

Graffiti Artists in East Africa

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Abstract

The desire of people to leave their mark on walls has been around for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found graffiti scratched on walls in the city of Pompeii as old as 1908. This paper looks at graffiti designed by the East African graffiti artists and their works as an art and design form. It also sought to establish how they have used graffiti as a social economic impact factor to change themselves and the environment around them for the better. The study applied desktop and multiple case study research methods and confined itself to the East African region. Newspaper articles, past interviews from online documents and material from East African graffiti artists were main source of data. The paper discusses graffiti artists; Jobray from Uganda, Rao from Rwanda, Moha from Kenya and the Wachata Collective crew from Tanzania. The paper concluded that local East African graffiti artists have little diversification in design business of interior and exterior that communicate ideas and aesthetics. Governments provide inadequate support for graffiti spaces and merchandise thus minimizing work to thrive in the cities. Graffiti artists are not given adequate respect, support and recognition of their art works. Graffiti has not been used maximumly to create social awareness campaigns. The paper recommends that apprenticeship programs should be supported and artists should come up with institutions, which can be able to document techniques works and facilitate in teaching programs. Graffiti artists should use their work to inspire, express and also speak truth to power. The pioneers of this art form are also called upon to dispense their knowledge to the next generation. The paper also recommends that graffiti artists should develop their own style, expression and inspirations to create identity and authenticity in their works. Further the artists need support from their respective local governments, mentorship programmes and diversification of their services and business.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Authentic, Awareness, Local graffiti, Murals, Street Art, Visual arts.

INTRODUCTION

Graffiti has been around from millennia. From wall etchings of political caricatures during the Antiquity period in the Roman Empire to cave paintings when human beings were still living in caves. The modern aesthetic and characteristic of graffiti reached Africa in the 1970s. Across the world, especially in the developed countries where the modern art form may have begun, graffiti artists have existed and fought for their legitimacy in urban places making it a lucrative profession in some major cities. Organizations have been formed with mentorship programmes to teach the next generations. The art form has also been able to merge with other cultures, for example, the hip-hop culture and the entertainment industry.

This modern phenomenon shall be described in detail in the literature showing the different styles

around the world. The theory also describes their functions and purpose. The focus of the paper is the graffiti artists in East Africa. The main objective of the paper is to establish the challenges faced, interventions being carried out, and innovations being put in place by artists in developing the new profession in East Africa.

The paper establishes who the graffiti artists are, how long they have been in this new industry, their beginnings, artistic influence and inspirations, organizational efforts and mentorship, and who supports them. The paper examines what has made the graffiti artists pioneers in the graffiti landscape in East Africa. Further, the paper studies the support and the transitions of the industry over the years and the dominant players, social awareness of the art, effects in communication, how it is being used for income opportunities and

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