

Re~Action  
Jan ~05

#01





# STOCKHOLM





**UNDER**

**GROUND**

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# RE~ACTION

STOCKHOLM  
FINSTA  
SWOON  
LONDON  
BEN LONG  
UNDERGROUND

3-8 & 18-20  
9,10  
11-13  
14  
15-17  
21,22



# STOCKHOLM





SEE MORE OF STOCKHOLM ON PAGE 18 >>





# FINSTA

Swoon has been putting up her work for the last 5 years in NY. I got a hold of her to answer a few questions and show off what she has been doing lately...

# SWOON

Name, age, location? "Swoon, 26, Brooklyn."  
Influences? "Millet, Daumier, Kathe Kollowitz, Revs, Gordon Matt Clark."

And what's on your desk right now? "A big installation in London that will be turned into material for the peepholes installations."

When & how did you get started with streetart? Done any graffiti?  
"Five years ago, I got tired of the preciousness of the fine art world, I wanted to make something that was too relevant to the present moment to ever stick around. I did one tag once down in the subway tunnels in Brooklyn, it was drippy and it sucked."

What's the graff/streetart scene like in your city? "Old school roots still rule, but there are many many ventures into every form of urban intervention going on all over the city."

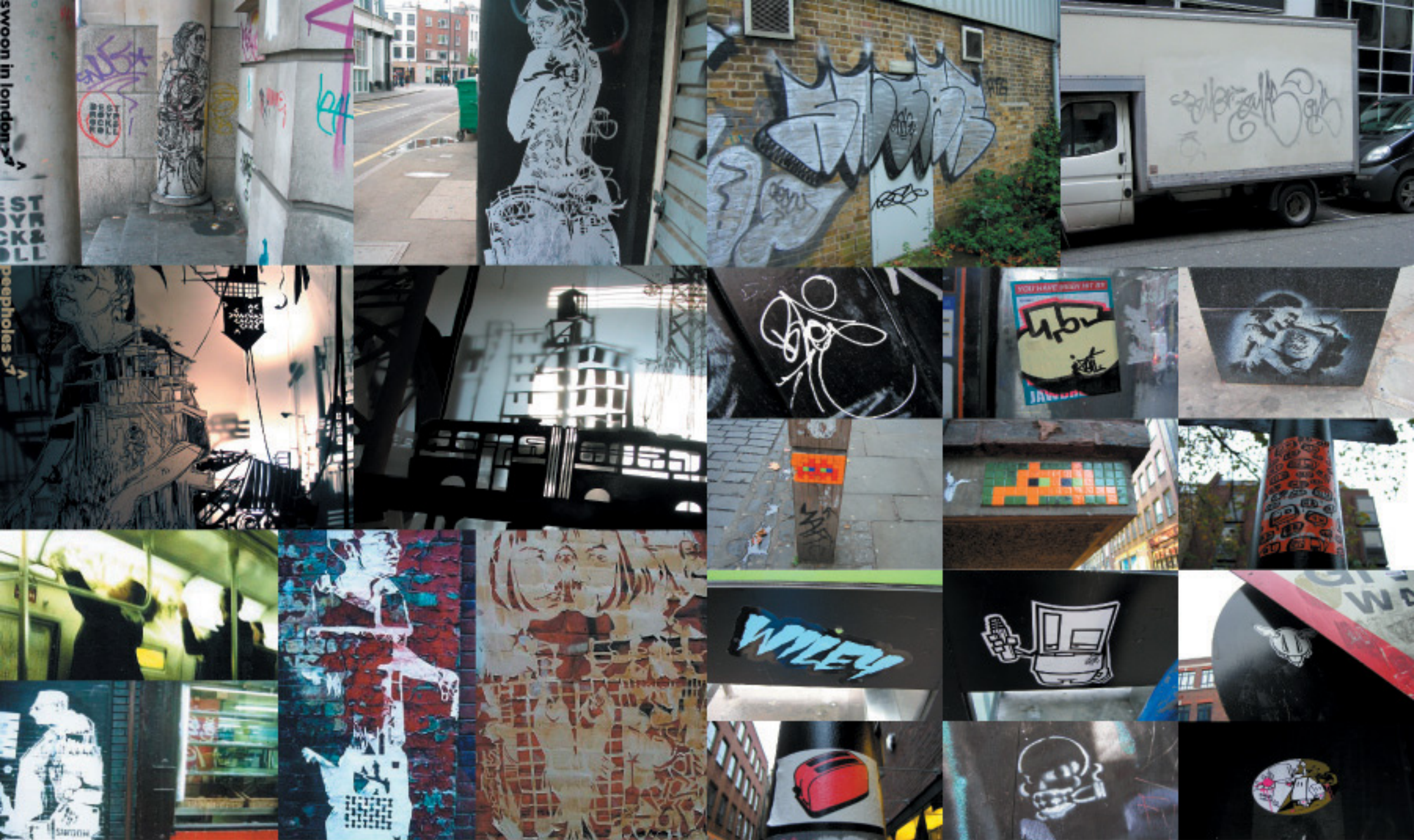
Do you prefer working alone or with other artists? "Alone."  
Favorite spots to display your work at? "I like pedestrian heavy places, street level stuff so that my characters mix with the other folks on the street, I like big brick walls as well as textures and bright colors."

Been caught? "Got a friend caught once, I got away on my bike, thought he was getting away too, but when I looked back it was no such luck... That was a terrible feeling."

Future projects & plans? "I am working on a project of installing tiny peepholes into walls and construction fences around the city so that people can peer into them and see a tiny little world."

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Swoon in London

EST  
OWN  
CK &  
OLL

peepholes

# SWOON

# LONDON

# BEN LONG

Since October 2001 when Ben decorated his first truck by removing the dirt that collects on the shutter his Great Travelling Art Exhibition has only grown bigger. He has decorated a great amount of trucks and recently developed other forms of public art for his exhibition.

What are your plans for today?

"I'm going to try to retrieve some galvanized tubing that a local scaffolding company stole from my front yard yesterday afternoon. I didn't see them do it, but one of my neighbours did..."

What's on your desk right now?

"Pot of glue, Box of 2mm wood doweling, £1.07 in loose change, Two knives, "The First Third" by Neil Cassidy, Scale models for "Dog Scaffolding Sculpture", Wristwatch, Capo for guitar, Map of Wandsworth, Plastersine, Junior hack saw blade (broken), "Faust" by Goethe, Cordless telephone, The Yellow Pages, Blank cd, Dax "Wave and Groom" hair pomade, House keys, Cup of tea"

Interests besides art?

"Chess and falconry."

How did you get started doing art on the streets?

"It was by pure chance. When I left college I no longer had the money to carry on making gallery type work, nor the studio space from which to base myself. That situation made me think a lot about why I wanted to make art, who I was making it for, what art is, where it gets shown, who gets to see it, etc, etc."

So how did you get the idea for The Great Travelling Art Exhibition? When did you start the project?

"I started thinking about a gallery space that wasn't fixed and didn't rely on people having to come and see the work - that it just somehow appeared in unusual places. So the first stage of that, the drawings on trucks, was started in October 2001. But part of that vision is that everyday life could be made more creative or visually rich... that art could somehow infiltrate what we normally consider "ordinary". For the majority of people in the UK, contemporary art isn't part of everyday life - it's very divorced from it."

Are you trying to appeal to any one group of people with the art you create?

"Yeah. I try to make work that is accessible and enjoyable to everyone, but especially to those people who might normally be intimidated by the high culture idea of art. The biggest challenge I face as an artist is to create something that is valued both artistically and commercially. That's actually a very difficult thing to achieve, but it's really important to me. By "commercial" I mean something that many people embrace and celebrate together. You know, like...well the best example of this that I can give you is something like The Beatles. Not only were they the most artful and progressive band of their time but they were also the most popular too. Ha! I'm setting high standards there, aren't I!"

Give us some more examples of people who inspire and influence you?

"Erm...ok. Blind Blake, Reverend Blind Gary Davis, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, Blind Willie McTell... they're all blind y'know. They'd be good at a dinner party, wouldn't they?"

What is the streetart/graffiti scene like in your city? How involved are you in it? Have you ever collaborated with other artists?

"Right...well, even though I live in London, I must admit that I'm not that involved in the graffiti scene there. It's something that I have recently begun to appreciate and enjoy. Really I just keep myself to myself and do my own thing. I like the solitariness that comes with the work I do. I don't collaborate with other artists because I'm simply not prepared to compromise my vision. Sounds pretty selfish I know, but that's the way it goes. But the street art scene is defiantly growing in the UK I think. I know that the Urban Art Official have just set up a couple of gallery spaces in town and they work with very good graffiti artists from around the world. Obviously, as a scene grows you get more of the messy shit coming along and everyone thinks that they are a dab hand with a spray can. But it's good that Urban Art is becoming more popular."

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How many trucks have you decorated?

"Oh, a lot. I've been doing the drawings on and off now for three years and I have lost count of how many I've made. It wouldn't be too hard to work it out, but I can't be bothered to actually. I might if I ever stop making them...just out of curiosity, and all that. I did a new one just yesterday though. It's a drawing of a woman in a still life pose, but she is facing away from the viewer. It's quite a good drawing. Probably the best one I've done this year...and one of the simplest. It only took me half an hour to complete, which is very, very fast for me. Later in the week I will go and meet the driver of the vehicle and travel with him for a day or two. I know the guy who drives the truck because I travelled with him last year. He's a nice guy but he doesn't talk very much. I can't remember his name..."

How do the truck drivers react when they see that you have decorated their truck?

"It depends on the driver and it depends on the drawing. In general terms I think that most people are quite surprised and intrigued by what I do. But the reactions always vary and I can never be sure how anyone's going to respond to my efforts. Some of the drivers take a little convincing to let me travel with them for the first time too. But this is understandable because they all have jobs to do and deadlines to meet. I have to be respectful of this. Truck driving is a solitary occupation. A lot of truckers that I meet prefer their own company - driving all night, sleeping through the day and hardly saying a word to anybody during that time. Others are immediately welcoming, grateful for both the drawing that I have done and the travelling company."

Been Caught? Got any fun stories you want to share?

"I've been caught many times. Caught and removed by the various security teams. But by getting caught you can learn how to overcome these guys eventually. For a start, you learn that a lot of the cameras and close circuit television are fake - they're often just empty plastic boxes with flashing LED's on them. And I'm proud to say that whenever I have been caught and evicted, I have always returned an hour or so later to finish the drawing I was working on. I've never given up and left one half done. But having said that, there are sites in London where it is impossible to even get a drawing started. One place is New Spitalfields Market in Leyton. A guy called Superintendent Culverwell and his "mock" Metropolitan police team govern it. They're like Dad's Army. But it's just impossible to do anything there because Culverwell's too bloody good at his job."

Tell us a bit about Scaffolding Sculptures

"Ok. Scaffolding Sculptures is the second phase of The Great Travelling Art Exhibition. The idea was conceived mid 2003 but it has taken me quite a long time to develop the project on paper. My interest in scaffolding, as a sculptural material, goes way back to when I would work with my dad on building sites during academic holidays. I would always watch the scaffolders and I was amazed at how fast they were at their job...they all seemed to be incredibly agile and acrobatic. In fact, I remember this one guy, he probably wasn't much older than myself at the time, and he would show off by swinging "monkey bars" on the scaffolding. He was a daft lad - I'd see him do summersaults on the bars 20 foot off the ground and his work mates would bollock him for not wearing a hard hat! Anyway, the scaffolding system always interested me because I saw it a bit like Mechano or Lego or something. It's incredibly versatile and literally any shape can be formed from its components. And I liked the idea of going back to these places and doing something creative there. Basically, the main advantage of using scaffolding is that it can only be classified as a temporary structure. Public sculpture is a notoriously difficult area to work in because of bureaucracy and public opposition that prevent most pieces from ever being made. I simply avoid all that by using a temporary material. The sculptures get taken down and I move the parts to another site and construct something new from them. After all, I am not interested in creating art that lasts forever..."

What does the future look like for The Great Travelling Art Exhibition?

"Well, once I retrieve my stolen scaffolding tubes things should look very good again. I have three or four sculptures planned for 2005, another album of music on its way ([www.thegreattravellingartexhibition.com](http://www.thegreattravellingartexhibition.com)) and many more drawings to come too. And over the summer months I will probably start developing ideas for the third phase of The Great Travelling Art Exhibition. Also, as a side project, I would like to start photographing "art" that people put in their homes. Stuff they hang in frames on walls, decoration, crafts, ornaments. The things that somehow reflect British culture and it's aspirations and ideals. I think that would make a fascinating book of images."

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