

Student Name: James Evans

P Number: 2306269

Programme of study: Graphic Design

Module: Ways of Perceiving (ADDA4023)

Word Count: 1,471

Ways of Perceiving

Urban Canvas: Street Art's Evolution

Graffiti, street art, and urban art have an intricate and varied history that spans multiple decades. Its origins can be seen in America's political and social changes in the 1960s and 1970s. Graffiti, especially in the Bronx and Brooklyn neighbourhoods of New York City, became one of the first types of modern street art. Graffiti swiftly developed into an instrument for social criticism and self-expression, frequently highlighting the struggles encountered by underprivileged groups. According to Roach (2009), graffiti provided a voice to those who felt excluded from mainstream society, *allowing them to reclaim public spaces and challenge dominant narratives.*

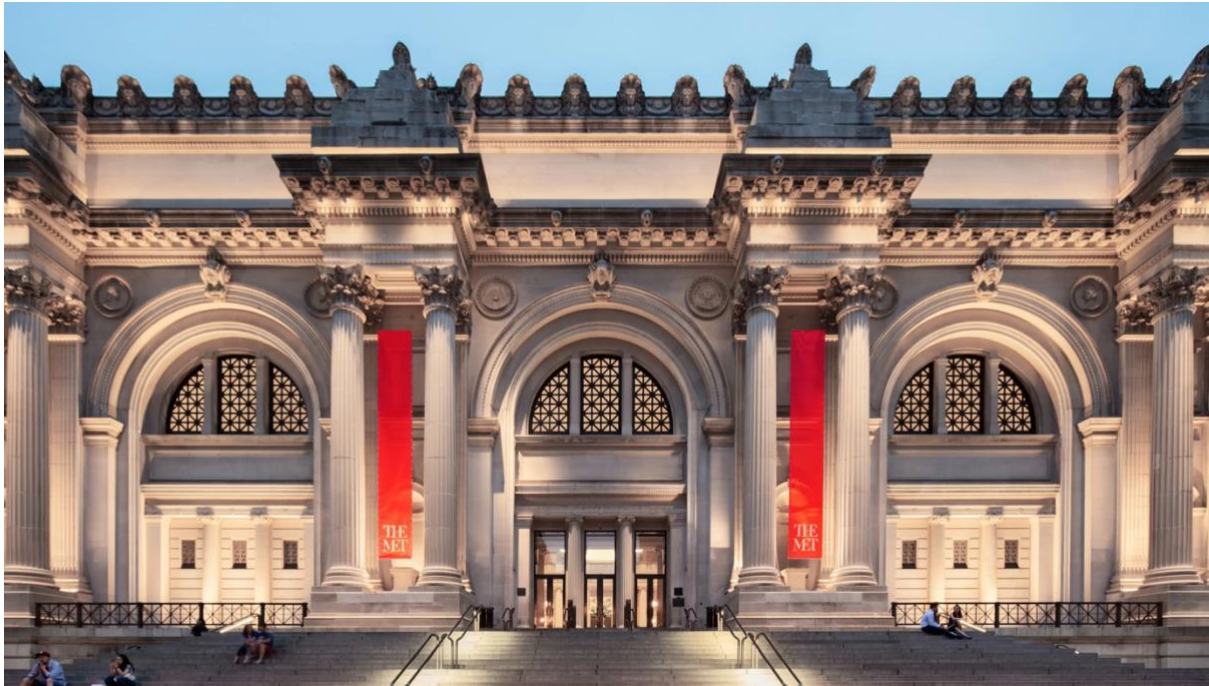
In the 1980s, street art evolved from basic graffiti to stencils, wheat pasting, and paintings. During this period, artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring gained popularity for their unique approaches to making art in public. Haring's recognizable characters and Basquiat's mysterious symbolism embodied the essence of the era, fusing art with social change.

Urban art became increasingly popular worldwide in the second half of the 20th century as artists from Asia, Latin America, and Europe incorporated the style to suit their respective cultural contexts. In the early 2000s, Banksy, a British graffiti artist, gained fame for his politically charged and satirical art. The street art is practised differently by different people. There is a connection between ownership and public space.; At the same time, it is a dialogue and disagreement platform. More so, according to this, Street art can be defined as an artist's visual expression in public places. As Roach (2009) suggests, street art remains a

potent form of cultural resistance, asserting the right to the city and challenging conventional art institutions.

The Concept:

The work of Urban Canvas holds both ground-breaking after delves into how street art has evolved to become global. It is in a dynamic city-centred space that the exhibition explores this power of transformation, displaying select works by internationally acclaimed artists. Visitors will embark over time with street art since the 1970s when it evolved from graffiti in New York streets before developing into the current recognized artwork style. The exhibition showcases masterpieces that were done by pacesetters such as Keith Haring & Jean-Michel Basquiat hence recognizing their contribution towards the formation of this movement. In addition to that, the street art organization Urban Canvas recognizes international artists who have gone beyond established limits in the modern age. (Ganz, 2011). The exhibition is made up of virtual environments, immersive screens, and multimedia presentations which highlight the variations and inventiveness of the street art found today (Schacter, 2013). In art talks and participatory workshops, we would passionately have attendees engage in the discussion on street art, dwell on issues of urban identity, show social activism and reveal how art can be influential in public spaces.



The exhibition will take place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York. The Met is a venerable institution that has been around for over 150 years; its development from a humble start-up to one of the outstanding world museums. A museum of American art was the innovation of a set of civic authorities, artists and wealthy individuals who had the intention of upgrading the city life of New York with culture and art. The museum was officially founded on April 13, 1870, by a group of businessmen and artists who secured a charter from the New York State Legislature (Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.). The Met quickly outgrew its space and began to expand, initially located in a building on Fifth Avenue. The museum received significant donations from prominent collectors and patrons, including financier J. P. Morgan, whose contributions helped the Met acquire important works of art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022). One of the defining moments in the Met's history was the construction of its current main building on Fifth Avenue, which opened to the public in 1880. Subsequent expansions and renovations, such as the addition of the Cloisters Museum in northern Manhattan in 1938, have further enhanced the Met's

standing as a global cultural institution (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022). Presently, millions of tourists are attracted to Met annually and it still plays a major role in world art and culture. Met educational programs, exhibitions and scholarly research contribute to understanding and appreciation of art among various audiences.

The Artefacts:

Bird on Money, Jean-Michel Basquiat **(1981)**:

The street art piece "Bird on Money" by Banksy can be analysed from the perspective of critical theory, particularly focusing on themes of capitalism and power dynamics (Banksy, n.d.). This artwork features a bird perched atop a pile of money, symbolizing a juxtaposition between nature and finance. This piece can be examined from the Marxist way. Capitalism was questioned by Karl Marx where he put emphasis on how people are disconnected to nature and their fellow human beings at the expense of economic forces. In "Bird on Money," the bird denotes nature and liberty, whilst money represents riches as well as capitalism. The placement of the bird on the money suggests a commentary on the commodification of nature and the subjugation of natural elements to economic interests.

Moreover, the artwork can be understood through the lens of postmodern theory, which challenges established norms and power structures. Banksy's street art often subverts traditional artistic settings and challenges the notion of art as solely confined to galleries or museums. "Bird on Money" confronts the viewer with a striking image that forces contemplation about the relationship between wealth and nature in contemporary society. Critically analysing "Bird on Money" involves questioning the implications of placing nature (the bird) in such close association with money. The piece invites viewers to reflect on the consequences of capitalist systems on the environment and wildlife. Additionally, it raises questions about the value systems that prioritize financial wealth over ecological preservation. In conclusion, "Bird on Money" serves as a powerful critique of capitalism's impact on nature and raises broader questions about the intersections of power, wealth, and the environment.



Fig 1. “Bird on Money” 1981

Source: <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/street-art-legends-best-of-basquiat-art/ascent->

Dondi, Donald Joseph White **(1983)**:

"Dondi", this piece of street art may be analysed within the ambit of postmodern theory. Particularly through the lens of graffiti art as a form of subversive cultural expression (Harvey, 1990). Postmodernism focuses on the collapse of aged borders and orders recognizing the equal right to creative activities. "Dondi" defies traditional artistic concepts by simply appearing in non-traditional arenas and by using common places for the expression of art. This artwork disrupts established norms, questions the commodification of art, and screams for inclusiveness and accessibility in the world of creative expression.



Fig 2. "Dondi" 1983, New York

Source: <https://straatmuseum.com/en/blog/history-of-graffiti-and-street-art-1980s-1990s>

Fertility, Keith Haring (1983):

Keith Haring's Street art piece "Fertility" can be analysed through the lens of queer theory, which explores non-normative identities and challenges societal norms related to sexuality and gender (Halberstam, 2011). Haring, a prominent figure in the LGBTQ+ community, often incorporated themes of sexuality and liberation into his artwork. "Fertility" depicts figures intertwined in a dynamic composition, suggesting themes of intimacy, connection, and human vitality. From a queer theoretical perspective, "Fertility" can be seen as a celebration of diverse sexualities and bodies. Haring's use of bold lines and vibrant colours conveys a sense of joy and empowerment, challenging conventional ideas of gender roles and sexual norms. The figures in the artwork may symbolize the fluidity and complexity of human relationships, transcending rigid categorizations. Critically, "Fertility" also raises questions about visibility and representation of queer experiences in public spaces. By creating art that celebrates queer identities, Haring subverts heteronormative narratives and asserts the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals within the urban landscape. The use of public walls as a canvas for such artwork challenges the privatization of queer experiences and promotes inclusivity in public discourse.

In summary, "Fertility" by Keith Haring exemplifies the transformative potential of street art as a medium for queer expression and resistance against societal constraints. Through vibrant aesthetics and symbolic imagery, Haring invites viewers to contemplate the richness of human diversity and the importance of embracing non-normative identities.

Fig 3. "Fertility" 1983

Source: <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/articles/keith-harings-art-emergence-street-art-1980s>



Balloon Girl, Banksy (2002)

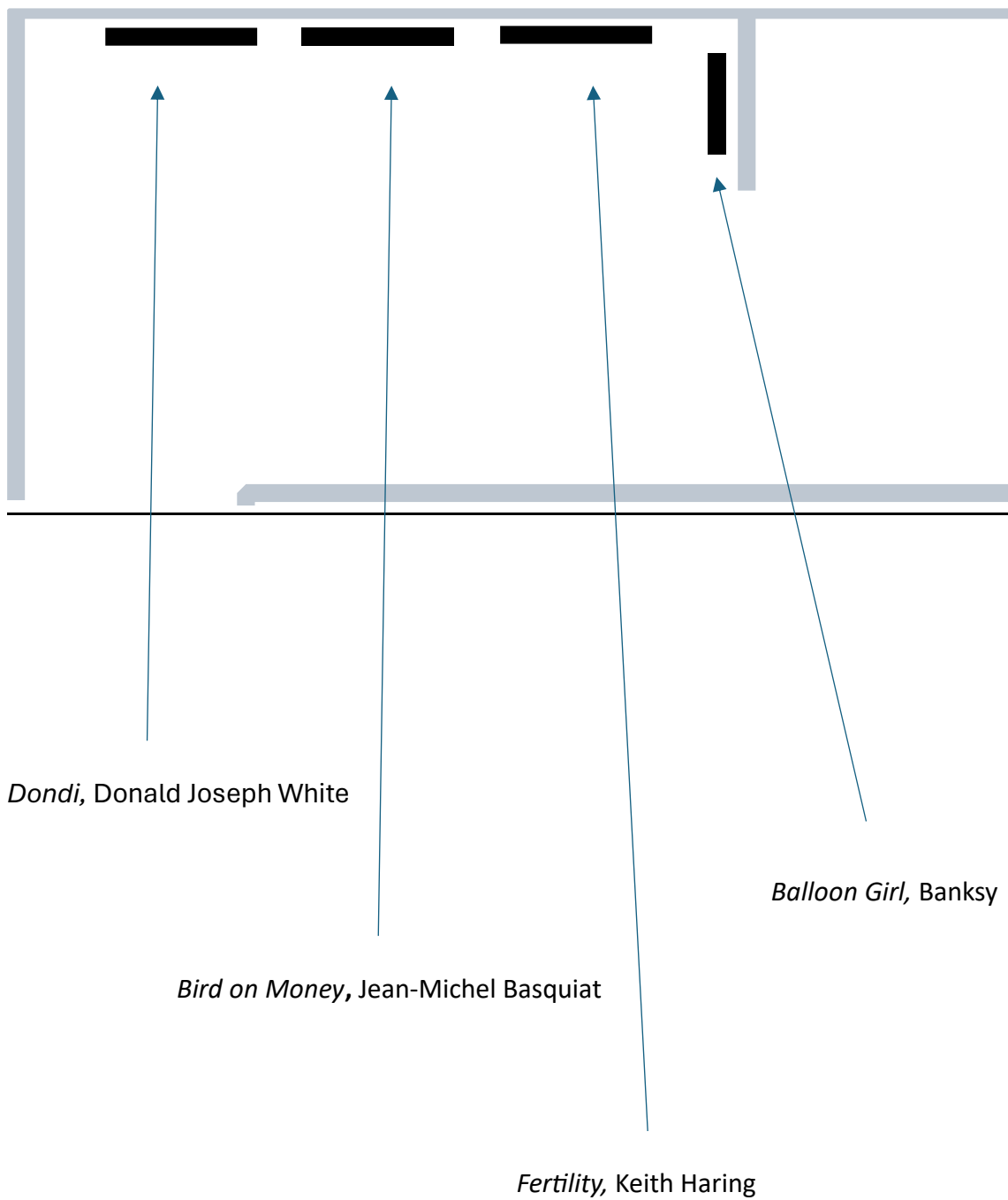
The graffiti "Balloon Girl" by Banksy can be subjected to a cultural studies analysis. In this regard, the study shall focus mainly on its socio-political statements as well as its role in contesting dominant narratives; she appears to be reaching out for a red-heart-shaped balloon thus suggesting hope and purity which are common themes among societies regardless of their location within cities. From a cultural studies perspective, "Balloon Girl" critiques societal norms and capitalist consumerism. The balloon, often associated with fleeting joy and desire, represents the ephemeral nature of happiness within a materialistic society (Kellner, 1995). Banksy chose public space for this artwork because it overthrows traditional art spaces and says something concerning access to art and its inclusiveness. The use of stencilling and graffiti techniques aligns with cultural studies' emphasis on subcultures and resistance to mainstream culture (Hall, 1997). The "Balloon Girl" forces the viewers to re-evaluate how consumer culture affects a person's happiness and society's values. The work challenges today's problems by being simple yet evocative.



Fig 4. "Balloon Girl" 2002

Source: <https://banksyexplained.com/issue/girl-with-balloon-graffiti-legend/>

Urban Canvas: Street Art's Evolution – Exhibition plan.





Bibliography

Banksy. (n.d.). Bird on Money: <https://banksy.co.uk>

Ganz, N. (2011). Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution. New York: Abrams.

Halberstam, J. (2011). The Queer Art of Failure. Duke University Press
Hall, S. (1997).

Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. Sage.

Kellner, D. (1995). Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern. Routledge.

Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). About The Met. Retrieved from
<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met>.

Roach, Catherine. (2009). "Defacing the Currency: Aesthetic Subversion in Contemporary Street Art." Journal of Aesthetics and Protest.

Schacter, R. (2013). The World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti. New Haven: Yale University Press.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2022). In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Metropolitan-Museum-of-Art>.