

LEGALISE GRAFFITI

This art project aims to promote the legalisation of graffiti with the goal of legitimising its expression. In other words, all plastic interventions in a public space should be free from political or economic pressure. Self-expression and dialogue in a public space through painting, drawing, sculpture or video should be a legitimate right in the same way as the spoken word.

The goal of this art project is therefore to promote this legalisation. This legalisation that poses numerous questions and calls for numerous debates has only briefly been discussed.

For example, as far as we know, no organised or publicised group exists that campaigns for this legalisation. There has been no exhibition on this subject. There is no reference website in French, English or Spanish on this subject, even though the subject is not completely unknown.

For a start, graffiti artists themselves are talking about it, questioning it, criticising, refuting or supporting it. Certain researchers, sociologists or graffiti enthusiasts have already thought about this legalisation. But once again, to my knowledge, no organised group exists to support this proposal to legalise graffiti. That is why this art project may appear provocative, insane, purely utopian or dangerous to some, but it raises a number of questions that are increasingly pertinent today.

To cite just a few:

- that about free expression and dialogue in a public space;
- about the creation of alternative media to commercial or political advertising in a public space;
- about the very existence of a public or private space;
- about the relationship between a public space of ideas, and a physical public space.

To explain a little better, a public space in its contemporary sense, as a space for exchanging ideas and holding dialogue about issues of common interest to a society, came from the revolutionary movements of the 18th century. It is one of the foundations of any democracy. But a public space does not exist in itself. It only exists through action, using freedom, the expressions on which is it based.

Obetre: „Legalize Graffiti is a project I began in 2007. It is the result of careful consideration about graffiti in relation to the current legal system. It is based on social, political and legal research. During the Exposition exhibition at the Museum of Ixelles in 2011 I presented it as a work in progress and as the centrepiece of many other art studies that deal with this complex issue. The question of whether graffiti is art or vandalism depends here on our subjectivity. However the question of whether it is a legitimate act of communication or not is placed at the centre of this exhibition, which calls for a public and objective debate. I invite you to read the text above, which enables you to dive right into the theoretical subject of the Legalization of Graffiti.“

For example, a commercial poster sends out a message – „be as beautiful as this top-model, buy an anti-ageing cream“. Everyone can look at it, make up their own mind about it and discuss it with their neighbour, but no one has the right to respond to this poster artistically speaking. The physical world of a public space therefore acts as one-sided emitters, breaking with the principle of dialogue and thus with the principle of a public space. The space is privatised when there is no longer a means to start a dialogue on equal terms. At the current time, this public space is increasingly privatised, mainly by commercial advertising, and instrumentalised by the authorities, by the masters of power and of the state, in order to impose their strategy of domination.

If minorities are not heard, if majorities are sometimes pushed to silence, if brilliant ideas are not communicated, it is because the communication space, which is supposedly public, is monopolised and retained in the hands of the wealthy.

The emancipating, democratic and liberating potential of a public space has never really been explored. And it is exactly this that the project for legalising graffiti, which is only a project for legalising expression in all its forms, is trying to explore.

It is not about giving more walls to young artists, but about giving real possibilities to the citizens of a society to participate in the construction of a public space.

Social mobility has not stopped working – it never really worked in the first place. Too much machinery enables representatives, the elected or other wealthy people to prevent each citizen from participating equally and freely in public dialogue.

The principle of legalising graffiti calls for direct and participative democracy (power to the people). It is also based on trust in the social being, in a free and uncensored public space. It is built on the analysis of an unjust and discriminatory system that reproduces inequalities, privileges and a form of slavery.

We want a fairer, more just, more respectful world. Perhaps we ought to start by leaving each person the means to make it so.

The art project of legalising graffiti is therefore a collective project that aims to deal with these questions of common interest fairly and in a public space.

Text by Obetre, Brussels

Web site: www.obetre.net/legalize-graffiti/

It can be conceived of in two ways :

1. a public space of ideas – that of words, of media, of communication, otherwise known as the public arena
2. a physical public space – that of urbanism, of architecture, of ornamentation, of urban property, of objects that take up place in the street, public squares and parks.

Commonly, freedom of expression in a public space is related to free speech, to the freedom of opinion that, theoretically, is maintained in Belgium, for example. We have the right to speak, to say what we want – at least, theoretically.

But as we might imagine, a public space is part of a physical world: streets, houses, benches, statues, cars, billboards, shop windows, façades. Each object transmits a message and therefore supposedly participates in public debate, in issues of common interest to a society, and supposedly shapes public opinion. But while it is possible, theoretically, to respond to anyone expressing themselves in a street on a given idea, it is nevertheless illegal or effectively impossible to respond spontaneously and thus to start a dialogue in a physical public space.

Editors

Atelier Das Gelbe Haus – www.dasgelbehaus.de

B 1 | Graffiti Art Forum . Ruhr – www.b1-graffiti-art-forum.ruhr

B1 | European Street Art Papers – www.b1-european-street-art-papers.eu