

Graffiti as a Communication Tool and Use of Experimental Graphic Design in Graffiti Applications

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Article Info

Abstract

Keywords:

Street art
Graffiti
Experimental graphic
Design
Communication

Graffiti, which emerged in New York in the 1960s-70s with the writing activities of young people to prove their existence, evolved into an original, free and aesthetic art, street art, by diversifying with different techniques, technologies, and styles. This study deals with the reflections of experimental graphic design practices in street art. In addition, this study deals with the reviews of practical graphic design practices in street art. Finally, the study, which aims to reveal the application areas, diversity, and effectiveness of experimental graphic design in street art, answers the questions of what experimentalism corresponds to in design, whether street art and graphic design interact, and how this interaction affects street art. A qualitative research design was used in the study, and the graffiti sampled over the concepts distilled from the literature were subjected to descriptive analysis. The findings show that 3D illustrations are at the forefront beyond realistic illustrations in today's graffiti applications.

Introduction

The experiment can be defined as any “new” thing that has not been tried before, is unconventional, and cannot be easily classified. It can be said that the first of all the steps taken by human beings to reach the “new” is experimental in a sense. In experimentation, which is expressed as the state of all techniques when they are first used, new applications can be developed by combining different techniques. Graffiti, which started as a writing activity, developed over time with the experimental methods it used, evolved into an art form, and took its place as street art today. Today, street art turns walls into canvases, reflects the city's spirit, and expresses it in an aesthetic, figurative, and abstract style. It can be said that “Street” is now only a concept corresponding to where that work is done. Graffiti also interacted with different disciplines in transitioning to street art and benefited from the techniques of the disciplines with which it interacted. Among these disciplines, it has undoubtedly experienced the greatest impact with graphic design. Graphic design is a visual communication art with many sub-disciplines, from typography to photography, printmaking to illustration, and informational designs to environmental graphics. Expressing the idea through visuals is the common denominator of both art types.

While the interaction of graphic design and street art, which will be put forward by equating the evolution process where protest writing acts are replaced by abstract or realist illustrations, constitutes

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the starting point of the study, examining the experimental design practices arising from this interaction and revealing their effectiveness include the purpose of the study. Starting from the problematic effects of experimental graphic design applications on street art, this study will also seek answers to some research questions. Among these questions are what experimentalism corresponds to in design, whether street art and graphic design interact, and with which sub-disciplines of graphic design and how this interaction affects street art. In this study, which assumes that the interactions in question are effective on the development of street art, a qualitative research design was used, and the graffiti sampled from the concepts distilled from the literature were subjected to descriptive analysis.

Experimental Graphic Design

Design, which Bernard refers to as “the thing that can be seen and has a communicative or functional purpose” (2010, p. 32), is, in general, a creative process in which the planned or conceived idea is materialized and made visible in any field. In other words, it is an innovative action that pursues a specific purpose (Becer, 2015, p. 32). It is the best means of expressing feelings and thoughts that cannot be explained verbally.

In graphic design, ‘design’ transforms a direction of information or need into a finished product or a solution that starts with the problem and ends with producing an effective, permanent and exciting solution. Using various techniques and mechanisms in the solution production process encourages people to think outside of the ordinary (Ambrose, Harrsis, 2019, p. 11). Considering out of the ordinary makes the design creative, while using an unusual technique makes the design an experimental design. Ciric expresses experimentalism as the state of all classically accepted methods when they are first used, new applications can be developed, or techniques and technologies can be used by combining different techniques. In this way, it is possible to experiment with attempts to develop new ways of thinking, formulate the known, create the unknown, or try to stay away from the original with new methods in which the old is used (2014, p. 1). In doing so, the aim is to dissipate the uniformity in design that is often encountered. It is not to limit the design field due to the necessity of adherence to a new rule but to offer more flexible and accessible structures where knowledge and intuition are combined. To give an abstract form to the materialized design product is to transform the materials into new visual rhythms and textures (Okur, 2003, p. 37). Creating materials such as line, tone, color, texture, shape, size, and direction by combining different techniques and technologies puts graphic design into a mixed discipline and expands the product range. From packaging design to illustration, from photography to printing, from interface designs to animation, from informational designs to environmental graphic designs, graphic design is the field where experimental studies find the most application environment.

Design on the Street: “Street Art”

This attitude of human beings, which determines the living space they own with the paintings, signs, and descriptions they have inscribed on the cave walls, makes that thing their own, and not only that but also communicates with us, conveys their knowledge and shares their experiences with the traces they left on the walls from thousands of years ago, is a form of artistic expression today can be said to have been created. The foundations of today’s meaning and philosophy of this form of the word, street art, were laid with the graffiti tradition. During the Second World War, JJ Kilroy’s writing “Kilroy was here” on buildings, walls, and even bombs was not simply an act of scribbling, but an expression of resistance against the pressures, marginalization, and restrictions brought on by the social, social and economic changes, and of individual existence. Both sides of the Berlin Wall dividing Germany were covered with the same protest texts and slogans (Balamer, 2015, pp. 29-31).

In the 1970s, young people from underprivileged neighborhoods like Brooklyn, Queens, or the Bronx, who couldn’t afford to take the subway to Manhattan, found a way to get around: by writing their names or nicknames on the exteriors of subway cars, making their names appear all over the city. This is not an ordinary post. Inscriptions in a style and technique that will enable them to be easily read from

afar and distinguished from each other in areas where subways stop at night. Large and bubble-like letters, hard and thick contours, and vivid colors (Heller & Vienne, 2016, p. 186), in which spray paints are used... The graffiti, included as Vandalism Criminals by the press, defined themselves as Style Writers. These writing acts were more memorable with technical techniques and carried them to another dimension with their styles.

Graffiti is no longer just a manifestation of personal existence or a protest attitude. It has turned into a language where the details of daily life are hidden, information about traditions, attitudes and behaviors is given, and the social, cultural and political pulse of the period is read. It can be erased, washed away by the rain, changed, into a volatile language...

Over time, this volatile language became the main material of the exhibitions of photographed artists, so graffiti gained popularity and became documented and immortalized (Balamer, 2015, p. 34). There is an aesthetically valuable graffiti, where mixed methods are blended and applied, and simple handwriting turns into typographic compositions and artistic expressions. This period, which coincided with the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s, was the period when graffiti evolved into "street art".

For street artists, streets are like large picture frames baked in the sun and washed in rain (Heller and Vienne, 2016, p. 186). Crossing the streets of New York where he was born in the 1960s, he soon colored the gray concrete walls of his living spaces and turned the walls into living canvases. Street art is emotional, ideological, protest, in love, angry, happy, hopeful, pessimistic, cheerful and angry. It does not need an invitation for its audience, a gallery for its exhibition, a permission for its existence; It has managed to become a free, original and aesthetic field of art that no one can ignore.

Street art born from graffiti, unlike graffiti, has incorporated more techniques and styles. It has become abstract by getting rid of the primitive forms that make up its origin, and attained aesthetic and figurative forms (Sarikaya, 2018, p. 238). His concern was not to express the self but to address the world, and thus he became a part of the visual universe. Of course, in this process, he interacted with different disciplines and benefited from the techniques of the disciplines he interacted with. Among these disciplines, it has undoubtedly experienced the greatest impact with graphic design.

Findings: Experimental Graphic Design Applications in Street Art

Graphic design has a wide spectrum from typography to photography, from printmaking to illustration. While the interaction of graphic design and street art, which will be put forward by equating it with this evolution process, where protest writing acts are replaced by abstract or realistic illustrations, constitutes the starting point of the study, examining the experimental design practices arising from this interaction and revealing their effectiveness constitute the aim of the study. During the long readings and research made for this purpose, we come across a person who has studied graphic design and understood the importance of underground artists: Keith Haring. It is possible to define himself as someone who bridges the gap between these two cultures (Heller & Vienne, 2016, p. 186). Young but extraordinary artists such as Keith Haring and Jean Basquiat, who produced their first works on the streets, attracted attention with their works and then began to appear in galleries. This is not a step forward, but it has attracted the attention of photographers, art historians, and art lovers. It has become the first step toward the evolution of graffiti into street art.

After these steps, the graffiti created became original, their size grew, and calligraphic, aesthetic, and impressive writing began; graffiti techniques, on the other hand, started to develop and diversify with the effect of the interaction with the graphic design discipline. Experiments have been started with many methods, from Xerox and screen printing to wood printing and linoleum printing techniques, hand or machine-cut stencils, stencils, collages, photographs, and painting made by projection with a projector.



Figure 1: We the Youth Keith Haring, Philadelphia

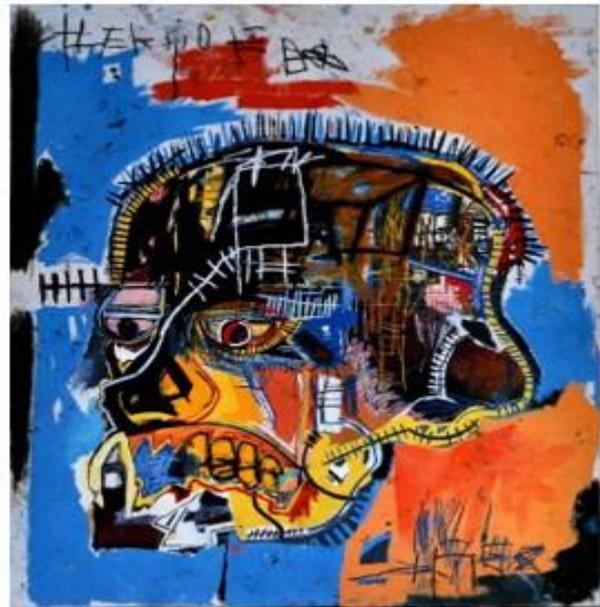


Figure 2: Untitled, Jean-Michel Basquiat



Figure 3: First trials with stencil– Blekle Rat

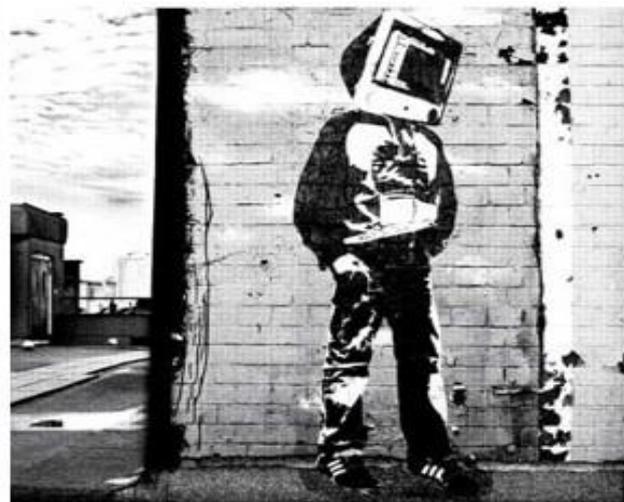


Figure 4: First trials with stencil– Blekle Rat

It is possible to say that the pattern created with stencils can be transferred easily and quickly to all kinds of floors, allows graphical expressions, simple typographic arrangements, and can be applied to many different walls of different cities, and it is possible to say that the stencil provides great benefits for the proliferation and spread of street art. In 1981, Blek le Rat applied “rats” (Balamer, 2015, p. 99), which he refers to as “the last rebels” and “the only animal living freely in the city” (Balamer, 2015, p. 99) to the walls of the city in real size with the stencil technique, and with this technique he developed, he presented the artists after him has been a source of inspiration.



Figure 5: Hope, Shepared Fairey, 2008



Figure 6: Obey, Shepared Fairey, 2014



Figure 7: Defend Dignity, Shepared Fairey, 2017



Figure 8: Welcome Home, Shepared Fairey, 2017

One of these names is the world-famous graphic designer, street artist and activist Shepard Fairey. Fairey, who creates collages, wall paintings, design templates, posters and stickers on different backgrounds by blending various styles, is inspired by popular culture images (Irvine, 2012, p. 9). The poster and sticker, which is in the center of attention of punk and skateboarders, has succeeded in placing it in the center of attention of the world. *The HOPE* poster, which he designed as a street art work but later turned into a symbol, and the *OBEY* sticker campaign he created with reference to the definition of phenomenology, are good examples of the worldwide interest. Fairey, where his experimental designs are figurative and turned into material, is one of the best providers of the interaction of street art and graphic design.



Figure 9: Chuuutttt, Jef Aersol, Paris, 2011



Figure 10: When Hands Talk, Eyes Listen, 2019

After interacting with photography in the 1970s, it was seen that Jef Aersol, who combined the possibilities of photography with his own art, began to use the distortions and collages he obtained from photographs in his works. In the 80s, it started to use stencil printing possibilities and specialized in the use of stencils. Although the templates allow for the reproduction of their designs, the fact that the experiences in the transfer process of the templates are the first added experimentation to each work.

Anonymous people, contrast colors, texture effects, cultural icons... Even though his techniques have changed, the thing that does not change is the characters in his art and the 'red arrow', which takes its place in each of his works, leaving its meaning to the audience, which has become Aersol's signature.



Figure 11: Library Street Collective, Swoon, 2016



Figure 12: Time Capsule, Swoon

Swoon, who includes the city's unsung heroes in his works, establishes a dialogue with them. Current events and the people of the city where he works are a source of inspiration, so every work is a 'first' experience. Known for his life-size and realistic designs, Swoon brought his art to the streets by adding his printmaking education, thus making his works experimental and detailed (Schacter, 2013, p. 41). In his works in which he uses wood and linoleum printing techniques, he paints family and friends or people he photographed on the streets, perhaps at a bus stop, or while carrying a load on his back. It is a motif and ornamental. It uses abandoned building walls inside it. In this way, he talks about the pleasure of being a part of the urban fabric. Swoon does not hesitate to write his works inspired by his stories in museum galleries. Thus, it transforms gallery spaces into street environments in collages, scraps, metal, etc. For Swoon, who boldly uses all materials, every piece of his work is no different from his 'first' work experience.



Figure 13: Mural in Dierbahood, C215, 2013 **Figure 14:** Mural in Dierbahood, C215, 2013 **Figure 15:** Mural in Dierbahood, C215, 2013

He is one of the names who use the stencil, a graphic design discipline, as a tool in his art in C215. However, unlike his colleagues, he is one of those who pushes the limits of technique. According to Balamer's quote from Saff and Sacilotto, the main problem with using the stencil is the necessity of connecting each cut piece to each other with bridges (2015, p. 104). C215 was able to add different linear values to his art by turning this seemingly disadvantageous situation into an advantage. By pushing the limits of the stencil, he translated the graphical, plain and simple structure into a pictorial language. Summarizing his style as "template and contextualism", C215 was able to make a name for himself with the characters he integrated with painting reaching to realism. The purpose of C215, which characterizes ordinary people, is "authenticity and prestige within the capitalist system" (Bahar, et al, 2014, p. 41)



Figure 16: The Story off My Life, Logan Hicks, 2016



Figure 17: Medina Sentinel, Logan Hicks, 2017

What you see in figure 16 and figure 17 are not oil paintings. It is not in the photos that have been played with the light settings and applied a few color and texture effects. It is the result of Logan Hicks' meticulous and subtle stencil technique that fills the walls of the streets. The artist, who settled in San Diego by selling his screen printing company where he made logo and t-shirt prints, started cutting stencils because he did not have a machine to print his poster designs (Soteriou, 2012, p. 74). After mastering the technique, the artist paints the moments he frames in life with a photorealistic style (Bahar et al. 2014, p. 201) and a single point perspective, especially in his photographs that he prefers to take at night. Despite the crowds of the streets, he meticulously transfers the photographs he transferred to stencils to the walls. Logan, who paints the stencils he creates in an average of five or six layers one after the other, reaches the final result by spraying his own colors (Soteriou, 2012, p. 74).



Figure 18: Deny me tree times, Gaia, 2010



Figure 19: Half Rabbir, Gaia, 2010

Gaia, who examines the works of high-pressure artists such as Swoon and expresses that she is highly impressed, uses linoleum and screen printing in her art, which she prefers to experience on the streets. Stating that these techniques offer the opportunity to reproduce her works, Gaia (Brown, 2012) figures out her characters by combining animal and human bodies. Preferring to work without sticking to a single technique, the artist's use of lines bears the traces of engraving and woodcut applications. His sculpture, *Half Rabbit*, created by combining different, recycled materials and garbage collected from the city, clearly reveals the technical diversity used by the artist.

Except for the sameness of the figures he obtained by printing, each of his works is the result of an experimental work, in which no other work is the same. Sometimes collage, sometimes printing, sometimes painting...

Discussion/Conclusion

The place of graphic design in street art, where each work is an experimental experience, is undeniable. Born as an act of writing, graffiti is typographic when considered in terms of its formal features. Apart from the standard, its completely personal and original formation, in addition to its formal features, strengthens its characterization as art today. Graffiti, which we can say was born with typography, appeared in galleries and museums with photography, spread and turned into art. Street art, which has the opportunity to reproduce with the use of printmaking techniques, has gained momentum at the point of its development. Today, art on the street, where 3D illustrations speak beyond realistic illustrations, continues to make people experience different emotions and experiences. This change that the walls have undergone since Blek le Rat brought street art into contact with the graphic design discipline is an indication of the gains street art has gained from this interaction.

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