

Graffiti Art in Rio De Janeiro

Alex Traboulsi

Graffiti art has always been an art form surrounded by controversy. The constant criticism of defacing of property and vandalism overpowers the true artistic nature and raw talent of artists using cans of spray paint to create works of art, and in sense, change the way a city is seen and how in turn, it functions. New York City has its own branch of police to deal with graffiti in the city, punishments for those found offending can range from a fine to jail time. Graffiti art is a dying past time and art form, however, it rains supreme in style and prevalence in Rio De Janeiro.

The Graffiti art in Rio De Janeiro makes up a large portion of the city's originality and demeanor. Artists in Rio have free range on most any walls or buildings in the city and it is apparent from the plethora of art work that ranges from the beaches to the mountains. The artists in Rio often mask their identity, especially those who are particular of where they paint. Some of the pieces that are done are commissions from the city, although most are done in true guerrilla form as the artists take on the streets by night.

I found that Rio's graffiti art is by far some of the most beautiful and tasteful in the world, artists using vibrant colors seldom found in other prevalent developing cities in the world. There are often artists who use their tag name, or alias as the center piece for their work, where others are recognized by a certain symbol or symbols in a piece or alone. For example, ranging the streets from Ipanema to Copacabana, one artist uses a penguin and a chicken sporadically on different corners, where others simply tag their alias with an extra bold marker. There seems to be two different kinds of graffiti in Rio. There are the smaller pieces, which solely consist of a tag name or drug gang affiliation scribbled on one brick of a wall, or on a small sign or sticker, and then there are the elaborate vibrant masterpieces which line the streets and are often admired by the public and seldom frowned upon.

The most impressive pieces are done by a handful of world renowned graffiti artists, all living in Rio De Janeiro, some exposed to the public, others through their art work. Some of these artists go by Does, Neto, Brown, Chivtz, Fabio-q, Marone, Toz, Binho. These artists all work alone and often collaborate on giant wall pieces that can define a certain sector of the city. These pieces can simply illustrate the artists name, as most artists often paint, contoured and stylized until it loses its legibility and becomes a free flowing work of art. Other pieces can illustrate a certain place, juxtaposing it with social issues, for example a beach scene with drug lords perching in the background celebrating the significance of the drug culture on Rio and its tourists or address a world issue such as the war on terrorism. In a piece I studied near the Rohcina favela under a bridge, was a work depicting Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush arm in arm. Nuclear bombs were dropping and both men had smiles on their faces and money signs were ringing in the background.

Sometimes artists collaborate to "bomb" a wall together, creating a giant masterpiece that will be free standing for often years to come.

One issue that I can address is the city's tolerance to graffiti art. It never seemed to be an issue in our travels through Rio. Pedestrians would stop and study the works, a

very unlikely scene in other major cities, especially those in the United States, where all graffiti work is seen as juvenile and destructive. There also didn't seem to be too many "paint-overs", a technique used in many cities where the government issues workers to simply paint over works. There also didn't seem to be too many pieces on rooftops. The reason for this in the streets of US cities, is simply a strategic move by the artists as an easy way to get their names and works out and easily dodge the police. The works were on ground level all over the city and often in very populated and lively areas.

Graffiti art can stimulate the mind in both a political and artistic manner, and because it is done on such a raw level by artists from the city, the credibility of the subject matter is definitely high. This art work will never die no matter how much of an effort the city or state has on destroying it. It will forever maintain an underground following, with artists constantly improving.

Rio De Janeiro has some of the most inviting and amazing works of graffiti art in the world, with colors ranging from the most earthy and warm tones to exploding fluorescents. Each artist making his or her own effort to stand out in a very difficult scene where the skill level is so high. I was blown away both by the intricacy and beauty of the pieces and by the city's response to the works themselves. The problem could be too big to maintain, however, if there is a conscious effort to keep graffiti art alive by the city then I praise the officials who are reviving and fueling an art form that is withering away city block by city block.

<http://www.graffiti.org/rio/doesnetobrownchivtzmaroneto.jpg>

http://www.graffiti.org/rio/dinho_lico_bom_retiro.jpg

http://www.graffiti.org/rio/dinho_alma_apolo.jpg