

24 2020

STREET ART. DRAWING ON THE WALLS

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DISEGNARECON ISSN 1828-5961
<http://disegnarecon.univaq.it>

Indexed in SCOPUS / Abstracts.com access / Middle East journal network

DISEGNARECON

SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL ON ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE



Simon Jung and Paul K. Hertz: Schweizer, The Corallo of Stampa Naples, September 2008. Cover image edited by Igor Tolosa.

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DISEGNARECON

ISSN 1828 5961

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[Home](#) > [Archives](#) > **Vol 13, No 24 (2020)**

Vol 13, No 24 (2020)

Street art. Drawing on the walls

Edited by Antonella di Luggo and Ornella Zerlenga

Table of Contents

Editorials

[Street art. Drawing on the walls](#)
Antonella Di Luggo, Ornella Zerlenga

Articles

[From anamorphosis to vision: "3D Sidewalk Chalk Art"](#)
Cristiana Bartolomei, Alfonso Ippolito, Cecilia Mazzoli, Caterina Morganti

[WRITERS EDUCATION when street art enters the Academy](#)
Paolo Belardi, Luca Martini

[Visual Pollution and Social Asymmetry. The Origin of Dientenegro](#)
Carlos Campos, Alessandra Cirafici

[Urban and community renaissance in the Caserta area: the "arts village" of Valogno](#)
Ornella Cirillo, Pasquale Argenziano

[Drawing on the walls of the Naples' VIII Municipality. Social stories and technological portals.](#)
Vincenzo Cirillo, Luciano Lauda, Igor Todisco

[Street art. A methodology for coding a heterogeneous language](#)
Sara Conte, Valentina Marchetti

[Street Art: Institutions, art and urban management in Brazil and Canada](#)
Gerson José de Mattos Freire, Joao Victor Faria Freire

[The visual culture of the images of the revolt \(1968/1977\).](#)
Francesca Fatta

[Erik and Tore Ahlsén. Mural art](#)
Jaime J. Ferrer Forés

[Mural art in the work of José Ríos. From personal experience and glancing through history](#)
Fabian Garcia Carrillo, José Antonio Benavides Lopez, Claudia Moreno Romero, Angie Benavides Castillo

[Talking walls and figurative polyphony in Buenos Aires](#)
Maria Pompeiana Iarossi

[Drawing on the Walls: Graffiti, Street Art or Walls in Time. Analysis of the Torrevieja Experience.](#)
Pablo Jeremías Juan Gutiérrez, Carlos L. Marcos

[National and globalization features in sculptural, pictorial and font compositions of modern street art in Ukraine](#)
Iryna Kuznetsova, Igor Dudnik, Oleg Lilchitskij

[Shadow Street Art: from walls to streets between projection and invention](#)

[PDF](#)
ED.1-ED.12

[PDF](#)
1.1-1.14

[PDF](#)
2.1-2.14

[PDF](#)
3.1-3.9

[PDF](#)
4.1-4.14

[PDF](#)
5.1-5.14

[PDF](#)
6.1-6.17

[PDF](#)
7.1-7.10

[PDF](#)
8.1-8.11

[PDF](#)
9.1-9.18

[PDF](#)
10.1-10.12

[PDF](#)
11.1-11.11

[PDF](#)
12.1-12.13

[PDF](#)
13.1-13.10

[PDF](#)

[OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS](#)

[Journal Help](#)

USER

Username

Password

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JOURNAL CONTENT

Search

Search Scope

All

Browse

- [By Issue](#)
- [By Author](#)
- [By Title](#)
- [Other Journals](#)

FONT SIZE

Emanuela Lanzara	14.1-14.14
From the Wall to the Pavement and Back. Murals in the Epoch of Drones. [with an interview with the artist Giulio Vesprini] Marta Magagnini	PDF 15.1-15.12
Designing art in the city between ethics and creativity. Anna Marotta, Claudio Rabino	PDF 16.1-16.20
Public art in the cities. Critical overview of street art in Umbria, between graphic techniques and relations with the urban space Valeria Menchetelli	PDF 17.1-17.21
Temporary or Permanent? The Duration of Works of Street Art: between Intentions and Techniques Alessandra Meschini	PDF 18.1-18.22
The Israeli West Bank wall: iconographic storytelling Rossana Netti, Osama Mansour	PDF 19.1-19.16
Murals in Turin as tesserae of a scenographic mosaic spread in the urban landscape: can art reveal new local identities? Giuseppa Novello, Maurizio Marco Bocconcino, Giada Mazzone	PDF 20.1-20.20
The city of Millo. The wall as an urban highlighter. Caterina Palestini	PDF 21.1-21.21
Drawing the places through street art. The case study of Furore "painted village" Nicola Pisacane	PDF 22.1-22.14
Photographic techniques for urban art documentation Pablo Rodriguez-Navarro, Pedro Manuel Cabezas-Bernal, Teresa Gil-Piqueras	PDF 23.1-23.22
Symbolic learning in the city. Street art in the regeneration of public space Monica Val Fiel	PDF 24.1-24.15
Shaping identities through Street Art. Iconography of social claims in Orgosolo's Murales Michele Valentino, Enrico Cicalò	PDF 25.1-25.10
Street Art and Landscape Art: Kobra's homage to Michelangelo in Carrara Giorgio Verdiani, Angela Mancuso, Carmen Accursio	PDF 26.1-26.9
The T.R.U.St Project: A Street Art Experience in Taranto Ubaldo Occhinegro, Fabrizio Manzulli	PDF 27.1-27.11

Interviews

Art on the walls of the city: interview with the artist Kristin Jones Giovanni Caffio	PDF 11.1-11.15
Street art cannot do redevelopment by itself Simona Capodimonti	PDF 12.1-12.18
Street art as a flower in the cement for urban regeneration. Interview with the street artist Bifido Margherita Cicala	PDF 13.1-13.20
Experiences of anamorphosis between poetry, architecture, and social context: interview with Boa Mistura Vincenza Garofalo	PDF 14.1-14.17
Drawing on the walls from architecture to street art. Interview with "MILLO" the street artist architect Caterina Palestini	PDF 15.1-15.12

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disegnare con ... Antonio Almagro Gorbea Pablo Rodríguez - Navarro	PDF DW.1-DW.19
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DISEGNARECON

ISSN 1828 5961

Registration at L'Aquila Law Court no 3/15 on 29th June, 2015.

Indexed in SCOPUS. Diamond Open Access. All papers are subjected to double blind peer review system by qualified reviewers.

Journal founded by Roberto Mingucci



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Temporary or Permanent? The Duration of Works of Street Art: between Intentions and Techniques

Today, there are instances in which works of street art are erased or defaced; what is perhaps less highlighted, however, is a certain intrinsic perishability related to the techniques with which some of these works were created. Therefore, an investigation of the variety of such techniques, their evolution in terms of hybridization, and the diversity of tools and materials used may inform us about the relationship with the impermanent character of certain mural art operations.

Circumscribed to works made on walls and other vertical or horizontal surfaces in urban contexts and focusing on particular graphical/representational aspects, this article proposes a suitably diversified panorama of works and artists based on the variety of methods, techniques, materials, and tools used, highlighting their relationship with the works' durability. These studies have helped to highlight the provisional or permanent nature of different works of

street art and therefore to interpret the related intentions of the artists. Many of them, in fact, in full awareness of the impermanence of their works, lay claim to their intrinsic fragility, understanding it as a quality related to being conceived as participatory events and/or surfaces only temporarily given a new meaning. With respect to this, the study invites us to ask whether the recent tendency to 'collect and enclose' mural works in museums in the name of their presumed preservation does not rather border on distorting their sense. If anything, better appreciation for these works can be taught by studying effective interventions to protect the works where they were installed.

Keywords:
materials/techniques; artistic intentions;
urban scenarios; permanence/impermanence;
visual art

1. PREMISE

In the last thirty years — twenty if one looks at Italy — street art has grown in importance in contemporary creativity, also in terms of influence in the world of graphics and visual arts in general. The interest it has progressively managed to attract has contributed to its emergence and it has become a true sociocultural phenomenon with dynamic connotations and edges that cannot be easily circumscribed because it is undergoing continuous change.

For example, what the Italian counterpart to the term 'street art' should comprise is still an issue much discussed among its interpreters. If one intends to include both spontaneous, unauthorized, illicit interventions and those created in agreement with entities, administrations, or private parties (public art) as well as freely created but authorized (non-commissioned) works, then the most inclusive term might be 'urban art' [1]. What is more, while this initially related to a world that existed in parallel to so-called 'official' art (McCormick, 2010), street art has recently become somewhat institutionalized. Some artists, by invitation from galleries and museums, have agreed to exhibit at 'indoor' showings as well as others. For their 'outdoor' realizations, artists are increasingly working in collaboration with entities and institutions on various levels within festivals organized by cultural associations or in events [2] (Outdoor, 2014; AA.VV., 2017) that have now multiplied around the world and which have transformed entire urban areas into true street art districts. Moreover, this evolution has more than a few consequences — positive ones — for the specific topic addressed by this study.

While it may therefore seem that urban art has been accepted everywhere to the extent that numerous works have been perfectly conserved and integrated into the urban landscape, there are still situations in which it is still misunderstood or poorly tolerated and works have therefore been erased or defaced (Bonacquisti, 2016). Setting aside these voluntary 'destructive' actions, what has perhaps been less highlighted is a certain intrinsic perishability inherent in some interventions

that can instead be ascribed to the techniques with which they were realized. The issue therefore becomes one of investigating the variety of these techniques and their evolution also in terms of hybridization and diversification of the tools and materials used (Dogheria, 2015). The emphasis lies in how this may both inform the relationship with the impermanent character of certain street art interventions and help to interpret the intentions of the artists regarding the choice of the nature of their performance, whether temporary or permanent. In fact, different artists are aware of the limited durability of their works and the fact that they cannot/should not survive forever, whether as a result of the materials and techniques used, or the voluntary acceptance of the connotation of illegal action that make them liable to removal. More in general, the artists recognize that the surfaces are consigned to the good or bad intentions of people, passing time, and the weather.

Today the techniques used are quite varied and while some principal, more or less consolidated ones can be identified, they cannot be clearly separated since they are increasingly combined in many experiments with mixed techniques (Danysz, Dana, 2011; Danysz, 2018). Therefore, restricting the investigation to works made on walls

and other vertical or horizontal surfaces (squares, stairs, bridges, etc.) in urban contexts, the topic of study was addressed with a methodological approach that proposes a suitably diversified panorama of works and artists. While favouring one technique, the chosen artists were identified with the aim of describing a summary of creative paths that include investigating, hybridizing, and reinventing the media. Therefore, in relation both to the variety of methods, techniques, materials, and tools used and the intention and contexts, their interventions were framed by mainly highlighting their intrinsic durability.

2. PAINTED MURALS OR FRESCOES

This technique is based on acrylic paints applied with paintbrush and/or spray/aerosol paints but also more recently ecological paints and other tools such as scrapers, spatulas, or airbrushes. Often used for large works, murals require a great sense of proportion and entail a long stay at the site with the help of scaffolding or baskets to work in safety and telescopic poles on the end of which are attached paintbrushes or other tools. The procedure to create a painted mural may be more or less ordered beforehand: it may be based on a simple

Fig. 1 -Keith Haring, deleted in 1992, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome. Left: photo by Stefano-Fontebasso from <http://www.saichearoma.it/tag/keith-haring/>; right: photo source GDG Press from <https://www.artwave.it/arte/eventi-e-mostre/cross-the-streets-dalla-strada-al-museo-il-riscatto-della-street-art/>





Fig. 2 - Blu, mural censored in 2014, SanBa Project, Roma. Left: photo from <https://lmanifesto.it/san-basilio-dipinto-di-blu/>; right: photo from <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/548313323359853176/>.

sketch of the subject, which is then oriented directly in the place. It may also follow a more controlled process with photographic surveys of the façade followed by the development of preparatory designs (on the photos themselves or another support) whose main traces may be transferred to the wall both by hand — using points of references including stains, imperfections of the wall, windows, or other classical masonry tools such as levels or the like — and with the projection of a mask on which the lines of the drawing are represented on a smaller scale. With respect to other techniques, this is the least perishable and the most used in urban regeneration activities promoted through festivals organized by cultural associations and are more or less authorized, commissioned, or supported by public administrations.

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A painted mural, which in itself has the technical characteristics to last over time, may however be erased or disfigured with true acts of censorship or vandalism that compromise their originality and durability in whole or in part. A historical as much as emblematic case is the mural that the artist Keith Haring (Pennsylvania, 1958–1990) made in 1984 on the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (Fig. 1), which was erased in 1992 by the Municipality for Gorbachev's visit [3] (Von Vacano, 2017). Today, in retrospect, the fact that the artist, a supporter of 'Popular Art' for all (Clausen, 2010), was aware of the temporary nature of his works is not much consolation for a loss of this sort. Nevertheless, more recently (2014), even the work created by the street artist Blu (Blu, 2018) in the San Basilio quarter of Rome under the *SANBA*

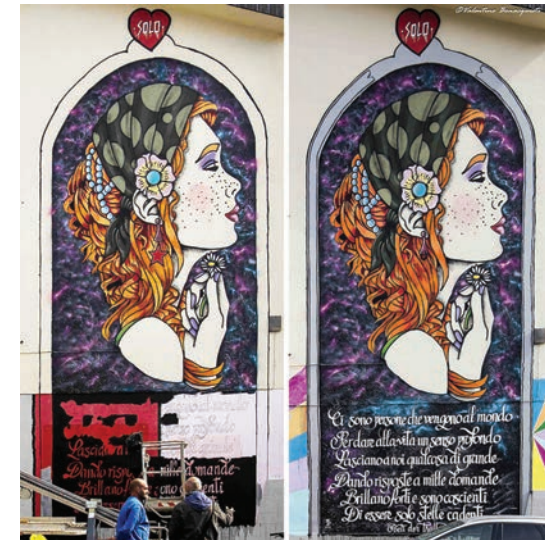


Fig. 3 - Solo, mural in Trullo quarter, Roma, 2015. In the right photo it is possible to notice the small detail which was then censored. Photos by Valentino Bonacquisti from <http://www.fotografiaerrante.com/2015/11/10/un-murale-al-giorno-toglie-la-malinconia-di-torno-215/>.

Project, was the object of censorship since in the subject, which aimed to commemorate the murder of a youth during a rally in the 1970s, the artist represented police officers turning into sheep and pigs. This detail was erased by a city Urban Decorum unit against the wishes of the quarter's inhabitants themselves, who, to protest, induced the word 'censored' to appear in red (Fig. 2). Although they are smaller examples, a few cases of censorship were also experienced by Flavio Solo (Rome, 1982), both in Italy and abroad. In Rome in 2015 his mural *Laura* (portrait of a deceased friend), made in the Trullo quarter for the *International poetry and street art Festival* he had organized, had to be modified to change a small, but evidently for some, non-negligible detail (Fig. 3). Following this, in Russia in 2017



on a work made together with Diamond at the *Satka Street Art Festival*, he was asked to replace the logo of the Russian space agency that the artist had inserted in the mural. Another very recent case (2019) happened to the artist Lucamaleonte (Rome, 1983) with his mural at the Ostia Lido Nord metro stop (Province of Rome) made for the participatory route with the association a.DNA Collective. With respect to the theme, anti-mafia, his 'wall of fame' with portraits of people for Culture and Legality in Ostia was censored by the Municipality due to political pressure: the unwelcome faces were obscured with stains of red and clumps of green vegetation, which meant that the artist disowned the work and did not sign it (Fig. 4).

On-the-spot erasure is not the only way to make a street art painting designed and realized for the street 'disappear'. A mural may also be 'torn' by means of a technique recognized historically since the eighteenth century and which has been appropriately revisited today. This entails covering the entire work with a layer of a particular glue, creating a sort of canvas that, once hardened, may be torn away, taking with it a few-millimetre layer of wall and thereby tearing away the mural. This method has been used recently with real or only presumed motives of protection, to

move some street art from walls on the street to the walls of a gallery. If, however, as has unfortunately occurred, it is relocated inappropriately, that is, without the consensus and therefore disrespect towards the artists, it may also lead to a further negative escalation for the durability of the works, as occurred in 2016 with the murals made by Blu in Bologna. In this case, the artist erases his works himself, covering them with grey paint [4] (Fig. 5). The purpose was precisely to prevent them from being ripped from the walls, that is, being transformed into pieces for museums and inserted in the exhibit *Street Art. Banksy & Co. – Art in the Urban Form* [5].

It is clear then that no work of street art is free of acts of pure vandalism. One historical but symbolic example consists in the 107 metres of Berlin Wall painted by Keith Haring in 1986 (Fig. 6), who declared almost prophetically that he wanted to "destroy the Berlin Wall through painting it" [6]. His 'pop art people', painted with the colours of the German flag and forming a human chain symbolizing the union of the two halves of Germany, were stained with grey paint the day after its realization. However, in this panorama, even different virtuous cases of the fight against defacement or disappearance can be found. The work *Tuttomondo* created by Haring in Pisa in 1989 (Fig.7a), his last

Fig. 4 - Lucamaleonte, mural censored at the Ostia Lido Nord metro stop, Roma, 2019. Left: work in progress by the artist; right: the unwelcome faces obscured with tufts of green vegetation. Photos by Oscar Giampaoli from <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/street-urban-art/2019/07/lucamaleonte-a-ostia-tra-casapound-e-cinque-stelle-storia-di-un-murale-censurato/>.

Fig. 5 - Blu erases all the murals he painted in Bologna in the past 20 years. Photo from <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2016/03/street-artist-blu-is-erasing-all-the-murals-he-painted-in-bologna/>.





Fig. 6 - The 107 metres of Berlin Wall painted by Keith Haring (1986). Photos from <https://fahrenheitmagazine.com/arte/plasticas/la-efimera-intervencion-de-keith-haring-en-el-muro-de-berlin>.

work and the only one designed as a permanent work, to which the artist therefore gave a name, is the object of periodic restoration and is protected in situ by a glass balustrade (McDonald, 2013). Likewise, singular is the event of another mural the artist created that same year in the El Raval area of Barcelona. The work, which was found on a wall that was later knocked down in an urban restoration project, came back to life near the MACBA [7] thanks to a real-scale cast made by technicians from the City before the wall was demolished and following a declaration by the Haring Foundation, which authorized its reconstruction (Fig. 7b).

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Fig. 7 - Keith Haring: a) the work *Tuttomondo*, Pisa, 1989, photo from <https://www.icoloridelcaribe.it/blog/news/la-street-art>; b) the work that was in the El Raval area of Barcelona reconstructed near the MACBA, photo from <https://www.2duerighe.com/arte/73129-originale-riprodotto-messaggio-keith-haring-ariva-comunque-intatto.html>.

Fig. 8 - Murals painted with Arlite technology: a) Iena Cruz, mural *Hunting Pollution*, Ostiense quarter of Roma, 2018, photo from <https://www.lifegate.it/persona/news/hunting-pollution-iena-cruz-murales>; b) Peeta, mural for *Super Walls* in Padua, 2019, photo from <https://www.biennalestreetart.com/peeta/>.



Finally, also on the plane of techniques of painted mural art, experimentation by some artists is moving in the direction of a search for new meaning for the permanence of the works, entailing a function in terms of environmental sustainability. Such is the case of the *Hunting Pollution* mural painted in 2018 by Lena Cruz (Federico Massa, Milan 1981) in the Ostiense quarter of Rome (Fig. 8a) but also of another twenty murals painted in 2019 between Padua and Abano Terme for *Super Walls*, the first biennial of sustainable street art (Fig. 8b). The paints used (Airlite technology), activated by light, are able to purify the air by capturing polluting agents to turn them into inert salts, neutralize odours, eliminate bacteria, prevent mould, repel dust and dirt, and reduce energy costs.

3. STENCILS, STENCIL POSTERS, AND POSTER ART

Stencilling is a technique based on the use of a form — a stencil — made of cardboard, paper, acetate, PVC, or wood, which, when cut with a precise drawing as if it were a negative, allows an image to be transferred to a surface. Its use spans two moments: the first, careful and patient preparation of the stencil; the second, creation of the work, temporarily fixing the stencil on the wall in order to fill in the empty spaces, generally with spray paint. While stencils grew out of the idea of being able to repeat a subject, this is not why some street artists favour this technique. Rather, it lies in the speed with which the work can be finished, especially if it is an 'unauthorized' act.

A primary example in this sense is the work of the street artist Banksy (Bristol, 1974?), the star of the stencil technique, which, like it or not, has made the 'non-regular' and unexpected appearance of his work his mark (Lazarides, 2019). His street art therefore aims more at the strength of the message than at the durability of his works, which, dealing with heavy topics, are not at all free of acts of vandalism, censure, theft, and sales unknown to the artist (Fig. 9).

However, there are entirely different, particular cases of the use of this technique such as the work *Triumphs and Laments* (Rome, 2016), a project that can better be defined as 'urban art'. It was



Fig. 9 - Banksy, stencil dedicated to French 1968, near the Pompidou Center, Paris, 2018. One of the many works of the artist that were stolen. Photo from <https://www.open.online/2019/09/03/parigi-rubata-dal-muro-un-opera-di-banksy-dedicata-al-68-francese-e-il-secondo-caso-in-francia/>.

created by an artist, William Kentridge (Johannesburg, 1955), not exactly 'street artist' but certainly an experimenter of different techniques and expressive means. This project, promoted by the Tevereterno cultural association [8], was realized along the bank of the Tiber River (Piazza Tevere). It is 500 metres long and 10 high and consists of a large frieze of 80 images that recount a particular history of Rome, revisiting and associating fragments of visual memories between the past and the present in a collage that is at times surrealist [9] (Crescentini, Pirani, 2017). The work was made with enormous stencils made of a laser-cut plastic material (corrugated plastic) with respect to

which the images emerged by removing material, that is, using a pressure washer to selectively remove the organic layer on the faces of the massive walls [10]. Therefore in this case, the stencil was used not for the purposes of addition, but rather subtraction of material, which implies a work with a brief lifetime because the organic patina is settling again, making the images progressively disappear to remain only in the memory of those who have seen it or in photos and videos. The project is therefore a metaphor for what is ephemeral, transitory (of the work, life, human beings), that is, the exaltation of impermanence as a means to leave a more lasting impression (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 - William Kentridge, the work *Triumphs and Laments*, Roma, 2016, photos by Sebastiano Luciano e Marcello Leotta from <http://tevereterno.org/progetti/triumphs-and-laments/>.

The stencil technique has, however, evolved through many experiments, among which one must mention work by the street artists Sten & Lex (Rome, Taranto). This duo first developed (2003) a method called 'Hole School', which is still based on the stencil, but of paper and straight black and white lines, which applies halftone to the stencil to generate a different perception of the works based on distance: up close they seem completely abstract, while from afar they take on meaning of a figurative representation. Later (2009), with an even more innovative approach, they caused the stencil to evolve into a 'stencil poster'. The process consists in gluing a light and fragile paper stencil to the wall like a poster, letting the stencil degrade due to atmospheric agents or people that rip the strips, making the underlying image emerge a little at a time (Sten & Lex, 2010). Their works, which recall the world of Optical Art, are presented with hanging, ripped residue, that the artists themselves create first through controlled voluntary breakage of the stencils in order to make the works irreproducible and unique (Giannella, 2009). The artistic intentions of Sten & Lex are therefore a sort of celebration of fragility, transformation, and impermanence (Fig. 11a). Poster art ('paste up' in English) is a technique whose most likely ancestor is the modern poster widely used since the beginning of the nine-

Fig. 11 - a) Sten & Lex, Stencil Poster in Poznan, Poland, 2012, photo from https://www.facebook.com/stenlex/photos/?ref=page_internal; b) Ludo, Poster *Lovers1*, Paris, 2016, photo from <http://thisisludo.com/walls/>.





Fig. 12 - The works of TvBoy and Sirante removed by Urban Decorum units in Rome. Left: TvBoy, Rome, 2018, photo by Valentino Bonacquisti from <http://www.fotografiaerrante.com/2018/03/25/un-murale-al-giorno-toglie-la-malinconia-di-torno-452-ovvero-uragano-tv-boy/>; right: Sirante, / Bari, Rome, 2018, photo from <https://www.investireoggi.it/forums/threads/bar-del-forum.87725/page-66>.

teenth century as a vehicle of mass communication. It employs paper (poster) as a medium applied to a surface with glue, often an organic one called 'wheatpaste' [11], which is spread with paintbrushes, rollers, or brooms in two layers, the first on the wall and the second on the poster. This technique also entails two moments: the realization of the work in the studio

and then its quick gluing on the walls. The paper may be painted, drawn freehand or with stencils, printed digitally or with old techniques such as xylography and may be of various types and weights (from tissue paper to photographic paper). The formats may also be quite varied: from simple sheets and strips — which with a suitable collage, allow very large works to be created —

to particular forms shaped based on the image. The materials, paper and glue, underlying this technique ensure that these works are among the most ephemeral: a poster, if not torn beforehand, deteriorates in about two years. The street artist Ludo (Paris, 1976) creates posters in grey scale with which he combines an acid green drizzled on the paper when it is pasted to

Fig. 13 - Zed1, the work *Fishing* (Second Skin Project) for the SUBSIDENZE Street Art Festival in Ravenna, 2014, photo from <http://ilgorgo.com/zed1-fishing-second-skin-video-art-project/>.



the wall. His particular posters, baptized *Nature's Revenge*, represent elegant, disconcerting hybrid organisms (plants and insects), half nature, half mechanics, drawn with botanical precision; they combine serigraphs, pencil, printing, and scalpel to cut out the poster according to the figure (Longhi, 2011). Its 'outdoor' mode is mainly illicit, so the use of this technique allows for quick application on the walls (Fig. 11b).

In Italy, two street artists very active in the small-to medium-scale poster technique are Tvboy (Salvatore Benintende, 1980, Palermo) and Sirante (anonymous). Their works, mostly imprinted with political satire and pasted onto walls in the historical centre of Rome in an entirely unauthorized way, are promptly removed by Urban Decorum units (Fig. 12) or vandalized (TvBoy, 2020). Sirante in particular, whose posters are based on new interpretations of classical works in a contemporary key, accompanies each work with an explanatory caption. In other words, he considers the street as a museum.

The project *Second Skin* by Zed1 (Marco Burresi, Florence, 1977), presented in 2014 for the SUB-SIDENZE Street Art Festival in Ravenna, instead represents experiment in mixing painted murals and posters. The artist first painted a mural and then covered it with layers of pasted-on paper on which he painted other closely connected images (Fig. 13). The project therefore took advantage of the poor durability of paper for the purposes of performance: not only time, but occasional viewers, tearing away the posters, become 'discoverers-creators' of the work (Burresi, 2016).

Large-scale poster art may perhaps be exemplified through two important interpreters. The 'street photographer' JR (Jean René, Paris, 1983), using paper and glue, likes to define his projects in urban contexts as 'Pervasive Art', that is, works designed in a participatory manner (JR, Thompson, Remnant, 2019). Close ups of women's faces in the project *Women are Heroes* or elderly people in *Wrinkles of the City* (both begun in 2008) were transformed into giant black-and-white posters not meant to last, but with the sole purpose of relating people and places (JR, Berrebi, 2012). More recently JR

interacted with a symbol of France: the Louvre. In 2016 he pasted onto one of the faces of Ieoh Ming Pei's Pyramid hundreds of pieces of paper (collage) depicting the elevation of the Museum behind it (including the sky). The anamorphic effect observed from a particular position generated the perfect overlap, giving the impression the Pyramid was not

there. In 2019, again with photographic collage, he covered the entire area around the Pyramid, creating a monumental tromp l'oeil that, on the contrary, simulated the emergence of the architecture from a crater through perspective illusion (Fig. 14). In both cases, these were ephemeral works, conceived as events that presupposed the end; installations de-

Fig. 14 - JR at the Louvre Museum in Paris. Top: the posters-collage pasting on the Pyramid, 2016; bottom: the posters-collage pasting on the area around the Pyramid, 2019. Photos from <http://www.jr-art.net/project-list/jr-au-louvre>.





Fig. 15 - WK Interact, the work *Project Brave*, 2011, New York City. Massive posters-collage pasted onto the wall to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11. Screenshot from <https://vimeo.com/57033487>.

signed to be destroyed, torn, disassembled, taken away in fragments as memories and that therefore intend to celebrate impermanence, that is, the incisiveness of the image by means of its dissolution. The artist WK Interact (Caen, France, 1969) instead starts with a storyboard then moving on to a photographic set through which he aims to immortalize suspended movements, trying to capture the energy and freeze the intensity of the actions. He then subjects the selected snapshots (or drawings) to a process of manipulation (twisting) using a photocopier, pulling, elongating, or distorting them to exalt the effect of movement in black and white. Finally, he assembles the modified images to compose a long poster as if it were a short film (WK Interact, 2014). The artist's intent is not to create works to remain 'forever' (in his street projects neither signature or date appear),

but rather to establish two levels of interaction: on the material plane via the tools and on the visual plane with people through the strength of his images for the time that they last (Fig. 15).

4. SCRATCHING, 3D INSTALLATIONS ON WALLS, MOSAICS

Why try to reach new levels when it is possible to use the existing 'layers' of a surface? This principle has inspired two urban artists in particular, who have made this innovative approach the defining characteristic of their actions. The project *Scratching the Surface* [12] by the artist Vhils (Alexandre Farto, Lisbon, 1987) is based on a technique of creative destruction through which the image is 'revealed' by removal or erosion of the surface layers of the support. Advertising panels, old doors, or abandoned

walls serve as canvases on which he works with scalpels, hammers, and even acid solutions, creating works by removing material: faces with marked lines that symbolize a reflection of the need to 'excavate' beyond the superficial nature of things (Moore, 2020) (Fig. 16). Likewise, the versatile artist Gonzalo Borondo (Valladolid, 1989) has centred his creativity on the extension of painting on various supports such as glass, hay bales, ceramic, and wood. In particular, with the 'glass scratching' technique, he has refined a language between painting and etching that consists in painting the glass with white (or black) paint and then scratching the surface with awls, box cutters, and brushes such that the figures emerge like a drawing through the subtraction of material. This technique began with 'illegal' creations on the display windows of abandoned stores where his expressive human figures aimed to act as a diaphragm between interior and exterior (Fig. 17). He has also etched glass sheet with the use of acid and serigraph printing. According to the approach of these artists, the deterioration that a work can undergo must be read as a necessary evolution that may even make it more interesting (Caprasecca, Pietropaoli, 2015).

Among the multiple representative modes of urban art, those that are expressed via 'installations' of three-dimensional objects made of various materials on walls are also worth mentioning. Edoardo Tresoldi (Cambiago, 1987) is an artist that creates sculptures in electro galvanized welded mesh, a material that he came to understand by arranging scenery for the cinema. His background is not that of a street artist, but it is precisely the urban art scene that afforded the opportunity to develop his creativity, in particular his interaction with Borondo. Together they created the work *Chained* (2015) at the Bicocca University in Milan, in which the two-dimensional nature of a mural is transformed into a sculpture articulated in space thanks to a figure of metal mesh that emerges from the wall. Keeping in mind the theories of the *genius loci*, his sculptures 'play' with the transparency in a realm between material and immaterial. While being concrete and monumental, they are presented as a virtual drawing in space like a hologram. These are permanent but also tem-



porary works whose inevitable transformation by atmospheric agents is viewed by the artist as a means to read the history of a place (Fig. 18). An entirely different tenor is seen in the sculpture installations created by Mark Jenkins (Alexandria, Virginia, USA, 1970). His street art consists in using the street as a stage for eccentric, extravagant, situational sculptures (Jenkins, 2012) that aim to create destabilizing visions and therefore reactions that become an integral part of the works themselves [13]. Created as dry moulds using simple transparent adhesive tape and also presented as perfectly 'dressed' people, his works are absolutely ephemeral; their deterioration begins the moment they are delivered to the street. While similar installations have already earned him the moniker 'urban prankster', in reality they address important social issues such as marginalization, indifference, and suicide (*Project 84*, 2018). Likewise, within the limits of legality, the Italian artistic duo Urban Solid (Busto Arsizio) populate unused walls with plaster or cement creatures with strong pop colours made with classic sculpting techniques. Hands, huge ears, pistols, and TVs emerge ironically and provocatively from the walls with the goal of evoking visual and tactile reactions as well as reflections on the obsessions of modern life such as money, technology, and social media (Fig. 19). Completing the frame of possible artistic demonstrations on the street is also the mosaic technique expressed in a 'street' mode. One example among many is *Invader* (anonymous, Paris, 1969) whose inspiration lies in imitating the *Arcade Game Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978), that is, he reproduces pixel images from the game using small coloured ceramic tiles. While the artist then developed his own original icons, also integrating QR codes to conceal messages that can be read with the appropriate application, the guiding idea of the mosaic installation has remained unchanged:

Fig. 16 - Works by Vhils. Top: *Scratching the Surface* project, wall in Lisbon, 2018, photo by Bruno Lopes; bottom left: scratching on billboard, Hong Kong, 2016, photo by José Pando Lucas; bottom right: hand-carved old wooden door, 2016, photo by Bruno Lopes. Photos from <https://www.vhils.com/work/>.



Fig. 17 - Borondo, scratching on glass, site-specific installation *Shame*, Athens, 2013, photos from <https://gonzalaborondo.com/#ancla>.

creating a sort of articulated device in which each piece is independent but cannot exist on its own (Invader, Ardenne, 2013). Basically, these pixellated figures, located in places where their visibility is guaranteed (near doors, intersections, shop signs, street signs) and according to strategic criteria, initiate an action not far from Guy Debord's notion of psychogeography, that is, they do not change the image of the cities where they are installed [14], but rather aim to re-establish their itineraries, instilling creative practices of 'interference' (Debord, 2013). The mosaics are fixed to the walls with cement or glue in a mostly illegal way, so nothing guarantees their permanence, since they are subject to removal, damage, or theft (Fig. 20).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In aiming to highlight the relationships between the artists' concepts of durability and techniques/intentions, the summary of examples presented has depicted the framework of the planning through which street art has always moved. These studies, for as much as they certainly cannot exhaust the topic, have enabled a focus on some distinctive, transverse characteristics that identify the phenomenon and especially give rise to some reflections. Street art undoubtedly spurns the concept of a merely decorative function and is always proposed as a 'site-specific' project closely tied to the physical and social context and this occurs

independently of whether they are actions expressed 'freely' or they fall under specific projects. All the artists show full awareness of the fact that acting in the urban context is a great responsibility towards people and places, that is, their works, designed as a form of freely usable communication, are nevertheless a strong act that may condition those who observe them. Having said this, with regard to the central theme addressed by the permanence/impermanence of works of street art, it is evident that some techniques allow more durable projects to be created. What seems to emerge, however, is that it is not this aspect that guides the technical choices of the artists but rather, sometimes even entire-



ly the opposite. In other words, there are more than a few artists that somehow lay claim to the fragility of their works precisely because they are intended as a participatory form of art and therefore intrinsically designed to be destroyed. More in general, the surfaces are designed and given a new meaning only temporarily, with the awareness that they are consigned to others' intentions and the effects of natural events and time. What therefore prevails in the choice of the technique is undoubtedly the artistic intent and not the search for permanence of the work, which if anything is only a consequence.

This does not mean that the artists approve of the defacement due to pure acts of vandalism or that they do not experience problems such as copyright protection, the persistence of censure, and political exploitation behind some acts of removal by the institutions of Urban Decorum (Colantonio, 2017); basically all those aspects for which impermanence has nothing to do with their 'programme' of artistic acts. Not by chance were precisely these issues discussed in late 2019 by the artist Diavù in Progetto ExP [15].

On the other hand, it is likewise undoubted that street art is becoming an increasingly main-

Fig. 18 - Installations by Edoardo Tresoldi. Left: work *Chained* in collaboration with Borondo, Bicocca University, Milan, 2015; right: work *Il collezionista dei venti*, Mura Mura Fest, Pizzo Calabro (VV), 2013. Photos from <https://www.edoardotresoldi.com/works/>.
Fig. 19 - Left: Mark Jenkins, four example of the *Embed* Series. Dublin, 2011; Rome, 2013; Besancon and London, 2017. Photos from <http://www.xmarkjenkinsx.com/outside.html>. Right: Urban Solid, installation *Filosofarti*, street art workshop, Busto Arsizio (VA), 2015. Photo from <https://www.urbansolid.org/filosofarti/>.





stream phenomenon and this places some artists in a position that is not always favourable to certain institutionalized art scenes. It is certainly undeniable that this has recently been verified in the multiplication of operations aimed at shifting urban art to the logic of the market (collections and museums) and that some have been conducted with little-invasive means towards urban art or disrespectfully and in a way not agreed with the artists. In this sense, it is enough to think about certain acts intentionally implemented by some artists such as self-erasure, the placement of works in locations that are difficult to reach, or the use of particularly delicate techniques. These are strategies that arise with the purpose of avoiding the works' removal or 'tearing' from the walls due to theft and their placement in exhibits without the artist's consent or asking if it does not betray their meaning, that is, if the loss (impermanence) is not an integral part of the work. With respect to these actions, the question should be raised whether the pretext of such presumed preservation does not lie at the limit of distorting the sense of works created for free, independent interaction with the urban space, that is, if 'removing and enclosing them' is not a contradiction in terms. Therefore, perhaps more appropriately, this is due both to trying to instil better appreciation and respect for urban art and, if anything, to concentrate greater effort to study effective interventions capable of protecting the works in situ.

Fig. 20 - Invader, some example of 'invaded' cities in the world: Rome, Paris, Cologne end Bilbao. Photos from <https://www.space-invaders.com/home/>.

NOTE

[1] Reference is made to definition and classification into the three categories (street art, public art, urban art) proposed by the artist David Diavù Vecchiato, which were discussed again in November 2019 during the round table *Street Art o Arte Pubblica?* held within Progetto ExP. <http://muromuseum.blogspot.com/2019/11/street-art-o-arte-pubblica-dallicontro.html>

[2] Some of the most recent events in Rome include: *OUTDOOR – Urban Art Festival*, from 2010 to 2014, <https://out-door.it/>; Project *Big City Life Tormarancia*, 2015, <http://www.bigcitylife.it/hello-world/>; *Cross the Street*, exhibit at the MACRO, 2017; *Decades*, an exhibit in the Guido Reni District, 2017; Project *Dominio Pubblico-MA@T, Millennials A(r)T Work – Ma@T*, 2018–19, <http://www.dominiopubblicoteatro.it/2019/10/31/mat-millennials-art-work-mat/>; Project *POPSTAIRS*, since 2015; Project *GRAArt*, since 2016, <http://www.graart.it/>; Muri Sicuri, from 2016 to 2020, <http://murisicuri.it/>.

[3] A photo feature by Stefano Fontebasso De Martino that covers the artist's project on the wall was presented at the *Cross The Streets* exhibit held at the MACRO in Rome in 2017.

[4] The website <https://www.wum-ingfoundation.com/giap/tag/banksy-co/> recounts the erasure.

[5] Exhibit promoted by Genus Bononiae with the support of the Fondazione Carisbo and arranged in the Palazzo Pepoli in Bologna.

[6] The wall fell after just 3 years, in 1989.

[7] Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

[8] This non-profit organization

aims to create better use of the river and its banks by both residents of Rome and tourists.

[9] For example, the Trevi Fountain becomes a bathtub in the depiction of the embrace between Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Eckberg in the film *La dolce vita* by Federico Fellini.

[10] This means was already experimented with by Kristin Jones in the iconic parade of *She Wolves* created on the same tract of wall of the Tiber for the event *Solstizio d'Estate*, the artistic installation that inaugurated the activities of the Teverterno non-profit organization in 2005.

[11] A mix of wheat flour and water to which sugar or corn starch are added once cooled to make it stickier. Before application, wood glue is added in a ratio of 1:5 along with copper sulphate to better protect the mixture. For a clear finish (optional), a layer of Minwax Polyacrylic can be added on top of the poster.

[12] Presented for the first time in 2007 at the VSP group exhibition in Lisbon and then at the Cans Festival in London the following year.

[13] The artist has indicated the Spanish sculptor Juan Muñoz (1953–2001) and the Absurdism of Aphex Twin and Albert Camus as his sources of inspiration.

[14] The project, begun in 1998 in Paris, today counts about 80 'invaded' cities around the world with as many published maps and indications of points assigned for each invader.

[15] Reference is made to the *Street Art o Arte Pubblica?*, a meeting organized by the E-Lex law firm and the M.U.Ro project in collaboration with Yococu (YOUTH in CONservation of CULTural Heritage) and the Rosso-20sette Arte Contemporanea Gallery.

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