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MCWP 50

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Research Proposal: Draft 1

The question I will be exploring in this proposal revolves around an examination of graffiti and street art, and the duality of the modern perception of these art forms as countercultural expressions in some contexts, while simultaneously acceptable and even valued in other contexts. I would like to examine the cultural, ethnic, and economic conditions surrounding different types of street art, and how these play a role in its perception as either an illicit activity or an expression of high art. To investigate these issues, I will specifically be focusing on Latin American and Chicano works of street art.

This question is important to address because it is a unifying theme that helps bring to light issues of cultural representation, identity, and potentially appropriation. A common theme brought up by sources that speak to these issues is the fact that in many parts of the United States, Latin Americans are no longer a minority population, and thus their cultural productions are a vital component of what would be considered a modern "American" identity (Cordova, Bullock, Vargas). There are also strong arguments that their contributions, particularly in the world of art, are often devalued and excluded from the American mainstream, while simultaneously having a profound influential impact on it (Vargas).

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a dramatic shift in the perception of street art. Although still considered an act of vandalism and punishable by law in many areas, it is not uncommon to see such works in galleries, either decontextualized from its original medium or as

the result of more socially acceptable avenues of production. Thus, another facet of this topic is how these works have been commoditized and have even been privy to commercial success. This is particularly interesting when contrasted against the ephemeral nature of street art, by virtue of its illegality, as well as its obliquely public nature of the original media and the economic status surrounding its genesis. By exploring these topics, I hope to learn more about whether this process harms either the overall quality, integrity, and purpose of the art form, and whether recent shifts towards commodification of the style have displaced the original creators and the messages they hoped to communicate.

A primary source I will be using is a book containing photographs of a large collection of modern street art from Mexico City, which specifically highlights different types of graffiti (Raúl & Arroyo). This is an important anchor, because it provides a visual representation of these works, from which I hope to glean information not only about the works themselves, by examining aspects such as the iconography, but also about the surrounding physical space within which these works are situated. It is also important because it highlights tradition of street art that has evolved from similar roots as their Latin American counterparts but reflects its parallel development under different cultural norms and restrictions.

I hope to compare these works to a second primary source that documents different types street art in the Mission district of San Francisco, which includes graffiti as well as works such as murals and community art projects (Cordova). This is important because it is a very targeted case study of a well-established community of Latin Americans, and so this collection of works reflects a connected and cohesive community. It also helps highlight many of the political implications associated to street art.

Finally, a third primary source also includes photographs taken by the author of a wide variety of different types of Latin American art, which is not restricted to street art (Vargas). This is important because it helps situate Latin American street art in the wider context of Latin American art, highlighting commonalities in motivations and messages, as well as differences that arise due to differences in medium and societal perception.

Works Cited

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Cordova, Cary. *The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Identity in San Francisco*. 2005.

Vargas, George. *Contemporary Chican@ Art: Color & Culture for a New America*. University of Texas Press, 2010.