

Greetings From:



Even the dumpsters are an available canvas in the Art Alley of Rapid City, South Dakota.



Parked cars literally surrounded by graffiti.

Rapid City, SD

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What is art?
What artwork is good?
What artwork isn't?
Who gets to say whether a particular piece of art is "good?"
What would happen if an art gallery wasn't juried? What if any artist could participate?

Questions like this get answered in different ways.
Some answers are more formalized. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the yearly "ArtPrize" event opens the city up to all types of artists, and the public uses a smartphone app to vote on who wins the \$450,000 in prizes.

Other answers are messier.

At the Cadillac Ranch In Amarillo, Texas, anyone can stroll up to one of the 10 half-buried Cadillac cars and become an artist.

For a moment, anyway.

No matter how much time you spend planning and creating your artwork, it's all fair game the moment you step away. The next "artist" may even ask to borrow your can of spray paint in order to desecrate your just-completed work (don't ask how I know).

In Rapid City, South Dakota, the "Art Alley" is another place where answers to those questions are pondered.

Running between busy downtown streets, Art Alley is just that - a true alley with the backside of buildings, dumpsters, power poles, and resident parking.

And every surface is covered with paint.

During our visit Art Alley was an unregulated art anarchy.

There was graffiti. There was art. There were murals.

But it operated like the Cadillac Ranch. Paint what you like, anywhere you like, but understand the temporary nature of your work.

The local police essentially threw up their hands about patrolling the alley, saying it was difficult to determine who was an artist and

who was "vandalizing property."

Since then?
Graffiti started to edge out the murals.
"Concerned citizens" groups formed. Building owners wanted more control over the type of art that appeared in the alley. Tourism dollars were at stake.

The city council voted in a system. Artists needed to file for permits, present their plans for artwork, present proper ID, sign a liability form, and agree to an "Art Alley Policies" form.

All managed by the local arts council.

The city was confident they were going to make the Art Alley "more beautiful than it was."

Three years later?
Local artists commented that the once-vibrant space was now "really stale." Rapid City had to develop a plan to "revitalize" the space.

Questions over nature and ownership of art continued to get asked.

And answered.
In 2019, a properly permitted, planned, approved, and signed-off breast cancer awareness mural had some unapproved graffiti added.

And in a space that used to be described with words like organic, fickle, and bohemian, some new words are getting used.

Words like suspects, vandalism, damage, suspicious activity, and mischief.

As humans, we'll probably never stop asking what art is.

But least in Rapid City, the city police now have an answer.

Art is done by people with permits.

Learn more about the Art Alley of



A wall of the Art Alley in Rapid City, South Dakota.



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