

The wall as a form of art and protest

FROM DIVIDING WALLS TO MURAL ART

The importance of the mural art

Barrier walls have been used throughout history to separate warring nations, protect trade routes and stop migrants and refugees.

Some examples are The Great Wall of China, The Berlin Wall, The walls in Israel and Mexico and the "Peace Walls" in Northern Ireland.

However, walls have been used by humans since prehistoric time to today as a form of testimony of life to express religious and political beliefs. From the cave paintings people have been leaving signs of their own existence in many places around the world.

Therefore, these murals hold great significance for mankind, as they give a look of the diversity of our cultures during different periods.

Weather murals and graffiti are a form of art or not has always been a topic of debate. What is sure is that the historical events and social background are strictly connected to their existence.

THE ORIGINS OF MURALS AND GRAFFITI

➤ **MURALS :1920s MEXICO**

The art of muralism flourished during the 1920s in Mexico as an important tool to promote and communicate social and political messages.

Through the large paintings of **Diego Rivera**, **José Clemente Orozco** and **David Alfaro Siqueiros**, murals became the most important form of expression, symbols of solidarity, freedom and hope.

From the 1920s to about 1970s a large number of murals with nationalistic, social and political messages were created on public buildings in other parts of the Americas, including the United States.

➤ **MURALS: 1960s – CHICANO ART MOVEMENT**

In the 60s, a Mexican-American civil right movement called Chicano inspired mural artists who brought attention to their struggles for equality across Southwest America and expanded throughout the United States.

➤ **GRAFFITI and TAGGING: 1960s-70s PHILADELPHIA and NEW YORK**

Graffiti are something different from Murals. Urban graffiti are usually realised with spray cans and first appeared on the American west coast, in Philadelphia in the early 1960s then they soon reached New York: large elaborate coloured graffiti on building walls and subway came to define the urban landscape.

This phenomenon was closely associated with gangs, who used it for a variety of purposes: for identifying or claiming territory, for memorializing dead gang members and for challenging rival gangs.

However, in the 80s, some New York artists such like **Keith Haring** gained notoriety for their graffiti and were recognised as successful painters by top galleries.

➤ **STENCIL GRAFFITI - 1980**

In the early 1980s, a new stencil graffiti genre emerged: it is a form of graffiti that makes use of stencils made out of paper. The use of this technique allows the artist to be quick and to reproduce the artwork anywhere.

Stencils usually want to promote a message, it could be anti-war, anti-consumerism or a form of protest.

➤ **MODERN TIME MURALS**

Today mural art is used to speak in the name of communities, nations and cultures and represent an aesthetic element merged in the environment.

Banksy, whose identity is unknown, is considered one of the leading exponents of contemporary street art. He is known for his ethical, cultural and anti-war stencil art. His first works appeared in Bristol, but now they may be seen anywhere from Los Angeles to Palestine.

MURALS AND PUNK ROCK MUSIC

Music and visual art are means of communication which have been used by the youths to express their feelings and denounce the establishment.

After the second World War a series of historical and social events made people feel uncomfortable. The Cold War, the fear of nuclear weapons, the Vietnam war and the economic recession urged people to give voice to their anxiety.

As a result, in the 70s and 80s punk rock music spread supporting strong ideologies against injustice and the establishment.

“London Calling” is a song written by the British punk band the Clash in the 80s to remind the danger of nuclear power soon after the accident occurred in 1979 in an island in the U.S. when a nuclear power plant started to release radioactive gas.

The cover of the album has been transformed in a graffiti by the mural artist Banksy: The character is smashing an office chair instead of guitar probably to react to a money-making society.

A STREET ARTIST: BANKSY

Banksy anti-pollution artworks

Show Me the Monet (2005)

Banksy is concerned about the issue of pollution.

In one of his works he has replicated the original Impressionist painting by Claude Monet which gives a sense of tranquillity and shows a bridge over a pond surrounded by green vegetation.

The green colour in the painting contributes to the idea of harmony but this harmony is broken by the additions Banksy had made of shopping cards and a traffic cone.

The colours of these objects—orange and red—provide a striking contrast to the shades of green and lead to a feeling of anxiety.

By representing man-made objects such as a shopping carts and a cone discarded into a natural setting, Banksy critiques the contemporary society's disregard for nature and excessive production of waste in favour of material goods.

Season Greetings - South Wales' Port Talbot – 2018

Just before Christmas 2018, this stencil by Banksy appeared on a wall in Port Talbot, an industrial town in Wales.

The image appears on two sides of a garage wall:

When just one garage wall is viewed, the image appears to be a typical Christmas scene of a child enjoying the snow. The small boy has a sledge beside him and his tongue out to catch what could be falling snow

But nothing is what it seems

When the viewer turns the corner and sees the full work, they can see that the falling substance is in fact ash emitting from an open fire in a recycling bin.

This Stencil highlights the problem of pollution caused by the nearby steel factories

Consumerism and the Hypocrisy of Capitalism

With his art of works, wants to denounce today's consumerism and the hypocrisy of capitalist systems.

Two examples of these two topics are :

The "Sale Ends Today" which has a biting humor. The are stenciled black-and-white figures that resemble women in Biblical scenes from 16th and 17th century paintings. However, what they prostrate, is not a Biblical savior. It is a bright red sign that reads, in white letters, "Sale Ends Today."

The artist's print mocks the culture of consumerism that has nearly become a holy status in many societies.

The second one called "Can't beat the feeling", depicts Mickey Mouse and Ronald McDonald holding the hands of a terrified, naked girl.

Banksy took inspiration from an original photo of a girl in Vietnam after a napalm bombing. The girl is naked because she had ripped the burning clothes off to avoid napalm burn her skin.

The napalm bombs created a worldwide disgust at the conduct of war and this picture became the symbol of the event that horrified the world.

By putting the girl next to two children's characters, the image shows how a population can be pacified by a designed culture of entertainment and consumerism.

Banksy denounces the American Nation for being obsessed by goods and being blind to foreign policies and war conduct.

The image stresses the commercialisation of war itself, how the military has become a multi-billion dollars industry with powerful corporate lobbies.

These thoughts remind us that the important things in life are free: peace, love and empathy for other people.

The Israel Wall

Banksy also denounced the war in Israel. A war that has been going on for years dividing land and people. In fact, in 2002, the Government of Israel built a Barrier to prevent terrorist attacks by Palestinians in Israel. However, Palestinians believe that it only removes space from the borders and that it worsens their living conditions. This wall also divides local population who often has relatives working beyond the wall.

The wall is 700km long and it is from 3 to 8 m high.

Some artists have used this wall for their murals. So, this wall speaks to those who really know how to read it.

One mural from Banksy represents two angels trying to make their way through a gap in the wall; another one shows an Israeli soldier checking a donkey's ID; "Flower Thrower" shows a Palestinian boy throwing flowers instead of a bomb; finally, "Girl with balloons" depicts a Palestinian Girl flying over the wall.

“Stand with Syria” campaign

On the 6th March 2011 in the Syrian town of Daraa, fifteen children were arrested and tortured for painting anti-authoritarian graffiti. The protests that followed their detention led to an outbreak of violence across the country.

In 2014 Banksy's cooperated with more than 100 international non-government and humanitarian organizations to show support for Syrians at the third anniversary of country's civil war.

He realised a video to call on people to show support for an end to the war. His Balloon Girl was transformed this campaign.

There is always hope

In this picture we can see a little girl who's trying to reach a balloon.

This red balloon represents her childhood that is flying away but she's trying to get it back.

She's trying to regain her innocence, her dreams, hopes, love and fragility.

With this image Banksy wants to tell us that in this world innocence can easily be lost, and society makes children grow old too fast.

But there is also a sentence, “there is always hope”.

It is a positive message which suggests that no matter what happens there is always a hope for better days, maybe in a world without barriers, without separating walls, where people can “live life in peace” “sharing all the world”.