

The Use of Street Art and its Role in Activism

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking & Digital Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aife Kerrigan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Your name

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore and research street art and how it is used in social and political activism, internationally but also in Ireland, and learn whether or not it is effective. Research will be done to see does street art actually help raise awareness about topics in the public sphere. The goal of this thesis is to shine a positive light on street art as a medium and aid the removal of the stigma surrounding it. By doing research through news articles, books about art history and street art, and conducting interviews with Irish street artists; the information gathered is intended to show the effects of street art used in activism, the reactions of the general public, and the aura of the art pieces while also taking mechanical reproduction into consideration. Investigation will be done into the differences and similarities between the vandalism and removal of street art based on women's right and the Black Lives Matter movement. The research done is intended to see whether or not the use of this street art for a variety of causes is effective and if it actually gains traction from the public for each of their intended purposes.

This thesis shows that street art is proven to be effective when used for activism purposes. That when there are negative reactions to topics within the pieces, it brings more positive interactions to the pieces because people are upset that an important topic and art has been defaced. Street art brings communities together and shows that places are lived in and have culture. It brings life to the community. As a medium of art, street art brings more positivity the world than negative. It brings people together no matter the circumstance and it fosters meaningful conversations about important topics within our society.

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Introduction

Street art was once an extremely taboo form of art merely seen as vandalism. In recent years it has become a more appreciated and accepted art form and is now seen more widely not only in Ireland but internationally. From tagging sides of trains to pieces being worth millions, street art has come a long way.¹ Today, street art is being used by many artists for the greater good to raise awareness of topics that aren't being brought to the public's eye, or inequality towards women and minorities.

Through researching news articles and books, conducting interviews with Irish street artists and delving into the history of street art, this thesis will start with a brief history of street art, followed by the use of street art in standing for women's rights and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. I shall be delving into the effects of street art used in activism and the positive and negative effects and reactions it has on the public. By conducting interviews with street artists and activists and researching thoroughly into the history of street art and its role in activism. Through analysing examples of street art from Ireland and abroad, I hope to shine a light on this art form and see whether its role in activism is effective or not.

As someone who is an artist with many years of experience with street art, it is important that these lesser known and underappreciated forms of art with very little recognition get the recognition they deserve, especially when they are being used to raise awareness to much needed causes like the ones I will touch on further in this thesis. As street art is not a permanent way to make an impression because

¹ Tagging- The quick writing of a nickname or mark on a surface by a graffiti artist.

of vandalism or the inevitability of it being covered up, is it really a substantial way to make a difference?

Through the 2020s so far, street art has been used massively in activism, particularly in Ireland. I'll particularly be focusing on women's rights and Black Lives Matter through this thesis, and the ways in which street art has been used in aid of these subjects. Women in Ireland are being assaulted and murdered at an outrageous rate. Murals have been created over time raising awareness, and to support the victims of these crimes. After the murder of George Floyd in June 2020, murals appeared globally as a mark of respect for Floyd and to challenge the inequality minorities face in the United States when faced with people of authority. All in all, the focus of this research is to see the effects of street art used in activism and the impact they may have on the public. Exploration will be done into the effects of reproduction and the pros and cons that come with it. It will consider how the aura of the original can be lost through reproduction, but the importance of the message still carries through into the copies.

While chapter one will be beginning with a brief history of street art, with messages found on walls in the remains of Pompeii, to murals being used as a political statement in times of crisis, street art has been seen and used in many ways through history so far. I will be focusing on Walter Benjamin's theories on aura in his writing, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and considering these theories while studying the selected pieces of street art throughout this thesis. The focus will be on artists in Ireland, such as Maser and Emmalene Blake, using this art form as a medium to raise awareness to national and international matters for many decades. The focus of this thesis will be on the use of street art

for women's right and the Black Lives Matter movement. Chapter one will go from abortion referendums, where a piece of street art became its iconic logo, to women's violence, where street art was in the forefront to aid charities. Chapter two will focus on how street artists in Ireland have used their medium to focus on the rights and needs of women that are consistently neglected. As well as this, chapter three will focus artists, such as Emmalene Blake, Marty Lyons, and Mickey Docherty, who are using their platforms in Ireland to raise awareness to international causes such as the Black Lives Matter movement which began with the brutality of black Americans in the United States. These causes are everyday issues for a large majority of the Earth's population; however, they are never acted on in this world where wealth and status are the main priority of the people in power. The main sources of research will be done through news articles and interviews with street artists Jess Tobin aka Novice and Maser.

Chapter One: A Brief History of Street Art

Street Art was once a taboo form of art, but over many decades it has become a more appreciated form of art, while also being used widely in activism internationally. Street art or graffiti is a mysterious form of art that conceals the identity of the person who has created it. In modern times there are artists who are famous for their street art. However, there are still plenty of artists around the world, some famous and some casual, whose identities are still anonymous such as Banksy.² “A simple example of that is Banksy, social commentary through stencils”-Maser (Interview B) Artists have used their forms of art to express themselves and portraying aspects of society, which is incredibly relevant in the world of street art. It is believed by art historian David G. Wilkins, artists such as these who suffered and displayed their sympathy for societies outcasts opened a door for people to not be afraid of speaking up for themselves in more ways than just their voices.³ Although Street art may be ubiquitous around the world, the popularity of its artistic expression is relatively recent. Street art has undergone a major transformation in the last forty years in public opinion to become socially accepted and respected in some public places since the late 1980s in New York when street art became a new appreciated form of art. “So, graffiti is coming from New York culture, trains, which prior to that it started in Philadelphia- but then the sort of activism anti-establishment... they’ve all sort of merged together now” – Maser (Interview B) Even with this degree of acceptance, defacing private and public property with any message, whether it is it is considered art or not, is still

² Banksy is a pseudonymous England-based Street artist, political activist and film director whose identity remains unknown.

³ Wilkins, David G. “Social Protest.” *Big Book of Art: From Cave Art to Pop Art*, Collins, 2005, pp. 492

widely illegal.⁴ The street art movement has made art more visible to the world and is brightening up urban areas and cities. “Even when through tags and stuff it like that because what it shows is that there’s people in that space. They’re living there and usually places, like heavy with street art that are usually the most culturally significant kick-starter.” – Maser (Interview B) It has become a form of expression in which artists are using it as an opportunity to have their voices heard and more public than ever.⁵ It wasn’t until the French Revolution when rebels began to deface high-end art to stage a protest against French society’s toxic hierarchy that graffiti took on the vandalism label it has today. Historians believe that street art is rooted in the 1st century B.C.E when Roman citizens would write messages to each other on their dry brick walls.⁶ To this day there are samples of street art from this time period still visible in Pompeii (see Fig. 1&2).⁷ According to ancient literary sources there appears to be no specific term in ancient Greek or Latin for street art. Most street art from this time is scratched into the plaster on walls using sharp tools. Charcoal was also used as a more temporary form of street art.

⁴ Bacharach, Sondra. “Street Art and Consent.” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 55, issue 4, 2015, pp. 481–495.

⁵ Bird, Michael. *100 Ideas that Changed Art*. Laurence King Publishing, 2014, pp. 194-195
; McCormick, Carlo, Marc Schillier and Sara Schillier. *Trespass: A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art*. Taschen, 2010.

⁶ Choi, Caroline. “Street Art Activism: What White People Call Vandalism.” *Harvard Political Review*, 21 Oct. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://harvardpolitics.com/street-art-activism/>.

; Wall, Kelly. “A Brief History of Graffiti - Kelly Wall.” *TED-Ed*, 8 Sept. 2016, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/a-brief-history-of-graffiti-kelly-wall>.

⁷ Milnor, Kristina. *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
; Ross, Laura Sobott. *The Graffiti of Pompeii*. Adelaide Books, 2018



Fig. 1 - The Archaeological Park of Pompeii, Pompeii, Italy

Madenholm, Terry. "Ancient Romans Were Prolific Graffiti Artists. Not All Took Themselves Seriously."

Haaretz.com, Haaretz, 30 Nov. 2021, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.haaretz.com/archaeology/2021-11-30/article/largest-collection-of-ancient-graffiti-ever-found-in-pompeii-some-are-hysterically-funny/0000017f-dc01-d856-a37f-fdc1f53a0000.



Fig. 2 - The Archaeological Park of Pompeii, Pompeii, Italy

Madenholm, Terry. "Ancient Romans Were Prolific Graffiti Artists. Not All Took Themselves Seriously."

Haaretz.com, Haaretz, 30 Nov. 2021, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.haaretz.com/archaeology/2021-11-30/article/largest-collection-of-ancient-graffiti-ever-found-in-pompeii-some-are-hysterically-funny/0000017f-dc01-d856-a37f-fdc1f53a0000.

In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', written in 1935, Walter Benjamin discusses the aura of a work of art, the artistic authenticity of the artefact,

its cultural authority, and the aestheticization of politics for the production of art.⁸

This essay of cultural criticism proposes the explains how mechanical reproduction devalues the aura and uniqueness of a work of art. Benjamin believes that in the age of mechanical reproduction there is an absence of traditional and ritualistic value in the production of art. However, Benjamin notes that by ritualizing the mechanical reproduction of art, that thereby increases the social value of exhibiting works of art. This is a social and cultural practice that has progressed from a private sphere of life to the public sphere of life, which is incredibly relevant in the world of street art.

The Berlin Wall is one of the most renowned collections of activist street art. It is often considered an iconic symbol of the division in the Cold War, as the art of the 1980s was a representation of the events of the Cold War in Europe. The Berlin Wall first became a public canvas in the mid-1970s when the wall was upgraded to a taller smoother surface which was perfect to paint on. The wall was quickly covered with jokes, art, and political slogans from then until the late 1980s which expanded the underground urban street art scene in Berlin. This wall, which was once considered the “wall of shame”, became an artistic sentiment which visitors would add to on their travels. When people were initially painting the West Wall, they carried the fear of being caught by authorities. Because of this they only brought a small variety of paint colours with them so they could quickly flee the scene.⁹ The wall today features one hundred and fifty murals by artists from around the world, and many of which

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Schocken Books, 1935.

⁹ Grither, Daniel. “The Art on the Berlin Wall: Sentiments of East and West Berlin.” *The Collector*, 7 Feb. 2021, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.thecollector.com/art-on-the-berlin-wall/>.

were painted in 1990, the year after the wall fell. These murals stand as a memorial to the unification of Germany and the significant political change globally.¹⁰



Fig. 3 - Dmitri Vrubel, 'Fraternal Kiss', Berlin Wall, Berlin, Germany, c1980s

Dundon, Alice. "Iconic Murals on the Berlin Wall." *Culture Trip*, The Culture Trip, 20 Nov. 2017, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/10-iconic-murals-on-the-berlin-wall/.

Scarred by decades of conflict, the Falls Road in West Belfast is a political hotbed with a compelling history and wide range of street art. The political and religious struggles in Belfast throughout the 20th century have manifested and transformed into a series of powerful and thought-provoking artworks throughout the city. This tradition dates back as far as 1908, however the street art scene peaked particularly during the Troubles between the 1960s and the 1980s because of the complex divisions and feud between Catholics and Protestants and unionists and nationalists which is still ongoing today. Today's modern Belfast has become a place where artists from across the globe gather to create pieces of art.¹¹ On the Falls Road there are many murals at the world-famous International Wall of Murals in West

¹⁰ Dundon, Alice. "Iconic Murals on the Berlin Wall." *The Culture Trip*, 20 Nov. 2017, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/germany/articles/10-iconic-murals-on-the-berlin-wall/>.

¹¹ Gregory, Kim. "The Best Places to See Street Art in Belfast, Northern Ireland." *The Culture Trip*, 10 July 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/northern-ireland/articles/the-best-places-to-see-street-art-in-belfast/>.

Belfast that change regularly, depicting international current events. Many of them display the injustice in society towards groups of minorities, such as, people of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community, religious people and even women. This site is visited by thousands of people each year from around the world.¹²

Unfortunately, depending on the topic of the mural, many artworks get vandalised by people who are not so tolerant with facing global injustices. Many of which, whether they admit it or not, are racist, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic bigots who unfortunately are undoing the good of people trying to stand in solidarity with minorities and adding to the ongoing battles of said people seeking safety and comfort in their lives.

¹² Jones, Jonathan, and Mee-Lai Stone. "Ghost, Angel, Martyr: The Brutal Brilliance of George Floyd Murals from Syria to Belfast." *The Guardian*, 5 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2020/jun/05/george-floyd-murals-worldwide-street-artists>.

; Keenan, Shaun. "Mural in Tribute to George Floyd Appears in West Belfast." *BelfastLive*, 4 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/mural-tribute-george-floyd-appears-18366671>.

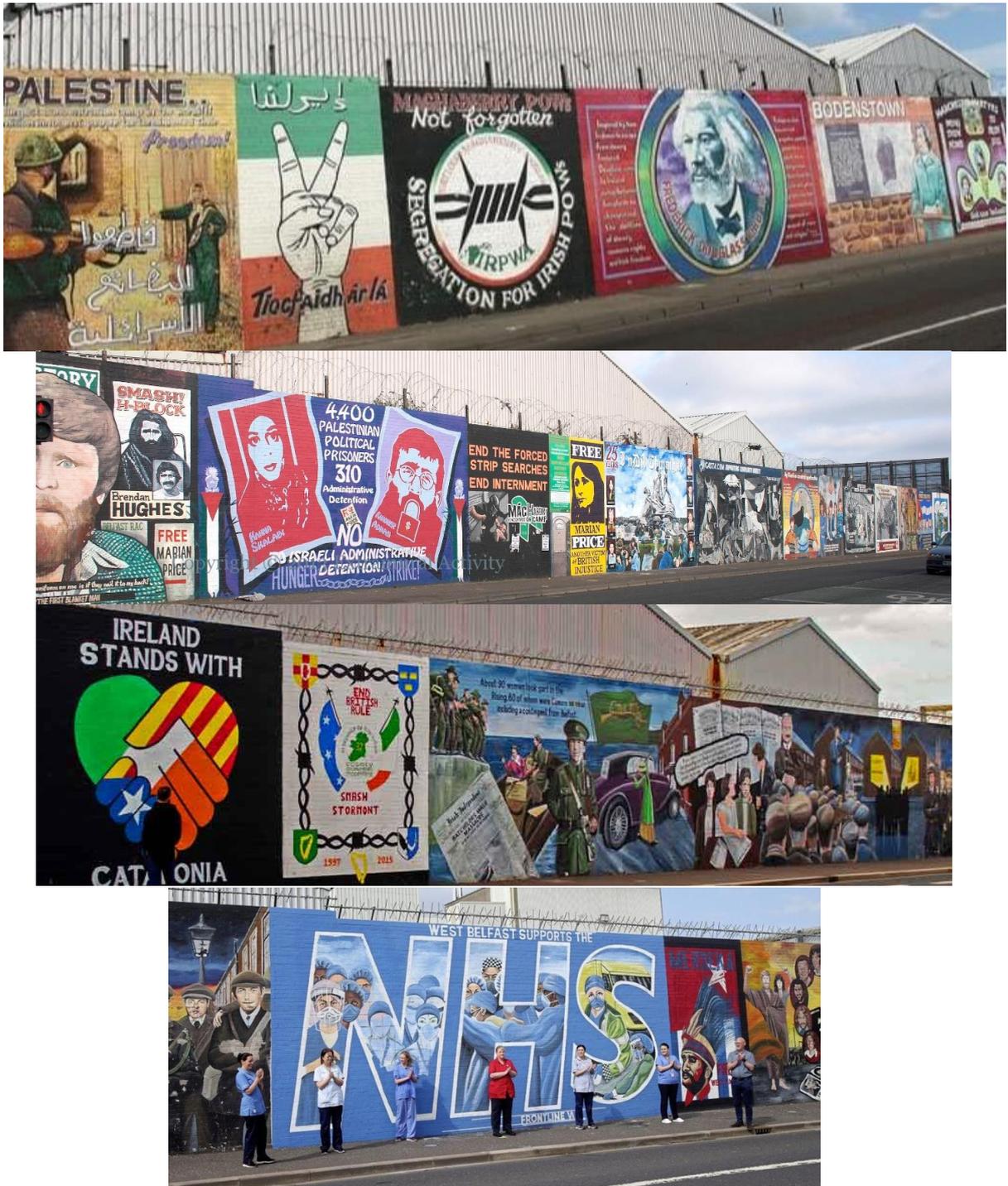


Fig.4 - A selection of murals on Falls Road over recent years

- "Tickets & Tours - Belfast Falls Road, Belfast." Viator, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.viator.com/Belfast-attractions/Falls-Road-Murals/d738-a14879.
- Belfast, The Falls Road. "Falls Road Belfast: All You Need to Know & More." City Tours Belfast, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.citytoursbelfast.com/falls-road-belfast.
- "Private Belfast Political and Mural Tours 2023: Luxury Tour." Private Belfast Tours, Day Tour, City Tour, Shore Excursions, 12 Feb. 2023, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.belfasttoursni.com/belfast-political-and-mural-tour/.
- McConville, Marie Louise. "Video: New Mural Completed in West Belfast in Honour of NHS." The Irish News, 20 Apr. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/04/20/news/new-mural-completed-in-west-belfast-in-honour-of-nhs-1907724/.

The Minaw Collective is a group of fourteen female street artists who fight for equality, diversity, and tolerance through the medium of art. This collective of a diverse mix of artists from all over the world, but all based in Ireland, and showcase their work together as an expression of empowerment among female artists. “Minaw” is a contemporary spin on the Irish word for women, “mná”, written phonetically to make the collective’s name more accessible to the international members of the group, but also the public who don’t speak the Irish language. This collective of street artists are changing perceptions and providing a support network for new generations of talents. However, many people don’t take well to this group as it is female based: “People often assume with the Minaw Collective it was a reaction, kind of a feminist thing, but it wasn’t” – Jess Tobin aka Novice. (Interview A)

Even though many people would believe men are at the forefront of the street art scene, the members of this collective continue to prove otherwise. This creates a block for women in not only the street art world, but any of the creative industries where men are considered to have the overruling power. Thankfully in recent years these boundaries are slowly breaking, and more female artists are making their way up the creative ladder and getting the recognition they deserve. According to artist Stephanie Utz, street art is no longer the boys club it once was. Utz underlines the importance of exhibiting female street artists as not only does it dissolve the “exclusionary ideal of the male street artist”, but it also helps diversify the perspectives and techniques of the audiences they are exposed to.¹³ Since the

¹³ Mattanza, Alessandra, and Stephanie Utz. *Women Street Artists: 24 Contemporary Graffiti and Mural Artists from around the World*. Prestel Art, 2022, pp. 6

beginning of the street art scene in Ireland in the 1960s, women have always been involved. Hopefully, through time with more visibility on female artists, we will continue with this positive trend for women and possibly even speed it up.¹⁴ According to street artist Jess Tobin aka Novice, the industry isn't as difficult for women as one would assume. As most street artists use nicknames or tags to sign their street art, majority of people wouldn't know whether a piece's creator is male, female or anyone else unless they knew the artist directly or saw the artist at work. (Interview A)

For Pride 2022, many members of the Minaw Collective came together to create murals celebrating the LGBTQ+ community on some scaffolding surrounding buildings on Dame Street and Georges Street (see Fig 5&6). Unfortunately, months later the murals were all vandalised. This act of vandalism once again shows the ongoing hate thrown towards this community and the solidarity shown by the artists and allies. Even through these pieces were vandalised, it is believed that they may have gained even more traction and appreciation after being vandalised. From experience, artist Novice gained more traction to a Pride piece she had created years prior in aid of the Vote Yes campaign for the gay marriage referendum in 2015. The mural by Novice was vandalised shortly after being finished, however the frustration of the public towards the message and the mural being ruined brought more support and awareness to the piece. (Interview A) From this, it is shown that even when there is hate, love and support will always dominate even if it is not always visible.

¹⁴ Jones, Christopher. "Made in Dublin: The All-Female Street Art Collective Brightening up Our Walls." *Dublin Live*, 14 Jan. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.dublinlive.ie/whats-on/arts-culture-news/made-dublin-female-street-art-22744406>.

; O'Neill, Bronwyn. "How Irish Women Are Taking Street Art by Storm with Minaw Collective." *EVOKE*, 2 Nov. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://evoke.ie/2020/05/27/inspire-women-in-business/the-minaw-collective>.



Fig. 5 - The Minaw Collective, Pride on Dame Street/Georges Street, Dublin, 2022
Smith, Mary Cate. "Like, Follow, Share: The Irish Artists You Need to Know on Instagram." *Irish*



Examiner, 5 Sept. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023)
www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/people/arid-40954718.html.

Fig. 6 - The Minaw Collective, Pride on Dame Street/Georges Street, Dublin, 2022
Myself, September 2022

Chapter Two: Women's Rights

Women around the world have been fighting for their rights for over one hundred years. In recent years these issues continue to persist. In Ireland in particular the feminist movement has played a major role in shaping the legal and social position for women today. The roles for women have been influenced by numerous legal changes in the twentieth century, particularly in the 1970s.

In 2018, a referendum was held in Ireland to either abolish or reinstate the 8th Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland which recognises the unborn fetus as having an equal right to life as the mother. This amendment, before being voted to be repealed, meant that women had no legal right to obtain an abortion either by choice or for medical reasons. A mural painted by Maser (see Fig.7) on the side of the Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar stating "Repeal the 8th" in support of abolishing the 8th amendment, caused outrage amongst some members of the public who disagreed with the statement. This mural actually first appeared here in 2016 for the same cause, but was then removed by Dublin City Council due to planning legalisation.¹⁵ According to the Charities Regulator the mural was deemed to be considered "political activity", which was a breach of the centre's code and the Charities Act 2009, and therefore the mural was painted over (see Fig. 8). The Project Arts Centre themselves replaced posters next to the covered mural stating "you can't paint over an issue".¹⁶ The removal of the mural sparked conflict among members of

¹⁵ Pacadm. "Repeal the 8th: Maser and the HUNREAL Issues at Project." *Project Arts Centre*, 15 July 2016, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://projectartscentre.ie/repeal-8th-maser-hunreal-issues-project-arts-centre/>.

; Pacadm. "Repeal the 8th: Maser and the HUNREAL Issues: 9 Apr - 28 May." *Project Arts Centre*, 10 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://projectartscentre.ie/repeal-the-8th-mural-reinstalled/>.

¹⁶ Holland, Kitty. The Irish Times Holland, Kitty. "'Repeal the 8th' Mural Removed in Dublin under Protest." *The Irish Times*, 23 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/repeal-the-8th-mural-removed-in-dublin-under-protest-1.3471011>.

the public and protests were held at the Project Arts Centre. The “No” side of the campaign were proactive with inaccurate posters about pregnancy with no repercussions, yet the “Yes” side of the campaign was silenced and artworks as such were removed.¹⁷ Due to the fact that the partial removal of the mural gained such outrage, it gained more traction to the mural and the message it was spreading. Even though the removal of the mural was so frustrating for many, it is only fair to say that the outrage brought the subject into the limelight and gave the intention of the initial mural even more attention than it had already received. As a street artist Maser himself wasn’t as frustrated with the removal of the piece as it comes with the territory of street art, “Either building gets knocked down or get painted over, so I was sort of versed in it.”- Maser (Interview B) However, he also saw the good in this situation that was bring such upset to members of the public, “I was trying to explain to them, this is good, because the ‘No Side’ are putting a lot of energy into this.”- Maser (Interview B)



Fig. 7 – Maser, Repeal the 8th, The Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin, April 2018

Pacadm. “Repeal the 8th: Maser and the HUNREAL Issues: 9 Apr - 28 May.” *Project Arts Centre*, 10 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.projectartscentre.ie/repeal-the-8th-mural-reinstalled/.

¹⁷ Demolder, Kate. Joe.ie Demolder, Kate. “Protest Held over Removal of Maser Repeal Mural from Project Arts Centre.” *JOE.ie*, 23 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.joe.ie/news/protest-maser-repeal-mural-623466>.



Fig 8 - Repeal the 8th mural painted over, The Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin, April 2018
 Knox, Kirsty Blake. "We Are Disappointed! - Protesters Gather as Repeal the Eight Mural Painted Over." *Independent*, Independent.ie, 23 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.independent.ie/irish-news/abortion-referendum/we-are-disappointed-protesters-gather-as-repeal-the-eight-mural-painted-over-36834639.html.

In the following weeks Amnesty International commissioned Maser to recreate the Repeal the 8th mural, this time in yellow and black, which are the colours of Amnesty International, on the side of their office building only 400 metres away in Temple Bar. However, this time it was there to stay (see Fig. 9).¹⁸



Fig 9 - Maser, Repeal the 8th, Amnesty International Office, Temple Bar, Dublin, 2018
 Hilliard, Mark. "Repeal the 8th' Mural Reappears in Temple Bar." *The Irish Times*, The Irish Times, 27 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/repeal-the-8th-mural-reappears-in-temple-bar-1.3476832.

¹⁸ Hillard, Mark. *The Irish Times* Hilliard, Mark. "Repeal the 8th' Mural Reappears in Temple Bar." *The Irish Times*, 27 Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/repeal-the-8th-mural-reappears-in-temple-bar-1.3476832>.
 ; Duffy, Rónán. "Maser's Repeal the 8th Mural Is Back up in Temple Bar (and It Won't Come down This Time)." *The Journal.ie*, Apr. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.thejournal.ie/amnesty-repeal-mural-3983467-Apr2018/>.

To spread awareness about the referendum and to stand up for women's rights, stickers, badges, tote bags, t-shirts, jumpers, and more were sold with the image of the "Repeal the 8th" heart on them to raise money for women's charities in Ireland. Maser himself uploaded a file online, copywrite free, with a template of the mural for members of the public to use freely and to continue the spread of the Yes campaign, which is exactly what happened and also led to people making their own recreations. (Interview B) "It wasn't my piece, and I made a very conscious decision at the start that like I would actually interview. I wouldn't interview about it. I'm doing it now, it's post, but I didn't interview. so didn't want to take ownership of it."- Maser (Interview B) Unintentionally, this became the image of the campaign and is still worn and spotted around the country, even some places around the world, today. "It all just sort of dropped at the perfect time, at the right time for it to have it sort of, significance, you know, and I think really the main trigger for it was that people really took ownership of it."-Maser (Interview B)

In 2021, a replica of the painted over mural was put on display in IMMA, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (see Fig. 10). This mural embodies more than just the Repeal campaign but also the more serious questions between art, politics, and free speech.¹⁹ As this piece is a recreation of the original mural, the aura of the original hasn't totally carried over. However, the original message of the mural still stands. The viewer gets brought back to a specific and important moment in Irish history. "For what the piece was, for its cultural significance and recreated on the walls of IMMA... it was nice, because it took it out of the public... and put it into a new

¹⁹ Keogh, Lynda. LovinDublin. "Replica of Maser's Iconic Painted over Repeal Mural Goes on Display in Imma." *LovinDublin.com*, 16 July 2021, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://lovinDublin.com/dublin/replica-of-masers-iconic-painted-over-repeal-mural-goes-on-display-in-imma>.

setting, and when you look at art in a different setting, it has different tones and appreciation, and it has context in terms of reflection. So, people can read about it before, and what it meant. So, it was nice, it was. What they are actually doing there with museums is different than gallery's is they are archiving that piece now. So, that's in history it's archived. So, it was important for me to do it and say yes.” – Maser (Interview B)



Fig 10 - Maser, Repeal the 8th, "The Narrow Gate of the Here & Now. 30 years of the global contemporary.

Chapter 1: Queer Embodiment", IMMA, Dublin

"The Narrow Gate of the Here and Now. Chapter One: Queer Embodiment." *IMMA*, 26 Apr. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.imma.ie/whats-on/the-narrow-gate-of-the-here-and-now-chapter-one-queer-embodiment/.

With the outcome of the vote being 66.9% yes, the 8th Amendment was then overturned and the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, signed the new bill into law. President Higgins signed the 36th Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018 which meant that women would be able to access a termination within the first twelve weeks of their pregnancy.²⁰

In March 2021 Emmalene Blake created a mural quoting “when will I be able to walk alone at night and feel safe?” (See Fig 11). This piece voiced the fear of women and

²⁰ Unknown. “Eighth Amendment Repealed as Irish President Signs Bill into Law.” *BBC News*, 18 Sept. 2018, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45568094>.

minorities and feeling unsafe while alone in public. This mural caught the attention of the general public. Blake left markers along the wall encouraging people to write messages on the wall for victims of attacks, rapes, and murders. Some people even wrote about their own stories on the wall. The bold white text on a black background made it easy to catch the eyes of people passing and read the message.



Fig.11 - Emmalene Blake, "When will I be able to walk alone at night and feel safe?", Fegan's, Dublin, 2021

Emmalene Blake, *Instagram*, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.instagram.com/p/CM-apXCHHVF/?hl=en

In December 2021, Blake's mural resurfaced in the public eye after the attack of 17-year-old Alanna Quinn Idris. Quinn was attacked by two men near her home in Ballyfermot while out with a friend and was left with shattered teeth, broken cheekbones, and a ruptured eyeball.²¹ The community came together after the assault showing respect for Quinn while she was in hospital undergoing a number of operations. Blake reuploaded her mural to Instagram after the assault marking her respect for Quinn and taking a stand against the crimes being committed against women and minorities throughout the country. This assault shook the community

²¹ Tuite, Tom. The Independent Tuite, Tom. "Two Young Men Face Extra Charges in Alanna Quinn Idris Assault Case." *Irish Examiner*, 24 June 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/courtandcrime/arid-40903118.html>.

and many people around Ireland, heightening the fear amongst women and minorities, such as the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour, about being out alone at night. As a large number of attacks on said communities rose after the decreasing of Covid 19 restrictions began, widespread fear was already felt amongst these communities. Quinn now suffers from lifelong injuries, including the loss of sight in one of her eyes. Her attackers are still facing trials in court today.²²

On the 12th of January 2022 at roughly four o'clock in the afternoon, 23-year-old Ashling Murphy was attacked and murdered while jogging along the Grand Canal in Tullamore, County Offaly, in broad daylight. The murder of Murphy shook the population of Ireland causing widespread vigils and protests around the country. Within hours of this tragic news breaking Blake posted an image of the mural in honour of Murphy with "at night" crossed out, leaving the mural to read "When will I be able to walk alone and feel safe?" (see Fig. 12). 31-year-old Jozef Puska was charged with murdering Ashling Murphy after a court case lasting four weeks. For many following months communities around Ireland came together in memory of Ashling and her life. To this day people walk along various parts of the Grand Canal in respect of Ashling where many places have memorials dedicated to her. Tullamore Men's Shed built and installed a canal side bench in memory of her for people to 'stop and remember' (see Fig. 13).²³ More than €2,000 was raised for Ashling Murphy's

²² Tuite, Tom. "Two Men to Stand Trial over Alleged Assault Which Left Dublin Teen Alanna Quinn Idris (18) with Horrific Facial Injuries." *Independent*, 20 Oct. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/courts/two-men-to-stand-trial-over-alleged-assault-which-left-dublin-teen-alanna-quinn-idris-18-with-horrific-facial-injuries-42082998.html>.

²³ Clarke, Vivienne. "Ashling Murphy: Canalside Bench Built for People 'to Stop and Remember'." *The Irish Times*, 28 Sept. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2022/09/28/ashling-murphy-canalside-bench-built-for-people-to-stop-and-remember/>.

trust fund ahead of the Tullamore Tradfest to celebrate the life and music of the young Irish teacher who was known for playing traditional Irish music on the fiddle.²⁴



Fig.12- Emmalene Blake, When will I be able to walk alone and feel safe?, Fegan's, Dublin, 2022

Emmalene Blake, Instagram, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.instagram.com/p/CYrFRdxMcb3/?hl=en>

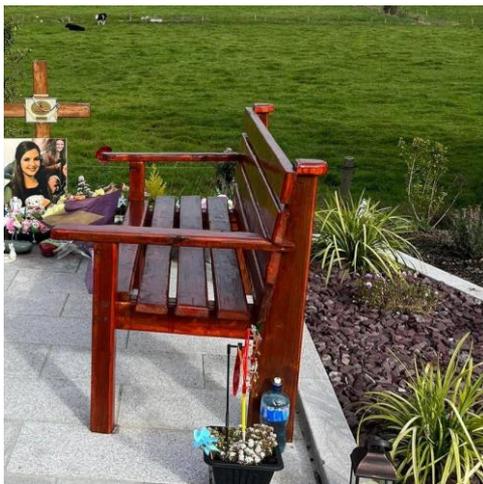


Fig.13 - Tullamore Men's Shed, Stop and Remember-Ashling Murphy, The Grand Canal Tullamore, 2022

Clarke, Vivienne. "Ashling Murphy: Canalside Bench Built for People 'to Stop and Remember'." *The Irish Times*, The Irish Times, 28 Sept. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2022/09/28/ashling-murphy-canalside-bench-built-for-people-to-stop-and-remember/.

T-shirts, jumpers, and tote bags were sold with an image of this mural on behalf of Women's Aid Ireland, an organisation and crisis centre for women and children with

²⁴ Wilson, Jade. "More than €2,000 Raised for Ashling Murphy Trust Fund Ahead of Concert." *The Irish Times*, 6 Apr. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/more-than-2-000-raised-for-ashling-murphy-trust-fund-ahead-of-concert-1.4845977>.

its aim being to support and help put an end to domestic violence (see Fig. 14). With the sales of these products the message of the original mural carries on. Through reproduction, this message can be spread all over the world, whether someone wears the items internationally or the items are bought internationally, the initial aim of the message continues so spread and more awareness is brought to the reality that women face daily of not feeling safe while alone.²⁵



Fig.14- Emmalene Blake, When Will I be able to walk alone and feel safe?, Women's Aid Ireland Emmalene Blake, Instsgram, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cb5qAsOMwWI/?hl=en>

In January 2023 Blake was commissioned to create another mural about the murders of women in Ireland at Fegan's bar where 'When will I be able to walk alone and feel safe?' once was. By the time the sketch of the mural was complete two more women, Natalie McNally and Bruna Fonseca, lost their lives to violence against women. The new mural 'Stop Killing Women' (see Fig.15) containing a woman covering her face with her hands and the message 'Stop Killing Women' written across her arms. The red text stands out against the greyscale portrait.

²⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Schocken Books, New York, 1935.

Being unable to see the woman's face leaves the mystery of who she is and the dark metaphor for the fact that any woman could be the next name in the news. Male violence against women in Ireland has become an epidemic. A fundraiser was made along with the mural to assist Women's Aid Ireland where over five thousand euro has been raised to help women in need.²⁶



Fig. 15 - Emmalene Blake, Stop Killing Women, Fegan's Bar, Chacery Street, Dublin, January 2023
Emmalene Blake, Instagram, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm-ArokMBcN/?hl=en>

²⁶ McCurry, Kate. "Family of Brazilian Woman Raise Almost €50,000 to Repatriate Her Body." *BreakingNews.ie*, BreakingNews.ie, 4 Jan. 2023, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/family-of-brazilian-woman-raise-almost-50000-euro-to-repatriate-her-body-1413758.html.

Chapter Three: Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is a decentralised political and social movement, founded in the United States, that seeks to highlight racism, discrimination and racial inequity experienced by black people. The primary concerns are incidents of police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people. The online hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer.²⁷ Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old African American who was shot while visiting relatives in a gated community by George Zimmerman, the neighbourhood watch coordinator. Zimmerman was charged with the murder of Martin, however, when Zimmerman claimed his actions were due to self-defence he was acquitted. Since, the Department of Justice have reviewed this case and no further actions have been taken due to lack of evidence.²⁸ Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc is a global organisation in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.²⁹ The movement became nationally recognised in the United States for street demonstrations following the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014.

In 2020 the movement returned to national headlines and gained even further international attention following the global protests after the particularly gruesome murder of 46-year-old George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin. A cashier in a Minneapolis convenience store suspected Floyd had used a counterfeit \$20 to purchase cigarettes, and the store's manager called the police. When the police arrived on the scene Floyd initially complied until he was being forced into the police car. He was pinned to the ground and Officer Chauvin pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. As Floyd gasped for air he stated, "I can't breathe". Chauvin and the three other officers at the scene continued to restrain him while bystanders begged to get off him. Unfortunately, Floyd was

²⁷ *About - Black Lives Matter*, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

²⁸ "Trayvon Martin Shooting Fast Facts." *CNN*, 14 Feb. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-fast-facts/index.html>.

²⁹ Tikkanen, Amy. "Black Lives Matter." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Lives-Matter>.

unresponsive when the ambulance arrived and was pronounced dead at a local hospital. An estimated 15 to 26 million people were in attendance of the George Floyd protests in the United States alone, making it one of the largest movements in the country's history.³⁰ Protests were held internationally as well including Ireland. It is believed by many activists that the turnout for these international protests were so substantial due to the fact that they took place during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.³¹ As so many people across America and around the world were suffering due to the pandemic, this frustration and sorrow ignited the peoples need to protest. These ground-breaking protests have made history in more ways than one. Demonstrators from coast to coast of America chanted "Black Lives Matter" and "I Can't Breathe".³² Shockingly, police departments around the country responded with riot control tactics at these peaceful protests. At least twenty-five Americans were killed during protests and political unrest throughout 2020, and thousands were left injured from tear gas and rubber bullets that were shot from too close of a proximity.³³ More than nine thousand peaceful protests were held across America after the death of George Floyd. In Ireland protests were held in Dublin and Belfast in solidarity of the Black Lives Matter movement. In Dublin, thousands gathered at the GPO on O'Connell Street and marched to the US Embassy in Ballsbridge.³⁴ In Belfast, hundreds of people gathered at Belfast City Hall and took part in a rally to protest the death of George Floyd. The organisers of the rally said they were overwhelmed by the numbers and diversity of people that attended.³⁵

³⁰ "George Floyd Is Killed by a Police Officer, Igniting Historic Protests." *History.com*, May 2021, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/george-floyd-killed-by-police-officer> ; Silverstein, Jason. "The Global Impact of George Floyd: How Black Lives Matter Protests Shaped Movements around the World." *CBS News*, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-floyd-black-lives-matter-impact/>.

³¹ Arora, Maneesh. "Analysis | How the Coronavirus Pandemic Helped the Floyd Protests Become the Biggest in U.S. History." *The Washington Post*, 4 Aug. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/05/how-coronavirus-pandemic-helped-floyd-protests-become-biggest-us-history/.

³² Cheung, Helier. "George Floyd Death: Why US Protests Are So Powerful This Time." *BBC News*, 8 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52969905>.

³³ Beckett, Lois. "At Least 25 Americans Were Killed during Protests and Political Unrest in 2020." *The Guardian*, 31 Oct. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/31/americans-killed-protests-political-unrest-aced>.

³⁴ Black, Rebecca, and Kevin O'Neill. "Thousands Stage Peaceful Protest in Dublin over Floyd Death." *Irish Examiner*, 2 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-31002870.html>.

³⁵ McKinney, Seamus. "Black Lives Matter Rallies Organised across Ireland as Hundreds Turn out for Belfast Protest." *The Irish News*, 4 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023)



Fig.16 - Niall Carson/PA, People at a Black Lives Matter protest rally outside the US Embassy in Dublin following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, US. Dublin, June 2020

Black, Kevin O'Neill & Rebecca. "Thousands Stage Peaceful Protest in Dublin over Floyd Death." *Irish Examiner*, 2 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-31002870.html.

After the murder of George Floyd hundreds of Black Lives Matter and George Floyd murals were appearing across America and around the world.³⁶ (See Figs. 17-21) Murals were also painted outside Cup Foods, the shop where Floyd was murdered, along with Minneapolis city officials renaming a two-block stretch of Chicago Avenue as George Perry Floyd Square.³⁷ (See Fig. 22&23) Around 2,700 pieces of street art have been created around the world in response to his unjust death. Murals are one of the longest and most engaging forms of communicative art and it is primarily a public form used as a tool for revolution, community building and remembrance. Murals have been seen in Minneapolis right where the murder happened, Germany, Palestine, Kenya, Syria, Italy, Pakistan, the UK, and Ireland just to name a few.³⁸ Many containing the phrases 'say his name' or 'his name was George Floyd', as well as "I can't breathe," which were the words Floyd gasped while in hands of the police. Other murals containing portraits of Floyd and many other black Americans who were wrongfully killed by law enforcement such as

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/06/04/news/black-lives-matter-rallies-organised-across-ireland-and-hundreds-turn-out-for-belfast-protest-1962643/>.

³⁶ Lang, Cady. "George Floyd Murals around the World." *Time*, 25 May 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://time.com/6180773/george-floyd-murals/>.

³⁷ 9, FOX. "New Sign Unveiled Marking 'George Perry Floyd Square' in Minneapolis." *FOX 9 Minneapolis-St. Paul*, 26 May 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.fox9.com/news/minneapolis-unveils-street-sign-honoring-george-floyd.

³⁸ Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.

Breonna Taylor, David McAtee and Sandra Bland, and many of those contained the phrase “Say Their Names.” ‘Say Their Names’³⁹ or #saytheirnames a powerful phrase that has built off the #sayhername movement which was started by the African American Policy Forum after the death of Sandra Bland in 2015. The movement strives to bring awareness to the erasure of black Americans killed by police brutality, as well memorialise each of the victims. The website *Say Every Name* is a list of black Americans from present to as far back as the late 1800’s that were wrongfully killed, along with their picture, age, and where they were from. Most cases state what they were doing at the time of their death, such as, walking, driving, at home, mentally suffering or even playing on the street. As well as this, there are icons next to each name indicating whether they were killed by US Law Enforcement or a civilian and unfortunately a vast majority of victims, including children, have been killed by US Law Enforcement.



Fig. 17 – Say Their Names, 11th Street, Louisville Kentucky, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. “26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World.” *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.

³⁹ “Say Their Names List 2022 - #Saytheirnames.” *Say Their Names List 2022 - #SayTheirNames*, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://sayevery.name/>.



Fig. 18 – Asmar, Aziz. No to Racism, Idlib, Syria, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.



Fig. 19 – Cruz Artiles, Jesus. I can't breathe, Mauer Park, Berlin, Germany, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.



Fig. 20 – Mwangi, Allan. Floyd, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.



Fig. 21 – TVBoy, Stop Racism, Barcelona, Spain, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.



Fig. 22 – George Perry Floyd Jr., 38th St & Chicago Ave, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 2020

Neeson, Johanna. "26 Powerful George Floyd Murals Seen around the World." *Reader's Digest*, Reader's Digest, 9 Dec. 2022, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.rd.com/list/george-floyd-murals/.



Fig. 23 – I Can Breathe Now, 38th and Chicago, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 2020

Artists Are Memorializing George Floyd with Murals around the World. (accessed 15 Feb 2023)

www.fastcompany.com/90511807/murals-for-george-floyd-around-the-world-memorialize-his-death-and-show-solidarity-against-racism.

The street artist Emmalene Blake had been brightening up her estate by painting a series of murals during the first lockdown of the pandemic and created a mural as a tribute to George Floyd at the news of his death (see Fig. 24). The mural containing a greyscale portrait of Floyd as the main focus with the words 'His name was George Floyd' sprawled across the top of his chest in red paint. The image used by Blake is

the same image used by most artists when creating the murals in memory of George Floyd. The photo in question is the photo that was used when the news broke of Floyd's murder. Red as the colour of blood is a colour associated with power and aggression.⁴⁰ To the ancient Chinese red was associated with death along with the colour black that were often seen paired on tombs. Ancient Egyptians wrapped mummies with red dyed linen, and Osiris the God of the Afterlife was known as the 'Lord of the red cloth'. Blake stated "Teach kids about racism and privilege. Teach them to recognise their privilege- white, class, straight, cis, male privilege and teach them to be allies. Teach them to always stand up to racism and discrimination. Teach them to do better than the generation that came before them."⁴¹ Blake also posted the piece on her Instagram saying it was a piece more important than any other work she was creating at the time.⁴² Blake's work had been received so well by local residents that neighbours began fundraising to pay for the paints required to create these striking artworks.⁴³ Neighbours donated €1,000 for Blake to buy more paint and continue her work that cheered up the community in such a dire time.

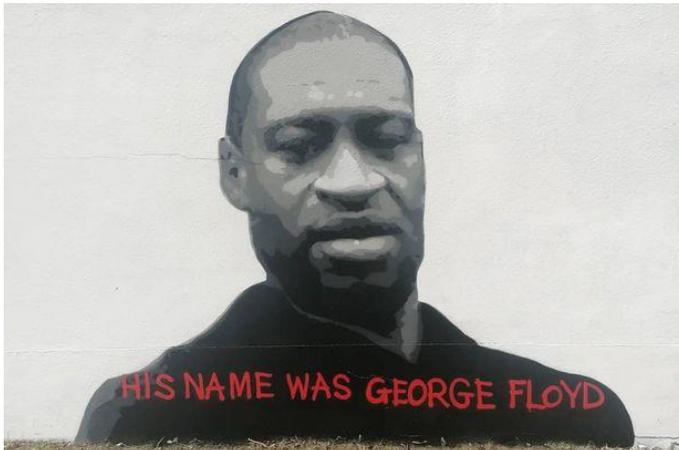


Fig. 24 - Emmalene Blake, His Name Was George Floyd, Kingswood, Tallaght, Dublin, June 2020

Emmalene Blake, Instagram, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA2IUJHBbK/?hl=en>

⁴⁰ St Clair, Kassia. *The Secret Lives of Colour*, C&C Offset Printing Co.,Ltd, 2016, pp 134-136.

⁴¹ O'Brien, Mark. "Dublin Artist's Latest Mural Pays Touching Tribute to George Floyd." *DublinLive*, 1 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.dublinlive.ie/news/dublin-news/george-floyd-tallaght-artist-emmalene-18341358>.

⁴² Fenton, James. "Dublin Artist Creates George Floyd Mural and Says, 'It's More Important than Any Other Work'." *LovinDublin.com*, 3 Nov. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://lovinDublin.com/dublin/dublin-artist-creates-george-floyd-mural-and-says-its-more-important-than-any-other-work>.

⁴³ Beresford, Jack. "Irish Artist Pays Powerful Tribute to George Floyd with Stunning Mural on Tallaght Estate." *The Irish Post*, 2 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://www.irishpost.com/news/irish-artist-pays-powerful-tribute-to-george-floyd-with-stunning-mural-on-tallaght-estate-186021>.

A mural was developed in Belfast on the international wall on Fall's Road by the Belfast tourism development organisation Fáilte Feirste Thiar and Ireland's largest community arts festival Féile an Phobail. Marty Lyons and Mickey Docherty were commissioned to create the mural of George Floyd (see Fig. 25). According to the local MP the mural is an expression of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter campaign.⁴⁴ Not only did the mural show respect for Floyd but it depicts the negligence of American police forces towards black Americans, showing the three other officers on the scene in the 'Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil' gestures, along with Chauvin in a 'Make America Great Again cap' and members of the Ku Klux Klan in the background. Unlike other murals where most seen were portraits of Floyd along with his name or last words, this mural evokes the state that many people see America as, a country this is built on and protects racism. With George Floyd as the focal point of the mural and the connotations of the reality of black Americans in the United States. This mural shows how these concerns constantly loom in the background for black Americans with the fear that they or a loved one could be the next name to the continuously growing list of black Americans who have been wrongfully murdered across the United States. Even though all these issues are focusing on the black American experience, that's not to say that people of colour in Ireland don't experience these fears. The black community in Ireland is ever growing and unfortunately Ireland is a country that is still breaking out of its old-fashioned views. Unfortunately, shortly after this mural was completed it was vandalised (see Fig. 26). Unfortunately, racism is alive not only in the United States but Ireland as well. When some members of the public are faced with murals of people of colour or simply someone who doesn't look like themselves, they take it out on these murals. Street artist Jess Tobin also had a similar experience in the past where a member of the public came to issue when she was doing a mural in aid of Black Lives Matter. (Interview A)

⁴⁴ News, RTÉ. "Belfast Marks Black Lives Matter Movement with Mural.", *Head Topics*, 6 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) <https://headtopics.com/ie/belfast-marks-black-lives-matter-movement-with-mural-13505139>.



Fig.25 - Marty Lyons and Mickey Docherty, Black Lives Matter, International Wall, Falls Road, Belfast
 Keenan, Shaun. "Mural in Tribute to George Floyd Appears in West Belfast." *BelfastLive*, 4 June 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/mural-tribute-george-floyd-appears-18366671.

Fig.26 - Marty Lyons and Mickey Docherty, Black Lives Matter (VANDALISED), International Wall, Falls Road, Belfast
 Odhiambo, Elly Omondi. "Opinion - Elly Odhiambo: They're Killing George Floyd All over Again." *Belfast Media Group*, Belfast Media, 25 Oct. 2020, (accessed 15 Feb 2023) www.belfastmedia.com/they-re-killing-george-floyd-all-over-again.

Conclusion

The image of street art has drastically changed over time, from being a medium just seen as vandalism to being used as one of the most popular and appreciated art forms of the twenty first century. Street art used in activism is a new common way, in Ireland in particular, to spread awareness about causes that aren't being spoken about enough or even at all. It has been proven as a way to get the public talking about necessary topics such as women's rights and Black Lives Matter.

The difference between street art and art in galleries is quite important to point out. While galleries are curating and making art accessible to the public, these are places always that aren't accessible. Some people may not feel comfortable in galleries or may not be able to access them freely. However, with street art it is accessible to anyone who passes that street. Street art isn't as restrictive as art in galleries as they can talk about difficult topics that might not be so welcome in galleries. However, galleries and museums alike have the availability to have pieces archived which is drastically different to the short lifespan of street art.

As street art is constantly changing, it creates a time limit for the lives of many murals and pieces. It makes the murals exclusive. The only way street arts life to live on is through reproduction or images. This means that the aura of the original piece was only truly experienced for a short period of time. Through reproduction, the message of pieces can live on, and the love and appreciation of pieces can be brought through prints, clothing, stickers and more. The aura of murals such as 'Repeal the 8th' and 'When will I feel safe...?' were so strong and important, but unfortunately, when reproduced the aura was lost. However, when these pieces were removed or vandalised, the original message of the mural still stands.

Whether by print, recreation, stickers or t-shirts, the message behind each of these murals continues to live and spread around the world. By this, issues that some members of the public or people internationally may not know about are being brought to light and into discussion. These pieces helped charities raise money for the families and friends of the victims, as well as women's charities, domestic violence supports and Black Lives Matter foundations. With communities coming together to support artists doing what they love, this is a hopeful glimpse into the future of street art.

The effect these murals have had on the public has been genuinely amazing. The positive impact these have created for women and minorities is astounding and has created a platform for people to say their minds, show their respect, and give much needed causes their time in the limelight. More victims have spoken out, more solidarity has been shown, and an effort to make this world a safer place for everyone has begun. Even though these things may only be small changes, in reality they are the first big step that needs to be taken for action to take place, which is, to get people talking.

The reactions to the murals based on women's rights had a very different reaction to the murals for Black Lives Matter. While both had incidents of murals being painted over, both were done for different reasons. While the removal of the 'Repeal the 8th' mural was due to being against the organisation's code of conduct, it proved the point that women's rights were seen as lesser than the image and reputation of a building. However, the vandalism of the George Floyd mural in Belfast was done because of anger or frustration. The racism people of colour face in the United States are not much different to the racism faced by people of colour

in Ireland as well. Either way, the removal or vandalism of street art also brings even more attention to the pieces than initially intended. The negative responses each time get more positive interactions and a counterattack to the negativity. All in all, it is safe to say through the research of this thesis, it is evident that street art has a positive effect on people, whether it be the love, passion and dedication put into the craft by the artist, or the reaction received by the public. It is proven the use of street art in activism in Ireland is incredibly effective at spreading the word of a good cause or even simply bringing a community together.

A: Interview Transcriptions

Appendix A - Interview with Jess Tobin aka Novice
Institute of Art Design and Technology (on call) 30/1/2023

AK: How did you get into street art?

JT: It was actually through youth work. Some of the kids in a group led were interested in graffiti and stuff. Now I hadn't been quite exposed to the industry at the time, so I got in touch with a friend of mine who did graffiti lettering and that's where I started. So, he came in with me to the group one day to do it with the kids and they had a great time. I then got involved with a group called evolve urban art and we had some exhibitions in the White Lady Gallery. That's when I started getting involved with graffiti jams and stuff, like the one that was at the Tivoli Car Park. They were great fun, and it was so cool just seeing other people all working on all these different pieces and seeing the old school men at work. That's where I met a lot of the street art girls too which is great, and we used to do lots of projects together.

AK: How did you get involved with the Minaw Collective?

JT: See when we made this group it was just the other girls that I'd been doing projects with, and we thought it'd be nice to make a group of only female artists because you don't really see that. A lot of us were involved with Evolve, or street jams, or the white lady gallery already. One of the girls Catriona, so her street art name is Kim with an X (KXM), and she had the idea to make an all-girl group and we were all mutual on it and already knew each other so we thought why not. I think our first exhibition was in 2013 and we had the White Lady Gallery. It was in Temple Bar I think on one of the queys maybe Aston Quey.

AK: How do you find the industry as a woman?

JT: I don't find it to be any different and it's an interesting one because people often assume with the Minaw Collective it was a reaction, kind of a feminist think, but it wasn't. We just thought it would be cool. So, all of us came from jobs that obviously had men, women, all sorts you know. None of us from my experience or any of the other girl's experience have never been "oh working with men". As well because it's the street art scene I wonder because it's not your name you never really know (who did the piece). At jams you're like 'oh, that's a woman'. Graffiti would be male dominated. I'm not really sure about now, but probably more male dominated. I've never noticed any different treatment because I'm a woman.

AK: How would you go about getting permission to do pieces in public spaces or commissions and stuff?

JT: Well, there's a couple of different ways, there's something called free walls that are spaces to paint where you can use whenever. Then there's kind of spots

on buildings and stuff that have been painted on for years, so it's kind of like a known street art spot. So, there are requirements from the council that if you're putting a piece on a wall and you have to seek permission, and what you can do is you can, let's say, me and the building owner, put in an application to get permission to do the piece on the building or house and then I'd have permission to paint on that spot for the next three years once I get the permission. Now there's a couple of things before you put anything up, like you can't be offensive and that. Then, it's not allowed to be an advertisement because that's a different planning permission. Yeah, so that would be the main way I mean like there's definitely some buildings around Dublin that seems to be like I don't know whether like ad agencies have bought them or something or maybe buildings have rented them as a space. You know they like, have you ever noticed in town say, Busy Feet, that changes all the time. So, I don't know whether Busy Feet have like lease that out to people who want to do advertisement with using street art, but I would still imagine they probably need to actually apply for a different type of planning permission. Sometimes people just paint walls and then worry about afterwards. If it's not too big you know like if I got permission from the owner to paint like if nobody complains, it'll stay there. Do you know what I mean? But if you're doing something big that will probably draw attention, you're better off getting that planning permission. So yeah, I have to go to the council generally.

AK: When it comes to the effect of street art on the public, have you seen like a shift in the change of people's reactions to things over the years? Would you consider it negative or positive or would you say it's a mix of both?

JT: My experience has been like 99% positive. The modest thing is you know any time I've been involved in doing street art pieces out in the public it's generally the older community who are really real champions of street art because you know it might be in an area where it's like 'oh this beautiful art' 'it's lovely to see this in our community', 'I love seeing the change', 'you know it's great to have the roads cleaned up a little bit', things like that, and people often assume that it's the older age group that might be more pretentious. Now, I've had two experiences where people complained to me. One of them I was doing a Black Lives Matter piece and a guy walked by and just said 'oh who is that?' and he knew quite well that it was a picture of a black lady. So, he was looking for at a bit of a discussion, but it never came. Then I was doing a piece in Clondalkin, the one you remember the one at Tesco's? That was with a youth group and a lady, young enough, probably my age, came across and she was losing it and that was commissioned piece with Clondalkin tidy towns and Tesco's and then the youth service. She was just given out stink because she would have to look at it out her window. I think she just having a bad day but they're the only real experiences I've had. In saying that the girls, the Minaw girls, we did a piece, a pride piece and it was completely tagged. Obviously, you could assume it was against gay rights, but then at the same time what can happen in the street art/graffiti scene, some people maybe have taken a disliking to the collective, to the message of the collective, you know, you never you can never be too sure unless something has been written that blatantly says 'I don't like this'. I took it that it was you know anti-pride. Actually, now that I mention it one of my pride pieces

was tagged as well. But what's interesting about when pride pieces are tagged it ends up causing more positive attention than negative. What happened when my piece was tagged it was coming up to the referendum and a load of us did pieces, it was kind of funny not funny, in that my piece that was tagged I was really unhappy with it so because it was tagged, I had to go back and fix it. So, the second version was better and then because people had such a strong reaction to the fact that it was tagged. People would say 'it's terrible your piece was tagged' 'it's terrible because the message' you know and then it got loads of traction because it was tagged. So, it got loads of attention for the referendum and vote yes. I'd say people saw that piece more because someone's gone by and sees it tagged and is really bothered by the fact that someone has put the negative message around vote yes referendum message, and so, then people are walking by snapping and sharing it. Otherwise, it's a positive street art piece with a good message but because it was tagged it got more attention, which worked out great in the end.

AK: From your experience, do you think that like these pieces that are spreading the word about something are effective in that way where more people get talking about something?

JT: Yeah, I think if it's done respectfully. I think so but I mean I have never seen statistics. I think it's because it's very accessible. It's quite tactile and it's done by an actual human. It's not just like a poster on a billboard. Someone has to actually make a big effort to do that piece. I don't know whether it resonates more with people. I mean street art is being used for a very long time to raise awareness for different things. I'd imagine it does because you know the way say there's a campaign, let's say it's a suicide awareness campaign or something. That's an emotional thing, but I wonder if because street art is kind of personal, so it takes a person to want to make a statement about something. It might be better bringing attention to the more niche topics that maybe are really big but aren't getting big news. It could be something awful that's happening in another country, and it's pushed down the line on the news front because they air stupid or whatever is headline worthy, but you don't hear the real big stuff. Street Art is a great way to shine a light on those things.

AK: How do you see Street Art and what does it mean to you?

JT: I think why I like it is it's very accessible. So, you know the way like art galleries and museums can kind of be a bit intimidating? Whereas Street Art is on the street. You don't have to go to a gallery if it makes you feel kind of weird and uncomfortable. It's so diverse as an art form. It can be like highly detailed, it can be really abstract, it could be huge, it can be small. Obviously, there's a lot of illegal stuff that goes on but a lot of illegal good stuff. It means you can get access to a load of different types of art, where gallery spaces are much more difficult to be in as an artist because they're very expensive, and then you're there you're dictated by what else is in the gallery or maybe what's trendy now or whatever. Whereas Street Art you know the good the bad and different is all out there for you. I think as well for me you know why I like to for doing youth arts stuff is that it there is so many versions of it. You know when you're trying

to champion creativity with people, I just hear all time I can't draw so I'm not creative but that's not true at all. Then you can have someone who really likes doing cool paste ups, or drawing big pictures, or someone who does abstract stuff. There's something for everybody in it and I know something for everybody in all types of art forms but it's just such an accessible version of that.

Appendix B – Interview with Al Maser
Institute of Art Design and Technology, 9/2/2023

AK: How did you get into street art?

AM: So, I got into street art before it was called street art. I got into it when it was graffiti. I was about 14 or 15. So this brings back to about, “95/”96, and my friend Gus, his bigger brother was Lorcan, and you know when you're younger you always looked up to your friends' bigger brothers, sisters. This dude was into hip hop, had graffiti magazines and all this in his bedroom and he had a tag, and his tag was 'rism'. He gave me my first hip hop album to listen to. So, it was also based around hip hop culture back then really and he did it, so I got into tagging and few friends just tagging around where we lived. Then I went into a shop called 'Forbidden Planet', it was originally on Harcourt Street. I went in there and I picked up a magazine called 'Graphotism'. It was my first index into graffiti outside of my area because I saw little bits and pieces, but this showed all this UK graffiti and that was a real kick, a real moment for me to learn and I bought the magazine, and it became a little bible to me. After that actually over the years I got featured in the magazine loads. But that's really how it started and then it just built out so learn from tags into throw ups some people would be familiar with them, into pieces so it's all letterforms taking letters abstractly skewing them to sort of manipulate sort of expressionism in some way of letterforms you know. That's what it was, and so the energy and motivation behind it was pretty much like young, curious, male, loads of energy, want explore the city, did want to get in trouble a little bit, but it actually made me meet a lot of like-minded other individuals, cause I definitely walked on the periphery a little bit with my friends because I wasn't into soccer, definitely my feminine side was stronger than I assumed with the other guys, you know. Maybe little bit more aware of myself and more sensitive but I didn't realise. So, the art, it all sort of, I found all these other people who were sitting in that same other space. That just gave me a good encouragement to sort of explorer that. Went on to then getting good at graffiti and do more public works and painting walls and travel the world with other graffiti crews. So that was pretty much the start of it, lots of it, obsessive, like obsessive, like girlfriends got jealous.

AK: How would you go about getting permission or getting commissions to do pieces?

AM: It's a funny space I'm in now because in some way some of the things I used to sort of ridicule or criticise I've now become. So, I was in a very, in a space of graffiti, anti-establishment, quote on quote “fuck other artists”, and it was all because during that time we weren't credited for what we did and our passion just wasn't understood, it was dismissed. Now I'm gravitating more towards studio space, painting, canvas works. I'm moving actually away from murals, just that chapter. I'll probably revisit it again; it's got a bit of muddy water around it at the moment. But to get to get to your point, of like how, so it was sort of knock on. What you do, once you put yourself out there and create work, more people see it, more people see it and sort of people if you work people and are drawn to it, they usually invite you in to do stuff. Now, there's a lot of

forward moving stuff as well. I will come up with a concept, let's say, the native project that I'm working on. I'm looking at native flora, from exploring, from going on hikes. So, I did out a full, sort of proposal, of like painting a mural in every county in Ireland. So, I would put that together for myself, like what would that look like to have a mural in every county in Ireland. No one's ever done that. That's what I'm working right now. So, then I was like, who does this need to be in front of to make this easier. Like, what bodies are there that have the filofax of all the people who are important to do it, you know. There are different ways, but a lot of times people get invited to do stuff there's a big you can see like a big trend, brands and commercial entities utilising the public space for work. So, a lot of artists are getting, sort of, commissions to do works like that. But overall, outside of Ireland because Ireland is still a very small space. I will get invited from cultural institutions, like museums of contemporary arts or art festivals in cities, were I've been invited over to go work with other artists. Yeah, so it's a variety of different things and then there's lots of murals you just go paint yourself. You just want to do it.

AK: I'm going to go straight into the repeal piece if that's okay.

AM: Yeah, 100%

AK: What gave you the idea to do that piece?

AM: Yeah, so obviously that was being conversated quite a lot at the time. I was living with a lady called Andrea Horn, a good pal of mine. So, that conversation was brought up a lot in the house. She said to me "what would it look like for you to create a badge?", a badge like a pin that you would wear, you know, like a campaign badge. I was like, okay, I would do it based on my style and my typography, and understand it needs to be legible, so not too complicated. So, I used a typography that I usually use, this sort of signature type face I use called Bello Pro, put it in the hearts, heart graphic. We designed and then I was like "we should try paint it" because that's the fun part for me. then I said to her there's a space outside the Project Arts Centre, that have painted before, with a project with Damien Dempsey in 2010. And I wrote on the "give the mirror a kissed odd time". So, I knew there was a space there available, it's a new high traffic, high foot fall space and its cultural institution, so, it would be more sort of susceptible and open to an understanding a sort of political peace like this. she then knew Cian; the director of the space and it all just sort of happened. I was living in London at the time so, I flew back, ordered a cherry picker, a scissor lift and I had a friend who was my assistant at the time. I said, "are you comfortable doing this with me?" and I believed this is a good piece to do. not knowing, it was very simple, like you would think it would just be painted and passed by. but I feel maybe, just at the timing, of this its location, and legibility of the artwork maybe people wanted to have a visual logo, identity, associated with it. It all just sort of dropped at the perfect time, at the right time for it to have it sort of, significance, you know, and I think really the main trigger for it was was that people really took ownership of it. wasn't my piece and I made a very conscious decision at the start that like I would actually interview. I wouldn't interview about it. I'm doing it now, it's post, but I didn't interview. so

didn't want to take ownership of it. I actually made it, I looked up models, let's say 'the shape of our image' designed by Jim Fitzpatrick and he made that copyright free. so, people were allowed use it, and so people are allowed use it anywhere. So, I'd used the same sort of idea, its copyright free, user as you wish, we built a website where you can download it, make a stencil, or do whatever put on t-shirts. and that's when people made their own interpretations. That's how it sort of became the, I don't know what the word is, like, iconography, the logo for it. That's how it all sort of came about. there weren't any crazy strategies. Artworks are usually made on impulse and feeling and then you reflect after you know. So, if you overthink it, you probably won't do it. so made sense, like-minded friend, I wanted to show my support. And that was it.

AK: When that was removed how did that affect you or what was your stance on that?

AM: So, I've experienced in painting works in public spaces, the people who in that circle who would associate with it, Andrea, Cian and all these different people, were upset, you know, obviously for obvious reasons. But my experience was like artwork in a public space is transients. Either building gets knocked down or get painted over, so I was sort of versed in it. In terms of energies and stuff like that, I was trying to explain to them, this is good, because the No Side are putting a lot of energy into this. So, it's being remove but it's now evoking the second chapter to the mural. conversation is going to be hard. If you take something, someone chases more. I felt the time, the actions of the people who want to remove it actually did themselves a bit of disservice. So, quickly I got assumption that this isn't a bad thing.

AK: Tell me about the recreation in IMMA.

AM: So, when the mural got removed from the Project Art Centre, there's a lot of back and forth, and then it was some sort of loophole or something where I painted it again. It was like a bait on the streets, it was really nice to sort of be a participant of it, you know, and everyone has the right to speak their opinions. It was sort of taken out of this mural. So, it was really cool, and then it had to be removed, but not all of it, the words had to be removed. So, Cian took to painting it over the final time, but left a little piece as like a momento to the thing. I nicknamed it 'the nugget'. So, that was there, and he just did it so well, because it's unbodied everything. It still had the memory, you still knew it was there, you knew all the all the actions that happened around it, it was great. So that in itself became a piece, and we did a print too, to support the cause with the Project Arts Centre. Then forward on a while, I'm really bad with dates, probably last year, the year before then IMMA, a curator there, asked me to be a part of a large group show to celebrate, I'm gonna say, 30 years of IMMA. Something like that, I need to double check the facts on it. For what the piece was, for its cultural significance and recreated on the walls of IMMA. So, I did. So, was it so just sort of, it was nice, because it took it out of the public. Like public public space and put it into a new setting, and when you look at art in a different setting, it has different tones and appreciation, and it has context in terms of reflection. So, people can read about it before, and what it meant. So, it was nice, it was. What

they are actually doing there with museums is different than gallery's is they are archiving that piece now. So, that's in history it's archived. So, it was important for me to do it and say yes.

AK: Do you think street art has a positive and/or negative effects on the public?

AM: It's shared space, public space, so anything within that space well no matter what action it is, is going to have positive and negatives no matter what. You know, you cross the road and the lights on green and there's a cyclist there, it's a shared space. I think it depends on the artwork, the intentions of the artists, the framework of it, are you just painting mural or is it disguised as artwork but it's actually a company getting artist to pay for a brand, you know. So, I think all in all if I was to give an overview and I'll talk about all my travels during the world, I would say it has it definitely positive impact. Even when through tags and stuff it like that because what it shows is that there's people in that space. They're living there and usually places, like heavy with street art that are usually the most culturally significant kick-starter. So, the space you'll see independent coffee shops, you can see young creatives, you'll see start-ups. Now, let's cut to a business district, it's in the city. I go there on a Sunday, it is desolate, there's no one around, there's grey buildings, there's no tags, there's no life, there's no energy. So, I've noticed from when I used to go and do a lot of murals in different countries, I'd get up and I'd go jogging in the morning. Where was I where I really noticed it... Detroit, and I was painting Detroit murals in this area with this market food market, murals everywhere, little galleries, and then I went for a jog around to the business district and it was just like.. like some kind of zombie movie, you know. And so, it's a visual representation – now I know illegal graffiti and stuff like that upsets people and stuff and again, there's so many layers to that conversation that I can't just give a blanket answer, but I do sort of say that like, you know, we love to watch, let's say, we love to watch premiership football, but they then would be annoyed about the kid kicking a ball against the side of their wall. Like you know, there's starting places for everything – not saying tagging's the start of it, but like, its shared space, a bit of empathy and understanding for a lot of things is, you know. It just reminds me of like when you see people beeping at someone with a learner plate trying to do their driving lesson, like you know. So, what I think it creates the identity to a city quite a lot, and I believe from the artists that I know, out of the hundreds of artists that I've met, 99% of them are coming from good places and have good intentions and are good people so I would say, yes, positive.

AK: Do you think that street art used in activism is effective then?

AM: Yeah, it's a good tool. Like, you know, we say street art and I would say, I came from graffiti. So, graffiti is coming from New York culture, trains - which actually prior to that it started in Philadelphia – but then the sort of activism, political statement stuff, that's more street art, anti-establishment. A simple example of that is Banksy, social commentary through stencils, you know, punk era, that sort of stuff. So, they've all sort of merged together now, and now there's contemporary murals and stuff, but it's a great vehicle to communicate for people on ground level how we all feel and how we're responding to certain

situations, you know what I mean? So it is, it's social commentary on the street, and it's valid and it's needed, and it's like protesting, you know. That's what it is. And it's an artist's life – again, I speak very general, I can't speak for every artist – but even the act of being an artist and not conforming to a quote-unquote 'easier life'. That's not the right thing to say there but that in some ways is activism you know it's going against sort of what society tells you to do you know you're going down the unbeaten path, so yeah.

AK: Now this is a bit of a loaded question but it's the last one, so. How do you see street art and what does it mean to you?

AM: See, I'm in the gun smoke. I'm lost in it. So, it's hard for me to stand on top of the hill and look down. I have been a part of it since, as I said, that day fourteen/fifteen doing it. For me it's a huge part of my identity, it's a huge chapter of my life. I'm probably, I still hold on to a lot of those elements and they're in my work. I'm probably gravitating towards more gallery space work now, but I would be very upset if I was to lose that big thread and part of my life. I think it's finally getting its accreditation it deserves. When I was in this college here, a tutor, my proposal for my thesis was based on graffiti and it was really sort of shunned upon, graffiti. Not understood. And no fault to the tutor, that tutor's amazing. But I can see it now getting its credit, but with that comes all the little vultures everywhere who want to exploit artists, like any culture, and monetize off us, and artists sort of get, you know, the scrapings at the ends. So, that's another conversation, but it means a lot to me, it really does. And I love it, and I'm very protective of it and I'm very protective of the people who are in it, and we're a close community and we look out for each other, and right now we're whatsapping each other about a project we're all working on, and there's a few discrepancies there and I can just see everyone huddled together because Ireland's small. And that extends globally, like I've friends, I lived in the States and the UK and I've friends who are huge international artists and we still all support each other in DMs and comments. So, I think it's knowing that again I'm forty one, so I'm doing this for twenty something years you sort of know the years of struggle that you did to get here even though it's not much of a – you love doing it, you wouldn't have done it any other way, but you appreciate, sort of, the journey that you went through and so everyone's sort of quite tight. Yeah.

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