

GRAFFITI

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Jay "J.SON" Edlin

Foreword by Andrew "Zephyr" Witten



Dondi

Ever-smiling Donald Joseph White was born in East New York, Brooklyn, in 1961. He started writing graffiti in the mid-1970s under the alias Naco, a tag he soon abandoned in favor of the nickname his parents had given him, Dondi. He joined the TOP crew in 1977, and the following year, he formed his own crew, CIA (Crazy Insides Artists), with friends and fellow writers Crash, Doc, Duro, and Rasta (see 270). He invented many graffiti styles and techniques, and while he could paint intricate Wild Style burners that only the most dedicated graffiti enthusiasts could read, Dondi also enjoyed making clear, crisply outlined pieces and tags so his name could spread among the general public as well. In the early 1980s, Dondi appeared in the movies *Style Wars* (see 322) and *Wild Style*; was the first graffiti writer to be given a solo museum exhibition in Germany; and created graphics for the Rock Steady Crew and for Malcolm McLaren's album *Buffalo Gals*. Dondi, one of the friendliest, most popular, and most influential graffiti writers of all time, passed away on October 2, 1998. As he had said prophetically six years earlier, "Now, when I come back, it will be strictly my work speaking for me."



Photograph by Henry Chalfant,
New York City, 1982.
Detail: Photograph by Anita Rosenberg,
The Fun Gallery, New York City, c. 1985.

Futura 2000

Leonard Hilton McGurr has always been ahead of the times. In 1970, inspired by the typeface Futura and the epic science-fiction film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the fifteen-year-old New Yorker adopted the tag Futura 2000. He had fallen in love with the ultra-creative street art of Phase 2 (see 255), as well as other graffiti progenitors like AMRL, Flint 707, and Stay High 149 (see 316), and he was determined to become part of the scene. McGurr served in the U.S. Navy from 1974 to 1978, but when he returned to civilian life, he started painting entire subway trains, always preferring solo missions. His unique work earned him space in a 1980 exhibition at Fashion Moda, and in New Museum and Mudd Club shows the next year. By 1982, "Fut" was featured in solo exhibitions at Tony Shafrazi and the Fun Gallery and was tapped to design album covers and stage sets for The Clash. It's been a long time since Futura painted subways, but he remains true to his aesthetic, continuing to create inventive and visually stunning art on everything from broken windows and burnt exhibition invitations to clothing, toys, footwear, and his website, where he has posted new art every day for years. Futura's Kandinsky-esque abstractions look as though he takes a chain saw to the solar system and cuts, carves, and colors his very own cosmos. Whatever he chooses to do in the future, one thing is certain—people will be following.



Futura 2000 (left) and Patti Astor
All artwork by Futura 2000.
Photograph by Anita Rosenberg
New York City, 1981.
Detail: Photograph by Flint Benson
New York City, 1974.



Zephyr

Zephyr began his writing career in the mid-1970s, and in 1979 he made the leap from tagger to piecer. His novel piecing style had great appeal; it didn't follow the script style of the day, which relied heavily on Death Squad (see 086) and TMT components. Zephyr particularly admired Rick Griffin's work, and its influence could be seen throughout his piece books from that era.

In 1980, his work matured, as he started mixing in design components from other artists he had written with, a list that included Futura 2000 (see 141), Seen (see 294), Dondi (see 097), Kel, and Noc 167. Perhaps no one had more of an impact on Zephyr than Dondi, but Zephyr was no acolyte, and he always retained his individuality.

Zephyr's impact on the culture was not only through his subway works; he was the driving force behind a number of graffiti projects that helped solidify the movement, among them the Sam Esses Studio, in 1980, and the Soul Artists (see 310) workshop, where writers learned to paint on canvas and network with each other. He floated in and out of the art world and was a mainstay at the Fun Gallery (see 140). The logo he did for the film *Wild Style* has been seen throughout the world. In the 1990s he began writing about the movement, and his book *Dondi: Stylemaster General* is considered a must-have in any writer's collection. Not content to simply chronicle the movement, Zephyr returned to his roots in the late 1990s, choosing freights as his new medium and often painting with kids twenty-five years his junior.



Photograph by PJay One.
New York City 1980.
Detail: Photograph by Anita Rosenberg.
New York City, 1982.