

# “PENGO”

## CHICAGO, IL.

I started writing PENGO in 1984 at 14 years old on Chicago's Westside, bombing buses with my crew GMC. I got this name because when I walked, especially when it snowed, my footprints were angled to the side, like a penguin. The first time I did an actual piece was 1985 within my neighborhood. I began to meet other writers at my high school, Lane Tech., which had some of the city's best writers like TRIXTER, SCARCE, DRASTIC, BBOYB, RISK, DEFSKI, CAZEL, and many others. It was at this time I discovered the train line, where I did my first rooftop in 1985 and began steady bombing stations and trains. I also got down with TAC (Taking All City), TRIXTER'S spin-off of the FEDERATION (ABC, MPC, TCP). When my name got hot, I changed it up to PG or PEGE (short for PENGO) or MIKE, to throw off the police. I continued to bomb and piece up until 1988, when I joined the US Army. When I was finishing my time in the service, I started up again doing graffiti right where I left off. This is around 1991. For the next 5 years, I did much damage and taught quite a few writers in Chicago about letters and style. In 1996, I fell off the graf scene for a long time when I became a Christian (which I still am). In 1999, I attended Bible College and then seminary in order to be a minister. I came back slowly in 2010 and have been doing pieces almost every year since just to let people know I'm still around and to remind them of what graffiti in Chicago is like.

My style, like many others in early Chicago graffiti, had been influenced by writers in NYC. For me, I appreciated SEEN and SKEME for their letters and overall philosophy behind graffiti. Now as a writer in Chicago, there were also those in our city that began developing a unique “Chicago style” of lettering. Some of these early influences of mine were SEEN, TAKE 2, and TRIXTER, whose pieces along the rooftops of the train line and in the Walls of Fame were just beautiful. And as to the philosophy behind it all, WARP definitely cannot be forgotten.

This “Chicago style” had some very unique aspects that made our pieces different than what was going on anywhere else at the time. We had very structured, symmetrical pieces, where there was a balance from end to end. We also emphasized flow, meaning the pieces had to move in a certain way that gave them vibrancy and life. Finally, we had to have style; something that was unique and identifiable. Also, when it came to style, we took great pride in not doing the same style over and over again; like you see too often today. Of course there were aspects of your letters that identified them as yours, but we would change them up so they were not repetitive. This could mean the way the letter was formed or the flow it produced. In addition, we would have to be proficient in all types of lettering, from simple letters to carnival letters; semi-wild to full wildstyle. After all, you cannot call yourself a letter master unless you can manipulate them in a variety of contexts. This made early letters here a challenge, as structure was to be

maintained, originality was to be expected, and the newness of trying to do something different was unknown.

For me, letters are what graffiti is all about. I am a graffiti writer; a purist, who maintains the structural integrity of the letters and centers everything else around them. If you have no letters, then you do not have graffiti. Colors, characters, and background are all great, but in graffiti they serve only one purpose – to enhance the letters. That’s why many of my pieces are just letters with a simple background. And I am not too overly obsessed about neatness and detail. Graffiti is meant to be seen from trains and rooftops done quickly in the dead of night while looking over your shoulder for the police. The overall look of the piece as a unit is all that matters to me.

Finally, as a Christian and a minister, many people ask me how graffiti and God can interact. My response to them is; “The 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment, though shall not write, does not exist!” So whatever I do, even when I piece, I do so for the glory of God.