

Eloquent Vandals

Editorial:
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The theme of Issue II – ELOQUENT VANDALS – is a provocative link to street art and urban culture’s delinquent roots and the ‘creative joy of destruction’ – evidenced most recently in Banksy and Blu’s high profile acts of auto-iconoclasm, but also present in a plethora of quotidian, human scale, unsanctioned urban interventions. The rise of festival-sponsored neoliberal muralism sits uneasily with these ungovernable forms of urban creativity. Issue II contains contributions that celebrate the work of street art’s eloquent vandals, and papers that critically examine attempts to cultivate, instrumentalise, commodify, and ‘protect’ the art of the streets.

Eloquent vandals are integral to a critical street art. We need to recognise that ‘vandals’ and those associated with acts of creative crime and resistance are also capable of positioning and understanding their work in relation to critical theory/studies/history – and indeed often do so, while also recognising that they needn’t do this to be accepted into the field. The theme of this issue also raises critical questions about the use and mastering of specific forms of language to justify/block entry into the field of contemporary/public/fine art discourse.

In this issue, we also explore the importance of storytelling and its relationship to the city, of narratives with the power to turn a single space into a multitude of places with different meanings to different people, stories that transcend ‘history’ and bring in herstory, yourstory, ourstory and theirstory – whilst freeing us from narratives we no longer need. Italo Calvino’s 1972 novel *Invisible Cities* is a literary masterpiece that explores the imaginable possibilities of the city. The book is framed as a conversation between Marco Polo, a 13th Century explorer and Venetian merchant and the emperor Kublai Khan. The majority of the book consists of short stories describing 55 fictitious

cities that Polo has visited as part of Khan’s expanding empire, these are narrated by Polo to Khan himself. Towards the end, Khan prods Polo to tell him of the one city he has never mentioned directly – his hometown Venice. Polo’s response: ‘Every time I describe a city I am describing Venice’. In effect, Polo has been going home each time and imagining the possibilities of what a city might be.

Many of Polo’s descriptions can be read as eloquent meditations on the city, culture, language, time, memory, or the general nature of human experience in relation to place. What can we collectively imagine? Perhaps the imaginable is not so ridiculous and fanciful as it sometimes sounds, maybe we already have the resources we need to shape and create the environments we want to pass through and live in.

The lead visual article for this issue, Jeff Ferrell’s ‘Sometimes the City’, offers a further meditation on collective imagination and the city, through his photo essay which features long lost photographs, scrounged from the rubbish bins of a large American city. Ferrell presents these tattered, stained, yet startlingly evocative photographs as ‘a secret archive’ of urban life, ‘a disorienting *dérive* through other lives, other times, and other places... another city within the city’. Ferrell’s quietly powerful visual essay is a deft blend of scholarship and art.

Our lead academic article for this issue, Alison Young’s ‘Art and Belonging: On Place, Displacement and Placelessness’, explores some provocative questions about the way that street art relates to place, and its power to both foster and dismantle spaces of connection and disconnection. Young explores the uneasy relationship between street art and gentrification, before turning to critically consider the work of artists who focus squarely on the radically unsettling experience of displacement,

dislocation, and dispossession. This is a traditional academic paper with a critical yet empathic edge. Young poses – and responds to – the kinds of ‘difficult questions’ that are necessary for a truly critical street art practice.

Indeed, this second peer reviewed issue of *Nuart Journal* marks another step towards realising a more critical street art. The journal is a forum for critical discourse and commentary on urban art cultures and street art practice. We aim to publish traditional academic articles as well as making space for more experimental and visual essays. We have an open call policy (subject to peer review) and we particularly welcome submissions that break the mould and challenge conventional modes of scholarly and artistic communication.

We want to engage people who would not usually read academic journal articles. And we want academics to be exposed to the cutting edge work of independent scholars, artists, and curators. We believe there is an untapped synergy we can activate by bringing these divergent players together, in one volume.

The journal is divided into three main sections:
Original articles
Experimental and visual essays
Interviews, book reviews, and talks

In Section I, our academic articles deal with some key practical, political, and conceptual issues currently facing critical street art practice. This includes Young’s critical consideration of art’s relationship with place, displacement and placelessness. Reuben Woods builds on Young’s focus on displacement, to consider the work of ‘secondary vandals’, in the uncommissioned urban art that flourished in post-earthquake Christchurch. In a more theoretical paper, Mancini considers the conceptual emergence of street art, considered against the productive notion of the ‘gift’; while Enrico Bonadio provides a thoughtful consideration of the implications of preserving street art for the ‘authenticity’ of the works ‘protected’.

In Section II, our visual essays offer an alternative to the more traditional papers of Section I. Articles in this section push the boundaries of conventional modes of scholarly and artistic thought. These include Ferrell’s meditation on lost photographs found; Oskolki’s striking black bombing project, which radically expands the limits of our understanding of bombing as it converges with text-based interventions; Italian artist Vlady’s *Art Underground* project, an experimental diagram mapping the overlapping connections and unexpected influences of contemporary Italian urban artists; and Jens Besser’s photo essay on his *PADiGLIONE IN MOVIMENTO* project, an unauthorised ‘Vandals Pavilion’ held during the Venice Biennale in 2017. Georgios Stampoulidis picks up a thread raised in Young and Wood’s academic articles, with his photo essay on urban creativity in abandoned places, with a focus on the failed *Xenia Hotels Project*, in Greece. Daniël de Jongh considers the role of text based street art in our cities, while Jaime Rojo of Brooklyn Street art presents a striking photo essay on the eloquent vandals of New York, and other places.

Section III contains interviews and talks from leading artists, curators, and academics. Curator Christian Omodeo discusses the role of the ‘Vandal Curator’ and suggests some critical strategies for art historians and curators to ‘escape from the system’ in order to find new ways of working with art institutions. Vittorio Parisi reviews *Urban Art: Creating the Urban with Art* (Edited by Ulrich Blanché and Ilaria Hoppe), a book that positions ‘urban art as not simply about making use of the urban space... [but rather] art as an active, bottom-up process by which communities shape and reshape the urban environment they inhabit, through a multitude of actions’. To round off this section, artist Faith XLVII discusses her critically acclaimed new book, *Ex Animo*, and Argentinian artist Milu presents her provocative ‘Anti-Ted Talk’ talk about street art.

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

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