

An Evening with Calligraffiti Artist eL Seed

Tuesday, October 9, 2018, at 7 p.m.
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California

ABOUT EL SEED

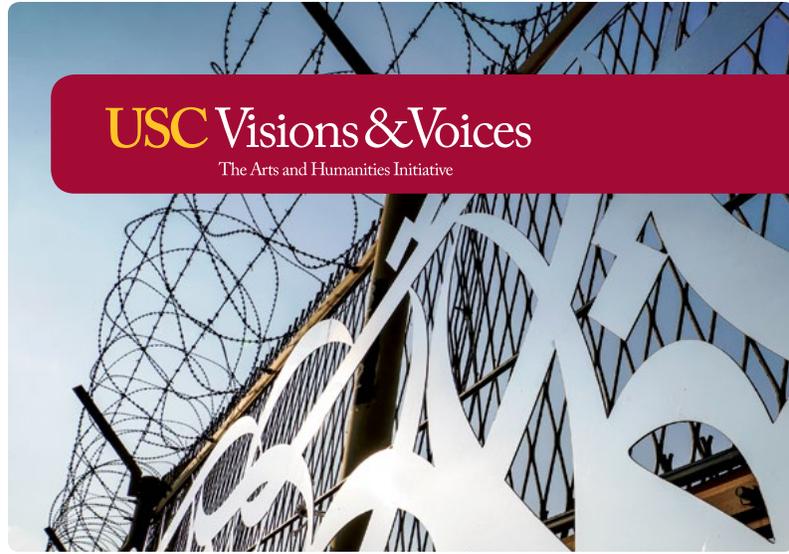
- ◉ eL Seed is a French-Tunisian “calligraffiti” artist, blending the traditional art form of Arabic calligraphy with the contemporary medium of graffiti.
- ◉ He has installed art in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea and created a mural across more than 50 buildings in Cairo, among many other projects.
- ◉ His inspiration to create large-scale public works was intensified by the Arab Spring in 2011, particularly the Tunisian Revolution.
- ◉ The pseudonym eL Seed was inspired by Pierre Corneille’s tragicomedy *The Cid*, about a popular character from Spanish folklore who, in eL Seed’s words, “lives in service of art and hopes to foster peace.”
- ◉ eL Seed has been honored with the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture and named a “Global Thinker” by *Foreign Policy*.

CALLIGRAPHY

Though related to writing, calligraphy is considered a visual art. Typically done with a pen or a brush, its key characteristics are an elegant stylization and being done by hand. Western calligraphy, which is rooted in the Latin script, gives visual expression to text. Arabic calligraphy, which developed alongside Islam and the Arabic language, is often associated with sacred geometric Islamic art. It is a highly venerated art form in Islamic culture. Calligraphy also plays a significant role, and takes on different forms, in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Ethiopian, Persian, and many other cultures.

GRAFFITI

What makes graffiti graffiti? Graffiti is writing or drawing on a wall or other surface in public space. Typically, what gets called “graffiti” is art that was placed on a given surface illicitly, or without permission – that is, it is unauthorized. When done with permission, art on a public surface tends to be called a mural or something else other than graffiti.



The word *graffiti* comes from the Italian *graffio* (“scratch”), with the form *graffiti* meaning “incised inscriptions.” Graffiti dates back to ancient Rome, Mayan cities in Central America, and medieval England (among others). In the twentieth century in Europe and the United States, graffiti became associated with dissident political expression (especially in Europe) and with gangs marking their turf (especially in U.S. cities), but even in this period, many artists and observers saw graffiti as a form of art. Artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring were able to transition their graffiti art into high-art careers in the 1980s, while others developed their art entirely in the space of the streets.

PUBLIC ART

Public art can be any size, in any medium, in any public space. It might be a large sculpture, a minimal tag, or a site-specific sound piece, just to name a very few examples. What makes it public art is that it exists in public space and is there for anyone who enters that space. Site-specificity (or being designed specifically for the site in which it is placed) and community involvement are common hallmarks of public art, but there are also plenty of examples of public art that are neither site-specific nor created in collaboration with the community they are placed in.

ARAB SPRING

Arab Spring was a series of protests or uprisings across the Middle East in late 2010 and 2011. Depending on the perspective of the teller, they have been described as pro-democracy or anti-government protests, and they ranged in form and national context. In 2011, demonstrations against poverty, corruption, and political repression in Tunisia — known as the Jasmine Revolution — led to the stepping down of President Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali and a free election for a new president and a council tasked with drafting a new constitution. Major uprisings also occurred in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, Libya, and Syria. While in some cases the uprisings led to regime change or human-rights improvements, in others there was an authoritarian backlash or, as in the case of Syria, a full-scale civil war. The impact of the Arab Spring has been as varied as the original protests and contexts, and is still playing out.

VOCABULARY CORNER

HYBRIDITY: Hybridity refers to a mixing of different elements, such as eL Seed’s mixing of calligraphy and graffiti.

PORTMANTEAU: A portmanteau is a word that blends the sounds and meanings of two different words – e.g., calligraffiti.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How can art foster peace?
- eL Seed’s projects always feature site-specific, thought-provoking text. Is it necessary to be able to read the text to be affected by the work? What is the relationship between text, site, and image in eL Seed’s art?
- eL Seed’s mural across more than 50 buildings in Cairo reads (in translation), “If one wants to see the light of the sun, he must wipe his eyes.” What is the contemporary relevance of this quote from a third-century Coptic Christian bishop?
- What would you like to see on walls, buildings, and other exterior spaces in your neighborhood?
- Who should decide what appears in public space?
- How does the concept of graffiti relate to the concept of property rights?



Jean Michel-Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1982



Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1982, Vinyl paint on vinyl tarp



Zaraeab in Cairo, Egypt, 2016



Ulysses Jenkins, 1848 Bandaide, 1976
A segment of "The Great Wall of Los Angeles"
Photo: Isabel Rojas-Williams



ROA's mural on Imperial Street and Jesse Street,
Downtown Los Angeles



Downtown Los Angeles Arts District

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- 🕒 eL Seed on Instagram
@elseed
- 🕒 Public Art in L.A.
www.publicartinla.com
- 🕒 Graffiti/Mural Tours in the L.A. Arts District
laarttours.com/graffititour

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

ALYSSA BRISSETT of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about the artist eL Seed and calligraffiti. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g., databases, journal articles) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- 🕒 Awad, Sarah H., and Brady Wagoner, eds. *Street Art of Resistance*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.
AVAILABLE ONLINE THROUGH THE USC LIBRARIES
- 🕒 Issa, Rose, Juliet Cestar, and Venetia Porter. *Signs of Our Times: From Calligraphy to Calligraffiti*. London: Merrell, in association with Rose Issa Proects, 2016.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY N7265.3 .S54 2016
- 🕒 Weibel, Peter. *Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*. Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM, Center for Art and Media, 2015.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY N8236.P5 G56 2015

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

- 🕒 Georgeon, Dounia. "Revolutionary Graffiti: Street art and revolution in Tunisia." *Wasafiri* 27, no. 4 (2012): 70–75.
- 🕒 Naguib, Saphinaz Amal. "Engaged Ephemeral Art: Street Art and the Egyptian Arab Spring." *Transcultural Studies*, no. 2 (2016): 53–88.
- 🕒 Riechers, Angela. "The writing on the wall." *Print* 68, no. 5 (2014): 44–51.

RECOMMENDED DATABASES

ARTbibliographies Modern

The scope of ARTbibliographies Modern extends from artists and movements beginning with Impressionism in the late 19th century, up to the most recent works and trends in the late 20th century. Photography is covered from its invention in 1839 to the present. Covers all aspects of modern and contemporary art, including performance art and installation works, video art, computer and electronic art, body art, graffiti, artists' books, theater arts, crafts, jewelry, illustration, and more, as well as the traditional fine arts of painting, printmaking, sculpture, and drawing.

Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson)

Art Full Text is a comprehensive resource for art information featuring full-text articles from more than 300 periodicals dating back to 1995, high-quality indexing and abstracting of over 600 periodicals dating as far back as 1984, including 280 peer-reviewed journals, as well as indexing and abstracting of over 13,000 art dissertations.

Arts and Humanities Full Text

This database features hundreds of titles covering Art, Architecture, Design, History, Philosophy, Music, Literature, Theatre, and Cultural Studies.

OTHER RESOURCES

TED Talks

- eL Seed. "Street art with a message of hope and peace". March 2015. TED Video, 5:40, <http://bit.ly/TEDel1>
- eL Seed. "A project of peace, painted across 50 buildings". June 2016. TED Video, 11:27, <http://bit.ly/TEDel2>

