Context and Content

The Art of WD

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2025943481
The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota

ISBN-13: 978-1-966360-08-7 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 978-1-966360-09-4 (Ebook/PDF)

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Art won’t change anything if the people who see it can’t be inspired to do something. So let’s create something that can inspire people.

—WD

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Foreword

Kostis Kourelis

Whether in museums, magazines, or the streets, art brings people together. This is what happened with a group of strangers who had separately encountered Wild Drawing's (WD's) images in inexplicable contexts ranging from walls to the pages of *The Economist* and *The New York Times*. Each viewer was moved and sought a deeper engagement between the street image and the larger project to which it might belong. Paradoxically, an image in the middle of a public place initiates a conversation that is drowned by other images, sounds, and movement and asks to be completed in other contexts. Some individuals moved by their first encounter of WD found each other and created an informal circle of admirers through the disparate networks of academia, activism, and publishing. This volume is a formal articulation of those informal conversations that transpired over economic crises and global pandemics. There is no doubt in the contributors' minds that WD will be commemorated in the annals of Greek history, when scholars reflect on the history of the twenty-first century. Whether it be the *Owl* or *Homelessness*, WD's work will certainly be included in the future textbooks of modern Greek art. Faced with WD's canonization, our modest volume offers some assistance in contextualizing the recent past. And we look forward to a story that transcends ethnic parochialism, celebrates the national other, and embraces the racially diverse leaders of contemporary Greek art practices.

WD's art brought people together at a time when street art in Greece garnered significant media attention. Those who live outside Greece encountered WD's murals remotely, thrice removed from the original, as (1) illustrations in print or online media reproducing (2) a photograph of (3) the original piece in the streets of Athens, Aruba, Geneva, or Bali. WD's work blossomed while the European economy collapsed. The debt crisis, along with the European refugee crisis, dominated much of domestic and international attention. As a socially engaged artist, WD tackled economic collapse, climate change, racism, and xenophobia; he gave local residents and international flaneurs visual provocations. WD's ability to encapsulate those social concerns into single monumental compositions attracted the lens of journalists who, unfortunately, never credit the creator, in spite of the prominent signature in each piece. By its very public situation, street art can dissolve into daily life and merge with the urban furniture, but it can also rise to the primacy of an icon or a statement spiking attention across media and audiences.

Like Julia Tulke (in this volume), I also encountered WD for the first time through a magazine illustration (*Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*). At the time, I was serving as book-review co-editor of the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* and had developed a policy of promoting original art on the cover. For the May 2017 issue, we commissioned a work by Filipino domestic worker Rosita Sumagaysay. WD's work was on the cover of the May 2018 issue. Through the academic network of Modern Greece Studies, I met Panos Leventis, Julia Tulke, Maria Chatzididakis, and Kostas Avramidis—who had already paid significant attention to WD's work. In a 2017 summer trip to Greece, I finally saw WD's work in person and met the artist and his fearless partner Katerina Karipidou.

WD has already received world recognition. He has been included in international and pan-European surveys of street art (Oxygène and Silhol 2018) and was included in the magazine *Migrate* published by the Loeries Prize, an annual award for the communications and creative industries in Africa and the Middle East (Williams 2018). He has been included in books focusing on urban transformation (Landes 2018), climate change (Laux and Felix 2018), and on bestiaries (Chrixcel, Urbanus, and Audeguy 2018). Conservation on his murals has been featured in *BloombergCity* and *Vice* (Kirk 2016; Noémie 2016). Meeting WD in person, I made a visceral realization of the importance of the Zeitgeist for the history of Greek art. The work had to be amplified, interrogated, and integrated into the academic field of Art History and Modern Greek Studies.

In the summer of 2018, I met WD and Katerina at Cafe Korova at 93–95 Kerameikos Street. We sat outdoors covered by the apartment block's upper floors and just a few feet

away from Dimitris Taxis' mural *I Wish You Could Learn Something Useful from the Past* (2012). Within a few minutes of our introductions, WD pointed out a group that had gathered behind us, looking at Taxis' piece. He pointed out that the group was an organized tour of foreign visitors organized by an informal network of tour guides. It was the first time I witnessed this phenomenon.

At this pleasant summer evening at Korova, we started planning this book as part of a year-long project that included WD's visit to the United States. The Richard C. Von Hess Foundation based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania had recently endowed an artist residency program and we had slated WD to spend a semester at Franklin & Marshall College. Jo Davis in the Office of Public Art of the City of Lancaster planned a mural commission in the city's center. WD's work would be featured at an exhibition in the newly opened Winter Visual Arts Center, and this book would have served as the show's catalogue. We made elaborate arrangements to make the best out of WD's American visit. Artemis Leontis arranged a lecture at the University of Michigan and a potential mural commission on a wall in Ann Arbor where Cacao Rocks and Olga Alexopolou had already completed pieces; William R. Caraher (editor of this press) arranged a lecture and mural commission in Grand Forks, N.D; we arranged a lecture and class-teaching at New York University and explored the Bronx Art Space in New York.

In 2020–21, all plans for WD's American residency were interrupted with the COVID-19 pandemic. American academia and foreign travel came to an abrupt halt, while WD was stranded in Bali unable to return to Greece for many months. The book is, therefore, a small record of a much larger community of people and institutions that admire WD's work in the United States and need to be acknowledged for their enthusiasm, generosity, and brilliant conversations. The project was shepherded along every step of the way by William R. Caraher, editor of the Digital Press of the University of North Dakota and was designed by Andrew Reinhard. We hope that this book is a small step in disseminating WD's brilliant career.

Figure 1. Baron Paul de Granges, Athens-Erechtheion, Caryatid porch, 1868–mid-1880s. Getty Museum.

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The Native and the Foreign

Kostis Kourelis

The Caryatids supporting the Erechtheion in Athens were, according to Vitruvius, permanent markers of the displacement of enslaved women from Karyai (Fig. 1). Although classical art is universal and canonical, it was once site-specific, articulating for ancient viewers the conflicts of belonging and otherness. "Stay and mourn at the monument of dead Kroisos," reads the base of the Anavysos Kouros, the celebrated Archaic sculpture now at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. We have become so accustomed to seeing sculpture in curated displays that we forget its role as an art for the streets. It broadcast civic anxieties over war, crisis, and lost youth; it engaged the public materially; and it was damaged and defaced. In some cases, like the Knidian Venus, it was tagged with semen excretions (Stewart 1997, 86–107). Like the sixth Caryatid displaced by Lord Elgin at the British Museum, the Anavysos Kouros has its own migrant history. It was dug up by Greek looters and broken into ten pieces that were boxed and shipped for sale abroad. The Kouros was discovered by law enforcement in Paris following questions over a similar piece at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Philadelpheus 1935/1936). When returned to Greece in 1937, it filled the media and captured the public imagination. Its non-western Archaic style seemed so weirdly foreign to the nation's classical aesthetics, that it was equated with another repatriation of

the 1.2 million refugees from Turkey (Rodriguez and Vivrette 2024). At the beginning of his novel *Tranquility*, Elias Venezis imagined a meeting between looters and refugees, one digging holes for the past, the other digging holes to cultivate new gardens, and seeing both as futile conditions of Greek modernity (Venezis 1939).

WD evokes the complexities in Greece's public art's heritage in *Break Time!* (Fig. 2). A floating capital at the left identifies the figure as a Caryatid taking a break from the burden of the Erechtheion. The facial features of WD's Caryatid, moreover, suggest a racial otherness. The modern Caryatid is not load-bearing; she is an ephemeral presence on the white walls of a 1930s building. She takes a labor break to enter her social network via cell phone. Won't we, too, engage our cell phones with her image, whether as tourists on the marbled Acropolis or pedestrians in the painted city? Are we not compelled to snap a photo, share it on social media, tag #athensstreetart, and declare that we have broken time in a commemorative moment? WD's mural breaks the blank wall with an allusion to the broken state of Greece's visual culture: the Caryatid at the British Museum separated from her sister or the ten fragments of the Anavysos Kouros. Street artists have played liberally with iconic images of Greek antiquity, but WD's commentary is subtle and encyclopedic. In *Caryatids Crying*, iNO projects a direct image of the Erechtheion Caryatid into three different positions and adds dripping blue tears. iNO's frequent recycling of ancient statues (Nike of Samothrace, Pericles, Democritus, etc.) reduces them to repurposed icons; they change the blank walls on which they are painted, but, unlike WD's Caryatid, the figures remain unchanged.

Figure 2. WD, Break Time! Athens (2015).

Figure 3. WD, Graffiti Lovers. Athens (2014).

In *Graffiti Lovers*, WD inserts a panel of Venus and Cupid in a street scene full of graffiti (Fig. 3). Venus holds up her cell phone and clicks a photo, while Cupid holds a Lego toy. The figures belong to the Renaissance tradition but are far from foreign intruders. They allude to the murals commissioned for the propylaea of the University of Athens in 1862 and completed in 1888, landmarks of modern Greek street art (fig. 4). Law, Medicine, Theology, Astronomy, Physics, etc. each hold an object appropriate to their discipline. WD's Venus (adorned by the tunic of Physics and the immodesty of Health) holds the cell phone with which she captures *SILENCE*, the work of another street artist. Paid for by two expatriate Greeks from Vienna, the murals of the University are no less global or viral.

Figure 4. Karl Rahl and Eduard Lebiedski, The Sciences, The University of Athens (1861–1881). Photo by author.

WD's *trompe l'oeil* of the *Graffiti Lovers* stood a few feet from the Fashion Workshop, a school founded in 2011 by model Vicky Karya (and host of *Greece's Next Top Model*). Like *Taking a Break!*, *Graffiti Lovers* borrows the classical body, it recycles Renaissance perspective banished by modernism, and it revives the large panels of academic painting that elevated scenes of ordinary into calls for moral action.

Figure 5. Georgios Iakovidis, The Refugee Girl (after 1900). National Gallery, Alexandros Soutsos Museum, Athens. Photo by author.

WD's art is socially informed, intervening in the complacency of the pedestrian experience to bring to light underrepresented figures. A number of works by WD thematize directly the condition of being a migrant, a foreigner, or disposed, most famously *No Land for the Poor* (2015) (p. 40). In *Exile* (2014) three migrant children sleep huddled together in a cardboard box (p. 86, figs. 8–9). Although very contemporary in its problematic, we are reminded that the visual motif has deeper origins in the history of Greek art, including Georgios Iakovides' *The Refugee Girl* at the National Gallery, an institution that he directed in 1900–1918 (Fig. 5). Exhausted from walking the streets and peddling flowers, the child rests on the steps of a Neoclassical building and falls asleep. In another piece, *I Need Job not Speech* (2013), we see a hooded sitting figure with a plate for donations (p. 54, fig. 8; p. 147, fig. 2). Here, WD's reference is more generalized, an iconography recognized as a gesture of compassion. We find the same pose in *When I Was Hungry and Thirsty* (Fig. 6) by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz also known for his *Homeless Jesus* (a bronze figure lying on a bench).

WD's artistic practice thematizes artificial boundaries between private and public space, fine art and popular art, what is real and what is imaginary. A key theme is the geography of belonging and the tension of citizen versus foreigner. It is convenient to label WD as a European

Figure 6. Timothy Schmalz, When I Was Hungry and Thirsty. Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral (2017). Photo by author.

non-citizen based on his place of birth and citizenship status. But it is much harder to sustain that attribute in light of his visual language that is far more classically European than any of the natives. Thinking through the binary between native and foreign seems particularly fruitful in the consideration of street art. The Europe in which WD has been practicing in the last two decades has been preoccupied with that very question. Diasporas and crossing boundaries may be a recent pre-occupation in Greece's national discourse, but it has been endemic since the foundation of the nation-state. We will highlight the role of Greek immigrant Takis in the beginnings of graffiti in New York; we will review the prominence of young immigrants in the contemporary arts of Greece; we will reflect on Indonesia's prominence in global art markets (in contrast to Greece's provincialism), making WD an asset for Greece (and not vice versa).

WD's global reach is evident from the long list of countries where he has completed murals: Albania, Aruba, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Kosovo, Malta, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom. Even if a large number of his works murals are located in Greece, WD's *catalogue raisonné* resists attempts to localize him. Panos Leventis first alluded to the importance of a migrant experience in the work of Athens's two leadings artists, Taxis (born in Szczecin, Poland) and WD (born in Bali, Indonesia) but regrets how those biographies of otherness have not been appropriately considered (Leventis 2013, 7). Racial otherness has been a visible liability for WD, making him an easy target to Greek law enforcement. The anxiety of visibility (leading to persecution and arrest) is a trope in the life of a street artist, but doubly problematic when coupled by visible otherness.

Should we not credit the origins of street art to a diasporic Greece? Histories of graffiti credit TAKI 183 as a pioneering figure who—as his name Dimitraki reveals—was the son of Greek immigrants in New York city (Fig. 7). While the second half of his tag grounds him on West 183rd Street in Washington Heights, the first half grounds him to a Greece of his parents. Would it not be hypocritical to claim ethnic pride for the Greek origins of global graffiti outside the nation, while discounting the foreign practices within the nation? What do we then make of the fact that WD's inclusion in a major public museum took place in the US rather than Athens at the National Hellenic Museum of Chicago? The curators mentioned the diasporic roots, "starting as a subculture on the streets in New York in the 1970s, ironically by a Greek American, 'Taki 183'—graffiti street art has evolved into a major artistic movement," and highlighted the centrality of migration, "the art also inspires a public dialogue of broader social issues such as racism, immigration, individual responsibility and empowerment" (Mourtoupalas 2015).

The population of foreign nationals in Athens has been growing drastically from 1.9% in 1991, to 10% in 2011, and 23% in 2021. Sociological fieldwork in the neighborhoods of

The New York Times

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JUL 21, 1971

'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals

Taki is a Manhattan teenager who writes his name and his street number everywhere he goes. He says it is something he just has to do.

His TAKI 183 appears in subway stations and inside subway cars all over the city, on walls along Broadway, at Kennedy International Airport, in New Jersey, Connecticut, upstate New York and other places.

He has spawned hundreds of imitators, including Joe 136, BARBARA 62, EEL 159, YANK 135 and LEO 136.

To remove such words, plus the obscenities and other graffiti in subway stations, it cost 80,000 manhours, or about $300,000, in the last year, the Transit Authority estimates.

"I work, I pay taxes too and it doesn't harm anybody," Taki said in an interview, when told of the cost of removing the graffiti.

And he asked: "Why do they go after the little guy? Why not the campaign organizations that put stickers all over the subways at election time?"

Withholds Last Name

The 17-year-old recent high school graduate lives on 183d Street between Audubon and Amsterdam Avenues. He asked that his last name not be disclosed. Taki, he said, is a traditional Greek diminutive for Demetrius, his real first name.

"I don't feel like a celebrity normally," he said. "But the guys make me feel like one when they introduce me to someone. 'This is him,' they say. The guys knows who the first one was."

Taki said that when he began sneaking his name and street number onto ice cream

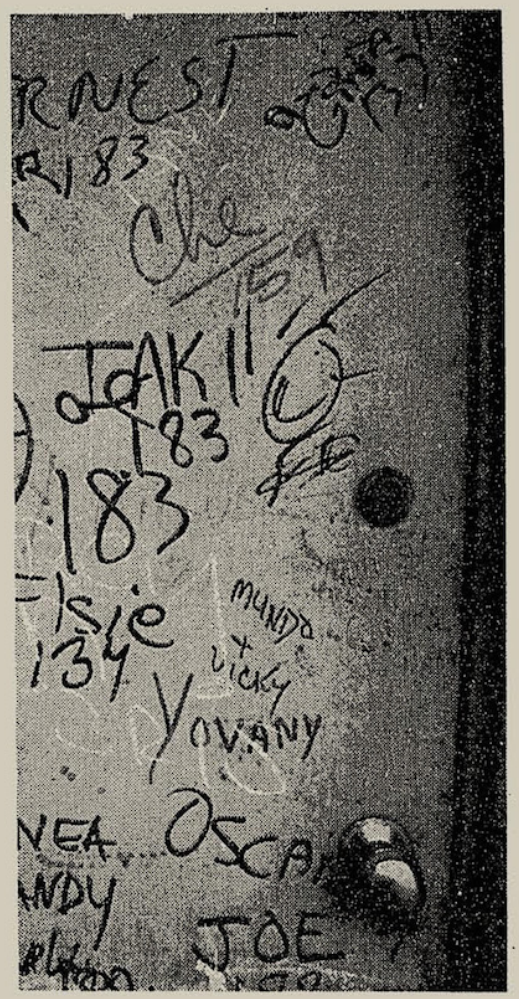


Figure 7. "'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals," The New York Times (July 21, 1971).

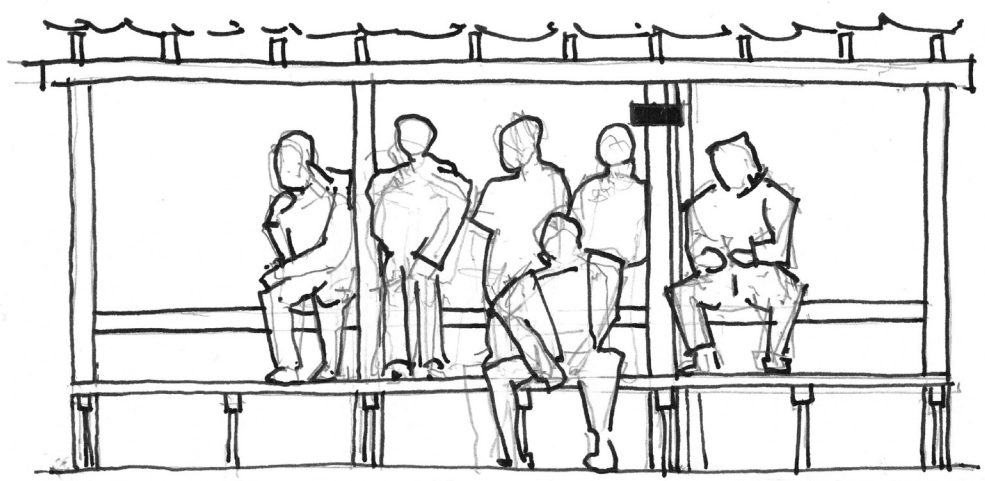


Figure 8. Staging for LiFO photo shoot at Agios Demetrios Loumbardiaris (December 21, 2007). Drawing by author.

Metaxourgeio and Kypseli illustrates how Asian, African, and Eastern European migrants have kept the Athenian economy afloat (Balampanidis and Polyzos 2013). As the children of these immigrants have come-of-age in Athens, they have taken over creative leadership over its expression. Their language is unapologetically global as is their social and familial networks. Taking up the moniker ATH Kids, a collaborative of seven Athenian kids with roots in Congo, Sierra Leone, and Ecuador entered the space of Greek hip hop. Choreographed in the spaces of the city which they fully claim, their videos give visual acuity to the movement just as the 1970s saw the inseparability of graffiti, hip-hop, and break-dancing.

In 2017, ATH Kids appropriated Greek modernism's most iconic spaces, the Loumbardiaris complex in the Philopappos Hill designed by Demetris Pikionis as part of the repaving of the Acropolis in 1951-1957. The Roman Monument of Philopappos is itself a case study in the street art of migrant otherness; commissioned by the prince of distant Samosata (the home of the Kurds), it visually confronted the Acropolis. Historians of modernism have credited the Loumbardiaris project with inventing a counter-modernism, "a Critical Regionalism" that does not romanticize the Greek past but, rather, globalizes it with Asian (Japanese) and American (Frank Lloyd Wright) amalgamations (Frampton 1985; Philippides 1984, 295–300). Its walls recycled marbles from demolished nineteenth-century Athens shaping one of the most beautiful café spots in Europe, which inexplicably closed down in the 2000s. ATH Kids reconfigures this abandoned masterpiece for the era of hip hop by staging their portrait on its unused wooden pavilion (fig. 8).

Figure 9. Theodoros Manolopoulos, record cover, Negros Tou Moria, Thrasos (2022).

In contrast to ATH Kids, Afro-Greek rapper Negros Tou Moria (or BlackMorris) confronts the status of indigeneity more aggressively. He raps in Greek and thematizes the racial tensions of his Ghanaian-Athenian identity. His Greek moniker borrows from Greece's first medieval romance, Alexander Rangavis' *Ο αυθέντης το Μωρέα* (1850). The novel is based on *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott (whom Rangavis admired) and French editions of the medieval *Chronicle of the Morea*. The novel explores tensions between the Morea's native (Byzantine) and foreign (Latin) rulers, while Rangavis' own nativity was challenged when he married the daughter of the Scottish painter James Skene; the mixed marriage caused his firing as director of Greek antiquities (Kourelis 2011–2012, 314–315). Negros Tou Moria plays with Greekness as part of his musical and visual identity. His 2023 album *Θράσος* (Audacity) shows him in the clothes of a Greek revolutionary hero (Fig. 9). The racial conflation of black and Greek is intentionally provocative, but it should also remind the viewer of the vibrant African community that lived in Ottoman Athens, whose erasure from history has not yet caught up with Black Lives Matter.

Another figure that dressed like a revolutionary hero was the folk painter Theofilos Hatzimichail, whose work we would today categorize as Outsider Art. Theofilos was discovered by the avant-garde in the 1920s and heralded as a foundational figure. He painted many murals, including the Zalkos House in Lesvos (1924–1930) that is now in the Museum of Greek Folk Arts. In 2014, WD brought Theophilos into the street, making an argument for continuities (and disruptions) in a long tradition of counter-culture in the official Greek story (Fig. 10). WD might not have grown up in Athens as the child of immigrants, but the social milieu they have created adheres to his own experiences.

WD's career illustrates an important moment when the art of Greece ceased being the product of an ethnic monopoly. Immigrants from Africa, Asia, and South America who had come-of-age in Athens were ready to tell their stories. The most popular manifestation of this immigrant renaissance is Marina Satti who represented Greece in the 2024 *Eurovision* contest. The daughter of a Sudanese father and a Greek

Figure 10. WD, Theofilos (2013).

mother, she took over the Greek airwaves with the pop-traditional song "Mantissa." In the video Satti is accompanied by a multicultural cast who dances through Psiri, a neighborhood with a high concentration of foreign-born Greeks. The scene is saturated with art and graffiti, as well as, with the faces and languages of Asia and the Middle East. In an interview with National Public Radio, Satti notes: "It's one of my favorite streets. There are people from Pakistan and Arabs who live there and work there. There's a market or a bazaar. You can really see the Eastern influences, and then there's the graffiti — and, in this video, a bunch of girls in our jeans and our jumpsuits, dancing" (Kakissis 2017).

Thus far, we have considered how immigrant artists have changed Greek culture from the inside. We have not considered WD's Indonesian experience, which has enriched Greek art from the outside. In 2008, artist I Nyoman Masriadi garnered over one million dollars in an auction of his painting, marking the ascendancy of Indonesian art in the global markets (Spielmann 2017, 1). Modern Greek art, in contrast, does not have the same demand and international reach. Even the most valued pieces of twentieth-century Greek art sell for a quarter of that price in the annual Greek sales at Sotheby's London. Contemporary visual culture, patronage, collecting, and international exposure in Greece remains under the shadow of its more marketable ancient heritage. Modernity in Greece is dominated by its writers—including two laureates and eight nominees for the Nobel prize in literature—and more recently by its films (the Greek Weird Wave of Yorgos Lanthimos). WD has brought the vibrance of the Indonesian art world into Greece.

Modernity in Indonesia has been visual, and its visual artists take center stage (see Dewa Ketha essay). Suharta, Indonesia's dictator from 1965 to 1998, was an avid art collector, even as his oppressive regime imprisoned and killed the leftist artists of the Institute for the People's Culture (Lekra). It is hard to imagine Suharta's Greek contemporaries, the colonels of the 1967–1974 junta, collecting modernist art. The fall of the Suharta regime in 1998 opened up a flood of artistic innovation that included street art. Indonesian arts were framed by the aesthetics of Yogyakarta and Bandung, the two competing art academies of the 1950s. Yogyakarta centered on surrealism, magic realism, decorative abstraction and mythological symbolism. Bandung, the colonialist art academy started by the Dutch, on the other hand, was steeped in imported western figuration. Indonesian identity played out between Yogyakarta and Bandung (Spanjaard 1990, 65).

A similar battle between figuration and abstraction took place in Greece by a movement posthumously called "the Generation of the Thirties," that deployed folkloric visual traditions to expunge the western influences brought to Greece from Munich (first) and Paris (second). In the Sixties, the anti-academic vocabulary of the Thirties morphed into a graphic style of sun-drenched primary colors, clean shapes, and archaizing forms disseminated by inter-

national tourism. Conveniently, the nationalist Hellenism of Greek modernism was grounded in the abstractions of a mid-century American modernism, or the middle-brow translation of Abstract Expressionism (lead by Greek American artists in New York, e.g. Theodore Stamos, William Baziotes, etc.)

Questions of indigeneity have plagued Modern Greece. This is natural, since nation-states are predicated on the self-determination of discreet groups of humans (ethnos) and the territories which they occupy and self-govern (topos). Even if one could construct a linguistic unity between Greek speakers, no-one could do the same through the visual arts. Any notion of "Greekness" in classical, medieval, or modern art makes no sense considering the vast geographical scope of pre-national empires and chains of transmission.

Similarly, the demographic constitution of Athens has never been monolithic. Immigrants from Miletus, for instance, erected gravestones in Roman Athens proudly declaring their hybrid otherness, while African freedmen established communities at the foot of the Acropolis in the Ottoman period (Gray 2011; Ferguson 2010). The first public monuments of the new capital were built by merchant emigres from Bucharest, Odessa, London, and Vienna who left their legacy on the names of their institutions (Arsakeion, Gennadeion, Marasleion, Zappeion, etc.) When Athens became the capital of the Modern Greek state in 1831, it took on the ideological burden of representing a simple and coherent national Greekness that was diametrically opposed to the multinational realities of the city, spanning a wide socioeconomic spectrum from Bavarian royalty to Turkish refugees, or Saudi investors to African-American GIs. Athens's self-image as an ethnically coherent "Greek" city became demographically visible in the 1960s when its rural population abandoned the devastated countryside and created a new concrete megalopolis. The national clarity of this demographic wave, however, might also be challenged considering a parallel migration to America, Australia, and Germany, which financed the monetization of Athenian apartments through family remittances.

Public arts in Greece reveal some fissures in the ideology of a nation brought by the trans-national substructure below the superficial realities of that nation. In her autobiography *Upward Panic*, Eva Palmer-Sikelianos writes about an early piece of public art in 1933, a gigantic neon sign over Lycabettos that "flared every night, effectively changing Athens into Broadway." Palmer-Sikelianos had organized the first international Greek arts festival in 1927. The Delphic Festivals promoted Greek traditional arts and the preservation of craft traditions. After the success of the second Festival in 1932, Palmer-Sikelianos recommended that the Greek state invest in the craft manufacture that the exhibitions and exports had illustrated. She writes: "But I was talking to deaf ears. The only result of this effort was that (with money which, according to my suggestion, would have been spent in building a few handlooms, and in employing a few spinners and weavers to produce a stock of good material) the committee ordered and installed an electric sign, so huge that it covered the whole side

Figure 11. Relief on Athens Hilton, 1963. Photo by Alexialia, Wikemedia (2014).

Figure 12. Painted sign for NISSAN, along the Tripolis-Olympia state road. Photo by author.

of the beautiful hill of Lycabettos: "BUY GREEK PRODUCTS" (Palmer-Sikelianos 1993, 142). Rather than materially promoting Greek production, the state chose to use the cheap media strategy, an act of early neon postmodernity, that was materially made-in-America.

A related slippage between a false-conscious of Greekness and its execution is found in another grand public arts project three decades later. When the history of Greek mural arts is written, a whole chapter will be devoted to Greece's largest public project, a 15-story relief by Yannis Moralis. When the Athens Hilton opened its doors in 1963, street art came to the service of an American multinational corporation (Fig. 11). Traditionalists who mistake street art in Greece as a recent innovation, have ignored the visual landscape of postwar Athens with its larger-than-life corporate neon signs or the ubiquitous posters advertising Hollywood cinema. Another example that typifies the visual culture of the remote rural countryside are the large hand-painted signs that advertise Japanese car company NISSAN or the domestic appliances of PITSOS (Fig. 12). If the street art of the mid-nineteenth-century was Viennese, the street art of the mid-twentieth-century was American.

More recently, Greek street art has served multinational corporations like Nike and Red Bull. The painting of three basketball courts by Bille Gee, Cacao Rocks, Nique, and Same 84 in 2019 illustrates the partnership between Nike, the NBA, and the Greek government in celebrating the career of Greek basketball star Giannis Antetokounmpo. Nique's mural reads "We Have Always Been Bros." Sadly, corporations and the Greek public embraced Giannis only after his star status; while before, he was persecuted, denied papers, lived under the threat of constant deportation to Nigeria (although he was born in Athens), and was not allowed to play in national leagues. WD's politics have sensitized us to the problematics of corporate sponsorship.

Amsterdam and Munich had early forms of graffiti based on its punk underground, but European graffiti emerged in the 1980s with its eyes on American hip hop, punk, and skateboarding. But not in Greece. What is peculiar about Greece is that "subversive" street art was ushered through the most official channels of the Greek Ministry of Culture in the early 2000s. Similarly, punk and New Wave subcultures had a late start and were introduced to Greece, again, through the Ministry of Culture, when Melina Mercouri hosted the *Rock in Athens '85* festival at the Olympic Stadium (where Greek homophobic fans harassed Boy George of Culture Club) (Caraher, Kourelis, and Reinhard 2014, 113, 191–192). On the occasion of the 2004 Athens Olympics, the Ministry of Culture sponsored magazine *Carpe Diem* to organize the Chromopolis festival where sixteen artists from Greece, Brazil, Germany, France, Australia, and South Africa completed murals in ten cities (Luong and Van Poucke 2016, 124–127; Ganz 2009, 128).

In this essay, we have tried to assess the complexities of street at in relation to the native and the foreign. WD is an instructive case study of the present state of contemporary Greek art and its future. The art historian must situate WD's practice in the long history of Greek public arts from the Archaic Anavysos Kouros and classical Caryatids, to the murals at the University of Athens and the Athens Hilton. A close diachronic reading illustrates the disruptive character of those practices geared towards an expression of otherness. The Greek Debt Crisis (2009–2017) and the European Migrant Crisis (2015–2016) heightened anxieties over what is considered foreign in Greece at the same time as downtown Athens was transformed into a multicultural metropolis.

The endless concrete surfaces and whitewashed blandness of postwar Athens has been normalized as native. It was fueled by the growing economies of reconstruction, the urbanization of a large peasantry, the construction of cheap multi-story housing, and the availability of cheap petroleum. The vertical apartment building that typified the social cohesion of a Greek middle class in the 1950s-1980s began to break apart with poorer immigrants renting the lower floors while older Greeks retained residence in the upper floors (Balampanidis

Figure 13. Commercial advertising for Stanco children's apparel on an Athenian wall, 1970s. Photo by author.

2015). The urbanization of Athens in the 1950s created an urban landscape of relentless concrete surfaces whitewashed in white blandness. In *The Seduction of Place*, Joseph Rykwert (2000, 130) argues that street art has emerged universally as "palliative" to the dissatisfaction of bland walls. Street art in Greece as we know it emerged at the same time as the Greek upper middle class vacated the downtown for the northern suburbs (what American historians term white flight) and as the apartment blocks became vertically segregated.

The art of WD brought to the European scene themes and visual languages that were different but parallel to the history of Greece. Although far apart in climate, religion, culture, or shared experiences, the artistic tensions evident in both Bali and Greece share many similarities. Bali was colonized by the Dutch who brought a western academic tradition. The Bavarian royal court brought a related Germanic neoclassicism to Greece. Romanticizing a nonwestern Baliseering corresponds to the discovery of non-western or Byzantine vernaculars in Greece by the Generation of the Thirties. The tension between Yogyakarta and Bandung in Indonesia corresponds to the paradigms of Hellene versus Romios in Greece's national dialectics. In both countries, tourism dominates the exportation of desire that is visually constructed. And finally, both countries survived oppressive totalitarian regimes and cultivated leftist artistic subcultures (Suharta's regime lasting, unfortunately, longer and more recently). WD is a figurative painter distinguished by his technical understanding of the western canon including perspective (see Avramidis essay). He is expert in an academic language with a universalizing history, and he practices it better than his European-born colleagues who might claim its heritage.

Armed by those deep experiences from a globalized Indonesia, WD was able to witness and articulate Europe's tensions between the native and the foreign. Although entirely under-studied, Greece has had a rich visual culture akin to a street art. Lacking strong aristocratic patronage or an artistically progressive church, the modern nation had to be heavy-handed in constructing an urban visual culture. The bankrupt national coffers, moreover, required that this new urban culture had to be funded by international players (at first the Greeks of the diaspora). Both the University mural of 1862 and the Hilton mural of 1963, after all, were foreign-funded projects. Street arts was kick-started in 2004 though the Chromopolis festival that imported artists from abroad. As Julia Tulke illustrates (in this volume), foreign media had a strong hand in constructing Athens as a visual landscape of austerity for all Europe, while *documenta 14* authenticated such claims in the competitive arena of fine arts in 2017.

Under the myopia of presentism, it has been difficult to embrace the idea that Greece has been multicultural and global for much longer than it has been monocultural and national. The sudden proliferation of mural arts on the walls of an economically depressed downtown in the 2010s gave the sensation of a dangerous saturation of visual chaos. The demographic

increase of migrants in Europe has fueled a nativist ideology that has misrepresented the ethnic homogeneity of the nation. A nostalgia for the short-lived and artificial monoculture of the Greek 1960s (like the equivalent MAGA movement in the US) breaks down in the vibrant creative arena of contemporary Greece. But although the nation can accommodate the foreign in basketball or pop music, it has a difficult time acknowledging WD as the visual spokesperson of its times. But within his work, WD has made it possible for the nation to better understand its own long history and the role played by the diaspora, the expatriates, the migrant laborers, and the newly hyphenated citizens.

Duologue. Aubin, France (2022).

Episodic Memory. Antwerp, Belgium (2018).

Dating. Vukovar, Croatia (2019).

Flirting. Dimal, Albania (2021).

The Beauty and the Beast. Valletta, Malta (2015).

Prosperity. Kemi, Finland (2016).

Humane. Naousa, Greece (2016).

Purple Dream. Sala, Sweden (2019).

Nirmala. Nummela, Finland (2022).

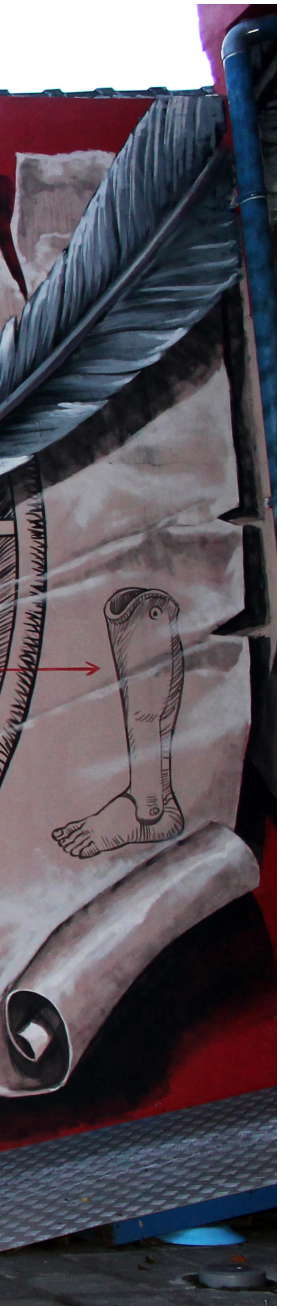
Hymn to the Caribbean Sea. San Nicolas, Aruba (2022).

Pianist's Room. Sala, Sweden (2018).

Shelter. Errekaleor, Spain (2019).

Blessing. Athens, Greece (2019).


World Drawing
with
The Pojoks
2014
"Impossible is just a big word
thrown around by small men
who find it easier to live in the world
they've been given than to explore
the power they have to change it
Impossible is not a fact,
it's an opinion
Impossible is not a declaration
it's a dare. Impossible
is potential
Impossible is Temporary
Impossible is
Nothing"
Disable
Not
Disable



It’s not a Disability, It’s a Different Ability.
Bali, Indonesia (2014).

Message in a Bottle. Morlax, France (2022).

Woman. Athens, Greece (2019).

Hall of Fate. Athens, Greece (2014).

No Land for the Poor. Athens, Greece (2015).

3

Visualizing Crisis on an Urban Canvas: Street Art by WD in the Historic Center of Athens (2009–2015)

Panos Leventis

1. Into the Urban Jungle (2004–2008): WD and the Rise of the Discontents in Central Athens

Since the Olympic Flame was extinguished on a late summer evening of 2004, a sentiment of discontent surfaced and persisted across layers of Greek society, particularly among Athenian youth. This resulted from an often well-founded perception that multiple financial and political scandals involving the sociopolitical elite invariably went unpunished. After December 2008, this sentiment exploded into a socio-urban crisis targeting political, judicial, and financial institutions alike, which were perceived not only as silent observers, but also as active participants in the layers of corruption that plagued public life (Avramidis 2014, Chatzidakis 2014).

This chapter revisits the post-2008 Athenian landscapes of crisis by identifying and interpreting street art works by WD, and the walls of central Athens that carried them, as mirrors, active agents, and foretellers of crisis. It thus falls within a body of research that engages the socio-urban significance of street art in the post-2008 Athenian context, during which visual- and textual-based graffiti encompassed the entire city center. These multi- and inter-disciplinary studies include, among others, Tsilimpounidi (2011, 2012, 2015), Avramidis (2012, 2014), Leventis (2013, 2016), and Tulke (2013, 2016, 2017). We argue for the highly transformative nature of political street art in contexts of crisis in a number of ways: transformative of the walls and architecture that carries the art, trans-

This chapter revisits part of a larger research project conducted between 2013 and 2015, which surveyed Athenian works by street artists Dimitris Taxis and WD. These works were therein interpreted as integral and inseparable features of Athenian socio-urban fabric, offering continuous and updated commentary to the crisis narrative enveloping the post-2008 city. The project and its initial conclusions were presented and debated at a number of conferences and lectures, among them in Łodź, Poland (Sept. 2014), Nicosia, Cyprus (December 2014), Östersund, Sweden (Jun. 2015), and Athens, Greece (November and December 2015). This chapter constitutes the first published fragment of the project.

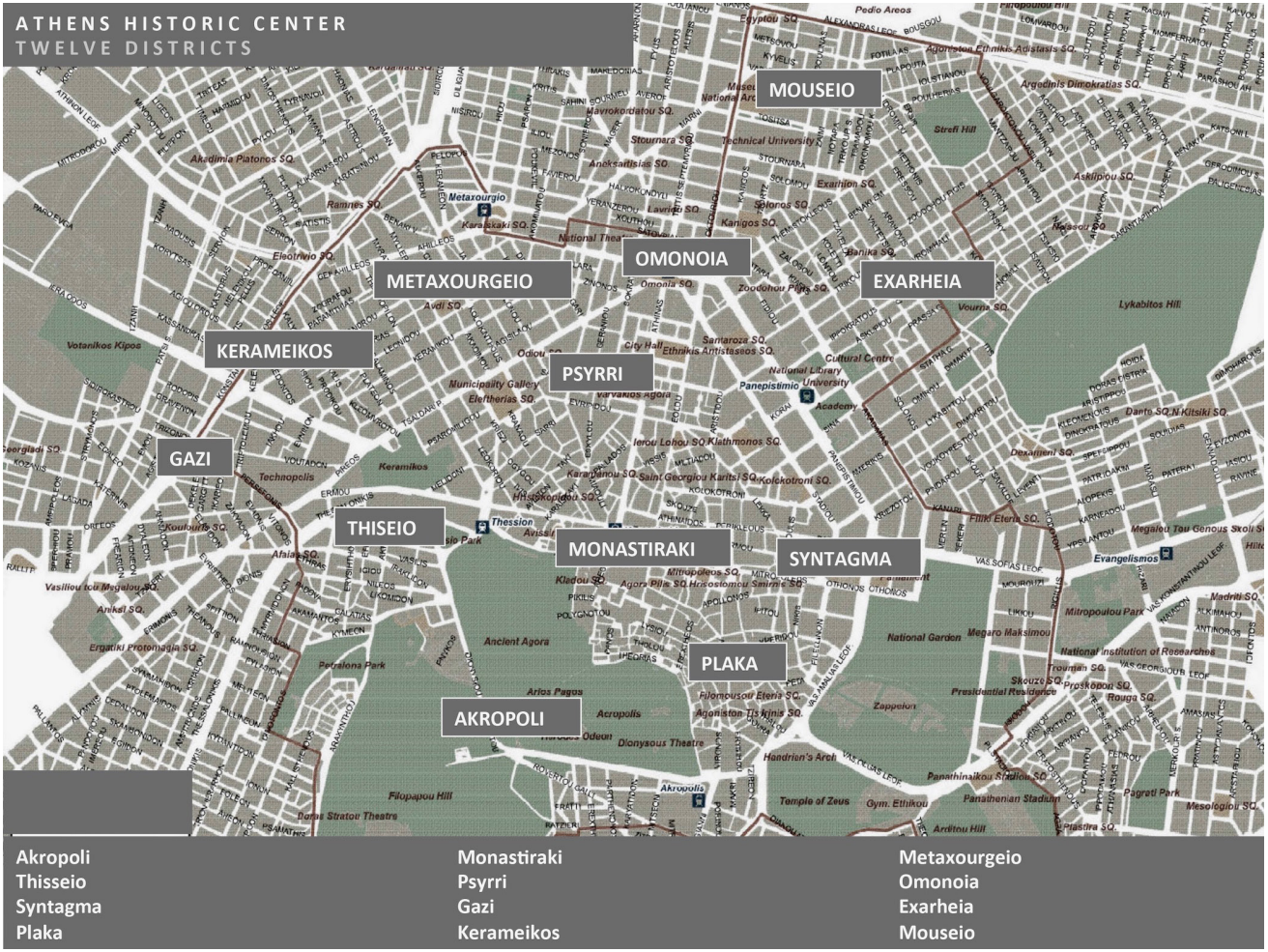


Figure 1. The Athens Historic Center and its districts. Map overlay by author (2015).

formative of the larger urban spaces and places that bind the art with the city, and transformative of the citizens who become active civic participants and agents of resistance.

Born in Bali, Indonesia, WD was surrounded by the uniquely expressive Balinese iteration of Hinduism. He recounted episodes of his pre-Athenian life in interviews with Botoulas (2011), Hulot (2012), Tulke (2013), and Makris (2014). Considerable exposure to varied art forms during festivals and religious ceremonies was unavoidable: painting and hand-made constructions at school, charcoal drawings on the family home walls, shadow puppet theater decoration for performances by family members in temples. Between 2000 and 2005, he attended the Art Lyceum and the School of Fine Arts in Denpasar, the Balinese capital. This was the same time that he first ventured into the world of street art, forming the crew POJOK with friends and classmates, and painting on walls in a variety of public spaces. Examples of that work, such as the fragment *Open Mind, Open Eye*, part of a larger mural titled *The Arts Must Be Crazy*, depicting Einstein's head with part of his skull cut open to reveal his brain, not only betray unique artistic capabilities, but can also be read as reflecting a restless and inquisitive mind superimposed on a carefully observing eye.

By the end of 2006, and half a world away from the Balinese landscapes, WD was already living in, and inquisitively observing, the urban jungle that is central Athens, as it searched for a less corrupt and more just post-Olympic identity.

Central Athens is divided into six pairs of districts, not by following municipal boundaries, but by identifying areas sharing similar topographic and socio-urban characteristics (Fig. 1). At the urban core lie Akropoli and Thisseio, with well-preserved archaeological and historical fabric. East of these lie Syntagma and Plaka, housing the Parliament, Presidential Palace, ministries, embassies, and high-end tourism infrastructure. North of the core, Monastiraki and Psyrri include shopping and entertainment venues addressing local and visiting publics. West of the core, the post-industrial, low-income landscapes of Gazi and Kerameikos, with gentrified and gentrifying pockets, are sites of both avant-gardes and mass leisure. Due northwest, Metaxourgeio and Omonoia are post-2004 re-depressed areas plagued with relative poverty and crime, while due northeast, Exarcheia and Mouseio form the heart of student life and protest movements. This study identified more than 80 works created by WD from 2009 to 2015 in all pairs of districts mentioned above. The narrative that can be re-woven from WD's first paste-ups around revolutionary Exarcheia, to larger-scale paste-ups on squatted buildings in Psyrri and Kerameikos, to visual-based graffiti and collaborations in humble alleys in Metaxourgeio or upscale avenues in Syntagma, and to the ever-expanding murals throughout the center and beyond is significant and

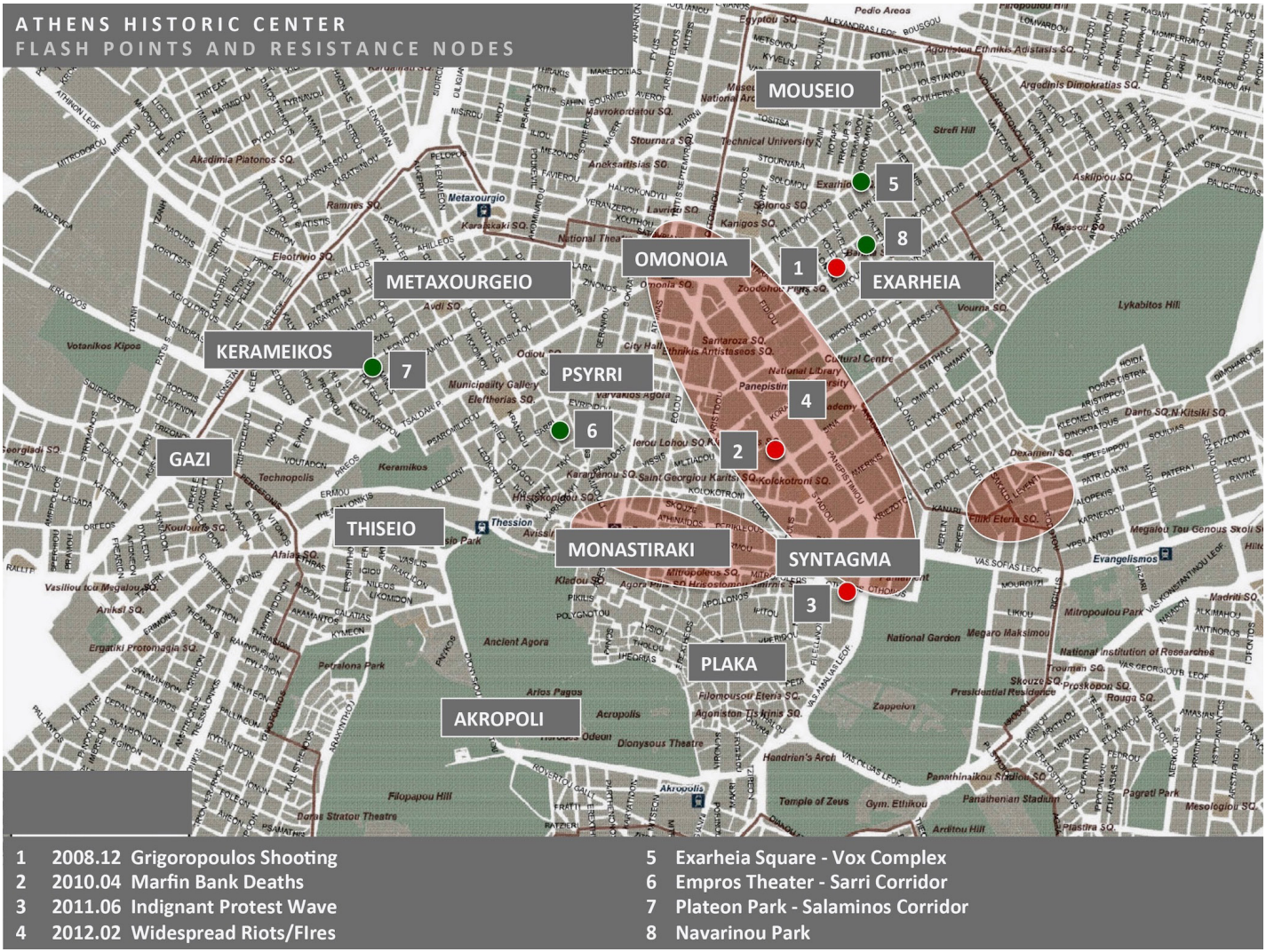


Figure 2. Protest and resistance nodes during events of 2008–2012 in the Athens Historic Center. Map overlay by author (2015).

revealing. These works reflect, contextualize, and publicize crisis by placing it directly on the walls that gave it a stage and in the streets that housed its episodes.

Four flashpoints (protest nodes) and four occupied spaces (resistance nodes) featured prominently during the events of 2008–2012 (Fig. 2). They include Messolongiou Street in Exarcheia where Alexis Grigoripoulos was killed on December 6, 2008; the Marfin Bank branch on Stadiou Street where three deaths occurred on April 5, 2010; Syntagma Square where protesting culminated and where the "Indignants" dwelled during the spring and summer of 2011; and the corridor leading from Omonoia to Syntagma Square, bound by Stadiou and Akadimias Streets, where most of the destruction occurred during February 12, 2012.[1] Works by WD, repeatedly pasted or created on and around these nodes, forms a body of political street art that indeed does not merely represent an ongoing crisis, but actively transforms urban space (Tulke 2017) via its messages. Through this transformation, WD's work not only visually describes alternatives but also influences subjectivities, urges citizens to action, and becomes itself an active agent of narratives of crisis. Following terms used by Kallianos (2013), the street art itself is shown to produce public space, to contribute to the multiple "social antagonistic movements" that permeated the Athenian landscape during these years, and to become part of an "Agency of the Street."

2. Broken Wings (2009–2010): Paste-Ups during the Period from the Grigoropoulos Shooting to the Marfin Bank Deaths

The killing of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos by two policemen in Exarcheia on December 6, 2008 triggered widespread demonstrations, followed by rioting and fires throughout the Athens Historic Center. The destruction was centered along the Omonoia–Symtagma corridor, continued west down Ermou Street connecting Syntagma to Monastiraki Square, and branched north of Syntagma into the wealthy Kolonaki pocket. An 18-month period of instability followed (December 2008–May 2010), which included an election and government change in September 2009 (see Kallianos 2013). Uncertainty over the country's fiscal situation was amplified by the outbreak of the global financial/debt crisis, which played out some of its most dramatic iterations in the Greek parliament and on the streets of Athens. As these events unfolded, WD had been living in Athens for a little more than one year. While the

1. For spatial analyses of 2008–2010 events see Makrigianni and Tsavdaroglou 2011 and Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011.

Figure 3. WD, Broken Wings paste-up series, 36 Solomou St., Exarcheia, ca. 2009–2011. Photo by author (2014).

chronology of his first Athenian street artworks is difficult to determine, it is inferred that they occurred between 2009 and 2011, coinciding with this initial period of crisis. His physical "otherness" paired with his passion for street art led to him finding refuge in graffiti-saturated Exarcheia, his favorite Athenian corner, where he felt "comfortable, not excluded, and among friends" (Hulot 2012). An Indonesian "Other" among the "Others" of Exarcheia, WD entered Athenian street art via a number of self-referential paste-ups that he titled "Acquaintance" or "Street Fighter." He was ready to fight and to create his own "social diary" and his version of a "visual history of marginalized and minority groups" (Tsilimpounidi 2012).

He repeatedly pasted his signature image of a smiling one-eyed puppet held by a boy, an alter-ego of sorts that he described as "classic, easy to remember, [and] a symbol of innocence and violence" (Tulke 2013), not only near the site of the Grigoropoulos killing in Exarcheia, but also on the façade of the occupied cultural squat of Empros Theater in Psyrri, and by the guerilla-urbanism communal park project at Plateon Street in Kerameikos. He simultaneously worked on a larger series of paste-ups depicting full-body portraits of various figures with severed wings. One of the figures was a variant of the familiar boy-with-alter-ego-puppet, but others appeared as well, their faces always turned away from view (Fig. 3).

As with the previous works, WD pasted these near familiar resistance nodes, including the vicinity of the main square in Exarcheia, by the Empros squat in Psyrri, and along the Sarri Street corridor in Psyrri. These works were humble in scale and scope but quite powerful in the intention and message of empathy they carried. They evidenced early on that WD's corpus would become one of the prime Athenian examples of a street art that functions as "a viable and valuable expression of human rights issues" and part of a growing "symbolic terrain of resistance" (Tsilimpounidi and Walsh 2011). Broken wings were by now not just a "privilege" of marginalized or minority groups. They had filled the city: Whether demonstrating in the streets or watching from their balconies, while trying to physically or vocally express resistance, opposition to or solidarity with unfolding events, in the end the majority of Athenians felt increasingly helpless and powerless in a city swirling deeper into crisis.

This period would end (again) in violence on May 5, 2010: at news of the country's fiscal default and the signing of an IMF/ECB/EU "rescue" loan agreement, and while between 100,000 and 500,000 people marched peacefully in Athens against the proposed austerity measures that the agreement with the creditors necessitated, a large wave of rioting followed. Three people, including a pregnant worker, choked to death inside a Marfin Bank branch on Stadiou Street after Molotov cocktails were thrown in the building. The shock of

Figure 4. WD, All you Need is Joke paste-up series, 19 Sfaktirias St. and Salaminos St., Kerameikos, ca. 2009–2011.

the Marfin deaths numbed the momentum of protest for a number of months, but the city was by now catapulted into the center of the global financial crisis. Beyond the evident rage recognized by WD as the main sentiment through Athenian streets (Hulot 2012), he also saw the resulting prevailing mood of sadness and resignation and incorporated it into a fourth series of paste-ups. While years later he would still despair that "smiles today have vanished [from the city]" (Makris 2014), his 2010–2011 response was a series of portraits featuring

Figure 5. WD, Clowns paste-up series, 1 Agatharhou St., Psyrri, ca. 2009–2011. Photo by author (2012).

thick, smiling, clown-like red mouths painted over serious or sad faces, and the slogan "All you Need is Joke" written below them. He placed them in the same nodes as previous works, some of them surrounding the main square and the occupied Vox Theater squat in Exarcheia, others lining the Salaminos Street corridor and its alleys in Kerameikos (Fig. 4).

Variants of this theme gave a fifth series of at least four pasteups. Two found themselves again near or in the Sarri Street corridor in Psyrri. Psyrri had already quasi-gentrified before

Figure 6. WD, Jokers paste-up series, 98 Agisilaou St., Kerameikos, ca. 2009–2011. Photo by author (2012).

2004 without coherent planning or vision and by now, beyond the Empros Squat or the Sarri corridor, lay mostly in a semi-abandoned state. These works featured the familiar smiling clown-like red mouths, now painted over the evidently pensive face of, among others, Michaelangelo's *David*. (Fig. 5).

Meanwhile, southwest of Psyrri, the gentrification of neighboring Kerameikos and Gazi, already home to a number of *All you Need is Joke* pasteups (see above), had already gathered pace following the May 2007 arrival of the Metro there. Both districts, and especially Gazi, quickly mutated into entertainment nodes for the wider city, draining any remaining life out of Psyrri. WD's *Joke* paste-ups also mutated, and their message darkened further. A series of *Chef-Jokers* appeared in Kerameikos and Exarcheia (Fig. 6).

Their smiles became evil. Textual messages accompanying them grew from simple slogans to paragraphs. They offered direct commentary on unfolding events, on who was "serving" crisis to whom, on the uses of knives or guns, etc. Rather than the expected reverse that one would expect (see, for example, the discussion in Pangalos 2014), textual graffiti, quite political in its nature, was now evolving out of WD's street art. His dark Jokers, possibly completed at a date around the May 2010 Marfin deaths, prophesied that for Athens the worst was yet to come.

3. R/Evolutions (2011–2012): Graffiti Collaborations during the Occupation of Syntagma Square and the Fires in Downtown Athens

By early 2011, opposition to loan agreements, bank bailouts, and the systematic tearing up of post-WWII social contracts, gave rise to the "Indignants" movement in the Mediterranean and beyond. The "Indignants", inspired by the hope that a novel, just social order could arise out of crisis, found fertile ground in Athens. A series of mostly peaceful demonstrations occurred in May and June 2011. They culminated on Syntagma Square, by now continuously occupied and squatted as part of the "Indignants." Meanwhile, blanket directives taken to secure the initial loan were choking most, if not all, social strata. Post-demonstration riots turned ever-more violent. The center suffered considerable destruction on June 29 as more measures cleared parliament for implementation and again on December 6 on the three-year commemoration of the Grigoropoulos killing. During this explosive period, WD created at least 40 works from September 2011 to September 2012. Five were studio drawings,

Figure 7. WD and Sonke, Beauty and the Beast, Leonidou St. & Kolokynthous St., Metaxourgeio (November 2011). Photo by author (2014).

canvases, or sculptures for contributions to group exhibitions, and 35 were street art pieces, including four on the island of Milos and one in Thessaloniki. The remaining 30 Athenian works feature a number of paste-ups, but most pieces were now visual-based graffiti completed on-site. This study located 12 pieces from this period still on downtown walls, which evidence a diversification of both the methods and sites for the works.

WD now painted directly on walls—and thus spent more of the creative process outside in urban space—rather than pasting up pieces that had been completely prepared in the studio. He was finding himself more at ease in the city, as reconfirmed by five works that constitute his first large-scale Athenian murals. Furthermore, it should not be considered coincidental that 12 of this period's works are collaborative. He completed many of these between fall 2011 and spring 2012 with artists Cacao Rocks and Sonke, with whom he also collaborated on a piece for the exhibition/festival "Urban Lovers" organized by *Ozon* magazine at the Romantzo cultural hub in Omonoia. He felt more at ease in the city, and he was working with others. By July 2012, collaborations had also been executed with writers Icons, Komet, Scar, Señor, Steez, and Zyan. These works were located in Kerameikos, Metaxourgeio, Psyrri, along the Omonoia-Syntagma corridor, and elsewhere, at times away from nodes directly connected to the crisis, at times right in the heart of them. With his contributions, however, WD invariably took what were largely apolitical visuals and darkened their message, as if insisting that no matter who or where you found "your" Athens to be during this time, there was no escaping the way the crisis narrative was shaping and changing the whole city (Fig. 7).

As unemployment skyrocketed and northern European friends and so-called partners became new colonial rulers that had to discipline the perceived lazy southern natives (see Leontidou 2014), Athenians searched for alternative ways to vent their frustration. The void in the dwindling list of available options was to be filled by another political extreme. The rise of the fascist Golden Dawn party was made plain on February 12, 2012: following the passing of a second, broader loan agreement between Greece and the IMF/ECB/EU, and a 500,000-strong protest in Syntagma Square, widespread clashes took place not only between the leftists/anarchists and the police, but also between protesters and the bullies of Golden Dawn. By the end of that day, more than 45 buildings, including many listed edifices, were set on fire along the Stadiou-Panepistimiou-Akadimias corridor. WD reacted to these events by revealing that fascism was now his greatest fear (Hulot 2012). Via his singe-authored body of work, he offered increasingly evident direct commentary on the new ramifications of crisis. When alone, he still created almost exclusively in Exarcheia. Asked in January

Figure 8. WD, No Country for the Jobless, 35 Zoodohou Pigis St., Exarcheia (January 2013). Photo by author (2014).

Figure 9. WD, Jobless Clown, Eresou St. and Themistokleous St., Exarcheia (November 2012). Photo by author (2014).

Figure 10. WD, Athens Burning (Welcome to Athens), 16 Tzavela St., Exarcheia (June 2012).
Photo by author (2014).

2012 how the city influenced his art, he responded: "It just takes a walk in Athens to realize the different cultures, the uncertainty and the rage of the people, the inequality in society and the tough present times […]. I live in between these things so they influence my work […]" (Hulot 2012). Resulting subject matter evolution is the *No Country for the Jobless* stencil in at least two January iterations, the February *E-Disaster/Keep Away* road-sign stencil featuring a crumbling Euro structure allowing a Greek-flagged car to fall in the sea, and the April pensive primate portrait of *R/Evolution*, completed following the destruction in the city center (Fig. 8).

While WD would soon use the theme of revolution repeatedly on university campuses (see the following section), these pieces, and a number of collaborations mentioned above were now located on or near entries of in-use apartment blocks. They engaged dwellers of Exarheia and other districts in direct dialogue, mirroring their disillusionment, questioning their resignation, and urging them to action. The issue of poverty and unemployment would be taken up again with a revisiting of the earlier *Clowns* and *Jokers* series via pieces such as *Jobless Clown*, which WD interpreted to signify that "only unemployment and depression" persisted now in the city (Makris 2014) (Fig. 9).

But perhaps WD's most iconic work of 2012 was executed in the limelight of the double elections of May and June. Though it was perhaps to be expected that *Athens Burning* would also be located in Exarcheia, it was undoubtedly purposefully mounted on the façade of a burned-out neoclassical building on Tzavela Street—barely one block away from the Grigoropoulos shooting location on the corner of Tzavela and Messolongiou (Fig. 10).

This work, which WD himself interpreted as a play on state-sponsored tourism advertisements for the city, appeared at one of the most critical moments in the Athenian crisis narrative. It became an iconic representation of the city-in-crisis in national and international media for months and years to come. Willingly or not, it re-imagined the reasons why visitors would choose Athens by functioning as an alternative "welcoming" to all sorts of "tourisms of crisis" that were already flocking to Exarcheia and throughout the center in order to experience the Athenian predicament first hand.

Figure 11. WD, Poverty is the Parent of Crime and Revolution, Athens Polytechnic, Exarcheia (September 2012). Photo by WD (2012).

Figure 12. WD, Fall in R/Evolution, University of Athens, Zografou (July 2013). Photo by WD (2013).

4. Walls of Desperation (2013–2015): Murals, Stable Financial Indicators, and Collapsing Urban Realities

Following the double elections of May and June 2012, and under the new government of the right-wing New Democracy party, an initial stabilization of the sociopolitical context took hold. But the reality on the streets was markedly different than theoretically improving economic indicators. Against the backdrop of a fatigued and by now largely silent urban populace, the triumphant domestic and international neoliberal establishment was implementing directives by Greece's creditors, disbanding decades-old protective social webs. Whether by calculated and deliberate plans, or simply by divestment in order for mounting debt and interest payments to be met, the health, education, and social welfare systems became unrecognizable by the time of the next change of government in 2015. During this time, WD's prolific work further expanded in geographic and thematic scope. He was completing ever-larger murals with increasing frequency. Though the volume and location make for a survey of this period's pieces by WD to be a formidable challenge, a total of roughly 100 works can be identified as completed between September 2012 and September 2015: 10% of these were executed during summer visits to the islands of Crete, Kea, Lesvos, Naxos, and Serifos; 10% were completed in Greek cities such as Ioannina, Kavala, Kastoria, Patra, and Thessaloniki; 10% were completed during three visits to Berlin and another 10% during stays in European cities such as Caen, Helsingborg, and Malta. An additional 10% were completed during a four-month sojourn in Bali that included a solo exhibition, and another ca. 10% can be identified as non-street art pieces like canvases, etc.

Of the remaining 40 works, at least 30 can be localized with certainty in central Athens, and 14 were surveyed by this study. Thus, though Athenian walls were now site of only half to one-third of WD's work, the intensity of their political messages increased further. When he worked abroad, the content of the work diversified and now often included environmental activism. But when he was painting in Athens, commenting on the crisis remained prevalent and unavoidable. Revolutionary themes became more frequent and direct. In the center, he urged Monastiraki that *Enough Is Enough (Open Your Eyes)* (June 2013). Historic figures were employed once more, as had been the case in the *Clowns* series. This time, the sites were university campuses, and the work was at a mural scale. At the onset of the 2012–2013 academic year in September, Aristotle is about to throw a Molotov cocktail at the Athens Polytechnic in Exarcheia (Fig. 11) as the sentence *Poverty is the Parent of Crime and Revolution* features behind him.

At the Zografou campus of the University of Athens, as the academic year was ending the following July, two tear-gas-masked figures walk in front of a wall carrying the Che Guevara quote "Revolution is not an apple that falls when it is ripe. You have to make it fall" (Fig. 12).

Was there any revolutionary urge or will remaining in Athenians? The bill for criminal miscalculations by both Greek and EU political and financial elite was now demanded from the most underprivileged social strata. Poverty, homelessness, lack of adequate health care, and lack of urban maintenance enveloped the city. After 30 months of obedient implementations, the government could manage neither continued support from European partners nor to hold on to power until the completion of its mandate. Early elections were called in January 2015. The left-wing Syriza party was catapulted to power with a promise to cancel all loan agreements and lead the country out of the Euro—and possibly the EU. But as reality quickly set in for the new governors, an about-turn followed, and a third loan agreement was agreed to in July. Uncertainty, shock, and the urge to oppose, gave way to anxiety and desperation. During this time, new walls by WD throughout the city center comment on the anxious and desperate state of its citizens. Though feeling evidently restricted in his invited *Controlled* piece at the "No Respect" exhibition of the Onassis Cultural Center (Apr. 2014), in the streets of Psyrri he freely completed pieces like *Solidarity* (Nov. 2013) and *Exile* (Sept. 2014). More than in any other district, though, it was again in Exarcheia that the most evocative and time-consuming works surfaced. On the crumbling ruins of a house on Eressou Street, the mural *Five Euro* (June 2014) depicts a faded and abused "cheapest" of paper Euro notes featuring a figure emerging from a window of the ruined façade, holding their face with both hands in desperation (Fig. 13).

Given the socio-urban context, one can perhaps imagine this figure as a personification of the city of Athens, or even of Greece as a whole. As the Syrian and other conflicts gave rise to the refugee tide that reached Greek shores in 2015, the "Greek Crisis" and its Athenian iterations headed into a yet unforeseen new chapter. WD widened the scope of his work with street art encompassing this scale and subject matter as well. Based on an oil painting he had completed in 2013, he executed *No Land for the Poor* (July 2015), stretching for more than 10 m on the complete front façade of a disused building on Benaki Street in Exarcheia (Fig. 14).

Though WD's work was perhaps now entering and engaging a truly global scale, his Athenian creations of 2009–2015 remain one of the most recognizable bodies of crisis-themed political street art in Greece and beyond. The visual storyteller that is WD took on the crisis-hit city via the volume of his work and via the work's directness, intensity, and

content. In turn, by identifying, surveying, and interpreting roughly 80 of these works, this study places them within, and argues that they are evidently inseparable from, the surrounding socio-urban and temporal context. The works were read as both anticipation and reflection of events taking place in the center of Athens. In WD's hand, Athenian walls became pages and authors, media and commentators, mirrors and reflections, prophets and prophesies of crisis. They took on a social function and civic duty of their own (Brighenti 2009, Young 2019), calling for initiatives and actions that can alter (mainstream?) realities and re-empower marginalized urban populations, and re-engaging a disenfranchised public with socio-urban civic processes.

Figure 13. WD, Five Euro, 53 Eressou St, Exarcheia (June 2014). Photo by author (2014).

Figure 14. WD, The Illusion of Freedom. Athens, Greece. Photo by WD (2022).

Dread Dream. Bali, Indonesia (2024).

Money Kills. Bali, Indonesia (2015).

Break Free. Bali, Indonesia (2020).

Facing the Future. Sumatra, Indonesia (2020).

They Tried to Bury Us but They Didn't Know We Were Seeds. Bali, Indonesia (2020).

Study. Naxos, Greece (2018).

Mindtrap. Berlin, Germany (2016).

Old Skull. Berlin, Germany (2015).

Box of Imagination: A Tribute to Moebius. Cheltenham, UK (2019).

4

Changing [Sup]positions: Perspective and [Hyper]reality in the Construction of WD's *Trompe l'œil*

Konstantinos Avramidis

The place is Aliko Beach, Naxos Island, Greece. The time is 12:27 pm, August 2, 2020. The breeze of the Aegean Sea at the abandoned hotel on this low hill overlooking the sea allows my presence under the strong midday sun. I stand in the middle of a slightly discolored turquoise circle with a pointed arrow reading "point of view" (Fig. 1). I adjust my body to the circle and my eyes follow the instructions on the floor. I'm staring at *Beaching*, as I would find out later. It depicts two colorful, supernaturally big birds. I wonder whether this is one of the many rare species residing in the fragile ecosystem of the area that was disturbed when this hotel was erected in the early 1970s. The bird feathers somehow resemble the local famous cedar forest. The pictorial scene is completed with a blue sky and a beach fusing the drawing with the reality.

Of course, this is not my first encounter with WD's work. Yet, it is the first time that this encounter is directed. I look around and see more WD pieces and couldn't resist exploring the entire site. I start walking and remember the words of urban designer Gordon Cullen (1961, 118) on embodied perception: we apprehend space "through kinesthetic experience." Gorillas, sea dragons, elves, three-eyed giants, and all sorts of exotic animals and surreal creatures inhabit the abandoned hotel. But they don't just occupy they walls. WD's pieces interact with them: they extend them, offering (an illusion of) depth, openings and materiality, to name a

Figure 1. WD, Point of View, Naxos, Greece (2015). Photo by author.

few. Most of these series of in-situ interventions and installations are part of the open-air solo show "Unruly Days" that took place after an invitation in 2018, whereas the others were produced illicitly in 2015 (Perzycka-Borowska et al. 2024). I keep exploring the abandoned hotel ignoring the writings on the wall warning me to be cautious: "danger, walls are falling," they read. "The images on the wall fall apart when you move anyway," I'm thinking.

WD has become famous for the creation of his trademark context-sensitive, (hyper)realistic images. His *trompe l'œil* creations, regardless of their theme and protagonists, interact with all sorts of architectural structures producing compelling optical illusions. Through his work, WD takes op-positions in relation to social injustices, environmental issues, and political matters. His pieces raise awareness and mobilize the passersby, literally and metaphorically. They require the observer's involvement to visually (re)construct the images. This is usually achieved through the manipulation of the architectonic space and the introduction of vantage points that enable the perception of the artwork. In so doing, the completion of the image lies in the viewers, thus transforming them from passive observers to active, embodied participants. In WD's work, geometry subjectifies rather than objectifies the art. I would argue that there is a correspondence between the content of WD's works—i.e., taking position and raising awareness—and their form. The goal is to highlight how WD, by forcing us change our physical positions, also manages to challenge our sup-positions in relation to the matters he wishes to address. To do so, let us focus solely on this subset of his oeuvre and carefully study a number of such artworks. I begin with a short historical review of and philosophical reflection on the technique to position WD's work in the wider context and then move to a critical commentary on a selection of *trompe l'œil* pieces that has been executed in Athens before returning to Naxos at the end.

Trompe l'œil is not new (Ebert-Schifferer et al. 2003). It dates back to ancient Greek and Roman wall paintings and reached its apogee during the Renaissance and Baroque periods with the famous, sophisticated frescoes (Fig. 2). *Trompe l'œil* is a technique that through the deployment of perspectival depth and photorealistic imagery, and, by interacting with or replicating architectural and environmental elements, creates an optical illusion of a three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface. Deriving from the French phrase "deceiving the eye," *trompe l'œil* as an artistic genre and scholarly subject regained prominence in the recent years (Grootenboer 2006). *Trompe l'œil* is historically found in interior spaces and is often associated with religious iconography (D'Otrange Mastai 1976). It depicted architectural and natural elements that visually extended religious spaces thus allowing people come closer to the divine and, by extension, emphasizing the powerful ontological conno-

Figure 2. Andrea Pozzo, trompe l'oeil on St. Ignazio's ceiling, 1685. Public domain.

tations of this technique. *Trompe l'œil* has frequently been used by nobility to decorate palaces (e.g., studiolos) and, later, bourgeois interiors because it could bring the outside world inside whilst offering an illusion of control and ownership of the outer world to the wealthy residents (cf. Avramidis 2019). Recently, *trompe l'œil* has become fashionable once more, this time outdoors, as a subgenre of street art and murals movements (e.g., 3D chalk art), through the introduction of popular culture themes or in association to conceptual art (e.g., Varini 2004).

By using this technique, WD positions himself and his work within this lineage. In so doing, he not only elevates graffiti writing to art but also breaks down the barriers between distant historical instances of parietal writing thus highlighting that their dividing line is thin or even nonexistent, encouraging us to study them together in continuity (Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi 2017). It also emphasizes the situated nature of these works and, by extension, the need to account all these genres in their social, political, and spatial context (Avramidis 2014). Interestingly, WD identifies himself as someone who wildly "draws" rather than "paints." If we move beyond the somewhat-limiting dry-wet, lines-stains, pen-brush comparisons between drawing and painting, we can identify as the common denominator of both gestures the notion of trace (Flusser 2014). Drawing, however, is often associated with geometric precision and systems of projection.

The birth of central projection in the fifteenth century made *trompe l'œil* much more realistic, compelling, and deceiving. In his study on parallel projection, Massimo Scolari discusses Pompeian wall paintings in relation to spatial illusionism. In a time well before the invention of common linear perspective and the Renaissance, he sees each of these interventions more like a scenography rather than painting whilst arguing that "illusion is the most desirable gift of pictorial representation" (Scolari 2012, 28). Linear perspective would push the illusion to extreme levels given that it is a two-dimensional representation that approximates how three-dimensional scenes or objects are perceived by the (single) human eye. It illustrates how an "environment might appear to the eye of an observer looking in a specific direction from a particular vantage point in space" (Ching 2015, 107). Its major characteristics are the convergence of parallel lines, diminution of size, and foreshortening, all contributing to a realistic portrayal of the depicted scene (Ching 2015, 112–117).

There are three types of linear perspective in relation to the observer's angle of view and the number of vanishing points, i.e., the points where the lines converge: one-, two-, and three-point perspective. One-point contains one vanishing point where all lines converge. When looking down the axis of a space positioned perpendicularly towards its termination,

it places us in the scene, puts emphasis on depth, and often has a dramatic effect. It is commonly used for interiors. Two-point perspective has two vanishing points at the horizon line and appears when we are facing an inward or outward corner and are typically not positioned perpendicularly to any surfaces of the scene. The emphasis is on corners and edges, on X-Y axes so to speak, makes structures look endless; that is why it is used primarily for the depiction of exteriors. In three-point perspective, the third vanishing point is not on the horizon line. The focus here is on the Z axis, and it is frequently used for aerial or ground views at eye-level. By extension, the viewer is usually either on top or below the scene, i.e., outside of it. Despite the differences, perspective types rely on the station point, namely the relative position of the observer to the object. A basic understanding of these types allows us to appreciate the aims of the maker in creating the pictorial scene and how a perspective construction can direct our looking by framing our vision. WD shows a clear preference for one-point perspective, which reveals his intention not only to create more evocative illusions but also to place us into the scene of action. This placement turns us into witnesses of the issues or concerns he wishes to address. Regardless of the type, perspective offers an optical, experiential, and subjective reality contrary to parallel projection, which gives us an abstract or objective view of reality.

The discovery of regular linear perspective—as a key component of contemporary *trompe l'œil*—enabled not only a mathematical control of the physical world but also the "scientific objectification of reality" (Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier 1998, 34). Albrecht Dürer's famous *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman* (ca. 1600) could not illustrate this condition more vividly (Fig. 3). *Trompe l'œil* usurps this scientific knowledge of visual perception and uses it against itself. By positioning the eye in the vanishing point, art historian Norman Bryson (1990, 144) argues, the viewing subject is annihilated as the universal centre, thus abolishing its sovereignty. This leads to a paradoxical reversal: the objectification of the subject and the realisation of the virtuality of the real. This im-position challenges our visual expectations and questions our dis-position in the world.

WD frequently deploys anamorphic perspective, or what is often termed "hidden" and "magic" perspective: a distorted representation of an image which appears regular only when observed from a specific angle and/or requires a device to become recognizable (e.g., a reflecting cone). Deriving from the Greek prefix *ana-* and word *morphe*, meaning "re-" and "form" respectively, it refers to a deformed image that in order to get re-formed needs to be viewed from a certain point. Probably the most famous anamorphic painting in the history of the art is *The Ambassadors* created by Hans Holbein in 1533, which de-

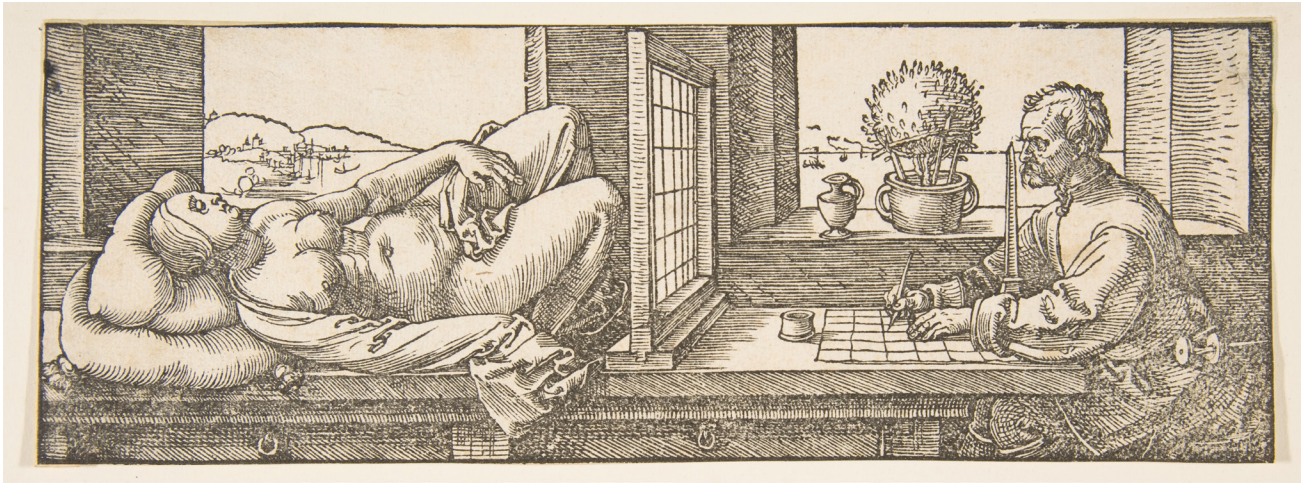


Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer, Draughtsman Making Drawing of a Reclining Woman, Nuremberg, Germany, 1538.

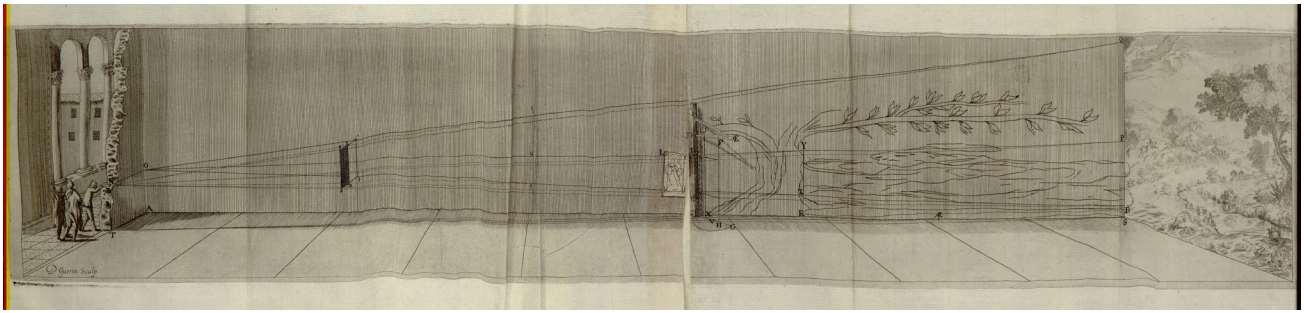


Figure 4. Emmanuel Maignan, Anamorphic perspective device with direct reference to the trompe l'œil of Saint Francis of Paola, Perspectiva Horaria. Rome, 1648, p. 438. Public domain.

picts two French diplomats in a rich interior and an anamorphic skull at the bottom-centre of a composition, thus making a hidden comment on the vanity of wealthy living. At a larger scale is the anamorphic fresco *Saint Francis of Paola* painted in 1642 on a corridor wall of the Trinità dei Monti Church in Rome by mathematician and cleric Emmanuel Maignan (1648) (Fig. 4). It is based on Maignan's as well as his fellow friar Jean-François Niceron seminal work on "curious perspective" (1638), and it seemingly depicts a landscape with some irregular shadows that, when viewed from a different angle, reveals the figure of Saint Francis (Fig. 5). Anamorphosis "delays access to deeper meaning" by controlling our perceptual understanding (Quay et al. 1991).

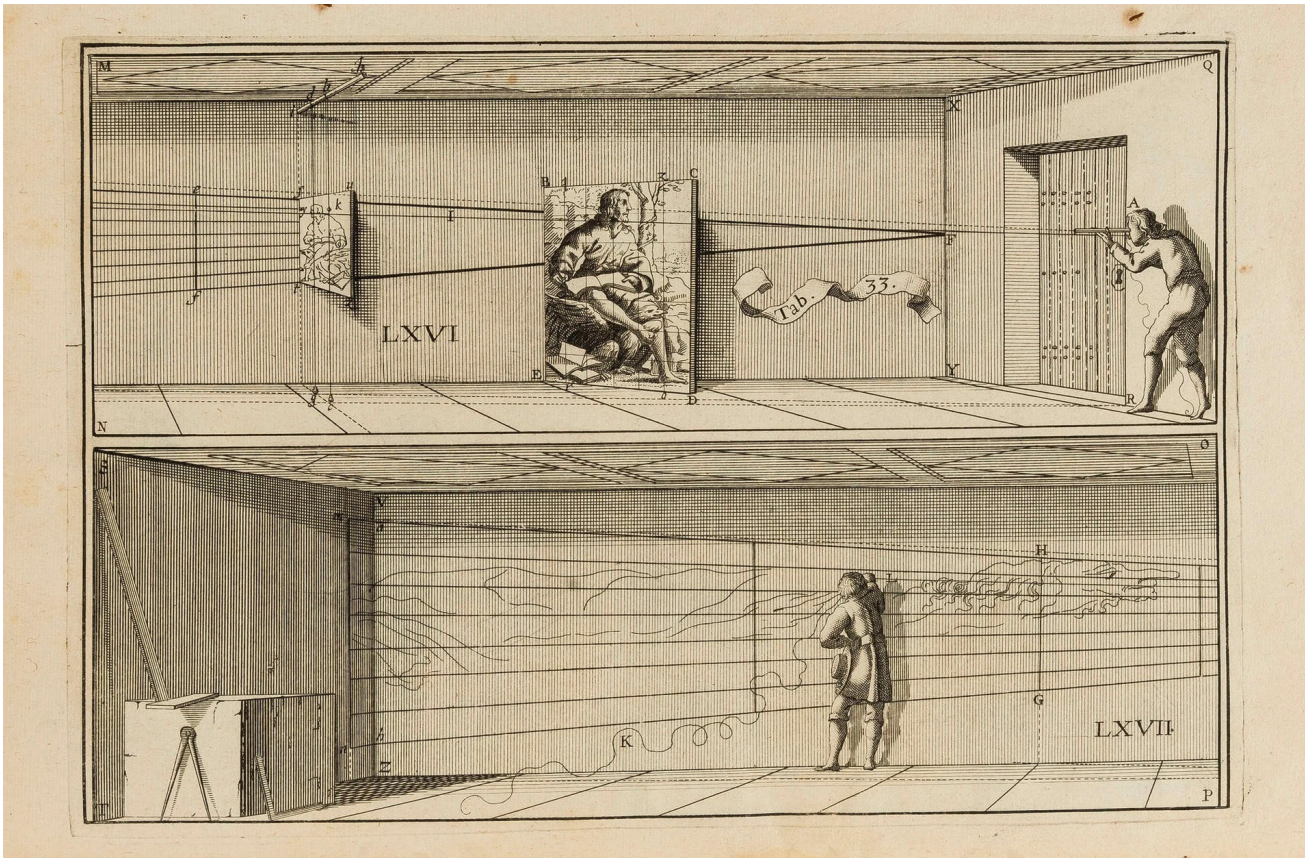


Figure 5.Jean-François Niceron, Anamorphic perspective device, La Perspective Curieuse, (Tab. 33, Fig. LXVI and LXVII), Paris, 1651. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Anamorphosis and *trompe l'œil* are closely related. An anamorphic image is not necessarily a *trompe l'œil* nor does *trompe l'œil* have to use anamorphic perspective. Their subtle difference lies in the nature of the illusion. *Trompe l'œil* has a single—usually easily identifiable or even given—viewing point from where the observer is tricked to perceive a constructed image as reality. An anamorphic image, on the other hand, is either illegible or shows something different when viewed conventionally without any indication of the alternative viewing point that will resolve the hidden picture. In both cases, the point-of-view is displaced making the movement of the body a prerequisite for the appreciation of the

picture. Or, as Lyle Massey (2002, 2) aptly puts it in her treatise *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies*, anamorphosis and *trompe l'œil* "reground perspective in lived experience." From an abstract mechanism of picturing space, perspective in *trompe l'œil* is turned into an embodied and subjective perceptual opportunity; it forgrounds—as Thi Phuong-Trâm Nguyen (2016, 108) argues in her pratice-based research on anamorphosis—the "tangible experience of invisible phenomena, exposes our desire for wonder" while allowing "a questioning of our relationship with both the real and the imagined realms." For Ernst Gombrich (1986), the perceptual uneasiness caused by the illusion has a psychological impact on the spectators who are forced to reconsider both their physical and interpretative positions. Given the unfixed nature of these images, as the observers move become aware of their situation developing a deeper understanding in relation to their own original sup-positions. WD's *trompe l'œil* pictures are not illegible like the ones produced making an extreme use of anamorphosis. Yet, his optical distortions "make the viewer aware of phenomenal as well as representational space" (Massey 2007, 67). His perspectival compositions always rely on the observer's relative position, thereby delaying their resolution. At the same time, WD's works introduce a private (point of) view to the public eye blurring the line between the two and, in so doing, highlight the multiplicity of realities.

In his insightful philosophical essay on the topic, Jean Baudrillard (1988) considers *trompe l'œil* to be a non-representation, a simulacrum. He identifies a metaphysical dimension to this technique and claims that it does not attempt to "confuse itself with the real" but creates a reality of its own: a hyperreality (Baudrillard 1990, 62). It is not the realism that makes *trompe l'œil* so magical, captivating, and seductive but the sudden realisation of a loss of and break from reality (63). This is due to its ability to invite a physical response, a "tactile vertigo": by being visually deceived and understanding that this human sense has been compromised, the viewing subject retreats to other senses—such as touch—to comprehend the presented (hyper)reality. The perverted manner through which perspective is used questions the reality of the third dimension, thus destabilizing our perceptive system and, by extension, our belief system. The fourth dimension, that of time, is immobilized. The outdoor *trompe l'œil* works pose an even greater challenge given that there are only a few moments when the two realities are attuned, depending on lighting, seasonal, or even weather conditions. *Trompe l'œil*, Baudrillard argues, "attacks our sense of reality [...] undermining the world's apparent factuality" (64). The initial unease of the deceived subject is followed by the revelation of a non-deceptive potentiality of the real. WD's *trompe l'œil* works enhance reality by exposing

Figure 6. WD, The Last are Lost from the List. Athens, Greece (2014).

its virtuality: by challenging the taken-for-granted reality, they instill potentiality to our established views on particular social, political, and environmental issues.

Often magnified in scale, WD's *trompe l'œil* pieces are not only visually orchestrated to masterly integrate their physical environments but are also context-sensitive: a work that celebrates cultural diversity appears on a school wall, or another one addressing homelessness is executed in an area known for being a shelter for people who sleep rough. Due to the situated nature of *trompe l'œil*, the reproduction of these pieces through images often reduces their deception capability. Their removal from their original contexts turns them into mere visually arresting representations of realities rather than critical hyperrealities.

The Last Are Lost from the List, a *trompe l'œil* executed on the rear wall of the First Primary School of Nikaia in 2014, takes the viewing subject on a fascinating trip to the Amazon (Fig. 6). Using one-point perspective, it depicts a tropical forest rich in vegetation, full of tall trees, colorful exotic birds, and animals enjoying the wildlife. In the center two happy kids, members of a local tribe, point at the viewers as if inviting them to join this place where people and nature live in harmony. Everything coexists in perfect balance in the scene, highlighting the fragility in every ecologic system and giving us a prophetic glimpse of the Amazon pre-wildfires. The piece encourages viewers—with primary school children being the main audience—to embrace difference and, by extension, reject xenophobia. This hyperreality, however, has become a target of racism overwritten with slogans of hatred: the delicate balance of the ecology violently disrupted.

The piece *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*, created in the context of the Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival in 2016 (see Chatzidakis, Mini, Fragkiskou, this volume), portrays the head of an owl staring out of acanthus leaves and scrolls, resembling a Corinthian capital. By deploying anamorphic perspective, it occupies two walls of an abandoned typical single-story building close to the central train station of Athens. Even though the title of the work derives from Jimmy Hendrix's lyrics, the depicted animal reinforces the concept given that the owl is a symbol of wisdom and is often associated with Athena, the patron goddess of Athens. This *trompe l'œil* takes its place in the urban iconography of Athens over the several years that the country experienced an unprecedented crisis. But "*krisis*" also means "judgement" in Greek. The crisis should have allowed us become wiser rather than just merely vocal. So, maybe the owl symbolizes the *krisis* inviting us listen to the walls. The piece circulated widely on the internet and has been internationally acclaimed. This publicity led to the defacement of the work with slogans accusing it of going viral before being restored by the Street Art Conservators team. In so doing, the hyperreality of the *trompe*

Figure 7. WD, The Girl and the Dragon. Athens, Greece (2014).

l'œil was reduced to an emptied representation of the real: the price it had to pay for its own success.

The piece in Plato's Academy Park was painted in the place where Plato founded his famous philosophical school during Classical times. The composition blends masterfully with the surroundings and shows a young girl petting a small dragon while a bigger dragon stares at them skeptically from a cave (Fig. 7). An allusion to Plato's cave allegory? Maybe. The intervention is nature-related and takes place not only in a historically loaded site but also in one of the few green public spaces in the Greek capital. In 2014, when the piece was executed, there was a heated public debate about the erection of a mall in the area. The pictorially similar *trompe l'œil Blessing* (p. 33) depicts a female ancient divine figure infusing life to a flower in a derelict building. It is a (hyper)realistic fulfilment of the prophesy regarding nature's reclamation of the world in a post-Coronavirus era.

Exile is a paradoxical *trompe l'œil* because it is not directly executed on a wall but rather on a canvas placed at the site it depicts, which combines WD's two spaces of practice: studio and street (Figs. 8–9). The work shows three young and poorly dressed children sleeping inside a cardboard box on the pavement. One can feel the roughness from the awkward, uncomfortable body postures. Given that this is a canvas, it could have been anywhere, but it is staged in contemporary Athens that has seen the numbers of people who sleep rough skyrocket in recent years. The fact that it appears in front of a church, a potential shelter for homeless people, makes it even more caustic. This is one of the most dramatic artworks in WD's oeuvre, not because it touches on a hot social problem and a recurring theme in WD's iconography—homelessness—but due to its modest size and placement on the ground. It might be easier to be passed unnoticed, but the actual human scale causes a greater degree of shock when suddenly disrupting the real. The use of one-point perspective leads us into the action, as if the three-dimensional effect created makes the viewer enter the scene. By forcing us to lower our horizon to align it with the artwork's artificial perspective, it places us in the position of the children from where the world looks large, frightening, intimidating, out of our reach and control. For a moment, the subject (viewpoint) and the object (vanishing point) are synchronized. The fact that this *trompe l'œil* is detachable makes it even more powerful. Having the ability to remove the canvas, we can appreciate the virtual in the real: it is in our hands to be agents of change recognizing the potential embedded in the (hyper) real rather than passive observers of the real.

Figure 8. WD, Exile. Athens, Greece (2014).

Figure 9. Perspective analysis of the Exile. Drawing by author.

Figure 10. WD, Screams from the Mediterranean Bed. Naxos, Greece (2015).

We are now back to the Island of Naxos. This time, on the terrace of the ruined hotel looking at the worn *Screams from the Mediterranean Seabed* (Fig. 10). It depicts several oversized human figures of different genders, ethnicities, and ages screaming under the water. From this point of view, the *trompe l'œil* is unified with the sea, mixing the real with the hyperreal, both spatially and temporally. Here, WD turns the most privileged viewing point of the gulf into a critical commentary on an ongoing humanitarian crisis. This very disturbing break from the real and immersion to the hyperreal turns anamorphosis into metamorphosis; it questions our "theory." As evident in the etymology of the Greek word *theoria*, theory is the establishment of a "point of view"; it involves the act of looking from a particular place, and from there making a leap into analysis of the wider interrelationships of events (cf. Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi 2021). WD's *trompe l'œil* works create a (hyper)reality that by challenging our physical point of view invites us reconsider our (sup) position in relation to particular matters.

Time Hole. Patras, Greece (2018).

Childhood. Meylan, France (2022).

Little Girls with Dreams
become Women with Vision.
Sala, Sweden (2019).


Skolstigen

Gaia. Tirana, Albania (2021).

Sunbathing. Istanbul, Turkey (2019).

New Day, New Fight, New Strength. Athens, Greece (2022).

Leaking. Athens, Greece (2019).

Third Eye. Naxos, Greece (2018).


2012
WD

Morning Song. Athens, Greece (2022).

Tribute to Jules Verne. Paris, France (2023).

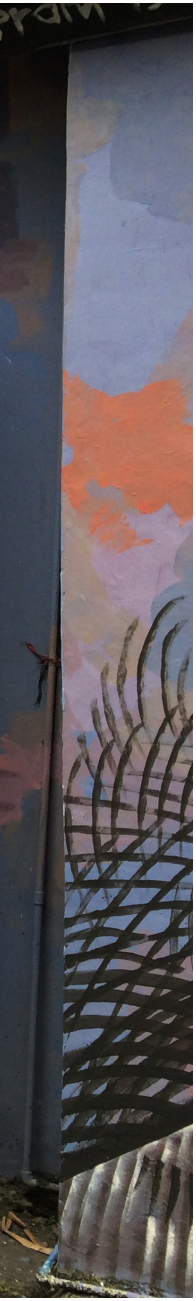
NESTalgic. Bali, Indonesia (2014).


WD
2014

Stairway to Hell. Ikaria, Greece (2016).

Cats. Tinos, Greece (2022).


"Kau tak kenal bangs
GD '15



Birds Born in a Cage Think Flying is an Illness.
Bali, Indonesia (2018).

Illusory. Cambridge, Canada (2017).

Connection. Moncton, Canada (2017).

Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens.
Athens, Greece (2016).


WD
ΟΔΟΣ
ΣΑΜΟΥ

Helixotherapy. Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2017).

Griffin. Arvika, Sweden (2017).

COVID-19 vs. Poverty. Bali, Indonesia (2020).

5

Wild Drawing in the Anthropocene

Dewa Ketha

"As *Homo Sapiens*, we have been greedily exploiting the Earth."
—WD

For decades, Bali Island has been branded as the "last paradise" by the Western world. For Western travelers, the island is regarded as a living museum where traditional and "authentic" culture exists and is still practiced by the local people on a large scale. Under the colonial rule of 1901, Queen Wilhelmina stated that the Dutch morally owed the Dutch East Indies (the future Indonesia), and in order to pay this they launched *Pax Netherlandica* (the Dutch Peace) of which *Ethische Politiek* (ethical policy) was applied. During the implementation of *Pax Netherlandica*, *Puputan Klungkung* took place in 1908. "*Puputan*" is *basa* Bali and is derived from "puput", which means "the end." In this context, "*puputan*" is a Balinese term for fighting until the end, an all-out war where every member of the royal palace joins the war to meet their end in a mass suicide.

For the most part, the fall of the Klungkung Kingdom was surrounded by silence (Wiener 1995, 4). Such silence was not without any political motivation, since two years earlier, in 1906, the shocking *Puputan Badung* took place, and the Dutch were fiercely criticized by the international community for their ruthless annexation of the Balinese indigenous people. In

his outstanding book *The Dark Side of Paradise*, Geoffrey Robinson notes that the romantic image of Bali started to bloom in the 1920s at the time when Western scholars visited Bali and conducted research on its artists. They developed an elaborate and respectable portrait of the island as a sort of "last paradise," even when they saw evidence contrary to their image (Robinson 2006, 29). In the early 1920s the colonial government started with an idea of "*Balisering*", which literally means the "Bali-nization" of Bali. The idea aimed at keeping Bali— especially Java—away from negative external influences, where ideas of nationalism had started to emerge.

Baliseering itself sought to reorganize the socio-cultural life of the Balinese, and such reorganization was put into practice for the first time in Klungkung through education in public and private schools (Sidemen 1983, 21). The Balinese were taught to *mawirama* (narrate Balinese folk tales), dance, carve, as well as paint. In art, the Kamasan style of painting is one of the genres that emerged from *Baliseering*. Thus, Bali's artworld has arguably developed in order to fulfill the colonizer's desire to keep Bali away from the flaming growth of nationalism and in extending their power over Bali. This motive was not really making any sense because educated youths who studied in Java brought the influence of nationalism with them when they returned home (see Robinson 2006, for an elaborate explanation).

The combination of *Baliseering* and Western travelers' notes paved the way for the emergence of Bali's tourism industry. Ida Sidemen (1983, 11) and others cite that the tourism industry was started to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century, pioneered by the *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*, a Dutch trading company, that at first mainly served trades in agricultural products to shift its attention to serve Dutch tourists visiting Bali. Ever since, the industry has developed rapidly especially after the construction of hotels and an airport in the 1930s. The industry was expanded further under the authoritarian regime of New Order (Wardana 2019).

Years of serenity in Bali's tourism industry were shaken all of sudden by a series of bomb explosions in October 2002 and in 2005. These shocking events had brought the tourism industry to its nadir. Because the industry plays the biggest role in the local economy, 70% of Bali's workforce who were heavily dependent upon tourism faced economic challenges to support their families. A temporal awareness emerged out of the decline of the tourist industry advocated by the Bali Post Group, the biggest media company with a conservative leaning in Bali, that tourism is not everything for the Balinese. It called for returning to agriculture and preserving Balinese culture under the banner of *Ajeg Bali*. According to Satria Naradha, the owner of the Bali Post Group, *Ajeg Bali* is not a static concept, but regarded as

Figure 1. “A Balinese beauty, about 1910. Photographs of bare-breasted Balinese women, encapsulating and reinforcing the image of Bali as an erotic paradise, were common fare in the travel literature, art books, and tourist brochures of the 1920s and 1930s (Photo and print collection of the Koninklijk Insituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkerkunde, Leiden).” Robinson 1995, 5, fig. 1.

"a continuous and conscious effort to enhance the Balinese. Its objective is obvious. It was to protect Balinese identity, space, and its cultural process" (Naradha 2004, ii). In the end of the story, *Ajeg Bali* became touristic jargon in which preserving culture was merely marketing talk and a strategy of the tourism industry to ensure the flow of tourists to the island. From the tourists' viewpoint, experiencing traditional society is an event that would never happen for them in their home country. Seeing Balinese cultural practices became an "out of the world" experience. Meanwhile, for the Balinese, *Ajeg Bali* has become a lens through which "authentic" Balinese culture is defined, akin to that of the *Baliseering* project, and a mantra to "monitor" practices that are considered "inauthentic" and contradict *Ajeg Bali*'s ideal form of "Balinessness."

Art was at first a domain for offerings to gods and goddesses. Following massive tourism, art has been given a new meaning, which is completely new for the Balinese on how to value art. As stated by Miguel Covarrubias, "art" (*seni*) or "artist" (*seniman*) does not exist in the Balinese language, and he observes that "basically, an artist in Bali is a handyman and at the same time is an amateur, ordinary, and unknown…. His only purpose is to serve his community" (Covarrubias 2014, 166–167). With the new meaning, art that was considered by the Balinese since the 1930s as having a valuable use, has become a mass product that is bought and sold as a souvenir for tourists (191). This demonstrates how traditional activities for community services have been commodified through global tourism markets. Such commodification has been justified at first by the *Baliseering* project in the colonial period and later on by *Ajeg Bali* in post-authoritarian Bali. The *Ajeg Bali* project is seen as necessary by the Balinese public considering the dependency of Bali upon tourism. Hence, there has been a mutually constitutive nature between the tourism industry and Balinese culture: the culture shapes the image of Bali primarily for the tourism industry, and at the same time Balinese culture, including its arts, is shaped by the tourism industry to flourish according to that industry's needs.

The mutually constitutive relationship of the culture/tourism nexus has consequently put traditional arts in a special place within contemporary Balinese life. In almost every occasion, art is equated to traditional arts, and in turn traditional arts have enjoyed the privileged position at the expense of non-traditional or contemporary arts. In this regard, I do not discuss the irony of traditional artists when they serve the tourism industry. The industry needs traditional arts to perform for tourists, but the artists are poorly paid because they do not have a balanced bargaining position with the industry.

Figure 2. Young girls in Bali Arts Festival. Photo by John Y. Can (2010). Creative Commons.

It appears that new forms of the arts are seen as merely a complement to the privileged traditional arts. This can be seen in the Bali Art Festival, an annual art event initiated and organized by the Provincial Government of Bali. The event itself is conducted in order to "excavating"—developing and preserving Balinese socio-cultural values—but the new forms of art that are not considered to have Balinese cultural roots are never given any space in this biggest art event on the island. What I mean by "rooted in Balinese cultural traditions" here is the development of traditional forms or art, for instance the composition of Adi Merdangga that was made in 1984. The idea of creating this new musical composition was initiated by the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Mantra, then realized by *karawatian* (traditional music) artists of ASTI Denpasar, such as I Nyoman Astita, I Wayan Rai, I Ketut Gede Asnawa, I Wayan Suweca, and I Nyoman Windha, under the auspices of artistic experts like I Made Bandem and I Wayan Dibia.

In the early 2000s, street art was not very popular in Indonesia. Communities that were actively depicting murals and/or pasting at that time were Apotik Komik and Taring Padi in Yogyakarta. During this time, a group of Balinese youth in Denpasar, Bali agreed to establish an art community named *Komunitas Pojok*. Following its establishment, *Komunitas Pojok* randomly identified itself as "street decorators," not knowing that what they did had a name: street art. Since its establishment, *Komunitas Pojok* has been a form of protest manifested by concerned young Balinese artists. It is no wonder that individuals who are part of the community bring their personal concerns into their artworks. From this community, several well-known street artists have emerged with their distinctive style. One of them is WD. After graduating from the School of Fine Arts in Denpasar, WD decided to move to Greece and still produces many artworks just like when he was still in Denpasar with *Komunitas Pojok*.

In the context of Bali, WD very often visualizes the gap in reality caused by the fetishization of the tourism industry that has been advocated without any limit by the government and business enterprises. The industry has managed to provide an illusion of progress by overstating an increase in Balinese living standards, and to create a shared myth that serving the tourism industry is a virtue. Everything from education to the exploitation of nature is justified for the sake of tourism. With regard to the educational system, vocation-oriented educational institutions have mushroomed to attract young Balinese with a promise of finding jobs easily in the tourism industry. This is not inherently bad, but the consequence of so many young Balinese absorbed into the industry has been the decline of critical voices toward the industry itself as the youth become dependent on it for making a living and for social mobility.

Figure 3. Kamasan painting, ca. 1990s, Ketha collection. Photo by Dewa Ketha.

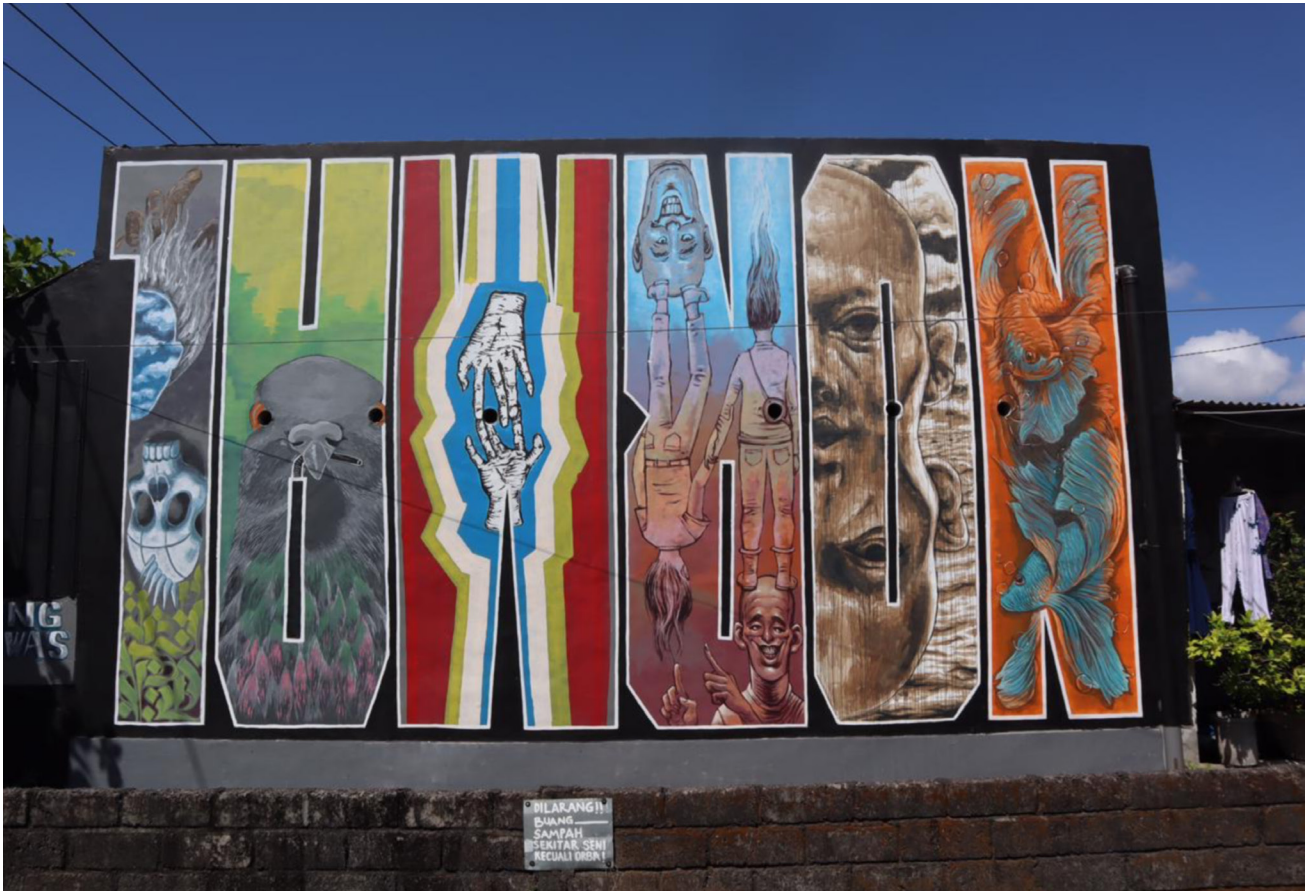


Figure 4. Komunitas Pojok, Normal, Denpasar, Bali (2022). Photo by Dewa Ketha.

Figure 5. WD, Exploited Land. Bali, Indonesia (2014). Photo by WD.

From ecological perspectives, Bali's natural beauty has been exploited for the expansion of the tourism industry. Agricultural lands have been converted and continually decrease in size in order to build tourist accommodations. Once land conversion becomes costly due to the rapid increase in land price, the tourism expansion then turns to the coastal areas to construct artificial islands through reclamation in Benoa Bay. Spatial planning of Presidential Regulation No. 51 of 2014 has been enacted to legitimize the reclamation project, but the Balinese public who is concerned with its impacts has mobilized to massively refuse it.

Indeed, environmental issues caused by the expansion of Bali's tourism industry are and will continuously be occurring in the future. A water shortage has been threatening Bali for some years; however, hundreds of luxury tourist accommodations have been enjoying a privilege in extracting both surface water and groundwater, while local communities, especially farmers, have been made to reduce their water consumption (De Suriyani 2019). In many occasions, the Balinese communities have protested against these challenging conditions, but still they are not able to imagine themselves free from tourism, the root cause of the problems. When local communities' banal protests are not heard by the policymakers, a strategic, critical, aesthetic approach such as WD's could be an important alternative to make those concerns heard. From his artworks, we see that art is not merely a commodity to serve the power of capital, that behind the beauty of art there is sadness and concern, a warning of threats in the future we live in. We hope that the aesthetic articulation of critical voices as depicted by WD does not disappear into, or is drowned out by, its apparent beauty. Fingers crossed.

6

"A Mural in Athens" The Street Art of WD in Global Media Discourses on the Greek Crisis

Julia Tulke

My first encounter with the work of WD, aka Wild Drawing, in the year 2012, took place in a rather unusual setting: not in the streets of Athens, a city that I then only knew through the lens of media reporting on the Greek debt crisis and anti-austerity movement, nor through a street art archive, but printed in the pages of the business section of a German daily newspaper. Here, amid bits of text commenting on the fiscal mechanics of the crisis, I happened upon a photograph showing the stenciled figure of a grimacing boy, a tribute to Diane Arbus' iconic 1962 photograph *Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park*, wheatpasted atop a densely painted urban surface. This was not the first time that I had seen an image of street art utilized to illustrate reporting about the Greek crisis; the student job in a newspaper archive in Berlin I was working at the time afforded me access to a wide array of German and international publications, all of which were devoting considerable space to the fraught situation of Greece. I did, however, find myself struck in this instance by the profound awkwardness of juxtaposition, the pairing of the dry, technocratic language of finance journalism—credit ratings, bond yields, and economic adjustment—with an artwork so deeply imbued with the affective complexity of crisis as lived experience. The caption, which to my frustration simply read "A Street in Athens" [*Eine Straße in Athen*] did nothing to shed light on what—let alone whose work—I was looking at. It was then that I decided to initiate the

research project that would, under the title *Aesthetics of Crisis*, come to examine the political and performative potentials of Athenian street art and graffiti in the context of the crisis (Tulke 2013, 2017, 2021).

I begin here with a personal anecdote because this particular economy of circulating and consuming Athenian street art through crisis news reporting—a phenomenon for which, as my own initial encounter suggests, the work of WD offers a truly paradigmatic case study—remains underexamined within the rich body of scholarship to have emerged around crisis-related street art and graffiti in Athens in recent years (e.g., Avramidis 2012, 2021; Leventis 2012; Pangalos 2014; Karathanasis 2014; Tsilimpounidi 2015; Stampoulidis 2016; Leontis 2016). Attending to the ways in which the work of WD has been selectively mobilized in media narratives about the Greek crisis, this essay offers some initial thoughts on this complex locus of circulation and discusses what is at stake in the displacement of a site-specific urban intervention towards the discursive realm of crisis media reporting.

This endeavor takes as its foundation a corpus of 25 news articles on the Greek crisis that prominently feature works by WD in an illustrative function (see sources below). To be clear, these are not articles *about* crisis street art—though numerous such pieces exist, usually taking the form of photo galleries (e.g., *Zeit* 2011, *Time* 2012, Asche 2015, Giannakouris 2015, Chu 2015, *Economist* 2017)—but rather news pieces concerned with various economic, political, and social facets of the crisis that *use* images of street art as a secondary narrative device to complement a written account. The selection, which draws together sources from North America (US and Canada) as well as Europe (Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands), was compiled through two particular strategies. First, I manually searched digital archives of news outlets with meaningful transnational circulation (i.e., *The New York Times*, *The Guardian, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [*FAZ*]) using the broad search query "Athens" and limiting results to the years 2011 through 2015, the period during which crisis news reporting was at its most intense. Second, I probed the image archives of the world's three biggest press photography licensing repositories—Getty Images, Associated Press (AP) Images, and the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA)—for photographs featuring the work of WD, using the query "Athens" in connection with the terms "graffiti," "street art," and "mural." While the agencies were unable to provide any information on the publications who had licensed a specific image due to privacy rights, I was able to trace back some instances of their use via reverse image search.

While not exhaustive, this press archive is representative of the myriad ways in which WD's street art has been invoked to visually reinforce hegemonic media narratives about

Figure 1. WD, Arbus Boy. Athens (2011). Photo by Julia Tulke.

the Greek crisis. Hailing mainly from business, finance, and opinion sections, the collected articles were all published between 2012 and 2019, with the vast majority (18 out of 25) stemming from 2015. This year saw two elections and a shift of power to the left Syriza party, protracted and highly contentious negotiations over the third memorandum of understanding between Greece and its creditors, renewed speculations about a Greek exit from the Eurozone, and the staging of a public referendum—a crescendoing series of events that galvanized crisis reporting on Greece.

Sourced from publications situated along a moderate political spectrum, these accounts are firmly grounded in the mainstream media narrative that frames the Greek crisis as an exceptional and temporary (rather than systemic and protracted) disruption (Petsini 2019). Here, the word "crisis," in close keeping with its etymological origin in the Greek verb "κρίνω" [krinô]—to separate, judge, choose—is invoked in a diagnostic, if not pathologizing function, "not a condition to be observed [but] an observation that produces meaning" (Roitman 2014, 39). In designating a particular historical situation a crisis—here the "indebtedness" of the Greek state—media narratives posit deviant institutions, actors, and behaviors that compromise an otherwise unproblematic economic system, and, implicitly or explicitly, call for their containment through social control (Roitman 2014, 15, 4). In the case of crisis reporting on Greece, narratives frequently revolved around problematically racialized notions of corruption and fiscal, respective moral, irresponsibility (Mylonas 2019, 2015; Kostopoulos 2020). At the same time, notes Penelope Petsini, Greek photojournalism consolidated around visual tropes of social documentary that cast the city of Athens as a "theatre par excellence of sociopolitical catastrophe and/or upheaval" (Petsini 2019, 264), with photographs of expressive street art and enraged political graffiti emerging as prominent indexical devices.

The 25 news articles that are considered in this essay feature a total of eight distinct pieces by WD, which will be discussed in chronological order of their creation below: one paste-up, the 2011 Diane Arbus-inspired artwork mentioned at the outset; two stencils, both from 2012, titled *Keep Away* and *No Land for the Jobless*; as well as five murals: *Poverty is the Parent of Revolution and Crime* (2012), *Enough is Enough* (2013), *5 €uro* (2014), *Hope Dies Last* (2015), and *No Land for the Poor* (2015). Notably, this selection, a mere sliver of WD's vast body of work, strategically emphasizes the share of his oeuvre that might be ascribed to the genre of social realism, works in which the connection to the Greek crisis is unambiguously articulated, i.e. through visual references to the Euro, as present in *Keep Away*, and *5 €uro*, or by calling attention to material and social effects of the crisis—joblessness, poverty,

homelessness—through expressive depictions of the human figure. A narrowing of both the technical and aesthetic repertoire of the artist, this selection-by-news-value brackets WD's explorations of the fantastical and the speculative, his engagement with matters of ecology, as well as his technical ingenuity, all of which are highlighted by the contributions to this volume. This flattening of WD's work is a particular iteration of a conventional pattern. For street art or graffiti to appear in press photography it undergoes a process of *decontextualization* through cropping, juxtaposition, and unspecific captioning that usually evacuates the artworks depicted of their site-specific significance (see Lennon 2021, 12-14, 19). On the streets of Athens, WD's pieces stage performative, ephemeral, and polysemic interventions into the cityscape, poetic gestures whose meaning remains open to continuous contestation and renegotiation through contingent encounters with urban dwellers. When captured via press photography, these interventions are severed from their embedding in the urban landscape and abstracted into static signifiers, artifacts that can be licensed and subordinated to the intentionally constructed narrative of a news article.

In such acts of appropriation, an inherently democratic and publicly accessible art form is harnessed into a proprietary commodity, in turn exposing various issues around copyright and monetization, a complicated terrain that can only be tangentially discussed here. Suffice it to say that photojournalists and particularly licensing agencies strategically benefit from the indeterminate status of street art as intellectual property (Flessas and Mulcahy 2018, 224). While most agencies will not license images that simply capture a work of art on the street without written permission from the artist (Giannakouris 2021), photojournalists can create original (legally speaking) compositions by simply juxtaposing a street art piece with a passing human body or car. As generic as the resulting images are—scanning large numbers of street art press photographs reveals an almost comically repetitive visual pattern—this method allows an image centered around the creative production of street artists like WD to generate revenue for photojournalists as well as large licensing conglomerates such as Getty Images, AP Images, or the European Pressphoto Agency, all while the work's originator often remains uncredited. Out of the 25 articles considered for this essay only three explicitly identify WD as the artist, more often employing generic captions such as "A mural in Athens."

Notably, within this economy of circulation, Greek photojournalists occupy an ambivalent and complex position as interlocutors tasked with translating the everyday affective and political atmosphere of the crisis into the visual realm. For many, the attraction to street art as a motif is guided by a genuine interest in this medium of expression and its significance in the context of the crisis, paired with a deep respect for the artists behind them (Giannakouris

2021, Gouliamaki 2021). However, photographers observe a range of different approaches to image captioning and attribution: while some include artist credits and available contextual information as a matter of principle, thereby also setting a standard for publications potentially looking to license an image they took, others offer generic descriptions such as "a man walks past a wall bearing graffiti," in turn transforming a site-specific artwork into a stock photo of sorts.

1. Early Works: Paste-Ups and Stencils, 2011–2012

Though photojournalistic appropriations of WD's work exhibit a clear bias towards his work as a muralist from 2013 onward, his earlier, often serially produced stencils and paste-ups occasionally surface in press photography, at times captured several years after their original creation. The oldest such piece I found featured in a news article is the untitled Diane Arbus paste-up from 2011. Accompanying the headline "*I greci non ce la fanno più*" [The Greeks can't do it anymore], an uncredited and uncaptioned photograph of the work appeared in the Italian weekly *L'Espresso* in March 2012 (Riva 2012). Shown in a rare variation, the portrait of the young boy here features an added speech bubble containing the sentence "My nightmares had no name!" with an older man, unaware of being photographed, passing in front. In this instance, image and text relate to one another in a fairly literal manner. Billed as a "report from an exhausted country," the long-form piece offers street-level observations from the Greek capital, describing the precarious effects of government austerity as prescribed by the terms of Greece's bailout agreements—in essence spelling out the unnamed "nightmares" from WD's artwork—through economic figures and spectacularized descriptions of night-time drug use and illegal street hawking. In order to accommodate a specific narrative, one that casts Greece as a victim of European Union policy, whose plight is here demonstrated via descriptions of abject poverty and wide-spread crime, the affective depth and complexity of the original artwork is flattened into an abstract, merely representative visual reference.

An even more literal use can be found for 2012's *No Land for the Jobless*, which appeared in an AP-authored 2015 article summarizing the newest update on Greece's enduringly high unemployment figures (AP 2015b). Photographed in situ three years after its original appearance, the stencil, which shows the figure of a cloaked beggar and a sign proclaiming "I need job, not speech," is here seen placed inside the bricked-up door frame of an abandoned

BUSINESS

Greek unemployment dips to 24.6 per cent in second quarter

The Associated Press
Published Thursday, September 17, 2015 8:37AM EDT
Last Updated Thursday, September 17, 2015 8:37AM EDT

Figure 2. AP/CTV, "Greek Unemployment Dips to 24.6% in Second Quarter" (September 17, 2015).

Figure 3. WD, Keep Away. Athens (2012). Photo by Julia Tulke.

building, a glimpse at WD's signature incorporation of a site's given architectural features, in particular what Sabina Andron calls "street frames" (Andron 2024, 16). The caption, one of the rare instances where the artist is explicitly identified, posits an unambiguously indexical relationship between the work and social reality, asserting that "the mural [sic] refers to Greece's shockingly high unemployment rate." *Keep Away*, another 2012 stencil, is invoked similarly in a cluster of articles all published in the second half of June 2015, a time when the looming failure of negotiations between Greece and its creditors over a third economic adjustment program was fueling speculations over a so-called Grexit, the departure, voluntary or forced, of Greece from the Eurozone (Hope, Jones, and Spiegel 2015; Aldrick 2015; Ritholtz 2015; Klossas 2015). Employing a simplified visual style atypical for WD, the stencil, mimics the shape of a warning sign, at its center a large Euro symbol that is beginning to disintegrate at the edges. A small car, painted in the pattern of the Greek flag, has just launched off the precarious platform provided by the large € and is shown suspended in mid-air in anticipation of its inevitable crash—essentially a pictorial account of the Grexit scenario. Unsurprisingly, the image found wide application as an illustration for news and opinion pieces contemplating the merit, potential choreography, and possible consequences of a Grexit. As in the case of *No Country for the Jobless*, these appropriations displace WD's work from not just its spatial but also its temporal context: they are severed from both their specific placement in the urban landscape—their situatedness in a specific neighborhood, presumably Exarcheia, on a particular street and building—and the historical moment that they emerged from. By using, knowingly or not, an artwork from 2012 to illustrate crisis reporting in the year 2015, these articles project a notion of the Greek crisis as a moment of temporal stagnation, suspended, much like the little car in *Keep Away*, in a liminal space of indeterminacy.

2. The "Other" Murals, 2012–2015

While media attention on WD's muralism has been disproportionally focused on two specific artworks from 2014 and 2015 respectively, *5 €uro* and *No Country for the Poor*, three other murals of his surfaced in my article pool: *Poverty is the Parent of Revolution and Crime* (2012), *Enough is Enough* (2013), and *Hope Dies Last* (2015). *Poverty*, an explicitly activist artwork created at a time when the anti-austerity movement in Greece was at its most active, pairs the famous adage by Aristotle with a portrait of the philosopher holding an ignited Molotov

cocktail in his right hand. Given its significant location on an interior wall of the Polytechnic University campus in Exarcheia, the site of a 1973 student uprising that initiated the collapse of Greece's military dictatorship and a space that has since occupied an exceptional position in the symbolic geography of the Greek left, its appearance in a 2019 *Guardian* article on the neighborhood of Exarcheia is, for once, appropriate (King and Manoussaki-Adamopoulou 2019). Though the piece had long disappeared under new layers of paint at the time of the article's publication—a fact not accounted for in the caption—the image's use as a representation of the defiant political spirit of the neighborhood remains proximate to the work's intention relative to its spatial embedding.

A rather different kind of use can be found for *Enough is Enough*, a 2013 mural created in Psyri, the commercial center of Athens. Painted under the auspices of the Athens Video Art Festival, the piece occupies three adjacent shutters belonging to a now defunct tailor shop wedged in between two trendy coffee shops. Playfully engaging with the existing partition of the wall, the mural adopts a sequential form that mimics the styling of comic book panels. We are shown the profile of a sleeping woman whose rest is threatened by the tip of a pair of scissors, inching a little closer to her hair with every subsequent image, an escalation of intensity that is further emphasized by the captions, "Open your eyes…" (panel 1), "Time to wake up" (panel 2), "Enough is enough is enough is enough" (panel 3). Though dense with intertextual references and potential meaning—the mural's captions cite from the anti-fascist Chumbawamba song "Enough is Enough," whereas the scissors might be read as references to the much-cited notion of a debt "haircut"—in the three instances in which an image of the work appeared alongside news articles it is reduced to a mere backdrop. Both press photographs of the work currently in circulation (AP/Karahalis 2015; EPA/Kolesidis 2017) show it with café seating in front, occupied by young Athenians leisurely enjoying their *frappé*, an image that news media have seized upon to advance thinly concealed claims of Greeks as "lazy, corrupt" and fiscally irresponsible (Lazzarato 2012, Mylonas 2019). While a muted *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article from May 2017 simply remarks that successful credit negotiations between Greece and its creditors will allow ordinary Greeks to return to higher levels of consumption (Musler 2017), two articles in the Swiss *Handelszeitung and Neue Zürcher Zeitung* present a deeply stereotypical and morally patronizing image of Greece. One of them, from 2015, chronicles the tense negotiations between the left Syriza government and its European creditors in Brussels, blamed entirely on the supposedly audacious and unorganized demeanor of the Greek delegation, which is described to have enjoyed

Figure 4. WD, Poverty Is the Parent of Revolution and Crime. Athens (2012). Photo by Julia Tulke.

Figure 5. WD, Enough is Enough. Athens, Greece (2013). Photo by Julia Tulke.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Navigating the Storm Engulfing Greek Banks

A mural in Athens. Until banks in Greece are strengthened, more companies will fail, making problems for lenders and the economy worse. Yorgos Karahalis/Associated Press

Figure 6. The New York Times, "Navigating the Storm Engulfing Greek Banks" (August 9, 2015).

an "extended brunch at one of the most expensive spots in the city" while their colleagues labored over the terms of a new credit agreement (Reuters/dbe 2015). The other, published in 2017, is yet more direct. Here, a listing of the most corrupt business sectors ends with a sardonic comment on the "fact" that while 86% of Greeks oppose corruption, a third admits to evading taxes when given the opportunity (Kauffman Bossert 2017). The juxtaposition of such a crude, racialized narrative of Greece as inherently corrupt with WD's complex and explicitly anti-fascist mural testifies to the deep moral incongruity that media appropriations of political street art can produce.

The third and final "other" mural, the 2015 piece *Hope Dies Last*, created on the façade of the iconic self-managed theatre Empros, is again used in a more indexical function. Its central shackled figure appears alongside a *New York Times* article about the restrictions that immobilize Greek banks (Dixon 2015) as well as an Associated Press piece about the dissenting opinions in the government coalition foreshadowing new elections (AP 2015a). Here, interestingly, the framing of the mural by photojournalist Yorgos Karahalis invites the reader to consider the mural in dialogue with another piece, a large inscription of the word "βασανίζομαι" prominently visible above the work by WD. Somewhere between a tag and a slogan, "βασανίζομαι" translates to "I am tormenting myself," a phrase that holds deep resonance with WD's affectively saturated portrait below (Tulke 2022). Despite offering little contextual information—the captions read "A mural in Athens" and "A man walks at an alley in front of a mural"—the photographer's decision to provide a view that, instead of closely cropping the mural, presents it in a way more proximate to its embedding in the densely painted and written upon city of Athens, suggests a more nuanced understanding of WD's work as dialogic intervention within a continuously unfolding urban text.

2. 5 €uro (2014) and No Land for the Poor (2015)

By far the most abundantly cited WD works in my collection of media articles are the murals *5 €uro* and *No Land for the Poor*, which appear in eight respective articles, published between 2015 and 2019. 2014's *5 €uro*, which circulates in at least five different photographic varieties, is strikingly used almost exclusively in the context of the prelude and aftermath of the 2015 austerity referendum, likely due to its visual referencing of the Euro currency, the very matter at stake at the time. The mural, which transformed the façade of an abandoned neoclassical house in Exarcheia into a 5 Euro note, replaces the architectural structure usually

Figure 7. WD, 5 €uro, Athens, 2014. Photo by WD.

found on the currency with a forlorn face, hands placed on cheeks in desperation. As such, it unsurprisingly presented a compelling illustration for reports on the ongoing negotiation between abstract financial institutions and the material and embodied reality of living with crisis (Alderman 2015; AFP 2015; Tagesanzeiger 2015; Plickert 2015; Otero-Iglesias 2015; Klompenhouwer and Willems 2015). One exception is a *Guardian* piece about young people attempting to escape unemployment by founding businesses under the so-called social enterprise (KINSEP) paradigm (Meaker 2015). Notably, one of the most widely used depictions of the work is a selectively cropped frame that shows only the portrait with a fragment of a European Union flag visible to its left (EPA/Pantartzi 2015), thereby emphasizing the capacity of press photography to abstract an artwork from not just its temporal and spatial context but also its very composition.

Finally, *No Land for the Poor*, is perhaps one of WD's most well-known and certainly one of his most moving works. Painted on the day of the 2015 referendum, the mural presents the rare instance of a direct political commentary by the artist. A monumental portrait of the sleeping figure of a homeless man, horizontally stretching along the length of a residential building in Exarcheia, the intervention draws attention to those simultaneously most vulnerable and most invisible amid the shifting global currents of crisis: "the poor and homeless, here & around the globe," to whom the piece is dedicated. In my collection of news articles, I found *No Land* appropriated in the very context that it was created in—the referendum and its aftermath—twice (*Il Post* 2015; Fratzscher 2015), one article using a rare variation on the street art press photograph that actually depicts WD in the process of painting (AP/Giannakouris 2015). It also appeared in two articles devoted to the subcultural and political currency of the neighborhood of Exarcheia, in both cases portrayed according to the familiar trope of an "anarchist playground" (Dilouambaka 2017; Kailath 2017). In the most recent use of the image I was able to trace, an article from 2019, the mural is placed in an entirely different context: a sensationalist account from conservative German weekly *Der Spiegel* on the street drug sisa, dubbed the "poor man's cocaine" (Christides and Heisterkamp 2019). Assuming a tone not dissimilar to that of the Italian article described at the beginning of the essay, the report trains its gaze on the escalation of the drug's distribution in Athens since the beginning of the crisis, an issue openly laid bare in the streets of the city. *No Land*, here shown in the photographic variation that features the artist and is closely cropped to the homeless figure's face and torso, appears underneath a headline describing drug users as "walking dead," a problematic conflation of WD's portrait, painted with a deep commitment to values of horizontal solidarity and emancipation, with a behavior marked as abject.

culture trip

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Welcome to Exarcheia, a Playground for Athens' Anarchists

"No land for the poor", Emmanouil Mpenaki St., Exarcheia | © Dimitris Kamaras / Flickr

Ethel Dilouambaka
02 September 2017

Figure 8. Culture Trip, "Welcome to Exarcheia, a Playground for Athens' Anarchists," (September 2, 2017).

This example demonstrates once more the essential trouble with the appropriation of street art in media discourses: through the medium of press photography an intervention created in a site- and historically-specific setting enters into an image licensing repository from which paying publications can freely appropriate materials to visually complement their reporting as per their own editorial policies. Once selected, the work is thrust into circulation as a static representational device for news consumers to briefly encounter on printed pages and online news feeds. And yet, this re-circulation of street art imagery through news media also affords new and contingent modes of engagement for autonomous readers who, much like me in 2012, may find themselves struck by the affective ambience emanating from a photographed mural, pasteup, or stencil on a newspaper page. Reminiscent of Roland Barthes's notion of the *Punctum*, which denotes how subjective elements of a photograph have the capacity to prick or puncture the viewer beyond any formal knowledge of its aesthetic and spatio-historical context (Barthes 1981, 25–27), readers may find themselves moved by a small detail of the image: the texture of a wall, the expression of a painted face, the juxtaposition of text and image, the scale of a piece. Such unexpected moments of resonance have the potential to invert the hierarchy between written narrative and visual illustration, media framing and affective everyday reality, and, in turn, to propel viewers beyond stale and static crisis narratives and back into the streets.

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I DON'T
HATE
MORNINGS
WD
2014
trotter.eu
Volkswagen Shuttle
HELSINGBORG
OPEN

The Best Dreams Happen when You’re Awake.
Helsingborg, Sweden (2014).

Fly Away. France (2015).

Pimp Your Ride. Ikaria, Greece (2016).

Pornograffiti. Athens, Greece (2015).

7

Keeping the Wise Owl Alive: The Conservation/Restoration of WD's Mural, *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*

Maria Chatzidakis, Eve Mini, Sofia Fragkiskou

1. Introduction: The Chronicle of the Public Mural, *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*

The public mural *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens* was created in 2016 by WD by invitation from the Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival, which covers an area in the center of the city where most of the streets have French names. The Festival has been organizing outdoor exhibitions and street art projects in this area since 2013. WD's mural is located on the façade of an abandoned house at 52 Palaiologou and Samou Streets, in the neighborhood of Agios Pavlos.

The mural depicts the head of an owl that appears to emerge from the corner of the house creating a 3D effect. On his website, the artist notes:

> The owl symbolizes wisdom and at the same time is a symbol of the goddess Athena, the one that gave her name to the city of Athens. On the other hand, the owl is famous for its exceptionally good far vision, particularly in low light. Nowadays Greece, and not only, is experiencing a really dark phase and I think
>
> is time for people in Greece and around the globe, to recall this creature's wisdom.
> —WD 2016

The old decayed house was used as a creative background where the artist combined old and new materials, textures, and styles. The organizers of the Festival had been granted permission from the owners to use the building for the Festival's activities. WD connected the new synthetic painting media, the acrylic ochre paint of his new background, with the old traditional ochre lime paint of the wall that was typical of Athens's houses in the middle of the twentieth century. From a conservator's point of view, it is interesting that the artist purposely kept the original ochre paint layer on the edges of the walls.

The background of the mural is painted with roller and brushes in an expressive way where we can distinguish the artist's gestures. This technique helped mixing the new paint with the old deteriorated paint layer. The spiral floral decoration around the owl is influenced by Art Nouveau ornaments and reminds one of the late neoclassical wall decoration that was popular in Greece in the early twentieth century.

Among the most interesting expressive means of this mural is the contrary effect between the matte background and the glossy spray paint that the artist used mainly for the owl's head. This technique enhances the impression of 3D painting. The glossy smooth texture of the owl's head has a strong vivid effect that catches the eyes of passersby.

The mural quickly became known to both the real and digital world. It had a strong impact on social media and soon became viral on the internet (Harris 2016, AthensLive News 2016). On October 22, 2020, key words "wild drawing," "owl," and "Athens" drew over 4 million results on Google's search engine; 31,156 votes on Reddit; and 1,200,000 viewers watched the video "Knowledge Speaks - Wisdom Listens, Athens Greece 2016" on Facebook. It was also nominated as one of the most important street art pieces of the year 2016.

On February 4, 2017, the owl was partially overpainted by someone who made a long trace with pink paint and wrote the word "VIRAL" on the east side. The pink color is characteristic of graffiti visual language for expressions of insult called a "dis" (from "disrespect").

The next day, the organizer and representative of the Festival Marios Strofalis called the Street Art Conservators and asked to remove the overpainting after the artist's suggestion. The team Street Art Conservator (StACo) was founded in 2012 by students and professors of the Department of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Athens (now the University of West Attica). The aim and interest of the team is the documentation, study, and preservation of street art in Athens. The StACo team does not usually remove tags, dis, or overpaintings except in cases of aggressive or racist interventions that offend and threaten people or ideas. StACo undertook the project of conservation/restoration of the mural two days after the attack on the painting in collaboration with the Conservation of Painting Laboratory of TEI University.

Figure 1. The removal of the overpaintings. The StACo team with students of UniWA and Elias Demetriou, the director of the documentary StACo. Photo by the authors (February 11, 2017).

2. Conservation of Eternal Values on Ephemeral Art: Bring Owl in Athens

The conservation of a mural is not something that can be done easily, quickly, and cheaply. The outdoor murals are large-scale artworks, with complex problems that can start from being in the cold and rain of winter and in the heat and strong sunlight of summer, where both the walls and the conservators suffer. Usually, a mural's substrate has already deteriorated and has a lot of previous interventions that might cause serious problems. At the same time, the substrate on which the mural is painted may have elements of historic value. Carrying out this restoration project was a challenge due to the difficulty and the extent of the appropriate interventions.

The systematic conservation of a mural is a process that requires documentation, study, and careful planning to ensure a successful outcome. But what is really important is to identify the values that compose the significance of the work of art and the purpose of its conservation so that it is as clear as possible *what*, *why*, and *for whom* we are preserving this work.

The ephemeral nature of street art makes conservation seem like a pointless process. On the other hand, the conservation of street art and public murals is a new field of research that is dictated by the social, scientific, and educational value of these artworks, the will of the local community, and the significance that they gained (García-Gayo 2015, Chatzidakis 2016, Amor-Garcia 2017, Glasser 2017).

In the case of the *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*, the Street Art Conservators team had to assess the different values of the artwork and the will of the community to support their decision for the removal of the overpainting. The significance of the mural for the local community was the main reason that the StACo. team decided to remove the overpaint. From the first moment, the people of the neighborhood expressed their indignation for the vandalism of the mural. They were coming every day to the field of work to thank the team and to say how irrational and aggressive this act of vandalism was for the community. The attack on the mural was considered as an attack on the neighborhood.

The mural's fame was spread via the internet, and the neighborhood of Agios Pavlos became well-known. This fact had a great impact on the local community. The mural became a focal point and also an attraction of the area that rejuvenated the daily life of the neighborhood. Thus, when it was necessary to decide whether or not to remove the vandalism, the answer was easily taken after taking into account this feedback from the local commu-

nity. The aim of the conservation was to keep the aesthetic and social value as well as the scientific and educational value that could be revealed during the conservation/restoration procedure.

Regarding the legal framework for the protection of *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens*, this does not fall, at least for the time being, into a special protection scheme, nor does the building to which it belongs. In other words, neither the original building nor the mural were considered valuable or legally protected by any city or national laws. The mural was created in the context of the Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival, which managed the property with the relevant permission by its owners.

After the invitation from the people in charge of the Festival, the first autopsy was performed. The mural was examined with non-destructive testing techniques such as portable polarization digital microscopy (Dino lite 2.0. AM7013MZT, 5Mp, 10x~50x, 200x.), ultraviolet (UV) lighting (365 nm), infrared thermography (FLIR E5), and raking light.

The documentation of the mural and the solubility tests of the overpainting were performed immediately. This process was not easy due to the external conditions, the cold weather, and the difficulty of securing the necessary materials and equipment. Before taking any action, the team had to decide the limits of the intervention, as it was already part of the history of the mural but it strongly affected its aesthetic value.

The conservators decided to keep the pink paint as a reminder of the vandalism on the decorative zone of the lower part of the wall. In the lower zone of the south side there was already written, before the pink overpainting, the word "ΘΕΑΜΑ", which in Greek means "spectacle." In this case, the comment was more discreetly stated by writing the word in the lower zone in a way that commented on, but did not particularly interrupt, the section of the project, and therefore was not removed.

For the removal of the pink overpainting, it was important to take action as soon as possible to prevent the stabilization of the paint, as the solubility was decreasing day-by-day. The pink overpainting on the mural was a mixture of white and red household paint with the addition of a great quantity of water. Therefore, the binding media was very weak because of its low concentration, the environmental conditions, the minimum film formation temperature (MFFT), and glass transition temperature (tg) (Jablonski et al. 2003, Zumbühl et al. 2007). The average daily temperature and time of the vandalism (early morning) was probably below the minimum film formation temperature (MFFT). As a result, the layer of the overpainting was not strong enough to produce a continuous film over the painting.

The overpainting was removed with hot water and later, in some cases, with a mixture

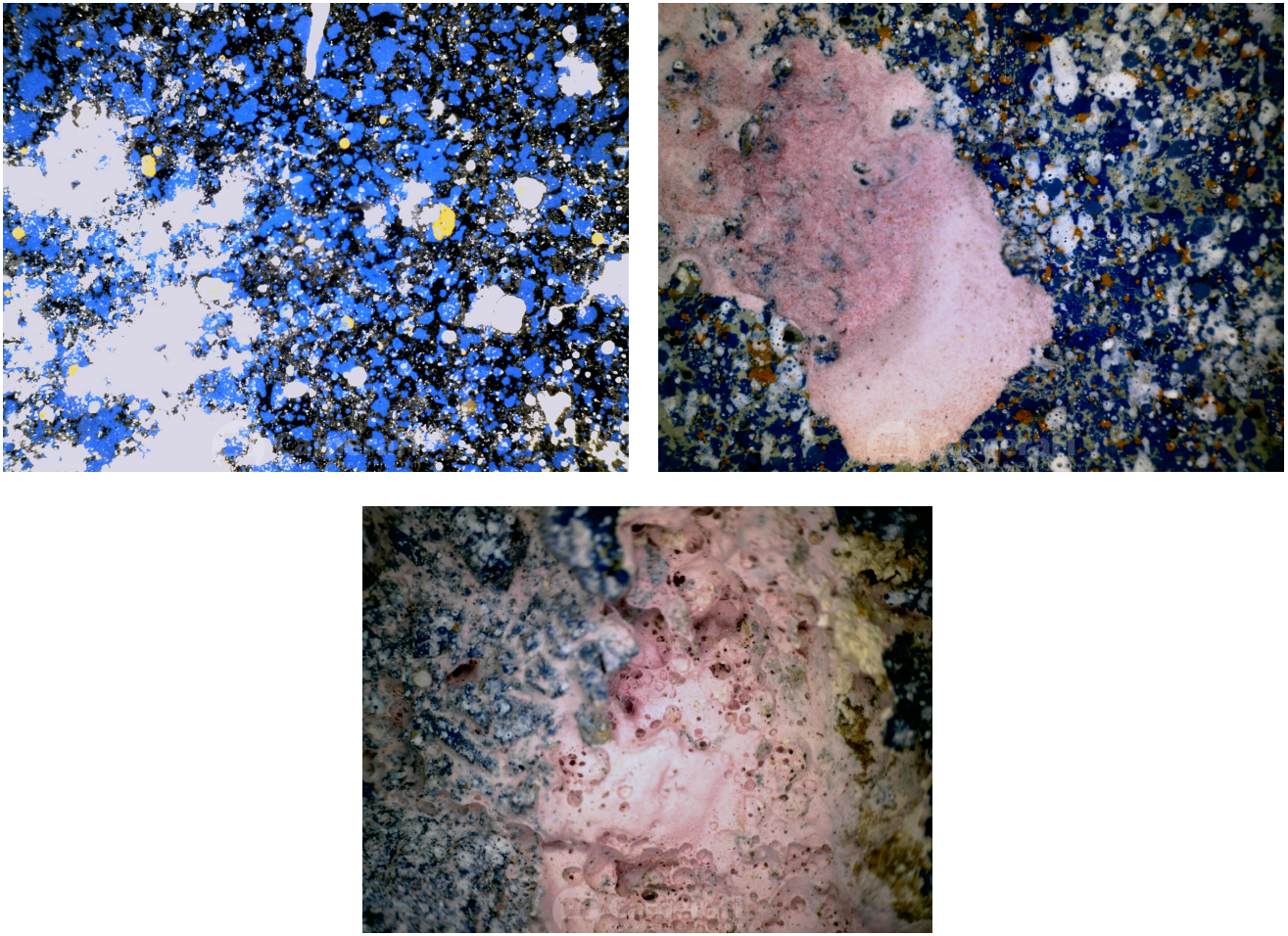


Figure 2. The pink overpainting under the microscope. The characteristic craters that appear when the coalescence takes place under non-appropriate environmental conditions and, in this case, because of the addition of a great amount of water. Photos by authors (2017).

Figure 5. The inscription "ΘΕΑΜΑ" (spectacle) on the lower part of the east wall. Photo by authors (2017).

of water and a polar organic solvent. The use of the solvent was limited and the contact time was as short as possible so as not to interact with the original paint layer. After cleaning, there was a need for a slight aesthetic reintegration and surface consolidation. For this purpose a technique of transparent glaze inpainting was applied only on small losses using chemically stable acrylic pigments. The bigger losses and lacunae remained untouched.

At the same time, mock-ups were prepared in the laboratory on which several coating materials were applied. Some of them were also applied on the edge of the east side of the mural in order to choose the appropriate protective coating.

This project was financed by the StACo team members and the Department of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art, and it was carried out by the volunteer work of the members of the StACo group with the help of students and professors of the Department of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art, and fellow professional conservators. The students included European exchange students from Spain and Romania who were part of the Erasmus program. In this context, on-site courses and seminars were held, and the Conservation of the work of WD became an open laboratory for the students of the Department of CAWA. After the vandalism, the conservation/restoration interventions became a part of the mural's history, and the mural has now become a monument of contemporary cultural heritage of the neighborhood.

3. The Impact of the Project: Looking through the Owl's Eyes

During the last decades and especially during the socioeconomic crisis in Greece, street art became popular even with a part of the public that, until then, did not have much interest or access to art spaces. Over time, people who considered street art and graffiti as exclusively illegal, offensive activities, and that these works are of minor importance for the history of art, now recognize some value in it.

WD is a street artist who has played an important role in the acceptance of street art by the public in Greece. This acceptance is due—among other things—to the high quality of his work, to his avoidance of overexposure to the media, and mainly to his inspiring way of depicting and expressing the sociopolitical atmosphere. The above reasons reinforced the disapproval by the public and from the people of the field of street art and graffiti of the vandalistic attack. Many artists took a stand and criticized the vandalistic overpainting via social media. For days, social media and traditional newspapers criticized and mocked the

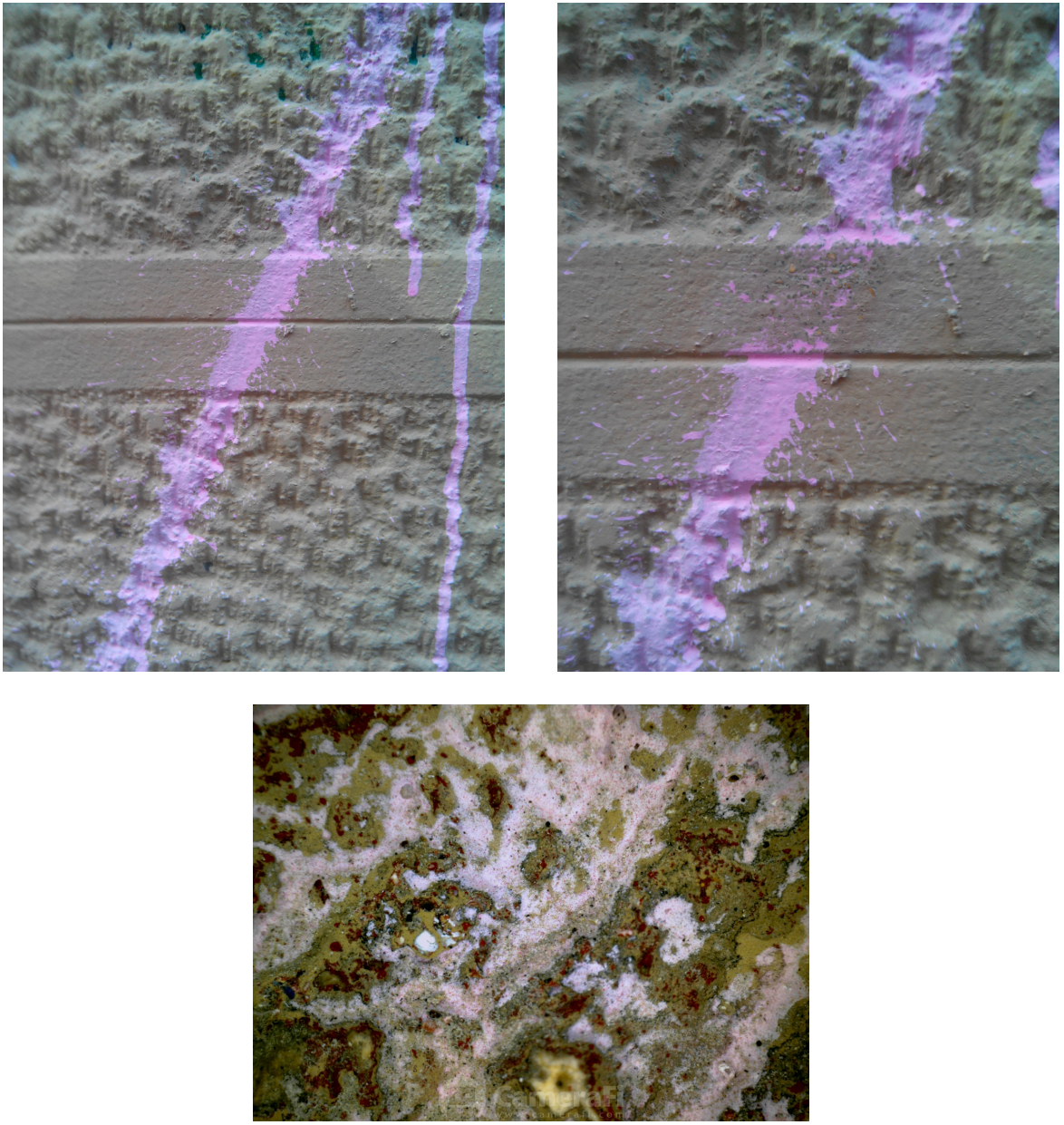
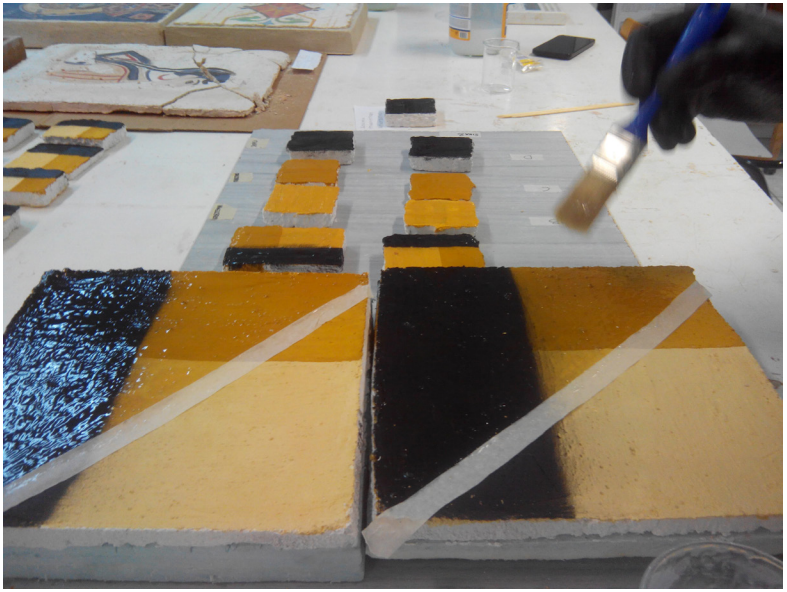
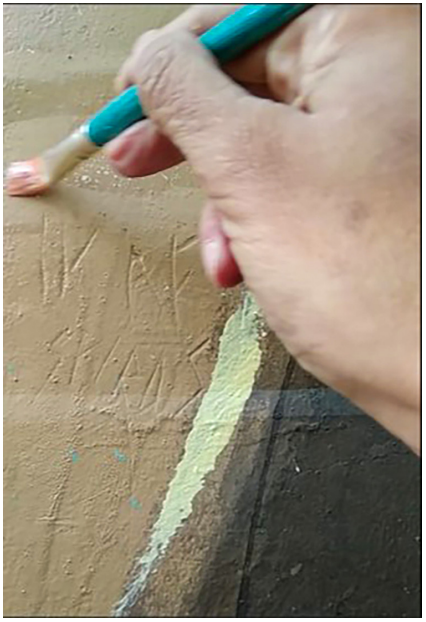


Figure 6. Cleaning tests, before, during, and after. Photos by authors (2017).

Figure 7. The owl after the vandalism and during the removal of the overpainting. Photos by authors (February and March 2017).





Figures 8. Testing for protective coatings. Photos by authors (2017, 2018).

unknown perpetrator, while the owl was surrounded by visitors and journalists on a daily basis. The publicity that the work received increased after the vandalism but made the conservation work more difficult as journalists and cameras made constant appearances.

The mural became an attraction that gathered people to see it and take photographs, mentioned during the discussion in the presentation of the project at the Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival on October 8, 2017. In spite of the mural's great publicity, gentrification has not yet arrived in the area. It was mentioned that the price of the real estate around the owl has risen because of the mural's fame, but the neighborhood, four years after the creation of the mural, remains the same. The story of the mural and its conservation appears in *StACo*, a documentary film directed by Elias Demetriou (2018) who recorded the group's activities from 2015 to 2018. The documentary presents the conservation in detail and includes interviews of WD, Marios Strofalis, StACo members, and neighbors who shared their opinion about the mural's vandalism and conservation. The conservation of the owl was also presented in TV series *Dialogue* in the episode "Wound Healing" that brought together the group of rescuers that provides first aid for wounded animals and StACo that heals the "wounds" of city's "wild" life: street art (Pottakis 2017).

The project of the conservation-restoration of the mural *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens* was the topic of a 2019 undergraduate thesis by the co-authors Eve Mini and Sofia Fragkiskou in the Department of Antiquities and Artworks of the UniWA. The owl was also used in a pilot, participatory approach program for a group of individuals undergoing drug rehabilitation by Kalliopi Oreianou (2018) in the Master's Program of Museum Studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. It was presented as a case study at many international conferences and lectures. It was also used as a case study and essay topic of undergraduate, postgraduate, and Erasmus students of the UniWA. The mural has become an object of research and discussion and a case study of the courses of the conservation of wall paintings at UniWA. On the occasion of the restoration work, many tours and educational programs for children, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and the public were carried by StACo, the University of West Attica, and the Urban Layers organization for street art tours in Athens. Many students, professors, and researchers from all over the world visited the mural, and through this framework opened a discussion about the conservation/restoration of public murals.

This almost no-budget project is an example of a successful collaboration of conservation activists, professors, conservators, students in conservation, and the local community to protect a public mural. This ongoing process transformed the Samos and Palaiologou Street

Figure 14. During the removal of overpainting. Photos by authors (2017).

corner to a point of special significance. At the end of the film *StACo*, Marios Strofalis (composer and Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival representative) says:

> I think that what these guys did is just as important as the artwork itself. And in the end, it is this collective effort that makes an artwork a classic. An artwork remains a classic not only because it was created, but because it was repaired and conserved and because, in the end, this is life. Life is a set of repair mechanisms. There can be no life without repair mechanisms. And we learned a lesson about this thing. This is that if we want an institution to be an institution, in addition to doing new things, you should always think that you have to conserve or repair the old ones because these are what will be in the future your treasure and your heritage. So these guys made our first heritage, one would say. The first great heritage and they brought it back!
> —Demetriou 2018

4. Conclusions: What's the Lifespan of an Owl?

The conservation/restoration of the mural *Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens* was a successful collective effort to preserve a public mural by a team of activists, conservators, professors, and students of an academic department, the members of the initiative of the Petit Paris d'Athènes Festival, and the entire neighborhood that cherish it as their living cultural heritage.

This project pointed out the artistic, educational, scientific, and social value of the community mural that seems to fulfill the requirements to become part of the contemporary cultural heritage, while it is the conservation procedures that can add or reveal the values of an artwork. It also gave the opportunity for students to practice on a real artwork, gain high-level hand-skills, sharpen their critical thinking, decision-making ability, and communication skills.

Therefore, the importance of this project is multidimensional and will continue to bear fruits for quite some time to come. In this story, there is the will and faith of the people of the Festival who try to make their neighborhood a better place, a great street artist who supports this effort offering a monumental public mural for free, the neighborhood that embraces the mural as its local heritage, a disgruntled graffiti writer who protests against

empty publicity, but at the end, an attack on a community mural, the media that are always looking for a new story to consume for publicity, a group of pioneer conservation activists, an academic department that supports the efforts for the social and scientific role of conservation activism, and, most importantly, the young conservators who took part in a difficult project: to keep alive a community mural taking into account parameters beyond traditional conservation projects

Finally, this story did not "bring owls to Athens." The phrase "brings owls to Athens" (κομίζει γλαύκας εις Αθήνας) means that someone says something that is not new or special. The owl in ancient Athens was the official symbol of the city and its depiction was present almost everywhere; therefore, an owl in Athens was something very common. It is, for the moment, a happy ending to a story where the owl survives, and it is still there posing for tourists. Most of all, it is there for the people of the neighborhood who are proud of their contemporary heritage.

Figure 15. Knowledge Speaks—Wisdom Listens. Work in progress. Athens, Greece (2016).

What if I Fall? But Imagine, what if You Fly? Work in progress. Athens, Greece (2015).

Hope Dies Last. Work in Progress. Athens, Greece (2015).

NESTalgic. Work in progress. Bali, Indonesia (2014).

Journey. Work in Progress. Wiesbaden, Germany (2016).

Box of Imagination: A Tribute to Moebius. Work in progress. Cheltenham, UK (2019).

No Land for the Poor. Work in progress
Athens, Greece (2015).

Croc Family. Work in progress. Berlin, Germany (2016).

8

An Interview with Wild Drawing

Elizabeth Levkovich

This email interview was conducted in 2020 between Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, and Athens, Greece.

How did you start painting?

It sounds cliché, but I feel like I was always painting. As a typical Balinese, my life was much connected to art from the very beginning, before even I went to school. I still remember myself sitting with my uncle showing me how to draw traditional Balinese motifs. Also, I remember how impressed I was by sculptures and great hand-painted movie billboards. I was wondering how they make these kind of stuff. So I followed the Artistic High School and then I graduated from the Indonesian School of Fine Arts. Later in Athens I got my degree in Applied Arts. My first painting in the street was in 2000 and apart from this I've never stopped working in my studio.

How did you become a street artist? Why did you choose this way of expression?

It's my need to communicate and share my thoughts and ideas with people, and based on people's reactions, I think the message finds its final recipient, which makes me happy and

encourages me to keep up. Art can't solve the problems of our society, but for sure can educate us. It's important that anyone can freely access art without social, economic, cultural, or other limitations. In fact, art is there, and finds us on our way to work, to school, or when we just take a walk in the city. What's more, the process itself is very interesting, and there are so many challenges when painting in public space that I really enjoy. Even if I have to be prepared for the worst, we must not forget that painting in the street is still illegal.

Is Athens a dynamic city concerning street art?

I think so. Many local and foreign artists from different backgrounds interested in working in the streets make the walls of Athens rich in visual art: from tags and styles to stencils and murals, even though the quality does not correspond that much to the quantity. Graffiti/street art forms a powerful visual mirror of the society and Athens's walls prove it; Athens is one of the most representative examples in fact. It's a dynamic open gallery that changes every day with new stuff coming up and some others disappearing forever. In Athens, walls are alive and art in the street grows still wild, not like in most of the big cities at least in the West, where only big commissioned murals are welcome.

The city seemed to become an artistic center during the economic crisis. Why? Do you also feel it?

As history shows, art blossoms in hard times, and for almost a decade now Athens is in a deep crisis. not only an economic one. We, the local artists, become more creative and we force our brain to work to the extreme, while foreign artists find Athens friendly, interesting, or inspiring enough and choose her as their artistic base. At the same time and because of the crisis again, some other people or organizations choose Athens—a city whose people are struggling to survive in the ruins of the economy—as the perfect scenery to present their art events and exhibitions in a way that sometimes makes us feel like the exotic indigenous or as a subject worthy to be observed. To sum up, I'm not sure if all these are enough to name Athens an artistic center. I mean, "artistic center" compared to which other cities? What is the scale of it, etc.?

How would you describe your own personal style? When I look at your works I am transformed by the fluidity of shape—especially in the human figures you create. It often seems as if the color and texture of the imagery is melting.

Maybe at first glance my work can be described sometimes as surrealistic. But actually, as I get a lot of inspiration from comics and graphic novels, fantastic art is more suitable to describe my work.

Many of your works are done in blue tones. Is there a reason for this? I find them to be extremely peaceful and calming, even though many of the themes you explore are the opposite.

Actually, my favorite colors are turquoise and purple, so when I apply these colors, they get mixed and create these blue tones. My impression is that the most difficult/important thing is how an artwork can attract people's attention. If people stop by to see and enjoy the artwork, only then will they realize the theme of the mural and the (hidden or obvious) message of my work. Especially the latter one—the message—is an element of great importance for me and it's one of the reasons I paint in public space. Given the fact that my work is usually located in the crowded urban jungle, another reason I use this color palette is to give people a feeling of serenity, a piece of art easy on the eye and enjoyable.

Some of your pieces, like *The House of Venom*, look like they come straight out of a fairytale or children's story. Is this an effect you intentionally create?

Yes. Until now, a great challenge for me and one of the parts that I like the most while making a mural, is how to create a fantasy world in the middle of an urban space: how to respond to the existing architecture and the surrounding space and then step-by-step, how to turn the place I paint into an unreal spot, like in a dreamland. The goal is to surprise myself first, and then the audience, by transforming the spot into a space for a dreamy contemplation.

House of Venom. Athens, Greece (2017).

If you were given the chance to create a mural in any place in the world right now, where would it be? Would you decide what to create before you got there, or would you want to see the setting in person first?

I have never thought about it. However, if I could describe the ideal spot for me, then it all comes down to the challenge, the inspiring creativity, and the margins of experimentation that the spot can give me. As for the decision about what to paint, I have to see the spot first because the spot is the leader when creating a mural; it's one of the main sources of inspiration for me.

If you could choose a soundtrack/genre of music to describe your art-making process, what would it be?

Space music, a genre of ambient music.

Where does your inspiration for creating stories about animals come from, for instance, *The Lion of Kea* and *Space Monkey*?

I was born and raised in Bali and despite the intense tourist development, nature is still around you, not to mention when I was a little boy. I mean, I bring all these inside me, all these animals and birds and trees, so it's normal for me to create murals with animals. And then comes the other part, the creative one. As a big portion of my murals are inspired by the place where the mural will be created, I have to think how to synchronize these animals with the existing objects on or around the wall—like bushes and trees, or windows, pipes, and architectural forms—in order to achieve an interaction of all these elements. Two good examples of the process can be seen at *What if I Fall? But Imagine, What if You Fly!* and *Hominoidea*. The latter was painted on a spiral staircase outside the library of the National Technical University of Athens, and it brought attention to the scientific work done on that campus. Incidentally, during the first COVID-19 lockdown in May 2020 when there were no students around, the university erased the mural (see Kouleta 2020). Other times, the depiction of animals has to do with the history of the location. Then, I'm looking for references from the history or folklore of the local area. *The Lion of Kea*, for example, is inspired by the large lion sculpted out of limestone during the sixth century BCE.

Space Monkey. Athens, Greece (2013).

What is the process of creation look like? Dream? Research?

Actually it's more about reading and research. These, among others, feed my imagination.

What is your definition of fantasy?

It's a process of creating something through your own imagination.

Can you describe your first *trompe l'œil*, and when you realized it?

From my beginnings, in 2000 when I started working in public spaces, I was interested in responding to objects that already existed on the surface of the walls. There were windows, doors, pipes, etc., which I was changing by creating new forms. But at that time I was still focused on portraits, so I thought this was just for fun. Later, when I moved to Europe in 2006, I realized that visual illusion is the most creative challenge for me. From then on, I devoted most of my time in creating murals of visual illusion, looking for new possibilities in managing the space. And I really enjoy it!

Why did you choose this type of intervention?

I choose it because artworks in public space actually can involve many elements that already exist around the work; it's a process of give and take. For example, when people stop to look at a roadside mural or to take a photo, what they see is the whole scene in that space: the architecture of the building, the street equipment in front of the wall, trees, or nature which are the background for the mural, etc. And these all are becoming a unified image. This is where I find a challenge to be more creative in cultivating a space, to be able to give a new image in that space. Art in public space is not like art in a gallery, where I use the wall only to display my work. For me, in the street there must be a dialogue between the work and the space where the work is located.

In *Girl behind the Chimney*, the *trompe l'œil* seems to play with the constraints of the wall and the presence of the fireplace. How do you deal with these constraints?

This mural project was rather an adventure for me. It's a bit of a long story, but I think an interesting one. Well, when I was first selected by the Grenoble Street art Festival, I was excited because it was tricky enough and gave me much inspiration and creativity. When I sent the design, all parties said yes: the festival, the owner of the building, and the church that owns the chimney. But a couple of weeks later—when even the paints for the mural had been bought—I was contacted again by the festival that told me that the church had changed its mind, had rejected the design, and I was not allowed to paint there. By the way, my design was science-related because Grenoble is an important center for scientific research. The design was about electricity, light, and Apollo, the god of light in Greek mythology. After this fact, the festival proposed another wall, a plain one, which I didn't find as inspiring. So I decided to go for the challenge and paint something that I would be proud of without touching the chimney at all, the church's forbidden property. It took me quite long to find the idea. I wasn't allowed to paint on the chimney, but no one could ban me from including the chimney in my mural. So I just used the "forbidden" chimney as part of the harp, and the mural *Girl behind the Chimney* was born. In the end, the funny thing is that even some people connected to the church organisation told me that they liked the mural. But at the same time, they were quite embarrassed by the local media that had exposed their refusal, and they worried about the impact of this fact's publicity.

Can you describe your way of making a *trompe l'œil*? How in particular do you create the illusion?

The most important thing is the selection of the spot. Once I find it, I check all the details of the wall, all the elements related to it, its architectural shape, etc. For painting the mural, I usually start by creating the background illusion part of the space; after that, when I think it's good, I continue with the main object of the mural. There is nothing particularly special about making *trompe l'œil*, except working through all the elements that already exist adding some imagination.

Girl behind the Chimney. Grenoble, France (2019).

What are the recipes for a successful *trompe l'œil*?

I don't know if there is a special recipe, but to make *trompe l'*œil, one actually indirectly has to learn to be an architect or an interior designer, more or less. One's spatial ability and knowledge of perspective must be strong, because the key to an illusionary image is all in perspective. And of course, one needs experience with doing it as often as possible.

Your *trompe l'œils* are based on elements located near the wall: sky, vegetation, architectural materials. What effects are they trying to produce? Are they a way of "breaking through" the wall, of making inroads to see beyond?

Yes, all these elements play an important role in my murals; they are the ones who dance together. I just make a stage for them and give them a bit of extra costumes.

Your style is realistic, but your themes are rather surreal, dreamlike. How do they resonate with the choice of trompe *l'œil*?

For me, the combination of these two choices is very important because the situation in public space is totally different from the indoor atmosphere (e.g., in a gallery or in a museum) where all can be arranged in such a way as to lead the audience's imagination according to the artist's concept. But outdoors, everything is wild, so I think that drawing in realistic style gives the audience the closeness to the mural, but when they get deeper into the work, it turns out that they enter another world. And hopefully these two elements can complement each other; fantasy feeds and grows the *trompe-l'œil* and *trompe-l'œil* enriches and visualizes the fantasy.

What place does photography occupy in your work? How does it reinforce the illusion?

Documentation of the mural (photo/video) is of vital importance; it's the only thing that could last "forever." We can never be sure of the existence and fate of a mural in public space; a mural is very easy to get vandalized, or to disappear because of the harsh weather, or because of the building's demolition, etc. Especially for murals with 3D illusion, another problem is the focusing ability of the human eye. A camera lens can always capture all the elements into one complete image, while the human eye is not strong enough for that.

How does social media affect your following, the kind of people you attract to your work? Do you notice a specific type of response on Instagram? Is there some type of risk with sharing your work on Instagram?

Being a fan/follower of an artist's account normally means that you like his/her/their work, so 99,9% of the feedback I get is positive. Of course there are some few cases—like when I post a politically themed mural accompanied by a quite radical caption or when I posted the black square icon for #blackouttuesday—where some people stopped following me or made comments of disapproval, and of course they also stopped following my account. When sharing your work on social media, the risk is always the same for all the artists, and has to do with their intellectual property. Accounts use your content without any credit to the creator. Or even worse, your work is transformed into a product without any permission, of course.

Was there a response from the Greek government to your public exploration of the poverty and unemployment growing in Athens?

No, there was not any kind of response.

What do you think your work does for people in getting across a message that other street artists do not do?

I can't say about what other artists do or don't do. Instead I'll tell you a very touching moment for me. When I was about to finish painting the mural *No Land for the Poor*, I wrote a dedication, "to the poor and homeless here and around the globe." At that moment, I felt someone poked me on my back so I turned back and I saw a guy. He said, "Hi, thank you for this," and when I asked him why, he said, "because I'm homeless." By the way, this mural was painted for five days in a row and was finished on the day of the referendum in Greece on July 5, 2015, when the Greek people voted whether to accept the bailout by the European Union.

How did you start to engage with visual arts, and which are your most important influences?

From the time I remember myself, I was always drawing, or at least I was trying. I finished the Fine Art Lyceum and then I graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Bali. As for the influences, many great masters in the Renaissance era made spectacular *trompe-l'œil*—like Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel—and their work became a very important source of inspiration for me. Apart from that, I really like comics and graphic novels, reading and sometimes drawing comics. So artists like Moebius or Toppi have greatly influenced my work. As for the influences on my thematic palette, I get a lot of inspiration from social phenomena, lifestyle, art, and nature.

Are you always using the same materials?

No, the materials I use are changing according to the condition of the spot, the nature of the surface, etc. Also, what I use and when depends on my mood, so I can use spray paint, acrylic, or ink. However, during most of the last decade, I mostly use acrylics, and I paint with a roller brush.

Is it important in your opinion for a city and its people to have murals?

Of course! Your whole mood changes. What better way to start your day than with colors? Murals are art, and art is education. Art cannot solve any socioeconomic problem, but it is food for the mind and the soul. And often, street artworks become the reason for the opening of a very interesting discussion in the local or the online community.

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I Need My Space. Pristina, Kosovo (2018).

Believe in Dreams. Athens, Greece (2017).


WD

No Place like Home.
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