Proto Street Art in Ljubljana in the 1980s and 1990s: The Case of Mizzart

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Abstract
Mizzart, a collective of students from different artistic fields, created large-scale paintings in the urban landscape in Ljubljana in the 1980s and 1990s. Their independent artistic practices in public space in the 1980s and 1990s could be described as 'proto-street art' – a new avenue of contemporary research in graffiti and street art studies. Based on a brief historical introduction of genealogical connections between street art and graffiti, upgraded with Rafael Schacter's classification of 'street art' as a defined artistic period, the article identifies the main characteristics of 'proto-street art', which are: the time of occurrence, agents, spontaneity/sovereignty, iconography, site specificity, unprofitability and interaction with public. Mizzart's ephemeral cultural heritage is analysed by the proposed seven key formal elements of 'proto-street art'

Keywords
proto-street art, street art, graffiti, Mizzart, Ljubljana

Introduction

The notion of 'proto-street art' is a new avenue of contemporary research in graffiti and street art studies. Documentation about independent public art from distant past is usually rare, because their authors often did not have the technological support for documentation or the archives got lost. Artistic collective Mizzart, an agent of street art practices in Ljubljana in the 1980s and 1990s, is therefore a valuable source for the research of this past phenomena. The case is also a good starting point for discussion about terminology and generic properties of 'proto street art'.

Firstly, we have to establish that street art is not graffiti despite their genealogical connections. They might share the same authors, space and techniques, however they still produce visually and conceptually different art works (Velikonja, 2008; Abram, 2008; Radošević, 2013). In the process of developing the key formal elements of 'proto-street art', I will start with a brief historical introduction of the development of graffiti and street art in the last century. Initially, I will be focusing on muralism because murals were considered to be a part of graffiti movement already by Martha Cooper, Henry Chelfant, Anna Waclawek and others (Cooper and Chalfant, 1983; Castleman, 1982; Bulc and Abram, 2008; Waclawek, 2008; Radošević, 2013). I will explain how muralism as a movement from the early 1960s in California drastically differed from the expansion of graffiti in Philadelphia and New York in the 1960s and 1970s.

The key elements of 'proto-street art', that I will propose after a short delving into the terminological issues, are: the time of occurrence, agents, spontaneity/sovereignty, iconography, site specificity, unprofitability and interaction with the public. They derive from Rafael Schacter's five key formal elements, techniques and approaches that describe Street Art, according to Schacter, as "a defined artistic period" (see Schacter, 2017, p. 105).

In the following case study, I will analyse Mizzart's body of work focusing on the proposed key elements of 'proto-street art'.

'Graffiti' versus 'street art'

The dominant academic discourse on graffiti in the 1960s and 1970's in the USA differentiated between indoor and outdoor graffiti. There was no use of the term 'street art' in academic writings. American researchers focused mostly on indoor graffiti in public restrooms (Radošević, 2013). European researchers (i.e. Jean Baudrillard, Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault) focused mainly on outdoor graffiti with political and rebellious messages. In 1975, in his essay 'KOOL KILLER, or The Insurrection of Signs', Jean Baudrillard tackled graffiti with semiotics, linguistics and other approaches. Henri Lefebvre agitated for transformation of urban life in his essay 'The Right to the City' in 1968. Michel Foucault interpreted graffiti as a local character of criticism and a communication phenomenon in his lectures and writings, i.e. 'Of Other Spaces' in 1967 and 1986. They were significantly influenced by street propaganda of the student movement of May 1968, however, except for Baudrillard, graffiti were mostly a marginal topic of their analyses.

A unique graffiti style, that exploded in New York City during the 1970s and by the mid-1980s reached numerous urban centres throughout the world, is widely known as 'the New York style of writing', 'wild style', 'hip-hop graffiti' or 'signature graffiti'. It originated in Philadelphia during the 1960s as a signature of the writer, written with a marker or a spray. In the 1970s, a combination of the writer's nickname and the number of the street from the home address became the ubiquitous marking on the streets and subway trains in New York City. Visual elaboration of writers' nicknames became larger and more detailed. The most common forms of signature graffiti were 'tags', 'throw-ups' and 'pieces' (Waclawek, 2009; Abram, 2008; Radošević, 2013).

In the 1980s, there was an academic breakthrough in research of spraycan graffiti[1] and a growing interest of the art world in the USA and Europe. Jean–Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, among others, created their widely recognized works. In the 1990s, graffiti flourished as independent culture around the world, developing new styles and techniques (Radošević, 2013). Anna Waclawek described the new trends as "an addition to the established signature graffiti tradition" and as "a renaissance of illegal, ephemeral, public art production" (Waclawek, 2009). Waclawek predominantly uses the term 'post-graffiti' for 'street art', 'urban painting', 'neo-graffiti' or similar and emphasises that the post-graffiti movement "derives from the culture of graffiti writing" (Waclawek, 2009).

The addition of the prefix 'post', however, suggests that while this movement distances itself from the established visual vocabulary and principles of New York Style graffiti, post-graffiti also implies a chronological progression. While the post-graffiti label invokes a historical reference, it concurrently indicates formal, material, and visual development. (Waclawek, 2009, p. 4)

In the 2000s, the term and genre of street art took over the dominant discourse in the popular and academic terminology, involved with graffiti. Art world incorporated and commodified the illegal art movements, uncritically describing graffiti and street art as synonyms. Major art institutions in London, Los Angeles and Paris organised street art exhibitions, based on the increased interest of art market (Radošević, 2013). According to Radošević,
'urban art' became a signifier "for graffiti, street art and contemporary production which did not fit under any other definition" (Radošević, 2013).

Ulrich Blanché defines 'urban art' as a broader term, which refers stylistically to street art and graffiti, but it also includes legal works. 'Urban art' is the part of 'public art' that is often illegal or un-commissioned, and even more importantly, without the site-specific aspect:[2]

1 - Ljiljana Radošević refers to Craig Castelman's ethnographic study Getting Up, published in 1982.

2 - Ulrich Blanché defines contemporary graffiti as 'style writing' or 'American graffiti', which became quantitatively the most dominant in the Western world since the late 1960s as it spread from the USA. Blanché explains that this name writing with a spray can or a marker in the form of little tags or more elaborated pieces on urban public surfaces, is only a particular form of graffiti in general, and a relative of street art. (Blanché, 2015: 32).

Unlike Public Art, Urban Art can be in a museum or gallery – that is, it can be sold commercially as well. Dismounted from the street, works of Street Art become Urban Art. Unlike Street Art or Land Art, the majority of Urban Art focuses less on the mounting location and the urban environment. Urban Art is very often gallery art in the visual style of Street Art. (Blanché, 2015, p. 38)

Waclawek points out the social aspect of the new forms of graffiti (stickers, stencils, posters), which emerged during the 1990s: "the rules of writing loosened and the culture of street art broadened to be more inclusive in terms of technique and style." (Waclawek, 2009). While signature graffiti were and still are predominantly produced by male pre-teens and teenagers, the creators of street art are mostly older males and many female artists. (Waclawek, 2009). According to Waclawek, street art is a performative art form that sustains the artist's identity through acts of diffusion and reception (Waclawek, 2009). "Although both graffiti and street artists acknowledge a city as a space of communication, post-graffiti art, through figuration, logos, and words seeks to communicate more specified ideas" (Waclawek, 2009).

As Ljiljana Radosević pointed out: "street art is not pure and independent. It intertwines with different art forms and urban subcultures and nurtures spin-off production. Therefore it is quite hard to trace its borders." (Radošević, 2013). Ulrich Blanché proposes a working definition:

Street Art consists of self-authorized pictures, characters, and forms created in or applied to surfaces in the urban space that intentionally seek communication with a larger circle of people. Street Art is done in a performative and often site-specific, ephemeral, and participatory way. Street Art is mostly viewed online. It differs from Graffiti and Public Art. (Blanché, 2019, p. 33)

Based on the radical divergence between the common understanding of Street Art in the 21st century compared to what it represented initially, Rafael Schacter proposed classification and periodisation of its artistic milieu (Schacter, 2016). According to Schacter, street art's defined artistic period was between 1998 and 2008, when the critical mass of its practices occurred and they were most innovational (Schacter, 2017). Schacter's five key formal elements for street art, described by my transmission of them for the purpose of defining 'proto street art', are as follows: Spatial Assimilation or site specificity, Figuration/Iconicity or iconography, Non-Instrumentality or unprofitability, Institutional Autonomy or spontaneity/ sovereignty and Communicative Consensuality or interaction with public (Schacter, 2017).

Anton Polsky noted that Schacter's periodization of street art as a global movement "needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes", since the processes in regions with less developed art institutions and markets take place at a different speed (Polsky, 2018a). Polsky proposed "terms proto-street art and post-street art to describe personal unsanctioned art practices in public spaces—before 1998 and after 2008 (specified for a certain region/scene)" (Polsky, 2018). Ulrich Blanché wrote about the beginning of street art in Germany and some other western countries from the 1970s up to 2000s, using the term 'avant la lettre Street Art' and emphasising regional styles (Blanché, 2019).

Some of the artistic practices in the 21st century are labelled as street art even though they fail to uphold to its basics. The prevailing murals in gigantic sizes should be termed as 'neo-muralism' or 'new muralism' as they ignore the specificity of the space, do not integrate, and fail to engage with the public. The street art festivals are usually subordinated to the urban planning, with "the bureaucratic delimitations and curatorial constraints of traditional Public Art" (Schacter, 2017). Regulation of visibility on urban surfaces in modern cities grants exclusive privileges to commercial communication and the massive presence of advertising, thus forming, according to Andrea Lorenzo Baldini, a 'corporate regime of visibility' (Baldini, 2022). After 2008, the term 'street art' started to profoundly differentiate from what it originally represented (Schacter, 2016).

Street Art soon came not simply to sell itself, but, more perniciously, to sell a false notion of place. It came to act as a branding tool for the Creative City, parasitically utilized to amplify and magnify the process of profit, parasitically utilized to control and contain. (Schacter, 2017, p. 106)

Schacter proposes the term 'intermural art' for post-2008 practices, which utilize the visual styles of graffiti and street art in three key ways: firstly, a conceptual palette with aesthetic form; secondly, a methodological tool with traditional techniques and methods; and thirdly, as an ethical imperative with an independent ethic regime (Schacter, 2017).

In literal terms, Intermural Art means 'art in between the walls'. Not art inside the walls (intramural), nor outside them (extramural), but art between these same walls. As such, what is key to Intermural Art is the relationship between inside and outside. (Schacter, 2017, p. 111).

Baldini argues that essential value of all genuine works of street art "is their subversive value, or subversiveness", (Baldini, 2022) and elaborates that street art "includes graffiti as its original and most radical style" (Baldini, 2022). Baldini's philosophical perspective on the connection between graffiti and street art states differs from the introductory statement, that graffiti is not street art and that street art represents an evolved concept of graffiti or post-graffiti. Understanding street art as a broader phenomenon, that also includes graffiti, is quite present in the 21st century. The core overlap of graffiti and street art in their purest form is confrontation with the "dominant visuality of the public sphere" (Schacter, 2017), resisting authority and putting marginality on public display.

'Proto-street art'
background, key elements and examples

Proliferation of independent public art in the USA started with the mainstreaming of a Mural Movement in Los Angeles and San Diego in 1960s, as Eva Sperling Cockcroft and other authors noted (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995). Muralism was a widely used tool of historical revisionism and cultural reclamation since Renaissance.[3] After the Mexican Revolution of 1917, their new government granted unprecedentedly high support to muralism for promotion of revised version of Mexican history. In the early 1930s, during Depression years, muralism was revived in the United States with renowned Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. A mural program was included into the New Deal. In the 1960s the community mural movement transformed into an unfunded and unofficial arm of struggle that accompanied the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. It also claimed urban space (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995). Initially the majority of muralists were professional artists, who worked with youth and other neighbourhood residents. Most of them were "young art school graduates from African American and Mexican American backgrounds, or European American New Left activists, using their skills to aid political movements" (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995).

Eve Simson wrote about artistic contributions by the Chicano community in Los Angeles in 1976, emphasizing creative force of ethnic diversity. Simson speculated that increased recognition and emphasis on ethnical background contributed to revitalization of folk arts. New artistic expressions compounded the cultural heritage of a specific group with the mainstream culture (Simson, 1976)

In 1973 in Chicago, Mark Rogovin self-published The Mural Manual. The Community Murals Newsletter was produced regularly since 1976 for more than a decade. In Europe Gerard Kelly painted a great number of murals in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995)

Jean Baudrillard pointed out institutional support to wall-painting in New York as a part of large-scale urban planning that came from the top since 1969 (Baudrillard, 1975). Although Baudrillard was not using the term 'street art', he referred to its essence:

There are also frescoes and murals in the ghettos, the spontaneous artworks of ethnic groups who paint their own walls. Socially and politically, the impulse is the same as with graffiti. These are savage painted walls, not financed by the urban administration. Moreover, they all focus on political themes, on a revolutionary message: the unity

3 - Mural painting (not synonymous with fresco) reached its highest degree of creative achievement in Europe with the work of such Renaissance masters as Masaccio, Fra Angelico, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael" (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023).

of the oppressed, world peace, the cultural promotion of ethnic communities, solidarity, and only rarely the violence of open struggle. In short, as opposed to graffiti, they have a meaning, a message. And, contrary to the City Walls project, which drew its inspiration from abstract, geometrical or surrealist art, they are always inspired by figurative and idealist forms. (Baudrillard, 1975, p. 36, 37)

The first mentions of 'street art' originate in the early 1970s. Robert Sommer photographed numerous murals and sculptures in Chicago, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, San Francisco and on other locations in the USA. In 1975, he published a book *Street Art* with a selection of photographs of such artistic objects in cities and landscapes that, according to Sommer, contradicted the commercial messages of corporate advertisers.

The lesson of the mural groups is that some exterior spaces can be reclaimed by the community to reflect its own culture. There are many walls still to be painted, a great deal of material for sculpture, but above all, there are creative people who have inherited a thousand years of experience in the use of paint and stone. (Sommer, 1975, p. 168)

In the 1980s, significant funds were granted for public arts; so many community muralists turned professional and started to work on city projects. Financial support continued also during the recession in the late 1980s. Murals were a source of pride, prevention of gang violence and tourist attraction. Los Angeles became known as the 'Mural capital of the World' (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995).

Based on the above presented background and examples, I hereby present a frame of reference that reflects the material and ideological categories of what is widely known as 'proto street art', according to Schacter's classification of Street Art (Schacter, 2017).

The key elements and approaches of proto-street art, stated below, enable a proper identification of independent public art, originated prior to the 'official' start of street art or, better expressed, its global recognition. They include the pivotal questions: when, who and what, as well as specific characteristics. The key elements of proto-street art, explained in details below, are: the time of occurrence, agents, spontaneity / sovereignty, iconography, site specificity, unprofitability and interaction with the public.

1. The time frame of proto street art[4] (the prefix 'proto' points out the preliminary phase before the main occurance) is predominantly, but not exclusively, 20th century, until the year 1998, when, accordingly to Schacter (2017), is the milestone that marks the beginning of the street art as a defined artistic period.[5]

2. Practitioners of proto-street art were artists, educated or trained, mostly with background in graffiti, exploring communicative strategies in public space, using visual and applied techniques (stencils, stickers, posters and other) with the DIY activities (Schacter, 2017). For example, Richard Hambleton (alias Shadowman), John Fekner and Xavier Prou (alias Blek le Rat) had studied art. Leonard Hilton McGurr (alias Futura 2000), Jean–Michel Basquiat (alias Samo) and Kenny Scharf started as graffiti writers and Keith Haring worked alongside with them. According to Anton Polsky, there were examples of proto-street art in the works of some conceptual artists in Moscow and Odesa in the late 1970s—early 1980s that resembled street art and were not influenced by graffiti movement (Polsky, 2018). Ulrich Blanché wrote about predecessors of street art in Germany (i.e. Ingrid Kohlhöfer or Moennig, Imi Knoedel, Peter Moennig, Walter Dahn, Fekner, Beuys, Loomit, Dokupil, Baumgärtel, Kaluza, Krips, Mazurka) and Switzerland (Naegeli). They were educated artists, active in international networks and connected with contemporaries like Hambleton, Haring, Holzer and Basquiat. Nearly all of them were inspired by graffiti style writing from New York (Blanché, 2019).

4 - The prefix 'proto' represents a preliminary phase before the beginning of the main period of the phenomenon (Schacter 2017: 105).

5 - Anton Polsky pointed out that Schacters "periodization needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes" (Polsky 2018a: 123) with different dynamic of the art institutions and city discourse, compared to the global movements (Polsky 2018a: 123).

3. Spontaneity and sovereignty refer to institutional autonomy. Proto-street art practices were created without any authorization or permission. There were no rules of judging committees. Artists were surpassing laws, following their own moral obligations, and worked practically illegally (Schacter, 2017). This element clearly demonstrates the difference between proto-street art and muralism, based on the tradition of government funded mural projects in Mexico, USA and elsewhere. Murals in a particular area were very similar, produced with virtually the same techniques and narration. According to Sperling Cockcroft, the community mural movements in the late 1960s in the USA were receiving material and ideological support of certain political movements and some unions. "Also, from the early 1970s, some monies were available to pay muralists (or at least buy supplies) through grass-roots fundraising, small grants, and creative use of anti-poverty and social service funds" (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995). Another sign of uniformity of muralism is the political and cultural imagery of community murals in the late 1960s, which was according to Sperling Cockcroft "similar in origin and themes to the republican murals of the north of Ireland" (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995).

4. Iconography of proto-street art is the most distinctive element of its visuality, as well as a progressive turn and the main differentiation from graffiti's central characteristic – typography. The material elements were mainly, but not exclusively, non-textual markings, such as characters, logos, ideograms and other images. They addressed the wider public unlike the inward communicating graffiti (Schacter, 2017). For example, there were John Fekner's "stenciled words, symbols, dates and icons spray painted outdoors in the United States, Sweden, Canada, England and Germany" in the 1970s (Fekner, 2023). According to Ulrich Blanché, the works of German 'proto street art' were improperly called "graffiti"; however, they were pictorial, with occasional readable text. The artist Sprayer of Zurich "drew virtuously line-art spray-can figures in the streets of Zurich" between late 1970s and mid-1980s (Blanché, 2019). In the 1980s there were stencils of rats in Paris by Blek le Rat (Schacter, 2016). As REVS from New York said: "I started doing these crazy sloppy rollers with the wheat paste because everything at that point in graffiti was so meticulous in 1990. Perfect straight lines, right angles… I was like; 'nah, I hate everything'" (Alva 2019).

5. Site specificity refers to spatial assimilation or contextually considerate interaction with the surrounding environment. 'Proto-street artists' incorporated the normative purpose of the existent architecture into their practices. In a socially responsible way, they were playfully enhancing, improving and reforming public urban surfaces (Schacter, 2017). For example, Richard Hambleton's realistic markings of fake crime scenes and life-size human shadows in dark alleys were calculatedly placed to scare passers-by (Zlatkov, 2017). John Fekner's stencils with blunt social criticism were strategically painted on deteriorating buildings and abandoned cars (Fekner, 2023).

6. Unprofitability (also non-instrumentality) implies the unprofitable nature of proto-street art. Just like graffiti movement, proto-street art incorporated intrinsic purity, refusing to be commoditized or used for commercial purposes (Schacter, 2017). Apart from its basic message, intended for the general public, it did not hide any hidden political or commercial influence. There is another apparent difference between proto-street art and muralism. According to Sperling Cockcroft, the community mural movements in the late 1960s in the USA were receiving material and ideological support of certain political movements and some unions. "Also, from the early 1970s, some monies were available to pay muralists (or at least buy supplies) through grass-roots fundraising, small grants, and creative use of anti-poverty and social service funds." (Sperling Cockcroft, 1995, p. 201, 202).

7. Interaction with the public of proto-street artists was aimed at the whole public sphere. Their work was more noticeable "than the vast majority of visual culture that lay within the street" (Schacter, 2017). It was completely different from the inward communication of graffiti, limited to groups, familiar with the complex typology, or institutional fine art, understandable to people with proper education. With open and rational communication, they tried to transmit independent values and provoke a conversation with the public (Schacter, 2017). For example, Keith Haring's visual language and slogans contained

pictorial influences of Central American, African, and Oceanic cultures. They were raising awareness about the crack and AIDS epidemics, as well as transmitting engaged messages for gay rights and against racial discrimination (Mercurio, 2005).

As Baldini noted: "movements of social and political change in Africa, Asia, and Europe often use street art as a tool of protest against governments, institutions, policies, and behaviours that are deemed unjust" (Baldini, 2022). Compared to the most recent versions of commercial street art, repurposed to serve institutional visual regime as a tool for advertising, commodification and gentrification (Schacter, 2017), practices of 'proto-street art' were a pure or independent version of street art. They enacted the role of independent public art despite occasional collaboration or support from groups and institutions.

The case study: an analysis of Mizzart's body of work by the key elements of 'proto-street art'

This case study is a condensed ethnographic, historical and visual analysis of Mizzart's artistic practices. Before I analyse them with the proposed key elements of 'proto-street art', I shall briefly explore their historical background. Graffiti scene in Slovenia has been emerging almost simultaneously compared to global trends, while developing its own local and cultural peculiarities. Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, has a strong heritage of resistance graffiti from the Second World War and punk graffiti from the end of the 1970s (Konda, 2017). Slovenia was then one of the six republics in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The economic growth in Yugoslavia and Slovenia started to decline in the 1960s, leading to a long-term inflation. The crisis was "emerging in the economic processes, the development of production, and social returns" (Rendla, 2018a). Social unrest escalated throughout Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, the civil rights movements were especially strong and active. Since the late 1970s, punk, a provocative musical and subcultural phenomenon, expressed explicit criticism against repressive social norms and the establishment of the Slovenian self-governing socialist culture (Rendla, 2018a). Using repressive measures, the police and mass media intimidated their members. Therefore, punk graffiti and hangout spots vanished from the streets of Ljubljana in the early 1980s.

Alternative student clubs and galleries allowed graffiti on their interior walls since 1981, leading to graffiti that flourished as a new form of socially critical artistic practice (Rendla, 2018). Dušan Mandić and his artistic group Irwin organized several exhibitions of graffiti paintings in Disco FV and Gallery ŠKUC in Ljubljana. Irwin's artistic practices were very provocative and politically resonant.[6] They gained international recognition and consequently reached success in the global art market (Rendla, 2018). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, political graffiti in Slovenia, written by individuals or groups, reflected themes of repression, nationalism, fight for independence, democracy, and armed conflicts.

According to historian Marta Renda, in the 1980s some indicators of the living standard were similar to the ones in the neighbouring countries such as Austria and Italy (Rendla, 2018a). "At the turn from the 1970s to 1980s, the perception of a better living standard as a development objective in the population reached beyond the mere material possessions and included other elements of life" (Rendla, 2018a, p. 423). By the end of the 20th century, Slovenia was economically and culturally more developed than the rest of the former republic of Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries, yet it was lagging behind the progress of the Western European countries (Rendla, 2018a).

With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the efforts for demilitarization intensified in Slovenia. Mizzart's members were very active in local civil movements of the late 1980s (Šuštaršič, 2023; Šipec, 2023). The authorities negotiated with the Yugoslav People's Army for the legal takeover of the large military complex on Metelkova Street in Ljubljana since 1989. The place should be used for

6 - Irwin's provocative artistic motifs were pictorial remakes of executions of partisans, displays of gay eroticism and comparisons of the nonexistent art market in Yugoslavia with the prohibition of pornography (Konda 2017: 85–89).

development of alternative culture under the supervision of the civil association Mreža za Metelkovo (MZM). In 1993, against the agreement with MZM, the authorities started demolishing the complex, so the activists of MZM squatted the premises. Mizzart was a part of MZM and one of the first squatters (Šuštaršič, 2023; Karba, 2016; Abram, 2023). According to the opinion of their members and contemporaries, various artistic practices altered the squat into a visually appealing place and a worldly renowned cultural centre Metelkova (Nabergoj, 2013; Mirović, 2012; Rakočević, 2021).

Marija Stanonik, one of the first Slovenian academic researchers of graffiti, noted:

At the end of the eighties and in the nineties of the 20th century, graffiti lost its rebellious charge and shifted to a more artistic, aesthetic level. This transition was marked mainly by two groups that closely associate both graffiti with musical affiliation (hard core, post-hard core, post-punk tradition). In 1988, Dušan Šuštaršič, the head of Mizzart, with a group of students of art, started the illegal painting in the Šentvid tunnels with the aim of enlivening the empty greyness. For their murals (also due to ecological awareness) they no longer use spray paint, but wall paint. (Stanonik, 2004, p. 691)

In the 1980s, 1990s and even in the first years of 2000s in Slovenia the term 'graffiti' was used for nearly all self-authorized linguistic messages (i.e. signature graffiti) and pictorial images in public space, also indoors. With new approaches in the 21st century, we can retrospectively distinguish their individual genres.

The research methodology

Mizzart's archive contains photo documentation, press releases, reports, notes and other materials. I used it to supplement my research, based on ethnographic analysis of archival sources, testimonies and personal observations. I conducted several talks and interviews with Mizzart's members and contemporaries. During interviews, I used a lot of visual materials such as photographs and printed publications to stimulate reflection. In this way we were able to process past events as accurately as possible. I was in contact with Dušan Šuštaršič, the founder of Mizzart, and Darja Šipec, who entrusted me with their archive. I recorded Barbara Abram's testimony and had several conversations with Primož Karba, still an active member, who runs the Mizzart's studio in the autonomous social and cultural centre Metelkova in Ljubljana. I also talked with some contemporaries[7] of the collective and researched their work.

The analysis by key elements of 'proto-street art'

The time frame: The collective Mizzart was established in 1988 in Ljubljana. It was active in the production of independent public art for twenty years.

Figure 1. Mizzart's paintings from the early years. Underpass in Ljubljana – Šentvid, 1989. Source: Mizzart archive.

Agents: The founders of Mizzart were Dušan Šuštaršič, Darja Šipec, Barbara Abram and Boštjan Franc Avguštin. Later they were joined by Matic Golja, Aleš Hočevar and Primož Karba. They chose the name Mizzart because it summed up the group's purpose, which was to create art.

7 - Multimedia collective Strip Core was Mizzart's main contemporary. They collaborated closely during the squatting of Metelkova. I conducted several interviews with members of Strip Core, mostly with Katerina Mirović – Katra, the manager, and Božo Rakočević a.k.a. Lie Eye, a graffiti artist and a musician in the band 2227.

The name Mizzart is a coinage of words 'we for the art'; in Slovenian: 'Mi za art' (Abram, 2023). In the 1980s they were students of design, painting and fashion (Mladina, 2010). Later some of them developed individual careers in the world of art, for example Dušan Šuštaršič a.k.a. Bela tehnika – sculpturing, Darja Šipec a.k.a. Beladona – sculpturing and graphical design, Primož Karba – music and graphical design, Boštjan Franc Avguštin – classical painting and scenography, Barbara Abram – knitting and teaching of various artistic techniques.

Spontaneity/sovereignty: Mizzart's performance was spontaneous from the very beginning. In 1988, Dušan Šuštaršič organized the first workshop in the passage under the highway of the Ljubljana ring road with a group of friends. They used their own resources and collected some voluntary contributions for the project, but there was no formal authorisation by the authorities, even though, according to the existing legislation, one would need a formal permit to carry out interventions in public space (Šuštaršič, 2023). Šuštaršič acted very sovereignly in the planning and implementation of the activities. Their sole purpose was commitment to the city (Šuštaršič, 2023; Abram, 2023). The collective wanted to realize its artistic ideas without the supervision of the authorities or the demands of the sponsors. In the 1990s, there were some funds available from different calls and tenders that could be used for independent artistic production. The collective received some grants, however that did not change their institutional autonomy or impose the obligation for authorization (Šuštaršič, 2023; Abram, 2023; Karba, 2016).

Iconography: Mizzart's paintings mostly followed classic painting technique, supplemented with text in the style of comics, illustrations and advertisements. They refused to accept the established aesthetic forms of the New York graffiti style, as well as the provocative style of Irwin's graffiti paintings from the mid-1980s (Abram, 2023). They also refrained from the written style of political graffiti. Mizzart never used sprays, only brushes and paint, because the technique enabled them to create precise figures and it was more environment friendly (Šuštaršič 2023). Boštjan Franc Avguštin, educated painter, instructed the collective with the classical painting approach as they painted in various styles. Members of the collective took turns in managing individual projects; the leader designed a sketch of the mural and others helped him or her to complete the work (Abram, 2023). Mizzart's artistic style was eclectic because people with different motives and backgrounds were creating it simultaneously (Abram, 2023).

Figure 2. Demonstration of different painting techniques. Playground in Ljubljana – Šentvid. 1988. Source: Mizzart archive.

Mizzart never wrote political graffiti in basic typography. One of the exceptions to their purely artistic practices was a provocative graffiti with a strong political message against the military on December 22, 1989 (Šuštaršič, 2023). Action was a part of a larger civil initiative for demilitarization in Slovenia, simultaneously with civil movements in the wider region after the fall of Berlin Wall (Bibić, 2003). "The inscription DEMILITARY on the embankment of the river Ljubljanica, under the restaurant Ljubljanski dvor, which was created at night on the former Day of the Yugoslav People's Army, especially resonated in the campaign of illegal murals." (Šuštaršič, 2023)

Figure 3. The inscription DEMILITARY on the embankment of the river Ljubljanica. December 22, 1989. Source: Mizzart archive.

Site specificity: Mizzart's original motive was an attempt to break the urban greyness. Interaction with urban space was the initial motive for the creation of the collective (Šuštaršič, 2023). Nearly all members of the collective lived in Šentvid, the rural suburbs of Ljubljana, which has gone through a massive urban transformation at that time. When the city built a ring road around the edge of the district, the new large concrete surfaces in the neighbourhood sparked their creativity. They playfully transformed the surrounding environment with paintings of blooming grass on the walls near the highway and fun characters on surfaces near the school area. They acted socially responsible and accessible (Abram, 2023).

Figure 4. Interior painting in the club Channel Zero on Metelkova, in 1994. Source: Mizzart archive.

Due to their unique technique and reputation, Mizzart was invited to paint the interiors of several clubs in Slovenia and abroad. In Ljubljana they decorated clubs B 51, Channel Zero and Gala Hala. Outside of the capital city, Mizzart decorated club Stiskarna in Velenje, club Swenak in Idrija and club ACU in Utrecht (Netherlands). They participated at the festival Forbidden Fruits of Civil Society in Utrecht on two occasions (Mizzart archive).

Figure 5. Exterior painting in the club Swenak in Idrija, in 1994. Source: Mizzart archive.

In the 1980s, the alternative cultural movements formed a critical wave that significantly distinguished Slovenia from the rest of Yugoslavia and other even more conservative socialistic countries in the wider region (Rendla, 2018). Local clubs enabled social cohesion and implementation of projects in the community, especially among young people (Mirović, 2012).

Unprofitability: Mizzart held the implicitly uncommercial position. They were applying for grants on several calls, thus keeping their independent and non-instrumental position in the implementation of projects (Šuštaršič, 2023). Mizzart's mode of operation has always involved giving back to the community. In their own words on the celebration of the twentieth anniversary: "In 2007 the studio grew into the Mizzart gallery, which became a space for creative workshops, a second-hand shop and an exhibition space for younger and unestablished artists." (Mizzart archive, 2010)

Every two weeks their studio turned into the Klub 100% Mizzart and hosted exhibitions, concerts, DJ evenings and other events for empowering young independent artists (Karba, 2016).

Interaction with public: Mizzart addressed the most diverse segments of society. Their paintings, posters and other works were transmitting understandable messages, even though they were mostly pictorial. With diverse activities, they raised questions about art, public space and environmental protection (Rakočević, 2021; Terrah, 2021). They participated in civil movements and publicly expressed socially critical messages, especially for environmental protection and demilitarization (Mirović, 2012).

Figure 6. The artistic jumbo poster, celebrating Earth day, April 22, in 1997. Source: Mizzart archive.

In 1997 Mizzart started celebrating Earth Day, April 22, with artistic jumbo posters. They also founded the cultural and ecological association Živozeleni for their environmental activism. The unique paintings on jumbo billboards were one of the first public media in Slovenia that drew attention to climate change (Šuštaršič, 2023; Abram, 2023).

Conclusions

Ljubljana is a capital city of a small country with powerful historical examples of graffiti and street art. Mizzart's legacy is an example of a unique ephemeral urban heritage and one of the most representative cases of proto street art in Slovenia.

The analysis of Mizzart's body of work is a subtle insight into power relations in the public space. It reveals the values of the collective of young urban artists, whose artistic style was eclectic and defined by emerging environmental activism. The contextual framework of the case study enables understanding of social changes in a country that was experiencing transition from socialism to capitalism at the end of the 20th century.

The case study is an application of the generic properties of 'proto street art', developed in the first part of the article. Theoretical discussion initially explores the difference between graffiti and street art with interpretation of historical background and values. It is followed by forming of the seven key elements of 'proto-street art', based on the Rafael Schacter's key elements that classify Street Art as an artistic period (see Schacter, 2017, p. 105).

The main result of the research is introducing new topics in contemporary research in popular culture. Introduction of 'proto street art' as a new topic is a step towards an expansion of academic research of the history and specific qualities of graffiti art. Applying the methodology and approaches of studying street art in 21st century to the cases from previous periods enlightens their characteristics and value in broader sense. It also outlines transfer of experience in the projects of their contemporaries and successors in a modified form.

Conflict of Interests and ethics
The author declares no conflict of interests. The author also declares full adherence to all journal research ethics policies, namely involving the participation of human subjects' anonymity and/ or consent to publish.

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