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Dear Reader,

Abstract expressionist painter Hans Hoffman said "The whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color." Really, color is just varying wavelengths of light, reflected and absorbed by surfaces in our world. That's all. Why then, is it so hard to define color? Mystic, maybe; certainly mysterious. Color manifests itself in every aspect of our daily lives.

For some, color represents money; a flickering flash of gold hidden in a riverbed. For the great Pacific Northwest Orca whale, color is an evolutionary tool of stealth and survival.

Maybe you've never considered why certain foods are certain colors, and how those colors are important. Or maybe you see color as a more abstract essence, an emotion, like the redness of rage or hatred.

In today's society, even with the election of our country's first black president, discussions of color often focus on race and ethnicity. This issue explores the varying meanings of color, whether as lighthearted as a card game, or as heavy hitting as race. As you read this issue, I implore you to keep in mind that every American has a right to share their point of view and show their true colors, even if those colors represent ignorance and fear.

ANGELO SPAGNOLO
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Dark brown mud squishes underfoot as an experienced hunter trudges his way along an oft-walked trail in central Whatcom County. The air is silent except for the wind lightly rustling the trees and the occasional trill of a bird overhead. The water of the nearby river hurriedly flows by, a constant reminder that the hunter is treading ever closer to his quarry.

The destination: a rock-strewn bank on the south fork of the Nooksack River. The prey: gold.

For centuries, countries and civilizations have fought over it. Fortunes have been won and lost in the pursuit of this malleable, yellow material. But, for the members of the Washington Prospectors Mining Association (WPMA), the allure of hunting gold is not the green of a dollar bill, but the sense of community found in this old-fashioned way of connecting with the outdoors.

Bill Thomas pauses on the trail and looks out from under his aged baseball cap, which bears a patch displaying the WPMA logo. A group of a dozen amateur gold hunters formed the club a little more than 18 years ago and Thomas became president of the now 650-member group last December. He says prospecting has been a serious hobby of his since 1998.

"You have to know how to read the river," Thomas says as he gazes at the river from the path. "The gold is only going to move when the river is really moving."

The hunt continues approximately 24 miles south-east of Bellingham. Thomas says the key to a successful gold hunt is knowing near which rocks on a riverbank to start looking for gold. The best rock is about the size of a bowling ball and halfway sunk into the gravelly sand of the bank, he says.

Gold is approximately 19 times heavier than water. Therefore, the large rocks on the bank are the best places
Bill Thomas, the president of the Washington Prospectors Mining Association, demonstrates his gold-panning technique. Thomas hikes the trail that leads to the prospecting site on the south fork of the Nooksack River. Thomas displays the flakes of gold he found while prospecting. He says these flakes are worth about $9.

to look because of the suction created behind the rocks when the river flows over them, Thomas says. Gold that eroded from deposits in the Cascades naturally sinks to the bottom of the river, and flowing water traps the gold in small pockets on the downstream side of the rock.

The mining association maintains leases on 35 claims, locations specifically set aside for mineral prospecting, in Washington, Oregon and California. The majority of these claims are leased from the Federal Bureau of Land Management.

All of the association’s claims are unpatented, which means the association owns the rights to the minerals found on the land, but not the land itself, Thomas says. The owner of a patented claim is able to live on the claim, in addition to pan it for gold. The specific bank of the Nooksack Thomas is panning is not owned by the Whatcom Land Trust and is open to the public, he says.

The muddy trail ends. Thomas exits the shade of the surrounding trees and heads for the riverbank, navigating his way among the rocks strewn along the way. Three fellow prospectors, two of whom are also WPMA members, greet Thomas at his destination.

“This spiral wheel is the best thing since sliced bread!” Brian Salmon, a member of the miners association, says as he waves to Thomas while crouched over the device in ankle-deep water.

Salmon’s spiral wheel is a battery-operated version of the classic prospecting miner’s pan. The pan sits at approximately a 45-degree angle in the water and slowly spins under the power of an electric motor.

The spinning of the pan more easily separates a pile of wet sand and gravel into larger pebbles and “concentrate,” the black sand in which gold flakes are most often found. After a few minutes, Salmon gives his ex-wife Debbie Lueder a turn at the machine. She
pulls a small, metal stool closer to the device and begins to slowly pour a handful of sand and pebbles onto the wheel.

The spinning motion separates the heavier, black sand, called “concentrate” from the lighter, tan material and works out most of the pebbles, she says. The concentrate eventually finds its way to the center of the wheel, where Lueder collects it and sets it aside for further panning.

No matter what sort of device is used to separate concentrate from everything else, referred to as the “aggregate,” Thomas says the concentrate must eventually be panned by hand to separate black sand from any gold that may be stuck. Anyone who has an interest in prospecting for gold needs to learn the technique by hand first.

“Oftentimes, people will just go out with a pan,” Thomas says. “They don’t know the rules or what they’re getting into.”

The process takes time to learn, but pans area easily accessible. Thomas says a sturdy, plastic prospecting pan costs about $8. More advanced equipment, such as the “high-banker,” which allows the miner to pump water over large amounts of gravel, can run upward of $400.

Before Thomas starts panning, he selects a digging site near a large rock on the bank and jams his foot against the rock to make sure it is securely stuck in the sand. He plunges the shovel’s entire blade into the bank about an inch away from the downstream side of the rock and removes a heap of sand and gravel.

Here, Thomas begins his search for gold.

Thomas says he first heard about prospecting as a hobby while in the Navy. When he was discharged, he joined the Gold Prospectors Association of America after reading numerous books about panning for gold. He says he took prospecting trips nearly every weekend while he worked as a camp ground manager on San Juan Island and it did not take long until he was hooked.

Thomas dumps the heap of aggregate off the shovel into a bucket fitted with a “classifier,” a round grate about the size of a dinner plate that separates out larger rocks and pebbles from the sand. Shaking the bucket with a harsh, rotating motion to sift the sand through the larger rocks, he is pleased with the amount of quartz pebbles he finds. Where he finds quartz, he often finds gold, he says.

After classifying, Thomas removes a plastic pan from the green duffel bag that contains his prospecting equipment. His pan has molded ridges to catch and hold the heavier black sand and gold flakes. He takes a handful of the classified aggregate from the bucket, puts it in the pan, and submerges it halfway in the river.

“Shake, shake, shake; wash, wash, wash,” Thomas repeats as he alternately shakes the aggregate to the bottom of the pan and washes the lightest material into the river with a back-and-forth motion. The process requires patience, but eventually only pebbles and black sand remain in the pan, which Thomas tips back to remove the pebbles by hand with a single finger.

Then he sees them: a half-dozen sparkling flakes glinting in the sunlight, each about the size of the head of a pin.

Gold.

Despite the current price of gold, approximately $1,100 per ounce, Thomas says most prospecting enthusiasts he knows are not after the money. The majority of the mining association members are at or near retirement age and are looking for a hobby that takes them outdoors. Four to five flakes is about an average take for a few hours of prospecting, he says.

“If you’re lucky, the gold you find can pay for the gas for your trip,” Thomas says.

Lueder says she and Salmon have been prospecting for 30 years. They became interested in prospecting when they lived in central Arizona, an area with a rich
mining history. She says she and Salmon will take their camper to a spot such as this bank of the Nooksack and spend an entire weekend panning for gold and enjoying the outdoors.

Salmon understands the allure of gold that brought prospectors to California in the mid-1800s. Although profit is not a driving factor, Salmon says something about sifting through seemingly worthless sand for treasure is difficult to resist.

“You never know what you're going to get in that next pan,” he says.

While gold is not as prevalent in Washington as it is in other parts of the West Coast, it is not unusual to see gold in the streams flowing down from the Cascades, says George Mustoe, a research technologist with the geology department at Western.

Only one successful commercial placer mining operation has existed in Washington's history, Mustoe says. Placer mining includes the type of prospecting WPMA members practice. With the exception of the Blewett Pass mine southwest of Wenatchee, every mine in the state has been underground, Mustoe says. The last underground commercial gold mining operation in Washington was in East Wenatchee, and it closed in the 1980s, he says.

The tumultuous geological history of Washington has made gold difficult to find consistently, Mustoe says. Historically, panning for gold and placer mining have helped test areas for their gold content and identify the best place for an underground mine. Large scale placer mining operations are rarely economically feasible. Today, Mustoe says he sees panning for gold as a recreational activity, not one that will make anyone rich.

“If I wanted to make money with a shovel, I'd get a job with the highway department,” he jokes.

After a few hours on the Nooksack, Thomas gathers up his gear for the trip home. He delicately presses his index finger to each gold flake he found and touches it to the top of a small, plastic vial he has filled with water.

The surface tension of the water sucks the gold flake into the container; each piece sinks to the bottom and lands with a soft clink.

Thomas says the gold found in this expedition is worth approximately $20. The master prospector seems pleased. It is clearly not about the money.

After the hike back, mud and sand tenaciously cling to Thomas' shoes as he climbs into his truck.

The hunt is over. The take is modest. It is time to go home. ■
The dull roar of the boat’s engine quiets as the passengers of the Odyssey rise out of their seats knowing something exciting must be up ahead. A cold wind whips over the water of the Haro Strait in Puget Sound as the passengers stretch their legs and wait on the bow. Waves lap the hull of the boat, slowly rocking it back and forth as the people wait anxiously. A woman pulls out her camera and holds it ready. Silence.

Heads turn and eyes search the vast area of the water in front of them. Suddenly, a single, black fin slices through the water followed closely by two others. A burst of squeals and gasps erupts as the spectators take in the magnificence of a Pacific Northwest legend: the orca whale.

The species, identifiable by its contrasting black and white coloring, is well known from the “Free Willy” movies and marine parks. But orca whales, also known as killer whales, have a close connection to coastal residents of the Pacific Northwest. Orca whales have lived and fed in the waters surrounding the San Juan Islands for hundreds of years. Due to a continuous decline in their population, orca whales became listed under the Endangered Species Act in 2005 and continue to face threats to their existence today.
STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

Between April and October, the Puget Sound waters are home to three pods of orca whales known as the Southern Residents. Before Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) in 1972, Puget Sound was a gold mine for capturing and selling orca whales into captivity. In the early 1960s, the Southern Resident population was largely depleted after 45 whales were captured and sold to marine parks across the country, and another 13 were killed instantly in the process.

One of these captured whales was Shamu, who was sent to a Seattle aquarium before being sold to SeaWorld in San Diego where she performed until her death in 1971. The only whale still surviving in captivity from the Southern Resident captures is Lolita, a 43-year-old female who still performs at the Miami Seaquarium in Florida. Jenny Atkinson, director of The Whale Museum in Friday Harbor says researchers believe Lolita’s mother is still alive and think that if the whale were returned to her pod, she would be welcomed back.

BLACK AND WHITES

The orca whale’s distinctive coloring is not only visually stunning, but also assists in hunting. According to the Center for Whale Research, the whale’s black upper body acts as camouflage in the dark water when it approaches prey from below. Its white underbelly blends with the sunlight on the water’s surface when hunting from above.

Orca whales feed almost exclusively on fish and travel and hunt in family groups called pods, which usually consist of 20 to 30 whales related to each other. The Southern Resident population is currently at 89 whales, including a female who is estimated to be 99 years old, Atkinson says.

A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS

In 1976, the Center for Whale Research created the “Orca Survey” as a census to identify and keep track of whales in each pod. Because it is dangerous and illegal to tag orca whales in the wild, researchers identify each whale by the white patch behind the dorsal fin, known as a “saddle.”

Like a human fingerprint, each orca whale’s saddle is unique, says Cindy Hansen, Whale Museum naturalist. Through photo identification, scientists can identify and study individual behaviors. Once identified, whales are named and given a number, which links them to their pod. Hansen says because of the identification, people can understand the uniqueness of each whale.

“It’s not just a pod of whales,” she says. “They are a bunch of individuals that we know and they all have their own story.”

DANGEROUS DIET

Although orca whales also reside in other waters of the world, the Southern Residents are the only community of whales considered “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act.

The first danger facing the Southern Resident
population is a shortage of prey, says Heather Hill, a whale naturalist for the whale-watching company San Juan Excursions. Salmon farming and over-fishing have depleted the Southern Residents' main source of food, forcing them to migrate long distances to find prey. Hill says she is concerned the food shortage will become so low the whales will not return to the Puget Sound waters.

Not only is the whales' food source depleting, it is becoming poisonous. Due to years of pollution and toxic runoff dumping into the Puget Sound, the ocean's inhabitants embody a high level of toxins. The toxic chemicals stay safe in the whale's blubber, but through starvation, the whale's body begins to absorb the harmful substances, she says. A female whale's first calf has a low chance of survival because of the poison passed from her body during breastfeeding. Hill says the water pollution is hampering the Southern Residents' ability to grow the population effectively because of the low survival of new life.

A NATURAL BOND

The importance of community, which is apparent in the lives of the Southern Resident pods, is also present in the lives of those who work to protect and preserve the whales and their habitat in the Pacific Northwest. Many organizations, such as The Whale Museum, are devoted to educating and monitoring the health of the Southern Resident pods.

Jeanne Hyde, a retired accountant from California, came to the Pacific Northwest in June 2004 out of a desire to see whales in their natural environment. Now in her 60s, Hyde works part time at The Whale Museum and full time as what she calls an "orca-geek." Hyde says she desires to educate others and share the connection she feels with the Southern Residents.

"I'm not out there to force people to love these whales," Hyde says. "I just do, and I want to share that with them."

Natosha Gobin, a native language teacher for the Tulalip tribe, says she often shares the story and significance of the orca whale as the tribe's emblem to the reservation's school children. Tulalip-area tribes believe orca whales are their ancestors, Gobin says, and she fears the whales' extinction would take away an important part of her people's history.

"Once something like [the whales] are lost, you can never get them back," Gobin says.

Although research has revealed the dangers the Southern Resident orca whales face, so much is still unknown about the origin of the species, Hill says. The mammals' choice to hunt and live in family groups and their fearless interactions with humans prove that the complexity and intelligence of the species will most likely never be fully understood. Hill believes that this attribute is a beauty in itself and would be heavily missed if the Southern Residents were to become extinct.

"Losing the whales would be like losing your hearing," she says. "You could still live on without it but it would be a less beautiful world without it there."

Bill Wright, owner of San Juan Safaris, a whale-watching company based out of Friday Harbor, has worked in the whale-watching business for more than 30 years and says he is still amazed with the whale's behavior toward humans. Due to federal law, vessels must remain 100 yards away from marine mammals at all times, but the whales will often come right up to the boat. The relationship between whales and humans has changed drastically in the last 50 years, from hunting and capturing the whales to watching and protecting them, Wright says.

"What is amazing to me is that they have forgiven us," he says.

Although whale hunting and capturing will likely never again affect the Southern Resident pods, their environment continues to be threatened by humans.

There is a haunting possibility the Southern Residents will eventually be forced out of Puget Sound because of lack of prey, which may lead to eventual extinction.

Although many people are working to educate others about the dangers facing the Southern Residents, the Pacific Northwest could lose the whales — a creature that's crucial to local history and identity.

The day may come when the passengers of the Odyssey will wait silently on the bow of the boat searching the water for a fin, but will never see one.
EAT THE RAINBOW

Story and photos by Renee Davies

DON'T BE COLOR BLIND WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING YOUR DAILY DOSE OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.
Remember being a child: sitting at the kitchen table, moving that repulsive piece of broccoli from side to side on the plate, waiting for the moment when mom looks away, only to shove it quickly into that spot behind the couch where vitamins and other inedible things are hidden.

Mom loves to tout that same old phrase, “Eat your greens.” But what about all the other colors of the rainbow? For some reason, mom never said, “Eat your blues, oranges, reds and yellows.” How is it that blueberries and red peppers got left out of the mix? After all, it’s more important to eat colors than just greens, says Jill Kelly, Western’s registered dietician.

“The more colors we have on our plate, the more vitamins and minerals our diet will consist of,” Kelly says. This is especially true with plant foods. The deeper the color, the better the nutrients.

As college students, the new routine has become standing in front of the grocery aisle, heads moving back and forth, debating between the $2 processed white bread, or the $4 wholesome, nutritious wheat. The last bank statement has replaced the nagging mother, a reminder of a different type of green that people are lacking. Kelly, however, says it is still possible for college students to eat healthy and shop on a budget.

For example, she recommends buying foods in season to avoid the high cost that comes from shipping those cherries all the way from Chile. According to Kelly, the less distance traveled also means preserving more of the nutrients that come in fruits and vegetables, and therefore getting more nutrition for your money.

One diet that carries out Kelly’s advice and incorporates all food groups is the seven-day color diet. The overall concept of the diet, developed by Mindy Weisel and her two daughters in their book, “The 7-Day Color Diet: The New Way to Health & Beauty,” separates the colors into different days.

For example, the dieter would only eat red foods, such as red peppers, strawberries and a tomato salad on Tuesdays; and then on Wednesday, they eat only green foods. The diet also incorporates a rainbow day, which, the book quickly points out, does not mean it is OK to eat jelly beans all day.

Although the focus on color means the food selection consists mostly of fruits and vegetables, the diet stresses the importance of eating from all main food groups.
groups. Many days still allow the dieter to eat foods like rye bread on red day, cheddar cheese on orange day, and rainbow-baked fish on rainbow day. The diet also builds on a core group of white foods that can be incorporated into every day’s meals, such as chicken, eggs, milk and cheese. After fruits and vegetables of that day’s color are added, the dieter can also add a beige, such as wheat bread, brown rice or a small baked potato.

However, the diet does have some restrictions. For example, the dieter is given a daily allowance of only one tablespoon of butter and just one cup of coffee each day.

Other color diets recommend eating only one color, such as green vegetable diets, or completely eliminating one color, such as those that eliminate white foods to try to limit carbohydrate intake. Kelly says she remains more skeptical of a diet that eliminates other nutritious colors.

“Plant greens are extremely high in vitamins and minerals, but if that’s all that’s being eaten, that means there’s going to be a lot of other vitamins and minerals that are going to be excluded,” she says.

Kelly says the key is eating foods that are closest to their original form. If eating white foods while on the seven-day color diet means eating potato chips, Wonder Bread and a Twinkie, then it is not going to help anyone lose weight. White foods, such as mushrooms, onions and milk, all have important nutrients that someone would not want to eliminate in an all-green, or no-white diet.

In an article published in a 2002 issue of Readers Digest, Dr. David Heber argues that the reason for many diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer is the common beige-only diet. Heber’s diet recommends eating one fruit or vegetable from each color group every day.

According to the National Cancer Institute, current research shows that nutrients from the different colors of plant foods can protect against cancer, heart disease, cataracts and macular degeneration.

Whether eating a different color each day, or just incorporating colors into an everyday diet, most nutritionists would agree color is a key factor to healthy eating. “Just eat your greens,” is no longer the popular phrase it used to be. It’s time to sweep out the vitamins and broccoli from behind the couch and get creative with all the colors of the rainbow food has to offer.

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FIVE A DAY, THE COLORFUL WAY
To get the most out of meals, seek nutritious, fresh and colorful foods.

Source: National Cancer Institute, "Eat by Color," by David Heber

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLORS</th>
<th>FOODS</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEEP REDS</td>
<td>Tomatoes, red or pink grapefruit, watermelon</td>
<td>Reduces risk of some cancers, including prostate cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AND PINKS</td>
<td>Blueberries, cherries, beets, eggplants, red wine, red apples, strawberries</td>
<td>Reduces risk of heart disease, stroke, and protects against harmful carcinogens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RED/PURPLE</td>
<td>Cabbage, kale, cauliflower, broccoli</td>
<td>Increases cancer-fighting enzymes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREEN</td>
<td>Garlic, onions, mushrooms, asparagus, artichokes</td>
<td>Fights tumors and prevents cell damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE/GREEN</td>
<td>Avocados, corn, green peppers, green beans, spinach, zucchini</td>
<td>Fights cataracts and macular degeneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YELLOW/GREEN</td>
<td>Sweet potatoes, mangos, carrots, apricots</td>
<td>Improves immune system, skin and eye health, reduces risk of certain cancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORANGE</td>
<td>Oranges, pineapples, peaches</td>
<td>Prevents cell damage, reduces bloating, helps digestion</td>
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Illustration by Rebecca Rice | KLIPSUN
Manuel Padilla doesn't look like a gang member anymore. Today, the 35-year-old father of two dons a plain white T-shirt, khakis and boots, and sets to work building a fence around his Woburn Street home with the help of his friends and family. His attire is a far cry from the bright blue bandanas, shirts and Dickies he wore with pride in his gang years.

Padilla moved from Mexico to a poor neighborhood in Yakima, where he grew up taking care of his two younger brothers as his mother worked full time. His brothers joined a neighborhood gang that offered the teens a chance to party and earn respect from fellow members, and girls. At first, Padilla primarily sold marijuana to the crew, but was eventually "courted in;" getting beat up by his friends for membership. He sprayed graffiti and stole guns and amps to prove himself.

After a beer-run car crash killed three of his friends and an innocent driver, Padilla quit the gang lifestyle and enrolled in Wyoming Technical Institute in 1996 to become a mechanic. Soon, however, he found himself slipping back into drug dealing and partying. As federal agents closed in on him for moving drugs and weapons, his brother began receiving death threats from a rival gang in Yakima. He returned to an empty home; his family had moved to Bellingham to escape the violence.

In 2002, Padilla went to federal prison in Arizona for five years on charges of drug dealing. While he was locked up, his daughter Isabela was stricken with cancer and his son Emilio got appendicitis. Although both recovered, Padilla says he regretted not being there for his children, and realized he could be a positive leader in his community.

"My mentality when I first got in there was, 'I'm gonna retaliate, you know, on all these snitches,'" Padilla says. "But at the end I was like, 'I can make a change. I can make a difference. I can work with these kids and my cousins and my family.'"

In 2007, Padilla entered into a custody battle for his children with his ex-wife. Her accusations of assault and abuse that initially put him on probation were later proven false by the court. With the help of three public defenders and Child Protective Services (CPS), he won the case and earned full custody. Through the legal proceedings of the case, Padilla learned the ins and outs of CPS laws and began a support group in Bellingham that gives legal advice...
to fathers in custody battles, the first of its kind in Whatcom County.

In January, Padilla joined a gang-prevention initiative that works with Bellingham Police detectives. Once a month, he attends “safety dinners,” where police and community members help find alternatives to gang life for teens and their families. Padilla says the program, aimed at migrant communities where gang violence has recently taken place, has made people more aware of the threat, and established a working relationship with police.

Currently, Padilla is working on his associate degree in process technology at Whatcom Community College. He’s now taking care of his kids, volunteering for the Whatcom Family & Community Network and plans to marry his fiancée Monica Curtiss in June. Even now, however, Padilla says he cannot bring himself to wear red, the color of a rival gang in Yakima.

“I have a hard time wearing it, even though I’m not doing gang activity,” he says. “It got indented in me so bad that ... I just don’t like it. But I don’t mind my woman wearing it. I don’t mind my kids wearing red shirts and all that. It’s just, you know, I don’t wear it.”

RIGHT: Padilla holds his daughter Isabela, who is now 10 years old. At the time, he was involved with a gang in Whatcom County.
Western junior Kelsey Bujacich poses in Bellingham henna artist Chele Armstrong’s home to show off three different stages of henna application: paste on (left arm), glitter on (left arm and back) and paste off (back and right arm.)
As the sunset burns over Bellingham Bay, three women relax in the remaining sunlight filtering into The Woods Coffee in Boulevard Park. One woman's arm boasts a complex pattern of dark swoops and dots that stand out against her skin. The heat from the nearby stone fireplace warms the mocha-colored paste glistening on Elaine Nichols' arm. Over the next several days, the paste will react with the heat and Nichol's unique body chemistry to permanently dye the top several layers of her flesh, leaving what local henna artist Chele Eva Armstrong predicts will be a rich, orange stain.

The application of henna — through a process called Mehendi — has spiked in popularity in the West during recent years, Armstrong says. The Bellingham artist owns a henna business, primarily run through her website, HennaMoon.com. Armstrong says she has been applying henna professionally since 2006. Armstrong pauses for a moment to inspect the tip of her makeshift henna-application tool. Tightly gripped in her right hand is a plastic bag full of henna paste. The bag hovers an inch above Nichols' arm as Armstrong squeezes the paste through a plastic tip, fastened to the corner of the bag.
The henna plant is originally grown as a small shrub in humid, hot locales such as Northern Africa and Southern Asia and is ground into powder. The grit that remains is mixed with a variety of natural ingredients, such as lavender, Terps, eucalyptus, molasses and essential oils, like tea tree oil, to produce henna paste. In Indian cultures that involve the henna ritual, the chunkier parts of the recipe are rubbed into beards or hair, permanently dyeing the hair follicles, Armstrong says.

Only the finest and smoothest of henna pastes are used for skin decoration, Armstrong says. Each recipe is unique, and some people keep their personal concoctions secret.

Armstrong’s special paste ingredients include tea for an appealing scent and lemon to break down the cell walls of the raw henna plant.

Nichols, the human henna canvas, has been Armstrong’s friend for more than 10 years. As she sits relaxed, her 14-year-old daughter sits in an overstuffed armchair nearby, doodling. The faint lines of a recent henna design can be seen on her right arm.

Justine Howland-Goodwin, who owns and operates Magical Mehendi in Anacortes, says she has been applying henna for more than a decade.

“Every year, henna gets more and more popular, and a little more mainstream to those who aren’t culturally raised with it,” Howland-Goodwin says. “Festivals and street fairs give people a taste of henna, and then if they are really interested, they will call for an appointment at a later time.”

She says the reasons people choose henna over the more traditional tattoo range from the painless application to the short-term presence.

“[Henna] gives people a temporary adornment to express themselves with; maybe they want to be a little rebellious, or sexy, or just different — henna can help do those things,” Howland-Goodwin says. “Also, for people going on vacations, or having an event that they want a little something extra to wear, henna affords them the ease of something that they don’t have to pack or worry about.”

Howland-Goodwin has eight tattoos, yet says henna art holds a deeper, more powerful meaning. The popularity of traditional tattooing has changed the image of the practice, she says.
"Modern tattooing is so popular and mainstream now that it has lost its edge," Howland-Goodwin says. "People are getting full sleeves and facial tattoos, and it is time to say 'enough.'"

Steve Hate, owner of Old School Tattoo & Piercing in Bellingham, says tattooing is all about personal dedication to something special.

"You have to really love something to put it on you forever; that's what keeps [tattooing] pure," Hate says. "It's one thing to put ink on top of the skin — it's a whole different one to put ink under it."

Armstrong believes the differences between henna and tattoos reflect different life experiences between one individual and another.

"Where people are known to get ink tattoos to memorialize an event, or remind them of their power and strength, henna has [magical] transformative energy," Armstrong says. "As [henna] strengthens in color, so does your conviction; as it fades you are reminded of lessons learned."

Western junior Kelsey Bujacich has long been Armstrong's go-to human canvas for new henna designs. Bujacich loves tattoos, but says she would never get one because she feels nothing is important enough to put on her body permanently.

"There is something relaxing about … becoming a canvas for something beautiful," Bujacich says. "Chele and I never plan a design; the best part of it all is that whenever I am done with a particular design and am starting to feel ready for a new one, the old design has already worn away, and I'm ready for the next adventurous look."

Many individuals fear the permanence and high pain threshold of traditional tattooing, and are looking to henna for a more practical form of body art, Armstrong says.

"As [henna] is just now becoming mainstream, people are fascinated. Henna can be for someone who wants to do something different," Armstrong says. "It is something innocent yet still extreme; something sensual and fun. It has no consequences."

While most henna paste is safe, there are exceptions. Armstrong says many foreign street vendors sell what is known as "black henna," a combination of weak, unhealthy henna powder mixed with black hair dye. The substance is not only a cheap substitute for the real thing, but can also be dangerous, she says. Black henna has been known to cause physical harm, including rashes and blisters on the body, according to HennaPage.com.

While most of this poisonous black henna is sold abroad; some henna found in U.S. department stores also has been altered from its pure form with the addition of metallic salts in the powder, Armstrong says. Despite the salts, henna bought commercially in the U.S. is a much safer bet than the overseas alternative, Armstrong says.

"If you plan on traveling and getting henna done in another country, buy your own at home — it's safer," Armstrong says. "To stay out of harm's way, I use the phrase: 'If it's brown, stick around … if it's black, step back.'"

Although the darkest hues are desirable, Howland-Goodwin says she has seen the full spectrum of possible colors from her long list of clients in her 10 years applying henna.

A large part of her work has been performing Mehendi for bridal events, a wedding tradition that originated in India.

"The familial aspect is something that I really enjoy … for me to go and do the Mehendi for these families, and to be a small part in their important event — it is really touching to me," Howland-Goodwin says. "I've been able to henna several brides in one family."

As the sun dips behind a cloud bank on the horizon, Armstrong finishes the design on Nichols' forearm. Nichols rises and tells her daughter to grab her belongings, thanks Armstrong and promises another session in the near future.

"Henna gets used [as a] healing [process] — I like that," Armstrong says. "[Clients will] see it all week, remembering how good they felt when they got it. We all need different energy and strength at different times in our lives."

"HENNA CAN BE FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. IT IS SOMETHING INNOCENT YET STILL EXTREME … SENSUAL AND FUN. IT HAS NO CONSEQUENCES."

—CHELE EVA ARMSTRONG, LOCAL HENNA ARTIST

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SINCE OBAMA'S ELECTION AND THE ECONOMIC TURMOIL OF THE RECESSION, THE NUMBER OF HATE GROUPS HAS SPIKED NATIONALLY.

HATRED

Story and photos by Hailey Tucker
Illustration by Rebecca Rice
John Austin’s shoes are impeccably white. At 28 years old, he works in organic agriculture and says he thinks the American government has been committing a crime in not providing universal health care. He is college-educated, an atheist and laughs when he tries to explain exactly how much he hates Sarah Palin. With his gel-spiked hair and perfectly pressed shirt, there is almost nothing about Austin that indicates his vision of the future. A vision of the future that is much like his shoes — pure white.

With his evident knowledge of history and welcoming demeanor, few people — perhaps none — in Austin’s community would guess the extent of his racism. Austin, born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, is a white supremacist.

Austin, whose name has been changed for this story, is a member of the Creativity movement. Creators, as the movement’s followers call themselves, believe white people are the epitome of evolution. Creativity’s sacred texts denounce all religion and encourage followers to be wary of conspiracies within their government, media and educational systems.

“What is good for the white race is the highest virtue. What is bad for the white race is the ultimate sin,” Austin explains as the main premise of Creativity.

Creativity is one variation of a pro-white movement encouraging racial segregation and preaching the superiority of a skin color.

HATE GROUPS: THE NUMBERS

White supremacy is one hate movement in the United States that has been on the rise for more than 10 years. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in Montgomery, Ala., estimates 923 active hate groups exist in the country, up from 602 in 2000, says Janet Smith, one of the center’s research analysts.

The SPLC aims to track, educate about and ultimately disband hate groups. Smith says the numbers compiled by the center are some of the most accurate estimates in the country.

“We try not to get one guy with a computer and dog and say that’s a hate group. We try to make sure they have meetings, they distribute literature. That’s what makes them active,” Smith says.

The national hate group total includes racial hate groups as well as anti-gay and anti-government groups. It does not, however, include some of the newly formed anti-immigrant groups, which are also racially focused. Smith attributes the increase in hate groups and similar movements in past years to recent political developments.

“A lot of it has to do with our first black president,” Smith says. “It’s the economy too. When things go south in the economy, people will look for someone to blame.”

In Washington, the SPLC identified 15 active hate groups in 2009, 14 of which are racially focused.
Despite the common assumption that racism is limited to areas with conservative politics, the numbers dispel the popular belief.

The SPLC found Pierce, King and Spokane County to be the counties in Washington with the most active hate groups. The majority in all three voted for Barack Obama in 2008. As a state, Washington voted liberal but still has more active hate groups than any other state in the Northwest, including the traditionally conservative-voting states of Idaho and Montana.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2009 population estimates, Washington has almost six times the population of Idaho or Montana. The most active counties in Washington are also of the most populous in the state, suggesting racism might have more to do with population than politics.

The increasing popularity of the racial hate movement may be due to a shift in the movement’s social image. Racial hate groups seem to be trying to avoid the “in-your-face” tactics people are more familiar with, and streamline the movement to be more muted and acceptable in mainstream society, says Western sociology professor Glenn Tsunokai, who specializes in race relations.

Hate groups have also become more prevalent since the advent of the Internet. Tsunokai says it allows individuals who usually would not join a hate group because there is not one nearby, to do so.

“You’re with a group of people who you feel like are just like you. The Internet is helping you to meet some sort of need. If you’re really depressed, and you want someone to blame, it’s giving you that target, and so there’s a real sense of community. Even though they may be dispersed all over the country, and they may never see each other, they still feel like they’re a part of something,” Tsunokai says.

MENTALITY BEHIND RACIAL PREFERENCE

For Austin, whose racism is unknown to his community, the Internet allows him to communicate with other pro-white groups and sell racist merchandise without tarnishing his relationships offline.

“As the situation [of multiculturalism] gets worse,
you feel more compelled to do something about it – or I do ... but it's hard when you have a job and you live in a community, and you don't want people to hate you," Austin says.

He says his racism began around the age of 18. He describes a series of events that opened his eyes to what he considers the falsity of racial equality.

Austin says his frustration in a college diversity course was one of the critical events that influenced his racism. He describes it as "the most anti-white situation" he has ever experienced. After being told all white people were inherently racist because of history and white privilege, Austin says he started doubting the lessons of equality.

Tsunokai says this is a common feeling among racists. They look at affirmative action, or other programs meant to help lessen the impacts of historical racism, and start to say the system has been overturned, making them the new victims.

Austin describes his hatred toward other races as something more deeply embedded in philosophy than something of mere disdain.

"We feel like we're under threat from losing our identity," Austin says. "That feeling breeds resentment and feelings of hatred in the sense that you want to strike back at the people who might become your oppressors because you are the minority now."

Creativity followers believe human races are different subspecies, each competing against the other for survival. Despite the many factors other than race that explain statistics showing nonwhite people being more frequently involved in crimes, Austin says the only factor is DNA.

"It's really ingrained in blood. It's genetic. It's not based on economic factors or religion or institutionalized racism," Austin says. "It's based on science. The

WASHINGTON HATE GROUPS
15 of the United States' 923 documented hate groups operate in Washington — more than any other Northwest state. Source: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009

Illustration by Rebecca Rice | KLIPSUN
THE WHITE RACE IS THE MOST ADVANCED RACE ... IT'S JUST LIKE DOGS. YOU KNOW, A MUTT IS A MUTT. A PUREBRED DOG IS A PUREBRED DOG. NOBODY WANTS A MUTT BECAUSE – IT'S NOT LIKE IT GREW UP IN BAD ECONOMIC CONDITIONS – IT HAS AN INGRAINED GENETIC PROBLEM.

- JOHN AUSTIN, MEMBER OF THE CREATIVITY MOVEMENT

The white race is the most advanced race ... It's just like dogs. You know, a mutt is a mutt. A purebred dog is a purebred dog. Nobody wants a mutt because – it's not like it grew up in bad economic conditions – it has an ingrained genetic problem.

Tsunokai says biology studies show there are not significant genetic differences between humans. He does, however, maintain that race exists as a social construct and therefore, cannot be ignored. Creativity argues historical events demonstrate the superiority of whites' genes. Austin justifies the success of President Barack Obama with this belief. He says Obama is not black, but is half white, and would have never reached his level of success if it had not been for the white half of his heritage.

Despite the hatred Austin holds for other races, he says he does not see violence as a solution. Even if violence eliminates some nonwhite individuals, Austin says, it can turn other white people away from the movement or put racists in jail, which he believes is counterproductive.

This belief falls in line with the trend Tsunokai describes as making racism more palatable for mainstream society. Austin, however, is the first to admit Creativity is different from many racist groups in this way.

“We want to protect and expand the white race, but we don’t want to do it shouting, ‘Sieg Heil,’ or anything like that, like wearing swastika armbands,” Austin says.

Despite Austin claiming he does not see violence as a productive way to achieve the goals of white supremacy, many others do.

HATE CRIMES

When hate speech is legally determined to be a “true threat” or when criminal activities can be linked to a prejudicial motive, they are considered hate crimes.

In 2008, 7,783 hate crimes were recorded nationally, according to the FBI’s Hate Crime Statistics.

Of these, Washington reported 239 hate crimes, which is comparable to the state of Texas. Despite a difference of 18 million more individuals being monitored in Texas, Washington had only eight fewer reported hate crimes.

The FBI statistics are based on voluntary reporting by individual law enforcement agencies in each state, so Smith argues they are grossly underestimated.

Tsunokai says hate crimes are often not committed by hate groups, who are the expected culprits.

“Surprisingly, a lot of the things that happen, in terms of violence that happen, are not perpetuated by hate group members. They’re individuals who just dabble into these things,” Tsunokai says.

FUTURE

Although Tsunokai and Smith are not optimistic about the present situation, they both argue changes can be made.

“You can never change people’s minds, but you can change their behaviors,” Tsunokai says.

He advocates legal repercussions for hate-motivated actions would provide hate groups with incentives to keep their opinions to themselves. Smith says education seems to be the best way to fight racism.

“They use fear to prey on people,” Smith says, arguing people need to recognize this tactic.

Austin’s idea of the future involves the government offering incentives for all nonwhite people to leave countries where white people live.

“Our belief is that if we didn’t subsidize other people, like in Africa, with food aid, then they’d probably just die off on their own,” he says.

Other pro-white groups believe a racial holy war, often referred to as RaHoWa, in which each race is pitted against another, is the inevitable future.

Although Tsunokai says he does not foresee a massive white uprising, he says the trends indicate different hate groups are beginning to associate with each other more than before.

Austin agrees, saying even though religion and politics may differ greatly among groups, such topics are of little importance compared to the goal of an all-white nation.

The growing popularity of this mission and changes in the movement that break the stereotypical idea of racism indicate our country is still divided based on color. Although an overt racial war may seem unlikely, the increasing amount of hatred, whether it is across Washington or in an individual, is apparent.
his poster certainly has a message—it cries for attention, even if the meaning isn’t obvious. Thick, red, nearly indecipherable characters jump out from the bright-blue outline of two nude bodies. At the bottom, small, inconspicuous text reads, “10 p.m. December 18. The Rogue."

Bellingham-based graphic designer Riley Hoonan explains how the poster he designed for his former band, Queen Amina, gets attention, even if it is unreadable.

“It’s big, it’s really colorful, it’s blasting colors at you,” Hoonan says. “We got more people to come to this show than any show we had advertised via the 11- by-17 [inch] posters that were printed off. And it only uses two colors.

The whole is more than the sum of its parts, Hoonan says, and color is one of those parts. Whether promoting a show, company or product, color provides the ability to go beyond simply explaining what something is or does.

“Color sells,” Rosalie King, a professor in Western’s design program, says. “Things that used to be light—we used to have white kitchens, white appliances, white dishes—now everything is just so colorful.”

Graphic design consultant Ericka Bakkom, who owns Bellingham’s E Fresh Design, taps certain colors to reflect her clients’ style. Her coffee remains untouched as she avidly, hardly stopping to take a breath, walks through her portfolio.

For a rebranding of Seattle Speciality Insurance (SSI), Bakkom and SSI’s Marketing Director of Communications Jennifer Nausin used a muted chartreuse and slate to play on the company’s image and its Northwest heritage.

“But if [the product] was something that resonated clean and fresh, you wouldn’t want the dull earth colors for a natural product,” she says. “You would want bright and vibrant against a lot of white.”

Companies often adopt colors or palettes that eventually become synonymous with that business: Starbucks’ green logo. McDonalds’ golden arches. Google’s rainbow text. Target’s red ... well, target.

Apple Inc.’s iMac campaign draws on a white, minimalist pallet to reflect its distinctiveness and reliability, Hoonan says.

The vivid color and movement of the iPod campaign certainly has a different effect, but it relies on the same methods.

“They were probably like, ‘What can you do with an iPod that you can’t do with a CD player? You can dance with it, you can have it on your body, and shake your booty,’” Hoonan says.

The meaning and use of colors is ever-evolving.

Blue and pink are associated with baby boys and girls, respectfully, but that wasn’t the case 70 years ago.

Until approximately the 1940s, blue was used for girls as it was considered calmer and softer, Jill Morton, a branding expert who works in color psychology, has said.

“Color is extremely important,” King says. “But we have no more rules about what color should be used with another one.”
The world pulses and contracts. Face flushes red as knuckles fade white. Foot presses down, car shoots forward. Faster. Rapid lane change right; faster. The Mercury Mystique jockeys for position next to the instigator. Joel Iwagoshi rides beside the enemy.

With his left hand on the wheel, Iwagoshi's right hand finds the glove compartment, fumbling through insurance papers in search of tiny weapons. With three nails clenched tightly in his strained fist, Iwagoshi sets his sight on the rear tires of the car in front of him. As eyes narrow and brow furrows, his mind goes black. His body fights for more oxygen as his breathing quickens. Window rolls down, his arm swings back, and fist loosens. Three nails are thrown with purpose.

“The first thing I always ask [road ragers] is: What are you mad about?” says Mary Rawlins, a licensed mental health counselor, of Mary Wister Rawlins, MS, LMHC, in downtown Bellingham. “It’s about working backward—like a chain. What happened right before you got mad? What happened right before that?”

Iwagoshi, a 23-year-old Western student, says his road rage is triggered primarily by people who drive too slowly. His rage starts small and subtle, and grows into something wildly uncontrollable.

“I'll be stuck behind a driver going 50 mph in a 60 mph zone,” Iwagoshi says. “I'll be annoyed at first. And then three seconds later I'll be pissed. And three seconds after that, I'll be enraged. That's how fast it escalates.”

Rage is an emotion that may have once served a purpose from an evolutionary standpoint, Rawlins says, but is now a useless, counterproductive disposition. The fear or anxiety expressed through rage helped our primitive ancestors fight for survival. Today, this fight-or-flight mechanism still exists, but is generally useless for most people besides athletes. While all living creatures experience fits of anger, not all are affected by rage behind the wheel of a car.

Because it's too difficult to prove a violation was caused by road rage, officers must instead cite aggressive driving on traffic tickets, says Sergeant Freddy Williams, public information officer for the Washington State Patrol. An aggressive driving violation shows up on a traffic ticket in the form of tailgating, speeding, abrupt lane change, erratic driving or rude behavior to other drivers, he says.

According to Rawlins, if a person can find what triggers his or her rage, then they can work to control it. “Hurt and fear are at the root of rage,” Rawlins says.

Excessive anger can lead to dangerous health issues, such as heart attacks, coronary artery disease and diabetes. Rawlins says aerobic exercise may be helpful for people dealing with rage, although people with diagnosed mood disorders may need something more emotionally in-depth, like talk therapy.

As roadways become more congested, displays of rage become more common, Williams says. Next time someone drives below the speed limit, be calm, take a deep breath and look around. Maybe they're seeing something you're missing.
THE WORLD OF MAGIC

Two wizards stand atop rocky crags with a plain stretching out below them. One wizard raises his hand; the mountains rumble and a bolt of lightning shoots out at his opponent. The opposing wizard moves his hand in a circle and the bolt vanishes, leaving him unharmed.

On the plain below, creatures charge and attack each other in red and blue waves. Goblin warriors are swept aside by luminous blue beings made of air and water who appear from nowhere. Crimson dragons swoop in low over the battlefield and shoot blasts of flame and sulfur before they are driven back by the stinging arrows of hundreds of elves.

It's an epic competition: spells and creatures are thrown against one's opponent in a battle of wits, brute force opposes guile and resourcefulness. However, these wizards are not masters of forgotten lore — they are local hobbyists in their mid-twenties. The lightning attacks, illusions, goblins and dragons are all represented by playing cards.

This is Magic: The Gathering. Each Friday night, Cosmic Comics, a downtown Bellingham comic and hobby shop, hosts Magic tournaments. The players, or mages, sit at two rows of long tables and use...
cards from their custom-built decks to take life from other mages in a race against the clock. Each mage begins the game with 20 lives; if that number hits zero, they're out of luck and out of the game.

As the mages try to break down the other's defenses, they banter back-and-forth about a good play on the previous turn or chuckle quietly as they prepare their next move. The excitement of dueling wizards with titanic powers is not apparent in the relaxed attitudes of the players as they study their cards and consider which to play next.

Each player has a minimum of 60 cards in their deck and they draw seven at the start of the game. An additional card is drawn at the beginning of every turn. These cards are a player's hand, from which they pick their stratagems.

Created by Richard Garfield, Magic: The Gathering is one of the first collectable trading card games and first to hit the market in 1993. Garfield developed the game while studying mathematics at graduate school in Pennsylvania. He sold the game to the Northwest Washington company Wizards of the Coast. Wizards, which has helped produce the game since its first commercial release, became a subsidiary of Hasbro in 1999.

Since those initial cards hit the streets 17 years ago, thousands more have been introduced to the game. Players throughout Whatcom County, the United States and the entire world competed using a combination of luck and skill. Magic players can hone their skills at small local events, like the Friday Night Magic tournaments at Cosmic Comics, or try out for regional, national and world events.

Magic cards are divided into five colors, white, blue, black, red and green, which determine what each card does in the game and provide mages with a game strategy. Each color is tied to a landscape and element. White represents plains and light, blue represents...
The color of manipulation and guile. Allows players to take control of the game by countering opponent’s spells and using tricks and illusions.

Represents death and decay. Players using black can call forth demons, zombies, vampires and other horrors.

Represents growth and vitality. Includes elves, druids, treefolk and other spirits connected to nature.

A good color for beginners because red’s aggressive nature allows for a fast, simple game play style.

islands and water, black—swamps and decay, red—mountains and fire and green—forests and nature.

Brandon Tomlinson is the owner and sole employee of Wizard’s Library, a hobby store on Broadway Street in Bellingham. He is a large man with elaborate tattoos running down both his arms, defying the stereotype of the Magic player as a small, weak individual who rarely leaves his or her room. Tomlinson has played Magic since the beginning, and founded Wizard’s Library in 2005 as a one-stop-shop for players looking to build decks. He says he has moved locations once already and is still looking to expand to something more substantial in the near future.

“There’s just so much to it,” Tomlinson says of the game’s variety. With approximately 30,000 cards to choose from and incorporate into a deck, the combinations players can use are endless.

Economics plays a big role in what cards players use, Tomlinson says. Beginners and casual players will spend approximately $20 to get a deck to play with. However, those who want to be competitive at tournaments need to invest $500 or more in order to procure the good cards they need to get ahead.

Although card price is a big factor in the quality of a deck, game strategy focuses on the card’s color. Tomlinson says each of the five colors has a unique function in the game which affects how the cards are used. The colors often connect to the personalities of beginning players who choose a particular color as they learn the game.

Rosie Crow, Western junior and the vice president of the Western Mages Guild, an on-campus Associated Students Magic club, says she started playing with white because she liked playing lots of creature cards and then making the creatures more powerful.

“I like that [white’s] about order and that it’s about playing a lot of little guys and then giving them all boosts, so you can kind of attack with an army of little guys,” Crow says.

With several years of playing experience under her belt, Crow says she plays with a deck that uses a combination of white, blue and green cards. She says with more practice, card selection becomes less about using one color and more about using particular cards because they’re powerful or useful.

As far as the economics of the game, Crow says players are limited by the cost of cards because some decks can cost $300 or $400 to construct.

“Cards can be pretty expensive,” she says. “There [are] $40 cards and $60 cards, so if you’re trying to get four of them to go into your deck, that gets really expensive, so you need to think about what cards you already have or what you can trade to get those cards.”

Crow says a secondary market has grown around players trading cards before the cards fall in value, since the release of new cards means fluctuating prices.

Despite the high cost of obtaining new cards, the mages have remained committed to the game. Perhaps it’s the lure of the five colors and the personalized strategy they offer, or maybe it’s just the fun of zapping a friend with metaphorical lightning and then setting the goblins on them. Whatever the case, the battle for Magic supremacy will not be ending anytime soon.
Graffiti — markings, as initials, slogans or drawings; written, spray painted or sketched on a sidewalk, wall of a building or public restroom. It is often seen as vandalizing and illegal. But to some, graffiti is an art form.

It is a mass communication medium for urban artists to convey their thoughts and expressions in the most colorful ways possible. Walking down streets and alleys, looking for the perfect place to paint is almost an everyday occurrence for them. They look for any blank wall of brick or concrete that would be perfect for their next canvas.

Graffiti artists around the world have made a name for themselves by spray painting on public and city walls. It’s no different for local artists in Bellingham.

Growing up in Fayetteville, Ark., Shawn Cass, 30, had no idea he would end up all the way in the Pacific Northwest. Cass began practicing graffiti in 10th grade.

He lives in a small apartment near Western, which doubles as his art studio, cluttered with spray cans and drawings. It reeks of fresh paint, as if he recently finalized a new piece of art.

After being in the game for more than 10 years, Cass, who tags under the name Ruckas, considers himself to be somewhat of an expert on graffiti.

“There are not many people that have the same level of style and control that I have,” Cass says.

Professionally, he has done everything from murals to painting Dr. Seuss characters for children’s rooms.
“Everyone likes Dr. Seuss. Not everyone likes graffiti because it has a bad connotation with it,” Cass says. “What’s cool about Dr. Seuss is that it goes really well with different colors. Sometimes I’ll take a face from Dr. Seuss and twist it up to make it my own.”

Last winter, he created the mural on the outside wall of McKay’s Taphouse at Pizza Pipeline, which is the biggest mural he’s completed in a public spot.

It’s an intricate piece, showing a crowd of cartoon people sitting at the bar with taps hanging above them.

Above the design, it reads “McKay’s Taphouse,” and beneath the painting is Ruckas’ tag.

For 20-year-old “Teevee Cult” it’s a similar story. Cult has a tall, slender stature. A dark brown stocking cap barely sits on the top of his head as he describes what it’s like being a graffiti rebel.

He got his start in graffiti after moving to Seattle from Whidbey Island.

The first people he interacted with were graffiti artists who tagged with little concern for consequences. He considered them to be role models.

Now, Cult tags in Seattle. Sometimes he steals paint, or buys the cheapest glossy-white and glossy-black cans at Wal-Mart for 99 cents.

He says he appreciates peoples’ different styles and individual takes on the urban art form — but that appreciation for others’ work can also inspire competition.

“If I see a homie’s piece up and if it looks good, it makes me want to paint right next to him,” Cult says. “Because if he did it, I know I can do it as well.”

But maybe that competition is useful for advancing in realm of tagging; for gaining experience, flair and a knack for beautifying an empty space with a spray can.