



## City of Angels Graffiti Jacket & Tee

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“Historically, like back in the ’80s, New York was the place to be. That’s where graffiti started. But I honestly feel that after the ’80s and ’90s, LA officially took that title of “capital of graffiti,” at least in the United States.” -Robert Reiling in an interview for “Graffiti: The Untold History of The City’s Truest Art Form” (McKenty 2015).

The *City of Angels Graffiti Jacket & Tee* is an artistic outcome combining street art, namely graffiti found in Los Angeles, photography, digital printing technology, and the 1980s influences in women’s apparel. The artistic reference for design, along with digitally printed fabric resulted in the finished piece which exhibits a combination of urban graffiti art, influences of 1980s punk and moto styling and feminine details.

The opening of “Art in the Streets”, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles marked the largest American museum exhibition of graffiti and street art to date. Curator Roger Gastman says, “Bringing graffiti from the street into the museum venue isn’t easy” (“The History of American Graffiti.” 2011). But Gastman had developed a skill for doing just that, with the Los Angeles exhibit showcasing 50 graffiti and street artist installations. Attending this show became the primary inspiration for the pieces in *City of Angels Graffiti Jacket & Tee*.

The first American graffiti writing is historically attributed Darryl McCray, better known as Cornbread, in the late 1960s. He began tagging his name all over North Philadelphia, the story goes to impress “a girl he had a crush on, Cynthia Custuss, which led to him writing ‘*Cornbread Loves Cynthia*’ all over the area” (Gray, 2015). Graffiti, thereafter, grew into a diverse and illustrative form of expression in its own right. New York City became the canvas in the 1970s, particularly subway cars.

By the 1980s, graffiti art and art were becoming a potent amalgam, elevating the street style into a legitimate art medium. Graffiti art and artists became recognized and celebrated. Fine artists borrowing style and inspiration from the form included Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, while street artists elevated to gallery-worthy included Fab 5 Freddy and Lady Pink. Today, graffiti continues to be an intriguing form of art, inherently positioned for mass consumption. It is conceivable more people recognize the artist Banksy, a famous European street artist who remains incognito, than any of his contemporary fine artist colleagues exhibiting in galleries.

The show “Art in the Streets” inspired the creator of *City of Angels Graffiti Jacket & Tee* to locate and photograph street and graffiti art in the Los Angeles area. Dozens of locations and hundreds of photographs resulted in some compositionally exceptional examples. The photograph chosen for the *City of Angels Graffiti Jacket* is one with compelling subject and composition as well as beautiful color balance. The photograph was enlarged in Adobe Photoshop, and was then digitally printed on 100%

cotton canvas, on a Motah 1638x digital printer. Each pattern piece of the jacket pattern was placed strategically on five printed copies of the photograph to maximize the effect of the art on the jacket. The goal was to enhance the two-dimensional graffiti art onto a three-dimensional platform, a woman's jacket.

As graffiti morphed from tagging and gang-related symbolism to art, many permutations occurred along the way. In the 1980's, it was closely linked to hip-hop music, and in Europe, punk music also borrowed the idea of graffiti to help spread messages. "UK anarcho-punk band Crass regularly had stencil-like images on their releases and undertook a graffiti **stencil campaign on the London Underground system** in the late 1970's and early 1980's, with anti-war, anarchist, feminist and anti-consumerist messages being popular" (Gray, 2015).

The portion of the photograph of graffiti featuring a play-bill style image of a woman, and the assumed band "The Atom Smashers" was placed on the center back of the jacket. At the wearer's right shoulder is a line illustration of a Krylon can of orange spray paint. This is an important reference in graffiti history. Interviewed by the LA Times about the "Art in the Streets" exhibition, Chaz Bojórquez, age 62 and a pioneer of L.A.'s graffiti scene, considers himself the oldest continuously working graffiti artist in the world. His work has been purchased by the Smithsonian. But starting out in the 1970s, "there was only one can and only one tip-Krylon. It had low pressure, bad pigment and the paint would run down designer's elbows. Thus, the designer went back to the old tradition of graffiti writers from the '40s who used a brush. The designer uses a brush and acrylic today" (Finkel, 2011). Not all graffiti artists use or use spray paint. But Krylon has an iconic connection to the medium. The design of the jacket takes some inspiration from the 1980s as well. It incorporates components of motorcycle or motor jackets, but with a more feminine interpretation. The jacket has a zipper placed at the princess seam, typical of moto jackets. However, the jacket design is longer and more feminine than motorcycle jackets, includes and peplum and has a flare detail in back.

The *City of Angels Graffiti Tee* incorporates the same influences. First stencil-style art, like that used by the UK punk bands, was created by dipping vintage wood type in bleach and pressing them on black pastel paper. The words used on the tee artwork are portions of an original poem written about Los Angeles. The art was then scanned and layered into a composition for the tee in Adobe Photoshop. The art was digitally printed onto 100% cotton jersey. It features the stencil poem text art on front and back. The design also incorporates separating zippers on the shoulders. It is sleeveless, much like the 1980s style of punk tee shirts. But it is also gathered at the shoulders to create more softness and femininity.

The *City of Angels Graffiti Jacket & Tee* is a design marrying genres of past and present graffiti/street art with the technology of digital fabric printing. This design combines a technologically aided design process with culture and historical references as an aesthetic foundation. It is a work grounded in research, that of American urban expression, and art, along with a design process that explores how the past consistently informs the future. It is intended to reflect the human race's urge to communicate ideas and identity, and the spontaneous nature of artists everywhere.

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