

KINGA RYBAK-NIEDZIÓŁKA\*

## PUBLIC SPACE PLAYING WITH STREET ART

### ZABAWY STREET-ARTU Z PRZESTRZENIĄ PUBLICZNĄ

#### Summary

Street art is a particular kind of art, not only because of its spatial context, but also due to its ability to redefine the character of a place. The artistic actions related to street art influence the reception and form and function of a space. This article discusses the image, sculpture and performance as fields of a kind of game between the artist and recipient in the public space.

*Keywords: street art., graffiti, urban planning*

#### Streszczenie

Street art. Jest specyficznym rodzajem sztuki, nie tylko ze względu na kontekst przestrzenny, ale na dużą moc redefinicji charakteru miejsca. Działania artystyczne w których się mieści w istotny sposób mogą wpływać nie tylko na odbiór, ale również na funkcję i formę danej przestrzeni. Niniejszy artykuł zwraca uwagę na obraz, rzeźbę i performance – jako pola na których odbywa się rodzaj gry artysty z przestrzenią i odbiorcą.

*Słowa kluczowe: street art, graffiti, projektowanie urbanistyczne*

\* Ph.D. Arch. Kinga Rybak-Niedziółka, Department of Land Art., Faculty of Horticulture, Biotechnology and Landscape Architecture, Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW.

## 1. Introduction

Public space is less and less a static phenomenon. There are some reasons – the first being the stronger necessity to show, to emphasize something, and a second is more and more apparent advertisement. Their elements are an incessant game with user/spectator in a given public space and with the space itself. These games should be very individual, on the verge of legality, or purely commercial. These activities can be a kind of art, often very spontaneous, but could also be a stimulation to sell something. There are instances of these two functions being linked. In its variety of art forms, street art is relatively popular. There is the kind of art that is located where actions with planar graphic elements like *murals*, *stickers*, *tags* or graffiti take place, but there are also sculptures, gardens (*guerilla gardening*), and installations. In street art we find activities happening connected with group expression (*flash-mob*). On the border of street art are all the activities made with light installations or light sculpture technologies. Generally we could divide all of these activities into three categories in special context – picture, sculpture, and performance.

## 2. Picture

Visual street art has a long historical tradition. One could say that the first piece of art in this movement were the cave paintings made by our ancestors [5]. Nowadays in spaces such activities are all manifests connected with the fights of earlier occupants (like slogans vowing to fight with invaders during the time of insurrection) or sooner (one of the most common pictograms of very great importance layer – the sign of Fighting Poland, or the “Solidarność” caption made by Jerzy Janiszewski). Also important were other activities, too like all electoral posters.

The origins of street art are connected with United States and hip-hop culture. It was there that the first slogans and symbols of graffiti art were created. The pioneer of these illegal and sometimes vandalistic activities was TAKI 183 from NY Bronx [5]. In Poland, for a long time the most common were murals with a political message. The precursor of artistic graffiti in our country was Włodek Fruczek in the 1970s. His works were very deliberate and had a strong influence in the spatial context on the site where they were created. Nowadays the most popular are activities which are a kind of art manifesto, and advertisements of course. Author’s activities in public spaces may be just a slogan, less (*throw-up*) or more complicated (*piece*) [5], or signature, or they could also be somebody’s or something’s symbol (*tag*) [2]. The semantic layer is very important here, as in war time, visual street art is often a kind of transmission, a type of rebellion or comment, not only in the political meaning, but in the spatial meaning too, which is created in a particular place. The legality of artistic works here is very important too. In some examples as with the work of one of the most famous street art artists – Banksy or among Spanish artists – one basic rule is that “When it is legal it is not graffiti” [2] in the sense that all that only recalls commercial tendencies is not art. Thus, anonymity is very popular among street art creators. It is very important for the artists’ consciousness that they can do more than legal creators [2]. An appropriate example from the border between art and vandalism is *bombing* [2]. This is an activity when artists meet in a particular part of the city or in place and paint its space in one, previously planned motif. This is

a dangerous game with city's space. Such actions have been organized in New York, London or Madrid. These days graffiti exists as illegal and legal kinds of street art in Poland (one example is the wall of the racecourse in Służew in Warsaw on the Puławska Street side) and as spontaneous activity, unfortunately often connected with damage to elevations and public spaces [5].

Another kind of artistic manifest are *murals*. These are not always legal either, like for example those by Banksy or the Spanish artist Muelle [2]. In Poland artistic murals were created after 1989, which was related with the wider market of graphic tools available after the political and economic changes in our country. We should not forget about the advertisements from the 1960s and 70s, painted on walls and often created by famous artists. Some of them can be seen nowadays (in Praga in Warsaw for example). Interesting examples of early murals were works by the Twoczywo group (this was founded by Robert Czajka, Krzysztof Sidorek and Mariusz Libel), who created as did artists in times of transformation, they were influenced by 1930s artists like Malewicz or El Lisidzky [6]. Recently murals have become a very popular and trendy form of art which interplays with the public space. Their appearance is often a kind of revitalization of places not only in the visual but also in the social sense. Creators of murals, most of whom decided to work legally, are recognized artists. Murals fall into two groups of style. The first is connected with more literal works, while the second deals with an abstract style. [6] [7]. Artists worth seeing in this first way are: Mariusz Waras (*M-city*), Damian Terlecki (*Czarnobyl*), Sławomir Czajkowski (*Zbiok*), Daniel *Chazme*, and the ETAM Group. Interesting abstract creators include Autone, Pener, Roem or Nawer. What is it important is that all these artists have a sense of space and the places where their works are located [6].

In the meaning of street art there are activities on larger scale, but noticeable too. These are *stickers*, *patterns* or *lighting graffiti*, the last of which are often installations like sculptures. *Stickers* are very popular manifestation of ideas and adherences to all kinds of clubs or political groups. They could also be a kind of art, like for example the stickers in the windows of the ASP in Warsaw. They are small pictures or slogans in black and white or colourful style [5]. They are often located on bus-stops or public transport. Their authors are anonymous like most creators of *patterns*. *Patterns* are very popular in the public space too. Sometimes they are used in advertisements, but may also be a kind of manifesto. The aforementioned symbol of Fighting Poland is also a kind of pattern. The most important in creating patterns is the design [13]. An artist who very often uses this tool in their work is Banksy [7].

*Lighting graffiti* exists in several forms. This could be a screen on a wall or some kind of animation display from a projector. This could also be the whole wall which is one monitor. This technology is most popular in advertisements, but they could be used by artists like *lightwriting* or *videoart* as well [6].

Worth seeing is another trend connected with the visual game in public space – *reversed graffiti*. This is a kind of revitalization of walls or whole spaces by ordering earlier graphic layers [7]. They are often overpainting of a surface in one colour or creating space murals in tunnels, overpasses or subways. An interesting example of this activity are the Fast Tram stations in Poznań – “Pestka”. This kind of art is very powerful in the revitalization of abandoned spaces. One of the most famous artists in world in this trend is the Brazilian creator Alexandre Orion [8].



Ill.1. Banksy, Sweeping Under Carpet, Hoxton, Anglia ([www.wilko.com](http://www.wilko.com)); Ill. 2. Window of ASP in Warsaw with stickers ([www.vlepkotronika.blogspot.com](http://www.vlepkotronika.blogspot.com)); Ill. 3. ARYZ, Pomorska Street, Łódź ([www.galeriaurbanforms.org](http://www.galeriaurbanforms.org)); Ill. 4. K. Krzykawska, Eyes 2000, Floriańska Gate, Kraków (phot. K. Krzykawska); Ill. 5. Akademia Ruchu, Queue going out of the shop ([www.akademiaruchu.com](http://www.akademiaruchu.com)) – collage Kinga Rybak-Niedziółka

### 3. Sculpture

Spatial activities connected with public spheres in the context of their game with street art are very often a kind of installation, but they could also be understood as sculpture or relief. They could be temporary or permanent. Sometimes their limits are indefinite because of verbal or scent elements. This could fall into some parts which build a wider context in public spaces. One of these activities are multimedia arts, often connected with performance. An interesting example here is the use in the public space of some of Gehl's walls made from untypical materials, with not only visual transmission but also play with other senses [2]. Artists who create this kind of art are Jaume Plens or Francesco Mariotti [7]. What is important for the context of a space is the influence of these elements on its visual reception. Sometimes even temporary installations create some new characteristic points, or change proportions of interiors in the public space. It could be that the appearance of a new sculpture in a public space creates a new definition of its identity and character of place. Sometimes new elements could become a new landmark, like the famous Wind Tower by Toyo Ito [9]. A good example of a game on the verge of urbanism and sculpture is also the very famous revitalization of the estate in St. Gallen by the architect Carlos Martinez and the artist Papillotti Rist [7]. In Poland there are very interesting examples of the interaction between art and space in the sculptures created by Katarzyna Krzykawska. They exploit the context of place and dialogue with landscape where they are located.

### 4. Performance

The border between performance and sculpture, like the border between performance and image, could be blurred. Sometimes a piece of art which is intended to be temporary remains for a long time. Performance is activity, making and presenting, and was very popular in the 1970s. Performances connected with space were presented by the "Łódź Kaliska" group, or Warsaw's Movement Academy [7]. Performance influences place by its existence in space; it could strongly interact with space by changing its layers of meaning and identity. The social context is very important here, not only as transmission between the artist and spectator, by paying attention to some event or action in the context of certain spatial issues. Performative street art is strongly connected with community art- activities in local communities [7]. It often has to do with revitalization in a particular space such as in the works of the ODblokuj foundation. Interesting movements in space games with street art are *happenings* or *guerilla gardenig* [2]. A happening is a previously planned and presented activity. In the United States very popular happenings now include the *flash mob* – this is a group dance configuration made by random people. This action relates to the need of being in a group and has a temporary effect, but always on the reception of the space in which it takes place. *Guerilla gardening* is the semi-legal taking over of space and changing them into, most often, temporary gardens. The informal leader of this movement is the English artist Richard Reynolds. In Poland there is the Kwiatuchi group [7].

### 5. Conclusions

The interaction between artist and space can take place in various fields and can very powerfully change identity, form and function. This kind of game can be temporary or permanent.

In street art this kind of relationship is on both the sensual and visual layer. Activities take place, there are entrance elements, which may redefine the place but can also change the whole context of a space. Street art is a kind of social opinion, often a rebellion or manifestation of views or identity with some group. The game between the public space and art is in this meaning not purely a visual experience but there are also emotional senses. Social meaning is very important here. Street art draws our attention to problems in a less evident way. What is important here is individuality of reception and interpretation. The fact of reaction, visible or feeling of change in public space is the point, acceptance is not necessary. Only the manifesto – this is the foundation of public space playing with street art.

## References

- [1] Bartkowiak Z., *Graffiti – sztuka czy wandalizm*, Fundacja Bezpieczne Miasto, Zielona Góra 2008.
- [2] Ganz N., *Graffiti. Arte urbano de los cinco continentes*, Barcelona 2004.
- [3] Gehl J., *Life between buildings*, The Danish Architectural Press, Copenhagen 2001.
- [4] Giżycki M., *Słownik kierunków, ruchów i kluczowych pojęć sztuki drugiej połowy XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.
- [5] Gorczyca Ł., *Dlaczego Mona Lisa się uśmiecha? O dobrych praktykach artystycznych w przestrzeni publicznej*, „2+3D”, III/2010, 2010 p. 54–58.
- [6] Marx-Kozakiewicz M., *Ulica jako forma przestrzeni życia miasta*, „Czasopismo techniczne”, z. 3-A, 2008 p. 226–230.
- [7] Niżyńska A., *Street art jako alternatywna forma debaty publicznej w przestrzeni miejskiej*, Trio, Warszawa 2011.
- [8] Rutkiewicz M., Sikorski T., *Graffiti w Polsce 1940–2010*, Wydawnictwo Carta Blanca, Warszawa 2011.
- [9] Śliwińska B., *Sztuka publiczna jako czynnik kształtujący charakter przestrzeni*, praca magisterska na kierunku Architektura Krajobrazu, SGGW w Warszawie, wykonana pod kierunkiem prof. J. Królikowskiego, 2012.
- [10] Taborska H., *Współczesna sztuka publiczna. Dzieła i problemy*, Warszawa 1996.
- [11] Wejhert K., *Elementy kompozycji urbanistycznej*, Wydawnictwo Arkady, Warszawa 1984.
- [12] [www.akademiaruchu.com](http://www.akademiaruchu.com)
- [13] [www.galeriaurbanforms.org](http://www.galeriaurbanforms.org)
- [14] [www.wilko.com](http://www.wilko.com)
- [15] [www.vlepkotronika.blogspot.com](http://www.vlepkotronika.blogspot.com)