

# A graffiti artist in residence? A local skatepark is embracing the once-shunned artform.

By [Spencer Buell](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 13, 2025, 4:20 a.m.



The Charles River Conservancy picked Lee "SOEMS" Beard, right, to be the Lynch Family Skatepark's first graffiti artist-in-residence. Other Boston artists including Mar, left, will join him in painting in the park, teaching lessons, and handing out paint. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

**CAMBRIDGE** — There's no putting the paint back in the can.

The Lynch Family Skatepark has been a graffiti destination for years. Bubble-lettered tags coat its jumps and staircases, and have turned the walls of its skateable concrete bowls into an ever-changing street art collage.

In most other public parks, graffiti artists are chased away, and their work covered up as fast as park staff can manage it. Here, in the sprawling park along the Charles River, there has been an informal policy to look the other way.

Now, say the skatepark's overseers, it's time to make it official.

This summer, they hope to designate it a "free wall" space, where graffiti is encouraged — and hire its first-ever graffiti artist-in-residence to promote and teach the artform they feel is too often misunderstood.



Michael Siedlecki rode his skateboard at the Lynch Family Skatepark in Cambridge in 2023. VINCENT ALBAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

“Most people associate it with vandalism. That’s where it started. That’s its history,” said [Lee “SOEMS” Beard](#), who was picked by the nonprofit Charles River Conservancy for the artist role. “I’m trying to show them it’s not just about destruction. You have seen graffiti your entire life, but you just didn’t have anyone to tell you where it derived from. That’s what I want to do.”

Beard, and the crew of other Boston graffiti artists he works with and whose help he is enlisting, will be paid to spend the summer spray painting in the park.

They are set to host street art events, teach graffiti lessons, and hand out paint cans. A kickoff event at the park is planned for May 17.



# FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

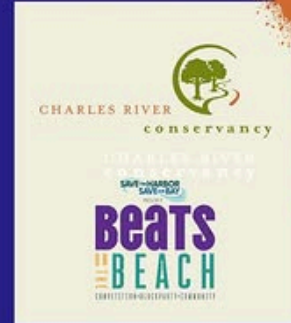
## GRAFFITI ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE LAUNCH PARTY

LYNCH FAMILY SKATEPARK  
SATURDAY MAY 17<sup>TH</sup> NOON-4PM

### MEET OUR ARTIST

The Artist-in-Residence will work this summer at the Lynch Family Skatepark to be an advocate and leader, create new graffiti artwork, and welcome public involvement in projects.

Stay tuned to find out who this mystery artist is! We are very excited to celebrate the launch of this program with them!



**DROP IN  
DROP OUT  
ALL AGES  
WELCOME**

CELJAY PHOTOGRAPHY



### CONNECT

With the Charles River Conservancy's new Graffiti Artist-in-Residence

### PAINT

Street art and graffiti on site at Lynch Family Skate Park with paint provided by CRC



### FOOD

Food and refreshments available

### MUSIC

Live sets by Save the Harbor's Beats On The Beach Program

### SKATE

All wheels, all levels, have fun!

Instagram icon CharlesRiverConservancy      Questions? Email: [crc@thecharles.org](mailto:crc@thecharles.org)

\*Increased foot traffic at the park is expected during event hours

[View more on Instagram](#)

charlesriverconservancy

Mark your calendars! Join us from 12pm to 4pm on May 17th for our graffiti Artist-in-Residence launch party at Lynch Family Skatepark! Come meet and paint with the artist who will be working at the skatepark this summer. Huge thanks to @beatsonthebeachboston @savetheharbor for providing the music with exciting live DJs! There will be food, vendors, and more!

Come skate, paint, and get together with the local community! We can't wait to see you there!

#publicart #lynchfamilyskatepark #bostonarts #bostonskating #skatepark #artforall  
#communitycreatives #graffiti #graffitiart #streetart

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They will also serve as ambassadors for the artform, teaching visitors about how graffiti culture is reflected in modern art and fashion, while also helping to manage the tricky logistics of doing public artwork in a space that is often crisscrossed by skaters at high speeds.

The conservancy had, at one time, considered hiring a muralist to paint more mainstream pieces inside the park. Instead, they decided to try something else entirely: lean into the unauthorized art that has been popping up in the space since it opened [a decade ago](#).

“We see our role as trying to support that culture, and then letting the incredible creativity and imagination bloom,” said Laura Jasinski, its executive director.

They hope to secure permits soon to make it a “free wall,” akin to the policy at Cambridge’s [“Graffiti Alley”](#) in Central Square, where the artform is legal and encouraged.

The plan awaits approval from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which owns the already graffiti-slathered pillars that dot the park and hold up the I-93 ramps under which it sits.

Beard, 38, is now an established muralist, whose recent work includes one honoring Boston R&B stars New Edition in Roxbury, and the [500-foot-long Black Lives Matter](#)

[mural](#) in Nubian Square. His residency will be collaborative — after he was selected from dozens of artists who applied for the role, he insisted the conservancy hire the three other members of his art crew, [called AOA](#).

Liam MacDonald, 12, rode his scooter at the Lynch Family Skatepark in Cambridge on August 25, 2022. CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

As kids growing up in Boston, artists learned the craft doing it in the middle of the night, meeting up with friends and painting graffiti pieces made of a few letters and completed in a hurry, he said. Most people never got to see the process up close.

“We had to stay silent before because it was all illegal,” Beard said.

They also learned to navigate graffiti’s complex unwritten rules, which will come in handy managing a new arts program in a high-traffic area like a skatepark, where skaters and spray-painters have sometimes had an uneasy relationship.

“The two cultures combine. Part of the skate park is the paint,” said Jameson Carmody, a 20-year-old Curry College student from New Hampshire, who was icing a freshly twisted ankle at the park on Thursday.

But that doesn’t mean taggers should treat the park as a free-for-all. Once, he said, some friends were so annoyed by a sloppy and large-scale paint job by a group of graffiti artists at a skatepark in Hyde Park that they power-washed it off themselves.

“You can’t be coming here and just spray-painting everywhere,” he said.

A plan to turn the Lynch Family Skatepark into a "free wall" space where graffiti is legal and encouraged will follow the lead of the city's famed Graffiti Alley, where the artform has also been allowed to flourish. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

Fresh paint can also make surfaces like ramps more slippery, skaters say. It can be distracting, or impact depth-perception.

Some graffiti in the skatepark is made with high levels of skill. On one pillar, an enormous tag by the artist [Brian LiFe](#) is recognized as being done with love and care.

Some aren't, and are just curse words in black or red paint. In a few high up areas of the park, someone put a lot of effort into warning women, in big letters with pink paint, about someone named "Dizzy."

But there is a lot of love among skaters for this medley.

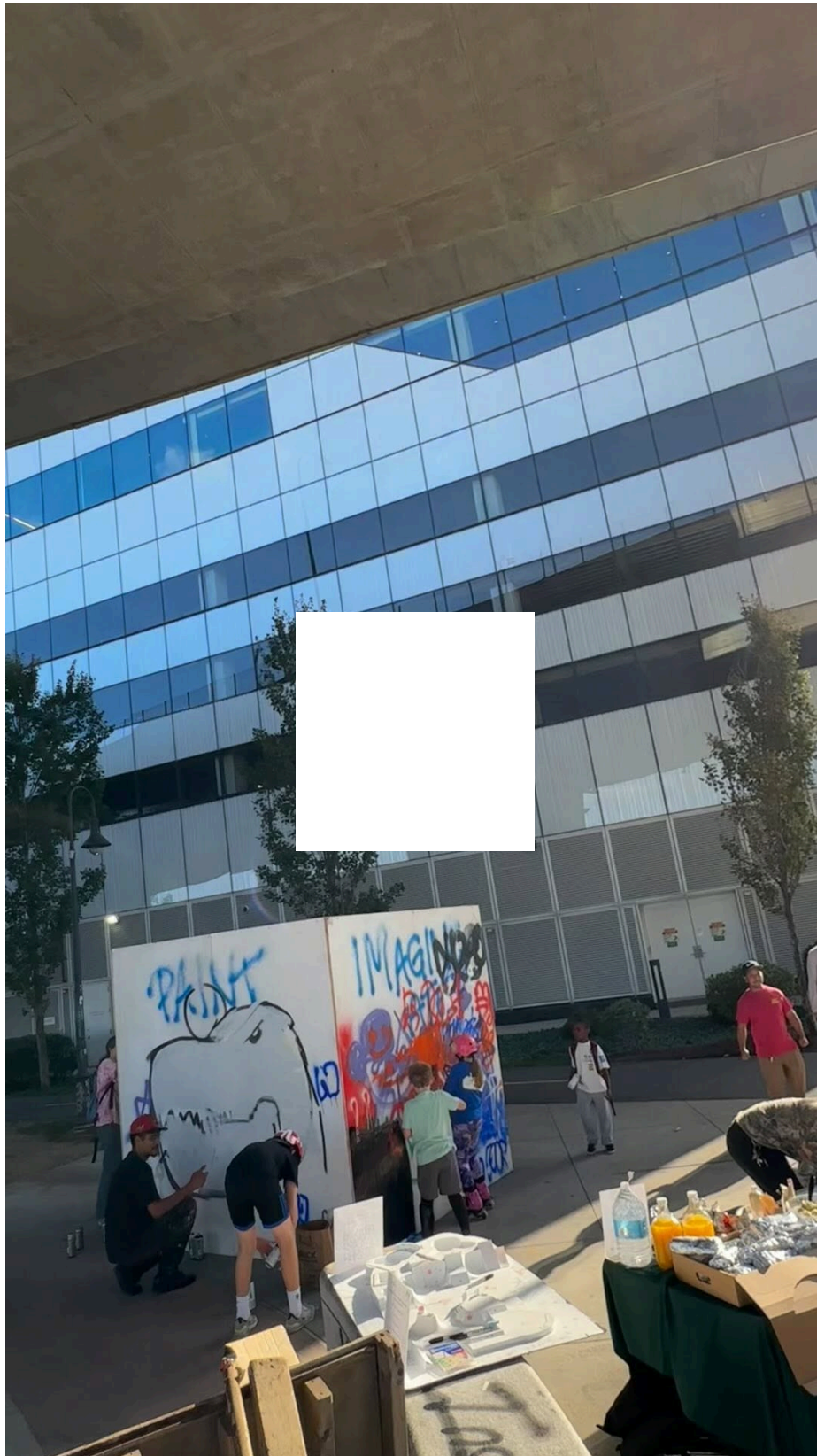
A skateboarder rides over graffiti at the park in 2020. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

"Every time I come in here, and I come here pretty much every day, there's always more graffiti," said Matt Portle, a 22-year-old skater and [skating Instagrammer](#) from Somerville. "It has its own vibe now."

It also serves a purpose. He was frustrated a few years ago when he found the multicolored tags in the park's bowls had been covered with dark gray paint, making the curved terrain harder to navigate.

"It was terrible. Absolutely awful," he said. "You couldn't see, so it was super sketchy. The graffiti a hundred percent helps."

So a bit of coordination might be in order as the call goes out for even more graffiti here. That is where Beard hopes to come in.



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expression. Special shoutouts to [@curtistic](#) for the live art and graffiti workshop, [@sun.sets.boston](#) for keeping the beats flowing, [@nobladingbostonchapter](#) and [@saps\\_boston](#) for bringing the enthusiasm, [@izdawggg](#) for creating the art box, [@cejay\\_photography](#) for snapping some great pics, and [@massdcr](#) for making the night possible.

There's still time to apply to the Skatepark Advisory Group! Group members will support the Artist-in-Residence program and future placemaking at the skatepark. The deadline to apply is October 20th—link in bio! 🌳 🎵

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“I want it to be understood that this is a skatepark. If there’s a particular area you want to paint, cool. Talk to the skaters,” Beard said. “Communication over everything.”

The idea is to inspire more understanding, not more animosity, so people walk (or skate) away viewing the tags in their neighborhood a little differently.

“You don’t want to teach somebody how to use this to go destroy some stuff. We want to teach you the essence of this situation: where graffiti came from, what it’s actually about,” said AOA artist Mar. “You can use it to make the city look good when you want to. This is giving us a chance to actually teach that.”

Lee "SOEMS" Beard, left, and Mar, will be among graffiti artists who will be part of a residency at the Lynch Family Skatepark this summer. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

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