Approaching the White Cube or Approximating the Streets
OSGEMEOS and the Displacement of the Street Art Aesthetic

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Abstract
The work of OSGEMEOS is used to shed light on the issues arising from the intersection between the realms of street art and high art. The paradox of displacing street art into a gallery or museum setting is discussed, with a particular focus on the transitional period for OSGEMEOS from 2005 to 2010, during which they established their position as artists spanning the gap between the street art scene and the institutional art world. In the first section, the critical discourse surrounding three of their exhibitions within gallery settings are analyzed in this context, alongside pertinent statements made by the artists. In the second section, the focus shifts to the highest profile commissioned work for these artists during this phase in their careers, their 2008 mural on the façade of the Tate Modern for the exhibition titled “Street Art.” The debate surrounding the limitations concerning the displacement of street art and forces of institutionalization are presented and discussed in the context of this artwork as an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of this dilemma.

Keywords: OSGEMEOS, street art, urban aesthetic, institutionalization

1. Introduction

As graffiti and street art become institutionalized on an international level, there are two perspectives one could take: first, that these movements are becoming ever more displaced from their original context, with museums and galleries putting on exhibitions of "street art" within their walls, and second, that the “urban aesthetic” (Bengtsen, 2014: 76) that has been shaped by the body of work of graffiti and street artists is steadily establishing itself as a worldwide visual culture. Spurred on by these developments in the relationship between the street art scene and the world of art institutions, as represented by art galleries and museums, OSGEMEOS were catapulted onto an international stage in the last decade, thus positioning them directly in the middle of this debate.

After being featured in various graffiti magazines, both Brazilian and international, as well as in the book *Graffiti Brasil* in 2005, OSGEMEOS gained attention from various galleries, museums, and other institutions for commissioned works and exhibitions. They were chosen to represent Latin America in a project for the Olympic games in Athens in 2004, for which they painted their first international large-scale commissioned piece, the *Giant of Volos*. Promoted by New York gallerist Jeffrey Deitch, they exhibited work at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2006. Back home in Brazil, after participating in several group exhibitions, they had their first solo exhibition in Brazil at the Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, in July 2006. In 2008 they were featured in the Tate "Street Art" exhibition, where they also produced a giant version of one of their quintessential yellow characters, bony-legged and nude, yet masked and holding a bundle of CCTV security cameras. Over the course of the following decade, they were involved in many more high-profile commissions and exhibitions. Their rise in popularity on the international art scene presents a variety of issues that are critical for the analysis of their art and offer the potential to gain insight into the effects of the museumification and institutionalization of the street art aesthetic, which is why the work of OSGEMEOS and the discourse surrounding it will be used here as a case study for the analysis of these processes.

The prominence that OSGEMEOS had gained in the street art and graffiti scenes for their prolific uncommissioned

work in Brazil helped lead to commissioned projects such as outdoor murals on urban walls, both public and private. However, as they began to attract attention from galleries and museums, a variety of questions arose, such as whether the authenticity of the street art or graffiti spirit can be preserved when their work is removed from the context of the urban landscape. Whereas their first high profile piece in the context of a museum – their piece for the 2008 Tate *Street Art* exhibition – was created on the exterior walls, OSGEMEOS have also been involved in several exhibitions within gallery spaces and these have generated a wide variety of responses.

In what follows, the work of OSGEMEOS will be used to shed light on the issues arising from the intersection between the realms of street art and high art. The museumification of graffiti and the paradox of displacing street art into a gallery setting will be discussed, with a particular focus on the transitional period for OSGEMEOS from 2005 to 2010, which was pivotal in terms of establishing their position as artists spanning the gap between the graffiti/street art scene and the institutional art world. In the first section, the critical discourse surrounding three of their early gallery exhibitions from 2006 and 2009 will be analyzed in this context. Furthermore, a selection of statements that the artists themselves have made about this relationship will be critically examined. In the second section, the focus will shift to the highest profile commissioned work for these artists during this phase in their careers, their 2008 mural on the façade of the Tate Modern for the exhibition titled “Street Art.” Though the debate surrounding the limitations concerning the displacement of street art and forces of institutionalization is one that goes far beyond the scope of this paper, it will be discussed insofar as it applies to the analysis of the art of OSGEMEOS during this period, the curatorial strategies surrounding their work, and some of the critical reception.

The street art aesthetic is now firmly embedded within a worldwide urban visual culture, yet the nuances of the relationship between this movement and dominant culture remain complex, and the goal of this paper is not to give a definitive answer to this question, but instead to present certain arguments that may lead to a clearer understanding of the dilemma.

2. OSGEMEOS Inside the White Cube

One technique employed by OSGEMEOS that may have helped preserve the spirit of street art for a gallery exhibition was to transform the entire gallery structure itself into a work of art and a metaphor. For their first exhibition at the Galeria Fortes Vilaça in 2006, titled "O Peixe que Comia Estrelas Cadentes” (the fish that ate shooting stars), they turned the exterior walls of the gallery into a giant square yellow head and visitors entered underneath its right ear. Inside the exhibition, the works ranged from wall paintings of fantastic scenes from the alternate world that permeates all of their work, which they call *tritrez*, with a diverse range of their characteristic yellow figures, to a large scale installation in the center consisting of a giant puppet sitting backwards in a boat with a house-like element at its stern. The paintings incorporate many of the same elements that can be found in their work in the streets: their trademark style of characters with yellow skin, almond eyes, and bony limbs, as well as various other fantastic or surrealistic elements and indirect references to Brazilian folklore, yet the works are executed on a scale and with a level of detail that would be next to impossible for an unsanctioned work in an outdoor urban environment. In a review of this exhibition in *ArtForum*, Marek Bartelik comments on the problematic of displacing the street art aesthetic and OSGEMEOS' approaches to dealing with this issue. Bartelik states that OSGEMEOS create "a poignant metaphor for that transition [from the streets to the gallery]" by painting the "giant head on the gallery's facade, as if to enter it was to be devoured" (Bartelik, 2007). One could also interpret this as a metaphor for entering the mind of the artists, with the interior being saturated with images from their dream world *tritrez*, the source of inspiration for the characters and images that they continue to put up illegally in São Paulo and throughout the world. Bartelik sees the dreamlike characters of the interior as a way of exposing the absurdity of that which exists outside of those gallery walls.

“When graffiti leaves the dangerous streets of São Paulo, it becomes more ornamental and cerebral. Osgemeos seem to understand the consequences of such a transition, and that's where this exhibition succeeded the best–in exposing and celebrating the dreamy and artificial aspect of life in a city with one of the highest crime rates in the world.” (Bartelik, 2007)

Whereas Bartelik, a Polish-born art critic based in the USA and writing for an international art magazine, validates the significance of OSGEMEOS' exhibition works by discerning a connection to their work in the streets of São Paulo, a Brazilian critic was not so forgiving when discussing OSGEMEOS gallery work in an international setting during that same timeframe.

Marcos Augusto Gonçalves, contributing art critic for the *Folha de São Paulo*, wrote in 2006 with reference to OSGEMEOS appearance at Art Basel Miami that the "criteria are different in the art world" (Gonçalves, 2006: E1). He continues by addressing the issues with the street artists' transition to a gallery setting.

"In the territory of urban visual art, the codes are not the same as those of the art circuit. Works to be shown in an established gallery of contemporary art must display a confrontation with history and with the specific criteria for recognition– even if they have been produced with the intention of ignoring or contesting those criteria." [1] (Gonçalves, 2006: E1)

The implication of this statement is that OSGEMEOS do not display enough of an awareness of the codes of the art world to create a meaningful contribution to the discourse surrounding the displacement of street art into a gallery setting. The criticism becomes more scathing as Gonçalves continues, implying that their gallery work is merely decorative:

"The hype of OSGEMEOS, in the middle of a renewed interest in graffiti, involves an approach to a work that would be able to transcend the urban illustrative universe and gain value in the eyes of collectors –people inclined to pay 41,000 Brazilian Reals to have, in paintings, the famous artists on their walls. The commercial interest, as one can see, exists – but it is not sufficient to determine whether the production of OSGEMEOS will be able to surpass the level of curiosity and decorative character."[2] (Gonçalves, 2006: E1)

Since the article dates from 2006, it represents only the beginning stages of OSGEMEOS foray into the contemporary art circuit, so Gonçalves leaves open the possibility that the artists may in fact make an impact later in their career. However, the tone of the article indicates that the author is skeptical that such a transformation will take place.

Three years later, OSGEMEOS created an exhibition titled "Vertigem," which opened at the Museu de Arte Brasileira da FAAP in São Paulo in 2009, a much more high-profile location for the two artists. This museum, with its strong focus on Brazilian art and cultural representation, seems to have been drawn to OSGEMEOS not only because of the Paulistas' growing international fame, but also due to their thematic treatment of Brazilian daily life and the influence of Brazilian folklore in their work. The description on the FAAP website bills the exhibition as "bringing together works that reflect the duo's sensitive view of Brazilian daily life, from the urban periphery to the northeastern folklore, in surrealistic images that generate a dreamlike atmosphere, by means of cheerful colors and melancholic characters."[3] (Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado)

For this exhibition, another critique appeared in the *Folha de São Paulo* that was quite a bit harsher than that of Gonçalves in the same newspaper in 2006. The author of the article, Fabio Cypriano, not only declares that their exhibition has nothing to contribute to the discourse, but also accuses them of commodifying poverty and misery. *Vertigem* included a similar combination of painting, sculpture, and installation as the exhibition at Fortes Vilaça, but Cypriano did not find the same metaphoric significance in this medial transfer of OSGEMEOS' urban folklore imagery as Bartelik did. Cypriano states:

"However, the 'installation,' which appeared more like an attraction at an amusement park, was situated in the field of entertainment and added nothing to the debate about carrying a transgressive work made in the street into the white cube of the art gallery."[4] (Cypriano, 2009: E1)

Furthermore, the more problematic issue according to Cypriano, is the strategy they employ to try to transfer the dynamic of the streets into the gallery, that is, to incorporate imagery of those people into their work, mainly residents of poor urban neighborhoods, such as *favelas*, depicted in the same cartoonish style as their fantastic characters. This, according to the author, does a disservice to the harsh realities of those people who actually live under such conditions:

"The problem is that, while in the streets this tension is authentic, within a museological space, the images of these suffering people are merely illustration, or even worse,

shallow appropriation of a state of indigence typical of Latin American metropolises. Since OSGEMEOS create an “aesthetic of poverty,” they turn misery into a product of easy consumption, falling once again into the field of entertainment.”[5] (Cypriano, 2009: E1)

Cypriano, who is known in Brazil to write harsh critiques at times, is unambiguously fierce in this case, driven home by the final statement: “In the debate about the transposition of street art into the museum, '*Vertigem*' has nothing to declare.”[6] (Cypriano, 2009: E1)

What remains unclear is whether or not OSGEMEOS actually intended on adding to that debate with their exhibition pieces. If their goal was to replicate some sort of authentic street art experience within gallery walls, be it the aspect of danger, the reappropriation of space for the people, the transformation of the urban environment, the restoration of culture to the residual voids of public space, combating the hegemonic gray of the concrete jungle with their colorful outbursts of graffiti (Cf. Kuttner, 2014), one would gather from these reviews that OSGEMEOS achieved none of these in the two gallery exhibitions. However, in order to assess their intentions and also to gauge their awareness of these critical issues, it will be necessary to consult statements made by the artists that directly address the topic.

In various forums, such as interviews for articles, exhibition catalogues, and television talk shows, OSGEMEOS have repeatedly been quoted as saying that there is a major difference between what they do in the streets and in the galleries, and this difference goes beyond the medium, scale, and ambition of their works, but touches upon the essence of street art. They have expressed an acute awareness that the site of their art is of critical importance and that the spirit of what is done within the urban landscape cannot be simply relocated to a protected gallery or museum setting.

In the same newspaper as Cypriano's critique, three years earlier, Rafael Cariello had quoted OSGEMEOS as saying “In reality, we separate the world of the streets and the world of the gallery”[7] (Cariello, 2006: E1). In 2007, Otávio Pandolfo was quoted by Bill Hinchberger in ARTnews as saying "What we do in galleries has nothing to do with graffiti" (Hinchberger, 2007: 136-137). In an interview with Vik Muniz in 2008 for the graffiti magazine *Bomb*, they stated: "We know how to keep things separate. The universe of the street cannot be compared to that of the gallery in the least" (Muniz, 2008: 63). In a 2010 interview for the Brazilian television station SESCTV, Otávio reaffirmed these sentiments: “The gallery is another story. The street is a unique thing, you can't compare it with a museum. When you go out to do *grafite* in the street it has nothing to do with a museum”[8] (SESCTV, 2010). In fact, the two seem fairly consistent in expressing that any attempt to bring the unique characteristics of their graffiti or street art from the urban environment into a gallery setting would be doomed to fail. When interviewed by Ana Luisa Vieira for the Brazilian magazine *Cartacapital* in 2009, they elaborated “*Grafite* for us is in the street, you can't take it into any gallery. Inside here it's another support. They can call it contemporary art, if they want, but we believe in art that is atemporal”[9] (Vieira, 2009: 85). There is a subtle irony in this statement as their work in the streets is often far more transitory than atemporal, since it is subject to weather conditions, buffing, modification, or demolition. However, the quote gets to the heart of the paradox of the transplantation of street art or graffiti. Contemporary art galleries and museums must intrinsically be concerned with the contemporaneity of the works on display, either due to the critical relevance of those works regarding current issues and debates or by pushing boundaries and expanding concepts of artistic practice. Street art in its natural setting secures its critical relevance by being an intervention in the urban environment, yet when institutions displace it in an attempt to promote an expanded concept of contemporary artistic practice, they simultaneously negate its original critical value. Recognizing street art as contemporary art is to rob it of its contemporaneity.

OSGEMEOS have also demonstrated that they are conscious of the political implications of their work in the streets. When asked by Vik Muniz in 2008 if they intend on engaging in social criticism with their street art, they responded:

“Using public space was our way of dialoguing, directly or indirectly, with other people. The mere act of interfering in public space already entailed a critique, changing something. [...] To intervene in public space was our way of speaking out.” (Muniz, 2008: 59)

OSGEMEOS understand that social critique in street art does not necessarily have to take the form of a direct social statement, because the use and alteration of public

space itself is a statement and has an impact on society (cf. Kuttner, 2014). They also are conscious of the fact that this is a form of critique that is site-specific, as in it must take place within the urban landscape, and cannot be transferred into a gallery setting.

The aggregate of these statements reveal two important aspects that disarm the criticism cited above. Firstly, OSGEMEOS cannot be faulted for failing to bring the socio-political impact of street art into a gallery setting, not only because this is not their intention, but also because they have repeatedly stated that such an effort would amount to a fool's errand. Secondly, they have indeed shown an awareness of the implications of their work in the streets. However, one might ask what their intentions are for entering the gallery if they admit that it cannot approach the same level of critical significance as their street art. OSGEMEOS insist that the intention is merely to paint, create art, and express themselves in any possible setting, and that the prospect of entering the art market and thereby making a living does not alter that intention. When interviewed by Aaron Rose for the graffiti magazine *Juxtapoz* in 2005, OSGEMEOS explained their motivation for utilizing both "supports" for their art, whether interior and exterior:

“We think that gallery spaces, museums, the street, all these places are just one little support for us to show what we believe and make the experience, our dreams, more true for us and for the people that don't fear to discover who we are. Maybe the only unique place where our work is truly safe is in our heads.” (Rose 2005: 37)

Although the setting has changed, the essence of this sentiment fits into the narrative about street art and graffiti that has fascinated cultural observers for decades, that is, the subtle narrative about graffiti & street artists’ seemingly pure desire to express themselves under any circumstances and by any means necessary. Even in 1976, Jean Baudrillard lamented that graffiti was being recuperated by means of the “bourgeois humanist interpretation” of the movement as “a reclamation of identity and personal freedom” (Baudrillard, 1993: 83) in a society which denies one's autonomy and individuality, a sort of pure will towards self-expression, regardless of the lack of financial benefit or the persistent threat of arrest.[10] The statement by OSGEMEOS cited above, on the other hand, subtly modifies this narrative, presenting a will towards individual expression that transcends the streets, one in which the concept of creating art under any circumstances truly means any circumstances, even within institutional settings, or at the risk (or inevitability) of compromising critical value. Yet in each of these realms they are subject to different risks. In the streets, aside from the risk of arrest and the ephemeral nature of an art form subject to weather, alteration, and buffing, there is also the risk of it being simply dismissed as vandalism rather than acknowledged as art. On the other hand, in the gallery setting, they are somewhat ironically subject to accusations that their art does not maintain the same critical value as in the streets and at risk of being dismissed as insignificant and labeled “decorative.” Perhaps that is why they believe the only truly safe place for their art is in their own heads.

Nevertheless, in order to maintain the opportunity to express themselves in both of these settings, they understand that they must walk a figurative tightrope that is not always easy to navigate. "We've learned to search for a balance in our production so that our work can participate in these two extremely different worlds" (Muniz, 2008: 62). They strive to create something that is accessible and appealing to drastically different demographic groups. “Everyone can enjoy our art, from the collector to the beggar who lives underneath the viaduct of Glicério” (Hora, 2006: 18).[11]

Therefore, those representatives of cultural institutions who wish to bring the art of OSGEMEOS into the gallery setting have to consider their motivations for doings so. If they wish to attempt to solve the paradox of preserving the sociopolitical and site-specific aspects of street art and transferring them into a gallery setting, OSGEMEOS may have certain approaches like the exterior modification of the Galeria Fortes Vilaça that add an interesting wrinkle to the dialogue, however OSGEMEOS would not fundamentally change their mode of artistic production specifically for the purpose of aiding in this endeavor. If on the other hand, they would like to give OSGEMEOS another forum to put their creative world of *tritrez* into visual form, especially a forum that is protected and allows them to work on a scale and level of detail that is not possible in their unsanctioned productions, then the Pandolfo twins are more than willing to oblige. Márcia Fortes, of the Galeria Fortes Vilaça, told Rafael Cariello in the *Folha de S.Paulo* that “OSGEMEOS fell into our hands because we had been saying for two or three years to everyone: We want new painters. Someone

developing a universe and a pictorial imagery"[12] (Cariello, 2006: E1). Galeria Fortes Vilaça thus presents itself as a viable partner for OSGEMEOS because there is no pretense of wanting to delve into the problematic relationship of street art and the confines of institutional walls. Private art galleries may have the luxury of not being forced to address such issues. Although maintaining a certain level of artistic integrity is essential for them, market forces and trends in the interests of their collectors are likely to be more influential factors than solving paradoxes in the art world. (As Gonçalves noted in his critique, the market value for their work is indeed present.) Furthermore, even the host of the "Vertigem" exhibition, MAB-FAAP, with its focus on local Brazilian art and culture, can be excused for steering the audience's attention towards OSGEMEOS' representations of Brazilian life in the periphery and folkloric influences, rather than addressing the more global issues surrounding the institutionalization of street art. However, when major international art institutions choose to engage street artists, some attempt must be made to grapple with these issues curatorially and theoretically.

3. OSGEMEOS at the Edge of the White Cube

In 2008, on the northern façade of the Tate Modern in London, at the edge of the quintessential white cube, six murals were commissioned to be produced by artists who built their reputation by creating unsanctioned works in the streets. This exhibition, titled "Street Art," featured OSGEMEOS, Blu, Faile, JR, Sixeart, and Nunca. The piece by OSGEMEOS depicted one of their quintessential yellow figures with all of the hallmark features: almond-shaped eyes, bony limbs, boxy torso, and a somewhat awkward pose. The giant figure, although mostly nude, still incorporates certain street art "tropes" (cf. Bengtsen, 2014: 76) such as the concealed face and the presence of CCTV surveillance cameras, which in this case are bundled together and dangling from the giant's hand by their cables.

Based on its title alone, the Tate "Street Art" exhibition, in contrast to the two OSGEMEOS exhibitions discussed in the previous section, had at least some intention of representing the current state of street art and all of its sociopolitical and cultural implications. Yet the paradox of displacing a site-specific art form is partially sidestepped by the Tate's decision to keep the work outside the museum on its northern façade. The significance of this strategy was not lost on the Brazilian art critics for the *Folha de S.Paulo*. Pedro Dias Leite and Bruna Bittencourt write:

"Different than other shows with the name 'street art,' the Tate preferred not to transport the production of these artists to its interior – on the façade, it is visible to a larger number of people. They also created a tour to show the graffiti on the premises of the museum, in an effort to stay true to the original scenario."[13] (Dias Leite & Bittencourt, 2008: E1)

The reviewers refrain from approaching the question of whether this effort is successful, meaning that the strategy was at least effective enough to allay the suspicions of the critics at the *Folha*, which had published the harsher reviews cited previously.

The location and the commissioning of OSGEMEOS' giant, which shares a title with the Tate exhibition, *Street Art*, represent a gray zone between the worlds of street art and fine art. On the one hand, their work on the Tate façade is a painting that was executed legally and commissioned by a major contemporary art institution. The space was provided and permitted rather than sought out and seized. Even the curator, Cedar Lewisohn, admitted: "Since museums are often funded by the government, we have to consider them as voices of the state" (Lewisohn, 2008: 127). Therefore, OSGEMEOS' participation in such an exhibition could easily be interpreted as yet another example of the institutionalization, appropriation, or co-opting of *grafite*, as outlined by Neil Schlecht in his article "Resistance and appropriation in Brazil: How the media and 'official culture' institutionalized São Paulo's Grafite" from 1995 (Schlecht, 1995), however, this time on an international scale. On the other hand, the Tate piece not only clearly belongs to an "urban aesthetic" (cf. Bengtsen, 2014) or "street art aesthetic," (cf. Kuttner, 2015) but it also embodies some of the central characteristics and ideals of the street art movement.

First of all, the work exists in a public space and is accessible to and thus able to be enjoyed by a diverse range of viewers. Here the decision to use the northern façade, facing the Thames river, and also the scale of the works are both significant, in that both aspects allow the works to be seen from a long distance with little obstruction, thus reaching a large audience and not necessarily those

who have gone to seek out art, i.e. the museum-goers of the Tate. Secondly, the work is ephemeral; like most street art or graffiti writing produced throughout the world, it was created with the knowledge that one day it will be destroyed. The difference, of course, in this situation is that the date for the removal was set before the commission was given. Nevertheless, by choosing not to preserve this work, it avoids the trap of museumification. The work exists in physical form only within its own contemporaneity; what remains are only the fragments, memories, and traces of the piece, through various forms of medial documentation. This also may have been a factor in the decision not to create a traditional catalogue for this exhibition.

Perhaps more important than these first two aspects, however, is the fact that the modification of the industrial architecture of the Tate Modern's drab brown brick façade with OSGEMEOS' bright palette and fantastic imagery is in itself an intervention in the public realm that has a significant, albeit impermanent, impact on the urban landscape. An analysis of the impact of OSGEMEOS' work in the streets of São Paulo in terms of spatial theory is provided in "Os Gêmeos & São Paulo: Reappropriating Public Space in a 'City of Walls'" (Kuttner, 2014). When extrapolating that analysis to their work on the Tate façade, although the setting does not fit the description of a non-place, the imposing walls of the Bankside Power Station could be seen as having a similar effect as the fortified enclaves of São Paulo that OSGEMEOS and their peers have been transforming with their street art over several decades. Granted, the socio-cultural significance is quite different in London, but if one considers the possibility that the area between the Tate and the riverbanks may have been turned into a "void" of public space (cf. Caldeira, 2000) through the fortress-like industrial architecture of the former power station, then commissioning these street artists to paint the walls could be seen as a highly effective way of restoring social interaction to that space. One can see from various visitor photographs of this work that the space at the feet of OSGEMEOS' giant became a place where people would congregate not only to look up and observe the artwork as traditionally is the case with exhibited art, but also just to interact with one another.

Nevertheless, one must not forget that OSGEMEOS' *Street Art* giant is a commissioned work, even though it retains some of the essential aspects of OSGEMEOS' work in the streets, including style, subject matter, public visibility, ephemerality, and certain effects on the surrounding urban landscape. Graffiti began as an anti-discourse, an anti-institutional force with the potential to upend concepts of public space and make people reconsider what exactly freedom of speech entails. Without the forcible appropriation of a space that does not legally belong to the artist, one essential characteristic of graffiti is lost. One could make the argument, on the other hand, that the act of commissioning autodidacts who emerge from a countercultural artistic scene that began as an anti-discourse to modify the Tate, with little or no restrictions about how and what they create, is to some extent inviting an aesthetic attack on the codes and value systems of the "fine art" world contained within the building. Thus, one might still be able to consider the *Street Art* piece as a more subtle or subdued form of semiotic attack in that OSGEMEOS utilize the same codes and visual language of the streets despite the setting. However, this does not appear to be the main intention of the artists, nor the curator, Cedar Lewisohn, who agrees that the exhibition itself cannot attain the same level of critical impact as uncommissioned street art:

"The best street art and graffiti are illegal. This is because the illegal works have political and ethical connotations that are lost in sanctioned works. […] That's not to say that these works should never be shown in museums; it's just that when they are, we have to realise, as Blek le Rat says, that we're 'looking at the shadow of the real thing.'" (Lewisohn, 2008: 127)

Furthermore, it is telling that two of the six large-scale works commissioned by the Tate were created by Brazilian artists, since Manco et al. state:

"Brazilian writers also tend not to get as hung up on the distinction between legal and illegal work as their North American and European counterparts. While writers elsewhere knock each other for 'only doing legals', it isn't something you often hear in Brazil." (Manco et al., 2005: 46)

This position, combined with the relatively early institutionalization process in São Paulo described by Neil Schlecht in 1995, indicates that it is neither frowned upon nor unusual for Brazilian street artists to create art within institutional contexts, especially in the case of OSGEMEOS.

For street artists who were not invited to participate in the Tate exhibition or those who might refuse to work within an institutional framework, there was an alternative event hosted by Banksy several weeks before the Tate's opening. Forty street artists participated in the event, called the Cans Festival, which took place in a London railway tunnel just walking distance from the Tate and drew large crowds according to *The Guardian*. In that newspaper, Alice Fisher states that it is "hard not to see the Cans Festival as a spoiler to Tate Modern's exhibition" (Fisher, 2008). Since this event was organized by the most famous street artist in the world, not a major publicly-funded museum, it clearly was perceived as having more "street cred" than the Tate exhibition, compounded by the fact that it took place within a more natural habitat for street artists, a train tunnel. Yet not all participants were critical of those who received Tate commissions. The group Faile participated in both events and was quoted by Fisher defending the museum's decision to put on their "Street Art" exhibition: "At least it's no longer undermined as something on the street, something without value. Money fuels interest - it's an injection in the butt that fires people up and makes them realise they should pay attention" (Fisher, 2008).

Despite Faile's comments, the issue of money is a delicate topic when dealing with contemporary street art and it is almost always mixed into the discussion of institutionalization and co-opting. One of the aspects which cultural theorists were so captivated by during the early days of modern graffiti writing and street art was the fact that teenagers and young adults were risking arrest (and in some cases their lives) en masse, without pay or any sort of reward other than fame within a particular subculture, in order to express themselves visually, to create art. So when money, especially large amounts of money for major commissions, enters the equation, critics are often skeptical, not only because of the potential conflict of interests between the institution and supposedly anti-institutional art forms, but also because of the loss of this romanticized ideal of the artists' pure will to express themselves and make a visual impact at any cost. It may then be no coincidence that OSGEMEOS have been the main Brazilian *grafiteiros* contacted for projects like these, seeing as their dreamlike subject matter and the influence of folkloric imagery give the impression of preserving this almost mystical aura of the street artist as the autodidact with a pure will to express him or herself artistically, unaffected by institutional forces or financial markets, much like the folk artist. Lewisohn also sees the connection to folk art in the institutional perception of street art, but he intuits the opposite result:

"In the eyes of the art world, both street art and graffiti are akin to folk art or 'popular' art. Classifying them in this way, even subconsciously, has made it far easier for mainstream arts organisations to dismiss or ignore them." (Lewisohn, 2008: 130)

However, it is hard to see this as having a negative impact on the institutional recognition of OSGEMEOS, because their connection to Brazilian folklore, and by extension folk art as well, has been a major talking point in every exhibition catalogue and in most commentary on their works commissioned outside of Brazil. If anything, this has helped drive their international success by showing that their art, although it belongs to a distinctly contemporary street art counterculture, is anchored in the Brazilian cultural heritage. The actual validity of this perception, however, may be open to discussion, considering OSGEMEOS were born and raised in the megacity São Paulo, a far cry rural northeastern Brazil. Regardless of whether or not they have benefited from these associations with folk art, it is clear from their participation in the Tate event that OSGEMEOS are willing participants in the art market and not strongly concerned with the risk of their work being co-opted by dominant culture institutions.

The problematics of sponsoring and promoting street art are addressed to some extent by Lewisohn. Overall he sees it as an inevitable but positive development, although he expresses some reservations:

"A market for artworks is something that is difficult to avoid, no matter what the genre, and is largely a good thing, since artists deserve to make a living from their work. The problems come with speculative buyers looking to make quick profits, who have little interest in the actual work. […] Artists who use working on the street as a springboard into the commercial sector, then completely leave the street scene behind, can harm the reputations of other artists."(Lewisohn, 2008: 130)

Lewisohn describes it as a delicate balance for both parties involved. On the one hand, from the institutional side, gallerists, collectors, or sponsors should promote street art for the right reasons, i.e. based on the quality and merit of the works, not as an investment in a fleeting cultural trend. On the other hand, street artists who enter institutional

settings must retain a connection to the streets with ongoing uncommissioned and unsanctioned interventions in public spaces, or else their work becomes simply a hollow representation of the street art aesthetic. That is why it is of critical importance that OSGEMEOS continue to produce illegal works worldwide in a variety of forms, from their characters to bubble-letter pieces, combinations of both, and even pichação as well. The repopulation of urban public space in São Paulo with their yellow figures is the foundation upon which their commissioned giants stand.

Nevertheless, despite OSGEMEOS' continuing strong connection to the street art scene, despite the Tate mural's ephemerality and its location outside institutional walls, and despite its effects on the urban environment, the initiative of the Tate to acknowledge these street artists can be seen as an act of domestication or cultural appropriation in that it neutralizes its oppositional character and recontextualizes the art as an accepted part of hegemonic culture. This paradox seems inevitable indeed, but it is one that has entered public consciousness and certainly becomes a more prominent part of public discourse with major events like the Tate Modern's "Street Art" exhibition. However, the cultural transformation is a two-way street. Through the cultural appropriation of street art, which in its current international manifestation OSGEMEOS have been a major part of, hegemonic culture and the institutions that engage in this process are not left unadulterated. On a superficial level, there is the popularity and omnipresence of the street art aesthetic itself, which has permeated both high and low culture through the media, fashion, and art has become ingrained within a worldwide urban visual culture and is now internationally legible. Furthermore, as pop art did so effectively in the decades before street art's genesis, street art culture has once again challenged people's perceptions of high and low culture, mainstream culture and counterculture, and provoked a more in-depth discourse on the conflicting nature of these issues and disrupting the status-quo. Institutions that want to avoid obsolescence are once again – as has happened several times over the course of art history – forced to relinquish their non-oppositional character and support a form of artistic production that emerged from an anti-institutional counterculture. It seems that these forces, dominant culture and street art culture, are at once parasitic and symbiotic. They feed off one another, gaining strength from each other yet compromising their own structural integrity at the same time.

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Notes

1 - Original text in Portuguese: “No território da arte visual urbana, os códigos não são os mesmos do circuito de arte. Obras à mostra numa galeria estabelecida de arte contemporânea se expõem necessariamente a um confronto com a história e com critérios de consagração específicos – mesmo que elas tenham sido produzidas com a intenção de ignorá-los ou contestá-los.”

2 - Original text in Portuguese: “O hype dos Gêmeos, em meio ao renovado interesse pelo grafite, encerra uma aposta num trabalho que poderia transcender o universo ilustrativo urbano e adquirir valor aos olhos de colecionadores –gente disposta a pagar RS 41 mil para ter, em telas, os artistas famosos em muros. O interesse comercial, ao que se vê, existe – mas ele não é suficiente para estabelecer se a produção dos Gêmeos conseguirá ultrapassar o plano da curiosidade e do caráter decorativo.”

3 - Original text in Portuguese: “A mostra reúne obras que traduzem o sensível olhar da dupla sobre o cotidiano brasileiro, da periferia urbana ao folclore nordestino, em imagens surrealistas que remontam uma atmosfera de sonho, por meio de cores alegres e personagens melancólicos.”

4 - Original text in Portuguese: “Contudo, a 'instalação', que mais parecia a atração de um parque de diversões, situava-se no campo do entretenimento e não agregou nada ao debate de como levar um trabalho transgressor feito na rua para o cubo branco de uma galeria de arte.”

5 - Original text in Portuguese: “O problema é que, enquanto na rua essa tensão é autêntica, dentro de um espaço museológico as imagens desses miseráveis são mera ilustração e, pior, apropriação rasa de um estado de indigência típico das metrópoles latino-americanas. [...] Pois Osgêmeos realizam com 'Vertigem' uma 'cosmética da pobreza', já que tornam a miséria um produto de consumo fácil, caindo, novamente, no campo do entretenimento.”

6 - Original text in Portuguese: "No debate sobre a transposição da arte de rua para o museu, 'Vertigem' não tem nada a declarar."

7 - Original text in Portuguese: "Na real [...] a gente separa o mundo da rua e o mundo da galeria."

8 - Original transcript in Portuguese: “"galeria é outra história [...] A rua é uma coisa única, não se compara a um museu. Você sair para fazer grafite na rua não tem nada a ver com um museu."

9 - Original text in Portuguese: "Grafite pra gente é na rua, não dá pra levar a galeria alguma. Aqui dentro é outro suporte. Podem chamar de arte contemporânea, do que quiserem, mas acreditamos na arte atemporal."

10 - Somewhat ironically, however, Baudrillard to some extent also recuperates the movement by interpreting graffiti writing in a way that fits his own narrative of semiotics, presenting it as an anti-discourse attacking the contemporary semiocracy.

11 - Original text in Portuguese: “Todos podem desfrutar da nossa arte, do colecionador ao mendigo que mora embaixo do viaduto do Glicério."

12 - Original text in Portuguese: “"Os Gêmeos caíram nas nossas mãos porque a gente estava há uns dois ou três anos falando para todo mundo: Queremos novos pintores. Alguém desenvolvendo um universo e um imaginário pictórico."

13 - Original text in Portuguese: “Diferentemente de outras mostras com nomes da 'street art', a Tate preferiu não transpor a produção desses artistas para o seu interior – na fachada, é vista por um número maior de pessoas. Criou ainda um tour para mostrar grafites nas redondezas do museu, em um esforço para manter a vertente em seu cenário original.”