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Concerning Berlin Wall in Seoul / artist faces prison time in Seoul Case***My relation to the topic***

In 2017, I received a scholarship for research about Urban Art in Berlin by the Senate of Berlin (Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa, Abteilung Kultur). I studied publications about Graffiti, Street Art, urban interventions and the art on the Berlin wall from 1983 to 1989. I met some „wall artists“, like Kiddy Citny, did Interviews and I am still working on this vast topic.

In June 2018, I had the chance to curate a photo exhibition about Berlin graffiti from 1983 until now. Graffiti writing started in Berlin on the Berlin wall in 1983 and we showed some exclusive archives (review with pictures of the exhibition: <https://www.urbanpresents.net/en/2018/11/obit-to-the-sorry-exhibition/>).

In fact, only the westside of the wall was accessible and could be painted by West Berliners in certain districts between the 1970ies and 1989. This was illegal and a gesture of protest and hope to tear down this wall. Artists started in 1983 to paint in the North of Berlin or in Kreuzberg or Mitte and by 1989, the wall looked mostly like an open air gallery with paintings, graffiti pieces, tags and political slogans.

Segments of the wall after the fall

After the fall of the wall, most of the segments were destroyed, some administrated by the Land Berlin and some taken by dealers. The situation in Berlin early 1990 was a bit anarchic and people took pieces and segments of the wall to sell it to tourists. In 1990 two companies were in charge of the commercial aspects because of the exploitation by manies Lelé Berlin Wall Verkaufs- und Wirtschaftswerbung GmbH" was in charge to sell pieces, and "Limex" in charge for the distribution of the touristic souvenir pieces.

Many painted segments were sold by Lélé in Monaco at an auction in June 1990. They all had original illegal paintings on the west side of the segments by known artist as Thierry Noir and Kiddy Citny or other artists. They were sold out, but without implicating the artists in the sale. Thierry Noir and Kiddy Citny went to court because of this exclusion and won the case 10 years later.

There are many segments of the Berlin wall left in Berlin, that are not handled as national treasures and that are painted over regularly. Even the long piece of the wall at Mauerpark is not classified but a legal wall, a hall of fame, for graffiti writers since the 90ies and officially since 2012. At the same time, many original pieces, including those offered as gifts to other countries have been the support of contracted-graffiti or street art work, like in Bangkok, Thailand, this year. (<https://www.dw.com/de/originalteile-von-berliner-auer-in-bangkok-aufgestellt-und-enth%C3%BCllt/a-46264211>)

Only some of the segments left in Berlin have become a national treasure since, like some single pieces with paintings by Thierry Noir and Kiddy Citny. The one classified as a historical monument, is the East Side Gallery (but only since 2009). The East Side Gallery is the longest piece left, 1,2 km long, and was painted officially after the fall of the wall in 1990 by 121 visual artists from all over the world. It was a commissioned work on the east side of the wall and the paintings on there are not originally paintings from the time of the wall, but symbolic art works after the fall of the wall.

Berlin Wall Segments in Seoul

The three segments in Seoul are plain grey at the back side (east side). On the west side are some traces of old graffiti, maybe from the late 80ies, especially on the left piece. The state of the segments and the original graffiti is pretty bad, the paint and wall crumbles. They seem to have been already severely damaged after the fall of the wall by people picking pieces as souvenirs. It is obvious that the three pieces were not together on the original wall but are a patchwork of three segments. The graffiti on the left segment looks like part of a "throw-up", a graffiti painted very quickly to mark one's name. The graffiti writer who did this back at that time didn't expect it to last and a throw-up is not seen as a piece of art or as something to be reproduced or protected.

These three segments of the wall in Seoul are unfortunately in a bad condition and the traces of graffiti/paint on there have no artistic value.

Graffiti by Hideeyes on wall segments in Seoul


The graffiti and its meaning by professional artist Hideeyes on the Berlin wall segments in Seoul was a meaningful artistic work, which could have had an important historical meaning in the future, just like some of the painted or tagged wall pieces in Berlin, that were sold, offered or have become a national treasure. The remaining segments of the Berlin wall became interesting after its destruction, because of the art pieces and personal marks on them. Just plain grey ugly wall segments wouldn't have had such a symbolic value. The people marking the Berlin wall with slogans, the artists painting the wall, the writers spraying graffiti on the wall are making the difference and transformed the Berlin dividing wall of the cold war into a document or a canvas of historical value. Traces of lives, personal expressions, traces of wishes and hope with the intention to touch people.

This is exactly what the artist Hideeyes was doing in Seoul in public space on these wall segments symbolizing division: marking them artistically with the symbol of hope for his own divided country, with the intention to touch people and to transform these unextraordinary segments of the Berlin wall into a peace symbol for his own country. This should not be seen as an act of vandalism, but as an act of patriotism for a peaceful united Korea through an act of artistic intervention in public space.

The question of the author is also important in those cases of self-authorized art in public space : If worldwide known street artist Banksy would have painted this Berlin wall segments in Seoul, will he be searched and maybe judged or will the city of Seoul be proud?

Considering the circumstances, the deteriorated segments of the Berlin wall in Seoul with no piece of art on it, not classified historical monument by Germany, but only with traces of graffiti lines falling a part from a sad past of German history, the contemporary graffiti painting of Corean artist Hideeyes gives a new meaning to this dividing wall of the past. His artistic intervention adds – more than 40 years later - even more meaning to it : the actuality of the symbolism of this normally harmless construction. And therefor, by his artistic light modification with a narrative quality, Hideeyes turns this piece of wall into a contemporary art work.

Berlin, 3.12.2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive name followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

About me:

Katia Hermann, art historian, independent curator, writer, film assistant. Born in 1971, french-german, raised in Paris, Katia studied cultural managing and history of modern and contemporary art at the Université Panthéon-Sorbonne IV. After assisting documentary film productions and thematic exhibitions in France, she moved to Berlin in 2001. Since she curated several exhibitions of modern artists like Hundertwasser, Picasso, Otto Dix and photographers like Bert Stern or Joe Conzo, as well as documentary thematic photo exhibitions (egyptian revolution, Berlin graffiti writing 1983-2018). Her group shows in project spaces were featuring mainly young Berlin based contemporary artists. Katia is also an art mediator and tour guide in German, French and English about Urban Art and the history of Berlin.