

## Relive the Subway's Graffiti-filled Glory at this Bronx Exhibit

by Hannah Frishberg  
October 11, 2019

When Henry Chalfant sees ads on the sides of today's subway trains, he often mistakes them for the graffiti he used to photograph in the 1970s and '80s.

"I think, 'Oh my God, window down,'" he tells The Post, using the phrase for graffiti done underneath subway car windows.

New York's days of painted trains are decades gone, but an exhibit featuring Chalfant's prolific body of work documenting their heyday resurrects the era at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Through March 8, "Henry Chalfant: Art Vs. Transit, 1977-1987" allows graffiti-heads to relive the era through a re-creation of the "Style Wars" co-producer's Manhattan studio, to-scale re-creations of tagged-up trains and prints and ephemera showing the Bronx during hip-hop's birth — all while a boombox blares from the corner.



Henry Chalfant's chronicle of graffiti art is examined in an exhibit at the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

"The unexpected was constantly happening," Chalfant, 79, says of the decade his work spans. "In terms of culture and art and what your day would be like. I am nostalgic for that."

To capture "burners" — the most complex, photo-worthy graffiti murals — he staked out subway stations. "I would catch [the shot] while the train was on the opposite platform waiting to pick up passengers," he says. Only twice did he go into train yards to shoot. One wall features video footage of trains pulling in and out of stations.

While he misses the NYC of yore, Chalfant doesn't mourn it. "We may have lost the trains, but we've gained the whole world," he says, borrowing a quote by graffiti writer Mare 139, which appears in the exhibit.

In 1989, the MTA was able to end subway graffiti by introducing a new fleet of cars and aggressively removing the tagged ones — but by that point, graffiti had become an international movement. In the exhibit's first room, a timeline charts graffiti's rise through mainstream media as vintage interviews with Chalfant play.

The exhibit's name is dedicated to street art's loss to transit policy, at least in NYC. "Art versus transit,' the title, comes from a painted train sometime in the early '80s," Chalfant says. Don't bother looking for a shot of the car that bore those words, though. "That picture is not in the show," he says, "cause I never got it."