



## TEXTILE ART - A NEW PARADIGM IN PUBLIC SPACE

NANI Corina

West University of Timisoara, Faculty of Arts and Design, Department Design and Applied Arts,  
Oituz n<sup>o</sup>4, 300086, Timisoara, Romania, E-Mail:

Corresponding author: Corina Nani, E-mail: [corinani@gmail.com](mailto:corinani@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *Based on the 10 years of planning, organizing, and implementing the project "International Street Art Festival Timisoara", this work is the preparation of the integration of textile arts in the academic and institutional coordinated use of the same for the urban regeneration projects through Street Art in Romania. There is a brief presentation of the concept used and the relationship between the different means of contemporary artistic expression means and the public space. Thus, the first part briefly describes the art that occupies the city with all the forms of visual expression currently used, which are implemented in the public space: from graffiti and street art to various installations and objects. Art in the public space involves a much wider audience than the art exhibited in galleries and is more prone to criticism, because it is directly intertwined with everyday life. We are all the public of this art in the urban environment, whether we like it or not. Following the main theme "Textile art - a new paradigm in public space" in the second part we will refer to four artists with different styles that shape the city with all its specific components. Their works are distinguished by strength, shape, size, color, political, or social importance. In the final part of the article, a pilot project for the use of textile art is proposed in the context of a major work of Street Art existing in Timisoara and known as "Undertown Street Art Gallery".*

**Key words:** *textile art, yarn bombing, urban art, installations, objects.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Before addressing the subject of this paper, we should point out that one of the oldest forms of human technology that was invented 27,000 years ago is the practice of weaving. Textile art - which includes fabrics, embroidery, tapestries, fiber arts, carpet design, and more - has undergone a renaissance in the last century as artists have gone beyond what a textile can be considered art. With the "Feminist Art Movement" of the 1960s and 1970s, a turning point in the field of textile art was marked, which claimed its status as art. For example, the two artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro challenged the distinction between textiles and art using techniques that have traditionally been downgraded to the realm of "women's crafts," such as sewing or quilting.

The International Street Art Festival of Timisoara (FISART) [1] was organized for the first time in the year 2011. The annual editions of the International Graffiti and Street Art Festival (FISART), organized by the EnduRoMania Foundation in collaboration with Timișoara City Hall, the Faculty of Arts and Design of the Western University of Timisoara and other partners, has shown that events of this magnitude can be done with sustainable results and impact to improve the urban aspect of the city with minimal financial investments. Through these festivals, Timișoara once again demonstrated its artistic avant-garde character in Romania, confirming an international trend of street art proliferation in the efforts of aesthetic improvement of the urban space. The reality of



this approach is also confirmed by Olivier Landes (Art Critic and Director of the Rouen Art Festival) - in his book "Street Art Contexte (s)", which was launched on 19 December 2017 in Paris, by the following quote: "The development of street art is definitely one of the remarkable trends of contemporary art after the years 2000. It is an art of the present time: free, accessible to everyone, not only deeply anchored in the urban public space but also exposed on the internet, a true digital public space, an extension of the real world. The recent development of street art has experienced a number of technological advances through digital photography, mobile phones and social networks that have allowed unprecedented dissemination of works that have accompanied the accelerated evolution of this artistic discipline." [2] In the ten editions of FISART, it has gone from graffiti in 2011 to street art of normal size in 2012 and then to BIG CANVASES, with some works of very large dimensions in recent years. The experience and quality of the artists was from year to year better, which can be seen by following the quality of the works. All these years, local and international artists (Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Croatia, Switzerland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Rep. Moldavia, Peru, Russia, Spain, USA and Venezuela) participated. The locations, many of them very visible, are spread throughout the city, helping to improve the look of the Timișoara urban public space. Due to the fact that there are many active or disused industrial structures in Timișoara with inadequate aesthetic aspects, after 2015 the tendency was to focus on the use of technological objectives, such as halls and industrial installations (Fuel tanks of Colterm, Water supply stations Aquatim Bega and Urseni, Ribbon Factory Pasmatex, Silos of Cerealcom and Undertown Street Art Gallery belonging to the Shopping and Business Center of Iulius Town). The artists have left their mark on the walls, doors and windows of industrial buildings, which become true open air museums, and at the same time a remarkable optical and aesthetic improvement has been achieved. Art pieces of different sizes vibrant and colorful in different styles and techniques are admired and photographed by locals and tourists. Additionally to the active creation in Timișoara of over 550 murals in over 50 locations involving over 300 mural artists, the members of the FISART management team participated in a series of national and international conferences as contributors, at street art events as artists or curators and as journalists including: Anina, Arad, Brebu Nou, Reșița / Romania, Frankfurt am Main, Kassel, Halle a.d. Saale / Germany, Toulouse / France, Miami Wynwood, Sankt Petersburg / USA and Lima / Peru.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT AND ACTUAL SITUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TEXTILE MATERIALS IN CONECTION WITH STREET ART**

Beginning in the twentieth century, artists began to use textiles in new contexts, and cities as a privileged medium of expression offered multiple possibilities in modern and contemporary artistic practices. In various forms, discreet by occupying very small spaces (drawings, stickers) or very visible through monumental works, art has imposed itself on our streets. Although ephemeral and often made illegally, street art has come to be accepted as an integral part of contemporary visual art. In the public sphere, artists use art as a means of communication and often create works that reflect social or political issues; however, the subject is varied and diverse. Many of today's artists simply prefer the public setting and enjoy direct dialogue with their works and passers-by - compared to artists exhibiting in museums and art galleries, which are limited to their audience. Serbian specialist S. Vuković says: "Art history has from its very beginnings included a history of artworks situated in various public spaces. But, being simply put outdoors, say, in front of a representative building, does not necessarily and immediately render an artwork to be 'public art'. In order to become such, it has to acquire a performative role in the collective imaginary and spatial experiences of the ones who are



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using the space in which it is placed, and a developed relation towards the signifying practices in the social and cultural milieu they share.“ [3]

Also, presenting works in the public space, the artists enjoy a considerable exposure to the general public. Traditionally, artists use paints (sprays, or washable paint) to create art using the city walls as giant canvases. Alternatively, some artists use templates (stencils), others create ensembles from various materials (paper, wood, metal, ceramics, plastic, textiles, etc.), or even simple or complex finished objects (ready made: photographs, technical devices, furniture, vehicles, mechanical or constructive subassemblies). Since then, textile art has developed new forms and language, involving many artists who experiment with various techniques, materials and concepts in the public space.

Starting from Foucault's statement that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power" [4] we will see how art in public space becomes a multidisciplinary mixture of both artistic and artisanal, where artists leaving the intimate space of the workshop spontaneously invest in three-dimensional space by various textile materials that interact with the urban environment. The almost always ephemeral works create a mixed and dynamic environment through artistic interventions on street furniture, buildings and sidewalks. Thus, the urban space, the topography of a neighborhood, the beauty of an official or private building, the originality of a certain construction, become sources of inspiration for the artists who create these installations based on textile materials. Artists who create in the public space using the art of knitting or crocheting on various everyday objects we witness on the one hand a return to traditional techniques, and on the other hand to the roots of urban art to mark the territory. As art critic Stevan Vukovic puts it in the following quote: "Site specific artwork is created to exist in a certain place, and its composition is fully dependent on the manner it is placed in that spatial setting – it does not function separately. The origin of the basic idea, and, later on, the project the artist is to realize at the site, is being derived out of the research of the site itself, and, even though it may contain sculptural elements, it cannot function in a gallery or other spatial setting the same way it does at the site to which it is specific – it can never be reduced to gallery type of sculpture.“ [5]

In the following lines I will write about some artists with different styles and techniques of working in an urban context. These artists experimented, expressed their protest, expressed their opposition and redefined the public space for their messages.

The "yarn bombing" movement, as a contemporary form of street art in which the objects of the urban landscape are knitted and crocheted. It began in 2005, when artist Magda Sayeg covered the doorknob of her wool store in Houston, USA with colorful knitting yarns. The "bombardment" with threads invades the city covering the street with knitwear: benches, stairs, bridges, but also elements of the natural landscape, such as tree trunks, as well as sculptures in squares or gardens. One of the goals is to dress public places by making them more personal, more humane and provoking the reaction of passers-by. The practice then spread widely in the world of street art, especially in Eastern Europe and England. This recovery of traditional female art (knitting, crocheting) to participate in the graffiti scene dominated by male presence, has become synonymous with the current feminist movement. Joanna Mann explains in her article about the balance between this type of art (yarn bombing) and politics: "Yarn bombing, I argue, does more than feminize the city, for the whimsy with which it is imbued has the capacity to increase our attentiveness to [6] to complete the above, I mention what Magda Sayeg (fig.1) wrote: "My passion is with the material: I love displacing hand made, mostly woven, material in environments where it seemingly doesn't belong... only to discover that they can coexist quite harmoniously. I understand the limitations of this medium intimately, and I continue to challenge it. There is a transformation that occurs when I cover an inanimate object with soft hand made material. This interaction changes the object without taking away its identity or paralyzing its original function. It is this unplanned arrangement of the

material that makes these objects come to life, become sculptural and even redefine or reinterpret a space. The exploration of environmental change drives me: provoking the world to be a more challenging, unconventional, and interesting place." [7]



*Fig. 1: Magda Sayeg*

Another artist very well known and appreciated in the field of textile art both in the "white cube" and in the public space is Victoria Villasana (born in 1982 in Guadalajara, Mexico). As an artist, she is deeply interested in the human relationship connected in a fragmented post-digital world. After studying design at ITESO University in Mexico, she spent over a decade in London where she became well known in the art community in public space for her rebellious femininity and sharp intercultural images. The dynamism of her work (fig. 2) derives from the way the thread is left uncut, far below the frame, like the untold stories, offering a surreal aesthetic that is reflected in the acceptance of transience and imperfection. Using art as a tool to connect with people on a more emotional level to produce a changing impact.



*Fig. 2: Victoria Villasana*

NeSpoon is a Polish artist whose works focus on lace motifs covering walls, streets and parks in public space. The lace works are represented in various techniques: painted directly on the surface, made of ceramic, made by hand by herself or by the traditional folk artists with whom she collaborates (fig. 3). He is inspired by the local folk art and motifs he comes in contact with when preparing for a work. NeSpoon says: „In lace there is an aesthetic code that is deeply embedded in

every culture. In each lace we find symmetry and a kind of order and harmony. Isn't that what we're all instinctively looking for?" [8].



*Fig. 3: NeSpoon*

Another artist who has changed the paradigm with his own large textile installations is Gili Avisar (born in 1980 in Haifa, Israel). Thanks to his talent and originality, the artist works with remnants of textile materials that are assembled and sewn in various monumental installations, thus creating a fantastic and intense world through colors. It is this technique that gives him the ability to personalize public spaces, becoming a game between creation and show (fig. 4).



*Fig. 4: Gili Avisar*

### 3. PROPOSAL OF A STREET ART PROJECT USING YARN BOMBING TECHNIQUES

Considering the existence in Timisoara of a large complex Street Artwork called "Undertown Street Art Gallery", made in 2019 in a four-lane underground car passage and with a length of 220 m within the Iulius Town complex, I propose the realization of a pilot project for the addition of textile art on the circular columns available in large numbers (over 60), but unpainted, to complete it. The murals already made along the passage are delimited by circular columns of apparent concrete (fig. 5). Yarn bombing textiles (crochet hooks, textile collages, or lace installations) can be applied to these columns, integrated into the compositional rhythms of the works, personalized and valued while ensuring a sensory interaction between the underground passage and those who use it as motorists or pedestrians. This pilot project would be relevant because in addition to the visibility and international notoriety of the "Undertown Street Art Gallery", its complementation with textile art would have an advantage, which would ensure this intervention a durability comparable to that characteristic of traditional materials used. This advantage would result from the fact that this location is underground, thus being protected from

climatic whims in the form of precipitation, wind, and freeze/thaw cycles, which particularly affect the textile works exposed in the open public space.



Fig. 5: Circular apparent concrete collumns of the Undertown Street Art Gallery

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

The diversification of materials (spray, washable paint, textiles, etc.) and means of creation reflects a natural evolution of the urban art scene, and the urban environment becomes one of the essential parts of the work of art. Textile art in public space adds a new visual and aesthetic perception contributing to the personalization, significance, and ennobling of urban space. This sensory world, complemented by textiles, creates a game of movement, light, and shadow. The purpose of this paper is to initiate this research to be implemented in the near future to ensure the continuation of the project, the International Street Art Festival Timisoara, and at the same time to be considered in the preparations for the European Capital of Culture 2023. Starting from the use of textile artworks in the public space, I have in mind to analyze the concrete possibilities of their implementation, thus enriching the art gallery in the public space with new forms of artistic expression through different styles and techniques of textile materials. Of course, there are many spaces in the city that would lend themselves to such interventions of this "yarn bombing" movement. For a start, a first selection from the public space in Timișoara would be to continue the collection of the international gallery "Undertown Street Art Gallery", by completing it with textile interventions (yarn bombing).

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