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Title

Comparing two graffiti artists and asking the importance of graffiti and street art

Introduction

For this essay I will be exploring the work of two UK based contemporary graffiti artists :Phlegm and Banksy. I will discussing and comparing their street art by looking into the semiotics and practice their work as street artists. I will also be considering the importance and effect graffiti has in modern society today.

Phlegm practice

Phlegm's street art murals are made from frames of comic books he draws. His marks are usually dots and cross hatching. Phlegm paints murals in black and white. (hemming 2024)

Phlegm is based in Sheffield where he did his degree. His practice started in illustration before moving into street art(hemming, 2024).

Phlegm has I believe, been working for around two and a half decades,*Or: since the early nineties. His murals can be small but often his commissions are two or three stories high. Phlegm's influences include Albrecht Dürer and work from that era. (hemming,2024)

As an artist Phlegm likes the way things were done back in the sixteenth century, making copper plates engraved or etched to print from. Phlegm has done work in his style, but at the same time, directly influenced by Dürer and also Escher in both style and recognisable image.

Phlegm's art works tells a story with mythical creatures machines and buildings. (hemming,2024). His buildings look historic, his machines look steam punk,*(steam powered, belonging to another period).

Phlegm has a fondness of portraying enormous telescopes with characters peering in his murals, all in a style that looks like pen and ink despite being drawn with spray cans. Phlegms drawings, engravings, and graffiti are made using cross hatching, dots and linear marks.(hemming,2024), his graffiti work in roller paint and spray cans.

He takes frames from his comic books to tell unknown stories in his murals. (hemming,2024).Whether or not his comic books tell a story, the narrative is open to interpretation. His mural designs are taken from his comic books narrative and story telling from folk tales and old forgotten ways. (Hemming,2024).



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The choice of art is reflected in the location. Scale matters, Phlegm likes to work on an epic scale with giants, birds and other animals. So to summarise, Phlegm likes to paint murals on a larger-than-life scale, painted in black and white images, which are taken from his comic books. He is influenced by 16th century artists who made copper plate printing.

Banksy practice

Banksy's work, like Phlegm's, is black and white, sometimes a touch of selective colour. However, Banksy's street art is produced on a generally much smaller scale to Phlegm's murals.

Banksy's art started out in a more wild and freestyle way: "Banksy and mates were having innocent, naive, laughs and fun". (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020) like I imagine Phlegm did. For many graffiti artists graffiti is great fun and one can get a buzz from seeing your work up for all to see.

It is documented that in the early days/early nineties?* , Banksy and his friends would go to an arty bar they knew the land lord he let them cut stencils get drunk and they would out and paint. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020).

For many graffiti artists, their designs are done free hand, generally using a graphic word or tag the writer uses as an alias. Names however weren't as important a thing for Banksy, not so much as getting up an image. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020)

Stencils became central practice over free hand graffiti for Banksy. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020) Stencil art was shunned by some graffiti artists, as being a less skilled art form. Yet stencils became a quick way to get an image up on a surface when it was a criminal activity.

Despite now being world famous contemporary artist, and his art selling for millions, money and galleries weren't an aim for Banksy

to begin with. He later stated that the “old fashioned way of eating food” was motivation to become commercial. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020).

Having seen his work on the street, and in a frame in a gallery, I can appreciate that there is a *professional/crispness about displaying street art in a gallery setting. Banksy stated that canvasses give him greater control over how a work looks, rather than working on the street where he’s “up against it” in terms of the location and the law. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020).

Going back ten years he had a war with graffiti artist ‘King Rob’ (now passed) over one of his pieces that Banksy went over, .Despite this feud, it would later see King Rob come out of



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retirement and exhibit in London as a professional artist. Through the Banksy buzz), Banksy and others forwarded street art over the years by organising street art festivals painting parts of the city on mass. eg walls on fire. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art. 2020)

A few bullet points are Banksy uses black and white paint, utilising stencils to create images , his work varies in scale from mini works



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to what I would call medium size graffiti. He shunned the art world and selling work later started making a living.

Graffiti

Although it is common knowledge that graffiti, or painting on walls, has existed since neanderthal age of early man, the era of graffiti I as I am referring to in this essay took off in the 1960's to the 1980's

in America in New York. tagging started by corn bread in the 1960's (graffiti; street art or vandalism?)

From diverse community's graffiti in the early days it has evolved outside the institutional art world. Championed by the people, Graffiti had the power transform deprived city areas into a multi coloured canvas. Graffiti is held high by average people in the public more than art galleries its popularity comes from this. (Banksy and the rise of out law art 2020)

Tagging started by corn bread in the 1960's (graffiti; street art or vandalism?) Nearer the millennium, since the rising popularity of street artists like Banksy and Phlegm, graffiti has become accepted by both the main stream art world and public and since been viewed and accepted as a respected art form in its own right.

In the uk and all over graffiti is the best thing to happen since the young British artists. (Banksy and the rise of out law art 2020) sought after by art collectors, exhibited in art galleries all over the world (such as MOCO) and funded by councils to improve local areas.

To summarise graffiti has in its contemporary form has been performed for 60 years it came out of working class neighbourhoods, some see it as a negative, some as community building. The art movement is underground and for some artists main stream.

Phlegm semiotics

Phlegm chooses to paint giants human spirit creatures, visual narratives unfold in forgotten places (ness, 2025).

Painting what looks like steam punk machines operated by human characters. Surreal city scapes and enigmatic beasts (ness, 2025) anthropomorphic birds. Owls for example, possibly taken from greek myths with their meaning of protection or wisdom. Owls were seen by romans as transformed witches or omens of death (lewis 2021)

Phlegm paints cats too, magical creatures in witches tales. Cats are seen as magical and are said to be used in spell working by shamans and magicians (Conway 1998). His visual stories take place in lost off places haunting us with strange surreal city scapes and mythological beasts. So generally, Phlegm paints giant mythological places with legendary animals and characters that could be seen as to conjure up feelings of old. *like his machinery and characters*.

Banksy semiotics

- “they exist without permission...if you are dirty insignificant and unloved rats are the ultimate role model” (banksy 2005)

Banksy likes to paint animals and children amongst other subjects these are often up to some antics, sometimes the children or animals are pictured with higher intelligence than adults or humans.

His work makes us consider and question society in a satirical manner. His piece of the light house is was just the common bollard in the street, or his wish to be still seen as a worth, shining a warning in these dark days.*

Police or authority figures to be questioned or looked at with sympathy. (Banksy and the rise of outlaw art 2020) as we see in the picture of the army painting and wanting peace as opposed to their roll as fighters this juxtaposed image make us think. The hammer of the huge usually standing for justice made in this image to be hitting the protester a victim because of the wish for free speech. A piece causing us to question the justice system.

So to conclude Banksy causes us to consider the world we live in with juxtaposed images and message with work expertly positioned to emphasise the meanings presented

Conclusion

Phlegm takes us into mysterious worlds with his murals in contrast to Banksy, who takes his subject from the everyday news and asks us to question unfairness in the world around us and even himself. Both Banksy and Phlegm choose to portray their work in black and white. Phlegm illustrates free hand on a massive scale, whilst Banksy tends to work on a small or medium scale with his stencils. Phlegm is influenced by old stories and ways conjuring up fairy tale type feelings, Banksy influenced by current affairs and making social comment. Both artists have made money out of their work on the streets and in galleries, but both still paint for fun criminally/ illegally. Graffiti largely remains underground, but has as in my choice of artists here have secured a living graffiti is still the voice of the voiceless and for many a way of getting art seen.

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