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ARTS & CULTURE

Winter Edition



**ART AS THE
LANGUAGE OF
POWER**

ART AND POWER

**THE CULTURAL AND
POLITICAL POWER
OF GRAFFITI**

BANKSY

**EUROVISION'S (A)
POLITICAL STAGE**

**AWARENESS
RECOMMENDATIONS**





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EDITORIAL

The Arts & Culture Magazine is the meeting place of some of the creative minds of Nova Awareness Club. Following last semester's magazine about image, visuals, and film, our team decided to pick another theme for this semester.

This edition explores art as a political tool, reflecting the current era of geopolitical instability. Throughout history, art has served as a powerful form of protest against oppression. A simple symbol, image, book, or sculpture can hold deep significance, prompting reflection on its hidden message. This type of art tugs at your soul, urging you to listen, to learn, and, above all, to refuse indifference.

In this issue, Giulia Randon takes us back in time to Ancient Greece and Rome, exploring how architectural decisions or sculptures were used to legitimise empires, to shape civic life, and influence moral character.

Then, Lucas Bernal goes even further back, to the ancient days of the cavemen, tracing how art and humanity have remained deeply intertwined throughout history.

Continuing the theme of wall art, Marta Nascimento delves into a detailed history of graffiti as a form of social and political expression, followed by Inês Rebelo's analysis of Banksy's artworks and their connection to contemporary struggles and social critique.

Finally, Filipa Torres dissects Eurovision's "apolitical" stance, showing how rules, voting dynamics, and geopolitical crises turn silence itself into a political act.

Lastly, for this edition of cultural recommendations, I have selected a collection of works that I hope will inspire reflection and contemplation within you this winter.

“

No book is genuinely free from political bias.
The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics
is itself a political attitude

”

George Orwell, Why I Write

Welcome to the seventeenth edition of the Arts & Culture magazine, we hope you enjoy!

- Inês Lino Ferreira



Tellus Panel, Ara Pacis Augustae 9 B.C.E. (Ara Pacis Museum, Rome)

BY GIULIA RANDON

ART AS THE LANGUAGE OF POWER:

BEAUTY, WAR AND POLITICAL ORDER IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Throughout history, art has served as far more than decoration; in times of war and political turbulence, it becomes a language of power capable of persuading, stabilizing, and legitimizing.

This dynamic is especially clear in the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome, where artistic production emerged in direct response to conflict and functioned as a tool for transforming violence into visual order. The Greeks and Romans did not create art apart from war: they created art because of war, using beauty to reshape civic identity, control memory, and turn military success into enduring ideology.

The Greek world was repeatedly shaped by warfare, from the Persian invasions to the long Peloponnesian conflict, and these crises forced Athens to reconstruct itself not only physically but symbolically. After the Persian destruction of the Acropolis, the Athenians rebuilt it as a monumental narrative of victory and rebirth.

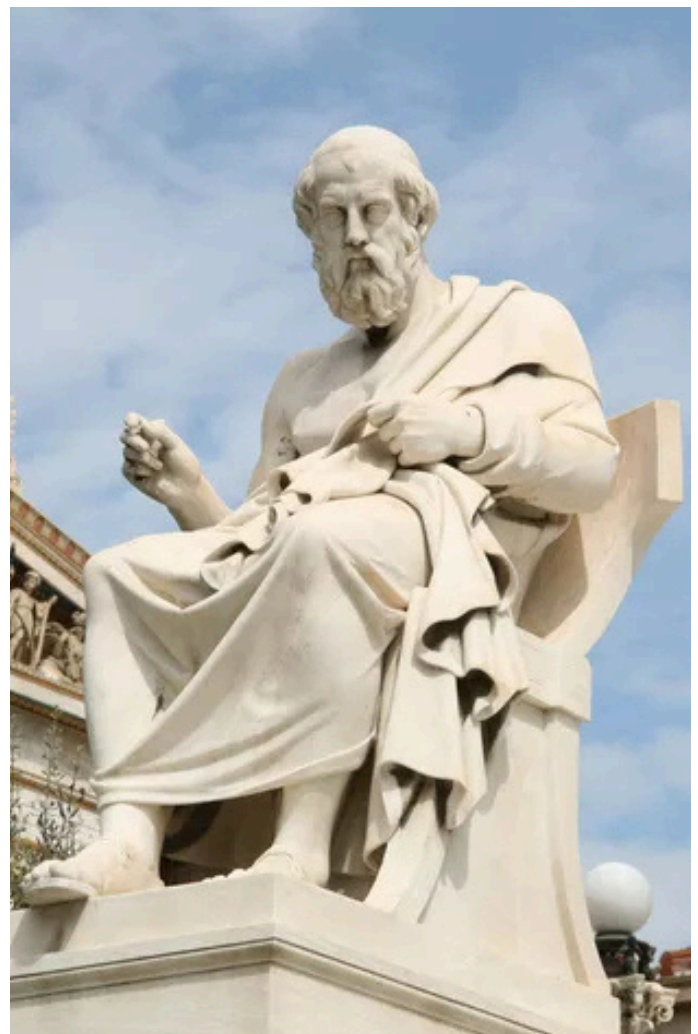
The Parthenon, rising where the ruins had stood, was not merely a temple but a political message inscribed in marble. Pericles famously described Athenians as “lovers of beauty without extravagance, and lovers of wisdom without weakness”, a statement that reflects the conviction that aesthetics and civic virtue were essential in redefining the polis after war. Through architectural harmony, sculptural precision, and theatrical performance, Athens used art to transform the trauma of conflict into a narrative of resilience and moral superiority.

Rome, too, relied on art to absorb and neutralize the violence of its wars, especially the civil wars that had shattered the Republic. When Augustus emerged as the sole ruler after decades of bloodshed, he deployed a comprehensive artistic program to rewrite Rome’s violent past and present his regime as the restoration of cosmic order. Sculptures portrayed him eternally youthful and serene, coins circulated images of victory and prosperity, public monuments proclaimed the arrival of peace. Art became a political instrument through which war could be remembered selectively, sanitized, or mythologized. The message was clear: through the emperor’s authority, chaos had given way to harmony.

Philosophers of the classical world understood the intimate connection between art and civic life, especially in the aftermath of conflict. Plato, wary of the power of images to shape moral character, warned that “all poets are imitators” and that their representations could mislead the young if not properly controlled: a reminder that art could be both educational and dangerous in a wounded society.

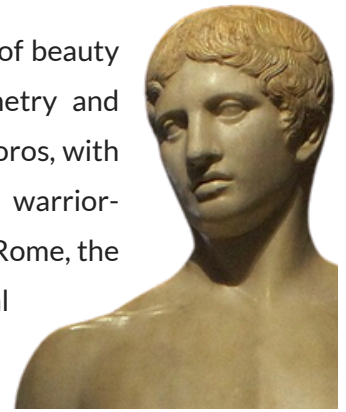
Aristotle offered a different perspective, arguing that tragedy performs a civic function by bringing about “the purification of emotions through pity and fear”, thereby helping communities process the psychological scars of war. Stoic and Roman thinkers such as Cicero linked beauty to universal order, claiming that “nature preserves all things in harmony and connection”.

This philosophical ideal of harmony explains why Roman art so often framed emperors as embodiments of calm and rationality: visual order reassured citizens that, after violence, the state had returned to balance.



Statue of Plato

The Greeks expressed this same ideal through the word “kalokagathia”, the unity of beauty and goodness. Classical sculpture and architecture embodied proportion, symmetry and equilibrium, offering a material metaphor for political harmony. Polykleitos’ Doryphoros, with its mathematical precision and idealized form, represented not only the perfect warrior-citizen but also the perfect state: disciplined, balanced, ordered. In both Greece and Rome, the aesthetics of perfection served as a response to the imperfections and violence of real political life.



Statue of Doryphoros

Art also played a crucial role in reconciliation. In Rome, the Ara Pacis became the visual expression of peace after the civil wars, blending mythological imagery with representations of Augustus’ family to create a narrative in which empire itself appeared as a restoration of cosmic stability. The monument transformed political settlement into an eternal, almost sacred truth. By aestheticizing peace, Rome effectively controlled the memory of war, ensuring that violence receded into the background while order dominated public consciousness.

Yet classical art carries a fundamental tension. It presents itself as truth, wisdom, and beauty, thus as a philosophical pursuit of harmony, while simultaneously acting as a sophisticated instrument of propaganda. It teaches virtue and civic responsibility, but it also obscures power, masks violence and converts military dominance into moral legitimacy. This ambiguity raises an essential question: in the classical world, was art a form of enlightenment or a tool of manipulation? The answer is both. Beauty could inspire and elevate, but it also served to persuade, pacify and justify.

In the end, the art of Greece and Rome was inseparable from the wars that shaped their histories. It emerged from conflict, responded to it and helped societies cope with its consequences. Temples, statues, reliefs and monuments forged collective identities, legitimized rulers and translated philosophical ideals into visible forms. Their legacy endures in the idea that beauty can transform violence into order, that art can convert the chaos of conflict into an illusion of eternal harmony.

Understanding how classical societies used art to interpret and control the memory of war reveals a deeper truth about aesthetics and power: harmony is never neutral. It is a political force, capable of soothing or persuading, and forever intertwined with humanity’s need to make sense of conflict.



Ara Pacis



Bison image in Spain's Altamira cave, dated over 15,000 years old

ART AND POWER: INTERTWINED PATHS

BY LUCAS BERNAL

Art has been one of humanity's defining characteristics, accompanying us every step of the way ever since the first human decided to capture what they saw on a dark cave wall.

We have come a long way from the days of bison and hunting compositions, yet the essence of art remains just as significant today as it did hundreds of thousands of years ago. Art continues to stand as a testament to humanity's role in the world and how we understand it.

Yet as we progressed as a civilization, our intrinsic values were molded by our social structure.

No longer were all equal under one roof, as property, then inequality, then strict social structures, kings and nations appeared.

Everything changed, and art changed with society, hand in hand throughout revolutions in our way of life and thought.

The first ancient civilizations learnt quickly how to use art as an expression of power. In many cases, art worked as a manifestation of divine and royal authority.

The great walls of Babylon or the monumental graves of the pharaohs served not only as monuments to the gods, but also as a projection of the ruler's power and abundance.

In a time of rudimentary technology by today's standards, the mobilisation of the resources needed to build a pyramid was nothing but a "screw you" to neighbouring kingdoms and tribes.

The carvings of the temples of Luxor or Karnak express power in an incredibly obvious way, presenting the Pharaoh as a giant, strong god-king. Art in these societies was a means to legitimize and glorify rulers, immortalize their achievements, and communicate their supremacy to both subjects and rivals.



Statues of Ramses II as Osiris in Karnak Temple



Notre Dame de Paris Gothic-Architecture

Fast-forwarding throughout the Middle Ages, we see how art followed social changes closely.

With the creation of feudalism, artistic power shifted to the Church and nobility. Nearly all surviving art from this period was commissioned by the wealthy and powerful, and it frequently carried explicit political or religious messages.

Gothic cathedrals, with their soaring arches and stained glass, were not only expressions of faith but also instruments of episcopal competition and local economic control.

Illuminated manuscripts and portraits of kings and nobles celebrated the status of both social classes, reinforcing the role they played within society for hundreds of years.

The peak of artistic expression in the West came during the Renaissance. It marked a transformation in art and power's relationship. While the Church maintained its patronage, wealthy merchants (the first "middle" classes) began to commission works to demonstrate their prosperity and refinement. The great Flemish towns of Bruges and Ghent, Florence and Venice, serve as a testament to this shift. Artistic commissions signaled not only power and financial status, but also personal ambition and civic pride. The artist became an icon, stepping from the fringes of society towards a more central role as a driver for cultural expression.

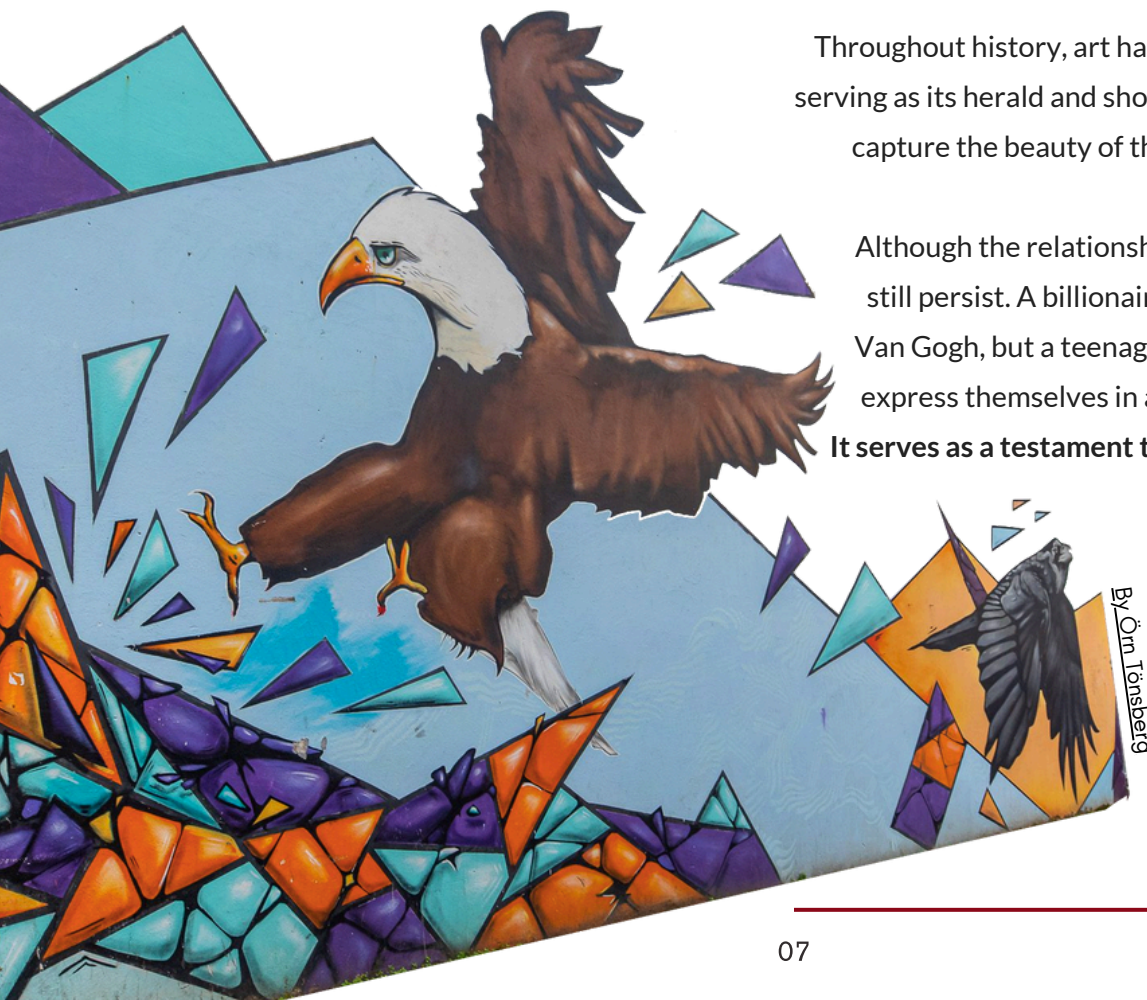
In the modern age, art's relationship to power has become more complex. Whereas it still served as an expression of power for the elites, driving the price of single canvases to the hundreds of millions, it has also become a vehicle for critique, resistance and democratization.

With literacy increasing, art became more accessible to the working classes. Public installations, street art, and digital art pieces challenge the traditional relationship between art and power.

However, economic structures reflect the contemporary power dynamic, where the few wield influence over what is considered art and, more importantly, what is considered valuable.



John Lennon Wall in Prague, where thousands of visitors express themselves every day



Throughout history, art has served as a trail for power, serving as its herald and showing to all how power could capture the beauty of the world in a lasting physical form.

Although the relationship has changed, inequalities still persist. A billionaire can still afford an original Van Gogh, but a teenager with an aerosol spray can express themselves in a purer, more personal way.

It serves as a testament to the persistence of human nature, and our urge to paint on stone walls.

WRITINGS ON THE WALL:

THE CULTURAL AND POLITICAL POWER OF GRAFFITI

BY MARTA NASCIMENTO

Graffiti is a form of communication and expression defined as a writing, drawing or painting made on a wall or other surface, usually unauthorized and within public view.

The term comes from the Italian word “*graffio*” which means “scratch” but the concept was around long before the term was coined. Indeed, we could say graffiti was born 40,000 years ago during the Ice Age in the form of paintings and drawings on caves.

These represented mostly handprints, animals and geometric signs and, although their meaning and purpose remain unknown, they are proof that human beings have an intrinsic need to express themselves artistically.

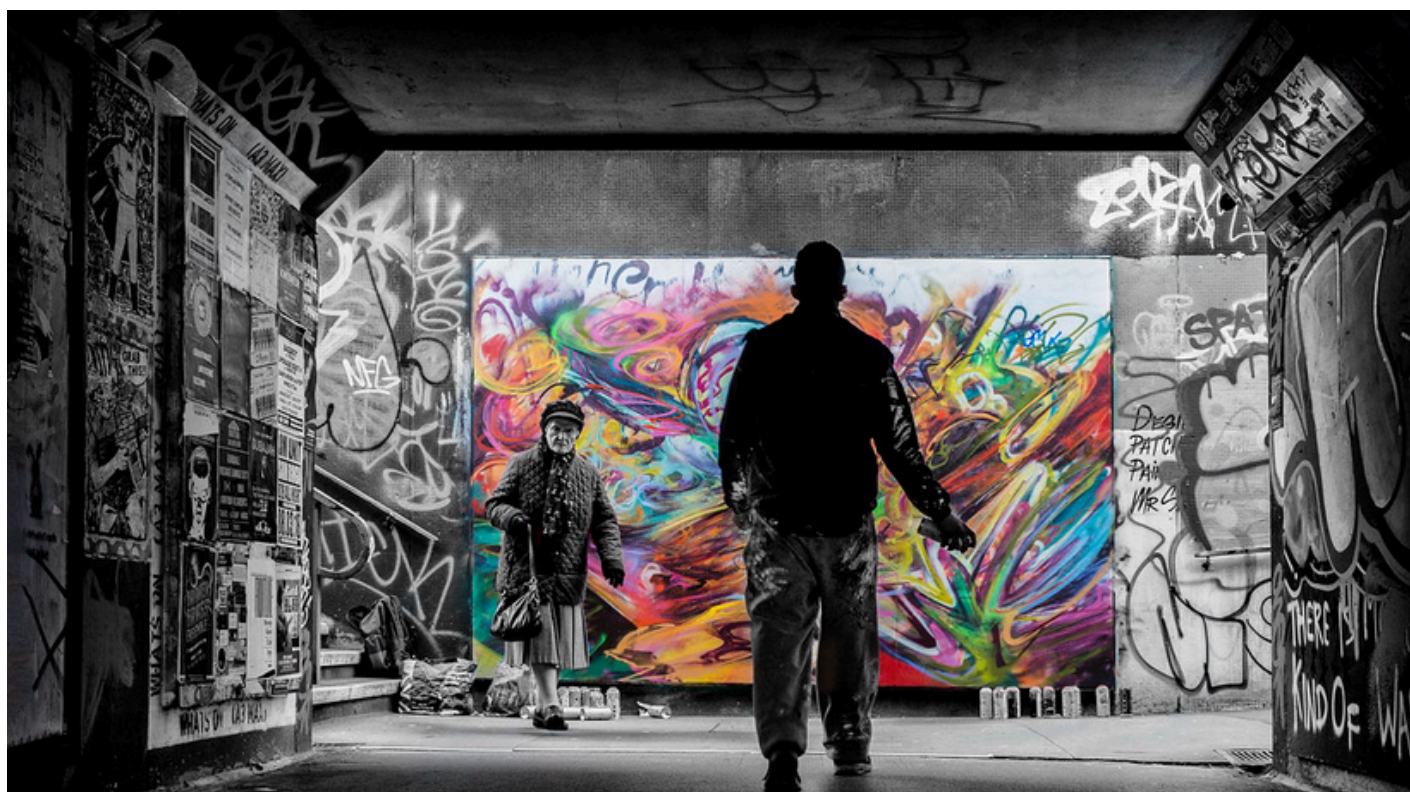
Graffiti is among the most accessible forms of artistic expression and can therefore provide insights into societies, cultures and identities of both past and present populations.

“

Graffiti is one of the few tools you have if you have almost nothing

Banksy

”



Street portrait of a Bristol Graffiti. Bristol's Bearpit gallery.

THE HISTORY OF GRAFFITI

In Ancient times, graffiti played a somewhat important role in political and social discourse. In Athens, citizens carved their opinions about certain politicians on the city walls to spark debates and discussions about political matters.

Then, during the **Roman Empire**, graffiti became a trend and started to take on many different forms: on top of political messages, Romans used cities' walls as canvasses for poems and love declarations, greetings and insults, messages and drawings, thoughts and literary quotes, and even advertisement for businesses.

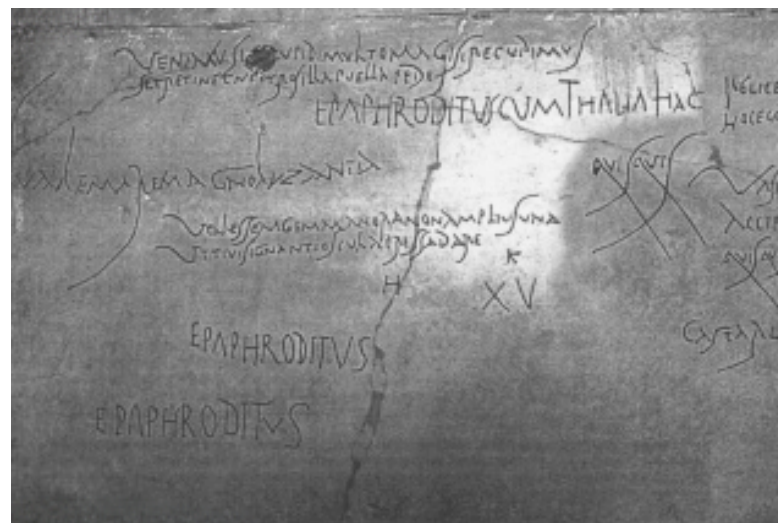
The eruption of Mount Vesuvius over the city of Pompeii preserved over eleven thousand of these, giving modern historians and archaeologists insights about the Roman civilisation and, more particularly, about its everyday life.



Sh*tter beware the evil eye, Naples Archaeological Museum

“
*It recreates the life
of
the town.*
”

Rebecca Benefiel,
Professor of Classics at
Washington and Lee University



Ancient Graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii

One passage reads:

*“vasia quae rapui, quaeris formosa puella accipe quae
rapui non ego solus; ama. quisquis amat valeat”*

Which translates to:

*“Beautiful girl, you seek the kisses that I stole.
Receive what I was not alone in taking; love.
Whoever loves, may she fare well.”*

An example of a love declaration found on a Pompeii wall is:

“Victoria, vale, et ubique es, suaviter sternutes.”

*(“Health to you, Victoria, and wherever you are may
you sneeze sweetly.”)*

In the Middle Ages, graffiti prevailed mostly within monastic communities. Monks wrote prayers on monastery walls as a devotional practice that offered spiritual appeasement.

Then followed the Renaissance, a period characterised by a huge outpouring of art, humanism and rising literacy. It sparked a resurgence of graffiti as a form of communication and knowledge dissemination: walls were once again adorned with poems, political commentary and love declarations.

Graffiti as we know it today emerged during the 1960s in the US along with the rise of youth cultures such as punk and later hip-hop. Young people, especially minorities like the African American community, started tagging the walls as a way to express their identity as marginalized groups, allowing them to proclaim their struggles and reclaim public spaces.

At first, graffiti was considered vandalism, an illegitimate art form; artists were criminalized and anti-graffiti task forces were set up. However, it gained in popularity during the 80s with the rise and success of the hip-hop movement and art galleries started to gain interest in the subculture. During this time, some artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring rose to fame, while others, including Crush, Dondi and Futura, chose to mostly keep painting on the streets.

This decade also saw the emergence of street art, at the intersection between the graffiti subculture and the art market, adding new techniques, like collage, stencilling, posters and stickers, to the traditional spray can, gradually moving from the cryptic language of tagging to the pictorial image and helping to destigmatize the movement.

The Golden Age of graffiti and street art also expanded to Europe where Paris established itself as the epicenter of the movement, giving birth to artists such as Blek le Rat, who heavily influenced Banksy, or Miss Tic and Miss Van who focused on women's place in both art and society.

In The Arab world and the Middle East, the movement also rose, although rooted in a different culture. In this region, graffiti related mainly to the art of calligraphy, the artistic practice of handwriting based on the Arabic alphabet, focusing mainly on religious scripture. Cordoba, Istanbul, Baghdad and Cairo saw their Mosques, courts, palaces and universities decorated with verses from the Qur'an.





Monster Graffiti and a Woman, Bristol

PERCEPTION

Perception of street art in general is shaped by cultural differences. Whereas in some societies graffiti is celebrated as a form of artistic expression and cultural heritage, and is even displayed in galleries and museums, in others it is perceived as vandalism and a threat to safety.

In Latin American countries, graffiti is often used by local governments to adorn public spaces.

On the same note, in New York, a city with a strong artistic heritage, namely in the street art movement, graffiti is also regarded as cultural element that adds character to the neighbourhoods.

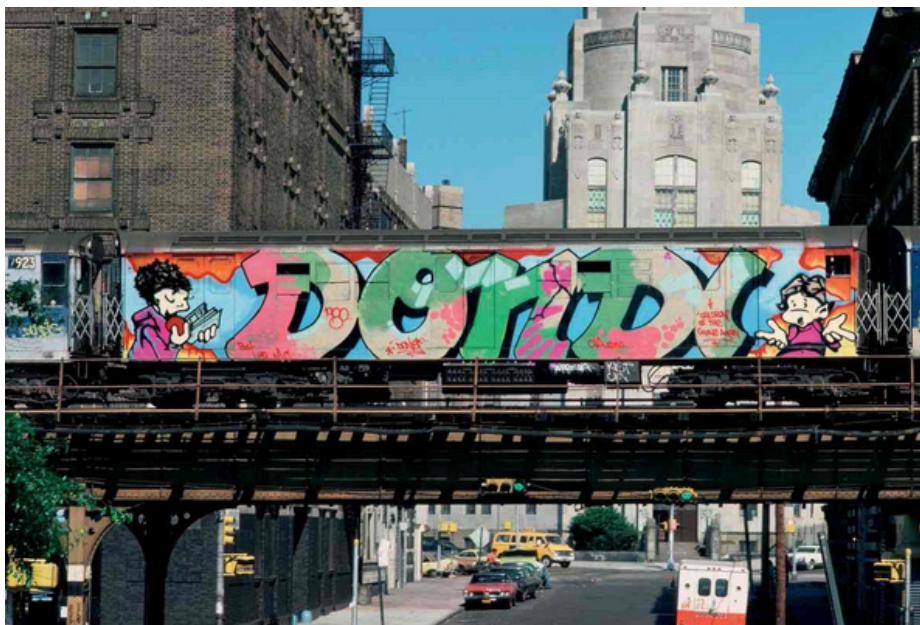
On the other hand, in Los Angeles, graffiti is associated with gang violence and is very negatively perceived.

Sunshine and Skateboards, London



Images of Dondi White, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring, capturing the influential street art and neo-expressionism of 1980s New York City.

Children Of The Grave, Dondi White



International Youth Year, Haring, 1985



Jean-Michel Basquiat, California, 1984



Keith Haring, Stedelijk Museum



Untitled, Basquiat, 1982

POLITICAL GRAFFITI

As we saw above, graffiti and street art have almost always had a **political undertone**. The latter has gotten much stronger since the Ancient Greeks' mere attacks and appraisals of certain political candidates. In fact, graffiti has become a form of communication and expression around the globe, especially for the **marginalized and the disenfranchised** as it allows artists to **escape censorship** and control. In times of political turmoil, it is the **most available** form of protest.

Street art's political undertones are highlighted by the variation of the themes it vindicates depending on the political climate of each country.

On one hand, in the West, artists tend to focus on themes such as **unemployment, equality and prejudice**. For instance, Basquiat's work depicted racism and power structures and Haring's focused on AIDS awareness, among other themes.

On the other hand, in countries struggling with more extreme political instability, street art tends to focus on **freedom, human rights, revolt against the government and even acts as a communication tool**.

For example, prior to 2011, when the regimes of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt censored media, street walls acted as an alternative means of communication.

People shared information and activists shared instructions and organized protests. In general, street art played a crucial role in the revolt against these regimes and in defying hegemonic power.

For instance, in **Tunisia**, the word "Irhal", which means a strong urge to disobey authority, was written all over street walls and public spaces, becoming the symbol of the public's revolt against Ben Ali's regime and spreading across the region to Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria.

The Arab Spring, a series of pro-democracy and anti-government protests that spread across the Arab world at the time, was fueled by these slogans and the proliferation of the arts. Although, today, the extent of its impact is debatable given the region's current political climate, the legacy of the Arab Spring perseveres in the form of murals and graffiti that memorialize those who were killed in protests.

An example is the "Blue Bra", an iconic symbol of the period that originated in the viral image of a woman being beaten by Egyptian soldiers, exposing her blue bra.



Blue Bra symbol, Egypt



Mural depicting Salgueiro da Maia, Lisbon

The proliferation of the arts in this period was not just due to its practical aspect of providing a way to communicate and to implicitly criticize the regime, but also to its ability to form a sense of identity. Indeed, emotion is needed to push people to act, especially when political writing and speeches are restricted, and art is a way to express it by highlighting common feelings of outrage and a creating a sense of community, bringing people together.

Street art also serves to illustrate and depict how political struggles **affect people**.

For example, Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation throughout the years has manifested itself in the form of graffiti on the Separation Wall along the West Bank, documenting the Nakba and the suffering faced by local populations.

Another noteworthy example took place in 2016, when **Aleppo** inhabitants were forced by the Syrian regime to leave their city. They decorated the city's walls, expressing their distress with phrases such as "underevery destroyed building there are families buried along with their dreams",

"love me away from the country of humiliation, away from my city which is filled with death scenes ... Besieged Aleppo this is the last day, 15 December 2016".

A crucial aspect of street art is in its name: the street, and, more generally, **the city**.

The city is a physical embodiment of both its people and its governance and has therefore always been a place where power dynamics are manifested.

This is apparent in dictatorships: parades, monuments built for the leaders and militia demonstrations are all ways through which regimes assert their power in the public sphere, in the cities. After these regimes fall, there is often an effort to strip cities of all symbols associated with them and replace them with symbols of change, symbols of the revolution.

These symbols are often materialized in the form of graffiti. In Portugal for instance, after the 1974 revolution and the fall of Salazar's dictatorship of Estado Novo, citizens were quick to fill the streets with paintings of revolution, with its figures and legacy. The "Murais de Abril" are murals all over the country celebrating its freedom.



Stencil by artist Por Favor. Photographed in Madrid, Spain, 2017

Franco's dictatorship in Spain also sparked creative protest. During the civil war, from 1936 to 1939, Franco nationalists often painted democratic villages with offensive slogans such as "Your women will give birth to fascists" to which communist, anarchist and socialist groups retorted with slogans slamming the nationalists.

During the dictatorship, the Basque separatist group ETA used graffiti as a means of informing Basque society and the Spanish government of its active resistance against Franco.

After the fall of the regime, public art revitalized as people resorted to previously forbidden forms of protest. Like in Portugal, the legacy of the Franco regime is still felt on the streets.

An example is the depiction of **Ascensión Mendieta** whose father was a victim of political violence and was buried in a mass grave.

For context, after Franco died, the country passed a law prohibiting investigations of political crimes during the regime. Mendieta took her case to Argentina which led to the first digging-up of a mass grave from the civil war. She was able to re-bury her father and has become a hero for the victims of Franco's regime.

Creative protest has also been resurging in Spain since the 2008 financial crisis. At the time, Spain was heavily affected: unemployment rates grew and austerity policies were put in place, which ultimately culminated in the 2011 riots.

Throughout the crisis, the number of political street art pieces increased and many known street artists started their career at that time.



They have commented on why they chose to start:

“

I had economic problems, my parents had
problems,
my brother, and my friends.
It was really bad
time for me.

Some point I thought

*‘Shit! – I consider myself a political person,
interested in the issues of the society, and
here I am painting [classical] flower
paintings.*

.No, no! This is not okay!’

So, I started doing political pieces.

”

DosJotas. Madrid, October 2017

To sum up, graffiti can have a political and social influence by raising awareness, inspiring protest, and challenging injustice. It is also a form of self-expression; it allows artists to share ideas and emotions. Moreover, it can provide insights into societies as it often represents popular opinions, political discourse and social issues.

“

I want to give a voice to the
people who are not heard in
the society, like LGBT and
anarchist groups.

I believe in changes, and
from my experience, if you
fight enough, you can reach
what you want.

I am siempre enlucha [always
fighting].

”

DosJotas. Madrid, October 2017

Like any form of protest, its negative connotation is understandable: up to what extent is vandalizing public monuments necessary?

However, this debate leads to a stigmatization of this art form and overshadows all of its positive impacts and goals.



BY INÊS REBELO

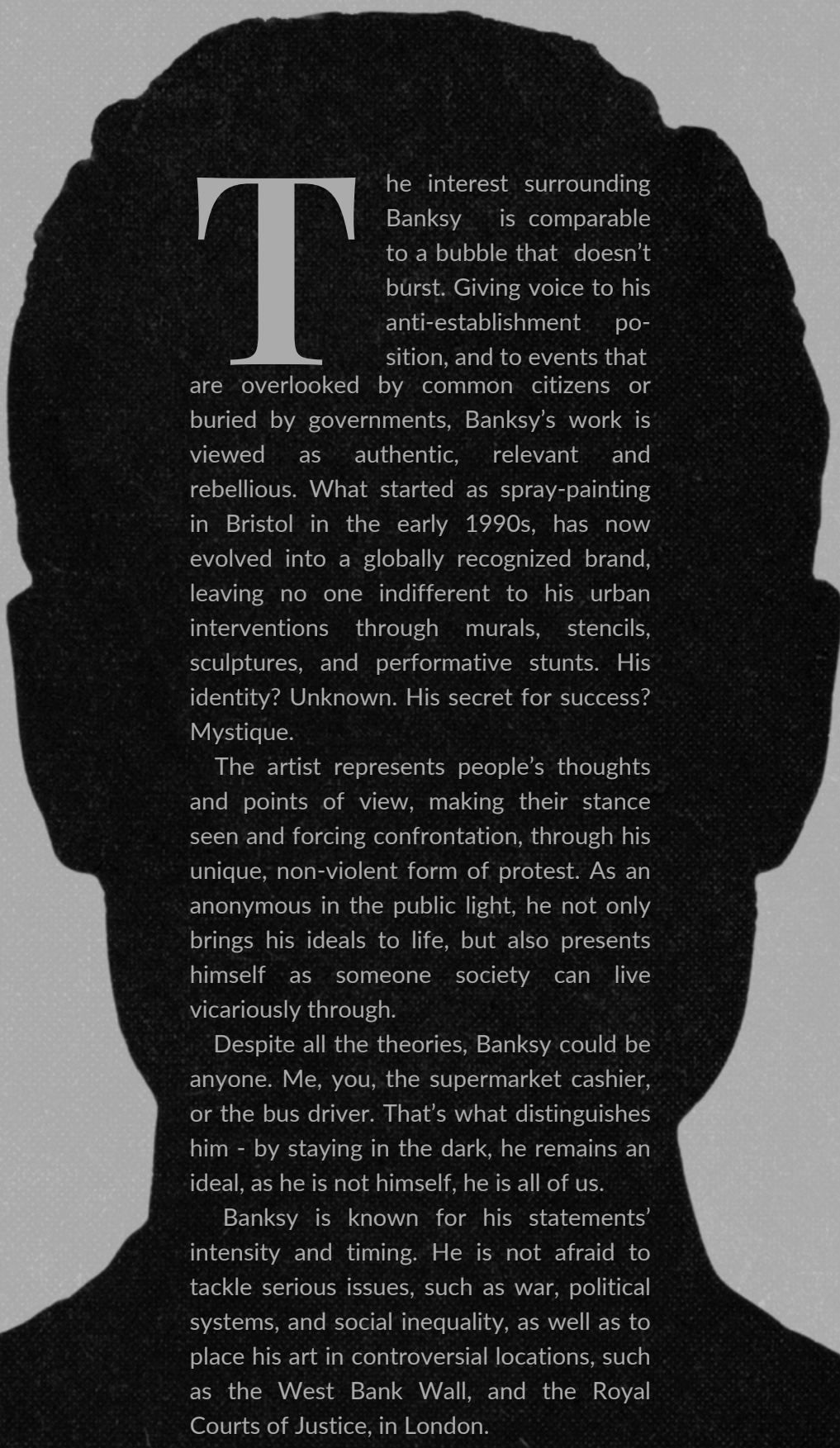
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WHEN ONE UNCONFORMING VOICE SPEAKS LOUD ENOUGH FOR ALL

ANSKY:



"Love is in the Air," Banksy, Bethlehem, Palestine (2005).



The interest surrounding Banksy is comparable to a bubble that doesn't burst. Giving voice to his anti-establishment position, and to events that are overlooked by common citizens or buried by governments, Banksy's work is viewed as authentic, relevant and rebellious. What started as spray-painting in Bristol in the early 1990s, has now evolved into a globally recognized brand, leaving no one indifferent to his urban interventions through murals, stencils, sculptures, and performative stunts. His identity? Unknown. His secret for success? Mystique.

The artist represents people's thoughts and points of view, making their stance seen and forcing confrontation, through his unique, non-violent form of protest. As an anonymous in the public light, he not only brings his ideals to life, but also presents himself as someone society can live vicariously through.

Despite all the theories, Banksy could be anyone. Me, you, the supermarket cashier, or the bus driver. That's what distinguishes him - by staying in the dark, he remains an ideal, as he is not himself, he is all of us.

Banksy is known for his statements' intensity and timing. He is not afraid to tackle serious issues, such as war, political systems, and social inequality, as well as to place his art in controversial locations, such as the West Bank Wall, and the Royal Courts of Justice, in London.

His hidden identity protects him legally and politically, enabling him to act and display the art in public spaces with no consequences. While some condemn it and characterize his work as vandalism, others praise it and defend that streets and walls are a form of public property.

Among his most known and widely discussed interventions is the series of paintings on the Palestinian side of the West Bank Wall. Also referred to as the Segregation Wall, it was built unilaterally by Israel in 2002, under the pretext of security, as a separation barrier between them and Palestine. It was built in a calculated way, annexing large portions of Palestinian land, deemed illegal by the United Nations.

Moreover, it separated communities and restricted freedom of movement, isolating and pressuring those on Israel's side to leave their homes. As expected, Banksy heavily disagreed with the wall, stating it "essentially turns Palestine into the world's largest open prison".

Reinforcing his position, Banksy and his team travelled there in August 2005 and added seven murals to the already expanding artistic interventions on the wall.

One of his most recognizable West Bank Wall murals, often called "The Window", depicts a large painted hole in the barrier, with a child standing at its

center holding what appears to be a hammer, as if he had broken the wall from inside.

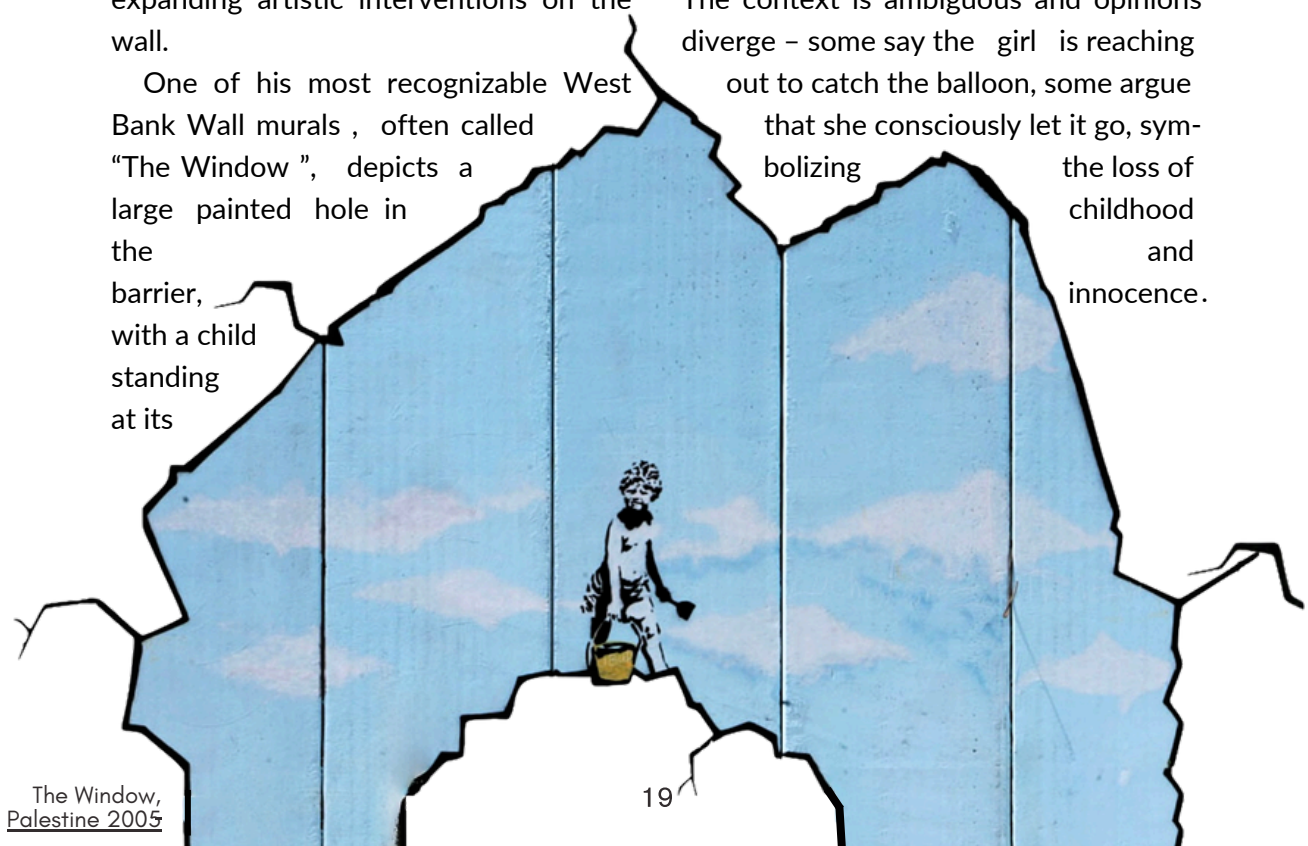
Through this opening, the sky is clear blue with fluffy white clouds, contrasting with the barrier's soulless grey. Banksy paints an alternative reality, not a luxurious one, but simply the possibility of basic human freedom. The mural highlights the coexistence of suffering and hope, and the act of resistance through imagination. Furthermore, it undermines the wall's authority, portraying it as vulnerable – shattered by art rather than violence.

By targeting the world's most notorious wall at the time, he once again redefined vandalism and turned it into an international news event.

It was in 2002 that the world became acquainted with the artist's most iconic and evocative work, "Girl with Balloon". It first appeared on a mural on Waterloo Bridge, in London, followed by print editions in 2004, and reproductions.

The stencil depicts a young girl, reaching for a red, heart-shaped balloon, and the quote "There is always hope" next to it. The context is ambiguous and opinions diverge – some say the girl is reaching

out to catch the balloon, some argue that she consciously let it go, symbolizing the loss of childhood and innocence.



The Window,
Palestine 2005

The emotional impact of the image originates not only from the child's devastated face, but, more importantly, from the moment of release or loss. It has been interpreted as a statement on ephemeral moments and reproduced by the artist throughout years and controversial locations, addressing social issues and inequality.

In 2018, "Girl with Balloon" was sold for \$1.4 million at Sotheby's, yet no one could expect the artist's stunt that followed the auction's result. Seconds after the gavel pounded, the canvas started sliding down the frame and shredding itself, stopping half-way through and leaving the balloon untouched. Intending to criticize the commercialization of art and delivering a message of nonconformity, Banksy's goal was to shred it completely. The irony is, despite (and due to) the malfunction, the stunt resulted in the artist's greatest secondary market expansion, the same middlemen he considers illegitimate and condemns.

The piece was renamed "Love is in the Bin" and was sold in 2021, for \$25.4 million, once again at a Sotheby's auction.

It raises a thought-provoking question about the nature of art itself: where does intrinsic value end and social construction begin?

As Banksy became famous, so did his past art. Everyone wants a 'Banksy original', not necessarily because they appreciate it or as an investment, but due to the social status owning such piece brings. Despite the artist's criticism of capitalism and "money buys everything" mentality, many of his creations are sold, and at exorbitant prices. The same society that once disapproved street art and looked at it through biased lens, is now taken in by all the buzz and high-profile people who make up the anonymous' fan base. Once again, art became a synonym of belonging to a closed, exclusive circle, and Banksy, unwillingly, is the one providing this commodity.

Remaining true to his principles, he did not let himself be corrupted by money and fame, and it is estimated that in the last 20 years, he has raised almost £30 million for charity. His donation list is composed by hospitals, homelessness organizations, refugee camps, and many more. Banksy is aware of his market power and leverages it to support the causes he cares about, staying committed to his original purpose.

"Sale Ends Today" was created as a critique of our materialistic society.



Girl with Balloon, Waterloo Bridge,
South Bank, London

In this 2006 oil on canvas painting, four figures kneel in worship before a red sign reading “SALE ENDS TODAY”, highlighting the almost religious devotion with which society concerns consumerism.

The sign suggests urgency and relies on emotional manipulation rather than logic, pointing to a broader critique: capitalism increasingly fills the emotional space once occupied by spirituality, community, and meaning.

Using psychology and FOMO against consumers, large corporations make us believe that we’re gaining something by seizing the discount, when, in reality, the discount is the one gaining from us.

As if any purchase could ever fill the emotional void for more than 10 minutes; as if we even knew we wanted something before the sign dictated it.



The artist touches on a structural dependency: capitalism needs us to stay unhappy and seek relief through instant gratification. He strongly opposes this dynamic and criticizes those who capitalize on a culture that increasingly values possessions over beings.

It is a self-reinforcing loop, perpetuated by both consumers and producers - material goods have become society's new band-aid to emotional discomfort.

The more Banksy creates, the more society craves for. His relationship with the public is one of fascination and provocation: he captivates with his timing and relevance, yet unsettles with his irony and bluntness. Across murals, installations, sculptures, films, pop-up actions, and city-scale interventions, Banksy owns an extensive and diverse portfolio that engages with some of the most urgent issues of our time.

His repertoire spans critiques of greed, violence, surveillance, consumerism, dehumanization and state hypocrisy, regularly dominating the new cycle and sparking debates.

Throughout his career, Banksy has challenged institutions, governments, and cultural norms, while also holding them accountable. Ultimately, Banksy has positioned himself as an artist who consistently calls out injustice, wherever it originates.

His impact is not only social, but also deeply political. By raising awareness to modern life issues, and tackling situations with major psychological consequences, the artist makes us reflect and think sharply.

Despite the progressive normalization of catastrophic and horrifying events, we must not overlook it and let higher figures decide our fate and path.

Our voice holds power, and by staying awake and engaged, we can influence real change. Inertia and conformism will never be the answer, but advocating and acting on behalf of our core values and for a better, fairer, and less unequal world will.

*We can all
be Banksy,
in our
own way.*



A photograph by Banksy's former agent is said to show the artist at work

UNITED BY A PARADOX:

BY FILIPA TORRES

EUROVISION'S (A) POLITICAL STAGE

At the beginning of the television age in the early 50's, televisions across European homes showed an image of a politically divided continent, searching for ways to reconnect after the devastation of the Second World War. Not only was there a craving to broadcast something more hopeful to the general public, as it was essential that it could be spread across all borders.

It was from this moment of renewal that the Eurovision was born, as a test from the European Broadcasting Union, whose mission was to push the limits of live, simultaneous, transnational television broadcasting on the whole continent. What began as a technical experiment soon became something far

more symbolic. The Eurovision Song Contest fostered a reason to gather families, neighborhoods and entire countries, even if it was an ordinary radio or a malfunctioning TV. Without doubt, people were separated by language, history, or ideology, yet "united by music".

More than that, Eurovision made possible a togetherness that evidently did not discourage countries from showcasing their unique cultures, traditions, and artistic expressions as well.

In its earliest version, the contest appeared to promise a simple, light-hearted celebration of art and



Eurovision 1968, which took place years after the original

different identities - an apolitical space to bridge divides rather than expose them. Still, beneath that cheerful surface lay seeds of a much deeper paradox that would shape the contest for decades to come.

Indeed, Eurovision explicitly seeks to safeguard this "neutrality" through its rules. Beyond forbidding political lyrics, the EBU also bans political gestures or symbols, allowing only official national flags and the EU flag onstage or by delegations.

And these rules are not on paper only, they have been actively enforced. In recent years, flag policies have become stricter, resulting in a rule that effectively bans the Pride flag during certain segments, despite Eurovision's strong LGBTQ+ presence.

Further illustrating this, in 2019, Iceland's group Hatari was fined after showing Palestinian flags during the live vote reveal, and in 2024, Israel was required to change the title of its song from *October Rain* to *Hurricane* to avoid perceived political references.

Together, these examples expose a more profound contradiction: Eurovision attempts to quiet political expression within a stage built for

artists to be seen and heard. In this way, the contest's claim to neutrality becomes a source of conflict itself.



Ukrainian Verka Serduchka sings
"Dancing Lasha Tumbai" at Eurovision,
2007

The truth is, rules aside, the very structure of the contest makes neutrality nearly impossible. As each song represents its nation, every decision - selecting an artist, financing staging, approving a song - is part of a country's effort to determine how it is perceived abroad. Even hosting becomes a tool of soft power, allowing countries to present themselves as capable and attractive on a global stage. This set-up, where national identity is the core unit of the competition, means the contest is already political long before the show begins.

This structural bias is even more visible by the very end of the contest, in the final voting. The recurrent exchange of high points between countries with shared cultural, historical,

or geographic ties (e.g., Greece and Cyprus, the Nordic countries) is often dismissed as solely harmless neighbourly affection. Yet, these patterns are also quantifiable indicators of geopolitical relationships, not purely musical merit. The fact is that the tension revolving around the presenter saying "And the 12 points go to..." isn't merely about a score, but also a public, televised declaration of diplomatic affinity or cultural connection.

The scoreboard from Eurovision Song Contest 1960



Until this stage, some may still argue that political tensions can be dismissed, and that creative value remains the main focus. But can music truly stand apart when the conditions shaping it are themselves unequal

?

If truth be told, when the EBU attempts to enforce silence, it exposes the privilege embedded in being “apolitical”. For those whose identities and homelands are secure, the contest can be easily seen as a purely entertaining show. But for artists from marginalized communities or conflict zones, their presence and expression are often acts of resistance.

And still, it is precisely when the artists’ lived realities collide with geopolitical crises that the contest’s political fault lines become visible.

Currently, we can even perceive the EBU’s responses to these moments as inconsistent: it banned Russia in 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine and allowed Ukraine’s 2016 entry “1944” to reference

historical trauma, yet in 2024, it reprimanded guest performer Eric Saade for wearing a keffiyeh, citing a compromise of the event’s non-political nature. More recently, since the outbreak of the Gaza war, Eurovision has been at the center of public debate once again, with artists, activists, and some European politicians calling for Israel’s exclusion, drawing direct comparisons to the earlier decision to ban Russia and forcing the EBU to confront its claim of political neutrality.

Despite this pressure, the EBU ultimately confirmed Israel’s participation, a decision that led several broadcasters and artists to withdraw in protest and further intensified scrutiny of the contest’s claim to political neutrality.

These examples serve not to place conflicts on the same scale, but to show a recurring pattern: when global tensions rise and public pressure intensifies, the EBU is pushed out of its neutral posture. Its decisions, whether to ban, permit, or censor, become unavoidable acknowledgements of the political context surrounding the contest.

Austria's JJ winner of the 69th Eurovision Song Contest



Ultimately, asking to separate art from politics is a struggle not only for performers, but also for viewers and fans at home who are living through war, discrimination, or social crisis and cannot simply switch off those realities either.

For them, watching a nation celebrate itself on the Eurovision stage can feel jarring, painful, or even alienating when their own circumstances are defined by insecurity or oppression. Expecting these artists and audiences to separate art from politics overlooks the fact that both are shaped by the very conditions they are forced to navigate every day.

In conclusion, Eurovision's enduring paradox is that its commitment to neutrality only highlights how impossible neutrality really is. In a contest built on national representation, where millions of viewers watch each country perform a maximum 3-minute song about how they wish to be seen, silence is never just silence and becomes political itself.

And still, this very tension is what makes Eurovision so culturally powerful: by insisting on being apolitical, the contest does not erase politics, it intensifies every attempt of manifestation.

A path forward does not require the contest to solve political conflicts or take ideological positions. Rather, it requires acknowledging what the contest already is: a space where nations express themselves, where identities coexist, inevitably shaped by their realities. The goal should be to manage the space transparently, rather than deny the existing political tensions, while ensuring that they do not overshadow the music entirely.

In the end, recognizing Eurovision as a space for debate does not invalidate its power to bring us together. It remains a vital reason to gather people and bridge generations who have watched it evolve from the days of ordinary radios and malfunctioning TVs to the digital age. This annual ritual allows for the sharing of memories and the witnessing of Europe's unfolding history side by side.

It is, above all, a shared moment of music, visibility, and connection, where art helps us understand not only who we are, but who we might become.

Awareness Recommendations

BY INÊS LINO FERREIRA



Knee-Deep



Han Kang



Toni Morrison



Spirited Away



Grave of Fireflies



“

All of that art-for-art's-sake stuff is BS,” she declares. “What are these people talking about? Are you really telling me that Shakespeare and Aeschylus weren’t writing about kings? All good art is political! There is none that isn’t. And the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying, ‘We love the status quo.’ We’ve just dirtied the word ‘politics,’ made it sound like it’s unpatriotic or something.” Morrison laughs derisively. “That all started in the period of state art, when you had the communists and fascists running around doing this poster stuff, and the reaction was ‘No, no, no; there’s only aesthetics.’ My point is that it has to be both: beautiful and political at the same time. I’m not interested in art that is not in the world. And it’s not just the narrative, it’s not just the story; it’s the language and the structure and what’s going on behind it. Anybody can make up a story.

Toni Morrison

”

Toni Morrison

STUDIO GHIBLI

If you haven't watched a Studio Ghibli film recently, or ever, you're missing out on something quietly extraordinary. So, I invite you to sit down, dim out the lights, wrap yourself in your favourite blanket, and be prepared to be transported to a magical universe.

Ghibli films kindly invite you to slow down, to marvel at the simple act of cooking, at the colours breathing life into the screen, at worlds that feel magical yet deeply familiar. However, beneath the fantasy, Ghibli effortlessly weaves political and moral reflection into its stories: the fight between the iron people and Princess Mononoke resembles closely today's environmental disputes; *Grave of Fireflies* painfully exposes the reality of children living amid war; and *Spirited Away* reminds us not to forget our names, our souls, and to refuse conformity in the midst of this fast-paced, capitalist society we live in.



Chihiro Ogino

At the same time, characters such as Nausicaä, San, Sophie, and Chihiro, remind us that women, too, are fully capable of being heroines in their own right, of standing up for peace, protecting nature, and driving the story forward, rather than being reduced to mere love interests (Disney, take notes...). Across its films, Studio Ghibli returns to three enduring themes: environmental protection, pacifism, and strong female characters, using fantasy not to escape reality, but to better understand it. And as the world once again flirts with fascism, Miyazaki leaves us with a line worth remembering:

I'd rather be a pig than a fascist.

Miyazaki,
from his film, *Porco Rosso*

Grave of Fireflies



HUMAN ACTS

BY HAN KANG

In 2024, Han Kang was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. After having read three of her books this year, I find her one of the most extraordinarily realistic writers I have ever encountered. She has mastered the art of painting pictures in your brain: she will make sure that every action, speech, and colour is permanently etched into your mind long after you close the book.

In *Human Acts*, the author draws on the student uprising of May 1980, in Gwangju, South Korea, and its violent suppression by the military. Blending fiction and historical reality, the novel follows several interconnected characters across time, tracing the enduring psychological and moral effects of the Gwangju massacre on their lives. This event remains deeply controversial in South Korea, as the actual number of victims was never fully disclosed, and peaceful civilians were subjected to brutal atrocities.

At its core, *Human Acts* interrogates whether violence is inherent to the human condition and, in doing so, serves as a powerful reminder of literature's role as both art and historical witness.



Han Kang



Is it true that human beings are fundamentally cruel? Is the experience of cruelty the only thing we share as a species? Is the dignity that we cling to nothing but self-delusion, masking from ourselves the single truth: that each one of us is capable of being reduced to an insect, a ravening beast, a lump of meat? To be degraded, slaughtered - is this the essential of humankind, one which history has confirmed as inevitable?

- *Human Acts*, Han Kang

music

KNEECAP

Kneecap are an Irish hip-hop trio from Belfast, Northern Ireland, known for rapping in a mix of English and Irish and for their unapologetically political stance. Since their debut in 2017, the group has consistently defended Irish language and cultural rights, opposed British rule in Northern Ireland, and, more recently, spoken out against the genocide in Gaza. Their activism, expressed both in their lyrics and on stage, has come at a cost: radio bans, legal charges against a member (which he successfully fought), and even a three-year ban from entering Hungary. At Glastonbury 2025, where efforts were made to prevent them from performing, they instead took the stage and declared on social media:

You know what's 'not appropriate', Keir? Arming a fucking genocide.

Whether you see their behaviour as provocation or principle, Kneecap forces us to confront the cost of silence and the price of standing up for what you believe in.

Kneecap photo





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