

Interview with Giulia 'BLocal' Riva about: "As Seen on the Streets of Paris" A Street Art Travel Guide and Art Photography Book in One

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Abstract

Paris, November 22nd – Writer and street art expert Giulia 'BLocal' Riva announces the release of her new book, *As Seen on the Streets of Paris*. The first in the series "As Seen on the Streets of...", this book seamlessly combines the depth of a travel guide with the visual splendor of an art photography collection. Offering a unique perspective on Paris' street art culture, it reveals why this city occupies a pivotal role in the European urban art scene.

Featuring over 250 striking photographs by Paolo Giannotti and insights from 13 Parisian street artists, *As Seen on the Streets of Paris* invites readers to embark on a journey through the French capital's urban art landscape.

The series "As Seen on the Streets of..." will continue in 2025 with new editions focusing on other major street art capitals, including London, Athens, Madrid, Rome, Lisbon, and Berlin. Each book will celebrate the distinctive urban art scenes of these cities, blending local perspectives with captivating visual storytelling.

True to the ethos of "Be Local", the guiding principle behind Giulia's travel and street art blog "BLocal" (a respected voice in the field since 2011), this book reflects not only the author's perspective but also the voices of the Parisian street artists she interviewed. Their contributions infuse the guide with authentic local flavor, leading readers to both iconic landmarks and hidden gems—offering a richer, non-touristy glimpse into the life of the city.

1 - Introduction

Two Formats, One Comprehensive Guide

To accommodate different readers, *As Seen on the Streets of Paris* is available in two formats:

The Art Photography Book: A hardcover edition printed on premium-quality paper showcasing vibrant images, perfect for art lovers.

The Travel Guide: A portable A5 paperback with lightweight paper, perfect for travelers exploring Paris' urban art scene on foot.

What's Inside *As Seen on the Streets of Paris*

This book is the ultimate guide to Paris' urban art scene, combining cultural depth with practical tools for exploration. Inside, you'll find:

Local Insights: Exclusive tips and favorite spots shared by 13 Parisian street artists, offering you an insider's perspective on the city.

Hidden Gems: A curated selection of lesser-known neighborhoods brimming with stunning murals and graffiti.

Graffiti and Street Art History: An introduction to the history and culture of graffiti and street art in Paris, providing context to the city's iconic street art movement.

Urban Art Spots: A detailed guide to the best street art locations in Paris and its surroundings, including Vitry-sur-Seine, Pantin, Aubervilliers, and Saint-Denis.

Art Photography: Nearly 300 pages of high-quality photographs by Paolo Giannotti, capturing the essence and diversity of Paris' street art.



Figure 1. Both editions feature the same content: 278 pages that blend visual storytelling with practical tools for exploring Paris' most compelling street art locations.

Artwork Stories: Engaging insights into the stories behind the murals, including the inspirations and intentions of the artists.

Must-See Works: A focus on essential pieces and key street art neighborhoods, ensuring you don't miss the highlights.

Practical Info: Useful tips and information on urban culture to enhance your visit and deepen your understanding of the local scene.

Off the Beaten Path: Recommendations for exploring hidden gems and lesser-known areas, ensuring a unique and memorable experience of Paris.

An Authentic Way to Discover Paris

As Seen on the Streets of Paris serves as both an artistic treasure and a travel companion, offering readers a unique way to experience the city's rich cultural fabric. Whether you're a seasoned street art enthusiast or a curious traveler, As Seen on the Streets of Paris is the perfect resource for connecting with the urban art culture of the French capital.

2 - The interview

What inspired you to create *As Seen on the Streets of Paris*? Could you tell us about the concept behind the books and how it came to life?

The *As Seen on the Streets of...* series is a natural evolution of the work I've been doing on my travel and street art blog since 2011. After more than a decade of writing online, I felt the urge to create something tangible—a way to translate the digital storytelling I've honed into a physical format. The concept remains true to the blog's ethos: uncovering the hidden stories embedded in the streets.

Urban art is an integral layer of the cities we inhabit. By learning about it, we transform our experience of public spaces from something passive into something actively engaging. These books are a thoughtfully curated and elegantly crafted invitation to delve into the urban art of our cities, offering a deeper exploration of the narratives I've been sharing on www.blocal-travel.com. From the history of graffiti and street art to artists' biographies, interviews, the stories behind murals, and neighborhood guides, they encapsulate the essence of what I've been passionate about for years.

You mention that the content is the same in both the travel and hardcover editions. So, if the content is the same, it's simply a format option for buyers, correct? Or, as you also mention, to have it as 'One Comprehensive Guide,' should people buy both books?

The content is identical in both versions, spanning 278 pages, but the key difference lies in the format and production quality. The hardcover edition is printed on high-quality paper, enhancing the vibrancy and detail of the photos, making it ideal for those who appreciate a more elegant, coffee-table-style art book. On the other hand, the travel edition is designed to be more accessible and portable, perfect for taking along on your urban explorations.

By offering these two formats at different price points, I wanted to ensure there's an option for everyone—whether you're seeking a beautiful keepsake or a practical guide to

accompany your adventures. It's not about needing both; it's about choosing the version that best suits how you want to experience the stories and images (and, ultimately, the city).

Paris is home to a vibrant and diverse street art scene. What do you think sets Paris apart as a street art capital, and how did you capture that essence in the books?

Paris holds a unique place in the history and evolution of graffiti and street art, making it a true street art capital. Its roots in these art forms extend far beyond the modern graffiti wave that arrived from the United States. For instance, Brassai was already photographing graffiti on the streets of Paris in the 1930s. When New York-style graffiti began spreading across Europe, Paris became one of the movement's key hubs. Similarly, the street art revolution found its footing here, with artists pioneering stencil art and transforming the streets into vibrant galleries.

Even today, Paris continues to shape the global street art scene, serving as home to some of the most influential artists, such as Invader and JR. In the book, I aimed to honor Paris's rich graffiti and street art legacy by providing the historical context, and showcasing the profound impact the city and its artists have had on this art form. By exploring the layers of its street art culture, I sought to capture the essence of Paris as a city where urban art isn't just decoration—it's a reflection of its identity, history, and rebellious spirit.

The book includes insights from 13 Parisian street artists. What were your selection criteria? How did you approach collaborating with them, and what role did their contributions play in shaping the narrative of the book?

Many influential artists who have shaped the global urban art scene call Paris home, though they may no longer be active in the streets. For this book, I chose to spotlight those who continue to create regularly in public spaces, offering a contemporary perspective on the city's urban art scene. I aimed to capture the full spectrum of urban creativity by including artists working across various forms—street art, graffiti, installations, murals, stencils, and stickers. This di-

versity was essential to reflect the richness of Paris's street art culture.

My approach to collaborating with the artists mirrored how I typically prepare for a trip. I reached out to artists I knew in Paris, asking for their insights—where they paint, what inspires them, their favorite neighborhoods, and what's currently shaping the local scene. This time, though, I'm sharing those insider perspectives with my readers. Their contributions were invaluable, weaving a personal and authentic narrative throughout the book that goes beyond the surface to reveal the soul of Paris' urban art.

In the book, you guide readers to both iconic landmarks and hidden gems. What are some of your favorite lesser-known street art spots in Paris that readers shouldn't miss?

One spot that stands out, and which many artists recommended to me, is Spot13. Nestled beneath the pillars of the Boulevard Périphérique, Spot13 has developed organically into a vibrant hub of graffiti and street art. The space features an incredible variety of styles, making it a must-visit for anyone looking to experience the full spectrum of Parisian urban art.

In terms of neighborhoods, one of my favorites—and a favorite among many of the artists I interviewed—is Butte-aux-Cailles. This charming area offers a unique blend of village-like tranquility, cobbled streets, and intimate, human-scale street art. It's a refreshing contrast to the city's fast-paced energy and large-scale murals.

With the book don't you think you might be removing the détournement, psycho-geographical, random flâneur, discovery feel, approach aspects related with street art?

I understand this concern and think it's a valid point to reflect on. Street art, at its core, thrives on discovery, serendipity, and the thrill of stumbling upon something unexpected. The book is not meant to replace that experience but to complement it. It serves as a guide to deepen one's understanding of the art and its context, not to dictate a fixed path.

I see the book as a tool to empower readers to engage more actively with urban art, and therefore -ultimately- with the public space. By offering historical insights—both on street art and the neighborhoods where it thrives—along with artist stories and a glimpse into the creative process, the book aims to enhance the experience of wandering through the city rather than constrain it. It encourages readers to explore in their own unique way, letting the streets surprise them and using the book as a source of inspiration. The goal is to ignite curiosity, spark discovery, and empower readers to create their own psycho-geographical maps of the city, enriched by a deeper understanding of the art and its context. It's about enhancing the journey, not replacing the spontaneity that's intrinsic to street art.

The book is filled with stunning photography by Paolo Giannotti. How did you and Paolo work together to capture the essence of the murals and the urban environment? Were there any specific challenges you faced in documenting street art?

Our collaboration was quite organic and unique. I didn't directly direct Paolo beyond sharing a list of potential artists and works to feature in the book. The process unfolded as part of the crowdfunding activity for this book series, where a small, intimate group of long-time readers of my street art blog joined me in exploring the city. While I guided the group—explaining why certain pieces mattered, what to focus on, and their context—Paolo was capturing the essence of these moments through his lens.

The real collaboration began in the post-production phase, where we worked closely to select the photos and create a visual narrative that would seamlessly align with the chapters and themes of the book. The main challenges were, of course, Paris' unpredictable weather and the inevitable car parked right in front of key artworks. :-D

The book also touches on the history of graffiti and street art in Paris. How did you approach providing this context, and what do you see as the key moments in the city's street art evolution?

To provide historical context, I began by exploring Paris's rich and multifaceted history with graffiti and street art, tracing its roots back to the early 20th century. I organized the material with a straightforward chronological structure, similar to traditional guidebooks, to offer a clear historical framework—giving graffiti and street art the same level of respect and recognition as other artistic movements commonly featured in travel guides.

However, I didn't want to approach this solely as a detached historian. One of the unique aspects of graffiti and street art is that many of its protagonists are still alive, meaning I could ask them directly about their experiences, memories, and perspectives. By incorporating their personal stories and anecdotes, I was able to weave Paris's graffiti and street art legacy into a larger, more dynamic narrative, connecting past and present in a way that reflects the movement's ongoing vibrancy and relevance.

How do you believe street art reflects and interacts with the broader urban culture of Paris? What does it tell us about the city's social and political dynamics?

Urban art, not just in Paris but everywhere, reflects the many layers of a city's identity—its history, culture, social dynamics, and collective expressions. Historically, Paris has been a hub of artistic and intellectual movements, and much of that has spilled onto the city's streets, from the Situationist movement to the posters and political writings of the 1968 student protests. While today Parisian street art might be less overtly politicized than in the past, it still powerfully reflects the city's vibrant multiculturalism, with works that celebrate diversity, challenge stereotypes, and address pressing issues like immigration, gentrification, and inequality.

At the same time, street art interacts with the urban fabric in transformative ways. In gentrifying neighborhoods, for example, murals and graffiti can serve as both symbols of creative resistance and unintended markers of change—a phenomenon that isn't unique to Paris but happens globally. Urban art, in this sense, is a dynamic force, both shaped by and shaping the evolving identity of the cities it inhabits.

What do you hope readers take away from *As Seen on the Streets of Paris*? How do you envision the book influencing both street art enthusiasts and tourists exploring Paris?

As I mentioned earlier, the goal is to ignite curiosity, spark discovery, and inspire readers to create their own journey through Paris, enriched by a deeper understanding of the art and its context. It's about enhancing their experience of the city while also helping them become familiar with the visual language spoken on the walls—not just in Paris, but in cities around the world. The book encourages readers to go beyond the “pretty image” of a mural and start “reading” urban surfaces, interpreting the stories and messages embedded in them. I've been practicing this during my travels for a long time, and I truly believe that “reading urban surfaces” is an excellent key to unlocking a deeper understanding of a city. By learning to interpret what's written, painted, or pasted on the walls, we can connect with a city on a more intimate and insightful level.

Another goal, which aligns more with the documentation aspect of the book, is reflected in its title: capturing a moment in time and preserving what was present on the streets of Paris when these photos were taken. Street art is inherently ephemeral, and I believe it's important to document these works before they disappear. For readers, this serves as a testament to a specific moment in the city's urban art history, providing a deeper appreciation of its ever-evolving nature and the fleeting beauty of the art form.

You mentioned that *As Seen on the Streets of Paris* is the first book in a series. What can we expect next in the series, and how will the upcoming editions explore the street art scenes in other European cities?

The next book in the series will focus on London, and it will have a slightly different approach. I spent two months in London last summer, which gave me more time to connect with local artists. This has made it challenging to narrow down the selection to just 13 artists, so I'm considering expanding the number of voices featured in the book. Some artists might share historical insights, while others may guide readers through their favorite neighborhoods or talk about their creative processes, offering a broader perspective on the city's unique street art culture.

In 2024, we also traveled to Madrid and Athens—two cities with fascinating and distinct urban art scenes that I'm excited to explore further in this series. And, of course, there will be a book about Rome at some point, as it's where I'm from and the city that first inspired my love for graffiti and street art.

While the goals, spirit, and core ideas of the series will remain consistent—celebrating the distinct character of each city's urban art scene and connecting readers with it—I see the format evolving with each city. Rather than fitting the city into a predetermined structure, I believe it's more meaningful to adapt the book's format to reflect the specific character and stories of each place.

After spending a year researching and documenting the street art scene in Paris, how has this project shaped your own understanding of urban art?

Unlike my blog—or the internet in general—a printed book has a beginning and an end, which requires a more structured approach to organizing the many layers of a city's urban creativity. On the blog, my street art travel guides have been built up over multiple trips, often years apart. Each time I revisit a city, I update the articles, which can make their structure feel a bit chaotic—much like the layered and ever-changing artwork on the streets.

Creating a printed book, however, required me to look at the city holistically and to see how the various aspects of the street art scene interact and influence one another. For example, it offered the chance to delve deeper into patterns like the movement of artists as neighborhoods change, or how the evolution of certain areas influences the art that appears there.

What advice would you give to anyone looking to explore the world of street art, whether as a writer, photographer, or simply as an admirer?

Don't be shy and connect with the artist, either in person at festivals and jams or online. You can learn so much about an artist's creative process by asking a few questions, and the artworks you already admire in the streets will mean

so much to you if you learn the story that is behind them, what inspired their creation, how the artist developed that specific technique, and so on.

What are your future projects, and do you have any upcoming plans related to street art that you're excited about?

Carrying on with this book series is already an ambitious plan in itself! Since the project is entirely independent, self-published, and very much DIY, I'm involved in every stage—from research to distribution. It's a hands-on commitment, but one I'm deeply passionate about.

Looking ahead, I have some exciting street art trips on the horizon. In 2025, I plan to return to Paris, where I hope to organize a book presentation, and then embark on a journey to Lisbon with readers. This Lisbon trip will be an integral part of the creative process for another book in the series, offering the chance to meet local artists, explore the city's vibrant street art scene, and capture the photographs that will bring the Lisbon edition to life.

About the Author

Giulia 'BLocal' Riva is a writer and content creator on a mission to unveil the artistic and rebellious heart of cities. She creates content for creative enterprises and museums, and her writing was published in street art catalogs and art publications. Since 2011, she has run the independent street art blog "BLocal", which has become the media partner of important street art festivals around Europe. Over the years, she has worked and written for museums, art galleries, tour operators, street art festivals, magazines, websites, travel guidebooks, publishers, urban art blogs, and DMOs.