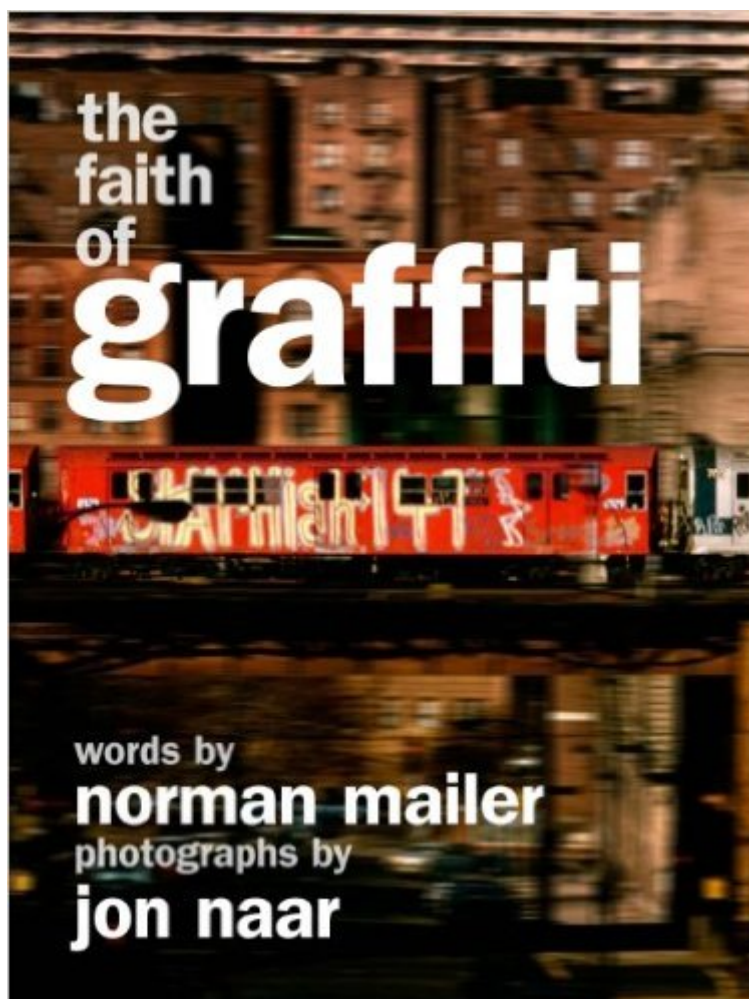


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# The Faith Of Graffiti



## Synopsis

The Faith of Graffiti is the classic, definitive look at the birth of graffiti as an art form, pairing the fascinating 1974 essay by Norman Mailer—National Book Award and two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Executioner's Song*—with the stunning, iconic photography of internationally acclaimed photographer Jon Naar. Back in print for the first time in three decades and expanded with 32 pages of additional photos, *The Faith of Graffiti* is a landmark in the history of street art: an essential, contemporary, and still-relevant meditation, in words and pictures, on the meaning of identity, property, and city life.

## Book Information

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: It Books; First Edition edition (December 29, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061961701

ISBN-13: 978-0061961700

Product Dimensions: 9 x 0.4 x 11.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars— See all reviews— (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #84,425 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Arts & Photography > Other Media > Graffiti & Street Art #200 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Criticism #253 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > Art

## Customer Reviews

I've been re-reading Norman Mailer's "The Faith of Graffiti", and it seems astounding Mailer grasped a street aesthetic born of marginalized, nonwhite urban youth. This is an important essay I suspect Eric Michael Dyson or Cornell West would come to admire. Mailer is susceptible to the charges of depicting these artists as noble savages, but he does make the connections between the impulse to transform the environment by adding a bit of one's personality upon it with the shattered reconstructions of Picasso's vision. Nice polemic, this. What impresses me is that he refined the existential-criminal-at-the-margins tact he controversially asserted in his essay "The White Negro", backing away from the idea that violence could direct one to new kinds of perception and knowledge, and emphasized an aesthetic response to a crushing, systematized oppression. Living long enough, I suppose, made Mailer aware of strong trend in urban style that added value to circumstances and individual growth that didn't involve a fist, a gun or a knife. Mailer would argue

that modern architecture and the corporate power it represent is violence against them and their right to exist, and that graffiti is an aesthetic response to an economic reality that wants nothing to with individuals or their dreams or their latent talents. It creates an intimate relationship with the surroundings that other wise seem designed to urge one to end their lives anonymously. Mailer, though, was talking about a particular quality of prolific taggers , "writers" as they called themselves, and rather rightly discussed them that they were artists no less than the gallery variety.

The Faith of Graffiti deservedly remains an icon and reference in the documentation and vindication of graffiti, and the urban cultures it represents. Taking the form of a photo-essay with images taken by John Naar in 12 days between December 1972, and January 1973, with a text by Norman Mailer, it saw the light first in 1974 gaining cult status. A much expected reprint with a few additional images, was finally offered in 2009. The volume operates as a sample case study documenting relatively early graffiti manifestations, although some of those involved were already talking of a dead scene at the time. While quite innovative in formalizing the work, what Naar and Mailer documented referred to a cultural form that with its shifts and transformations was already quite well developed. These early years present a nice raw sense of graffiti in the city, and Naar's images offer an stimulating document. However Mailer's essay feels not only a bit disconnected, maybe even dated, but other than for the congratulatory hyperbole of graffiti it feels in a manner that it barely scratches the surface. The New/Gonzo Journalism employed by Mailer uses an openly personal and subjective approach that more often instead of feeling that it aims to offer the close and critical account of an experience, ends putting him egotistically at the center of the narrative. However it is true that Mailer makes a strong case for the recognition and importance of graffiti, and in that context the essay has often been idealized to extremes.

When The Faith of Graffiti was first published, in 1974, modern graffiti-writing culture was just reaching the first of its several ascendancies. The streets and trains of New York were 'destroyed' with the writers' tags. This book was the first to look at proliferate tagging not as a nuisance but as a sub-cultural movement. Jon Naar photographed his New York environment over an intensive, two-week period to produce an extraordinary time capsule. Norman Mailer later lent his voice to the project with a flawed, but well-meant, interpretation of the seemingly foreign values that had taken hold in this American city. Even though the book soon went out-of-print, it quickly rose to, and has maintained, the status of a cult classic among writers in the graffiti underground. Now, some thirty-five years later, The Faith of Graffiti has just been re-released in its second edition. While the

title remains unchanged, and its content includes virtually all of the photographs and text of the original, the book has been entirely redesigned. More photographs are included and the presentation packs a stronger wallop. The principal explanation for this is not the inclusion of additional imagery, but that Jon Naar's photographs are now presented full-frame. There is a greater sense of context associated with each image. We see the compositions as the photographer saw them. We, the book's audience, no longer need to dress up graffiti as graphic design in order to appreciate it. After we flip past Mailer's introductory text, it is as if we, the reader, are riding a train back in the day. It is a magical train, one not bound to its rails, and our trip takes us through many of the old neighborhoods. We catch a succession of fleeting glimpses framed by our window, this book in our hands.

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