

Specifics of Periodization in Russian Street Art

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Abstract

Although Street Art as a consistent global movement existed from approximately 1998 to 2008, this periodization needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes. As street art is site specific and peripheral by its nature, it needs to be perceived as follows. Not everywhere, especially in comparison to the cities or regions with less developed art institutions and art market, the processes of instrumentalization and co-opting of Street Art by the Creative City discourse happens with the same dynamic.

Keywords: street art, Russia, periodization, terminology, regional scenes

1. Introduction

Street Art is a period—stated a widely discussed article by British anthropologist Rafael Schacter¹. According to him, street art, as any other artistic movements, has its period, and was characterized by distinct practices, techniques, and a core group of artists.

“Street Art was operative and, crucially, innovational, between the years of 1998 and 2008 (...) 1998 was thus the year in which I would argue that a core group of artists – approximately 100–200 artists worldwide – began to explore new ways of working both site-specifically and independently in public space (...) The latter date of 2008, however, is what I argue to be the year of Street Art’s creative culmination. This is the point both at which all that could be produced within Street Art has been produced, the point at which artists began to move away from its confines and into other artistic arenas.” [Schachter, 2016, p. 105]

The aim of this article is not only to apply (and update) given periodization to the local context of peripheral scenes, but also to question some of the terminological conventions that exist in discourses on Street Art.

1 - Schacter R. Street art is a period, PERIOD. // *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City* / edited by Konstantinos Avramidis, Myrto Tsilimpounid. London: Routledge, 2016. P. 103–118.

2. A brief history of Street Art in Russia

The first wave of graffiti in Russia and the Baltic States occurred in 1985–91, as part of the popularity of break dance and electro. Some of the first graffiti were made by b-boys at official break dance contests organized by authorities (they were understanding it as a dance sport). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the scene experienced a period of demise.

The second wave of popularity of hip-hop starts in 1996, when a new generation of post-soviet kids were involved in different subcultures. Some of these kids were trying to rap, dance, and make graffiti. It was a time when information was still being distributed through more traditional media, such as magazines, radio, and television. Although the internet was becoming accessible for people as well.

In the beginning, these kids were un-critically adopting new trends coming from the West, but in the late 1990s some of them were trying to find new forms rooted in the local context. The new forms of site-specific art on the streets were later known as Street Art. Being peripheral and underdeveloped in the 1990s, the Russian art scene (in general, and street art in particular) was mostly adopting Western trends and searching for a self-identity.

By 2008, the year Rafael Schacter co-curated an exhibition at Tate Modern, Igor Ponosov² published his third book on Russian street art and organized an exhibition called "Russian Street Art is Dead." His idea was not to highlight the demise of street art in general, but to provoke artists to be more active on the streets. At that point, some of the key artists already organized their first solo exhibitions in galleries, while first mural festivals were already there. However, 2008 was also a year when the global economic crisis dealt a crushing blow to the fragile Russian art market, which was just about to absorb urban art practices (citation needed).

Therefore, art systems as well as other institutions were not able to give enough effort to co-opt street art at a given point. On the other hand, since 2009 street artists started to search for new ways of self-expression in public spaces. This tendency was dramatically catalyzed by the number of activist initiatives (environmental, right to the city, anti-governmental movements). These two factors (an economic crisis that reduced the art market and the politicization of society) created a situation of another specific wave of Russian street art, much stronger and unique than a previous one.

3. Analysis

Some of the important aspects to discuss: logocentrism of Russian (street) art, political street art and activist street art (partizaning), terminological challenge (street art, urban art, intermural art, etc.), what is after street art (post-contemporary art), street art theory and museumification of street art, later commercialization and instrumentalization of street art practices by the government and private institutions, new periodization.

4. Conclusion

Although Street Art as a consistent global movement existed from approximately 1998 to 2008, this periodization needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes. And, as street art is site specific and peripheral by its nature, it needs to be perceived as follows. Not everywhere, especially in comparison to the cities or regions with less developed art institutions and art market, the processes of instrumentalization and co-opting of Street Art by the Creative city discourse (needs to be described in introduction) happens with the same dynamic.

2 - Author of a series of small books *Objects* (2005, 2006, 2008), book on history of global street art phenomenon *Art and the City* (2016), and currently publishing his next book in English about Russian street art scene (2018) — check all the dates and titles.