



Paul Young is an associate professor at Parkland College where he teaches graphic design and 3D animation.

Contact: [pyoung@parkland.edu](mailto:pyoung@parkland.edu)

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*“Fiction is the truth  
inside the lie.”*

— Stephen King

### **Behind the Symbol**

*A series of eight manipulated images  
by Paul Young*

#### **The story:**

“Since the early 1990s, I have been noticing this strange symbol appearing on walls in various cities. In 1998, I began recording them. To date, I have collected over one hundred sightings. It seemed odd to me that this symbol crossed so many cultures and continents. Like the famous “Kilroy was here” graffiti — was this the work of one person or many different artists? Was this an organized effort or a spontaneous explosion? Is there a message or is this simply mischievous fun?”



## The other story

Graffiti has always intrigued me. Considered “outsider” art by many, it can be argued that graffiti’s relationship to “fine” art parallels hip hop music’s relationship to classical music. Usually created by untrained artists in urban environments, graffiti is spontaneous, personal, rebellious, and even considered destructive by many. Which is exactly what makes it so “hip,” and therefore ready to be co-opted by commercial interests to sell products and services.

Being too much of a chicken to actually go out and paint graffiti myself (technically it is illegal), the next best thing to do would be to paint it digitally. The process of creating digital graffiti is pretty much the same: sketch out designs that you like, select a location that would be appropriate, paint it, then photograph it for the record. Except in this case, the picture was taken before the painting began.



St. Louis



St. Petersburg

## Research

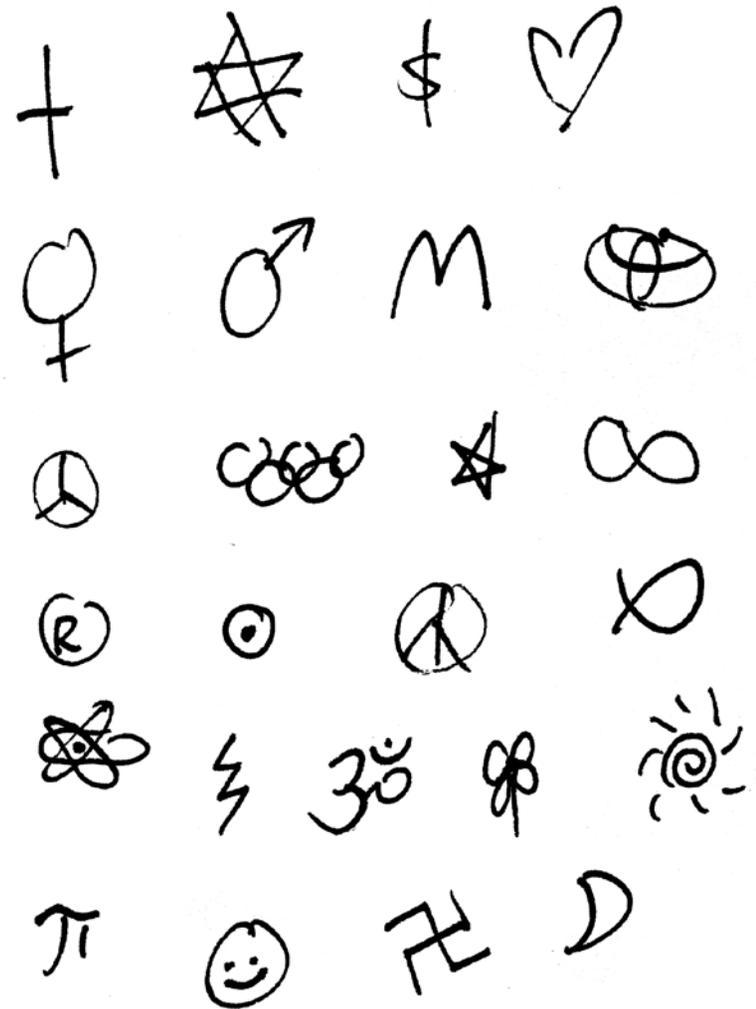
Graphic designers are often asked to design symbols for businesses and organizations seeking a visual identity. These symbols become part of logos and marketing strategies, making their way into the mass media and eventually into our cultural consciousness. Why do these symbols have so much power? And, what were their origins?

I was interested in exploring the relationship between symbols and the emotional energy people invest in these very simple marks.

Because we are educated by the culture we live in, we're familiar with most of these symbols on the right. But what do they *really* mean?



Oaxaca



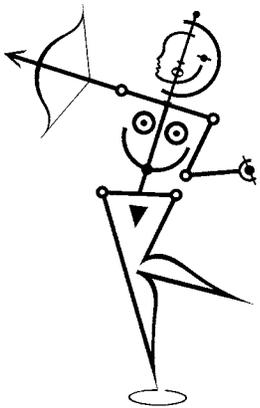
## Inspiration

In fabricating the “story,” I needed a symbol that felt familiar. Religious organizations and corporate commercial interests have enormous resources to invest in making their symbols known. Without such resources, I had to rely on what is already culturally familiar.

These explorations were attempts at conceiving an “original” icon that’s also “familiar.”

Another inspiration was Jay Vigon, a California designer who creates instantly memorable figures with the simplest of lines.

When trying to conceptualize artwork, I always find it easier to use pen and paper rather than the mouse. The results are more intuitive and far more fluid.



Jay Vigon's logo for Tamar Bane Gallery

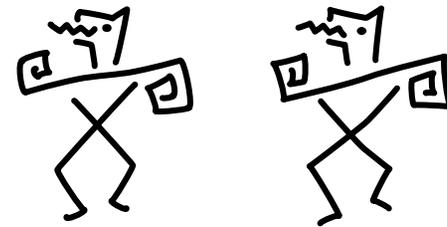
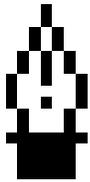


## Designing the symbol

A computer was used to finish the drawing. With thumbnail sketches as reference, Adobe Illustrator's drawing tools were used to create a digital version of the final art.

The symbol was designed to be easily painted with a spray can (you have to be quick if you're doing something illegal).

Variations were created by duplicating the art and making minor adjustments.



## “Painting” the symbol

The digitized art was imported into Adobe Photoshop and further manipulated to imitate the “spray” of a can of paint.

Next, the art was merged with a photograph, layered in such a way as to allow the textures of the wall to show through.

Each image was cropped to evoke the “spontaneity” of a snapshot. The final print was imaged at Walgreens on Green Street.



## The actual locations

The background images were selected mostly from travel snapshots taken with a digital camera. Some pictures were taken specifically to be painted on at a later date.

To make the “story” more interesting, not all the titles posted reflect actual locations (however, the captions on the next page are real). This confirms what most of us already believe — that you can’t always believe what you read.



Photographing graffiti in St. Petersburg



Oaxaca



Oaxaca



Chicago



St. Petersburg



Oaxaca



Moscow



Moscow



Warsaw