

# White

The SPRING  
FASHION ISSUE

## AMANDA SEYFRIED

*A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*  
By Justin TIMBERLAKE

AMERICAN GRAFFITI  
*Street Art, a Vandal's History*

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# Street WISE

THIS SPRING, THE WILDEST, FASTEST, MOST CRIMINAL, LEAST COMMERCIAL, AND DEFINITELY MOST URBAN OF ART FORMS WILL BE TREATED TO ITS FIRST MAJOR MUSEUM RETROSPECTIVE. WILL ONE BUILDING BE ABLE TO HANDLE SO MUCH STREET?

Some critics might argue that "street art"—whether this loaded term refers to straight-up graffiti or more interpretive activities like skateboarding—has no business being in a museum. The whole point of street art in the first place was as a radical act of dissent, a rebellion against the very forms of art sanctified within museum walls. Street art has an essential element of criminality to it and if that outlaw spirit is institutionalized, doesn't the very substance of the art disintegrate before the eye? Well, these arguments only hold if one sticks to the old idea of the museum as an elite organization split off from the rest of the community. What if the separation between the museum and the street weren't as rigid? The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles will use these questions—as well as many others—in their first blockbuster exhibition since curator and dealer Jeffrey Deitch took over as director last year. No one expected Deitch to be a conventional, by-the-book leader, and he has immediately experimented with the principles of what a museum can do by planning the retrospective "Art in the Streets." From the early days of taggers hanging on to the sides of Bronx subway cars to the tricks performed in Los Angeles skate parks, from its subversive rap and punk origins to its spectacular embracement by mainstream culture, street art will be explored in the exhibition through the various and divergent threads that weave together (and, in some countries, such as Brazil, Chile, and Iran, are still being sewn) to create one of the most influential art movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Deitch is no stranger to the genre. In fact, he was a regular fixture on the downtown New York scene of the late '70s and '80s, which galvanized the street-art movement. But to curate around such an ambitious theme, he relied on certain key figures who could tell the story from a first-person point of view. Among them: Fred Brathwaite, a.k.a. Fab 5 Freddy, the pioneering artist, curator, and all-around master of the New York scene, and Aaron Rose, the L.A. native who ended up creating a vital platform for many street artists in the early '90s. "What is very rewarding about this project is that it's being put together by a community of people with whom I've had a dialogue since 1975," Deitch explains. "In particular, Fred and Aaron are friends and collaborators going back a long, long time." Here, Deitch speaks separately with these two confidants to discuss their respective parts in a far-reaching movement: one that could never be contained in a single voice, a simple explanation, or a mere scratch. —CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN



FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: STYLE BARN BY NOC 167, 1981; CHILDREN OF THE GREAT BARKS BY DONDI, 1980; POT CAPE NOD BY MED CRASH AND DAZE, 1980; STOP REAL CRIME BY LEE QUINONES, 1978; HAND OF DOOM BY SEEN, 1980; THE CHILDREN OF TOMORROW BY LEE QUINONES, 1979; KASE BLK BY KASE, 1980. ALL PHOTOS: HENRY CHAI FANT



A pioneer of the early hip-hop and graffiti movements, Fred Brathwaite was one of the first individuals to publicize street art as pop art in the late '70s. He got his Fab 5 Freddy nickname as a member of the Fabulous 5 graffiti crew and went on to introduce mainstream audiences to hip-hop with 1983's cult film *Wild Style*. He cemented the link between early hip-hop and graffiti culture in 1988 as the first host of *Yo! MTV Raps*. Today, Brathwaite remains active in the art world, most recently exhibiting 10 multimedia works at The Cosmopolitan hotel in Las Vegas.

**JEFFREY DEITCH:** I think because this is for Andy Warhol's *Interview* we should start by discussing your genealogy with Andy, and how you had the remarkable insight to contact [writer, former *Interview* editor, and TV host] Glenn O'Brien and ask to participate in his show *Glenn O'Brien's TV Party*.

**FRED BRATHWAITE:** I was a fan of Andy's since I was a small kid. I recall seeing an ad of famous people on an airplane together. It was caricature drawing. There was Muhammad Ali, there was Miles Davis, and there was Andy Warhol. I had a fascination with him since I was little, and then I saw his work and the thing that he did. As I got older and more curious about the scene, I reached out to Glenn O'Brien, who was doing a music column in the magazine called "Glenn O'Brien's Beat." I loved the way he wrote about all different kinds of music—funk, reggae, new wave, and punk. I wanted to interview him for my college radio station. I was attending Medgar Evers College [of The City University of New York] for a short period. So that's how I met him, and Glenn told me he was going to do a public-access TV show called *TV Party*. He said he wanted to have me on as a guest, because at that time I was also telling him about the beginning of hip-hop music—rap music, if you will, because at the time it really wasn't known as hip-hop. And I was also telling him about graffiti and that I had been a graffiti artist and was interested in moving into the art world. I told Glenn, "I'd love to be a cameraman on your show." He said, "Fred, you've never done that before. You can't be the cameraman, but I'd love to have you come by and be a guest on the show." When I showed up for the first episode, the guy who was supposed to operate one of the two cameras wasn't there. Glenn looked at me and said, "Fred, get on that camera." [laughs] I became one of the show's cameramen and a regular guest. That was the beginning of my friendship with Glenn and many of the cool people that I would meet.

**DEITCH:** You've had a remarkable role as an artist, as a connector of people, and you've had an instrumental role in film. How did you discover that art was going to be your path?

**BRATHWAITE:** I grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. My father grew up with Max Roach, who became a prominent member of the bebop jazz scene in the '40s and '50s. That was the most cutting-edge American music. Growing up, there were always lots of my father's creative friends in the house talking about what was going on in the world with culture and politics. It was a time of the anti-war movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power movement. All of these things were discussed passionately in my house every day. As a young kid running in and out of the room, I got snippets of this world, and as I became a teenager I began to look at the things I was involved in—the things going on around me. And I saw a similarity, a connection, between what we were doing in the streets and those earlier conversations about politics and art. Suddenly these things were much bigger than we realized. And I started getting really curious about art. I read about the Dadaists and the Futurists and the Constructivists—those kind of movements which were reflect-



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ing the angst of the people of their times. Their work was trying to lead a movement. I began thinking about what was happening, with painting on the streets and painting on the trains as being similar but also coming from a real, pure space. It wasn't being created by academics. It was a spontaneous combustion of ideas that just happened. I would bring these ideas up while talking with Glenn and others. I was trying to find other people who could articulate the graffiti culture and take it out of that negative perception that the media gave us. I wanted to show that we were making viable art, a reflection of the time that we were living in.

**DEITCH:** The time you are speaking about—New York in the late '70s and early '80s—was a period when so many of the most important contributions to contemporary art and culture were germinating.

**BRATHWAITE:** Yeah. It was an amazing period. *Amazing*. Working on the essays for the upcoming show at MOCA and going over the material with [graffiti artist] Lee Quifones, I've been thinking about that first important show of graffiti art at the Galleria La Medusa in Rome in 1979. It was Claudio Bruni's gallery. He came over and sought us out and wanted to give us a show. That show had a ripple effect and started calling out other [graffiti] artists like Futura [2000] and ALI from [graffiti collective] Soul Artists. People began to say, "Wait a minute, this is interesting. These guys are doing it on their own and people are taking them seriously." That's because we were beginning to put the work in a context where audiences could look at it and not see it through

the negative lens that the media put on it. They began to see some value in the work. I was also taking inspiration at that time from new wave and punk bands, which I felt had a similar attitude to what was behind the beginnings of rap music. It was this same rebellious attitude of, "We're going to do this anyway, regardless. We are going to find a way to make this happen." I saw that similar energy when I was talking to Chris Stein and Debbie Harry from Blondie and also Glenn. And then, of course, just hanging out with Jean-Michel [Basquiat]. We talked often about finding an audience and getting people to understand what we were doing. All of these different forces seemed to be happening at the same time. And I remember you, Jeffrey, as being one of the people who came early on and saw the work and understood what was happening.

**DEITCH:** I believe we met at least by 1980.

**BRATHWAITE:** We definitely did. It was actually at [editor of *Art Rite* magazine] Edit Deak's loft, because I had made a few pieces that I would put in the Mudd Club show, which I was in the process of curating. The same day you visited Jean-Michel and Suzanne [Mallouk], you came to visit Edit's loft and saw some of the things I was working on for the "Beyond Words" show.

**DEITCH:** "Beyond Words." Now that's become essential history. Tell us about that show.

**BRATHWAITE:** Well, I had become friends with a bunch of artists on the scene in '79. After taping *TV Party*, we'd all go down to the Mudd Club [a seminal club of the downtown scene at 77 White Street in Tribeca], and that group included [TV Party director] Amos Poe, [director] Eric Mitchell, the Talking Heads . . . It was an illustrious crowd of really cool people. I'd also become friends with Keith Haring, who used to do odd jobs. We were all struggling at this time. But Keith started to curate some shows and he did one at Club 57 [on St. Marks Place in the East Village]. He asked me to be a part of it. One was a black-light art show where all the art had to be made in fluorescent so it would glow in the dark.

**DEITCH:** I remember that. I was there.

**BRATHWAITE:** Yes, it was fun! They felt like really cool art-school projects. Anyway, [Mudd Club cofounder] Steve Mass had been observing what was going on with graffiti and the buzz of rap and new wave. You know, "Rapture" was a big song at the time. So Mass said, "Man, I'd like you to curate a show." I said, "Wow, yeah. Maybe I'll get some of the guys." Because also at that time, I was working on developing [graffiti and hip-hop film] *Wild Style* with [director, writer, and producer] Charlie [Ahearn], so I knew a lot of the key rappers and deejays from the Bronx. I decided to put a show together that would showcase graffiti, but I also wanted to expand the concept of how that work was seen. I came up with the title "Beyond Words." I asked Futura to help me put the show together. I wanted to get graffiti based, or rooted. That included inviting friends around us, people who used to do graffiti but were now trying to make art, and others from Club 57. Then Edit knew Alan Vega from Suicide, who was making art, and Iggy Pop made some stuff too. We had different things going on and threw it all together at the Mudd Club. And we got a bunch of groups to perform. The show was a blowout. Many, many people came and crowded the street outside. People were bouncing off the walls, having a great time. And a lot of people got to experience all of this culture for the first time, and they became fans.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 213)

ABOVE: FRED BRATHWAITE AT THE FUNHOUSE IN NEW YORK, 1982. PHOTO: ROXANNE LOWIT.  
See more of AARON ROSE, JEFFREY DEITCH, AND FRED BRATHWAITE on [intercivilmagazine.com](http://intercivilmagazine.com)

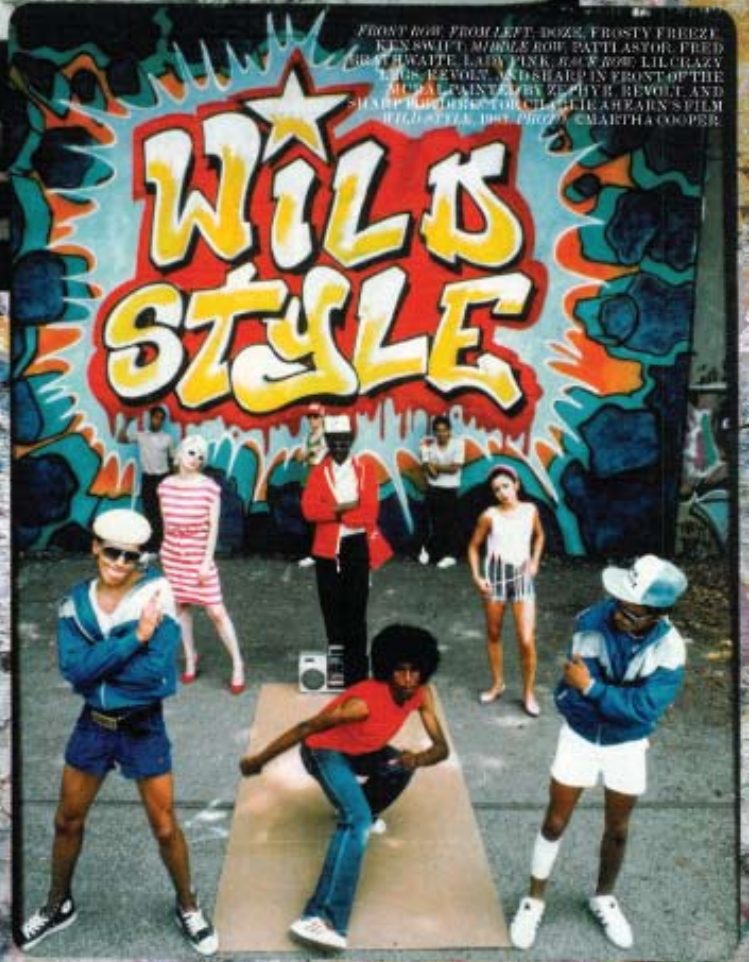




CAMPBELL'S SOUP TRAIN BY FRED BEATHWAITE IN NEW YORK, 1981. PHOTO: CHARLIE AHEARN.



FRONT ROW: KEITH HARING, FRED BEATHWAITE, GIPANO, MASTIFF, AND OTHERS AT THE OPENING OF THE '85 ARTS AND CULTURE CENTER IN NEW YORK CITY. PHOTO: CHARLIE AHEARN.



FRONT ROW: FROM LEFT: DOZZE, FROSTY FREEZE, KEN SWIFT, MIDDLE ROW: PATTI ASTOR, FRED BEATHWAITE, LADY PINK, BACK ROW: LIL CRAZY, LUGS, REVOLV, AND SHARP IN FRONT OF THE WALL PAINTED BY ZEPHYR, REVOLV, AND SHARP FOR THE FORUM AT LEE AHEARN'S FILM 'WILD STYLE'. PHOTO: MARTHA COOPER.



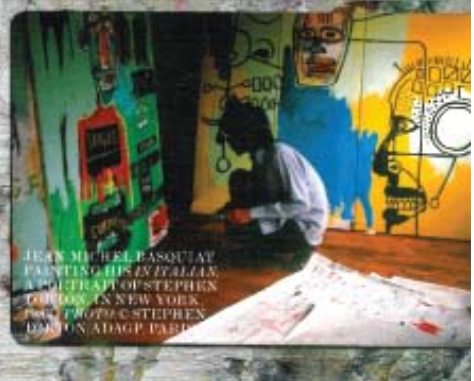
OFF: KEITH HARING IN A NEW YORK SUBWAY TRAIN, 1984. PHOTO: YSE NI KWONG FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE CENTER PROJECTS, INC., NEW YORK. DRAWING BY KEITH HARING. © 1984 KEITH HARING FOUNDATION, NEW YORK.



FRID BEATHWAITE, 1985. PHOTO: MARTHA COOPER.



OFF: KEITH HARING PAINTING IN A NEW YORK SUBWAY STATION, 1985. PHOTO: YSE NI KWONG FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE CENTER PROJECTS, INC., NEW YORK. DRAWING BY KEITH HARING. © 1985 KEITH HARING FOUNDATION, NEW YORK.



JEAN MICHEL BASQUIAT AT PAINTING HIS 'EYE BALLS' IN A TRIBUTE TO STEPHEN GORDON IN NEW YORK. PHOTO: STEPHEN GORDON. ADAPTED FROM 'ADAPTED'.



(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 150) DEITCH: It's fascinating how these key events are so important when you look back in history, and how a show like "Beyond Words" brought this whole scene together and defined it.

BRATHWAITE: Yeah, it did. And you know what was also interesting about that time? It did bring people together. In that downtown scene there weren't really that many people of color hanging out. It was just a handful of us—me, Jean-Michel, Pat Griffin, who was a young architect. But we had all these different people in a room together—Latin and black guys from the Bronx and Lower East Side hanging out, mixing, dancing with punk-rock, new-wave arty types. Everyone was enjoying each other's company. It was amazing to be in the room, because things like that didn't happen on a regular basis. But that was really representative of what New York is. In fact, Afrika Bambaataa, who was one of the DJs at "Beyond Words" later made a song called "Planet Rock," which was inspired by playing in front of a new kind of crowd: all those spiky-haired kids enjoying this stuff. "Planet Rock" changed the face of contemporary music. It created the electro-beat sound.

DEITCH: You've been talking about the interrelationships between new music and new art. Can you expand on the idea of how graffiti was involved with rap and punk music?

BRATHWAITE: I felt strongly at the time that there was a synergy between rap music, deejaying, breakdancing, and the graffiti art on trains and walls. I saw them as one thing. When I met Charlie Ahearn at [Collaborative Projects art exhibit] "The Times Square Show" in 1980, he said right away, "Let's make a movie." We began making a film that would connect these forms as one movement, which we now know as hip-hop. My personal motivation was also that of being a painter and having my first shows alongside Lee Quinones. I was very concerned about creating something bigger as a platform on where we were coming from as visual artists. I felt it was a complete culture, with dance, a unique sound, and visuals coming from a similar place—all made by these wild, urban New York teenagers, essentially [*laughs*]. It was great to put the pieces together to what would become *Wild Style* [1983]. A lot of the people in that film were really playing themselves. There was a lot of life imitating art at that time and everybody *got it*, everybody played along. And I think to our surprise, these things are still pulsating globally in ways that still boggle my mind. To be in Brazil and see the work of Os Gêmeos or to be in England and see what Banksy is doing is pretty fascinating to me.

DEITCH: The art and the music of that time is resonating more and more today. It fascinates me how much of the work was given attention by the art world establishment at the time. But while the "official" art world moved on, the actual audience just kept getting bigger and bigger. In fact, the audience for the art that has come out of your innovations is probably bigger than anything else in contemporary art.

BRATHWAITE: That's great the way you put that, Jeffrey. When I was looking at the Russian Constructivists, these agitprop artists actually painted on trains. It was a heavy influence. They were bringing art to the people, to the masses, and breaking it out of the clubbiness of the art world, which is a monolith. We use the term pop in the art world, as in Pop Art, but we forget that its root is popular—popular culture. As we've become more sophisticated and we have more means of accessing information, we can put these stories together for ourselves, as opposed to only relying on some person in the art world. We can now dictate some of these rules ourselves. And by the fact that thousands of people have experienced aspects of this particular culture, they're able to understand it. They're able to put the pieces in place. *Wild Style* was a key to putting faces on individuals and allowing people to see that we were just young folks trying to break out and do something interesting that touches a lot of people. Our main aspiration for *Wild Style* were the movies that would play on 42nd Street in Times Square. That's the old 42nd Street with all the Kung Fu and horror films. That's where our target audience would gather for entertainment. We wanted a film that would appeal to our target audience, and now that film resonates 30 years later as a cult film. *Rolling Stone* voted *Wild Style* number 7 of 25 greatest music DVDs of all time. It's so much more than we could have asked for, but really it's just a reflection of the popular vote. We're not from the classic background of those who had the large, loud voices of the art world. We're not those people. But we were determined. Our objective was to do it by any means necessary, particularly Jean-Michel. It was going to be music, it was going to be film, it was going to be art, and it was definitely going to happen. ~~We were figuring out some of the things that we were~~ course doing good work along the way. It's great that it's still alive and thriving and there are new players jumping in and adding new pieces. It keeps it from getting staid and boring.