

ART

Vlady

'Art Underground' is an unconventional diagram aiming to highlight the connections between and the background of 28 top Italian street artists. The diagram has the appearance of an underground system map that is a nod to the so-called 'underground' of the Italian contemporary panorama.

I asked the 28 street artists to answer the following question: 'Name three contemporary national artists who have had a lot of influence on your own career path, or are still relevant to you today. You can also indicate up to three foreign artists, if you so wish.' The artists mentioned (Italians, foreigners, deceased, or alive) form a list of 136 names. Despite their heterogeneity and transversality, some very interesting convergences emerge that help to understand the past, the present, and the collective imaginary of the Italian urban scene.

Both the pivotal artists of modern art history (Burri, Balla, Kandinsky, LeWitt, and – top of the artists' preferences – Munari) as well as the representatives of the graffiti scene (Mode 2), and the world's most important street artists (Os Gemeos, Erosie, Momo) were called to mind. No less important, so were many of the very artists that were interviewed (108 stands out among them). Banksy, due to a number of factors, represents the greatest noticeable absence. The interviewees come from a classical graffiti background, rather than having an activist history/path. Moreover, 'stencilism' has never been well represented in Italy, so Banksy appears to be not directly influential.

Possible interpretations? Street art is a fickle pheno-

menon, difficult to define and almost intangible – a scene that has neither leadership nor a unitary identity. However, from the answers given, we can trace some very precise foundations and branches, as well as a dense network of interchanges and relationships. Although it is questionable to call it a 'movement' (or even an 'artistic current'), there is however a movement of artists in continuous mutual contact that keeps this environment alive. This network of private and stylistic interconnections has never really been investigated. This is what I wanted to explore in a creative, rather than a scientific way.

Notes: The project lasted for about nine months in 2017. Few artists ignored the call or declined to take part in the survey. The interviewed artists were selected personally following criteria that included genre, popularity, and endurance. The privileged genre was painting, as per most post-graffiti artists.

How to read the diagram: Each interviewed artist has their own 'line' (in colour) and a station bearing their name (a circular symbol). Along their lines are their preferences (following the direction arrows). Example: Basik cited the artists → 108, Aruzzo, Samorì, Ochoa, Aryz, and Void. The last three fall into zone '2' (non-Italian artists). In turn, Basik was chosen by Carne (and not vice versa – note the direction arrows), with which he generates an exchange connection. The exchange also takes place with 108, but since he has been multi-nominated by his colleagues, he ended up having a very crowded interchange station in the centre of the diagram.

UNDERGROUND

Vlady (aka Vladyart) is a prolific multidisciplinary artist known for his minimal, spontaneous, and sociopolitical street-based works. His witty and critical approach towards society and environments makes him one of the few Italian names active in this specific branch of public art (unsanctioned interventions). Born in Catania in the mid-1970s, Vlady attended the State Institute of Art and then Brera's Art Academy in Milan. With the complicity of the economic crisis, in one of the most deprived areas in Italy's south, Vlady went on to challenge his own society with an unprecedented, sarcastic, sharp, guerrilla activism. More recently, Vlady's approach has turned more conceptual, open to new media and to various forms of communication. Vlady has gained a national and international reputation in urban/public art, resulting in publications, articles, interviews, exhibitions, and invitations throughout Europe and Russia. Today he lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

