

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
cordially invites you to a workshop on

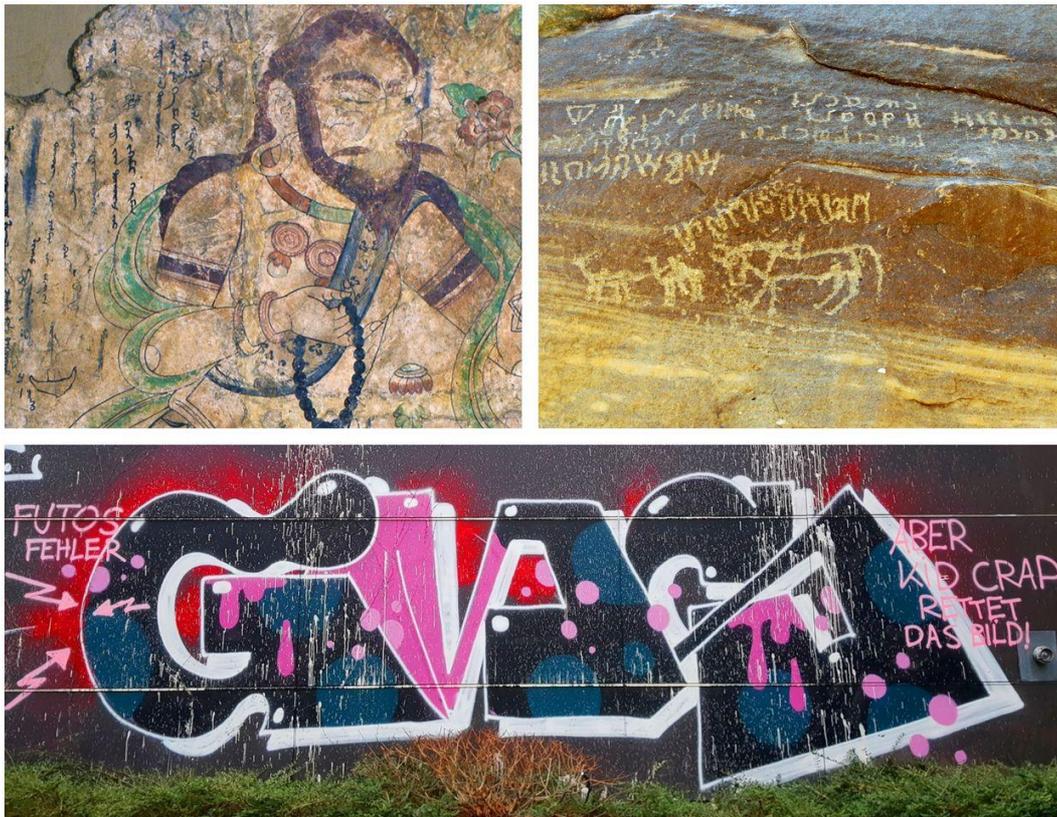
Scratched, Scrawled, Sprayed: Towards a Cross-Cultural Research on Graffiti

Friday, 26 February, 02:00 pm-05:30 pm CET

Friday, 5 March, 02:00 pm-06:00 pm CET

Friday, 12 March, 02:00 pm-05:30 pm CET

Zoom-Meeting



Upper left: Siddha, wall-painting with graffiti, 7th–11th c. CE. From Bezeklik Caves, Turfan, China, collection of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Reproduced with permission.

Upper right: Graffiti in Dadanitic and Nabataean scripts, may date between 5th c. BCE–2nd c. CE. Oasis of al-‘Ulā, Saudi Arabia. Photo by Christian J. Robin via OCIANA database (sigla U 045.1–2).

Bottom: GMS Crew, undated. Hamburg, building of Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek: “Futo’s mistake, but Kid Crap saves the piece!”. Photo by Malena Ratzke.

About the workshop

From the deserts of Egypt to the forests of Mesoamerica to contemporary metropolises: Graffiti are everywhere, and it has been that way for quite some time. Indeed, the human urge to claim their voice in the visual landscape surrounding them seems to be one of the universals of literate societies. Both as a solo creation on a pristine wall and yet another addition to a chain of scribbles, graffiti are socially creative acts that have been imbued with a variety of meanings by their creators. With their designs, they shape the perception of spaces and objects. Modern scholarship endeavours to place these written acts in context and do justice to their significance as important sources of cultural history. Yet the word 'graffiti' is a fluid term that has been imbued with specific connotations within distinct scholarly traditions that study diverse graffitiing communities in different times and spaces. Even within these traditions, its use often reflects personal experience and assumptions of individual scholars rather than a general consensus. This poses a challenge to a real cross-cultural approach to the study of graffiti in different writing cultures.

In three sessions, this workshop brings together experts on graffiti scratched, scrawled, or sprayed on surfaces around the globe. By exploring the extent of graffitiing practices from antiquity to the present day and the diversity of scholarly traditions dealing with them, the workshop aims at opening up an interdisciplinary dialogue on the prospects of a cross-cultural study of written artefacts known as 'graffiti'.

Programme

Session 1: Graffitiing in Ancient Cultures (Friday 26 February 2021, 02:00-05:30 pm CET)

Chairs: Leah Mascia & Lauren Osthof (Hamburg)

02:00-02:10	Alessandro Bausi (Hamburg): Opening Remarks
02:10-02:55	Charlotte Roueché (London): <i>'Graffiti' in an Inscribed Environment</i>
02:55-03:40	Michael C. A. Macdonald (Oxford): <i>'Crying in the Wilderness': The Enigma of Graffiti in a Non-literate Society</i>
03:40-03:50	Break
03:50-04:35	Jitse H. F. Dijkstra (Ottawa): <i>'Rien que la marque d'un pied!': Egyptian Graffiti in Context</i>
04:35-05:20	Ingo Strauch (Lausanne): <i>Indian Graffiti along the Silk Road</i>
05:20-05:30	Chairs: General discussion and closing remarks

Session 2: Graffiti in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures (Friday 5 March 2021, 02:00-06:00 pm CET)

Chairs: Malena Ratzke & Leah Mascia (Hamburg)

02:00-02:10	Chairs : Opening Remarks/Recap
02:10-02:50	Dai Matsui (Osaka): <i>Graffiti by Old Uigur Pilgrims in Dunhuang and Eastern Eurasia</i>
02:50-03:30	Matthew Champion (Norfolk): <i>Accepted and Acceptable? Attitudes to Historical Graffiti Inscriptions in the Medieval Church</i>
03:30-04:10	Jarosław Żrałka (Krakow): <i>Incised Images among the Palaces and Temples: The Content and Meaning of Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti</i>
04:10-04:25	Break
04:25-05:05	Arlo Griffiths (Paris): <i>A Very First Exploration of Graffiti as an Epigraphic Category in South East Asia up to ca. 1500 CE</i>
05:05-05:45	Mia Trentin (Nikosia): <i>Medieval and Modern Graffiti in Eastern Mediterranean: Challenges and Potential</i>
05:45-06:00	Chairs: General discussion and closing remarks

Session 3: Modern and Contemporary Graffiti (Friday 12 March 2021, 02:00-05:30 pm CET)

Chairs: Lauren Osthof & Ondřej Škrabal (Hamburg)

02:00-02:10	Chairs: Opening Remarks/Recap
02:10-02:55	Minna Valjakka (Helsinki): <i>Transcribed Flows and Arrhythmias: Chinese Writing Cultures from Stone Inscriptions to Contemporary Graffiti</i>
02:55-03:40	Seth M. Markle (Hartford): <i>'Spray It Loud': Notes on Graffiti History, Culture, and Politics in Urban Tanzania</i>
03:40-03:50	Break
03:50-04:35	Anne Vieth (Stuttgart): <i>Curating Graffiti</i>
04:35-05:20	Alexander Araya López (Venice): <i>Narrating 'Graffiti' in the Media: Why is it News?</i>
05:20-05:30	Chairs: General discussion and closing remarks

Abstracts and Contributors

Session 1: Graffitiing in Ancient Cultures (Friday 26 February 2021)

'Graffiti' in an Inscribed Environment

Charlotte Roueché (26 February, 02:10-02:55 pm CET)

Abstract: Greek and Roman cities and settlements were full of inscribed texts; while the necropolis outside the city contained funerary inscriptions, the city itself presented a range of formal texts – honorific, and official – which were executed with care and show professional standards. But at many sites there is also a wide range of texts less carefully presented and whose status is less clear – reservations on theatre seats, location texts for market stall holders, names, slogans, and many others whose meaning is unclear; there are also many images. These are not equally distributed: they are far more easily identified at sites where the local stone made it relatively easy to cut a text, or at sites such as Pompeii where plaster walls and painted texts have survived. Over time the development, in particular, of photography has led to increased recording of the less formal texts which are frequently described as graffiti: what in practice do we mean by this? What terminology do we need?

Charlotte ROUECHÉ is Professor Emerita of Digital Hellenic Studies at King's College London (<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3606-2049>). She has worked for many years on the Roman and Late Roman inscriptions of Asia Minor and North Africa, with an increasing focus on informal texts – graffiti?

'Crying in the Wilderness': The Enigma of Graffiti in a Non-literate Society

Michael C. A. Macdonald (26 February, 02:55-03:40 pm CET)

Abstract: I would suggest defining graffiti as 'the expression of personal thoughts in a public place'. As such, they are different from 'tags' or 'signatures' which record a person's presence in a place simply by writing, carving or painting his or her name, sometimes accompanied by a symbol or traditional word or phrase. The term 'graffiti' can be used of words or drawings in a public place, and a single graffito can consist of both. Inevitably, we associate tags and verbal graffiti with literate societies, but ironically scores of thousands of – often very informative – verbal and figural graffiti were produced by members of a *non-literate* society some 2,000 years ago in the deserts of what is now southern Syria, eastern Jordan, and north-west Saudi Arabia. In my paper I will explore how this apparent contradiction in terms came about and what these tags and graffiti mean for our understanding of the concept of 'graffiti'.

Michael C. A. MACDONALD has worked on the languages, scripts, inscriptions and rock art of ancient Arabia and its neighbours for the last four decades, both in the study and in the field. He created and directs the *Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia* (<http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/>) and is a Fellow of the British Academy and an Honorary Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford.

‘Rien que la marque d’un pied!’: Egyptian Graffiti in Context

Jitse H. F. Dijkstra (26 February, 03:50-04:35 pm CET)

Abstract: Egypt possesses perhaps the largest concentration of graffiti in the ancient world. In this beautiful land, graffiti covering the whole stretch of Egypt’s history are encountered in large numbers on rocks, in tombs, in quarries and, in particular, on the walls of the many temples that dot the Nile valley. Long neglected, there has been a remarkable upswing in the interest in ancient Egyptian graffiti during the last few decades. In this paper, I will provide an overview of current scholarship on this topic, with a particular focus on temples, and address questions such as why Egyptians left graffiti in such great numbers, what they meant for them and what we can deduce from them about the personal religious piety of both priests and visitors to temples. The diversity of the material will be illustrated by examples from recent fieldwork.

Jitse H. F. DIJKSTRA is Professor of Classics at the University of Ottawa. His research centers around the question how religion became transformed in Late Antiquity. In order to answer this question, he focuses on the particular regional and local context of religious transformation rather than on the ideological and general story. Trained as a papyrologist but multidisciplinary in approach, his main interest is Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt. He is the author of a monograph on the religious transformation in the First Cataract region, southern Egypt, in particular at the island of Philae, and a study of the graffiti in the temple of Isis at Aswan. He has conducted fieldwork in the region from 2001 onwards and is currently directing two more graffiti projects (at Elephantine and Philae). He is also the co-author of a critical edition of the Coptic “Life of Aron”, a sixth-century hagiographical work from the Cataract region. In addition, he has edited four volumes on such diverse topics as Egyptian hagiography, ancient religions and early Christianity, ethnicity and religious violence.

Indian Graffiti along the Silk Road

Ingo Strauch (26 February, 04:35-05:20 pm CET)

Abstract: As a field of epigraphy, the research on ancient graffiti in an Indian historical or cultural context has been for a long time an almost complete *terra incognita*. Little scratchings left by visitors or pilgrims in the surroundings of important archaeological sites were in most cases either neglected or simply noticed without further discussion. This situation changed when in the 1980s the construction of the Karakorum Highway in Northern Pakistan brought to light thousands of ancient drawings and inscriptions on the surfaces of the rocks that are scattered along the ancient roads from India to China. More than 20 years later, another find-spot at the opposite end of the so-called Silk Road was discovered. More than 150 inscriptions left by sailors in a huge natural cave on the island Socotra (present-day Yemen) bear witness to the presence of Indians, but also of Greeks, Arabs and Ethiopians in the first centuries CE. My paper will shortly present both geographically remote, but formally close corpora and discuss their characteristics.

Ingo STRAUCH is Professor for Sanskrit and Buddhist Studies at the University of Lausanne. His research focusses on South-Asian Buddhism, ancient Indian history and epigraphy, and Indian palaeography (Brāhmī, Kharoṣṭhī). His publications include the 2012 volume *Foreign Sailors on Socotra: The Inscriptions and Drawings from the Cave Hoq* (<http://www.hempen-verlag.de/kulturwissenschaft/antike-und-orient/foreign-sailors-on-socotra.html>).

Session 2: Graffiti in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures (Friday 5 March 2021)

Graffiti by Old Uigur Pilgrims in Dunhuang and Eastern Eurasia

Dai Matsui (5 March, 02:10-02:50 pm CET)

Abstract: Research on the history of the Old Uigur Turks, who flourished mainly in the East Turkestan (modern Xinjiang, PRC) from the 9th to 14th centuries CE, have been generally based on the Old Uigur paper manuscripts (Buddhist scriptures and secular documents) excavated in Central Asia in the early 20th century. However, Buddhist sanctuary sites in Xinjiang, Gansu, and Inner Mongolia still preserve Old Uigur wall inscriptions and graffiti. Those inscriptions and graffiti were written by the Buddhist Uigurs in memory of their pilgrimage and provide a lot of information on various aspects of the Buddhist Uigurs' activities, e.g., their pilgrimage range, daily religious practices, and folk Buddhist elements. Such information is scarcely detectable in the scriptures and documental sources. In the last ten years, I have conducted a field research at the Buddhist sites of Dunhuang (Gansu) and Turfan (Xinjiang) to decipher the inscriptions and graffiti. In 2017, as a part of the results, I published the edition of the Uigur and Mongolian graffiti of the Dunhuang Caves, 283 texts in total. Based on the edition and comparison with other Old Uigur sources, I will display the significance and potential of the Old Uigur graffiti as historical sources.

MATSUI Dai 松井太 is a Professor at the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University (Ph.D. Osaka University, 1999). His research interest is in the history of Central Asia, mainly East Turkestan (modern Xinjiang, PRC) under the rule of the West Uigurs (9th–12th centuries) and the Mongol Empire (13th–14th centuries). He is engaged in the philological edition of Old Uigur and Mongolian documents excavated from Xinjiang and Dunhuang (Gansu) to provide the source materials as a basis for historical reconstruction. His CV and previous works, which include, among others, the compendium *Uigur and Mongol Inscriptions of the Dunhuang Grottoes* (2017), are mostly available online at <http://osaka-u.academia.edu/DaiMATSUI>.

Accepted and Acceptable? Attitudes to Historical Graffiti Inscriptions in the Medieval Church

Matthew Champion (5 March, 02:50-03:30 pm CET)

Abstract: It has been argued that the widely accepted modern perception, that graffiti is an illicit practice associated with concepts of destruction and vandalism, cannot be applied to historic inscriptions – and particularly not those found in a religious context. That the only thing that historical and modern graffiti have in common is the medium on to which they are applied. Whilst the physical evidence on the walls is coming under increasing investigation, the study of contemporary attitudes towards its creation remains largely overlooked. This short paper aims to set out what evidence is currently available, how it can be interpreted within the wider study of lay piety, and examine the paradoxical attitudes associated with graffiti inscriptions within the medieval parish.

Matthew J. CHAMPION is an award-winning freelance archaeologist and historian, Project Director of the Norfolk and Suffolk Medieval Graffiti Survey, and author of *Medieval Graffiti: The Lost Voices of England's Churches* (2015).

Incised Images among the Palaces and Temples: The Content and Meaning of Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti

Jarosław Żrałka (5 March, 03:30-04:10 pm CET)

Abstract: Pre-Columbian Maya civilization flourished in the jungles of Central America where many monumental centres developed with examples of sophisticated architectural complexes such as pyramids, temples, palaces, and ballcourts. The interiors of some of these buildings were inscribed or painted with depictions that escape canons of classic Maya art and are usually described as 'graffiti'. Maya graffiti constitute one of the most fascinating but still poorly studied aspects of pre-Columbian art. This presentation deals with several different aspects of pre-Columbian Maya graffiti such as their architectural and archaeological contexts, dating, and meaning. We will also elaborate on the subject of an exact definition of graffiti in the scientific discourse of Maya and Mesoamerican studies. As we will demonstrate, the style and content of graffiti are very complex and may reflect different authors and diverse motivations behind their creation. This presentation will also deal with the iconographic diversity of the ancient Maya graffiti corpus, presenting similarities and differences to graffiti from other pre-industrial societies.

Jarosław ŻRAŁKA is an Associate Professor of Archaeology at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow. He specialises in Mesoamerican archaeology with a special focus on the ancient Maya. Jarosław Żrałka has been working as an archaeologist in Central America for more than 10 years. Since 2006, he has been co-directing a regional project (Nakum Archaeological Project) in the Maya site of Nakum, located in north-eastern Guatemala. Currently he is conducting a project in the Guatemalan Highlands aimed at the conservation of Colonial wall paintings from the town of Chajul (El Quiche Department). His publications include such books as *Terminal Classic Occupation in the Maya Sites Located in the Area of Triangulo Park, Peten, Guatemala* (2008) and *Pre-Columbian Maya Graffiti: Context, Dating and Function* (2014).

A Very First Exploration of Graffiti as an Epigraphic Category in South East Asia up to ca. 1500 CE

Arlo Griffiths (5 March, 04:25-05:05 pm CET)

Abstract: This contribution will be a first step towards a survey of graffiti in premodern South-east Asia. What instances of premodern writing are known that could be classified as graffiti? In what kind of archaeological contexts and on what kinds of supports were they engraved? To what period can they be dated? What languages and scripts were used? What, if anything, could this material contribute to a cross-cultural definition of what graffiti are?

Arlo GRIFFITHS is Professor of Southeast Asian History at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in Paris. Having been trained in Indology with a speciality in Vedic studies, the focus of his research has gradually shifted to Southeast Asia, first and foremost the epigraphical documents

in Sanskrit and in vernacular languages, both Austroasiatic and Austronesian (Cham, Khmer, Malay, Javanese). He was posted at the EFEO's Jakarta Centre from 2009 through 2014. Since then, he has published extensively on the topic of Southeast Asian epigraphy. Most recently, he has co-edited a book titled *Champa: Territories and Networks of a Southeast Asian Kingdom* (2019) and the on-line corpus *Early Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa* (2017). Currently, he is one of the principal investigators of the DHARMA Project and is in charge of and contributes to research work in the project's task force C (Southeast Asian Epigraphy).

Medieval and Modern Graffiti in Eastern Mediterranean: Challenges and Potential

Mia Trentin (5 March, 05:05-05:45 pm CET)

Abstract: The Eastern Mediterranean has always been a crossroad of cultures, a lively area where East and West come together in a multi-ethnic and multicultural environment. As informal written expression, medieval and modern graffiti record many aspects of the area's socio-cultural life, providing material evidence of past people's interaction with their surrounding space. Graffiti show us how locals and foreigners lived and perceived these landscapes, sharing places and recording their messages through textual or pictorial forms. Graffiti analysis for this area presents many challenges due to a multiplicity of factors, including numerous languages and scripts, the richness of pictorial expressions, and the area's socio-cultural complexity. This talk will illustrate these aspects by describing general trends in graffiti in the Medieval and Modern Eastern Mediterranean, including typologies, distribution, and possible interpretations based on the available edited material. The overview will show graffiti's potential as a complementary source for enhancing our knowledge of different aspects of past societies living in this area. On the other hand, it will highlight the challenges emerging from graffiti documentation, analysis, and study. An array of digital technologies and tools, already tested or under development, will be mentioned as efficient solutions to overcome these issues. The second part of the talk will consider a Cypriot case-study, showing what has been discovered to date in the ongoing extensive graffiti survey of the island's Medieval and Modern buildings.

With a background in Medieval History and Archaeology, **Mia TRENTIN's** research interest embraces the multiform medieval and modern written culture, with a focus on epigraphy. She specialises in informal written communication – graffiti – as a source to recover past people's practices, attitudes, and approaches with their surrounding natural and anthropic space. Her PhD (2011) represents the first extensive Italian survey of medieval graffiti along the main pilgrimage routes of Northern Italy. In September 2017 she joined The Cyprus Institute – STARC with a post-doc position in collaboration with the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, enriching her knowledge in digital humanities. In January 2019, she started her MSCA project GrafMeDia – Graffiti Mediterranean Dialogue (Visual and Verbal Communication in the Medieval and Modern Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean), funded by the Cyprus Research and Innovation Foundation. The project's purpose is twofold. It aims to develop specific digital tools for the documentation and visualization of graffiti and their context while establishing a methodology of analysis based on ontological description and standards. On the other hand, it will contribute to the broader study of medieval and modern

mobility in the Eastern Mediterranean, providing new and original data concerning cultural exchanges, informal writing practices, and people's interaction with their anthropic and natural landscape.

Session 3: Modern and Contemporary Graffiti (Friday 12 March 2021)

Transcribed Flows and Arrhythmias: Chinese Writing Cultures from Stone Inscriptions to Contemporary Graffiti

Minna Valjakka (12 March, 02:10-02:55 pm CET)

Abstract: Chinese culture is defined by affluence of practices, elaborated styles and refined aesthetics of writing. Besides engravings on temples, tombs and monuments, esteemed flows of brush were reproduced on rocks and wooden plates to bring added value for scenic spots, gardens and other significant sites. Given that such traditional acts of calligraphy were mainly reserved for eminent figures, the presence of these culturally revered examples has shaped the perceptions on what kind of writing, where, and by whom is still accepted. While water calligraphy on streets, for instance, is an appreciated practice for and by elderly men, unsolicited writings can be considered as 'psoriasis' of cities. Based on long-term research in and beyond the major Chinese cities, this talk will formulate main tendencies and characteristics of contemporary graffiti and its emergence in China. Through both diachronic and synchronic, locally-embedded and cross-cultural approaches, I elucidate the challenges and limitations of using the western concept 'graffiti' and its Chinese equivalent *tuya*. More nuanced understanding of the differences in conceptual, cultural and socio-political value structures of contemporary graffiti, graffiti art (*tuya yishu*) and street art (*jietou yishu*) practices may facilitate future research of creative and artistic practices and their potentiality in public space in general.

Minna VALJAKKA is Senior Lecturer of Art History at the University of Helsinki. Dr Valjakka received her PhD in Art History (2011) and MA in East Asian Studies (2005) from the University of Helsinki. In her postdoctoral research projects, she has thematically shifted and geographically expanded her expertise into artistic and creative practices in urban public space in East and Southeast Asian cities. Through an interdisciplinary and comparative approach bridging together Art Studies and Urban Studies, she examines urban creativity as a response to the distinctive trajectories of environmental issues, geopolitical circumstances, developments in arts and cultural policies, and translocal mediations. Minna lives and works in between Finland and East and Southeast Asia.

'Spray It Loud': Notes on Graffiti History, Culture, and Politics in Urban Tanzania

Seth M. Markle (12 March, 02:55-03:40 pm CET)

Abstract: 'Spray It Loud' is a critical examination of the origins and development of hip hop-oriented graffiti art in Tanzania (East Africa). In this multi-modal presentation based on over 12 years of ethnographic fieldwork, I set out to explore questions about motivation, aesthetics, entrepreneurship, mentorship, intragroup dynamics, and grassroots community organizing to show how the embrace and practice of graffiti writing contribute to a process of transnational cultural identity formation. On the one hand, the failures of late postcolonial nationhood and

neoliberal governance, which has resulted in systemic youth disenfranchisement, have necessitated new modes of cultural and political agency and engendered alternative strategies for employment for Tanzanian urban youth, mostly young men. On the other, economic motivations and the lack of competition and rivalry among and between the movement's few dominant practitioners have led to graffiti's stagnated growth and expansion.

Seth MARKLE is an Associate Professor of History and International Studies at Trinity College where he serves as the faculty advisor to the annual Trinity International Hip Hop Festival and teaches courses such as 'Introduction to Hip Hop', 'Global Hip Hop Cultures' and 'Hip Hop and College Radio'. He is the author of *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power and the Uncertain Future of Pan Africanism, 1964-1974* (2017). Currently, he is working on several hip hop-related research projects that focus on Tanzanian graffiti culture, the history of hip hop in Hartford, and the place of Africa in the African American hip hop imagination.

Curating Graffiti

Anne Vieth (12 March, 03:50-04:35 pm CET)

Abstract: My lecture gives an insight into my curatorial experiences regarding the exhibition *WÄNDE I WALLS*, which dealt with graffiti at two exhibition venues in Stuttgart. In addition to the theoretical considerations and concepts, I will also report on a discussion with the sprayers, which exhibited that graffiti is a unique and thoroughly ambivalent art form. The comprehensive exhibition project *WÄNDE I WALLS* took the wall in its diversity of meanings for the first time as the starting point for an exhibition. The project traced the artistic examination of the spatial boundary of walls at three central locations in Stuttgart. While at the Kunstmuseum wall works were realized in the interior, the focus at the StadtPalais – Museum für Stuttgart and Stuttgart's Central Station was on graffiti designing walls in public spaces. The exhibition *Graffiti in the City (Graffiti im Kessel, StadtPalais)* provided a comprehensive overview of the history of graffiti in Stuttgart over the past years and decades, based on photographic and archive material documenting historically significant walls throughout Stuttgart. The impact of graffiti in public spaces could be experienced in the Bonatzbau, the main building of the Stuttgart Central Station. More than 70 artists from the Stuttgart sprayer scene transformed the interior of the historic hall into a huge temporary graffiti gallery, the ~~Secret~~ *Walls Gallery*. The sprayers worked on-site, providing insights into their creative work. For the more than 150,000 daily passers-by, a completely new atmosphere was created in the station concourse. Further information: <https://www.kunstmuseumdigital.de/waende-i-walls-2/>

Anne VIETH has been a curator at Kunstmuseum Stuttgart since 2017. She studied art history, German philology, and Spanish literature in Hamburg and wrote her doctoral dissertation on contemporary wall works in the exhibition space. She began her curatorial career at Kunsthalle Mannheim and worked at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden from 2014 to 2016. Her research focuses on classical modernism and contemporary art. At the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart she is in charge of the Otto Dix collection, the Fritz Winter collection, and the collection of art since 1945.

Narrating 'Graffiti' in the Media: Why is it News?

Alexander Araya López (12 March, 04:35-05:20 pm CET)

Abstract: 'Graffiti' is a complex term frequently used to designate a wide variety of social practices, including tagging (or pixação in Brazil), street art, political statements, murals endorsed by authorities and even advertisement. From news articles to op eds to editorials, there are many discourses about 'graffiti' and its producers, from those describing the practices as inherently criminal to those that elevate it to the category of art. But why is 'graffiti' news in the first place? Why do media dedicate journalists and resources to cover these diverse stories? Who is included as a source and who is excluded from this public debate? Is there important 'news' about graffiti that is not being written or told? This theoretical discussion will address not only the narratives about 'graffiti' in the media – with a special emphasis on Latin American cases – but also the newsworthiness criteria that take graffiti from the streets and put it in the printed pages or the screens of our many devices.

Alexander ARAYA LÓPEZ is a sociologist and postdoctoral researcher at Ca' Foscari, University of Venice. In 2018, he was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship for the project RIGHTS UP, focusing on social movements critical of global mass tourism in Venice, Amsterdam and Barcelona. He concluded his PhD dissertation at the Lateinamerika-Institut at the Freie Universität Berlin and has published extensively on graffiti representations in the media in Costa Rica and Brazil. His main interests include research on cities, urban dissent, radical politics and the right to the city.