

Writings on the wall- the Indian context

Workshop on Fresco removal, Poortgebouw-Rotterdam

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Introduction:

Urban writings can be contextualized as the idea of spontaneous communication embedded in the city fabric, interpreted as messages to the society. The writings symbolize the free expressions of the society either in the form of deriving own pleasure (creating identity tags) or evoking thoughts amongst the public of the locality (creating specific and generic statements to large groups of people). While both may be implicit or explicit, the first is where intended messages are displayed as tags, bombs, signatures etc. and the second as socially accessible messages to the common people by using strategic and appropriate public spaces. In this regard, the urban environment clearly delineates space for writings on the wall that is influenced by the behavioral, social and cultural aspects belonging to certain segments of the society.

Intended messages to the society:

Reflecting on my own Indian culture, the sub-continent of Asia where graffiti culture as such is less prevalent but often noticed as political-religious jargons of the society. Here, the concepts of place and culture are interwoven and public writings support the diversified socio-cultural sides as common tools of propagation. Understanding these writings form an inherent part of the city where the subject of preservation is seemingly questionable, those that demand preservation are the ones proliferated by the changing conditions of the urban landscape. As for India, the public messages seldom contribute to creative ideas but form strong communications of the socio-political conditions. For instance, the aids campaign in India was mainly advertised using writings on the wall. This tool gained popularity within the local and found itself in common places near schools, colleges, government buildings, recreational areas, street markets etc. for high vicinity and reach to the people of the city. The propaganda won immense appreciation generating increased levels of awareness by public graffiti writings that revealed safe sex practices and preventive measures.

Public writings as a communication tool:

The idea of public writings in India is seen as a much controversial medium subjected to the changing influences of the authoritative groups and local political leaders. In my view, the significance of writings on the wall can be strong weapons that communicate to the society, to the greater masses having culturally distinguished lifestyles. On one hand while the writings can add to the urban development of an area exchanging thoughts on the importance of education, anti-corruption etc. as they help rethink the social

uplift, on the other hand they revitalize and enliven the ambience of the neighborhood by art that can be both fun and thought provoking to the residents.

For example, the emerging art movement in India, focuses on this aspect of transforming dead and boring inhabited spaces to breed with vibrant life and color as in the case of the great wall of Mumbai. This project started in the global city of India, Mumbai and is about recreating street art that embodies the culture striking conversations with people passing through it on an everyday basis. The movement was an initiative by the local artists of the city that invited participants from all walks of life to contribute to the wall and where pop culture met the city pride bearing a myriad of global and local messages. Writings or creations of this kind ubiquitously communicate to the inhabitants and are bound to be preserved for generations to come, as an art documentation of emerged-emerging India.

Conclusion, fresco removal workshop:

The workshop on Fresco removal has been a specific experience that dealt with the preservation of writings on the wall. The technique illustrated the various processes involved in the art of conserving wall graffiti. The subject of fresco removal in our case were done in the interiors of Poortgebouw, a historical building originally squatted, currently housing a creative community involved in cultural arts, Rotterdam. In my opinion, the presentations given by the artist during the workshop was a catalogue of photographs showcasing an overview of the social and cultural habits of Italy. The collection and the explanation was a strong inspiration to think and look one step beyond in observing city spaces. While this aspect was quite prominent, the most noticeable aspect was to study the preservation of writings understanding the materials and processes involved both in a meticulous and joyful manner.

To summarize, it is important to learn how to preserve wall frescoes as they explain the integral and inherent socio-cultural practices of an urban environment. The writings can either be representations that significantly express its society or can be meaningless tags of less relevance to the place itself. However, the preserved writings of either support in understanding the city, as an orientation to perceive the formal and informal communications of the past, that which exists in the present and those that may consequentially arise in the future. Preservation of this communication is inevitably essential as located and subjected to the ever changing social conditions and is a powerful tool to get oneself acclimatized to the urban climate of a place.

My message: Learn and let learn; Your society, Your India;

Emphasizing the importance of Knowledge and Literacy.