

Street art and graffiti in former communist Albania from 2010 to 2022

Ilir Muharremi ¹, Albana Krasniqi* ²

¹ Professor at University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina, Faculty of Education, Kosovo; Email: ilir.muharremi@uni-pr.edu

² Professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka", Kosovo; Email: albanakrasniqi2@hotmail.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract

This paper deals with graffiti in the streets of Albania, a former communist state which in the time of communism had every modern motif banned, except the art of propaganda that was under the service of the party. Graffiti on the walls of buildings in different cities of Albania since 2010 has social, political, economic, psychological, social, and personal motives. It shows the development of murals, the freedom of expression of artists, and positive propaganda through this art. In Albania, artists are now free to express all their artistic ideas, and graffiti is used as public art which reflects any current events occurring. Color is the main element that distinguishes mural artists, as well as motive and figuration.

Keywords

Graffiti, art, motif, color, figure, painting, propaganda, freedom

1. Opening

Art in Albania has been influenced by various events during the country's history as it has early traces, and continues to develop. The Neolithic period gave birth to the first traces of Albanian art. Through numerous archeological discoveries in different areas of the country, hundreds of thousands of pottery, terracotta, metal ornaments, etc. were found, which belonged to Illyrian tribes, the direct ancestors of the present-day Albanian people. The earliest products are simple, for practical use, but show artistic value in a variety of ways such as zoomorphic forms of dishes as well as in decoration and engravings as well as many other physical expressions of art. From the sixth to the third-century p.e.s., geometric figures are also drawn in ceramics, the shapes being built with elegant silhouettes and enriched with plastic. Many vessels of this period, which are preserved today in the museums of Albania, have genuine distinctive local artistic values, which we do not encounter in the art of other neighbors as ancient as the Hellenes, Macedonians, or Romans. From those ancient

vessels, decorated with decorations and plastic fractures, begins the path of sculpture in the territory of Albania, thus becoming a companion to the art of the earliest peoples of Europe. As time went by, art became clearer through the use of better resources, specifically along the time of the formation of the Illyrian cities Bylis, Amantia, Phenicia, Butrot as well as with the Hellenic settlements of Dyrrahu, Apollonia, and Orikumi.

Graffiti is another way of making art that breaks the frames of "traditional art". Urban art ranges from simple word writing to 3D paintings. Sometimes with the language of letters and pictures, the pieces are intended to convey a social or political message that is not always easy to understand. Public spaces such as house walls, buildings, bridges, and old and damaged buildings are generally used. Not infrequently due to their unnatural presence in these places is this type of art considered as a form of vandalism or imposition on private property.

In our country so far, the walls have been used to write political slogans and this current example of art is under prejudice. This contemporary art, while for some it is unacceptable and meaningless, for the eyes of some others they are works of value. The capital of Albania is a pleasant and lively city. An increasingly popular destination that never ceases to amaze. There are many reasons why it is worth visiting Tirana, one of the most important being the abundant presence of street art. Graffiti has literally changed the face of the city, which today is one of the most colorful in Europe. Graffiti is closely associated with hip-hop music, breakdance, and punk and is very popular as a way of expression through spray, colors, and lines by teenagers.

Although born in America in the '50s at the neighborhood level where representatives of different cultures lived, today graffiti forms an international aristocratic form. In many countries, it has become so popular that art galleries are dedicated to them.

Anyway, their real place is the street because it was born there, inspiring, and still lives there. In fact, along the streets of Tirana, you often encounter colorful works of art, many of which have been made by local street artists with the support of the city administration.

Like Franko, an artist from Vlora, the third largest city in the country, a kind of pioneer of Albanian street art. His works, of very symbolic value, are scattered throughout the city: for about a year he has been working for the municipality of Tirana to decorate the capital with his colors. They are reflective graffiti: they often represent the most vulnerable groups of the population, such as children and the elderly in need. One of the most original forms of street art is the one that included, always with the support of the local administration through "Enterprise and Decor - Tirana Municipality", a city decoration project conceived by the Municipality of Tirana, the decoration of the streets of the capital.

2. Graffiti on the streets of Tirana

The Albanian people are a people whose way of education coincides with a non-open mentality and this is often an obstacle for young artists. Creating graffiti on different

walls in the city is a problem, as most people who can not understand the graffiti never admit that they have soiled their walls. Although among young people, this type of art is one of the most favorite. Most young people see this art as a kind of social activity to create and express their emotions. In the city of Durrës, since it offers coastal tourism, various graphic artists have created their works on the city streets and these have been art colonies from different parts of the world. The people of Durrës love this kind of art, perhaps because they want to place the artistic "hand" of young artists on the historical walls of the old neighborhoods.

But this does not happen only in Durrës, as in Tirana graffiti artists create their works in the streets, and often have these graffiti on the fronts of the bridges of the river Lana. Many graphic artists have their own groups that work as well as studios, where lectures are given to lovers of this art.

The largest concentration of these works is located in Bllok, the coolest neighborhood of Tirana, in the street "Myslym Shyri", one of the most elegant streets in the city, and the boulevard "Bajram Curri", the road that crosses the river Lana.

The whole city is a mixture of colors, writings, and inscriptions: it is impossible not to be immersed in the style of Tirana, which although not as beautiful as other capitals of Eastern Europe, has a unique and inimitable beauty.

The street art tour can not help but finally include a stop at the New Bazaar, the city's new market. It was inaugurated in March last year and is the most important fruit and vegetable market in Albania.

The image of a girl holding a bouquet of flowers in one of the apartment complexes of Tirana and that of a girl in moments of meditation near a complex of NSHRAK, have qualified in the 100 finalists to be declared the best artwork in the world for 2021. This girl with the bouquet created in bright colors creates an aesthetic, figurative feeling. Colors like orange, red, yellow, and green, are neatly lined up next to each other. In this piece, we see two female fig-



Figure 1. Girl with bouquet.



Figure 2. The girl in the chair.



Figure 3. "The man with the bicycle", by Adrej Zikic in Tirana.

ures, the first one stands up and her face is clearly visible. We see a uniform psychology in the eyes, so she neither smiles nor looks easily. There is a focused gaze somewhere in the distance. Whereas, the other portrait which is located behind the colors covered with handprints, looks like a mysterious portrait, in a cold psychological state. The author of this mural focuses more on the play of colors than on the emotional state of the figures. The work of the painter Gera in the framework of "Mural Fest 2021" that was organized in Tirana is called "Wild Drawing" and has managed to be ranked among the best works in the world for street art or as it is otherwise known as "Street Art". For the past 12 months, "Street Art Cities" have selected some of the best murals around the globe and distributed them in their popular Instagram Story polls leaving the audience to decide and vote. This resulted in a list of the 100 most famous works of art of 2021, among them- two from Tirana.

"One of those murals are already in the top ten. The "uralID mural" is located on the edge of the Lana in a very interesting corner that is captured by thousands of eyes and is the figure of a contemporary girl. The second is located at the Municipality of Paris at the intersection with the road of Kosovars ", says Haliti.

These murals were created last year within the Mural Fest with curator Qirjako Sofithi and Helidon Haliti.

He hovered, detached from the ground, maneuvering the basket onto the crane of a small pickup truck that was lifting him and his brushes, high. For two days, Adrej Zikic, an artist from Belgrade, has been trying to turn the pale facade of a building on Myslym Shyri Street in Tirana into an art canvas.

The work, a man with a bicycle thrown over his arms, was getting the last liters of paint. The Serbian painter, whose



Figure 4. "Mother", graphite located in Tirana.

artistic name is "Artez", is one of thirteen international "street" artists who responded to the call of the municipality of Tirana to organize, in early June, the first mural festival in the capital. An elderly man of color is seen holding the bicycle in his arms. Behind it is a misty sunset landscape.

A few blocks further on, at the entrance to the "Paris Commune", on the side of a slender building without windows, Licuado from Uruguay is drawing a portrait of a woman. The symbols reveal a likable metaphor. The analogy aims to turn street noise into street art.

"She is the mother, my mother," she tells me, "but she represents all mothers!" Along with the paint boxes, brush and food in a small plastic container, it will stay up late on the pier. Urban noise is spreading at heights, but Licuado hopes the icons will "come down" to the streets. All around, a dense network of brands and cables The Internet spreads anxiety and insecurity, but in its hands are the

threads, which traditionally, but also modern, connect us with the past and promise eternity. Its appearance is calm, and cool, realistically created, her hands look masculine, hands that show constant physical work.

Albania, formerly communist and isolated during the Cold War, today is a city with open gates. Tirana Mural Fest is an opportunity for authors to climb on the facades. Globalization and metropolitanization are fostering a new aesthetic. Materials and techniques have changed. Artists, liberated from curators, are unleashing greater energy. But, is it just an aesthetic that suffices with unfolding the artist's ego? Nadine Kseibi, a Romanian artist originally from Syria, was assigned to work in the Bloc area. But before it started, she removed another poster from the wall, pasted there, a few months ago.

It is about the famous "Motra Tone", of Idromeno, transformed into Sorrela Tone by "Çeta", a secret group of



Figure 5. Sister Tone, the work of Kol Idromeno, the prominent painter of the National Renaissance, transformed into Sorella Tone by the group Çeta. Photo: Artan Rama.

street political art. Since 2016, this group of activist artists operating in the style of "Banksy", is using their creative energies to criticize government policies through Graffiti. Nadine performed wonderful work, probably the best of the Festival, entitled: "Innocence without identity" but the circumstances on which it was created, previously removing another achievement and this, not without the help of the municipality, left me the taste of disappointment. Sister Tone is a half-length portrait of an Albanian woman by artist Kole Idromeno. Idromeno painted it in 1883. The photograph is part of the collection of the National Gallery of Albania. The way of standing, the masterful realization of every detail and the calm light that focuses on the appearance and the portrait in view, showed her conviction and appreciation for the high ideal and the general creativity of the portrait. At the time the portrait was made the painter, Idromeno, and his

sister Tone were not aware that the first realistic painting was being realized. And, of course, with this work, would mark the beginning of a new phase in Albanian visual art. "Sister Tone", this major work was painted with high sensitivity and very rare emotion of experiencing a real character. And yet, looking at it with high attention, this portrait seems to resemble the "Mona Lisa". Well, why not call it the Albanian "Mona Lisa"?

It goes without saying that this confrontation of reality always shows the high pride of the Albanian woman, who are always confronted with the reality of life. And, in this flow, both the way of standing, the realization and the study of every detail densely show the compositional balance of a portrait, however with a highly sensitive and extremely substantial expression.



Figure 6. In This image of Zyle's mother, who sold dynamite to the citizens instead of leeks, Çeta criticizes the municipal police for not allowing the villagers to sell their products on the streets. Photo: Artan Rama.

Undoubtedly, this highly emotional and creative expression clearly shows the genius of the painter by showing us the image of the Albanian woman, as well as showing us her stoicism and heroism.

Mother Zylja, the villager who was fined for selling leeks on the street now sells dynamite thanks to Çeta's posters. This graffiti shows an Albanian woman with a headscarf in typical Balkan dress from the region of Albania. Her face displays suffering and her wrinkles tell the suffering of all mothers who work to survive. Here, the artist raises his voice to the great pain. Dynamite is replaced by peasant products such as tomatoes, fruits, vegetables, honey, and other items sold on the streets. Through this graffiti, the revolt of the villagers is expressed.

3. Conclusion

Graffiti is a kind of high-expression art that appears in spray paints. It is a symbolic combination of urban art just like other forms of social development in cities.

Graffiti's meaning is not common as we mentioned above, many people view it as "ugly art", as the whole artistic meaning lies in the way of composing colors, its tonalities and in the lines, signs, and objects that are arched to bring something beautiful to the eye. The Albanian people are a people whose way of education coincides with a non-open mentality and this is often an obstacle for young artists.

Creating graffiti on different walls in the city is a problem, as most people who can not understand the artwork view it as contaminating their walls. Albania still suffers from the

feeling of the past. Graffiti is sometimes hidden by the authorities, and not many artists have been arrested for making them. As inscriptions are a relatively new phenomenon in Albania, they are not provided in the criminal code of the Republic of Albania. In fact, Article 154 on property rape does not mention graffiti as a phenomenon at all.

References

H. Muharremi: Metamorphosis of figurative language, The Kosova Academy of Sciences and Arts.

M. Protiq, oblik i vreme (Form and time), Beograd 2002.

R. Elsie, Historical Dictionary of Kosovo, Scarecrow Press 2010.

<https://www.kultplus.com/trashegimia/tirana-aty-ku-arti-rruges-ka-ndryshuar-fytyren-e-qytetit-foto/>

<https://lajmengabota.com/muralet-e-tiranes-mes-me-te-mirave-dy-prej-tyre-renditen-ne-100muralet-me-te-bukura-ne-bote/>

https://sq.ëikipedia.org/ëiki/Arti_n%C3%AB_Shqip%C3%ABri

<https://portavendore.al/2018/06/20/fasadat-kane-ni-sur-te-belbezojne/>

https://sq.ëikipedia.org/ëiki/Motra_Tone

<https://ëëë.botasot.info/kultura/526428/cka-na-tregon-portreti-motra-tone-e-idromenos/>

<https://frekuenca.net/arti-grafit-ne-rruget-e-shqiperise-problem-apo-emancipim/>

<https://top-channel.tv/2014/07/03/grafiti-nje-tjeter-forme-e-artit-ne-shqiperi/>

<https://www.reporter.al/2012/03/12/nacionalistet-shqiptare-kontrollojne-tregun-e-grafiteve/>

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/albania/articles/a-street-art-tour-of-albania-the-land-of-theeagles/>

http://www.visit-tirana.com/news/view/205/Street_Art_and_Mural_Art_in_Tirana

<https://artmargins.com/the-politics-of-street-art-in-albania/>

<https://vagabundler.com/albania/streetart-durres/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/TheEnglishHostelTirana/street-art-in-tirana/>

<https://exit.al/en/2020/12/06/tirana-streets-an-emerging-art-canvas/>