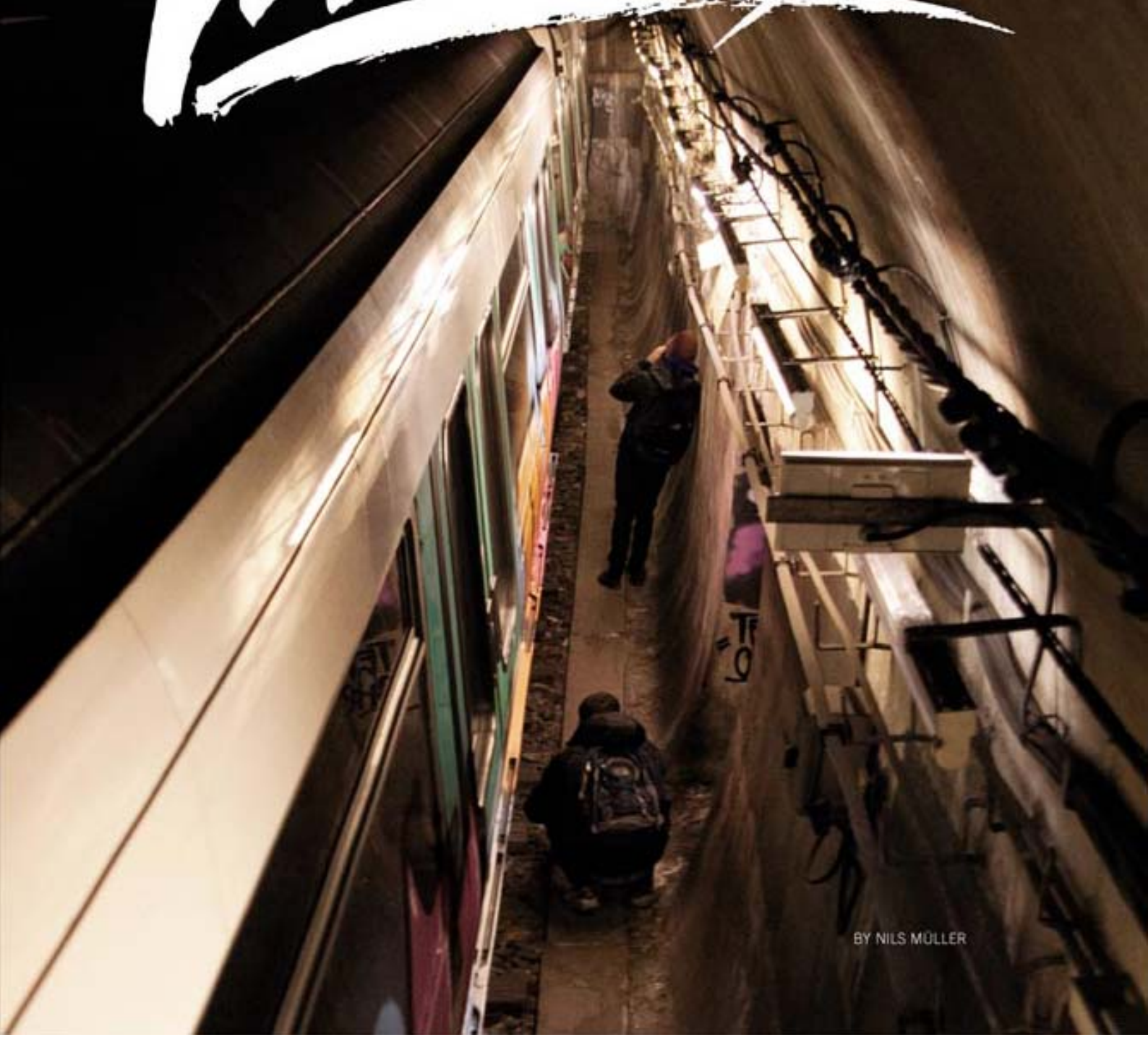


VANDALS



BY NILS MÜLLER







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NEW YORK CITY (US)

Behind a smooth surface

While New York is indeed striving to be safe and modern, parts of the city still reveal glimpses of a much edgier era, one that preceded the clean-up campaigns of several mayors and the consequences of 9/11. While being superficially pristine, the city has not lost its charming heart, hidden nowhere more so than inside the tunnels of its metro. In fact, they serve as the most authentic kind of underground museum, a showcase of cave paintings offering the legacy of generations of graffiti artists. Markings originating from the early 1980s – to name but a few – such as those by Futura 2000, Revolt, Haze, one of my favorite style-writers Skeme, and the Vandal Squad are immortalized down in the bowels of the city. You see tags, throw-ups and even pieces. It is an unforgettable journey back in time.

The history of the New York metro itself is equally impressive. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, better known as the MTA or TA, is one of the world's oldest railway networks. Opened in October 1904, it is one of the longest and most complex systems today: 468 stations, 337 kilometers of route length, 1355 kilometers of total track length, 7500 subway cars, transporting around 5 million passengers a day.

It goes without saying that I have been documenting how some of the subways got spray painted. Two actions were so remarkable, they felt like a scene from the wrong movie. In both situations, police presence was stronger than usual. The first was down to the execution of America's latest public enemy number one – inside the tunnel, we were tensed up more than usual. The second was because it was New Year's Eve. About ten police cars were heading straight to the gas station where we wanted to buy two bottles of beer to toast to a successful action and the new year. When officers arrived and got out of their cars, we thought we got busted. But instead of investigating us, they called out a happy new year to each other and enjoyed their well-deserved break. Phew!

Being attentive both under and above ground, I train my lens for moments that can easily remain unnoticed. Paradoxically, graffiti remains a form of vandalism while increasingly being considered an art form too. Just as odd are the New Yorkers who escaped being tarred with the brush of globalization and assimilation. For instance, the American Indian, who walks amidst the modern city while conveying the sense of living in the past.









