

KINGS OF SPRAY – art

At the beginning I would like to point out that graffiti aren't ugly signature scrawls that mar the city landscape, which we often see in Slovenia, but true artistic paintings – murals.

In our country graffiti are illegal, but yet there is a city in the world, where the artists are encouraged to create murals. The city is called Cape Town.

In the south African city, where the apartheid is also present, there are a lot of artists that don't work in oils or pastels, but in spray paint, producing graffiti art. This type of art connects the white people with the black people, despite the apartheid regime, which is officially supposed to be gone. Now the graffiti scene is the only place in Cape Town where everyone is judged strictly on skill. The artists want to create a culture that's not like the one they grew up with.

These artists are always making their work under the cover of night, when nobody else is looking. Judging from the crowd next day, it could have been any trendy gallery opening in New York or London – those are people who are admiring their work.

Now Cape Town's art establishment can't take its eyes off them. Impressed by the enormous murals brightening large swaths of the city – many supporting causes like anti – retroviral drugs for AIDS patients or quitting smoking – gallery owners have begun inviting graffiti artists to exhibit their work on canvases. The shows have become so popular that some of the artists can now make a living solely off their graffiti. Advertisers, corporations, political candidates – even private art collectors – are commissioning their work, sometimes for as much as about 900 \$. Two of the country's top artists have been even hired to decorate buildings for the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. They can earn money by editing magazines of graffiti culture, making customised graffiti-style shirts and pants, or even direct a documentary on graffiti art.

So everything was all right, they didn't bother anyone. It came as a surprise 2 months ago when city officials announced a crackdown on graffiti “ we were shocked,” said one of them. “One minute we're the Kings of Cape Town and the next minute everyone wants to see us disappear.” Indeed, officials hoping to lure tourists and investors suddenly decided that the graffiti – which had gone largely unpoliced – was unsightly. City councillor announced a new package of laws that would regulate spray – paint sales, confiscate artists' property and initiate a 24 hour “graffiti hot line” for citizens to report unlawful painting. Offenders could be fined up to about 180 \$ and even sent to jail. A few weeks ago, police made their first graffiti arrests in years. The offenders: a pair of academics protesting the proposed bylaws by spraying the words FREE ART on a overpass. “ We felt the new laws sounded extremist and unfair,” said one of the culprits, a design teacher at a College. ” There are a lot of artists who put a lot of energy into making big, beautiful public murals ”.

Graffiti art started in the 1980s in Cape Town's “coloured” communities inspired by TV Images of New York buildings and subway trains covered with graffiti. Today graffiti has spread to the affluent southern suburbs, and is becoming popular elsewhere in the country as well. One suburban inhabitant even commissioned 3 graffiti artists to paint a piece on the front wall of his house. But neighbours think that he is bringing crime into the area.

At the end I would like to say like that of all art, it seems, graffiti's appeal lies squarely in the eye of the beholder.

UNKNOWN WORDS

wobble (verb) - to move unsteadily from side to side, or make something do this

clutch (noun) - a clutch of - a small group of similar things

matted (adjective) - twisted or stuck together in a thick mass (hair)

mural (noun) - a painting that is painted on a wall, either inside or outside a building

swathe/swath (noun) - any large area of land that is different from the land on either side of it

canvas (noun) - a painting done with oil paints, or the piece of cloth it is painted on

solely (adverb) - not involving anything or anyone else; only

commission (verb) - to formally ask someone to write an official report, produce a work of art for you etc

lure (verb) - to persuade someone to do something, especially something wrong, by promising them something they want; tempt

confiscate (verb) - to officially take private property away from someone, usually as a punishment

culprit (noun) - the person who is guilty of a crime, or responsible for damage, a problem etc

staunch (adjective) - giving strong, loyal support to another person, organization, belief etc

mar (verb) - to make something less attractive or enjoyable; spoil