

Some thoughts on the street art panorama: the case of Madrid

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Abstract

During the last four decades, street art has been developed and multiplied in most of the biggest European and American cities. In the case of Spain, the roots of this artistic phenomenon appeared during the restoration of democracy, so it is specially linked to the urban society created according to the arrival of freedom. In Madrid in particular, an increasing number of urban interventions have appeared in some neighborhoods such as *Malasaña*, *Tetuán* or *Lavapiés*, which means that the street art is the artistic reflection of the new urban reality. In recent years, some initiatives, such as *Pinta Malasaña* or *Muros Tabacalera*, have used this phenomenon as a way to improve the area and, as a consequence, a new artistic expression has been developed: the new urban muralism. The identification of the artists working in a certain city will give us the idea of where the city can be located in the global panorama of street art and, moreover, this local study will enrich the knowledge of the whole phenomenon. This essay focuses on giving an overview of the street art in Madrid with the idea of providing new insights to increase the knowledge of the current global society.

Key words: Street Art, Madrid, Urban Muralism, Contemporary Art

Since the inception of democracy, first, graffiti and, one decade later, street art have appeared in Spanish cities. Since then, the number of interventions has been increasing incessantly. Due to its development and to the growing interest shown by the media, it has become a major issue for the established art market.

“In recent years, street art has become embedded in popular culture and received growing attention from the art market and art institutions. Work by street artists has entered galleries, auction houses and museums, and some artists have been given the opportunity to create large-scale sanctioned public art projects” (Bengtsen, 2014)

Despite its recent relevance, few attempts have been made in our country to study this phenomenon, with just

a few publications existing, most of which contain a wide range of images but with short texts. In the academic field it doesn't exist a consistent theoretical corpus, in fact the term “street art” is quite controversial and it is difficult to define what it encompasses. Only ten years ago street art was defined as: “All art on the street that's not graffiti” (Lewinsohn, 2008:23). Since then only four theses have been produced in the Spanish academic field. The few theses or articles about this recent phenomenon agree in adding some other ideas: street art is an artistic intervention carried out in an urban space with no permission. That urban space is chosen by the artist, as the relation with the urban context is essential. (Abarca, 2010; Fernández Herrero, 2018).



Ilustración 1. Madrilénian Graffiti. Madrid. Source: Antnio Pavón

In the case of Spain, the birth, development and evolution of street art has grown in parallel with the new urban society developed since the democratic process started. During the 80s two groups of graffiti writers could be identified in the city: the followers of “Muelle”, the most widely known graffiti writer in Madrid, close to the culture of skateboarding and punk, and the group of the followers of the New York graffiti, usually hip-hop and breakdance fans. During the 90s some individual artists, from both graffiti groups, began the new adventure of street art. They were not interested in writing their names any more, but in creating artistic interventions, sometimes for raising awareness about different issues, other times to communicate with the citizen or just to bring beauty to the neighborhood.

Since then, some neighborhoods such as *Malasaña*, *Tetuán* or *Lavapiés* have experienced a multiplication of urban interventions in their walls, not only by local artists but also by internationally renowned artists. A wide range of techniques may be appreciated today in the city such as stencil, stickers, paint, yarn bombing or sculptures made with plaster (e.g. some poetic lips made with plaster are currently decorating some facades in Lavapiés). A wide variety of styles can be found, from the colorful big compositions by the famous artist Okuda to the subtle conceptual art by Dos Jotas, the poetic interventions by

Jonipunto or the signals hacked by Yipi Yipi Yeah. Not only local artists have done interventions in the city, but also relevant international figures such as Blu or C215.

During the last ten years, new artistic experiences have been emerging from Street Art. Some initiatives, like *Pinta Malasaña* or *Muros Tabacalera*, have called on artists in the city to make artistic interventions as a way of improving the area. These new experiences are mainly big murals produced in street art Festivals or Encounters. Current studies appear to support the idea that they cannot be called street art as they create legal art with permission and they are not site-specific anymore. These initiatives would be more accurately labelled as urban muralism rather than street art, although they were born under the umbrella of street art and most of the artists are producing interventions in both fields (Abarca, 2016) dado que existen diferencias claras y fundamentales entre estos murales y las obras a las que llamábamos arte urbano en la década pasada, más pequeñas y producidas sin permiso.¹ Este texto identifica las diferencias entre estas dos prácticas y es al tiempo una descripción detallada de las cualidades que hacen único al arte urbano independiente.”, “accessed”: {“date-parts”: [“2018”, “1”, “23”]}, “author”: {“dropping-particle”: “”, “family”: “Abarca”, “given”: “Javier”, “non-dropping-particle”: “”, “parse-names”: false, “suffix”: “”}, “container-title”: “urbanario.es”, “id”: “ITEM-1”, “issued”: {“date-parts”: [“2016”]}, “title”: “Del arte urbano a los murales, ¿qué hemos perdido?”, “type”: “webpage”, “uris”: [“http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=c3edd03e-57ce-346f-942f-8f3ff5e92d94”]}, “mendeley”: {“formattedCitation”: “”(J. Abarca, 2016).

The aforementioned initiatives are related to the improvement of the neighborhood and therefore to the process of gentrification, and thus we have to emphasize the current need to develop some researches focusing on the existing relation between street art and the development of the neighborhoods as well as studying the new relation between art and citizens.

Some areas are experiencing today a controversial situation. Many neighbors feel very proud of the artistic interventions. It is not unusual to find one of them showing and explaining the works to the visitors. In that sense, the interaction with the works is clearly changing the relation



Illustration 2. Gay Pride by Yipi yipi Yeah. 2018. Madrid.
Source: author's material



Illustration 3. Mural "Love Wins" by Okuda for MUROS TABACALERA. 2014. Madrid. Source: author's material

between the citizens and the urban space in a positive way as street art is transforming that space into a place for communication with other human beings. On the other hand, other citizens see in these interventions a way of gentrification and they have a clear position against them. As an example, some violent messages have recently appeared in the façade of Swinton and Grant, a gallery and bookshop specialized in street art in the Madrilenian neighborhood of Lavapiés.

The development of street art in Madrid is not unique. Similar experiences are appearing in other locations as street art is a global movement which is connecting experiences all over the world. The research of what is happening in every city as a local level will give us the whole picture of what is happening in the global sphere. That means that the next step to follow would be to develop and connect local studies to look for new solutions.

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