

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## An Appreciation for the Often Hilarious, Usually Horrible, World of Bad Graffiti

by [Allison Meier](#) on March 1, 2013



Scott Hocking, "Shit" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012) (all images courtesy Black Dog Publishing)

Who cares about bad graffiti or street art? The spray paint scrawls of ill-chosen tag names ("Piggy Nasty," "Pony Tail," "Tricky Trout, Jr."), reckless vulgarity (penises and boobs drawn on absolutely everything), and sad drawings that barely shape into the animal, face, or whatever they're trying to be, who cares about all that? Usually these aerosol-on-concrete creations just fade into our visual background without a second glance, but artist [Scott Hocking](#) has recognized them for the masterpieces of mediocrity that they are in a photography book appropriately called [Bad Graffiti](#), released in December 2012 by Black Dog Publishing.



Scott Hocking, "Dream Team" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)



Scott Hocking, "You Can Jump!" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)

Hocking writes in the prologue: "Sure, anyone can spot a unanimously amazing work of graffiti, but what about the drunken dude who comes along and draws a giant penis on that work? This book is dedicated to those dudes." He states that bad graffiti can be "vulgar, juvenile, poorly scrawled, misspelled, ignorant, sexist, racist, and ridiculous," but it can also be "freaking hilarious" and "so bad, it's good." For example, the cover photo is a drawing of a cobra, likely representing the Cobras gang, on a bland brick wall, the effect more cuddly than menacing, and there's also the tagger who for some reason took the name of "Salad" and writes it in cursive (a strangely popular typographical style for "bad" graffiti), which Hocking describes as "mystifyingly bad." (It's really a shame that Hocking's commentary doesn't progress beyond the first page, as the guy is hilarious.)





Scott Hocking, "Death Road" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)

It's worth noting that most graffiti used to be "bad," in that these huge elaborate tags full of shadows and color are something new, and the quickly written names and symbols were, and are still often, the norm for graffiti. People have long left their name on the places they've been, as anyone knows who has been in a medieval church and seen the bored etchings of long-gone choir boys on the stalls, or witnessed the casual mutilation of stone by the Romans on the Coliseum. Tagging on the streets increased in popularity with subcultures in the 1960s and 70s, sometimes with bands or DJs trying to get their names out (like [Black Flag](#) that was prolific in this in the late 1970s), but the elaborate work really started in New York City around this time. Dimensional effects and multiple colors appeared the tags like those for [Super Kool 223](#) on the subway trains. The transit canvases got more and more vibrant as the years went on with what was known as the "Wild Style," and in 1979 graffiti artists Fab 5 Freddy and Lee Quinones even got an exhibition in Rome, where they showed their own art and that of other taggers. The 1980s were then rich with graffiti art, and it's hard not to imagine the streets and subways just reeking of paint fumes seeing photographs of the city dripping with tags. While this saturated time was somewhat transformed by the "[Clean Train Movement](#)" in 1989, graffiti continued to evolve and experiment into the urban landscape we know today. (This incredibly brief history is of course skimming over a lot.)



Scott Hocking, "Nice Boat" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)



Scott Hocking, "Illuminati?" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)

I think this is a compliment, but Scott Hocking really has an eye for the absolutely horrible graffiti that is still everywhere, and how to bring out not just how artistically bad it is, but also its absurdity in placement. (Although often absurdly comical, like the "Nice Boat" on a boat that's been totally trashed with a falling branch.) His other photography and installation projects are also adept at exploring a certain absurd futility in grand gestures, like his "[Fountain of Youth](#)" vending machine hidden in a jungle near where Ponce de Leon made his quest 500 years ago, and "[Cast Concrete in the Auto Age](#)" that documents from within the 150-year history of reinforced concrete.

The *Bad Graffiti* photographs are remarkably placeless and could be just about anywhere. Maybe even your own neighborhood and you've never bothered to look. Well, take a glance next time, because while they might be an abomination of aesthetics and deface a perfectly fine wall, there's something endearing about these examples of bad graffiti from people who just have to



make their mark.



Scott Hocking, "Fuck You on Wheels" in "Bad Graffiti" (2012)

[Scott Hocking: Bad Graffiti](#) is available from Black Dog Publishing.

Tagged as: [Black Dog Publishing](#), [book reviews](#), [graffiti](#), [photography](#), [Scott Hocking](#), [street art](#)

- **Subscribe to our newsletter to get the top stories delivered to your inbox each week!**

### You may also like:

- [The Vandals Are No Longer Too Hot To Handle at MoMA](#)
- [On Top of The Rubble: Recent Work by Wendy White](#)
- [America Runs On Graff: An Interview with Moody](#)
- [First Lady of NY Graffiti Traces Her Evolution](#)
- [An Artist Who Celebrates Miami Style](#)



[Advertise on Hyperallergic with Nectar Ads](#)

Hyperallergic welcomes comments and a lively discussion, but comments are moderated after being posted. For more details please [read our comment policy](#).

3 comments • 20 reactions



Leave a message...

Discussion ▾

Community |

Share ▾



**Brian Fernandes-Halloran** • a day ago

shit should never be centered on a garage door or anything for that matter

0 • Reply • Share ▾



**JosephYoung** • 2 days ago

bad graffiti is great on it's own though certainly good photography is what makes it art.

0 • Reply • Share ▾



**Jillian Steinhauer** Mod • 2 days ago

I love Scott Hocking. So glad you wrote about him. (And this book looks hilarious.)

0 • Reply • Share ▾