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Street Art Belgrade

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PHENOMENON AND DEVELOPMENT OF GRAFFITI CULTURE IN BELGRADE BETWEEN 1996. AND 2005

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Abstract: *This paper is a condensed version of an art history MA thesis defended in 2005 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, focusing on graffiti culture. Graffiti culture became prominent in Belgrade in the mid-1990s and has developed with some fluctuations ever since. This research covers the most formative period of its development, relying primarily on interviews with local graffiti writers and immersion in the local graffiti scene. Consequently, what began as a study of the visual aspects of graffiti writing from an art history perspective evolved into an ethnological study of contemporary urban culture and subcultural artistic movements. The research revealed significant differences in the reception of graffiti culture in Belgrade compared to other major cities, largely due to the unique social, political, and economic context in Serbia in the late 1990s and early 2000s.*

Key words: *graffiti writing, subculture, city, Belgrade*

Introduction¹

The graffiti found on the ancient walls of Pompeii are considered some of the most important sources for understanding everyday Roman life, and researchers regard them as invaluable discoveries. This raises the question: why are contemporary graffiti so unwelcome? Couldn't they also be a subject of serious research? Double standards are nothing new in the theory and history of art, making it essential to become familiar with contemporary graffiti in order to assess them properly.

¹ Radošević, Lj. (2005) *Istorijsko-teorijska rasprava o pojavi i razvoju grafita u Beogradu od 1996. do 2005. godine*, Master thesis, Department of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade.

The term »graffiti« is so broad that it requires clarification to focus on the aspects relevant to this research. The word graffiti has two roots: the Greek word *graphein*, meaning »to write,« and the Italian word *graffito*, meaning »to scratch« or »scratch in.« Today, »graffiti« is a common term used to describe various phenomena, including cave paintings, political slogans, random names, messages in public toilets, hearts scratched into tree bark, and acid etchings.

In this paper, we will discuss graffiti that appeared in New York at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. These emerged on the trains of the New York subway, created with spray paint, giving the word »graffiti« a completely new meaning. Members of the graffiti culture generally agree that »graffiti« was not the original term for the phenomenon. The pioneers of graffiti culture referred to their activity as »writing« and later accepted terms like »aerosol art« or »aerosol culture,« but neither fully captures the breadth of the production within this subculture. Over 50 years, graffiti have evolved beyond mere writing and the use of aerosol.

This widespread phenomenon arrived in Belgrade in the mid-1990s, catching the attention of many young people who began writing graffiti, as well as some enthusiasts who documented and researched them. Why is the Belgrade graffiti movement interesting? What makes these graffiti different from those in other parts of the world? Are graffiti art? These and other questions will be addressed and analyzed in this paper to determine the originality of Belgrade graffiti and their »old school« spirit, which is essential for becoming part of the global graffiti writing culture.

At the time of writing this thesis, no comprehensive research had been conducted, so most of the data was sourced from interviews the author conducted with graffiti writers over two and a half years, from 2000 until the end of 2002. Field research continued until the final version of the thesis, although some data remained inaccessible. The core of the thesis is divided into two segments: the first three chapters cover historical data and local history, while the second segment addresses theoretical issues and consists of four chapters. The aim of the thesis was to provide an overview of the historical and theoretical aspects of the Belgrade graffiti scene and its place in the global context. This paper, however, is an adapted version of the thesis and will focus solely on the historical aspects of the Belgrade graffiti scene.

Belgrade "wild" graffiti

Civil war that came as a consequence of Yugoslavia falling apart, made the everyday life of the regular citizens of Serbia almost unbearable. In addition we need to take in consideration the sanctions, economical crisis and the anesthetized feelings of the general population, in order to understand the full extent of the last decade of the 20th century in the Balkans. In one of the newly created countries, the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (at the time when paper was written it was the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro), writing on the walls reached a completely new dimension. Media were controlled by the ruling party loyal to Milošević's regime and created, on a mass level, a state of mind that was enticed to their cause: they constructed their "truth" and control-

led every aspect of the nation's everyday life. This situation naturally led to the rebellion of the common sense and Belgrade's walls became a place for the heated discussion between the autocratic party in power and the opposition. Everyone wrote on the walls, but unlike the previous periods, no one was cleaning that up. Those that grew up during that period, the wall full of all sorts of graffiti was a completely normal occurrence. Therefore, it is not surprising that one group of young people chose graffiti writing as a form of their personal expression.

First graffiti that were inspired by New York wild style emerged in Belgrade, like in the rest of Europe, in the mid 1980s but they did not take root. They were made by some of the first members of Hip-Hop culture, by the local breakdance crew - Belgrade B-boys. Some of them still live in New Belgrade until this date. Those first graffiti could be seen in the New Belgrade blocks facing the Sava river, in the primary school "Užička republika", at the local kindergarten in Block 62 and so on. The famous graffiti *Rap City*, made in 1985, or the *Venus* at the Zeleni venac are the ones that members of the graffiti culture still remember. In Block 45, and some other surrounding blocks, tags started appearing during the year 1996.² There were surprisingly a lot of them since they appeared all at once. At the time it seemed that New Belgrade was full of graffiti writers. However, that was not the case. A year earlier, our officially first graffiti writer, came back from France (or Paris to be more precise). He went there to high school and when he came back he brought with him the spirit and lore of the graffiti culture. Miša Jens became a guru of Belgrade graffiti. At the beginning he did not have a crew to go bombing with him, so he tagged his numerous aliases as well as nicknames of his friends. He created one of the first crews BMB (Biša, Miša and Bosić), in which he was the only active member.

Around the same time in the New Belgrade blocks Cobe was also doing graffiti on his own. In the beginning he was mostly tagging and his first graffiti was made in Novi Sad: "Mika from New Belgrade, who's been doing graffiti for a long time, was at the time in Novi Sad, so we met, took two cans of paint from the garage and some old spraycans and we made our first graffiti sketch."³

Jens and Cobe met at the beginning of 1997 and immediately started working together. Their obsession was tagging around the city. At that time they still had no contact with graffiti writers from abroad and the existence of the spray nozzles was still a mystery, but that was the case with all other pioneers in Belgrade. Soon enough they understood that they wanted to do something more significant which led them to establish the AGC Crew (Anonimus Graffiticus Crew or Ag City Crew). From time to time other graffiti writers joined in but the core of the crew were the two of them. They used

2 At the time when this thesis was defended in 2005, the author did not manage to get an interview from Miša Jens so the precise year of his return from France and his first graffiti were obtained only through second hand information. Later on, in 2008, the author interviewed Miša Jens and he gave different years for the significant events. However, the year 1996 was already established in this research as the starting point so we will keep it as such. For further reference regarding the exact year of the beginning of the Belgrade scene, see Bojan Stevanović's and Hope's articles.

3 Radošević, Lj. (2001) *Interview with Cobesta*28, March 2001, Belgrade.

to do pieces around the neighborhood which drew attention of other young guys who tried to do the same. That winter, because of the unexpected situation, Cobe had to take some time off. But the crew gained some new members at that time, new members were Sane 751 (Juice), Mise, Jamas, Jole, Shorty (Evil), Krca, and Face. When Cobe came back the crew was large and quite active. That changed when new members started joining in and that led to the dissolution of the crew, in mid 1998, because it was too “massive”. However, that led to the forming of new crews such as Deep Cover (Krca and Jole) and Rough Squad (Helios and Leco) but most of them were not active enough in the streets. All of the aforementioned writers did graffiti in New Belgrade and on the vehicles of the public transportation. Face continued to work with Jens and Cobe and sometimes Leco joined in. Shorty and Juice created hip hop group Fool Moon but they continued doing graffiti as well.

Dedinje, another part of Belgrade, got its 90210 Crew relatively early. The name was a parody of the popular series *Beverly Hills 90210*. It was founded by Bougie (Gie) and Soter (Sot) in 1997. At that time Dedinje was a high end neighborhood, where most of the government officials and mafia bosses used to live, and it seemed impossible that a neighborhood like that could birth a graffiti crew. Yet they did exist and they were very active. They also did the public transportation vehicles so that was not a prerogative of the writers from New Belgrade. Bougie worked a lot with Cobe after the dismantling of the AGC Crew. Two of them thought that bombing is the most exciting and the most original form of writing, so it became their favorite pastime. No matter how many pieces all the aforementioned writers created, it still was not enough for the “whole city” concept, so they had to travel across neighborhoods in order to see new pieces.

The Republic Square (The Square further in the text) was and still is a favorite gathering spot in the city. It is a hot spot where the biggest part of the city population gathers and says goodbye, the place to meet to go to nightlife or a place to spend nightlife. Narrow strip of land between the monument of the Prince Mihajlo and the National Museum was a favorite spot for the gathering of skateboarding culture as well as of those who were into rollerblading. That was some form of the theater, a scene, where they had an option to demonstrate their skills while the rest of the people were passing by. Crew from the Square, next to the skateboarders and rollerbladers, was comprised of musicians, graffiti writers and fakers (*pozeri*)⁴.

C.S.A.K. or simply A.K. was a typical representative of the Square line-up. He was skateboarding, writing songs and he did graffiti. He became interested in graffiti roughly at the same time like the guys from the New Belgrade blocks but there was no one else in the city center who shared his interests. He tried on his own to figure out the technique and the complexities of the graffiti writing and therefore it took him a longer time to progress. A year later, in 1997, the situation in the city center started to change. Youth from

⁴ The local term *pozer* is used for the persons that join a certain group or a fan group just because their main interest seems to be in the trend at that given moment. In essence they are not really into the philosophy or way of living of the given group.

Vračar, who came to the city center to rollerblade, Mask (Msk), made his first graffiti that year. The same year, miscellaneous guys from the Square party, Master of Disaster, Leo, Shorty and Musli (Msl), did their first graffiti too. Master and Shorty went to the same high school, Architecture High, and together they made numerous sketches but because they were from the different neighborhoods (Master from Dorćol and Shorty from Zemun) they did not do graffiti together. So they scrambled the line-up a little bit, Shorty and Msk went into the action together while the other informal crew consisted of A.K., Leo, Master and Msl. Next year they formed a first crew which they called CO2 – the Circle Of 2.⁵ First, and at the time of writing of this paper, that was the only crew from the city center.

This crew was not homogenous, at the beginning members were not only graffiti writers but also musicians and numerous friends from the Square. Soon enough Master stopped doing graffiti but his tag was for a very long time considered to be the best one on this side of the river. Msl and Ism were not that active and by the 2000 they completely stopped doing graffiti. Relatively quickly the crew from the city center was synthesized. Crew's active members were A.K., Leo and Jew (he was there for all activities but he was not doing much graffiti). The latter's tag was intentionally created so that it could be signed in latin letters as Jew and in Cyrillic as JEY. No matter how much Leo and A.K. tried, the city center was never as colorful as New Belgrade. What made the vivid scene in the city center were tags. Graffiti writers were mostly tagging in their neighborhood but everyone tagged in the city center. Following parameters could be deduced from the tags:

- A graffiti writer was active,
- A writer changed their style,
- A writer took on a new alias,
- A new writer appeared,
- Someone changed crews,
- A crew gained a new member,
- Graffiti writers or crews were in conflict.

City center became a universal "info board". However, one of the most impressive actions was Leo's bombing that took over every piece of free wall, trash bin, doors, metal surfaces... "When I started it began with tagging and I wrote Leo CO2 everywhere. My goal was a whole city. I wanted to interest people in all of this. What we talked about earlier, about messages, my message at this moment is the popularization of graffiti. Not in a wrong way, but promoting what they truly are."⁶

Characteristic of this early period was that our graffiti writers drew parallel between them and the New York graffiti movement. During the mid 1990s Belgrade was in a

⁵ Tram no. 2 in Belgrade has a circular route and it is widely considered, even though incorrectly, that the very center of the city is within this circle. And those that live in the city center have somewhat a higher social status.

⁶ Radošević, Lj. (2000) Interview with Leo, November 2000, Belgrade.

similar state of disarray like New York in the 1980s, so the story of how and why it all started made sense on Belgrade's streets. Except the need to paint, there was an element of rebellion against the state, against the system by means of doing things that are prohibited. Tagging and bombing were main activities, while pieces were mostly simple with very few colors. At the beginning no one had caps, and the spraycans they used were "beggary". They mostly used Kenda Kolor or Cosmos spraycans, and the biggest issue with them was that the cans were under a strong pressure so the paint had tendency to be runny. "If you ask me, the characteristics of our writers is that we are jazz types, we always improvise. You shouldn't whine, if you don't get that, you shouldn't paint."⁷

More writers, more pieces, more style

Halley's Crew was created already in 1997, but it still belongs to the second period of Belgrade graffiti history. Even though the difference in the year of birth between the first generation graffiti writers and the second wave is really small, they are still part of the second generation of graffiti writers in New Belgrade. At the time they started doing graffiti there were already enough good pieces in the neighborhood that served as an inspiration for their personal style. But they wanted to do something completely different. Subzero (Sub), Absolute (Abs) and Gips (Negre) made their first graffiti on the walls of the 10th Belgrade Gymnasium (*Haine*⁸) and at the bus terminus at Block 23 (*Liquid*). They practiced diligently and they tried new things, so when Leco brought from France the first caps they were ready. In 1998 they did the first photorealistic image on our streets and they tried 3D style as well. When they started they agreed to divide the tasks. Abs was doing only characters and Sub did letters. This division of labor did not last long because Sub and Negre wanted to perfect every aspect, while Abs kept doing only characters. His choice could not be explained by the lack of talent, moreover, we could say that it was a consequence of his love of comics. He transferred some of the characters from the comics and animation onto the walls because he believed that comics possess the quality of line that could be used in graffiti as well.

That same year Msk started painting with Halley's but he kept to his simplicity without compromise. Msk and Shorty opened up one of the halls of fame, the staircases by the Branko's bridge in Branko's street. They did a piece together, where Shorty did letters *Seča* and Msk did the character of the cat. This gives us indication that characters started to appear more frequently on the scene. In CO2 Crew characters were made by Msl and A.K. Msl's favorite character was the stoned devil while A.K. started doing characters late so he did not have time to elaborate before he quit graffiti. That is certainly a pity, keeping in mind that his first characters were stylistically diverse, they were done with mastery and were quite interesting.

We can see that there are quite a lot of activities in every city neighborhood, styles become more complex and there is a lot of experimentation. It was still hard to obtain

⁷ Radošević, Lj. (2001) *Interview with Cobesta28*, op. cit.

⁸ Inspired by the cult French movie *La Haine* directed by Mathieu Kassovitz in 1995.

caps and those that own at least one were considered lucky. Colors are still, up to that point, of relatively poor quality, but sometimes, at the New Belgrade flea market, it is possible to find some professional brands. Here and there, some cans of Belton and just one shade of Montana Aerosol Art in Poison Green.

Three significant things for our scene happened in 1999. First of which was the presence of Kim-Tec spraycans. Their price was 10 RSD while others cost approximately 170 RSD (at the time that was the equivalent of the 5 Deutsche Mark). So the unprecedented amount of spraycans was purchased both for direct use and for keeping the stash. Maybe this occurrence would not have had such a huge impact on our scene if it was not for the second significant event of 1999. In March of the same year NATO bombing of Serbia and, hence, of Belgrade started. This traumatic event that lasted almost three months, youth of that time remember as a period of the most intense socialization and creative idleness. Air-raid sirens, instead of danger, meant the time to go painting. All of the graffiti writers were painting as mad, as if they wanted to chase away bad thoughts from their heads and heads of other people with colors. According to one of the writers, Dubi: "When I started doing graffiti regularly, Kim-Tech sprays came in. We all went overboard, and if it wasn't of that period I would probably be less good. When you do something intensely, with people that are better than you, you learn quickly."⁹

The third significant thing that happened that year was the organization of the first graffiti Jam in Belgrade.¹⁰ It was organized by the Postpesimist association in the courtyard of the primary school Kralj Petar I at the Old City municipality. This event was informally a public recognition that there is a graffiti culture on the streets of Belgrade. Among the local graffiti writers (Jens, Mise, Cobes, Sane 751, Face, Mask, Sub Zero, Abs, Negre, Shorty, Chef Sale AK and Dr Leco) there were two writers from Croatia (Jen and Fuk) and three street artists from Slovenia (Goražd Prinčič and Rok Ogorevc; we do not have the information about the third one). For the first time caps were offered for sales and for the first time they could paint with, at the time, important graffiti writers from Croatia (their scene is much more advanced than ours). Even though local graffiti writers were not happy with the organization of the event, this Jam was a spark of inspiration to all graffiti writers in Serbia. According to one of the participants: "We were quite unhappy, and we know that they were burned by Studio B and B29, actually, wherever someone organized something like that we were treated like clowns, or nobody took care of us. They pick us up from the streets, show us, and then push us back to the streets. We learned a lot from that, so we became deft, we've decided that if they want to show us like in a circus we're going to ask for money."¹¹

9 Radošević, Lj. (2001) Interview with Dubi, March 2001, Belgrade.

10 Jam is an organized gathering where members of the subculture can showcase their skills. There are usually competitions in rollerblading, skateboarding, breakdancing, DJing, MCing and graffiti writing. Sometimes, only in graffiti writing context, it can mean painting of a big wall by a large number of graffiti writers usually with some music in the background.

11 Radošević Lj. (2001) *Interview with Cobesta28*, op. cit.

During that period the graffiti scene in Zemun started to stir. Shorty did his first graffiti on the health care center in Zemun in 1997, but because there were not other graffiti writers at the time in Zemun, he usually worked with crews from New Belgrade and the city center. Until then, only a few precious pieces were created in Zemun. Most famous one was done in the Boulevard of Nikola Tesla by the B.F.H. Crew in 1998. That summer Demon and Dubi met while riding skateboards, then Zoro (Rozer) joined them and they created ZAS (Zemun Art Scene Crew). The first graffiti they did together was *Shao Lin* and it took a while until they discovered their style and to upgrade it. At the beginning Dubi was not very active, he became more engaged when Kim-Tec spraycans came out. Demon was not wasting his time, though, he was painting a lot in order to figure out new techniques and what kind of style is the most alluring to him, because there was no one in Zemun that could show him.

They mostly painted in their own neighborhood, and their favorite spots were the white-tiled high rises at the beginning of Glavna Street. They seldomly did throw ups, and even less frequently they tagged, but they created the biggest number of 3D pieces and thus marked Zemun as the center of 3D graffiti. Soon they changed the name of the crew into NPC (New Paint Crew). Then they ventured out into the city center and New Belgrade even though they did not have the best working relationship with the crews from New Belgrade. Relatively frequently they painted with Shorty who introduced them to the guys from the city center. Leo and Shorty ordered caps for them because the NPC was not connected to the graffiti writers from abroad.

When Rozer stopped doing graffiti at the end of 2000, Demon, Shorty, Leo and A.K. started painting together more frequently. For Demon, that was a time of great productivity and innovations. Unexpected change happened when he started painting with Sane 751. Together with Dubi, two of them created the SDB Crew and started bombing the city. It seems quite unlikely that an artist who independently mastered the technique and created a unique style in Serbia, dropped everything and went back to the graffiti culture roots. Sane 751 was always into simple pieces and when he found the formula he liked he never changed it. Demon, on the other hand, always wanted more. Yet, in 2002, he started doing silver pieces that were completely opposite to his style up to that date. His style and attitude towards graffiti culture have surprised the local graffiti scene yet again.

Fresh talents of the Belgrade scene

The year that spread the optimism and had big promises, regarding the local graffiti scene, was the year 2000. Political situation was strenuous, but that much energy on the streets was not seen since the political protest of 1996/97. State of euphoria after the 5th of October overthrow of Milošević and the faith that after that everything will become better, was held dear by most of the citizens of Belgrade well into the next period. The third generation of graffiti writers began their graffiti exploration in that atmosphere. Besides, the older writers were solid support and were willing to share their knowledge and experience.

First graffiti in Miljakovac saw the light of the day the same year. Vle (Crnac) was rarely confined to one area, he wanted to do more walls. At the beginning we did letters but quickly realized that he was more comfortable with creating the characters. He was tagging as Crnac, meaning Black, in order to point out how different he is from other graffiti writers in Serbia. Unusual feature of his characters is that they “speak French”. His pieces attracted a few other guys from the same neighborhood and the next year they created MSC (Miljakovac Style Crew). Members of the crew were Mišel and Packe. Knowing Cobe resulted in intense exchange of pieces between Miljakovac and New Belgrade.

The 90210 Crew had new arrivals that year, namely, Dulait and Homine. They could see some pieces in the neighborhood and during NATO bombing met Bougie and Soter, that motivated them to continue. Just as he mastered the technique, and just as he was capable to start producing more and better, Homine had to quit graffiti. A severe allergy to the spraycan fumes made him renounce the activity he loved. But, the newcomer Dulait really surprised everyone with his talent. He was a valuable asset not only to this but to many other crews he was part of over the years. Graffiti writers usually start with writing the letters but very quickly Dulait understood that his characters have an aura that makes them different from any other character seen on our streets.

In New Belgrade there had to be some shuffling among the crews and crew members. Many writers that were not active stopped doing graffiti all together. Some crews lost their goals, while others merged and created a union in the form of BG Illegal Crew. This crew was composed of the active “leftovers” from other New Belgrade crews, 90210 Crew and several new writers (NecOne, Angel, Dulait). Before they formed the union, Halley’s Crew got new members, namely, NecOne and Angel. Two of them joined the crew from completely different starting points. NecOne was spending a lot of time with Halley’s since their establishment, practically he was their member even before he started doing graffiti. And since he was several years younger he had time to watch and learn. On the other hand, Angel was an author of alternative comics and he was not even thinking about taking on spraycan, but when his artwork was not officially acknowledged he decided to try another art avenue. He started doing graffiti with Sane 751 and Face in 2000 and he progressed very quickly.

The same year company Saatchi & Saatchi made a marketing campaign for the music event *Urban Experience*. They employed graffiti writers for the campaign and for the first time in Belgrade we could see hand made billboards. Alongside Angel, other writers that made billboards were Sane 751, Face, Gips, Sub and Abs. Angel and Negre together painted one of the billboards and that is how he learned the basic rules and small secrets of the writing technique. According to his age he could have been a member of the first generation of writers, but his particular style, fresh approach and his personal traits really put him in the right place and in the right generation. He made a significant difference on our scene when it comes to diversity of styles. One of the first pieces Halley’s crew made with Angel at Jugopetrol hall of fame was under the slogan “Why did you leave me?” (Kaži zašto me ostavi?) and it was chosen as the best graffiti of the new millennium by the B92 radio.

Finally, the number of the BG Illegal Crew settled on nine members – Sub, Bougie, Negre, Dulait, Necone, Leco, Abs, Cobes and Angel. They really understood the value of community and they were among the first ones that accepted the benefits of the World Wide Web. They created the first Serbian graffiti site www.bgillegal.com and, naturally, they were the ones who maintained it. Next to the standard markings of their primary crews, such as Block Art and H-Zone (Halley Zone), they started adding the internet site in their new pieces as well.

Although Sector was not a member of the crew he painted a lot with the “illegals”. He knew NecOne from before but they did not do graffiti together earlier. In high school Sector met Jesma (Жесма) and Snipe, the future members of the new crew. LMC (The Line Machine Crew or MAC from Machina) was active only one year from the end of the 2000 until the end of 2001 but it officially dismantled three years later. Jesma was one of the rare graffiti writers that tried to do pieces in cyrillic letters and he was quite good at it. Crew was primarily based in Čukarica where they did their first pieces, but soon enough they were working in other city areas as well. From time to time Dulait was joining them for action. According to Sector: “The sensation you have when you do trains is really good ‘cause you’re sneaking like a partisan (*partizan*).”¹² It was then that Sektor and Dulait discovered their affinities towards the unusual characters that look as if they stepped out of a weird animation or a child’s drawing: “I find those characters genius, even though the old schoolers with an attitude think that’s total shit.”¹³

Beginning and end

When foreign graffiti writers start visiting it is a sign that you have been officially accepted into the global graffiti family. We know that German writer Kobolt came to Belgrade in 1997 but not that many foreign writers came to Belgrade before 2000. Personal contact is crucial for the adequate distribution of knowledge. The crucial point was exchange with the graffiti writers from the surrounding countries. When a writer sets off on a journey he does not want to visit only one country, he wants to visit all other countries around it and to do graffiti in all of them. But he needs a place to stay. So, the foreign writers come to your city, and your place, with recommendation, and you host them and feed them properly, and sleeping is not a big deal at all since you go bombing in the night. You get to meet the foreign writer while you are writing, that is the most important part. They are, anyway, more interested in a good bombing than in a good hosting. That, on the other hand, opens up a possibility for your travel since every writer is happy to return the favor.

This is how the new world without borders and national differences is created. It is a world full of new adventures and information of what is going on in the other scenes. All of that had to be on standby on our scene, we needed to establish relationships with the writers from the region and from the former Yugoslav republics. We had to take it one

¹² Radošević, Lj. (2002) *Interview with Sector*, April 2002, Belgrade.

¹³ Ibid.

step at the time. Some of the first guests in Belgrade were ones from the North of Serbia. Those were mostly writers from the Novi Sad crews such as DNK (Batos, Epok, Boem, Scare) and GSF, Lemon from Senta and Skec from Subotica(RS)/Szeged (HU) from the VBS Crew (Vojvodina Bombers Crew). In Belgrade Skec did pieces with very complex wild style and B-boy characters, while Lemon liked to illustrate the atmosphere of the regular Vojvodina small town, by doing, as Cobe says, village twats and wells.

In 2001 the first Senta Jam was organized by Lemon. It was successful because it was organized by a graffiti writer, the only person who knows what participants really needed. A large wall, a lot of spraycans, a large number of writers, a chill atmosphere and a huge pot of goulash. There were graffiti writers from Novi Sad, from Hungary and, of course, from Belgrade (Angel, Dulait, Sektor, Necone, Negre, Sub, Bougie, Cobe). Events like this entice the overall progress (in style, productivity, networking) and creation of a more cohesive and productive scene. AFO (Anti Fascist Youth Crew or Atifašistička omladina in Serbian) is a crew that was established the same year. They are special because they have created a local version of anti-style and because of the composition of their members. Next to the Belgrade graffiti writers (Mišel, Ceger, Bougie, Dulait) they had two foreign writers as well. Imun is a writer from Banja Luka (BiH) and Bask (Peqmez) who is also from BiH but lives in Germany. They all do simple graffiti, letters are easily readable and they look as if they were scribbled, and characters look as if they were made by children with lines all over the place and very few colors. Messages they leave are easily understandable, funny, cheeky, and sometimes they show a high level of social awareness.

Cultural exchange with writers from BiH was established and writers from Croatia started visiting on a more regular basis. A period of high productivity and intense creativity started. For this period it is characteristic that we have a higher presence of the characters and letters inspired by the fonts inspired by the commercial design and logos. This is a consequence of “the maturing” scene. Many graffiti writers were around that time doing their graphic design studies, and they were able to try out their design in real life, in the streets. Interesting fact is that many of them went to the Design High School some attended Graphic High School (Face, Cobe, Msk, Sektor, Jesma) and even more of them did university studies related to many branches of art, such as the College of Graphic Design, now Belgrade Business and Arts Academy of Applied Studies (Negre, Sub, Sektor), Faculty of Contemporary Arts (Dmon, Spin), College of Fine and Applied Arts (Angel), and Faculty of Architecture (Dulait).

While “AFO heroes” were working on deconstructing the graffiti guidelines, Negre and Sub were trying to reach technical perfection when it comes to style. At the same time there was a retro movement. Wildstyle evolved in many different directions and we can still find those iterations today, but the old school version is still widely popular. Spin was working on his version of wildstyle because he believed that on the local scene there is still reminiscence of the old school graffiti. His aim was to have his graffiti look like large stickers on the wall. Totally different approach can be found in bombers Kang, Worm, Snupi and the RTS Crew (Rakovica Terrorists Crew). At the time the only active

graffiti writer from the city center was Folk who took a new tag Sekta (the Sect) which was so provocative that it triggered some quite negative public reactions.

At that moment in time professional quality spraycans were available for a few years in several shops, but with the creation of an online shop www.deadlemonade.com they could, for the first time, find everything they needed in one place. For a short while they even had a branch in one of the Zemun's basements. Since graffiti culture became present in Serbia this year saw the biggest amount of jams. It started in Subotica, continued in Belgrade and Niš, and ended simultaneously with two events in Belgrade in the middle of July. In each of these events Montana was the main or partial sponsor. That was a good and productive year that, unfortunately, did not have the desired effect. As with many things that happen in Serbia that make no sense, the almost complete and abrupt end of graffiti activities was in 2004. Potential explanation could be found in the new crisis that took over Serbia and Montenegro after the assassination of prime minister Đinđić in 2003. The sudden plummeting of the financial means of the regular citizens as a response to the political crisis could be just some of them. We also need to mention that the most active writers went into another phase of life where they had to enter the job market and sustain themselves were just some pieces of puzzle called life. In 2004 DeadLemonade was closed down because there was no market logic in selling spraycans in a country where nobody does graffiti.

Here we go again

Towards the end of 2004 we started seeing some throw ups again around the city center and on the vehicles of public transportation. Crews like PHL and CKR and some freelance graffiti writers that do only bombs give us an impression that everything has started from scratch. The only significant event is the emergence of the stencils. Technique that has been used in Europe for more than thirty years has emerged shyly through the artworks of only one artist. We find the artworks of TKV – The Kraljica Vila (The Fairy Queen) from Branko's bridge to the city center in relatively small numbers keeping in mind the fact that the use of stencils can allow you quite large production. It is interesting that TKV mostly presents motifs from modern art such as Frida Khalo's self portrait, Klimt's *Kiss*, Munch's *Scream*, or popular culture characters such as Amélie Poulain.

The following spring brought just enough activities that we could not say that graffiti culture in Belgrade is dead. Most significant and, at the same time, most interesting occurrence is the JDW crew (Jedi Wall Crew) which has a Serbian version of the name as well – Javni WC (The Public WC). Members of this crew are well known writers such as Angel, Sektor and Dulait who, while working together, developed some form of street art which is quite new in our city. While previously graffiti culture has influenced some of the important art movements, now graffiti culture receives the influences from contemporary art. In order to understand something as graffiti it does not need to have a recognisable form of graffiti from New York. Deconstruction of the style through anti-style was a significant moment for the emergence of street art.

At the moment when this thesis was written we can find JWC on the Hippodrome fence. With those artworks Belgrade has finally become part of the world scene. One of the reasons behind that is that during the 2003 jam our writers formed good connections with the writers from Croatia and BIH, and consequently they worked throughout the 2004 more frequently in Zagreb and Tuzla than in Belgrade. At the biggest world graffiti manifestation Meeting of Styles in Zagreb some local writers participated such as Lemon, Sot, Sektor, Dulait and Angel. Most significant Croatian crew YCP (Yo Clan Pose), established in 1992, admitted new members that year - Angel, Dulait, Sektor, Rea (Mostar, BIH) and Aorta (Tuzla, BIH).

Girls with attitude or bros from the hood

In Cobe's words at the time: "Girls are mostly just tagging. Graffiti became a real man's sport over here. That's really ludicrous because some of the pioneers were women. It started more or less on equal terms, but even now women have no good rating to speak of. They are more like bros from the hood and they should call guys out on it."¹⁴

If in the previous sections about Belgrade graffiti you did not find much details about the girls who do graffiti, the reason is quite simple. All along there were only two of them. Keeping in mind that in graffiti culture, just like in most other subcultures that are dominated by men, men were the ones that established their own rules and there was not much place for women. In her study of graffiti culture in New York, Pamela Dennant says: "Female writers then were always slaves of the male dominance of the subculture, always having to be one step ahead in order to be taken seriously as graffiti writers. They were always on the outside, sometimes breaking through into the inside. Females had a lot more to prove than their male counterparts, while aiming for the same goals of style and fame."¹⁵

It really was not easy for women to take on this activity but some of them had an important contribution in the development of graffiti culture. At the same time when Taki 183 was leaving his tags in New York in the late 60s, two girls who were tagging together were also active – Barbara 62 and Eva 62. Girls were mostly doing the walls and handball courts, they were also tagging on the inside of the subway trains, but Kathy 161 was one of the first who did depots. One of the most common excuses for guys to refuse to take girls out with them to paint was that they were afraid girls might get hurt. But if a girl had a good style she could have been admitted as a member of a crew. In UGA (United Graffiti Artists) Hugo Martinez invited two pioneers such as Charmin and Stoney. Charmin became notorious as the first person who tagged the Statue of Liberty in New York, while Stoney was a member of Ex-Vandals Crew. The best known and most appreciated female graffiti writer was Lady Pink who was working shoulder to shoulder with the most important writers on the early New York scene. She is to some extent still active today but she mostly does legal pieces.

¹⁴ Radošević, Interview with Cobesta28, op. cit.

¹⁵ Dennant, Pamela, *Urban Expression... Urban Assault... Urban Wildstyle... New York City Graffiti*, <https://www.graffiti.org/faq/pamdennant.html>, 18. October 2004.

In 2000 and 2001, Deb 3 and Shady were the only two girls who did graffiti in Belgrade. While she was hanging around with the crew from the Square, Deb 3 was just tagging. For a while she was interested in animation and while socializing with Leo she started doing pieces. The ghosts, characters from her animations, became her favorite topic. But her productive period did not last long. After she stopped doing graffiti she moved out of the country and to my knowledge she never continued doing graffiti.

It seemed at the time that Shady will have a longer career in writing. With lots of energy and motivation she started painting and sometimes she would surprise people with her tenacity. According to Shorty: "Unfortunately, I still haven't done any [rooftops] but lately I'm looking at potential roofs and tall buildings, but I still haven't found the good ones. While my friend Senka [Shady] already did it, she just climbed on someone's house and did it."¹⁶ Even though she went out to do graffiti on her own, she was sincerely supported by all the graffiti writers she socialized with (such as Shorty, Sane 751, and Dubi): "I haven't painted with the guys so far, we tried to organize it but we didn't do anything together. I'm not into having a crew. I don't think it's necessary to have a crew, what I care about is to have someone next to me while we paint, so I wouldn't be alone."¹⁷ She received a lot of support, magazines and instructions, but it seems, that was not enough. She started painting with a lot of enthusiasm but she stopped abruptly and Belgrade lost an opportunity to get pieces done by female hand.

We can say with confidence that Belgrade graffiti writers are quite emancipated (at least when it comes to male/female graffiti writing topics), because in none of the interviews done with them for the purpose of this research had any of them had negative comments regarding the girls who are trying to do graffiti. They all thought that girls should do graffiti as well. There is still a relatively low percentage of women who do graffiti but it is no longer a taboo. It is possible that one of the reasons for their disinterest lies in their affinities. If we take a look at the currently active women that do art in the streets (Egr, Nina, Joan, Fafi, Lus, Miss Van, Faith 47), we can notice that their art has a different sensitivity and gravitas. They radiate with warmth, a quality that is profoundly rare in pieces done by male graffiti writers.¹⁸

Writing spots

There are many walls in Belgrade that can host graffiti but many of them will never get one. In order to "activate" a particular spot it needs to be compliant with certain standards:

- Spot needs to be visible or to have high frequency of passers by or vehicles of public transportation,
- The wall needs to be flat, or at least, painted so it would not suck in too much color,
- Neighbors and passers by need to be ok with this kind of activity,

16 Radošević, Lj. (2001) *Interview with Shorty (Evil)*, February 2001, Belgrade.

17 Radošević, Lj. (2001) *Interview with Shady*, February 2001, Belgrade.

18 See: Ganz, N. (2004) *Graffiti World*, Thames & Hudson, London.

- Wall needs to be large-scale so that multiple people can do graffiti at the same time.

Here stated rules are always applicable, except in the case of bombing. Then, the only thing that matters is that whatever you put on the wall is visible. Besides walls, favorite spots are metal surfaces (rollo shutters, garage doors, basement doors and so on), poles, all spaces next to the highways, and especially highly rated are trains and vehicles of public transportation.

The oldest, and still the most important, spot for doing graffiti is Block 45. The walls on the buildings in this neighborhood are perfect for doing graffiti, locals are so used to this activity that they use graffiti as a form of orienteering marks. Sometimes neighbors bring out *rakija* to offer to graffiti writers, and some moms send their kids to bring them sweets. It is not a wonder that here we see the best graffiti in the city. Quai on the bank of river Sava, where Block 45 is situated, used to be a favorite spot as well but now it fell into disrepair and does not have that many graffiti anymore. It seems that the role Sava quai used to have was handed over to the concrete fence of the IMT factory across the street from the Block 70. Here we can find a multitude of quality graffiti but mostly the writers from New Belgrade. Intentionally or not, it appears that this wall is reserved for the local writers.

Concrete fence of Jugopetrol in Radnička street is a place well known to all writers and Belgraders alike. Previously one would paint on this wall only when they were sure of their mastery. After one mastered their technique and style they would dare to paint on Jugopetrol. Having in mind that this is a prestigious gallery space, if you want your piece to stay in the wall for a while it has to be good. And if someone dares to paint a piece of a lesser quality they would know from the start that it was not going to last. Later on, things changed. Some young writers realized that that is an “easy” spot for doing graffiti and we started seeing some that were not so good. It seems that youngsters consider this spot for practicing so the experienced writers lost their motivation to paint on this wall. But, apart from the trains, this is still a place where locals bring the foreign guests to do their pieces.

In close proximity to the Jugopetrol we can find a concrete fence of the Hippodrome, which offers ideal conditions for the graffiti. This spot was activated a bit later than Jugopetrol, and it became popular only in 2000. During NATO bombing this fence was severely damaged and after it was renovated its gray color was very inviting for the graffiti writers. At the moment this thesis was being written, it is THE place for doing graffiti. Its height and length are ideal for the activities of the JWC.

A lot of concrete and a lot of graffiti can be seen at the Mostar interchange, an inaccessible and dirty place, which makes a great canvas for the graffiti writers of Belgrade. We can not say that underground passages in Bulevar Oslobođenja and Autokomanda interchanges are any better. Thousands of people pass through daily, and they all try to stay there the least possible amount of time. However, an unintentional glance at one of the pieces with bright colors can direct their attention towards the artwork instead of the smell of urine and garbage.

In the city center there are not that many places where one can do graffiti. Old buildings with dilapidated walls, a lot of passers by, and police patrols are not good conditions for graffiti writing. However, there are still several graffiti oases where it is possible to engage in this activity. Between Kralja Petra and Rajičeva streets there was a park between two buildings whose gable ends made perfect spots for graffiti. This is a spot where only guys from the city center, and sometimes guys from Zemun, used to paint. This was for a very long time terminus for the trolleybuses which in 2004 became a building site, which turned into an archeological site, which turned into the largest shopping mall in the city center that was opened in 2017. Graffiti spot with the best view in the city is a plateau between Pop Lukina street, Male stepenice street and Branko's bridge. During the day it is a tiny capsule of calmness in the busy city, in the night it is a stage with incredible light effects. A spot in front of the "obelisk" is an inspiration to all. "Obelisk" is a colloquial expression that refers to the monument dedicated to the Non-Aligned countries movement whose first summit was held in Belgrade in 1961. Steps that lead under the Branko's bridge would look absolutely horrifying if it was not for graffiti that gave it a bit of color. Even the city center can do with some color. Highrises with white tiles, in Glavna street, at the beginning of Zemun were the favorite spot of graffiti writers from that neighborhood. There we can see really good pieces, the atmosphere is homie and friendly like in the Block 45. There are some other good spots like Zemun quai, but the aforementioned is still the favorite one.

All previously mentioned spots are good ones but nothing can substitute the excitement and adrenaline they have when they paint the trains. This is considered to be "the original graffiti canvas" and has unprecedented allure for the graffiti writers all over the world. Sometimes this can be achieved by painting the public transportation vehicles, but it is not the same thing. However, every spot where they do graffiti has a particular quality and atmosphere which make writers go back there again. Each of the aforementioned places, more or less, hold the status of the Hall of Fame.

"A wall is a wall, even if in a gallery"¹⁹

Even in New York, among the pioneers of graffiti writing, debate about the graffiti in galleries became omnipresent. And still, up to this date, debating if graffiti lose their essence if they enter the art world and mainstream art or that is just one way for transformation and progress, is present. This dilemma, most likely, will never be solved because each new generation of graffiti writers is reopening it over and over again. On the other hand, the art world has accepted graffiti writing as an artistic expression and is dedicated to following their development. In Serbia that is not the case. Maybe it is because graffiti writing as a movement appeared comparatively late in our environment or because of the political situation of the country and consequently in our official art scene. This situation, however, turned out to be quite beneficial for the graffiti writers. They were kept out of the official events and movements and as such they could work without disturbance.

¹⁹ Radošević, Lj. (2002) *Interview with Negre*, Februar 2002, Belgrade.

In 1997 Belgrade got its first graffiti wall in the form of a mural. In Tadeuša Koščuška street, just behind the city library, French writer Mr. Andre filled in the gable end with his recognizable stick man. He is one of the best known graffiti writers, or street artists, who has been painting in many European cities. This mural was part of the production of BELEF festival, funded by the city council, and it was protected until the building was torn down between 2004 and 2007.

It took four years for the next project to happen and this time the initiators were the local graffiti writers. Members of the BG Illegal Crew had an idea to paint the walls of the home for the children without parental care "Drinka Pavlović" they received help from the art history professor Irina Subotić and architecture student Jelisaveta Mihajlović. Before this event Jelisaveta got to know the BG Illegal Crew, she got interested in graffiti and was very happy to help with the organization. She graduated at the Faculty of architecture with an MA thesis about graffiti.

In spring of 2001 Student Cultural Center hosted an event where foreign artists used spraycans to paint the base of the building. This intervention was painted over very quickly and to my knowledge there is no photo material related to it. A few months later, across the street from the Student Cultural Center several Slovenian artists organized the communal mural inspired with graffiti writing. Ilija Terrah, Boris Bačić and Matej Kocjan have opened Flower square for the direct communication with the passers by where they had an opportunity to try the spraycans, use the stencils and try doing art in the public space. As a local support there were graffiti writers Folk (Lortek) and Demon who shared their experience with graffiti writing. This event was part of the Belgrade Summer Festival under the title "Constellation BELEF 2001" and that year the city was in focus: "As we deal with the reality of the city from a research and critical standpoint, with traditional and potential functions of its space, its possibilities for artistic expression, BELEF 2001 is pointedly marking several artistic interventions in the city space."²⁰

At the same time TV director Tanja Fero, from the culture department of the national TV station RTS, does a show about the streets. Originally her idea was to talk about broad topics such as billboards, murals, graffiti and so on. After she met Folk (Lortek), and later on me, her concept was drastically changed. It was supposed to be one 20 minute show and it ended up being a two part show in which the part about graffiti culture was the longest. This TV crew managed to document the making of the community mural at Flower square. The huge success of this show led to a new one, also made in two episodes, which were broadcasted in 2003.

Regardless of that, one thing shot out graffiti into the art world's starry sky and that is due to the October Salon. In 2001, the 42nd October Salon changed the curatorial practice. It gave the role of curators to the artists among others, Era Milivojević. His concept was "anonymous art" which he explains as following: "Anonymous Art is an attempt of liberation from the 'artistic ego', its suppression, not in an ascetic way, but in a way of dedication. To be dedicated, means to put above you, that what you do, and not your

20 Katalog *Sazvežđe BELEF 2001*, Kulturni centar Beograd, Beograd, 2001.

own ego. It is a way of being apersonal, which does not mean the loss of identity, but a balance between ego and your artwork. To reach that kind of balance, even if for a little while, means to be free.”²¹

A large piece done by Demon and Dubi on the construction site metal panels at the YUBC center in New Belgrade, Era found by chance and made it part of his selection. He was impressed by Demon's artwork and he interpreted it as a form of a “lyrical painting”. Regarding dimensions of the artwork, Era even compared it to Jackson Pollock. The metal panels were deconstructed and moved into the gallery Cvijeta Zuzorić, and after the exhibition they were returned to their original site. Media hype was quite present, and TV Studio B announced the public call for the artists to appear so that they can interview them. At the end Era and Demon were guests at the art show where they talked about their personal understanding of this intervention.

Another artist has selected graffiti in his exhibition. In March of 2002, at the gallery House of Đura Jakšić, the exhibition “Self Portrait” was opened. Original idea was made by Đorđe Arnaut who invited different artists to present their interpretation of this traditional topic with contemporary spin, and with a wide array of techniques that are available to us today. Canvas made by Folk (Leo, Lortek) was purposefully made for this exhibition, and at that moment, it was the first graffiti made on canvas. Next to the painting the legend said “FOLK - born 1980, Belgrade, youth from the streets.”

Photo exhibition, under the title “My wall, my rules”, was on show from 21st of May until the 10th of June 2002 at the gallery 29 Steps in Dom Omladine Beograda. Borivoje Bjelić Lun, an enthusiast, a man whose love for graffiti is the only thing in common he has with graffiti writers, has been photographing graffiti since 1996 with his 35mm camera (nowadays we think of that model as a one-use camera).

“2002% OF EVERYTHING” was a slogan of BELEF in 2002, when Mr. Andre visited Belgrade again. This was a shared project with the local artists who live in France – Vuk Vidor and Marko Velk. Concept was created by Vuk Vidor and Mr. Andre did graffiti on a series of locations around the city. It was almost like a “search for a gold” game with the local inhabitants. This project, under the title “Urban Stories” was imagined in the form of a comic, in order to read it you needed to walk the city. Positive adjectives, such as words BEAUTIFUL, FANTASTIC, GORGEOUS, NICE, POETIC, PRETTY, ROMANTIC, and WONDERFUL, were created in the dilapidated places in the city and they were reminding us about the important feelings we tend to lose sight of in the busy pace of everyday life.

Another big, urban event, which among others hosted the graffiti writers, happened on 29th of June at the Tašmajdan sports center. “Belgrade Fireballs”, a streetball tournament, had an interesting programme. There were 16 streetball teams, some of the best known Belgrade DJs and bands and top 10 graffiti competition. Segment with graffiti writing was organized by Folk and graffiti writers who participated were Skec, NecOne, Negre, Lemon, Dmon, Shorty, and others. Even though the selection was great the audi-

21 42. Oktob(Art)ski salon, Kulturni centar Beograd, Beograd, 2001.

ence was not very interested. That is the reason why the segment with graffiti was not really a competition, it turned into a performance. Writers came, did their thing, and left. This was discouraging for any future organizers that had similar ideas.

That year was concluded with the filming of the new show by Tanja Fero. This time, besides me, there were two colleagues from art history that follow this phenomenon – Ivana Marjanović and Marija Kovač. Segment of the show related to photography was narrated by Marko Miletić (Foto Ćomi), who studied photography in high school and discovered the beauty of actions graffiti writers took him to. Again there were two shows, and while the first one was talking about the history of graffiti movement and different activities, the second one was about graffiti entering the art world. We had an opportunity to talk to Era Milivojević about his selection for October Salon the previous year. A photography exhibition of Marko Miletić “New Way, New Life” was also documented. Part of the exhibition was also a painting of the junk appliances in front of the Student Cultural Center. There was also a video art under the title “Bombing” by Tanja Fero. This exhibition was part of the “April Encounters” manifestation which was organized by the Student Cultural Center. This concluded the year with the most graffiti activities in the official institutions in Belgrade.

Year 2003 started with the exhibition by Miletić and continued with graffiti writers participating in an charitable event where they painted, together with other artists, a mural on the fence of the school for the deaf children Stefan Dečanski in Belgrade. By working shoulder to shoulder with other artists, it became obvious that graffiti writers have a much better understanding of open space. They conceptualized the space in a different, more coherent way, they worked much faster and used spraycans, which allowed them to finish earlier than others. Traditionally trained artis had much more issues in finishing the art pieces on a smaller scale.

In May, at the gallery Zvono, Vesna Golubović had her exhibition. Since 1981 she has lived in New York where she had an opportunity to meet graffiti writers. She exhibited in Fashion Moda gallery and her artwork bears the influence of graffiti. Her inspiration is an unusual blend of the Serbian medieval frescoes and graffiti writing that meet in the linear domain. An interesting artwork, inspired by graffiti, appeared at the annual student show of the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade which was held at the Museum of Yugoslav History. Aleksandra Stokić's diploma work was called Silver Graffiti where she presented seven silver rings inspired by graffiti – Dance of Circles, Street Wibe, Neon Temple, are just some of the titles of very warebel rings.

It was not surprising that a graffiti jam was part of the official BELEF program in 2003 that was titled “Logical”. We could logically expect graffiti to be part of this manifestation since they were part of it in the past two years. Up till then graffiti were done by foreign artists and this year the initiative and a project came from Marko Miletić and me. Coordinators of the visual aspect of the project (sketch for the graffiti mural, selection of the artists, color pallet, calculator for the number of spraycans and so on) were Aleksandar Milivojević – Angel and Jovan Mikonjić – Sektor. The project called *Nov način novi život*

(*New way new life*) lasted for three days and during that period there was a graffiti mural in Pop Lukina street and a graffiti jam on the fence of the IMT in New Belgrade. There were over twenty graffiti writers from Serbia and from abroad (Hungary, BiH and Croatia) and it was the largest graffiti jam that was organized in Belgrade up to that date. Media coverage was unexpectedly very good and the municipality of New Belgrade turned out to be very good for collaboration. Municipality covered part of the costs for the graffiti jam that took place in New Belgrade, they provided the sound system for the DJ set and food and drinks for the participants of the Jam. Even if there was one rainy day this project was considered as an absolute success.

By coincidence a project organized by Marija Kovač and Ivana Marjanović under the title "Follow the Sign" was happening at the same time. This was also part of a larger project Public Art & Public Space (PAPS) that is organized by the Faculty for the Architecture in Belgrade. The idea was for the project to have two parts: production of the graffiti as the street signs in the city center and graffiti jam on the wall close to the old Sava bridge, because the topic of that year was the regeneration of the river banks. Because of the lack of funding and uncertainty of the organizers of PAPS, regarding the legal and technical organization, there was only one tram that was painted by the graffiti writers. This tram was running on line no. 2. This turned out to be an unexpected success. Unplanned collaboration between the graffiti writers that participated in this project with the writers from abroad that came for the graffiti jam that was part of BELEF, produced a redesigned tram that was visually very impressive. Organizers of PAPS were so impressed that this project won the best project prize that year and they already planned to support the painting of several new trams next year.

Exhibition "Paintings" was an appropriate end to this very productive year. In the main gallery of Student Cultural Center from 24th to 30th November we could visit the exhibition by Emir Šehanović (Esh), Dušan Rajić (Dulait) and Jovan Mikonjić (Sektor). While working with these artists in previous years I have applied for the call with this exhibition as a curator. This turned out to be one of the most visited exhibitions in SKC in that season, and not without reason. Pieces exhibited by these artists had almost magnetic properties in attracting the visitors and coaxing the smiles on their faces. All visitors left the gallery with a smile on their faces. Paintings were made on canvas, gypsum boards, wood boards, plywood boards and other movable flat surfaces on which one could do the painting. With the enthusiasm of children they imagined these artworks in a simple and effective way, in the form of children's drawings. They used spraycans, acrylic paints and brushes, that were also used for production of their personalized billboard they made for the exhibition. Stop motion movie of this activity was made by Marko Miletić.

After the end of the exhibition this billboard was exhibited in front of SKC for months. During this exhibition, as a part of V. I. P. gallery, but presented in the main hall of SKC, we could see a multimedial project of Marko Miletić. Name of the project was "You Won't Be Able to Breathe" which was also the sentence painted by graffiti writers on the large canvases on which there was a projection of the trains. In a large hall of SKC one

really could not breathe. Visitors could experience to certain extent the elements which are well known to every graffiti writer – dark, scent of the color, sound of the shaking spraycan and good atmosphere that triggers the adrenalin.

As it was mentioned, during 2004 there was only one event related to graffiti. That was the “Follow the Sign” project that turned into “Colordrive” and three new trams were painted that year. A whole project and painting process was filmed and made into a short documentary under the same title “Colordrive”. Since then there were no important events or exhibitions in our capital city. Is this positive trend going to continue it remains to be seen. But one thing is certain, in all previous projects there was so much effort, enthusiasm and time invested, that without that input nothing of significance can really happen in future.

Conclusion

Since their appearance at the end of the 1960s graffiti writing has received animated reactions from the general public. The understanding was fluctuating from absolute delight and euphoria to judgment and anathema. At the beginning they attracted only the interest of the researchers who were interested in deviant behavior and street gangs. But graffiti culture despite the bad odds managed to thrive. Hip-Hop culture spread them all over the world like a dandelion fluff. In the early 1980s graffiti entered European galleries and then the streets, while changing in the process and gaining new forms and concepts. The European audience understood them as an art form even before graffiti reached its streets. But that did not stop policy makers and law to understand them as vandalism.

All former Yugoslav republics, and especially Serbia and Croatia, have the established graffiti culture movements. Belgrade, officially, saw the first “wild” graffiti in 1996/97. A group of youngsters that refused to become a part of the existing system, created their artworks on the city walls and vehicles of public transportation. Period of almost complete cultural and economical isolation from the rest of the world brought many new movements. One of those was graffiti culture. In form of tags, pieces and characters they were not interesting to the current political system since they were not explicitly writing against the regime. Legal system was not interested in them, the public did not judge them, and so the Belgrade graffiti had a good environment for the development. Many graffiti writers left their pieces on the walls as individuals, as members of crews, but their presence never reached disturbing numbers. Almost as if it was under some invisible control, the number of Belgrade graffiti writers was always on the same level. This group, with all of its subcultural signifiers, functions as a world of its own. And it is quite interesting that the emergence of graffiti writing in Belgrade coincided with the similar conditions as the emergence of graffiti culture in New York in the 1970s. This can serve as one of the most important lines of inquiry in future research.

Being legal or not, does not impede researchers in understanding graffiti writing as an art form, even as an independent visual expression, an aesthetic phenomenon that does not need to be part of an art world. They appeared in the time of the postmo-

dern era but with the distinctive elements of the avant-garde movements, graffiti culture can be fully understood as an art form. Graffiti are part of the contemporary folklore, ethnological phenomenon of the urban setting. They appear and disappear in an instant, but to those that see them (whether they like them or not) they bring color to the day and potential of enjoyment in art, stimuli to think about the messages and to find the moment of respite and contemplation in monotonous and stressful life in the city. In a hectic city environment there is a fast, explosive, adrenaline charged art, the only one that gives the color to the gray of concrete and the filth of the streets.

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ИСТОРИЈСКА РАСПРАВА О ПОЈАВИ И РАЗВОЈУ ГРАФИТА У БЕОГРАДУ ОД 1996. ДО 2005. ГОДИНЕ

Сажетак: У овом тексту, који је скраћена верзија мастер рада одбрањеног на Катедри за историју уметности Филозофског факултета у Београду 2005, фокусирали смо се на културу графита. Ова култура појавила се у Београду средином деведесетих година прошлог века и отада се развијала кроз успоне и падове. У раду је представљен најзначајнији формативни период локалног графити покрета. Подаци су прикупљани из интервјуа са локалним цртачима и кроз укључивање у београдску графити сцену. Тако је истраживање, започето из позиције историје уметности и анализе визуелних одлика графити културе, постало етнолошко истраживање савременог града и супкултурног уметничког покрета. Резултати су показали да на београдској графити сцени постоје значајне разлике у односу на сцене других великих градова. Ове разлике последица су социјалног, политичког и економског контекста у Србији крајем деведесетих и почетком двехиљадитих година.

Кључне речи: *графити култура, супкултура, град, Београд*