

Using information design to mediate conflict

An interactive exhibition to create understanding between Pittsburgh graffiti writers and property owners

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• Abstract Graffiti has a long history of controversy in the United States. This controversy is often fueled by implicit assumptions that characterize the way we talk about the issue. The exhibit we are producing is an attempt to more accurately frame the problem. With the partnership of a local Pittsburgh museum we plan to use information design to represent the divergent points of view on the graffiti issue. By juxtaposing the opinions of graffiti writers and community members in a shared space we hope to provide a forum for empathy and shared understanding.

• Research Conducted

Interviews

- 4 interviews with graffiti writers
- 1 interview with art store manager
- 3 interviews with property owners affected by graffiti
- 1 phone interview with government official

Archival Research

- Books, magazines, articles, zines, websites, chatrooms, videos, documentaries

• Findings

I ignore...

"Graffiti is like noise to me. I can't even read it. I ignore it just like I ignore the noise of the city."

-Walnut Street property owner-

"Young punks and goofs should be sent to jail for destroying public and private property."

-Bob O'Connor, Former Pittsburgh City Council President-

Art



"To go out like Mook did, I'm sorry, if he is allowed then [Pittsburgh is] going to look like the slums of New York."

-Bob O'Connor, Former Pittsburgh City Council president-

Creating Environment



"Graffiti is just like trash on the wall. It doesn't belong there. And it's a lot more difficult to remove than if someone threw trash at my door."

-Walnut Street property owner-

Why?

"I don't understand. Do they have nothing else to do? I want to know why someone do that to me."

-Walnut street shop owner-

I don't care...

"Why should we care what they think? They don't even take the time to understand anything about graffiti. They don't know how much effort goes into graffiti and they don't even care."

-Pittsburgh graffiti writer-

Vandalism



"I love art, I do it all the time. My graffiti reflects what I know about art. I think there are three shapes you see most commonly in nature: the circle, square and triangle. My work incorporates all three."

-Pittsburgh graffiti writer-

Harming Environment



"People will never really understand what graffiti is unless they go to New York to live. Then you've got all this rubble and shit, and yet you come out of there with the attitude toward life that you can create something positive."

-Jim, New York City graffiti writer-

Why?

"I don't understand why I was fined so much. It takes only a couple of rolls of paper to remove it. Aren't there things that are a lot worse than graffiti? Why is the government so concerned with graffiti?"

-Pittsburgh former-graffiti writer-

Trace Measures

- Documentation of two areas affected by graffiti
- Photos taken of areas on a monthly basis.

Eliza Furnace Trail

- Place: out-of-the-way spot of the city
- Time: graffiti forming layers

Walnut Street shopping district

- Place: center of city life
- Time: graffiti being erased and written over

Participatory Design Session

- 1 session held with graffiti writers

Aesia's collections

- Place: Pittsburgh through Aesia's perspective
- Time: personal progression

• High Level Insights

Graffiti Writers

Property Owners

Art

- See graffiti as art.
- See graffiti as a craft that takes time and effort to master.

GRAFFITI

Vandalism

- See graffiti as an eyesore.
- Aware of that some people regard graffiti as art, but believe that such graffiti is 'somewhere else'.
- See graffiti as random acts of rebellious youth

Culture

- See graffiti as a culture based around an act.
- The culture is endowed with a shared vocabulary and widely known local and national history.

ENVIRONMENT

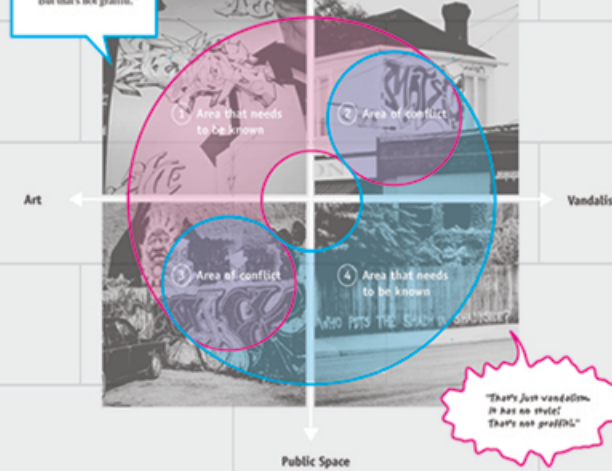
Public Space

- See the city as a drab environment of similar structures and want to enhance it.

- Depend on the kinds of business, concerned if graffiti would give bad impression to customers.
- It takes time and effort to remove graffiti.

- Are generally unaware of motivation and underlying culture of graffiti writers.

"That, I think is art. But that's not graffiti."



• Design Implications

Idea 1

- What (areas of focus): ① ② ③ ④
- Why (goal): Learning
- How (experience): Journey

Idea 2

- What (areas of focus): ① ④
- Why (goal): Empathy
- How (experience): Role-changing

Idea 3

- What (areas of focus): ② ③
- Why (goal): Discussion
- How (experience): Voting

• Next Steps

December 2003

- Conduct interviews with local politicians
- Decide on three potential directions for project
- Begin sketching out design options
- Take 3rd round of photos of Eliza Furnace Trail
- Take 6th round of photos of Walnut Street shopping district

January 2004

- Meet with Soviet and Aesia to receive input
- Talk with local museum about collaboration
- Begin iterations on design
- Finish up interviews
- Take 4th round of photos of Eliza Furnace Trail
- Take 7th round of photos of Walnut Street shopping district

February 2004

- Continue refining design
- Take 5th round of photos of Eliza Furnace Trail
- Take 8th round of photos of Walnut Street shopping district

March 2004

- Continue refining design; Conduct product testing
- Take 5th round of photos of Eliza Furnace Trail
- Take 8th round of photos of Walnut Street shopping district

April 2004

- Finish and present design