

# Rereading the Reality of Graffiti Based on Hegel's Ideas in a Case Study from Banksy and Iranian Artists' Works

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## ABSTRACT

Hegel's aesthetics has great potential for reading socially generated, the artwork that reflect the spirit of their times. Because of, for him, artworks are animated by an internally purposive form. He believed artifacts can't be regarded as a living being, in fact they have a given purposive with an external function, for example machine or shoes. Of course, we don't forget that artwork is a production of an artist's mind and specially his/her imagination and this is an inherently infinite possibility. Thus, we want to know the statue of graffiti from Hegelian perspective, especially since it is not a simple or a homogenous phenomenon, and also the relationship between content and form in it. For this reason, we selected some works of graffiti at random to describe and analyze in this qualitative research. Considering that art is one of the stages of Geist's self-consciousness, this could be a way to understand the relationship between beauty, social protest and collective self-consciousness in graffiti works as a whole organic and as artworks not artifacts. Because their purposive and function is as internal dynamics.

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## **Introduction**

Hegel started from art to complete and carry out his philosophical project in the philosophy of the spirit. In fact, he is concerned with expressing the position of the Geist in reaching self-consciousness, where he leaves the philosophy of the nature for the philosophy of the spirit. The first step for the mind is to depart from the senses through art. Of course, discussion of art is always attached to beauty and truth. But truth is the first for this reason he uses from the term, that is, manifestation or same emanation. On Hegel's view art has only its essential nature, because art is a function of the artist's mind and imagination. Thus, he argues from ontology of art and epistemology of art; there is no doubt that he questioned the relationship between art and truth. Truth is the identity of being and thought, this truth or the Idea is the identity of absolute form and content. This Hegel's view is the ground of the theory of art. In the category of art courses, he mentions from symbolic art classic art and romantic art. Here must be said that classic art for a perfect balance between form and content is noteworthy, because of truth is expressed in the form of human-centered beauty.

For this reason, classic artworks have objectivity unlike modern art, and romantic works of art, in addition to objectivity, enjoy awareness and the manifestation of the spirit.

Hegel divides the arts from two perspectives: 1- in terms of historical-conceptual development (symbolic art, Classical art, and Romantic art); and 2- in terms of specific types of art, including architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. In this classification, it can be said that most paintings belong to the Romantic arts, because painting focuses on the interior and mental expression, and creates an inner experience with light and color on the surface. Painting tries to escape materiality, moves beyond pure beauty, and expresses spiritual depth along with various emotions.

Hegel's philosophical process in the division of the arts is not simply a historical sequence, but rather represents the gradual evolution of the relationship between idea or content and form: from the unfinished attempt to express the idea (symbolic), to its harmonious realization (classical), and finally, to the transition from tangible form to subjectivity and introspection (romantic). Stace explains: Hegel's philosophical project is the famous dialectical method, in that every idea may have its opposite hidden within it, and this opposite can be extracted or deduced from that idea. Therefore, to understand the process of classifying the art "we consider the first three pillars of Hegel's categories, namely, being, non-being, and becoming" (Stace, 2002: 120).

Then painting is artwork and not artifact. Artifact has decorative and functional aspect and technical skill and must not communicate something beyond itself for example, a cultural, political, social and economic reality or spiritual idea, and it is not its intellectual content. Now we ask from the true of graffiti, whether graffiti is an artwork or artifact?

We want to know what kind of phenomenon is Graffiti. No doubt it is a form from painting because of, graffiti forms through line, color and light on surface, but what is its function? Whether has it decorative aspect? Thus, we want to know the status of graffiti, especially since it is not a simple or homogenous phenomenon. We chose a few works for closer review as case study. Six works from Banksy the famous English artist, and some Iranian artists such as 11one, GEO, Blackhand, Khamoosh, and Unknown artists, have been randomly selected to answer the main question: what is Hegel's view on artwork as an organic whole and, how does graffiti contribute to consciousness?

### **Hegel's View on Art**

Hegel saw art as an evolving phenomenon. What is the reason for Hegel's evolutionary view? It must be said that everything returns to the Absolute and consciousness. In the words of this comment about consciousness:

It sees Absolute Being partitioning itself out in space, and Absolute Self-Consciousness developing itself in time; and by means of post-Cartesian philosophical concepts, it stands at the point of their fusion-no longer the passive pawn of appearance and accident, but in possession of pivotal reality, and weaving the threads of its own Fate. There still remain, of course, opacities, problems, obstacles; but these no longer appear as alien to consciousness, since consciousness, in full possession of itself and its roots, has the key to deciphering the full meaning of all that appears to it (Kainz, 1979: 184).

Accordingly, we must seek truth and the truth of art in this process. But what is his definition from truth or reality? In response, apparently, we are reaching another central concept, for example:

That the truth is only realized in the form of system, that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the idea which represents the Absolute as Spirit (Geist) – the grandest conception of all, and one which is due to modern times and its religion. Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself—it is externality (otherness), and exists for self; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself—it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once. This self-contained, however, is first something known by us, it is implicit in its nature (...); it is Substance spiritual. It has to become self-contained for itself, on its own account; it must be knowledge of spirit, and must be consciousness of itself as spirit” (Hegel, 2001: 10).

Here we come across the concept of Spirit (Geist). How can art be understood without this central concept, but does this level of abstraction, distance art from the social and reality? The

question is: How is it possible to emphasize on unity or plurality, abstract or concrete thinking in art?

### **Influence of Dualism or Monism on Art**

The long-standing debate in the history of philosophy has always been ongoing between the two trends: dualism or monism. Each trend has been influential in defining art and beauty. It is essential to have both for a comprehensive philosophical system, which Hegel was trying to present, of course, ultimately, to achieve unity. In the words of one commentator:

Any such system must include (and reconcile) two seemingly opposed aspects: the world of physical nature and the world of mind. One is extended in space, the other in time. One is determined by physical forces and laws; the other is supposedly free. There are numerous ways of distinguishing between the two sorts of things which make up the cosmic inventory (Rauch, 1983: 15).

But what role does art play in this project? We have both man and nature in art or space and time and or freedom and lack of freedom. It seems “for Hegel it is the essence of consciousness to be the unity of opposites”, (ibid, 17) then, both sense and reason are necessary, both form and content, both subject and object. Thus, we have a collection in art. Now, the question arises that what is the real or actual, especially in art?

In his view, what is ultimately real (or, in his terminology, what is actual) is the self-knowing spirit. This is not to deny reality to the world in which we live or to ourselves as sensuous beings, but, although these are real, they are not, taken in and by themselves, actual. What is actual is not the real, but the ideal, and Hegel's point might be put, in his own paradoxical manner, by saying that the ideal is more really real than the real. The ideal is the synthesis of concept and reality, or, in art, of meaning and shape. This synthesis is what Hegel calls the Idea. 'The Idea existent in sensible form is the Ideal, i.e. beauty, which itself is truth implicit (Hegel, 1988, ix).

This is enough to know that art and beauty are not unimportant to him. He saw art as essential expression of absolute spirit (Geist) and a key mode of understanding reality. Thus, artistic form cannot be a decorative thing because of it must be expressed spiritual content through it in sensible way. Therefore, artwork is not without function, but what about artifact?

Artifact is a production with an objective end and function, for example, a shoe. It includes a form and a function or end. We don't seek meaning in artifacts. But meaning or concept is important in artwork; because of art has a historical function in advancing freedom and awareness. Art is part of life human in individual and social dimensions. The distinction between artifact and artwork can be summarized in Table 1, considering the two aspects of form and content in the works of art:

**Table 1. Distinction between artifact and artwork (Source: Authors, 2025).**

<b>Graffiti</b>	<b>Graffiti as an Artifact</b>	<b>Graffiti as an Artwork</b>
<b>Form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical</li> <li>• Repetitive</li> <li>• Static</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private</li> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Transformative</li> </ul>
<b>Meaning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningless</li> <li>• Imitative</li> <li>• Decorative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the carrier of Self-Consciousness</li> <li>• the carrier of dialectics</li> </ul>

## Art and the Social

Art is a medium to grasp truths about society and world or the human condition, then art cannot be without function, but this function is an essential part of art, because of, art is made by human mind; especially in modern art and Christian art that create a subjective and spiritual experience. In Hegel's thought this is related to the romantic period, in which content or concept is more important.

Although he argued, art loses its central role in modernity and instead philosophy and politics become more important, but how is it possible they're to function without the media? Therefore, it is an inevitable relationship between art and the social.

For Hegel: "...'ethical life', objective and social, i.e. living conscientiously in accordance with custom or established institutions" (Hegel, 1988: xiii).

It is claimed indeed similarly that the final end of the state and the social life of men is that all human capacities and all individual powers be developed and given expression in every way and in every direction (ibid, 48).

Art has the capacity and the vocation to mitigate the ferocity of desires (Ibid, 48) Therefore, considering the ability of art to act as a medium for the help of the whole, the impact of graffiti cannot be ignored. If a mural is a decorative thing, for example, just to decorate a wall, it is more of an artifact than a work of art. Such works are among official murals to coordinate with urban furniture and are made to order, but they are not seen among graffiti works that express the artist's personal or social expression. But other graffiti contains messages for different segments of society. Graffiti encompasses both the natural world and the human world, that is, space and time, and contributes to human self-consciousness and ultimately Geist. It can even be a tool for higher stages such as spiritual experience or a philosophical perception such as the study examples that we will discuss later in this research.

## Graffiti and its Origins

Every time we enter an urban space, we are confronted with a multitude of images that are a wide range of commercial and cultural advertisements. Among them, we see informal and non-

commissioned works that are a different experience of underground art. Informal street art chooses the street walls as a medium and turns its back on formal art institutions. Since “the medium is the message” (Lemoine, 2021: 17) street art also has multi-layered meanings. “Graffiti is a form of visual communication, usually illegal, involving the unauthorized marking of public space by an individual or group” (Snyder, 2009: 21).

Despite its informal nature, graffiti is a well-known phenomenon in the world. The process of creating and producing graffiti involves risks such as arrest, injury to the artist, and ultimately the provision of free artwork to the public, which competes with official, commissioned wall art. Sandro Boccia classifies graffiti as a postmodern art form, explaining that the creative methods of graffiti pioneers in America were influenced by Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art (Bocola: 2008: 520-531).

Although the creation and production of graffiti works is initially carried out with individual motivations, it is then expanded with social motivations. The individual motivation in graffiti is related to emotions or feelings such as fear, attracting the attention of the audience, and a sense of liberation. Meanwhile, social expression in graffiti emphasizes the artist's right to the city in addition to his personal expression. In other words, graffiti is a tool for criticizing. Doing graffiti with individual motivations is associated with a feeling of excitement arising from the fear of being arrested while performing the work, while the rush to perform graffiti gives a special quality to the work. The feeling of liberation after expressing an idea in a visual form is one of the things that happens to a graffiti artist. A kind of mental discharge and, as a result, a kind of peace after mental activity is achieved for the artist.

But the origin of street art, including graffiti, emphasizes its social direction. Socially motivated graffiti artists freely choose the content of their work. The graffiti artist chooses the street to interact with people, which is different from a painter whose works are installed on the wall of a gallery or museum. Therefore, the audience of graffiti works is all people and not a specific segment of them. The content of these works deals with issues such as social justice, job security, attention to the oppressed, women's rights, environmental protection, animal rights, and the like.

Although graffiti works in Iran have a shorter history than in the West and are collected through online media due to the lack of official data and information about these works, with the spread of this street art in Iran, we see that these works are in line with street movements in the world. Therefore, studying and analyzing these works as part of world art is essential. Thus, a number of graffiti works with the central approach of this text were randomly selected from among the works of the well-known English artist Banksy and some works of Iranian artists such as 1lone, GEO, Blackhand, Khamoosh, and unknown artist.



In this section, we will attempt to examine and analyze the following works, considering the relationship between form and meaning in graffiti works, and taking into account Hegel's perspective and the social components of the text, including the presence and manifestation of "spirit" (Geist), the logical relationship with the objective world (historical and social reality), the aesthetic stage of the work (symbolic - classical - romantic), and the degree of freedom and self-awareness in the artist's path.

*Graffiti Untitled: The Beginning of Expression*



**Figure 1. Left & right. (Unknown: 2003-2010) Untitled: Location: Ekbatan, Tehran. (<https://mohit.art>).**

Graffiti with individual motives is usually executed on walls on the outskirts of the city and in informal places, and if its images are not published online, they will not be seen by many people. In Ekbatan, Tehran, walls are covered with meaningless words, incoherent shapes, strange signs, and writings that are often incomprehensible for passersby. This form of graffiti, which on the surface has no clear social message, obvious artistic skill, or coherent form, can nevertheless be considered at the initial stage (symbolic) of Hegel's aesthetic classification. In symbolic art, the Idea is in search of true artistic expression because the form is inadequate to the content (Hegel, 1975: 131).

That is why in Figure 1, the forms are often disproportionate and exaggerated. In crude and meaningless graffiti, there is also a kind of expressive confusion—a desire to say something without having a specific language to say it. At this stage, the graffiti artist registers his presence more than he speaks.

Although these writings and signs may seem meaningless at first glance, from Hegel's perspective, this very meaninglessness is a form of negation of the symbolic order of the city; a negation of the formal language, the dry architecture, the soulless spaces, and the symbolic order on which the city is built. In fact, the graffiti artist in Ecbatana – consciously or unconsciously –

enters into a dialogue with the walls, breaking their stony silence with meaningless writings. If we understand Hegel's philosophical project as a process by which the spirit moves from the unconscious to the conscious, we can say that these aimless graffiti are the initial moment of the spirit's movement. They are not the end of art, but perhaps the "birth" of art at a fundamental level. The spirit has not yet found its language, but it dares to write. In Hegel's logic, this initial movement prepares the ground for a renewed negation, a refinement of form, and the birth of meaning. These graffiti are often unsigned, have no clear identity behind them, and may simply be a teenager's work or a passerby who has decided to leave a mark on the wall to vent their emotional feelings. But from Hegel's perspective, this anonymous act can be a moment of the formation of the subject; a subject who does not yet have a fully developed individuality, but who wants to register itself in the world – even if it is with an invisible word or an endless form. Finally, Ecbatana's meaningless graffiti, despite its chaotic appearance, carries a kind of dynamism of the spirit; a human spirit that begins with wordless writing in its attempt to find language. This is the dialectical beginning that, in Hegel's philosophy is considered as a prelude on the formation of consciousness and meaning. Graffiti as (Figure 1), can hardly be classified as artworks because of its lack of personal style, its imitateness, and its meaninglessness.

*Artist's Signature: The Subject's Expression*



**Figure 2. Tanha (alone); Location: Ekbatan, Tehen. (lone: 2003-2010). (<https://mohit.art>).**

In the graffiti (Figure 2), the word "lone" or "alone" (depending on the interpretation of the writing) is represented in a very abstract and formalistic style. The form here is either abstract or decorative. As a result, the inner content does not fit well with the form. Its readability for the general audience is difficult, and understanding the work requires prior knowledge of art and familiarity with the artist's style and personality.

Here, the forms carry a concept that has not yet been properly and clearly translated into a form understandable to the ordinary audience, just like the Egyptian statues that are for Hegel a



prime example of symbolic art: they appear massive, magnificent, but mute in terms of inner expression.

For Hegel in symbolic art the Idea is still more or less indeterminate and seeks expression in sensuous form, but the form remains incommensurable with the content. The unity of content and form has not yet been achieved (Hegel, 1975: 79).

But at the same time, the artist's signature, which manifests itself in the complex typographic representation, places the artist on the Hegelian dialectic path of transcending form. Here, the artist attempts to aesthetically place his subject in an objective and proportionate body. In the present work, a kind of suspension is seen between the street-social form of graffiti and the individual and mental expression of the artist. The form still carries personal aesthetics, but it is objectified in a public and urban context; this suspension is a sign of the transition from the symbolic to the classical stage. This graffiti can be seen as a manifestation of the dialectical process of art in Hegel's thought; where the idea begins with the impotent form, progresses in the suspension between beauty and meaning, and returns to subjective self-consciousness in the social context. In this work, the individual spirit rises from the complex forms and announces itself on the wall of society.

Since this work carries the idea of self-consciousness that has an aesthetic form and individual style; with its signature shows the creative identity of the artist, it passes through the symbolic stage. Therefore, it cannot be considered an artifact, because we are faced with a self-conscious manifestation of an idea that is non-imitative, dynamic, and therefore it is an artwork.

### *Water Crisis: Idea and its Manifestation in Form*



Figure 3. Water of Life; Location: Tehran. (GEO: 2018) (<https://mohit.art>).

Figure 3, is one of the well-known graffiti, which has been executed by his graffiti artist several times on different streets of Tehran. In this graffiti, the artist depicted the logo of the

Iranian Water and Wastewater Company in four stages from 2003 to 2018, and visually expressed the gradual decrease in water.

The central idea of this work is the gradual depletion of water resources. In the graffiti, the form of the logo changes from a symbol filled with water to a completely empty symbol. This change is the same gradual manifestation of the idea in matter that Hegel considers the essence of artistic beauty (Houlgate, 2005: 84–87).

The artistic power of this work lies in the bitter humor that arises from the contrast between the formal form of the logo and the collapse of its content. The function of humor in creating this contrast is not only aesthetic, but also conceptual and, from Hegel's point of view, one of the ways to reach the truth (Pippin, 2014: 19)

Art should be a reflection of the cultural, historical, and social conditions of its time. According to Hegel, "No man can surpass his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit" (Hegel, 2004: 54). As a reflection of the environmental crisis and the general concern of society about water resources, this work is precisely the spirit of his time (zeitgeist) expressed in a visual form. Therefore, given the characteristics we listed for Figure 3, this graffiti is considered a work of art.

### *Cycling ban: The Spirit on the Path to Realizing Freedom*



**Figure 4. Cycling ban. Location: Tehran. (Black Hand: 2014) (<https://mohit.art>).**

The Figure 4, depicts one of the most famous graffiti works by the anonymous Iranian artist known by the pseudonym Black Hand. Created in Tehran in 2014, the piece is conceptually considered one of the most important examples of protest street art in contemporary Iran. The graffiti portrays a modern woman wearing the state-mandated hijab, holding a yellow bottle of "Jam" dishwashing liquid in the shape of the FIFA World Cup trophy. Her outfit resembles the

jersey of Iran's national football team. The artist's signature, "Black Hand 2014," appears beside the work.

The work conveys a critical message about the status of women's rights in Iran, particularly highlighting the ban on women entering stadiums to watch football matches. The artist's ironic use of the word "Jam"—which is both the brand name of the dishwashing liquid and the Persian equivalent of the word "cup" or "trophy"—is both clever and sarcastic. It suggests that a woman's share in football is limited to "washing the dishes," rather than participating as a spectator. The juxtaposition of the hijab with the national team uniform symbolizes the tension between the desire for public/national participation and sociocultural restrictions.

From Hegelian perspective, as discussed in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, a tragic situation arises when two legitimate but conflicting ethical demands confront each other—surpassing the simple opposition of good and evil. In the classical example of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Antigone represents the familial (divine) law, while Creon embodies the law of the state. Both positions have moral legitimacy, yet are practically incompatible (Hegel, 1977: 266). A similar structure is present in Black Hand's graffiti: on the one hand, the woman in a football uniform symbolizes the demand for civic engagement and public freedom; on the other, the sociopolitical system of the Islamic Republic claims to preserve religious-moral order by restricting women's presence in stadiums. Both claims possess relative legitimacy, and it is precisely this conflict that forms a modern cultural tragedy.

Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation) simultaneously means "to cancel," "to preserve," and "to transcend." In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes: "Aufheben in the German language has a dual meaning... it means both to cancel and to preserve... the resulting unity expresses a higher truth" (Ibid: 41). In this artwork, the substitution of the World Cup with a dishwashing liquid bottle challenges both traditional symbols of victory and gender roles. The domestic object is elevated into a symbol of public triumph. This transformation of meaning is a clear expression of the *Aufhebung* process: the meaning is not merely negated, but preserved and redefined at a higher level.

As Hegel notes in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, "Art is the sensuous appearance of the Idea" (Hegel, 1975: 103). From this viewpoint, art serves as a medium for expressing complex philosophical and political ideas in an accessible form. In Black Hand's graffiti, the notions of gender exclusion, public protest, and political satire are all conveyed through a single visual image. The woman, within a context of social denial, appears bearing a symbol of victory. The piece manifests the *Geist* (spirit) in its historical self-revelation (Hegel, 1977: 41).

The artwork not only reflects cultural struggles but actively participates in the historical process—by exposing contradictions and opening a path toward their resolution.

*Long Live Hope: Manifestation of the Spirit in Art*

**Figure 5. Long live hope Location: Tehran. (Khamoosh:2020) (<https://mohit.art>).**

Figure 5, is an example of contemporary street graffiti in Iran, attributed to an unknown Iranian artist with the pseudonym "Khamoosh". This graffiti depicts a child (or teenager) running, wearing a face mask, holding two bottles of water. The background of the work is a concrete wall of the city, with an air conditioner visible in the corner of the image. Below the image are several bicycles (possibly rental or shared), which create an interesting composition with the image, as if the child is moving among them. On the right side of the image, spray-painted in red: "Life must go on" - a short but profound sentence, with a strong emotional and social charge. The face mask on the boy's face clearly refers to the era of the Corona pandemic. The running child is a symbolic sign of movement, life, continuity and hope, while the mask and water bottle indicate crisis and care. The phrase "life must go on" has a completely hopeful function, and the message is one of encouragement to persevere and continue in the midst of crisis.

In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel explains that the progress of the spirit towards consciousness always passes through a path of contradictions and tensions. The contradiction between the critical biological situation (mask, epidemic, disease) and the movement of the child (sign of life, energy, future) is a manifestation of the contradiction between limitation and liberation, death and life, stasis and dynamism. The spirit reaches a higher level only through the conflict with itself and the resolution of this conflict (Hegel, 1977: 41).

As explained in the previous work, the key word *Aufhebung*, for Hegel, means the negation of something and its preservation at the same time. The child with the mask symbolizes the negation of the previous normal state, but his movement symbolizes the continuation of life and the passing of the crisis. The water bottles in his hands are both a reminder of caution and protection, and a sign of survival. It is as if the meaning is negated from the heart of the crisis, but redefined in a new and sublime way.

In *Aufhebung*, we both negate, we retain, and we elevate (Ibid: 41). Given that, for Hegel, art is the sensory manifestation of an idea, this graffiti is a concrete manifestation of the idea of resistance in a context of crisis. In the masked child, the general spirit (*Geist*) of society is manifested sensorially; not in the language of logic, but in the language of images. As Hegel writes in his analysis of the classical tragedy *Antigone*, “tragedy arises from the conflict between two legitimate rights” (Ibid: 266). In this work, too, on the one hand, protection and distancing are essential (the right to collective health), and on the other hand, the need to live, move, and grow (the individual right of the child). Both are legitimate rights, but in conflict. This conflict turns the work into a modern tragedy—the tragedy of living in an age of crisis.

This work not only reflects a historical crisis (the coronavirus pandemic), but also participates in history as a ray of consciousness: by keeping hope alive in the midst of loss. This work, given its conceptual content, historical context, social message, and dialogue-oriented structure with the audience, is a clear example of an artwork, not just an artifact. From a Hegelian perspective, since the “*Geist*” (spirit) of the time is manifested in it, its place is established in the realm of genuine art.

### *Hole in the Wall: Romantic Art at its Peak*



**Figure 6. Hole in the wall. Location: The Segregation Wall Palestine. Left & right: (Banksy: 2005) (<https://banksyexplained.com>).**

Figure 6, shows children playing next to the barrier wall, the border between Gaza and Israel, seemingly unaware of its nature. But the presence of the beach painting (as if the product of their imagination or hope) is the beginning of a self-awareness that can lead to liberation. Here, art is not simply a representation, but the actualization of the possibility of liberation. The barrier wall is not only a physical structure, but also a symbol of a closed, controlling, and freedom-denying military. From Hegel's perspective, this wall is the historical representation of the "other" against which the subject must take a stand.



In his lectures on aesthetics, Hegel considers art to be the manifestation of the spirit. This painting represents the spirit of freedom against the physical manifestation of the deprivation of freedom (the wall). By drawing an image of freedom on this hard surface, Banksy creates the visual and conceptual antithesis of this wall. He negates this structure not with a weapon, but with an image. His painting creates an imaginary crack in the wall through which another world can be seen. In the phase of negation, the artist, faced with the closed state of the wall, breaks it and from within creates a new meaning.

From a Hegelian perspective, Banksy's work constitutes a kind of aesthetic and moral synthesis: a form of art that opens a path to freedom in the midst of oppression. The viewer is confronted not only with the objective political situation, but also with a sense of liberation, childlikeness, and the possibility of transformation. This is the moment when art comes to express the idea of "freedom of the spirit"; that is, the moment when form, meaning, and protest are revealed simultaneously. This Banksy work can be seen as a clear example of the Romantic stage in Hegel's aesthetics: where form is broken, simple, even graphic, but carries a deep and subjective meaning. Here, the child's figure is a metaphor for the spirit in search of freedom; a spirit that transcends material and objective limitations and calls forth a new world. The spirit now finds the artistic shape not adequate to its inner life, and passes over from art into religion and from religion into philosophy (Hegel, 1975: 103). Ultimately, we can see that this artwork is beautiful not because of its form, but because of its liberating content.

**Table 2. Analysis summary table (Source: Authors, 2025).**

Case Study	Self-Consciousness	Aesthetic Stage	Manifestation of Spirit	Relation to Society	Realization of Freedom	Category of work
Figure 1	In the beginning	Symbolic	Natural spirit	Experience	Instinctive freedom	Artifact
Figure 2	Self-recognition	Classic	Subjective spirit	Individual awareness	Individualism	Artwork
Figure 3	Free consciousness	Romantic	Objective soul	Criticism	Awareness of the right	Artwork
Figure 4	Free consciousness	Romantic	Objective soul	Criticism and denial	The union of individual and general will	Artwork
Figure 5	Free consciousness	Romantic	Objective soul	Criticism and denial	The union of individual and general will	Artwork
Figure 6	Free consciousness	Romantic	Absolute Spirit-Art	Criticism, negation, and influence	Participation in the moral whole	Artwork

## Conclusion

In confronting graffiti from Hegelian perspective, we realize that this form of urban art, beyond an act of protest or a crude aesthetic experience, it is a moment of realization of the



"spirit" in contemporary history. Graffiti, as a contradictory confrontation between individuality and social order, between beauty and violence, and between formal art and free expression, carries within itself the dialectic that Hegel considers the foundation of the movement of history. What is inscribed on the wall is not simply an image or a word, but a reflection of the struggle between mind and object, subjectivity and objectivity, which ultimately leads to a new synthesis in our understanding of art. From this perspective, graffiti is not a deviation from the path of art, but an authentic part of it; a manifestation of beauty that finds meaning and glory in the context of conflict and contradiction.

In a case study of six graffiti works, we conclude that the correspondence of form and concept is not the same in all works, and not all works are placed in the highest stage of art, i.e. romanticism, according to Hegel's classification of arts. It can be said that, the process of departure of graffiti works begins from the natural and instinctive stage of the artist's consciousness (Figure 1) and continues to the manifestation of the absolute spirit as a sublime work of art (Figure 6). In fact, this process is formed in relation to the subject's relationship with society. Graffiti in its early stages is influenced by the subject's experimental and instinctive encounter and gradually moves on the process of consciousness, criticism, and negation of the existing system. Ultimately, at the highest level of this process, is important the unity of the individual with society, which is influential and participation in a moral whole. Therefore, most graffiti works are considered artworks because they are in motion with characteristics such as the subject's individual consciousness, creativity, transformation, and interaction and unity with society.

Graffiti, as a contemporary form of urban art, is born in the context of social, political and cultural tensions and enters into a dialogue with public spaces in an informal but deeply meaningful way. Graffiti can be considered as a spontaneous manifestation of the spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*); an art that emerges on the walls of the city in the context of modern contradictions. From a dialectical perspective, graffiti is not simply a visual or protest praxis, but a scene of tension between formal art and free individual expression; between regulated beauty and the immediate outburst of aestheticism. In Hegelian logic, art is one of the forms of manifestation of the "absolute spirit"; a spirit that is realized in the world on its path from objectivity to subjectivity. In this framework, graffiti can be considered as a moment of the "objective spirit" that emerges through social, political, and spatial relations with subjective aspect. Graffiti, as art, leads to a synthesis between the thesis of institutional order and the antithesis of individual protest, in which the wall becomes canvas, and space becomes meaning. In this way, graffiti is not as a reduction of art, but as an organic whole a redefinition of it in the battlefield of meanings; where the dialectics of beauty, criticism, and liberation are intertwined.

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All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts.

**Data Availability Statement**

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