

**Zach: Not Another Banksy**

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ARE6933 - Spec Topics Art Education

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October 7, 2023

At first glance, urban-centered murals and artworks by Lithuanian-born artist Ernest Zacharevic may not seem so disparate from other street artists. However, with focused observation, their carefully planned characteristics shine out as cultural and economic beacons for the cities of which they were created. “Zach” did not begin his artistic path as a street artist. He would describe himself as a traditional painter who found urban jungles as his canvas. Born in 1986, “Zach” found his early artistic education uninspiring. He moved to London where he gravitated towards challenging conceptual art that became a foundation for his atypical methods (Colors, 2019). Thus, his works became a merging of detailed brushwork of fine art portraiture and spray-painted gestures of street art. His work incorporates overlooked and nameless utility fixtures on city walls and found objects he fixes to these walls, which complete his mixed-media paintings as public installations (see Figure 1). His work is not limited to street murals but includes traditional canvas as well. Zach’s global impact raises awareness of social, cultural, and environmental issues, challenging viewers to reexamine neglected human and ecological concerns through his captivating public art.

**Figure 1**

*Children on a Bicycle*



*Note.* By E. Zacharevic, 2012, mural, George Town, Penang, Malaysia. 1 in a 6-piece series for Penang’s annual George Town Festival; a reflection of the joy and daily life of town. One of the most photographed artworks in Penang. <http://www.ernestzacharevic.com/>

Though his works captured attention of local inner-city dwellers and critics, it was not until the creation of his 2012 6-piece series at Penang's George Town festival in Malaysia that he became internationally recognized, being tagged as "The "Malaysian Banksy." But calling Zach another Banksy would be a misnomer as Zach's artistic achievements stand on their own. Though one rose to fame before the other, the artists have their own merits for singularity.

There is no doubt both Zach and Banksy offer artistic and conceptual similarities. Both artists utilize similar environmental backdrops and notably depict innocence through child representations. However, the usage of children may be for contrasting purposes. Referring to both Banksy and Zach, Ed Norval (2018) from the online Compulsive Contents writes "Banksy too, often focuses his artistic eye onto portraying children - a universal symbol of innocence, set against a backdrop that seems set on taking it away. Both of their characters look like they've had to grow up quick in a world that advances at white-knuckle speed."

Creating a divide, Zach refers to his portrayal of children as a way to simplify a viewer's perception of a whole conceptual work, saying "when I paint these children, people don't have these questions of what these children are, and what's their job" (TodayOnline, 2015). He thinks a viewer can better connect when confronted by a relatable past. To further differentiate the two artists, Norval points out that Banksy and Zacharevic, though distinct in style, both aim for art that resonates beyond their locales. Banksy invokes anger against injustice, while Zacharevic elicits a poignant sadness or joyfulness, urging us to cherish our inner child (2018).

This remarkable disparity of their upfront emotional conveyance can be seen in Banksy's art revealing a darker, more satirical humor. His thematic brainstorming must demand a high amount of creativity, perhaps being contingent on his anonymity which would require a speedy

approach to remain unobserved. Yet, his quick artistry of multilayered stenciling evokes an almost vigilante determination. In contrast, Zach depends on spontaneity in his murals, finding inspiration for his works through his social and cultural interactions, gleaning from his own private photograph collection he creates during these connections “real-world” connections (Colors, 2019). He finds deeper meaning through storytelling, allowing others to expand it - almost a domino effect beginning with art revealing the present environment, and its viewers connecting with the art. Zach discloses with IPIC, “I find it important to create work that does not change the environment but rather compliments what already is there...[keeping] my work site specific and relevant” (IPIC, 2019). His canvas – the walls of the city – is essential to this connection. Norval (2018) explains that Zach emphasizes how people’s interactions with both the art and the walls it adorns are shaped by their unique life stories and perspectives.

Zach understands once his murals are completed, they belong to the public and are its communal story. The canvas, in this case the public wall, does not belong to him. When art interacts with the urban landscape, it becomes a part of the community and invites the public to respond. Zach believes that “street art is the biggest movement in the history of art in terms of public exposure and social engagement” (TodayOnline, 2015). When a local artist “doodled” a dinosaur chasing his Penang ‘kid on a motorbike’ street installation (see Figure 2), journalists called for his opinion on the “vandalizing” of his work. He responded, “I didn’t see it as vandalism of all things...I paint some wall and someone else paints that wall...it’s not my wall, it’s not anyone’s wall, really” (TodayOnline, 2015). Proving his sincerity, he painted another boy, taking hold of the leashed dinosaur (see Figure 3). These additions were a continuance of the community’s story.

**Figure 2**

*Kid on a Motorbike*



Note. By E. Zacharevic, 2012, mural, George Town, Penang, Malaysia.

<https://www.toptravelsights.com/street-art-of-george-town/>

**Figure 3**

*Little Boy with Pet Dinosaur*



Note. By E. Zacharevic, 2012, mural, George Town, Penang, Malaysia. Zach's addition of a child

restraining another local artist's drawn dinosaur. <https://www.toptravelsights.com/street-art-of-george-town/>

Zach's globally admired murals blend humor, whimsy, and deep truths; mirror local cultures, and inspire reflection on childhood and daily life. They seamlessly become part of the local landscape, immortalizing community stories and fostering strong bonds with the people.

Unquestionably, they stand on their own. Zach has not changed these cities but brought them to light.

## References

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