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Anti-Architecture: When the Relationship Between Sculpture and Architecture Goes Wrong

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Abstract

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Art as a generator of social change has become synonymous with community-centred urban regeneration initiatives, an art form that tackles socio-economic, political, and environmental issues, with the aim of creating a collective conscience, and which may seek to influence policymaking. These initiatives can be generalised into two main groups: one which tries to redefine the aesthetics of poverty by applying cosmetic improvements to existing structures to highlight their sculptural properties and to create an image of safety and prosperity, and a second one where the artists use socially informed methodologies to try to subvert the underlying social frameworks to alter them and produce new models which could generate progress. This paper proposes a critical reflection on the former, highlighting the shortcomings of cosmetic approaches to complex urban situations and the risk they pose of perpetuating their condition, in the context of sculpture practice and governmentally and privately funded interventions..

Keywords: Sculpture; Architecture; Anti-Architecture; Favelas; Social Change.

1. Introduction

Having graduated in architecture in Peru but never quite feeling I fit that career's profile, I was propelled to pursue postgraduate studies in sculpture in Japan, only to find that I didn't fully fit that path either. This uneasiness, I think, has made me a wanderer between media and countries.

This paper is part of that journey and an expression of the body of practice-led research that has emerged from it, and in which I have been engaged for over 30 years, exploring the relationship between sculpture, architecture, and society. Within that field, I am particularly interested in exploring how architecture, when it misuses principles of sculpture, can become a blatantly repressive or subtly subliminal tool to repress individuals and entire social groups. This noxious combination I define as anti-architecture, or architecture not made for human benefit but against it.

For that purpose, I focus on social practice projects in underprivileged areas of cities in developing countries, reflecting on their conceptual, procedural, material, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions and, based on this analysis, determine if they deserve the anti-architecture label.

1.1. Methodology and Structure

My methodology consists of establishing a framework of references that bridges critical examples of contemporary artworks with non-art, outsider art, and grassroots initiatives, with the aim of addressing a range of possible scenarios that define the context of sculpture in disenfranchised neighbourhoods. This is informed by practice-led research, bibliographic research, and fieldwork, and outlines the parameters that define anti-architecture. The work is developed on the premises of balancing those different elements through the application of the *Janusian Creative Process*.¹

This research has been limited by a lack of scholarly research on socially engaged projects and sculpture in the public realm carried out in disenfranchised neighbourhoods, which, in some cases, has forced me to rely on video interviews

¹ "The *Janusian process* is defined as "actively conceiving multiple opposites anthitheses simultaneously." As a mental operation, this process plays a role in the development of all types of creativity." (Rothenberg, 1996)

and presentations available on www.youtube.com and other platforms. My hope is that this work will contribute, even if modestly, to fill that existing gap.

The work is divided into three parts. In Part 1, I explore issues related to disenfranchised neighbourhoods, particularly favelas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Pueblos Jovenes in Peru, to lay out elements that, while location-specific, are, to some degree, also universal. In Part 2, I reflect on sculpture in the public realm, focusing on unresolved issues and how they may translate into projects in underprivileged urban settings. In Part 3, I introduce the concept of anti-architecture, briefly addressing how I apply it in my studio work, and, from there, establish a framework to define it as a separate category.

2. Favelas, Their History and Representation

The word slum was first used in the London press in the 1820's to refer to the neighbourhood of St Giles Rookery located in the area today known as Tottenham Court Road, and to people of different social levels living closely in worn-out buildings. (Finch, 2023).

In this paper, I will focus on slums in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and in Lima, Peru, also known as Favelas and Pueblos Jovenes, respectively. In Rio de Janeiro, the favelas date back to the XIX Century, with 11 settlements recorded by 1888, the year of the abolition of slavery in Brazil. From their origins, they were a spatial expression of the rejection of people of colour by the white criollos; a kind of unofficial apartheid. Fast forward to the XXI century, and we find over 1,000 settlements housing approximately 20% of Rio de Janeiro's population. Despite their significant presence, the dominant classes in the city have consistently adopted strategies to alienate them through stereotyping and discrimination, to which favela residents react with shame, hiding their place of residence when possible as they navigate the system. This is not a recent development, but a legacy of structural racism, economic inequality, exploitation, and abuse from the colonial period. (Valladares & Anderson, 2019)



Figure 1. Favela, (n.d.) Photo by Projeto10. Available at: <https://www.freeimages.com/photo/favela-1513439> (Accessed 22 May 2026).

The pronounced social gap manifests in the contrast between the planned, urban, developed districts of the city, which, in public perception, become symbols of civilisation, and the unplanned, improvised favelas, which are seen as symbols of barbarism, thereby reinforcing cultural and social divides and stereotypes. (Valladares & Anderson, 2019)

Besides that, as Amaral states building walls and painting have been used as a strategy to enforce the separation between favelas and the rest of the city. Also, in advance of the 2016 Olympics, a military police commander proposed building a wall to separate the highway from the favelas, hiding them from visitors:

“In 2014, the Military Police suggested that the construction of concrete walls (instead of the already existent acoustic panels) to separate the Maré favelas from the “Linha Vermelha” expressway was an excellent measure to reduce violence, and in 2016, those same acoustic panels were painted as a measure of city beautification in preparation for the 2016 Olympics. That is, instead of taking real measures to improve the living conditions of the favela population, the government opted for an attempt to hide the favela and its misery from the eyes of foreign visitors who would travel through the highway leaving the airport, painting the panels that ended serving as a visual barrier between those on the road and the favela on the other side.” (Amaral, 2021)

Besides that, the proliferation of drug gangs in the favelas, with the violence they carry, contributes to an image of decay and depravity, even though most of the buyers are located outside the favelas, creating a relation of mutual dependence and a cycle which repeats to perpetuity. Furthermore, Valladares and Anderson determine three dogmas that influence the academic research on favelas:

“The first is that of specificity: the favela is a different place from the rest of the city. The second is that the favela is the urban locus of poverty. The third dogma is that of unity: unity between favelas, unity within the favela.” (Valladares & Anderson, 2019)

The authors argue that holding these dogmas has made academic research complicit in the stereotyping of favelas. Creating the conditions for othering and delegating the favela's residents as second-class citizens, with lesser rights and

making them targets of indiscriminate abuse by authorities. (Amaral, 2021), (Valladares & Anderson, 2019). In response to this, the word community has begun to be used to refer to favela inhabitants as a way to convey inclusivity, although this is not welcomed by everyone, since some consider it synonymous with neediness and being disingenuous, whereas favela speaks to their roots. (Amaral, 2021)

Amidst the negative image that favelas carry, they are associated with a sense of exoticism, which Thomas Apchain states varies with distance:

“The stigma is stronger among neighbours, and only the ‘exoticism’ that a distant view builds seems to be able to create the conditions for a real interest in discovering the favelas.” (Apchain, 2024)

Furthermore, Apchain states that the mixed images of the favela have, in part, been informed by the work of a diverse group of progressive artists who have contributed to its association with exoticism. Although this has mostly been as a setting rather than a subject, as with the film *City of God*, which had a major impact on favela tourism:

“City of God had a decisive importance on the evolution of the international imaginary towards the favela by conferring to the latter, and while favouring its association with violence, a powerful exoticism, an atmosphere made of warm colours accompanied by bewitching music. Therefore, its impact on the development of tourism was immense” (Apchain, 2024).

Have artists working on social practice projects in favelas contributed to this, and to what extent? It can be argued that art projects in favelas that receive media coverage would also attract tourism.

Simone Kalkman states that the representation of favelas in film, literature and visual art produces a double stereotype, and against this backdrop, grassroots initiatives like the project *Morrinho* emerged. This project was the first to gain international recognition on major art platforms, providing residents with a direct avenue to showcase their creative potential to the world. It started in 1997, when 14-year-old Nelcirlan Souza de Oliveira, who is known as Cilán, moved to the favela Pereira da Silva with his family. Shortly after, he began building a downscale version of the favela using leftover bricks and other found objects. The project was spotted by filmmakers Gavião and Oliveira, who recognised its originality and taught the group of kids, who have now grown to 7, how to document their play and make their own films. This drew attention from the media and the arts community, and invitations to international exhibitions at major venues began to appear, the most prominent of which was the 2007 Venice Biennale curated by Robert Storr. In the Biennale’s catalogue, Storr stated that the weight of their selection lay on the background of the authors and their authenticity, more than the work itself (Kalkman, 2013).



Figure 2. Nelcirlan Souza de Oliveira, 1997. Available at: <https://www.projetomorrinho.org/media>, (Accessed on 21 May 2026).

Kalkman concludes that the main aspect to highlight in the project is its capacity to move across different platforms, whether in community settings, at high-profile art events, or across social boundaries in Rio de Janeiro and beyond. I argue that the work’s value transcends Storr’s statement and that it engages in dialogue with works by contemporary artists, such as Charles Simonds’s *Dwellings*. (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Charles Simonds, *Dwelling*, PS 1, New York, 1975. Available at: <https://cooper.edu/events-and-exhibitions/events/fall-2013-seminar-series-charles-simonds>. (Accessed on 22 May 2026).

Despite that, when Cilan started working on *Morrinho*, he most likely didn't know about Simonds' work; the way they echo each other provides important context, without which the significance of *Morrinho*'s contribution can't be fully appreciated, prompting us to look at it through a different lens. Yet, as we see each of the works through the eyes of the other, I argue that in that same way, our view of the favelas is transformed through the works.

3. Sculpture in and Out of Disenfranchised Neighbourhoods

Rosalind Krauss, in her influential work *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, argues that sculpture has arrived at a stage in history where it can only be defined by what it is not:

"... it began by about 1950 to be exhausted. It began, that is, to be experienced more and more as pure negativity. At this point modernist sculpture appeared as a kind of black hole in the space of consciousness, something whose positive content was increasingly difficult to define, something that was possible to locate only in terms of what it was not" (Krauss, 1979)

According to this, public sculpture is something in between landscape and architecture. (Krauss, 1979). Artist and researcher Euyoung Hong, in *Spatial Politics of Sculpture*, argues against Krauss' double negativity take, by stressing the sociopolitical dimension of the sculptural, arguing that sculpture can't be defined as a standalone object, but in its relation to space, which it actively shapes, a characteristic that Hong defines as "sculptural space", which encompasses the sculptural as a dynamic phenomenon.

"The sculptural does not simply reside in either the inside or the outside of a gallery. By transcending, or in other words, constructing or destroying further existent boundaries of space, the sculptural as an operative force between different elements and spaces is involved in the process of the production, transformation and movement of space." (Hong, 2016)

Taking this idea further, and considering the sociopolitical dimensions of space, it could be argued that sculpture will also transform the audiences who interact within the fabric of that space, and vice versa. But what happens when the conditions of the sculptural space are unknown? When the community and its environments are beyond our reach, or when its residents are denied existence on the same plane as ours? What kind of sculptural space and sculptural experience could be generated? This is the case of favelas, where, as previously stated, the physical, cultural, and social barriers have historically alienated their residents from the rest of the city; therefore, it could be argued that public art projects produced in disenfranchised neighbourhoods embody the sociopolitical relations within that space, but are also a reflection of the existing limitations and contradictions within it.

On the other hand, as traditional definitions of public sculpture have long been challenged with participatory practices playing an increasingly prominent role within it, as Tom Finkelpearl, former Commissioner of the New York Department of Cultural Affairs, in an interview in *A Companion to Public Art* states that while artists have been focusing on audiences for a long time, it has grown into a genre of its own, which relies upon interaction or audience participation. (Knight & Senie, 2016). Thus, the definition of sculpture in the public realm includes performance, social practice, and installation. A work that consummates this is Antony Gormley's *One & Other*, his 2009 project for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, London, in which he invited 2,400 individuals from diverse backgrounds and regions across the country to perform for one hour. The project ran for 100 days. (Knight & Senie, 2016)

Similarly to sculpture in the public realm, and regardless of these developments, socially engaged practice projects elicit limited critical reviews, which, as noted by art historian Grant Kester in his interview with Finkelpearl in *What We Made*, might be due to an existing distrust in the art sector of collaborations, especially when they involve artists and non-artists. He also argues that there is an expectation that artists should remain distant from political and social life and adopt an ironic stance towards them, so when artists become more engaged, they tend to be dismissed. (Finkelpearl, 2013)

How do these conditions affect artists working in disenfranchised neighbourhoods? In a setting where there are already significant logistical, cultural, and social barriers, how effective can initiatives be without the reference framework provided by critical practices? What are the risks of working in a setting of scarce references and networks? The odds of working in this improbable scenario might have led Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrc to remove herself from that environment and address the subject of slums outside of the slums. Potrc, known for her large sculptural representations of slum-like constructions (Figure 4), sees them as expressions of an alternative nature, challenging preconceived capitalist constructs. (Real, 2008).

Although this removal from their environment, understood as the space as well as its community, exposes a vacuum, as pointed out by Patricio del Real:

"Rarely, in these revelations of the human condition as Potrc likes to characterize her work do we hear individual names. In Caracas: Growing House the representation of the real is somehow voided of what is most real about it: the people who actually build and live in these structures." (Real, 2008)



Figure 4. Marjetica Potrc *Caracas: Growing Houses*, 2012. Available at Marjetica Potrc | nicolaskrupp.com. (Accessed on 22 May, 2026).

Real also argues that this approach of what Potrc describes as “urban negotiations, ends up normalising conditions in slums, and they do not guarantee any result, as the conditions for that to happen are not resolved (Real, 2008).

A different strategy is taken by the Istanbul-based collaborative Oda Projesi, which comprises 3 female artists whose practice operates within communities and outside traditional art platforms, yet has managed to attract the attention of the art world. They ran workshops for neighbours, in partnership with local artists, with the sole goal of integrating with their surroundings, and with no agenda to heal or improve a given situation. Having no desire other than to promote communication between them and their surroundings, and between groups who would not normally interact. Furthermore, they avoid using the term aesthetics in their discussions, focusing on creating equal conditions for collaboration with the communities they work with, who are also part of their immediate surroundings. (Bishop, 2011)

In their practice, we see a balancing act between community engagement and detachment; the lack of ambition to improve a situation, arguably, speaks to the art system, while their reluctance to produce aesthetic objects makes them elusive to market classifications.

In contrast to Potrc’s approach, who, besides being an artist who produces objects, is also a practising architect and in this role works on projects to improve the living conditions in deprived neighbourhoods. By maintaining a dry relationship with the community and remaining distant from social-change agendas, Oda Projesi echoes Grant Kester’s comments. This, though, raises the question: if detachment and irony are the only ways for artists working in the social realm to attract critical attention from the art world, how could this be applicable in a context where the socio-political is everything, like a slum?

Therefore, I argue that sculpture in disenfranchised neighbourhoods constitutes a sub-category within art in the public realm and social practice, with a separate set of conditions and strategies, for which the art system lacks specific references, and one that requires specific methodologies. Not acknowledging this risks placing them further away in the orbit of the art system.

4. Anti-Architecture

This is the only part of this paper where I will discuss my studio work, which I deem necessary, as it is how I arrived at the concept of anti-architecture and from which the first reflections on its broader applications sprouted. In that context, anti-architecture stands as a definition of an architecture not made for humans but against them. I started working on it in 2004, when I made the piece *Siempre la Misma Historia*, (The Same Old Story), presented at the *V Bienal del Barro*, V Mud Biennial, in Maracaibo, Venezuela (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Cesar Cornejo, *Siempre la Misma Historia*, (The Same Old Story), 2004. V Mud Biennial, Maracaibo, Venezuela. Photo by Luis Becerra. Courtesy of the author.

The piece addressed the state of education in Latin America, reflecting on the inefficiency of government policies in meeting the population's needs. It used school desks from a school in Maracaibo and cinder blocks, which are traditionally used to build public schools in that country. The work was organised on two perpendicular axes, with the architecture aligned to one and the school desks aligned to the other, so that the architecture cut through the desks, portraying a dystopian scenario. This piece was a departure from previous work, and I always refer to it as the first contemporary sculpture I made, since before then, and following my graduation in architecture in Peru and during my postgraduate studies in Japan, I had been working on organic architectural approaches to art, which I now classify as forms of architecture.

With these works, I was also exploring sculpture's communicative potential to critically address subjects I cared about, and this work was the first of a body of sculptures and installations that I developed over the next few years. In this section, I examine art and non-art cases in which the anti-architecture category may be applicable, whether by governmental bodies or artists, analysing them in the context of contemporary art.

4.1 Lima's Wall of Shame

This is not an artwork, although for the purposes of this research, I consider it relevant, since it has become a major architectural symbol of the repression of a specific social group and therefore a prime example of anti-architecture, leaving an indelible scar on Lima's social and urban fabric. Beyond that, I argue that it has created a backdrop for contemporary art and particularly for art in the public realm to react to, and with which those art projects may engage, directly or indirectly; thus, these local governments, unwillingly, contributed as artists, or in this case, anti-architects, in the art in the public realm discourse.

Lima's *Muro de la Vergüenza*, (Wall of Shame) (Figure 6), was a wire topped extension part of a 10 kilometre long wall built in Lima in the 1980's to separate on one side the affluent districts of La Molina and Santiago de Surco from the poorer districts of San Juan de Miraflores and Villa Maria del Triunfo on the other side, and the alleged reasons put forward by the Municipality of La Molina for building it, were fears of new squatting incursions and the proliferation of illegal land trafficking into their district. It was demolished in late 2023 by order of Peru's Constitutional Court after finding it to be discriminatory and obstructing free transit. (Campoamor, 2019)



Figure 6. Wall of Shame, 1985 - 2023. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/01/05/peru-wall-of-shame-tear-down-symbol-colonialism-class-and-segregation>. (Accessed on 23 May 2026).

Lima's population grew rapidly in the mid-20th century due to migration from the countryside, increasing between 1940 and 2000 from 662,000 to 7.5 million; as the centre became overcrowded, its residents began moving to the city's newly urbanised areas on the outskirts. Simultaneously, migrants from the countryside settled in desert areas in the southern and northern edges of the city. In the south, as the new urbanisations and the informal settlements grew, they eventually met, and one of those meeting places is the border between the districts where the Wall of Shame was built. (Campoamor, 2019; Skrabut, 2024)

The imposing materiality and scale of the wall, together with its social and historical connotations, are stark reminders of a history of racism, inequality, and abuse, which dates back to the colony period, under Spanish rule, which laid down a social structure for exploitation and abuse, which has been followed by a constant struggle for power between the dominant class traditionally of European ancestry and the native Peruvians. (Campoamor, 2019; Scarritt, 2012)

Thus, it can be argued that the Wall of Shame, rather than being the product of an isolated municipal government decision, emerged as a symptom of historic social inequality, and struggle, which is exacerbated by the wall's choice of materials, stone topped with wire, which aimed to cause bodily harm to those who dared to go over it, making it a stark example of anti-architecture.

Despite it not being a work of art, since this paper exists in the space between sculpture and architecture, I consider it relevant to establish a framework of references that bridges those fields, in which the Wall of Shame could fall, and contribute to a fuller appreciation of its material and conceptual implications.

Therefore, I draw parallels with wall public art installations such as Andy Goldsworthy's *Taking a Wall for a Walk*, a wavy stone wall built in Grizedale Sculpture in Cumbria, which engages in a dialogue with the trees standing in its proximity, and which while shares some material characteristics with the Wall of Shame, it radically differs by not being directly interfering with human free transit, while integrating to become one with its natural surroundings grounding it firmly in agriculture rather than art, as Goldsworthy emphasizes (McLean, 2002). The wall thus becomes a vehicle for integrating humans with nature.

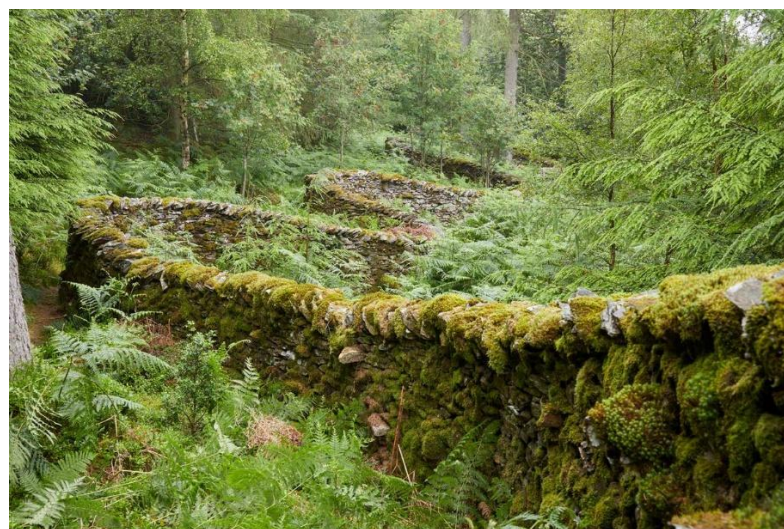


Figure 7. Andy Goldsworthy. *Taking a Wall for a Walk*, 1990, Grizedale Sculpture, UK. Available at: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/taking-a-wall-for-a-walk-262275/search/2026--keyword:taking-a-wall-for-a-walk--referrer:global-search>. (Accessed: 23 May 2026).

Another parallel could be drawn to *Running Fence*, the iconic 4-metre-tall, 40-kilometre-long temporary, site-specific installation created in 1976 in Sonoma and Marin counties, California, by Christo and Jean-Claude. Aside from the social and material and location differences which distance it from the *Wall of Shame*, *Running Fence* in most of its extension was located in a desert far from disrupting transit, and when it crossed roads or a town, which it did, it left openings for people, cattle and vehicles to transit freely, thus not disrupting transit, and contrary becoming a symbol of the futility of borders. Made of soft white nylon panels, steel poles, and metal cables, it was the result of dialogue and 4 years of negotiations that brought together people from different positions on the political spectrum. (Linke, 2026)

While the Wall of Shame was eventually demolished, making it temporary, this was not intended at the time of its construction. Its deconstruction, though, adds another layer to its history and identity as anti-architectural work and as an untamable performative act, an expression of the struggles for power in Peruvian society.

Besides that, the Wall of Shame, in contrast to the works of Goldsworthy and Christo & Jean-Claude, did not promote human connection with nature; instead, it stood as a symbol of sterility, environmental discontinuity, and disruption of free transit, undermining potential communication and integration among social groups.

Another work relevant to this analysis is *When Faith Moves Mountains* created by Belgian artist Francis Alÿs in collaboration with Mexican curator Cuauhtemoc Medina for the 3rd Iberoamerican Biennial held in Lima in 2002. It consisted of a line of 500 volunteers, equipped with shovels, marching up an arid hill in Ventanilla, on the outskirts of Lima, to perform the symbolic act of moving the hill by 10 centimetres. The work commented on the inefficiency of Latin American ways of doing things, in which large numbers of people participate in actions with very little result. (Swenson, 2019) A point of contention in this work is that none of the participants was paid, (Alÿs & Medina, 2005) which, in the context of the piece, added to an anti-systemic posture, although I argue that while it could also be related to ancient pre-Hispanic traditions such as Andean Reciprocity² It could be ethically questionable as a mode of exploitation, and in the Peruvian context, a restaging of colonial practices. (Scarritt, 2012)

Alÿs recruited students from the Universidad Nacional de Ingenieria, Universidad Catolica, Universidad Federico Villareal and Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, a motley cross-section of Lima society's strata. Bringing together Peruvians from diverse backgrounds to work towards a common goal, regardless of the material outcome, was a major accomplishment of the work. This living wall, while set far from the Wall of Shame, spoke to it as an existing feature within the broader set of references in the Peruvian landscape. Here, there were emerging settlements in the vicinity, but this wall did not divide; instead, in a fashion closer to Goldsworthy and Christo and Jean-Claude's, it modified the relationship to the landscape through a temporary performative action that, as with the dismantling of the Wall of Shame, unveiled deeper issues in Peruvian society, whether intended or not, with one bringing people together and the other setting them apart.

4.2 Favela Painting Project

This is a project by Dutch artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn also known as Haas and Hahn, who initially arrived at Rio de Janeiro in 2005 to make a film on the hip hop culture in favelas and while there they had the vision of changing the image that these neighbourhoods have in the city by painting their facades. They started with the mural *Boy with a Kite* (2007). A project which was followed by the painting of a Japanese-style river on a containment wall along a public stairway in Vila Cruzeiro, designed by Dutch tattoo artist Rob Admiraal in 2007. This was followed in 2010 by a 7,000-square-metre mural of geometric design in bright colours, spread over thirty-four houses in the favela Santa Marta, which radically changed the look of that neighbourhood (Figure 8).

This project has received extensive media coverage and has become a poster child for artist interventions in favelas. On the other hand, it embodies the issues mentioned earlier regarding the lack of critical reviews or academic research on socially engaged practice and works in the public realm. The information available on this project is unsubstantiated, lacks scholarly rigour, and is at best anecdotal. Some of the main materials found online are a documentary produced by Dutch director Seven Halsema and a TED Talk by the artists, both of which tell the story from the artists' perspective, and although in every interview, video, and presentation, they stress their focus on community and the involvement of neighbours in their projects, there are no testimonies from members of the communities involved, nor detailed information about the conditions under which the engagement took place.

² Andean Reciprocity is a centuries-old pre-Hispanic set of complex reciprocal relationships within the community based on ideas of shared property developed in the Andes. (Lyle, 2017)

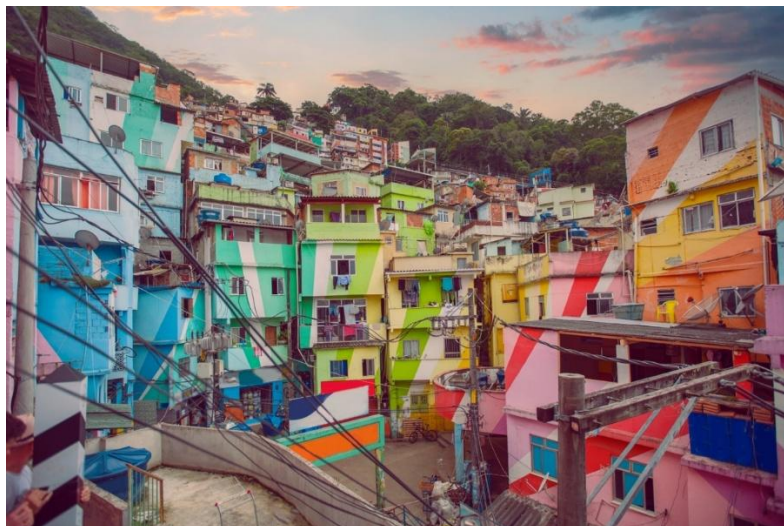


Figure 8. Hass & Hahn, *The Favela Painting Project*, Vila Cruzeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2010.
 Photograph: iStock-2195679557. Available at: Favela Santa Marta In Rio De Janeiro At Sunset Stock Photo - Download Image Now - Favela, Rio de Janeiro, Slum - iStock (Accessed: 8 May, 2026).

The difficulties imposed on developing projects in favelas constitute a virtual and, in some cases, literal wall, of which we remain outside, as a passive audience limited to receiving drops of information from those who are inside. Without testimonies from community members, we cannot assess the project's effectiveness. Although the question remains, why, if they worked so closely with the community, as they alleged they did, did they not include their voices in any documentation?

Furthermore, it could be argued that Haas and Hahn's approach is also hiding their reality from the rest of the city. In their recorded presentations, they state their goal is to change the image of the favelas to the rest of the city (Haas & Hahn, 2014; Halsema, 2013). But the question remains: if this is done exclusively to make the experience of the favela more pleasant for the outsider, in essence, how is that different from the proposals to build walls around them?

A painter who works with communities and has a different approach is Aliza Nisenbaum. Who makes portraits of minority groups, immigrants, and underrecognized social workers, amongst others, establishing a personal relationship with them in the process, where generating spaces for them to express themselves through their voices is central to the work. (Melick & Morrill, 2016). Also, artists Juan-Si Gonzalez and Jorge Crespo, who in 1986 brought sexually and politically explicit paintings to one of the busiest bus stops in Havana at 5 pm, pretending they were transporting them, where people started engaging with them and the works. This caused their arrest, interrogation, and a prohibition from the police to carry out any activities in the bus stop, since, as they said, many counterrevolutionaries and gay people frequented it. (Cartiere & Schrag, 2023). And with a closer relation to architecture is the work by the Hong Kong-based group Art Together, whose project *Window* asked children and adults the question of whether a window was to be added to their homes, what views they would like to see through it, to which they responded by painting them, which also inspired community members to take on painting themselves. (Cartiere & Schrag, 2023)

In contrast, the available reviews of the Favela Painting Project, while praising its qualities and achievements as a community-transformative project, offer little evidence to prove it. To start, no examples are provided of community involvement beyond labour to execute tasks under the artists' direction, and even in those roles, there is no mention of community members as individuals, but they are referred to as "community", thus denying the individualization and turning them into an anonymous entity, confirming what Paul Halmos statement on the tendency to rely on the solitary artist even in collaborative settings:

"Even in an age in which scientific research can and does work co-operatively, in teams, in which the individual is submerged, artistic creativity continues to rely on the personal, individual and unique idiosyncrasies of solitary artists." (Halmos, 1970)

The absence of any mention to the contrary implies that community participation was limited to helping to paint the artists' designs, for which they received training and payment, but no community members' names appear in the piece credits. On the other hand the knowledge exchange that Kosmala and Imas refer to in their article "Favela is painting. An UrbansparkZ/art installation of social commitment and organisational change", is arguably limited to the payment for the painting services by community members, but not one that would have informed the designing process, nor been the result of dialogue or a joint decision-making process (J. Miguel Imas, 2014; Kosmala & Imas, 2012).

I argue that the lack of acknowledgement of residents' involvement and, furthermore, their merging into an anonymous entity, reflects an approach in which the community, while a participant, is expected to remain silent and is not given space to voice their views.

On the other hand, Nisenbaum, who is not a stranger to large commissions and exhibitions at major museums through her work with communities, demonstrates community engagement throughout the process, from start to finish, as portrayed in her *Painting the NHS* project. (Shepherd, 2021). While it could be argued that portraiture-based work, such as that of Nisenbaum, lends itself to closer identification between the subject and the work of art, in contrast to abstract work like that produced by Hass and Hahn, with the exception of *Boy with Kite* (Halsema, 2013).

Also, Hass and Hahn, if they had received support from the Dutch Ministry of Culture would raise further questions. As Claire Bishop documents in *Artificial Hells*, an initiative was presented to the Dutch right-wing coalition government by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs. It outlined the potential of creative activities to propel different areas of the Dutch industry and economy. The paper did not distinguish between ‘creative industry’, the ‘culture industry’, ‘art’ and ‘entertainment’, a generalisation which, according to Bishop, reduced the subject to a matter of finances. The following year, a €15 million fund was established on the premise of supporting creativity as a Dutch export: “as if taking the logic of *De Stijl* to its unwitting expansion as an entrepreneurial opportunity” (Bishop, 2011). The Favela Painting Project, which started in 2007, would have been produced under that umbrella and subject to its rules and regulations, which were laid out as part of the party in power’s broader political agenda.

Furthermore, in the broader art context, because of their eclecticism, exhibited through their works, and their approach to community, it could be argued that Hass and Hahn’s works can be categorised as expressions of “pluralism”, in the sense that there are no dominant styles and that there is an anything goes attitude, where quality concerns are left aside. Furthermore, as Gustavo Fares states:

“Pluralism expects the Western first-world to produce art and theory, while the rest of the world becomes a province that, at best, produces art and theory limited to their own spheres of the national and, at worst, offers cultural (raw) materials to be later processed in the first-world where academic/cultural value is added.” (Fares, 2013)

As we deconstruct the process of creating their site-specific mural paintings and unveil the single directionality embedded in it, it could be argued that their approach exemplifies the first world/rest-of-the-world division that Fares refers to. Where the local community becomes material for later first-world attribution of value through cultural processes, as demonstrated by international platforms that have exalted the work.

Some of the problems which might be posed by restricted access of the community to the creative process in public art projects, and to express their views, were brought up by American artist Sam Durant, when, after installing his work *Scaffold*, portraying a hanging structure, realized about the deep commotion that it had brought to the Native American community in which lands it was installed, as he acknowledged:

“Museal ignorance, or arrogance, about *Scaffold*’s assumed public acceptance included the Walker’s failure to engage Native American audiences in advance of the sculpture’s installation. “We made a fatal mistake,” Durant observes.” (Cartiere & Schrag, 2023)

Has the work of Hass & Hahn provoked similar reactions? Certainly, there is no evidence to substantiate that. On the other hand, we can’t underestimate the appeal and effectiveness of their approach, painting facades at no cost to the owners, and where people from the community were trained and hired to paint, and making a whole neighbourhood look more appealing, all these can be more than enough reasons for anyone to want to be part of such a project. Furthermore, the environment gained a renewed image, signifying a major change in a place where stagnation is otherwise the norm.

Despite these attributes, I argue that the shortcomings as to choosing to serve the outside audience over the local one, using a work model, which didn’t include community members in any decision making capacity along the process, their lack of consideration of the potential impact in the community as a whole in the short, medium and long terms, and the restaging of colonial models of master/servant, are so significant, that they can’t be ignored, and they warrant the project’s placement in the anti-architecture category. Besides that, the project does not engage with developments in social practice, as outlined by Claire Bishop: community participation drives the work, with involvement at every stage of the process, and the artist relinquishes sole authorship. But we shall be careful not to assume the role of community protectors in doing so, since, as Bishop warns, failing to acknowledge the community’s capacity to make its own informed decisions would be patronising. (Bishop, 2011)

With that said, this should not stop us from assessing the work objectively and based on its contribution or lack thereof to art in the public realm debates and the contemporary art context in which it is situated, while assessing whether it reiterates old models. With this in mind, and considering the alleged purpose of the Favela Painting Project as stated by the authors, was to change the image that people from the affluent areas of Rio de Janeiro have of the favelas (Haas & Hahn, 2014), It is only fair to look into local initiatives which are working with the same purpose.

One of these initiatives is *The Voz da Comunidade*, which was created by René Silva in 2005 at age 11, started as a newspaper project for the inhabitants of Complexo do Alemão, considered one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in the city and known to the public for drug-related crime. The enterprise’s agenda from the beginning was to focus on the community’s positive aspects to change the image people outside the favelas may have of them. Therefore, it focuses on broadcasting only positive news about favelas, and it came to prominence in November 2010, when the police operation to take down the local gang lords and install the Unidades de Polícia Pacificadoras (UPP) began. During the raid, journalists from the mainstream media could not enter the favela and relied on René’s broadcast to learn about the unfolding situation, making René the first favela leader to gain notoriety on social networks through the Twitter account @vozdacomunida. *The Voz da Comunidade* posts are almost entirely positive, actively avoiding posting any news of negative connotations. Its success has spurred the emergence of similar initiatives, all with the mission of defending the community’s rights. (Amaral, 2021)

It is worth highlighting the difference in approaches, where *La Voz da Comunidade* emerged as a spontaneous grassroots initiative; and while it lacks the visual aesthetic appeal of the *Favela Painting Project*, it is arguably a more authentic and effective way to communicate the community’s positive aspects and to promote positive views of the favela outside and within them, since the residents are protagonist of the news which are broadcasted. From a sculptural perspective, it speaks to contemporary non-object developments in public-realm sculpture and an authentic manifestation of local culture.

Meanwhile, a project aimed at an outside audience has to mould itself to serve the expectations of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, (Debord, 2020), of which a market-driven art system is also a part, of which we are complicit, which helps to explain the appeal and the extensive media coverage the work has received and continues to receive. While the silence of the involved community so far has been deafening, we wonder whether the artists’ next plan is to paint a whole favela, whether

the favela residents want the same, and whether they will remain silent.

5. Conclusions

When I planned this research, I had departed from the premise that there were two main approaches to public sculpture projects in disenfranchised neighbourhoods, although as I embarked in the research and I started finding information about projects which didn't fit neither category, I realized that the initial classification was not applicable and that I had to keep an open mind to the possibility that there were models of work which I had not envisioned, and which would resist categorization.

Working in disenfranchised neighbourhoods presents the challenge of navigating realities that stand in opposition to one another, with no common ground for integration-based projects. Under these circumstances, I argue that new processes will need to be implemented, one such process, specially designed to deal with opposites, is the Janusian Creative Process. Named after the Roman god Janus, it is based on the simultaneous use of opposing ideas to generate new knowledge.

Furthermore, I argue that the odds of succeeding when working on socially engaged and sculpture-in-the-public-realm projects in disenfranchised neighbourhoods are directly proportional to the success of implementing networks that include community members, grassroots and government institutions, artists and cultural agencies, who, in some cases, come from opposite realities. It is for these kinds of situations that the Janusian creative process is perfectly suited. Thus, enabling participants to leverage their differences to generate new solutions, and I argue that this should be constantly evaluated against the risk of producing anti-architecture.

On the other hand, we have the model proposed by projects such as the Painting Favela Project, which has successfully captured the imaginations of audiences, including specialists in socially engaged art and favelas, but where the opposites are reaffirmed. This is illustrated by the books: *Associativismo em rede na Favela Santa Marta (RJ)* by Atilio Machado Peppe (Peppe, 2022) and *Voices from the Favelas, Media Activism and Counter-Narratives from Belo* by Fernanda Amaral (Amaral, 2021). Both of which use photos from the Favela Painting Project in Santa Marta, though neither book mentions it. This could be interpreted in two ways: the artists succeeded in creating a work that has now become associated with the idea of favelas worldwide, although the lack of any mention in the books also suggests a disavowal of social relevance. Similarly, projects which originated in the community, and which have managed to break through in the art system also present challenges. Cilán, the founder of Morrinho, despite being included in important international exhibitions and receiving extensive media coverage, still struggles financially, with long periods without income in between projects, and has not been able to leave his mother's home. (Kalkman, 2013). This speaks to a dysfunction between spectacle-oriented art systems and grassroots community initiatives.

I argue that implementing a process that amplifies those differences could enable grassroots initiatives to leverage the tools offered by the art system without abandoning the grassroots origins of the work. For this process to yield meaningful results, challenges related to time constraints imposed by budget restrictions, project timelines, and potential changes in the institution's management would have to be addressed.

There are already examples of projects which, in my interpretation, have applied Janusian-like processes and achieved significant results. The work of *Movimento Fazendinho* in Jardim Colombo, a favela in São Paulo, Brazil, which started as a youth-organised art festival in 2018, with the goal of improving their environment, developed into an organisation which played a significant role during the pandemic crisis, where the group, amidst the loss of jobs, organised food baskets for families in need, delivered health care supplies, facilitated doctors' visits and workshops for children aimed to promote mental health. (Moya-Latorre, 2022). I argue that the main contribution of this project lies in how it bridges art and real life and in raising the question of whether the art system is prepared to learn from such initiatives.

It is also important to acknowledge government-sponsored initiatives, such as the *Programa Favela-Bairro* (Favela to Neighbourhood Program), launched in 1993, which, in the face of a legacy of alienation, was designed to integrate the favelas into the rest of the city. The project, though limited in its scope, brought significant change to the areas it reached; but when the funding ended, so did the project (Valladares & Anderson, 2019). Could collaborations with artists contribute to the bigger success of such projects? How could artists preserve their autonomy within an institutional framework? If we follow Tom Finkelpearl's advice to partner with art institutions when working on community projects, we may as well include government bodies.

This resonates particularly with my own work in Puno, in the Peruvian mountains, where, over the years, I have resisted working with the local government due to a history of institutional corruption there (Lauracio Ticona et al., 2024). A problem which I know needs to be addressed, but for which I still don't have a solution.

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The author declares no conflict of interest

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