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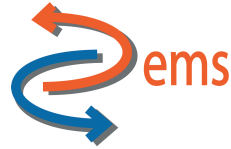


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GAP PROJECT Graffiti Art in Prison

Call for Applications

A 6-Week-Intensive Study Program for PhD students offered by “GAP – Graffiti Art in Prison,” an international and interdisciplinary project funded by ErasmusPlus– Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education 2020-2023.

Application Deadline: 19 July 2021



The GAP project connects Palazzo Chiaramonte (Steri) in Palermo, one of the most important cultural sites in Sicily, with artistic expression in prisons today. Graffiti Art in Prison revolves around scientific research, pedagogy, artistic programs, and social engagement. This interdisciplinary structure will impart innovative training and new educational pathways in order to benefit university scholars and enhance their interventions in civil society.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Steri was the site of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and its prisons. The graffiti, a palimpsest of writings and drawings painted on the cell walls, are a corpus of inestimable historical, artistic, and anthropological value. These unique documents form both the core of the project and its point of departure to other sites of inquiry. The program also includes other Inquisition prison graffiti, specifically that of Narni (Italy), Zaragoza and Tarazona (Spain). These prisons held people from the Mediterranean diasporas with different religions and on those walls the prisoners left traces of their presence and messages to be deciphered: a 'chorus' of silent voices with different levels of meaning and a high degree of complexity.

In addition, other forms of prison graffiti and wall paintings, both historical and contemporary, will be addressed and compared to other sites of detainment, such as psychiatric hospitals and concentration camps, spaces characterized by conditions of deprivation, separation, lack of freedom, and censorship. Thus, the project encompasses places of confinement in a broad sense and the creative responses to these specific environments in their multiple dimensions: material, corporeal, psychological, political, social, devotional, spatial, and temporal.

One of the project's important interventions is to expose inmates to contemporary art practices through artistic programs. The goal of introducing such forms of creativity is to improve their living conditions and to contribute to their future rehabilitation and societal reintegration. This project will also heighten social consciousness for art and architectural research and teaching. The recent coronavirus restrictions and space limitations, the violent protests that broke out in the Italian prisons during the lockdown, and the issue of mass-incarceration and immigration detainment are crises that lend this inquiry into space and control a particular socio-political urgency.

The 6-week-intensive study program for PhD students from different backgrounds and countries plays a key role in the project. This program, organized by the partner institutions of the GAP project, gives participants a broader understanding of the topics related to art in spaces of confinement in the past and present, including the (in)visibility of prison environments, the violence of the wall and its role as a relational tool, visual strategies and textual narratives of self-representation in murals, and the reuse of prisons as spaces for contemporary art. Cultural and methodological issues related to graffiti will be discussed: the relationship between freedom and censorship, the boundaries between art and vandalism, the theory and practice of graffiti as well as their perception and value in different times and places, including their role as political protest and system critique.



The format adopted for the program consists of lectures, seminars and discussion-sessions through an interdisciplinary approach that will allow doctoral students to address their topics from different perspectives and employ different methodologies, while the workshops will enable participants to physically experience prison environments.

The intensive study weeks will take place between October 2021 and January 2023 in Florence, Munich, Palermo and Zaragoza (see below: schedule, topics, and content).

The GAP project invites applications from doctoral candidates in the fields of history, art history, architecture, law, anthropology, theology, psychology, social sciences, heritage studies, material science, medicine and related disciplines. The number of participants is restricted to n. 20, and the selection will be made on the basis of a motivation letter, a curriculum vitae and an interview with the project leader and coordinators.

Each participant is expected to contribute to the intensive study weeks not only with oral presentations and a written paper, but also by actively engaging in the discussions, site visits, and workshops. To enable active participation in the teaching, research, and artistic activities, good knowledge of English is required and basic knowledge of Italian is recommended.

Benefits:

The GAP project will bear the cost of accommodation and will reimburse each participant for round-trip expenses to the locations where the activities are scheduled. The selected students are invited to participate in the entire study program (6 weeks), which can contribute credits to their PhD Program, if applicable.

The applications can be in English, German, Italian or Spanish and must include:

- a motivation letter including a presentation proposal (on a topic of your choice);
- a short curriculum vitae (max 2 pages);
- graduation certificate or a declaration of intention to enroll in a master at the Universidad de Zaragoza;
- evidence of admission to a PhD program or a declaration of intention to participate in a PhD program, accompanied by a letter from the master thesis supervisor.

Please send your application by **19 July 2021** in a single PDF to: graffitiartinprison@gmail.com

Intensive Study Weeks: schedule and contents

1) Graffiti, drawings and wall writings from the Inquisition in Palermo October 2021 – Palermo/blended

The first week will focus on the graffiti of the secret prisons of the Holy Office in Sicily, situated in the Chiaramonte-Steri palace in Palermo from the early 17th to the end of the 18th century. The history of the Inquisition from a broad chronological, geographical, thematic perspective (court, location, procedures, crimes, penalties, prosecution, imaginary) constitutes the context to conceptualizing graffiti as ‘action writings’ and artistic expressions produced in a specific space of confinement and at a precise historical moment. The richness of the iconographic and writing heritage of the Palermo inquisitorial prisons raises a set of theoretical and methodological questions about the circumstances of their realization, their formal characteristics, the identity of their authors, their patrimonial and memorial value so as to make them an exemplary case-study. The exhibition *Inquisitio Contra Haereticos. I Processi dell’Inquisizione a Streghe, Eretici e Società Segrete* (Palermo, October 2021) will offer participants the chance to see original historical books and important documents from the XVII century.

2) Caesura, censorship, imagination: artists, historians and anthropologists in dialogue March 2022 – Palermo

The second week will involve artists, performers, architects, photographers, pedagogists, anthropologists, writers, historians and art historians on topics including contemporary art and new languages, politics, and participation. This week’s program puts students and inmates in dialogue with various actors of different cultures around the controversial and complex relationship between censorship, imagination, and free expression. Censorship will be treated from a comparative perspective, starting with the historical Inquisition and continuing until today’s condition of coercion and lack of freedom. Today – in the contemporary social and political context – censorship is a result of an extremely intrusive surveillance system, the so-called ‘surveillance capitalism’. The wide use of controlling devices in public and private space reveals the ubiquity of surveillance in our daily lives through invasive structures, such as artificial intelligence (AI) software and machine learning tools that study consumers’ behavior. Exploring the reciprocal nature of the subjects treated, scholars and students will play a central role in a participatory process, taking part in an experimental creative activity through art practice, criticism and an interdisciplinary project approach.

3) Modes of expression and resistance in prison environments: graffiti in their devotional and political dimensions

May 2022 – Florence

Among the motifs represented on the walls of the prisons of the Holy Office in Palermo and other places of seclusion and detention are biblical scenes, figures of saints and martyrs, of Christ and the Madonna. Religious iconography can be found in the artistic expressions of prisoners of all times and places, as in Mexican Chicano mural art, in which traditional sacred images such as the Virgin of Guadalupe take on a strong political and identity connotation. Starting from the history of the panopticon and an analysis of prison space in the Middle Ages, to William Kentridge's 'political' frieze in Rome, in this week we explore the votive dimension of graffiti and the role of muralism as political activism, social criticism and a tool of protest and resistance. Case studies from different historical and geographical contexts (from Italy to Spain, from Germany to Turkey, from Mexico to Chile) offer the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between punishment and expiation, faith and devotion, art and dictatorship, freedom and censorship, concealment and visibility as well as on the question of the (im)permanence of graffiti and the intrinsic fragility of a medium entrusted with the task of preserving and handing down memory.

4) Marking space: the wall as heterotopic place

July 2022 – Munich

According to Michael Foucault, heterotopia is a space 'other' than 'ordinary', a separate enclosure, delimited within precise boundaries, 'outside all places and yet locatable'. The prison, the heterotopia par excellence, is an 'other' place that is based on the principle of exclusion. This week starts with the concept of heterotopia to deal with spaces (prisons and beyond) and partition walls – subsequently painted, engraved and appropriated through the graphic sign. Prison is a place where violence is real. However, violence is not exercised by individuals or the community, but by the walls themselves, by the architecture, a space designed to control the body and the mind. Art is a way to transform and transcend this environment. In prison, the wall isolates, separates, and oppresses. However, through graffiti, it can become the exact opposite, the instrument of communication, the element that connects. In this sense, the wall of a prison is also a heterotopia: like the mirror, it hides and reveals, it represents itself and projects the image of those who are reflected in it. In this process of inversion, is it possible to find salvation?



5) From sign to symbol: new educational approaches for inmates **October 2022 – Palermo**

The fifth week will focus on the artistic phenomenon of prison graffiti in a diachronic perspective, from the past to the present, bringing into reformatories artistic programs for inmates. The challenge will be to combine ancient evidence and current needs of prisoners, through practical art sessions creating a story about spaces of detention, both from a realistic and utopian perspective. The invited artists will offer workshops where the prisoners themselves closely interact and influence the results. This will change the environment in which they live and introduce them to new communication channels through art. Participants will be invited to look at this contentious topic in a new critical light and will actively participate in a series of conversations, seminars, workshops, round-tables, meetings, video projections that will be realized in collaboration with the prisoners involved in the project.

6) Cultural heritage management: reusing prisons as spaces for contemporary art **January 2023 – Zaragoza**

Prisons are historical constructions, considered nowadays as a trace of history, most evident through the existence of historical graffiti. In general, this typology is linked to dark emotions and feelings, such as pain and repression. In this sense, prisons are one of the best examples of 'dissonant heritage', a new concept in the field of heritage studies. On the one hand, these buildings could have some important values for the history of architecture and the conservation of cultural heritage. On the other hand, they could be transformed in something different with the introduction of new uses, for instance exhibition of contemporary art, but other possibilities for reuse will be explored. Accordingly, in this week we will study prisons from the heritage point of view, considering their cultural value, analyzing potential new uses, and exploring the possibility of contemporary art, including graffiti, to change the uncomfortable feelings linked to these places. We will include cases in Spain and in other countries to compare experiences and to evaluate their possibilities to change the perception of society about prisons and prisoners.