



**DVD: *Style Wars (1983) plus Style Wars: Revisited (2005)***

**Review Rating:** Excellent  
**Label/Studio:** MVD (Music Video Distribution)  
**Catalog #:** DRB-1395  
**Region:** 1 (NTSC)  
**Released:** October 10, 2006

**Genre:** Documentary  
**Synopsis:** Classic time capsule of graffiti's shift from gang markings to urban art, and absorption into modern pop culture.

**Directed by:** Tony Silver  
**Screenplay by:** n/a  
**Music by:** various  
**Produced by:** Henry Chalfant, Tony Silver



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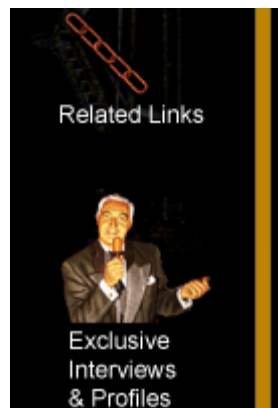
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**Cast:** Carp, Dondi, Frosty Freeze, Kase 2, Edward I. Koch, Crazy Legs, Mare, Min One, Seen, Skeme, and Iz the Whiz.

**Film Length:** 70 mins

**Process/Ratio:** 1.33 : 1

**Colour and Black & White**

**Anamorphic DVD:** No

**Languages:** English Dolby 5.1 Surround, English Dolby 2.0 Stereo

**Subtitles:** English

### Special Features :

Audio Commentary with filmmakers Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant / Filmmaker Interviews (9:57) / Editor Interviews (2:31) / Graffiti Interviews: Crash + Tracy 168 + Pink + Daze (24:44) / Style Wars: Revisited (33:55) / Music Video by Aesop Rock: "No Jumper Cables" (3:56) / Looped Stills Montage: Destroy All Lines (32:43) [no audio]

### Comments :

Over the past 23 years, **Style Wars** has become a revered, if not the definitive documentary on modern urban graffiti, and while graffiti - in image or word form - has been around for thousands of years, its impact on pop culture has never been more potent.

MVD Visual's more recent release, **Rock Fresh**, documents the transition of west coast graffiti art and artists from the margins of urban neighborhoods to mainstream pop culture, whereas **Style** captures graffiti's prior transition from name tags on walls, doors, cars, and such to a more creative expression of free-style fonts, and whole words and sentences as streaming, organic images.

The interviewed graffitiists in **Style**'s final third explain how the roots of their rebellious movement began with a handful of youths signing their names on any flat surface for recognition, local immortality, and pure ego gratification - youths now long forgotten, and branded as 'old school' types by the new generation in **Rock Fresh**.

**Style** doesn't question whether graffiti is art - a collection of interviews balance the views between supporters, and the local governments that had to spend a fortune in removing paint from subway cars in New York City during a very grimy period - but the filmmakers do explore the reasons why youths and young adults disappeared into NYC's labyrinthine subway service tunnels, or rode trains to tag exterior and interiors of cars and stations: in a nutshell, subway cars gave youths a perfect venue to place their names, logos or art on large murals that moved past the gang-controlled neighborhoods with total anonymity; there were no rival gangs to sneak past to paint, and the trains would advertise a name across a huge swathe of NYC.

Whether the act impresses anyone is really immaterial, because the graffitiists ultimately became addicted to the challenge of spraying their monikers in rival or hard-to-reach locales, obsessed over new logos for their names, or feuded between less creative taggers who simply sprayed their own name or blotted out sections of a piece that took all night to create. By 1983, the city was fed up with the unending mess, transit passengers were repulsed by wet paint from homemade markers within the cars, and the city was looking rundown as paint-smearing trains traveled through neighborhoods filled with abandoned tenement buildings, or huge piles of rubble.

Parallel to the tension was a youth culture that identified with graffiti style, burgeoning hip-hop music, and break dancing - each of which seem incredibly natural, as captured by the camera, before the music and dancing was heavily exploited in films, and by reams of one-hit wonder bands pushed by the major record labels. What may seem less unique today in **Style** is the use of rap music, the fast editing, and montages which director Tony Silver used to interweave the stories of the film's real-life characters.

The DVD's extras include the featurette **Style Wars: Revisited** (35:55), which contains outtakes and complete unused sections that were dropped from the final film. Portions of the outtakes appeared on the doc's first 2-disc release from Plexifilm, which assembled 21 mins. of footage in 9 separately indexed galleries. For the new single disc release, more footage was unearthed, and has been edited from the raw sources between picture and sound edits from new interviews with some of the graffitiists that appeared in the original doc.

There's also a series of 4 new follow-up interviews with additional graffitiists - Crash, Tracy, Pink, and Daze - and like the **Revisited** doc, one sees how different their lives are today. Some moved deeper into the art world, while others took on wholly different careers. One former graffitiist, interviewed in **Revisited**, later became a military career man, and not dissimilar to **Rock Fresh's** aging taggers, he found the discipline needed to organize a fast-acting crew a valuable asset in his future career.

It's an irony that's also touched upon in the DVD's mostly consistent director-producer commentary track, also ported over from the prior 2-disc release. The men discuss the peculiar relationship between vandalism and art, and note how a few of the graffitiists who navigated the NYC transit system during their teens later became employees of the system, after developing a hard affinity for the strange underground world, and working alongside masses of trains.

There are occasional mentions of some subjects having since passed away, but the lack of further details leads us to assume a mix of drugs, crime, and health ailments contributed to their demise, including one of the film's most colourful characters, a one-armed artist.

In a separate video interview, filmmakers Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant who trace the project's formation from a series of stills that Chalfant was taking to preserve the ephemeral art. The doc's two editors, [Victor Kanefsky](#) and Sam Pollard, also appear in a separate interview piece that was similarly filmed in 2002, and archived on the 2-disc set, and discuss their use of montage, multiple music styles, and the narrative conventions which have since become standard in doc filmmaking.

Fans of graffiti art will relish a 30 min. loop of stills - titled **Destroy All Lines** - that have been edited into a montage of art which no longer exists. The stills come from the filmmakers' personal and professional collections, which were also archived on the 2-disc DVD in the same loop, and in separate artist galleries with website links.

**Style Wars** also presages a fascinating irony: whereas graffiti was and remains an act of rebellion that's still a headache for big city governments, affected merchants, and police departments, some of the transit systems that were smeared during the 1970s and 1980s have now welcomed graffiti from corporate clients.

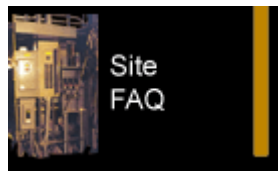
From a more local angle, one can see subway cars and buses rendered into giant billboards for beverages, cable TV stations, or movies; and in the case of Toronto's own transit stations, the busiest hubs are regularly transformed into giant 3-D billboards with latex sheets of branded graffiti molded to turnstiles, walls, floors, and steps - the same objects and surfaces graffitiists where verboten to touch. By adopting and expanding upon the technical aspects of urban graffitiists - optimum placement, use of logos and catch-phrases broken up and spread out over signage or steps - corporations have validated the core methods for graffiti: recognition, ephemeral immortality, and ego.

MVD's new disc sports the same crisp transfer, though viewers should note the Play option automatically loads the default stereo 2.0 mix, and not the more aggressive and discreet 5.1 mix. Alongside [Rock Fresh](#), **Style Wars** is a mandatory social and artistic document of a pivotal slice of NYC's urban history.

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