

# The Connotation and Symbolic Significance of Street Styles Clothing from the Perspective of Graffiti

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**Abstract:** In the past two years, street styles have been surging in different styles of clothing design, so what is the reason for the popularity of this street style? In order to explore the internal reasons for the popularity of street style in the world, this paper analyzes the historical development background of street style clothing, the popularity of street style clothing and the spirit of hip hop culture, and summarizes the popularity of street style clothing in the world by combining with design cases. The popularity of street style clothing is the expression and release of people's inner feelings. Clothing is the symbol of people's inner feelings. The core three elements of hip hop culture are graffiti, music and break dance. Music is the core of these three elements. Hip-hop culture, which is still an important part of the world's popular culture, whether dance or graffiti, music or street style clothing fashion, is an expression of people's inner desire to be fearless and unfettered emotions and attitudes.

## 1. Introduction

Graffiti gives people the feeling that it is doodling in a random and messy manner, and doesn't seem to have any connection with elegance. However, this is not the case. In the past two years, graffiti is applied in the deconstruction design, street style and classic style of different styles of international high-end clothing design. Performance effect of the application is different due to the designer's different design concept and brand style. Rei Kawakubo, a world-renowned deconstructionist master, used graffiti in her spring works of 2018 which were saturated in color and creative in messy lines. (Figure 1 Comme des Garçons 2018 Spring ready-to-wear)

In 2018, French luxury brand Louis Vuitton announced that Virgil Abloh, head of high-end street label Off-White, became the new art director for its menswear. That the well-established luxury brands leading the fashion such as Louis Vuitton adds this street element to its design is further proof that the street style is already in full swing.

So what is the reason for the popularity of this street style? Let's start with street graffiti.



Figure 1 Comme Des Garçons

The word “graffiti” originates from the comment of Lu Tong (a poet living in Tang Dynasty) on

the doodling done by his naughty son. The literary quotation is from “Yuchuanzi Collection-Yuntianding” (name of the Collection of Lu Tong’s works): “(Lu Tong’s son) suddenly comes to the desk and turned over the ink on the desk. Then he doodled (pronounced as Tu for Chinese character) with the ink and drew something like a crow (pronounced as Ya for Chinese character)”. Later, people get the phrase “Tu Ya” (Graffiti in English) from Lu Tong’s verse and the phrase was passed down to now. Graffiti is the English word for Tu Ya. [1]

Graffiti is called graffiti art because of its historical background and development process.

## 2. Background of Graffiti

Europe suffered devastating destruction in various aspects during the Second World War. Influenced by the war, many famous European artists fled to the United States which rose in the war, and the international art center was transferred from Europe to the United States. The war caused great damage, which made artists start to rethink the relationship between art and life. Instead of continuing their previous creation methods, artists began to explore new visual fields. Abstract expressionism and pop art began to emerge in the United States. [2] New York is the largest port on the east coast of the United States. Immigrants from all over the world gather here. With its mixed ethnic composition and the full exchange of various cultures, new ideas keep emerging. Perhaps it is New York's inclusivity that endowed it with the unique innovation vitality. At the same time, as the western art developed to the middle of the 20th century, the exploration of various styles entered a bottleneck period and an important figure (M 'Ducha-mp) appeared in the development track of the art. M 'Ducha-mp (1887-1968) is the representative personage of Dada school who advocated opposition to artistic authority and tradition. The most famous work of M 'Ducha-mp is the urinal that was named “fountain”. In the American “Independent Artists Exhibition” hold in 1917 in the United States, Ducha-mp's work “Fountain” was the most controversial work, but this work indeed had epoch-making significance. 50 years after the appearance of this work, American pop art found a fire-new artistic direction from his finished products. [3] (Figure 2 France Ducha-mp)

From Ducha-mp's subversion of artistic tradition, people started to open up new ways of artistic expression.

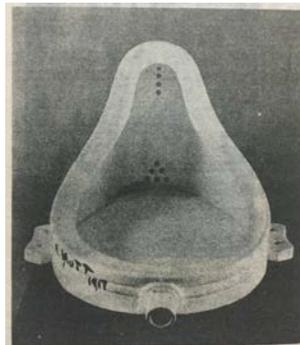


Figure 2 Foundation Created by m Ducha-Mp

From the middle of the 20th century to the late 70s, American artists explored all aspects of the artistic adaptation, starting from putting the photograph, cartoons, hamburgers, and so on in the pop art until putting all sorts of incredible forms in the arts, for example, the artist may even be able pack his excrement and sell it. At this point, it is not surprising that graffiti can be called art. [4]

## 3. Graffiti and Hip-Hop Culture

The integration of different nationalities and cultures has made New York a gathering place for new and innovative art forms. A large number of new art forms are born here. Graffiti was born in the Bronx of New York of the United States. Being the poorest neighborhood of New York, Bronx was home to a large number of blacks and Latins from north and Central America who worshipped black singers and basketball stars in the extreme. Extremely poor life makes black teenagers worship money badly. At that time, there are numerous black gangs in Bronx and the fight

between people of different gangs occurred now and then. Gang territories show the special significance. Sometimes members of a gang were sent to the territory of the rival gangs to scrawl his own symbol on the walls by using spray paint cans in the middle of the night in order to provoke the rival gangs. This way of drawings on the wall slowly attracted people with painting talent. They take the wall as a canvas and graffiti art was born. Gradually graffiti spreads to the subway car. The performance spirit of graffiti and hip-hop culture has a close relationship. The two are interlinked in spirit in that both of them are unshackled, fearless and outspoken. [5]

When we talk about Graffiti, we cannot avoid discussion of hip-hop culture. The English word Hip Hop itself comes from a meaningless garrulous. “Rap” is a term used by black Americans to describe “being garrulous”. Many people used “Rap” to refer to the MC's performance at the ball. One sentence the early black MC specially loves to say is “To the hip, the hop, the hibby-hibby dibby-dibby, hip-hip-hop, and you don ’ t stop”. The three core elements of hip hop culture are graffiti, music and break dance, among which music is the core element [5]. Both the dance and the graffiti of Hip-hop culture, which is still an important part of the world's popular culture, originate from the streets of the Bronx. It is the love of the poor for life. Hip-hop refers to the culture of the underclass in New York City in the 1970s. Its main participants are the residents of black Americans and Latinos. It includes and integrates various cultures and crosses various art forms. It has its own distinct feature and characteristics and performs in music, dance and art. This culture originated in the 1970s, developed in the 1980s, and became popular in the 1990s. Now, it has become a popular culture all over the world. The most prominent feature of hip-hop culture is that it shows a sense of freedom to break the shackles and defy conventions in both music and art [4].

Both hip-hop culture and graffiti art appeared in the Bronx of the United States. Early graffiti artist were also hip-hop DJ or MC. The Bronx of New York city gathered a large number of blacks and other minorities of South America. These people lived a poor life but their talent with love of music and dance burst with enthusiasm in their poor life.

#### 4. Graffiti Effect

Graffiti at the beginning is a kind of labels scrawled by the black gangs at the Bronx to mark their territories. So at the early stage they are usually in the form of letters. Bronx and New York subway coach are filled with all sorts of different letters in different forms. There are bubble fonts and 3D fonts. Later some underlying people with artistic talent show more graffiti art forms, such as cartoon form of graffiti [4]. (Figure3, 4 and 5 shows graffiti effect)



Figure 3

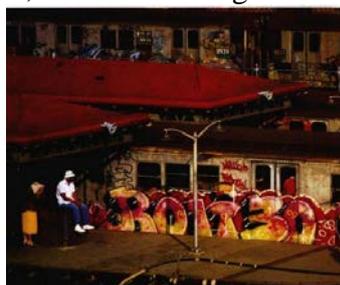


Figure 4



Figure 5

#### 5. Graffiti Effect in Clothing Design

##### 5.1 Representation of the Patterns

Graffiti is mainly represented by patterns in clothing design, which will be represented according to the material of the clothing or craft of the pattern. There are woven materials and knitted materials for clothing. In terms of the technological representation of patterns, there are printing and dyeing patterns, knitting patterns and three-dimensional graffiti effect. Seen from the aspect of graffiti effect, there is graffiti with letters like Jeremy Scott Spring 2019 ready-to-wear in Oversize-style knitted coat which presents graffiti letters with multi-color variations. The graffiti is

fixed on the garment by the way of stitching, giving vivid and varied visual effect. (As shown in figure 7) Burberry Fall2018 ready-to-wear thick coat, the noodling graffiti effect is represented by arbitrary sewing lines and small decoration, giving people the solemn feeling but with flexible and unrestrained feelings. (As shown in figure 8) Prada Spring 2018 ready-to-wear presents flexible visual effects with printed cartoon strips. Even though there is cartoon design effect in the graffiti representation of the Bronx, strictly speaking, this season's cartoon design of PRADA is more inclined to strip cartoon design, but the effect embodies the streets elements in the two seasons. Since the brand will fully consider whether or not the element adopted conforms to its style, a compromise of the more freely streets cartoon effect and the brand style will be adopted. (As shown in figure 9) MAISON MARGIELA 2019 Spring Couture uses a variety of colors with high saturation to show the unrestricted and bold graffiti with fringe and chaotic interspersion effects. The background and subject are unified, giving strong representation effect.



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Market factors and brand image have been considered in the above clothing design. The designer fully considers whether or not the graffiti element complies with its own characteristics at the time of representing the graffiti elements. Not all the use of graffiti elements will consider market factors. The designer is also unrestrained when representing his or her creative ideas. An example for this is that the unconstrained style of Rei Kawakubo appears in the design of Comme des Garçons 2018 Spring ready-to-wear. (Figure 10).



Figure 10

## 5.2 Popularity of Street Style

Street style clothing which is popular in recent years is matched with street symbols. The clothing silhouette is dominated by oversize and quickly become popular around the world. It is loved by many fashion people. The oversize clothing is also derived from the style of dressing in hip-hop culture. The exaggerated clothing size of the OVERSIZE style shows a growing trend. This exaggerated clothing profile originally come from parents who often buy over-size clothes for their child so as not to throw away the clothes of the fast growing child in such quickly manner. As time

passes, this kind of exaggerated clothing style, the graffiti, the dance and the music all become element of hip-hop culture and makes this kind of clothing displaying the street style, endowing the clothing with a rebellious, cynicism, uninhibited and independent personality and making it a favorite of the fashionable and young people around the world.

## 6. Graffiti Design Case

### (1) Inspiration Source

This series take the “Camp taste” as the source of inspiration. Exaggerated humorous art style with strong visual impact is created by integrating the graffiti elements and using hand weaving, knitting jacquard and woven fabric texture reengineering. Graffiti illustrations are used as a main expressive force which shows casual and free dressing in a kind of unruly visual performance effect to convey people’s concept of removing the daily pressure and yearning for themselves. Passionate and unrestrained tomato red and youthful Monaco blue are taken as the main tone in the aspect of color. Denim cotton is adopted as the fabrics with combination of positioning printing and hand stitching. (Figure 11)



Figure 11

### (2) Design Sketch



Figure 12

### (3) Manufacturing Process Description

Before the printing is positioned, the fabric needs to be to prevent wrinkles. In order to make the printing color brighter and maintain the original hue, sizing processing is required. After sizing, the temperature needs to be adjusted to dry the fabrics. Then the materials will be drawn into the printing machine to locate printing. After the printing, the fabric should be separated and hung and put into the steam box to receive 1 hour steam. After that, the fabric will be put into cold water to fix the color. Finally the fabrics will be dried by natural air. (Figure 13 (Figure 14: positioning the printing plate)

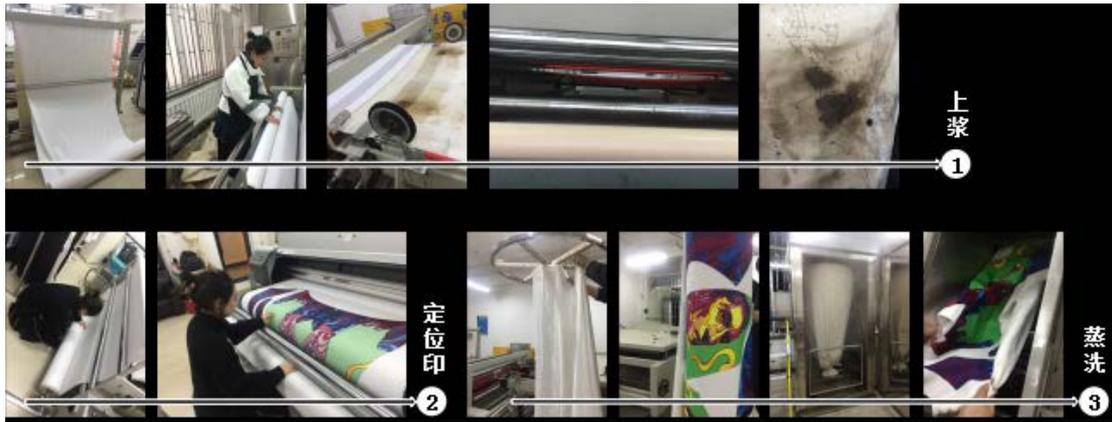


Figure 13



Figure 14

(5) Details of the Ready-to-wear (Figure 15, 16)



Figure 15



Figure 16

## 7. Relationship between Graffiti Popularity and the Current Era

In its forward-looking vision for fall/winter 2018/19, WGSN, a leading pop forecaster, summarizes that people of the art, design and music worlds unanimously agree that culture is more powerful than state or nationalism. From catwalks to the high street, street style continues to be popular. The fashion industry draws inspiration from all over the world. [6]

Application of graffiti to clothing design is closely related to the popular trend of the present era. After the financial crisis in 2009, the clothing design field brought stunning visual effect with bright colors. This effect is corresponding to the gray inner emotions of people in the economic crisis. The economy had been on the downturn since the financial crisis and that may be the reason for application of more graffiti design symbols by the clothing design industry. Graffiti is one of the elements of hip-hop culture which is full of passion, rich in innovation but without constraint. Human society is a group with continuous innovation and development. Color application of pattern

representation of graffiti is eye-popper. At the same time, the music and way of dressing in the hip-hop culture become current popular element. Clothing expresses the real heart and emotion of the people living in each era, for example, Bikini was invented in the best economic situation of the United States after World War II. Clothing is the economic and political reaction of an era. The popularity of street style is the expression of people's inner feelings and the expression of pursuit of a better life by dressing.

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