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eum edizioni università di macerata, Centro  
direzionale, via Carducci 63/a - 62100  
Macerata  
tel (39) 733 258 6081  
fax (39) 733 258 6086  
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Saggi

# The ethical side of Aesthetic: street art against the Camorra

Luca Palermo\*

## *Abstract*

Casapesenna is a small town (near Naples, southern Italy) in the notorious *Terra dei Fuochi*, land of Mafia and lawlessness. In order to counterbalance the deterioration with the beauty and the illegality with the colour, the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli” and the agency Agrorinascie (an agency for the innovation, development and homeland security for this territory) focused its project on the regeneration of a real estate confiscated from the camorra by using street art and its ability to approach and engage all kind of audiences, thus activating, not only cultural processes, but also social (sense of belonging and historical identity) and economic (development of a territory): from degradation to beauty, from illegality to legality.

The site-specific works of two Italian street artists, Giò Pistone and Alberonero have transformed the face of the real estate, metaphorically breaking down the high perimeter

\* Luca Palermo, Assegnista di ricerca presso il Dipartimento di Lettere e Beni Culturali dell'Università degli Studi della Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”, Via Perla, 81055, Santa Maria Capua Vetere (CE), e-mail: luca.palermo@unicampania.it.

walls built by organized crime bosses and transmitting to the citizens a message of colour and hope. Similarly, citizens have appropriated this space, triggering virtuous processes of participation and social inclusion.

Casapesenna è una piccola città (vicino Napoli, Italia meridionale) nella famigerata Terra dei Fuochi, terra di mafia e di illegalità. Per controbilanciare il degrado con la bellezza e l'illegalità con il colore, l'Università della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" e l'agenzia Agrorinasce (agenzia per l'innovazione, lo sviluppo e la sicurezza del territorio) hanno focalizzato il proprio progetto sulla riqualificazione di un patrimonio immobiliare confiscato alla camorra attraverso l'utilizzo della *street art* e la sua capacità di avvicinare e coinvolgere ogni tipo di pubblico, attivando così non solo processi culturali, ma anche sociali (senso di appartenenza e identità storica) ed economici (sviluppo di un territorio): dal degrado alla bellezza, dall'illegalità alla legalità.

Le opere site specific di due *street artist* italiani, Giò Pistone e Alberonero, hanno trasformato il volto dell'immobile, abbattendo metaforicamente gli alti muri perimetrali costruiti dai boss della criminalità organizzata e trasmettendo ai cittadini un messaggio di colore e di speranza. Allo stesso modo, i cittadini si sono appropriati di questo spazio, innescando processi virtuosi di partecipazione e inclusione sociale.

## 1. *Introduction*

«The fight against the mafia – has repeatedly argued the magistrate Paolo Borsellino – must be above all a cultural movement that get used all of us to feel the beauty of the fresh scent of freedom that is opposed to the stink of moral compromise, of indifference, of contiguity and thus of complicity»<sup>1</sup>. That “cultural movement” mentioned by Borsellino is finding, in recent years, practical application in the south of Italy and, therefore, also in Campania region where organized crime has been able, over time, to impose themselves and to settle any social level.

In this context, Street Art shows an excellent expressive force, mainly due to the peculiar characteristic to arrive in never reached spaces, to speak to the suburbs, to the border places, and to the falling buildings; and if the traditional visual arts speak to those who want to listen, to those who seek it, Street Art is not hiding, is able to communicate with all audiences and to activate, thus, not only cultural, but also social (sense of belonging and historical identity) and economic (development of a territory) processes.

Born as anti-capitalist and rebellious, considered by some as a nuisance, by others as a tool to communicate opinions of dissent, to trigger questions, today the street art seems to be losing its informal and revolutionary features to get into institutional programs of urban regeneration, promoted by governments,

<sup>1</sup> Costabile 2005, p. 25.

but also by cultural institutions, in order to foster innovation's processes. often becoming harmlessly and quietly reassuring.

Street art moved from narrative device of a counter culture in ferment and expression of a generational and social conflict, to embellishment, decor and requalification tool, in order to reduce the lacerations and often encountering rhetoric linked to beauty and social benefits.

Starting from these assumptions, the street art has shown, as we shall see, to be able to radically change the architectural and social contexts both aesthetically and ethically: from degradation to beauty, from illegality to legality<sup>2</sup>.

But, quoting Lefebvre, «is it really possible to use mural surfaces to depict social contradictions while producing something more than graffiti?»<sup>3</sup>.

Street art has the power to redefine public space and to break the conspiracy of silence. Through visual imagery and iconography, street art communicates messages that focus on themes such as anti-war, anti-capitalism, anarchism, hypocrisy, greed, poverty, and despair. Both politically and ideologically embedded, street art «denounces the insincerity and falseness of current society»<sup>4</sup> and communicates this through the act of defacing public space. Artists are sparking an important dialogue through their street art regarding the search for common space and the democratization of art.

The Campania region and, more specifically, the provinces of Naples and Caserta are often at the forefront of national and international chronicles for episodes of violence connected with the activities of the camorra clans that have turned what for the ancient Romans was the *Campania Felix* in *Terra di Gomorra* or *Terra dei Fuochi*.

The province of Caserta is a strategic area between Naples (in the South) and Rome (in the North). It is the home of several significant cultural heritage sites, such as the Museo Campano of Capua and the Royal Palace of Caserta, which is the largest royal residence in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Despite this, the Province of Caserta hasn't been able to achieve economic growth, nor reach any kind of cultural development. This is why local residents find the camorra the only way to survive in a place with no opportunities: no jobs, no culture, no future prospects, and no alternatives. For this reason, the camorra remains deeply rooted in the local life. Communities in these areas

<sup>2</sup> In 2012 at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, one of the most prestigious international exhibitions of contemporary architecture, in the Italian Pavilion, in a section with the title *Ethics liberates beauty. What to do with assets seized from Mafia-style organisations?*. This section was devoted to the conversion of properties confiscated from criminal organisations and the roles that architecture, the public institutions and the local universities can have in creating a new sensibility and producing concrete results in the territories tainted by the culture of dramatic Mafia-style crime.

<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre 1974, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> Visconti 2010, p. 517.

need to fight against the presence of widespread illegal behaviors, frequently without any support from the authorities.

Crime, and the fear of it, has to be seen as an urban issue. In order to reverse the disastrous trend, indicated by the crime rate, that has lasted for too many years in the province of Caserta, therefore, a series of initiatives have been assumed with the awareness that security is a prerequisite for the productive and trade establishment, to ensure work to new generations and, ultimately, for the development of the territory under each aspect<sup>5</sup>. We believe that art activities can generally help to reduce crime and its perception.

In these areas, in fact, the potential of street art is, therefore, magnified by the difficult social and economic situation that, for too long, decisively influences the civil and cultural development.

The ethical aims pursued through aesthetic interventions in the town of Casapesenna have been the countering the degradation with the beauty, the illegality with the colour and the giving space to the positive energies of the territory. So, how does street art communicate socially relevant, and often times strongly political, themes to the public? How has the art form proven to be a catalyst for both political and social change, and how is this reflected in various cultures? What are the identifiable characteristics of street art that have led to its acceptance, and, ultimately, the more serious aesthetic appreciation the art form has experienced? The accessibility of this art form contributes to its power: «like the press – claims Chaffee – one role of street art is to form social consciousness. In authoritarian systems where outlets for free expression are limited, it is one of the few gauges of political sentiment. In more open systems, street art enables various entities to lobby for their interests. Street art, in essence, connotes a decentralized, democratic form in which there is universal access, and the real control over messages comes from the social producers»<sup>6</sup>. Street art serves as a tool for advocacy as well as a reporting forum. It functions socially as it helps

<sup>5</sup> The Province of Caserta is among the local bodies that have made use of European Union funds promoting projects for restructuring confiscated assets from the Camorra and then assigned for social use. A lot of initiatives have been carried out on the territory in order to spread, first of all among young people, the concepts of legality and organised crime. SAPUCCA (Sharing Alternatives Practices for the Utilization of Criminal Assets confiscated) is a project promoted by the Province of Caserta with national partnership Province of Catania, Province of Pistoia, Agenzia Nazionale per l'amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata, Comitato Don Pepe Diana, Tecla Association, Flare Association (Freedom, Legality and Right in Europe) and two transnational partners: CEPACA (Commission for Establishment of Proceeds Acquired from Criminal Activities) and Centre for the Study of Democracy.

Certainly, the most important initiative is the "Caserta Model", a model expressly created for the fighting of crime that has been exported from Campania region in other Italian regions such as Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, the Emilia and Lombardy. The Caserta Model, named and created by the Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni, has the main aim to put together all the technical and operational components that directly or indirectly interface with issues of public policy dealing with the security of citizens. For further details see Musella 2012; Baldascino, Mosca 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Chaffee 1993, p. 4.

to shed light on events, identify key players, provide social commentary, and even to articulate political agendas and present visions. Street art is accessible to everyone regardless of point of view, and by its very nature acts as an arena for expression and a sounding board of sorts for the marginalized. This kind of art is exemplified by expressive thought directly communicated to its audience through the use of an «economy of words and ideas, and rhetorically simple discourse»<sup>7</sup>. The communicative power of street art lies in the fact that there is just one editor – just the artist, directly initiating a dialogue with the viewer. It is the mix of «social activism, social outrage, and creativity» that enable the art form to deliver a strong message in the most «beautiful [of] public gestures»<sup>8</sup>.

In this paper, I will try to explain that we have chosen art to fight against camorra because:

1. Art engages people's creativity, and so leads to problem solving;
2. Art is about meanings, and enables dialogue between people;
3. Art encourages questioning, and the imagination of possible futures;
4. Art offers self-expression, which is an essential characteristic of the active citizen;
5. Art is unpredictable, exciting and fun.

But we do not have to forget that these kinds of arts programmes cannot be an alternative to regeneration initiatives like environmental improvements, training schemes or youth development projects. But they are a vital component which can transform a given situation<sup>9</sup>.

## *2. Street art for regenerating a real estate confiscated from the camorra: The Casapesenna case study.*

### *Background*

The story of Pasquale Miele is similar to that of many other people who have lost their lives unjustly because of the organized crime.

Pasquale Miele was a twenty-eight years old emerging young entrepreneur; with his father Tammaro and two other brothers, he led a small clothes factory, located very close to his house.

On 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1989 Pasquale was in his house in Grumo Nevano (province of Naples), with his family, when the camorra killers opened fire at eye level and fired him in the chest. Investigations were immediately trained on

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Landry C. *et al.*, 1996.



the racket world and for the investigators, there were few doubts: the execution had been carried out by a gang with the orders of intimidating the Miele family in order to pay a bribe.

Three years later, on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1992, four gunmen killed in Villa Literno Antonio Diana, the owner of a machine stop, Nicola Palumbo, employed in the same machine stop and Antonio Di Bona, a farmer that during the attack was there. Antonio Di Bona was there to repair his tractor: behind the triple murder there was a revenge<sup>7</sup> between rival camorrist clans.

In that period a feud between the clan led by Francesco Schiavone also known as *Sandokan* and the group headed to Venosa family was carried on. The police immediately believed at the aim of the killers was the owner of the garage, Antonio Diana, related to Raffaele Diana affiliated to the Schiavone clan. Antonio Di Bona and Nicola Palumbo would be eliminated because they were considered by the killer inconvenient witnesses.

For this reason, (o in consideration of this) Antonio di Bona and Pasquale Miele are recognized as innocent victims of organized crime by the Italian Interior Ministry.

As violent and organized crime has increased in Casapesenna and neighbouring cities in the past thirty years, so has the fear of crime. People are very reluctant to talk about organised crime, not only in this town but in Italy and also in various countries across the globe because they fear the callous consequences they might face. For years, the town's political apparatus was a plaything of the local Camorra clan, which at its height was arguably the most powerful and violent syndicate within the notoriously powerful and violent Neapolitan mafia. Organized crime has imposed a disorder on lived experience; everyday life and the city have changed because of crime and fear, and this change today is too much rooted in the citizens' mind. «Usually – claims Teresa P.R. Caldeira – an experience of violent crime is followed by reactions like enclosing the home, moving, restricting children's activities, not going out at night, and avoiding certain areas of town, all actions that reinforce a feeling of loss and restriction as well as the perception of a chaotic existence in a dangerous place»<sup>10</sup>. But the fear has not stopped hope.

Family members of these two innocent victims of the Camorra have become promoters of the association Terra Nova in order to be a reference point for the social commitment, to educate the younger generation to fight against the camorra and to remember all the innocent victims of the camorra, and to renew a commitment in the contrast to organised crime in their name.

This association had as its headquarters a real estate confiscated from Venosa boss (located in Casapesenna, in the province of Caserta in the heart of the notorious Terra dei Fuochi) in which arose a youth centre for art and culture<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Caldeira 2000, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> For further details see <<http://www.centrocultura.org>> 29.08.2018.

The property, delivered to the association completely vandalized, has been entirely renovated with the support of the Italian Ministry of Interior. Since the eviction, in fact, bosses have six months to leave the property. During these six months, they are usual to destroy everything in order to not return the real estate to the State in good conditions. The values and symbolic message underlying this trend in the restructuration are extremely important: they demonstrate that the State is succeeding in striking at the wealth accumulated by criminal associations, thereby restoring or building trust in the institutions.

The restructuration, however, did not allow to break down the high perimeter walls that had changed the urban fabric and the road network of the town. A real separation wall erected with the intent to hide to the citizens what was happening inside the house. A sort of «fortified enclave»<sup>12</sup> demarcated and isolated by walls and fences; a privatized, enclosed, and monitoring space for residence, consumption, leisure, and work. It emphasized the value of what is private and restricted at the same time that it devalued what is public and open in the city and what is include and excluded. Its presence in the urban fabric is a clear statement of the power of organized crime. This fortified enclave valorised a private universe and reject the city and its social rules.

In Casapesenna public spaces no longer relates to the modern ideals of commonality and universality: high walls promote separateness and the idea that social groups should live in homogeneous enclaves, isolated from those who are perceived as different; walls divide and isolate. Walls are fundamentally vertical, and the first meaning we can give to verticality is impediment; walls constrain people flows transforming a smooth place into a striated one. A city segregated by walls and enclaves foster the sense that different groups (criminal and non-criminal) belong to separate universes and have irreconcilable claims. Once walls are built, they alter public life in an undemocratic way. But walls can be built for an aim but deflected to many others<sup>13</sup>.

The solution thus is to break down, at least metaphorically, the high walls: street art, an art form daughter of everyday life and contemporary living. In this way, what once divided, isolated and prevented communication, now draws the attention of thousands of people who visit or pass close to this real estate confiscated from the camorra. In using a private property as a surface for communication, artists «create a city in common»<sup>14</sup>. The notorious camorra boss Luigi Venosa – who is now living behind bars – could never have guessed that his villa on the outskirts of Naples would someday become a monument to the victims of organised crime.

<sup>12</sup> Caldeira 2000, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Brighenti 2009, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Iverson 2010, p. 131.

### 3. *Alberonero and Giò Pistone for Casapesenna*

«Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic practice»<sup>15</sup>.

There are places where it is not usual to meet art, forgotten places, from which it is very easy to escape to and in which it is very hard to create alternatives.

Street art appears in public spaces where people may normally not accept nor expect it. When I speak about public space or urban space I refer to a social product<sup>16</sup>, not only shaped by spatial designers and regulated by state authority, but also transformed by its users as well as misusers.

It is in these places, that art and even more street art, can try to pierce the daily monotony and to stir the slumbering souls. It is not, however, urban renewal, but it is an undeniable sense of rebirth that the participation and the attention of the individual, or of a plurality of persons, can generate in the city, and above all, in the suburbs and in small towns.

Thanks to University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli and the Agrorinasce Agency for the Innovation, Development and Homeland Security<sup>17</sup>, the function of those walls was completely reversed: no longer an instrument of division, but of acceptance and openness to all those who choose the law and the rebirth desire as their philosophy of life. An exhibition about the seventies in Caserta area called *Ars Felix. Gli anni Settanta all'ombra della Reggia* was held in the confiscated building and for the first time in Italy a four hand mural was made by blending in perfect harmony the coloristic and abstract geometric style of Alberonero<sup>18</sup> and the fantastic figures of Gio Pistone<sup>19</sup>: in this sense the walls have changed shape and intended use, giving back to this place a new identity that is well suited to a centre for art and culture, and thus becoming a source of inspiration for children, young people and adults that frequent it. Alberonero and Gio Pistone have combined their styles, almost the polar opposite, to achieve a common goal: the transformation of a degraded space and the attribution to the same of new meanings. An aggressive looking worm opens up to release a wonderful butterfly (Giò Pistone) flying towards the coloured cubes realized by Alberonero: from darkness to light, from degradation to beauty, the works, designed specifically for the place in which they were made, have become a symbol of hope and strength; they are an invitation not to give up in front of adversity, to go on overcoming obstacles that may seem insurmountable: as

<sup>15</sup> Hooks 1990, p. 153.

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre 1974.

<sup>17</sup> It is a consortium company constituted by Municipalities of San Cipriano d'Aversa, Casal di Principe, Casapesenna, San Marcellino, Santa Maria la Fossa and Villa Literno and created in order to cope with the economic and bureaucratic commitment of reuse initiatives. For further details see <<http://www.agrorinasce.org>>, 28.12.2016.

<sup>18</sup> For further details see <<http://alberonero.tumblr.com>>, 24.12.2016.

<sup>19</sup> For further details see <<http://giopistone.it>>, 24.12.2016.

the butterfly leaves behind itself the imprisonment of the worm to go towards a world of colour, so the people of Casapesenna must move away from the ugliness of the camorra and the havoc of the past to create, together and united, a new future full of hope.

The work is perfect conjunction of the different stylistic signatures of the artists. Gio Pistone opens and closes the work with two new creatures, the first symbolizing changes, the second to the static and stillness of the place. Alberonero, on the other hand, works in the central part creating a complex puzzle of coloured squares. The tonal variation of the square suggests a reflection on the difficulties of an active change, with the artist engaged in tracing a dual path linked to the movement.

Aberonero is an Italian urban Minimalist artist who utilizes geometric shapes and colour to create provoking insitu murals in which the colour scale as aesthetic element of an a not so apparent continuity. Gio Pistone is an Italian artist, known for her colourful paintings and drawings on paper and walls, inhabited mostly by strange and charming creatures of her imagination.

The choice of Gio Pistone and Alberonero is not accidental as what we need first of all was colour: not only because the space was completely grey, but mostly because we tried to bring positivity in a place marked by a negative history.

Colour is used as a means of manipulating emotions: through the manipulation of various colours, different types of messages are communicated. «The environment and its colours are perceived, and the brain processes and judges what it perceives on an objective and subjective basis. Psychological influence, communication, information, and effects on the psyche are aspects of our perceptual judgment processes. Hence, the goals of colour design in an architectural space are not relegated to decoration alone», writes Frank H. Mahnke in his recent article *Color in Architecture – More Than Just Decoration*<sup>20</sup>.

Thanks to the works by Giò Pistone and Alberonero we've been looking at the power of street art to reface, re-contextualize, re-energize and re-imagine a building and its place in the neighbourhood.

The top quality works by these two Italian artists grab their fellow citizens' attention and help to regenerate urban spaces that has been for a long time under the control of camorra. Street art is able to re-semantise places and to re-write their meaning and functions. It, as argued by Simona Stano, intervenes «in opposition such as 'lack of communication' vs 'dialogue', 'isolation' vs 'communication', 'euphoria' vs 'dysphoria', 'life' vs 'death', 'continuity' vs 'discontinuity', etc.»<sup>21</sup>. Street art could be a redefinition of the relation between

<sup>20</sup> <<http://archinect.com/features/article/53292622/color-in-architecture-more-than-just-decoration>>, 2.12.2016.

<sup>21</sup> Stano 2013, p. 94.

spaces and individuals since, by using public spaces as a surface for interaction and communication, it can create alternative spaces in the city<sup>22</sup>. Art is our weapon and the walls of Casapesenna are our canvas in the fight against the organized crime. In what until October 2015 was an anonymous and sad house, today stands three playful and fantastic street artworks created with the means of making the urban context cleaner and more accessible to citizens. So, we used urban art to bring attention back to the neighbourhood, highlighting the problems. The processing line is identified with a particularly appropriate metaphor: the metaphor of a butterfly that leaves the captivity of the bug to fly far and high; this should be an example for everyone involved in this, as in other projects. It is also a fundamental message of true hope for those who firmly believe that the community of Casapesenna, as well as that of the province of Caserta, can and should move away from the estrangement induced by the organized crime, and must regain possession of their territory (figg. 1-4).

#### *4. Power to the people. Street Art, community engagement and participatory art approach*

The realization of the murals was followed by numerous laboratory activities with local schools in order to involve, with the power of art and culture, the younger generation in raising awareness in contrasting Camorra not only with arrests and courts. For this, the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli has decided to support specific academic goals, such as teaching and research, and the promotion and use of knowledge (third mission of the university) in order to support public art interventions for the promoting of the social, cultural and economic development of the society and the territory (the province of Caserta, unfortunately recently known as Terra dei Fuochi), which the university belongs to and which constantly confronts with<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> For further details see Chaffee 1993; Dickens 2008, pp. 471-496; Tsilimpounidi 2012, pp. 546-556.

<sup>23</sup> Following this idea of community engagement and participatory art approach, the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" in collaboration with the Department of Law, Department of Engineering, Department of Economy, Department of Architecture and Department of Psychology of the same university and with the CRIE (Centro Ricerche sulle Istituzioni Europee) of the University of Naples "Suor Orsola Benicansa", has conceived the project *Insidel/out* in order to reflect on the role of contemporary art in public spaces (especially community engagement art and participatory art) as tool of identity creation, of strengthening the sense of community and of socio-economic reconstruction of a specific area. The methodological choice based on interdisciplinary should have allowed to study the role of art in the regeneration processes from different points of view in order to foster sustainable growth, employment and social cohesion and to maximize the contribution of culture to the economy of the territories. This could be possible stimulating creativity in people,

Participatory processes<sup>24</sup> of significant potential were activated in order to allow the comparison between heterogeneous positions and building sharing platforms.

The art in the public space is a living and active nucleus for the local community interacting with it; it is a catalyst for economic, identity and social processes, as well as for urban regeneration and cultural proliferation.

The role of street art is to transform the spaces into places, and to re-characterize the faceless masses of the pedestrian public into the individually recognized yet collectively termed entity of the people.

As a voice for engagement and activism, street art addresses the gap, and creates dialogue and transactions between people, concerns, and their environments.

Engagement is often an ambiguous word in community arts education. We talk about engaging families, engaging students, engaging community – but we are rarely exact in our definition. What does engagement look like? How do we do it? The terms civic engagement and youth engagement emerge in nearly every conversation around community arts, from marketing strategies to program development. I found a pretty good definition of community engagement in the arts on the National Guild for Arts Education website: «What is community engagement? *Community* describes the people and organizations that are related to a community arts education provider's mission: students, parents, families, artists, partner organizations, schools, government agencies, and so on. *Engagement* describes an active, two-way process in which one party motivates another to get involved or take action – and both parties experience change. Mutual activity and involvement are the keys to community engagement. Sometimes organizations interpret community engagement as collaboration, marketing to diverse audiences, or developing programs for underserved groups. While those are all worthy and necessary activities, an engaged community arts education provider does more. It promotes consistent community interaction that is a step beyond conventional programmatic partnerships. Consistent community engagement is not program based; it is part of organizational culture»<sup>25</sup>.

But, «in what way do spaces produced by the inhabitants through the misuse value of space challenge the normative order of the city and in what ways do

creating opportunities for expression and participation, celebrating the uniqueness and diversity of the communities and encouraging their development through and intercultural understanding and cooperation.

<sup>24</sup> In order to understand and explain this scenario, I have started a studying campaign for identifying, developing and sharing themes related to community building, civic activation, participatory processes, social initiatives related to commons and other expressions of bottom up regeneration processes of public places or places for public uses. For further details see Rodotà 1978; Habermans 1991; Carta 2004, pp. 39-56; Lepore 2007; Esposito De Vita, Ragozzino 2013, pp. 173-188.

<sup>25</sup> <<http://resourcecenter.nationalguild.org/topics/Community-Engagement.aspx>>, 24.12.2016.

they affirm and reinforce it?»<sup>26</sup>; what can creative tools do for community engagement? Creative tools can strengthen the understanding and exploration of community values; creative tools can increase stakeholder involvement; creative tools can better engage people in community and urban design projects. Furthermore, community engagement can be oriented not only at listening, interpreting and sharing but also at creating the humus for nourishing bottom up initiatives by supporting communities in investing energy, creativity and resources in spaces and public facilities of the area<sup>27</sup>.

This idea is closely connected to the notion of participatory art. Participatory art exists under a variety of overlapping headings, including interactive, relational, cooperative, activist and dialogical art. In some cases, participation by a range of people creates an artwork, in others the participatory action is itself described as the art.

Participatory art refers to a range of arts practice where emphasis is placed on the role of the viewer or spectator in the physical or conceptual realisation and reception of the artwork. The central component of Participatory Arts is the active participation of the viewer or spectator. Many forms of Participatory Arts practice foreground the role of collaboration in the realisation of an artwork, de-emphasising the role of the professional artist as sole creator or author of the artwork, while building social bonds through communal meaning and activity.

Participatory art raises important questions about the meaning and purpose of art in society, about the role of the artist and the experience of the audience as participant.

The idea of a participatory art is rooted in the methodological practice theorized by Suzanne Lacy in 1995 and known as New Genre Public Art «to distinguish it in both form and intention from what has been called public art – a term used for the past twenty-five years to describe sculpture and installations sited in public places. Unlike much of what has heretofore been called public art, new genre public art – visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on engagement»<sup>28</sup>.

One of the most important elements in the present project has been the use of the universal idea of creativity. Creativity is one of the most powerful characteristics in the human being and it is a quality that is not limited to the genial character or to a rare aptitude of an individual in particular.

In Casapesenna we had to shift our thinking away from bringing great art to the people to working with the people to create art that is meaningful. In this

<sup>26</sup> Özkan 2010, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Jacobs 1961.

<sup>28</sup> Lacy 1995, p. 56.

way, quoting Linda Shearer, «monologues have become dialogues»<sup>29</sup>, and the art has to be a sort of «forum for dialogue or social activism gained in power and effectiveness by being situated in the real world»<sup>30</sup>.

### 5. *Specific objectives*

The fundamental objective of contemporary social art practices that are developed within certain communities is «to emancipate the people involved, so that they feel encouraged by the experience of participating in the development of the art work and eventually to produce the same effect on other people for the benefit of the social body. This emancipatory action is usually comparable with the social activity of other agents operating with a conventional approach in relation to the visual art, making it often difficult to distinguish between what belongs and what does not belong to the domain of aesthetics»<sup>31</sup>.

When street artists are commissioned or given an official authorization to complete a work on a public or private wall, even if this work is thematically and stylistically identical to the works that are created illegally, the result – I think – must be categorized as a work of public art. Rosalyn Deutsche, in fact, defines official public art as «a practice that is within the build environment, is involved in the production of meanings, uses and forms for the city. With this capability, you can help reinforce the consent to the renewal and restructuring which is historically the form of the advanced capitalist urbanism».

In regenerating the abovementioned confiscated real estate, we focus on using street art as public art to create dynamic spaces of creativity and interaction in an urban environment that has been neglected. But as Hilde Hein claims public art is an oxymoron: public art means something other than art not to be kept in private sphere; the meaning of public art certainly varies according to the community, culture and development of each society<sup>32</sup>.

However, unlike the official public art, street art chooses a radically different use of the city<sup>33</sup>. I am talking about artistic interventions that invite us to look at the other side of urban landscape, in which citizens play an active role by building, repairing and imagining public space<sup>34</sup>. The interventions by Giò Pistone and Alberonero in Casapesenna show us new ways of living the urban context. Culture and art (especially public art) have three basic motivations in urban contexts: 1) attracting capital flows; 2) Establishing a new social order; 3)

<sup>29</sup> Shearer 1998, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Jacobs 1995, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Gorgel Pinto 2015, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Hein 1996.

<sup>33</sup> For further details see Caldeira 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Young 2014, p. 94.



Regenerating the degraded context and urban fabric<sup>35</sup>. But Regeneration is not an end in itself: it is about people and the quality of the lives they will be able to lead. So, we especially focus on the re-establishing a new social order and on the regeneration, community engagement and on the creation of a legal street art space. Participatory art-making also helps to fulfil social service mission of community engagement and transformation. In this case, participatory art focuses on:

- Reviving social and urban environments, through the regeneration of a real estate confiscated from the camorra.
- Recreating the social fabric through the active involvement of citizens.
- Stimulating the inhabitants searching and sharing a positive collective identity that contains an idea of the future.
- Involving young people of the territory, stimulating and implementing their specific talents and abilities.
- To reduce the incidences, impact and fear of crime.

We have chosen to focus on street art because art and culture should not be something useful only within the academic context or into the already accustomed frameworks, but, on the contrary, art should be able to bring all audiences close, enabling in this way, not only cultural, but also social (the sense of belonging and historical identity) and economic (development of a territory) processes.

Urban artists create a cultural space otherwise non-existent within the urban environment. By engaging with the city physically, urban artists develop a special relationship with it. In a way «they forge a very... intimate negotiation with space by altering it»<sup>36</sup> and instead of playing the role of consumer, exist as the role of creator whose identity is forged on the walls of the city.

These laboratory activities have been designed and built taking into great consideration the type of audience we, from time to time, were confronting with: from elementary schools to high schools, all visitors have had an active and crucial part for the success of the project. From 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015 to 1st march 2016 twelve laboratories were held (more or less one per week). The activities involved more than 6.500 persons.

The relaunch, thanks to this kind of projects, of confiscated real estate could be a proof of the will of those who live and work in these contested territories to oppose cultural initiatives to the organized crime in order to stir the consciences of the citizens and creating job opportunities for young people of the territory itself. In this way, it will be possible to lay the foundations for the development of not only economic but also social and cultural capital.

But even today, unfortunately, behind these beautiful artworks on the walls, life has remained the same. Art is narrative, criticism, and reflection of

<sup>35</sup> For further details see Logan, Molotch 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Lewisohn 2008, p. 83.

these issues, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done to advance them, extending to the realm of politics, governments and institutions.

The next revolution to come is not in painting techniques, but in how the institutions can do for these citizen-artists to use the walls of the urban public space as their canvases.

The Casapesenna case is the proof that street art can successfully assist and encourage urban regeneration of cities, places and communities. This is viewed as physical, economic and social drivers to successfully implement and transform changes to underprivileged places and communities in order to reinvent, rejuvenate, occupy the city, building urban space and community via adopting new life, improved quality of life, urban beautification, community participation, and a cultural and lively community/city.

In this way citizens, can take the urban spaces back and use them as pointed out by Lefebvre: use value «implies non property but appropriation»<sup>37</sup>. So, street art integrated in the urban context represents a mode of appropriating territory. In this direction, we can considerate this kind of art, in the optical of Baudrillard, as a symbolic matrix with emphatic charge<sup>38</sup> and we can think the walls and the buildings, as a place of experimentation, laboratories of creative reflection. Moreover, Cedar Lewisohn argued that «street art is often reflective of the place»<sup>39</sup>.

## 6. *Achievements and impact studies*

Our art program has been able to build social capital by boosting individuals' ability and motivation to be civically engaged, as well as building organizational capacity for effective action. According to us, this has been specifically accomplished by:

- Creating a venue that draws people together who would otherwise would not engage in a constructive social activity.
- Fostering trust between participants and thereby increasing their generalized trust of others.
- Providing an experience of collective efficacy and civic engagement, which spurs participants into further collective action.
- Art events become a source of pride for residents (participants and non-participants alike) in their community, increasing their sense of connection with that community.

<sup>37</sup> Lefebvre 1974, p. 356

<sup>38</sup> Baudrillard 1976, pp. 118-128.

<sup>39</sup> Lewisohn 2008.

- Providing an experience for participants to learn technical and interpersonal skills important for life
- Increasing the scope of individuals' social networks
- Providing an experience for the organizations involved to enhance their capacities. Much of this comes when organizations establish ties and learn how to work, consult and coordinate with other organizations and government bodies in order to accomplish their goals.

This project moves, therefore, from the recognition of the centrality of art and active participation in the formation of culture and citizen's behaviour and identifies the younger generations as the privileged subject for the affirmation of a new ethical, civil and cultural awareness.

What does it mean to create a new awareness? This new awareness was generated among the young people who took part in our different laboratories. The concepts of culture and beauty were chosen as the starting point for the revival of the cultural and social fabric of the community and for the development of feelings of belonging, solidarity and sharing. Work in this direction has enabled young people to regain, first of all, the knowledge, but also the use of important physical, cultural and spiritual areas of their town.

During each workshop, video-interviews were taken in local schools, mainly involving young people in order to understand how our chosen methodologies of art have succeeded in starting a process of ethical change and revival, the results of which will be visible during the next few years.

In order to measure the impact of these activities, interviews with the participants were carried out to gauge their feelings and reactions towards the workshops. In each workshop, participation varied in terms of numbers and age: so far, we have carried out twelve workshops with more or less 50 participants attending each. The first four workshops were held with primary school children (5-11 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015; four workshops were carried out with middle school students (11-15 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December 2015; the last four workshops were carried out with secondary school students (15 -19 yrs) and were held in Casapesenna between 15<sup>th</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016. In this way, we covered all age groups. It is important to underline that this was the first attempt in Italy to carry out some impact studies on the effectiveness of street art. We had no proscriptive model nor bibliography to follow.

These interviews showed an incredible awareness from the youngest students, in particular on issues relating to organized crime: from camorra murders to the unauthorized construction of buildings to the issue of buried toxic waste. This awareness was also conveyed in drawings realized by the pupils themselves; one of them, during a wonderful sunny day, designed a landscape during a heavy rainfall. Asked to explain why he had decided to draw this, he replied that only the rain can could give birth to healthy plants and clear the ground of

toxic waste (4/12/2015<sup>40</sup>). Similarly, a child drew two huge hands that, in her opinion, were the hands of God that would help honest people to defeat the *Camorra*.

The key word most used by these young people during our interviews was hope (08/12/15<sup>41</sup>). Although aware of the social drama that exists in their local communities, each student had not lost hope of a future free from the yoke of organized crime. Similarly, parents who often accompanied their children during the workshops have, on several occasions, expressed their happiness about our workshops. On one occasion, one mother (53 years old) who often accompanied her children to the workshops explained: «My son always wants to be here because he says that everything here is beautiful and colourful» (22/1/2016<sup>42</sup>). This collected evidence shows how the implementation of such projects in urban contexts full of social decay can play a major role in the formation of a civic consciousness able to move beyond the entrenched ideas of organized crime.

The outcomes of this project deal with tangible (architecture) and non-tangible (street art) qualities in urban contexts. Tangible values in an urban setting can encourage urban regeneration, urban gentrification and improving public spaces in cities. Whereas, non-tangible qualities can promote a healthy and vibrant city through positives communication via artists' approaches to display constructive social, political and political messages.

Unfortunately, the lack of available funds in Italian universities did not allow us to carry out a more detailed and systematic study of the impact of our project, one where we could have measured how our project had changed the lives and visions of children in these deprived areas. Indeed, as Borriello has also pointed out, in Italy so far, no impact study on the effectiveness of street art has ever been carried out<sup>43</sup>. He also explains that his Street Art Observatory, Inward, is working precisely on how to determine the most appropriate methodologies to measure the impact of street art on the city and its inhabitants<sup>44</sup>. Evaluations need good theoretical grounding and evidence of such adequate theoretical grounding is not obvious. Moreover, because of the lack of funding and of previous studies, all measurements of impact carried out in Casapesenna were designed and realized by art historians without the support of sociologists or psychologists, which may explain why they are so limited. Thus, the lack

<sup>40</sup> Video-interview with a student of Istituto Autonomo Comprensivo Don Milani-Gravante-Grazzanise-Santa Maria La Fossa held in Casapesenna on 04<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Video-interview with a student of Istituto Comprensivo Leonardo Da Vinci-San Marcellino held in Casapesenna on 09<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Video-interviews with a mother held in Casapesenna on 22<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Conversation with Luca Borriello held in Naples on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Borriello is research director of Inward, one of the most important observatory on street art in Italy <<http://www.inward.it>> 29.08.2018.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

of expertise in evaluating the effectiveness of the project and the associated understanding of good practice in street art are evident, resources in terms of both people and funding remain scarce. Yet, this project has had the merit of turning the spotlight on a territory too long forgotten and left in the hands of the Camorra. Our hope is that in the future, there will be greater funds available to support similar projects and to study, in the best possible way, their impact on the lives of young people (figg. 5-10).

## 7. *Conclusions*

Camorra is not just an organised crime association; unfortunately, in Southern Italy camorra is a sort of ideology extremely rooted in cities and people. Fighting camorra cannot simply mean creating a task force of policemen and magistrates; fighting camorra means first of all trying to change the mentality of the people, making them an active part in this processes of correction/modification. Culture in general and art (street art and public art) in particular could thus play a key role in this regeneration processes of the territories where camorra is (or was) present.

Unlike other visual arts, in fact, street art speaks to us universally: It transcends politics, gender, economies, cultural differences, and technologies, revealing insights unattainable by reason or rationality. Street art is more and more playing an increasingly crucial role in guiding the paradigm shift we need to reframe in order to define how we see our world and our place in it.

The methodology of intervention in Casapesenna has been structured starting from a participatory approach: the street art works by Giò Pistone and Alberonero have been the starting point for the development of processes of social inclusion in order to give participants the sensation that, to quote Fëdor Dostoevskij, beauty will save the world. Yet I think beauty alone cannot save the world. In fact, our idea of beauty is something more than mere aesthetic; it possesses an ethical dimension that can affect a decisive way in the formation of a renewed civic sense and belonging to a particular community. When intervention of street artists call for attention to local and social issues, they can boost this identity building process getting a positive feedback from their fellow citizens when interventions are top-quality and respect neighbours.

Street art and other kind of participatory-art based are able to actively construct a social 'reality', as opposed to its mere reflection. This way of using art «reconnects culture and society, and recognizes that art is made for audience, not for institutions of art»<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Jacobs 1995, p. 54.

Commissioned graffiti art was invited not simply to 'beautify' inhabited residential buildings and complexes this art was also intended to convey multiple messages to both local and visiting public audiences. These are processes that Özkan indicates as «aestheticization of urban chaos».

Ephemeral by nature, street artworks are art forms that celebrate changes and feed on new ideas: in the case study, I have presented camorra has lost. Today camorra, have had their organisational capacity to a certain extent defeated, giving the people here an opportunity to raise their heads again. Thanks to art and culture, tourists and above all local people can understand how important it is to join forces to fight together against the camorra and any other form of organized crime, and to bring a different kind of development to an area where, in the end, people will be able to legally work and produce high quality local goods.

Unfortunately, this project is not enough to change the prevailing situation in the region, but it is a perfect way to demonstrate that thanks to the promising improvements taking place no one needs to escape from here. According to me, the use for this purpose of confiscated properties is, a sort of compensation towards communities deprived by incumbent presence of the clan that impede healthy life cycles of activities and at the same time a signal that an alternative is possible.

I hope that in Casapesenna (and in other cities in this area) everyone could put some colours on their balconies, which are not only flowers and plants, in order to make the little town vibrating of a good and positive energy against camorra and any other kind of organised crime. I hope that in the near future everyone in Casapesenna could make a creative difference.

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*Appendice*

Fig. 1. Alberonero at work, credit by Jessica Stewart



Fig. 2. Giò Pistone at work, credit by Jessica Stewart



Fig. 3. Alberonero (on the right) and Giò Pistone (on the left), credit by Jessica Stewart



Fig. 4. Poster of the exhibition *Ars Felix. Gli anni Settanta all'ombra della Reggia*



Fig. 5. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli



Fig. 6. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli



Fig. 7. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli



Fig. 8. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli



Fig. 9. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli



Fig. 10. Community engagement activities, credit by Alessandro Santulli

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