

Development of mural art (street art) after the last war in Kosovo

Agnesa Muharremi- Kastrati

Professor at Faculty of Arts, University of Pristina, Kosovo
agnesa1muharremi@hotmail.com

Illir Muharremi

Corresponding author
University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina, Faculty of Education, Kosovo
ilirmuharremi1@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents the development of graffiti art after the last war in Kosovo. From 2000 to 2020. The presented murals express emotions, contain satirical nuances, humor, ridicule of various political figures in the state of Kosovo. Except that the ugly spaces are decorated, through this art, artists have used it as a voice of revolt and disappointment by playing with humor to fix the current system. The colour of the graffiti have been analyzed with The content, the messages it contains, the forms and many other details.

Keywords: The Art, Graffiti, Mural, Colour, Form, Line, Public Art.

Introduction

The graffiti art decorate walls and rough spaces or the walls turn them into fabrics for painting. Graffiti and street art or murals sometimes are considered as a hooligan work or as something that related to crime or irresponsible teenagers. However, this view has begun to change while this kind of art is already valued as something that can adorn a street, a neighborhood, even become the identification point of an entire city.

This kind of Art which was usually illegally created - without the permission of the city leaders - is very interesting for tourists, because this kind of art present a culture without speaking..

Although much can be said about this trend - one thing is for sure for this trend - it has made a place in the art world.

The walls of cities with centuries were used to convey the different messages. One of the first example of this phenomenon dates from the ancient greek, in the modern Turkish city ,Efes. The roman city Pompei is covered with inscriptions and carvings that look as if someone made them in a hurry. It has everything from rude insults to

sayings of love and political criticism. It all started with the first writings on walls called hieroglyphics in ancient Egypt which date back to the fourth century BC. Since then the walls have played the role of fabric, carrying messages through symbols and words. Over time, the art on the walls has become a way to express people's concerns. Various inscriptions and murals reflect the crisis, anger, but also the hopes of the people, especially in countries that have gone through transition stages after a difficult time of war. Public art is visual art created in public places. Works of this type of art are usually out of bounds and the traditional context of art.

In recent years, public art has undergone a transformation in terms of public opinion, thus becoming a socially acceptable, respected expression and this for the fact that modern street art has the ability to through amazing drawings and details turn any wall or object however old and ugly it is into an amazing work of art, which can also carry important messages.

Public works of art are an important point of a country because in addition to returning the beauty to the neighborhoods or the place where they were painted, they

also attract the attention of residents and tourists. In the years when Kosovo was under Serbian administration, they took away almost all the rights of Kosovo's citizens. One of the many disasters of the war was the fact that the Serbs took over the cultural and educational institutions, thus causing great setbacks in their development.

Since the end of the war with Serbia in 1999, Kosovo has undergone many changes. In many respects, Kosovo is still facing the difficulties of a country in transition, just like many other countries in the world that have gone through wars and similar situations.

Art has always been a good way for artists to express their feelings and talent and at the same time represent the country in a creative way. However, difficult conditions and post-war developments have had an impact on the development of art in general in Kosovo.

Topic: "Development of mural art (street art) after the last war in Kosovo"

Graffiti in Kosovo

Kosovo, a state that has been out of the war for twenty years, has a stronger art than the war itself. Young artists see public art as a form of self-expression, a form of communication of certain messages, and also a form of revolutionary art that has no rules and at the same time plays an important role in society.

We find this last category, that of political statements, mainly in Pristina. Messages are usually painted in black: calls against injustice, allegations of corruption, and expressions of fear for the future - "I vote, you vote, he / she votes. We vote, you vote, they benefit"; "Are you offended by unemployment?"; "A sign of radioactivity, accompanied by the words" Radioactive Zone ". Former President Atifete Jahjaga's graffiti, dressed as a nightclub dancer. Graphite of Parliament Speaker Kari Veseli as Tony Montana in the movie "Scarface". Recently, the silhouette of Astrit Dehari was presented in the cities of Kosovo, thus calling for justice for the activist who died in mysterious circumstances in a prison in Prizren.



Fig.1. Former Kosovo Parliament Speaker Kari Veseli



Fig. 2. Former President of Kosovo Atifete Jahjaga. Graphite made in the center of Pristina



Fig. 3. The graffiti artist Astrit Dehari was killed in the Prizren prison and even today no one has been convicted of this crime. The mural expresses revolt and uplift to clarify the case in words.

Public art in post-war Kosovo

During the Serbian occupation, the possibility of expression through art has been almost impossible, especially through public art. As a country with countless political and economic problems, until 2005 Kosovo did not have any major development in art, especially in the public one. Protest slogans and political or social comments were among the first graffiti on public walls in post-war Kosovo. The unstable political situation has caused some of the first graffiti to appear in post-war Kosovo, which have conveyed political messages that can still be found today. During 2005, one of the most popular political graffiti was created, which has been viral across the country. "No Vetëvendosje negotiations" has been one of the most popular political campaigns through graffiti. What was the purpose of this graph? Not to negotiate with Serbia, considered as an enemy state of Kosovo against the last war in 1999 in Kosovo. Vetëvendosje is considered a political movement which, after this graffiti, tried to call on the entire population and the political scene not to negotiate with Serbia. The whole graphite is made in black, a colour that is used in every graphite in Kosovo for political purposes. Over

time, many artists began to use their artwork to raise social, economic, and political issues in post-war Kosovo and after the declaration of independence, public art began to have the greatest developments. However, graffiti with political messages was only the beginning of what later became a genuine and creative "street" art.



Fig. 4. Graphite worked on the walls of the capital of Kosovo. Protest of the Self-Determination Movement through art.



Fig. 5. The graffiti dedicated to the figure of Ukshin Hoti killed in Serbian prisons, whose remains have not yet been found.

Over the years, the way graffiti is created has changed, as have the places chosen to make it, and the messages being conveyed. In the '90s, they were faster, more embarrassing, and found in hidden places where darkness reigned. They were like children's drawings - spontaneous, fast, but still managed to convey a message in a very short time. There were strong reasons for this haste during the '90s. Serbian police were not indifferent to such acts. Their assessment method was usually rewarding artists with kicks, beatings and arrests. These artists have left an indelible mark. Each is a story in itself, perpetuated by photography.

When the Hip -Hop culture in Kosovo began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, graffiti was labeled as one of the four key elements, alongside rap, song mixing (DJ-ing) and breakdance dance. Soon the whole city was filled with labels. Labeling culture spread rapidly, even in Pristina. Taulant Qerkezi, known by the nickname Taki, began labeling the city in 2001, initially on his own, and later as part of Urban Gorillaz, a youth team that has "sworn to decorate the walls of Pristina with their creations." Taki describes the scene at the time as small, but with members dedicated to their art.

After graduating from the faculty with a degree in graphic design, incorporating elements of typography and calligraphy, Tak's work developed into more complex graffiti and murals. One of his favorite works is a mural outside the National Gallery of Art, which he painted this year. "In that mural we worked three people, an artist from the London Police Group, Zeds, a graffiti artist who is one of the pioneers of the world of graffiti in the Netherlands, and I participated with the writing above," he says. Tak's two favorite works are no more, as the places where they were found have been painted, but he still thinks that working outside the system is the real essence of the world of graffiti. He created another favorite work in the basketball court in Gërmia (Gërmia is the big park in Pristina). Through her, Taki explored the concept of déjà vu, as it had greatly influenced him. "I did it with great pleasure, and it took me a long time," he explains. "For a very long time no one touched it, they just left it, but in time the colours started to fade". They also painted that part at the beginning of 2017.



Fig.6. Graphite worked on road B in Prishtina.

Taki's evolution as an artist also reflects the growth of graffiti culture. Many credited the UK artist, Banksy, with transforming graffiti from a subculture into a more recognizable art form. Banksy's works are widespread throughout the world and are often exhibited in galleries, while his works on the city walls are protected by bulletproof glass.

Although most states still have laws in force that do not allow graffiti and impose heavy fines, many cities have now accepted this subculture, allowing some parts of the city to be decorated with "street art". Graffiti culture by the central current has been criticized by some graffiti artists who say that this culture is being offered to the middle class audience just to look underground and cool.

Other parts of Kosovar society have embraced the new form of graffiti culture. A non-profit organization, Qart Art Development Center, formed in 2014, has taken on the task of addressing this 'problem' in public spaces. This

organization has created two street art festivals, Guerilla Art Festival and Meeting of Styles. Through the latter, the side walls of Road B in Prishtina have been transformed.

A mural dominates the goddess's portrait on the throne. Her nose joins her forehead, while the part of her eyes is unkempt, resembling extraterrestrials. It is an image with a rhythm of vertical shape that appears in compositional space near abstract pores. The lines and colouring is transparent. Then the fracture is abstract and the associative silhouettes are the characteristic features of these graffiti.

A graffiti on the same street B in the city of Prishtina was made by the Portuguese artist Ausr Philipe, who in his graffiti had presented the freedom of monkeys. There are homeless monkeys and this mural is like a kind of house for them. He treats monkeys like humans who wear long coloured glasses and hair. The colouring is ennobled, though it is also the expression of dramatic concept with harsh valence contrasts.



Fig.7.Mural made in Prishtina



Fig. 8.Large mural built on road B in Prishtina. The theme is various portraits.



Fig. 9. Mural made below the Mitrovica's bridge. This hunger divides the Albanian nationality with that of Serbia and art, which serves for non-hate integration.

Another London-based artist, Airborne Mark, has created a conceptual work in Kosovo. His work is based on origami models and looks like a multi-colored design with intense color ratios with gradations of grading and light shadows implementing geometric shapes and stand as pandam in the compositional spaces of the walls, while the sfodni is black and highlights the contrast of the yellow colour of the form. The shape is distorted and has something to do with the art of caricature because the face part is exaggerated in shapes and proportions. The work comes with a modern spirit in Kosovo.

There are also pottery murals influenced by Pablo Picasso. Portraits are dreamy realities, beyond the concrete, not at all ordinary, more and more poetic, they have mystical dimensions, for example the motive is surreal, while the

realization with modern geometric lines, and the whole has no epilogue, leads to the right beyond. The portraits make noise, are tense, quarrel, merge into membranes with existential human spaces, spiritual entanglements. Here is a work with a poetic look, where the color is not only seen, but also smelled, where the artist creates from the left part, he spreads the portraits horizontally in different positions, sometimes they are seen, sometimes they keep the concentration towards the public, and sometimes they are ashamed, keep their eyes down, some have their eyes closed, some suffer as if in Van Gogh's works, some are extremely happy. In all this chaos at the top, above their heads stands an apple, nside too, and that symbolizes healthy healthy living. This work brings out the aesthetic sense and the visitor creates the feeling of magic.



Fig. 10. Graphite made in Prishtina, the picture shows the Goddess on the throne.

Grafi unites Serbs with Albanians

For the first time, Serbian mural artists from the north of Mitrovica took part in the festival with the motto “Separated from the river, united by art”, proving once again that art knows no borders and no nation. Dozens of young Albanian and Serbian artists have worked together on various murals, thus turning the Ibar Bridge in the city of Mitrovica into an artistic installation. “We have decided to finally come to the Ibar bridge and change its appearance for the better.” We have Albanian and Serbian artists, since we also did the festival with the two communities. We held a camp in Vllahi where we made the sketches, after the camp we came to the city of Mitrovica in the south and in the north and we started with works “, stated the Director of the NGO ‘Introduction of colour’, Bardhyl Dobrosi.

On the other hand, Milan Dobric, from the non-governmental organization ‘Link’, based in northern Mitrovica, said that the purpose of all this is to involve as many young people as possible in this activity, so that even for a few moments the problems related to politics are forgotten. According to him, it doesn’t matter which community he belongs to, because the problems and things they do are similar, while the goal is to work. “The goal is to involve as many young people and

creative people as possible, and to forget for at least a few moments the problems that surround us and that are related to politics.” We absolutely do not see if anyone is Albanian, Turkish or Serbian. The goal is to work... We are human beings, after all we are doing similar things, we aim to beautify the city, even for a few years, until someone destroys them “, Dobric emphasized.

In these murals were the inscriptions “Serbia”, “KLA”, inscriptions as symbols of the last war which itself incites hatred and murder. The compositional spaces of the walls are replaced with portraits of women accentuated through lines and transparent colour. Sensational and quite meaningful, peaceful imagination, call for a happier life using as a symbol the flowers on the walls in bright red, yellow and green colours. The tonal gradation of warm and cold colours is especially noticeable.

There are also such compositions constructed in geometric shapes of articles from a neutral colour. However, it is painted on various nationalist, fascist and insulting symbols in both parts of the city.

Conclusion

This type of art was not initially given the attention it deserves, but over time in Kosovo, mainly in Pristina, there have been many improvements. Young artists through art have managed to express not only their creativity, but also important messages for society. A large number of Kosovar artists, with their amazing work have given the capital a completely different look, colourful and full of life, making Prishtina known as the "Capital of Public Art".

A good example is Q'art, or the Art Development Center, which has organized some very successful art festivals. This organization, which has managed to have the support of the municipality of Prishtina, aims to provide a platform for young artists to start intervening in public spaces, in order to enrich them and at the same time provide a platform for communication through art.

During 2017, Q'art organized the "Meeting of Styles" festival in Prishtina, a festival that has had amazing results, while another similar event is expected during 2020, which will bring together a large number of artists to work together, so that the capital does not miss the colourful view and at the same time reflect the positivity of Kosovar youth. Their goal is to continue the mural tradition and turn various buildings into more attractive views for citizens.

References

- G. Qendro, R. Ferri monography, Prishtinë 2010, The Kosova Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- H. Muharremi: Metamorphosis of figurative language, Pristina 1986, The Kosova Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- Eckardt, F., 2018. From augmented urbanism to urban hacking, in: *Urban Art: Creating the Urban with Art*. <https://www.kosovalive360.com/muralet-jo-vetem-ngjyra-ne-qytet/>
- <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/21/artistet-e-rruges-i-japin-jete-mitrovices-se-ndare-ne-kosove/?lang=sq>
- <https://telegrafi.com/muralet-ne-rrugen-b-prishtines-shtohen-ngjyrat-foto/>
- <https://insajderi.com/mbulohet-grafiti-ne-prishtine-punuar-nga-artisti-njohur/>
- "How Old Is Graffiti?". *Wonderopolis*. Retrieved 24 January 2017.
- Caves, R. W. (2004). *Encyclopedia of the City*. Routledge
- "graffiti | Origin and meaning of graffiti by Online Etymology Dictionary". www.etymonline.com.
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti>
- <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/the-walls-as-a-canvas/>
- M. Protiq, *oblik i vreme (Form and time)*, Beograd 2002.
- R. Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Kosovo*, Scarecrow Press 2010.
- Sh. Nimanin, *Tendenca të reja në artet pamore të Kosovës (New trends in the visual arts Kosovo)*, Prishtinë 2008.
- <https://gazetablic.com/arti-spo-durohet-ne-prishtine-muralet-mbulohen-reklama/>