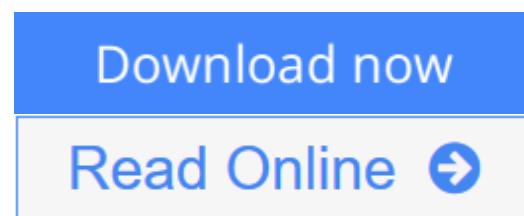


## Dondi White Style Master General: The Life of Graffiti Artist Dondi White

By Andrew Witten, Michael White



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"In the beginning, there was the Word. On the streets and in the yards, the word was the Name. And the name was everything. It was persona and place, form and content, truth and fiction. The name was an act of self-invention, a pure visual manifestation, through alter ego, alias, and nom de plume, of personal expressions in the public realm. The name was a line and the line begat the Mark. Then, in the great style wars toward the end of the second millennium, medium, meaning, and message were joined in a golden era where the name became the source and signifier of Style. And when the name became wild style, the word was Dondi."

-- from the Foreword

The dominance of the graffiti aesthetic in contemporary culture is undeniable. But how did an art form spawned in the train yards of 1970s New York achieve the ubiquity it now enjoys at every level of the mass-media landscape? There are many answers to the question, but one major factor is indisputable: Dondi White.

Coming of age in hardscrabble East New York in the early 1970s, Dondi White unknowingly began the process of introducing a whole new artistic dialect into the cacophony of the American art scene. His train pieces painted from roughly 1977 to 1982 stand as some of the most influential works ever committed to Transit Authority steel. Writing with legendary partners such as DURO, NOC 167, KID 56, KEL 139, and FUZZ ONE, Dondi created some of graffiti art's most enduring iconography. His pieces just don't stop -- and neither do the aliases. From the badass Mr. Whites to the cocky, self-satisfied Busses, from the nasty Pres to the perfect, vicious Rolls, Dondi straight killed it, again and again. Works like *Children of the Grave Part 2* and *Mr White + Bev* remain benchmark pieces for graffiti aficionados the world over.

In the 1980s, partially through his collaborations with noted photographers Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper, Dondi White's work entered the rarefied world of fine art. In making the transition from subway car to canvas, Dondi retained his unfaltering sense of letter form and balance, and his paintings remain a testament

to the clarity of his aesthetic. Dondi's canvases were subsequently shown in galleries from New York to Amsterdam to Tokyo and beyond, influencing a new generation of young artists and introducing an indigenous American art form to the rest of the world.

*Dondi White: Style Master General* presents the life and work of a seminal -- yet heretofore overlooked -- American artist whose work has resonated on every level of our popular culture. Filled with rare photographs, original sketches, unpublished interview materials, and testimony from some of Dondi's closest cohorts, here, finally, is the full story. At the time of his death in 1998, Dondi had seen the majority of his work destroyed -- scraped off, painted over, or chemically removed from the steel upon which it thrived. Within these pages, however, it still speaks volumes.

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**Dondi White Style Master General: The Life of Graffiti Artist Dondi White By Andrew Witten, Michael White Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #1564985 in Books
- Published on: 2001-11-13
- Released on: 2001-11-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .76" h x 8.24" w x 10.30" l, 1.56 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 208 pages



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Nearly 20 years after the art world began to consider graffiti a contender, one of its most acclaimed progenitors from the '70s and '80s is honored in a retrospective called *DONDI Style Master General: The Life and Art of Dondi White* by Andrew Witten and Michael White. Raised in Brooklyn's East New York neighborhood, White was part of an active culture of graffiti "writers": "Dondi and his generation perfected the energetic, edgy, probing styles of their predecessors, learning control, fitting the painting to the car/canvas." Gifted with vision, purpose and talent, White also stood out for crossing boundaries within graffiti-artist and gang culture. Photographers Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant made his work visible to the art world and had a hand in transforming subway-art culture in the process. Color photos.

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### About the Author

Andrew Witten--aka Zephyr--has been referred to by the *New York Times* as "the elder statesman of New York graffiti." He was an integral of the graffiti art movement of the early 80s as a member of the Fun Gallery, whose artists also included Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, and Keith Haring. His work has been exhibited extensively throughout Europe and Asia, and a number of his paintings reside in the permanent collections of the Boymans and Groninger museums, among others. He currently runs his own firm, Zephyr Designs, here in New York City.

Michael White is a former science editor of British *GQ*, as well as previous Director of Scientific Studies at d'Overbroeck's college, Oxford. He is the author of hundreds of articles covering the cutting edge of science, as well as popular and classical music. A consultant for the Discovery Channel series "The Science of the Impossible," White is the author of a dozen books, including bestselling biographies of Stephen Hawking, Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton, and Isaac Asimov. He lives with his wife and daughter in London, England.

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##### Deborah Allen:

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