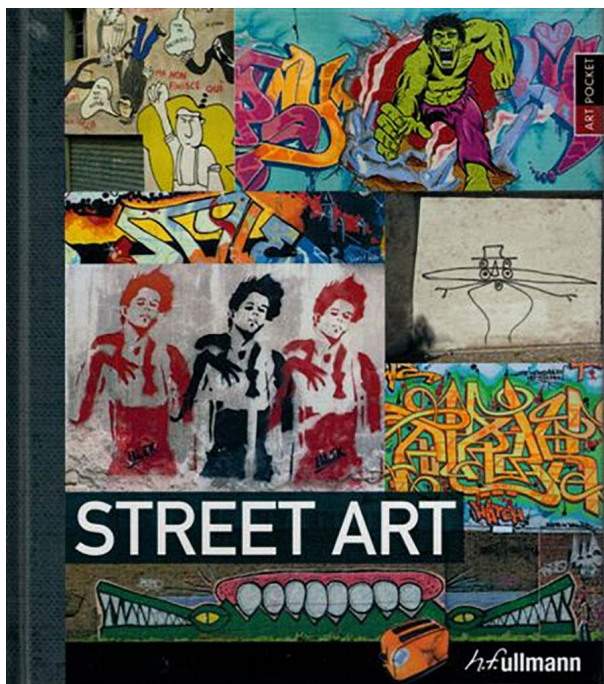


**BOOK REVIEW:**

**Johannes Stahl, 2009, Street Art. Illustrated Edition,  
Hamburg: H. F. Ullmann, ISBN: 3833149442, 9783833149443**

**Olga Grytsiuk**

*Автор пропонує короткий огляд книги Йоханнеса Шталя "Стріт Арт". Робота присвячена неофіційному мистецтву, його історичному розвитку та місцю в сучасному світі. Йоханнес Шталь пропонує новий підхід до цього суперечливого явища, вважає його важливим історичним індикатором, що проливає світло на головні політичні, соціальні й культурні процеси у суспільстві.*

**Introduction**

“Street Art” by Johannes Stahl is highly intriguing book which has a wide audience of readers. It is devoted to the concept of graffiti, its role and species. The author describes his object of research as a political, cultural and social phenomenon. Today the graffiti as well as a street art in general became a topic that provokes dual attitude. From one side it is considered as a branch of art and aesthetic creation, thus from the other side it is sometimes labeled as “an act of vandalism”.

As it is pointed out on the book’s cover: “A surprising amount of beauty and wit lies within these distinctive street art creations, revealing a world of expression one cannot so easily find in a typical art gallery. Street Art is highly recommended as an addition to any artbook shelf”.

The author of the book underlines that this art is the work of those people, whose prime aim is not only to create an artwork, but also to focus on important messages and images that are foremost about themselves.

I am absolutely agree with Johannes Stahl. No doubt, street art is not just about painted walls, it is rather about political ideas, esthetic perceptions and objectives of the moment. It is trend and fashion; it is face of the city and part of its landscape.

**Book of street art. Overview**

Nowadays we often hear the words “graffiti” and “street art”. But is there distinguishing point between these two definitions? The author of the book is sure that unofficial signs and images

have always existed and were significant not only for their creators, but also for the viewers as strong signals. Usually we use these two terms to describe unofficial texts and wall paintings.

The word “graffiti”, coming from Italian, was used for the first time as early as in the mid-19 century. At the same time, “street art” is rather a new term that describes the culture of placing marks on a wall and making it public. I have to add that today “street art” has a wider sense, including not only the wall scripts and images, but also installations, mosaics, murals of the streets etc. So, this type of art has long history – from the ancient images and messages of Pompeii to the contemporary colorful and elaborate spray paintings and installations.

It is not a secret that the birthplace of street art and world graffiti is the USA. The author of the book analyzes the roots and origins of American and world graffiti and compares it with a street art of old Europe. He makes an overview of the most prominent authors and their works.

One of the main ideas of the “Street Art” is that this unofficial kind of art is independent from the art scene and its progression through epochs. On the contrary, it is mainly youth art and part of youth sub-culture. It is very public and often hardly understandable, but it educates its viewers.

Johannes Stahl underlines that important role of such works is to claim the existence of their authors: “They shape their environment and imbue it with their own, idiosyncratic interpretation”.

It is interesting how signs on the wall reflect trends – political ideas, perceptions, objectives of the moments – which only later become part of official culture. That is why in the author’s opinion the creative phenomena of such pictures is that they figure as an important historical indicator.

### **Style and methodology**

This thought-provoking book has decent and logical structure. The “Street Art” contains an introduction, chapters, glossary, index of names and picture credits, publisher’s information.

Chapters of the book introduce graffiti from different sides and outline its connections with globalization and media, fashion and hip-hop. The last chapter is the most provocative. The author tries to look at graffiti as educational objective and asks readers some rhetorical questions, makes them think about significance of this phenomenon. One of them is “what came first – the writing on the walls or art”.

Applying comparative method, the author of the book tries to find distinguishing point between the artworks on the private walls and street art. In his opinion, the main difference between them is publicity. Street art takes place in the public eye and is accessible to all.

Today the borders between scientific and popular literature are blurred, and “Street Art” is written in a relaxed, easy to follow style. The book by Johannes Stahl is really pleasure to read. It is full of interesting well-aimed quotations. Another treasure of this book is its wide gallery of illustrations. The reader can find full color photography on almost every page.

### **Conclusion**

The books by Johannes Stahl highlights the development and place of unofficial art through the historical periods. It describes the street art as very public youth one, which has enthusiastic audience and can appear illegally or as a private commission. No doubt, it is a topic of current interest.

The author underlines growing popularity of the street art and its connections with nowadays trends. Moreover, it is important historical indicator, which shedding light on the main political, social and cultural processes of particular society.

“Street Art” is a chronicle of wall symbols which is highly recommended for those who are interested in contemporary art and culture.

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***Received:*** 29-01-2018

***Advance Access Published:*** February, 2018