



Visual Arts that change and challenge the city: Stencils in Lisbon, Portugal

Leandro Gabriel, Isabel André, Ana Estevens

Visual urban art have largely dominated western cities throughout history. While these images express a certain idea of domination on the context in which they arise (evolving from prehistoric times to the Renaissance), today they combined new skills and knowledge of contemporary art movements with a more proactive attitude of social-political awareness and persistent challenge of city order. Thus, visual artists have been changing and transforming some public spaces in living canvases as they spray of an aerosol can using stencil templates. This artistic technique appears as an alternative, simple and direct form of communication, because it's easy to replicate and have a global circulation, as an example of the real democratization of artistic expression, as noted by its acceptance within the art market and artistic institutions. Nowadays, in this process, the international mobility of artists continues to play an important role in the exchange of imaginary, techniques and experiences on how visual art can effectively change and challenge urbanity.

Like other cities affected by political austerity due to the recent global crisis, Lisbon (Portugal) has been collecting several examples of this visual urban art mainly related to social and political tensions. The city walls are filled with important messages that, on one hand, enhance the fight against the shrinking of the welfare state or decline of social rights and, on the other hand, point out important issues and flaws related to planning and urban regeneration, and also stands out as an important alternative medium of mass communication, for example related to the consumption of some public goods.

This research intends to provide insights of a collection of stencils urban art in Lisbon, using detailed content analysis applied to a large database we have prepared, based on photographic inventory. The topics for analysis includes location in the city and in the neighborhood, the image meaning, words, colors, size, etc. Based on this information, the main focus concerns its role in urban transformations in contemporary cities, namely the discussion of key questions as: What are the relationship between these street artists and most active social movements? How municipal authorities are dealing with this urban art? What are the most listed themes in these stencils and what is the impact that they have in real Lisbon transformation?

Keywords: Visual Urban Arts, Stencils, Mobility of Artists, Urban Transformations.