#jointherevolution
#CREATEART

2014/15 SEASON
steppenwolf for YOUNG ADULTS

STUDY GUIDE
THIS IS MODERN ART
(BASED ON TRUE EVENTS)

WRITTEN BY IDRIS GOODWIN AND KEVIN COVAL
DIRECTED BY LISA PORTES

FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 14, 2015
DEAR TEACHERS:

THANK YOU FOR JOINING STEPPENWOLF FOR YOUNG ADULTS FOR OUR SECOND SHOW OF 2014/15 SEASON:

CREATE A MOVEMENT: THE ART OF A REVOLUTION.

In This Is Modern Art, we witness a crew of graffiti writers, Made U Look (MUL), wrestling with the best way to make people take notice of the art they are creating. They choose to bomb the outside of the Art Institute to show theirs is a legitimate, worthy and complex art form born from a rich legacy, that their graffiti is modern art. As the character of Seven tells us, ‘This is a chance to show people that there are real artists in this city. Right now. Living and grinding every day to make their art. And they can’t wait until we’re dead and gone to give us our recognition.’

Not everyone agrees with the actions of the MUL crew. Some people call them heroes, some vandals; however, in the wake of many revolutions, big and small, that have gained momentum across our country in recent months, it is easy to recognize why this group of artists needs to be seen and heard. This Is Modern Art asks all of us to consider, what is worth fighting for? How will you leave a lasting mark? What is your revolution?

Thank you for the many ways you support Steppenwolf for Young Adults. We look forward to having you at the theater!

Hallie, Megan and Lauren

Please see page 20 for a detailed outline of the standards met in this guide. If you need further information about the way our work aligns with the standards, please let us know.

As always, we look forward to continuing the conversations fostered on stage in your classrooms, through this guide and during our post-show discussions with your students following each performance.

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PHOTO BY KEVIN COVAL

ACCESSIBILITY DATES

American Sign Language-Interpreted Performance
Wednesday, March 11 at 10AM
(student performance)
Saturday, February 28 at 7:30PM
(public performance)

Open Captioned Performance
Saturday, February 28 at 7:30PM
(public performance)

Audio-Described Performance
Saturday, February 28 at 7:30PM
(public performance)

STUDY GUIDE CURATED BY
Megan Shuchman

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PHOTO BY KEVIN COVAL
Seven, and fellow members of the graffiti crew Made U Look (MUL), write graffiti on the walls of an abandoned factory while Seven’s girlfriend, Selena, keeps watch. As the crew works, they lament the fact that they often build beautiful masterpieces that the city’s graffiti busters take down hours later; as a result, too few people get to see their art.

At a party a few days later, an art student, Rhonda, recounts a recent trip to the Art Institute’s new Modern Wing, and all the amazing, fresh art inside. When Seven questions why graffiti art is not included in the new collection, Rhonda asserts that graffiti is based in performative, anonymous, impermanent elements. Could it exist inside a museum and moreover, would graffiti writers even want it to?

JC, another MUL crew member, gives the real history of graffiti art in Chicago, weaving together a narrative about Mexican muralists collaborating with graffiti writers starting in the early 80s. Chicago’s graffiti writers pieced all over the city, leaving a legacy on the north, south, west and east sides and beginning a rich tradition of graffiti.

The morning after the party, Seven and the rest of the MUL crew practice their graffiti writing while discussing the artists they most admire: Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Escher. Still angry about his argument with Rhonda, Seven affirms that graffiti art does have a rich legacy, it just lives in a different space than a museum.

Flashback: Seven and Selena’s second date. He takes her to see some of his graffiti pieces and begins to tell her about his world. As she is romanced by Seven, she also falls in love with the graffiti culture she discovers through him and joins MUL as a look-out and driver.

By the next morning, MUL’s piece is all over the news, as passersby debate whether the act was one of true art or simple vandalism. When the crew learns that police are looking for anyone with information about who is responsible, they have to go undercover, splitting up and hiding all evidence of their graffiti writing. Although Selena worries her parents could be implicated in the crime if the police track her license plate, Seven is worried about facing time in prison, which causes a rift between them. Seven moves to an apartment on his own, spending his time painting inside since he cannot risk writing outside. In the wake of the Art Institute graffiti bombing, Dose begins gaining notoriety for his legal artwork, winning contests, attending art conferences, and taking pride in being able to sign his real name to his art work.

As for Seven, at the end of the play, he is left grappling with whether or not what he did was worth it; after all, he now has no crew, no girlfriend, no graffiti. Seven leaves the audience with this final thought, “That night [we did our piece], JC said to me, ‘we’ll probably be the only artists who’ll EVER be on the outside of the Art Institute. If we were inside we’d be one of many, but we were on the outside. We were up so the whole city could see. We were the only ones to do that. ’”

Having done a small tag on the building during a lunch break, Seven gets inspired to do a full graffiti piece on the side of the Art Institute. Once the rest of his crew is on board, they get ready to create their piece, demonstrating for the audience how to successfully survive the urban wilderness: how to prep paint, wear the proper clothing, and bring rations in case you get caught. One night, when a gentle snow fall provides the right cover, the crew manages to complete the piece, writing on the side of the Institute, ‘modern art…made you look.’

“\[we were inside [the Art Institute] we’d be one of many, but we were on the outside. We were up so the whole city could see. We were the only ones to do that. \]

–Seven

PHOTO BY KEVIN COVAL
We reprint the following story from Chicagoist.com, by Laura M. Browning, which came out one week after the incident. Read on and think about how you view what happened: act of vandalism or important artistic commentary?

If you walked by the Art Institute’s Modern Wing earlier this week, you might have wondered if they were promoting a new exhibit on street art. Bright graffiti stretched for 50 feet along a light stone wall, bockended by the words “Modern Art” and “made you look.” While Chicagoist in no way condones illegal activity of any sort, we have to admit that this graffiti raises some interesting questions about the accessibility of art. It’s unlikely the tagging was gang-related, and it seems to be a pre-mediated, self-referential joke about art.

Though somebody should have told the graffers that the Art Institute is free for a few more days, it’s normally $18 a pop, which, for many, is prohibitively expensive for more than the occasional visit. And most of the art is, of course, inside a building, itself a barrier to the arguably more high-brow artistic undertakings within. Though the smooth lines of architect Renzo Piano’s Modern Wing are perhaps less intimidating than the original building’s lion-guarded doors overlooking Michigan Avenue, the graffiti certainly gives a new spin on the building’s tagline, “circus now.” It pokes fun at the high esteem we hold museum architecture in (see: just about any Gehry building and the surrounding hype), and it suggests that we can have a meaningful artistic experience just about anywhere. And, more importantly, it questions what we consider to be art.

Is graffiti “circa now”? Does an object become art just because it’s inside museum walls? Would the museum have felt differently if the tagger had been Banksy, whose easily recognizable, humorous, and often incisive style has placed him on the strange pedestal of anonymous international art superstar?

The graffers took less than half an hour to complete their work along the Modern Wing, and the entire affair was caught on the museum’s security cameras. This comes just a week after a similar tagging along a brick wall on a Gold Coast coach house in the 900 block of N. Clark Street, which, like the Art Institute’s graffiti, was also apparently not gang-related. The museum, at least, has a sense of humor about the tagging. Even as it was being sandblasted off the wall, Public Affairs Director Erin Hogan told NBC5 that the 50-foot-long graffiti showed “a good use of color.”

And to the graffers: point taken (and, yes, we also like your use of color). You made us look, and you made us think. And to the graffers: point taken (and, yes, we also like your use of color). You made us look, and you made us think.

Character Descriptions

Seven – The protagonist of our story, Seven is passionate about his art, and wants to make his mark on the city and leave a lasting legacy. Admittedly driven in part by ego, after being infuriated by a woman he meets at a party who asserts that graffiti art does not have a place among other, more mainstream art forms, he comes up with the idea to graffiti bomb the Art Institute. Seven got his name after tattooing the Chinese symbol for seven on his arm. The number seven represents good luck, leading Seven to believe he will always be safe, no matter what risks he takes.

Dose – The ‘class clown’ of the crew, Dose is always up for any and every opportunity to make a joke or show off. He is the first to find legitimate recognition for his work after the Art Institute bombing, admitting how good it feels to be able to sign his real name to his art.

Selena – Selena is romanced by both Seven and his lifestyle as a graffitist. Having grown up in a neighborhood rife with gang graffiti, Selena admires the artistry of the MÜL crew. Selena’s racial and economic privilege (she’s white and middle class) allows her to participate with less risk than Seven and the rest of the crew, a fact she does not always properly realize.

Kelly O’Sullivan

Charley Rickett

By Megan Shuchman

Photography by Kevin Coval

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Photography by Kevin Coval
Artist, educator and researcher, Miguel ‘Kane One’ Aguilar has been painting graffiti in Chicago since 1989. He founded Graffiti Institute in 2012, and, in 2013, curated “Outside In: The Mexican-American Street Art Movement in Chicago” at the National Museum of Mexican Art. Miguel holds BFA and MAT degrees from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a recipient of the 3Arts Design Apprenticeship Program Manager at Arts Incubator, University of Chicago.

Miguel is a generous, quiet and kind person. He laughs easily, is candid and frank but also careful to defend his art form, which he feels is too easily discounted as not being real or worthy art. He is proud of the rich tradition from which graffiti art is born, and even jokes about the laziness he sometimes sees in young writers, saying, “I know, I sound like an old man now!”

I sat down with Miguel to learn about his path to becoming a famed Chicago graffiti writer, how he has seen the world of graffiti writing change in his years as a working artist, and asked him to break down some graffiti terminology for the novices among us. Here is what I learned.

MIGUEL’S JOURNEY TO GRAFFITI WRITING

The graffiti scene in Chicago gained traction in the early 1980s, about a decade before Miguel started writing. Miguel says he got into graffiti writing “before I even realized what was happening.” While attending a small Catholic elementary school in Pilsen, in 7th and 8th grade, Miguel would doodle in the margins of his notebooks in class, practicing letters in the style of Old English fonts. As his school had no dedicated art classes, this became “my own artistic schooling.”

When he was 13, he was part of a neighborhood dance crew, Posse In Effect (PIE). As a way to get his dance crew’s name out in the world, he and friends would tag PIE around the city. By the time he went to Saint Ignatius College Prep, he met graffiti writers who told him to “pick a name and start to write it everywhere. Just practice it, over and over.” As he started writing, he began to notice all the graffiti around him. Says Miguel, “It was as if I didn’t have the eyes to notice it before, and now a hidden world had been awakened. There was this new layer to the world and it was beautiful.”

Graffiti writing introduced Miguel to a Chicago he had not known previously. It gave him “a new community to be part of.” He met people outside of his school and neighborhood and got to navigate the entire city. Says Miguel, “before writing, I had no reason to travel outside of my neighborhood. Now I did.”

Miguel enjoyed the “immediate reciprocity writing gave me with other teens.” He would go out and paint—from a simple tag to something more elaborate on a roof—and the word would spread like wild fire. Before social media, this is the way teenagers were being sociable with each other. The next morning, people would already be congratulating me and telling me they saw my tag. It felt good.” At the time Miguel got started writing, he was also DJ’ing. He was a fan of hip-hop M.C. Big Daddy Kane. One of his songs stuck with Miguel so he decided to call himself Kane One as homage to Big Daddy, saying, “I started playing around with the nickname and it just stuck.”

Miguel was arrested several times as a teenager for graffiti writing, however, given the other negative things happening in his neighborhood—violence, gangs, drugs—he couldn’t help but feel that writing was “the best available option” and way to spend his free time even if it was an illegal activity. It seemed unfair to Miguel that he could be arrested for painting, while others were participating in things far worse.

According to Miguel, in the 60s through the 80s, the relationship between gang tags or gang insignia and graffiti writing was muddy” and many could not distinguish between the two different types of writing. But, in the 80s, gangs began to limit their graffiti to their territories, only painting in areas they wanted to protect as theirs and using their tagging to draw these boundaries. At the same time, hip hop-based graffiti writers started getting more elaborate with their aesthetic, playing with swirls, different colors and experiments with various paint nozzles. As the two aesthetic styles—gang graffiti and hip hop graffiti—became more distinct, a code of conduct was born between the two groups of writers. Nowadays, Miguel says, “there is an unwritten code of conduct between gang taggers and graffiti writers. Hip hop graffiti writers know not to go over gang graffiti writing because that gets interpreted as a sign of disrespect and vice-versa.”

Miguel is proud to come from such a rich tradition of graffiti writers and to see so much good graffiti in Chicago all around him. Says Miguel, “My favorite place to view graffiti in Chicago is the Walls of Style on 30th and Kedzie. I have a lot of nostalgia for that wall. I have fond memories of particular graffiti pieces that really influenced me as a writer. If you go up to the wall, there are some sections that are so coated with paint that you can pull chunks off of it, revealing different iterations of graffiti writing that have taken place over many years. It’s like slicing a tree and getting to see all the layers within.”

THE TRADITION OF GRAFFITI WRITING THAT CAME BEFORE HIM

From what he has been told from writers who came before him, many graffiti artists in Chicago got started after seeing photographs of family members in LA and Philly with graffiti behind them. This early version of the ‘selfie’ allowed Chicago graffiti writers to see what was happening across the country and begin to emulate the tags and bubble letters from these photographs.

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Miguel has seen significant changes in the graffiti writing community over the past twenty-five years in both positive and negative ways. Miguel says that now, “there is a strong sense of community between writers. It is more about comradery and less about competition between writers, as was the case in the 90s.” Thanks to the internet, young graffiti writers can advance their skills much quicker than used to be the case. Miguel says, “It used to take a writer seven or more years to really advance their skills; now, young writers can develop in just three or four years. They have greater access to materials and they can see things online and practice emulating them.” With this however, might also come a bit of laziness. Tells Miguel, “When I was a teenager, if a writer was just getting started, you’d see his stuff everywhere. Now, because it is easier to learn how to paint, people don’t practice as much. I’d like to see greater output from young writers.”

I asked Miguel whether the act of Made U Look bombing the Art Institute advanced the art form in significant ways. Miguel said that graffiti writers definitely took notice because the media brought so much attention to the incident. Miguel saw the MUL crew making a social commentary, saying, “MUL was telling everyone, ‘the graffiti writing we are putting on the outside of this facility is even more contemporary than the art inside the Modern Wing.’” It was a purposeful act meant to advance the dialogue around graffiti art. I hope people understand that.”

Whether it made lasting change outside of the graffiti community seems harder to judge. Miguel recognizes that people remain very fearful of graffiti saying, “They believe that with graffiti comes gang violence, drugs and robberies. Where they see graffiti, they believe there will always be worse crime hiding around the corner. We need to change that thinking about graffiti.”

Miguel wishes people better understood the art form without judging it so quickly. “Graffiti writing is hard and rigorous work. People dismiss how much it takes to become good at it, how much of an artistic process is involved and so they don’t assign value to it.” Rather than just viewing graffiti as negative, Miguel wishes it could be celebrated for the advanced art form it is, and the rich tradition it represents.

At the end of our interview, Miguel proudly told me, “I met my wife because of graffiti.” When they were teenagers, he and his wife hung out at a famous graffiti writer’s house, along with many writers from southwest Chicago. Miguel is now a well-known artist who teaches graffiti writing and the history of graffiti at SAIC and the University of Chicago. He and his wife have a beautiful family of four children and live in the Pilsen neighborhood, close to where Miguel grew up.

I hope people understand that.”
Writing on the Wall:
GRAFFITI GIVES A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS
BY JARED BELLOT

INTRODUCTION:

“Graffiti is one of the few tools you have if you have almost nothing” says popular British graffiti artist Banksy. And it’s true. For thousands of years (since 30,000 BCE) people have been writing on walls as a way of making themselves heard. With the rise of modern graffiti in New York City during the 1970s and 80s, young people in the United States began to use graffiti as a way to “get up”, or have their names in as many places, and visible to as many people, as possible. In doing this, they were able to express themselves in new ways and speak out against the policies of neglect and abandonment that plagued their communities. Where before, their voices were ignored and silenced, now people were forced to listen to (and look at) what they had to say.

Individuals from around the world turn to graffiti during times of social unrest and revolution to make sure that they are being heard. Check out the map to learn more about some of the ways graffiti has been used by young people to make political statements in the 21st century!

1. GRAFFITI WRITING ON GREEK RUINS - ATHENS, GREECE
In the wake of a five-year economic collapse, people frustrated by the country’s present-day social inequality and the prospect of an even bleaker future have taken to covering Athens in a new wave of politically-aware art work. Although Athenian police rarely arrest graffiti artists (unless they are suspected of belonging to an anarchist group), Greek graffiti artists work under the cover of darkness, tagging the city’s buildings and many ruins with revolutionary images in opposition to corrupt politicians and bankers that have driven the county into debt.

2. FAITH47 AND THE WRITE ON AFRICA PROJECT - CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA
When Faith47 was 16 years old, she was first introduced to the graffiti community of Cape Town, South Africa. Inspired by the activists who turned to graffiti to fight against the Apartheid government, Faith47 began to explore how her own art could be used to make a political statement. After joining forces with the Write on Africa Project, an artist collective that works to mobilize and inspire South African communities, Faith47 set out on a series of large-scale projects to explore and contextualize the history of Apartheid South Africa. By creating pieces centered the new South African constitution, Faith47 used her art to remind her community of the injustices of the past, and continue to fight for equality today.

3. MIA GRONDAHL AND WOMEN ON WALLS - CAIRO, EGYPT
In 2011, when Egyptian citizens rose up and overthrew President Hosni Mubarak, graffiti artists were in the forefront of the revolution, covering the city’s walls with anti-Mubarak graffiti. Four years later, Egyptian graffiti artists use their art as a way to continue the struggle for equality that began back in 2011. Groups like Women on Walls (WOW) use graffiti as a way to call attention to, and fight back against, issues like gender inequality and street harassment. WOW uses art as a tool to empower women and give them a voice on the streets of Cairo, a place where they were formerly made to be silent.

"Graffiti is one of the few tools you have if you have almost nothing" says popular British graffiti artist Banksy.

WE WANTED TO MAKE A STATEMENT, TO CHANGE HISTORY, TO FLY OUR LETTERS IN A WORLD THAT WOULD NEVER HAVE WRITERS OR ARTISTS THAT COME FROM WHERE WE COME FROM. WE WANTED PEOPLE TO NOTICE. - SEVEN, THIS IS MODERN ART
WRITING ON THE WALL: GRAFFITI GIVES A VOICE TO THE VOICELESS

**THE 2014 WORLD CUP - RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL**

In 2014, Brazil, a country famous for its love of soccer, spent $11 billion hosting the World Cup, a figure that upset many Brazilians considering the widespread levels of poverty that envelop the country. Many protestors turned to graffiti to voice their disagreement with the government’s misplaced priorities, plastering buildings with bold and colorful political messages. Images of families being forced to abandon their homes in favor of soccer stadiums, and starving children with nothing to eat but soccer balls began to appear alongside slogans decrying the actions of FIFA and the Brazilian government.

**STINKFISH AND LOS GRAFITEROS - BOGOTA, COLUMBIA**

In Colombia, graffiti artists, or grafiteros, have been embraced by the community and are often commissioned to create specific pieces for local businesses. For the past 10 years, STINKFISH, a local grafitero and founder of the international graffiti collective Animal Poder Crew, has been using his art to make political statements. STINKFISH photographs anonymous individuals and uses those images as a foundation for his graffiti, using his art to document and celebrate the stories of everyday people from his community.

**THE RED SHIRTS - BANGKOK, THAILAND**

On September 19th, 2010 a group of protestors gathered to speak out against the Thai royalty. Demonstrators donned red shirts, and tagged the streets of Downtown Bangkok with anti-monarchy phrases such as “mueng mai chai fa mang khue ma thi nasomphet”, which in Thai means “you are not the sky, you are more like a pathetic dog” (calling someone dog is one of the biggest insults in the Thai language). This protest, which took place predominantly on the walls of the city, was one of the first public acts taken against the Thai monarchy in modern history.

**PAINTING ON THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE - SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**

In the summer of 2004, David Burgess and Will Saunders, two Australian peace activists, scaled the side of the Sydney Opera and painted “NO WAR” in bright red paint onto the iconic building. Burgess and Saunders were protesting Australia’s pending involvement in the Iraq War, but the act landed both men in jail. While the government and many individuals were upset about the defacing of a national icon, many others supported the anti-war message, even Jorn Utzon, the Danish architect who designed the Opera House.

**MERES ONE AND 5POINTZ - NEW YORK CITY, U.S.A.**

In 2002, New York City based graffiti artist Meres One began curating the 5Pointz Aerosol Art Center, a five-story, block-long industrial complex located in the borough of Queens. Envisioned as an outdoor graffiti museum, Meres One called on graffiti artists from across the city to come together in solidarity of their artwork. Hailed as an epicenter for the graffiti scene, 5Pointz quickly began to gain respect from the global art community, and served as a gallery space for many famous and influential graffiti artists from around the world to showcase their work before being scheduled for demolition in late 2014.

**CONCLUSION:**

Graffiti can be an act of storytelling. Whether it is the story of citizens unhappy with their governments, the story of women fighting for equality and the right to walk down the street without feeling unsafe, or simply a story celebrating the lives and accomplishments of everyday people, graffiti has always served as a way to leave a mark. For some, tagging a name on the wall reminds the world that one exists and is being heard.

In *This is Modern Art*, we see the members of the Made U Look crew feeling invisible, feeling overlooked, feeling voiceless, and so, they set out to demand that the rest of the world listen. Theirs is a purposeful act, to advance public understanding of graffiti. For Seven, JC, Dose and Selena, this means tagging the exterior of the modern wing of the Art Institute. This is the Made U Look crew’s revolution: to create art that gives them a voice. What is yours?

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**CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: 35-40 MINUTES TOTAL**

**STEP ONE:** Start by answering these questions about the *revolutionary causes* you just learned about:

1. What sticks out to you about these revolutionary causes?
2. What is something all of these revolutionary graffiti artists have in common?
3. What unique role does graffiti play in these revolutionary causes?

**STEP TWO:** Identify something in your community/neighborhood/school you wish to change. This will become your *revolutionary cause*. This could be something small, such as wishing your school had more artistic outlets for students or something larger, such as wishing more teens in your neighborhood had access to quality jobs upon graduation. List your *revolutionary cause* here.

**STEP THREE:** Come up with a short slogan that represents your *revolutionary cause*. Your slogan should be 1) short 2) catchy 3) convey your cause in simple terms.

Here are some examples of slogans from the revolutionary causes in this article:

1. “Their Wealth is Our Blood”
2. “All shall be equal before the law”
3. “Don’t Label Me”

List your slogan here: __________________________________________

**STEP FOUR:** Create an image to accompany your *revolutionary cause*. The image can be something you draw or an image you choose from a magazine or find online. Your image should be 1) bold 2) colorful 3) complement the message of your cause.

Draw your image here:

**STEP FIVE:** Share your slogan and image with your classmates then reveal your *revolutionary cause*. After each student has shared, have a group discussion using these guided questions:

1. What were common themes among the slogans and images presented?
2. What made a slogan effective? What made an image stick out?
3. How did seeing the slogans and images affect or change your understanding of the revolutionary cause?
This Is Modern Art is a collaboration between two writers: award-winning playwright and Hip Hop Studies professor Idris Goodwin and acclaimed writer, performer and Louder Than A Bomb founder Kevin Coval. A playwright, spoken word performer and essayist recognized across mediums by The National Endowment for the Arts and The Ford and Mellon Foundations, Idris Goodwin has performed on HBO, The Discovery Channel, Sesame Street and National Public Radio. Hailed by the Chicago Tribune as “the voice of the new Chicago,” Kevin Coval is a poet, educator, and activist. In his early twenties, Coval founded “Louder Than A Bomb” and now serves as serves as Artistic Director of Young Chicago Authors, the non-profit home of “Louder Than A Bomb” and numerous other youth writing and hip hop programs. A longtime enthusiast of graffiti art and Hip Hop culture, Kevin’s original photography is featured throughout this guide.

Education and Community Programs Coordinator Lauren Sivak spoke with playwright Idris Goodwin about his writing process, art as a revolution, and why it is important that he and Kevin tell this story.

"There are people behind graffiti art that are motivated by something larger. The theater is a space for education and discourse and what occurs onstage is merely a spark."

- Idris Goodwin, This Is Modern Art playwright

LAUREN SIVAK: What was your impetus for writing this play?

IDRIS GOODWIN: As a lifelong fan, practitioner and now professor of Hip Hop Studies, I believe there is a well of stories and experiences from Hip Hop culture that have yet to be explored onstage. Kevin and I vividly remember the real incidents that sparked this play and we wanted to write about them.

LS: Is This Is Modern Art based on specific characters?

IG: There is a great literary tradition of antiheroes. Though we may not “agree” with their choices, we are drawn to those who challenge authority, who question, and who spark debate. The Made U Look crew we created was based closely on the real perpetrators, but the goal was to render them as archetypal figures that correspond to a long history of literary rebels.

LS: How is this play similar or different to other things you have written?

IG: This Is Modern Art falls in line with many of my plays. It is drawn from true events and explores a contemporary African American experience. It examines the intersection of culture, power, and access.

LS: Thousands of students across the Chicagoland area will see this show. What do you hope they will take away from the experience?

IG: As a professional theater maker, my first and foremost goal is to present an inclusive, exciting, theatrical experience. The hope is that young people will remember that they had a good time watching a play—a new play—and know that there are new plays being written and produced that speak to their realities and interests. My second goal is that our collective understanding of graffiti art be broadened. There is a rich culture of graffiti that has a history, norms, and its own codes of ethics. There are people behind graffiti art that are motivated by something larger. The theater is a space for education and discourse and what occurs onstage is merely a spark. I hope this spark will encourage people to learn more and investigate graffiti further.

LS: Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me! I can’t wait for This Is Modern Art.
Graffiti is an ever-evolving art form, constantly redefining and reimagining itself in order to find relevance in the current moment. Since its early days in the United States, graffiti has relied on bold and innovative artists to continuously push the genre to new heights. These artists are constantly in a process of responding to the events in their communities and building upon the ideas of those who have come before them. In this way, the history of graffiti is a collage of people and laws that have left their mark on the art form and helped mold it into what it is today. From its acceptance as “true art” to the construction of laws to prevent it, below is a brief history of key moments from the past 50 years that have shaped contemporary graffiti in America.

1967
Daryl “Cornbread” McCray—infamous for writing his name on an elephant at the Philadelphia Zoo and on the side of the Jackson 5’s private jet—becomes the first documented person to “tag” his name

1971
The New York Times publishes a full length article about 18-year-old TAKI 183, making him the first American graffiti writer to be recognized by mainstream, popular media

1972
Italian art collector Claudio Bruni invites two American graffiti artists to showcase their work in a Roman gallery. Interest quickly spreads throughout Europe and enthusiasts in England, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and Holland begin to take note of the new American art form, causing graffiti’s global profile to rise

1979
Hugo Martinez forms the United Graffiti Artists (UGA), an alternative artist collective. Through the UGA, artists are given permission to tag public spaces while being paid for their work

1981
Jean-Michel Basquiat shows work at New York’s Annina Nosei Art Gallery, marking the first time a graffiti writer is featured as a solo artist and thus legitimizing the art form as part of the post-modernist movement

1982
Two social scientists, Wilson and Kelling, publish an article in the Atlantic Monthly, blaming graffiti for a cycle of urban decay that leads to more substantial crimes; this report is used by law officials to crack down on graffiti writers

1983
PBS releases Style Wars, a documentary following the lives of young graffiti artists in New York City, Style Wars is a crossover hit and gamers praise for its portrayals of graffiti culture from people across the globe

1989
Under Reagan, the country undergoes a War on Crime initiative, in which the funding for policing of inner-city areas doubles from 1982 to 1987, and municipal governments seek new ways to cut back on crime

1990
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1992
With The Graffiti Removal program, Chicago becomes the first major U.S. city to pay for the removal of graffiti from private property through city funding

1995
NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani leads the most widespread anti-graffiti campaign in US history, including banning the sale of aerosol paint cans to minors

2013
British graffiti artist Banksy carries out a month long residency on the streets of New York City entitled “Better Out Than In” and creating a new piece of art every day; despite the fact that graffiti is illegal in NYC, the NYPD receives zero complaints and many property owners praise the artwork

2011
The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles hosts the first major U.S. museum exhibit on graffiti and street art, Art in the Streets. The exhibit traces the global history of graffiti since 1970 in cities like New York, Philadelphia and London, including work from 50 renowned graffiti artists from around the globe

Teen programs at the Art Institute of Chicago provide opportunities for teens to get inspired by exploring the museum, creating their own art, going behind the scenes, and networking with other Chicagoland teens as well as artists and museum staff.

For more information about classes and workshops, afterschool and summer programs, internships, and other ways to get involved, visit www.artic.edu/learn/teens.

Questions? E-mail teens@artic.edu

Visit the Art Institute Teens Facebook page to see what other teens have created in the museum, stay up to date with our programs, and learn about new opportunities.

Check out the Art Institute’s programs for educators at www.artic.edu/learn/teachers-pre-k-12.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online resources to learn about graffiti art and artists:

- **12ozProphet**: established with a goal of raising the bar for the graffiti world while integrating its distinctiveness into popular culture. [www.12ozprophet.com](http://www.12ozprophet.com)
- **Art Crimes**: the first graffiti site on the internet that focuses on the preservation of graffiti art. [www.graffiti.org](http://www.graffiti.org)
- **Juxtapoz**: online art and culture magazine featuring graffiti. [www.juxtapoz.com](http://www.juxtapoz.com)

**Documentaries:**

- **Style Wars**: PBS graffiti documentary from early 80s (can be streamed on YouTube)
- **Exit Through the Gift Shop**: documentary produced by British graffiti artist Banksy (can be streamed on Netflix)
- **Bomb It/Bomb It 2**: a series of documentaries considered to be two of the most extensive and elaborate documentations of the graffiti movement ([www.bombit-themovie.com](http://www.bombit-themovie.com))
- **AlterEgo**: interviews with 17 different graffiti artists (from nine cities across 17 different countries) discussing the role of graffiti in the art world and the use of public space for personal expression (can be streamed on YouTube)
- **Next**: A Primer on Urban Painting: a documentary exploration of graffiti-based visual art as a world culture (can be streamed through Amazon.com)

**Opinion pieces and news coverage right after graffiti incident happened at the Art Institute (February 2010):**

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Project Compass is a series of events aimed at engaging you, our theater audience, to get you thinking and dialoguing about what goes into making a decision and how you are guided by your own moral compass. These events will serve as material for a world premiere Steppenwolf for Young Adults’ play to be created by artist Michael Rohd that imagines a fictional App that makes better decisions for a young person than they can make for themselves (premiering in Winter 2016). Be a part of the making of this play.

Looking Ahead: Project Compass

How do the decisions you make define your identity? How are your choices, big and small, reflective of your beliefs? Throughout this season and next we will continue to explore the complexities of decision making through Project Compass, a series of events to get you thinking and dialoguing about what goes into making a decision and how you are guided by your own moral compass.

Project Compass Events:

Are FUN
Are FREE
(and with free food)
Will MAKE YOU THINK

(about the decisions you make in your life, each and every day)

Want more information? Email Megan Shuchman at mshuchman@steppenwolf.org for the details of our next event!

steppenwolf.org/projectcompass

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is a participant in the Audience (R)Evolution Program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and administered by the Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional not-for-profit American theatre.
The Young Adult Council is a unique program for passionate and motivated high school students who wish to learn the inner-workings of professional theater from the most celebrated artists in the city. In addition to face time with these leading professionals, Council members attend the best plays in Chicago, learn how to analyze and speak about these plays and lead events for their peers around Steppenwolf productions in hopes of inspiring a new generation of theatre enthusiasts and practitioners.

Applications are available on March 1, 2015.

Like the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council on Facebook! Or visit steppenwolf.org/youngadultcouncil for more information.

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