

Coinciding with the fifth édition of Bien Urbain (artistic route through (and with) urban spaces) in Besançon, two days of gatherings, debates, and conferences will take place from the 9th to the 10th of June 2015.

These events is organized by the nonprofit organisation Juste Ici in collaboration with Université de Franche-Comté (Laboratory ELLIADD-CIMARTS)

The organisation 'Juste-ici', through Bien Urbain and its other cultural events, has created an important space for different forms of art centered around public space for four years, putting special emphasis on experimentation and a diversity of practices. The result of these different endeavors has given rise to inquiries that have motivated us to pursue new research directly in line with our activities and work ethic.

Beyond artistic actions in public spaces (mural paintings, installations, sounds creations...), public meetings are planned (guided tours, meetings with artists, talks...), around a welcome space that will be open to the public during the event.

We would like to encourage reflection on 'in situ', 'contextual', and 'specific' artistic practices. This is to say works related to the urban environment and to different contexts which constitute the city and place where they take place.

These sporadic and specifically located artistic action relate to a variety of artistic disciplines and forms, and are able to be perceived under a number of different categories such as 'street art', 'urban art', 'independent public art', 'post-graffiti', and 'contemporary urban art'. Here we would like to consider them through diverse approaches, allowing us to comprehend these productions in more relevant ways.

Several artists with origins in graffiti have chosen to develop their work in this direction, developing a new expressive vocabulary in close relation to their surroundings. These artists working primarily with urban space have developed their practice away from their earlier work and are moving beyond the codes (explicit or implicit) of those disciplines.

It is not a question of defining an 'ideal movement', including a repertoire of practices and forms, but rather of taking the time to focus on these productions in a field of study where definition itself can prove problematic.

Certain approaches will be privileged with the aim of taking on the perspectives of different agents, with a space left to discussions and meetings.

This reflection will priorities the following points; although the questions considered may be indicative of, and lead in, other directions.

DEFINITION

The work that we would like to study currently is cross-disciplinary (between sculpture, paintings, installations, performances, conceptual shapes) , is situated in an undefined way between different artistic fields ('street art', 'urban art', 'independent public art', 'post-graffiti', 'muralist', 'contemporary urban art'), and constitutes a vast repertoire of forms: novel and traditional techniques, provocation, activism, appropriation,

experimentation, and repetition are deployed in our cities using an extremely diverse formal vocabulary.

- When did these 'specific' practices appear, and in what context?
- Is it prudent to establish an artistic affiliation with other artistic 'movements'?
- How can we move beyond questions of form?
- What constitutes their specificities?

2- THE ARTISTS' BACKGROUNDS

Through insight into the background of artists, we will look to highlight the role played by graffiti in contemporary artistic practices in public space, as well as a variety of processes.

This will lead us to consider the teaching of artistic practices in urban space and the next generation of artists, close to graffiti or otherwise.

- By what means artists with training in an art school, or alternatively autodidactic experiences in urban space (through the practice of graffiti, for example), have arrived at their current practices.
- The internet through blogs and forums has allowed the development of both local and global practices. To what extent has this role been key to the evolution of these practices?
- Are these artistic practices currently taught? In what way? How does one teach students to 'practice' the city?
- Is there a new generation of artists, in the area of graffiti, that has not had to learn in the streets?

3- THE RELATION OF THE ARTIST TO THEIR CONTEXT

Artists evolving in the public space work largely as a function of the space with which they are confronted; this is at different levels and in different contexts: primarily artistic, then formal (physically adapting to a place, to the form of a surface), but also sometimes historical, social, politic...

Given that graffiti is situated largely with regard to visibility and performance, 'street art' tends towards the aesthetic and towards being contextual, in adapting more or less to the forms of the objects on which the works are made. 'In situ' practices seem to take into account a greater diversity of contexts. The creative process takes a new importance within the work.

- Which contexts are taken into account ? Local/global, social, political, historical, architectural, human...?
- How are these contexts discovered, how are they appropriated?

- What is the importance of the spontaneity of an act, does preparation add something different?
- How are these contexts expressed in the works?
- Does a conscious relationship with contexts inevitably imply a 'free' technical approach?
- Where are the limits between decorative, aesthetic, contextual, and vandalistic works?
- Do these artistic practices reveal something of the identity of a town (contextual), rather than simply generating a new image (decorative)?

4- PUBLIC

Art in public places generates exciting situations and rouses curiosity for locals and passersby: at once questioning notions of space, time, politics, art and aesthetics. But more generally, by its presence, it puts in question our way of living in the city, integrating itself in a definitive way into the urban landscape, whilst including the creative process.

- How do these creations in public space affect the city and its inhabitant?
- How are the works received, given that they are encountered in a space that is not intended for them.
- As another factor, how are they received when the public is considered as an actor and is called to participate in the creation of the work, to what point?
- How are locals/passersby/consumers able to participate in the creative process?
- How does this change our impressions of public space, of the ordinary functions of the city.

5- DOCUMENTATION

When the works produced make use of conceptual, performative, or ephemeral forms, documentation become really important.

Beyond photography and questions around archiving, documentation has a new function for artists: as indispensable part of the work or as didactic aid, it gains a new status through these different practices.

A clear evolution has also become apparent since the 90s: while preparatory sketches were not considered 'works' or even commercially viable and endowed with an interest by the artists. Later generations have developed these media of work and research which can now assume a whole other significance.

- Forms and reasons for refusal of documentation.
- What kinds of documentation are used? What is documented (process, result, research...)? in what way?
- What is the status of documentation (testimony? Work per se? Can it be sold, exhibited?)

6- PRODUCTION

A new consideration coming from political and cultural institutions, questions the production of art in public space after several decades of unauthorised popular practice.

Supporting independent practices in public space through state funding and collectives (in the form of festivals, orders, or even residencies) raises numerous questions relating to the production of works in public space in a milieu that is inherently 'constrained'.

- How can we compare works created independently by artists from those created in constrained circumstances (residencies, festivals?)
- What is the essence of these works? What value is added by independence, illegality, adaptability? What are the risks to these practices once they are legitimised by institutions?
- How might an artist or cultural organiser position themselves regarding vandalism, censorship, self-censorship, and artistic compromise?

Submissions and dates

These events are equally aimed at researches interested in the theme as at artists, journalists, students, and professions wishing simply to attend or submit a contribution.

Proposals (maximum of 500 words) and a short biography should be addressed to Lisa Mage (lisa@bien-urbain.fr) before Saturday April 25th 2015. We will notify you from May 4th.