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STREET ART AS A MEDIUM OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Among all the various art forms available today, street art that was considered illegal and outlawed has slowly transformed into a medium of expression. Unbound by norms and structures, street art provides a space for creative freedom and articulation; street artists use public spaces to voice out their opinions against socially relevant issues and create a sense of activism. This research tries to study the transition between the two phases and how the perception towards street art has changed. Something that was considered as vandalism has slowly found its place amongst the mainstream is being commercialised and considered as an art form. The usage of this to protest and raise awareness has intrigued people to accept it as a part of the society. The researcher attempts to show how street art has become a medium for depicting social standards by systematically interpreting and evaluating the contents of the works by British street artist Banksy. This paper will explore the history and liberal development by focusing on its evolution in society and how people have come to embrace it rather than it just being public nuisance.

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“If graffiti changed anything, it would be illegal.” -Banksy

There are various types of art forms available in today's world, one of them being street art. It falls under the category of contemporary art which in turn falls under the area of cultural studies. It has become popular since the early 1980's, this symbolises freedom and expression. Street art can truly be valued only if we consider its place in the lineage of fine art history and the outcome it has had on our modern society. They act as reflections of ourselves and the cities in which we live. Unconfined by form, medium, or message, the art form offers creative freedom and while artists have varied motivations behind their work, graffiti and street art tends to carry strong revolutionary messages for activism. Gregory Snyder mentions in his work, *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York's Urban Underground*, that “while the reaction [to graffiti] from the public [is] often positive, the reaction from City Hall [is] not” (24). “Now considered illegal vandalism, it is the reclaiming of public spaces for unauthorised art that continues to exemplify a form of political resistance acting as a major force for change as well as an act of rebellion in itself” (17). Some artists and their works have become highly commercialised and mainstream, while others particularly those who use their art to produce anti-greed or anti-corporation messages are still seen as vandals. While street art has become mainstream and commercialized in certain instances the art form offers a visual expression of protest that empowers those who cannot be silenced any longer.

Banksy's street work "*Follow your dreams (cancelled)*" and "*Banksy at the West Bank Barrier*" are used in this research to show how street art has become a medium for depicting societal standards and how a common artist is raising his voice using this medium to protest against it.

The main objective of this research is to identify how graffiti and street art have become a medium of expression. This research focuses mainly on the works of Banksy to prove that the art form has become a lead way of self-expression. His individual style combined with graffiti has become popular among the public. While he may be anonymous, he advocates a direct connection between an artist and his area. It would also try to focus on artists who are trying to bring about change through a medium we have not looked at yet-art. It will give an insight into the mind-set and characteristics of the artist. The research will also observe the artwork of well-known street artists Banksy. This paper will explore the history and progressive development of street art by focusing on its place in society throughout the years.

A review of the collection of academic articles based on British built street artist Banksy and his works are presented here. It attempts to critically study and analyse these articles, and identify its relevance to the research conducted on how Banksy is becoming more popular and how the public has begun to accept street art as an art form.

*Wall and Piece* by Banksy is a coffee table book. The book is compiled with works by the graffiti artist. The book is filled with photos and illustrations. There isn't a lot of text but when there is they complement the photos well. The book is categorized under six groups: monkeys, cops, rats, cows, art, and street furniture. Through these categories Banksy mocks state authority, capitalism, consumerism, and corruption. His images and ideas have an irony in them that is mixed with surrealism portraying an irrefutable and pleasing optimism. Banksy in one of his interviews had said, "I've learnt from experience that a painting isn't finished when you put down your brush — that's when it starts. The public reaction is what supplies meaning and value. Art comes alive in the arguments you have about it."

*Banksy: The man behind the wall* is a book by a former New York correspondent for The Sunday Times Wills Ellsworth- Jones talks about Banksy's works. He tries to offer a glimpse behind the numerous facades established to keep Banksy's identity hidden. Ellsworth looks into his works and familiarizes him to the world while keeping him anonymous. This book gathers all this information and introduces graffiti and street art and how it is becoming a medium of expression. This book focuses on his anonymity rather than trying to undo it. "The way he guards his anonymity gives him the added glamour of seclusion—the whiff of Syd Barrett or J.D. Salinger" (Jones).

### **British irony**

In the article, British Irony, Global Justice: A Pragmatic Reading of Chris Brown, Banksy and Ricky Gervais, James Brassett provides a critical analysis of the concept of irony and how it recounts to global justice. One of the protagonists considered in this essay is Banksy. He uses his art to rebel or protest against societal norms and injustices. This main question asked here is whether graffiti or street art can be considered as a 'mainstream' art and sold for profit. It also points out how it was when Banksy started his work and how he is now. People have scorned at the way has started to sell his work and taken up invitations; questions have also come about the irony of the situation where he mocks the society at one side and is slowly becoming a celebrity on the other. In reply to this, Banksy had said in an interview for the New Yorker "I think it was easier when I was the underdog, and I had a lot of practise at it. The money that my work fetches these days makes me a bit uncomfortable, but that's an easy problem to solve -you just stop whingeing and give it all away. I don't think it's possible to make art about world poverty and then trouser all the cash, that's an irony too far, even for me". But the writer tries bringing into consideration that his works hold meaning and thought. "Such inclusions speak of a deep humanism, a care for the hopes of people and a concern with their suffering" (Brassett, 236). Rather than looking at it from only a satirical view, it can be seen as a healthy interaction of critique and imagination. He addresses global issues and he juxtaposes the idea of capitalism and imperialism; he does not provide any solutions to the problems but gives credible pointers as to the kinds of power structures and insincerity that global ethical agendas must struggle with. "The performativity of Banksy's

graffiti, the completeness of the inversions he makes, means that the critique presents a permanent paradox" (Brassett, 244).

#### **Transformation of street art**

In the article *Aesthetics of Confrontation: From the Streets to the Classroom*, Sheng Kuan Chung talks about how street art is transforming. Street art came into being during the modernist period, there are no official records for the beginning of street art, but it has transformed tremendously. Street art symbolizes the desire of human beings to mark traces of their existence. "It is generally regarded as a post graffiti movement" (McNaughton, 2006). Street art is considered illegal and subversive, but ironically it is now being considered as an art form by the world. "Street art encompasses a wide array of media and techniques such as traditional spray-painted tags, stickers, stencils, posters, photocopies, murals, paper cut outs, mosaics, street installations, performances and video projections displayed in urban streets" (Chung, 97). "Street art inserts itself in the material city as an argument about visibility, the social and political structure of being visible" (Irvine, 4). Peter Bengsten in his article *Beyond the Public Art Machine: A Critical Examination of Street Art as Public Art* says that street art requires a rational mind and gives emphasis on a strong sense of individual vision and independent thinking. Disenfranchised Street artists emphasize what their art does and not what it is; in other words, they focus on the process of public interaction, intervention and discourse; it does not ask anything in return. As Matthew Lunn, author of *Street Art Uncut* observes, "[Street art] has a rawness you don't get through other forms of media. It is the voice of the world around us" (Lunn, 4). But now street art is being renovated and taken indoors. Many great works are transported inside to preserve its beauty, but this just makes the work lose all its beauty. The real beauty is always in the initial work. "Banksy's *Girl With Balloon* is a particularly clear example of the loss of meaning which occurs to varying degrees when artistic expressions make the transition from street to gallery" (Bengsten, 70). The rawness to which people could relate to is lost in this process. He argues that street art should be left wherever it is to respect the artist's work and ideas. "Most pieces need not be placed in a gallery reviewed by a critic, or blessed by the art world or be appreciated as art" (Riggle, 246). He also states that "This way of thinking about street art also helps make sense of the experience of seeing street art in designated art spaces it invariably feels dead and inauthentic. When a work is moved into an art space the one thing that changes is the very thing that made it street art" (Riggle, 246). Street art, makes one stop and think about the issues happening around us. When a work with such potential is waiting around the corner, it hits one harder than an artwork inside a room would. Street art has embodied a different purpose altogether compared to galleries and museums; it allows art to join the living.

A visual analysis of Banksy's street art is done to comprehend the manner and nature of his works and to understand how graffiti has changed to portray deep social meaning. The method of social anthropology is used in this research. This method examines communication devices such as signs, text messages and symbols used in everyday interactions. In our study, we combined street reading with content analysis for the purpose of studying how street art is becoming a form of retaliation and how he has used his works to protest and criticize the society and its norms.

To study more about Banksy and his works we have to use certain methodologies. Among the various methodologies present under the umbrella term social anthropology, content analysis is a research technique, used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts we can understand the technique and thought behind his works. "Content denotes what is contained and content analysis is the analysis of what is contained in a message. Broadly content analysis may be seen as a method where the content of the message forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content" (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1976). Bernard Berelson, considered as the father of content analysis, in 1952, published *Content analysis in Communication Research*, which received recognition for the technique as a versatile tool for social science and media researchers. According to Berelson (1952) "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". Using this methodology, we are able to make valid implications from the text.

The main points that will be looked upon in this research are how the reactions to Banksy's art work reflect social attitudes and perceptions of art. This paper will explore the history and liberal development of street art by focusing on its place in society through the works of British based street artist to get a better empathetic understanding. The unique structure and style of Banksy's art is what distinguishes him from other artists. His way of perceiving a situation and protesting against is what makes his works stand apart from the rest. Another point to think upon is how the public is coming to accept street art. How it's being regarded as an art form.

This research will be trying to bring to light what it is that makes street art in slowly becoming a medium of expression and how with this Banksy is able to show the world his outlooks on various issues. It also focuses on the possibilities of street art and how it is underrated as an art form and considered as supposedly illegal. It will also show the talent and thought put behind it especially of well know artist Banksy, also it will show how art is used as a form of response or protest particularly in street art. This research attempts to bring a new range into this field of research. In doing so, it will enable people to read and gamble on new ideas and maybe extend it to a different perspective.

The essence of this research is to bring into light the different characteristics of street art street art has evolved from graffiti writing into a social and artistic movement covering the walls of cities around the world in its various forms. The art form continues to communicate messages in the public area that are accessible to all, and acts as a tool for encouragement and an essential element and reflection of the human existence. It remains a vital instrument of protest to bring about social change for communities of people who have no voice.

#### **From Graffiti to Street Art**

When the word graffiti is mentioned, thoughts of inaudible lettering and spray paint usually come to mind, but several new types of the art form have emerged in recent years to include stencilling, stickers and other developments that are now labelled as street art. Graffiti and street art vary by technique and also sociological elements. Nicholas Ganz mentions in his book *"Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents,"* that graffiti is "largely governed by the desire to spread one's tag and achieve fame" (10). Street art, on the contrary, "tends to have fewer rules and embraces a much broader range of styles and techniques" (11). Writing on walls appeared during the Second World War, as a tool used by the Nazis to spread their propaganda, but for the most part, graffiti was also important for resistance movements as a way of publicizing their protests to the general public" (Ganz, *Graffiti World*, 8). An example of this is "The White Rose," a German group of nonconformists who, until their capture in 1943, "spoke out against Hitler and his regime in 1942 through leaflets and painted slogans" (8). It was the "unique make-up of New York City—in which the Harlem slums and the glamorous world of Broadway stand side by side—[that] seems to have been a breeding-ground for the first graffiti artists, bringing together many different cultures and class issues in one single place" (9).

"Graffiti writing presented the opportunity for people from peripheral areas of society to become someone, even if this was only recognized within their own sub-sect" (Lewisohn 43). Graffiti involves a kind of secret, a language that can be understood only by the ones involved in it. This involvement provides a refreshing opportunity to become part of the conversation taking place on the walls of the city, especially for those with "little or no voice in society" (45). It was actually the troubled situations of groups that initiated this movement and majority being youths. And the reason for it was mostly urban development that distorted their livelihoods; this became a medium for them to express their disapproval. Lewisohn states:

Planners think it's a great idea to bulldoze and rebuild, to displace the teeming neighbourhoods with real-estate opportunities for entrepreneurs, while destroying these 'dangerous' communities that might upset the social order...The underlying political idea was to isolate and break up potentially rebellious communities, to prevent the formation of a critical mass for unrest. (7)

Suburban life was being renovated to accommodate economic development. And the communities were displaced and relocated and suffered and soon, and in the "ensuing era of neglect and economic decline,

graffiti was born" (7). This led to the formation of a new community, who directed their frustrations and repressions into visual form. This was not born out of any particular training or knowledge about it. With the increase in graffiti, everybody wanted their works to stand out, hence nicknames and pseudo names began to emerge. At first they mainly targeted trains as they travelled almost through the entire city and was seen by millions. Ganz reports that "by the mid-1980s...there was not a single train that had not at one time been spray-painted from top to bottom" (9). This lasted till, around 1986, when "New York authorities installed fences around station yards and began routinely buffing graffiti from train-cars as a means of protecting city property" (9). It was during the mid-1980s, however, that the graffiti scene in Europe erupted. While some of the graffiti in Europe was modelled after the American movement, the art form began to take on a shape and a style of its own. While it was letters that once dominated, the "culture has [since] expanded: new forms are explored, and characters, symbols and abstractions have begun to proliferate" (7). Ganz adds:

Over the past few years, graffiti artists have been using a wider scope of expression. Personal style is free to develop without any constraints, and stickers, posters, stencils, airbrush, oil-based chalk, all varieties of paint and even sculpture are used. Most artists have been liberated from relying solely on the spray can." (7)

This led to the beginning of street art, a more profound form that changed the perception of graffiti. Before it was the iconic spray can that was considered as the official graffiti tool, now many new forms of sources have come into the forum; oil or acrylic paint, airbrush, oil-based chalk, posters and stickers, to name a few. Graffiti continues to grow, as it is the very nature of the art form to try new techniques, which oftentimes results in a shift from the "original concept to completely different areas. In its creative drive, it continually transcends its own borders as it devises fascinating new variations to bring life and colour to public spaces" (Ganz 372).

The term street art represents a broader term that categorizes many forms of art. While graffiti presents a more consistent pattern, street art tends to echo the place in which it is installed as artists utilize their surroundings in creative ways. Street artists do not try to change our perception of art but instead, attempt to "question the existing environment with its own language" (Schwartzman). He says that the work of a street artist is to communicate with everyday people about socially relevant issues in an informal way. In George Stower's essay, "*Graffiti Art: An Essay Concerning the Recognition of Some Forms of Graffiti as Art*," he says:

Most of the time when we encounter art and are transported by it to other worlds, we are in a location in which we expect this to happen. However, this is not the case with graffiti [and street] art. For it appears suddenly and in unexpected places. Thus, when we apprehend it, we are transported to these other worlds at a time and in a place that we are not accustomed to doing so.

The accessibility of the art form contributes to its power, as stated by Banksy, "graffiti [that] ultimately wins out because it becomes part of your city, it's a tool. A wall is a very big weapon," he says, "It's one of the nastiest things you can hit someone with." It has become a method of communication and it has the ability to link people regardless of colour, culture and speech. Because of the universal nature of street art, it can be recognized as a medium for mass communication as it provides a voice for those who "otherwise could not comment upon or support current or perceived social problems" (Chaffee 3-4). He also mentions that the art form can "shape and move human emotions and gauge political sentiments" (4). The slogans and pictures used are catchy and innovative, they catch the eye more quickly than any other form. The art form "breaks the conspiracy of silence," claims Chaffee:

Like the press, one role of street art is to form social consciousness. In authoritarian systems where outlets for free expression are limited, it is one of the few gauges of political sentiment. In more open systems, street art enables various entities to lobby for their interests. Street art, in essence, connotes a decentralized, democratic form in which there is universal access, and the real control over messages comes from the social producers. (4)

The aesthetics of street art contribute greatly to the impact of its message. Artists consider the effect colour and design will have in communicating to their public. Messages are more strengthened by shape, strategy and location. In order to maximize visibility and visual impact, the artists must place their works in crowded areas. They rely on ideas or designs that can be easily consumed, most of the times it is work that is done overnight hiding from being caught. Street art serves as a means to support as well as a reporting forum. It functions socially as it helps to bring to light events, identify key players, provide social observation, and even to articulate political programmes and present visions. Partisan in nature, the art form is not obligated to remain neutral or impartial, but instead works toward evolving a cause or idea. Street art is accessible to everyone and acts as an arena for expression and a session board of sorts for the marginalized. Whether the art form is authorised or unauthorized, it is represented by expressive thought directly communicated to its audience through the use of an “economy of words and ideas and rhetorically simple discourse”( Chaffee 9). The messages are not hard to decipher. Instead, street artists rely on simple, concise messages and a blending of thoughts, ideas and observations to initiate a political dialogue.

The ever-changing political sphere forces street art to be highly pliable; as issues arise, the art form’s themes alter to reflect current problems. As street art blows life into the walls, a community dialogue is sparked as people begin to ask questions. Spectators, now forced to reflect on what it is they see, become aware of the presence and viewpoint, of an active underground resistance movement. Street art, in direct opposition to commercial advertising, seeks to neutralize the themes and “ideological discourse of the streets” (Chaffee 19). The art form acts as a “framing device” for its communities around the world, as a “parallel voice of the city, and as a modern primitive art” that can be found all around for those who wish to look (Lewisohn 30). One must assume that street art is an effective means of communication; if it were not, the general response to eliminate the art form, specifically from those in power would not be so great. From its beginning, modern day unsanctioned art was a reflection of the turbulent political situations of the place. Street artists are important not only in the number of people their work reaches, but also the number of artists inspired to start work of their own. Jeffrey Deitch, a modern and contemporary art dealer, states that street art has “become the most influential cultural innovation of the past thirty years”. Street art and graffiti will always retain a sense of authority that will forever be “relevant in terms of representing the outside, non-edited view” because the artist’s work is presented directly to the viewer with no curator in between to command what is good and what is not. The communicative power of street art lies in the fact that there is just one person to guide, just the artist, directly initiating a dialogue with the viewer. It is the mixture of “social activism, social outrage, and creativity” that enables the art form to deliver a strong message in the most “beautiful [of] public gestures” (153).

#### **City Wall as a Canvas**

The landscape of the city itself also plays an important role, as it serves as the canvas and open outlet for communicating the messages of street artists and their work. Cities act as both “physical and imagined spaces” (Brown-Glaude 114) and “where differences are constructed in, and themselves construct, city life and space” (Bridge and Watson 507). Luca Visconti, John Sherry Jr., Stefania Borghini, and Laurel Anderson tell us in their research study, “*Street Art, Sweet Art? Reclaiming the ‘Public’ in Public Place*” that “inscription as a means of emplacing ideology [is] undisputed (513). Banksy states that “A wall has always been the best place to publish your work,” and through the medium of street art, the “most honest art form available [because] there is no elitism or hype,” one can exhibit their work “on some of the best walls a town has to offer, and nobody is put off by the price of admission” (8). The urban scene is always changing, Julia Ferrante states in her article “*‘Street Art’ Provides Text for Understanding Cities in Transformation,*” that it is “less about reading and interpreting the individual pieces rather than seeing them in the context of social commentary”. She states that in order to find out the condition of a country at this moment, you have to look to the streets. Because of its omnipresent nature, street and urban art have become a part of the cultural fabric of a city. Om-Rio, a female graffiti artist from Brazil, mentions that she wants to “open people’s minds, make them review their conception, and test their soul” (Ganz, *Graffiti Women*, 38). Ernest Abel and Barbara Buckley mention in their

book *"The Handwriting on the Wall: Toward a Sociology and Psychology of Graffiti"*, that the examination of graffiti and street art is:

To a great extent a cross-cultural investigation of class and ethnic differences whose messages [tend to] reflect shared attitudes and values as well as ethnocentric variations on main cultural themes (144).

Graffiti and street art that is developing outside of North America, offers a prime example of urban art that emerges as a response to major political and social crises and upheavals—specifically the movements taking place in Egypt and Brazil. The people of these nations have found street art to be an important tool for expression, in which their "ethnic and ethnic-linguistic identification and symbols" represent their struggle for "political recognition and rights under [their] dominant cultures" (Chaffee 11). Street art has a major contribution to visual culture. We can slowly see the transformation of street art, from being a simple means of expression it has become a method to rebel against politics and capitalism. By using content analysis, we can learn if the agenda intended by the artist is recognized, learned and internalized by the public. It is a methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences can be about source of message, the message itself, or the audience of message. According to Berelson, content analysis refers to any procedure for assessing the relative extent to which specified references, attitudes, or themes permeate a given message or document. In this case, content analysis is done on Banksy's two works, *"Follow Your Dreams (Cancelled)"* and *"Banksy at the West Bank Barrier"*.



Figure 1- Follow Your Dreams Cancelled

The famous British based street artist Banksy has left his mark in many cities around the world, from New Orleans to Israel's West Bank security wall. The individuality of the English artist "has long escaped from the media while [somehow] obtaining an international reputation" (Visconti et al. 517) Banksy's pieces usually bear a meaning that is political or satirical in nature, often controversial. It was stencilling that allowed him to best express his mocking and humorous comments into a powerful means of communication. Banksy's *"Follow Your Dreams"* (Figure 1) piece found in Boston is no different. In May 2011, a graffiti image appeared in the low-income area of Chinatown in Boston, Massachusetts. The image features a tired-looking male painter standing next to the outwardly painted words, "FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS" painted in all black, all uppercase letters. Over those words are the words "CANCELLED" in white, all uppercase lettering with a red rectangle background, as if to signify that the notion of following one's dreams has been cancelled. Street art is meant to be an integrally anonymous way to create and spread art. Unless the artist has signed the piece, it can be assumed that the artist does not want people to know who created it. Some street art is recognizable by style. This piece, distinguished by the use of stencils to create the image, is attributed to Banksy because of his signature style-stencilling. His stencils are both humorous and salient, and often are combined with slogans to convey a message that is generally anti-war, anti-establishment or anti-capitalist in nature. The artist has stated that through his work he "want[s] to show that money hasn't crushed the humanity out of everything."

Banksy used a stencil to create a clear picture of a lower-middle class or low class grunt worker. His clothing looks back into back to the depression era. Through this image Banksy is drawing parallels between the current economic crisis and the depression; he is pointing out the cruelty of the current political and economic environment. "Follow Your Dreams" is a popular axiom referring to the American Dream. For one to be able to follow a dream, freedom is required. Here the dream is being cancelled. The man from the depression era is the one that posted the cancel sign over the dreams. Though he is only the messenger, the use of him to deliver the message is poignant because he does not appear to be living his dreams and now he is working to cancel others, perhaps just to survive. He is not happy, rather he is resigned and doing what is expected of him, he doesn't seem be able to live out the American Dream. The idea of an American Dream no longer exists according to Banksy.

Banksy white washes the wall and then uses grey scale in most of the piece. The man in the painting is grey and the words follow your dreams are grey. Against the white background these figures stand out but the use of grey mutes them. In contrast, he uses a bright, vibrant red for the cancelled sign, setting it in stark contrast to the grey "follow your dreams" and worker. It is the only colour that Banksy chooses to use. Red is a strong colour that implies power, violence and force. When used in connection with the violent hints of cancel, presents a very powerful message that dreams were not just cancelled but taken away from Americans. That world no longer exists according to this piece; the ideals that founded this nation have been cancelled along with their dreams. Nobody is no longer free to choose the life they want in the place this art was created. The world has changed and in the process the ability to follow dreams was lost.

Through this piece of art, Banksy is challenging and questioning social constructs and American ideals and is asking his audience to live freely through his pieces and to question the world around them. This has over time been regarded as one his best works that looks simple but holds a deep victimised meaning hidden inside it.



Figure 2- West Bank Barrier

Next art is "*Banksy at the west bank barrier*" (Figure 2), there is a huge wall built by Israel of about 700 kilometres that divides Israel and Palestine along the West Bank. It was built to protect the people of Israel from attacks from Palestine. It has created a huge difference in the lives of people. People cannot go from one side to other for any purposes. Banksy has gained an international reputation by pushing the limits through his countless pieces of street art as well as highly illegal pranks such as works on the Israeli separation wall that echo the political situation surrounding. Banksy also records on his website how an old Palestinian man said



his painting made the wall look beautiful. Banksy thanked him, only to be told: “We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall. Go home”.

Over the years, graffiti has evolved in style and form as well as purpose. No longer about just tagging a name, street art is instead about activism. Far from meaningless, the point and purpose of street art is representative of our desire to communicate with one another and to express ourselves. While street artists have varied motivations behind what drives their work, street art tends to carry powerful, rebellious messages for activism. While most of us are aware of the fact that street art blanketing the walls of our cities is usually illegal, we are still compelled to lift our eyes and examine what it is we see. Street art is becoming the poetry of our time; it demonstrates the cultural climate of our cities by offering social and political commentary that speaks to our everyday lives.

Imagine a city where graffiti wasn't illegal, a city where everybody drew whatever they liked. Where every street was awash with a million colours and little phrases. Where standing at a bus stop was never boring. A city that felt like a party where everyone was invited, not just the estate agents and barons of big business. Imagine a city like that and stop leaning against the wall—it's wet. (Banksy 85)

Through visual images and iconography, street art gives messages that focus on themes such as anti-war, anti-capitalism, anarchism, hypocrisy, greed, poverty, and despair. Both politically and ideologically embedded, street art “denounces the insincerity and falseness of current society” and communicates this through the act of ‘defacing’ public space (Visconti et al. 517). Despite it being termed as illegal, the art form should be recognized nevertheless for its ideological messages. It acts as a “manifesto contesting the market domination and the exploitation of the consumer, [and] is interpreted as an indictment of consumerism and the excesses of materialism in a public space” (Visconti et al. 524). But no more is public space available, corporate companies want to take over any little space accessible, leading artists to search for common space and the democratization of art. Banksy argues that:

The people who run our cities don't understand graffiti because they think nothing has the right to exist unless it makes a profit...The people who truly deface our neighbourhoods are the companies that scrawl giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. Any advertisement in public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours, it belongs to you, it's yours to take, rearrange and re-use. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head (8).

Street art in both public and private spaces makes a strong “statement against Western ideas of capitalism and private property” (Stowers). Banksy shows his agreement with this view when he states that he “like[d] to think [he] ha[d] the guts to stand up anonymously in a Western democracy and call for things no one else believes in—like peace and justice and freedom” (Banksy 25). Because of the risks of the art form, anonymity also allows artists to voice their social commentary and cultural reproaches on a public stage, in a way that bypasses the media's power to convict and censor. That being said, street art acts as art should: it stands for freedom. Because the art form is illegal, it is best for the artist to maintain a sense of secrecy. “Speak softly,” states Banksy in his book, *Wall and Piece*, “but carry a big can of paint” (8). Completely open to the public, street art:

Breaks the hegemonic hold of corporate [and] governmental style over the urban environment and the situations of daily life. As a form of aesthetic sabotage, it interrupts the pleasant, efficient uniformity of ‘planned’ urban space and predictable urban living. For the writers, graffiti disrupts the lived experience of mass culture, the passivity of mediated consumption. (Banksy 176).

Artists see city walls as public spaces on which they have the right to reclaim, rearrange, and reuse. The art form signifies a resistance to cultural domination, as a “streetwise counterpoint to the increasing authority of corporate advertisers and city governments over the environments of daily life” (Ferrell 176). Stowers claims that “spray can art is an art form that is completely open to the public because it is not hemmed in by the confines or ‘laws’ of the gallery system or museum, [and] perhaps, that is its only crime”. The succeeding battle over the streets and in essence, the battle for artistic control, is essentially just a battle

for “property and space, as well as meaning, appearance and perception. It is a battle over style” (186). Graffiti and street art are a reflection of the world, and act as “the voice of the unelected, fighting back against systems that are imposed on them” (Lewisohn 87). The success of the art form has sparked a critical awareness of self, city, and surroundings as well as the expansion of social intelligence. The thin line between the illegality and legitimacy of graffiti is further blurred as institutions, ironically often funded by the government, celebrate the art form.

Over the years, graffiti has evolved in style and form as well as purpose. No longer is it only about just tagging a name, street art is instead about activism. The art form acts as an instrument of protest and advocacy as well as a genuine reflection of the human existence. As illustrated by the works of street artist Banksy, the researcher feels that street art and graffiti provide a vital means of expression to those who have no voice and want to raise their voice against society. In the future, the art form will continue to evolve around the world not only in the commercial realm, but also in the eyes of the public as it becomes more perceptive to the art form as a powerful means of expression with the ability to initiate social change. While there may never come a day that street art is considered lawful, Banksy says:

“Art is not like other culture because its success is not made by its audience. The public fill concert halls and cinemas every day, we read novels by the millions, and buy records by the billions. ‘We the people’--affect the making and quality of most of our culture, but not our art.”

Street art acts as a reflection of our very existence, and continues to speak to us in ways we all seemingly can understand. It has evolved over time to represent the flaws in our society and make us aware of it. It has taught us to accept and think in a very simple way. With this research, the researcher has come to the conclusion that in the past years street art has evolved from simple graffiti writing into a social and artistic movement.

With this research, the researcher might not be able to throw light on all the aspects of street art. The limitation to Banksy’s works and related texts might provide a problem to analyse his works in the required manner. This research might also not be able to show the entire transformation of street art throughout the years. The time limit restrains the possibility of a thorough research in the particular area. But this limitation can be dealt and overcome by doing further research on this topic. More texts and theories can be studied to get a bigger picture and analysis.

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