



IMAGINING HOME IN URBAN ART Place and Belonging in WOOL (Covilhã)

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Urban Art Home Belonging Place Public Space Collective Memory WOOL Urban Art Festival	<i>This article examines how urban art contributes to experiences of home through a case study of the WOOL Urban Art Festival in Covilhã, Portugal. Drawing on theories of home, place and public space, it argues that murals do more than regenerate urban environments or strengthen local identity: they foster belonging by reconnecting communities with landscape, industrial heritage, collective memory and everyday sociability. Through the analysis of four site-specific artworks, the article proposes home as a productive conceptual framework for understanding the social and cultural significance of contemporary urban art and its role in the continual production of place.</i>

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1. Introduction: Home, Place and Urban Art

Recent scholarship has productively examined urban art in relation to the production of public space, place-making, urban transformation, touristification and local identity (Campos, 2021; Evans, 2016; McAuliffe, 2012; Simões, 2023). However, considerably less attention has been paid to the ways in which urban art may contribute to experiences and imaginaries of home. Approaching urban art through the lens of home shifts attention from its role in regeneration and place-making to its capacity to shape emotional attachments to place and cultivate a sense of belonging. This article addresses that gap by arguing that urban art is not simply a vehicle for cultural regeneration or place-making, but also a medium through which experiences of home are imagined, negotiated and sustained. Focusing on the WOOL Urban Art Festival in Covilhã, Portugal, it examines how urban artworks foster belonging, activate collective memory and reshape everyday relationships with place.

Home is a multifaceted concept that has been examined across disciplines as encompassing material, social, emotional and imaginative dimensions (Mallett, 2004). Although it is commonly associated with a house, a neighbourhood or a homeland, it cannot be reduced to a single location. Rather, home emerges through the relationships people develop with places, memories, objects and those with whom they share everyday life. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2022) argue, home exists at the intersection of the material and the imaginative, grounded in the physical environments people inhabit while continually shaped through emotion, memory and attachment. From this perspective, home is better understood as a relational and continually evolving experience than as a fixed geographical location.

These relational understandings of home also foreground the importance of place. While space may be understood as a more abstract or undifferentiated environment, place emerges through lived experience and emotional attachment. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) observes, "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (p. 6). Place is therefore not simply a physical setting but a lived environment shaped through memory, experience and everyday practice. Feelings of rootedness and belonging arise not simply from occupying a location but from developing enduring relationships with particular landscapes, communities and ways of life. As Tuan (1997) later argues, a sense of place reflects our need for places that sustain both intimacy and belonging: "as embodied and social beings, we need intimate places — house and neighbourhood, community and kinsfolk — for nurture and support" (p. 47). Place thus becomes one of the principal means through which people experience, negotiate and sustain home.

Understanding home as a lived relationship to place also foregrounds the importance of memory, imagination and everyday inhabitation. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard (1994) argues that the house is far more than a physical structure: it is an inhabited space whose meaning emerges through lived experience and the work of the imagination. As he observes, "a house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (p.6), reminding us that places acquire significance through the memories, emotions and imaginative associations invested in them. Building on this phenomenological understanding, Sanja Bahun and Bojana Petrić (2018) describe home as operating simultaneously as "a concept, an experience, a discourse, an emotion and a (real or imagined) physical site" (p. 1), from which individuals derive "feelings of belonging and emplacement" that are translated into everyday material and social practices. Home is therefore not a static location but an ongoing process of home-making in which memory, imagination, place and community are continually negotiated. As Bahun and Petrić (2018) further observe, "home is the product of memory as much as of applied (present-and-future-oriented) imagination" (p.7).

Although home is often imagined through the domestic interior, the practices of home-making extend beyond the dwelling into the wider spaces of everyday life. Blunt and Dowling (2022) emphasise that houses and households constitute only one dimension of home, which is equally produced through wider socio-spatial relationships. Familiar streets, neighbourhood routines, local businesses and everyday encounters all contribute to the experience of belonging. Home is therefore continually negotiated through interactions with the wider urban environment. If home

is understood as an ongoing process of home-making grounded in place, memory and imagination, then urban art becomes an important cultural practice through which these relationships may be articulated and renewed. By making local histories visible, commemorating shared memories and encouraging new forms of encounter, urban artworks can reshape how people experience the streets, squares and neighbourhoods they inhabit. Rather than treating public space merely as the backdrop for artistic intervention, this article examines how urban art contributes to imagining home by strengthening emotional attachments to place, reinforcing belonging and creating new ways of inhabiting the city.

The WOOL Urban Art Festival provides a compelling case through which to explore these processes. Situated in the post-industrial city of Covilhã, WOOL has sought not only to revitalise neglected urban spaces but also to reconnect residents with the city's landscapes, industrial heritage and collective memory (Seixo Rodrigues *et al.*, 2022). Its significance therefore extends beyond urban revitalisation. By encouraging encounters between artworks, local histories and everyday life, the festival has helped reinforce the relationships through which many residents experience Covilhã as home. Understanding this contribution requires situating WOOL within the city's geographical, historical and cultural context, where a distinctive sense of place has emerged through centuries of textile production and continues to shape local identity.

Drawing on theories of home, place and belonging, this article examines four site-specific artworks produced for the WOOL Urban Art Festival. Through a visual and contextual analysis informed by the festival's historical and spatial context, it argues that urban art does more than beautify or regenerate public space: it creates opportunities for communities to recognise themselves in the urban landscape, reconnect with local histories, and experience the city as a place of belonging. In doing so, the article proposes home as a productive conceptual framework for understanding the social and cultural significance of contemporary urban art.

2. Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology that combines visual analysis, field observation, and contextual and historical research. Rather than treating the selected artworks as autonomous aesthetic objects, it examines them in relation to the urban environments in which they were created and the social, historical and cultural contexts that inform their meanings. Field observation undertaken in Covilhã informed the analysis by enabling close attention to the spatial relationship between the artworks and their surroundings, including their scale, visibility, siting and interaction with the everyday life of the city.

The analysis focuses on four site-specific artworks produced for the WOOL Urban Art Festival between 2014 and 2024. Selected from different editions of the festival, these works were chosen because each offers a distinct perspective on the relationship between urban art and home, illustrating how the festival engages with landscape, industrial heritage, collective memory and everyday practices of belonging. Considered together, they demonstrate the diverse ways in which urban art contributes to the production of place and the experience of home. Visual analysis is complemented by documentary research on the history of Covilhã, the development of the WOOL Urban Art Festival and the city's textile heritage. These sources provide the historical and geographical context necessary for understanding how the selected artworks respond to local narratives and contribute to broader processes of place-making and community engagement.

The study also draws on qualitative interviews with Lara Seixo Rodrigues, co-founder and artistic director of the WOOL Urban Art Festival. These include a semi-structured interview conducted in 2024 and follow-up conversations held in 2026. Rather than serving as primary evidence for the interpretation of individual artworks, these discussions provided valuable insights into the festival's origins, curatorial philosophy, commissioning processes and long-term relationship with the local community, informing the contextual reading developed throughout the article.

3. Place, Public Space and Urban Art

Understanding home as a relational process grounded in place, memory and everyday practice also requires rethinking the significance of public space. Rather than functioning merely as the physical setting in which social life unfolds, public spaces are continually shaped through the activities, encounters and meanings generated within them. Understanding place in these relational terms shifts attention from the physical characteristics of urban environments to the social practices through which they acquire meaning. It also provides a useful framework for examining how cultural interventions such as urban art participate in the continual production of place and belonging.

Doreen Massey (1995, 2005) challenges essentialist understandings of place as fixed, bounded or historically complete. Rather than viewing places as self-contained entities, she argues that they are constituted through networks of social relations extending beyond their immediate geographical boundaries. Local identities emerge through connections with other places, histories and communities, meaning that places are always relational rather than isolated. As Massey (1995) observes, places are "always constructed out of articulations of social relations" and their apparent uniqueness is itself "a product of wider contacts" (p. 183). Their identities are therefore never fixed but continually negotiated through social interaction and historical change. Indeed, she argues that the identity of a place is "always... in process of formation" and depends upon "the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant" (1995, p. 186). In *For Space*, Massey (2005, p.9) develops this argument further, proposing that space should be understood as "the product of interrelations" and as "always under construction" because it is continually produced through ongoing social practices and encounters. From this perspective, places remain open, dynamic and continually reinterpreted rather than complete or immutable.

If Massey's work explains how places are constituted through social relations and historical narratives, Henri Lefebvre directs attention to the everyday practices through which those relations are lived and experienced in urban space. Rejecting the notion of space as a neutral container, Lefebvre argues that urban space is continually produced through the interactions, routines and practices of those who inhabit it. In *The Right to the City* (1996), he describes the city not as a finished object but as an *oeuvre* — a collective work created through social life rather than simply consumed as a commodity. Urban space therefore acquires meaning through participation, encounter and everyday use. For Lefebvre, everyday life is not simply what occurs in the city but one of the principal means through which urban space is continually produced and transformed. Rather than functioning solely as a site of circulation or exchange, the city provides opportunities for communication, play and collective life. As Lefebvre argues, the urban gathers together "differences", bringing people, activities and meanings into relation rather than separating them. In *The Urban Revolution* (2003), this understanding is extended through the argument that urban space is never fixed but is continually transformed through social practices and interactions, reflecting the dynamic processes through which urban society itself is produced. Urban public spaces are therefore not passive settings but lived environments in which collective identities and forms of belonging are continually negotiated.

Vikas Mehta (2013) further develops this understanding by identifying the street as "the quintessential social public space of the city" (p. 10), arguing that one of its cardinal roles is to provide a setting for sociability. Rather than reducing streets to channels of circulation, Mehta conceives them as everyday environments where social life unfolds through a range of active and passive encounters. Streets are places where people meet friends, observe others, linger, participate in community life and simply experience the presence of strangers. Indeed, he argues that "good cities are places of social encounter" (p.2), and that without opportunities for casual and formal interaction, cities would become little more than "agglomerations of privatized spaces and buildings" (p.1). The social value of the street therefore lies not solely in its physical design but in the relationships it enables between people, activities and places, and in the meanings that emerge through repeated everyday use. As Mehta observes, sociability is achieved not by the physical environment alone but through the interaction between the built environment, land uses,

management and the meanings people attribute to particular places. Streets thus become settings where familiarity, encounter and participation foster attachment to place and reinforce a sense of belonging.

If urban space is produced through participation, encounter and shared everyday practices, then public art becomes one of the cultural practices through which these processes are made visible. Rather than simply occupying the city, artworks participate in the ongoing production of place by making local histories visible, encouraging new forms of engagement with the urban environment and fostering dialogue between past and present. Their significance lies not only in their visual impact but also in their capacity to mediate relationships between communities, local histories and the urban landscape, reshaping how neighbourhoods are experienced, remembered and valued. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that urban art participates in what may be understood as processes of home-making. By reconnecting communities with local histories, celebrating everyday experiences and reinforcing emotional attachments to neighbourhoods, it contributes to the continual production of places in which people recognise themselves and one another. These perspectives provide the conceptual framework for understanding how WOOL engages with Covilhã's landscapes, industrial heritage and everyday urban life, a context explored in the following section before the analysis turns to the selected artworks.

4. Covilhã, WOOL and an Evolving Cultural Landscape

To understand how urban art participates in processes of public home-making, it is first necessary to situate the WOOL Urban Art Festival within the geographical, historical and cultural context of Covilhã. More than a backdrop for artistic intervention, the city constitutes what Elisa Calado Pinheiro and Manuel José dos Santos Silva (2012) describe as an "evolving cultural landscape" (p. 13), whose identity has been shaped through successive interactions between landscape, industry and collective memory. The significance of WOOL therefore lies not simply in the murals it has commissioned but in the ways these works engage with the material and symbolic histories embedded within this evolving urban environment.

Located on the southern slopes of the Serra da Estrela, Portugal's highest mountain range, Covilhã developed under exceptionally favourable geographical conditions for sheep farming and wool production. Access to mountain pastures, abundant watercourses and timber resources enabled the city to become one of Portugal's principal centres of wool manufacture, earning it the title of the "Portuguese Manchester" (Pinheiro & Silva, 2012; Pinheiro, 2016; Vaz, 2021). The organisation of the city itself evolved around the textile industry, whose development was inseparable from the transhumant routes crossing the Serra da Estrela and from centuries of pastoral and industrial activity that profoundly shaped both the urban fabric and local identity. As José Manuel Lopes Cordeiro (2012) observes, the wool industry constitutes one of the most significant forms of cultural heritage in the Beira Interior, reflecting not only its economic history but also the geographical, ethnographic and social practices that have shaped the region over centuries.

During the second half of the twentieth century, however, this industrial model entered a prolonged period of decline. Structural changes initiated in the 1960s culminated in a profound economic and social reconversion during the 1970s and 1980s, as the traditional wool industry contracted and many family-owned factories closed. At the same time, the establishment of the Universidade da Beira Interior and the creation of the Museu de Lanifícios initiated a process through which the city's industrial heritage began to be reinterpreted as cultural memory rather than productive infrastructure. Rather than erasing the industrial past, this transition fostered new ways of remembering and reimagining Covilhã's identity (Pinheiro & Silva, 2012; Vaz, 2021).

Founded in 2011 by two local architects and an art historian, WOOL was conceived as a long-term cultural initiative rather than simply an urban art festival. As the first urban art festival in inland Portugal, it has become one of the country's most significant programmes dedicated to contemporary urban art. Over the past fifteen years, WOOL has brought together seventy Portuguese and thirty-nine international artists, creating more than one hundred permanent murals and artistic interventions that together form a curated route through Covilhã's historic

centre. These works have transformed the city into an open-air gallery while fostering new ways of engaging with its industrial heritage, landscapes and everyday urban life. WOOL can be understood as part of the broader processes of public home-making through which Covilhã's industrial and cultural memory is continually reconstructed. Rather than treating industrial heritage as a static object of preservation, the festival reactivates it through artistic practice, encouraging residents and visitors to engage with the city's landscapes, labour histories and everyday traditions in new ways.

Many of the commissioned artworks draw directly upon pastoral culture, textile production, women's labour and the mountain environment, transforming these historical experiences into contemporary forms of public memory. In this respect, WOOL complements wider initiatives that have sought to preserve and reinterpret Covilhã's industrial identity, including the Museu de Lanifícios, while extending these memories beyond museum spaces into the everyday fabric of the city. By activating streets, squares and neighbourhoods as sites of cultural engagement, the festival exemplifies the relational understanding of place discussed by Massey (1995; 2005), the socially produced urban space theorised by Lefebvre (1996; 2003) and Mehta's (2013) conception of the street as a space of encounter. Murals become more than visual interventions; they mediate relationships between past and present, enabling residents to encounter familiar histories in new ways while inviting visitors to experience Covilhã not simply as a post-industrial city but as an evolving cultural landscape shaped by memory, participation and belonging (Pinheiro & Silva, 2012).

Equally significant is WOOL's emphasis on participation. Each edition extends beyond the production of artworks to include community lunches, creative workshops, participatory murals, performances, concerts and traditional games that transform the streets of Covilhã into spaces of encounter and collective activity. These events reinforce the festival's commitment to public space as a lived environment rather than a mere exhibition site. The 2025 project *Grandma Came to Work*, for example, brought together more than five hundred participants aged between six and one hundred to produce approximately six hundred Smyrna wool squares, later assembled into a collective carpet. By reviving textile practices deeply embedded in the city's history while fostering intergenerational collaboration, the project exemplified how artistic production can strengthen the social relationships through which residents cultivate shared forms of belonging.

The four artworks examined in the following section reveal different ways in which these processes unfold. Some foreground landscape and pastoral traditions; others recover industrial memory, environmental transformation or everyday practices of sociability and care. Considered together, they demonstrate that WOOL does more than regenerate public space or enhance the city's visual identity. Through its sustained engagement with local histories and everyday life, the festival contributes to the continual production of place and to the processes of public home-making through which communities negotiate shared identities, remember their past and imagine collective futures.

4.1. Home, Landscape and Collective Memory

Among the works commissioned by WOOL, Colectivo Licuado's *Expedição à Serra da Estrela* [*Expedition to Serra da Estrela*] (2021) (Fig. 1) offers a compelling reflection on the relationship between landscape, memory and belonging. Created for the festival's eighth edition, the mural commemorates the 140th anniversary of the First Scientific Expedition to the Serra da Estrela, organised by the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa in 1881. Rather than reconstructing a single historical event, the artists interweave figures associated with different moments in the mountain's history —including shepherds, local inhabitants and scientific explorers— within a panoramic composition that unfolds across the façade of a residential building. Historical time is deliberately compressed, allowing different experiences of the Serra da Estrela to coexist within a single pictorial space. In doing so, the mural presents the mountain not simply as a geographical setting but as a lived landscape through which successive generations have experienced, remembered and imagined home.

Figure 1. Colectivo Licuado, *Expedição à Serra da Estrela* [Expedition to Serra da Estrela] (2021)



Source: © WOOL. <https://www.woolfest.org/edicao/wool-2021/>

The composition reinforces this reading. Organised through a series of horizontal bands, the figures occupy distinct spatial and temporal registers rather than a unified narrative. Some walk purposefully with staffs in hand, others pause to observe the landscape, while women tend grazing sheep in the foreground. Several bodies extend beyond the edges of the building, suggesting that the histories represented continue beyond the physical limits of the mural itself. The Serra da Estrela becomes the visual thread connecting these otherwise fragmented episodes. Rather than functioning as a picturesque backdrop, the mountain emerges as the central protagonist of the composition, linking pastoral labour, scientific exploration and everyday life across time. The centrality of the landscape transforms the Serra da Estrela from a scenic backdrop into a place of memory, attachment and belonging. This resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's (1974, p.93) concept of *topophilia*, which he defines as "the human being's affective ties with the material environment". For centuries, the Serra da Estrela has shaped Covilhã's economic, social and cultural development through sheep farming and the wool industry, making the mountain inseparable from the city's historical identity.

The mural does not simply represent this relationship; it visualises the enduring attachments through which landscape becomes part of collective memory. By bringing together explorers, shepherds and local inhabitants, Colectivo Licuado suggests that belonging emerges through multiple ways of inhabiting the same environment across generations. The work also evokes what Tuan (1977, p. 194) describes as *rootedness*. Rather than equating attachment with the preservation of historical artefacts, he argues that rootedness arises when people "identify themselves with a particular locality" and experience it as home across generations. This distinction is particularly relevant here. Although *Expedição à Serra da Estrela* commemorates a nineteenth-century scientific expedition, it does not monumentalise the past as something detached from the present. Instead, it embeds memories of exploration, pastoral life and everyday dwelling within the contemporary streetscape of Covilhã, allowing historical memory to remain part of lived urban experience. The mountain is represented not as a distant object of contemplation but as an enduring presence within the city's cultural imagination.

The mural can also be understood as an act of place-making. Tim Cresswell (2004) argues that places are continually produced as people invest environments with meaning, identity and belonging through everyday practices. Read in this light, *Expedição à Serra da Estrela* symbolically relocates the mountain within the city, transforming an ordinary building façade into a site where environmental memory and contemporary urban life converge. Rather than transporting viewers to the Serra, the artwork brings the Serra into the everyday experience of Covilhã, reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between the city and its surrounding landscape. This interpretation is complemented by Chen *et al.*'s (2018) discussion of place attachment, which describes the emotional connections people develop with places through repeated experience and shared meanings. They argue that cities become places not simply through their physical form but through the memories and attachments that accumulate over time. By reintroducing the Serra da Estrela into the everyday visual landscape of Covilhã, Colectivo Licuado strengthens these attachments, encouraging residents to recognise the mountain not as a distant geographical feature but as an enduring component of the city's identity. By bringing the Serra da Estrela into Covilhã's urban fabric, the mural makes visible the historical relationships between environment, labour and community that continue to shape local identity.

4.2. Labour, Care and the Afterlife of a Mural

Created by Portuguese artist Mr. Dheo for the second edition of the WOOL Urban Art Festival in 2014, *Portugal pelas Costuras* [*Portugal by the Seams*] (Fig. 2) reflects on Covilhã's textile heritage through the image of a young girl sewing a section of the Portuguese flag. Installed on the façade of a building along one of the city streets, the mural transforms an intimate domestic activity into a monumental public image. Rather than presenting national identity through conventional patriotic symbolism, the work foregrounds the act of sewing itself, shifting attention from the completed flag to the patient labour through which cloth, and, by extension, cultural traditions, is made, repaired and sustained. The composition is striking in its restraint. Set against the expansive white surface of the building, the solitary figure appears almost suspended in space, detached from any recognisable interior or landscape. Delicately holding a needle while gathering the folds of the flag across her lap, she directs her gaze away from her work towards something beyond the picture plane. The simplicity of the composition focuses attention on the quiet concentration of the sewing gesture. Enlarged to an architectural scale, an activity traditionally associated with the domestic sphere becomes a highly visible presence within the public space of the city.

The image also recalls William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *The Seamstress* (1898), whose portrayal of a young girl absorbed in sewing similarly celebrates the dignity of manual work. By evoking this nineteenth-century academic painting and relocating its imagery from the museum to the urban landscape, Mr. Dheo recontextualises a familiar artistic motif within Covilhã's own industrial and social history. The reference reinforces the mural's emphasis on care, craftsmanship and the transmission of textile knowledge across generations, while transforming a private domestic scene into a public reflection on the city's identity.

The choice to portray a young girl is particularly significant. Beyond its reference to sewing as a traditional domestic skill, the image evokes a more troubling aspect of Covilhã's industrial past: the widespread employment of children within the wool industry. Historical studies indicate that child labour played an important role in Covilhã's wool industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting wider patterns within the Portuguese textile sector (Goulart & Bedi, 2017). Read in this context, the mural resists a nostalgic celebration of textile heritage. Instead, it acknowledges that the city's identity was shaped not only by craftsmanship and economic prosperity but also by forms of labour that today are recognised as deeply exploitative. The young girl's quiet concentration therefore acquires an ambivalent quality, simultaneously suggesting care, learning and manual skill while recalling a painful chapter in Covilhã's social history.

Figure 2. Mr. Dheo, *Portugal pelas Costuras* [*Portugal by the Seams*] (2014)



Source: © WOOL. Reproduced with permission from WOOL.

This complexity distinguished *Portugal pelas Costuras* from more conventional commemorations of industrial heritage. Rather than representing factories, machinery or production itself, the mural foregrounds the human bodies and manual practices upon which the wool industry depended. Sewing becomes more than a technical activity; it emerges as an act of care through which materials are maintained, repaired and given renewed life. The image therefore suggests that cultural memory, like fabric, is neither fixed nor complete but requires continual acts of attention and renewal. As Laurajane Smith (2006) argues, "heritage is something vital and alive. It is a moment of action, not something frozen in material form" (p.83). Read in this light, the mural presents textile heritage not as something preserved unchanged but as an ongoing process of remembering, questioning and reinterpretation. Installed within the streets of Covilhã rather than in a museum, *Portugal pelas Costuras* also brought these histories into the routines of everyday urban life. The mural transformed an ordinary building façade into a public reflection on textile labour, encouraging residents to encounter their city's industrial past beyond the institutional frameworks of heritage preservation. In doing so, it complemented initiatives such as the Museu de Lanifícios while offering a more intimate and human-centred perspective on the experiences that shaped Covilhã's identity.

The subsequent history of the mural adds a further dimension to its significance. Over time, exposure to the elements caused the work to deteriorate until it was eventually replaced by another mural. Its disappearance prompted discussion among residents about whether such works should be preserved, revealing the extent to which *Portugal pelas Costuras* had itself become embedded within Covilhã's visual and emotional landscape. The attachment generated by the mural was no longer directed solely towards the textile traditions it represented but towards the artwork itself, which had become part of the city's collective memory. As Alison Young (2016) argues, the meanings of street art continue to evolve through their encounters with particular communities and urban environments, rather than remaining fixed at the moment of their creation. In this sense, the history of *Portugal pelas Costuras* demonstrates that the significance of urban art extends beyond its iconography. Through its engagement with labour,

care and difficult histories, the mural encouraged new ways of understanding Covilhã's textile past.

At the same time, the mural's deterioration and eventual replacement revealed how temporary public artworks can themselves become objects of attachment and remembrance. Reflecting on a site-specific public art project developed within a context of urban transformation, Sarah Barns (2019, p.56) argues that artistic interventions can create "an emotional landscape of attachment" by making visible histories and relationships that have disappeared from the physical landscape, while enabling "multiple forms of attachment" to place to be acknowledged (p. 58). Similarly, Aylin Şentürk (2026) contends that murals should be understood as forms of ephemeral urban heritage, producing continuity not through material permanence but through the memories, encounters and lived experiences they generate within urban space. The disappearance of Mr. Dheo's mural therefore did not diminish its significance. Rather, the public response to its loss demonstrated that its value resided not only in the painted surface itself but also in the collective attachments, memories and sense of place that the artwork had helped to cultivate.

4.3. Ecology, Materiality and the Temporal Life of Place

Created by Bordalo II for the second edition of the WOOL Urban Art Festival in 2014, *Owl Eyes* (Fig. 3) forms part of the artist's internationally recognised *Trash Animals* series, in which monumental representations of animals are constructed from discarded objects and industrial waste. Installed on the façade of a deteriorating building in Covilhã's historic centre, the work combines sculpture, assemblage and mural painting to produce an image that appears to emerge directly from the architecture itself. Through the use of recycled materials, the mural transforms the remnants of human consumption into the likeness of a living creature, inviting reflection on the relationship between urban environments, waste and the natural world.

The owl dominates the composition. Its large circular eyes, formed from discarded tyres and painted in vivid black and yellow, immediately attract the viewer's attention, while its beak, feathers and body are assembled from an array of salvaged metal, plastic and mechanical components. Unlike a painted illusion, the owl projects physically from the wall, casting shadows that emphasise its sculptural presence. Behind it, shades of green and black evoke foliage and woodland, visually connecting the animal to the surrounding landscape while simultaneously contrasting with the decaying surfaces of the building. The work blurs distinctions between sculpture, painting and architecture, making the owl appear simultaneously embedded within and emerging from the city itself. As Alison Young (2016) observes, street art extends beyond painted surfaces to encompass sculptural objects and interventions that manipulate the built environment, challenging conventional distinctions between artistic media and urban space. *Owl Eyes* exemplifies this expanded understanding of street art by integrating assemblage, mural painting and architecture into a single site-specific intervention.

Figure 3. Bordalo II, Owl Eyes (2014)

Source: © WOOL. Reproduced with permission from WOOL.

As with many works in the *Trash Animals* series, the choice of recycled materials is inseparable from the work's meaning. The discarded fragments retain traces of their previous functions while acquiring a new identity as components of a living creature. Rather than concealing their origins, Bordalo II foregrounds them, encouraging viewers to recognise the material consequences of consumption and to reconsider what society classifies as waste. The transformation of discarded objects into an owl suggests that ecological responsibility can emerge through the creative reimagining of materials already in existence rather than through the continual production of new ones. While the previous murals imagine home through landscape and textile heritage, *Owl Eyes* broadens this understanding by foregrounding the more-than-human dimensions of place. As Sarah Whatmore (2002) argues, places emerge through the entanglement of human and non-human actors, challenging the assumption that place is constituted solely through human experience and activity. The owl introduces a non-human inhabitant into Covilhã's historic centre, reminding viewers that urban places are shared environments in which human, animal and material lives are interconnected. Belonging is therefore presented not solely as a human relationship to place but as one that encompasses the wider ecological communities upon which urban life depends.

The work's significance has continued to evolve through time. A comparison between photographs taken shortly after its completion in 2014 and a decade later in 2024 (Fig. 4) reveals the extent to which both the mural and its architectural support have undergone visible transformation. The once vibrant colours have faded, the recycled materials have weathered and oxidised, vegetation has spread across the façade, and sections of the surrounding masonry have further deteriorated. Rather than diminishing the artwork, these changes reinforce its dialogue with the building itself. The owl appears progressively absorbed into the ageing surface, so that artwork and architecture become increasingly inseparable.

Figure 4. Bordalo II, Owl Eyes (2024)



Source: Paula Horta, 2024.

As Erika Doss (2016a) reminds us, "public art is not ... forever" (p. 1). Rather than viewing the changing appearance of *Owl Eyes* as a loss of meaning, it may instead be understood as part of the artwork's continuing life within the city. Doss (2016b) argues that public art is "neither inherent nor eternal but processual" (p. 403), dependent upon changing cultural and social relationships rather than existing as a fixed object. Alison Young (2016) similarly observes that the placement of artworks within public space entails accepting that they "may vanish or be destroyed or at the very least change and deteriorate" (p. 150). Rather than representing failure or neglect, these material transformations are intrinsic to the conditions through which street art exists, acquires meaning and becomes embedded in the everyday life of the city.

Owl Eyes illustrates this process with particular clarity. Constructed from discarded materials and installed on a deteriorating façade, the work does not resist the passage of time but participates in it. The mural ages with the building that supports it, revealing place itself as a dynamic assemblage of architecture, ecological processes and material transformation. As artwork and architecture weather together, the boundaries between them become increasingly blurred. The significance of *Owl Eyes* therefore lies not only in its environmental message but also in revealing how urban art becomes embedded in, and transformed by, the changing life of place. In doing so, the mural suggests that belonging depends not upon permanence but upon an ongoing relationship with environments that are themselves continually evolving.

4.4. Home, Neighbourhood and Everyday Sociability

Created by Daniela Guerreiro for the eleventh edition of the WOOL Urban Art Festival in 2024, *Chá das 5 [Five O'Clock Tea]* (Fig. 5) explores how home is experienced through the ordinary rituals of neighbourhood life. Unlike the previous murals, which evoke landscape, labour or environmental concerns, Guerreiro turns to the seemingly unremarkable practices through which people create and sustain relationships with one another. Installed across two adjoining

façades overlooking a small public square in Covilhã's historic centre, the mural transforms an everyday urban setting into a visual meditation on hospitality, conversation and shared presence.

Rather than presenting complete figures, the mural depicts enlarged, hyper-realistic fragments of bodies engaged in the preparation and sharing of afternoon tea. Hands pour tea, hold delicate porcelain cups, cut slices of cake and rest gently upon a lace tablecloth. The absence of faces directs attention away from individual identity and towards gesture itself. Care is expressed not through facial expression but through the choreography of ordinary actions: serving, offering, receiving and sharing. The monumental scale of these intimate gestures elevates the unnoticed rituals of everyday life, granting public visibility to forms of care that are more often associated with the domestic sphere. As Alison Young (2016) argues, street art continually expands the ways in which artistic practice inhabits and reimagines the built environment; here, the mural transforms two ordinary façades into a single immersive image that blurs the boundaries between architecture, artwork and lived space.

Figure 5. Daniela Guerreiro, *Chá das 5 [Five O'Clock Tea]* (2024)



Source: João Sousa, 2024. Reproduced with permission from the author.

The mural's site-specificity extends beyond its physical integration into the architecture. Because the composition is divided across two buildings, it cannot be apprehended from a single viewpoint. Viewers must move through the square, shifting their position in order to reconstruct the fragmented scene. This embodied experience transforms spectators into participants, encouraging them to inhabit the space rather than merely observe it. The curved benches placed within the square further reinforce this invitation to pause, linger and converse. Rather than functioning simply as street furniture, they extend the social world represented in the mural into the surrounding public space, encouraging the kinds of informal encounters depicted on the walls. The work therefore dissolves the conventional boundary between representation and lived experience, allowing the practices it depicts to resonate within the everyday life of the neighbourhood.

While the previous murals imagine home through landscape, labour and the more-than-human dimensions of place, *Chá das 5* locates home within the ordinary sociability of neighbourhood life. Henri Lefebvre (2003) argues that the street is not merely a space of circulation but "a meeting place (topos)" (p. 18), where encounters and everyday social life unfold. Similarly, Vikas Mehta (2013) argues that public spaces contribute to community life by encouraging people "to congregate, to meet, to enjoy being a part of community" (p. 2). Guerreiro's mural gives visual form to these ideas. Rather than commemorating a singular

historical event or celebrating an iconic figure, it monumentalises the everyday practices through which neighbourhoods are continually reproduced: sharing food and drink, exchanging stories and spending time together. Home emerges not as a fixed location but as an ongoing social practice enacted through repeated acts of hospitality, familiarity and mutual care.

Tea occupies a distinctive place in Covilhã's cultural identity, reflecting the historical influence of the British entrepreneurs who transformed the city's nineteenth-century wool industry. Over time, it became embedded in the city's social life as a ritual of conversation and hospitality. Rather than presenting this practice nostalgically, Guerreiro transforms it into a contemporary reflection on neighbourhood life. The ritual of preparing and sharing tea evokes continuity, hospitality and shared experience, preserving fleeting acts of everyday sociability in monumental visual form. By relocating these familiar domestic practices into the public square, the mural collapses the boundary between private and public space, suggesting that the care, hospitality and togetherness traditionally associated with home can also be cultivated within the shared spaces of the city. The absence of identifiable faces further universalises the scene, allowing viewers to recognise their own experiences within it. The mural therefore invites residents and visitors alike to imagine the neighbourhood as an extension of home: a place where belonging is sustained not only through memory or shared history, but through the everyday encounters that weave social relationships into the fabric of the city.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that approaching urban art through the lens of home offers a different way of understanding its social and cultural significance. Discussions of murals have frequently centred on regeneration, tourism, place-making and city branding. While these perspectives have generated important insights, they often overlook the ways in which public art shapes people's emotional relationships with the places they inhabit. The WOOL Urban Art Festival demonstrates that urban art does more than transform the visual appearance of the city: it participates in the continual negotiation of belonging, memory and identity through which places come to be experienced as home.

Rather than treating home as a private or domestic condition, the four case studies reveal it as a relational and public experience that emerges through different yet interconnected dimensions of urban life. Home is encountered in the shared landscape of the Serra da Estrela, in the memories embedded within industrial labour, in ecological relationships that extend beyond the human, and in the ordinary sociability of neighbourhood life. Together, these murals expand conventional understandings of home, demonstrating that it is not confined to the domestic interior but continually produced through the relationships that connect people to places, histories, environments and one another. In doing so, they also challenge the tendency to regard public space as merely the setting for artistic intervention. Instead, the city itself becomes a medium through which experiences of home are articulated, negotiated and renewed.

This shift also invites a reconsideration of urban art itself. The significance of the murals lies not only in what they represent but in the social and spatial relationships they activate. By bringing local histories into everyday streets, transforming walls into sites of encounter and embedding cultural memory within the routines of urban life, they encourage residents to inhabit familiar places differently. Urban art therefore does not simply depict belonging; it creates opportunities for belonging to be experienced, shared and continually renegotiated. As one of the works discussed here demonstrates, these relationships often persist beyond the physical lifespan of the artwork itself, becoming part of the collective memory and identity of the city.

Henri Lefebvre (1996) argues that "the urban ... is a mental and social form, that of simultaneity, of gathering, of convergence ... of encounter (or rather, encounters)" (p. 131). Read through this lens, WOOL reveals the city not as a neutral backdrop but as a dynamic field in which multiple histories, memories, practices and forms of life converge. The murals do not simply represent these relationships; they bring them into dialogue, allowing different experiences of landscape, labour, ecology and everyday sociability to coexist within shared urban space. Home

therefore emerges not as a destination or a bounded location but as an ongoing process of inhabiting the city through encounter, participation and collective memory.

Ultimately, the contribution of this article extends beyond the case of Covilhã. It suggests that home provides a productive conceptual framework for rethinking the cultural role of urban art itself. Rather than asking only how murals contribute to regeneration or place-making, we might instead ask how they reshape the ways in which people inhabit, remember and care for the places they share. Seen in this way, urban art becomes not simply a representation of urban life but an active participant in the continual production of the social and cultural relationships through which cities become places in which people can feel at home.

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