Walls that speak: urban graffiti and alternative narratives in Rome

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Abstract

Rome, universally celebrated for its ancient ruins and classical grandeur, is also home to a vibrant and evolving street art scene that redefines the city's relationship with its past. From Blu's politically charged murals at Porto Fluviale and Casal de' Pazzi to Lucamaleonte's historical tributes in Quadraro and San Lorenzo, street art becomes a means of reclaiming urban space and collective memory. Projects and institutional initiatives demonstrate how public art can foster social dialogue and environmental awareness, even as it moves from rebellion to recognition. Yet this transition raises questions about authenticity, preservation, and the role of institutions in shaping urban creativity. Works like William Kentridge's *Triumphs and Laments* epitomize the poetic tension between permanence and decay, using time itself as a medium. Together, these interventions transform Rome into an open-air museum where ancient stones and painted walls coexist, challenging the city to see itself not only as a relic of history but as a living, breathing canvas of contemporary expression.

Keywords
Rome; street art; urban regeneration; memory; identity; impermanence.

1 - Introduction

Rome, a city synonymous with memory and historical stratification, is universally celebrated for its ancient monuments, enduring symbols of a past that continues to shape the collective imagination. Yet alongside this monumental and archaeological identity, another Rome has emerged in recent decades: quieter, but equally vibrant — the Rome of street art. Far from tourist routes, entire neighborhoods have been transformed by large-scale murals and urban interventions that turn city walls into spaces of visual experimentation and social reflection. Born often in peripheral or marginalized contexts, these works engage in dialogue with the city's history and fabric, redefining the relationship between art, public space, and community (Avramidis & Tsilim-

pounidi 2017, p. 45). From the monumental creations of Blu and Lucamaleonte to urban regeneration projects such as *Big City Life* in Tor Marancia, and more recent institutional initiatives like *Cabin Art* or *Hunting Pollution*, this article explores the plurality of languages and meanings that characterize Rome's contemporary street art scene. Particular attention is given to the themes of memory, identity, and impermanence, central to works like William Kentridge's *Triumphs and Laments*, which places transience itself at the core of artistic discourse (Crescentini & Pirani 2017, p. 15). The aim is to demonstrate how street art, though rooted in rebellion and spontaneity, has evolved into a form of critical engagement with history and institutions, transforming Rome into a laboratory for reflection on the relationship between

past and present, preservation and innovation. In this sense, the city's walls become not merely visual supports, but surfaces of dialogue, places where art redefines the very way we perceive and inhabit urban memory.

2 - Blu: political imagination and urban resistance

One of the most iconic and symbolically charged works of street art in Rome is *Porto Fluviale*, a monumental mural completed in the autumn of 2014 by the internationally renowned and deliberately anonymous artist Blu. Widely recognized as one of the most influential figures in contemporary street art, Blu is celebrated for his large--scale, politically engaged works that challenge systems of power, capitalism, and urban inequality (Faletra 2015, p. 41). Consistently refusing to commercialize his art or collaborate with corporate or institutional sponsors, he has maintained a radical independence throughout his career. His murals, ephemeral and often controversial, are acts of political and social commentary that use public space as a platform for collective reflection (Barnett 2013, p. 210).

The *Porto Fluviale* mural (Figure 1) was developed in close collaboration with the Citywide Housing Struggle Coordination Group, which had occupied the former Air Force barracks at Via del Porto Fluviale since 2003. This occupation was part of a broader grassroots movement advocating for housing rights and the reappropriation of abandoned buildings in Rome. In this context, Blu's intervention transformed an otherwise decaying military structure into a vivid and politically charged symbol of collective struggle. The building, located in the Ostiense district, a historically industrial area that has undergone significant processes of urban transformation, became one of the most recognizable landmarks of Rome's contemporary visual landscape.

Two of the building's façades are covered with 27 enormous, surreal faces painted in bold, saturated hues of blue, yellow, green, and red. These fantastical visages, reminiscent of masks or totemic creatures, appear to emerge from the wall itself, their eyes formed by the building's windows — a striking integration of architec-

ture and image. Each face seems to embody a different personality or emotion, ranging from irony to anguish, playfulness to protest. Blu's anthropomorphic figures, oscillating between the human and the monstrous, echo his broader visual language: a world of distorted forms through which he denounces social alienation, greed, and oppression (Beuys 2015, p. 71).

On the third façade, Blu developed an elaborate allegorical scene depicting pirates attacking a massive grey ship laden with cranes, towers, and construction machinery. The imagery is unmistakably political: the ship symbolizes the forces of speculation and institutional power, the developers and bureaucracies driving gentrification and displacement, while the pirates represent the inhabitants and activists fighting for the right to housing. The mural thus operates on multiple levels: it is at once a celebration of collective resistance, a critique of capitalist urban policies, and a poetic reclaiming of the city's visual space.

Over time, the building's condition deteriorated, and restoration work became necessary. Although the intervention was carried out with Blu's explicit consent, only fragments of the original mural now remain, partially erased or altered during the process. This partial loss poignantly raises one of the central questions in the contemporary debate on street art: how can society preserve the memory of works that are inherently temporary, created outside institutional frameworks and meant to exist in direct dialogue with their environment? (Ciancabilla & Tusini 2019, p. 58). The fate of *Porto Fluviale* underscores the tension between the ephemeral nature of street art and its undeniable historical, aesthetic, and social value, a paradox that lies at the heart of its meaning. Another major work by Blu can be found in the Casal de' Pazzi district, created between 2015 and 2018 in collaboration with the local *Mammut* neighborhood committee. This vast, multilayered mural occupies the side wall of a public housing building and offers one of the artist's most searing critiques of contemporary society. The composition depicts a complex system of eight enormous waterpark-style slides through which streams

of human figures are propelled toward two dramatically contrasting destinies. Most of the slides end in a murky, swamp-like pool where crowds of people struggle, drown, and fight to escape, trapped behind barbed wire and confronted by police forces. In contrast, a single golden slide delivers a privileged few, politicians, bankers, and clergy, into a tranquil pool of luxury and excess.

The visual narrative is brutally clear: a commentary on systemic inequality, class privilege, and the indifference of those in power. The mural's title, *Càpita* ("It happens"), encapsulates the cynicism of social injustice — a resigned expression that mirrors society's passive acceptance of inequality as inevitable. The piece's palette reinforces its meaning: as the slides descend toward the swamp, colors progressively lose saturation, fading into lifeless greys, while the golden chute remains luminous, a biting symbol of corruption and privilege.

Nearby, Blu created another monumental mural, a spiraling evolution of life that rises from the bottom of the wall to the top. Beginning with unicellular organisms and prehistoric creatures, the spiral ascends through the emergence of mammals, humans, and modern civilization, only to culminate in self-destruction. The gradual desaturation of color as the spiral approaches the present reflects a bleak vision of dehumanizing progress that consumes both nature and culture (Ciancabilla & Omodeo 2016, p. 67).

This mural takes on an additional layer of meaning through its proximity to an archaeological site, where in 1981 archaeologists discovered over two thousand animal fossils and a fragment of a human skull dating back some 200,000 years. In this context, Blu's work becomes a kind of modern visual archaeology, juxtaposing the distant past with the existential crises of the present. By placing evolutionary imagery within a neighborhood marked by ancient remains and social struggles, the artist bridges Rome's deep temporal layers, transforming the wall into a meditation on time, decay, and the cyclical nature of civilization (Merrill 2015, p. 780).

3 - Lucamaleonte: memory and urban identity

The mural *Nido di Vespe* ("Wasps' Nest"), (Figure 2) created by Lucamaleonte in 2014, commemorates one of the most tragic yet defining episodes in the history of Rome's Quadraro district: the Nazi roundup of April 17, 1944. In the early hours of that day, under the command of SS officer Herbert Kappler (the same responsible for the Ardeatine massacre) German forces surrounded the neighborhood, conducting house-to-house searches and arresting nearly one thousand residents suspected of supporting the Resistance. Many of those captured were deported to forced labor camps in Germany, and only a few ever returned. The operation, cynically named *Operation Whale*, was meant to crush what the occupiers derisively called the "wasps' nest" (*nido di vespe*) — a reference to the district's reputation as a hub of partisan activity.

Commissioned for the 70th anniversary of this event and promoted by the MURo (Museo Urbano di Roma) project founded by David "Diavù" Vecchiato, Lucamaleonte's mural stands as a vivid act of remembrance and a testament to the resilience of the local community (Campitelli et al. 2017, p. 54). Painted on the façade of a building in Via del Monte del Grano, the work has become a symbolic landmark within the neighborhood, linking contemporary urban expression to the collective memory of wartime resistance.

Lucamaleonte, one of Italy's most prominent contemporary street artists, is known for his mastery of multi-layered stencil techniques, which he uses to create intricate compositions characterized by precision, clarity, and symbolic density. His artistic language often combines natural motifs (insects, plants, and animals) with allegorical and historical references, producing works that are simultaneously poetic and analytical (Pirani & Crescentini 2019, p. 22). In *Nido di Vespe*, the image of the wasp becomes a metaphor for both the danger and vitality of the community: small but fierce, organized yet unpredictable. The mural thus transforms a painful historical memory into an emblem of collective strength and civic pride.

Lucamaleonte's engagement with history, however, extends beyond commemoration. His works consistently interrogate the relationship between past and present, exploring how symbols, myths, and shared narratives continue to shape urban identity. This approach is particularly evident in *Patrimonio Indigeno* ("Indigenous Heritage"), a monumental diptych painted on two adjacent façades in the San Lorenzo district, one of Rome's most culturally active yet historically scarred neighborhoods. Once heavily bombed during World War II, San Lorenzo has long been a site of artistic experimentation and political activism, and Lucamaleonte's mural responds to this layered context with a dense network of visual and symbolic references (Rava & Collina 2019, p. 56).

In *Patrimonio Indigeno*, ancient symbols, local emblems, and mythological elements intertwine to form a visual map of the area's identity. The left-hand wall features a gridiron (the attribute of Saint Lawrence, the neighborhood's patron saint) alongside a Corinthian capital recalling the district's ancient roots, and a raven and chrysanthemums evoking the nearby Verano Cemetery. The larger right-hand façade shows the hand of the goddess Ceres grasping wheat stalks, alluding to the area's agricultural past and to the ancient *Ager Veranus* once owned by Emperor Lucius Verus. Other details include the totemic woodpecker of the Piceni, two red poppies symbolizing the antifascist resistance, and the laurel and snake of Minerva, a subtle nod to the academic and intellectual life that still characterizes the district today.

Through this complex web of imagery, Lucamaleonte transforms the building into a monument of memory and continuity. The mural functions not only as a celebration of San Lorenzo's cultural identity but also as a meditation on resilience and transformation in the face of destruction. By reclaiming postwar architecture, once a sign of loss, as a space of visual and symbolic regeneration, *Patrimonio Indigeno* reaffirms the essential role of public art in shaping collective consciousness (Arnaldi 2016, p. 77). It invites residents and visitors alike to rediscover the traces of history embedded in the urban landscape and to recognize the enduring dialogue between the city's past and its ever-evolving present.

4 - Diamond and Solo: between myth and modernity

In Tor Marancia, a once-marginalized working-class *borgata* in the southern periphery of Rome — once nicknamed *"Shanghai"* for its dense and precarious living conditions — a remarkable process of artistic and social regeneration took shape through the Big City Life project (2015). The initiative transformed the façades of large public housing buildings into monumental canvases for international artists. The project aimed not only to beautify the neighborhood but also to promote social cohesion, offering residents a renewed sense of identity and participation (Costa & Lopes 2015, p. 114). Within this context, Diamond's mural *Hic sunt adamantes* ("Here be diamonds") stands as one of the most poetically charged and stylistically sophisticated contributions to Rome's expanding street art heritage.

Created by Diamond (Stefano Biagiotti), a leading figure in the Italian street art scene, the mural embodies his distinctive fusion of Art Nouveau ornamentation, Japanese woodblock aesthetics, and underground comic imagery (Ross 2016, p. 111). The composition depicts a sleeping woman whose serene, introspective posture suggests both vulnerability and latent strength. In her hands, she delicately holds a diamond, the artist's recurring symbol and namesake: an emblem of purity, resilience, and hidden potential. Around her unfolds a luxuriant environment teeming with flowers, birds, and butterflies, rendered in sinuous, decorative lines that recall the flowing elegance of Mucha and Klimt yet are imbued with a distinctly contemporary sensibility.

This dreamlike tableau operates as a metaphor for Rome itself: a city of immense beauty and layered history, suspended between its monumental past and a still uncertain future. The woman's sleep evokes a state of cultural dormancy, a moment of rest before renewal, while the natural elements surrounding her hint at regeneration and awakening. The diamond, luminous yet fragile, becomes a symbol of latent transformation, echoing the project's broader social intent: to reawaken a neighborhood once stigmatized by neglect through the empowering force of art (Avramidis & Tsilimpounidi 2017, p. 53). Diamond's delicate interplay between mythic imagery and urban realism thus turns the wall into a visual allegory of both personal and collective rebirth.

In 2020, Diamond collaborated with the Roman artist Solo on another major mural, *Oh My Darling Clementine*, located in Garbatella, one of Rome's most emblematic districts (Figure 3). The work was commissioned to mark the centenary of the neighborhood's foundation (1920–2020) and celebrates the spirit of hospitality, resistance, and solidarity that has long defined this community. Garbatella, known for its garden-city layout and strong sense of local identity, has become a symbolic locus of Roman working-class memory, a place where architecture, everyday life, and storytelling intertwine (Pirani & Crescentini 2019, p. 25).

Oh My Darling Clementine pays tribute to Clementina Eusebi, the legendary innkeeper said to have inspired the neighborhood's name. According to local lore, Eusebi was affectionately called *"La Garbata Ostella"* ("The gracious hostess") for her kindness and generosity toward travelers and workers who frequented her tavern. Solo and Diamond reinterpret her figure through a contemporary lens: Clementina appears as an elegant, almost cinematic heroine, her face framed by ornamental motifs and vibrant colors that blend Art Deco stylization with comic-book dynamism. The title itself, borrowed from the American folk ballad *"Oh My Darling, Clementine,"* evokes both nostalgia and affection, linking the mural to a broader transnational vocabulary of popular culture (Arnaldi 2016, p. 77).

The collaboration between Solo and Diamond, two artists with distinct yet complementary visual languages, creates a powerful synthesis of pop iconography, symbolism, and decorative elegance. Solo, known for his reimagining of superheroes and pop culture icons as allegories of human strength and fragility, brings an element of immediacy and emotional resonance. Diamond, by contrast, introduces a refined sense of ornament and mythic depth, transforming the composition into a layered meditation on time, femininity, and collective memory.

Together, their work reaffirms the role of public art as a bridge between myth and modernity. In *Oh My Darling Clementine*, Garbatella's architectural past — rooted in the social idealism of early twentieth-century Rome — meets the aesthetics of global street culture (Rava & Collina 2019, p. 56). The mural becomes both an homage to a historical figure and a metaphor for the city's enduring vitality: a community that, like Clementina herself, continues to welcome change while preserving its human warmth and identity (Campitelli et al. 2017, p. 66).

5 - Leonardo Crudi and the "Cabin Art" project

In 2023, the Roman artist Leonardo Crudi created *Il suono di Roma* ("The Sound of Rome") as part of the Cabin Art project (Figure 4). This initiative repurposed disused police booths scattered throughout the city, transforming these small urban structures into vibrant canvases for public art. The project was promoted by the Youth Policies Office of Roma Capitale in collaboration with Zètema Progetto Cultura and invited artists under the age of 35 to reinterpret these micro-architectures, turning functional objects into sites of aesthetic engagement and neighborhood interaction.

Crudi's approach to *Il suono di Roma* is attuned to the rhythm and layered textures of the city. The composition of geometric shapes arranged in rhythmic patterns creates a visual language that evokes the sounds, silences, and movements of Rome's daily life. The interplay of warm and cool colors, from deep reds and ochres to muted blues and greens, captures both the vibrancy and the complexity of urban experience (Beuys 2015, p. 76). The shapes and forms appear to pulse and move, reflecting the continuous flow of human activity and traffic, transforming the static booth into a lively visual instrument.

An important element of Crudi's work is his attention to the temporal dimension of the urban environment. By preserving portions of the booth's original paint and surface, the mural acknowledges the stratification of history present in every corner of Rome. These traces of the past coexist with the artist's contemporary interventions, reminding viewers that the city is an ever-evolving palimpsest where historical layers, everyday life, and modern creativity intersect. In this way, the artwork actively engages with the surrounding environment, prompting passersby to reflect on the interaction between continuity and change, memory and transformation.

Il suono di Roma can be understood as a form of synesthetic urban art. The rhythmic arrangement of shapes, their color contrasts, and the dynamic flow of the composition evoke a sensory experience akin to listening to the city itself. Crudi transforms an abandoned police booth into a microcosm of Rome's vitality, capturing its multi-layered identity through color, form, and spatial rhythm.

The project was part of a broader competition launched in November 2022, which received 68 submissions from young artists across Italy. Six winning proposals were selected, with Crudi's intervention being one of them. The murals were inaugurated by February 2023, alongside works such as *Rifiorire* ("To Bloom Again") by Nian. Collectively, the Cabin Art project demonstrates how urban art initiatives can revitalize neglected spaces, promote emerging artistic talent, and foster dialogue between contemporary creativity and the city's historical and social context.

Through *Il suono di Roma*, Leonardo Crudi transforms a small architectural object into a canvas of sensory perception and encourages the public to reconsider everyday urban spaces as living stages of artistic expression. His work exemplifies the potential of street art to bridge the past and the present, offering a reflection on Rome's ever-changing rhythms, layered history, and vibrant cultural life (Costa & Lopes 2015, p. 118).

6 - Iena Cruz and sustainable art

Federico Massa, known in the street art world as Iena Cruz, introduced a significant environmental dimension to Rome's urban landscape with his mural *Hunting Pollution*, completed in 2018 (Figure 5). The work is painted using Airlite, an innovative and eco-friendly paint capable of neutralizing harmful substances such as nitrogen oxides, benzene, and formaldehyde through exposure to natural and artificial light. By incorporating this technology, the mural transforms from a purely aesthetic intervention into a functional instrument for improving air quality, demonstrating the potential of street art to address urgent ecological issues while engaging directly with the public.

Hunting Pollution depicts a tricolored heron, an endangered species struggling to survive in a heavily polluted environment. The image serves as both a visual spectacle and a pointed commentary on the consequences of human activity for wildlife and ecosystems. Positioned at one of Rome's busiest intersections, the mural captures the attention of passersby and drivers, inviting reflection on the environmental impact of daily urban life. Its scale, covering over 1,000 square meters, makes it Europe's largest example of regenerative urban art and exemplifies the fusion of creativity and sustainability in contemporary public art practices (Ciancabilla & Omodeo 2016, p. 72).

The project was supported by Yourban2030, a non-profit organization founded to promote art and creativity as tools for social change and environmental awareness. *Hunting Pollution* marked the beginning of a series of initiatives aimed at transforming street art into a platform for civic engagement and ecological responsibility. Subsequent programs sought to mobilize communities, artists, and local authorities to address pressing environmental concerns through creative interventions.

Through *Hunting Pollution*, Iena Cruz demonstrates that street art can go beyond its traditional expressive and decorative functions to actively participate in shaping a more sustainable urban environment. The mural embodies a dialogue between aesthetics and activism (Marsala 2013, p. 2), raising awareness of ecological issues while enhancing the cultural and visual landscape of Rome. It highlights the potential of contemporary public art to educate, inspire, and transform urban spaces, proving that creativity and environmental responsibility can coexist in powerful and meaningful ways.

7 - Institutionalization and authenticity

As institutional projects such as Cabin Art and *Hunting Pollution* have become more common in Rome, debates surrounding the authenticity and purpose of street art have grown increasingly prominent. Within local communities, particularly in neighborhoods with a strong history of grassroots artistic expression, some residents have expressed concern that these formally commissioned works risk transforming street art into a "bourgeois"

spectacle. Critics argue that by integrating murals into sanctioned projects, the raw, spontaneous, and often subversive spirit that originally defined graffiti is diminished, replaced by a polished, regulated version that caters to public institutions and wider audiences.

Despite these criticisms, it is important to recognize that even commissioned murals remain fundamentally rooted in the ethos of public intervention. While the context of production may shift (with funding, permissions, and logistical support from municipal or non-profit organizations) the core impulse of street art persists: to engage directly with the urban environment and its inhabitants. Rather than existing solely as decorative elements, these murals provoke reflection, stimulate dialogue, and intervene meaningfully in public space. They extend the original function of graffiti, which was primarily a subversive and often illegal act of expression, into a broader practice that encompasses social, political, and environmental commentary (Yngvason 2002, p. 13).

Institutionalization does not necessarily negate authenticity. Instead, it can amplify the reach and impact of street art, allowing it to communicate with larger and more diverse audiences. Projects like Cabin Art and *Hunting Pollution* demonstrate that regulated initiatives can maintain the participatory and community-oriented aspects of graffiti while also promoting sustainable practices, historical awareness, and social cohesion. These works exemplify an evolution in the field: they retain the creative impulse to challenge norms, reclaim public space, and give visibility to underrepresented voices, even as they operate within formalized frameworks.

Moreover, the integration of street art into institutional initiatives highlights a shift in the perception of public art itself. Murals that were once dismissed as acts of vandalism are increasingly recognized as valuable cultural artifacts that contribute to urban regeneration and civic engagement. Through this lens, institutionalized street art does not merely imitate its rebellious origins; it builds upon them, creating opportunities for dialogue between artists, residents, and city authorities. It fosters a new model of accessibility and participation, where the public can encounter art in everyday spaces, reflect

on pressing social issues, and engage in the ongoing narrative of the city.

In this sense, the institutionalization of street art in Rome represents not the death of authenticity, but a redefinition of it. Authenticity is no longer measured solely by illegality or rebellion, but also by the capacity of art to intervene meaningfully in public life, to resonate with local communities, and to provoke thought, awareness, and change. These works demonstrate that the spirit of graffiti can endure and even flourish within formalized frameworks, continuing to assert the relevance of street art as a vital, dynamic, and socially engaged form of contemporary cultural expression.

8 - William Kentridge: the poetics of impermanence

William Kentridge's *Triumphs and Laments*, installed along the embankments of the Tiber River in Rome, represents a groundbreaking exploration of the relationship between art, history, and temporality (Figure 6). Unlike conventional murals, Kentridge's work is realized through a process of selective cleaning, where accumulated layers of dirt, grime, and pollution on the travertine surfaces are removed to reveal contrasting lighter images. This method, often described as "reverse graffiti," creates a striking visual effect: the mural is defined not by the addition of pigment, but by the deliberate removal of material, allowing the underlying surface to emerge as an image. Because the travertine continues to weather naturally and accumulate new layers of dirt and environmental deposits, the artwork is inherently ephemeral, destined to fade gradually over time. In this way, the work embodies the transient nature of both urban landscapes and human memory (Crescentini & Pirani 2017, p. 15).

The thematic scope of *Triumphs and Laments* engages deeply with the cycles of history, juxtaposing moments of triumph with episodes of loss, glory with decline, and memory with inevitable erasure. Kentridge's choice to embrace impermanence as a central aspect of the work is highly symbolic: it reflects the reality that history is never fixed, but constantly rewritten, forgotten, and rediscovered. Monuments and narratives, no matter how monumental or celebrated, are subject to decay and reinterpretation, and Kentridge's mural makes this

fragility visible. The gradual fading of the images over time encourages viewers to reconsider the ways in which society commemorates the past, and how memory is continuously shaped and reshaped by both natural and cultural forces.

Beyond its conceptual depth, *Triumphs and Laments* transforms the Tiber's embankments into a living, evolving palimpsest. The surface of the river's walls becomes a dynamic record of the city's layered history, where the physical effects of rain, wind, pollution, and time are integral to the work's meaning. The mural is never static; it changes with each season and with each environmental event, ensuring that viewers experience a unique encounter at different moments (Ross 2016, p. 122). In this sense, Kentridge challenges traditional notions of public art as permanent, fixed, or static. Instead, he presents a form of artistic expression that is intimately intertwined with the rhythms of urban life, emphasizing the interconnectedness of art, environment, and temporality.

The impermanent nature of the work also invites philosophical reflection on the ephemerality of human achievements. Just as civilizations rise and fall, so too do the visual traces they leave behind. *Triumphs and Laments* becomes a meditation on mortality, the fragility of memory, and the inevitability of change. By engaging with this impermanence, Kentridge turns decay into meaning: the erosion of the images parallels the continual transformation of the city, transforming the Tiber embankments into a site where the passage of time itself becomes a medium of artistic expression.

Ultimately, *Triumphs and Laments* exemplifies the power of contemporary public art to provoke thought and reflection. It confronts viewers with the temporality of human endeavors, the fluidity of collective memory, and the intimate connection between art and its environment. Kentridge's innovative approach transforms the Tiber's walls into a living archive of triumphs, losses, and ongoing historical dialogue, demonstrating that the true impact of public art lies not in permanence, but in its capacity to evolve, engage, and resonate across time.

9 - Conclusion

Street art in Rome offers a multifaceted lens through which to understand the city as a living, evolving cultural landscape. From Blu's anarchic and politically charged interventions that challenge social and institutional structures, to William Kentridge's poetic meditations on impermanence and memory, these works demonstrate the capacity of public art to engage deeply with historical, social, and environmental concerns. Grassroots initiatives, often developed in collaboration with local communities, coexist alongside institutional projects and commissioned interventions, revealing the diverse strategies through which artists negotiate visibility, impact, and meaning in the urban environment.

These murals and installations transform Rome into a dynamic open-air museum, where walls, façades, and even urban micro-architectures become canvases for artistic experimentation. Unlike conventional museums that preserve objects in fixed contexts, street art inhabits public spaces, interacting with the rhythms of daily life and the cycles of time. It prompts reflection on the past while addressing present social and political realities, creating a dialogue between historical memory and contemporary urban experience.

Through their scale, symbolism, and location, these works challenge traditional ideas of permanence, value, and authorship. They invite residents and visitors alike to reconsider how art, memory, and identity intersect, and to recognize that a city's culture is not only embedded in its monuments and ruins, but also in its living, evolving streetscapes. In Rome, street art reveals a city constantly negotiating its relationship with history, community, and imagination, where the ancient and the contemporary coexist, converse, and challenge one another, offering new ways to perceive, experience, and inhabit the urban environment.

Conflict of Interests and ethics

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Figure 1. Blu, *Porto Fluviale*, Rome, 2014. Mural on a former military warehouse in the Ostiense district. A monumental street art intervention that transforms the building's façade into a composition of stylized and polychromatic faces.

Figure 2. Lucamaleonte, *Nido di Vespe*, Rome, 2014. Mural on an urban wall. The work depicts stylized wasps against a honeycomb-patterned background, combining naturalistic and graphic elements in a dialogue between public art and the urban environment.

Figure 3. Solo & Diamond, *Oh My Darling Clementine*, Garbatella (Rome), 2020. Mural created to mark the centenary of the Garbatella district (1920–2020). The work celebrates the spirit of hospitality, resistance, and solidarity that defines this historic Roman community.

Figure 4. Leonardo Crudi, *Il suono di Roma (The Sound of Rome)*, Rome, 2023. Street art intervention created as part of the "Cabin Art" project, promoted by Roma Capitale and Zètema Progetto Cultura. The work transforms a disused police booth into an urban microcosm through a visual language of geometric forms and rhythmic colors that evoke the sounds and movements of the city.

Figure 5. Federico Massa (Iena Cruz), *Hunting Pollution*, Rome, 2018. Mural created with Airlite eco-friendly paint in the Ostiense district. Depicting a tricolored heron as a symbol of environmental fragility, the work uses air-purifying materials, turning the artistic intervention into an instrument of urban sustainability.

Figure 6. William Kentridge, *Triumphs and Laments*, Rome, 2016. Public art intervention along the Tiber River embankments, created through the technique of selective cleaning ("reverse graffiti") of the travertine surface. Comprising more than eighty monumental figures, the work reflects on collective memory and the transient nature of history, gradually fading over time through exposure to the elements.