limit creative freedom, in the end the lowered risk and the payment make it worthwhile.

“Paying jobs are good because they support my lifestyle,” Reck Nasty said. “The fact that I’m getting paid for it does make it easier to embrace and paying jobs also challenge me at times to create things I wouldn’t normally think of.”

NOVL agreed.

“I love every chance to [do art] I get,” he said.

That simple love of painting seems to exist in most graffiti artists. It has to. The risks are high and the rewards are few. Why would someone hop over fences and climb up buildings if they didn’t love the feeling?

“Graffiti writers reap no benefits from having our name displayed publicly for free,” Reck Nasty said. “If anything we should be praised for being ballsy enough to do so avidly.”

You know how when you do something illegal, it becomes all you can think about because you’re so worried that you get caught or you start to regret it and feel bad? Graffiti seems to be kind of the same, but not because of fear or getting caught or regret. It seems to mostly just because once you start doing graffiti, you never want to stop.