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From the Wall to the Pavement and Back. Murals in the Epoch of Drones. [with an interview with the artist Giulio Vesprini]

Two phenomena undoubtedly represent our times: drones and street art. Both hit the headlines, are viral, versatile; ignoring them is impossible. In recent years, as flagships of technology and contemporary art, they have experienced points of contact and fusion, a kind of ‘symbiotic short circuit’ between the two.

On the one hand, the image plane of street art has flipped from vertical to horizontal — roofs, the pavement, basketball courts — so passers by do not see the murals on their walks through the streets, but rather through the computer’s eye, which displays satellite maps and drone footage spread through social networks. On the other hand, the movement of drones has changed from predominantly horizontal to vertical when used as piloted or automated hands to spray the city walls.

This paper retraces and reflects on the fusion in progress between street art, urban planning,

and drones to investigate how these phenomena are transforming our cities and societal customs in a context where art and technique no longer maintain their established borders and statutes in their traditional form. The text closes with an interview with Giulio Vesprini, an internationally renowned Italian street artist and art director of the collective street art project ‘Vedo a Colori – Street Art al Porto’ (Civitanova Marche, since 2009).

Keywords:
Street art; Drones; Urban planning; Horizontal frame.

DRONES AND THE AESTHETICS OF GEOPOLITICS.

Essentially aeroplanes without a cockpit, drones (technically called *remotely piloted aircraft*) are objects that symbolize the modern day, the pride of technology in military matters and applied to civil uses, where they find the most varied applications. They are emblems of technological progress while also representing low-cost methods. They are low-cost weapons par excellence (Chamayou 2015), but also tools for low-cost filming and aerial photography, and are now found at any home.

There is an aesthetic aspect to each technological object, however, beyond its lethal, military use — which Walter Benjamin taught us in his short but prophetic essay in 1935, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' — or its playful use. Drone were already immortalized in a photograph from 1944 as the eminence of American technological advancement in the context of beauty that would prophesy a long, even mythical, destiny characterized by ambiguity. In the photo, a propeller drone is held by someone who, due precisely to that photo, would soon become known as Marilyn Monroe.

That snapshot, thanks to which Gregoire Chamayou was able to backdate the birth of drones by at least 20 years, reveals that drones have always pertained partly to the world of war and partly to staging, and therefore to art. Chamayou himself speaks about this birth 'under the sign of pretence', not only because drones were used to train soldiers throughout the Second World War. In reality, the first drones of the 1940s, which were called 'radioplanes', were the invention of Reginald Denny, a film actor who had turned to aeromodelling and founded his Radioplane Company, where Norma Jean Baker worked (Fig. 1).

In fact, drones arrived relatively late to the civilian platforms of film and photography, let alone installation, sculpture, performance art, and theatre. It is from early twenty-first century successes that the global phenomenon today known as 'drone art' began, in which the drone is the key player and acts as both subject and medium.

As a subject, the drone can only be in motion. When it is not filmed or photographed but acts live, its

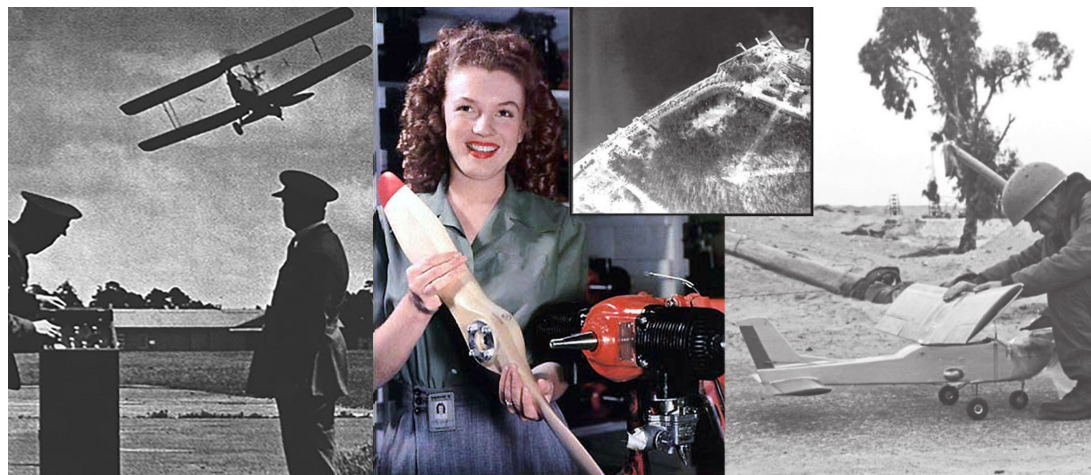


Fig 1 - Retracing early intertings of drone and performance, cinema and photography: a) 1935: Demonstration of how to remotely fly a 'Queen Bee'(K4227), a radio controlled pilotless target aircraft for the Royal Air Force; b)1945: Norma Jeane Dougherty photographed at the Radioplane Company factory in Burbank, California, by the US Army photographer David Conover; c) 1969: the first 'drone photo' was taken (insert) during a flight over the Suez Canal and captured the Egyptian side of the waterway..

movement is circumscribed by the spectator's visual field, and this is why it is mainly vertical, like in installations or performance art or the dancing drones in Cirque du Soleil.

Instead as a medium, the drone rises vertically and possibly moves horizontally, but more important than the movement is the action: capturing horizontal images from above, as in the horizontal networks that distribute its images, a sign of virality, which is likewise horizontal. Through its use, the observer's eye, i.e. the 'eye' of the drone, and the horizontal frame may (but may also not, since we increasingly use mobile devices with our heads down) become vertical again in a user's gaze or on the screen of an operator, who monitors the video or modifies the image. Nevertheless, the visual result perceives a three-dimensional nature, recognizes the volumes and relates them, because the image is not a horizontal projection, but rather a perspective with a horizontal frame.

What is revealed, according to Benjamin (Benjamin 2011[1936], 38-39), is an 'aestheticization of poli-

tics', or better yet, geopolitics.

The means of viewing with the aerial images introduced by drones in military doctrine has basically sanctioned an epochal change in the management of aerial power, which no longer moves only via horizontal coordinates, but identifies targets (kill boxes) with three-dimensional coordinates. 'To put that in very schematic terms, we have switched from the horizontal to the vertical, from the two dimensional space of the old maps of army staffs to geopolitics based on volumes'. Space has become a 'dynamic mosaic', functional for the counterinsurgency of the American military. 'We should see it as a patchwork of squares of color, each of which corresponds to specific rules of engagement' (Chamayou 2015, p.54).

The drone as a medium is increasingly used by street artists to create large-scale works on the urban scale. Their work, fundamentally two-dimensional, ephemeral, is not a photomontage on orthophoto maps, as the artistic duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude might have created, but is shot from

above using cameras and videocameras that move closer or away, mounted as they are on drones flying above and around the area. The representation, more than the work, is what aims to shock: destabilizing the view 'expected' by an observer, who is still unaware of the work and the entire operation. Falling between performance — in which the drone is a subject — and a work — where it serves as the medium — is the large-scale vertical graffiti made using UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) 'armed' with spray paint and programmed by CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati. UFO (Urban Flying Opera), a technological and artistic project that uses drones to produce culture, civic participation and urban innovation, is the latest development in CRA's research on vertical drawing and participatory design (Figg. 2,3). 'The city is an open canvas, where people can inscribe their stories in many ways', says Carlo Ratti. 'Such processes have always been happening; however, with UFO we

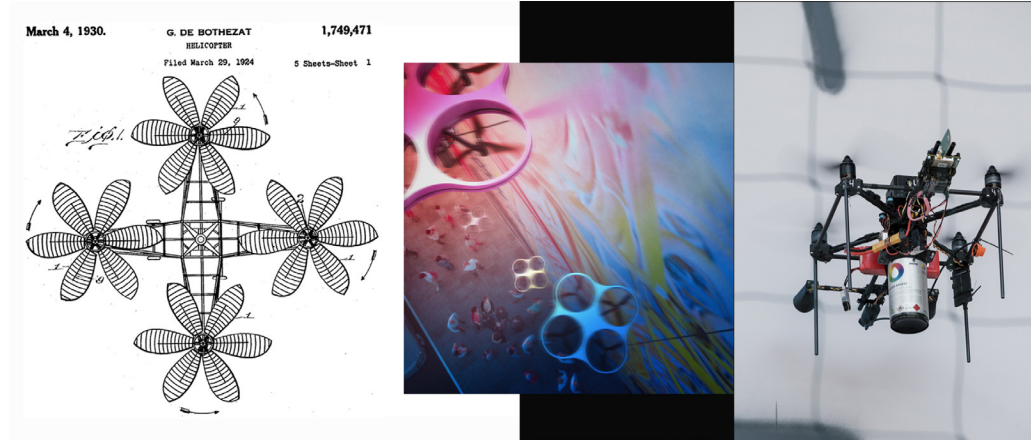


Fig 2 - The quadcopter yesterday and today: a) Top view of de Bothezat helicopter - the experimental quadcopter built for the United States Army Air Service by George de Bothezat in the early 1920s - as depicted in US Pat. 1,749,471. (b) *Paint by Drone*, CG rendering of the project by CRA studio and c) UAV at work for realizing the participative vertical graffiti UFO (Carlo Ratti Associati © / ph. Andrea Guermani).



tried to accelerate them, using drone technology to allow for a new use of painting as a means of expression' (Ratti 2019).

'Does art refer to artifacts created by drones?' This is one question that arises with such a flashy use of technology, however undeniably an allegory of military power and an instrument of death (Stubblefield 2020, 11). Adorno suggests an answer: 'It is now obvious that nothing of what concerns art is obvious, neither in art itself nor in its relationship to the whole' (Adorno 1975, 3).

While with many variations, it is convenient that in the era of emerging drone art, the use of drones has no explicit use for protesting against global power. 'Not only does drone art avoid explicit condemnation of its subject, but so does it refuse the expectations of protest art more broadly. In fact, next to Picasso's scathing critique of the aerial bombing of civilians in Guernica, Anselm Kiefer's cathartic postwar ruins, or the antiwar films of the Vietnam era, these works appear decidedly neutral and aloof' (ibid., 1).

Fig 3 - CRA, UFO-Urban Flying Opera, Torino (2019). (Carlo Ratti Associati © / ph. Andrea Guermani)

In reality, today's art in general no longer regards art only for art's sake, but the artist is more integrated in society. The paradigms of artistic production have changed in relation to technology and new media, but fall increasingly 'within' the system; the question of criticism of the system and the dynamics induced by its technologies, becomes increasingly problematic and elusive. This is explained well by Marco Mancuso, a critic and the curator and director/founder of Digicult (<http://www.digicult.it/>), Digimag Journal, and Digicult Editions publishing house, an international platform that observes the impact of technologies and science on art, design, and contemporary culture. He accurately describes the artists of today as all-round cultural subjects, the representatives of society, within which they move like true professionals. They have the uncommon abilities of entrepreneurship, communication, flexibility, technical capacity, and need to network with a series of elements ranging from the world of art to entrepreneurial creativity, education, and technological, industrial, and scientific research. All of this tends to undermine the role of criticism and analysis of the established political and social order, as well as the ability to understand the effect of technologies on them, in favour of a professional who increasingly understands the codes and behaviours of the surrounding society of infotainment. More and more often, they adapt and conform to said codes and behaviours, to the search for those expressive languages moving at the edges of the search for the technical potential of the tool, its capacity for storytelling or its primarily aesthetic qualities (Mancuso 2018).

Examples of this emerging type of artist are also found in the realm of street art, which might seem the furthest from the so-called 'new media art' and perhaps one of the few stable bulwarks of political protest. However, from the success of graffiti to today, it has revealed many different modes and strategies, as well as the personalities that have effected them. One example is JR, a French photographer and artist who carpets the world with gigantic portraits, from the favelas of Brazil to the MoMA and the Louvre, sought-after by stars and

increasingly often lauded by the press. JR works in a team in New York and Paris and is represented by a network of international communication. But surprises always flower on the periphery, because the paradigm has now been decreed.

THE SWITCH TO THE HORIZONTAL PLANE: A NEW SHARED PARADIGM.

The philosopher Giorgio Agamben has shown how 'surveillance by means of video cameras transforms the public space of the city into the interior of an immense prison'. Today this could be completed with reference to the omnipresent drones, under which we are all targets. 'In the eyes of authority — and maybe rightly so — nothing looks more like a ter-

rorist than the ordinary man' (Agamben 2006, 23). Here, therefore, is a grotesque, frightening puppet drawn on the ground in a gravel pit, framed closer and closer until ... boom! An explosion erases it forever. Sacrilegious, ironic, and revealing, this scene closes the video-portfolio created by Ella & Pitr, a French artistic duo specialized in gigantic projects on the ground (1000 – 25.000 sq. m.) [1]. Half-way between street art and land art, many of their works cover vast surfaces and are only visible from above a bird's eye view. Their project of sleeping giants started in 2013, when they painted their first drawing, called *Jump Here*, on a parachute base and asked some parachutists to take photos. From there they have gone on to draw on every type of horizontal plane: from car parks to abandoned air-

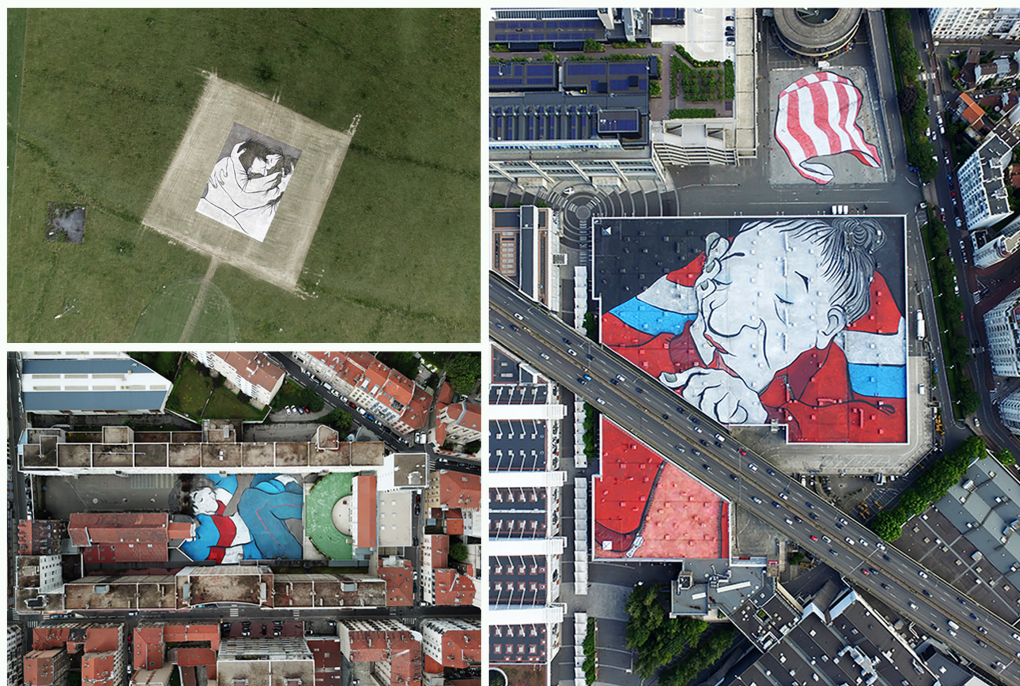


Fig 4 - Clockwise from top left: Ella&Pitr's *Sleeping Giants* (since 2013), lying down on a) the parachute base of the aerodrome in Montargis, France (2019); b) the courtyard of Saint-Louis College in Saint-Etienne, France (2019); c) the rooftop of the Paris Convention Centre, Paris (2019). (ELLA & PITR © / Emile Parlefort ©)

ports, from harbours to crossroads, on grass, sand, or asphalt... But their workhorses are roofs (Fig. 4). Drawings layed on the street are certainly not a novelty — perhaps the first drawing plane was the ground; we certainly have a centuries-old history of street painters, screevers and Madonnari. But those made by Ella & Pitr are marked not only by their size, but also the systematic design process, with which the ephemeral, playful operation is accompanied by a nonconformist, subversive spirit. This is the kaleidoscopic panorama of street art. Bridging painting, illustration, and graphics, street art is an unstoppable phenomenon; its spread is growing continually. Drawings are made on any surface of the city: from vertical walls, which ‘as one knows, attract writing’ (Barthes 1983 [1973]), to the horizontal surface of the street, roof, square, basketball court or five-a-side football pitch... anywhere everyone can see them. Murals are possible because their goal is precisely to ‘allow anyone to be able to see them’ (Serra 2007, 3), as signs that interact, negate, or ridicule other signs: prohibitions, limits, and separations (Guarini 1991).

The characters or figures in the murals capture and direct the observer’s gaze and movement, undermining the original hierarchies of the architectural objects. The so-called ‘lateral façades’ of blocks of flats come to mind, anonymous surfaces resulting from architectural planning, which, after an artistic intervention are transformed into picture planes, with the ability to generate new opportunities for the surrounding urban space, precisely by repositioning the point of view. Or the unravelling of metres and metres of containment walls for subways or city walls: a painting that is often not left alone, a single minimal episode in the overall perception, but is joined by other works by other artists such that the final choral work creates a tangent artistic path that transcends the wall’s original function. In the view of urban decorum, an uncontrolled or easily reviled passage is protected. In the view of urban reallocation of use, the mural slows traffic, directs the flow of pedestrians, cyclists, joggers ... The same is also true when intervening on the ground, where one can read the implicit signs of

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Fig 5 - SDARCH Trivelli Associates, *Piazza della Cooperazione*, Milan, Italy (2019): an example of ‘tactical urbanism’ Clockwise from top left: a) Varvara Stepanova, Handwritten poster (1919): graphical inspiration; b) a photomontage of the project to visualize the realization in the manner of a drone photograph; c) perspective of the square d) Opening day (SDARCH © / ph. Anna Galimberti ©).

abandonment, ignored signage, places to rediscover, aspects of excessive power to be declared. But when the plane is horizontal, when it does not coincide with the plane of natural vision, what means can be used to read and decipher a large drawing on the ground? Are drones instrumental for visualization or the primer of contending for the plane of action, thereby profaning the apparatus? Every answer is controversial and depends on the artist. Not always, however, are drones needed. This is also because it is not always the drawing with paint on the ground, cheap and reversible, that is the prerogative of more or less illegal art. At times we read abstract, geometric signs, parts of a beautiful large-scale coloured drawing be-

cause these are inherent in a focused urban project created from local short-term policies to modify the flows of cars, cyclists, pedestrians, and to define new places to meet, pedestrian areas, areas for play and spaces for events, spaces for bikes, safer crossings with less traffic. These are signs are drawn to be experienced in a less ‘distracted’ way, as Benjamin would say, certainly with the senses that pertain to architecture: haptic rather than merely visual perception. Hence the emphatic use of an aerial representation becomes superfluous. This approach is known as ‘tactical urbanism’, a contemporary urban-planning practice that aims to involve residents in neighbourhood urban regeneration processes using low-cost interventions to return the public space to the

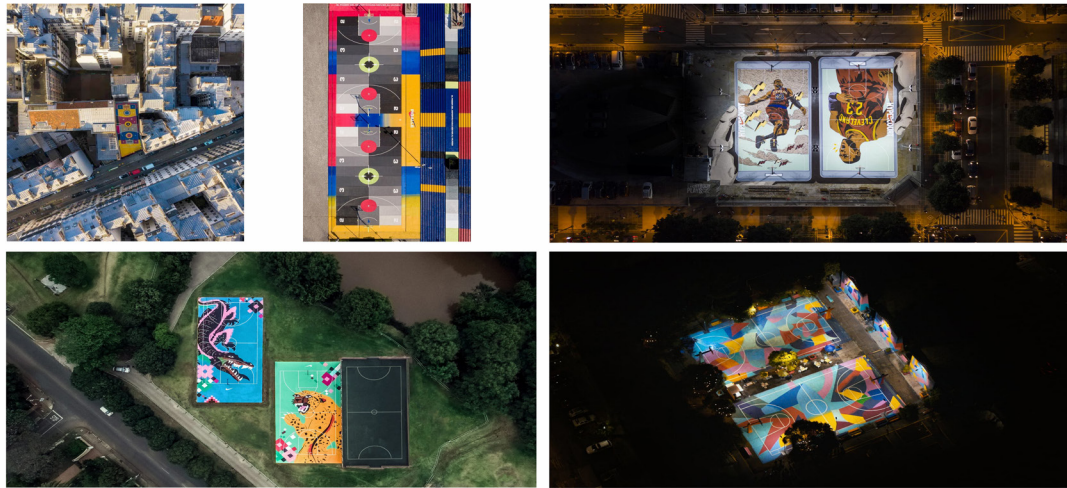


Fig 6 - Two (or more) is better than one. Clockwise from top left: a) The *Nike Pigalle Duperré* in Paris as it appears after the latest redesign (2020). The neighbourhood court was replicated in Beijing and Mexico City where b) the same design team (ILL studio with Stéphane Ashpool) signed two twin courts located outside the Gimnasio Olímpico Juan de la Barrera (2019); c) *Titan Love Court*, BGC or *LeBron James Nike Hyper court* (2017) in Manila, Philippines. Artist: Arturo Torres; d) *Zoo Lake basketball courts* (South Africa) with illustrations by Faatimah Mohamed-Luke and Karabo Poppy Moletsane (2017); e) *The ENGIE solar graffiti* in Mexico City: a real solar art work made with 111 organic photovoltaic (OPV) thin-film to illuminate at night a very dangerous neighbourhood at night (2018).

centre of life of its residents (Fig.5). Promoters and initiators of these interventions include public administrations around the world, from Paris to Bogota, New York to Mumbai, Mexico City to Milan, but in the participatory sense of the operation, everyone is called to propose their own ideas and create the works with a spirit of volunteerism [2]. It so happens that one might find urban palimpsests defending colour against the grey of the asphalt. Such is the very colourful Pigalle Basketball Court, sandwiched between two buildings between the Moulin Rouge and Montmartre, which grew out of the residents' desire to have a place for play for their children. Together with players on local basketball teams, they began to paint the first playground, which sprouted from the ruins of an old abandoned car park. Since then, the court has changed another four times (2012, 2015, 2017, 2020) and has become an internationally famous urban project via a dedicated project curated by Stéphane Ashpool (the founder of the brand Pigal-

le), Nike, and the creative firm ILL Studio (Fig. 6a). Basketball courts are becoming instruments of reappropriation of the city through colour, but it is not all: technology also has a fundamental role in activating wider-ranging actions. In the process of "gamification" of every aspect of contemporary society, the courts become "hyper courts": powered by Google Technology, Nike hypercourts are "on-court digital experiences" that unlock exclusive HD basketball content without the need for data, to inspire basketball players across the city to take their game to the next level (Fig. 6c). If playgrounds were originally the monopoly of the biggest Sport Brands, the expression of "commercial creativity", they are now also local administrators investing in the regeneration of spaces through the pitches or courts spread in their territories. From politics to art and back: politicians have understood the communicational power of coloured surfaces, especially when captured by drones (Fig.7).

The panorama of contenders on the horizontal plane is now complete: graphics and communication studios, architects, and street artists. The

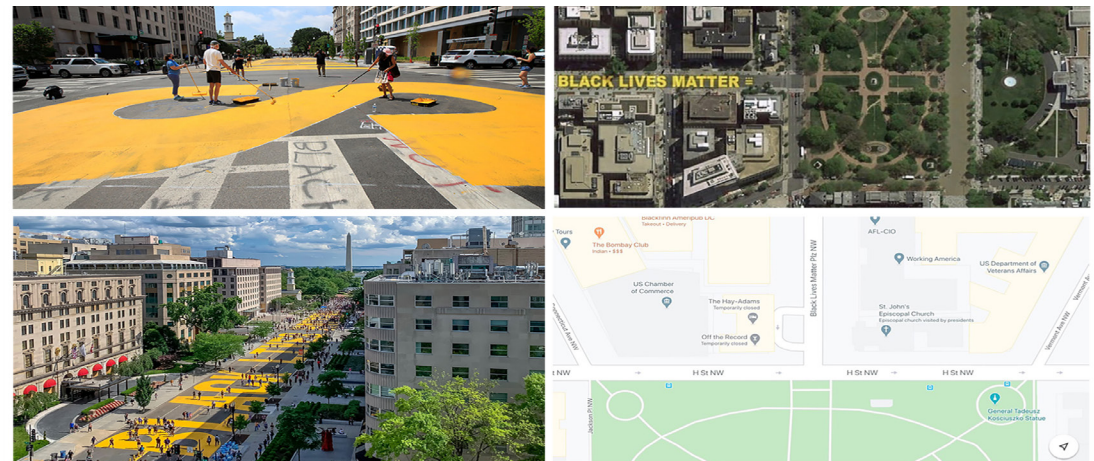


Fig 7 - A giant yellow message: BLACK LIVES MATTER. The massive banner-like project was painted as part of the George Floyd protests and commissioned by the mayor of Washington DC; it spans two blocks of 16th Street, the central axis that leads south straight to the White House and that on 5 June 2020 was renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza. It now appears on Google and Apple maps and satellite views.

ephemeral, low-cost practice of urban intervention based on paint is a design opportunity for all. But even where drones do not nullify the operation beforehand, the boomerang may still return, when the resulting aesthetics does not reflect an artistic search but a trend that, as in the current guise of the Pigalle Basketball Court, pertains to (war) video gaming, or other practices inspired by the war of drones [3].

WITHIN THE PRACTICE. EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR GIULIO VESPRINI.

PRESENTATION

Giulio Vesprini (Civitanova Marche 1980) is an Italian urban artist, graphic designer, and art director. As a Street artist, he has created works throughout Italy, in Europe, and more recently in New York. After an entire decade focused on graffiti, today his name is tied to projects of strategic public art. Some examples include the project 'Shared Space' for Cheap Festival (Sbarbati 2017) in Bologna (2017) — which managed to 'slow' traffic on the crowded Viale Masini, shifting attention to his 56 red posters— and the large murals created for the public housing unit of the old 'Pantera Rosa' Fascist summer camp (De Innocentis 2017) in Cervia (2016). He has received important awards such as the MYllennium Award — My City (2018) dedicated to enhancing the historical heritage of Municipio II of Rome and the City of Staffolo cultural prize (2017), which is awarded to people from the Marche Region who have established themselves in the sector of culture on the national and international stage (Da Vinci 2018).

His language is minimalist, abstract, with collage inserts that represent nature and organic shapes. Since 2009 he has curated the project 'Vedo a Colori - Street Art al porto' [I See in Colours - Street Art at the Port], which as of today has regenerated more than 600 m of the dock on the eastern pier of the port of Civitanova Marche, with more than 2000 sq m of painted wall and 16 shipyards painted by Italian and international artists [4]. With a Bachelor's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Mac-



Fig 8 - Giulio Vesprini laying on his playground Struttura G041, Fermo (2019). (Giulio Vesprini © / Ph. Andrea Amurri).

erata, today he is a working student attending the Master's course in Architecture at the School of Architecture and Design in Ascoli Piceno, because his work project, which he calls 'Archigrafia' (Vesprini 2016), is increasingly a design, strategy, and incisive action in the public space. *Struttura G041*, created in Fermo in 2019, is his first playground (Fig.8-11).

CONVERSATION

MM: I'm going to jump right to the heart of what I would like to examine with you: walls, that great vertical canvas of the street artist, is turned over and becomes horizontal...Why do we call it a 'playground'?

GV: *Playground* is the most respected term. This is an art that has a language and works by codes — like when you say 'street art'; it means everything and nothing, but it is a word that

everyone understands. So *playground* in this case is the most used term and it works well. In Italian we could say 'dipinto a terra' [painted on the ground], but it is not so evocative. In reality, a playground is commonly thought of more as a park for children, with swings and so on. The artistic concept of the playground instead most likely began in America and Northern Europe, with important brands such as Adidas and Nike, which involved different artists to transform the image of some basketball courts. Examining both the effectiveness and impressiveness of the term, I sincerely prefer *playground* to *street art*. It immediately recalls something that was once not so appreciated and now, with the drawing, acquires new appeal; one plays outdoors again, sports initiatives are organized. Another characteristic element is the view from above: powerful! It makes you understand the entire transformation, from an anonymous grey to a beautiful, coloured, impactful drawing.

MM: What difference is there between creating a mural and a playground?

GV: I immediately realized the 'physicality' of the work that a painting on a playground requires; it is much more tiring than what is usually created on a vertical wall. With a wall you are always in a frontal position. You can work and control the dimensions and balances of the shapes well; you look at it and you can move back at any time to have a clearer view. But with a work on the ground, all of this is impossible. You can use a ladder, but it is not enough. When you paint a horizontal surface, you must necessarily plan everything beforehand: the creation lies entirely in the sketch with its precise measurements. You divide the drawing into areas, you put the measurements in scale and then, metre by metre, you reconstruct the whole thing. The principle is very similar to the grid method used in the Renaissance. The work, therefore, is much more technical, but in particular, it is much harder. Creating a mural is like working with a performance, creating theatre, or better yet, a dance, in the street; the movements are rhythmic: passing the bucket (slow-fast), the colour draft with paintbrushes, then the roller, the extension pole (high-low) is all very organic. With the playground it is even more so. Because while it is true that you should not move up and down in height, there is the path pressed by the roller, a physical mantra that you need to repeat insistently so that the colour penetrates well. The most important thing for me, what differentiates the two types of work, is the effort that a playground requires, even before the fact that the visual perspective with which it is painted changes.

MM: With regard to perspective: a large drawing on the ground cannot be understood as a whole without a view from above. The common visitor has a distorted view of it. How do you view this perceptual difficulty in your work?

GV: True, it is difficult to understand the form, but what seems like a difficulty is in reality a resource.

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I can concentrate, for example, on other aspects of the project. When you paint a wall, you make a preliminary inspection to frame the context: you take photos, you sample the colours of the surroundings, the roofs, the plants, but not too much else. You make tests because you know that the wall will become part of that scenario, you will modify it. But the enjoyment of a mural is an action tied exclusively to vision. This allows you to be freer in the preliminary drawing. Your work may be more or less appreciated, but this does not affect the other activities at the site. The true difficulty of the playground instead lies precisely in the initial design, because it should make reference to those who use the court or pitch: the bar has been raised! Associations, sports players, the real users come to you with precise indications: 'look, there is the

three point line, there is the free throw line...' and this cannot be ignored. You have to regulate the design based on new instructions: you have to fill in the areas so that when it is created over the game lines, everything works out and is not confusing. The artistic part, then, takes a slight step backwards with respect to the technique, with respect to the function. At least this is what I do, even if I have seen that in reality some people make their drawings without considering the limits of the game lines. I like the area of play to be functional, for art to become a support. This is why I have been studying visual perception a lot and why I interact directly with basketball associations to understand how to apply the theory to artistic practice in playgrounds. The first question I wonder is: 'what colours, when they reflect, do not glare or become annoying? What are the best



Fig. 9 - *Struttura GO41*, Giulio Vesprini at work. (Giulio Vesprini © / Ph. Andrea Amurri)

colours to see the ball well?' Imagine what would happen to the ball if I painted a court orange! The lines are usually white, but they can also be black, so the drawing may be made with light colours to make the dark lines stand out better. Still, 'so that one team does not have an advantage over the other, is it better for the colours to be the same near the free throw circles?' Or even, 'red indicates danger, so it is a strong signal... so where can I fill in with this shade? Maybe in the bench areas to highlight the changes?' Here is the entire theory of colours! It is a choice to work like this, to follow my training, my studies: my thesis for the Academy of Fine Arts was precisely on Mondrian and De Stijl. Designing a project for a playground is really another world, if you want to do it well.

MM: Your way of presenting the work seems to be more like an architect than an artist. Can we trace the border between art and architecture on the playground?

GV: Yes, I think that among all of what I have done, this work is the one in which the design most approaches architecture. And this is the method I intended to investigate when I registered in the School of Architecture. I don't want to stop my research as an artist, but to do so, intuition is not enough; it requires discipline, dedication, and hard work. I am continuing my education so it transmits this message: there are those who do it to protest, some for political reasons, but we have a responsibility in painting a wall that it is equal for everyone, doing it in a public place. Even if only for a few years, even if our work modifies the space for a given time, it destroys or enriches a landscape. Like a tattoo, it cannot be removed immediately.

In the playground, graphics, art, and architecture are truly close and complementary. What one should have is a deep knowledge of the materials for its realization. We could talk of particular resins, not just water-based enamels, that is chemical solutions that become colours when combined with pigments created precisely for game courts or bike paths. But fundamentally they



Fig. 10 - *Struttura G041*, work in progress seen from above the drone's flight. (Giulio Vesprini © / Ph. Andrea Amurri)

are something else, so to create a well-made work, you should also study the various technical sheets. You have to use tools to calculate the rising damp, which will almost certainly cause the court to become deteriorated within a year if it is higher than 5%. Basically, a new world of creativity and technique is opened.

I have gone to speak with paint shops, I have met suppliers, I have attended training courses to choose one product rather than another, the correct additives, etc. This is just to mention only the practical, more technical part. Then there is the function: your initial drawing is a plan. You know that line is there, you know the area of play and you have an overall view of the surroundings. Art and sports should be together and the important thing is not ever to lose the playability of the game. There are limits, but they aren't limits for me.

Rather, they are a stimulus: limits have always characterized my art.

I am happy to speak about this. Few people recognize the study that lies behind my work; rather, they waste time interpreting the form of my drawing, as if it were a Rorschach inkblot... But it is a nice opportunity, why not take advantage of it also to send a message about design?

MM: Going back to the comparison with murals, do playgrounds and murals still have something in common?

GV: One of the common points between the surfaces is undoubtedly deterioration. It is here that playgrounds meet one of the criticisms of street art, because the duration is very ephemeral. They remain two very different projects and perhaps

the playground has not even fallen under the classic works of street art as we know it. Vulnerability and wear are, however, identical: bad weather, the lack of civic duty, humidity, bike wheels ...

The difference, however, is that a playground can be maintained. I am usually helped by local people. I ask for a hand from associations in the area and they ask me how to maintain the work when something happens. I think it is normal to give all the instructions for the specific case. What counts is the idea, and if the idea needs maintenance to persist on a court or a pitch, it is welcome or at least if it fades, after some years the old work is covered and a new one is made.

A mural, instead, perhaps because it is intended more as a large canvas, if you touch it up, it falls under the field of restoration and this is entirely another issue.

MM: Another type of horizontal painting is found on roofs, which has made some of your colleagues famous. Would you like to do a roof? And in your opinion, what difference is there with the playground?

GV: I think that a 'horizontal mural' is made on roofs. Sometimes they are illegal operations more closely tied to Street art at the beginning than current playgrounds are.

Personally, I have never approached them, but who knows, perhaps in the future, why not? New challenges are always stimulating for me. It is an act that does not have a public if it is not recorded, and I think that it has a much more intimate value than one might think: the performance lies in itself. There is perhaps a desire to 'go beyond the limit', to draw on the roof of a building. In that case, one brings into play invention, one draws on chimneys and plays with perspective illusions. It is painting tied to vision, temporary, accidental, and spectacular.

It can't be seen without drones or satellites. In the case of my playground, I wanted a snapshot with a drone because I was looking for a powerful, meaningful image ready to go viral. Working on roofs seems to be a more 'elitist' operation: those without Internet will never experience it, those

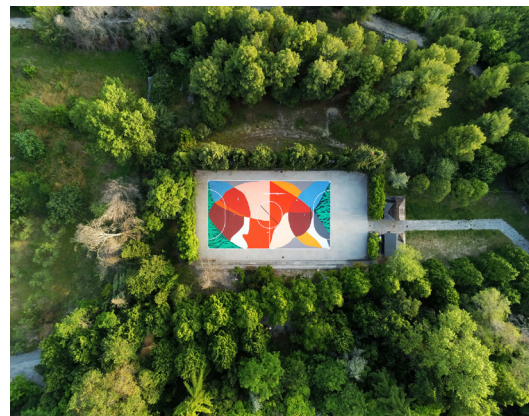
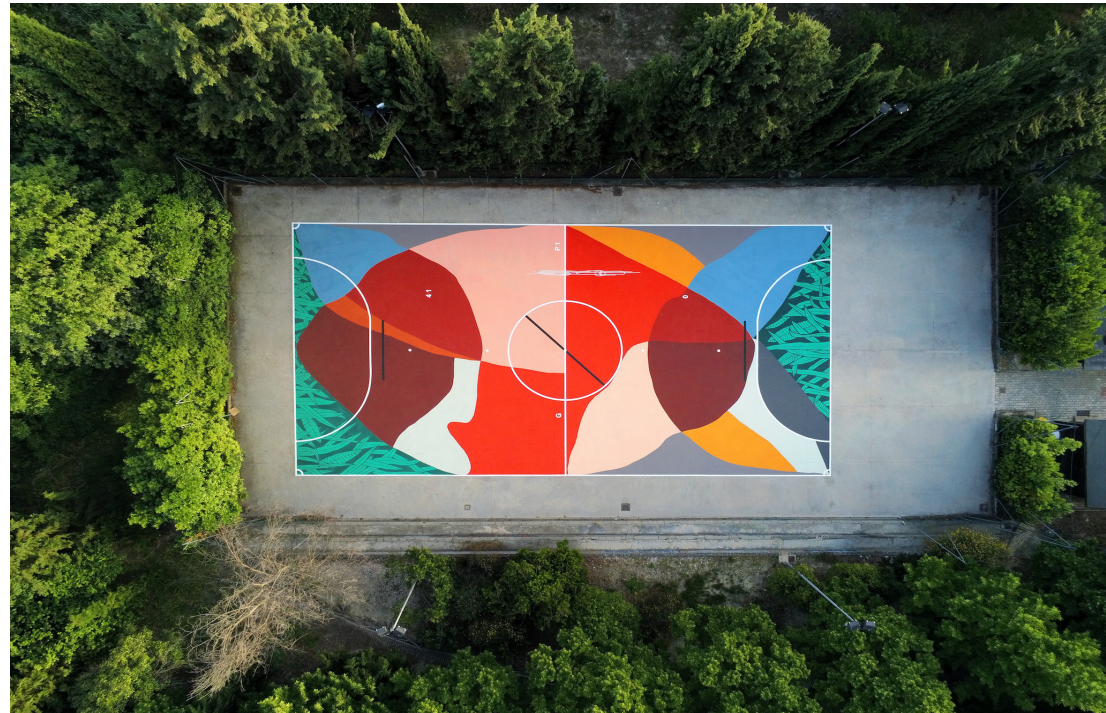


Fig. 11 - The playground in the Mentuccia park: sequence of drone photos taken at 30-60-90 m. (Giulio Vesprini © / Ph. Luca Antonelli)

without Google Maps will never see it. I think that it is more of a challenge for the artist. The plot twist is certainly created, the 'wow' effect upon its discovery, but what counts for the artist is moving ahead in the strategy, as in video games: you don't know what the final monster is, but you do know the strategy to get there.

For me, if there is no social purpose that goes beyond the message and becomes good practice — if the work is not 'used' — I cannot consider it a complete work; it remains an exercise in style. If during my artistic career one day I had the opportunity to experiment with creating a painting on a roof, I would do it, and perhaps a bit of pure madness would come out of it. At heart, most of my works are 'useful' and considered, so I could even allow it for myself.

MM: You work with the public a lot; on average your works are financed and approved. This is the path that naturally led you to the playground, but what is the history of *Struttura G041*?

GV: Over time, the message has probably spread that my work is tied to more structured situations, to targeted projects rather than dedicated festivals. In reality, I participate in few festivals because those doing abstract art are a bit 'cut out' today, except for particular thematic contests. In general, though, figurative artists are more popular and I abandoned figurative art more than ten years ago. I had already painted a wall in Fermo and they called me to do another, but repeating the same thing did not seem to make much sense. Some months before I had noticed some playground works around the world and I thought I would have liked to experiment with one. So at the meeting with the city administration, I mentioned that it was an interesting trend and I asked if there was a court or a pitch that could be recovered in the city or nearby. They proposed some, including this one in *Parco della Mentuccia*, which is a beautiful park, but half lived, with so much potential but overlooked and in part decidedly left to abandonment and degradation. I thought that creating a playground there might not only give a space for playing back to the city, but

also trigger a systematic project to regenerate the park, in which the City of Fermo would have great validation in quality of life, as well as be a tourist, sports, and social lure. This is how my playground came to be.

Already just by colouring those spaces the kids came back to play on that five-a-side football pitch, even without the goals. A great overall regeneration operation has been planned, which I hope starts soon; it would be a nice redemption of art.

MM: What role did the use of the drone play? Does a project also lie behind that?

GV: The photo from above is the only one in which the whole work is revealed. The orography of the site is also very particular, so I requested photos from three heights: 30, 60, and 90 m. By gradually increasing the height the frame expands: at 30 m you see only the court within the forest; at 60 m you see the court, the forest, and the park, which drops with the first houses; then at 90 m you see the whole park up to above the ring of walls. This photo is impressive. The buildings on the road above the park seem to be much taller. It is practically a plan with shadows, but it is impossible to understand the changes in height. You don't see the walls so they seem enormous, and Fermo looks transfigured; it looks like a city suburb in Argentina. That photo circled the world and turned the headlights on a still neglected zone. The images remain on the Internet over time. This is important: the creation of a mural or a playground cannot be an operation to guarantee a bit of consensus without inserting it into a unifying programme and carrying it to the end. When an artist interacts with social networks, politicians should keep in mind that everything will come to light, the press will arrive, and this will lead to making promises. Then those promises should be kept, or they will come back like a boomerang. This is my struggle as an artist, for the serious commitment of all to social improvement. For me, street art is not a trend, but a strategy whose true potential is still undervalued. It is the means to put strategies into action that truly affect the social fabric of the

city. This is what Blu did up to his retreat, avoiding festivals and dedicating himself to the most impoverished situations. This is what has always interested me: turning on the lights, beyond all the individual thinking heads.

NOTE

[1] See the full video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=uZgin6vIS1U&feature=emb_logo

For the Interview with Ella & Pitr by the MTN-world.com (editorial staff), see:

<https://www.mtn-world.com/en/blog/2019/01/18/ella-pitr-give-us-insight-on-their-impressive-heavy-sleepers-video/>

[2] The project *Piazze Aperte* by the City of Milan is ongoing and can be followed here: <https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/quartieri/piano-quartieri/piazze-aperte>

[3] Read the story of the Pigalle Basket court here: <https://www.itsnicethat.com/news/ill-studio-stephane-ashpool-nike-pigalle-duperre-basketball-court-architecture-200120>

[4] For an account of the project *Vedo a Colori*, see: <http://www.artvibes.com/street-art/vedo-colori-street-art-nel-porto-di-civitanova-marche/>

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