

# SMASH 137

SMASH PROOF



ARTIST



Boys.  
2007

BOYS

© M...  
M...

1988





# STYLE MUSING

## CHASING THE PERFECT STYLE

*“ Firstly, what is style? I mean, style is just about character—it’s about the personality you give to the letters, and style development is about sharpening the personality of these letters. ”* SMASH 137

**THE** strength of any piece lies in its style execution; the writer’s personal interpretation of the letter forms; how they interact and the charisma they possess. It’s the writer’s personal stamp. When you take away the glamor of a finished piece, the colors and the design details, this is what you are left with. The raw form.

When your style is not on point, your piece will tumble and no amount of tricks will fix it. If your style is lazy and built only on tricks, then who are you trying to fool? You need to school your style. When your style is educated and informed it can stand on its own even without unnecessary gimmicks or crowd-pleasing techniques. The style in its pure state is something that serious writers work on, refine and perfect. To become accomplished in the play between letters and word structure is a work in progress that keeps writers like Smash in shape; tweaking, pushing and progressing, not

*left page: SMASH 137 / Barcelona, Spain / 2009*

content to just settle for proven but well-worn styles. He, like many others before him, is driven by the allure of the elusive ‘perfect style’.

Smash muses, “The perfect style, according to Smash? That constantly changes—everyday actually. It’s hard to say what the perfect style is because I’m looking for it every day. Everything I do is kind of an experiment. Once I walk up to the wall, I’m curious myself what I’m going to write. For me it’s so interesting to see where it goes. So I’m glad that I don’t know what the perfect style is. I feel like that it’s not really important. It’s the path that interests me, and not the goal. It’s like in life, you almost don’t even need to say it.

My style is quite simple, it’s raw, and it has a lot of swing. At the same time it’s really important to me that the style is honest. Even though I do it

by heart, people still have to understand that there are no accidents. I try to find interesting forms in my style. Lately I have been trying to have parts where it is really calm and your eye can relax—and next to it, have a lot going on. I try to find a really interesting combination between those. The balance, or the right play, between busy and calm areas. This could explain a ‘perfect style’ actually. And if people can’t read my name, it’s the only mistake I can make. It has to be legible.

It is a relationship between them [the letters] and me. I feel I should know them well but actually... I don’t know them so well. I write them so often that I should—but I feel there is still so much to learn about them. I’m quite confident I can spend the rest of my life painting those letters and it won’t get boring.”







left page and above: SMASH 137 / Basel / 2003

**SMASH 137:** Here you can really start to see Dondi's influence.



SMASH 137 / Basel / 2003



SMASH 137 / Milano, Italy / 2003



SMASH 137 / Heidelberg, Germany / 2003



# CAN2MAN



# KLAR

# ATOMONE



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CBB

24/24



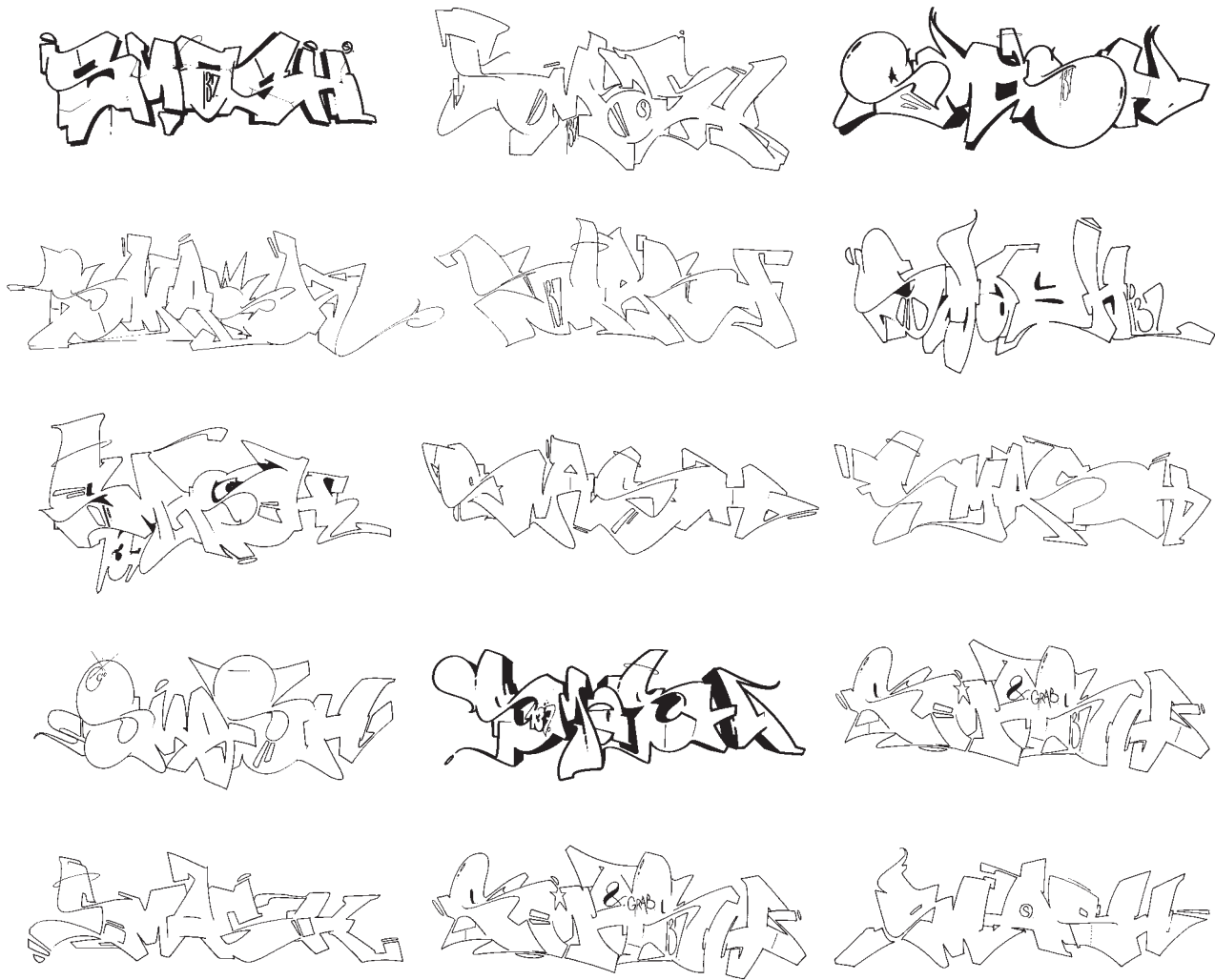
CKKENT

DASHISM



SMASH

MONTANA



right: SMASH 137, BAZOOKA / Basel / 2007









# CRACKING

“With cracking it is something completely different, because I can’t control the can any more. It does what it wants and I can just lead it in a few directions.” SMASH 137

**JUST** when he starts to settle into a direction, it seems that Smash needs to turn everything completely on its head with something extreme—just to shake it up. Enter ‘cracking’; an idea that Smash stumbled across one day while painting a Hall Of Fame. Like always there were kids hanging out there, smoking a few joints and causing a little trouble. As a precautionary measure, Smash was cracking open the left-over cans to release the pressure and render them unusable (so the kids couldn’t cross his piece for a laugh) when the concept suddenly came to him. “I opened them up and it just felt so nice—it was like a shot—and that brought me to the idea to try and paint with it.”

The way the paint spurts out of the can so hard and fast, it becomes a force that can only be

*left page: SMASH 137 / Heidelberg, Germany / 2008*



SMASH 137, CRONE, JERS / Basel / 2007

directed but not controlled. When painting with it you must move with strength and conviction or the piece just becomes one big mess, though a little messiness is a given when you ‘crack’. Reminiscent of the surrealist notions of automatism and Jackson Pollock’s action painting, one can see how it appeals to Smash’s sensibilities. Here is a painting style that only works when led by the heart.

Smash: “For most writers, the target is to do ‘the perfect piece’, and this is the motivation that keeps me busy. When I see my pieces I can really tell that from around 2007 onwards, I started to do

really new techniques to free myself, because there are so many rules in graffiti and with all those rules graffiti comes to a point where it ends. And with any new thing, like, even when Jackson Pollock started with action painting, most people didn’t understand what was so important about doing these drips and this ‘crazy stuff’. But it was so important to the whole painting scene, to free them from the rules. I feel that graffiti is at a point where we have to do the same, and where some already do. I do my part with what I call cracking. I just take a knife or something sharp, use it to crack the can open, and paint



SMASH 137 / Basel / 2007 / my first 'crack' piece  
Photos by Admir Jahic

with this. When I do this I have to empty the can from the first to the very last drop because I can't stop it. It's really messy and dirty so I have to work really fast and with power. This is an open style to me because it's no longer about trying to find the right line, now it's really working more like a sculpture. For a while I've stopped thinking in squares and straight lines, and now and I try to see my piece as a sculpture... or... as a building."

All the same, it was no free-for-all; the goal was still to communicate his name and not lose the form in complete abstraction. To do this he used the open parts with a mixture of outlines, just to bring enough form back into the piece. The opening of his letters led to an overall opening of his style; this, combined with the physical nature of cracking, helped free up his approach to the wall and the act of painting itself. Plus, it was damn good fun.

*“ Life feels pretty easy when you just let it go—of both the good and the bad things. I'm pretty sure it's the same with graffiti. If I tried to keep everything in my head I would be confused. ”* SMASH 137







SMASH 137 / Heidelberg, Germany / 2008



SMASH 137 / Heidelberg, Germany / 2008



SMASH 137 / Basel / 2008



SMASH 137 / Heidelberg, Germany / 2008





SMASH 137 / Miami, USA / 2008 / Photo by Ruedione







SMASH 137 / Basel / 2008

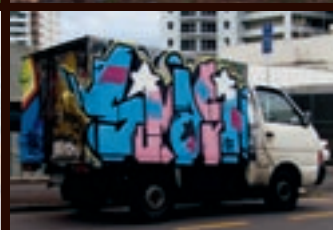
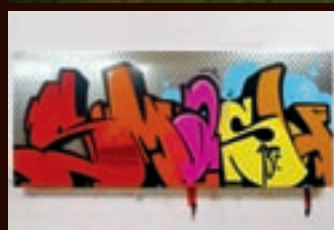
left page: SWEET, CRONE & SMASH 137 / Basel / 2008

**SMASH 137:** With 'cracking' I had to stop after a certain point; I got fed up and I just went too loose. But I feel that as a result of all of those paintings you really see that I became freer. This one—it's probably one of my favorite ones. Just look how much I opened the letters to one another. I mean this gives you so much space for your own interpretation. But I feel it's still totally clear to everyone looking at it how it works. I would say that it wasn't until after this crack thing, that my 'letter kama sutra' became cool. It at least reached a point where I could say this is something really interesting, and maybe even new.



above: SMASH 137, SMASH / Zwolle / The Netherlands / 2008

pages 108/109: SMASH 137 / Salerno, Italy / 2008 / Photos by Ruedione



**ON THE RUN BOOKS** together form an encyclopedia that catalogs graffiti and urban art from around the world. Since 1990, the OTR team has built an ever-growing archive, eventually to be donated to the Museum of Urban Art, a project presently under development as part of the Campus of Urban Culture, which focuses on Hip Hop and graffiti culture. With every title, we digitize and preserve original material from various key artists, and bring their story to the public. All this, and in-keeping with our motto: **KNOW YOUR HISTORY.**

KNOW YOUR HISTORY

SMASH 137

**AN** in-depth look at a style in flux, 'Smash 137 – smash proof' traces the various style excursions and developments of Smash 137—one of Europe's finest contemporary style writers—as he chases the elusive 'perfect style'. Never content with resting on his reputation or accepting in-vogue styles, Smash keeps busy mixing it up and pushing his forms to the limit. He is renowned for executing complex transitions and ideas under the guise of a simple veneer. Don't be misled—behind the bubbly persona and swing of these so-called 'simple' letter styles is a subtle but powerful punch. This is a work in progress full of interesting twists and turns. Watch

FROM HERE TO FAME PUBLISHING

ISBN 978-3-937946-56-6



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