CRITICAL PRACTICE IN AN AGE OF COMPLEXITY - AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITIQUE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Walls, painted walls. Contemporary urban murals and public housing.

• Format:
Written paper / Pre-recorded video (15-20 minutes)

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• Abstract (300 words):
Urban art, particularly large-scale murals, has been replacing traditional public art as cities’ landmarks. Occupying large façades, contemporary urban murals rival monumental sculptures or other forms of public art. They are economical, requiring few means, little time of execution, and guaranteeing great visual and communicative effectiveness.

Mural painting is eminently superficial: the flatness of the painted surface is easily captured by a smartphone camera, which facilitates its dissemination via internet. The spectacular nature of urban murals makes them the most popular form of public art in the digital age.

Although the historical genesis of urban art is usually tied to anarchic practices and the margins of society – graffiti, hip hop cultures – its legitimacy in the eyes of public authorities has been increasing. As a way to boost their artistic wealth and compete with each other, many cities in the Western world promote urban art festivals.
In Portugal, in the Greater Lisbon area, some public housing districts have hosted urban art festivals, on the argument that they improve urban space, which in turn bring arts to underprivileged communities, and cultural tourism to socially stigmatized areas of the city.

However, the enthusiasm of public and private institutions for these type of events is at times accompanied by a certain disregard for the social, architectural and urban preexistence of the places. In a certain sense, there is an political use of lived spaces for city marketing purposes.

This presentation focuses on the radical transformation of the urban landscape in the Padre Cruz neighborhood of Lisbon, which is the largest low-income housing district in Portugal, as a result of two consecutive urban art programs (April-July 2016). It is intended to reflect on the adequacy of urban art for this public housing district, taking into account how this urban space was previously conceived and built.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Inês Marques

Inês Marques is an assistant professor at Lusófona University, Lisbon, a researcher and visual artist. She holds a PhD in Public Art from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Barcelona (2012), where she also obtained a Master's degree in Urban Design (2008). She has a degree in Fine Arts - Sculpture, from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (2000).

Her interests center on the field of Public Art – art and participation, art and integration into architecture and urban spaces, history of public art – and teaching of the arts.

Her teaching experience at Lusófona University, Visual Art Degree, has led to a permanent interest in art pedagogy, experimental teaching methods, and artistic creation oriented towards public art.

Various projects that build bridges between painting and public art have been developed in this context. These are mural painting projects and site-specific installations, which place an emphasis on collaborative creation and interdisciplinary approaches.

Helena Elias

Assistant Professor, Bachelor degree in Sculpture, University of Lisbon, MA in Arts, RGU, UK, PhD in Public Space and Urban Regeneration, University of Barcelona. She was a post-doc research fellow at the faculty of fine arts of Lisbon between 2011-2017.
Along with her art based research practice, research and academic activity also includes the coordination of the project contributions for the study of urban mural in Lisbon http://artepublica.ulusofona.pt/ as well as several papers published in conferences proceedings and journals.