

ARTIST STATEMENT :  
THE INVASIONS OF THE MUTANTS ON STREETS  
AS A GRAFFITI (STREET ART)  
PRACTICE

by

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# ABSTRACT

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M.A, Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design

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The aim of this study is to show the link the graffiti works of “cins” with the research on graffiti; it’s history and situation today.

This research explores the birth and history of graffiti in the world and in Turkey, the perception of graffiti in Turkey, the language which I am trying to create in my graffiti work and the way my works communicate with people on the streets. For this, I explained the aesthetical and technical aspects of my works and the concerns and tactics in the application process. By doing this I tried to discuss and explore the intuitive and planned decisions I take before and during the graffiti practice.

Lastly, this research discusses the phenomenon of streets as “the cause” and “the means”, the communication of graffiti with people on the streets and proposes a way to regaining the streets.

**Keywords:** graffiti, street, form, mutant, regain

# ÖZ

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Bu çalışmanın amacı, “cins” in üretimleri doğrultusunda graffiti çalışmalarını, graffiti tarihini ve bugünkü konumu açısından incelenmesini içermektedir.

Araştırmamda graffitinin doğuşundan itibaren dünya ve Türkiye’deki tarihi, duruşunu ve ele alınışını; kendi oluşturduğum, üretimlerimdeki dil üzerinden sokaktaki vatandaş, izleyici ile nasıl bir ilişki kurduğunu incelemekteyim. Bu sebepten ötürü çalışmalarımındaki teknik ve estetik kaygıların yanısıra sokaklardaki uygulama

biçimlerimden ve önemli unsurlardan bahsetmekteyim. Böylece sokak üretimlerimde, atölye üretimlerimden farklı olarak; planlı üretimlerden ziyade daha spontane ve sezgisel gelişen çalışmaları incelemek ve tartışmaktayım.

Son olarak bu çalışma sokak kavramını ‘amaç’ ve ‘araç’ olarak algılanmasının yanısıra, graffiti ve sokak sanatı ile insanlarla nasıl iletişime geçebildiği ve sokakları geri kazanmak adına önemli bir alternative olabileceğini önermektedir.

**Anahtarsözcükler:** graffiti, sokak, form, mutant, geri kazanmak

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to answer the following research questions; How did street art and graffiti progress in art world? How is graffiti perceived today? How is the situation of graffiti in Turkey? What sort of aesthetic and technical details do I concern about in my graffiti practice? How does graffiti communicate with people on the streets? Is it possible to transform streets?

I've been practicing graffiti since ten years and trying to share and spread this culture also through exhibitions and workshops.

The research questions I listed above are also the questions that compose the progress of my graffiti practice and visual language. I explored them through my graduate and post-graduate education along with my production on streets. Moreover I tried to analyze the link of my works to streets, their content, aesthetical and technical aspects along with the graffiti culture, its roots and traditions and practice today. I intended to support my analysis by some visuals.

In the first chapter I explain the birth of the graffiti culture in the world and Turkey, its progress and also its state at the art market. In the following chapters, I focus on my graffiti works, how I met with graffiti, how my pseudonym was born, the aesthetical and technical aspects of my works, how I select the location and other details that I take into account in the practice.

In the last chapter I express my approach to the streets and propose why and how we need to and are able to transform the streets.

## CHAPTER 2. THE HISTORY OF GRAFFITI AND ITS EVOLUTION

Tristan Manco, who is one of the few researchers, who work on graffiti, explains graffiti cultures' content as follows;

“Graffiti (*sgraffiti*), meaning drawings or scribbles on a flat surface and deriving from the Italian *sgraffio* (‘scratch’), with a nod to the Greek *graphien* (‘to write’), originally referred to those marks found on ancient Roman architecture. The term is now associated with the twentieth-century urban environment, where it covers anything from simple marks to complex and colorful compositions. This broad definition includes all styles from tags to political graffiti, and all methods from spray-cans, paint-brushes and marker-pens to sticker and stencils.”<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays graffiti culture is mostly mentioned as “street art” or “post-graffiti”. Although today’s graffiti culture is seen as the progression of the graffiti movement, which started in New York in 70s, its spirit was based on propagandas and political writings during and before 1968 period. Even if we look back on earlier times, we can see that graffiti bears traces of cave pictures’ expressionism and documentation.

As the name implies graffiti’s field of application is open public space and streets, and this makes application owners’ status symbols such as their names, identities subordinate in the first phase. Because of this, important elements like explanandum, techniques, contents and ideologies differ. But still we can state that graffiti’s spirit is generally rebellious and liberal.

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<sup>1</sup>Tristan Manco, 2002.*Stencil Graffiti*, Thames & Hudson, New York.

Graffiti's aesthetic form, which was started in 70s in New York, and convulsive effect of propaganda posters before 70s influence today's street art. It can be said that today's street art is an evolved form of traditional street art.



Figure 1. Propaganda posters. Paris streets 1968.

Liberal movements all around the world show parallelism with street art at that period. The propaganda posters, slogans, manifestos and even announcements that were put on the walls in Europe and United States had started to transform into aesthetic pieces. Streets had become tools and aims to make statements without censor, directly.

The image that is formed when we think about graffiti and colorful, figurative calligraphy writings that we see around on trains and in streets commenced in 70s in New York. The origin of the graffiti has a legendary story. “Taki 183” writing started to be seen in the New York streets at that time. These writings had the characteristic of signature and they spread rumors and aroused curiosity. New York Times made news about these writing and writings reached the masses. The writings spilled the works and it came out that a postman from New York was writing “Taki 183” on the streets. The postman, who was traveling in the city for his job and wrote “Taki 183”, which originated the graffiti movement. After him, tags were espoused by an audience and they started to be tools of manifestation.



Figure 2. Taki 183 tag.early 70s New York.

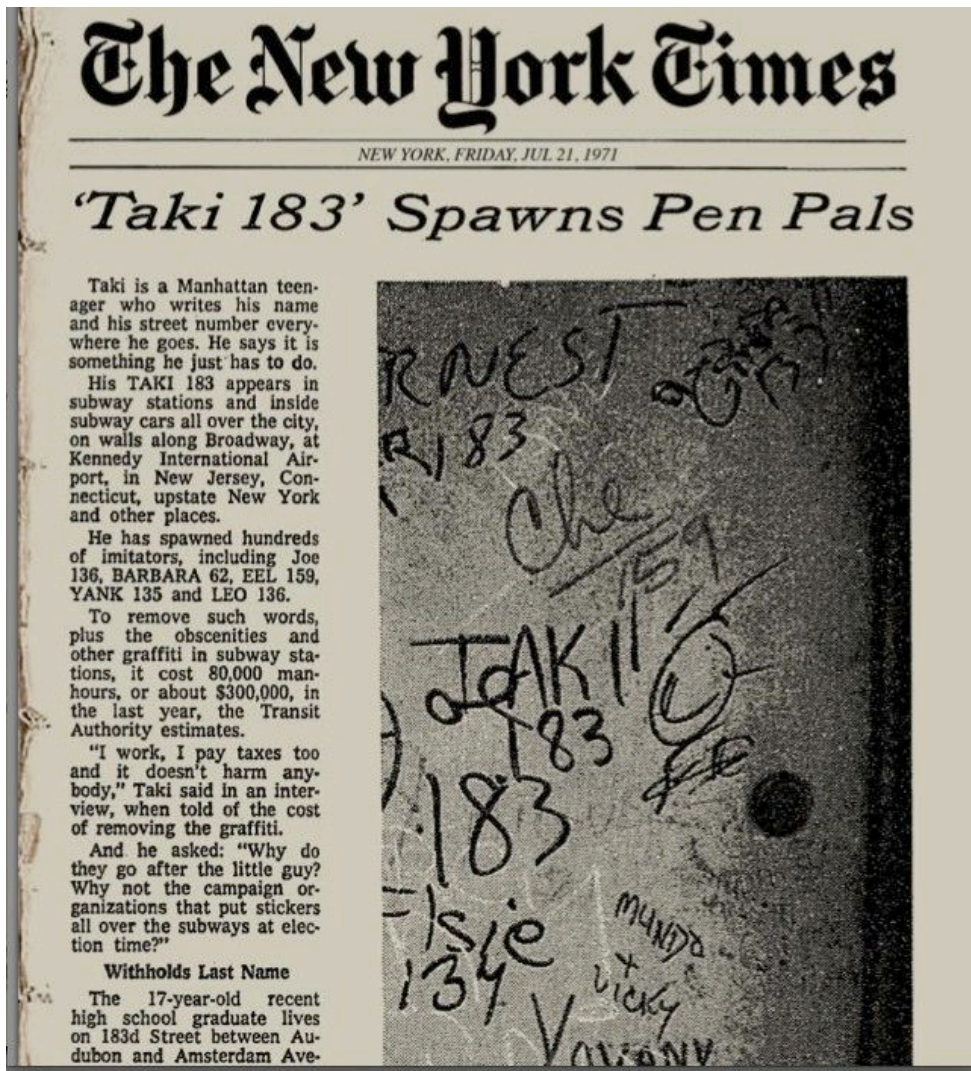


Figure 3. The New York Times, about Taki 183.

Class intervals became obvious in the big metropolitan: New York. Individuals who lived or made live in different parts of the city had different live styles and they made their own rhythms in the city. African – Americans were seen as second-class citizens in the States, and had socially and economically limited lives. Graffiti became a creative act along with rap music and hip-hop culture with its strong rhythms and boundless lyrics. By graffiti, individuals could express themselves and they could rebel.



The movement, which gave the message “we are gaining freedom and standing here against the system”, started to spread in the city.

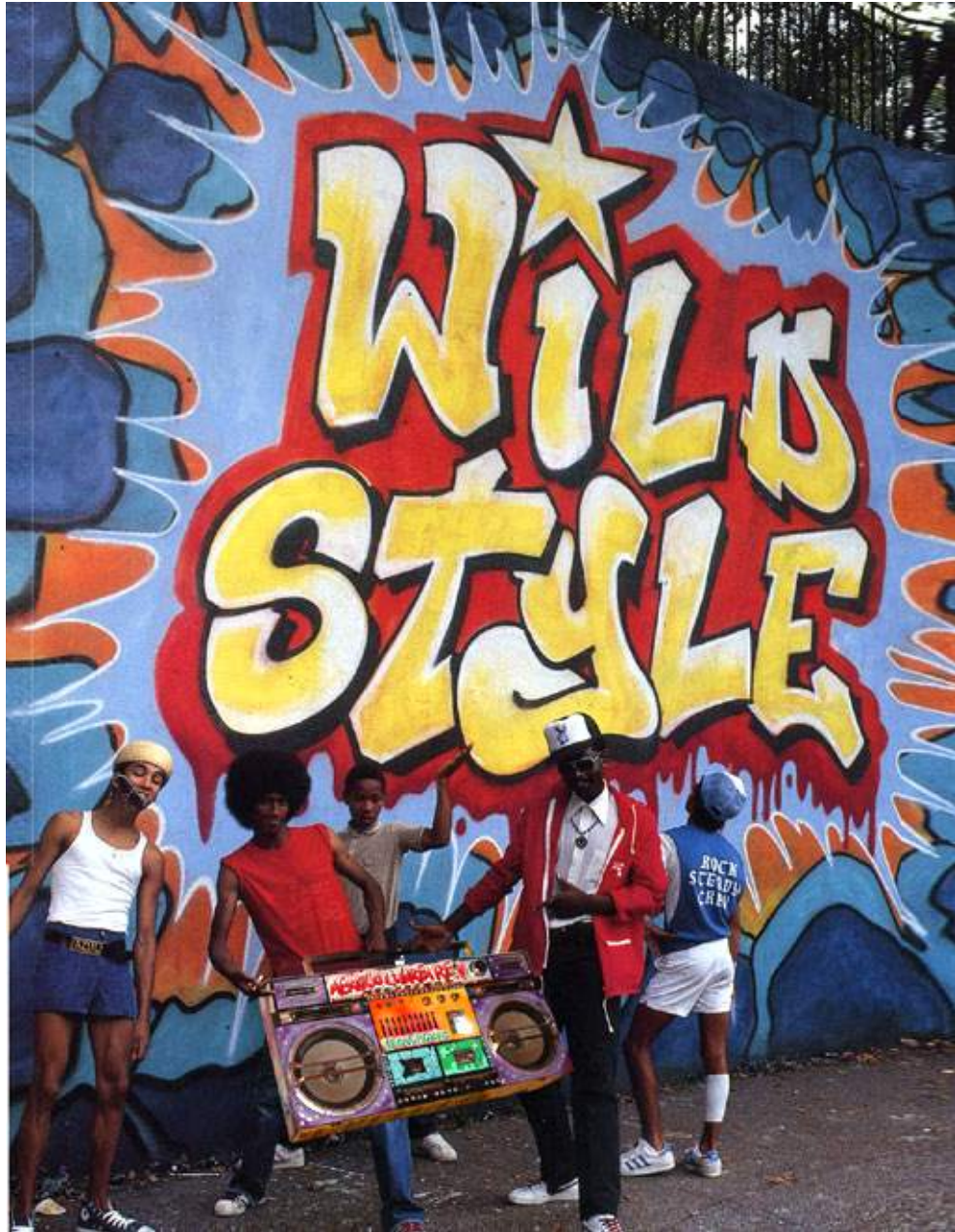


Figure 4. Photo from 'Wild Style' movie, 1983.

Firstly young African-Americans started to write their names or nicknames calligraphically on the streets and shops' shutters. These names or nicknames were, in a way, their signatures and were called as “tagging”s. Taggings became bigger and more

colorful by developed materials and techniques and inspired and motivated youth to begin a quest to new forms & techniques. Hereby the practices, which started as local movements, spread onto the public transportation such as trains, which turned into tools of communication between different regions.



Figure 5. Photo from 'Style Wars' movie, 1984.

Over years street art became uncontrollable and it initiated to be called as vandalism. Governments made provisions against this and new laws were amended. Non-governmental organizations against graffiti and private companies that use special chemicals in order to clean the graffiti are displaying how widespread graffiti is. Instead of preventing, these prohibitions provoked and motivated youth to generate creative solutions and try various new, practical techniques. This event was no more individuals' explicandum, and governments started act in aggressive manner, which is focused on police intervention.



Figure 6. A graffiti removal company.

Nowadays when we examine the “old school” graffiti form, which is simpler, plainer and more calligraphic across the world, we can see that this form has been evolving with its direct relation with different disciplines of visual arts. This form includes street installations, stickers, stencils and collages. Local differences became prominent in the new applications, however this form has its own universal language and comprehension. The most important reason of this is the globalization, by globalization the communication networks have been improved and disconnection between different regions was dissolved. The increase in the printed media about graffiti, the importance and generality of internet use in our daily lives let us to follow the new events and productions all around the world and by this, graffiti culture has become continual.



Figure 7. D\*Face, street artist, poster.



Figure 8. D\*Face, street artist, installation in U.K.

Besides graffiti culture is directly in relation with people and the streets, industrialization on graffiti also has affected the progress, extension and evolution of graffiti. Just like the increase of reactions against graffiti, supporters of graffiti also increased. There are many considerations that support and obtain its progression. Basic materials used for graffiti such as spray-paints created their own markets. Different brands offer different color scales and special equipments for graffiti artists. This large-scale market gives us perceptible information about how graffiti developed. The printed media, books and magazines about graffiti, documentaries on graffiti have increased and even the games about escaping from police and making graffiti on the trains was designed. There is no doubt that graffiti's and its market's progression is directly proportional with how art market drew intense interest on graffiti. Despite graffiti is still seen as a subculture and locality is seen more important than popularity for graffiti, there are some artists that stand out amongst others and reach larger masses.



Figure 9. MTN, spray paint brand from Barcelona.

## 2.1. The artists that graffiti bring in to art world, their status, and progress

In the mid 70's the progress of graffiti made it more recognizable and as a result graffiti became more interesting by the art world (market). At this period graffiti became creators and galleries hotspot. The development on both attitude and artistic side of it made it popular among art galleries. The graffiti artists who used to paint the walls and trains began to exhibit their works on canvases or boards in New York galleries with fancy openings. But the most important trigger was Andy Warhol's discovery of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring who rocked art world in the early 80's.



Figure 10. Basquiat and Haring together, 80s.

Both Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring gained fame in a short period of time by the help of Andy Warhol's influence, and also their unique style and success.

Considering the artistic values of their paintings, it is possible to see with quite different elements, but what combined them together were themes that they processed, beyond the technical values.



Figure 11. Haring while painting, 80s.

While Haring was referring to cartoons and comics with his illustrative style, Basquiat's expressive style was close to art brut. On the other hand their interest in the streets, life styles, and the dark-humored works were their parallel points. Their interest

in the streets shaped their lifestyles in a different way than the other artists of their time. Graffiti, drugs, homosexuality, AIDS, nightlife, sub-culture, anti-government elements were always felt in their dark humour. Despite their early deaths (Basquiat due to drugs, Haring due to AIDS) they left influential works. Haring's simplistic and colourful drawings like a scene in a cartoon, was not only charming but also stand for a wild world. He has been always a source of inspiration for new generation artists. And Basquiat's had a dark soul behind his childish drawings.



Figure 12. Basquiat, mixed media, *melting point of ice*, 1984



Beside their importance in art history, they also made graffiti more popular and well known. However it is a fact that the graffiti, street art as we know now made the real boom in the last decade. The sensational works of some artists and the activist actions played a significant role in this boom. The Bristol-born Banksy is one of the most notable artists in this period. What makes him different than the said artists is that he started to paint on the walls firstly rather than in galleries. His productivity, political attitude, and smartly designed works reflect his humour and helped him to gain a worldwide fame.



Figure 13. Banksy, London 2008.

"Who is Banksy? To answer this question is very hard as there is not much information about him apart from being born in the England's historical port city Bristol that is famous for the genre trip-hop. He trained as a butcher when he was kid and unlike people around him he chose not to work in ordinary jobs and die

likes an alcoholic. He decided to be a street artist. His family believes he is an artist...

After his ordinary works at streets he improved himself and created his own unique style. His name Banksy becomes signatures, which is both eye-taking and shows his characters in his works. His sense of humour is intellectual, and he mostly uses sarcastic and dark-humour elements in his works. He treats walls as canvases, which makes his works easily distinguishable among others. By successfully mixing his imagination and wit, he attracts many fans and gets many followers.

Beginning in England, he traveled cities New York, Barcelona and Paris, and left his fingerprints around the world, and became an elusive artist. Despite turning down the offer from Nike, he has always been criticized by the other street artist due to his popularity, but likewise the Punk music which saved the Rock Music from being a shiny-glory genre, and took it back to streets where it belongs; Banksy took the art from big art galleries to streets. Banksy's graffiti's main point is to be the voice of the voiceless and the aggressive bits of Punk, which can be seen in his works. Isn't the independence of graffiti art a reflection of Punks' "Do it yourself" way? He was the poet of the tough guys of the sub-culture ghettos who raise their voices with Sprays." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>RafetArslan, 2008. [www.ebenzin.com](http://www.ebenzin.com), accessed in November 2010.



Figure 14. Banksy, Palestine 2008.

His unusual style and attitude opened a new page for the street art people. Newspapers, magazines and TV made news about him and discussed his works. As a result street art concept gained an alternative place in art world. Besides, he put his paintings into the most well-known museums Tate Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and Louvre like a guerilla. He wrote about a memory of his own in his book “Wall and Piece” as follows;

"My sister threw away loads of my drawings when I was a kid and when I asked her where they were she shrugged and said “well it's not like they're ever going to be hanging in the Louvre is it?””<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Banksy, 2005. Wall and Piece, Century, England



Figure 15. Banksy illegal museum installation, 2005.

This ordinary conversation with her sister tells basics of his customs in his particular way. With these actions Graffiti and street art got its place in art museums first by guerilla tactics and then by invitation. Banksy's exhibition in Bristol Museum (2009) shows that he is acclaimed by art world.



Figure 16. Banksy exhibition, Bristol Museum 2009.

Furthermore these acts began to create their own alternative art market, and also some galleries that only belong to street art culture. These galleries have been held along with some festivals and organizations for a long time especially in Europe and the USA. After realizing the fact that street art is a self renewing and dynamic culture museums showed their interest in the other artists as well as Banksy. After graffiti exhibitions, shows, discussions, and workshops which held in some major museums like MOMA, lately with a radical decision some top street artists's works took place in front wall of

the Tate Modern building. However contrary to their act of supporting the street art, Tate Modern made an agreement with Graffiti Removal Company to remove the works from their wall after the exhibition.



Figure 17. Tate Modern 2010.

## 2.2. Graffiti in Turkey

The progress in the world has also affected Turkey in some ways. It can be said that Istanbul is far ahead than other cities in production. The progress in the last decade made people, media, writers, and other artist pay more attention to the street art. Therefore more and more articles and interviews about street art were published in books, magazines, newspapers, and internet publications. ŞinaşıGüneş the writer of the “SokakSanatı” (2008) which can be taken as an important example in this regard in terms of content and size explain his opinions as:

“There were some political writings on the streets, but there were no links between these writings and graffiti. However the book, which published, by Metis Books “Biz DuvarYazısıyız” came up as Graffiti in Turkey, which was

not reflecting the truth. On the other hand it is true that these writings were started in the USA. Today, we face “NuriAlço” signatures in every corner. The birth of graffiti in America was similar to “NuriAlço” signatures on the walls.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 18. NuriAlço, unknown.

The example NuriAlço was a cult figure in old Turkish movies, and writings were referring to the political incidents. Even if SinasiGunes explain this example as the birth of graffiti in Turkey, its importance lies in the curiosity it raised, as it was widespread in all around the country like the writings “183” in New York in 70’s. Even though it was not very popular at that time the history of graffiti in Turkey goes back to 80’s. The only crew that remains now is the “S2K” and its founder is “Turbo”.

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<sup>4</sup>ŞinaşıGüneş, 2008.SokakSanatı, Es, Istanbul.





Figure 19. S2K, Turbo, İstanbul 90s.

“S2K” started to make graffiti in Bakirkoy, Istanbul. “rez” a.k.a Turbo from “S2K” used to draw templates on notebooks as he did not have sprays. He made his first graffiti in 1985 in Yakacik, Istanbul. Then he started to draw everywhere in Istanbul alone for a year. He said “There were some other guys around, but they were influenced by break dance and some movies. So they did not continue. I am the only one who continued with desire.”

Although Turbo does not do illegal graffiti anymore, he still graffiti actively. The works he has created helped to make graffiti popular as he carried the graffiti culture to commercials, TV, and magazines. He participated in some exhibitions and festivals and also he is working on a book series called “Turkish Graffiti”. Two of them is already finished and composed of emails that come from every corner in Turkey. He links his

old-school style with illustrative drawings which he lately interested in. By this way he helps creating a graffiti concept in Turkey.



Figure 20. Turbo sketch.2009.

There are a lot more crews in Turkey like Turbo and S2K. Most of the crews are composed of young people whose ages are between 15-25. Moreover the techniques and calligraphy they use are under influence of 70's New York and hip-hop culture. After the arrival of the new equipments like high quality sprays, the quality and variability of the production also increased. The graffiti and street art were used to belong to ghetto and young people but following the growing attention of the art students has led graffiti to positive transformations.



Figure 21. DSK crew, İstanbul 2000s.

In 2007 an art initiative called Hafriyat arranged the first street art exhibition called “Müdahale” in Karaköy. During this exhibition, artists got the chance to know each other and made individual and collective works. Media showed great interest in street art exhibitions and by this way the awareness of street arts grew even though it was a bit late. The following exhibitions and festivals have helped this illegal art to move further. On the other hand this progress brought some concerns such as the risk of losing the spirit. As there is always a risk when the street based organization move to galleries. There are some efforts by street artists to save the street art from the degeneration in which I am also involved. In addition to this, understanding graffiti as an art form in Turkey is a positive progress, where graffiti believed to be only a hobby. Interviews, documentaries and workshops for different age groups which I also take part in their organizations, plays an essential role to increase an awareness of street art and to overcome the prejudices. The progress in the last decade not only affected the art world but more importantly it also changed ordinary people and even police’s attitudes.



Figure 22. OyDağlar, İstanbul, 2008.

New artists from different regions of Turkey help to increase the quality and variability of works and also make our grey cities more colorful. Knowing that there are places like Kadikoy where the graffiti can be saved from removal, when it is still illegal and never ending removal goes on in other places, proves us that this is a great move.

Like in other areas, with its young population Turkey is getting a decent place in the world of street arts. The relationship between surface and space, which is quite important for street art makes Istanbul a centre for the artists from all over world.



Figure 23. Kripoe (German graffiti artist), İstanbul, 2009.

## **CHAPTER 3. THE GRAFFITI PRACTICE OF “CINS” AS AN INDEPENDENT PROJECT**

### **3.1. Meeting with Graffiti**

People during their periods of youth inevitably have different pursuits, and the need to direct the uncertain rebellion into enriching the identity. The factors such as the social and economical background, friendships and interests of people, also differentiates these directions. Thus, also when we examine the history of graffiti, it is not surprising that many people meet graffiti in their youths.

About “cins”, it is possible to link the effect of the above-mentioned factors with his meeting with graffiti. At my youth, when the cartoon characters that I’ve been copying since my childhood began to evolve, I was also influenced by the music genres I’ve been listening to. Along with rock and metal music and their dark and melancholic face, hip-hop music and culture was especially influential for me to be interested in graffiti. I was attracted by the graffiti examples in the album covers and the music videos and I started to try these in my drawings. Although I was aware that the graffiti belongs to the streets, for a while my drawings were limited with sketches on paper, until I first bought my first spray can in high school times and met with illegal graffiti on streets. Then I realized that I could express my feelings, anger and my showdown through graffiti and this became my passion.

At that time, although graffiti was not as much performed as in European countries, through a few foreign graffiti magazines that we could find in the market and through internet, I started to enrich my knowledge through research. This was my drawing started to evolve along with the new styles and techniques I’ve been seeing. The greatest influence that shaped my work until today was the undergraduate education graphic design. Despite the school projects were taking most of my time, I was following graffiti eagerly. I was uncomfortable that the school projects were not exactly reflecting me. I was eager to continue to paint streets, live the excitement and to share my artistic

practice with people or even to siege them without getting involved in an order that is established by others. So I found my pseudonym and started to paint the streets actively and in a way started my independent dream project.

### **3.2. The birth of “cins”**

Although my illustrations were not much appreciated by my professors I was continuing my practice. I was examining the techniques I was introduced in the university; my work was evolving and was happy with the results. My work today has evolved by trying out and combining various styles and techniques in the search for the best expression and comfort.

I was practicing graffiti only for myself, without waiting to be appreciated or establishing bigger projects.

Graffiti requires taking risk. Still it requires good planning without losing the spontaneity and continuity. In my commercial works, I prefer to work in parallel freelance projects that feeds my personal graffiti works mutually such as designing logos for new enterprises and painting murals. Recently, I've been commissioned to design and paint a legal graffiti for a Turkish film.

To have a pseudonym is a graffiti tradition, it is also an attractive and mysterious side of graffiti, which stems from its illegal nature. It is for covering the formal identity and also it is about freedom from the bondages, creating an alter ego, a new identity. It is also an attractive and mysterious side of graffiti.



Figure 24. Cins, İstanbul 2007.

Although I've been practicing graffiti since ten years, I've been using the pseudonym "cins" for six years. It is not a designed name but aroused during the production style that time. 'Cins' means species, type and weird in slang; and I chose it as thinking that it suited to my style, which was unusual and different than more conventional graffiti styles in Istanbul at that time. It doesn't mean that I think of myself as "different" but I believe that everyone is different and a "cins" not only according to the art production style but also in life view. I use it for my alternative identity, which refuses the preset and monotonous lives, and follows its own way and type of life. This approach doesn't necessarily isolates "cins" from its environment but "cins" embraces its own world. This identity, although virtual, leaves real marks to the world.





Figure 25. Cins, İstanbul, 2008.

Rafet Arslan, who is one of the rare people, who thinks, writes and produces manifestos on street art in Turkey, wrote about my works in the book “Contemporary Art Manifestos” with the title “*The image of “cins” or the mutant forms of the subject between being and nothingness*” as follows:

“In the background of the work of “cins” what we see is not bodies but organs. Tongue, tooth, brain, eye... The perception of body is fragmented; from the body parts, new flesh comes into the world. In the transformation may encounter pain or a weird sort of joy in its object, even waits for its new form with curiosity.

The image of Cins, with its simplest definition, is naïve. Pink elephants, cute plants, smiling teeth saying, “curse!”... Having the naivety in child’s mind, not closing the doors to joy even in dark times, to wish a life like carnival. The image of Cins greets all the excitement of a child’s heart.



Figure 26. Cins, İstanbul, 2008.

Although graffiti is cited as a practice of ‘writer’s, a mural movement is maturing in our country, which we can easily say was started by Cins. Cins used to paint on packaging papers and cardboards, which he still does. Although he was using mostly stencils at the beginning, he became a virtuoso in using all the instruments of streets, from white-paste to stickers. Cins also writes onto walls but with his own slightly calligraphic letter, without much ornamentation. What he writes is not his pseudonym but the notions and slogans he produces in the streets automatically; “lancet”, “curse!”, “errorist” etc... The spray can transforms to a multi-functional weapon in his hand; sometimes it is a brush, sometimes a pen.

Although the street works of many artists are covered immediately, especially in Kadıköy- Moda district, his work stays with sound health. I thought about this long enough and tried to link the works with the psycho-geography of the district. The result I came to was that the inhabitants connects to these weird mutants, with the shortest interpretation they love these works.



Figure 27. Cins, İstanbul, 2008.

When we examine this statement, the rainbow effect of the color magician Cins comes to the table. Cins intervenes the standard flow of the city, his painting surprises people walking around the corner. He brings art to the people, who have no connection with art, and who is caught, snatched and carried away with the mechanical rhythm of daily life.

Although this creates a daze mixed with shock, shortly after the earnest of the work creates empathy with the guy on the street. The guy grabs the filthy information from the colorful mutants that he assaults against the matrix, cheerful but opprobriously and he keeps this as a secret. The guy approves this cheerful rebel subconsciously, even enjoys it. And because of this, Cins' image is a way to go to the answer of the question: "How is a flat, indigo painted city built,

brothers?”. The image of Cins, who acts against the grayness that the morality and principles reflect onto the face of the city, is civil and libertarian.”<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup>Rafet Arslan, 2010. "Contemporary Art Manifestos", 6.45 Yayinlari, Istanbul

Figure 28. Cins, İstanbul, 2010.

Usually, the biggest mistakes that the viewer makes when evaluating the graffiti works is to only focus on the results but not taking into account how it was made. In this respect, the comments that RafetArslan made about my production and process as a viewer is very important for me. In a way it summarizes my works as I design in my mind and share with people. For me, the planning and the application process are most important for me. The planning process is made concerning many details and circumstances.



Figure 29. Cins, making of photo, with 'ed', 2010.

In graffiti culture, identity creation lies among the most critical aspects, and the style of the artist is the most influential factor crating this identity. In the beginning of graffiti movement, the artists were playing with the forms of letters to express their creativity. Although this style is usually not stable, it forms a typographic order. Along with typographic characteristics, the colour scale also gives hints about the identity of the artist. Thus, in street art, the artist follows a consistent repetition. This also applies

for my work; I try to diversify my lines and forms within the same language. The main aim here is to connect with the viewer in the street and to give meaning to it; and for the people, who are used this language, to communicate.

There are many factors influencing the creation of this language, such as content, style and technical details.

### **3.3. Mutants, as the organic visual forms**

The expressions and forms that I use compose the aesthetics of my works. The forms I've been using recently can be described simply as "organic". Organic forms are suitable to evolve within certain limits. In a way they are living, transforming and even mutating as all the creatures on earth. Even with very abstract organic forms I aim them to gain meaning with the connotations of the viewers' subconscious. Following the content of my works, I mostly use connotative forms of flesh, bones and organs. I aim the forms to be both familiar and also strange to the viewers. Although I appreciate the direct message giving works as well. I avoid this style not to be restricted and also to arouse curiosity and questioning in the viewer with mystery.



Figure 30. Cins, İstanbul 2009.

When reflecting all these concerns in the streets, most practical technique to express the contents and form the aesthetics should be found and a strategy should be developed for the application process.

### **3.4 The technique**

I use the techniques stickers, stencils, wheat-paste, sometimes markers and chalk, but painting with spray and leaving space to spontaneous marks as well. The colours that I carry with are the predetermined factors but the place of graffiti is mostly determined at the application time, and the story, composition and form starts to come into being. Of course, in the illegal applications, the most important thing to consider is to finish the work safely.

### 3.5. Aesthetical components

Aesthetically, my graffiti works have a non-complex graphical structure. The most highlighted aesthetical components are the curves and colours. There are many factors influencing this style such as the technique, materials and the required work pace.

I try to form the curves in my works diligently, as I find this part of the process the most delightful. While creating these curves I am using clean black outlines, which can remind the works of Roy Lichtenstein. Clean lines, dots are also the main characters of my artworks. Besides, my educational background in graphic design and my illustrative works are influential in this. The curves usually have a changing width and depth of focus, which creates the movement effect. In graffiti culture, this is defined as “the flow” which describes the dynamicity and rhythm of the work. This also links to the roots of graffiti, to hip-hop culture and break dance.



Figure 31. Cins, İstanbul 2010.



The curves also obtain the freedom to improvise compared to more linear forms. They form the organic structure of my work.

Another very important aesthetical aspect is the colour selection. They reflect the feeling of the content and the story of the works. While using the familiar colours of the content, flesh, bones and organs, according to these elements most of my colors are consists of dirty pinks, grey based colors which you can find them in Georg Baselitz's dirty expressive paintings. I also use contrasting colours, which reflect and symbolize the external and artificial intervention, and the mutation. But still, these detail, although keeping continuity, are always open to experimentation. The colour selection involves in another task, to attract attention, to be remembered and to strengthen the interventions to the grey dominated city. Not only in itself, these colours contrasts with the city as well.



Figure 32. Cins, İstanbul 2008.

In my works, along with the illustrative expressions, I also use writing and slogans. When determining the wording, there are also some important aspects. “Tagging” have an important place in the graffiti culture, and it mostly practiced by the artist as writing their pseudonyms. In my practice, I also tag the work I do similar to a signature, but also use short, usually one-word slogans in my compositions. With these, I

again choose unusual or abstract words, where the meaning can be interpreted by the viewer. Sometimes the words compose the focus of the work and sometimes they appear as a speech bubble of the mutants. There are some slogans that I repeat in my works as well, such as “küfret” (curse!), “süzül” (slip away), “erör” (error), “erörist” (error maker), “neşter” (lancet) and “malazlar” (a Turkish match brand). For example “küfret”, besides its plain meaning, aims to call and provoke people to show reaction to the impositions of daily life and to stand up for their rights. When deciding on these, the connotative meaning, the sound and the characters, especially the Turkish characters with dots are the factors. I write these words using my own style of font.



Figure 33. Cins, İstanbul 2010.

In addition, for these works to interact with people, the decision on the place is another very important factor. The environment and texture of the wall influenced the content and the aesthetics of the works as well.

### 3.6. Location

The location, which is selected for the graffiti, sets the space of communication and interaction with the viewer. There are many factors effecting the decision of location selection. A crowded place always provides more viewers to see but this also means that to work in that location is risky. It is very common to paint on abandoned locations, but then the challenge is to be familiar with the location against surprises.



Figure 34. Cins, İstanbul 2008.

When selecting the location worst case scenario should be taken into account. There is enormous difference between painting a regular wall and a mosque wall or wall of a police station. And if the wall belongs to corporate company's building, the life span of graffiti is extremely short, such that it is usually covered immediately. In some cases when an inconvenient situation happens, the work might not be completed.

The location effects the aesthetical and technical application of graffiti as well. Abandoned locations give the opportunity to work very detailed and for longer times. Then the challenge to reach people can be overcome by the support of other media such as showing the photographs on internet. As the process, aim and the results of these works are very different, they need to be evaluated accordingly.



Figure 35. Cins, İstanbul, 2007.

Another strategic difference is to either work on a planned location and on a planned work or to firstly search for the location and work spontaneously. In spontaneous work, an intuitive approach stands out in the process.

The locations in together form a map of the graffiti artist, consciously or not. It can be compared with street animals marking their territories. I prefer to work on spontaneously selected locations.

The constant search for location changes the graffiti artists' view of the streets. They focus on details, which regular people don't pay attention when they pass by. Even sometimes they do explorative trips in search for the desired "canvas".



Figure 36. Cins, İstanbul, 2010.

### **3.7. The application process and tactics**

The biggest barriers in graffiti are the legal problems and thus the police. The civil public might cause another parallel danger as they might call the police. The attitude of the police might change according to the location, and the level of conservatism of the area. Another factor influencing the attitude of the police is the content of the graffiti, such as political or sexual content almost never gets a tolerance, whereas more artistic applications might even start a good conversation with the police, similarly if you write about love or football. Even the colour selection might effect the reaction of the police; some colour combinations might be linked to political content. These factors are strongly influenced by the political, sociological and historical characteristics of the region and country.

Another reason for the reactions against graffiti is vandalism, which aims at destruction and damaging the public goods. The difference will be proved when the good quality works will be accumulated. This is accomplished in Europe and the sympathy of the public towards graffiti art has been gained.

Every graffiti artist develops a strategy to protect their works, the slogans I use along with the aesthetical dimensions such as colours and curved forms are my way to connect the public and overcome the prejudice.

### **3.8. Indoor production and link to the streets**

Along with graffiti, I also do illustrations and drawing in my house. The style of these works is parallel to my graffiti works although the application process and the aesthetical concerns are completely different. Then I have the opportunity to work ore detailed, planned and experimental. These experimentations always feed my graffiti work, and this is a source of motivation as well.



Figure 37. Cins, paintings 2010.

In these projects, I mostly use acrylic paint and markers and sometimes also spray paint. As the canvas, I mostly use paper, corrugated and regular cardboards. The cardboards I usually collect from streets, especially the thrown-away packaging or advertisement posters, and select the ones with a little damage. This also links my indoor project with the streets, I a way to transform the garbage on the streets into an artwork. Sometimes I cut the cardboards according to my plans and sometimes I let the damage on the cardboard to set the size limits. I prefer cardboard rather than canvases as I feel more freedom with the size and feel more motivated to experiment on them.





Figure 38. Cins, painting, 2007.

In a sense, I see the cardboards as pieces of walls with different characteristics that I find on the streets and I think that as I find them by chance, this chance factor influences the surprises in my work as well.,

## CHAPTER 4. THE MUTANTS AND THE STREETS

### 4.1. The phenomenon: “streets”

‘‘City streets shout with billboards, fly posters and corporate advertising. They almost invite a subversive response... and increasingly they are getting one. Many of today’s graffiti artists have taken to the stencil and spray-can, and are using the streets as a giant creative forum for their arresting artwork. ‘The image,’ says San Diego artist Shepard Fairey, ‘is integrated with the texture of the street.’’’<sup>6</sup>

Owing to the rhythm and conditions characterizing life in contemporary metropolises, inhabitants inevitably confront an individualized and lonely life. Streets, vital veins of those grandiose and fast cities, present economic and sociological characteristics of those vast districts in a nutshell. This stems from the dynamics of the street, its active, incessantly regenerating nature. Pavements house each host regardless of her class and status, shoulder to shoulder with another. They are a home for some, part of a route unworthy of further reflection for others, and spaces/phenomena promising possibilities of uncensored expression for yet others.

The heavy impact of capitalism on lives, working subtly and deeming alternatives improbable, is common knowledge. It gives rise to several poles, by dint of hierarchical organizations and signs of status immanent to it, hence the cul-de-sac we stumble into in contemporary life. The long term repression of freedom acts characterizing 60s and 68, deemed as a total failure by some, figured large in the domestication of following generations, in a sense. The foremost space left to those cruelly tamed generations, especially younger ones, are streets, hosts of groups seeking freedom in 60s.

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<sup>6</sup>Tristan Manco, 2002.*Stencil Graffiti*, Thames & Hudson, New York.

#### 4.2. Streets as “the cause” or “the means”

Streets give us distinctive information about the identity of the city. The dynamism of a district's streets is in proportion to the variety of the identity of that district, which is directly related to the inhabitants therein; inhabitants shape the identity of the street to a considerable extent.

When we reconsider street art in light of these perspectives, we can identify the effects of street art on the identity of streets. An artwork is throughout its existence a part of the street and can alter the perception and the identity of the space. Most graffiti artists, instinctively seize districts –without necessarily being aware of this-, or leave their traces, similar to mongrels' possessive acts of urination. The existence of instincts and the evolution of consciousness can turn into a priceless weapon at this juncture.

The power of communication streets possess is an inevitable fact, as manifested in the interest in advertising companies in invasive, billboards and rackets. Labeling of an act that intends to reclaim the streets as vandalism, coupled with the defeatism in the face of massive ad occupation by big companies is a tragic situation. Most reasonable stance is perhaps focusing on the concept of street spirit rather than aesthetic concerns of a particular artwork. While streets are invaluable means for communicating with people freely and uncensored, they are also means to monopolize that communication. Throughout the evolution of graffiti, those concepts and approaches recur despite brief periods of fadeout. In that sense, it might not be very accurate to evaluate street artworks in comparison with works produced and exhibited in different spheres. In short, there is a thin yet vital line between street art and merely the art on the streets.

Streets are an alternative channel for art production today concerning the interaction with the viewer. Graffiti works are also exhibited in art spaces, in festivals or similar events, which are organized or supported by governmental institutions, private companies and art institutions. Then a mutual gratification is aimed at, both for raising the attention of young generation and also raising the familiarity to street culture. Concerning the graffiti artists, to exhibit the works in a gallery or an event allows interacting with a new and diverse profile of public.



Figure 39. Wooster collective, Spring Street exhibition, 2007.

Recently, the graffiti culture has evolved and diversified to “street art” and “post-graffiti”. The works are collated both aesthetically and visually with fine arts and are being exhibited widely in art spaces. The nature and aim of these works are contrastingly different than the graffiti art on the streets. Graffiti works are left on the streets to survive. They might or not survive the environmental effects in time, if the inhabitants of the city let them.

For me, the most important aspect of graffiti is the act, individual or collective, before the aesthetical production. The works that I leave on the streets, when the inhabitants are mostly asleep, are my marks, and also signs saying, “I am here too”.

Streets belong to everyone. If I live in a metropolitan along with millions of other inhabitants among the bulk of concrete, and if there are things that we are uncomfortable with, I think, we have the right to manipulate. The only tool I have against the structure that I am in and which evolves me, are the mutants I have been drawing. The mutants express what I cannot in the cycle of daily-life and interact with people. I’ve also survived to continue this expression.



Figure 40. Cins, İstanbul, 2008.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Graffiti evolved enormously in the last forty years. Although it is still an alternative channel expressed on the streets, it is also an art movement, which is recently involved in the contemporary art scene. Especially in the recent ten years many artists have been producing effective and impressive works and both by individual and also collective productions, it can be considered the biggest movement of all time, which stems from the streets.

Along with the world, also in Turkey, especially in Istanbul, we can see a growing graffiti movement. The quality and quantity of the works are increasing every day. As it also raises media attention, it reaches a wider public.

I've been continuing to make graffiti since ten years, feeding my works with my education, research and opportunities of application through diverse channels. The forms I've been calling mutants, I drew to many streets of Istanbul, mostly in Kadıköy. The streets are both the cause and means for me, and it lies in the basis of all my artistic and commercial production. Through the exhibitions I've been participated and the workshops I ran, I've been trying to introduce the graffiti culture to many people from a diverse background and age. I aim both to create my own space for expressing myself and also to provoke people to interact and act. I wish to live in a city full with colorful graffiti instead of bulks of grey and commercial colours of billboards.

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