

ZIA KROHN & JOYCE LAGERWEIJ

CONCRETE MESSAGES

STREET ART ON THE ISRAELI - PALESTINIAN SEPARATION BARRIER



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01

CONCRETE

In 2002, the Israeli government decided to start the construction of a barrier to separate Israel from the Palestinian West Bank. It will have a total length of 725 kilometres on completion. Although the barrier consists of ditches, trenches, wire fences, patrol roads and barbed wire in rural areas, it takes the form of an eight metre high concrete wall in urban areas. These concrete parts take up around ten percent of the barrier that has been constructed so far.

Israel decided to build the separation barrier to prevent militant Palestinians from entering Israeli cities. The Israeli Ministry of Defence states that it has made and continues to make all attempts to minimize intrusions into the everyday lives of innocent Palestinians.

During the construction of the barrier the Second Intifada – a violent period of Palestinian uprising – ended and since then the number of attacks in Israel by militant Palestinians has gone down. However, the separation barrier has also cut part of the Palestinian population off from family, land, jobs, health care, welfare services, higher education, certain goods and the markets where they used to sell their farm produce. The mobility of West Bank Palestinians has been reduced by the barrier and checkpoints, which they cannot pass without a permit from the Israeli Civil Administration. Because the barrier does not follow a straight line, approximately 150,000 Palestinians will be surrounded on three or four sides by it.

MESSAGES

Street art on the Palestinian side of walled sections of the separation barrier is one of many forms of protest against its existence. Large areas feature messages relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ranging from small scribbles done by local youth to major pieces of art made by internationally renowned street artists.

In August 2005, U.K. street artist Banksy was the first international artist to draw attention to the separation barrier by painting nine images on it. He came back to the Palestinian West Bank in 2007 and brought his annual gathering of international street artists, Santa's Ghetto, to work on the barrier again. This time Banksy, together with other artists, opened an exhibition in Bethlehem in order to draw attention to poverty in the West Bank and attract tourists there. The participants included Swoon, Blu, Paul Insect, Faile, Sam3, Ericailcane and Ron English.

Many more locals and internationals have given their voice a concrete manifestation on the separation barrier. Among them are Italian Filippo Minelli, Dutch Joy van Erven and Niels Bakkerus, Danish Agurk, British Ame72/Jamie Ame, Palestinian Steve Sabella and Israeli Know Hope, who had to sneak into the territory since it's off-limits for Israeli citizens. French JR and Marco drove around Israel and the Palestinian West Bank to put up their posters and register everything with their cameras for their Face2Face project.

A lot of the works have changed since the artists last touched them. In some cases the work is not intact anymore because of weather conditions or because someone didn't agree with it and decided to paint it over or add something. Even when it was not intended, a lot of the art on the separation barrier ended up being a collaboration of some kind.

Street art has probably always been the most important art forum for the instigation of social change. I started doing it around 1979. Street art gives you immediate and direct access to the public. To me it means freedom. I describe my art as popaganda.

The two pieces I did on the wall are *Grade School Guer-nica* and *Pardon our Oppression*. I felt it was important to do something as American tax dollars funded a large portion of the wall. I wanted to bring some attention to that fact to the American people.

I was part of Santa's Ghetto. While we were there obviously guns were pointed at us as we worked, but the locals were very supportive and the kids helped us a lot. I think Banksy's idea was to create an international tourist attraction in Palestine so that people would come in person and see the situation for themselves, which was pretty much what came to pass. He also wanted to raise money for the children there, which he was successful at as well.

I was hoping to increase awareness of the situation there. I thought that if people truly understood, they would be horrified. The wall is a monument to political failure and ultimately I was trying to make the world see the wall itself. I painted on the Berlin Wall many years ago, as did a large number of international artists, which helped to keep attention focused on the situation. Now pieces of the Berlin Wall are displayed as art around the world.













Originally, I wanted to place the figure with crossed fingers on one side of the wall and the other one on the other side, listening on scouts-honour. But I couldn't put one on the other side, because you can't get close to the wall on the Israeli side. So instead I had to put them on the same side, but you can see the cord going through the crack. If I could have put them on both sides it would have been showing that there are people on both sides. One really letting his heart speak, the other faithfully listening. It's kind of the hope that there are other people on the other side. It reminds you of when you were a kid and made these phones out of plastic cups. That's basically what I do – break things down to these simplistic, even sometimes kitsch-like, images. Then it becomes something people automatically can relate to and depending on the context it gets a completely different layer.

Without
vision,
the people
perish...
Do not
give up
HOPE!



















Ericailcane

ITALY







The Boxers is an image of two large boxers, caught in a moment of great anticipation. The story of Jake LaMotta and Sugar Ray Robinson is that of two great rivals. This seemed a fitting comment on the long, battered relationship between the Palestinians and the Israelis.