



Blue and Daze checking out their pieces.



Stig Ya Daze, Blue - Freshing Stockholm 2000

From passion to profession

Creating art to make a living makes other demands and has other requirements than doing pieces for ones own pleasure. Only a handful, of the hundreds who tried, has so far made it both artistically and commercially.

Of course not only graffiti artists has discovered the problem with transforming a passion to a profession. But in few other areas does the controversies shine through so well.

Graffiti has grown from an environment where it competes with advertising, buildings and all the other impressions we're met by in the place we formally call the public space. In an art gallery, where you go only to view art, there's no competition.

The pieces risk either to feel like caged animals or lead as an arena act in a basement club. Even in the act of painting the conditions, and what you have to think about to get across to your audience, differ enormously.

Daze was one of the first writers who took the step into the art world and one of the few who have managed to stay there. He is born and raised in Brooklyn and did his first

piece before most of UP's readers even knew what a spray can were. To this day he has exhibited in galleries for almost twenty years and makes a living out of his art.

It was during the first years of the Eighties that Daze and other writers like Dondi and Lady Pink had a first chance to present their art in galleries.

"In the beginning I was interested in it from an art point of view. Canvases were something new. I said never mind the money, because I never thought there would be any money in it anyway. We were recognised, but I think people played up the outlaw aspect too much. When you're doing a painting in a gallery for a show, there's nothing illegal about that at all. Eventually the art world didn't like it; they saw it as too much of a problem. They couldn't deal with the youth culture that went along with the paintings. They wanted the art, but not the artist. I'm one of the few people who continued working and ignored all that criticism. But I can't say it was just the art world that backlashed. There was a backlash from other writers too, saying 'you're not keeping it real, making canvases is not graffiti' and things like that. Some still do this to-

day, but I've always felt that if you were given the opportunity to do something, these people would probably be doing it as well."

What is graffiti then?

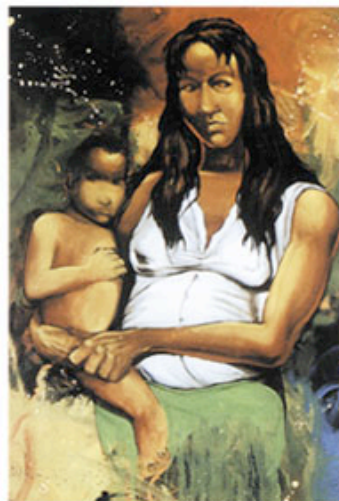
"When I think of graffiti, me personally, I think about styles done on trains or walls. I don't even consider my paintings to be graffiti, to be quite honest. OK, I'm using spray paint, but the stuff I do for galleries are not really graffiti paintings. I still do pieces; there is nothing commercial involved in that at all. I've been doing that for so long that I don't have to prove myself anymore. I can do my ten pieces a year and be happy with that. So for me, at this point, it's very separate. I try to keep my gallery stuff as a business and it's a lot of consideration with that. With painting styles on walls it's just for the love and there's a lot of freedom I have in doing that."

There is a big difference in working on the street and working in a studio situation, says Daze and continues:

"When you're working in your studio, people are gonna scrutinise and criticise it so much more, everyone will have a real opinion of it. You'll really have to try to produce something that is flawless and can withstand the test of time. A painting is gonna be here for like ten, twenty or a hundred years maybe even more than that, you don't know. When you're outside painting



First Famous Portrait of Mike Wilson by Daze 1987



Study for Fresh Show Museum by Daze 1988

a wall, you don't have to think that way, because pieces can last a week, a month, a year maybe. But they are gonna go away and all you'll have left is a photograph."

Even if Daze doesn't see his canvas production as graffiti there are more than a few similarities. Not only in the pieces but also in how they are produced. Daze shares a studio in the Bronx with his graffiti partner Cruz and they often work together. With exhibits, sometimes even on the same canvases.

We did trains together, now we do shows together. We work well together. Our styles are really different and when it comes together it somehow works.

What's your ordinary workday like?

"The first thing in the morning, I call people for jobs or whatever. I do that right off, for a couple of hours. Then I go to the studio, paint for three or four hours. When I come home I get on the phone again. A lot of what I do is being on the phone. You gotta be in touch with people, that's the business part of the job. Then I have other days when I'm not going to the studio. Maybe I have to go and get supplies or work on a design on paper for a record cover or a T-shirt."

For ten years Daze did no pieces at all. From 1983 he concentrated fully on his own exhibitions in galleries and apart from that

the scene had changed.

"For me writing was about seeing my name in motion and after 1982, which was like the height, the trains were starting to die out. There were still people painting trains, but the quality got lower and lower. I got bored with it. And I didn't feel that walls were exciting at all. I mean, if you were doing walls back in those days, people thought you were a toy."

But in the early Nineties the graffiti magazines became more common and in them Daze discovered the walls that were painted in Europe and by the younger artists in New York.

I started to think, 'Yo, I can be a part of this as well, it's really amazing what the guys are doing now. And that's when I started doing pieces again.'

Daze has one leg in the traditional art world and the other in graffiti. He says that he doesn't feel part of any special movement but rather with several individuals and that he feels as having an artistic dialogue with both graffiti artists like Mudge 2 and renaisance painters like Caravaggio.

Daze also talks warmly about The Ash Can School, an art movement in New York during the Twenties and Thirties:

"These guys were painting stuff specifically about New York. The Ghetto, street scenes, the elevated trains and train station

scenes. Those guys I really like, I can relate to what they did."

But even from the very beginning Daze's influences has come from different sources:

"When I started painting I was influenced by other writers, but also by Mad magazine, Robert Crumb, Fritz the Cat and Zap comics. Music and movies like Superfly and Foxy Brown. All these things that was part of the early Seventies, that kind of came together influenced me. Some of the first writers I saw was Blade, Tracy 168, Jester, Stay High and Voice of the Getto. And then later on I started to learn more about style. I looked at Phase 2 and he showed me that style doesn't have to end at a certain place. It can really evolve."

It feels like the label graffiti isn't that important to you?

"No, it's not, because when I was coming up we never talked about graffiti. It was like: Yo, You write. Are you a writer? You do pieces. You tag. You bomb. You never heard the word graffiti artist. It was writer, writers' bench, writers' corner."

Jacob Kimvall

More about Daze:
www.A11495T.com/daze3.html
www.webgallerynyc.com/chris.html