

The 50 most
influential
street artists today

Street art /today²

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Bjørn Van Poucke

It feels like
the peak of
street art's
identity crisis
is finally
behind us
and we're
witnessing
the re-birth
of a new,
reinvented
scene.

THE HYPER-GLOBALISATION of the world in the 21st century has resulted in dynamics and trends that are hard to comprehend and categorise using existing tools and methods.

Whether we're talking politics, economy, or culture, the transglobal mixing and merging – spiced up with the virtual allure of social media – has created hybrids which are regularly comprised of variety, sometimes incorporating opposing elements from different origins.

In a converged world, everything has become a hard-to-read mishmash of stuff which sometimes just doesn't make sense any more.

Highly noticeable, relatable, and ultimately hyper-likable, street art has not been spared these developments. Just like other forms of urban culture such as music or skateboarding, the mainstream pretty much lost its well-calculated mind over these forms of youth culture expression. Seeing its immeasurable value as part of gentrification processes worldwide, borrowing elements to build their own credibility, or plainly (ab)using it for marketing or branding purposes, we've witnessed the creation of a monster in the recent years. But this isn't the first time that things are taking such turn, as similar scenarios happened to other rebellious-minded movements – and most of them are still alive and kicking. And in all honesty, it feels like the peak of street art's identity crisis is finally behind us and we're witnessing the re-birth of a new, reinvented scene.

Getting deep into this matter, I can't help thinking of Jeremy Rifkin's *Entropy: A New World View* and the way he relates the world's economic and social structures by using the second law of thermodynamics. First, energy cannot be created; it's only possible to change its form. Second, everything moves from a state of perfection towards chaos. Like all things existing in the universe, the street art culture is also part of this predetermined programme. What started as a spontaneous form of expression by individuals has evolved into a globally recognised movement with a number of different forms and conducts.

INTRO-

INSTITUTIONALISATION

At the same time, the initial writing of statements and names evolved into the creation of the most elaborate, giant-scale murals in every corner of the globe, using classical art, technology, or anything else within its reach. And yes, a whole pile of decorative, Instagram-friendly work that is simply riding the same hype wave.

So yes, street art is still street, but not all of it is. As Escif stated in the interview I did with him for *Juxtapoz Magazine*, 'Actual street art is created by people who don't care about art: wall painters in Senegal, sign painters in Mexico, Pixadores in Brazil, political painters in Greece, homeless in United States and outsider people all around the world who really believe that what they are doing is a tool to change their context.' Those still exist, regardless of big festivals that took over gentrified areas of major cities everywhere, from Honolulu to Hong Kong. And so do the genuine street artists like Escif himself, or Blu, or countless others who are very much aware of how quickly tables can be turned and their 'tools to change their context' can ultimately be used for someone else's gain. The same goes for graffiti writers that are nurturing the vandalising aspect of the original movement. People like 1UP crew who are taking the marking of urban space to absolute extremes these days, risking their freedom and literally their lives while jumping trains and hanging off buildings in order to create the most insane and in-your-face illegal work we've witnessed to date.

Coming from a country that is usually not on the map of countries where big things happen, I've been following the introduction and evolution of street art in Croatia. It was interesting seeing the dynamics I've experienced elsewhere, watching them slowly taking place in my homeland, and observing a growing local interest. This has helped me step out of my bubble, in which I was aware of the ways the movement has been institutionalised (more or less successfully), labelled, bought

and sold, or just transformed into Instagram likes. It made me realise that there will always be new generations and new regions where these forms of expressions are not familiar and people will appreciate them, or hate them, with a pure heart, without prejudice or inhibitions previous experiences.

So again, street art is still street, it just grew bigger in so many ways, from its universal recognition to its general artistic quality. And while it might not look or feel like it did a decade ago, there will always be a significant group of individuals that will come up with new concepts, new visuals, and new techniques, which will challenge the viewer and other creatives. Because that is precisely what was happening in the beginning and is still the root of it all, no matter how many likes a selfie-friendly mural of angel wings on a bustling street of London/ New York/ Rijeka gets.

Sasha Bogojev

Contributing editor at *Juxtapoz Magazine* / writer / curator

IN 2016 WE RELEASED *Street Art Today*, the first book in what was already set to become a series of publications, which aimed to retrace the history of art in public space and present the 50 most influential artists of that time. We had curated the volume, presenting categories of style in an attempt to impose some order on the writhing and morphing world of street art. Even when writing that first text, it was clear to us that these artists, these projects and the speed of the changing environment around us made it nearly impossible to document exactly. The pace of evolution made each pinpoint of time sprint away before we could finish any sentence.

Three years on, we are continuing the conversation. Here we present an update, a Chapter II, a return, a small glimpse back over the past three years into the world of street art through the eyes of the artists, the curators, the journalists and the groupies. So many projects have been born in the last 36 months that we cannot do them justice in these few pages. As we present a new group of the 50 most influential artists worldwide, you may notice some changes since the last edition. New names have popped up, and we are super-excited to share the work of some talented emerging artists. How lucky we are to see fresh and exciting works catch our eye around the globe! You may also notice that previous chapters on toyism / naive art and surrealism do not grace these pages. That innovation will simplify the book's navigation for you, dear reader, but also relates to self-reflection. Aware of the polyvalence of all artists represented, we choose to broaden the themes in order to leave more breathing room for their creative minds to navigate. It feels wrong to pigeonhole or 'freeze' any artist in a rigid style, especially in the fast-paced world of street art.

In this edition, we are very happy to put forward some new thoughts, projects and artists that represent what we see as growing trends,

Which leads
us to the
question:
is street art
still 'street'?

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as well as some obvious themes that we feel it is important to discuss. The past few years have seen a rise in socially engaged art, with many artists across all styles and genres giving their voice, sometimes their screams, to raise awareness of climate change, discriminatory immigration policies, gender inequality, racism and violent governments. The rise in artists engaging in projects working directly with the community, often through not-for-profit organisations, is also important to note; we firmly believe in the power of public art to enable communities to engage in positive change.

When crafting this selection, we also found it important to address the question of gender inequality in street art and unfortunately in most creative networks, meaning by proxy across society at large. Though founded on notions of democracy, the street art world is not exempt from inequity, and even if we chose to promote a higher percentage of female artists than would typically be shown, women remain underrepresented in this field. It is important today to recognise this point, not in a voice of anger or defeat, but rather in celebration of all those brilliant minds that are creating environments of open discussion, addressing gender equality for artists and audience alike.

Technology is also considered an important element in public art production today. With accessible new gadgets popping up everywhere, and superfast programs being developed worldwide, artists are increasingly playing with installations, projection mapping, interactive artworks, and digital tech. Not only does this open the doors of creation, but it also increases our ability to disseminate works globally. It's a beautiful thing to be able to see the latest walls in Istanbul, the biggest pieces in Rio or the most hidden of ephemeral works. It's frightening, however, when we see artists sacrificing creativity for the ego game of cheap 'likes', hits or a competition about who can get the most 'followers'. Social media is becoming both innovation's best friend and creativity's worst enemy.

As street art is being slowly absorbed into academia, with accredited university degrees being promoted and endless studies conducted on urban visual history, we see more and more artists who hold university degrees. Street art continues to grow and evolve towards a 'legitimate' art form, far from the grit and glamour of the American tagging crews of the early days of graffiti, which people still associate with public art. As more and more university-trained artists become actors in the urban landscape, the diversity of the group grows – and with most creatives not creating a 'pure street' body of work, the lines between contemporary art, street art and design are increasingly blurred.

Commercially, international street art festivals are becoming longer standing, better organised and highly sponsored. Simultaneously, public funding is increasingly focused on community identity and 'creative placemaking'. Today, street art is more educated, more accepted and more popular than ever. But in some cases, it is being unfoundedly appropriated, unjustly exploited, cleaned up, toned down, auto-censored, commercially focused and dryly institutionalised. Which leads us to question in this edition: is street art still 'Street'?

Bjørn Van Poucke

004 **INTRODUCTION** / by Sasha Bogojev

006 **PREFACE** / by Bjørn Van Poucke

020 **INTERVIEW** / Anne-Laure Lemaitre, Doug Gillen, Iryna Kanischeva & Martyn Reed

**1/
ABSTRACT**

038 INTRODUCTION
 040 ELIAN
 044 **ELLEN RUTT** - interview
 054 FELIPE PANTONE
 058 KRISTIN FARR
 062 MADC
 066 MOMO
 070 MR. JUNE
 074 NELIO
 078 OKUDA
 082 ROBERTO CIREDZ

**2/
FIGURATIVE**

086 INTRODUCTION
 088 ALEX SENNA
 092 ALICE PASQUINI
 096 ANDREA WAN
 100 ARYZ
 104 BELIN
 106 CINTA VIDAL
 112 **MILU CORRECH** - interview
 122 ESCIF
 126 FAITH47
 130 FINTAN MAGEE
 134 HERAKUT
 138 HYURO
 142 JAZ
 146 LOW BROS
 150 PAOLA DELFIN
 154 SAINER
 158 SETH GLOBEPAINTER
 162 SHERYO & YOK

**T
N
Z
E
T
N
Z
O
O**

3/ REALISM

- 166 INTRODUCTION
- 168 AXEL VOID
- 172 BOSOLETTI
- 176 CASE MACLAIM
- 180 GUIDO VAN HELTEN
- 184 LONAC
- 188 SEBAS VELASCO
- 192 ZOER & VELVET - interview

4/ URBAN INTERVENTIONISM

- 202 INTRODUCTION
- 204 AMPPARITO
- 208 BANKSY
- 212 CRYSTAL WAGNER
- 216 ERNEST ZACHAREVIC
- 220 ICY & SOT - interview
- 230 ISAAC CORDAL
- 234 JAUNE
- 238 JR
- 242 LEON KEER
- 246 PEJAC
- 250 SHEPARD FAIREY
- 254 SPY
- 258 STROOK
- 262 SWOON
- 266 WASTED RITA

» /

Bosoletti
Bonito, Italy, 2018
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

Sebas Velasco & Zoer
Tolosa, Spain, 2019
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

Aryz
Chongqing, China, 2016
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

Okuda
Llanera, Spain, 2015
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

Elian
Valencia, Spain, 2018
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST



1

INTERVIEW

020

ANNE-LAURE LEMAITRE, DOUG GILLEN,
IRYNA KANISHCHEVA & MARTYN REED

Interview

Has there ever
been a more
audacious
project in
the history of
contemporary
political art
other than
Banksy's
Walled Off
Hotel?

What have been the most inspiring projects in the past three years?

AL: Street art has experienced tremendous changes over the past 10-15 years, shifting from a niche alternative scene to an art form which is universally recognised and appreciated. This evolution allowed for a greater plurality of voices, techniques, and approaches, visually and conceptually diverse.

MR: I'd say the exponential growth of the monolithic mural as the default setting for municipal and corporate-sponsored "street art", alongside the expansion of the mural festival network and the dominance of large-scale decorative works in public space.

DG: Nothing has changed street art like the internet. From the smallest illegal paste-up to ground-breaking blockbuster festivals, art is being constantly showcased and available for consumption 24/7. This has changed the experience for the artist

and the spectator like nothing else in history.

What have been the most inspiring projects in the past three years?

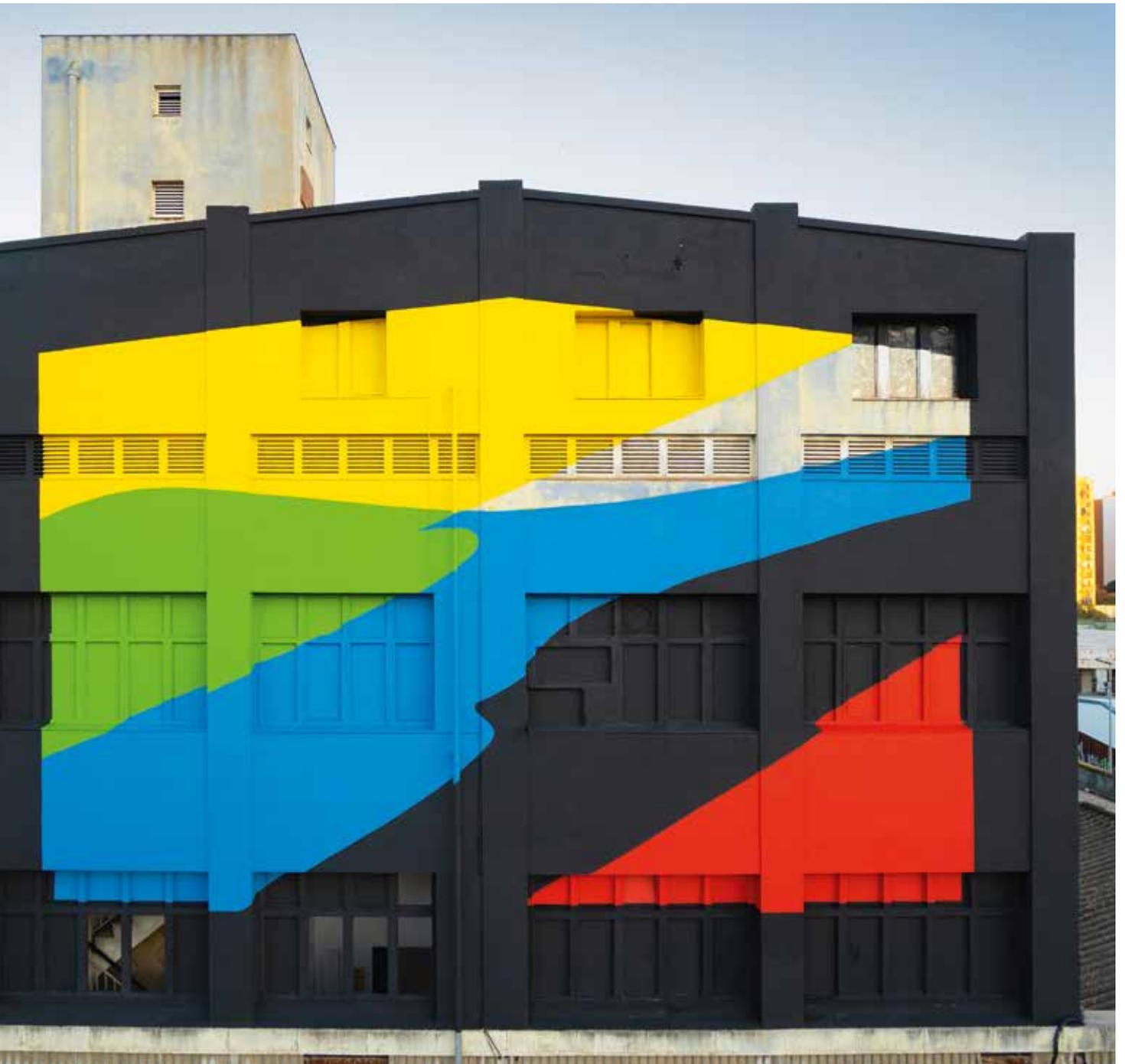
MR: If 'project' is something conceived with a beginning and an end that requires financial resources other than the artist's own, then it has to be Banksy's 'Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem'. Has there ever been a more audacious project in the history of contemporary political art? It's second only to his Sotheby's prank with the 'Shredded Girl with Balloon'.

If on the other hand 'project' is a plan conceived and executed on the streets by someone who simply wants to make their mark on the world, then I'd have to salute every tagger, stencilist, writer and stickerist out there. I'm inspired every day by the tags I pass, that manage to turn the private to public in the most efficient way imaginable under a system that

Famous for his bright geometric murals, Argentinian artist Elian was featured in the last edition of *Street Art Today* as one of the leaders in abstract street art. His large-scale works have continued to dominate the international urban art world as he moves forward, developing his craft through sensitive observations of architectural and social context.

His interventions are the fruit of studied dialogue with the architectural lines. Though the bright colours are often breath-taking, he takes particular care in creating a harmonious environment for the passers-by. 'I find it interesting that a person in his usual routine becomes a spectator / user of a work of art. I think it is an unexpected encounter with creativity.'





1/
Cologne, Germany, 2017
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

2/
Barcelona, Spain, 2018
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

ALEX SENNA

/ Sao Paulo

Few artists today aspire to such sincerity and genuine compassion for his fellow human as does Alex Senna. His illustration-style black-and-white street sketches portray people in the everyday. With positively endearing snippets of love, embrace, romance and tenderness, he demonstrates kindness and empathy. Rumoured to be colour-blind, Alex is self-taught and hardworking, having painted in the streets, galleries and studio for over ten years.

Often drawing inspiration from narratives of family and friends, Alex also presents wider concerns of the São Paulo community, one of disparity and contrast. His characters often take a larger-than-life presence with the simple use of shadowing, rendering an everyday scene suddenly spectacular. Alex talks of universal emotions, reminding us of the extraordinary in the ordinary and of moments that unite us all as human.



CHAPTER 2

088

1/
Civita Campomarano, Molise, Italy, 2017
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

2/
Civita Campomarano, Molise, Italy, 2017
PHOTO BY RODRIGO ERIB

3/
Civita Campomarano, Molise, Italy, 2019
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST



FIGURATIVE



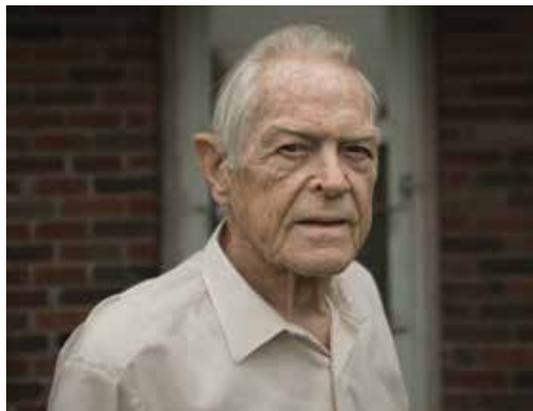
GUIDO VAN HELTEN

/ Brisbane

Best known for his large-scale, site-specific murals, Guido van Helten is a highly talented Australian artist whose breath-taking monochromatic portraits adorn walls around the world. Working in a photorealistic style, he creates delicate and elegant pieces that have an overall atmosphere of melancholy and a deeply sentimental quality. His work is often informed by photographic reference material that is socially important to the area he is working in. Guido always pays special attention to detail and tries to incorporate specific local elements into his pieces.

Guido's work can be found everywhere: from Australia to the United Kingdom, from Eastern Europe to Mexico. His portraits of un-idealised faces of ordinary men, women and children in a stunning, realistic manner are striking in their ability to capture all the emotions of their subjects. Amongst his large-scale pieces, the artist also creates studio works.

CHAPTER 3





1/
Urbandale Nations, Nashville, Tennessee, 2017
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST

2/
Panjim, Goa, India, 2018
PHOTO BY THE ARTIST



ICY & SOT

/ New York

Online
presence and
videos is how
we spread
our word
and
raise
awareness.
We think it's
really
important in
the process
of
creating our
work.

It is clear that you both see the role of an artist as a position of social responsibility. What issues do you think art has the most power to address?

The contemporary issues! Art has always been an important part of change in society. We believe that the role of the artist is to advocate for the freedom and the hope of the general public, and to raise awareness about the issues happening in their time.

Over the past few years, there have been many political, ecological and economic changes in society – many for the worse. What are the main concerns that your work focuses on? Have you ever encountered backlash for expressing your political views?

We always try to ensure that our work conveys a message. In recent years, we have focused more on immigration issues, the refugee crisis, climate change and social justice.

Yes, we have encountered backlash for some of our works about gun violence and borders in the United States, but for the most part we have gained an amazing response from our viewers. Sometimes people even engage with some of our projects. For example, we made a sculpture entitled 'Human Reflection on Nature', depicting humans damaging the environment. We were so happy to see an amazing response! Many volunteers and community members started to clean all the plastic trash from the river. They made sculptures inspired by our piece and installed them along the river the hope of motivating people to care about the environment.

Iran is not a very well-known urban art scene. Can you describe the street culture there?

It was always a small scene, even from the beginning, because it has been always riskier for the street

COLOPHON

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