Wall Art (1990)

Abstract

Up until the fall of the Berlin Wall, graffiti artists humanized the ugly divide by spray painting artworks on its western side, often poking fun at the East German regime and expressing hopes for its future overthrow.

Source

[…]

Miss the Wall – Miss Art

At first, the Wall was nothing more than barbed wire and a brick wall. Beginning in 1963, the wire and brick were slowly replaced by uniform, steel-reinforced concrete panels. In the late ‘70s the final version reached completion. Although, as a whole, an architectural monstrosity, each single panel of the Wall ironically obeys the laws of the classic column, with a “base,” “pillar” and “crown.” In the early days, the surface was bare and grey, with only scattered graffiti. But at the end of the ‘60s, the student movement discovered the Wall as a perfect medium for visual protest. The heavy tattooing of the Wall began in the late ‘70s when house squatters, tourists and children started dashing off messages and greetings. This new form of artistic expression began to mirror the Zeitgeist, or spirit of the times.

The ‘80s

Stimulated by the work of several artists, the ‘80s has seen a notable increase in Wall Art on a grand scale. The Wall Art aesthetic evolved from the harsh working conditions faced by the artist – not only the difficult surface of the Wall “canvas,” but also potential interference by the authorities, which forced most work to be done at night. The size and dimension of the Wall allowed for such panoramic murals as Keith Haring's 100-meter figure chain; and Boucher and Noir's “Statues of Liberty,” which illustrates how panels of the Wall can be used individually, or in composition with each other.

Angular figures, signs and colors in a painting at the corner of Bethaniendamm and Adalbertstrasse are reminiscent of the paintings found in ancient Mexico.

The base and the prominent crowning “roll” serve both a decorative and framing function. The crowning roll, hard to reach and designed to inhibit escape, is usually reserved for titles and signatures.

There are no limitations as to artistic technique: one can use chalk, felt tip, paint brush or roller, aerosol spray, relief or mosaic. In places where the Wall passes by apartment houses, the dead gray has been covered with vines, windows and flower pots – turning it into a suburban paradise.

In spite of the diverse modes of expression, most themes relate directly to the Wall, its meaning and function, with the majority of images depicting the hope of overcoming borders, and the wish for the Wall to fall. These thoughts are conveyed by pictures of zippers, holes, doors, ladders, stairs, etc. A “fissure” often shows friendly faces, idyllic landscapes, a better world on the other side.

[…]

Source: Heinz J. Kuzdas with Michael Nungesser, *Berliner Mauer Kunst.* Fourth updated edition. Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1990, pp. 10–14. [In English in the original]

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