



# The Calligraphy of Tagging

Workshop with Javier Abarca  
CSMC, Hamburg University  
May 2024



CENTRE FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
MANUSCRIPT  
CULTURES

Contemporary urban tagging is, by far, the most prevalent and widely practiced form of calligraphy in known history. In spite of that, it remains largely ignored as such by the wider world of calligraphy including practitioners, aficionados and researchers.

Tagging is also the most complex and extensive calligraphic tradition. Its range of writing tools, materials, surfaces, scales, postures, and heavily-conditioning contexts expands well beyond any other. Its palette of styles encompasses all possible aesthetic approaches to the letterform.

The calligraphic tradition of tagging is a mass phenomenon, and its depth should therefore come as no surprise. The established tastes, methodologies and values of the culture have evolved and ramified in the hands of generations of practitioners over six decades in countless cities across the world.

## LEARNING TAGGING

Tagging is underground knowledge. Mastering its secrets traditionally involved working one's way into the "prestige economy" of the graffiti scene in order to access its mentor-apprentice structure. This largely diluted with the arrival of the internet, and now anyone with time and curiosity can learn about it.

The workshop "The Calligraphy of Tagging" at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg University, gave students access to the culture of tagging from an academic and calligraphic point of view through lectures, exercises on paper, and a hands-on tagging session using graffiti markers.

Learning tagging opens the eyes to a whole new artistic landscape within the city, while providing with intellectual tools for a better understanding of the spaces, surfaces and inner workings of the urban environment.

## THE TEACHER

Javier Abarca (Madrid 1973) started his career in the 1980s as a leading pioneer of Spanish graffiti. Between 2006 and 2015 he taught the first-ever bachelor class on graffiti and street art, at the Fine Arts School of the Complutense University of Madrid.

Abarca is founder and director of the two leading events in graffiti research, the Unlock Book Fair and the Tag Conference. He founded the influential website Urbanario in 2008. Since 2020 he teaches online at his own Escuela Urbanario, the first resource for specialised education in the field.

Javier Abarca's work is widely cited in specialised literature, while his PhD (2010) has been downloaded over 25,000 times. He teaches, writes and directs events internationally.

U+H Universität Hamburg  
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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

**THE CALLIGRAPHY OF TAGGING**  
THEORY AND PRACTICE WORKSHOP

**13-14 MAY 2024**  
1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

AT THE  
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF  
MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

WARBURGSTRASSE 26  
20354 HAMBURG

INSTRUCTOR:  
**JAVIER ABARCA**

MORE INFORMATION  
AND REGISTRATION: [QR CODE]

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE  
UNDERSTANDING  
WRITTEN ARTEFACTS

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Image in poster:  
Nicolas Dolto









Two ways  
to hold a  
marker









Writing  
with the  
elbow



























Tags in Hamburg:  
Taps & Moses

Tags in  
Hamburg:  
Most

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UNDERSTANDING  
WRITTEN ARTEFACTS