Graffiti, in its most common form—name tagging—has always been a part of my life. In middleschool, my classmates always tagged things—desks, walls, backpacks, sneakers, and so on. They scribbled down their thoughts wherever they wanted. You could find anything on the walls of Abington Avenue School—cartoon characters, expletives, names, penises, jokes. It seemed nothing was off limits. When I was twelve, markers of all sorts were even banned in school, and anyone caught with them would be given detention. This is probably where my fascination with graffiti started.

Ironically, I was mostly an observer of graffiti. Rebellion is simply not in my DNA. As a child, I liked to think of myself as a rebel—telling people off and doing as I pleased—but in reality, I was happy to do exactly what was expected of me: the right thing. It never crossed my mind to write something on the school walls, but I was somewhat envious of everyone who did. What was different about me that kept me from trying to do so?

Instead, I feel compelled to record the graffiti other people have created. This selection of photographs shows some of the works that I crossed paths with while in Philadelphia. They are shot digitally and displayed in various size color prints. Some of the graffiti I chose to photograph is “traditional” graffiti, or spray painted, while some is on stickers. Most were taken head-on while I was walking, while a few were taken while I was on the train. I am interested in graffiti’s use of color as a method for attracting the eye, and often indulge in photographing these colors. The images are treated as portraits, because I like to think that what each person decides to ‘tag’ is a representation of him or herself. I like to think this is my way of finally participating—only once-removed.

My lithographs reflect another side of my interest in graffiti. These prints combine portraits I have taken of children and images of graffiti. For me, there is both a harmonious incongruity and a deep logic in putting the images together.