



## Editorial

# Unsanctioned Art in Times of Pandemic Anxiety, Rampant Inequality, and Anti-Colonial Iconoclasm

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A little later than anticipated, but we are excited to finally be releasing the fifth issue of *Nuart Journal*! COVID-19 is our alibi. Unfortunately, the unusual and unexpected circumstances caused by the pandemic severely impacted our capacity to deliver this issue in September 2020, as originally scheduled.

A lack of submissions was not the issue. On the contrary, with the overall state of anxiety brought about by the lockdowns, curfews, and other restrictive measures that followed in its wake – making everyday life eerily resemble a dystopian novel – the coronavirus proved to be a rich source of inspiration for both artists and academics alike.

Apart from causing an abundance of loneliness and misery, one thing the pandemic did in a truly explicit fashion, was uncover and exacerbate existing inequities all over the world. As billionaires' net worth increased by a staggering \$3.9 trillion between March 18 and December 31, 2020, millions of people lost their jobs and have fallen into destitution – with women, people of colour, and those from marginalised communities being among the worst affected.

Non-profit group Oxfam identified flawed and exploitative economic systems, entrenched inequality and oppression, patriarchy, and structural racism ingrained in white supremacy as the root causes of injustice and poverty. Along with police brutality, these are precisely the issues that motivated millions around the world to join Black Lives Matter protests following the killing of George Floyd, which sent shock waves around the world.

The anger and outrage of many was such that the urge to go out and raise one's voice outweighed the importance of staying at home and adhering to health guidelines. Consequently, cities in lockdown with barely a soul on the streets suddenly saw large-scale and sustained protests, typified first and foremost by controversial acts of iconoclasm. This, in turn, gave fresh impetus to the debate in many Western societies over how to deal with the grim realities of a colonial past.

The above crises are very much entwined. And it comes as no surprise that artists and writers working in public space have responded immediately to these developments. Especially now, the art on our cities' streets powerfully mirrors both our communities' concerns about the present and aspirations for our collective future.

In the call for papers for this issue of *Nuart Journal*, we purposefully kept the theme open and unrestricted to encourage a diversity of submissions that reflects the rich and interdisciplinary field of contemporary research on street art and graffiti. However, given our rapidly changing world, we also emphasised our interest in finding out more about emerging artistic forms of response and resistance to our current times; about the new challenges and inequities emerging from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and about the productivity of unexpected alliances and new creative connections forged in the face of this particular moment in our collective history. As a result, many of the articles in this issue represent an analytical, thoughtful, democratic, and aesthetic engagement with the hurdles all of us have encountered over the last year.

The lead academic article for this edition is 'Creating a Global Archive of COVID-19 Street Art', in which Heather Shirey and David Todd Lawrence describe their development of a collaborative database of street art across the globe produced in response to the pandemic. The authors provide key insights ('notes on research in progress') into their methods in approaching this formidable task, as well as a sense of the diversity of the art that was produced over the past year in various countries around the world. Notably, they have also created a parallel George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Database, to gather together street-based responses to systemic racism and the related global outcry.

Ulrich Blanché has written a detailed and insightful analysis of Keith Haring's illegal street-based interactions with the likes of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Hambleton and others on the streets of New York City in the 1980s. Particularly, it highlights the dynamics and complexities that were at play among these highly popular artists, as they repeatedly worked around, over, and in response to each other's artworks, most notably Hambleton's mysterious and menacing shadowmen that enthralled many a passer-by back in the day.

Enrico Bonadio and Olivia Jean-Baptiste have contributed a legal analysis of Banksy's recent trade mark case revolving around his image of the 'Flower Thrower'. A decision by the European Intellectual Property Office released in September 2020, represents the conclusion of a two-year battle between Banksy and Full Colour Black, a UK-based greeting card company. Bonadio and Jean-Baptiste explain how one of Full Colour Black's key claims, concerning 'bad faith', ultimately proved to be Banksy's downfall in the case.

Also featuring in the original articles section are two submissions with a focus on South America. María Fernanda López Jaramillo's provides an in-depth analysis of the history of *chapeteo*, a once thriving form of urban calligraphy in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Based on extensive research and interviews with *chapeadores*, her essay is an insider's account of a local phenomenon that was normatively stigmatised on account of its association with gang culture and crime, and which many people would therefore rather forget. López Jaramillo not only zooms in on the many traits of this style of writing, she also takes a wider view on the issue, highlighting striking similarities with two more such 'regional calligraphies': *pichação* in Brazil and *ganchos* in Mexico. We are pleased to announce that this is our very first dual language article, as the English is accompanied by a Spanish version of the text.

'The Forest on the Walls: Indigenous Street Art' by Laura Burocco is an iconographic journey along various artworks in different cities in Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia, most of them by Indigenous artists, a significant number of whom are female. Throughout her article, Burocco raises critical and provocative questions regarding the fraught relationship between street art and Indigenous knowledges. Arguing that gentrification can be considered as a new form of urban colonialism, she wonders how we may liberate Latin American street art from the weight of European and North American references, in order to ultimately decolonise street art.

In the visual and experimental section, the lead article by John Fekner – 'Revisiting *The Detective Show*' – links us right back to Gorman Park in Queens, New York, 1978. This was a foundational intervention with a much more quotidian, quiet, and nuanced character compared to most contemporary street art festivals, with their monumental murals and city-wide atmosphere. As such, Fekner's visual essay deftly connects with the productive restrictions COVID-19 has placed on organised urban creativity in 2020–2021.

Aida Wilde and Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski have contributed an evocative account of their collaborative response to the pandemic, and to the Black Lives Matter movement. Their collection of narratives/poems and calls to action are grounded in conversations between the duo during the first UK lockdown in 2020. The resulting works were exhibited as part of disCONNECT in London and Hong Kong.

Taking as a starting point the Black Lives Matter 'statue storm' which has seen confederate statues in the United States and imperialist statues in Europe toppled, defaced, or slated for removal, Kristina Borhes tells the story of various forms of iconoclasm in different places over time in her essay titled 'A Brief Moment of Monument'. By focusing on the tools and methods of the trade, she lays out how the idea of iconoclasm as an act of destruction gradually shifted away from the concept of total erasure to overwriting in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ropes, hammers, and blowtorches are still being used today, but have partially made way for spray cans and marker pens, skateboarding, light projections, and drones – and soon perhaps the hacking of virtual realities. All of these enable their own particular forms of (temporary) demolition – either in a literal sense, or, no less powerful, conceptually in the minds of great numbers of people.

Another visual contribution that connects with contemporary themes is Julia Tulke's '#StayAtHome Protest'. This visual essay addresses the use of handmade protest banners in the windows and on the balconies of private buildings throughout Berlin – banners meant as expressions and performances of political protest and solidarity. Tulke's photos are a vivid illustration of the ways in which the pandemic has provoked palpable shifts in our strategies of urban visual activism.

For their part, Kehinde Christopher Adewumi and Joy Iorvihi provide an illustrated account of their 'Boxed In Project' in Abuja, Nigeria. This pop-up installation and street-based performance, produced by a voluntary collective, was based on the masquerading tradition that has long been a part of African culture and was designed to sensitise the community to the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to make people aware of their individual and collective risks, rights, and responsibilities.

For the final submission in this section, we again hop from one continent to another, allowing Jan Vormann to make plain how decades of neoliberal policies have caused both great inequities as well as massive and nation-wide protests in Chile. By inviting local residents to come over and paint a wall of his own home in the city of Valdivia, the artist produced a powerful collaborative mural that enabled its creators 'to release the pressure that is weighing down on them'.

In our lead review article, Minna Valjakka attests to the novel and complex 'role, (re)mediation processes, and (im)materialities of graffiti and street art' raised by the particularities of the year 2020. In her review of the disCONNECT hybrid multi-site urban art exhibition that was held in London and Hong Kong, as well as online, she discusses how responsive collaborative installations have disrupted conventional art world paradigms and stimulated new questions on 'how and where graffiti and street art – and/or manifestations based on these practices – can be exhibited and documented'.

Finally, in our interview with Bill Posters, we discuss his recent book, *The Street Art Manual: A Step-by-Step Guide to Hacking the Streets*. This is an incendiary text, with a benign cover that belies the critical content within. Written with a high level of wit and a Do-it-Together ethic, and presented in an accessible format, this manual provides anyone who is keen to become active in public space in one artistic way or another with vital practical and legal tips, alongside history and critical theory.

The crown-like virions that are the perpetrators of this whole ordeal have proved uncannily versatile and stubborn. While many at the start of 2020 thought, perhaps naively, that the madness the entire planet is going through would be over in a matter of months, one year on we are slowly becoming aware that the disease may be here to stay, and that this is only the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end. However uncertain the future may be, with vaccination campaigns underway in most countries there seems a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Until we get there, we can take solace in the knowledge that (street) artists across the globe will no doubt continue to be at the forefront of social, political, and environmental change, and will one day reconvene in Stavanger and Aberdeen to reignite our interrupted twenty-year Nuart Festival tradition.

As they keep finding novel ways to subvert the system, express themselves, and engage and embellish the cities that we inhabit, we remain committed to our mission of bringing you the most creative and innovative research in the field of unsanctioned public art practice in the issues of *Nuart Journal* to come.

If you would like to contribute to a future issue, please see the back cover for the call for papers.