

The word "CASI-NO" is painted on a wall next to the Panjim-Betim ferry bus-stop in the capital. This is not the only location where the graffiti exists. The choice of the ferry wall in the city seems to be an excellent location for the purpose of any protest art. But considering the context, it is surprising that this stenciled piece of art continues to sit right under the nose of the giant casinos which it is opposing. This piece of graffiti is an example of public art and more such works are needed to reclaim the public space from the unabashed domination and bombardment of consumerist commercial hoardings and signage.



Graffiti is usually words and/or drawings, painted on the walls of public spaces. In his informative master's thesis on communication and design, *Advertising, Propaganda and Graffiti Art* (2006), Alex Kataras argues that contemporary graffiti art is the by-product of a society inundated with commercial advertisements. He explains that this art often borrows from the aesthetics of signage and the jargon of advertising campaigns. After all, he claims, just as in current advertising, contemporary graffiti art also relies on its ability to awaken the viewer's curiosity. Kataras rightly argues that the current advertisements have moved on to

the aesthetisation of commodities and consequently a world in which the promise made by the seller of love, eternal youth, or fairer skin – turns people into neurotic obsessive-compulsive consumers, with a penchant for instant gratification and a five-second attention span.

We in Goa have largely been resigned to blindly swallowing the propaganda of such commercial and political advertising, which include countless large, gaudy, repetitive, attention-seeking hoardings and signage. However, in similar contexts in Brazil and Argentina, graffiti artists have been able to reclaim some of the city space through captivating public art. According to graphic designer Tristan Manco, one of the main missions of the graffiti artists is to reclaim the city space, either as a reaction to the consumerist advertising, or to make a personal mark on the environment. After all, graffiti art has always been the voice of the underdog, as stencils, tags or simple slogans.

The *CASI-NO* graffiti, although a relatively small work of art, is very intelligent in its design. It mimics traffic signage, and is especially similar to 'No Parking' emblems. By this reference it echoes a larger public sentiment that casino ships are not to be 'parked' (docked) in the river, while simultaneously opposing casino culture itself. Graffiti like *CASI-NO* are based on guerrilla-style action; done quickly and anomalously. This very anonymity is indicative of the surreptitiousness needed in a repressive political economy.

Although there are artists in Goa who express their social concerns through their art work, these mainly remain restricted to the art-galleries with their negligible footfall. Some artists have, however, made their art public in such virtual fora as Facebook. One such artist whose work I enjoy is Angela Ferrao. Her art communicates social and political concerns which, at times, words fail to express. She has worked on many issues concerning contemporary Goa, such as citizenship, mining, casinos, caste, and language, to name a few. But she is one of a kind. While city walls and hoarding spaces are sold to the corporate world of advertisement, the Goan audiences, especially those who do not have access to the internet, remain deprived of witty social art available on virtual fora. It is sad that Goa finds more expressive space for protest art on the net rather than on the ground. One wonders whether this is because art culture is generally restricted in Goa.

Not that graffiti is always used as a mark of protest. Recently, one Mexican town, Palmitas, was in the news because the government sponsored young local graffiti artists to paint the entire town, without interfering into the theme of their work. With the help of local participants, the artist group named *Germen Crew* changed the face of the town creating for it a unique global identity.

Some would argue that Mario Miranda's work as promoted in public places, such as in Panjim market, could pass as public art. As much as I enjoy Mario's work, I think the popularity of his work has reduced perceptions in Goa of what art is supposed to look like and do. Because Mario's work is so ubiquitous, it has taken the place of what we think of as public art, especially because it is so commercial. Also, public art does not emerge from official endorsement of it, especially when it is used for touristic consumption as emblematic to a particular saleable idea of Goa. Moreover any promotion of the dominant ideology, be it political or commercial, also cannot be held as public art. We therefore remain in the debt of the artist/s who painted the *CASI-NO* graffiti I've been discussing, because it claims the public space with boldness and imagination.

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