

Weekly Assignment 4. Street Art in Museums

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4. *Explain why it is controversial whether street art should be exhibited in art museums.*

The question whether street art should be exhibited in art museums has long been in heated discussion since this new-born art form originated from America in 1960s. There are two main reasons why exhibition of street art can be controversial.

First, street art was born to be a sign of rebellion against mainstream culture, and this intrinsic rebellious characteristic of street art leads to behaviors that are against morality or law, such as leaving graffiti on a public building without permission. Considering that art museums are commonly funded by the public or the government, the act of exhibiting street art in art museums will naturally be considered as tolerance and acquiescence to these immoral or illegal behaviors performed by street art creators, which will in a sense encourage potential criminal behaviors of various kinds. This will certainly be harmful to the public interest, and art museums have to weigh the advantages of promoting artistic creation and the disadvantages of potential harm to the public when making the decision whether to exhibit street art in art museums.

Second, street art that ended up in museums may suffer a loss in its unique characteristic and value, so street artists may also protest against exhibition of street art in museums. As is mentioned above, the spiritual core of street art is its rebellious attitude towards mainstream culture. When street art is exhibited in museums, it seems that cooperation between the authority and “the deviant” is achieved, therefore depriving the works’ challenging characteristic. Moreover, the meaning of street art is extremely dependent on its surrounding environment, and when the context is deprived, the completeness of the

artwork is damaged, which leads to misunderstanding of the artwork from time to time. So many of the street artists oppose exhibition of street art in museums, though they get financial benefits from it.