

Street Art Will Soon Take to the Skies with Graffiti-Painting Drone Swarms

Paint-loaded quadcopters can turn any vertical space into a canvas



The taggers of the future aren't carrying cans of spray paint. (Carlo Ratti Associati)

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Drones can [make people better at tennis](#) and [track what's going on at sea](#). But you probably don't think of them as being involved in the graffiti

business. But [as CityLab's John Metcalfe reports](#), a new project proves that street art is another one of drones' many talents.

It's called "Paint by Drone," and it does what it says on the tin. The brainchild of international design firm Carlo Ratti Associati, [the project](#) will turn the facades of construction sites into canvases for drones starting this fall. When they're unleashed, swarms of drones will take to the skies to turn crowdsourced concepts into reality—putting a new spin on street art.

The system is pretty ingenious, Metcalfe writes: It's governed by a central management system that dictates where and how each drone sprays a single color of CMYK paint onto the wall. Carlo Ratti tells Metcalfe that the technology will start with construction sites, but could soon be scaled to paint on "virtually any vertical surface."

It's a cool concept, but for Ratti and his team it's about more than art. The firm plans to commission large-scale graffiti projects that bring together artists and communities who contribute to the artwork via mobile device—a collaboration that turns the art into "more than the sum of its parts."

That give and take is a chance to turn anonymous vertical spaces into a collaborative showcase, the firm writes on its website, and brighten up urban spaces along the way.

Drones have actually already gotten into the graffiti game. In 2015, [reports Arthur Holland Michel for WIRED](#), graffiti artist KATSU hacked a drone to draw all over the face of a billboard featuring Kendall Jenner. Since then, he's gone on to make political messages with his tagging drone and make [the open-source plans](#) for his graffitibot available to would-be high-tech taggers. [There's even a Tumblr](#) devoted to drone graffiti—proving, perhaps, that the graffiti of the future won't necessarily require feet on the street.