



## The Urban Arts Festival: Fifteen Years of Streets as Canvas

### Description

**SALT LAKE CITY, UT** From the start, The Urban Arts Festival carried a simple but radical conviction: art belongs to everyone. Unlike traditional gallery spaces or concert halls, the festival makes the streets themselves a stage and canvas. It invites established artists, emerging performers, and underrepresented creative communities to share the same ground a literal re-mapping of where and how art lives in Utah.



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**The Urban Arts Festival uniquely blends skate culture, hip hop, visual arts, music, and community, offering emerging artists a free, inclusive platform that transforms neighborhoods and embraces innovation.**

### â??Rhetorical Review

For Derek Dyer, Founder and Executive Director of Utah Arts Alliance (UAA), the most rewarding part of the past 15 years has been watching overlooked communities take the spotlight. â??We shine a spotlight on underrepresented creative communities, like the lowrider culture, which puts blood, sweat, and tears into their art,â?• he said. That ethos carries across the festival, from a mini skate park open all day to two stages showcasing emerging voices in hip-hop, punk, and drag. The result is a gathering where families, students, skaters, musicians, and muralists converge â?? not as separate scenes, but as one vibrant creative community.

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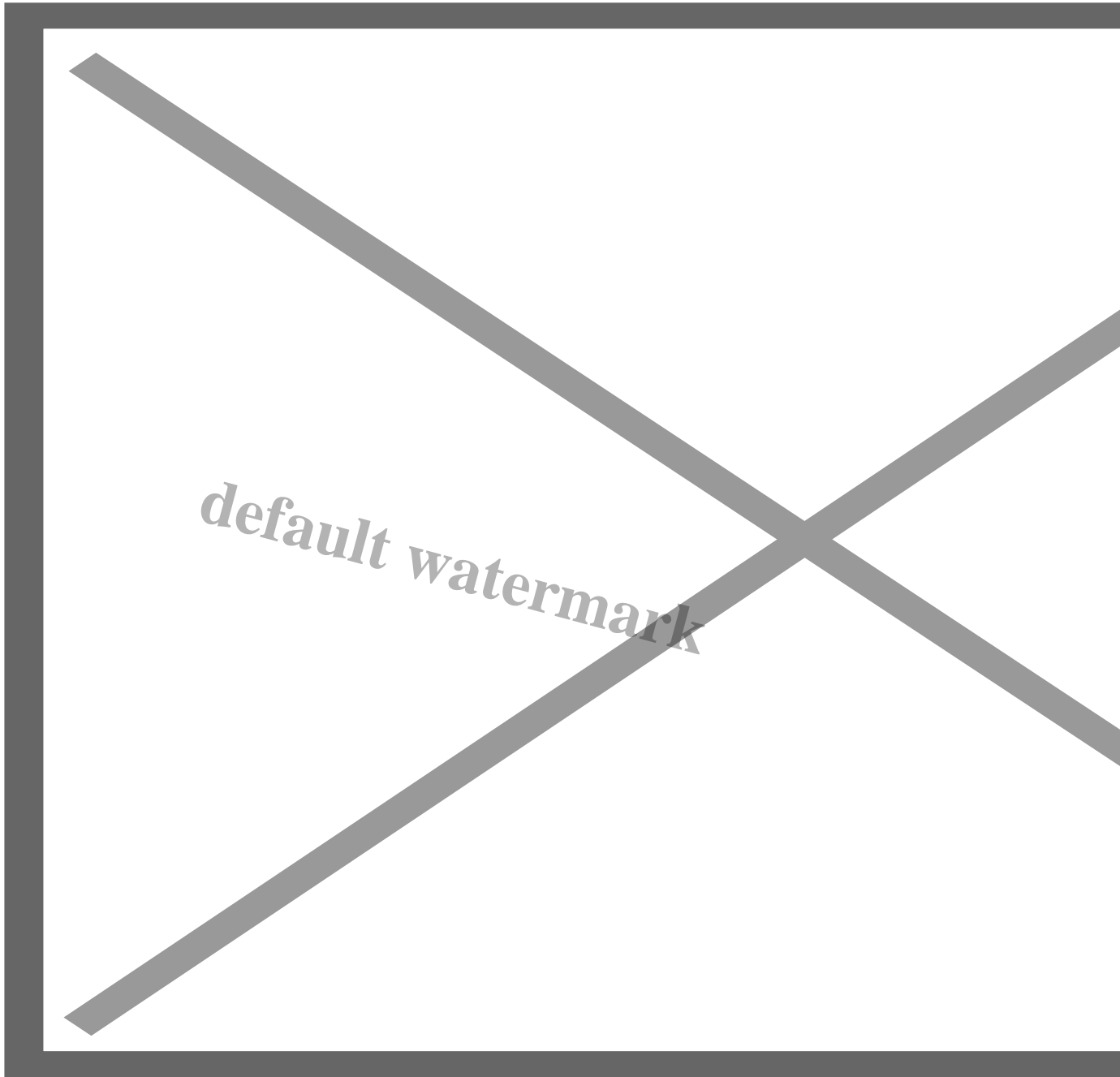


Photo Credit: Ross Richey

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## **Festival Details & Signature Events**

On **Saturday, Aug. 30, from noon to 10 p.m.**, The Urban Arts Festival returns to The Gateway in downtown Salt Lake City. Free and open to all ages, the festival transforms city blocks into a daylong celebration of creativity.

What began with a handful of vendors and local bands has grown into an immersive city takeover: murals rising in real time, beats echoing off brick walls, and skate decks reimagined as canvases. Each year, tens of thousands of visitors gather to experience the event, now recognized as one of Utah's

largest showcases of contemporary art and performance.



2024 **Skate Deck Show** 1st Prize Winner

**Signature highlights include:**

- **Artist Marketplace** – An open-air market featuring one-of-a-kind works across mediums, where visitors can shop directly from local creators.
- **Live Mural Painting** – More than a dozen muralists and graffiti artists transform walls into large-scale works before the audience’s eyes.
- **Skate Deck Show** at Urban Arts Gallery – The original spark that launched the festival remains its beating heart, with artists reimagining blank skateboard decks into works of art and competing for audience votes and juried prizes.
- **Lowriders Custom Car Exhibit** – A crowd favorite that celebrates the artistry of automotive culture, with custom cars, hoppers, and bikes gleaming in the summer sun.

These elements, paired with food vendors, artisan booths, and The Gateway’s lively atmosphere, create a space where art isn’t confined to a stage or gallery wall – it’s alive in every corner.

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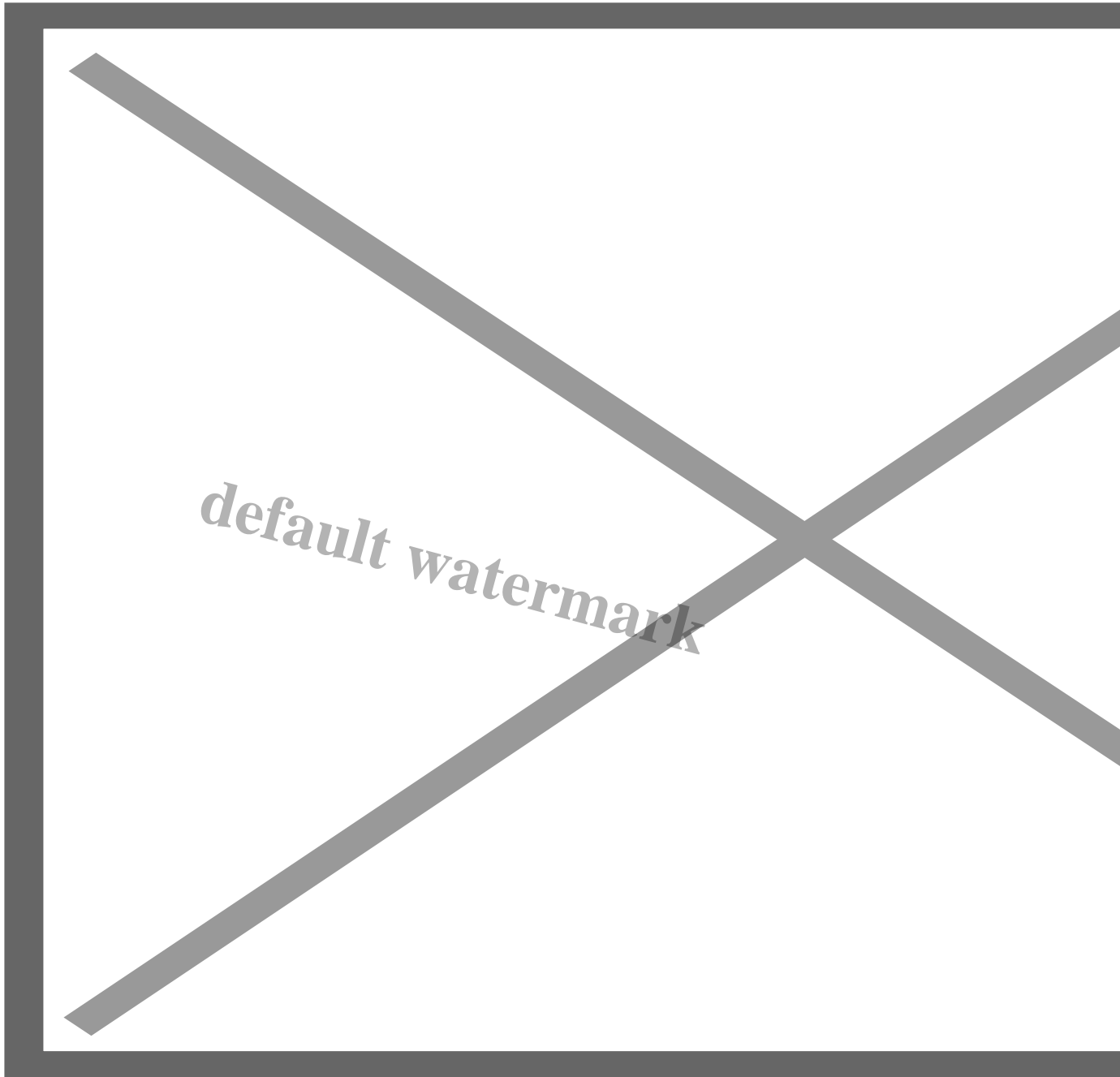


Photo Credit: Ross Richey

## The Pulse of the Festival

Among the most electric traditions is the [Mic Masters Alliance rap battle](#), freestyle duels where the audience helps shape the outcome. For Dyer, the event perfectly reflects the festival's ethos: art unfolding in real time, fueled by participation and community.

"This will be the third year that we've partnered with [Mic Masters]! They're working on some really interesting things that go back to what we're all about—community building, educating people, exposing people to these different art forms," Dyer said.

This year, festivalgoers can even sign up to compete. Five to six emcees will showcase their skills in high-energy formats like the **Build-a-Bar Challenge**, where the winner earns prizes and bragging rights. If too many sign up, the lineup will be decided by spinning the wheel live—adding a playful layer of suspense.

The performance invites audience members to see how freestyle rap is built from the ground up—from the structure of a 16-bar verse to the layering of rhythm and rhyme in real time. It's both a display of artistry and an open invitation for new voices to step into the circle.

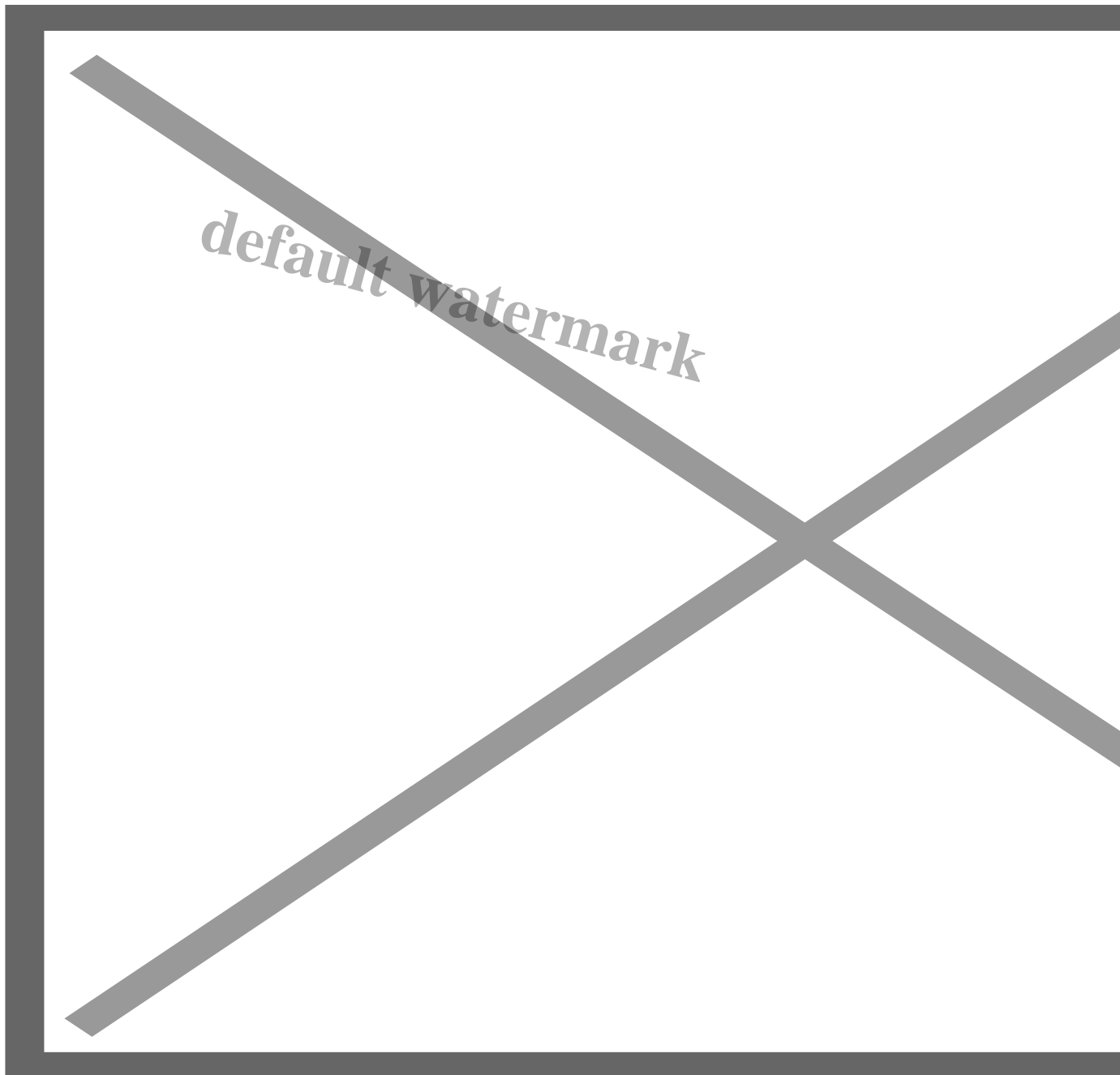


Photo Credit: Ross Richey

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## Fifteen Years Later

Looking back, Dyer marvels at how far the festival has come since those first skate decks. What started as a grassroots experiment is now one of Utah's most unique cultural institutions, recognized nationally for its scope and spirit.

“For 15 years, we have brought together an extraordinary variety of artists and performers to celebrate creativity in all its forms,” Dyer reflected. What began with skate decks and street art has grown into a citywide celebration — one that continues to redefine art and identity in Utah. Fifteen years on, The Urban Arts Festival proves that when the streets become a canvas, the community itself becomes the artist.

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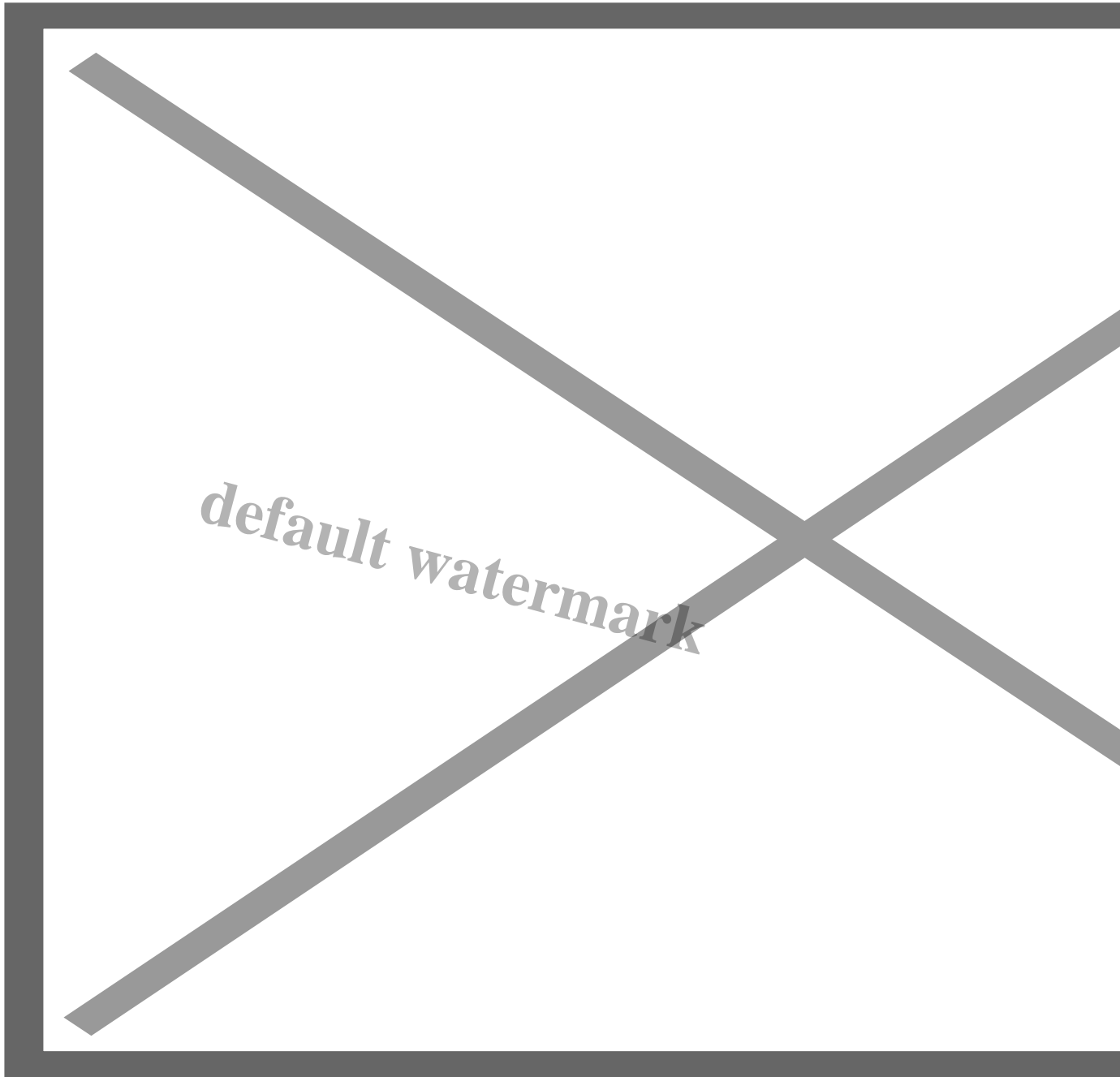


Photo Credit: Ross Richey

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## Derek Dyer: Visionary Behind the Festival

[Derek Dyer](#), Founder and Executive Director of the Utah Arts Alliance, has spent more than two decades championing creative expression in all its forms. Known for thinking on a grand scale—he once earned a Guinness World Record for constructing the world’s largest disco ball—Dyer has consistently pushed Utah’s arts scene beyond conventional boundaries.

With the Urban Arts Festival, he recognized an opportunity to provide space for contemporary and alternative art forms that rarely found support in traditional institutions. His vision has always been

expansive: a festival where muralists, graffiti writers, projection artists, performers, and musicians could share the stage, and where communities often left out of mainstream arts programming could see themselves celebrated.

For Dyer, the festival isn't just an event—it's a living, evolving platform that reflects Utah's creative energy and commitment to inclusivity.

### **Learn More**

Website: [urbanartsfest.org](http://urbanartsfest.org)

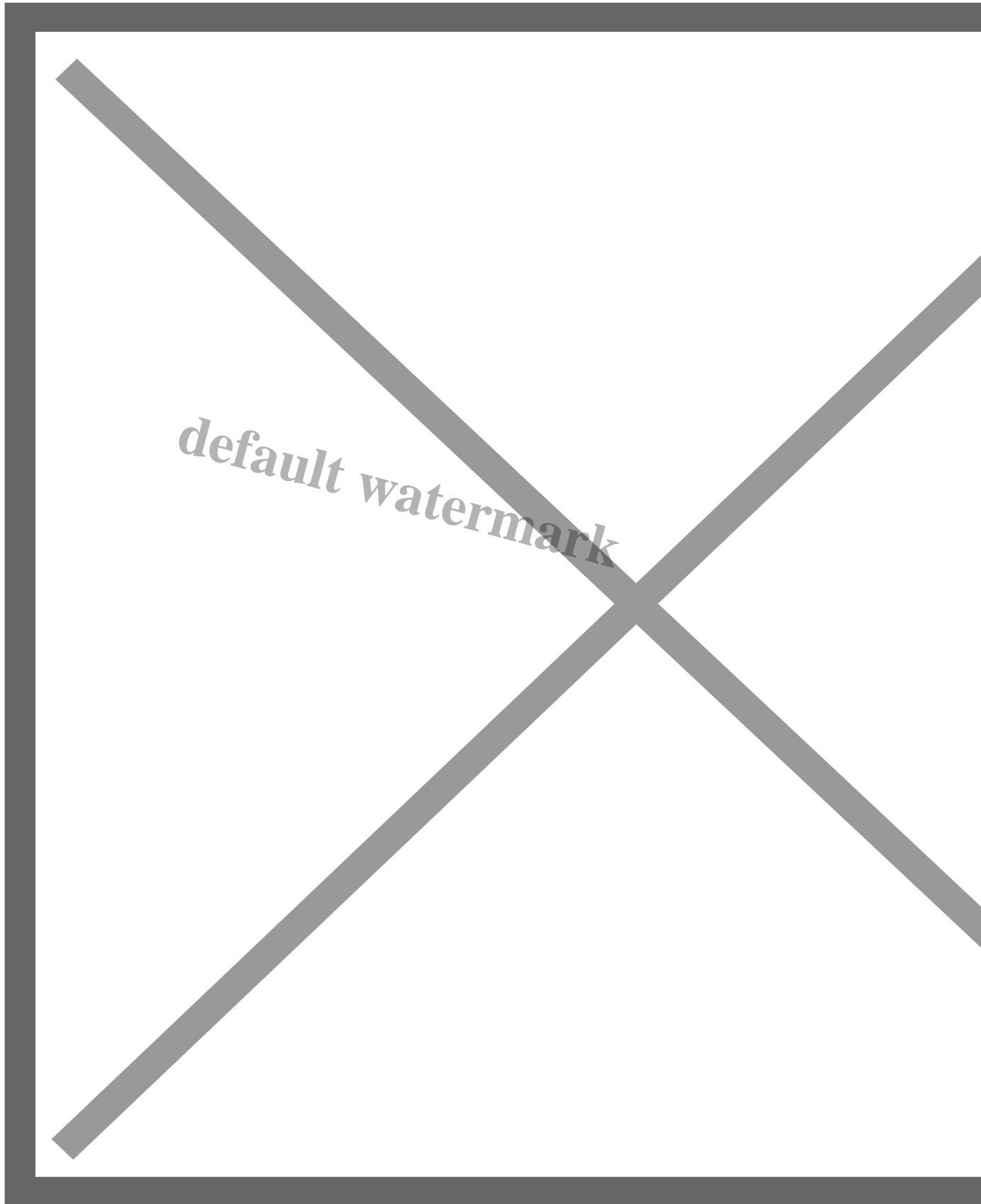
Instagram: [@urbanartsfest](https://www.instagram.com/urbanartsfest)

Facebook: [Urban Arts Festival](https://www.facebook.com/UrbanArtsFestival)

YouTube: [Festival promo](#) | [Mic Masters moments](#)

Those interested in volunteering can sign up online at [signup.com/go/XquJkkG](http://signup.com/go/XquJkkG).

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## About the Hosts

[Utah Arts Alliance \(UAA\)](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering the arts in all their forms in order to build an aware, empowered, and connected community. Founded more than 20 years ago, the Alliance manages artist spaces and galleries, produces festivals, and creates opportunities for artists to showcase their work. UAA also operates KUAA 99.9FM, a multilingual cultural public radio station that amplifies diverse voices and connects communities through music and storytelling.

[The Gateway](#) is a vibrant hub in downtown Salt Lake City, serving as a focal point for the city's arts and culture district. Anchored by the historic Union Pacific Depot, the complex spans 50 North to 200 South and 400 to 500 West, offering over a million square feet of shopping, dining, living, and office space. With its dynamic calendar of community-driven events, The Gateway provides the perfect backdrop for The Urban Arts Festival, blending history, creativity, and modern city life.

### Category

1. Events
2. Spotlight

### Tags

1. Creative Community
2. Derek Dyer
3. Emerging Artists
4. Freestyle Rap
5. Graffiti Art
6. Inclusive Arts
7. live music Utah
8. Lowriders
9. Muralists
10. Ross Richey
11. Salt Lake City Arts
12. Skate Culture
13. Street Art
14. The Gateway SLC
15. Urban Arts Festival
16. Utah Arts Alliance
17. Utah Festivals

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