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The Legitimisation of Street Art in Visual Arts Education: Exploring the Perspectives of Five Artists in New Zealand

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the phenomena known as 'street art' has flourished in the art world and become a prominent international art movement. This article extrapolates the findings from Hung's PhD thesis from 2020, *Hitting the street: The Legitimation of 'street art' in visual arts*

education in New Zealand. Insights about street art are articulated through the perspectives of five street artists, including Hung as a participant-researcher, from data collected via interviews and observations. These encounters have led to understandings about how street art is produced, the social contexts that underpin its production, and the on-going challenges and implications of its legitimacy as an artform. Positioned within a qualitative realist methodology, Hung examines possible causes, processes, and contexts that are often invisible to the phenomenon being investigated. Lucy Green's (2005) theory of musical meaning and experience is used as a theoretical framework to understand the artistic qualities of creating street art (inherent meanings) and the social contexts framing its reception (delineated meanings). This article concludes with a discussion of possibilities and achievable strategies for teaching street art in visual arts education at secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

Key words

Street art, knowledge, visual culture, visual arts education

Introduction

This article examines the perspectives of five artists from New Zealand and extrapolates findings of Hung's PhD thesis from 2020, *Hitting the street: The Legitimation of 'street art' in visual arts education in New Zealand*. However, while the original thesis sought the perspectives of secondary school art teachers, tertiary art lecturers, and their visual arts students, this article reports on the findings of the artists alone. The artists' perspectives explain how this art form is enacted, in what ways it is positioned within the informal art world, how it is perceived by the wider community, and the challenges and implications involved in its legitimation in visual arts education. A key provocation is to understand how adopting street art as a valid and legitimate form of visual culture in teaching programmes could contribute to enhancing visual arts education, particularly through the integration of its artistic meanings, techniques of production, and social contexts. If students can critically examine and understand the potential of street art this could, in turn, encourage future practitioners to create art outdoors. Such actions have the potential to make art more accessible, non-exclusive, and challenge the prevailing culture of Western fine arts.

Background to the Research

Locating the researcher

Wing-Tai (Bobby) Hung is an artist, researcher, and teacher from New Zealand. Hung

completed his PhD in education at the University of Auckland in 2020. With an increasing interest in biculturalism, cultural diversity, and visual culture art education, he questioned how discourses of street art could be legitimated as curricula in visual arts education. Within the informal art world, Hung operates under the artist pseudonym ‘Berst’ and has been painting graffiti for over 19 years. Learning about street art in greater depth during his doctoral research inspired him to consider the potential for educating students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

Purpose of the research

Over the past two decades, street art has risen to become one of the most globally recognised art forms of the twenty-first century. From large scale public murals to paintings sold in auction houses for millions of dollars, street art as a form of visual culture has found its way into the cultural milieu of everyday life. While street art’s origins, developments, and definitions emanate predominantly from America, this wave of public art has impacted New Zealand artists for over two decades. The aim of this research was to explore a selection of ‘street artists’ whose art is located within the context of New Zealand, evaluate their understandings of how community responses are shaped and formed, and to consider the status of street art within the art world and how it could intersect with educational settings.

The research question

The primary research question of Hung’s thesis was, ‘In what ways is “street art” understood

and legitimated as part of visual culture in New Zealand by its community of artists, visual arts educators, and students, and what are the implications of legitimating this art form in visual arts programmes at secondary schools and tertiary art institutions?' To answer this question, street artists were asked about their definitions and understandings of street art, the creative and technical processes involved in creating street art, the social contexts underpinning its production, and the possible affordances of legitimating this art form into secondary schools and tertiary art institutions. It was through these perspectives that the researcher could ascertain the possibilities, challenges, implications, and limitations of including street art as knowledge in visual arts curricula.

How the Research was Framed

Review of the literature

Underpinning Hung's thesis was the review of historical and theoretical perspectives of education, curriculum documents in New Zealand, and pedagogical rationales in visual arts. Important pedagogical rationales of this research align with visual culture art education (Duncum, 2013) and visual culture learning communities (Freedman, Heijnen, Kallio, Kárpáti & Papp, 2013), both of which argue for everyday forms of culture to be included in academia. This article, however, focuses on the scholarly literature of street art.

According to Blanche (2015), street art cannot be conclusively defined because it is in

constant negotiation with the people who produce, view, and interpret the work. He proposes a working definition:

> Street Art consists of self-authorized pictures, characters, and forms created in or applied to surfaces in the urban space that intentionally seek communication with a larger circle of people. Street Art is done in a performative and often site-specific, ephemeral, and participatory way. (p. 33)

A critical text used during the data analysis was Visconti, Sherry, Bourghini, and Anderson (2010); this highlights four consumption ideologies of public space used by street artists and people who consume public spaces (described as *dwellers*) [see Figure 1 below]. These ideologies delineate various positions, discourse, and motivations that street artists adopt when creating artworks in the public domain and provide possible explanations of public reception in varying contexts. These ideologies reflect some of the approaches adopted by the participants in this research, which are explored later in the findings.

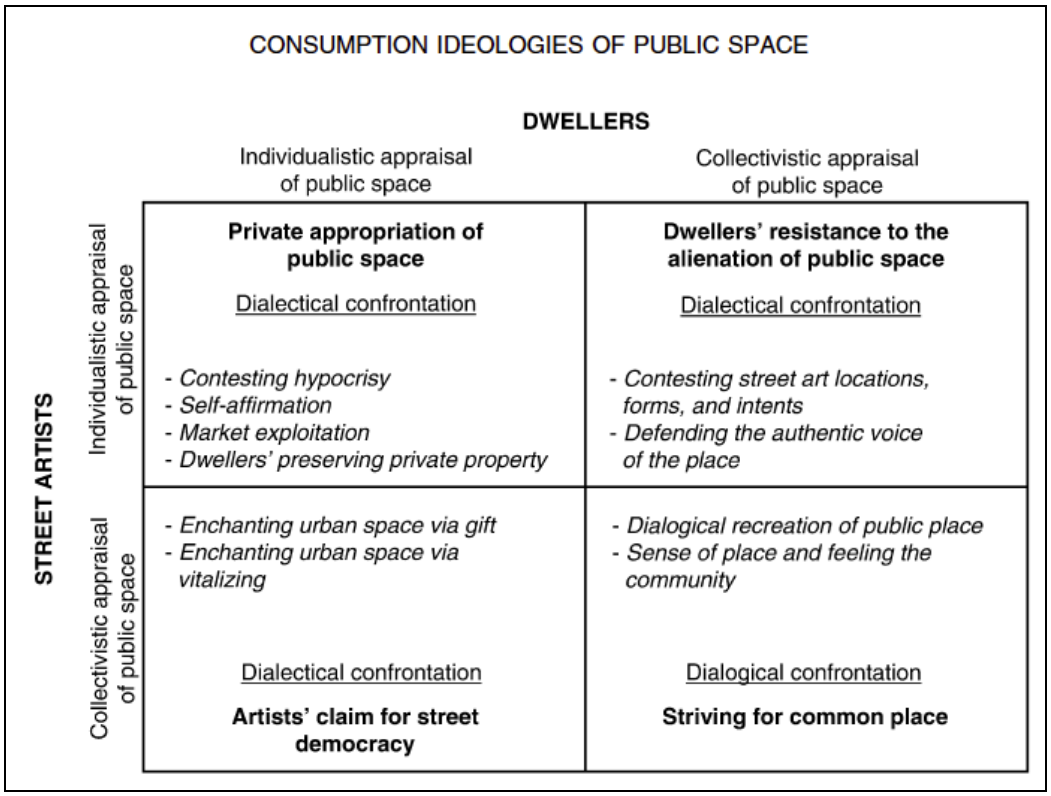

Figure 1 *Consumption ideologies of public space (Visconti et al., 2010, p. 6)*

Three important concerns were identified in the review of the literature: Decontextualisation, the internet, and current terminologies. Limitations of interpretation and impression as contextualised in the space of its creation or by its creator can become distorted as street art shifts from the street to legitimate spaces like a museum (Alves, 2014). This decontextualisation creates questions about authenticity, public / private ownership, and artist authorship (Abarca, 2016).

Likewise, the internet has contributed to the evolution of street art. Simulated online environments have created greater participatory culture and involvement of 'street art photographers' (Glaser, 2015), virtual culture and the negotiation of cross-cultural

backgrounds (Han, 2017), and an increase of globalised practice through social media and public response (Schiller, 2014). According to Sandywell and Heywood (2012) this shift from the street to the screen makes it the first ‘post-internet art movement.’

Propositions for alternative terminologies of art in public spaces include urban art (Daichendt, 2012), muralism (Kuittinen, 2015), and post-graffiti (Manco, 2004). Young, Ghostpatrol, Miso and Smits (2010) posit that the competing terminologies make it difficult to determine where street art begins, ends, crosses over with other forms, or clearly defines itself. It is from this position that further investigation is required to examine the discourse of street art in the context of New Zealand.

Research setting and participants

For this qualitative research, five Auckland-based street artists were purposively selected and included Hung who acted as a participant-researcher. Hung’s knowledge of public art in New Zealand, along with his experiences as a practicing artist, helped him identify street artists through their public websites. All participants were invited to voluntarily participate, but although Hung assured confidentiality of the participants’ data it was not possible to ensure anonymity of the artists’ identities because of the connection between their artworks and real names in the public domain.

How the Research was Enacted

Theoretical framework

Hung used Lucy Green's (2005) theory of 'musical meaning and experience' as a theoretical framework for examining the participants' understandings about street art. Green's theory has two categorical dimensions: Inherent meanings (the artistic dimensions of street art) and delineations (the non-artistic and social contexts of street arts reception). Inherent meanings denote the visual aesthetic, application of materials, subject matter, and techniques used in creating street art, while delineations represent the social understandings, assumptions, perspectives, and viewpoints which influence people's response towards street art. By exploring these dialectical relationships, Hung could theorise why peoples' attitudes towards street art may be positive, negative, or ambiguous in any given context of time or space [see Figure 2 below].

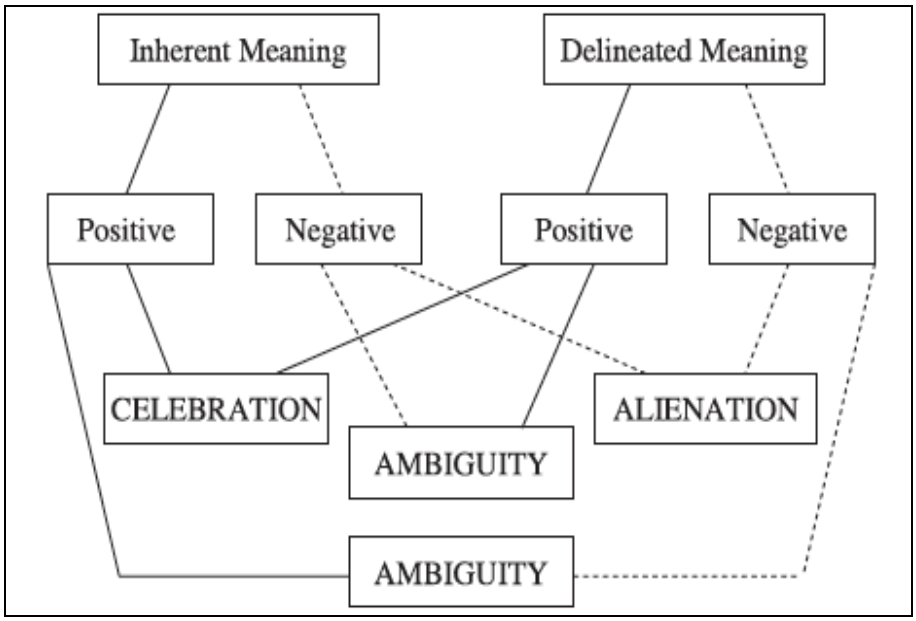

Figure 2 *Inherent meanings and delineations (Green 2005, p. 84)*

Methodology

The research was underpinned by a qualitative methodology and a realist paradigm. For Young (2008), a realist attitude views the output of investigation as either 'observable' or 'unobservable'. Observable data was gained through observations of the street artists, while the unobservable would emerge from semi-structured interviews and reviews of their websites. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide were used to organise, understand, and interpret the data. Validity was achieved through its interrelationship with the participants and Hung as a participant-researcher. Methods of triangulation was used to minimise researcher bias, increase the potential for comparing data, and question the congruency of the findings (Merriam, 2009). A combination of observations and interviews enabled Hung to draw connections between each of the artists' contexts and perspectives.

Limitations

The sample size of street artists for this research is not large or broad enough to fully encapsulate the diversity of practices, ideological tensions, assumptions, and / or patterns emerging from the global street art movement. Visconti et al. (2010) provides a useful framework for understanding consumption ideologies of public space, but the scale of the research limited the spectrum of discourses that could be analysed in positioning a complete understanding of the issues in legitimating street art. It does, however, offer a particular insight into what is occurring locally within Auckland during this period. The researcher is also aware that street art's legitimation as art curricula runs the risk of losing its subversive and spontaneous practice if decontextualised within the formal setting of schools. What is taught in visual arts education could potentially appear as the contextless production of street art devoid of its original meaning, although education of this art form is necessary if it can offer students an entry point into understanding the diversity of discourses of public art.

What the Research Revealed

Observations of the artists

As a street art 'insider' and participant-researcher, Hung had the opportunity to conduct multiple observations aimed at understanding more fully the varying social contexts that shape each artist's practice, their creative process, and their use of media and techniques.

Observations were video recorded over multiple sessions and revealed a diversity of creative, dualistic practices interlinking the studio setting and outdoor spaces, along with varying discourses of consumption ideologies outlined by Visconti et al. (2010) [see Figure 1].

Flox: Commercial Beautification

Figure 3 *Flox in her studio cutting stencils*

Flox is a formally trained artist who specialises in stencils. These combine New Zealand's native flora and fauna and are often created in the context of commercial public spaces. In the first observation, her brief was to create a community mural that celebrates cultural diversity. This was realised through floral motifs inspired by English, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian gardens. Each stencil had already been meticulously pre-cut in the studio so that the time

spent spray painting outdoors was minimised. The sites of her murals are strategically placed and located in prominent locations of the city centre, including a hotel entrance and a council building. In addition to the murals, Flox's studio doubles as a gallery and retail showroom. Work is always underway to design and cut stencils for the next project. Her practice is versatile and positioned in and between community and commercial contexts. It is evident that the visual communication in her artworks reaches both art and non-art audiences, is in highly visible places, and is intended to beautify a space.

Figure 4 *The large-scale mural, 'cultural diversity in the community', made by Flox and her assistant*

Andrew: Contesting Public Spaces

Figure 5 *Andrew in his studio*

Andrew J Steel is a self-taught artist who plays by his own rules. He is not concerned about following the hierarchies or systems of fine art. His artwork is often created as large-scale public murals and typically done without permission. Contesting public space is a self-affirming action he enjoys doing, especially when he is not allowed to. The themes in his art reflect his visual environment, stories of people, and his lived experiences. There is often a loose idea but no concrete plan of what the final artwork will look like. Andrew's illustrative aesthetic involves playful simplicity and resembles the line work of cartoons. Painting is much more intuitive, freestyled, and a process of trial and error. Without attending any formal art schools, Andrew's training in art derives from painting on the street. Parallel to the outdoor artworks, his studio space enables him to experiment with ideas and mixed media which eventually finds its way back into the public realm.

Figure 6 *Andrew painting a large-scale mural in an inner-city alleyway*

Charles: Site Specific Explorations

Figure 7 *Charles in front of his near-completed mural*

Charles is a self-taught artist whose practice involves the community, collaboration, and exploration of cultural identity. The process is as important as the outcome of the artwork. Preparatory work, including design, research, and consultation with the community / client, ensures that his artwork fits into the context of the space. A collectivist approach and vision ensure that the community will appreciate and value his art. Passers-by are always eager to understand the symbolism and visual meanings behind the artwork, which Charles is committed to explaining. Collaboration with his wife Janine involves the creation of co-constructed ideas and narratives. The depiction of birds, Māori motifs, and text are ways for Charles to discover his cultural identity as Māori. The creation of the mural often takes multiple days to complete, uses a combination of mixed media, and gridding systems to

ensure accuracy and proportion of images.

Figure 8 *Charles and his wife Janine collaborating on a community centre*

Askew: Diversity of Public Discourse

Figure 9 *Askew in his studio*

Askew is a self-taught artist who explores graffiti and the diasporic cultural identity in the

South Pacific through portraiture. Askew's typographic explorations in graffiti are created in vibrant colored spray paint and the process is usually freestyled and spontaneous. His large-scale portraiture usually requires several days to complete and resembles the original photograph. Both discourses of art illuminate a sense of place and feeling for the people in the community. In a final observation, portraits of his friends and community are created in his studio for a gallery exhibition. The paintings are drastically smaller compared to the large-scale pieces outdoors and he employs a specific tracing process in reverse on Plexiglass that contrasts the free-hand approach on the walls. Throughout these observations, it is evident that Askew operates in a range of diverse artistic contexts.

Figure 10 *Askew painting a commemorative mural for a local resident who passed away*

Bobby Hung: Visual Languages and Process

Figure 11 *Dr. Bobby Hung, AKA 'Berst', 2016*

Hung's creative practice explores graffiti and illustration. He is inspired by typography, cartoons, tattoo culture, and comic books. The underlying theme in graffiti is abstraction through distorted letter forms, layering, colors, and motifs. The name 'Berst' is usually a starting point, but other words, names, and messages are also featured. Using predominantly spray paint, the pieces are mostly improvised and large scale. The visual language of stylised lettering is usually created for the online graffiti community rather than for the public to understand. In contrast, the illustrations involve a different process, intention, and remix a wide range of visual culture. Selected themes can explore social, cultural, or political issues such as anti-whaling and operate as a form of social commentary. Storytelling and character design inspired by cultures other than Hung's own are also influential. Exploration of other cultures enables the discovery of alternative narratives, values, and beliefs, which enables

Hung to be more culturally responsive to others.

Figure 12 *A series of paintings created by 'Berst' to explore the issue of anti-whaling*

Inherent meanings: The artistic and technical production of street art

In examining the perspectives of the street artists, Green's (2005) theory of inherent meanings was used as a conceptual framework to understand the meaning of their art, how it is brought into being, and ways in which it communicates with the viewer. The findings revealed the importance of the studio setting, influences of visual culture, aesthetic styles and subject matter, and the application of practical techniques and media used to create street art. While

inherent meanings of street art are identified through the voices of each artist, Green's (2005) theory proposes a dialectic relationship, or tension, between inherent and delineated meanings. From this theoretical perspective, the delineations (non-artistic aspects and social contexts of street art) are explained in the section after the inherent meanings.

The studio setting

Each artist spoke about the significance of their studio setting for creating art, research, self-education, developing ideas, and experimentation. For example, Charles' research involves the investigation of local historical stories and without it, "there is no meaning to the art." Like Charles, Hung's process is comprised of examining multiple online sources from books to documentaries, which translate to visual responses. For Andrew, the studio is a space to self-educate: "I didn't really learn much about fine artists when I started making art, so the more I learn about them, the more my style develops." Andrew's approach reflects Nguyen's and Mackenzie's (2010) view that street artists typically blur the boundaries between high and low art through their approach of appropriation of aesthetics and imagery. Offering perspectives on process, Askew believes that "street artists tend to prepare a lot of their stuff away from the street and apply it quickly to get maximum impact in little time, with little risk." Flox explicitly creates pre-cut stencils in the studio before installing her art outdoors but is not for reasons relating to risk from the law, but instead, to achieve a higher calibre output. She said, "I spent three weeks cutting those stencils and it took me four days

with a helper to paint it." This supports the view of Lewisohn (2008), who claims that pre-planned artworks in the studio can maximise the level of technical detail.

Influences of visual culture

Local and global forms of visual culture were evident in each of the artists' practice. In an image-saturated economy, Hellman (2016) posits that the term visual culture refers to images from fine arts to everyday contemporary culture. The data showed aspects of 'hybrid remixing' between art and non-art forms of visual culture and cultural geography (Duncum, 2015). This notion of remix is described by Andrew as something that "keeps coming and eventually new things are produced." Askew and Andrew noted the influence of cartoons and comic books as a key source of inspiration. Askew said, "I pretty much learnt how to draw from copying my favourite comics", and for Andrew, "I grew up on cartoon stimulus. I guess that's why I don't paint something realistic." Freedman, Heijnen, Kallio, Kárpáti and Papp (2013) posit that 'Visual Culture Learning Communities' have emerged as a site for informal learning. Cartoons fall within the category of 'interest communities', which emerge from subcultures, whereas art that explores race or family are described as 'heritage communities.' For example, Charles draws on heritage through a Māori lens: "This harbour, mountain, and land means something to that iwi. I'm connected to the mountain because I have sat down with someone, and I've made sure the information is correct. We want to honour local iwi, and then add something from us." While there was no consensus of street art's subject matter,

it is important to discuss how artists use, appropriate, and recontextualise images to produce meaning in their artworks.

Exploring visual meanings

The artists used representations of culture through people and symbolism as visual devices and aesthetics to generate meaning in their art. For Charles and Askew, meaning is created through interpretations of Māori and Pacific peoples. An ethnographic approach adopted by Askew explored the melting pot of cultural diversity of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. He said, “All of the social, economic, and environmental factors that drive that mix is my inspiration. I’m exploring the mix of cultures here, the sense of identity, and belonging but through other people.” His aim is to find “deeper meanings” or “linkages between things” which are not always visible. In a related strategy, Charles uses images of birds to explore his cultural heritage by ascribing “depth and meaning” through Māori concepts such as guardianship. In contrast, Andrew and Hung convey meaning in art through personal storytelling. Our art represents how we see the world and the construction of it. Narratives include experiences in life, memories, loss, and encounters with others: “You are your environment. Society is a game of mirrors where you reflect things back and sometimes you reflect your output as art and differently otherwise it would just all look the same.” The artists either reproduced the existing ideas of cultural groups or remixed them with multiple social and cultural contexts to form alternative identities. Flox lies somewhere between the two.

Without a grand meaning behind each work, she believes that the community's comprehension of her images is relatable to New Zealanders, which creates a positive response.

The visual aesthetic

The data revealed two dominant aesthetic styles of street art: Graphic and photorealistic. According to Hoppe (2009), street art did not develop from the discourse of 'art' but instead adopts the visual aesthetics of illustration and graphic design. For most artists, this is accurate. Flox, Andrew, Askew, and Hung all adopt a graphic aesthetic, but for different reasons. Flox's aesthetic is "uplifting" and described as "paintings that people would like to have in their home and don't mind looking at … every day." For Andrew, refined simplicity aids visual communication: "The fewer lines you have to tell the story the better." Askew's aesthetic reflects his training in graphic design. Hung's style applies bold black outlines inspired by stylised cartoon characters and figures. A similar treatment of line work is applied to his graffiti, but it follows a more abstract depiction of letters, so fewer people understand. In contrast, Charles' artwork is described as Urban Contemporary Māori. Photorealistic images of birds are placed in the foreground and graphic patterns in the background. The aesthetic manifests "who we [Charles] are as Māori." The differing applications of aesthetic and visual languages provide explanations of why and how audiences respond and interpret artworks in certain ways. Along a continuum, Charles' reference to Māori culture is familiar to the psyche

of New Zealand and usually results in a positive response and sense of appreciation. Unfamiliarity of subject matter and aesthetics in the case of Andrew and Hung can create negative responses for the viewer which results in ambiguous or alienating experiences as the art is not understood.

Applications and associations of spray paint

Spray paint was identified as the most common medium used to create street art. The artists believe that early adopters of street art used primarily spray paint and the process of stencilling. These perspectives align with the early literature on street art and discourses overseas. Flox believes that spray paint is part of the "early culture" but has "progressed profoundly since." Charles suggests that other techniques have involved "wheat pasting and some other kind of markings with a brush and ink." In contrast, Askew and Hung use spray paint and techniques from graffiti including layering, colour combinations, and an improvised process of painting. The community's perception of spray paint and its historical association with vandalism was identified as an on-going issue. While paintbrushes are more socially accepted as a tool for fine art, a key challenge for street artists is how and whether the community's perception towards spray paint can shift to a more accepting attitude.

The inherent meanings associated with street art are not easily generalisable and can change over time. Any combination of inherent meanings can lead to a continuum of positive or negative responses in how street art is understood, valued, and ultimately legitimated. In

instances where positive experiences from the viewer were spoken of, the artists used familiar subject matter with recognisable aesthetics that could be easily understood. This positive response led to a celebration of street art. In contexts where the visual aesthetic is less appealing or the visual meanings are confusing, a negative response is created, resulting in an ambiguous or alienating experience for the viewer.

Delineated meanings: The non-artistic aspects and social contexts of street art

In continuing to examine the perspectives of each artist, Green's (2005) theory of 'delineated meanings' is used to understand and analyse the non-artistic aspects and social contexts of street art. Delineations provide insights into people's identities, cultures, and how these are perceived and understood. Hung's analysis identifies complex circumstances that influence community perceptions and attitudes which include: the significance of graffiti in New Zealand, community attitudes, artists' motivations, sites of dissemination, shifts in understandings over time, and the potential of street art as a community tool.

Graffiti and street art in New Zealand

Graffiti is acknowledged as an early discourse of public art. Framed in the context of Auckland in the 1990s, Askew believes the demographic was predominantly Māori and Pasifika youth. From 'tags' to elaborate 'pieces' under bridges, Charles' notion of graffiti align with the artforms originating from New York in the 1960s (Stewart, 2009). For Hung, ideologies of graffiti have laid the foundations of his art practice and contribute to his identity.

He believes that the community was not receptive to graffiti a decade ago, but that appreciation of street art has increased. The rise of street art in New Zealand correlates with international timeframes identified by Waclawek (2011), although many street artists adopted counter-cultural practices that were not prevalent in this country.

Askew posits that text-based artworks are less accepted by the public because of their association with vandalism. He believes that the use of images in street art are "instantly identifiable, recognisable, or funny." This raises questions about what the community tolerates, relates to, and understands. Banksy was identified as a notably successful example. Charles said, "Images stimulate people and our minds, which is why he's become a lot more acceptable." Likewise, Flox uses a similar strategy to create "reactions that are positive because they can relate to the images that are used." These delineated meanings illustrate how the community's appreciation of street art have been shaped during a period of history. Associations of graffiti have invoked a negative reception, while recent forms of street art have led to more positive responses, greater appreciation, and legitimacy as art.

Resetting the art world

Art in public spaces has reset the hierarchical art world. Through platforms such as street art festivals, Charles claims that less experienced artists now have opportunities to gain exposure: "You could be an art student, but you'll be invited. They don't care what you've done, if you're new or old, or where you've come from. It's non-exclusive … you're given a platform

immediately." Askew agrees that operating in the public domain creates an "accessible canvas to anybody, where anyone can do it", and the benefit of this is "There aren't any gatekeepers that are stopping people from doing what they want outside."

To this effect, distinctions between fine arts and visual culture are becoming less defined. For example, Askew asserts that artists such as Max Gimblett, a famous New Zealand painter who now lives in New York, uses "drippy marker tags of graffiti" that is "inspired by his environment and this is reflected in his paintings." Andrew has also witnessed a cross over between artists: "There's a new landscape where people are jumping and changing so there's no rules. The wider you spread your net the better you will be at infiltrating different spaces. You've got public and street artists coming into the gallery." For Flox, Banksy is a notable example and said, "He has put street art into a very commercially understood context. It's blurring high and low art boundaries and re-contextualising what it means to have something on the street … people are starting to see it for what it is." The dualistic artist identity has made it more complicated to categorise the discourses of practice.

Legitimacy through socially accepted experiences

Street art is now experienced in more socially recognised places which contributes to building its economic capital and legitimacy as an artform. Increased visibility has been achieved through murals, festivals, galleries, and films, which have been positively received by the community. For Flox, the diversity of opportunities has led to work with "big

companies, big brands, residential, public, council, and festivals" which she believes is making the culture "less closed off" and more "credible."

Charles noted that a reduction of graffiti could have contributed to its popularity in the community and said, "The alleyways used to have graffiti but now there's murals and people don't feel threatened, so they want more, and they embrace it." The preference of street art over graffiti was something Andrew had experienced, and who said, "People who used to chase us away are now welcoming us into their lives to make art so there's become a demand for it." Askew believes a mainstream documentary created by Banksy, called 'Exit Through the Gift Shop' was "satirical, political, intelligent, and often ironic", and which he claims was "really easily understood." Hung identifies the rise of street art festivals as cultivating celebratory experiences of art that did not previously exist. Abarca (2016), however, claims that these festivals have disrupted the subversive discourses of street art, which Askew also identified as problematic but relating to the stereotyping of artists. Hung concluded that adaptability of contexts enabled artists to diversify between commercial and community settings. The potential to position street art with more socially accepted art is therefore creating familiarity and building positive experiences for the viewer.

Closing the gap and expanding possibilities

The internet is used extensively to access global audiences, curate street art, and challenge the old art worlds. For Askew, an internet presence is important: "If you're not accessible you

don’t exist. The internet is the new subway system for the world ... It almost doesn’t matter where somebody makes it or what with anymore.” The internet provides alternative ways for street art to exist which Kuittinen (2015) believes often lasts longer than the actual art itself. Schiller (2010) contends that online platforms have developed the art movement more rapidly. From an artistic perspective Flox said, “We are geographically far away, and we are behind, although the gap is closing with the internet.” From a cultural perspective, participatory culture enables audiences to engage with street art (Glaser, 2015). Askew explained, “There’s many ways for people to view or engage with art that isn’t through a curated space. Hobbyist photographers are taking pictures of street art and sharing the images online.”

From an economic perspective, all artists in this research sold their art online. In Andrew’s words, “you can have an online store where you talk about and sell your work … the gallery model is dated so it needs to change itself if it wants to survive.” For Askew, he believes that the power to curate “culturally significant artworks” is no longer limited to the “gatekeepers of the art world such as galleries.” The redefining of what constitutes street art on the internet is closing the gap between the art and the viewer, but is also problematic in that all discourses of public art can be lumped into one category.

Terminologies and identity

Being labelled as a street artist creates the feeling of being stereotyped. As an artist, Askew is involved in multiple discourses of art including graffiti, murals, and studio work, but has

concerns with the terminology. He said, “I refute the term, but people still perceive me as a street artist.” Flox shared a similar experience and said, “I always cringe when I hear the term street artist in the media especially with reference to me and my art.” For Charles, his artistic identity is fluid: “As soon as I do something I come under this definition … so I don’t care what I’m called until I do it.”

The artists were adamant that street art was outdated and that forming associations with new cultural identities was self-evident. For Flox, “We’ve gone beyond street art, and it almost undermines what we do because it’s so much more than that. It has branched out into so many different areas.” The progression beyond street art is reiterated by Andrew who said, “I’m post-street art and a public artist. I make work in the public, in the studio, and a range of public experiences through art.” Similarly, Askew prefers the term “Post-Graffiti Pacific”, which describes people who “originate from a graffiti background but applied in the studio.” These perspectives point to the need for clarification of artist identities and their associations. Iglesia (2015) posits that while street art can be simplified to ideal types, a focus of promoting street art should be on examining its contexts, production, and how it is visually consumed. On-going education in the community is needed to minimise the misrepresentation of artists.

Community dialogue and education

Improving community reception towards street art can be achieved through the actions of

artists. Askew believes that in-depth discussions about art in public spaces are needed to promote understandings of varying discourses: “Street art, graffiti art, muralism, are just some arts that’s happening in the street … Melbourne have a little bit of everything.” Flox claims that this dialogue with the community can happen anywhere on the street: “When you’re painting in public you get to connect with people ... it breaks down barriers about their understanding. They just need to walk past, see it, relate to it, and start a conversation.” For Andrew, building value towards street art occurs when the community participates: “If the community believes they are active members of public art, and can contribute to it, then those are the values that are going to be important in how they value art.” In Charles’ case, learning about the history of street art should be taught at secondary schools and universities. Andrew, on the other hand, believes the study of public art could have taught him how to seek permission for walls. An emphasis was also placed on the social responsibility of artists to act as role models who pass down knowledge to the youth. There was a firm belief that street art has significant cultural, social, and economic capital for society.

The findings reveal multiple delineations which influence how street art is received and experienced in varying contexts by the community. New social contexts have improved the familiarity, accessibility, and engagement with the community. A critical question for street artists is how they will overcome the social attitudes of the community, and shift towards more positive perspectives while minimising the barriers that prevent its legitimation as art.

The label ‘street artist’ also requires some rethinking if it is to be included as curricula in visual arts education while simultaneously acknowledging other, diverse forms of artistic discourse within the public realm.

Conclusion and Possibilities

There is an abundance of concepts that could be used to create a system of meaning for teaching about street art in education. Hung acknowledges that street art draws on several branches of knowledge, including fine arts, as no new forms of art develop in total isolation from what has come before – no matter how counter-cultural the motivations might be. In determining the curricula potential, Hung turned to Winch (2013) who proposes two ways of finding a balance in teaching knowledge: Procedural knowledge (know-how) and propositional knowledge (know-that). Winch argues that acquiring expertise or deep learning requires the integration of both. Possible knowledge relating to know-how include:

- Developing techniques and media beyond fine arts. These could include wheat-pasting, stencilling, stickers, screen-printing, and spray paint;
- Developing skills that enable the production of large-scale artworks. This could involve using the studio to prepare digital mock-ups of concepts and researching to create site-specific artworks; and

- Understanding the processes and protocols involved in collaboration and co-constructed meanings with other artists and students.

Alongside procedural knowledge (know-how), learning about the social contexts of street art is equally important. Possible knowledge relating to know-that include:

- Understanding the different terminologies and discourses of art in the public including street art, graffiti, post-graffiti, and urban art to ensure the accurate representation of artists;
- Investigating the historical and contemporary contexts of street art to understand the discourses of production including appropriation, remix, and prosumer cultures;
- Discovering how street artists construct visual meanings in their artwork and its contexts to time, place, and space. This includes evaluating the issues of decontextualisation;
- Questioning how hierarchies in the art world can lead to discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion of less well-known types of art, artists, or disenfranchised people;

- Reflecting on how street art as a type of place making can contribute to the positive activation of a community, and how street artists can foster dialogue with art and non-art audiences; and
- Analysing the influence, impact, and effects of the internet on street art, including possible career paths and the community and commercial settings that artists operate in.

As an outcome of this research, Hung hopes that these potential possibilities can enable visual arts educators to find a balance of knowledge and contribute to formalising street art in the community and in educational contexts.

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