

# JIM PRIGOFF

## ART HISTORIAN

Nominated by LEE LANGAN MED'99



JIM PRIGOFF IS AN IMPORTANT PHOTOGRAPHER OF STREET AND URBAN ART. HE IS CREDITED FOR GIVING DIGNITY AND CREDIBILITY TO AN ART FORM THAT ONCE WAS CONSIDERED TO BE ONLY VANDALISM. A TRIBUTE TO HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ARTISTS, WHO WERE TEENS WHEN FIRST DOCUMENTED, IS THE FRIENDSHIP HE HAS MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES. HIS CO-AUTHORED BOOK, *SPRAYCAN ART*, COVERS THE ART MOVEMENT AROUND THE WORLD. IN LOS ANGELES IN APRIL 2010, THE *ESTRIA* FOUNDATION NAMED HIM AN URBAN LEGEND.

Graffiti is as ancient as man/womankind. Markings can be traced back to 60,000 BCE. In notable places like Altamira, Spain, and Lascaux, France, outstanding animal images painted in caves date back to 15,000 BCE. In 1804, French soldiers wrote their names on the ruins at Angkor Wat. In 1609, conquistadores left their names on New Mexico's Inscription Rock.

Modern examples appeared as rudimentary tags in the late 1960s. As the images came out of the subway tunnels and proliferated above ground, I recognized that something significant was happening that needed to be documented. Starting the project in 1984, the resulting book *Spraycan Art* was published in 1987. It has sold over 250,000 copies. What started as simple tags developed into highly skilled productions. Today artists have a following amongst collectors and museums.

My exploration to locate and document these images satisfied a number of my interests. These include the hunt to find the images, the challenge to photograph them, meeting local community people & artists, and lecturing. Many of the people that I have met have become friends for life.

In the beginning, tags were equated with vandalism. "Is it art or vandalism?" was a common discussion. Through my shows, and my involvements as a lecturer, author, and photographer, I have been credited as a major force in giving dignity and credibility to an art form that has become one of the most important art movements in the past forty years. The street artist Basquiat's tag was SAMO at first, yet a later day canvas sold for \$110 million at auction. I call it "From Tags to Riches."

ABOVE: JIM PRIGOFF BY SPRAY-CAN ARTIST: BRETT COOK AKA DIZNEY  
 FACING PAGE: THIS MURAL IS IN THE LA ARTISTS DISTRICT, PAINTED BY HOW AND NOSM, TWIN BROTHERS WHO CAME FROM GERMANY AT AGE 13. THEY HAVE PAINTED LARGE WALLS IN OVER 70 COUNTRIES AND PUBLISHED A BOOK OF THEIR WORK FOR WHICH I WROTE THE FOREWORD; THE BLADE WALL WAS AT THE FRONT OF THE GEFGEN MUSEUM IN LA FOR THE 2011 "ART IN THE STREETS SHOW." BLADE PAINTED 5,000 TRAINS IN NYC OVER MANY YEARS AND IS RECOGNIZED AS THE KING OF GRAFFITI. HE IS IN THE PICTURE WITH HIS WIFE PORTIA. THE MURAL IS MORE TRADITIONAL OF THE GRAFFITI MOVEMENT USING CHARACTERS AND NAMES.

