

From Vandalism to Contemporary Street Art

Designer and full-time mural painter, Angie Jerez is amplifying the new meaning of "street art " for Atlanta. Graffiti is rich in history and often perceived with negative connotations, but the world of graffiti has evolved. Angie's works of art are featured all over the city of Atlanta as well in several exhibitions. She uses her paintbrush to cover the city with nostalgic images, embed messages, inspire the youth, and most importantly encourage the creative process.

Angie sits comfortably in the center of her computer chair. Messy-bun, striped sweater, and jeans are an easy wardrobe choice for her workday. The slightest creaking sound from the swivel of her chair sets the rhythm for Angie's even pencil strokes. Her occasional pencil taps and anxious fidgeting disrupts this rhythm, nevertheless Angie continues to draw. A dazed glare covers her face as she considers the dimensions for her mural placement. Casually, she drifts back and forth in her chair. The screen saver on her laptop bounces left and right softly hitting the edges of her computer screen and seemingly on beat with the surrounding noises that fill the room. Her pencil serves as the perfect medium. She is meticulous with the pencil creating small even lines. Curious to see how far she has come; Angie lifts her paper slightly and holds it up to the wall in front of her desk. The paper's movements add to the jungle of sounds already lingering in the room. She carefully studies the paper's elements. After moments of consideration she lowers the paper, grabs her pencil and resumes.



Vibrant street murals coat the untold walls of Cabbagetown. What would seem like the graffiti capitol stretches from the notable Krog Street Tunnel to the vast walls of Wylie street. These inner-city streets have become a tourist site for Atlanta natives and tourists to admire

mind-blowing street art. This graffiti mecca has not only provided an outdoor art gallery for artists to showcase their creative talents, but simultaneously has helped shape and expound the perception of what being a graffiti artist entails. These murals provide a glimpse of how the creative process directly influences their artwork. Among the lineup of artists is Angie Jerez, a young artist whose murals along those endless walls, are changing the perception of street art and amplifying its newfound meaning.



What began with a negative connotation has transformed into a means of expression. The world of street art has evolved and is entering a new era. Graffiti now has a new meaning and offers society with a different outlook. Its creation has made a monumental influence on culture, fashion, and music. Its roots began in Philadelphia during the 1960's as a pastime for adolescents. Darryl "Cornbread" McCray is considered the world's first modern graffiti artist. He was 12 years old attending a youth center when he began spray-painting walls. Originally, it was used to make political statements and mark gang territory. Spray painted walls began to appear all over the urban cities of Philadelphia while obscure tags inspired viewers making graffiti not only a way of expression but a means for entertainment. The tags they created were bold, direct, and unlike anything people had ever seen in the art world. Many of these early graffiti artists were poor and young. Graffiti seemed to bring meaning into their lives. It offered them

fame. It offered them freedom. It offered them the ability to make their mark in the world of art. Most importantly it provided them with a voice.

Eventually this art style advanced to New York covering subways, developing associations with decaying communities that were considered out-of-control, and it soon became illegal. Many graffiti artists began tagging anonymously in order to protect their identity and reputation, as well as avoid legal consequences. Graffiti began to spill into the world of politics creating the basis of many controversial arguments. The opinions surrounding the new wave of art were subjective. Conversations of whether graffiti should be considered street art, or a crime were common and sparked the interest of many citizens. The debate surrounding graffiti's involvement with the first amendment challenged the personal feelings of city officials. The significance of Graffiti has established a connection to cultural heritage and established the process of creation as a means of life. Though its historical timeline may be rough, graffiti, now referred to as street art, has provided a stream of income for many artists. Artists are now commissioned for their work by companies, parks, and businesses. Full time mural painters have emerged creating their own path and using their passion for creativity to design their own careers.

Angie Jerez knows all about redefining careers. These days the Bogota, Columbia native calls Atlanta home. Nestled in a bright pink home located on the corner of Cabbagetown, it's been 13 years since she left Columbia. Now Angie lives literally an eye distance from many of her murals. She sits comfortably and accomplished in the middle of her in-home art studio.



Her career began at a digital agency doing web design, but she soon grew tired of the everyday structured demands. She felt that her creativity was stifled and waning, so she decided to take her life in a different direction, one that involved her creative side and provided her life with purpose. Angie shifted her focus to illustrations and printmaking. Although she is skilled in several mediums, linework is her specialty and signature style of art. Her ability to utilize intricate details, seamlessly blend vibrant colors, and transform regular objects into a masterpiece make her artwork one of a kind. "When I moved here to this home in Atlanta, maybe around the end of 2016 I was kind of tired of the routine of using computers. It was good, but at that moment I was just kind of tired of the routine. I decided just to start working again on illustrations. That was a challenge because I had spent a-lot of time working with the computers and with digital stuff, so it was like a challenge for me. Just to draw again and getting back to the brushes and paper and everything but I was just feeling that as I said before it was a big challenge for me. I decided just to stop for a year to check and see what would happen if I decided to start Illustrating and drawing again. Yeah, so that is exactly what happened. Around 2016 beginning of 2017, I started to just look for opportunities and go to galleries and ask for advice. I have to say that actually I met some people that helped me take certain opportunities and one of those people was Kyle Brooks, Blackcattips. I am sure you have seen his work, it's weird with smiles and faces. He was like an inspiration for me. He gave me the opportunity to paint a mural here in Cabbagetown. That was great, that day I said yes! I want to try to do this full-time. When I moved here, I saw a-lot of his stuff and randomly I met him, and I knew his story and it was like an inspiration for me. As I was saying, I started just asking for opportunities and showing my work and again trying to get like you know when you feel that you have everything done and you have made your salary. It's not like that, with art, you are sort of learning and trying. It always feels different and still you are constantly asking yourself if you are good enough to present your work. That was one thing for me and with social media. The world of graffiti has changed. The narrative for graffiti artists has changed from such negative thoughts of vandalism and urban life to something positive. It's great because you notice, I mean yes, there are still some people that want to just see plain walls. It doesn't matter what the message is, they are not really into art. At the same time, I feel like right now people have another view about street art and these kinds of opportunities to paint like at these events, like this whole movement right now is crazy here in the USA! I have to say in my city Bogota, It's crazy! Artwork is everywhere and I love that. It's like now, a-lot of people have a different perception about just art, just a simple image."

Her native country is the inspiration for many of her projects. She recently submitted a piece entitled pain concepts where she took a comical approach to her mother's home remedies. "I had a show this year. The concept was pain and I just wanted to tell how my mom and my grandma had these home remedies to soothe pain. It was really funny because I did some drawings for instance, if someone hits you in the eye you place raw meat on your face. I did a few pieces to incorporate this humor. I tried to draw these things; these sort of home remedies. It was a group show and these artists have a-lot of meetings about dealing with pain. I wanted to offer a lighter approach and boost their overall feelings. I thought it was great to see how everyone has a different answer for pain, so I incorporated it in my artwork."



Her idea to incorporate themes and underlying meanings into her artwork encourages conversations during galleries. Angie describes street art as a visual creative process and a medium to evoke social change. This creative process does not only involve telling a story but showing a story. "Every wall is different, it's like with every mural you get a different. Artwork is everywhere, and I love that. It's like now, a-lot of people have a different perception about just art or even just a simple image. It's like people now feel like this is cool. This is something when I am walking that I am seeing every day and I think that is great!" This creative process was misunderstood years ago during the first sightings of street art. Now it is common and consists in many entrepreneurial jobs. Angie describes street art as a visual creative process and a medium to evoke social change. It flows through you with passion and is in a sense an

extension of yourself. Many people do not understand what a creative process is but Angie



encourages everyone to adopt one.

“It’s like people now feel like this is cool. This is something when I am walking that I am seeing every day and I think that is great. I had an opportunity, well one of the latest projects was in a small community where they removed all of the trees. They had to be removed for some reason and they reached out to me to paint a mural there to replace where the trees would have been. I mean it’s not the same as if they had the trees, but it’s like they were looking to put something there. So, it’s good that people are thinking of creative things like that. Okay, one of the people, as I told you about Kyle Brooks, he gave me the opportunity to paint a mural here in Cabbagetown. That was great, that day I said yes! I want to try to do this full-time. You know with murals every wall is different. You have a different experience, and I love that because you don’t have anything set. It’s like you have this feeling deep. How am I going to fix this? How am I going to work around certain things to create.

Street art is dispelling old negative associations with graffiti and blossoming into a new genre of art. One with passion, one with meaning, and one with creativity.

“What I want people to gain from my art is... it’s like talking to you, I am grateful that this is happening to me. I didn’t expect when I decided just to start doing this full-time, I mean I wasn’t sure of the answer I would have gotten back. I feel really grateful for that.” Angie stands slowly, admiring her artwork that fills the room. She couldn’t imagine being in the middle of her home art studio two years ago and reflects on not only where she was two years ago, but who she

was. Now she is doing everything that she loves, her career is headed in the right direction, and she couldn't be happier. She is thankful for the true essence of creativity and its continuous element of inspiration. This process of creativity has shaped and molded not only her career but certain personal aspects of herself. Angie is well aware of the effect's street art is making in the world and is excited for the things to come. This process comes from within and is something Angie practices frequently. With an upcoming show in two weeks, proposals for an upcoming mural, and a hopeful outlook for the future, Angie is excited to continue her lifelong commitment to creativity. Art is a continuous process. "I don't want it to be about me. You don't even need to know me. I just want people to know that if you like something that I've done or created then that's enough."