
TRAINS



FIRST MASTER PIECE ON A TRAIN

Done at Baychester layup
 Summer 1972 | Age 15
 Together with Hondo 1, Probe 2 and Fresco 1

We only had a can of red and a can of white paint. It was my first night going up to the trains at 2 AM. It was both very frightening and exciting. It was very scary for fifteen-year-old kids. We had to work our way through the woods in the pitch-dark night. You could hear the humming sound of the train generators, which added to the excitement and made our hearts beat with anticipation. When you're standing on the ground next to the trains they seem very large. We looked for a clean train and started to write our names on it for the first time. It was an incredible experience, I was excited for weeks. Finally we had created our first masterpiece.



BLADE'S GETTING THE FUNKY FEELIN

Number 5 Train | 1974 | Age 17

I took the style of this piece from Phase 2, one of the pioneers of the graffiti movement. The paint I used was Red Devil Rust Oleum and it was lead-based, so it was very heavy and had a strong smell. Paint always contained lead in the early seventies. That lay-up was dangerous because I was fifty feet above the ground and we had to be careful not to fall through the boards onto the street or slip off the boards we stood on as we would have been electrocuted. But because of my love and passion for painting, I carried on until I had painted over 5000 trains. My energy comes from my desire to realize more beautiful ideas and designs. The trains were my canvasses and most trains from the mid-seventies ran through the city for three to five years.

BLADEISM

Winter 1973 | Age 16,5

My Bladeism piece came from the James Brown song 'Escape-ism' on the Hot Pants album. I was sixteen years old in 1973 when I did this piece. The graffiti in this piece is not three-dimensional because it had not yet been invented. By then only the cloud had been invented. I did this piece on the lay-ups in Burke Avenue, where I was born. 'ISM' stands for James Brown's Escape-ism Song. It means you can't escape your past, don't pretend you are something you're not. His song has also to do with Martin Luther King's dream 'Equal Freedom for all Men'. This song was played on the radio every day at that time and I thought it would be a cool thing to add to it the end of my name. I was the first person to put 'Ism' at the end of my name.



PROJECT WHERE I WAS BORN IN BACKGROUND 1957

End of Summer 1974 | Age 17

I had stolen the paint while I was visiting my Grandmother and brought the paint back to New York to experiment with the new three-dimensional concept. I made the orange section in the left-hand top three-dimensional to make it look as if the lettering flew off the train. I could see the neighbourhood where I was born from the lay-up.



BURKE AVE LAYUPS IN THE BRONX
1975 | Age 18



As you can see my foot is on top of the third rail wood party to hold my balance. I was wearing my beloved crushed velvet red jacket. Burke Avenue was one of my favourite places to paint in the mid-seventies. I must have painted trains in broad daylight a million times. At times people could actually see me when I was painting. Of course, I had to run when the police came. It was exciting and dangerous at the same time. The photo of me standing gives you an idea how big this train was and how overwhelming it felt to paint it. The adrenaline rush was incredible because, at any given moment, the police could come and arrest you. This only added to the excitement, there were 10,000 teenagers in the biggest city of the world risking everything to express themselves against all odds



BLADE AS THE FIRST WRITER TO DO MOUNTAINS AND SKY ON A TRAIN
Piece done at Esplanade Tunnel | 1976 | Age 19

With this piece I intended to become the first writer to draw a background of scenic mountains on a train. On this night, I actually had the nerve to bring my first boom box (radio) along with me while I was painting. The boom box weighed more than ten cans of paint. I had to carry it on my shoulder because it was so big! Listening to Herbie Hancock's song 'Chameleon' made me feel the funk while I painted this piece on the train.

**THE DAY I BECAME KING!
NEIGHBOURHOOD WHERE I WAS BORN
(JANUARY 1957) IN BACKGROUND**
Burke Ave Layups | Spring 1975 | Age 18

Other writers started to call me the king of the trains because I had painted so many trains by now. Therefore, I decided to place the King's crown over my name in the spring of 1975. This piece was done in the Burke Avenue lay-up. You can spot the neighbourhood where I was born in the background. This photo was taken by my friend Ajax 1. Here you see my newly invented three-dimensional letter. One letter (blue) overlaps another (orange) to achieve a certain three-dimensional effect.



BLADE STILL KING OF N.Y.C. TRAINS
1977 | Age 20

This idea is called 'Another Blockbuster Production' due to the large, square letter. I invented this so people could read it from afar. This train ran through the entire city for over five years. I'm fond of this letter: clear, sharp as a knife, like a BLADE, abstract-square-ish.





BLADE
1978 | Age 21

This piece was done in 225th street (in the station) on the beam that is in the photo. It was my first attempt at blending colours. My sight was enhanced by the lights in the subway, but when a train pulled in to let people get off, I would hide behind the beam to avoid being spotted by the train driver, people getting off and on the train, or the police.



BLADE GETS BUZY ON THIS VERY BEAUTIFUL TOP TO BOTTOM TRAIN
1979 | Age 22

Here I created a Top To Bottom Train in the Esplanade tunnel (the only tunnel in the Bronx). As you can see, my creative vision was starting to gain more depth. A lot of elements I mastered earlier are added here. This train took almost seven hours to complete.

BLADE'S BLOCKBUSTER PRODUCTION ON THE 6 TRAIN
1978 | Age 21

This is another blockbuster production. I invented the blockbuster around 1977-1978. When I painted my last train I had done about 500 blockbusters on a total of 5000 trains I painted throughout my entire career. Although the trains made for a good canvas, it was time to move on to bigger and better canvasses to broaden my scope. Meeting Yaki Cornblit opened the doors to many galleries and exhibitions.



MULTICOLOURED TRAIN
Subway South Bronx | 1978-1979 | Age 22

This one is done at Esplanade tunnel. Even though the train in this photo has buff windows, they were unable to remove the paint completely.



BLADE TOP TO BOTTOM

Photographed by Henri Chalfant | 1980 | Age 23

Mechanical letters swinging through the sky. I did this on the stump in the Esplanade tunnel. The stump is the deepest part of the tunnel where you can't go any further. It took me almost seven hours to complete this train, but when it was done it was worth it and now it's acknowledged as the best piece I have ever done on a train.



BLADE DEEP TOP TO BOTTOM

1980 | Age 23

I did this piece outside the Esplanade tunnel under the subway lights. It has a lot of depth because the surface of the train was dented. The character in the corner is bugging out in order to accentuate the depth of the piece. In 1988 I did a new version of this train painting on canvas and this was on the cover of the catalogue of the Sotheby's exhibition 'The Writing on the Wall' (2003) in Amsterdam.

