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RECONNECTION:

'Image Not Found.' Martyn Reed. Stavanger, Norway, 2022. Photograph ©Brian Tallman.



Forging Renewed Connections through Unsanctioned Urban Art

Editorial

Martyn Reed, Editor-in-Chief
& Susan Hansen, Editor

Following last year's LOCKDOWN issue, this edition of *Nuart Journal* explores the theme of RECONNECTION and the ways in which researchers, artists, curators, and communities are forging renewed connections with cities, projects, and each other as the uncertainty and disconnection of the past two years recedes.

Nuart Journal's acid yellow RECONNECT issue contains 12 original articles, visual essays, and interviews. In his discussion of his latest book, *Last Picture*, Professor Jeff Ferrell, the godfather of graffiti scholarship, asks whether we should rethink what we see as 'street art' by considering what forms of 'hidden' art on the streets might exist. He notes that 'art in the museum or the household is confined to those who have access to it. But street art is there for everyone to see.' Ferrell shows us a series of photos that were entirely salvaged from alleys and streets. Similarly, Adrian Burnham exposes the accidental and often anxious aesthetics of discarded everyday objects, as captured in the evocative photography of Franck Allais, while artist Alexandros Simopoulos presents a process-based visual essay, 'Sache Que Je T'Aime: A Tag Turned Mural', that shows the artist's translation of an impassioned yet almost invisible urban scrawl to a work of monumental proportions.

In her article, 'This New Chalk Era', Megan Hicks discusses a ubiquitous but highly ephemeral form of art on the streets and its key role in the history and politics of the Australian urban landscape. Moving forward to contemporary times, Lachlan MacDowall explains the curatorial ideas behind 'Flash Forward', a large programme of laneway-based art and music in Melbourne, Australia. The social and architectural history of the city and its infamous grid of streets provided a rich context for jumping forward into imagined futures for the city.

Curator Elisa Bailey looks at the poetics of process in the work of Oleg Kuznetsov (aka OK). She shows how this artist's work is always informed by his origins in graffiti and street art, including the importance of ephemerality, artistic freedom, ownership (or lack thereof), art as invisible labour, and the intimacy between artist and creation as being central to its value. Enrico Bonadio and Olivia Jean-Baptiste expand on issues of artistic ownership by asking whether copyright can be used to stop politicians from exploiting street art. They analyse a recent case involving

French leftist leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon's use of images from Paris-based artist COMBO Culture Kidnapper. As the artist reflects, '[this] is a fight which concerns all actors in the world of street art'.

One consequence of the social distance enforced by the Covid-19 pandemic was an exponential rise in the appropriation of mediated modes of creating and experiencing work on the streets. Cairo-based artist Agnes Michalczyk describes the development of her series of augmented murals in the Egyptian capital – a clear example of the ways in which artists have adapted to engage contemporary audiences by designing and incorporating interactive virtual elements into their street-based material work.

Artists Jan Vormann and Brad Downey discuss their recent project, 'Between Particles and Waves'. Developed during a period of radical disconnection, *Between Particles and Waves* harnessed the virtual yet almost material space of Minecraft to reconnect a group of international artists known best for their artistic practice in public spaces in cities throughout the world.

Artist Ian Strange and musician Trevor Powers give us some unique insights into the collaborative process behind the development of 'Dalison', an architectural intervention and sound and light installation that culminated in a single-channel film work, a series of photographic works, and a one-off live performance. *Dalison* has been described as an 'audio-relic dug up and still covered in dirt' and a 'requiem for a place now lost'.

London-based artist and activist Aida Wilde and museum consultant Dan Vo explore the resonance of lost places and displaced people in Aida's latest work, 'Dreamboat II'. Using repurposed Syrian banknotes, Wilde created a tiny origami boat waving a flag printed from pulverised Syrian currency. As Vo asserts, this piece is small and delicate, but it calls on us to remember the resilience of refugees rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of war, persecution, and natural disaster.

We end the RECONNECT issue of *Nuart Journal* with a roundtable discussion (chaired by Athens-based Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Anna Carastathis) that connects and amplifies queer feminist approaches to graffiti and street art scholarship and practice. As we revive our collective networks, critical and progressive discussions such as this give us all renewed traction and hope.



This New Chalk Era:



Figure 1. Photographed in 1934, this corner shop in Surry Hills (Sydney) is covered in text but the shopkeeper has chosen to use the pavement to advertise 'dole bread' at the government-subsidised price of three pence a loaf. Sam Hood Photographic Collection, State Library of New South Wales.

Pavement Graffiti in Australia 1930-1934

Megan Hicks
Western Sydney University, Australia

Unauthorised marking of pavements is a form of graffiti that is seldom discussed but, despite its ephemerality, there is ample evidence for the existence of chalk and whitewash writing on roads and footways during the last century or more. I investigated one short era, the tumultuous Great Depression years of the early 1930s, and found that pavement graffiti had a significant role in Australia's urban landscape during that time.

INTRODUCTION

Writing on pavements is a traditional form of public expression worldwide. Since ancient times there have been people who choose to communicate by making marks on footpaths (sidewalks), roadways and town squares, and for the last 170 years or more this horizontal graffiti, both official and unofficial, has contributed to the increasingly dense textualisation of public space in the city. There exists a great body of research dealing with the worldwide phenomenon of urban graffiti of the kind that has proliferated since the 1960s, but in this article I aim to contribute to the recognition of antecedents to 1960s graffiti and, specifically, to locate pavement graffiti in that history. Although I have concentrated on a short span of years, 1930 to 1934, in a particular English-speaking country, Australia, this study augments current discussions about the use and meaning of public space.

My previous articles on the largely overlooked subject of pavement graffiti have mostly been based on the photographs I have taken over the past 20 years. But for this present project I set out to find evidence of informal writing on Australian public pavements in earlier times. Other researchers have embarked on similar projects and have discovered physical relics of old graffiti. Katherine Reed (2015), for example, has studied surviving American Civil War graffiti left by soldiers in churches, courthouses, caves, and houses in Virginia, USA. And for her book *The City Beneath*, Susan A. Phillips (2019) photographed century-old pencil, charcoal, and scratched graffiti hidden under the bridges and in the drains and culverts of Los Angeles.

But I wanted to find evidence of text that was not preserved by its concealment in private or hidden places. I was looking for inscriptions made on very public surfaces in an ephemeral medium. Pavement graffiti, usually hand-written in chalk – either in stick form or as liquid whitewash – was vulnerable to rapid and permanent obliteration, either by passing traffic, or weather, or deliberate erasure. Evidence of its existence would have to come from photographic or written records made at the time it was inscribed.

It is worth noting here that the term ‘graffiti’ was originally coined in the mid-19th century to describe recently discovered inscriptions at ancient sites like Pompeii (Champion, 2017). As a word that referred to unauthorised contemporary inscriptions it did not come into widespread usage in the English language until the mid-20th century. Used in this way it does not appear in more than a handful of Australian publications, nor in any image catalogues, until 1969.¹ Consequently it was almost pointless for me to search for ‘graffiti’, let alone ‘pavement graffiti’, in Australian digitised databases. But when I became inventive with search terms I was overwhelmed with results, mainly from newspapers.² Countless news stories and commentary columns referred to ‘notices’, ‘advertisements’, ‘announcements’, and ‘signs’ chalked or whitewashed on roads or footpaths in the decades between 1850 (when Australian footways were first paved) and 1970.³ This showed that pavement inscriptions have been a visible and newsworthy element of the public landscape since the beginning of urbanisation in Australia.

DEPRESSION GRAFFITI

Because my search of more than a hundred years of digitised newspapers was producing an unwieldy number of results, I decided to concentrate on just one short time span, the Great Depression years of the early 1930s. There were several reasons for choosing this era, but mainly it was because this was a time of great hardship and financial inequality, civil unrest, and political turmoil.

Australia was badly affected by the worldwide economic crisis and many people suffered. Physical relief was offered by community-based charities while spirits were bolstered through sport and social events such as dancing, and picture shows (cinemas). But businesses collapsed and retailers struggled to find customers. Unemployment rose astronomically. Dissatisfied with the limited aid provided by federal and state governments, some people turned to the revolutionary promises of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and the practical help offered by its newly formed offshoot, the Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM). There were conflicts within and between the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Nationalist Party, trade unions, the Communist Party, and ultra-conservative groups like the New Guard. As Phillips (2019: 11) notes, ‘graffiti flourishes in constrained, disrupted or hostile circumstances’ and it is certainly true that graffiti, and in particular pavement graffiti, flourished during the Depression years.

It was not only political activists that used the pavement as a noticeboard. A 1931 article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* remarked:

It would appear that in spite of the depression the chalk vendor is doing quite a brisk business. All over the suburbs there are notices chalked on the footpath about evictions, public meetings, rallies, and speeches. Enterprising shopkeepers have also taken up the idea that footpath advertising is cheap and easily obtainable. Some of the councils are beginning to object to this new chalk era...⁴

A similar article in *The Age* added to the list of footpath scribes:

Cheap advertising is adding to the worries of municipal councils [...] Every morning footpaths are found to bear announcements in chalk or limewash of meetings, dances, and other gatherings interspersed with particulars of shop bargains. “Printers require money for their work, although they do not always get it”, remarked one [mayor], “and the tendency is to avoid expense. Hence this outbreak.”⁵

I also chose these dates because it was during this time that the chalked copperplate word ‘Eternity’ began appearing on Sydney footpaths. Even if Sydneysiders know nothing else about pavement graffiti, they know of former no-hoper and Christian convert Arthur Stace, who first bent down to write his one-word sermon in 1932 (Williams & Meyers, 2017). ‘Mr Eternity’ became an iconic figure in the Sydney imaginary. His mysterious anonymity, the latent meanings in his succinct message, and his persistence in continuing to chalk that word all over Sydney for more than 30 years seemed to touch something deep in the city’s psyche.⁶ But, as this project reveals, when he was first moved to use the piece of chalk that happened to be in his pocket, messaging on the pavement was not an unusual



Figure 2. Said to have been taken in the 1930s, this may be the earliest photograph of Arthur Stace's handiwork. Photograph Max Dupain, courtesy of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

practice. Nor was he the only evangelist to proselytise on the pavement.⁷

Although not necessarily exhaustive, my searches of Australia-wide newspapers for the period 1930 to 1934 yielded a remarkable 320 articles that referred in one way or another to inscriptions on pavements. Over half of these were published in 1931. There were even one or two grainy photographs. But using newspapers as my sole source meant that there were inevitable biases in my results. A majority of the stories that mentioned pavement signs had to do with the newsworthy political turmoil of the day – elections, working class militancy, union meetings, calls for a general strike, anti-eviction campaigns, bread raids, hunger marches, arrests, and prosecutions, as well as rallies and demonstrations organised by the Communist Party and the associated Unemployed Workers Movement. How these stories were reported depended in turn on the political biases of the newspapers themselves, from the mainstream conservatism of the *Argus* (Melbourne) and the *Sydney Morning Herald*⁸, to the far left leanings of the Communist Party's *Workers' Weekly*.

Advertisements for small businesses, entertainments, and charity events are mentioned in the papers less fre-

quently, and sometimes the only reason they are referred to at all is because political activists who were prosecuted for writing on the pavement claimed that they were being treated unfairly in comparison with shop or cinema owners who did the same. Frivolous or personal chalkings are only occasionally alluded to, but judging from a few casual remarks in the papers I suspect this means that they were inconspicuous because of their familiarity. There were, for instance, jokes (and jokey alterations of other people's notices), New Year greetings (apparently an annual ritual), children's scrawlings and games, and obscenities (although the actual content of these is never mentioned in the papers). There were also articles about pavement artists who drew pictures and made a living from the coins tossed down by passers-by, but I have written about these people elsewhere (Hicks, 2021) and have not counted them in my tally of articles about unauthorised 'pavement graffiti'.

Despite the biases inherent in my research, it is possible to get an idea of the role that pavement graffiti played in public life at the time. For this present article I have chosen a sample of newspaper stories to show how pavement inscriptions were regarded by law enforcers, civic authorities, the general public, and the chalkers themselves.



TAKES PLENTY OF CHALK.—Communist invitation to “trammies” to a lunch-hour meeting made a mess of the footpath outside the Randwick tramsheds.

Figure 3. There is no story with this rare newspaper photograph of pavement writing, only the caption, which reads, ‘Takes plenty of chalk. –Communist invitation to “trammies” to a lunch-hour meeting made a mess of the footpath outside the Randwick tramsheds’. Photographer unknown, Daily Pictorial (Sydney), April 4, 1930, National Library of Australia.

CRIME

The state of roads and footpaths is a matter of civic pride. In keeping with their prime responsibilities of ‘roads, rates, and rubbish’, it was the duty of local government councils to construct local roads and footpaths and keep them safe, unobstructed, clean, and presentable. Pavement graffiti, especially boldly drawn notices like the example in Figure 3, transgressed on all counts. They were hazardous, not least because they scared cows and frightened horses⁹; their foul language was unfair to women and children¹⁰; they were obstructive and caused traffic jams and bottlenecks (presumably because people stopped to read them or tried to manoeuvre around them); and, worst of all, they were unsightly, being variously referred to as ugly, disfiguring, hideous, defacement, vandalism, and offensive to civic order.

Well before the 1930s, most councils had in place ordinances or by-laws that prohibited unauthorised advertisements on council property and thus, in effect, prohibited writing on pavements. The *Sydney Morning Herald* article about writing on the footpath (quoted earlier) continues by setting out the general form of these ordinances and explaining why implementing them was difficult:

[...] Some of the councils are beginning to object to this new chalk era, and desire to put the law in motion in regard to it. There is an ordinance available, provided it can be enforced: “Except by permission [sic] of the council notices, signs, and advertisements shall not be exhibited in any road upon any tree, bridge, culvert, drain, fence, post, monument, or other work or property of the council.” The footpath

is the property of the council, and it would appear as if the ordinance sufficiently met the case. The difficulty is that these signs seem, like mushrooms, to grow up in the night. In order to prosecute, a council must be able to prove that some particular individual (who must be found and named and served with a summons) exhibited the notice on the footpath. It is the old story, “First catch your hare”.¹¹

Technically, these ordinances could only relate to defacement of property rather than the content of the notices, but in many cases it was the content that offended. There were councils that quite specifically did not want Communist signs scrawled in their streets. Brisbane Council, for one, broadened the definition of ‘advertising device’ in their relevant ordinance in an attempt to successfully prosecute Communist chalkers. In response, a columnist fumed that, although neither he nor his newspaper had any sympathy with the Communist Party, he objected to

[...] the power now wrongly given to the Brisbane Bumbles or officious employees, to come at ANYBODY on ANY count at all, under pretence of having broken the Council's latest precious “ordinance”. For instance [...] the chalked notice on the Council's road, or footpath, asking the public where it will spend eternity, or urging it to be at Blogg's Corner on Mother's Day, could also be used to annoy some perfectly innocent person, or persons – if they can be found.¹²

What this columnist apparently did not know was that street chalkers more innocuous than Communists were already being annoyed – and fined – in other cities and towns all around Australia. Even Mr Eternity (Arthur Stace) was taken in by the police periodically – but let go each time because it was decided that defacing the pavement was an improvement on the petty crimes of his former life (Williams & Meyers, 2017: 146).¹³

Since writing on pavements was a breach of local government ordinances, police would usually consult with the local council before offenders were taken to court to be tried before a police magistrate. But while some councils were strict in seeing their ordinances implemented, others were ambivalent about prosecution. This could create conflict between police and councils, exemplified by a case in Newtown, a working class suburb of Sydney, where aldermen were vocally antagonistic towards police when they arrested two men for chalking a sign about black-banning a particular worksite.¹⁴

A Lithgow Council meeting reported at length in the *Lithgow Mercury*, and in less detail in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, serves to illustrate the quandary that faced aldermen in some local government areas.¹⁵ Lithgow was an industrialised mining town seriously affected by the Depression. Because the town economy was dependent on the wages of workers, people of all classes were sympathetic during industrial disputes and retrenchments (Patmore, 2000: 507).

But by early November 1931, chalked signs had become numerous. Three outsiders had been caught chalking 'communistic signs' on footpaths in contravention of the relevant ordinance. The signs said such things as 'Smash the New Guard', 'Join Youths' Section, U.W.M.', 'Soviet Germany This Year' and 'Join the Militant Minority Movement' and the police wanted to know the Council's attitude to prosecuting these men. At its next meeting the Council considered not only the police report about the footpath chalking but also a request from the Friends of the Soviet Union to hold a march in the streets on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The request about the march was granted with the majority of aldermen agreeing that 'it was only British justice to allow every party or organisation a fair chance'.

But with regard to the chalked signs, there was a much longer debate. One alderman did not object to them as such but thought 'it was the objectionable terms that were added after that mattered'. Another considered that the wrifings did not matter much and 'until Council had a complaint from ratepayers it would be as well to defer action'. Several were worried that if they enforced the ordinance in this case then they would have to stop *everyone* from chalking signs, including the town's business people and 'shopkeepers who chalked [...] on foot-paths that ice cream and other articles were for sale'. The wrifings had been going on for years, said another, 'and probably the present matters had been brought up by the persons who objected to a certain political organisation'. After further rowdy debate it was decided that there should be no prosecution in this case but that a warning should be inserted in the press stating that, in future, action would be taken against offenders who did not first obtain permission of the Council. This notice was duly published in the *Lithgow Mercury*.¹⁶

At the following Council meeting, aldermen discussed a letter that had been received in the interim from the local branch of the Communist Party seeking the right to chalk signs on the footpath as this was the only means the branch possessed of advertising. It was decided that the request

be referred to the Hall and Parks Committee to see if it was possible 'to give these people a set place to advertise their meetings'.¹⁷ These matters were of general interest in the town, although not necessarily taken too seriously. That same month an entertaining mock trial was held as a fundraising event at the Lithgow Methodist church hall. About 150 people were charged with ridiculous offences and offered equally ridiculous defences. A mine manager, for example, was charged with selling black coal. And an alderman was charged with aiding and abetting footpath chalkers.¹⁸

Punishment Lithgow's leniency might have been an exception because there were numerous cases elsewhere of men, and occasionally women, who were prosecuted for writing on pavements. Thanks to the practice by newspapers of reporting cases in the police courts, it is possible to catch glimpses of court proceedings and to learn what fines – or gaol terms in lieu – were handed down.

For example, a South Melbourne man declined to appear in court to answer a charge of writing a footpath advertisement reading 'Demonstrate against Fascism and war'. He had told the arresting police constable, "I will say nothing. I am a Communist and I will take what is coming to me". In his absence he was fined 30/- (one pound and ten shillingsthirty shillings).¹⁹ In another case in 1931, three men were each fined 10/- with 8/- costs (18 shillings in all) for having chalked the words, 'Demand double dole, and do away with dole tickets' on the footpaths of Marrickville, an industrial suburb of Sydney.²⁰ This was at a time when the average weekly wage was between £3 and £5. The government's sustenance payment for unemployed men (the dole) was much less and the fine amounted to the best part of a week's dole.²¹

In Brisbane in 1932, the Police Magistrate fined a youth 30/- or seven days imprisonment in default, for 'writing an advertisement on the footpath about a mass meeting of the unemployed'. "I'll take the seven days, sir", replied the youth.²² In fact, many of those caught chose the option of a sentence (and consequently a prison record), but it is seldom noted whether they did so out of defiance, or because they could not afford to pay the fine, or because gaol meant a bed and meals for a few days (or indeed, all three). Nevertheless, working people and the unemployed were angry about the gaolings. In 1931 the East Marrickville branch of the Australian Labor Party passed a motion that:

This branch of the A.L.P. views with disgust the action of the Marrickville Council in showing its vindictiveness against members of the working class in prosecuting them for chalking on footpaths and advertising working class meetings, in the same manner as shopkeepers have been advertising their goods for many years.²³

There were offenders who seemed genuinely ignorant of by-laws prohibiting pavement notices; others feigned ignorance. When a feisty Fremantle man was asked by the arresting constable if he had permission to write the advertisement, he replied, 'I thought it was quite alright, and no one had given me permission'.²⁴ Some – the midnight chalkers – did their work furtively, others were either naïve or openly defiant, sometimes relying on passers-by not to inform on them.²⁵ Magistrates were unmoved either way. When one chalker declared that he did not consider the writing an injury to the pavement the magistrate retorted, 'Well, what right have you to write on the pavement? It doesn't belong to you'.²⁶

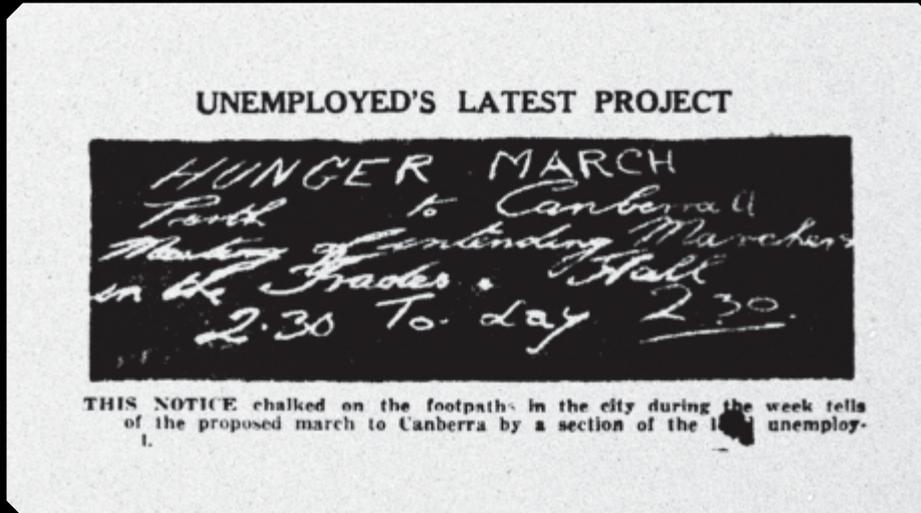


Figure 4. Another rare newspaper photograph of footpath writing, this one accompanied a story about a group of unemployed men who planned to stage a 'Hunger March' from Perth to Canberra and used the pavement as an advertising medium to recruit others. Photographer unknown, *Mirror* (Perth), September 13, 1930.

It is true that most arrests were of people writing political signs, usually slogans or notices about rallies and meetings. However, there was also the occasional surprising prosecution, such as when the proprietor of a cafe in Parkes (a rural town in New South Wales) was charged by the council with having inscribed an advertisement on the footpath. The case was so unusual that the story was syndicated in a number of rural newspapers, opening with the warning, 'It may not be generally known that advertising on footpaths is illegal, and persons disfiguring any footpath by chalking or painting advertisements thereon are liable to be fined'.²⁷

The public response to footpath chalkings, as far as it is recorded in the newspapers, was varied. While most people did not voice their opinions publicly, there were some who violently opposed the prosecution of chalkers and others, even in the same town, who thought the opposite. This no doubt reflected their own political leanings.

For instance, in Broken Hill, a remote mining city, a man was gaoled for two days in default of paying a fine, after a constable caught him starting to chalk a notice, 'Mothers protest against the re—' on the footpath. In response, some 600 unemployed men held a protest march through town singing 'The Red Flag'. At the town hall their leaders commandeered the balcony where they made speeches protesting against the gaoling of the man and condemning the town clerk and Labor aldermen. But at the man's trial the town clerk had pointed out that this was the

first prosecution of its kind in Broken Hill and it had only been pursued because 'numerous complaints had been received in regard to the practice, which was becoming exceedingly prevalent of late'.²⁸

People in Lithgow, too, finally decided they'd had enough of 'footpath chalking propagandists' and took matters into their own hands. Lithgow was the mining town where aldermen had been at pains to be fair to Communist chalkers. But a year later, when white-painted signs about May Day celebrations appeared on the asphalt of the main street, 'obliterators' tried to write over them, chalking 'church burners!' and other hostile messages.²⁹

Meanwhile, in suburban Sydney, good citizenship was on the mind of a columnist who wrote in his local Hurstville newspaper:

Vandals with white-wash brushes and chalk are still making tarred footpaths and roads, not to mention walls, in this district hideous and unsightly [...] If they are residents of the district they are certainly not worthy citizens. Civic pride seems to be a trait not understood by them.³⁰

Ostensibly, then, it was pavement graffiti's affront to civic orderliness that troubled local governments, the police, magistrates, and the community at large. But underlying these concerns was a fear of the threat to social

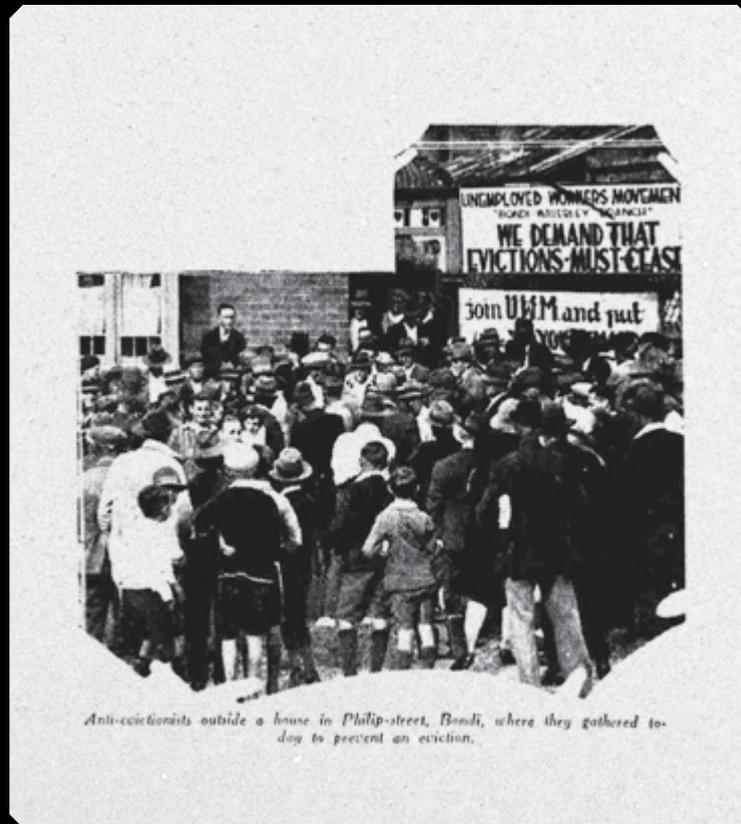


Figure 5. A crowd of several hundred people gathered outside a house in Bondi to prevent the eviction of its occupants in April 1931. Notices chalking on footpaths all over Waverley and Bondi had encouraged people to take part in the demonstration. Photographer unknown, Sun (Sydney), April 14, 1931.

order that the Communists' messages represented.³¹ Nevertheless, despite the prosecutions and the sometimes vehement objections to their signs, Communists and other political activists continued to use the pavement as a site for broadcasting their agendas. The reason was evident: their publicity worked.

EFFECTIVENESS

In the early days of the Depression, *Labor Call* (the official organ of the Political Labor Council of Victoria) reported that the unemployed of Melbourne were holding meetings in increasing numbers, noting that 'The mode of advertising is per medium of chalk on the footpaths, and it seems fairly effective'.³² The subsequent irruption of pavement writing across Australia attests to its effectiveness, or at least to a belief in its effectiveness. It was an advertising tactic that had been used for decades by theatres and small retailers but activists, especially those from the Communist Party and the United Workers Movement (UWM), took it to extremes.

As a communication tool it was cheap and required little more than a box of chalk³³ or a bucket of whitewash and willing bodies. It did not encroach on anyone's private property. It was very visible publicly, especially in the days when people walked a great deal more in their everyday lives than they do today. 'If this sort of thing extends', quipped one newspaper writer, 'the poor pedestrian who now walks

to and from work to save tram fares will get some little entertainment to lighten his weary tramp'.³⁴

In many cases it was the only way that activists could make written announcements. A defendant who had been caught chalking a notice about a May Day meeting in Fremantle was reported as declaring, 'The notice was not any different to other notices like "wet paint". My ad. was written in chalk. Further all other advertisements are blocked by the Capitalistic [sic] Press'.³⁵

An added feature of footpath writing was that it facilitated a quick response in urgent situations. Years after the event, Adam Ogston, a local Communist Party official at the time, recalled one of the eviction battles he took part in:

I was sitting in the Party office in Granville [a Sydney suburb] with Angus [Ogston] and Jock [Croft] when word came in that a woman and her children were to be evicted that afternoon from a house in Blaxland St. Immediately we went to the scene, where the tenant told us that she was expecting the bailiff and police at any moment. We had very little time, so we got out with a biscuit tin as a drum, and around the streets we went, calling upon everybody to come to the eviction and chalking notices on the footpaths. In no time, a large crowd had gathered at the house (Ogston, 1960: 6).



Figure 6. The infamous 'Siege of Union Street' anti-eviction riot took place at this house in Newtown in 1931. Notices chalked on footpaths in the preceding days would have been similar to those on the front wall of the house. Photographer unknown, picture attributed to the Justice and Police Museum, Sydney Living Museums.

Many authors have written about the Depression-era eviction battles but few, if any, have acknowledged the role that footpath writing played in those events.³⁶ With the economic crisis worsening, the numbers of unemployed rapidly rising, and the relief coupon system not providing any cash for rent, many working class tenants fell behind in their rent payments. Evictions became an everyday occurrence in cities around Australia. The UWM was the leader in resisting the practice of eviction, adopting tactics that ranged from deputations to landlords and agents to vandalising houses that had been evacuated. During 1930 and 1931, there was a series of confrontations, where UWM members would occupy houses whose tenants had been served a notice to vacate, and use footpath chalking to mobilise large numbers of people from the surrounding district. Bailiffs would be met in the street by crowds numbering in the hundreds. Sometimes these measures were enough to avert an eviction. One such event in East Sydney was reported in the *Daily Telegraph*:

Declaring that the Italian tenants will be evicted only "over our dead bodies", a large party of unemployed have garrisoned a house in Chapel Street, Surry Hills. Mr. S. Papatonian, with his wife and ten-months-old baby, were threatened with eviction yesterday morning; but news of their plight was chalked on

paths in the vicinity. When bailiffs arrived, the narrow alley was packed with people, and the door was guarded. Police were sent to the scene to prevent trouble; but, it is stated, they made no attempt to assist the eviction; it was not their job.³⁷

Reporting on the same event, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that,

Streets in the vicinity were disfigured with chalked notices appealing to the unemployed to rally around the home and prevent the bailiffs from executing the eviction notice [...] The bailiffs came, and went away [...] A roster was then prepared, and the defending forces were divided into shifts. They will guard the house until the matter is settled to their satisfaction.³⁸

By mid-1931 the situation had escalated in Sydney after police, no longer merely watchful observers, were enlisted to enforce evictions. Confrontations became battlegrounds with busloads of police brought in. Stones and missiles were thrown and shots fired. The most infamous of these riots happened in Newtown and came to be known as the Siege of Union Street. A hostile crowd in the street, once again drawn by chalk notices (which were permitted by Newtown Council), shouted and threw stones as a fierce battle took place inside the house between police and occupiers. Injuries, arrests, and a court case

ensued, but this was to be the last anti-eviction demonstration in Sydney. Within a month, an announcement was made that the state government would introduce anti-eviction legislation.³⁹ Pavement signs had been an integral part of a grassroots campaign that forced a change in the laws on eviction.

The eviction crowds, sometimes numbering a thousand or more, were tangible evidence of the effectiveness of footpath notices. No doubt similar notices raised attendances at other kinds of meetings and rallies, and played a part in recruiting new members to the Communist Party and the AWM. The chalking of multiple political signs and slogans would have had less tangible outcomes as well, including the affirmation of allegiances amongst those who wrote them, and a demonstration to the wider community of the political groups' strength. Conversely, they might have heightened the antagonism of those opposed to Communism. Other kinds of pavement notices, such as handwritten advertisements for ice cream, milkshakes, euchre parties, and picture shows probably brought positive results, their immediacy and personal touch likely to make them more appealing to locals than professional signwriting or mass-produced posters.

CONCLUSION

Pavement graffiti altered the appearance of streets in Depression-era Australia. By 1931 there had been an immense surge in the number of unauthorised messages, handwritten in chalk or whitewash, on the footpaths and roads of cities, suburbs, and towns. To a large extent this visual change was brought about by the struggle to bring about *social* change, with the Australian Communist Party and the Unemployed Workers Movement incorporating the pavement into their radical campaigns.

Until that time, shopkeepers' footpath advertisements had normally been tolerated and election notices were periodically expected, but the Communists' efforts emboldened others to make more use of public thoroughfares as noticeboards. Underlying all this textual activity, whether it involved political slogans, or announcements about cheap bread, or evangelical admonishments, was the assumption that pavements belonged to the public and were – or should be – available for public communication. Messy footpaths were manifestations of desperate times when nothing was normal.

Those ephemeral messages on dusty pavements were conspicuous, newsworthy and, in some cases at least, effective. They represented a threat to both civic orderliness and social order. They took up the time of local councils, police, and the courts. Consequently, they cannot be regarded as incidental curios or mere footnotes to history. Rather, they were integral to the story of public life in Australia during the turbulent years of the Great Depression.

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- 1 Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies was an early adopter. When supporting the continuing ban on Brendan Behan's *The Borstal Boy* in 1959, he remarked that it seemed to him the book 'was almost a collection of what the Italians called "graffiti" – that was to say, things written on walls in certain places by adolescents'. ('No intervention to release banned books', *Canberra Times*, February 19, 1959: 12)
- 2 I am indebted to Trove, the resource managed by the National Museum of Australia that connects and makes accessible digital collections from many Australian sources.
- 3 The term 'pavement' can be problematic in that usage varies across English-speaking countries and even within these countries. Paved footways laid down beside roadways, for example, are usually called pavements in Britain, sidewalks in North America, and footpaths in Australia. Because my source material comes from Australian publications I have generally followed them in using the terms 'footpath' for paved footways, 'road' or 'roadway' for paved surfaces for horse and vehicular traffic, and 'pavement' as a collective term that refers to either of these.
- 4 'Local Government. The writing on the footpath', *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 30, 1931: 4. The term 'new chalk era' is a reminder that Rennie Ellis described the 1970s as a time of the 'great graffiti renaissance'. Rennie Ellis and Ian Turner's books *Australian graffiti* (1975) and *Australian Graffiti Revisited* (1979) were among the very few projects to photographically document the graffiti of that time. Ellis's pictures mostly show political and protest graffiti on walls, but there are a few examples of pavement graffiti as well.
- 5 'Sydney day by day', *Argus* (Melbourne), July 31, 1931: 6.
- 6 Many authors, including myself, have reflected on Stace's legacy. See, for instance, Hicks, M. 2011, 'Surface reflections: personal graffiti on the pavement', *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 1(3): 365-382; Hicks, M. 2015, 'Words of regret', *Sturgeon*, 3: 48-53.
- 7 For example, covering a murder story a reporter noticed that '[b]efore the house, on the asphalt footpath, some wandering evangelist had chalked the text: "Your sins shall find you out."' ('Saw brute husband shot dead. Surry Hills tragedy', *Sun* (Sydney), October 18, 1931: 1).
- 8 See Young, 2020.
- 9 'Writing on footpaths. Its effect on cows', *Gosford Times and Wyong District Advocate*, March 29, 1934: 4; 'Writing on footpaths: Communists go to gaol', *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 20, 1931: 7; 'Chalking on footpath. Offenders hard to catch', *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, March 2, 1933: 2; 'North Illawarra Council', *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, July 17, 1931: 5; 'Horses shy at signs', *Mirror* (Perth), June 10, 1933: 9.
- 10 'Chalking footpaths', *Sun* (Sydney), March 15, 1933: 15.
- 11 'Local Government. The writing on the footpath', *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 30, 1931: 4.
- 12 'Of making "laws" there is no end!', *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List* (Sydney), September 7, 1933: 4.
- 13 In Australia today, as in many other countries, unauthorised and intentional graffiti of all kinds continues to be regarded as a punishable offence. Under the New South Wales Graffiti Control Act 2008, for example, police carry out enforcement and prosecution but local governments are responsible for graffiti removal. In their justifications for removal, local councils refer to graffiti as having a negative impact on community amenity, including pollution, visual pollution, damage to property and perceptions of neglect, poor safety and increased crime (Inner West Graffiti Management; City of Sydney Graffiti Management Policy). However, in 2014 a clause was added to the Graffiti Control Act explicitly permitting the marking of public footpaths or public pavements in chalk. In arguing for the amendment, parliamentarian Ian Cole invoked Arthur Stace. Some Christian groups refer to this clause as 'Arthur's Law' (New South Wales Graffiti Control Act 2008 – Section 4 Marking premises or property – Subsection (5); Williams & Meyers 2017: 266).
- 14 'Footpath writing. Police tread on Council's corns. Aldermen antagonistic', *Mirror* (Perth), April 21, 1934: 16.
- 15 'Defacing Lithgow footpath', *Lithgow Mercury*, November 5, 1931: 2; 'Footpath chalkers', *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 6, 1931: 6.
- 16 'Municipality of Lithgow. Warning', *Lithgow Mercury*, November 6, 1931: 3.
- 17 'Footpath advertising. Communists want it. Council to again consider', *Lithgow Mercury*, November 18, 1931: 4; 'Chalking footpath', *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, November 19, 1931: 6.
- 18 'Mock trial causes amusement, raises money', *Lithgow Mercury*, November 19, 1931: 4.
- 19 'Wrote on footpath. Man fined at South Melbourne', *Argus* (Melbourne), April 28, 1934: 23 (In the same article the Inspector for South Melbourne Council is reported as saying that the offence of writing on footpaths was so prevalent that the Council had offered a reward for the detection of offenders.)
- 20 'Mustn't Write On Footpaths!', *Mirror* (Perth), December 12, 1931: 18.
- 21 See Laughton, 1932: 194; Beaumont, 2022: 189. In Australian pre-decimal currency in Australia £1 (one pound) was worth 20/- (twenty shillings), so 30/- equalled one pound and ten shillings (or three dollars in decimal currency).
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- 24 "'Take the days out." "When do I start." May Day aftermath', *Fremantle Advocate*, July 6, 1933: 4.
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- 26 'Writing on roads. Two Cardiff men fined 2/-. Shire prosecution', *Newcastle Sun*, October 26, 1932: 6.
- 27 *Casino and Kyogle Courier and North Coast Advertiser*, May 20, 1931: 3; *Northern Star* (Lismore), May 19, 1931: 4; *The Gundagai Times and Tumut, Adelong and Murrumbidgee District Advertiser*, May 8, 1931: 2; *The Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, May 12, 1931: 2.
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- 29 'Random notes. (By the Man in the Street). Footpath chalking', *Lithgow Mercury*, April 29, 1932: 2.
- 30 'Vandals in our midst', *Propeller* (Hurstville), May 2, 1930: 6.
- 31 In his analysis of political trials of Australian communist and leftist defendants from 1930-39 (which also happens to be based on searching newspaper reports), Douglas (2002) does not specifically mention pavement writing but, in his table of offences, chalking may well be included in his category 'Bill-posting, leafletting'. Douglas found that magistrates (that is, court officials who dealt summarily with minor crimes like bill-posting or pavement defacement) 'sometimes made their distaste for communism clear', especially in the early 1930s, whereas judges presiding over jury trials 'proved to be masters of decontextualisation, with their judgments impressive for their capacity to transform politics into law'.
- 32 'Topical', *Labor Call* (Melbourne), March 27, 1930: 7.
- 33 In 1932 a box containing 150 sticks of white chalk crayons cost 2/3 (two shillings and three pence) ('For sale', *West Australian* (Perth), May 27, 1932: 21).
- 34 'Pavement propaganda', *Murrumbidgee Irrigator* (Leeton), August 18, 1931: 4.
- 35 "'Take the days out." "When do I start." May Day aftermath', *Fremantle Advocate*, July 6, 1933: 4.
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The Space
in Between
the
Poetics
of
Process
of
Oleg
Kuznetsov

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This paper is a meditation on the importance of artistic labour and the processes of creating over the final artistic 'product' in the work of artist Oleg Kuznetsov (Moscow, 1993; referred to here on out as 'OK', as per his tag). In recent years, OK has expanded from graffiti across different media and canvases including printing charcoal on snow, painting air, non-additive collaging, sketching, and private and public interventions from his own body to entire buildings, although his work is very much underpinned by many of the principles hailing from his street art origins. Such notions of artistic freedom, ownership (or lack thereof), ephemerality, art as invisible labour, and the intimacy between artist and creation as being central to its value, all provide and constitute some of the poetics of the space between the moment of each work's conceptualisation and completion that will be explored here. In keeping with OK's practice and the importance he places on incidental aesthetics and happenings that enrich his processes, the thread of this article weaves through his varied experiences and motivations during these moments and spaces in time, thought and making, as opposed to being an article as 'final product' that draws various lines of argument to a singular conclusion.

An illuminating portal into OK's practice is a hitherto unknown anecdote from what is perhaps his most known project to date, 'Kurskaya Wall', because it synthesises so much of his *modus operandi*. While hiding in plain sight under the guise of being a council worker buffing over graffiti on a wall at Moscow Kursky railway station in May 2015 (Figure 1), OK was approached by an onlooker suspicious at his use of bright, unmatched colours for the task, rather than the staid greys and beiges of usual council fare. Believing he had indeed caught out an artist at work, the

man asked OK if he would paint over his initials if he added them to the wall, and to his surprise, OK kept his cover – at once street art, performance, and appropriated labour – and did just that. However, this led him to feel that for removing the physical manifestation of this man's energy, he owed it to him to revive it elsewhere. This occasion came when OK moved to his residency at St. Petersburg's Street Art Museum, where he reproduced the man's tag in the space's 'hall of fame', proclaiming it was that of a famous yet mysterious Moscow artist.



Figure 1. Buffing by Oleg Kuznetsov on the Kurskaya Wall (photographs taken over time). Moscow, Russia, 2015. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



Figure 2. An analogue photo from the series 'Graffiti Pieces I Never Did'. Moscow, Russia, 2021. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

It is important to note that the stress here is on the energy, the process, the in between rather than on the tag itself, that being a final product. It is the significance of the former over the latter that underpins so much of OK's philosophy and intentions. Likewise, there is the 'why' of the Kurskaya Wall project, which he sums up rather as a 'why not?': nowadays it isn't something out of the ordinary to see people painting in the streets, so the power of illegality – and often protest – that graffiti once had, has been largely diluted. On the other hand, especially in Moscow where graffiti is usually painted over by the council within a day, indeed why not subvert this power structure, and appropriate the cover-up process into an artistic action in itself? The project became a layered, constantly evolving process, with unagreed collaborations from painters who worked over OK's buffs, that he would then buff again, in different colours and to fit over the new shapes. All that is left now are photographs documenting the wall's changing surface throughout the process, but neither the photographs nor the wall are the artwork. Instead, the artwork is lost, because

it was the actions and the energy. Quite the opposite to a gallery show that a visitor came to, it was a show that came to the 'visitor': the passer-by in the street, who would not have intended to find art intervening in their journey at that particular location.

It is often through photography that a great deal of OK's graffiti work – or another process in action – is captured. There has been growing conversation in the art and heritage community in recent years around the ethics, needs, and possibilities for the physical conservation of street art (MacDowall, 2006; Merrill, 2014; Hansen, 2018), but in all cases – particularly in contested spaces – the photograph is of course the most widespread tool when it comes to preservation (Blanché, 2018). However, it is worth mentioning that although OK takes photographs of his graffiti, he doesn't see himself as a photographer, nor the photographs as a product. Instead, it is just another process to form 'a document of the appearance of something, a reconstruction of an environment now deconstructed' (OK interview, 2022).

A series of analogue photographs of bare walls constitutes 'Graffiti Pieces I Never Did' (2021). These are essentially images of absence, records of something as transcendental as thought and intention rather than the visual (Figure 2). OK imbues in them a sense of being an in between space, at once evoking melancholy, while waiting for something that will not come – or even if it does, that will likely be removed immediately, as per a Moscow law that owners will be fined if they do not remove graffiti from their buildings (Bacchi, 2019). Of course, the concept is very much about the inspiration to do something and the opportunity not taken, a nod to the common thought among street artists before a large, blank wall that 'this would be such a cool place to paint', but often never getting around to it. By documenting these spaces, OK converts this sentiment into something intentional, describing it almost as 'striving to fail' (OK interview, 2022), whereby he has noted the blank building, but chooses instead to immortalise it in this peak state of imminency, leaving the action unfulfilled.

The series '1/36' (ongoing since 2019), on the other hand, captures an intimate process, with the camera literally between the artist and the wall, yet save for a few images in which we see a spray can, there is again an absence of concrete information and situation (Figure 3). Taken at night, on 36-frame photographic film, these were blind photographs for both OK and the subjects, with no viewfinder, checking or deleting, no flattering angles, posing, or direct looks. Such an intimacy is created that one can only imagine the power each of these moments held, what was going through the mind of each of the artists, what they did immediately before and after. The series succeeds at leaving the viewer more intrigued by these questions than over what the artists' final creation might have been. In 'Study for Crumpled Spray Can' (2019–present), however, we move from a powerful absence to a somewhat pathetic presence (Figure 4). These drawings are a personal comment on how the spray can as a medium lost its power for OK, signifying a move into charcoal – which, almost mockingly, is what he used to make them – and what he referred to as 'breaking the habit [of graffitiing]' (OK interview, 2022). Also of note is the intimacy afforded by the direct contact of charcoal to the paper, as opposed to the space between implement and surface in graffiti, although OK certainly explored and stretched that concept until he found the space in between, whereby charcoal would reach its surface in particles or through an intermediary surface, rather than through direct, drawn contact.



Figure 3. A selection of analogue photographs from the series '1/36' (2019–present). Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

One such example is a part of the immersive installation 'Who Lives in My Wardrobe?' (2020). Rare in his portfolio for being an interior-based piece, it consisted of OK's bedroom space behind wardrobes that he had converted into a Narniaesque entrance, and on the bed an imprint of his naked body formed by smearing himself in charcoal dust and laying down on the sheets (**Figure 5**), the result being reminiscent of David Hammons' body print works. OK then invited people to come and visit the work in his shared flat when the time came to move, allowing visitors into his space between wardrobe and wall for one evening only. Also carrying forth the very Soviet-era concept of apartment exhibitions (albeit without the political reason for a clandestine event), it was even more intimate, with the sensual imprint of his body at its most private and vulnerable. For 'Snow Prints' (2019–present), he laid items including a jacket, a broom, or himself, onto snow to make an imprint, before using sandpaper to grate charcoal onto it, creating something of a reverse X-ray-type image (**Figure 6**). Unlike a solid wall where there is a chance (however small) that graffiti will survive somehow, nature dictates that a work on snow is destined to disappear every time. This inevitability, along with the fact that the objects themselves are rather mundane, is perhaps one of the most perfect representations of the 'process-over-product' mantra of their maker.

A similar sensation, albeit a very different expression, might be ignited by his work 'The Lawn' (2020), which consisted of OK painting grass green (**Figure 7**). While 'Snow Prints' would disappear due to nature, 'The Lawn' was almost invisible (not quite a perfect shade-match) from the start, with the long-lasting thick paint undoubtedly ultimately defeating the patch of nature acting as its canvas. Certainly a futile activity, it was actually the reperforming of a task that OK had carried out while on military service, when, for lack of more productive ideas, his commander insisted he paint the grass so as to be busy with something in case the army general were to pay a visit. Alongside other seemingly banal tasks such as making the bed

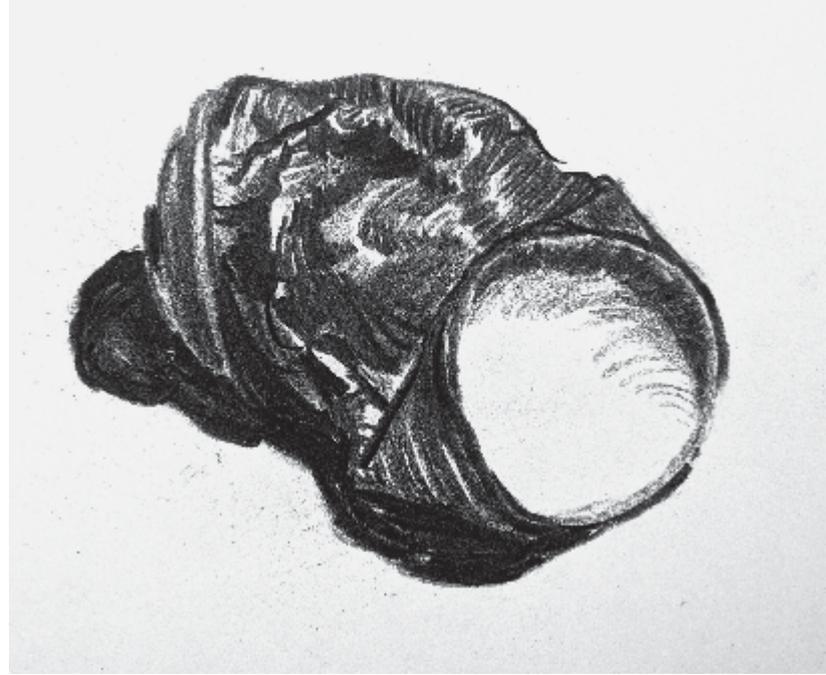


Figure 4. 'Study for Crumpled Spray Can', charcoal on paper (2019–present). Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



Figure 5. Photograph documenting the immersive installation 'Who Lives in My Wardrobe?', charcoal imprinted on textile. Moscow, Russia, 2020. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



Figure 6. Jacket from 'Snow Prints', powdered charcoal on snow. Moscow, Russia, 2021. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

perfectly without a crease, OK saw a correlation between this service and what art can also be at times – what it can mean for artists who feel a need to always produce, i.e., art ‘just for its own sake, with no function’ (OK interview, 2022). However, through his performative recontextualisation, OK has also seemingly liberated the task from its own banality, appropriating it in an artistic context. By remoulding an authoritarian order devised within the framework of discipline and service, into an act of free will and subversion with a touch of ridicule, he has taken back the power in somewhat similar fashion to when he took on the role of the council worker in ‘Kurskaya Wall’.

In short, through art, OK has made meaning out of an enforced ‘duty’ that for him had no significance, out of the ownership of his time, and even out of putting into practice his ideas about simply making art without meaning (as paradoxical as it may seem here). It was Joseph Kosuth who affirmed that ‘art is making meaning’, and one can also perceive a sense of his great ‘One and Three Chairs’ here, with OK’s original task, his reenactment, and its documentation on his website taking the seats of Kosuth’s real chair, image, and descriptor. OK in fact directly references this in his ‘Sketch to the Work #1’ (2018), a coloured pencil drawing of his degree certificate from the British Higher School of Art & Design (Figure 8). He exhibited it in his graduation show, describing how alongside the original, the image – albeit not a perfect digital copy – also constitutes a description of itself, leading him to conclude, ‘I have one and three diplomas’ (OK interview, 2022). The final product of the degree, symbolised by the certificate, and even the art show, did not matter to him in the way that the actual experience had, yet he understood that to his parents these were likely the key indicators of his success. Drawing his certificate to display in the exhibition was therefore another way that his art was a process in navigating the space in between his convictions and those of others in a poetic and sensitive manner.



Figure 7. Photograph documenting Oleg Kuznetsov working on ‘The Lawn’. St Petersburg, Russia, 2020. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

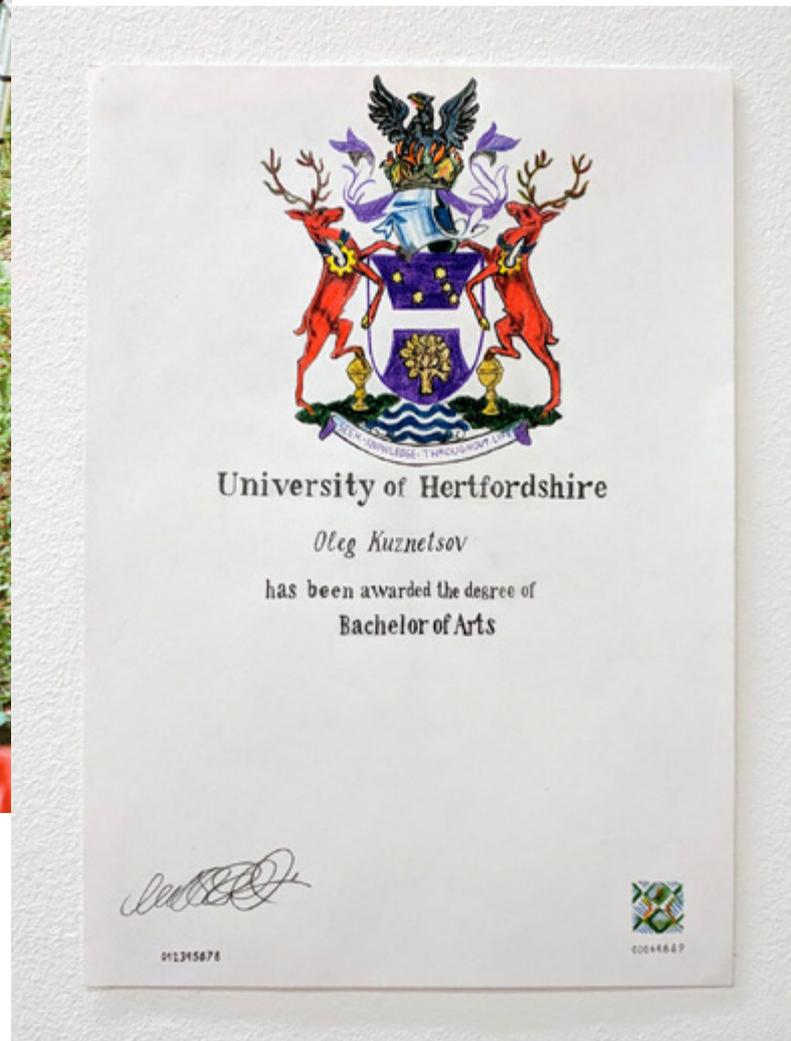


Figure 8. ‘Sketch to the Work #1’, colour pencils on paper. Moscow, Russia, 2018. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

OK's scepticism of the art-school-exhibition format stems from his view that these events are 'seen through the prism of studying art, rather than a demonstration of independent practices' (OK interview, 2022). Although he has not stated this, it is certainly possible to identify correlations between the graduation show and another typology of display and gathering relevant to his field: the street art festival. One is normally a requirement and the other optional, yet both offer a degree of public exposure and association (to an institution, other artists, an artform, or a place) that might render the decision not to participate a personal and professional disservice. However, especially contentious for artistic subcultures, these events also seek or serve to organise, categorise, and legalise them. Street art has fast become an accepted – and often commissioned – force, harnessed in many major cities across the world by real-estate developers, politicians, and projects seeking to 'beautify' public spaces for any number of good, nefarious, or obscure intentions², no less so in Russia under the state's policy of *blagoustroistvo*, literally translatable as the 'construction of a blessing' (Murawski, 2018). While in many ways this beautification – and essentially, gentrification – of outdoor areas may align them with global visions of sustainable urban paradises, or make them more attractive to certain segments of local and visiting populations, it also displaces many others and destroys grass-roots habitats due to decisions being forced down from above as to how to treat public spaces that belong to both everyone and no one.

OK's intervention at Carte Blanche, a street art festival held in Yekaterinburg in July 2018, brought to the surface these problematics. Organised by Russian street artists of near-celebrity status such as Slava Ptrk, permission had not been requested from the authorities in line with the intention that the festival be based in the true illegal roots of street art. Nonetheless, the event did not come under any fire for this (perhaps partly because Yekaterinburg is one of the most street-art friendly of all Russian cities), meaning that it might not be preposterous to suggest that Carte Blanche may even have inadvertently complemented *blagoustroistvo* for how it illustrated the city with figurative murals and photogenic text art statements, all mounted perfectly within their wall canvases. OK headed to the festival in its last days and contributed by illegibly scribbling over parts of these fresh pieces, before having his photograph taken next to them, wearing a mask of his own face in a nod to how underground graffiti artists usually conceal their identities (Figure 9). At first applauded as a radical response, by some scribbles later, it had angered many of the festival artists, who called him to their hostel, where they did not allow him to leave for the whole night while they demanded explanations and that he pay damages for his interventions on their works. To defend private ownership of a work that many might say should be public property from the moment the spray hits the wall (Bonadio, 2018), seems in itself a bizarre stance from supporters of graffiti's illegality. More than three years after this edition of Carte Blanche, Slava Ptrk wrote a long post on Facebook to publicly apologise for this reaction, in which he explained:

Illegality for us was and is not a goal, but a means; a way to do what we want and where we want. [...] The fact is that the artistic statements already created seemed to Oleg not radical enough and he decided to make truly 'illegal illegal street art', which fully corresponds to the maximalist precepts of the festival manifesto [...], testing the boundaries of what was permitted, our ideology and our strength. And we must admit, unfortunately, we did not pass this test at that moment [...] [as] preserved for posterity on a video shot by Oleg (you can find it on his website). [...] In the morning, Oleg left Yekaterinburg, and in a few days the festival participants and I returned all the works to their original state. Together with the other organizers of Carte Blanche, the (incorrect) decision was made to 'erase' this episode and any mention of Oleg from the history of the festival. With this post, I publicly apologise to Oleg Kuznetsov and admit that I was wrong in the situation that has developed on Carte Blanche [...], this cold war between two artists without purpose and meaning is not needed (I hope) by anyone. Artists should not fight each other, as Malevich said.

Mistakes must be acknowledged.
Freedom of expression is above all.
Censorship is not allowed.³

OK has also at times made interventions to the works of other artists, that likely happened without comment as they were not fresh pieces made by festival colleagues. These come in the form of his stick-figure logo (composed of his initials) which crops up seeming to surrender before – or perhaps attempting to stand strong and block – an advancing tank or soldier with his bayonet raised. Subtitled 'Collaborationism' (Figures 10 & 11), these unagreed collaborations with other artists have added new meanings and context. Graffiti truly is a world of layers (Andron, 2019): of buffs, collabs, interventions, and the erosion of surfaces revealing a new canvas beneath or perhaps reaching their limits, that cover up as much as they are on the top. Sometimes OK's graffiti is so high, low, small, or buried that no one can see it. The covered or hidden is another key facet within OK's practice: after hiding in plain sight as a council worker at the Kurskaya Wall or behind a mask of his own face, painting in little-seen locations such as an old train carriage near his dacha, or making small marks in hidden corners, for 'Underground' (2020), OK dug a hole in a field, sprayed his tag on one of its muddy walls, and filled it in again (Figure 12). The question of whether it is possible to make graffiti where nobody sees it – quite literally in this case because it is buried, and by now has more than likely been completely disintegrated by the wet earth – makes us reflect once again on whether graffiti equates to its product or its process, all the while juxtaposing labour against results.



Figure 9. OK with a mask of his own face in front of his intervention to the work 'Make Russia Grey Again' by Slava Ptrk at the street art festival Carte Blanche. Yekaterinburg, Russia, 2018. Photograph ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



Figure 10 & 11. Two examples of 'Collaborationism': OK's interventions to the works of other artists (the tank and the soldier). Moscow, Russia, 2020. Photographs ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



Figure 12. OK filling a hole in the ground he himself had dug as part of 'Underground'. Moscow, Russia, 2020. Photograph ©Vladislav Usik.



Another subtle, near invisible, refilling of a space constitutes the work 'Self-Collage' (2021), except this time OK is in the centre of town, intrigued by the communal practice of workers. Just as Kirill Kto was cutting eye shapes out of banners a couple of generations of Moscow street artists prior, or even before that, when Brad Downey cut a heart out of tarpaulin covering scaffolding on an Aberdeen building for 'Ladder Stick-Up' (2007), OK cuts shapes out of material covering building renovation works (**Figures 13 & 14**). Usually circles, he puts them back, albeit rotated slightly, carrying out double the labour of the worker whose job it is simply to patch up holes. It is a delicate play of poetics in public space, a lesson that adornment doesn't have to come from big, bright, commissioned murals, or through adding something to make a collage. These interventions might be read also as a metaphor for the economy of sustainability, the accessibility of art, and of making something out of what you already have, even just by viewing it from a different angle and refilling a space with something that was already there.

Figure 13 & 14. 'A Circle, a Parallelepiped, and a Rectangle' and 'Two Semicircles' from 'Self-Collage' Moscow, Russia, 2021. Photographs ©Oleg Kuznetsov.



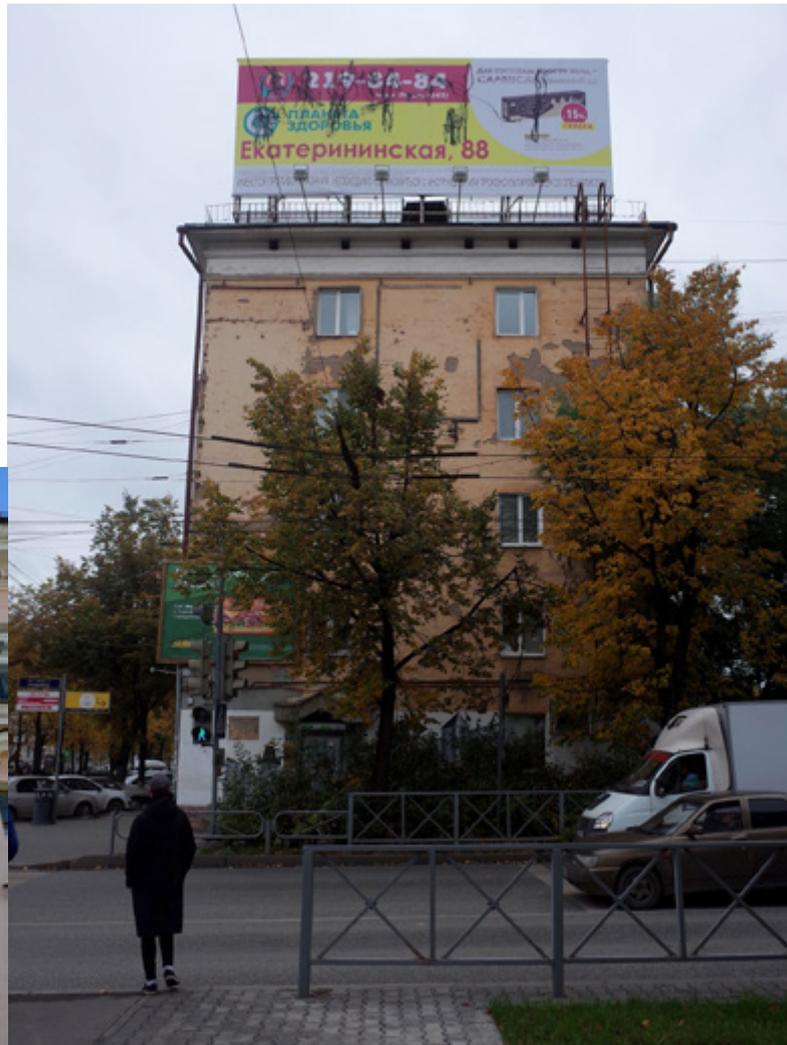


Figure 15 & 16. 'Scribblings' in Yekaterinburg, Russia, 2020. Photographs ©Oleg Kuznetsov.

Also oddly poetic are his 'Scribblings' (2017–2020), sprayings on walls that appear rather like the process of trying to get a ballpoint pen working at huge dimensions, at others resembling signatures or doodled diagrams crossed out, or simple tags repeated and tangled in bunches and bowers (Figures 15 & 16). These non-linear, non-verbal musings are an intriguing contrast to the text art of some of OK's (near-contemporaries, such as Tima Radya, who plants poetic or philosophical phrases on buildings and billboards – spaces that in the Soviet period were often dedicated for state-mandated slogans of iron encouragement, or both then and now to advertising – often with loaded meanings but that nonetheless can also be enjoyed superficially. Appearing mostly in similar places to these, OK's scribblings seem to be unfinished, yet also unstarted; the physical production (that never culminates in a product) of a moment perhaps in thought, or of boredom and distraction, of connecting with space, or of whatever comes with feeling the nozzle under one's fingers.

About the time of writing, OK says, 'it's really hard to think of your own stuff right now, but if you experience creative energy, you can't allow yourself to do something else. I don't want to become an artist who just produces – it's not important. I don't consider myself a political artist, but sometimes there's a really thin line and it's very hard to make something poetic and indirect to the topic you're touching upon.' He may indeed not be overtly political, but there is a great deal of what one could certainly interpret as socio-political thought, action, and reaction surrounding his practice, whether it is invisible labour with no discernible result, presence in and ownership of the commons, communal work, reclaiming power and reminding us all what graffiti used to be and now ever more rarely is, i.e., exerting the autonomy to do things because one wants to do them and without having to find a functional or aesthetic point to them within society's norms.

OK's work is a world of spaces in between, not of the empty kind, but rather that 'thin line' underscoring the poetry of unique moments, and the places where processes and actions play out. The space between a spray can and a surface, between an artist and a wall, street art and photography, original and reproduction, text and scribbling, reality and documentation, one layer and the next, the ephemeral and the eternal, showing and concealing, private and public, absence and filling, solo and collaboration, illegality and conformism, the power of the people and the power of authority. Some of these might appear to simply be polar opposites, or different states, but in OK's practice, so much happens between these spaces that most of us would not even stop to think about. Yet there are occasional suspicious onlookers who stop to watch people paint walls, take note of the spaces they will never paint, or ponder all manner of other things of which we just don't see the product. It is just a part of process: it is OK.

All figures courtesy of okuznetsov.com

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- 1 See also *Nuart Journal*, 1(1): 65-80, where OK shared images of this work and his statement, as well as *Kurskaya Wall* (Kuznetsov, 2019).
- 2 Examples can be found all over the world, for example in the USA, see: www.forbes.com/sites/wendyaltschuler/2020/03/23/americas-mural-magic-how-street-art-can-transform-communities-and-help-businesses/?sh=3c9d3ec41739; in Brazil: blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2017/04/20/graffiti-vs-the-beautiful-city-urban-policy-and-artistic-resistance-in-sao-paulo/, and in Iran: ajammc.com/2014/03/30/a-mural-erased-urban-art-mashhad/
- 3 Slava Ptrk in his Facebook post of December 31, 2021, written in Russian originally with translation provided by Facebook and sense-checked by OK.

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Can Copyright Stop Politicians from Exploiting Street Art?

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Combo v Jean-Luc Mélenchon before the Court of Paris

INTRODUCTION

COMBO Culture Kidnapper is a Paris-based wheat paste artist known for creating and placing subversive pieces across France. His artworks adorn the edifices of iconic locations and use popular symbols to catch the attention of the public. In March 2016 COMBO placed a large wheat paste on the wall of the Gustave Flaubert College in Paris depicting a representation of Marianne, the national personification of the French Republic. By taking an image which evokes the French Revolution, he was able to hijack the message for his own purposes. COMBO's Marianne represented a young woman with a bare right breast, carrying the French tricolour flag on her left shoulder, accompanied by the caption 'Nous voulons la justice' ('We want justice'). His intention was to reclaim this celebrated image from the far right.¹

COMBO has created a series of racially diverse La Marianne artworks in Paris. The artwork in the present case is *La Marianne Asiatique* (The Asian Marianne) which was produced in 2017 at Rue du Temple located a mere few steps from Place de la Republique.² To the disdain of the artist, *La Marianne Asiatique* was featured in several videos promoting the 2017 presidential campaign of French leftwing politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his political party La France Insoumise (France Unbowed). Additionally, COMBO's wheatpaste was incorporated into a video posted by Mélenchon on Facebook and YouTube in March 2020.³ Such videos were also published in France's oldest daily newspaper Le Figaro. In all the videos in question *La Marianne Asiatique's* image is taken from the shoulders upwards, or simply displaying the face of the figure. Additionally, in more than one case the artwork was falsely attributed to an unknown 'styx'.⁴

COMBO responded in June 2020 making the statement: 'since Jean-Luc has used my work without asking me, I contacted his team via my lawyer to ask them to remove my fresco from their clips'.⁵ In a letter requesting Mélenchon and La France Insoumise to cease the exploitation of his work, the artist asked for a sum of 100,000 euros in compensation for damages to his reputation.⁶ Then, the artist's grapple for control over his work took an unfortunate turn in the courts. In September 2020, taking the view that Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party had infringed his copyright, COMBO brought a further claim of 200,000 euros on the basis of infringement to his economic and moral rights.⁷ Yet, in January 2021 the Court of Paris rejected all his requests and dismissed the action.⁸

BACKGROUND AND THE PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE COURT

COMBO's reinterpretations of the Marianne image have the specific purpose of defying rightwing ideology. The artist was reported as saying:

*'I have a blonde Marianne, one who is Asian and one with a darker look, this is our national symbol of the freedom that helps the people. We will recover this pure symbol so as not to leave it in the hands of the extreme right because they use our flag and Marianne to make France something that it is not.'*⁹

As mentioned, *La Marianne Asiatique* was placed in a variety of promotional videos for Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, suggesting an even closer, and for COMBO, uncomfortable affiliation. Indeed, the artist expressed his aversion to having his piece placed in such an overtly political context.

But, not so contrastingly, during the French 2017 Presidential campaign Jean-Luc Mélenchon was known for clashes with his far-right political rival Marine Le Pen who espouses anti-globalist and anti-immigrant views.¹⁰ Ultimately, as we will see, the fact that Mélenchon has political views similar to those of COMBO contributed to the artist's loss in the legal action, especially as far as the moral right of integrity is concerned.

The Court of Paris first considered the politician's personal responsibility since the contested videos were posted by a social media manager affiliated with La France Insoumise and Mélenchon. It was held that Mélenchon himself could in fact be considered as the publisher of said videos since the person entrusted to conduct the publication evidently did not act independently and outside of his control.¹¹ Also, the Court had initially discussed whether COMBO was entitled to make a claim under the French Intellectual Property Code. This was quickly established because COMBO provided evidence which proved his ownership and that the work had been created by him under his pseudonym.¹²

Interestingly, it was questioned on Mélenchon's behalf whether the work bore the imprint of COMBO's personality since Marianne was such a well-known cultural staple. More specifically, it was argued that any modern representation draws from 'a common fund' which is not subject to copyright protection.¹³ The argument (pushed by Mélenchon and his party) that the artwork lacked originality (the most important requirement for attracting copyright) was a bold one and it is certainly reassuring that the court did not deign to justify it. If we are to imagine a legal landscape in which any work encompassing a popular figure is immediately relegated to the public domain, this would have a negative impact not only on the proliferation of creativity but would also stifle freedom of expression. The Court of Paris accepted the artist's point that he had made specific aesthetic choices and recognised that *La Marianne Asiatique* was unique in comparison to other representations of Marianne.¹⁴



Stills from a 2020 election video by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France insoumise featuring COMBO's *La Marianne Asiatique*.

NO INFRINGEMENT OF COMBO'S MORAL RIGHTS

Centrally, COMBO alleged that the appearance of *La Marianne Asiatique* in Mélenchon's campaign videos constituted an infringement of his moral rights of attribution and integrity.¹⁵ It should be reminded that moral rights are somewhat related to, but also different from, copyright. While the former rights protect the non-economic and personal interests of artists, the latter aims at protecting their economic interests.

Specifically, the artist drew the attention of the court to a YouTube video entitled 'les 15 et 22 mars, votez pour des listes citoyennes et insoumises!' ('The 15th and 22nd March, 'vote for citizens and the unbowed!'). In this video *La Marianne Asiatique* is featured after an opening shot of Mélenchon working at his desk. The art piece fades away via a transition of birds revealing The Statue of the Republic, the sculpture of Marianne created by Léopold Morice in 1908 in Place de République. What can be seen is that COMBO's work has been altered, his signature is absent, and the 'Styx' moniker is visible. Also, the message 'Nous voulons la justice' was not included.

The court expressed little sympathy to these claims. The defendants had argued that street art by its very nature is ephemeral and thus intended to be modified over time. The Court of Paris accepted this reasoning noting that since *La Marianne Asiatique* had been created in a public environment and without authorization, and is at risk of being defaced, which makes the attribution and integrity rights susceptible to being infringed. The suggestion that street art should expect to be degraded may on the one hand appear practical, but on the other marks a worrying trend of street art being relegated to a lower standard of moral right protection than other works of art.

Another condemning hallmark that swayed the decision out of the artist's favour was that the modifications of *La Marianne Asiatique* could not be attributed to the defendants.¹⁶ In particular, Mélenchon was able to establish that when the campaign videos were recorded, the message associated with the work 'Nous voulons la justice' had already been deleted by someone else.¹⁷

Concerning the second aspect of the integrity right claim, the fact that COMBO objected to his work being placed in an overtly political setting, was arguably the strongest element of his case. Ultimately, COMBO's disdain was borne from the many controversies and provocations he perceived that Mélenchon had been involved in. These actions, he argued, are contrary to the messages which he wishes to convey in his work.¹⁸

Yet, the artist's belief that the cooptation of his piece by Mélenchon and his party was derogatory did little to sway the judgment. The Court of Paris held that the artist failed to prove that his work had been treated in a way which was prejudicial to his reputation or honour, and that the way the defendants used his artwork distorted its very message. Indeed, the court highlighted the range of perspectives shown in the contested videos. These included wide shots of crowds at demonstrations, close-ups of young protestors, some of whom wore the Phrygian caps associated with Marianne and the French Revolution. The artist's complaint of the transition shot featuring the birds used in 'les 15 et 22 mars, votez pour des listes citoyennes et insoumises!' was almost ridiculed by the court which regarded the imagery of birds as evoking the very spirit of freedom COMBO proclaimed.¹⁹ Because of all the above, the Court denied a claim of infringement of the integrity right. The artist's lawyer expectedly could not hide his

disappointment and added that '*Combo found it insulting to be affiliated with the far left, but the judge felt that he [the artist] shared the same values of the left and of humanism.*'²⁰

Similarly, as far as the attribution right is concerned, the Court of Paris decided that the false attribution to the unknown 'Styx' could not be deemed the fault of the defendants. It was not Mélenchon nor La France Insoumise who altered the work by adding that name to the mural. The court held that such misattribution not only was not the result of the defendants' actions,²¹ it also reflected the very nature of street art – basically, a kind of vulnerability which should be accepted by those creating artworks in the public space.²² The Court therefore rejected the claim based on the violation of the attribution right.

FREEDOM OF PANORAMA

The Court of Paris also established that the freedom of panorama exception should apply in the present case (this exception allows third parties to use certain artworks placed in the public environment). This resulted in the dismissal of COMBO's claim for infringement of his economic rights. Indeed, the Court affirmed that as matter of law, the exception of freedom of panorama may apply to any scenario that does not constitute a commercial endeavour. This was yet another factor taken in the defendants' favour since it was established that it could not be seriously argued that the image of *La Marianne Asiatique* placed on Rue du Temple was reproduced by Mélenchon and his party for commercial purposes. Rather, the artwork was reproduced for the direct effect of illustrating La France Insoumise's political message in favour of 'a new republic'.²³

Furthermore, the court highlighted that had the freedom of panorama exception not been successful, Mélenchon and his party would have nevertheless benefited from the provision allowing the contested videos to be permissible as a short quotation.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the final decision of the Court of Paris left COMBO with little recourse and a rather damning condemnation of his attempt to claim the rights that French copyright law in principle affords him.²⁴ Evidently, this has been a disappointing outcome for COMBO. As we have seen, throughout the case the court made little to no concessions in favour of the artist. While the Court of Paris emphasised that the facts were considered strictly in the context of this case alone, one cannot help feeling that it has left a disquieting legacy for street artists in France.

COMBO's lawyer expressed the determination of his client to challenge the decision. At the time of writing, we are not aware of any appeal filed by the artist. What is certain is that COMBO has expressed, via his lawyer, his general willingness to change the position of French judges on copyright protection of street art:

*'[I]t is a fight which concerns all actors in the world of street art, and which deserves a real reflection: by not granting street artists full copyright protection, we run the risk of denying art its universal character, which is an unbearable attack on its essence and its vocation.'*²⁵

- 1 Page 10 of the decision.
- 2 Page 2 of the decision.
- 3 Les 15 et 22 mars, votez pour des listes citoyennes et insoumises! See the YouTube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKeR5ljlkj4>
- 4 Page 8 of the decision.
- 5 See the webpage <https://www.lejournaldesarts.fr/actualites/le-street-artist-combo-deboute-de-son-action-contre-melenchon-152719>.
- 6 Page 3 of the decision.
- 7 Page 4 of the decision
- 8 Tribunal Judiciaire de Paris, Jugement 352J W B7E CSWS.
- 9 Page 10 of the decision.
- 10 See the journalistic account at the webpage, <https://www.france24.com/en/20170402-france-far-left-melenchon-chair-table-more-likely-win-le-pen-elections>.
- 11 Page 3 of the decision.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Page 10 of the decision.
- 16 Page 10 of the decision.
- 17 Page 11 of the decision.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Page 12 of the decision.
- 20 See the webpage of the Le Journal des Arts of 22 January 2021 at <https://www.lejournaldesarts.fr/actualites/le-street-artist-combo-deboute-de-son-action-contre-melenchon-152719>.
- 21 Page 14 of the decision.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Page 13 of the decision.
- 24 This is not the first time the Court of Paris ruled on a copyright case focusing on street art. It also did so in a 2007 dispute. In that year Peugeot organised a show room in Paris where plexiglass reproductions of the pieces by renokwn French artist Invader – i.e. mosaic tiles based on the Space Invader iconic videogame of the '80s – were displayed (Tribunal de grande instance de Paris, Chambre civile 3, 14 November 2007, 06/12982). The artist sued both Peugeot and the company responsible for the showroom on grounds of copyright infringement. The defendants argued that they had reproduced the original figures from the videogame and not Invader's artwork. The Court of Paris found that Invader's ceramic tiles mosaics were original and therefore protected by copyright but that in the specific case Peugeot had not infringed his copyright since the reproductions exhibited at the show room were in plexiglass.
- The company which managed the show room was condemned for economic parasitism instead, as it was found that it had unfairly taken advantage of the artist's reputation. It is interesting to note that the court held that Invader's tiles were original despite drawing on the famous videogame image. What also gave the mosaic tiles originality – added the court – was the artist's choice of the place where to glue them.
- 25 See the webpage of the Le Journal des Arts of 22 January 2021 at <https://www.lejournaldesarts.fr/actualites/le-street-artist-combo-deboute-de-son-action-contre-melenchon-152719>.

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**Reframing Detritus:
Frank Allais's
Photography**

**of Everyday
Objects Discarded on
the Streets**

**Adrian Burnham
London, UK**

Don't laugh. Garbology is a thing. Predicated in part on the idea that you find out more about people studying what they throw away rather than how they choose to present themselves to the world. Discarded objects seem anxious. And various degrees of anxiety are attendant on viewing Franck Allais' latest photographs. His series of 'found' items in the street elicit pangs of concern for a number of reasons.

First there's something disquieting about the project itself. Without going to the lengths of attributing to the photographer Freud's questionable reasons for object-fixation, collecting has been compared to a disease. Allais – a French photographer based in London – has set himself an endless task. Making images of a whole range of things dumped on the street is necessarily an open collection, one that he can never hope to complete. The obsessive, Sisyphean nature of the undertaking is unsettling.

If we admit the more positive associations of collecting: the exertion of some sort of order or control over a world we can't control; the thrill of a fresh encounter with sought after object(s); the emotional satisfaction of adding a new find to the series; the pleasure to be found in arranging and sharing the fruits of a, in this case, photographic labour of love. Maybe then we can posit the work as a celebration of mundane, everyday items having been rescued from obscurity and represented in such a way as to give us fresh perspectives on urban dwelling.

Of course, those perspectives in turn may be negative. Illicit trash, matter out of place in the city, more often than not connotes both individual and civic failings. The post-COVID 19 litter 'epidemic' has led to calls for fines for littering to be increased more than five hundred percent. Campaigners are pressing councils to increase surveillance, to institute more patrols, to intervene and prosecute offenders. Littering as a signifier of social breakdown.

An intimate anguish is suggested by certain pictures: the calamity of a half-eaten box of chips spilt on pavement or asphalt; the pathos of a lost woolly hat (further amplified by a passer-by having thoughtfully picked it up off the floor and exhibited it on a railing or bollard, or tucked it away behind a pipe in the hope of a safe return to its owner). We sense a dichotomy between litter and loss.

There's visual and material discord when soft furnishings – items associated with comfort, cosiness – are abandoned on the pavement or a roadside grass verge. The incongruity of seeing objects associated with domestic interiors together with exterior textures: brickwork and a quilted pouffe; a lilac tufted woollen pillow and breeze blocks; a patterned silk cushion leaning against a graffitied shopfront shutter. Both material and associative combinations jar.

A different sort of poignancy is prompted when single mundane objects are pictured: white plastic forks; drink lids left pierced still with straws; scouring pads and sponges. When considered in their series format these everyday, quietly surreal scenarios – colourful kitchen sponges and farmac seem particularly absurd – become portraits of the persistence of human shortcomings: 'How is it we make the same mistakes over and over?'



Branded items – Lucozade bottles, Coke cans, Walkers crisp packets – more obviously declare themselves as litter proper, at one level a testament to heedless consumption and anti-social dispatch. Multiples of these ram home the ubiquity of our throw-away culture.

Larger abandoned objects, things that we use, that we purposefully interact with look particularly abject when left in urban space, their use value denied. Upright fridge freezers in the street appear especially ludicrous. Bulky, unplugged, and useless sentinels. Sentinels as in indicators of disease as much as immobile guards keeping a blind watch. There's a formal and material clash between our domestic machinery and most exterior urban scenes. A Hoover's streamlined design, its plastic body cast aside in the street, its extension tube prone against a wooden fence, its concertinaed hose snaking across paving stones afford a material and textural disparity. A psychic disjunct also pertains. Vacuum cleaners in the street affect a maudlin plea, like an abandoned pet.



Ironing boards struggle to elude anthropomorphising, their almost human scale lends these objects a tragi-comic pathos. And maybe it's also because the sight of them immediately conjures their human partner at work. When we see them loitering in a corner, leaning against a door or wall or tree, even when left horizontal on the pavement propped in front of railings, they suggest abstract recumbent figures. What's sinister here is that the people who've abandoned them don't necessarily not want them to be re-used. It's just that they have physically and morally washed their hands of these objects' future existence. It's no longer their problem. And there's little consideration as to whose problem it's now become.

Broader individual and societal ethics are suggested by Allais' patient visual study. In most affluent societies people are normally fairly removed from their waste. In the process of it being dealt with, the waste becomes anonymised. The individual has sloughed off responsibility pretty much the moment a binbag disappears into the maw of a dustcart. Allais insists that the viewer come face to face with our waste, inviting the question of who takes responsibility for the constant stream of materials discarded as a result of consumer culture. We are what we consume. It's not a pretty sight. Hence our desperation for our waste to 'disappear' into the various but hugely flawed and unsustainable means by which we make it all 'go away'. Except, of course, it mostly doesn't.

Allais has pursued a conceit to reclaim these casually junked items in such a way as to resurrect or remind us of their origins as commodities. That he's worked as a product photographer – shooting the fanfare birth of commercial goods – informs his approach to picturing these leavings coming to the end of their public existence. He tries to photograph what's been discarded with the same care and attention – composing the picture so the objects sit level and centre to the viewer – as if they're new and for sale. Colourful plastic lighters might pass as a fresh commodity if it weren't for the surroundings in which they're dumped: balanced on a wall, beneath a car, amidst leaves or tossed in a grubby gutter. Discarded banana skins wear their 'end of the road' state more obviously, they don't lend themselves quite so readily to being pictured in the way they would've looked for their debut promotion shoot.

So, we're invited to contemplate all this human-made or human-handled detritus in various states of atrophy. Allais' apple cores in the street made me think of the genesis of littering: there were presumably no waste bins in the garden of Eden. A more subtle appreciation is perhaps to be found in the Japanese concept of *mono no aware* meaning 'an empathy towards things' or 'a sensitivity to ephemera'. This way of looking, thinking, and feeling alludes to the impermanent transience of things. We are surrounded by stuff in various states of decay. Thereby reminded of our own mortality and that most of what we discard will outlast us by thousands of years.

In organising his finds by type, Allais draws our attention to more and less subtle differences between similar objects: colour, particular aspect, material state, location, etc. All of which contribute to the reading of both the work and the circumstances that created them. In a series featuring discarded Coke cans, for example, they are all left standing upright. Some are on a structure – wall, fence, gatepost, street furniture – which suggests they are 'placed' during the act of passing-by rather than tossed aside. Still images that recollect movement through the city. The photographer has obviously chosen to focus on and purposely collect these upright leavings but their recurrence begs questions.

Coke cans left upright at ground level question the act of littering as a 'mindless' activity. Balancing your empty can on a wall is not quite the same as tossing a crisp packet out of a car window. One wonders if the care taken to position the cans is an odd form of atonement? Is the litterer somehow deflecting their disregard for the environment by paying at least some attention to placement rather than altogether thoughtless disposal? Maybe they know what they're doing is anti-social, lazy, so – whether altogether consciously or not – they 'dress up' their negligence with a fringe of order. Perhaps this is less 'litter' and more de Certeausian tactic on the part of the transgressor. The branded can, arch symbol of mass commodity culture, has been co-opted as a marker, left as testament to the individual's presence.

Allais' 'findings' are pictured so that we see a good deal of their surroundings. This lends the objects photographed a sense that they are vulnerable to further movement: we observe them as part of the variously mobile entanglement of human and non-human actors in our urban environment. Quite different to other, albeit fine chroniclers of detritus who frame their observations from above, closely cropped as if the item 'collected' has been pinned, presented for 'objective' or 'taxonomic' consideration in the manner of a butterfly or moth. Allais' photographs are less fixed, more moments in objects' precarious journeys, images that aptly reflect our present times of anxiety and ambivalence.

ADRIAN BURNHAM has a long-held interest in both the variety and efficacy of interventions on urban space and a particular fascination with paper-based art and visual activism. His career spans both a mundane engagement with the metropolis – as a commercial flyposter in the 1980s and '90s – to more academic study of the city and the social production of space. After 10 years leading courses and lecturing on art and design at Hackney Community College, in June 2016 he founded and continues to curate www.flyingleaps.co.uk: a street poster display and online platform for socio-politically engaged artists.





A MONUMENT OF
(TEENAGE) LOVE?

SACHE

QUE

A MESSAGE
ON THE WALL?

WHO IS THE AUTHOR
AND WHO THE RECEIVER?

JE

T'AIME

A MESSAGE TO THE TOWN
AND ITS PEOPLE?

A TAG

TURNED

MURAL



During my three-month artist in residency in La Charité-sur-Loire in the summer of 2021, Cité du Mot – the cultural centre which had invited me – suggested I leave a trace somewhere in town. I wondered what would be an appropriate public work of art in a small city in the heart of France during the pandemic, so I started roaming around, looking for sources of inspiration.

I discovered that sometimes the idea is already there, in a simple, tiny, banal, everyday form. You just have to be lucky enough to encounter it. On the edge of the town, I spotted a small, anonymous message tagged on a road sign that read *Sache que je t'aime* ('Know that I love you').

I found this to be an honest, sensitive, empathetic, encouraging, kind, inclusive, poetic, timeless yet relevant, and ultimately necessary phrase. An intimate personal thought that is often kept secret transcended the private sphere and entered the public domain as it was inscribed on the skin of the city. Whoever used that marker pen remains an open question. Saying I love you is never easy, so maybe writing it will do the trick – or so the author may have thought.



As for me, instead of putting up my own message or aesthetic, I decided to precisely replicate this already existing phrase on a large scale on a wall just 50 metres away from the road sign. By making my work the mouthpiece of the message, I hoped I could assist the original author reach out to the person the amorous note was intended for.

Simultaneously, through this work I wanted to raise a number of questions, such as what is a representational painting, and what is a conceptual painting? What is a tag, what is a mural, and what is a public artwork? And what is the relationship, distance, and hierarchy between them?

ALEXANDROS SIMOPOULOS is a multi-disciplinary artist from Athens, Greece. He obtained a BA in International Relations and Humanitarian Law at the Panteion University in Athens and received an MA in Visual Arts and Illustration from the Camberwell College of Arts in London. He is the receiver of a significant number of awards, scholarships, and grants and has worked with NGOs, galleries, museums, and cultural institutions in various countries. He is one of the founding members of Sarri 12 Gallery in Athens (2012-2016), one of Greece's first galleries to showcase the work of artists working in public urban space. Simopoulos is active both indoors and outdoors, having exhibited in over 15 solo and group shows in institutions and galleries at home and abroad, and having created murals in countries worldwide, including Spain, Germany, Turkey, Greenland, and India.

CROSSING THE WALLS IN CAIRO:

Nothing disappears completely [...] In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows [...] Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements, but also representational spaces and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives (Lefebvre, 1991: 230).

The Augmented Murals of Al Khalifa

Agnes Michalczyk
Cairo, Egypt

When I reflect on urban art projects and the development of what is considered street art as opposed to graffiti (and vandalism) it occurs to me that the ever larger murals painted by a handful of internationally-operating artists contribute to gentrification and look pretty much the same all over the globe. Through images online, these works often get more views abroad than they do at home. According to architect Joe Halligan, it is impossible to design something in the public sphere without being aware that most people will only ever see it through images (Halligan, in FitzGerald, 2020). As more and more people live in cities, addressing questions of identity, belonging, and trust in the context of urban space is crucial for more inclusive cities and societies (Kern, 2020). Urban interventions can be a very direct means to creatively question, change, or reconnect the relation between people and the spaces they inhabit.

One such intervention is Augmented Walls, an independently-produced hybrid street art project created in February 2021 in Al Khalifa, a district in historic Cairo, Egypt. In this visual essay I would like to reflect on the precursors to this project and the way in which on-site art production and digital technologies in urban interventions may create connections spanning various urban narratives and different groups of people. The aim of Augmented Walls was to create artworks in a way that shows the connections between the rich history of Al Khalifa and its present, and to create added value for the residents as much as for visitors.



Figure 1. 'Map mural' by Agnes Michalczyk in collaboration with MEGAWRA BEC (Al Athar Lina initiative). Al Khalifa, Cairo, Egypt, 2013. Photograph ©Ahmed Zaazaa.



FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

My involvement in urban art production started in 2013 with a series of large-scale paste ups depicting images of women in the streets of Cairo. I was thrilled to see my work appear prominently in public space, but at the same time I was concerned and insecure about its reception, even though no one knew I was the author. Moreover, considering the charged atmosphere of the aftermath of the revolution that had taken place that year, I also felt intimidated by how easily fellow Egyptian street artists seemed to be communicating with their audience. In the process, I became acutely aware of the communication aspect of my own work. Putting art up for everyone to see is easy, but in order for passers-by to really connect to what you have to say, you need to speak their language and I just was not sure if I had the right words.

In many cases, understanding or enjoying art (in museums) requires familiarity with cultural and visual codes, this being a deliberate strategy to effectively exclude or limit viewership. As Raicovic (2021: n.p.) notes, 'art museums [become] remote palaces and temples-filled with objects not closely associated with the life of the people who were asked to get pleasure and profit from them, and so arranged and administered as to make them seem still more remote.' For my part, with every new project I reflect on how to create works in the urban environment that are not only an expression of my artistic vision, but are also meaningful to the people who see these works every day.

Since 2013, I have been involved in several projects in Al Khalifa through Al Athar Lina ('The Heritage is Ours') initiative of the MEGAWRA Built Environment Collective'. Al Athar Lina is based on the idea that the built heritage of Cairo belongs to its people and that in order to preserve heritage, people have to feel that it is indispensable as a source of livelihood and spirituality, as a connection to their

past, and as a place of memory, entertainment, service, or culture. In 2013, I was approached by Al Athar Lina to install two large-scale murals featuring maps of the area (**Figure 1**). The idea was to encourage tourists coming to visit the Ahmed Ibn Tulun Mosque (the oldest intact mosque in Cairo) and the adjacent Gayer Anderson Museum to also go and see the less famous local historic sites, workshops, street food outlets and shops. The local character, narrow streets and lack of awareness of the history of the urban fabric of Al Khalifa were discouraging people from visiting the area. To many people, clearly designated, time-frozen tourist areas such as Al Moaz Street or the Khan el-Khalili bazaar seem more friendly than the bustling streets of Al Khalifa. The idea was to see if the maps could change that, providing a space of encounter rather than exhibition and thereby challenging the typical dynamics of the tourist industry. As Marco D'Eramo has asserted, 'tourism kills the city, for it erases its urbanity and de-activates its function as a contact multiplier.' (D'Eramo, 2021: n.p.)

While working on the Athar Lina project I was asked by a local cafe owner to prepare a design for the exterior of his cafe. The image I created features women sitting in an ahwa (traditional street cafe), smoking sheesha (hookah) and playing backgammon with the Shajar al Durr Mausoleum, a nearby historic monument, in the background (**Figure 2**). Women very rarely hang out at local cafes as public space is the domain of men. I wondered how the image would be received – as a provocation or as a spin of reality? It turned out the cafe owner Aa'm Mostafa found the image and its resonance progressive. When I came back to visit, Mostafa not only showed me an interview he gave to a Cairo newspaper on the occasion of International Women's Day, he also urged me to restore some pieces of flaked-off paint. He told me people come to his cafe just to see the mural. Over time I have added more elements to it (**Figure 3**).

Figures 2 & 3. Mural by Agnes Michalczyk on a cafe in Cairo, Egypt, 2014. Photographs ©Agnes Michalczyk.





Figure 4. Mural by Agnes Michalczyk overseeing a football field close to the Gayer-Anderson Museum, Cairo, Egypt, 2016. Photograph ©Ahmed Zaazaa.

LEGENDS OF THE HOUSE OF THE CRETAN WOMAN

As I was decorating the cafe, a patch of urban wasteland that had become a huge garbage dump, was being redesigned by MEGAWRA BEC into a children's football field. They invited me to create a mural on a building overseeing this location (**Figure 4**). This project turned out to be a starting point for me in developing a visual language based on local imagery and connecting this with

my own drawings of the area. For this design, I adapted one of the illustrations in the book *Legends of the House of the Cretan Woman*. In this book, the author – a British officer named Robert Grenville Gayer-Anderson Pasha – documents the culture of Al Khalifa and retells its legends. Between 1935 and 1942, Gayer-Anderson lived in what is today the Gayer-Anderson Museum: two connected houses



dating from the Mamluk Empire², one of which was inhabited in former times by a wealthy Muslim woman from Crete. The museum is a stone's throw from the football field.

I wanted to bring the stories and myths from the book³ back to the streets they came from. Among locals, these stories and their visual language are well known. One day, a shoemaker from the area heard me and a friend

talk about a jinn (a ghost) from one of the stories living under a big stone. He began telling us about the jinns living in the street and how he communicates with them. The images from the book are being used by MEGAWRA BEC as colouring pages for local children so they too are capable of recognising them.



Figures 5, 6+, 7 & 8+. Murals by Agnes Michalczyk and their augmented reality effects. Al Khalifa, Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photographs ©Agnes Michalczyk & Florence Mohy.

AUGMENTED WALLS

My most recent project in Al Khalifa – Augmented Walls – brought together my interest in visual narratives from Cairo's streets, the experience I have gained from different mural projects, and my focus on developing images in conversation with community members and the owners of the houses I paint on.⁴ Augmented reality (AR) offers novel ways of experiencing the city: it allows for creating virtual artworks that can be released by anchors⁵ or

geolocation, and offers various possibilities for interaction (Figures 5, 6, 7 & 8) – from viewing only to playing games or connecting to online content such as videos or sound. The kind of content released depends on the creativity and skillset of the creator and is not limited by what is possible in real space. AR links together the practice of mapping and storytelling, creating narratives people can follow and engage with.

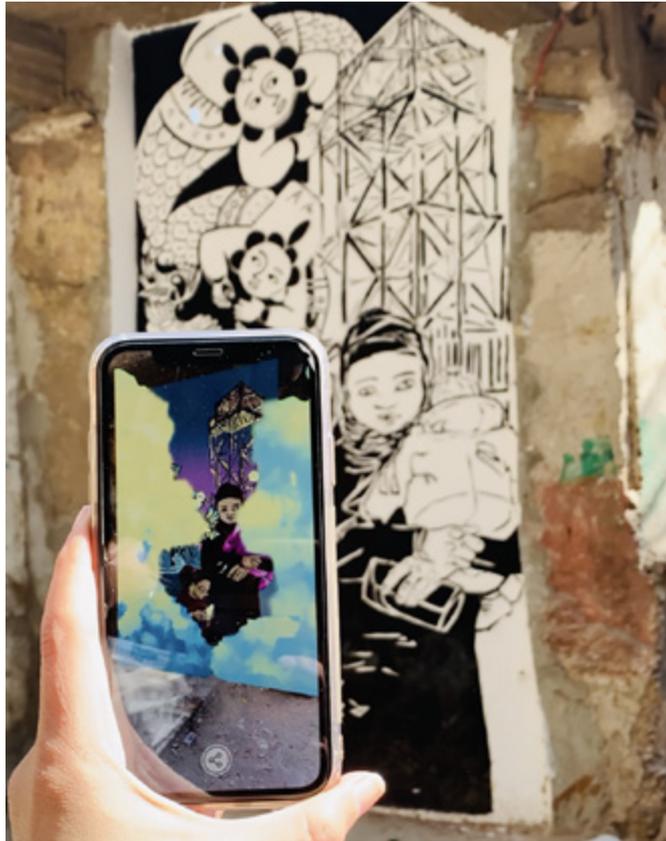




Figure 9+. Al Khalifa locals and visitors discover a mural by Agnes Michalczyk. Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photograph ©Agnes Michalczyk.

On four walls around a closed loop of small streets surrounding the historic Mosque of Ahmad Bey Kohya, I painted four murals, combining elements from the old drawings in *Legends of the House of the Cretan Woman* with contemporary scenes from the streets of Al Khalifa. Using visuals familiar to local residents as a way to directly address them as the primary public of these works of art follows Miwon Kwon's claim that 'the central objective of community-based site specificity is the creation of a work in which members of a community – as simultaneously viewer/spectator, audience, public, and referential subject

– will see and recognise themselves in the work, not so much in the sense of being critically implicated but of being affirmatively pictured or validated'. (Kwon, 2004: 95) For each mural, I created a layer of virtual illustration and animation with the user-friendly Artivive app. The use of different technologies helped raise interest in these works as people were keen to discover what was embedded within each image. The connections between the real and the virtual world and between stories from the past and the present prompted interaction between local residents and outside visitors (Figure 9).



Figure 10. Al Khalifa locals discuss the production of a mural by Agnes Michalczyk. Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photograph ©Florence Mohy.



Figure 11+. Mural by Agnes Michalczyk, Al Khalifa, Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photograph ©Florence Mohy.

PUBLIC SPACE DOMINATED BY MEN

I find myself lucky to have worked on several different projects in the same place over the past nine years because it has given me a chance to be in touch with locals whose feedback I have integrated into the augmented reality part of the project (**Figure 10**). Although residents took pride in the stories and imagery from *Legends of the House of the Cretan Woman*, there were concerns raised by some men who said they felt underrepresented and asked why I had only painted women (**Figure 11**). This response was not unexpected in a culture where public space is dominated by men. Women are nowhere near as visible and are often even worried to have their images displayed publicly.

The public images of women that these men are used to viewing are generic and usually feature foreign women in ads. One man asked me why I had drawn women wearing a hijab as there were already plenty of such women in the street. These were not representations of women that these men wanted to see. This view contrasted with the feedback I got from children – most of whom were excited to see things they recognise and make them happy, such as a tuk tuk, a pigeon house, and a kite (**Figure 12**).



Figure 12. Mural by Agnes Michalczyk in Al Khalifa, Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photograph ©Florence Mohy.

Another complaint was voiced by some elderly people who felt the black and white images were depressing. A few weeks after the project was finished, however, a woman stopped me in the street telling me how much she liked the 'funny' AR animations I had made in colour.

Taking pride in history and heritage is an important part of Egyptian identity and addressing this is a way to appeal to all segments of society. Given how rigidly divided and highly hierarchal Egyptian society is, it is hard to bring people from different social groups together on equal standing. This divide is plainly visible in public space, or rather lack thereof, as access to it is in many cases strictly policed. David Harvey writes that 'the right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our hearts desire.' (Harvey, 2001:3) Urban art projects such as Augmented

Walls have the potential to imagine such change and bring a diverse group of people together in public space.

Augmented reality technologies combined with more traditional urban art may result in work that is artistically relevant and socially impactful at the same time. Oftentimes the success or failure of community-based participatory projects is measured by looking at the degree of participation it achieves, which is often lacking when the work is too artist-driven. On the other hand, there is the idea that only critical or provocative strategies can be artistically relevant (Bishop, 2012), yet these are by and large incompatible with socially-engaged practice (which in turn often becomes purely decorative or complacent). The question of how the different modalities may interact – bringing together real and virtual space and creating a so-called mixed reality – and what the potential of such interactions is for socially-oriented art projects, is worthy of further exploration.



Figure 13+. Mural by Agnes Michalczyk in Al Khalifa, Cairo, Egypt, 2021. Photograph ©Florence Mohy.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION THROUGH AUGMENTED REALITY

Augmented Walls was a unique opportunity to find out if hybrid – i.e. AR – urban interventions have the potential to create connections between the present and the past in a way that keeps history alive. There are ethical challenges facing artists who aim to work with heritage in places where people are living and working, without setting in motion the displacement of these people and without turning these places into tourist attractions. Through my involvement in MEGAWRA BEC's projects, I became aware of the issues related to heritage preservation and the dire toll it often takes on communities in historic areas. In his book *The World in a Selfie: an Inquiry into the Tourist Age*, Marco D'Eramo explains how historic areas may be turned into tourist attractions and how 'tourism becomes an instrument of separation between residents and visitors'. (D'Eramo, 2021: n.p.) Finding a way to express yourself meaningfully through art, to connect people in socially constructive ways, and to create a dialogue between heritage and contemporary art requires artistic flexibility.

By creating a tour along the walls on Google Maps (a more modern form of my map project from almost a decade ago), I have tried to mimic a treasure hunt which encourages people to venture into parts of town they might otherwise not go to. This stage of the project is also part of my artistic research into the potential of AR technology in creating a virtual tour guide of the area and the visitors centre. Augmented reality offers a futuristic aspect to the blend, it is a way to tell a story without seeming stuck in the past. The four walls I painted are in a street that runs parallel to the Ibn Tulun Mosque. Previously, people came solely to admire this world-class monument, now they come also with the express purpose of seeing the art in the surrounding alleyways.

- 1 MEGAWRA Built Environment Collective is a Cairo-based NGO working closely with the local community on social and economic empowerment through capacity building, participatory urban upgrade, and heritage and cultural conservation.
- 2 The Mamluk Sultanate, also known as Mamluk Egypt or the Mamluk Empire, was a state that ruled Egypt, the Levant and the Hejaz (western Arabia) from the mid-13th to the early 16th century.
- 3 Gayer-Anderson commissioned an artist from Al Khalifa, Abdel Aziz Abdu, to create illustrations in the form of copper plates for each of the legends he described in the book. According to one of the stories, Noah's Ark came to rest after the deluge not on Mount Arara, but on Gebel Yashkur, the small hill on which the Ibn Tulun Mosque and the House of The Cretan Woman are built.
- 4 In my previous projects in Tunis village near the Egyptian city of Fayoum and in the coastal town of Al Quseir, I painted on houses simply those things that people requested. Trying to make things familiar and fitting, I did take into account the local visual language, drawing inspiration from pieces of pottery in Tunis and from drawings on walls Al Quseir.
- 5 Anchors are objects in the real world that Augmented Reality software can recognise. Once recognised, the software builds the virtual experience around those objects, essentially integrating the real and virtual world.

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Note: Figures with a '+' can be viewed through the Artivive application to show the augmented layer of the murals: artivive.com

LAST PICTURE

Godfather of graffiti scholarship Professor Jeff Ferrell
talks to us about his latest book, *Last Picture*.

Jeff Ferrell
Texas, USA

The introduction to your new book describes you as a consummate scavenger. You've been dumpster diving all your adult life, mostly for the kind of stuff that is useful or valuable. But in this case, you've found or rescued a collection of photographs. How are discarded photographs of people you'll never meet useful or valuable?

Jeff Ferrell: That's a really good place to start. I'll begin by saying that at no point over the last 40 years have I set out to 'rescue' the photographs. My goals as a dumpster diver have been anarchist direct action, and taking charge of my own life; an environmental intervention to try to keep things out of landfill; and certainly a kind of resource redistribution away from the privileged. So, as you say, that means that I'm looking for things that are useful to people or things that have ecological value by being saved. But in doing that over and over again, these photos popped up, layered into shoeboxes that were then thrown away or old photo albums. Sometimes they were just loose with other kinds of trash. And so being who I am and interested in the visual and street art, about 20 years ago I began saving them with some care, and now I have many thousands from dumpster diving here in the affluent neighbourhoods of a city in the United States.

So, you've accumulated a massive corpus of these photographs over time, yet the collection in the book is not huge. How did you select the photographs that ended up in the book?

In a sense you could say that I curated the photos in the moment of dumpster diving them. I'm drawn more to black and white; I have an eye more for sort of photo documentary imagery, not so much staged photos. So, no doubt looking back I made some choices as I went along, in terms of not bringing all tens of thousands of them home but just a few thousand. Gavin Morrison and Fraser Stables, the people with whom I worked on the book, were really in curatorial charge. So, we worked together and collaborated, but really I wanted their eye, as visual artists and especially as curators, brought to this. We agreed not to specify a criterion, not to try to pick the best or worst photos, the most beautiful or the ugliest, but to let our eye linger on the photos. And to pick photos that had some depth of meaning to them or were striking in terms of their composition, or their colour field, or the poignancy of the subject matter – without making those into a bunch of rigid categories. It seemed appropriate to photos that were found in a discarded, dishevelled state that we not over-organise them nor overly specify what we found attractive.

In a sense when you look through the book, it's a set of mysteries, sometimes positioned as diptychs and triptychs. It is really up to the viewer to figure out the connection. We aimed to leave some ambiguity and uncertainty, which is I think appropriate to the photos.

Why intercept these photographs when their owners have clearly destined them for destruction? Is there an ethical issue in 'rescuing' photographs that have been thrown away?

That's the one I've wrestled with the most. Whatever ethical issues are involved in illegally scavenging don't bother me – not in the least, I take pride in regular law-breaking! But beyond the issue of the illegality of scavenging, there's very much the issue of how we encounter these photos and what respect or empathy we owe them. Once they're dug out the trash, as you say, they really weren't meant to be seen again, so by resurrecting them or scavenging them out of the trash it does raise the issue of voyeurism. Even if we bring the right sort of attitude toward it, we're still in a sense enjoying other people's images, both in the sense of images of other people and the images that other people produced. So, I think for me, my personal tendency might be to be cynical, or to maybe bring some humour to what I find – but over the years, I've actually become, I suppose, more tender about these photos, more respectful of the circumstances in which they were shot.

The other thing that I find most interesting about that issue is back to the sort of postmodern concept of 'death of the author' – that we don't have to read a passage as it was meant to be when it was written. We can read it in whatever context we want.

I think that's true of the photos, and yet I would say, given the circumstances of how they were rediscovered and salvaged, I feel a certain need to at least make an attempt to be respectful of the original intent of those photographs and those doing the photography.

I suppose ethnographically it seems a sort of moral duty to try to be respectful of what was never meant to be seen again in the first place.

Are these photographs in any sense, 'street art'?

As someone who's written about and participated with street art and graffiti for decades now, one thing I found interesting about this project was that it forced me to rethink what street art means. To reconsider what I had assumed without really thinking about it. Art in the museum or the household is confined to those who have access to it, but street art is there for everyone to see, I assumed. And then I realised, well, this is street art. These are photos that were entirely salvaged from alleys and streets. These are not domestic. They're not in a museum or gallery. They're street photos, but they weren't there for everyone to see. They were only there for dumpster divers and trash pickers and homeless people to see. It makes me really rethink what else is street art in the sense that it's the art of the open public space of the street, and yet not necessarily paint on a wall, or highly visible. I want to think about that. Could this be thought of as street art, and if so what other kinds of hidden street art might there be?

You are, amongst many other things, an accomplished social scientist. Have your skills as an ethnographer informed your approach to these photographs?

Yes, I would say one way in particular. When I have taught ethnography all these many years and tried to practice it, I always have taught students that the first move is the phenomenological move – that is, the notion that you take the thing itself for what it is on its own terms. You don't bring to it an investigative framework, you try to understand the phenomenon with which you're dealing and let it in a sense teach you how to study it. And so at first some 20 years ago I began to create folders – you know, like urban photos, family photos, dog and cat photos – and then I thought to myself, that's really not appropriate to the subject matter, because these are lost, discarded, jumbled photos that were haphazardly discovered by me.

It seemed to me that I needed to preserve some of that haphazard nature.

And to leave that in place as I thought about how to present them, how to save them, even how to store them. So, I've abandoned my early attempts at categorisation. And now I think of them more holistically in terms of, again, the mix of intentional and unintentional image, person, photographic technique. It's a photographic history. I let all that swirl together as I think about which photos matter and how they matter to me.

Are you materially responsible for this corpus? Do you feel a responsibility to these resurrected images? And to share them in material form?

First of all, these photos are often materially deteriorated themselves; they've been out in the world for decades, and in some cases for centuries, so many of them are quite delicate. The writing on the back is faded. They have coffee stains. They are dog eared. In that sense they almost feel like injured animals, I guess. Once I save them, I feel a need to take care of them and not impose further damage on them. But of course, then I end up with the same issue that no doubt the original owners had, which was what to do with all these photos? So, it's interesting that as this work has become more public, I've gotten message after message from people asking my advice on what to do with all their old photos, and I tell them, you're asking the guy with the closet full of old photos! There really is no good answer as to what to do with them. They do tend to accumulate and then upon being thrown away, tend to be experienced as a kind of tragedy or certainly as having a great amount of pathos. So, I'm still troubled.

As you know, I've let a few out into this latest book and we had a few urban shots in an earlier issue of *Nuart Journal*. I've also had some public presentations, but I suppose I'm being careful about not letting them become part of the algorithmic web of photos out there – not digitised, not available to anyone. I suppose I do feel a kind of tender proprietorship toward them at this point that's dangerous, curious, and problematic.

In the book you describe the photographs in certain places as 'ghosts'. Can you tell us some more about what you have called elsewhere, 'ghost methods'?

In an earlier book, I began to rethink my decades as a researcher and my training as an ethnographer. Once, I thought to look for only what's there to notice, what's present, but it began to strike me increasingly that with fugitive populations, and refugees, and precarious work, and people on the move, we need to think about how to study the ghost of what happened, not just what is happening in the moment. So, residues and traces and ruins and at least for me, training myself to notice what's absent as well as to notice what's present. In that sense, decades-old discarded photos already fit that research methodology, but bringing that mindset to them I found especially helpful because I realised that I needed to be careful not to assume that what was present in the photos mattered more than what was absent. For example, the photos tend to be records of special events. As the great songwriter John Prine said, we tend to create images of the good times in between the bad times, and so these photos are not a thoroughgoing chronicle of everyday life. They're more of an episodic chronicle of happy moments and new automobiles and 10 year old birthdays; in that sense they leave out as much as they capture. They certainly show the absence of ethnic diversity, and in the largely white neighbourhoods where I found them, they become documents of who is not allowed to be in that neighbourhood at that time, or at that birthday party. They are certainly documents of rigid binary gender roles, of not allowing people to transgress those boundaries, and you see almost absurd displays of femininity and masculinity in these old photos. So, it strikes me that again once we think about ghost methods and reorienting ourselves to a world where absence may be as evocative and informative as presence, then we can use that. We can interrogate old photos or old archival residues for what they don't tell us as much as for what they do tell us.

I realised also that these photos were ghostly in the sense that they were residues of a particular period in photographic technology. You know, these photographs entail not only the image, but the period in which that image was sent to a developer and then fetched a week or two later having been printed on a piece of photographic paper. These photos all exist somewhere between the tin type and the digital camera. They are really markers of and ghosts of a particular period, and what I especially love is the photos where you can actually see the shadow of the technology. As most of us were taught in our first photography class, you put the sun at your back as a photographer and therefore the sun is on the face of your subjects and illuminates their face, then you take the photo. But what that means often is that if you're not careful, your own shadow is in the photo, so in many of these photos you can see the ghostly presence of the shadow of the photographer's body, and you can also tell what sort of camera they're using. In some of the older photos, you can see their elbows splayed out to their sides and their heads dipped down as they look down through a viewfinder in an old camera. And in photographs from later on, you can see their arms much more up beside their head, and they are looking straight ahead as they look through a viewfinder that's at eye level. So, if you again question these photos, you can actually see the use of photographic technology in the shadows of those taking the photos. And that's very spooky and eerie and haunted in a really beautiful way.

Actually – and I really shouldn't take credit for this because a colleague of mine pointed this out – today, we look down into the screen on our digital camera or phone. We can immediately see the photo we took and delete it or try again if it's not right. But these photographs date to the time in which there was no such vision of the photo in real time, and the film had to be taken from the camera and carefully kept out of the sun, sent away or taken to the drugstore, or the pharmacist and gotten back. What that also means is that these photos are more likely to be accidental and surreal. You know, to have a photo that no one knew was in the camera, the dog walking out of the frame as they try to photograph the dog, or the kid exiting the frame on their bicycle. I think this period of photographic materiality and technology also allowed for and almost ensured the kind of beautiful mistakes and engaging errors that are probably lost now. Largely because we can now edit in real time the digital photos we're taking.

I guess with analogue you had a limited number of shots and the camera counted them down. Towards the end of the roll, my Dad really used to agonise over which shot it was going to be for at least 10 minutes before he'd actually press the button.

That's a lovely point. The end of the roll, as noted by the counter on your camera, became more fraught with the need to get it right because now we're out of film! What a concept to be out of film in today's world. Shooting with a film camera also had a warmth to it that you can't find in the digital. I think it's the visual equivalent of a phonographic record versus a compressed audio file in that sensuality, materiality comes through in the sound or in the image.

And the whole idea that chemicals have to interact with light?

Yes, that's another thing. In these photos you can see the deterioration of the photographic process and the photographic paper differently. There are some photographs that look like about the '60s and '70s, at least in the United States, that turn a God awful shade of pumpkin, orange yellow, as the print deteriorates, while others retain their black and white beauty. So yeah, I mean if you knew enough about film technology and development technology, you could probably tell what the process was that led to that kind of deterioration. I mean it's linked to what film stock it is, and what company, and where you get it processed.

You must have a million other projects to be working on, but do you have any kind of plans for working further with this collection?

Well, I have far fewer projects than I once did because I'm very happily (mostly) retired now. But many of my favourite photos out of these many thousands did not make it into this book for various reasons, and so in that sense, and depending on how this goes, it would certainly be a pleasure to put together another edition of this book, maybe thematically. All of that could violate what I said earlier, maybe not – maybe it will be just the next 100 most interesting photos. To my mind, there's much yet to be seen and talked about and learned from with this accidental street archive of old photos that I seem to have developed, so I look forward to playing with it gently and letting it suggest to me what to do next.

This seems such a gentle way into such an otherwise overwhelming corpus. I mean, if you had to collect and sort these photographs for a funded research project you would be working mechanically through them with some kind of fixed goal and deadline – it's really lovely that you can make the time to organically let it speak to you.

Very well said. That also makes me think of something I hadn't thought of. Ethnography – which of course is my great passion – is all about losing yourself in the subject matter, getting rid of your notions of time and place and learning from the situations you're in and taking your time. Since these photographs are the result of that kind of practice, it seems to me they need to be treated that way now that they're part of my life too. So, I'm not really in a hurry, I'm not trying to impose a grant driven deadline or a 12 point framework. I just keep looking at them to see what emerges next.

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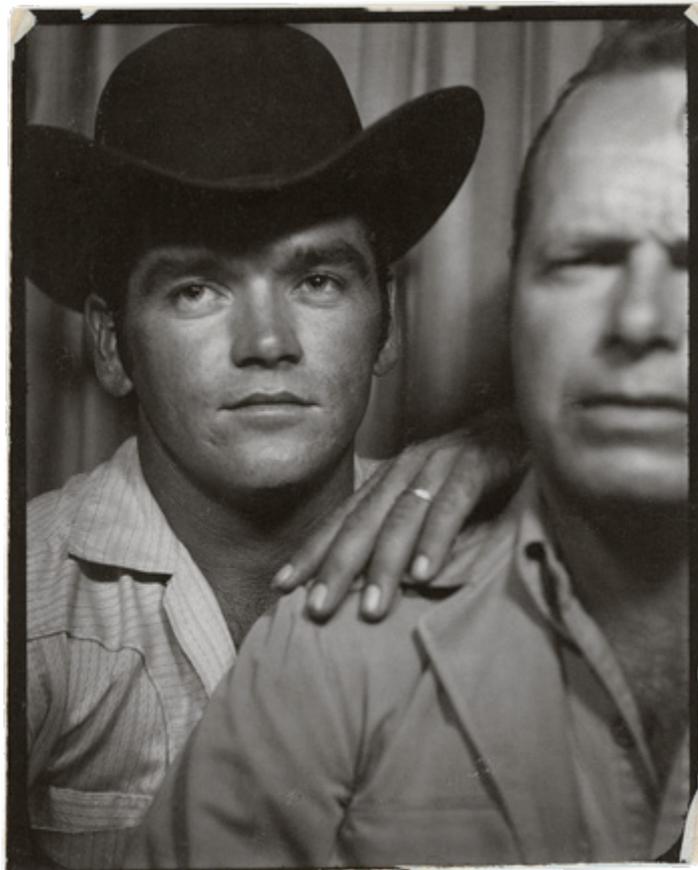
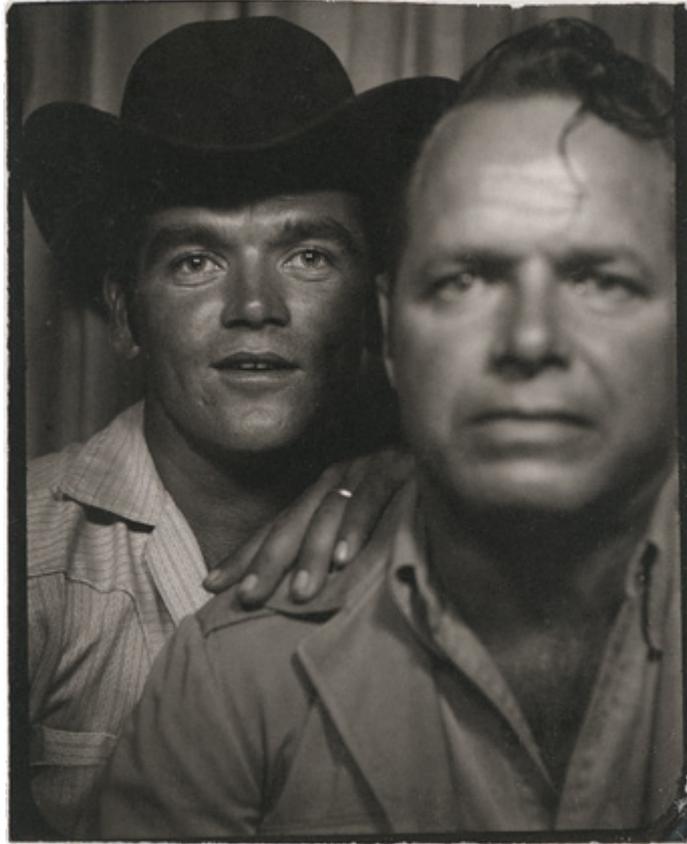
His latest book, *Last Picture* (Edited by Gavin Morrison and Fraser Stables) is published by Atopia Projects. Available from: <http://atopiaprojects.org/shop.html>

















This is an edited transcript of a talk originally given at SAUC, Lisbon, July 2021.
A version of this talk was also delivered at Nuart Aberdeen, June 2022.

Off the Grid:

Curating Flash Forward

This is an account of the curatorial ideas behind Flash Forward, a large programme of art and music presented in the laneways of Melbourne, Australia. In 2021–22, the Flash Forward project commissioned 40 artists to make 40 laneway artworks and 40 bands to make 40 albums that were released on vinyl, as part of an effort to support creatives and revitalise the city over the course of six extended lockdowns due to Covid-19. In curating the programme, the social and architectural history of Melbourne and its grid of streets and laneways was taken as a context from which to jump forward into imagined futures for the city.

Lachlan MacDowall
MIECAT Institute, Melbourne, Australia

LACHLAN MACDOWALL:

Here in Melbourne, for much of the pandemic, we have been in a giant prison. We have had an unusual journey with Covid in that through 2020 and 2021 we had very few cases of community transmission and we've had a strategy of elimination which has resulted in six lengthy lockdowns, including one lasting more than three months where the population stayed indoors in our homes. This has had a dramatic effect on the city.

When this took place, I had been doing some work with the City of Melbourne and a variety of things happened all at once that enabled me to propose a large intervention in the city, with multi-million-dollar funding from the local and State governments. This level of funding came available because due to the lockdowns there really was a high level of concern about Melbourne becoming an empty city and a city full of unemployed people, particularly creatives.

So, in order to try to grapple with the effects of Covid, and to employ artists and bring people back to the centre of the city we proposed a project to activate the city's laneways. Melbourne is well known for its street art and graffiti cultures and the city itself has many laneways. This is the main aspect of Melbourne's branding. So, I was given this opportunity to curate a project around laneways and street art.

Now when other people in Melbourne talk about laneways and street art, they have perhaps slightly different ideas than myself. As in many places, street art has become very commercial, very mainstream. And the laneways have become a branding element of the city. So, my attempt was to create a much more critical idea for this project. Here I'm thinking about the ideas of Javier Abarca and also the work on some of the more critical aspects of street art that we've seen at SAUC in Lisbon and from Nuart's Festival and Journal. These were all very influential in proposing this project, Flash Forward.

So, there are around 200 laneways in the centre of Melbourne: we chose 40 laneways and commissioned 40 artworks. We also commissioned 40 bands, and each of the band made a new album of music. So, we had 40 artists, 40 laneways, 40 bands. We then released all of the albums on vinyl, and we had a range of other activities, so there were about 150 people working on the project and about 450 artists working on the project.

In order for this to happen, it needed some clear curatorial ideas, so here I just want to share a couple of the curatorial ideas that were behind the project. These ideas come out of the conditions as I said of our city in lockdown, a lot of people working from home, a lot of economic disruption, especially for the creative economy, and some very negative government interventions at a national level, but a very active state government who was willing to spend an unprecedented amount of money on street art and other things.

There are three curatorial moments or ideas that I want to mention that motivated the project are Melbourne as a Grid City (1837+); the death of Walter Benjamin's (1941); and the Times Square Show (1981).

MELBOURNE AS A GRID CITY

Melbourne is a city based on the imposition of a grid in colonial time and it's out of this grid that we have these smaller streets on the laneways. The city is built on a completely different country that existed before European settlement. This is a map of the language groups of the indigenous tribes around Melbourne (known as Naarm) that continue to be the custodians of this land.

The occupation here by indigenous people dates back to at least 40,000 years, and there's been a recent, slightly mysterious, contested archaeological dating of a fire pit down the coast from Melbourne that dates back around 200,000 years. So, this is a very ancient place and the colonisation and the destruction from European settle

ment is very recent. This is something that's very much in the minds of Australians at the moment as we grapple with the impacts of colonisation and try to rethink the notion of the city as being both a European construct but existing on indigenous land, so the inclusion of indigenous and First Nations artists and their perspectives in the project has been a really important element.

But from the early 19th century, land speculators arrive in this territory. While they are mostly Australian born, the territories are under the control of the British government and in the late 1830s we see the beginnings of Melbourne, the site of a swampland and a billabong (waterhole) on a river, is laid down with a grid system.

Figure 1. Map Victoria Aboriginal tribes by Tirin aka Takver (CC BY-SA 3.0)



Figure 2 (top). Clarence Woodhouse, *Melbourne in 1838 from the Yarra River*, c. 1888. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.
Figure 2 (bottom). Calvert, Samuel, engraver (1880). *Melbourne, 1880 and accompanying key to the street plan*. Melbourne: David Syme and Co. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.



Below is the famous grid of the city. It's the same grid that is in Manhattan. It's the same grid that's in many European cities, and you can see these major lines here represent the major streets of Melbourne. The grid is often talked about with civic pride, for example that there are wide streets that are easy to navigate. But you can see also in this grid, apart from the main colonial streets, a series of much more informal, messy laneways. So, the first move, from a curatorial point of view was to create a little bit of

space between the colonial grid and the smaller, more informal and oddly shaped laneways of the city. Because these laneways, as in other cities, are really about what's repressed in our culture – the service laneways for the delivery of commodities that are then sold out at the front of the shop. They are a service entrance for labourers where labour is repressed, and also for the repression of bodily activity, bodily waste, toilets, sex – all the kind of things in culture that are repressed are connected to the laneways.

Figure 3. Morgan's map of the city of Melbourne, c. 1945. Val Morgan & Sons. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.



The British surveyor Robert Hoddle laid down the grid in 1837, and as I thought more about this colonial history, I was also struck by an odd historical coincidence, that Robert Hoddle himself was born in London in the 1790s, around the same time as Charles Babbage, and in the year that Hoddle lays down the grid is also the same year that Babbage and Ada Lovelace developed the first computing system, the Analytical Engine. So, there's this historical moment in the 19th century in Melbourne that sees the colonial logic of the grid matched by the kind of technocratic logic of early digital culture. I wanted to think about these laneways and their history and about how they are still reminiscent of this grid of colonial logic, and also the beginnings of digital logic and the digital city that's now become pervasive, particularly after Covid.

The logo of the project began with a black square and the black square has within it a number of small laneways that don't go anywhere, little culs-de-sac. The object of the project is to slice into the black square and carve off these small spaces. We are encouraging people to try and travel through the city in a different kind of way.

The architect Le Corbusier says something like anyone who travels along a straight line in the city knows exactly where they want to go, but we are encouraging people to move through the city in a way that is not just

about shopping or not just about traveling at the highest possible speed, but in taking these little *détournements* down the laneways and having a different kind of experience of the city that isn't structured by commodity relations or structured by a sense of private ownership of the city.

Interviewed by Mahmood Fazal, the Melbourne rapper Tornts, describes the long-term effect that living in a grid city can have:

The Sydney sound was more trappy. Melbourne had the darker, harder and grittier sound," explains Tornts. "We wore black TNs and big jackets 'cause it was colder. A lot of work went into writing and trying to put words together in different ways. And it reflects the way the city looks, the way the city is put together. It's like a grid. There's nowhere to hide.

Tornts talks about rap music in Sydney and claims that Melbourne has a particular sound that's built around the way that the city is organised around the grid, finishing with this statement, 'It's like a grid' and 'there's nowhere to hide.' Here, rather than the grid being a positive civic feature, it is seen also as a trap with a very rational, confining kind of logic. So, the grid was an important kind of feature to rethink the laneways against this colonial corporate logic.

Figure 4. Flash Forward logo



WALTER BENJAMIN'S ARCADES PROJECT

I was also really moved to think about the connection between laneways and arcades and the amazing work of Walter Benjamin in his Arcades project. This is often thought about as one of the most significant philosophical works of the 20th century. This is a study of the arcades in Paris in the 1870s, and arcades are kind of like covered laneways. But where it becomes most interesting in Benjamin's work is the attention to detail and the kind of historical delirium that's made possible by his very unusual methodology of carving up the small details of everyday life in the laneways and thinking about the city in a different kind of way.

We do have an example of a Parisian style arcade here in Melbourne, so there's a kind of touchstone for the project. Benjamin himself died tragically, committing suicide in 1941 to escape the Nazis, while carrying the manuscript of the Arcades project. But the Arcade project lives on. I think Benjamin's death in fleeing the Nazis is also connect-

ed to the possibilities of these concrete laneways having a kind of anti-fascist impulse. Benjamin's work is anti-fascist in that it's explicitly political about the making of art, but it's also anti-fascist in that it is not spectacular. It's very much about looking under the skin of the city, looking into the small details of the streets and the cities, so Benjamin's methodology in looking at very small details has been crucial in this project, where we have often looked at very small details in the laneways in order to connect artists and musicians to certain spaces. Benjamin's ideas are a very idiosyncratic mix of Marxism and mysticism, but I think the Arcades project gives us the capacity to think about some things that are usually repressed in ordinary history. For example, Benjamin has a section in the Arcades project on prostitution, sections about different types of commodities, and sections about street signage and the alphabet, some of which really resonate with graffiti and street art.

Figure 5. *Royal Arcade, Melbourne* 皇家拱廊 by Dicky (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

Figure 6. *Galerie Vivienne, Paris, France, 1916*. Photograph by Charles Lansiaux, image provided by Département Histoire de l'Architecture et Archéologie de Paris / Roger-Viollet / The Image Works.



Due to the unusual circumstances of Covid, in this project we had a large number of staff and a large budget but mostly our artists are used to working on very modest scale, and I myself am not so interested in monumental corporate street art. So, we are trying to use a huge budget to do very modest things. Benjamin helps to keep us grounded in the little things and the little details, and stops us becoming monumental, majestic, and overblown, in staying material in our thinking and looking for coincidences and very small gestures. You know, when I go into these laneways like a graffiti writer or a street artist, I'm looking at the walls, thinking, 'yeah, that's a good wall. I'm gonna take that wall. I'm gonna tag here. I'm gonna climb there'. So, I'm trying to curate a project that is not in the vein of many global street art projects which tend to feature large figurative corporate murals. Walls that are not so interesting.

So, this becomes another kind of key touchstone. We have laneways as being anti colonial, laneways as being anti corporate, and laneways as offering real material for an anti-fascist project, all of which are very relevant for our contemporary life.

THE TIMES SQUARE SHOW

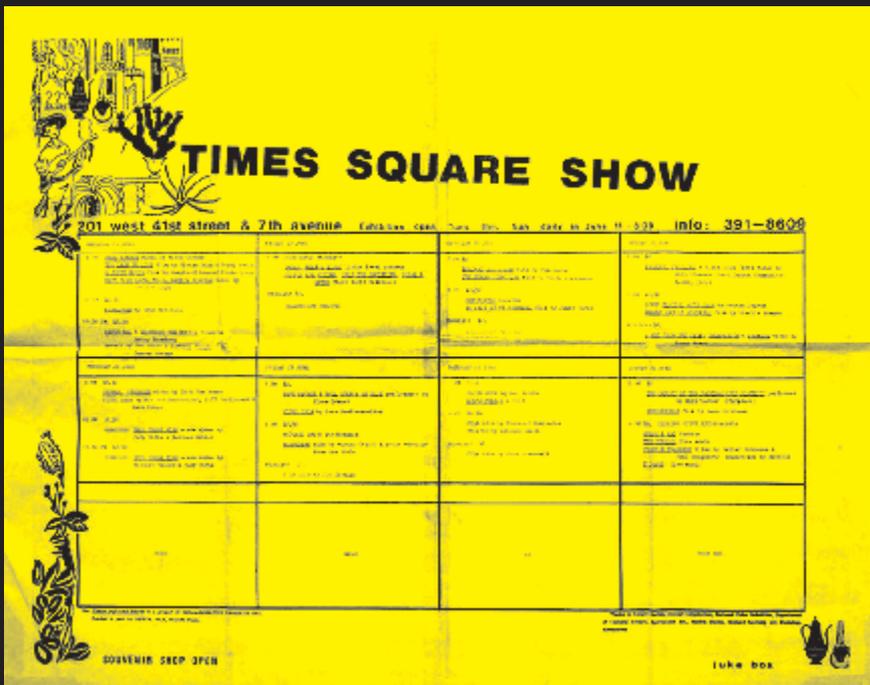
Finally, I want to mention the third curatorial touchstone, which resonates with people in Melbourne. There's another city that's undergone major depression, that's been full of empty shops, that was also about to experience a pandemic. This is the context of New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period when the city is nearly bankrupt, a period just before HIV/AIDS erupts into the

communities there. And this kind of decaying city is also the context, as we know mythologically, for an amazing burst of creativity. Right at this moment when graffiti writers and street artists, when gay artists and straight artists, black and white and Puerto Rican artists exist in this kind of melting pot of work, which is emblematised by the example of the Times Square show (1981).

This exhibition was in a massage parlor in Times Square that was taken over by a group of artists for a show organised by the Collaborative Projects group, along with Fashion Moda. Basquiat and Haring exhibited their first works here. So, this event and this context is at the heart of the thinking about the project. Is there a psychic memory that exists for Melburnians of an empty and derelict kind of inner city? This certainly was the case in the 1950s, as depicted in a famous Melbourne painting of people leaving the city to go home to the suburbs at 5 o'clock. But I think that psychic memory of an empty inner city is also a psychic and unsettled memory of the grid and the land speculation that gave birth to the European city, and of course, the colonial violence that's still kind of repressed.

Laneways offer an opportunity to set aside the pervasive logic of the city as a place defined by rational actions, property relations and commodity exchange, by the cross-hairs of capitalism and colonial logic. This is the broad curatorial premise of rethinking these kind of laneway spaces and thinking about how we can use this idea of getting off the grid as an opportunity here to use and to commission artists, art and music, street art, and other things to rethink the place of the city.

Times Square Show, 201 West 41st Street & 7th Avenue by thefuturistics, licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.



BETWEEN PARTICLES AND WAVES:

Street-Art Heavyweights Exhibiting in the Virtual World of Minecraft

Jan Vormann & Brad Downey
Valdivia, Chile & Berlin, Germany

The 2021 exhibition 'Between Particles and Waves' united a group of international artists who are known for their artistic practice in public spaces in cities throughout the world. For this show – the first of its kind – they were asked to create artworks in Minecraft, a virtual public space consisting of 28 million × 28 million × 256 blocks. Twice a week from July to September 2021, famous YouTuber Surry (Salvatore Cinquegrana) constructed the artists' works and streamed this process live on his YouTube channel. Then, during a short period of time in September, the exhibition was open to the public, allowing everybody with access to Minecraft to immerse themselves in the environment, experience the artworks in-situ, and take part in guided tours in different languages.

Nuart Journal sat down with the curators of this exhibition, Brad Downey and Jan Vormann.



'Between Particles and Waves.' An overview of the locations of several artists' works in the world of Minecraft.

'Between Particles and Waves' brings together a group of artists who usually work in real public space that you might not expect to find in virtual space. Where did the idea for this project come from?

BRAD DOWNEY: It was right at the beginning of the NFT hype, in December 2020. I was talking to Jan because I had heard that he had done a sculpture in Minecraft and I thought that I would like to do an artwork that was like a memorial for artworks that had passed, that you could physically install into a new environment. I wanted to approach this working in a digital way, but I wanted it to be work that you could almost physically experience.

Was this to memorialise your original Melania sculpture that was destroyed?

BRAD DOWNEY: Yes, I thought it might be interesting to make a sort of digital memorial to the monument which could live on forever, conceptually in digital space. But I thought if I was going to create something like that, I would like to be something that could be physically installed, like a site-specific artwork. And this was even before Minecraft was in the discussion.

JAN VORMANN: I had the impression that Melania would also fit perfectly in this virtual environment. There is a naive blocky texture to Minecraft that echoes Melania's naive or art brut aesthetic.



'A Monument to Melania.' Brad Downey. *Between Particles and Waves*, 2021.





'Melania.' Brad Downey. Sevnica, Slovenia, 2019. Photograph ©Borut Krajnc.



'A Monument to Melania' post-anarchy mode. Brad Downey. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.



So, how long had you been planning *Between Particles and Waves*?

JAN VORMANN: I met an Italian YouTuber, Surry, by chance during a project in Venice. He was invited by the Guggenheim to participate in one of my workshops. I then gave him a photoshopped version of my work that he put into his Minecraft world.

And this is where Brad jumps in. I was myself was very unaware of NFTs. Back then, I was more aware of crypto. But Brad was pointing to the fact that this environment is interesting because it materialises art – so it's not only a GIF, or the 'floaty ether' kind of virtual art, but it is something that could produce a 3D sculpture. We were talking about making work in the metaverse, and Minecraft is one of the biggest metaverses that already exists. It's a place where if you fall down, you can die. So, it has these physical boundaries, and there's a level of immersion that people come to accept even though it's so blocky. It's easy to immerse yourself once you are not looking for the perfect graphics.

BRAD DOWNEY: Jan immediately said like OK, it's a good idea, but maybe we should be more inclusive and curate a group show together and do a serious exhibition of site-specific artworks in this Minecraft metaverse.

The title *'Between Particles and Waves'* sounds poetic. Is this a reference to quantum physics?

BRAD DOWNEY: This is another discussion that we had for months because we were trying to figure out which parts of our physical reality would transfer over to this other reality. The first title I threw out was 'Let There be Light', because I thought that light is probably one of the things that this reality has in common with that reality – as it's totally made of light. But then we had so many discussions around this because you know, it's referencing the Bible. I thought that was funny, but it wasn't to some of the artists. So, in the end we settled on particles and waves.

JAN VORMANN: This is the duality of light – we are never sure whether it is a particle or a wave. So, we're referencing light, but what I also find poetic is that there is an ocean in

Minecraft – there are actual waves. Also, you might not see them, but in the texture of Minecraft you can also find particles, in the blocks. For me it has this double meaning. At the same time, we were trying to navigate algorithms. Surry was concerned that if we called it something like 'Minecraft art exhibition' this would not work, as these buzzwords are overused.

All of the artists in *Between Particles and Waves* have an existing practice working in public space. Why did you focus on artists who work in public space?

BRAD DOWNEY: We were literally trying to extend the public space. You know, like in this classic understanding of the Internet as the digital commons. We wanted to do a site-specific public exhibition in this virtual public space because it's a publicly accessible space on an open server and people can visit from all around the world.

So, it was accessible and open to all?

JAN VORMANN: Yes. The inclusion department of Guggenheim wanted to participate but they said it's not inclusive enough because you need to buy the game. Which is true, right? But once you have the game, if you have the server address you can join.

BRAD DOWNEY: That [having to buy the game] was also one of my problems with this whole thing. Surry has a very good relationship with Minecraft and with Google and with YouTube, so they were asking us to collaborate, but for me it was very important that we didn't officially collaborate with any of these companies. If we had done, we wouldn't have been able to work with artists like John Fekner and Jazoo Yang. In this context, I had to speak to John over many long conversations to convince him to participate, because for him it's absolutely off the table to start occupying a virtual space and to inspire people to stay inside games and computers and media. This is a thing that he's absolutely against, so the works that he made were about this floppy disk crushing a child – simple messages saying that maybe you should get out of here and go outside.





'Slow Down Children Growing.' John Fekner. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.



'Don't B Angry.' John Fekner. Pre- and post-anarchy mode. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.

In terms of production, did the artists build their work themselves? How did this process work?

BRAD DOWNEY: It took us six or seven months to build all the pieces because once you start to involve serious artists, you need to enable them to actually say something in this space.

JAN VORMANN: In the case of Brad's work, we worked with programmers from Chile and France. The Melania is a real copy of the physical work. We took his photographs of the original work and put these into a 3D mesh, which was then voxelised. A voxel is a three-dimensional pixel. It's a voluminous pixel. We put this into a schematic to get the layers and rebuilt the 3D sculpture in Minecraft.

We were in constant discussion with the artists. For example, Brad was talking to John Fekner to figure out what he wanted to make, Add Fuel was giving me all kinds of PDFs from drawings, and Vhils's team were producing sketches.

JAN VORMANN: We had to collect all the materials to build the works. For example, we had to build a wool farm to make the Melania.

BRAD DOWNEY: To get the colour we needed, we had to make a sheep farm, grow the sheep, and dye the sheep blue. These are the totally ridiculous details that you deal with when you start working in this gamified space. We had to grow the wool, and then dye the wool, because most of the sculpture was built out of wool – which meant that at one point during his process the whole thing blew away. So, in real life the Melania was burned and in this virtual world, a storm came through and blew the piece away completely.

If you go inside, you can actually feel it. It's not something that you can really feel with the screenshots of the space. But when you're walking around in the actual space, you really can feel the dimensions of the objects and you really can feel the scale. It feels like something much closer to an actual public artwork because you can feel yourself standing next to it. Like with Esther Stocker's work, you really feel that the exterior and the distance between the pieces, you know it takes time to get from one piece to the other. So, this environment offers scale and dimensions and materials. Each piece is made out of different materials. The aesthetics do get kind of flattened out overall because the Minecraft environment has a certain aesthetic limitation to it, but then so does our own environment.



'Dispatchwork.' Jan Vormann. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.

Through the limitations do you end up creating things differently?

JAN VORMANN: Yes and no. For example, for Add Fuel and Vhils, it was a translation of what they do in their real-life practice, using the graphics tool to expand their practice into this world. Brad and Jazoo Yang used the space to memorialise a real-life object that does not exist in real life anymore. They used the digital space as a memory medium. In John Fekner's case, he was referencing the idea of there being kids inside this space that are wasting a lot of time playing there. In my case, I'm referencing real-life Lego. So, I grew the texture of Lego to match the texture of Minecraft.

BRAD DOWNEY: We considered where we put each of the works in this environment and how you people would engage with them, like a real exhibition. Just on a massive scale.

JAN VORMANN: All of the production was featured on Surry's YouTube channel [Surrywastaken]. He built the works in survival mode live on YouTube. He made episodes for each artist. Some works were a lot more resource intensive than others. We had to mine all the stone for Vhils's work and then use explosives to produce it. Surry actually [virtually] died while exploding Vhils's work and that's also the point where we reached the end of the production. And then we opened the world to people.

JAN VORMANN: When we opened the show for the first time, we thought we had put it in a mode where you cannot manipulate the blocks, but people came in and hacked the space.

BRAD DOWNEY: They went into some hell part of our world. They found a hole. There's like one pixel in every world where you can go to hell, and they figured out how to hack from hell. Then there were lava portals coming out of Melania's chest. They were hacking back up so they could change the exhibition from below, from hell basically.

This sounds like a horror film.

BRAD DOWNEY: Yeah. But that hell area is also where you can mine precious materials, which is, I think what they built Vhils's work with.

JAN VORMANN: So, then on the second day we had to reboot the whole world and put it in spectator mode where people could fly around but not interact with the works. We left it like that for a couple of months, and then we put it into anarchy mode. And then people were able to interact with everything.

So, the anarchy mode, that's the product of just letting people loose in the space?

BRAD DOWNEY: Yes, we literally opened it up in this anarchy mode, which is when everything got destroyed and changed. Just like in real public space people are going to interact with your work, sometimes they're going to add stuff. I was happy when they added a Pinocchio nose to Melania. But they're also going to destroy stuff. The sad thing that translates to both of our realities is violence. You know, once we opened up the anarchy server, anarchy didn't necessarily mean a good thing. It's fun in a way, because the artworks get changed and turned into modified funny versions of their original selves, but if you take it as a parallel of a real situation, the fact that they often just blow everything up is sad.

JAN VORMANN: It was an illustration of people kind of misunderstanding anarchy. So, you're saying this is anarchy, but anarchy obviously doesn't mean destroy shit, it actually means the opposite. Respect other people's shit, and then do whatever the fuck you want, and I will respect your stuff.



'Something Went Wrong.' Vhils. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.

A lot of these artists, including yourselves, have worked together before in public space. Is there a sense that this exhibition was a way to reconnect that otherwise wasn't possible during the pandemic?

BRAD DOWNEY: At this point we were saying let's put all these politics aside and try to make the best exhibition that we can, curating artists that we wouldn't normally curate. We wanted to mix these things together in a way that would be inclusive and open, and also because of the lockdown and Covid. Because of this sort of feeling of wishing to reconnect, I think you're right about that.

JAN VORMANN: Yes, absolutely. Everybody was so used to Zoom, which everybody used all the time then. So, in that respect, it was perfect, and we got a lot of people involved. We had people making tours on Zoom in Spanish, French, English, Russian, and Arabic. There is also a YouTube channel, and a discord channel.

BRAD DOWNEY: I think from my radar, this was one of the first serious exhibitions in the metaverse. We wanted to have a serious cultural input, so we asked real curators to do guided tours of the exhibition. So, Korea's Total Museum of Contemporary Art did a long tour explaining every work, but from an academic point of view. That's why we didn't want people to be able to change the works at the beginning, because we wanted to have these academic tours with serious curators. That's also why we didn't have zombies coming in and killing people because we could also have opened this stuff in a funny way. We wanted to stay with a serious environment at the beginning. It was an exhibition with guided tours from serious curators from all around the world and with serious artists.

JAN VORMANN: In the tours, you are effectively looking through the eyes of the curator or through the eyes of the artist. How does the artist look at the work when they are showing their work to somebody? Where do I put my focus? Some tours were live and some were recorded. I would share my screen and walk around so people could experience the environment. Vhils had a solo show in Shanghai and we talked to the curator there. When Vhils opened his show, they put up a computer in the gallery so people could also access the game and see his work there. Jazoo Yang did the same from a gallery in Berlin.

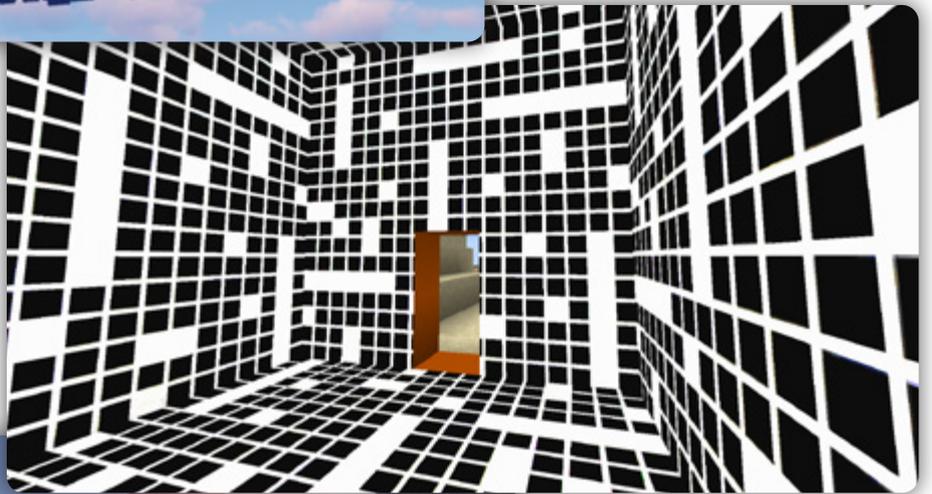
So, there were different windows into this environment from different physical galleries around the world?

BRAD DOWNEY: The funny thing is, in discussions with the Guggenheim in Venice, we realised that most of the kids in the game had never heard of this museum. So, in fact we were bringing a huge audience to the Guggenheim because Minecraft has a much wider audience. And there were also so many stories of parents with their kids going and looking at art together for the first time. The directors from the museum had to ask their kids to bring them to the Minecraft exhibition.

JAN VORMANN: And the kids wanted to know how we made the work. My little brother plays Minecraft but doesn't go to museums often. So, whereas John Fekner says he doesn't want to support this idea of people playing games and being in virtual space, I see it the other way around. I want to reach these kids because whether we do so or not, they will be living in this virtual space. We have to go there to find them because we cannot find them in the streets anymore. So, in a way, this was also a way to reach these forgotten audiences.

BRAD DOWNEY: We had a famous YouTuber releasing this as content from his POV in his actual world, so we had this layer of something between highbrow and lowbrow, academic and street art. We curated serious site-specific artists, and so this is another layer of audience. Then we connected museum curators to do academic tours, and then at the very end, we opened this world up into anarchy mode, which allowed everybody to flood in and change all the art and destroy all the art. Finally, after it was destroyed, we planned to chunk out the preserved original pieces to sell as NFTs.





From left to right: works by Octavi Serra, Michael Johansson, Esther Stocker, and Add Fuel. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.

Can you tell us some more about the NFTs?

BRAD DOWNEY: From the beginning I said it makes no sense to make this unless it has the chance to be installed as an actual sculpture. So, we have downloadable content that you can physically install in any metaverse. You can do whatever you want with it, but for us the main point from the beginning of this whole exhibition was that every work that we make can be reinstalled in an environment – it's not just a floating useless thing, it's actual work. Yes, it can be printed, but I think it's the same way to deal with it.

It sounds like you've generated a lot of process documentation. Does this form part of the NFTs or will this appear in some other form?

BRAD DOWNEY: We were thinking of making a film about this, but after working for a year on it we are ready to take a break from this content. As we're artists, we've already moved on to our next idea. But we do have all this content and we will put together a short film at some point. We're jumping out of this Minecraft scene, as we have other projects we're working on now. The aesthetics of Minecraft don't really carry over for us in the long term.¹

JAN VORMANN: Although the works fit very well with the aesthetics.

BRAD DOWNEY: I think it's the best place to start if you want to organise a virtual exhibition, because there are already millions of people using Minecraft and it's already set up so you can just download it and go in. So, it's a very easy way to open a worldwide public exhibition where people can actually know how it works, go in and walk around easily, even if you don't know anything.

How was the reception of the exhibition?

BRAD DOWNEY: It was quite a frustrating process from a producer to an audience point of view because when you put up an Instagram post with a little video or a screenshot of the exhibition, you know that the audience can't really feel these works. But when you bring somebody into the exhibition and you're walking around, people are suddenly like wow, because they're walking around in the space, and they can feel the scale and feel the works and feel the environment. It really has a much bigger presence when you actually see it in the environment. And I know that almost 90% of the people from my network didn't go in to see it.

Getting a random person from our networks in there was almost impossible. They thought, 'what a funny idea to put something in Minecraft', but they did not really engage with it as a serious public art show that they could walk around in. They just like looked at the screenshots on Instagram and moved on. As an artist that was frustrating because the content and the works give so much more if you actually go to see them.

JAN VORMANN: But when we opened the world and then Surry announced it on his millions-of-followers channel, people started to flock in by the hundreds. I was also disappointed by those within our circles who didn't seem to accept it, because Minecraft has this blocky aesthetic and is perceived to be for kids and gamers. Most people seemed to think Minecraft was not serious enough for making art.

But doesn't a lot of site-specific work on the streets also have a playful or non-serious element?

BRAD DOWNEY: Yes. Also, there was a big difference between how the Asian audience accepted it versus the Western audience. Honestly, the Chinese and the Koreans were really hip to this. They knew how to promote it. Jazoo Yang was super engaged. She became a really important component because she understood this more than any of the other artists, and she also got so many more people and art institutions involved from Asia.

JAN VORMANN: The digital readiness in South Korea especially was palpable. It was just accepted way easier in Asia than by our networks in the West.

It seems like *Between Particles and Waves* was the culmination of a very elaborate process. This was not a straightforward move from idea to NFT – you've got all of these considered months of work, and time spent opening it to the public as well. It feels more democratic than most NFTs.

JAN VORMANN: Yes, it was open for a long time. Now the whole world is also for sale, so somebody could buy it and reinstall the whole world with the exhibition and then they would also be able to own all the artworks. You know you're going to have a piece of the artists. This is the first NFT for many of them. For example, this was a first for me and Octavi Serra, and the first NFT for Brad and John Fekner. So, it's quite a historical moment.

This is actually quite a cool thing to have. You know, John Fekner's first NFT.

BRAD DOWNEY is a Berlin-based artist and activist from Kentucky, USA. He studied documentary film at the Pratt Institute in New York City, and painting at the Slade School of Art in London. His multi-faceted projects include performative gestures, video, installation, painting, and drawing. Using humor, sensitivity, and precise interventions, he investigates the underlying structure of our cities, our landscapes, our sacred sites, as well as the forgotten peripheries and contested borders. Downey has been featured in articles for Hyperallergic, JUXTAPOZ and The Guardian.

JAN VORMANN is an artist based in Valdivia, Chile. He is also the founder and director of COMA, a space for workshops and a residency programme for art creation and research from the south of Chile. Located in the centre of the city of Valdivia and steps from the Calle-Calle river, COMA seeks to connect creative, local and international communities, linking places of creation and producers of culture from all over the world. COMA has established partnerships with UaCh (University Austral de Chile) and its art and art-history department, and a range of local galleries and creative spaces.

¹ Editor's note: just before going to press, *Between Particles and Waves* was awarded a grant in collaboration with the Total Museum in Seoul, Korea, to extend the project in 2023.



'The Korean Thumb Print.' Jazoo Yang. Between Particles and Waves, 2021.



Dalison: A Visual-Sonic Collaboration

Dalison is an architectural intervention and sound and light installation by artist Ian Strange in collaboration with musician Trevor Powers. This temporary installation culminated in a single-channel film work, a series of photographic works, and a one-off live performance. The work was created around a 'hold out' home marked for demolition in a once thriving but now almost erased suburb in Perth, Western Australia. Created in collaboration with the former owners of the house and the former residents of the neighbourhood, Dalison is a eulogy to this home and the community it was once part of.

One of the things that's really interesting about this project is your visual-sonic collaboration.

How did this come to be as a collaborative project?

IAN STRANGE: I've been a massive fan of Trevor's work for a long time. His music was soundtracking my studio for years. A while ago I went to follow him on Instagram and saw that he was also following me, so I immediately messaged. I was excited to know that Trevor was aware of my work and reached out to say I'd love to find a way to collaborate at some point in the future. This was a while ago, but it's always been a bucket list goal to work with him in some capacity on a project, but I didn't want to come back to him with anything that wasn't significant.

And then, flash forward to 2020. I found myself in Australia in March and then lockdown happened, and I couldn't go back to the US. So I went back to my hometown of Perth. While I was there, I returned to a house on Dalison Avenue that I had always been fascinated by. I found out more about the house and discovered it was getting demolished. So, I reached out to Trevor again to say I may have a project for us. This was early in the pandemic, in the midst of lockdown.

TREVOR POWERS: When I got that initial message on Instagram I got so excited because I'm such a big fan of Ian's work. But there wasn't a specific idea yet. It was that whole thing of, 'hey we should work together on something', but we didn't know what it was going to be. And so, I just kept thinking, well, hopefully that works out. And then I think it was maybe two years after that when Ian sent me a message with the idea of Dalison. I really don't do much collaboration with people outside of my circle. And when I do, it's always music, so there are certain engineers I work with on a regular basis. I'm not one to generally collaborate with other musicians, let alone across other fields of art. It's not because I'm against it. It's because music tends to be such a personal thing for me. It might sound stupid, but it really does feel like there's a spiritual aspect to it. But when Ian reached out to me with the initial idea, it checked all the boxes because not only have I always been so excited about Ian's work, but with this project in particular – and the ideas that he gave out of the gate – I felt like I could already see it in my mind. And that's what guides me. That's what spoke to me.

IAN STRANGE: The thing that I've always loved about Trevor's work is that it has this foreign but familiar, alien but warm texture that is – I don't want to say melancholy, because that sounds too theatrical – but it has a kind of nostalgic warmth and humanity to it, but it's not overt. It has these big wafts of optimism.

You go on these big sonic journeys with Trevor's music, and there's those moments which I love in music where you can feel the composition almost falling to pieces, like someone's pushing it to almost break. And then it falls back in and then it has a warmth and humanity to it, and then it almost falls apart again. There's a reason I listened to it so much. I love his music, and I've absorbed it probably without even knowing. But I hope I wasn't prescriptive in how Dalison should sound.

TREVOR POWERS: Not at all, and that's what was great for me. I'm not good at working within boundaries because so much of what I do is based on accident. Anytime I have an intention when I sit down to create, the intention is never as exciting as the accident – I'll have this lane I'm trying to drive in, but then I'll

stumble on something else. I think it's because being human is such a beautiful thing. But then it's also so fucking hard. I like embracing accidents in music because it captures more of the essence of what it is to be a human.

When Ian reached out, there were a couple of words he said, I think melancholy was one of them. But other than other than a handful of words, I felt like I had a blank canvas to work with. And that was great for me because otherwise it would have been too restrictive. It would have been so much harder because I never really know what I'm going to stumble into. I have an intention, but if there's a blueprint, I usually end up throwing out the blueprint. Because most of the time it sucks.

IAN STRANGE: What I knew I wanted to do with the work was to use a light panel to create three phases where you could light just the house and isolate it floating in space. Then lift the panel behind it so you could cut its silhouette out of the landscape. And then, finally, light the entire landscape around it so you could place the home back in its context. I knew I wanted to move between those moments, where you could have it float in nothingness to then being etched out of the landscape and then pulled back into the context of the landscape and site.

That for me is why it lent itself to being a durational work and a musical collaboration. Most of my previous works are still images or videos, but nothing moved, the lighting wouldn't change. Whereas Dalison was about trying to shift perspectives over a period of time. A key thematic in the work is time and that temporality – the history and landscape of that house over time, the temporal nature of the home and the ideas it represents, and the context of it literally disappearing with its demolition.

TREVOR POWERS: Having that combination between familiar and alien was important. That's where it was with the idea of the house. Because houses tend to have a certain atmosphere, a certain spirit behind them, but you don't really know what's inside the house. That's what's alien.

Trevor, were you able to visit the site?

TREVOR POWERS: No, I never saw it, but Ian was so great about sending me photos and videos and information. So, I felt like I had seen it.

IAN STRANGE: Yeah, I spammed him with a lot of stuff. There's something poetic about the isolation of that house. And it being created in a moment where everyone was isolated in some way. I know this may be a reverse justification, but I do think there is an aspect of broadcast to this which I really like. The idea that both light and sound can touch things without physically affecting them. The idea that by broadcasting out light, this house touches this entire empty suburb, as does this sound broadcasting out across this empty suburb. With Trevor creating work from a place of isolation on the other side of the world that would then broadcast out across this empty suburb. There's something quite nice about it in this moment where people weren't able to travel or leave their homes. Trevor called it an anti-concert, which in my head was absolutely perfect. It's like the opposite of a concert. The work is about the lack of community, the lack of site, people not being there – in many ways the work is about that absence.

TREVOR POWERS: It really is the opposite of the concert in every way possible. Like Ian said, it's a lack of everything



rather than everything being present. Whenever I play concerts, I have this feeling that I don't know how to describe. I don't feel comfortable. For me, the process of music is always the writing, the recording. It's this insular thing that comes from the soul. Concerts can be fun, but I definitely have to become a different version of myself to do it. But when Ian had described the house and his plan for the lights it felt like a concert that I was comfortable creating, and obviously the process was all behind the scenes, behind the curtain. The anti-concert aspect of it was something I couldn't be there for, but I could feel my spirit touch it and taste it and hear it.

Trevor, in your prior work, you seem to be attracted to the nexus between the psychological and physical worlds. Does this collaboration represent a further development of this ongoing thread?

TREVOR POWERS: Always. Whenever I sit down to write anything it's like music is my form of prayer, and I say that in a very broad way. It's trying to communicate with that inner intelligence, the intelligence that's inside of us that we may never figure out, but it's a constant pursuit. That feeling of trying to make sense of what doesn't make sense, whether it be the world in general, or a more personal collision of feelings that you're just trying to put together. It's always that pursuit of the deep crevices in the brain that feel very unexplored. I feel like I could work on music for so many lifetimes and never explore all those surfaces. And that's the most exciting thing about it. It's nice that there's no end.

Ian, does this resonate with your own work?

IAN STRANGE: With my work, it's usually some form of poetic interpretation of architecture, like how to take the psychological interiors of spaces, or the intangible histories of spaces, and use forms of markings on these houses, to somehow shift these familiar spaces askew.

There are normally two aspects to these works. One is the very specific history of a site, an almost journalistic site history – the anthropological history of the site, which can be pretty absolute. But also, through working with an archetypal image like the home, you can start to deal with it as a broader metaphor, one of shelter and community and place, and everything else that this image is an index of. Even the notion of emotional shelter and safety that it can signify. There are very few things that you can do that resonate like this at a community level. Where you can show it back to the community it was made in, and then also show that same work around the world where, without knowing anything about that community, there's still a psychological truth and honesty to that work and an imagery that's somehow universal, that people can connect with. So, with those two aspects, I'm dancing between the psychological and the physical. Between the poetic universal read of a work and the hyper specificity of site and community.

TREVOR POWERS: The more poetic something is, generally the more others can attach themselves to it because there's not that specificity. When something's open-ended it's layered, and someone will always be able to find something in it. I think that was also what was so powerful about the work.

Is this specificity also part of gaining the respect or the trust or the engagement of the communities and families that were attached to the site?

IAN STRANGE: When you make work like this, it always starts from conversations and seeking permission to be there. That community involvement is a part of the project. But I

think that for all my projects there's always a contradiction there because there's always a universal frequency where it also has a resonance devoid of context, devoid of site. You could show this work without telling anyone about the history of the site and it would still be largely affecting, just because of the power of the symbols we are working with. But it's also a real place with a real history and a real community, which gives us this other narrative. Those things can coexist, but it's a kind of contradiction I've become comfortable with in my practice.

Ian, when you first moved from suburban Australia to the urban metropolis of New York City over a decade ago, you were working as a graffiti and street artist under the mentorship of Ron English. Is there a connection here, in your ongoing focus on the resonance of 'home'?

IAN STRANGE: It was a long while ago, but yes, I think coming from largely suburban Perth, Western Australia and then suddenly being in New York and connecting with graffiti and that whole urban centric scene had an impact. I arrived in 2009, and I was suddenly showing with Futura and Banksy and all these graffiti heroes of mine. They'd all been part of the first wave of that movement in the '80s and had been broke in the '90s, and then I was there for this most recent uptick in the 2000's, and it was that moment where that older generation gained recognition for a thing that they had built from scratch.

I was still very young. Ron English basically gave me Willy Wonka's Golden Ticket – he grandfathered me into this movement, right at the end, at this upswing. For me, it created a moment for me to question, what were these artists doing in their 20s? What were they making that was new and unique at the time, that was legacy now? You know, Ron English is in his mid 60s, and he was now just starting to get proper museum recognition. So, it made me reflect on what is an artistic legacy was. What story are you telling over a lifetime? And I guess, for me, if you're going to tell the story over a lifetime, it has to come from an authentic place. So, as much as I loved that movement, there was something that didn't completely fit.

But I'm still really interested in the impact of marking in public space and that antagonism of graffiti and mark making. At the time, I'd studied film and photography, so both backgrounds started to coalesce in what became my practice now. I still like the idea that a public marking like graffiti could somehow by aesthetically changing a wall be perceived as damage, without actually functionally breaking anything. You can antagonise architecture, you can antagonise public space, with this idea of marking houses. People can perceive this as an attack on the home itself and find it offensive but you're really only materially affecting the veneer of the house. You can paint back over it, but it somehow creates a psychological shift. I think that idea of how an aesthetic shift can create a psychological shift in the understanding of that space, and somehow reveal how vulnerable it is, psychologically.

TREVOR POWERS: Well yeah, because homes are everyone's most prized possession, that's the crown jewel. So, when you fuck it up, everyone's like, 'what did you do?'

IAN STRANGE: But it's interesting because in reality, you're not actually damaging it. And that then leads into all these notions that people have written about



for years, which is how much we load onto these objects and how they become these indexes of so much in our lives and how we understand ourselves. And of course, people don't logically think I'll just paint over that. They see graffiti as a visceral attack. I think that's super interesting. And that became a starting point for me.

Did notions of home become particularly resonant during the pandemic, when our homes became our whole physical world, and the rest of our lives became so immaterial?

TREVOR POWERS: From my end it definitely did, because home has always been the place that I come home or come back to sleep to with touring and traveling. I constantly had the opportunity and the drive to get out and I never imagined a world where everything would be shut down. That was something that I just never saw ahead. And so, when that was the case, and leaving home wasn't an option, even going to the grocery store was sketchy because you didn't want to get sick. So, to just be home and have that be the only place that you are had a comfort to it because you knew everyone was in the same position. You're going through it together. But being home also could drift towards the darkness and it could feel like a prison. So, for me in this work I was trying to explore all of these places.

My way of leaving the house was through movies. I have this this old VHS player in my room, and I would put it on mute. There was just something about what would come off the screen that informed my musical choices. I got a lot of my inspiration through the work of Andrei Tarkovsky. I watched his movie *Mirror* so many times when I was working on the score for *Dalison* because there was something about the spirit in that movie that somehow fit – the textures and the colours that he had worked with. I don't know what it was, but I the more I focused on movies like that, the more I felt like the score was taking shape.

IAN STRANGE: I did not know you were watching that while composing. That's fantastic. When we were first messaging, I was actually re-reading Tarkovsky's '*Sculpting in Time*'. I love the way he writes about poetics in cinema, it's informed nearly everything I do.

My lockdown was a different experience. Western Australia was locked off from the rest of the world, largely without Covid. It was like an island, as in literally if you left during the pandemic you couldn't get back in. That was a very surreal situation to be in. I was lucky in many ways, it's one of those situations where you certainly can't complain. But it was claustrophobic in its own way.

The work was born during our initial conversations right at the peak of the first round of global lockdowns when everyone was still in their houses, myself included. The work's subject is an isolated home – it's the last house standing in a former suburb. It's a house that is deeply vulnerable and set for demolition. And I think there was something about those layers of vulnerability in the isolation of these spaces, and a literal and figurative isolation during that time as well. When a project happens it always feels like there's all of these points of reference and they're all coalescing. And when we started, it all felt like the timing was perfect.

It felt almost too perfect. There was this moment where all my plans were off, but then I came back to this isolated home in Western Australia that was still there six years after I'd first seen it. I was blown away that it was still there, and it was just six months away from demolition. I was trapped in Perth and I was looking for a project to work on with Trevor. And the residents and former neighbours were so supportive of the work. I think the context of it being made at that time gives it a resonance. But I my hope is that it's a work that you could still talk about in 10 years' time. We have certainly not explicitly seen it as a pandemic work or a pandemic response.

TREVOR POWERS We would have had to work the same way anyways because we live across the world from each other. So really, Covid or no Covid, the process would have been relatively the same. But it would have been a little smoother as far as the timeline goes. We had to bump the timeline multiple times because of Covid. When I was first working on the music, Ian said I need the music in two months. So, I did all the music in two months because that was the timeline we were sticking to. It was actually really great for my process, because it forced me to be in this world and not do anything else because it was so important that I get it done. After that we had way more time. But if I had known that we had more time, I don't think if the music would have been what it turned out to be. So, I'm thankful.

IAN STRANGE: Yes, we were told the timeline the house would get demolished on. And then there was a Covid outbreak, and everything got pushed back. Initially we thought we'd have to make it really fast and then it slowed down. So, the work happened in spurts.

This is your first collaborative work together.

Are you planning to work together again?

IAN STRANGE: It's something I'd love to do again somewhere as a concept. I think it's something we could revisit – not this exact work, but the notion of responding to architecture or site and creating a work like this. For this project, we had a one-off performance just for that audience and then it was filmed. But I like the idea that this might be something that could sit within a bigger festival program meand city, where you find a site, create an installation and an original piece for that site, and it becomes a work that you come in pilgrimage to, to visit. These sorts of homes exist all around the world. I would love for a brave commissioning festival curator to curate a version of this work. I think that would be amazing.

And then we could think about how that music is performed. What does that look like, does that mean that it would be a live performance? There's an underlying concept here that I'd love to expand if Trevor is not sick of me.

TREVOR POWERS: I'm definitely not sick of you. It's funny because I mean really, if you count the number of conversations we've had other than email and DMs this is maybe number six?

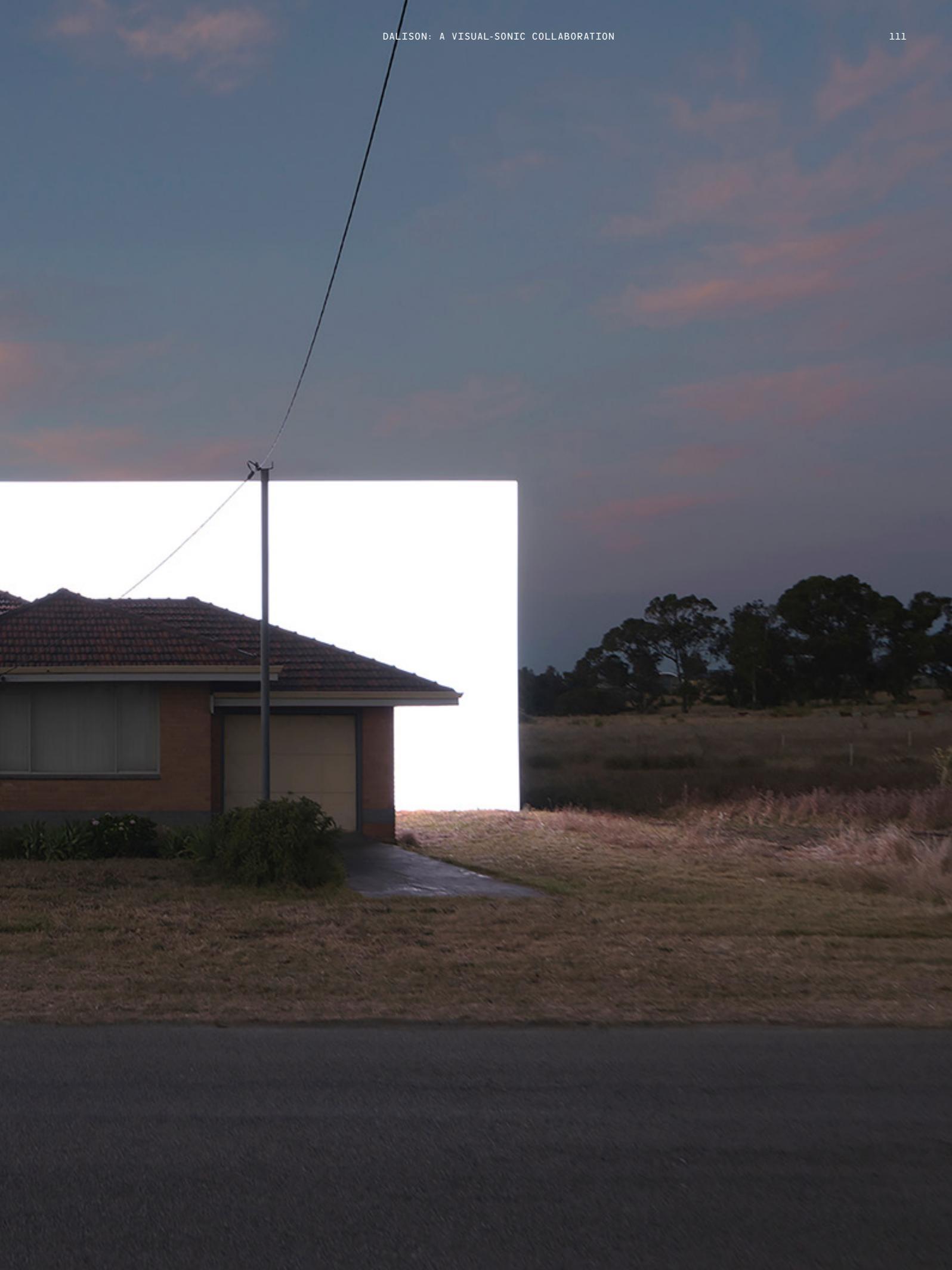
IAN STRANGE: Yeah, we've never physically met each other before.

TREVOR POWERS: It's crazy. It's all been screen based.

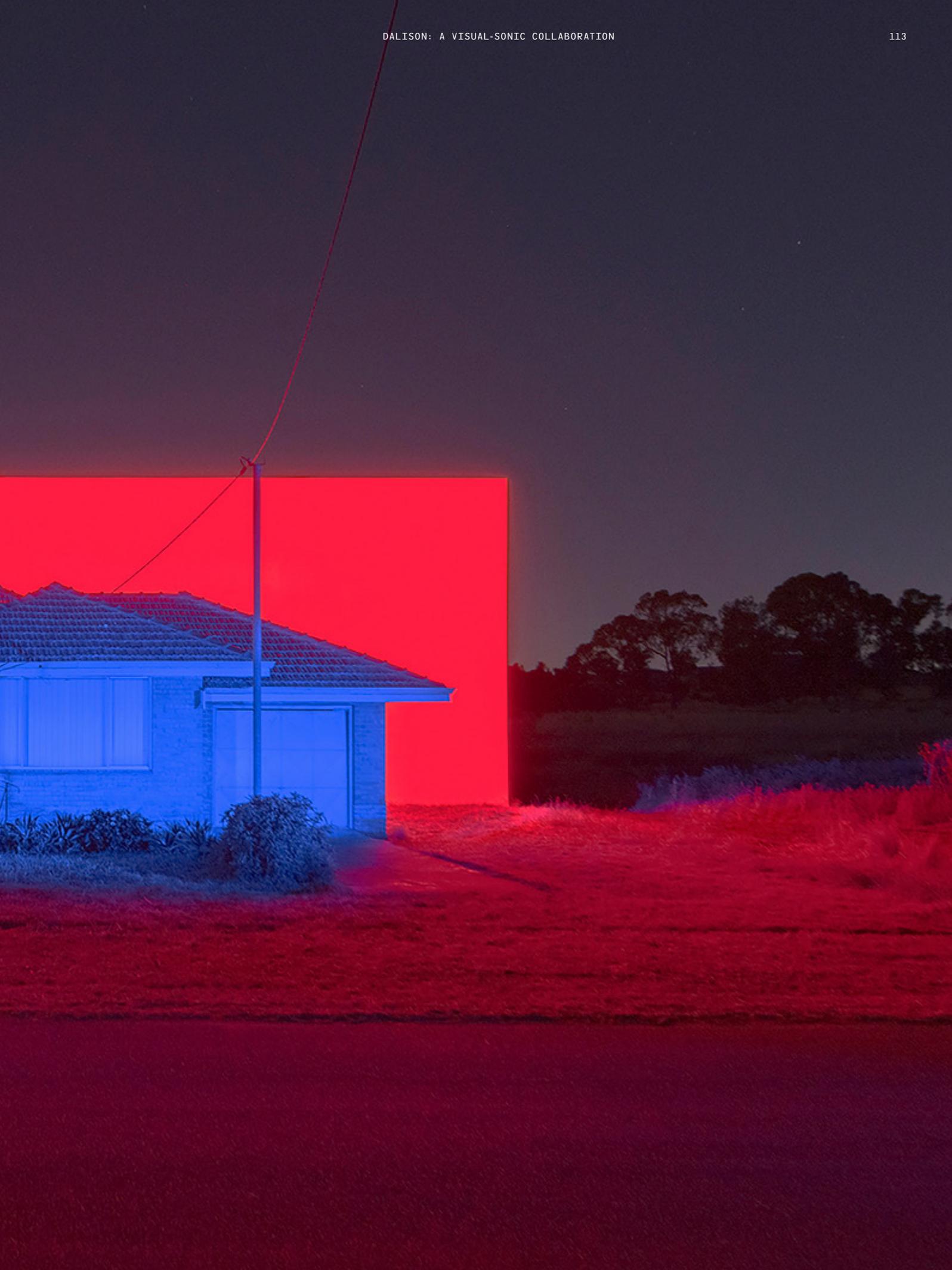
IAN STRANGE: Even though we haven't met in person, I feel like there's an intrinsic alignment in terms of value and approach and aesthetics and trust here. It's certainly been a dream collaboration.



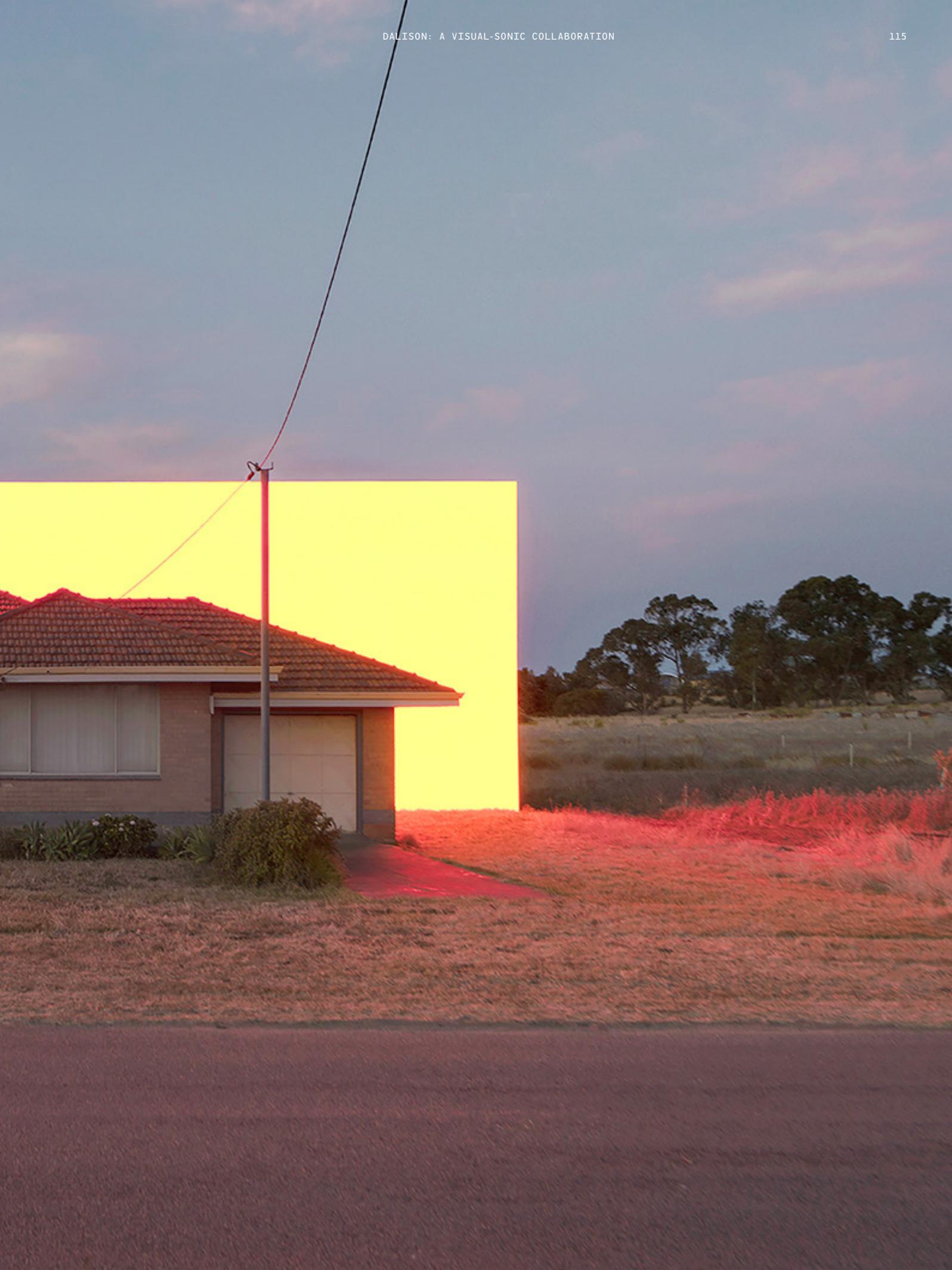
















IAN STRANGE is a transdisciplinary artist whose work explores architecture, space, and the home. His practice includes multifaceted collaborative community-based projects, architectural interventions and exhibitions resulting in photography, sculpture, installation, site-specific works, film, documentary works, and exhibitions created around the world. His studio practice includes painting and drawing, as well as ongoing research and archiving projects. Strange is best known for his ongoing series of suburban architectural interventions, film, and photographic works that subvert the archetypal domestic home. Strange's works have been exhibited extensively in spaces such as The National Gallery of Victoria, Canterbury Museum, The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Whitewall Galleries, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, ThinkSpace, MCA, The Queensland State Library, Allouche Gallery, Standard Practice Gallery, Strychnin Gallery Berlin, and Fremantle Arts Centre, as well as at arts festivals including Underbelly, PUBLIC, Nuart, Auckland Festival of Photography, and SPRING/BREAK 2017. In 2017, ABC TV released "HOME: The Art of Ian Strange", a six-part documentary series looking at Strange's career and work to date. Strange has spoken and lectured widely about his practice, including at Parsons School of Design (2014), Columbia College Chicago (2017), TEDxSydney (2018), RMIT University (2019), and Harvard Graduate School of Design (2020).

TREVOR POWERS is an American musician, producer, and composer based in Idaho. He began recording music in 2011, releasing a trilogy of albums under the moniker Youth Lagoon before announcing the end of the project in 2016. Two years later, Powers and a handful of contributors retreated to Sonic Ranch, a residential studio complex in Texas in the middle of a 2,300-acre orchard. The result was Mulberry Violence – the debut album under his birth name. The six-week tracking process consisted of fusing together textures, arrangements, and programming created at the ranch with poetry he had written over the previous two years. The album was mixed in Los Angeles by frequent Beyoncé collaborator Stuart White. In 2020, after a severe panic attack, Powers took to a cabin with a piano near Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains. Here Powers made the album Capricorn. As Quinn Moreland notes on Pitchfork, 'Like a heavily tattooed modern-day Thoreau, [Powers] sprinkles the record with recordings of raindrops, streams, and thunderstorms, reminders of the symphony that the natural world offers us for free.' Capricorn paints a world of melancholia and unsettling beauty. Powers' field recordings, classical motifs, and software sculptures don't stop time; they examine it like a beetle under a microscope – exposing that the extraordinary is often hidden in plain sight. 'From the minute we wake up, we're in a trance,' he says. 'This is music for our digital coma.'

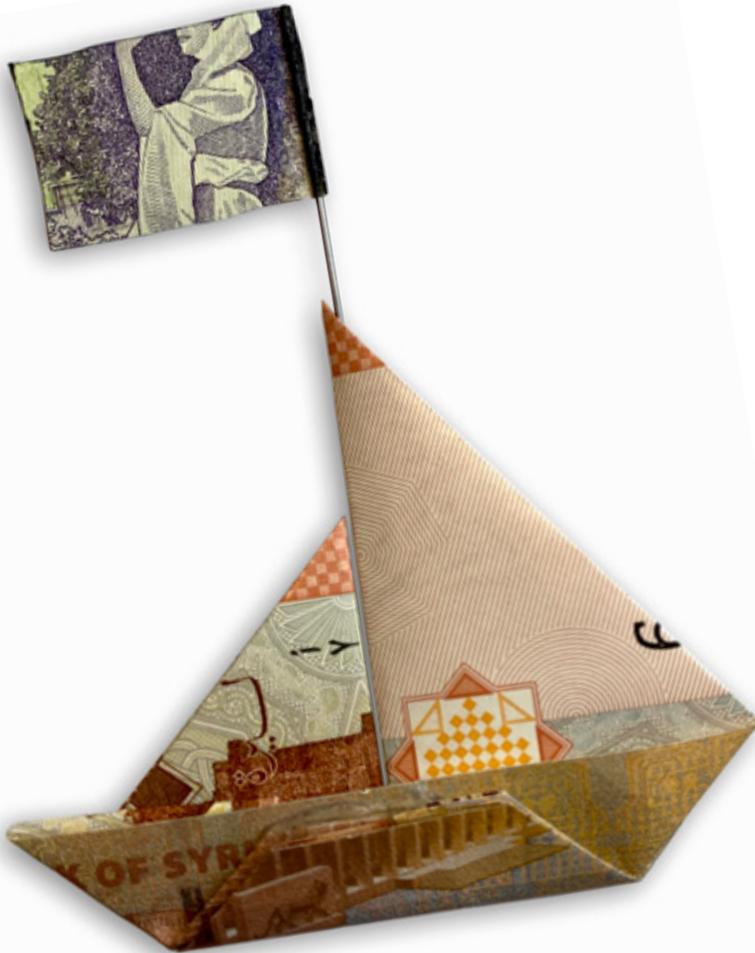
DREAMBOAT II:

Money Talks

Aida Wilde in conversation with Dan Vo
London, UK

DAN VO: Aida Wilde is a screen printer, street artist and activist who knows what it's like to experience displacement. In a piece she created to support refugee advocacy charity Choose Love, Aida uses boats as her inspiration. Rafts filled to capacity, making the perilous journey through the Mediterranean Sea, small and fragile, full of desperation and hope for a better future. Boats like these have become a symbol of the refugee crisis all over the world. Using repurposed Syrian banknotes, Wilde created *'Dreamboat II'*, a tiny origami boat waving a flag with the logo of the Choose Love campaign. Even the ink for the flag was made from pulverised Syrian currency. This piece is small and delicate, but it calls on us to remember the resilience of refugees rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of war, persecution, and natural disaster. Dreamboat II will be on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum as part of the *'Defaced! Money, Conflict, Protest'* exhibition from the 11th of October 2022 through to the 8th of January 2023.

'The exhibition examines the interplay of money, power and dissent over the last 200 years. A key strand of the show explores the role of the individual in protesting for rights and representation – from the radicals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, like Thomas Spence and the Suffragettes, to current artists and activists, such as Aida Wilde and Hilary Powell, who use money to promote social and economic equality or satirise those in power. The exhibition reveals the multiple roles money played during conflict, whether it be in occupation or resistance, as tokens of memory and remembrance, created during siege or emergency, made for or by prisoners of war, or made in support of sectarian or political ideologies. Contemporary artworks by Peter Kennard, Banksy and JSG Boggs are contextualised against earlier works and reveal continuities in the targets of protest across time.' (fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk: np)



CURATOR RICHARD KELLEHER EXPLAINS WHY THE FITZWILLIAM COMMISSIONED DREAMBOAT II: This is a key object in the exhibition. It's going to be part of a section which looks at the story of refugees and displaced people. It's going to be displayed among some other objects which touch on the causes of displacement, the movement and transit of people trying to get to new countries, their experiences in camps along the way and their reception in host countries. A Dreamboat is a powerful object for bringing this part of the story to the exhibition.

DAN VO: Aida, what will people see when they come to have a look at this piece of work?

AIDA WILDE: I hope that the message will be quite immediate as soon as you see it, even though it's this tiny little thing – it's only the size of your palm.

DAN VO: This whole work is very much raising awareness around the refugee situation. It's an origami work, so the note has been folded up to make up this boat.

AIDA WILDE: The origami idea was so simple for this note. It just made sense to make a boat, but then it turned out that I'm really rubbish at origami. I can't think in 3D, so I don't usually make 3D work. So, I was sitting in front of YouTube tutorial trying to make a boat for days and it was pretty rubbish. But I live in Hackney Wick, where we have such wealth of artists, including Michael True, who is a paper artist. So, I approached him and we experimented with a couple of shapes for the Fitzwilliam.

DAN VO: I do like the idea that there have been so many hands that have handled this piece, in the very same way that a note is handled by many people. There've been so many lives that have already been touched by it and continue to be touched by it. Now that's been given a new sense of meaning as well. For you there is a very personal element to this work, I believe you're also a refugee yourself, and so there's that personal resonance in the work.

AIDA WILDE: Yeah, completely. I've been practicing art professionally for 20 years or so and this was the first time that I ever addressed my heritage. In fact, when I did the first notes for Choose Love in 2019 (at Cash is King, Saatchi Gallery, London) a lot of the people that knew me well didn't know I was a refugee. In appearance, because I'm Iranian, my skin is quite light, so everyone always assumes that I'm English. This journey I started in 2019 has actually had a huge impact in my exploration of my identity, and why I may have suppressed it, or not overtly ever talked about it or used it within my work.

My father was arrested and brutally assassinated by the Khomeini regime when I was only two, leaving my mother with me and my two sisters. So, my mum made the brave and wise decision to flee Iran. We fled to the UK. It was such a culture shock. Going from that kind of scenario to somewhere where children are running around freely, and going to school, and playing with each other. And I think I just regressed. I stopped talking Farsi immediately. It was almost like I disowned that side and heritage of myself. These are the things that I've only come to the realisation from doing this work. I'd never examined why I stopped speaking Farsi or writing or mixing with other Iranians. It was almost like I just turned my back on everything. This has been rather painful, for me because I've also realised that I feel like I don't belong any anywhere. I'm always ticking this white/other box when I fill out forms but there's never an option that really fits. So, I've started to question that as well. You know why am I 'other'? What am I? I don't know, it's so complicated. I'm still working through these issues.

DAN VO: I think I was quite similar as well. I have to tick an 'other' box as well. But that's the nature of humanity. There are so many variations. Who and how we can be, and then to kind of say, well these are the only options you've got or 'other'. Then you kind of end up in a category that doesn't work. How can 'other' ever describe us? But do you want to carry on and engage with more work like

this? Do you want to continue to explore this? Or do you think it's too painful to keep doing?

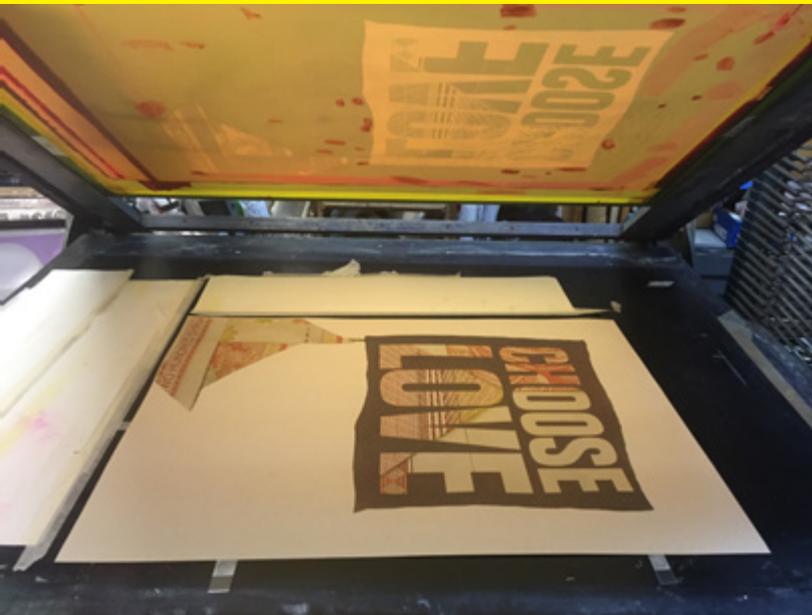
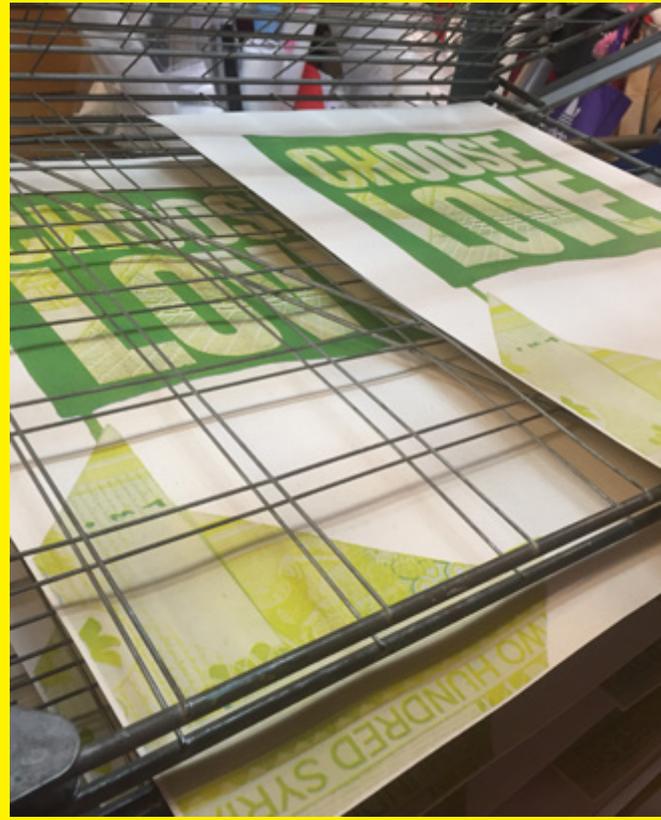
AIDA WILDE: I'm not going to go actively making work that's just about refugees, because I like making work about a lot of things in my studio and street-based work. When I started campaigning for Hackney Wick (where artists' studios are being threatened by development) I never realised why I was pushing so hard to fight gentrification. It was only in 2019 when it came to working with Help Refugees that I've realised it's all about the home. It's all about coming under attack. That fear of displacement is constant, because we used to move a lot when we first came to England. Every other year we would either be moving or changing schools. So, I think I still have this inherent fear of being displaced, of being thrown out and of not belonging somewhere. That was another realisation I came to in 2019 that seems to explain all the work I've been doing around gentrification and displacement.

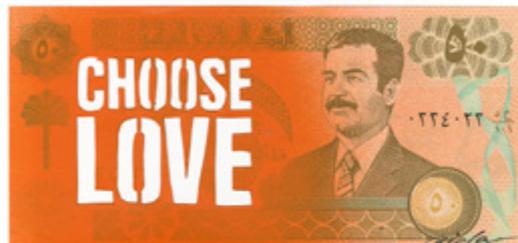
DAN VO: I suppose the boat is a visual example of that sense of displacement. My parents were refugees too. Of course, refugees are also people, so the boat is carrying souls. It's carrying people who are seeking a new home. And I can definitely see it in this work, that metaphor, that sense of displacement. Also, I think what's really interesting is the way that you've taken the image of the regime that they're often fleeing from, and you've subverted it. You've turned it into a means of getting to the new place. But I know there's also lots of things that you do to the notes as well, that aren't just folding, to completely obliterate that regime or change that or subvert – there's pulping involved as well?

AIDA WILDE: Yes, there's pulp involved – well, there's disintegration – but I discovered that you actually can't really pulp a note! It's a long process. I've printed with all sorts of weird things – I've burned my work and turned it into dust and printed with the ashes. I've printed with brick. I've printed with anything weird you could think of. So, this note involved three months of exploration. I literally pulped, soaked, mashed, and scraped away, and I got something like half a kilo of this pulp that I mixed into different sort of colours and ink medium, that I printed the Choose Love logo with, onto the origami boat. I think in respect when you look at look at the simplicity of the final outcome you don't realise that as much work has gone into just printing that tiny little Choose Love flag as the process of the origami.

DAN VO: What has really struck me with what you've just said is this idea of how these traces are within the print. So, you can't see them, but the traces are there, and once you know that the traces are there, I think of it a bit like human memory. There are these traces that will remain with us forever, these really tragic things that have happened. Sometimes these little traces travel between people as well. Like that metaphor of the note being passed between hands. I understand that when you first approached some of these notes, some of those traces and those memories reappeared for you and that you didn't really want to necessarily even look at some of the notes.

AIDA WILDE: Yeah, there were these Iraqi notes with Saddam Hussein's face on. I remember the curators came to my studio and said, 'oh, and we have these for you to work with'. And I was just repelled. I was like 'oh thank you so, you know we've got enough to get on with, without this', and I left Saddam to the side. I didn't want to work with them,





and it was only as I was working through ideas for the other notes that I had this revelation. I was examining Saddam's tyranny and reign and thinking about LGBTQ+ rights, and people getting stoned for their sexuality, and that's where the rainbow idea came from for these Saddam Hussein notes. Re-imagining these notes as a rainbow flag links us to the horrific human rights abuses LGBTQ+ people in Iraq have suffered, and to the experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees who then have to 'prove' their sexuality once they reach safety. I printed a Choose Love on each of these notes in different colours, but then as a stencil, I cut Choose Love out, and I used the note to spray a rainbow-coloured artwork from it, which used all of the notes.

These notes once had value. And then they became obsolete as countries go through civil unrest or war. So, now these notes are kind of worthless. And I think that sometimes, when we are dealing with refugees, and looking at their plight, and the mass exodus of people fleeing, they become a whole, and you stop seeing the individual. You stop seeing each life as worth something. And maybe we just forget that actually, this person could be a father, mother, uncle, brother, sister. And then people talk about lives lost, like you're just taking a sip of water or something. But every life matters.

DAN VO: What I'm getting from this, is this idea that we create value. It's something that otherwise in someone else's hands is just pulp. We create value, and so we should be choosing how to put value on things. So, you can choose love or you can choose monetary value. You can choose economics, or you can choose to actually see humanity, as you're suggesting. What does it mean to you, to be having this work placed in the Fitzwilliam Museum?

AIDA WILDE: I just wanted to raise more awareness. The Choose Love campaign has grown so rapidly in the last few years, which is just phenomenal. My initial feeling was, I just wanna raise some money. So, I didn't even really think too much about the museum, although obviously it's an honour to be

asked. It's so important, especially for someone like me. If you think about where I was born and where I've come from and now I have a piece in the Fitzwilliam – how did something like that happen? So of course, it's such a privilege and an honour.

DAN VO: Well, it's going to be a major exhibition. It's called '*Defaced! Money, Conflict, Protest*' and it's opening in October 2022. But if you think that people like you aren't supposed to be in the museum, and people like me aren't supposed to be in a museum but suddenly, your work is in the museum and suddenly I can take a group of refugees, or the children of refugees to the museum to show them your work. How does that make you feel?

AIDA WILDE: It reminds me of how I felt after my first acquisition (by the V&A, London) 10 years ago. I just want people to know that people like us can be somewhere, and we can make a difference and you can aspire to be there too. If I can do it, I think anyone can, right?

DAN VO: The other thing is that I hope that it will make people think about supporting Choose Love and refugees, whether it be financially as a donation, or whether it be to think about how they can support people who are new to this country, who are new refugees, and just trying to choose love in an emotional sentimental, real human level as well.

AIDA WILDE: Yes, that's so important. I remember when we first landed in the North of England. Back in the '80s it wasn't known for its great diverse pool of people. But the children there were so lovely, teaching me English, feeling sorry for me and playing with me. I think the most fundamental thing we can do is to just support people the human way. But I also believe that money talks. Money does really talk because it's only with money that we can actually make a difference and get supplies and support to the people who so desperately need them. That's why any art that I create for Choose Love is ultimately just trying to raise as much money and awareness as I can for refugees.

All photographs ©Aida Wilde.

This interview with Aida Wilde was originally conducted by Dan Vo for New Art, New Perspectives, a podcast hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum. Executive Producer, Hannah Hethmon.

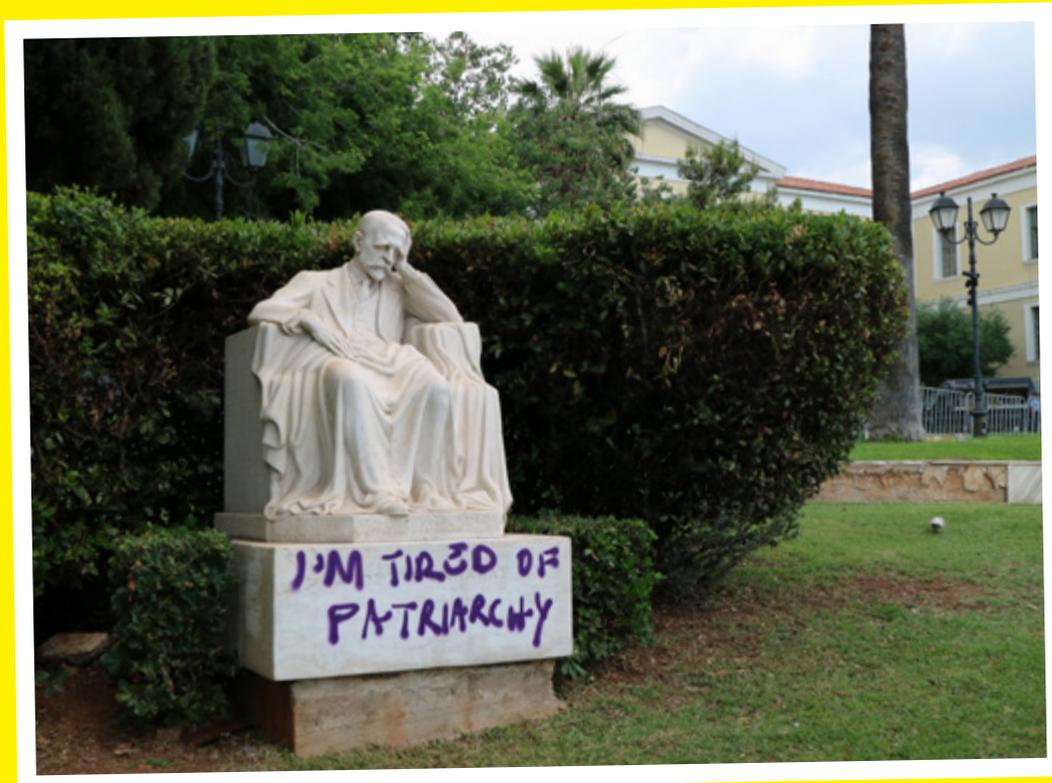
Defaced! Money, Conflict, Protest runs from October 11th 2022 to 8th January 2023 at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.

AIDA WILDE is an Iranian born, London-based printmaker/visual artist, and educator. Wilde's diverse screen-printed indoor/outdoor installations and social commentary artworks have been featured on city streets and galleries around the world and are responsive works on gentrification, education, and equality. Wilde's academic career includes, associate lecturer, course director and alumni, on the Surface Design and Foundation of Applied Arts at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts (2004-2015). Aida's serigraphs have been exhibited nationally and internationally at institutions including, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths, Vienna's Fine Art Academy, Somerset House, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and Saatchi Gallery.

DAN VO is a freelance museum consultant and media producer. He is Course Leader of the 'Gap Year London' programme at Sotheby's Institute of Art; Course Leader of 'A Queer History of Objects' at V&A Academy; and Project Manager of the Queer Heritage and Collections Network. Dan founded the award-winning volunteer-led V&A LGBTQ+ Tours and has developed LGBTQ+ programmes for other museums in the UK including the National Gallery, National Galleries of Scotland, National Museum Wales as well as the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Dan is part of the team that opened Queer Britain in 2022, making it the first LGBTQ+ museum in the UK. He has also been a presenter for BBC Arts. (chooselove.org)

Graffiti & Street Art: Queer Feminist Approaches

Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Anna Carastathis, Sarah H. Awad, Konstantinos Avramidis, Paridhi Gupta,
Susan Hansen, Piyarat Panlee, Julia Tulke & Oksana Zaporozhets



'I'm tired of Patriarchy.' Artist unknown. Athens, Greece, 2021. Photograph ©Julia Tulke

**Athens, Greece, Cairo, Egypt/Aalborg, Denmark, Delhi, India, London, UK,
Bangkok, Thailand, Rochester, USA, Moscow, Russia**

This roundtable brings together a group of interdisciplinary scholars from around the world to discuss queer feminist approaches to graffiti and street art studies. Chaired by Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Anna Carastathis of The Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research (FAC) in Athens, this discussion also marks the launch of the Special Feature, 'Inscriptions of Crisis: Street Art, Graffiti, and Urban Interventions' in *City: Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action*.

MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI: Sometimes academic scholarship and graffiti are not that distinct from one another, in the sense that they both share an attention to words, to detail and to placement. This Special Feature was created in reaction to the different crises occurring internationally, which were reflected in inscriptions on the walls. The different contributions to this collection give us glimpses of these inscriptions in urban environments around the world. Julia Tulke and Konstantinos Avramidis talk about the saturated walls in Athens after a decade of financial crisis, and then six years of what Europe calls a refugee crisis. Oksana Zaporozhets talks about the crisis of self expression and representation in public space in Moscow, while Susan Hansen talks about the visual counter responses to the vote for same sex marriage in Australia. Paridhi Gupta takes us to Delhi and the ongoing struggle for girls and women's presence in public space. Piyarat Panlee joins us from Thailand to discuss the crisis of eviction and gentrification under the military government, and our final stop is in Egypt with Sarah H. Awad's paper on the transformation of Cairo's walls, post-revolution.

We view city walls as a canvas and the social conditions in different locations as the paint in a gallery of mainly untold stories. What we want to celebrate today is that what is still very much a masculine subculture is experiencing a transformation, not only in the scholarship of queer and feminist perspectives but also in different crews and different writings on the walls.

ANNA CARASTATHIS: As a scene, as a practice, and as a body of scholarship, graffiti and street art have long been pervaded by a masculinist culture. We are interested in how this culture might be reworked through an alternative queer feminist lens. How does the approach that you've taken in your own scholarship on graffiti and street art embody a queer feminist perspective?

SUSAN HANSEN: I am delighted to be part of a panel where this is foregrounded, rather than something that I feel we're constantly sneaking in as some kind of underspecified critical alternative. Reading the line in Myrto and Anna's Editorial that said, 'we are tagging a spot for queer feminist contributions to the academic subfield of graffiti and street art' made me happy because it's saying something out loud that we all privately say once we've finished our presentations, but that we hardly ever get the opportunity to follow up on. I think one of the things that we have in common is that we are challenging a dominant model of scholarship that valorises the singular artist and the singular photograph of a work as it first appears on the wall. The latter practice is highly problematic because it effectively decontextualises what it is that we're looking at. It takes art out of local sociopolitical context. It doesn't look at what happened next on the wall, and it is very much based on an art historical model of scholarship that looks at individual – and assumed to be male – artists and creates a romantic myth around that. It also encourages a mode of analysing work that's based on practices developed for looking at work in museums and galleries, where you're not allowed to interact with the art. But work on the street is ideally more democratic and participatory than work in institutional art spaces, and I think a lot of our ways of trying to capture this also capture a level of contestation over who has the right to express themselves in public space.

The debates occurring on our city walls echo local and international crises, so it's important that we approach work in public space in sociopolitical and temporal context. I think Sarah Awad and I share an approach to walls as

dialogic and as conversational. This is an approach that doesn't ignore the tags or the scrawled comments on the more beautiful or monumental pieces, and in fact also looks at the practice of negative curation, erasure, and buffing as an integral part of the conversation – whether that's a local person taking offense to a work and painting it over themselves, or whether that's a zero tolerance top down approach from the authorities that seeks to erase everything. Erasure has to be part of this conversation.

ANNA CARASTATHIS: Piyarat, what are your insights on this question?

PIYARAT PANLEE: I think creativity has long offered an alternative lens for proposing solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues. In recent years in Thailand, there have been grassroots movements, civil society organisations, activists, social workers, teachers and academics and others across the country working hard to urgently discuss important issues related to the crisis with the feminist queer and decolonial lens. This movement has challenged political homophobia and anti-feminism locally through policy intervention, street demonstrations and digital activism. The movement also seeks forms of expression and political action that critique structures of sexism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and misogyny. A queer feminist perspective is based on the recognition that gender and sexuality are not only central to any understanding of a wider social and political process, but also are always brought forth in complex intersections with other social inequalities and conditions. We should also expand upon this perspective to analyse power structures through the lens of intersecting social divisions such as racialisation, gender, and sexuality in our current political context.

ANNA CARASTATHIS: Julia, what are your thoughts on a queer feminist perspective?

JULIA TULKE: I wanted to start by saying something more generally in response to this question, which is that I think employing a feminist queer perspective is really about becoming space invaders. And I say this with reference not to the French street artist Invader but to a 2004 book that some of you may know by Nirmal Puwar, that's called *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*. In this book, Puwar describes a dialectic between what she calls the somatic norm and the space invader, and I want to quote her here, because I think this is really insightful with regard to this question. Puwar says that 'social spaces are not blank and open for anybody to occupy. While all can in theory enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designed as being the natural occupants of specific positions. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong while others are marked out as trespassers who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined, circumscribed as being out of place. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders. Their arrival brings into clear relief what has been able to pass as the invisible, unmarked and undeclared social norm.'

There are echoes here of the notion of graffiti as something out of place in a more general sense, but I think this idea of the somatic norm and the space invader are immensely generative when we think about a feminist queer perspective to street art and graffiti scholarship practice, because they help us to decentre one of the most enduring and frustrating normative ideas about street art and graffiti, which is that the general anonymity of these practices somehow renders embodied identity irrelevant. There's this idea that there is a distance between the body of a writer, the body of an artist, and the trace that they leave on the wall, and by virtue of that, somehow this trace ends

up transcending race, class, gender, and so forth. There is also in turn this romanticised notion that writing on walls is somehow inherently democratic and that those are somehow inherently the marginal stories. But if we look more closely at who actually participates, who benefits, and how the risks and benefits are differentially distributed among lines of race, class, gender, and so forth within this practice – as they are in any other context – then I think we can get at a more queer feminist embodied understanding of the practice.

For me, as a visibly queer feminist scholar, educator, photographer and practitioner, I feel like I do take on the position of space invader. Any encounter I have with the field always forecloses certain conversations and enables others. I haven't yet explicitly written about what my particular body inhabiting this field forecloses and opens up, but I hope at some point I can, and maybe this can be a starting point. I hope to reflect on these issues in more of a collaborative setting. So, I hope that today we can function as an assembly of space invaders and start addressing some of these questions.

MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI: Let's accept this invitation.

Our next question is about the relationship between crisis and urban inscriptions in your work.

PARIDHI GUPTA: The crisis of gender is central to my case study. But primarily it is about the crisis of not belonging in a space, and to bring in Julia's points, it's about being made to feel like you constantly do not belong in a place, and what happens when as artists you come into that space and take up that space? We often think of graffiti as just the end product. We do not think of the process of making it. My project is about young women in a marginalised urban village in the capital of India. Some of them are immigrants from war torn countries, from marginalised nations, from marginalised castes, classes and gender identities, and they've found community within an art group.

They created murals which centre on women enjoying public space. This image is so intuitively opposite to what they see around them, which is a space occupied by males and traversed by males. However, the point is, it is not just about the image, it's about the time that they have spent in creating that image. They have occupied a space where women are not even speaking, and women are not even seen. What happens in the process when as young women, and as visibly gendered bodies, they enter this space and occupy it for a lengthy amount of time to paint? And what is the discomfort that they create around them? What is the reaction they get from passersby and how do they deal with it, and is there a positive sense of belonging that comes as a result of this occupation?

KONSTANTINOS AVRAMIDIS: In relation to my piece for this special issue, although it relates to two crisis moments in the periphery of what we call geographical Europe, I see in this an opportunity to approach crisis as a form of critique of the very means of space production, which we often take for granted. Through my architectural training and background, the aim was to underline the hegemony of spatial production and architectural representation itself. So, this crisis of representation in the public domain becomes a critique of the means of representing a space, and effectively there's an attempt to bring into representation this much needed multifocality of what it means to be present and to express yourself in public space – and to bring these voices of different crisis moments together, so they are speaking to each other.

OKSANA ZAPOROZHETS: I would like to express my gratitude to Myrto and Anna for dedicating this special feature

to the memory of my dear coauthor and friend Natalia Samutina, who was one of the pioneers of graffiti studies in Russia. Thank you Natalia for all our adventures and collaborations. We really miss you.

Today we take the wide geography and diversity of graffiti and street art studies for granted. But it was not like that for many years. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to discuss graffiti from Russia. In terms of the connection between graffiti and street art and crisis, we argue that it is not only the content of graffiti or street art that reflects crisis, but also the very presence of graffiti and street art inscriptions in the city. The absence of graffiti and the quick removal or buffing of graffiti from the streets of Moscow is a symptom of crisis. In many other cities all over the world the presence of street art and graffiti gives us a sense of the normality of urban life and indeed becomes iconic for some cities. But for many years it has not been like this in Moscow, because graffiti and street art are now rapidly erased, and at some point the state and neoliberal agents started replacing these organic urban inscriptions with large commissioned murals. This changed the whole picture for us because urban space became occupied by these monumental agents.

In our paper we focus on the presence of small urban inscriptions. These small-scale inscriptions matter as they bring public discussions back to the street. Today, the Russian anti-war movement is using small scale inscriptions to print messages on the walls, on bank notes, and on price tags in shops. They use these very small inscriptions to publicly register their opposition to the war. Our case study focuses on the idea that it's not the presence but rather the absence of urban inscriptions that represents crisis, and that Moscow's zero tolerance policy has led to small scale inscriptions becoming the barometer of what people think, what people want, and what they are eager to discuss in their reactions to our present situation.

SARAH H. AWAD: Thanks for creating this space where we can have a dialogue, share ideas, and build on each other's thinking. My field work in the article was based in Egypt and when I think about space and inscriptions of crisis in the city space, I think of how on a more general level power dynamics, our social relationships, who's represented and who's not represented, are always spatialised and they are always present in the spaces we live in. And they become more explicit in cases like Cairo and the Egyptian revolution, where new inscriptions appear that proclaim space in a certain ways that were not accepted before.

Power has a monopoly over visual representation in the city. For many years it's not just that the only images you see are advertisement images or images of authority, but also how that authority is represented. Here, we see only one version of the authority figure, as untouched and young and as the father of the nation. And then we see the counter images of the revolution breaking away from this and providing another version of reality. But in my own work, as in Susan's work, the idea is that when we follow those images and inscriptions in the city as some form of a social dialogue and some form of responses to each other – some reproducing certain visuals, some refuting them – then we find how power is spatialised and contested in this space. In the case of Egypt, we could see it in this cycle of the protest movement taking over, but also the counter protest and governmental forms of erasure, and in

the form of the government's own urban inscriptions. They were writing on city walls, 'the wall is not the place for your opinion,' So, we look at that dialogue. My more general point is how much power dynamics and representations are always spatialised in the places we live in, it's just that sometimes we do not see what's not represented, so we don't see the absences or who's not represented in spaces.

SUSAN HANSEN: The crisis that I looked at was centred around the recent postal vote for marriage equality (or same sex marriage) in Australia. I was drawn to this because I'm Australian and because I'm queer and also because I'm interested in the consequential dialogue that happens on the walls of our cities. What happened was that during the six week campaign before the actual vote for marriage equality, the rate of homophobic hate speech dramatically escalated. This has since been described as an acute external minority stress event for LGBTQ+ people and their allies in Australia. Notably, this hate crime also took the form of graffiti and other visual works in public space. In this case study I looked at both homophobic graffiti against marriage equality, and the subversion of and resistance to this hate speech in urban inscriptions in public space.

This postal vote put the human rights of one minority group on the agenda, as if the majority had the moral right to decide whether they should share the rights they already enjoyed. And this seemed to release a lot of homophobic public sentiment, the volume which was palpable in the media and in public space. What I was interested in were the ways that some people responded to this crisis by subverting this hate graffiti or by erasing it – or engaging in negative curation. I documented the graffiti and street art during this period using repeat photography, or longitudinal photo-documentation. This method allows us to unpick what happens to these spaces over time in this ongoing debate. I was also interested in the inverse of this. At the time, the Christian right was encouraging their followers to paint bomb or erase pro marriage equality murals. I used repeat photography to capture both the actions of the paint bombers and the evangelistic buffers, and how people responded to the buff as an invitational democratic surface that reinforced and affirmed the rights that were luckily borne out in the vote.

I also collected video recordings of attempted erasures in process, and captured people challenging those who were trying to buff pro marriage equality murals. So, I had two different data sources. Two different ways into the crisis – one over time, and one in the moment of attempted erasure. This can show us what happens when somebody tries to erase something from the public visual landscape that they are ideologically attached to, and how that is challenged, how that is resisted.

ANNA CARASTATHIS: Let's move to the third question, which brings into the present the visual essays which you all began writing nearly five years ago. Of course, a lot has happened since, and we were dealing with crises that were unfolding at the time of writing. These crises – some of them declared, some of them undeclared – were urgent, and often mortally violent, but they were seen as temporary conditions. We are wondering how you would now reflect on the urban conditions that were unfolding then? And how your perspective has shifted over the last five years?

PIYARAT PANLEE: It's sad to share that five years later, nothing much has changed in Thailand. We still ended up with a military-led government. And you know this kind of government – we can't expect much, right? Thailand is in

the midst of a transformation from a predominantly rural country to an increasingly urban one. In as little as ten years, the country has shifted from 36% urban to almost 50% urban, which means that half of the population now lives in cities and urban areas. While Thailand's urbanisation rates are still low compared to other developed nations, this transformation in Thailand is still significant, especially as most of the growth is expected to occur in Bangkok, the capital city. This development will place increasing demands on urban infrastructure as the city grows and grows.

The eviction of communities is part of a wider effort to modernise Bangkok. Authorities are also creating side-walks of vendors and food stalls and they are removing homes along the river to build a promenade. The evictions mostly target poor communities who have no formal rights over their land or property yet are an integral part of the city and contribute to its economy and 'colourful' character. Beautification is being worked up as a justification for urban redevelopment that threatens existing ways of life and ignores the aesthetic values and social needs of the poorer residents. They are being sacrificed on the altar of the touristic experience. It is a tragedy for Bangkok and for Thailand. Thai society has become irreparably divided by the interests of the ruling elite. The military-led government's urban development plans aren't just about the economy. The city itself is being reorganised against the poor and their politics. The Covid-19 outbreak and related quarantine and recovery measures and policy responses have exacerbated inequalities in the city. These have increased urban poverty and deepened the inequalities that existed before the Covid-19 outbreak.

SARAH H. AWAD: Like Piyarat, I also don't have good news. In 2013, my idea was to look at the Egyptian social movement's work on the street from the revolution. But it was some years until I got to do my PhD, and by then everything had been erased. That was actually what guided me to the idea of looking at the social life of images, because it was not just a situation of some images being erased. It was a situation of counterrevolution. It was a situation of great loss and grief from the activists and grief for a future where things could have been different. Many of the activists were imprisoned or died. So, this led to the idea of looking at the social life of those images – maybe those images live on, and they have other spaces to live on in, and they are documented in some way.

Even during my PhD, you could see these protest images transitioning from being large pieces, to only being able to be quick stencils, because of the risk of using public space for political messages, and then finally transitioning into online spaces. One other thing that's different from five years ago is that even the online space is quite threatening right now, so images that mock the President are targeted, and mobile phones are checked randomly in the street. This leaves me a bit pessimistic about the situation today, but I do think those ideas still live on in more hidden cultures and hidden spaces now, like James Scott's notion of hidden transcripts. But there is less and less space for expression. Making art as a form of social and political action has become, not only for me, but also for the street artists that I have talked with, a matter of weighing up the value and the potential impact of the work against the risk to people's own personal lives and families. The risk extends beyond the artist to their family.

Something that caught my attention with Piriyaat's discussion of the situation in Thailand is her observation that the city spaces are being renovated. In Cairo, it's also now very much controlled and renovated – there's fresh paint everywhere and many more cameras. So, we can see power very much spatialised. Those who support this development see it as beautification. They see it as evidence that we're finally moving away from the chaos of the revolution.

I will end with the words of one of my participants, who labels those kinds of creative beautifications and renovations all around the city – and especially in the central areas of the protest like Tahrir Square – a cover up rather than a beautification. It's like when you do a crime, you then need to cover it up and push it under the carpet. My academic attention is more and more focused on the idea of the spaces of absences and of what used to be, and the continued presence of absence in spite of the many efforts to cover it in so many layers of beautification.

PARIDHI GUPTA: I would like to build this connection between crisis and inscription and ephemerality. We understand that both the crises and the inscriptions that we're talking about are ephemeral. A crisis, at least in my case, of the community street art project in Khirkee is a continuous everyday rupture – every time you encounter the space as masculine, every time you encounter the space as visibly empty of women, that crisis reoccurs – it's an everyday rupture. Inscriptions as a response to this rupture create a disjuncture in this masculine space. They initiate a conversation.

In my paper the response to the first form of rupture has been to delay the ephemerality of the other. To somehow protect it against human erosion because there is this idea of reaffirming belongingness, to continue the stake you've claimed for as long a period as you can. When a mural is whitewashed, the group feels sad. They feel that a move that they had made forward is being pushed a step back, so they want to delay this ephemerality. They want to protect their art, at least from human factors of erosion, and that act of protection then becomes a way for them to resolve the crisis of not belonging. For young girls it is an extension of staking claim to space and holding on to this very temporary intervention that comes with street art and community art projects.

Over the past five years, the space itself has not changed. It has not yet gentrified like other urban villages in Delhi. But the act of making street art gave this group confidence. When I was talking to the artist who initiated this project, she said that now these young girls have started going out in the area at night, which is a huge thing for them. They have felt so threatened, as space invaders, just because of their gender in public space. Some of them have also encountered racism. But now these young people are the flaneurs.

OKSANA ZAPOROZHETS: I think the topic for the next special issue should be street art and graffiti in authoritarian cities. The situation is not getting any better in Russia where it's marching from authoritarianism to totalitarianism. I would like to stress two points. Firstly, that the history of graffiti and street art and their presence in the city is really important because it's not only the images which are erased, but it's also the stories of their creators and the public dialogue attached to it, which are also erased from the city streets. Secondly, I'd like to highlight non-hegemonic counternarratives. It's

important to look not only at those messages that are in direct opposition and which overtly resist the present situation, but also to remember that the very presence of unsanctioned images in public space could be considered as resistance.

Several years ago, the streets of Moscow were covered with these pictures of faces and people were puzzled. They could not understand what it meant. It's a simple image of a face which consists of a circle and a couple of spots. So, it's difficult to interpret. We assume that it's a face but we don't know if it's a human face. Or what the expression on the face is, is it happy, is it sad? In our urban spaces we have the right to understand and to identify the actors or the messages, but we also have the right to *not* understand. To be puzzled in this way means to be involved in the dialogue in urban space – to be curious about who created the image and what it means, and how I should react to that. The commissioned murals in Moscow's urban spaces are quite direct, there's a definite message praising military masculinity. In contrast to these monumental murals, street art that actually involves and troubles and puzzles you, includes people in the dialogue and makes you think about the city, the public, and your role in urban space.

KONSTANTINOS AVRAMIDIS: I think it was Ley and Cybriwsky who said that graffiti are the headlines of tomorrow's newspaper. Street art is destined to follow what is happening around us – we've witnessed this most recently with graffiti responses to Covid-19. Despite the fact that we now live in hyper technological and saturated technological environments, this low tech form of expression and community still matters. In the last five years, some street artists have left the scene and moved on, having made a name for themselves with iconography that reflected the economic crisis. But of course, the scene has also changed – not in terms of intensity, but there has been a drop in terms of numbers. In terms of urgency, things are getting more mature, despite strong municipal attempts to promote normalised beautified murals. In my architectural drawings for this special feature, I try to capture and render visible these palimpsests, writing over writing, erasing, the constant remaking of the nature of our city's surfaces, and the affinities these writings share across epochs and eras. In a sense I was creating a dialogue with Susan and Sarah's methods of repeat photography, just on a completely different time scale – my work covers several different decades and different crisis moments.

JULIA TULKE: My work is also grounded in Athens. Since 2013, I've had a project called Aesthetics of Crisis that has documented graffiti and street art in the context of the crisis in Athens. Athens has long been considered one of the most graffiti saturated cities in Europe. This is closely related to the abandonment of graffiti removal, both on the part of the municipality and on the part of private business owners. Crisis and austerity and graffiti and street art are closely interlinked in the context of Athens.

If that has been true for most of the 2010s, then at the end of this decade, with a governmental transition towards a new liberal conservative city government, there has been a distinct shift to graffiti removal – or negative curation – as an aspirational way of performing the end of crisis.

Everyone who has looked at graffiti and street art in Athens will know this quote from Amalia Zepou

from 2014, where she says, 'if the city is in crisis, if it has collapsed, you'll have graffiti everywhere, but once graffiti becomes commissioned, it's a signal of a beginning to the end of the crisis.' The current administration of Athens has taken this statement and made it into a policy paradigm. They're fully embracing commissioned beautification-centric street art as a means of ameliorating the visual appearance of public space, by removing 'visual pollution' and the 'smudge' of graffiti and uncommissioned street art from the city, as a signal to the end of the crisis. It's interesting to look at the kinds of discourses they draw on to justify this. It's about the return of control to public space. Crisis and austerity signify a retreat of control from public space, and now the administration is signaling a return. In these campaigns you see an insistence that there is a renewed presence of the municipality on the streets of the city, and they also draw on the old school moral panic discourses about graffiti from NYC in the '70s. The Mayor has spoken of graffiti removal as 'removing misery' and has asserted the 'right to live in a city with clean public spaces.'

There's also a more contemporary association with the sanitation of public space in the context of Covid, so it's interesting to think about how these discourses morph and adjust to newer crisis situations. If we look on the ground, these graffiti removal campaigns are actually not very successful. I think we can argue that removing graffiti or negatively curating public space is an impossible venture. But I don't think these campaigns are actually about making space free of graffiti, they're about using graffiti as a vehicle to symbolically claim the end to crisis. So, this is where my attention has turned at the end of a decade of thinking about street art and graffiti in the context of crisis.

ULISES MORENO-TABAREZ (CITY EDITOR): I'm curious about how your methodological approach to studying street art has changed over the last five years?

JULIA TULKE: For me, things have shifted from thinking about street art and graffiti as an object of study towards thinking of street art and graffiti as a method of studying space more broadly, and I think that's echoed in a lot of our contributions here. In moving away from object-centric approaches to site specific approaches, Susan's work on the method of longitudinal photo-documentation has been influential. This is essentially the idea of not centring so much on a single snapshot of an object as the object of analysis but repeatedly returning to sites to document them and thinking about sequences and dialogues. And this is how I've come to think of my engagement with Athens, because I've been returning to the city since 2013. Every time I come, I continue to document and I continue to think about changes. This is the prism through which I now think about my own scholarship.

SUSAN HANSEN: In terms of the evolution of my own methods, I came to this originally as a trained conversation analyst, so I see dialogue in images. So, I tried to find a way to capture what I was looking at that slowed the conversation down, and this is where the method of longitudinal photo-documentation came from. Even though work on the street is an asynchronous form of visual communication, it still temporally unfolds and responds in a lot of the same ways that verbal forms of dialogue do.

You've just got to string it all together retrospectively to re-embed it in sequence so that you can then analyse it. But over the last five years, I've had less time to spend on developing this methodology because I'm currently functioning as more of an academic midwife, in that I now spend most of my time developing, curating, editing, and promoting the work of others. But I am hoping that we can take these methodological developments forward together.

SARAH H. AWAD: I also think that our methods have changed from looking at objects that exist, to the stories of things that do not exist anymore, and the social life of what started in different narratives. But in authoritarian cities, engaging in this kind of investigation can not only threaten active political activists on the ground, but also journalists and academics. To be totally honest, this threat has discouraged me from taking on more field work and interviews and photo-documentation in Cairo. Egypt is a place where just carrying a camera could get you into a lot of trouble. So, my primary place of data collection has transitioned in response to this political threat. I now use the methodological framework I developed in Cairo on cases elsewhere. I am currently applying this to right wing political campaigning in Denmark, looking at the process of othering through images in posters and graffiti about the refugee crisis.

PARIDHI GUPTA: I also study political graffiti and feminist political movements as cultural interventions in the city. I feel that increasingly the city is becoming unsafe for the gendered body of the researcher. My methods have also transformed in that I no longer carry a digital camera. Even though we live in this very developed world of beautiful images being created with DSLRs, not everyone has the privilege, nor the ability to carry big cameras in public space, especially when we're going into active movements as women. So, we need to make a case for low resolution images being legitimate objects of research.

PIYARAT PANLEE: I started writing my paper from the point of view of an anthropologist using visual research methods. But recently, my interests have shifted more to visual anthropology and community-based research. I have started using the photovoice and photo elicitation method, which has given me insights into the community that I might not find through interview methods.

OKSANA ZAPOROZHETS: I feel that my approach has also changed in that it's moved from an isolated study of a particular city to a more comparative perspective. I am grateful to the Thai and Egyptian cases because they resemble the situation in Russian cities. I think it's really important not to exoticise the individual cities we study, and to put things in a broader context. Thank you so much for this discussion. It inspires me to continue our research.

MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI: Before we close, I want to acknowledge the queer feminist artists and crews. You know who you are. In essence they've told me everything I need to know about space, about community, and about writing, and I want to celebrate this feminist approach to graffiti and street art. Without this movement we wouldn't be here today. Whenever we arrive in a new city, other than following the inscriptions on the walls, we connect with each other. It's a way of understanding and viewing the city through collective eyes, through a collective lens, through collective opportunity.



'Queer Revolution.' Artist unknown. Athens, Greece, 2021. Photograph ©Julia Tulke.

KONSTANTINOS AVRAMIDIS is a Lecturer in Architecture and Landscapes at the University of Cyprus. He has taught extensively at various institutions in Greece and the UK, most recently at Drury University and the University of Portsmouth. His research has been published in books and journals, including *City* and *Design Journal*. Konstantinos co-founded the architectural design research journal *Drawing On* and is the principal editor of *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City* (Routledge, 2017).

SARAH H. AWAD is Associate Professor in sociocultural psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark. In her research, she explores the processes by which individuals develop through times of life ruptures and social change using art and storytelling. She has also a special interest in visual methods and the analysis of urban images and their influence on identity, collective memory and politics within a society.

ANNA CARASTATHIS is a political theorist. Anna has held research and teaching positions in various institutions in Canada, the United States, and Greece (Université de Montréal, California State University Los Angeles, University of British Columbia, Concordia University, McGill University, Panteion University of Political and Social Sciences). She is the author of *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016), which was named a Choice Outstanding Academic Title by the American Library Association, and *Reproducing Refugees: Photographia of a Crisis* (co-authored with Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020).

PARIDHI GUPTA has a PhD in Gender Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. Her doctoral work focussed on the cultural manifestations of contemporary feminist movements in India and their relationship to urban spaces. She is interested in visual interventions into cityscapes and has looked at forms of political art and community art in India. She is also one of the editors of an independent journal 'EnGender' and works towards making academia inclusive and accessible through her peer support group.

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MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI is a social researcher and photographer. Their research focuses on the interface between urbanism, culture, and innovative methodologies. They are the author of *Sociology of Crisis: Visualising Urban Austerity* (Routledge, 2017); co-author of *Reproducing Refugees: Photographia of a Crisis* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020, with Anna Carastathis); and the co-editor of *Remapping Crisis: A Guide to Athens* (Zero Books, 2014) and *Street Art & Graffiti: Reading, Writing & Representing the City* (Routledge, 2017).

JULIA TULKE is a PhD candidate in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester, NY. Her research broadly interrogates the politics and poetics of space, with a particular focus on crisis cities as sites of cultural production and political intervention, for which Athens has been her central case study. Her work on the city through the past decade includes research and writing on political street art and graffiti, austerity urbanism, crisis photography, and the emergence of feminist and queer protest. Cumulating and concluding these endeavors, her dissertation traces the proliferation and significance of artist-run spaces and initiatives during the historical period bounded by the 2008 economic crisis and the 2020 pandemic emergency.

OKSANA ZAPOROZHETS is a visiting researcher at the Insitute for Regional Geography in Leipzig. Her current research projects focus on urban inequalities, new residential areas and large housing estates. Her research interests also include street art and everyday mobility. She co-edited the books *Microurbanism: City in Details* (2014) and *Nets of the City. Citizens. Technologies. Governance* (2021).

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