



Text by Vittorio Parisi

OFF THE GRID

The story of graffiti is tied hand in glove with the image of a broken window.

It has been so at least since 1982, when American sociologists James Wilson and George Kelling formulated and diffused the theory according to which the visible signs of disorder and negligence - a broken window or a piece of graffiti for ex.- inevitably lead to the encouragement of antisocial behaviour if not even real crimes, because signs of a lack of order and an absence of laws.

Widely disputed today - though still endorsed by certain urban decorum associations and wannabe-sheriff administrators - the broken window theory inspired one of the most scathing and violent campaign against graffiti; endorsed in 1990 by then New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and known as zero tolerance, it put an end to the golden age of New York writings of the likes of Dondi White and Phase2, Lady Pink and Rammellzee.

If graffiti today continues to be considered as a sort of phármakon - a poison or an antidote at the same time, depending on the point of view - when in conversation with the principle of urban decorum, we owe it too and above all to this image. But what if we were to loosen that glove and this narrative for once, and think of a new metaphor able to tell us something more, something new, about the journey of the phenomenon after New York?

Among the artists-vandals who are absolute protagonists of that after, MOSES & TAPS™ take a spot like very few others; in fact, they embody the point of no return after which the writing, retrospectively observing its own story, has started to vandalise itself. Those familiar with the journey of the Hamburg duo know that it isn't a paradox, but an actual plan, almost a manifest that goes through impossible challenges and dadaist violations of writing very own rules.

Thinking of the INTERNATIONAL TOPSPRAYER™ project, that since 2008 saw MOSES & TAPS™ paint a thousand trains in a thousand days swapping their respective tags, or again the SPLASH™ project, begun in 2010, in which their respective tags completely dissolved through a perforation of the spray can that turned them into big abstract stains.

It is natural to ask if it isn't artists like MOSES & TAPS™ who might suggest a new image that can better represent what writing is today, as well as everything it has already been and - perhaps - will always be.

This exhibition seems to provide us food for thought: what if the broken window were to make way for a broken screen?

It does so right from its title, Liquid Crystal, but even more so from the artworks on display: the SPLASH™ series of irregular coloured splashes, here find themselves superimposed or juxtaposed to lattice and regular pattern borrowed from digital typographies, composing paintings aiming to emulate the mechanism of a broken or malfunctioning LCD.

In a liquid crystal display, these move between two transparent layers of electrodes that, disciplined by a grid, determine the image that will appear on the screen. When this breaks, the liquid crystals flood the grid and end up generating unexpected and cryptic shapes. Kind of what happens with the graffiti: they too, in their own way, flood that dense lattice of written and unwritten rules of urban common living, symbolically and aesthetically invading spaces, and generating signs - the tags - at times so cryptic, they appear illegible.

But this is MOSES & TAPS™ authentic mise en abyme and, once again, it aims at breaking a second layer of written and unwritten rules: those of writing itself, according to which it is not possible to disregard the lettering and its supremacy.

Once that constraint is broken, all that remains to the writer is to experiment the invasion of pure form.



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If the story of graffiti has for a long time been the story of broken windows, now we know that it isn't any less a story of broken screens. It is saturated with displays, literally: from those who crowd train stations since the Seventies, the smartphones that today enable us to photograph graffiti and to daily scroll through hundreds of images, liquid crystal screens are a kind of McGuffin, and object that, though it appears to be accessory, accompanies and transforms the plot of this movie that has been rolling for fifty years. After all, speaking of film isn't inappropriate: for the seventh art too, the screen today has more and more the configuration of a display rather than that of the écran-fenêtre André Bazin borrowed from Leon Battista Alberti's picture as 'an open window onto the world'. If the latter allowed the director to open, like a painter, a breach in reality, creating another meant to at least ideally last forever, the display is a space in which the images, fixed or in movement, result ephemeral - think of the use of glitch and pop-up in the so-called screenlife movies.

The ever more ephemeral nature of images is an inalienable part of our daily lives. They tell less and function more and more as simple information, whose duration is limited in time: this principle applies for the images that scroll frantically on our smartphones screens, the images that display train times, or the images the writer imprint on the surface of that train or wall. If writing is to take its rightful place in the history of painting, it is precisely because it has overturned the albertian principle more than any other pictorial practice germinated in the post-modernist chaos. In this chaos, buildings - from Time Square to Asian megalopolis - no longer have windows but screens and neon signs, and painting can no longer give itself as window but display, meaning a space for fluctuation and endless manipulation.

On trains as much as on canvas, MOSES & TAPS™ keep embodying more than anyone else this stage at which writing is being manipulated and lets itself be so, derides itself and vandalises itself. In other words, it becomes vertiginously aware of itself and of its story only to then break its own beliefs, escape its own laces, and, because of this, build its only possible way out of it in order to remain true to itself and together a wholly vandalistic and wholly pictorial practice.

MOSES & TAPS™ - a world renowned collective of german artist that have been designing public space since 1994.

They met in 2007 and have since worked as an artist collective with several pseudonyms. As TOPSPRAYER™ they developed the ambitious project to paint 1,000 trains in 1,000 days, using each other's names. This led to the publication of their first book, "INTERNATIONAL TOPSPRAYER™", the most commercially successful graffiti book to date.

They have spread their names through tags, throw-ups and pieces all over the world and are the first graffiti-writers to have claimed authorship of pieces solely based on distinctive colors - yellow and cyan blue - which they call "CORPORATE IDENTITY™".

In the span of almost 30 years of continued outdoor and indoor work, MOSES & TAPS™ are world-renowned and celebrated for their balancing act between the consistent development of graffiti and their conceptual strength. Beyond being leaders of a generation of graffiti writers, their influence reaches areas such as graphic design, visual arts, advertising, fashion and more. In their artistic process MOSES & TAPS™ dedicate themselves to different series of work.

One of the most famous, the SPLASH™ series, was born in 2010 as a visual declaration against "rules" in graffiti writing.

The Splashes are the visualization of their harsh criticism of the stagnation of graffiti and, in their reading, the logical end of aesthetics-based graffiti.

In the context of their artist residency in Reggio in the summer of 2023, MOSES & TAPS™ dedicated themselves to the further development of their SPLASH™ concept and created the new series of works LIQUID CRYSTAL™.

In their exhibition at SPAZIOC21, MOSES & TAPS™ are now showing these works for the very first time.