

TELT and the tunnel art work project

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ABSTRACT: The Tunnel Art Work (T.A.W.) project, promoted by TELT – Tunnel Euralpin Lyon Turin –, and curated by art critic Luca Beatrice, brings together – the first case of its kind – three pieces of street art in the exploratory tunnel of Chiomonte, Susa Valley, Italy. Via the T.A.W. project, it has been possible, together with the Italian artists Simone Fugazzotto, Laurina Paperina and the French artist LUDO, to reach the depths of a mountain and create a new art space. Paperina has decorated the workers’ convoy, while the other two artists have created original street art works at 2,800 meters from the tunnel entrance. Despite some international experience of dialogue between art and tunneling, such as the emblematic case of the Naples underground, there has always been a cultural and physical separation between the two fields. The T.A.W. project, therefore, aims to change this situation, promoting a reflection on underground creativity.

1. TUNNEL ART WORK

Playing on the double meaning of the word “gallery”, which in Italian means also “tunnel”, the Tunnel Art Work project, promoted by TELT – Tunnel Euralpin Lyon Turin –, and curated by art critic Luca Beatrice, brings – the first case of its kind – three pieces of street art in the exploratory tunnel of Chiomonte, Susa Valley.

Indeed, a gallery – intended as an art gallery – is the place where art is displayed, but “galleria” is also the Italian word for “tunnel.” Going through a tunnel means traveling along a road, in the dark, seeing the light again only at the end of the path. There is always something magical, mysterious, and ancestral about these routes, a different sense of challenge compared to the overwhelming presence of white that is found in contemporary art galleries. This is the new, unknown, and growing Underground world.

Via the T.A.W. project, it has been possible to reach the depths of a mountain and create a new space, together with the Italian artists Simone Fugazzotto, Laurina Paperina and the French artist LUDO. Paperina has decorated the workers’ convoy in her typical pop and comic-strip style, while the other two artists have created very original street art works 2,800 meters further away from the tunnel entrance.

Despite some crucial international experience of dialogue between art and tunneling, such as the well-known case of the Naples metro stations, there has always been a cultural, even more than physical separation between the two fields. The T.A.W. project, therefore, aims to change this situation, promoting a reflection on underground creativity and on the underground world. Its goal is to allow people to take back the underground environment, accompanying the technical development not only with the necessary communication about the work in progress,

but also with a cultural operation of recreation and discovery with a novel definition of the hypogeum space.

2. BACK TO THE ORIGINS

Thanks to the T.A.W. project, Street Art goes back to where it belongs. Graffiti, this peculiar guerrilla-art form which became popular in the U.S. between the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies, was indeed born on urban walls and in the underground.

At the peak of his career, between 1980 and 1985, Keith Haring left more than five thousand drawings on the subway billboards. He used to draw some of his iconic subjects, such as the radiant baby and the barking dog, very quickly: just a few lines, drawn with some chalk, before moving to the following station.

His art was meant to be for everybody, thanks to his accessible and unique style, as well as to the choice of public spaces, where millions of people traveled every day.

The Graffiti movement was considered illegal for a long time. Its goal was to defy institutions. For writers, leaving a tag (the author's signature) in the most unreachable place, such as the top of a building or the depth of a tunnel, just beside the rail, became a way of self-representation, in front of their or other artistic communities. The tag is also used to mark the territory. However, it is also a way to communicate to the world outside. Hence, Street Art invades public spaces and it often entails a violation of private property.

It intends to provoke and to contest, going back to the Biblical expression "writing on the wall", which is often used to refer to an imminent danger and is mainly linked to an anarchist environment.

If compared to the vast urban areas in the U.S., or the most infamous New York neighborhoods, the beginning of the Graffiti movement in Italy in the Eighties found a much more complex environment, with significant stratification and a long cultural heritage.

From Bologna to Milan, the hip-hop culture brought the Graffiti art to Italy, as well as rap music and break dance, which both represent relevant elements of this avant-garde.

The turning point in our country was the exhibition "Arte di Frontiera. New York Graffiti", which took place in the Bologna Gallery of Modern Art in 1984. The curator was Francesca Alinovi, an out-of-the-box researcher who brought to Italy some great artists, such as Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

They all were part of New York's Old School that Alinovi discovered as she was exploring the Big Apple's neighborhoods, in search of avant-garde movements and new combinations of artistic languages.

"They are like geysers," she said, talking about the Graffiti movement's impact on traditional art. At that time, 10 to 15 years of ephemeral art had passed by in America: from performance to body-art, to conceptualism. Going back to the visual arts was, in a way, sort of inevitable. A crucial contribution came indeed from the Graffiti movement, which found an artistic environment ready to react to its challenges.

3. THE BIRTH OF STREET ART AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET

The Graffiti movement evolves according to its geographical peculiarities, adopting each time new characteristics and styles. In the Nineties in Paris, at a time when tags invaded the city, some groups of artists began exploring new ways of expression. They chose a much more pop and accessible language, leaving the tags behind and starting to draw symbols and paintings instead. Street Art was born. Starting with spray, artists then adopted a mix of different techniques.

The most practical one turned out to be the stencil, allowing to prepare drawings in the studio and to apply them on the walls later, in a few seconds. This technique is also the one often used by Banksy, the most well-known Street artist of all times, and it allows him to keep the secret on his identity.

A quick performance is also crucial for LUDO, the French artist who took part in the T.A.W. project, as we will see later.

As new technologies spread, performance became even more important than its result. The internet amplified this phenomenon. Starting with the first fanzines in the Nineties, which were exchanged between groups of people, it has allowed a potential public of millions to access every piece of work.

This process, as well as a much more universal style if compared to Graffiti, made Street Art famous and acceptable to society. It has even become a trend.

As it always happens to avant-gardes, the entrance of the Street Art in the official art system caused a loss in its original political intent. However, a significant exception originated around the Lyon-Turin opposition (the so-called "Movimento No Tav"), which found in Street Art a significant means of expression. In the Susa Valley, in 2017, the No Tav even organized an art festival, named "Wall Susa", which was a way to oppose the project and to make people aware to the No Tav's thesis and initiatives.

4. T.A.W.: ARTISTS AND ARTWORK

In the environment described above, the T.A.W. project brought together Italian and French artists in the first experiment of "Tunnel art" at an international level, willing to explore a new way to connect the TAV Project with the often antagonistic world of writers.

Simone Fugazzotto and LUDO were invited to express their creativity 2,800 m deep inside the exploratory tunnel of La Maddalena, Susa Valley. Laurina Paperina decorated the train that brings the workmen to the excavation face.

37-year-old Fugazzotto began his artistic career at the Brera Academy, in Milan, before moving to New York, where he took his inspiration mainly from the streets. He spent five years there, studying everything from painting to sculpting, from animation to Street Art.

Above all, he prefers painting on canvas, but he likes exploring different materials as well, from wood to plexiglass, from jute to concrete. Fugazzotto brings on canvas a reflection over contemporary human existence, which is lost somewhere between passion and vice.

In Chiomonte, the Italian artist presented "(Silence of a crossword)", a mural which brings attention to the enormous amount of information that overwhelms today's society. The monkey, which represents our era, finds itself in the middle of a crossword puzzle, where keywords about the Lyon-Turin project are displayed, e.g., speed, control, speculation, underground. All of these concepts have become so recurrent in the last decades that they have turned into catchphrases. The monkey, confused, tries to save itself from this word-bombing by seeking refuge under an umbrella.

Laurina Paperina was born in Rovereto, Trentino, where she lives and works as an artist. Her very peculiar style is based on irony and parody. Her natural environment is in the street, where she can draw and express her Graffiti attitude. By painting, drawing, working on installations and amateur-video clips, she gives her reinterpretation of everyday reality, as well as the star system, the world of music, cinema and art, with their false myths and legends.

Her victims are rockers, artists, and cinema stars whom she often "kills" in parodistic circumstances, or superheroes whose superpowers are represented in a satirical way. She uses almost everything in the process: canvas, re-used paper, post-its, paint-cans, picture frames bought at a flea market. She usually fills her world with fantastic characters who take after comic strips and cartoons. Paperina's inspiration comes from the Eighties and Nineties' imaginary that she discovered as a teenager, spending her afternoons in front of the TV or playing on the first computers.

In "Little Trains" Laurina Paperina decorated two wagons of the train that brings workmen and visitors into the exploratory tunnel. Here, she created a moving artwork, such as it used to be in the underground, where Graffiti was initially born in the Seventies.

LUDO, born in 1976 in Saint Germain en Laye, France, lives and works in Paris. Crucial to his artistic conception is the dialogue between very distant worlds: poetry and nature on the one side, and the harshness of modern life on the opposite one.

With a tagger profile, he took to paste-up in 2007. He usually draws large scenes which he prints with the help of a plotter. He then sticks the posters to the wall and finally paints on them, using just three colors, green, white and black. LUDO can imagine fantastic creatures, half living and half hyper-technological: birds, insects, flowers, and trees mix with war weapons,

pistols, surveillance systems, and oil plants. A visual short circuit which can generate a reflection on our times, on human behavior towards his past and nature. However, there is no room for criticism, but rather for a trustful openness to the future.

In Chiomonte, LUDO prepared two artworks, one 12 metres long and the other 6 metres long, bearing two Latin quotations, "Dulce Bellum Inespertis" and "Casus Belli," mixed one with roses and barbed wire and the other with a strange, robotic butterfly. More likely to display in a movie than on canvas, these science-fictional scenarios have a gothic taste, which offers an alarming point of view on the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tunnel Art Work was inaugurated on October 10, 2016. Since then, dozens of articles have covered this project. Both traditional media and websites focused on this unprecedented cultural operation, contrasting it with the murals outside the worksite, in Chiomonte. Some of the most influential street artists in Italy, such as Blu, signed these paintings in order to express their solidarity to the No Tav movement.

The T.A.W. experience spread the debate also in the artistic community, where its impact was even more relevant than what TELT expected. "The art of controversy," titled the leading Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, which focused on "the new, cultural challenge between the No Tav movement and the promoters of the new railway." (Falcone 2016). *La Stampa*, another daily newspaper, published an interview with Paolo Damilano, former president of the Cinema Museum in Turin, who led the jury that awarded the contest for TELT's logo: "Culture can help to lower the tension and to release the spirits – he stated – Therefore, every initiative that goes in that direction is welcome." (Tropeano 2016).

In conclusion, we can say that if one of art's goals is to create hype, to open the debate and to make the public think, T.A.W. went right to the point. It helped rethink the underground environment, which often comes across with hostile and anxious feelings. Moreover, it opened the tunneling world to a non-professional public.

More than two thousand people have visited the exploratory tunnel since 2014. Most of them are technicians, researchers, geologists, and students. However, there are also groups of citizens among them, willing to discover the work in progress of a major European infrastructure. The T.A.W. opening made this participation increase, to the extent that a Japanese tour operator showed his interest in the project.

Another important influence on the T.A.W. project comes from the increasing trend of municipalities and other public bodies commissioning Street Art projects directly.

There are significant examples across Europe, sometimes linked to the underground environment. Just like in Naples with the "Metro dell'Arte" project, developed in '95 by the City in parallel with the renewal of its underground transport system. The stations, celebrated by the press around the world, host artworks by Paolini, Tatafiore, Paladino, Jodice, Alfano, De Maria and many others. In particular, the Toledo stop, designed by the Spanish architect Tusquets Blanca, won the Oscar for underground works in 2015, awarded by the International Tunneling Association. The *Daily Telegraph* and *CNN* also described it as the most beautiful metro station in Europe. The interior is enriched by two large mosaics and by an equestrian statue by William Kentridge, as well as by some photographs by Achille Cevoli and Oliviero Toscani. Bob Wilson instead, has turned the lowest part of the station into a "gallery of the sea."

At the opposite corner of Europe, in Stockholm, the Tunnelbana network has become the "longest art gallery in the world," with its 110 km of sculptures, mosaics, and installations, ranging from the pioneers of the 1950s to contemporary art experiments.

In the wake of these experiences, in the not too distant future the Mont-Cenis tunnel, which is currently under construction, may perhaps host exhibitions that lend themselves to still different fruition, starting with the enormous caverns where the Tunnel Boring Machines are assembled. Those may eventually become the "Sixtine Chapel" of underground art. In the background, remaining to be explored, is the idea of creating art works that can be enjoyed by spectators moving at high speed. This, however, is an entirely different story.

6. EXAMPLES OF T.A.W. ART WORKS



Fig. 1 – The French artist LUDO in front of his “Casus Belli” artwork.



Fig. 2 – “Dulce Bellum Inexpertis”, LUDO’s art work in Chiomonte

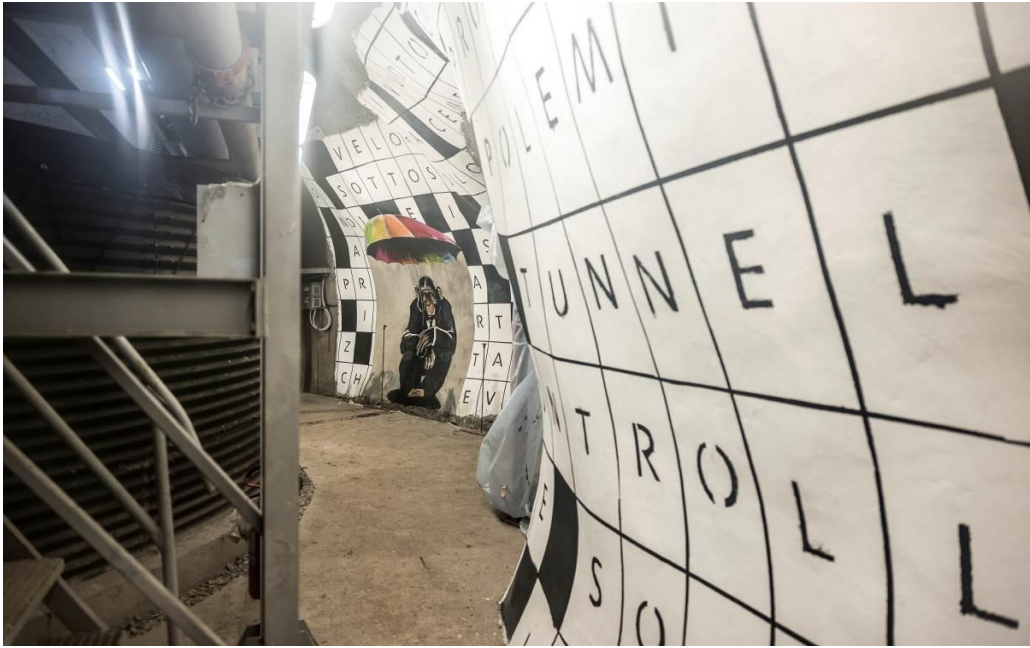


Fig. 3 – Simone Fugazzotto’s “(Silenzio di un cruciverba)”



Fig. 4 – The Italian artist Simone Fugazzotto in front of his mural in Chiomonte



Fig. 5 – Laurina Paperina’s “Little Trains” in Chiomonte



Fig. 6 – “Little Trains”, close up.

7. REFERENCES

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