

Conceptual Post-Street Art in Russia

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Abstract

Global street art turned into a neo-pop(ulist) post-street art (inter)muralist movement operating with simple visual messages easily accessible for people via Instagram. Artists' anti-capitalist pseudo-critical statements—what I call 'protest for sale'—circulating in social media are easily co-opted by creative city discourse, the capitalist neoliberal system, discipline society, and the art market. Artists' voices from peripheral scenes and regions dealing with local contexts, languages, and communities, and those who work in a more nuanced and sophisticated way are overshadowed by street art celebrities and their domesticated rebel aesthetics. Taking as an example Russian conceptual and dialogical post-street art I want to show other perspectives on the development of street art.

Keywords: street art, pop art, conceptual art, regional scenes, Russia

My previous essay in this journal was dedicated to street art periodization, influenced by a widely discussed article wrote by British anthropologist Rafael Schacter¹. According to him, street art, like any other artistic movement, has its period and can be characterized by distinct practices, techniques, and a core group of artists. My aim was to test and clarify this idea applied to a certain regional scene:

“Although street art as a consistent global movement existed approximately around 1998 to 2008, this periodization needs to be updated for the peripheral scenes. And, as street art is site-specific and peripheral by its nature, it needs to be perceived as follows. Not everywhere, especially in comparison to the cities or regions with less developed art institutions and art market, the processes of instrumentalization and co-opting of street art by the creative city discourse happens with the same dynamic.”²

Considering given periodization I propose to use terms *proto-street art* and *post-street art* to describe personal unsanctioned art practices in public spaces—before 1998 and after 2008 (specified for a certain region/scene).

1 - Schacter R. Street art is a period, PERIOD. Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City. Edited by Konstantinos Avramidis, Myrto Tsilimpounid. London: Routledge, 2016. P. 103–118.

2 - Polsky, A. Specifics of Periodization in Russian Street Art. SAUC - Street Art & Urban Creativity Scientific Journal, 4(2), 2018.

According to the results of my ongoing research, examples of proto-street art in the USSR can be found in works of Moscow and Odesa conceptual artists in the late 1970s—early 1980s. These examples of unsanctioned artistic statements in public spaces aesthetically similar to examples of contemporary street art were made with no influence of graffiti movement and before street art became a consistent movement—hence can be called proto-street art.

Post-street art practices are much more diverse and can include urban interventions, spontaneous sculptures, partizaning, street performances as well as exhibitions and murals by former and practicing street artists. While street art was site-specific, but globally consistent movement, today's post-street art is divided into numerous sub-genres and not necessary site-specific, but in many ways thematically unified.

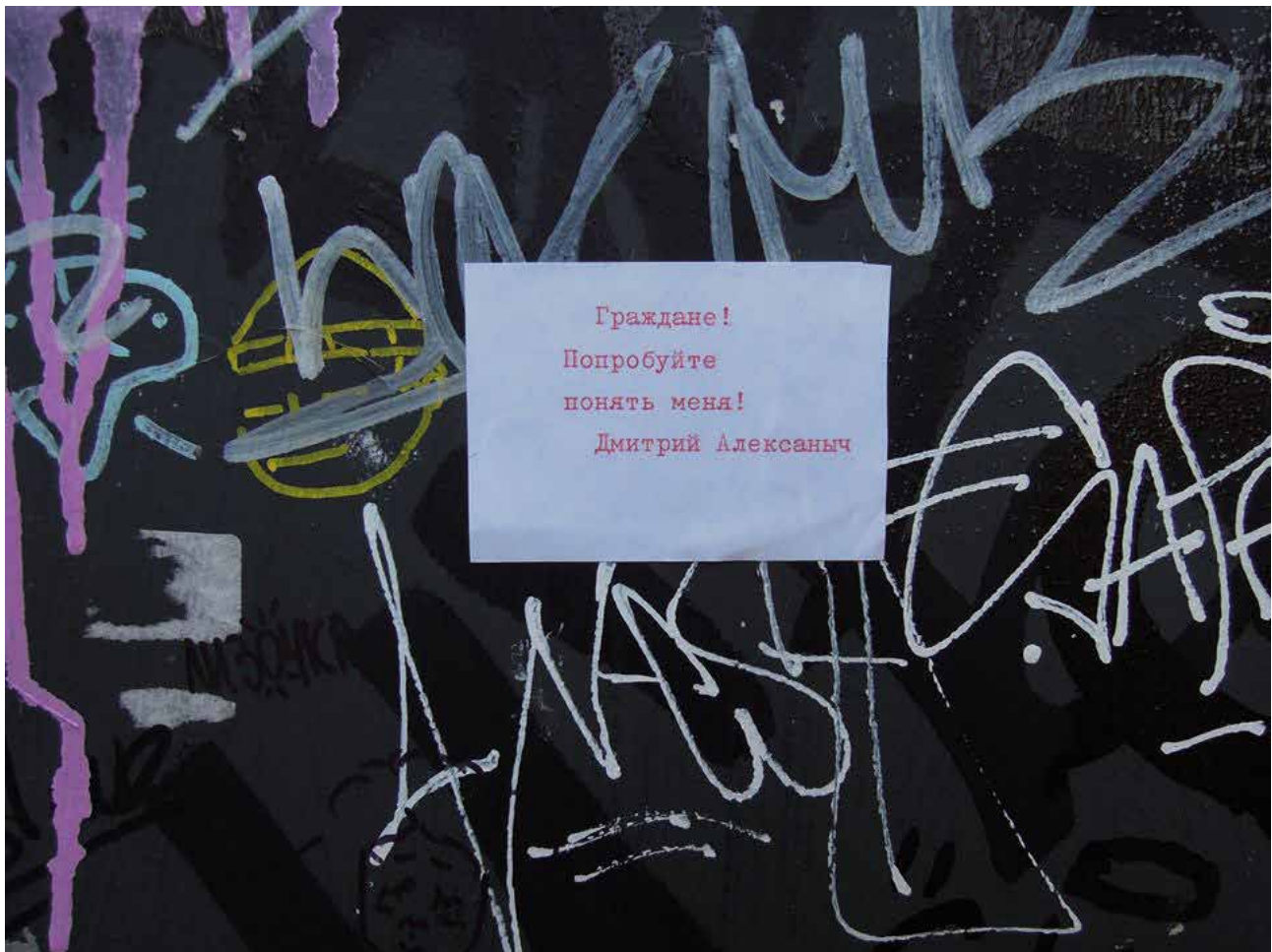
My hypothesis is that globally post-street art became a neo-populist aesthetic/style filled with domesticated anti-capitalist images circulating mostly via Instagram and other social media platforms. But certain parts of post-street art practices are hardly visible through this lens. I believe that Russian street art is very unique but critically underrepresented in the West. My claim that the reason why is that the local scene took another line of development

into conceptual post-street art. This happened for many reasons: logocentrism of Russian culture, its isolation from the rest of the world, and the focus on the local context, its connection to the tradition of Moscow conceptual school and Russian literature.

Not being able to get on the international level on an equal scale nor to find their comfortable niche in the art market and contemporary art, peripheral post-street artists in underdeveloped areas searching for new aesthetics and ways of interacting with co-citizens. Such ways as focus on local agenda (using Russian, not English), logocentrism, experiments in a field of dialogical and socially engaged art, building own theory, and DIY-institutionalization. These

characteristics are common for many of the conceptual and socially engaged post-street artists, as well as for Moscow conceptualists whose works can be described as proto-street art. This doesn't mean that all of the street artists in Russia have turned this way, many of them work in a more westernized pop-art aesthetics focusing on an international audience, same for the global scene where a wide variety of street art methodologies can be found.

My current research on Russian street art is crucial not only for the description of periodization and specifics of the local (post)street art scene but for building the theory of street art and for searching different overshadowed tendencies in post-street art practices on a global scale.



Citizens!
Try to understand me!
Dmitry Alexanych

Dmitri Prigov, 1980s
Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019

Citizens!

The rain will wash away these letters
the wind will tear these pieces of paper
and carry them away in an unknown direction
but the words will settle in our hearts.

Dmitry Alexanych



Dmitri Prigov, 1980s

Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019



Citizens!

Be patient! Be patient! A little more and everything will be alright!

Dmitry Alexanych

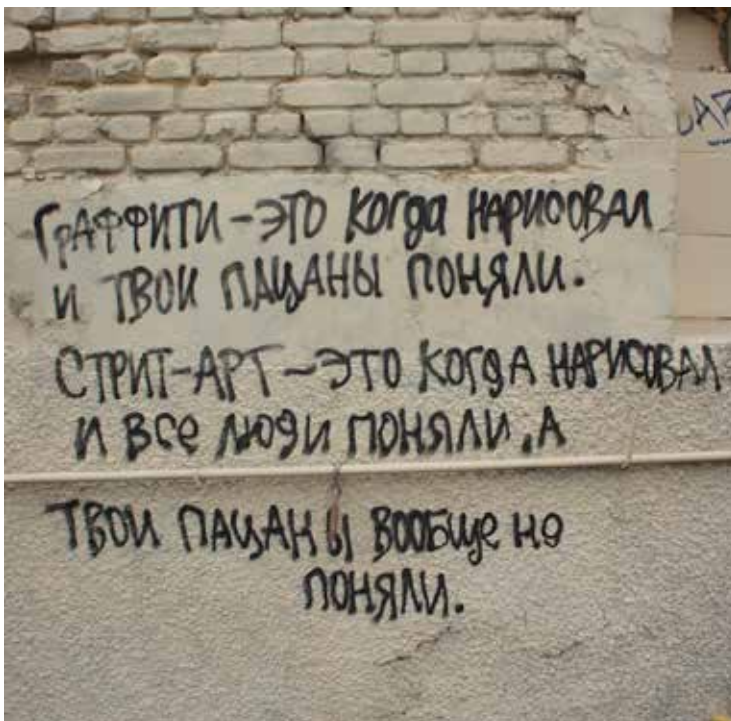
Dmitri Prigov, 1980s

Reenactment by School for Fool, 2019



I do not complain about anything and I almost like it here, although I have never been here before and know nothing about this place.

Collective Actions, 1977



Graffiti is when you drew it and your boys understood.

Street Art is when you drew it and all the people understood, but your boys didn't understand at all.

Maxim Ima, 2020



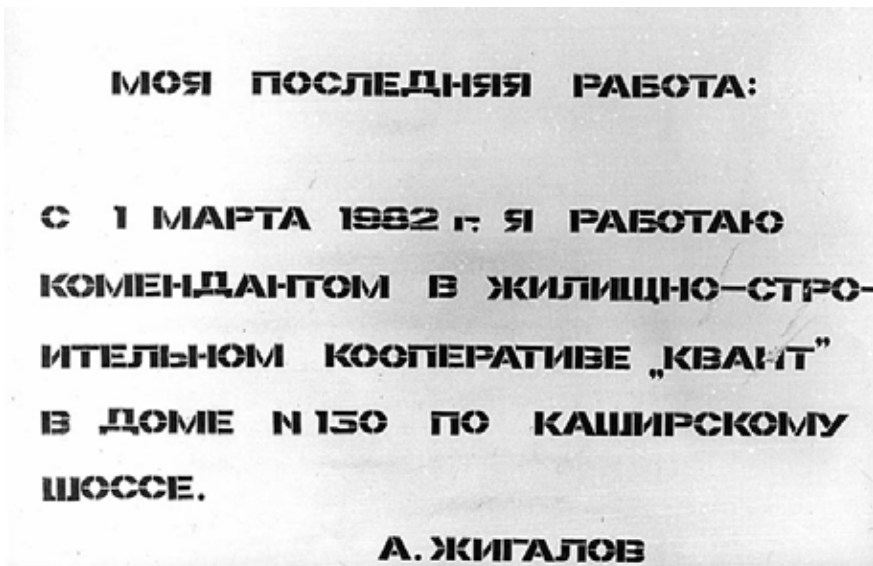
Kirill Kto, Patchwork, 2016



Partizaning, DIY-crosswalk buffed by officials, 2012



SZ-Group, Signs, 1980



МОЯ ПОСЛЕДНЯЯ РАБОТА:

**С 1 МАРТА 1982 Г. Я РАБОТАЮ
КОМЕНДАНТОМ В ЖИЛИЩНО-СТРО-
ИТЕЛЬНОМ КООПЕРАТИВЕ „КВАНТ”
В ДОМЕ №130 ПО КАШИРСКОМУ
ШОССЕ.**

А. ЖИГАЛОВ

My Recent Work

Since March 1, 1982, I have been working as a commandant in the Kvant Housing and Construction Cooperative in house number 130 along Kashirsky Highway.

TOT ART

