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Art of Ethics:
New Materialism and the Affect of Religion in the Post-Graffiti of Montreal

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Abstract

This article explores the recent flourish of the Greco-Roman post-graffiti style that has recently become increasingly common in the city of Montréal. While the classical Greco-Roman style has historically been represented in Europe and North America as what some might identify as the pinnacle of artistic aesthetic achievement, I argue, through analysis of four case studies, that post-graffiti artists utilize this style strategically, incorporating and appropriating iconic elements of the style in order to comment on the ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism that serve as the foundations of both the fine art world, and other far-reaching institutions of social, cultural, and political power. My analysis of these images centres a new materialist approach to this public art practice by studying the medium of graffiti, the autonomous nature of the post-graffiti work after its completion in the city, and the artists' open access calls to decolonial action. I suggest that these artists aim to subvert the original messages of the Greco-Roman art tradition, instead issuing challenges to include interpretations and interventions that museum spaces have often rejected, overlooked, forgotten, or erased. This contextual subversion allows for audience participation in the creation of the artworks' meaning. Through collaborative interaction with other post-graffiti works by Indigenous artists, the juxtaposition of the Greco-Roman style with works based on traditional Indigenous art styles that comment on historic and contemporary colonial practices brings awareness to the complex layers of habitation on this land that we know as Montréal. This article demonstrates how these figures of antiquity bring new life to the city of Montréal, demonstrating how power relations between people, things, and land are always in flux, and guiding us to live more ethically with care for the world and for one another, if only we take the time to stop and look around.

Keywords: Post-graffiti; New Materialism; Land; Affect; Audience Interventions; Thing Power; Open Access

Introduction

The category of the western canon is made up of what European and North American cultures consider highly valuable forms of literature, music, philosophy and art. The criteria for this category, also known as "high culture," has standardized, and romanticized, the incorporation of Greco-Roman mythological figures throughout Europe since the second century CE[1] and throughout North America since the fifteenth century.[2] The images of these once religious figures have been filtered down from the "high art" world to "low culture" scenes, such as comic books, websites, music videos, video games, advertisements, and other media. Thus, many people living in the western world today know the names of figures from classical mythology such as Aphrodite, Apollo, and Artemis, to name a few. These figures and their characteristic attributes are integrated into society through cultural references, to the point where people can identify these deities, often without having a formal education in classical studies.

Street art is one example of how the western canon has been adapted by artists and their audiences, utilizing and engaging with Greco-Roman figures in order to comment on contemporary issues. Street art is a difficult term to define; some claim that street art is an umbrella term for all art that is in the public sphere, be it present in the news, in the realm of commerce, or outdoors.[3] For others, it is a deliberate form of public political protest.[4] Additionally, street art provides a public platform for artists who are often excluded from the mainstream.[5] Greek and Roman representations are part of a recent sub-set of this urban art practice. Some may postulate that the incorporation of these icons of the western canon into street art serves to, in a sense, gentrify public art through the reinforcement of western colonial standards of artistic expression, but the inherent

1 Due to the growth of the Roman Empire under the emperor Constantine.
2 When European invasion and colonization of North America began.
3 *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City*, Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilim- pounidi, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 104.
4 Donna "Don" Haden, "Art and Activism: 10 Street Artists Using the Power of Art as a Catalyst for Change," *GraffitiStreet*, August 17, 2022, https://www.graffitistreet.com/art-and-activism-10-street-artists-using-the-power-of-art- as-a-catalyst-for-change/.
5 Haden, "Art and Activism," 105.

flexibility of this medium allows for artists to engage these symbols in ways that challenge the western canon, invoking their cultural capital to advocate for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) and other marginalized communities in Canada. Through its medium, accessible nature, and collaboration with other artworks in the street, Greco-Roman post-graffiti provides a means of dismantling the colonial views of the western art canon. This paper presents four cases studies of Montréal-based street art that demonstrate how a new materialist approach to Greek and Roman post-graffiti street art of Montréal can bring marginalized identities to the forefront of public art by highlighting the affect produced by creative subversions of Greco-Roman art styles and iconography.

History and Politics of Graffiti

The expressive medium of graffiti demonstrates how, in many ways, there has been significant continuity within the western art world since the era of antiquity. While innovative styles have developed over centuries, ever challenging the previous era's norms of artistic expression, many foundational elements of how art is defined and experienced have remained consistent. One persistent pattern of definition art pertains to the creation of distinctions between legal and illegal forms of art. In ancient Greece and Rome, wall murals (along with floor mosaics) were commissioned by wealthy patrons, who paid a specific studio of artists to paint or assemble the buyer's desired works. While domestic architecture was thriving in upper-class circles as a public display, graffiti was, by contrast, an anonymous practice that obscured the all identity markers of the artist, including gender and class. The word "graffiti" is the plural form of the word "graffito" which comes from the Italian word *graffio* meaning "to scratch" or "incise" a text or image into a surface.[6] According to Peter Keegan, graffiti, in antiquity, was a practice of "communicating… non-official… ideas about self and society."[7] This definition is equally accurate today, as graffiti is still often used to directly confront the socio-political agenda of the dominant culture.

6 Scott H. Decker and Glen D. Curry, "Graffiti," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., May 6, 2020), https://www.britannica.com/art/graffiti-art.

7 Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2016), xiv.

Another continuity, from antiquity to the present, is the diverse and wide-ranging techniques of graffiti that can be employed to deliver a message. This includes, "text, drawings and geometric figures, numbers and dates, and simple series of down strokes."[8] Historically, graffiti had two main objectives in antiquity: 1) to express the artist's objects of desire and a plea for it to be actualized, or 2) to demonstrate the artist's qualms and displeasures in the form of curses. Keegan mentions that graffiti encapsulated power; these creative channels were known as apotropaic devices, with graffiti being used as a method of warding off evil, protecting the artists and their loved ones and communities from suffering and corruption.[9]

Graffiti proliferated in many city-states in the ancient world.[10] Despite its pervasive presence, graffiti had a negative reputation, with critics associating the art style with filth, backwardness, and immorality. As such, figures of authority persistently implemented initiatives to deter this type of art, categorizing it as criminal. A proclamation from Rome and Pompeii not only advised against the vandalism of a piece of public property: "Gaius Julius Anicetus, at the behest of Sol, requests that no one inscribe or scribble on the walls or *triclia* [covered, porticoed chamber]," but also cursed the desecrator by noting that, "if someone writes something here, may he rot and his name be pronounced no more."[11] As a result of its continuous negative connotations throughout history, graffiti remains stigmatized. It is apparent that European and North American views of graffiti mirror the way Greek and Roman religious stories are also perceived as inconsequential and devalued in society.

Polytheism and graffiti shared similar connotations; they both threatened the structures of authority within ancient society. Early Christianity was a persecuted tradition; it was a religion that deviated from much of the practices of the past, but it also appropriated various elements of already existing traditions and assimilated them for their own purposes.[12] That said, once it became the dominant

8 Keegan, *Graffiti*, xiii.
9 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 125-34.
10 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 4-5.
11 Keegan, *Graffiti*, 5.
12 Richard King, "Disciplining Religion," *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 36.

monotheistic religion,[13] Christianity considered all forms of polytheism to be heretical, thus reducing them to being known as *paganus*, a Latin term meaning "rustic" or "of the countryside."[14] The word "pagan" also signified people who were not culturally civilized enough to understand the true path to salvation, for they were, and possibly still are by some, said to be too preoccupied with falsely worshipping idols instead of God.[15] Considering that the expression "pagan" was a derogatory term that connoted inferiority, the people of the ancient world did not identify themselves as such. This discrimination created a distinct divide between the majority religion and the minority religion, which in turn established a clear divide between how they saw themselves and how the majority defined them. There were those who were deemed acceptable in society, and the others, who were considered outcasts.

Post-Graffiti and Greco-Roman Art

The cities of Philadelphia and New York saw revitalization of graffiti practices in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Graffiti writing during this time was linked with new ideas surrounding hip-hop; they "render a similar energy and impulsiveness as…battles in hip-hop denote lyrical, musical, or physical competitions with cheap and expressive instruments or sound…while [graffiti] writers battle with spray-paint."[16] The same adolescents, who initiated graffiti to some extent, were the founders of hip-hop and breakdancing as a way to distinguish themselves from the disco movement. Graffiti became closely associated with the musical genre of hip-hop, as both forms of creative expression emphasize spontaneity and fluidity of motion.[17] These groups, often associated with gangs, wanted a visual language of expression that was a form of protest against racial oppression in a way that was anonymous and could be used as a source of personal or group empowerment.[18] Graffiti, to this day, has

13 Groups who believe in the notion of the rule of one God.
14 Owen Davies, *Paganism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.
15 Davies, "Introduction," 3.
16 Anna Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art,* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 56.
17 This, of course, is an overly simplified association of gangs, graffiti, and hip-hop, as these topics are far more complicated than that. Graffiti has always been practiced by a diverse group of nationalities, classes, and a variety of counter-cultural waves of "disenfranchised and rebellious youth." (Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 57.)
18 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 43.

an infamous reputation because of its association with gangs and territorial conflicts, but in reality, it is only one aspect of the global public street art scene in the contemporary world.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, a new form of public street art emerged. This style, known as post-graffiti, is what some see as an intentional move away from graffiti writing. It is distinguished by less of an emphasis on the style and lettering, and more of a focus towards involvement within the city landscape by creating site-specific figures, abstractions, and symbols by combining graffiti materials with "fine art," otherwise known as high culture techniques.[19] Since post-graffiti became more palatable due to its ability to communicate ideas to a wide audience, it was paid for by companies or private business owners to deter illegal forms of graffiti. Consequently, post-graffiti differs from Greek and Roman frescoes, since the location of many of these artworks have been transferred from the interior of a domestic space for the elite to the exterior of local shops and apartment buildings, which can be viewed and admired by everyone. The examples examined in this paper will explore Greco-Roman themes in the streets of Montréal to decipher semiotic hints that strive to unsettle authority and ignite interests in the spectator.[20]

One reason these artists were compelled to depict such characters could be because they were directly exposed to the high art world, and wanted to emulate these classical pieces. However, they were depicting these works in a way that derides or parodies the idealized characters. This is done through the artists' disproportionate dimensions, the conflation of their composition making their works look atypical of the classical style, or through their use or lack of colour. Another reason is that artists encountered these personifications over a number of years through the process of mass media filtering high art into their daily lives. New modes of displaying art objects that were once romanticized are now debasing the value of such canonical images.

19 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 30.
20 Although, Greco-Roman themes in street art have become a global trend.

For this reason, street art, as a channel for popular cultural images, is more likely to be regarded as an activity that is considered kitsch and not valued as art. According to Modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, "the avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similar or originals."[21] In other words, the colours, shapes, textures, and applications of art should be rendered for their own sake, and without any deeper significance or meaning behind them. A good example of the art to which Greenberg refers is abstract art.[22] On the one hand, to him, avant-garde art that is speculative and open to interpretation maintains the spark of art and its discourse. On the other hand, kitsch is art that explicitly demonstrates its content and meaning. It involves mass-produced assembly line formulae and is apparently devoid of any real experience or emotion because it is common and remains stagnant over time. This idea of the "everyday" experience is perceived as harmful by Greenberg – because it does not provoke new thoughts, it is something "true culture" never is and never will be.[23] In the same way, street art, of any kind, borrows and distorts popular culture references to secure its presence and holds the favour of the public in the everyday world.[24] According to Greenberg, such references to popular culture are culturally regressive. Likewise, because Greco-Roman art was used as a subject matter for artworks since antiquity, it now accommodates the likes of the ordinary person. However, I argue that post-graffiti imbeds itself and is taken over by the landscape, thus making it aesthetically valid. As such, it should not be looked down upon for being a part of the everyday for it too shapes our experiences and colours our daily lives. Why must we always look towards the sacred, the sublime, and the avant-garde for pleasure and inspiration? I suggest that we do not need to do so as joy and stimulation already populate our "everyday" world. Additionally, not all post-graffiti is intelligible nor is it always clear in meaning, therefore as per Greenberg's definitions, it satisfies his categorical conditions as *both* avant-garde *and* kitsch.

21 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, 1939, 6.
22 Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 4.
23 Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 10.
24 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art,* 47-48.

Some suggest that Greco-Roman themes in street art demonstrate the ideals of post-graffiti in practice by combining artistic skill with traditional high art techniques. While it is true that many post-graffiti artists pose an active turn away from the signature graffiti styles of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s[25] that revolved around tags,[26] throwies,[27] and pieces,[28] post-graffiti is still influenced by the graffiti style that came before it, and the values associated with graffiti still apply because of its association with counterculture. As Marshall McLuhan famous stated, "the medium is the message,"[29] which, when applied to street art, demonstrates how, when creating a piece of art, the choice of media is an extension of the human psyche. The colours, materials, and techniques used to create the piece of art are instruments of proficiency, both in terms of artistic skill and the knowledge of the social and political issues they present. For many, the medium relays to the spectator the creative and economic status of the artist. Post-graffiti artists often use a combination of conventionally cheap graffiti materials and the avant-garde skills that many of them received through their higher-educational training in the arts. Markers, spray-paint and spray-can nozzles (known as 'tips' or 'caps') can be used and mixed with "oil and acrylic paints, charcoal, posters, stencils, mosaic tiling and even open-source technologies involving lights and projectors," and represent just some of the graffiti materials used in post-graffiti art.[30] Artists may even use craft materials, such as oil-based chalk, stickers, and yarn. The use of such materials prompts some critics to question whether it is possible to make a great piece of art with insufficient means and low standards.[31]

25 During these two decades, graffiti was a form of counterculture for the youth of America.
26 Rapidly completed, invariable presentation of a person's name.
27 Larger, styled, and polychromatic versions of tags.
28 Highly elaborate and impressive tags that are placed in ostentatious locations that take a great deal of time and subject the artist to considerable risk of being caught.
29 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 1.
30 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 19-20; 32.
31 Heather Mac Donald, "Graffiti Is Always Vandalism," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/11/when-does-graffiti-become-art/graffiti-is-always-vandalism.

Materiality and the Decolonization of Things

The materiality of post-graffiti harnesses new materialist principles. Materialism, according to the French philosopher René Descartes, implies that the senses seem reliable in allowing humans to discern the truth about the world. However, the senses must be questioned for they occasionally deceive people into experiencing false sensations.[32] In the Enlightenment era, materiality was intended as a secondary vehicle to rationality and intellect for finding spiritual truth. However, the application of these ideals is fundamentally compromised by the reality that human beings are an aspect of the material world which produce the material culture that consumes them and which they consume.

Neo-materialism, now better known as new materialism, was a term first coined in the 1990s by Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti, coincidentally and independently of one another.[33] New materialism is now used as a way to re-read and interpret old texts and artworks in order to create a new and radical form of philosophical thinking.[34] Essentially, new materialism strives to equalize the power dynamics between humans and all other living and nonliving things, including organic and inorganic matter. In other words, instead a hierarchal order that prioritizes the importance and superiority of living things, new materialism orders the value of all things on an identical scale.[35] Therefore, in terms of Greco-Roman post-graffiti, the power of these images allows for the expression of their autonomous nature. According to Bill Brown, objects have no intrinsic value on their own; it is only once they have a use and function that they become *things.*[36] A *thing* is an object with agency and therefore, art (in this case Greco-Roman post-graffiti art in Montréal) has agency because each piece has the ability to transform itself and the space around it. For example, graffiti and post-graffiti is often located in and affected by the rodent- and insect-infested streets, with human and animal

32 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, originally published in 1641, trans, and ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

33 Rick Dolphijn and Iris Van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 19, 38.

34 Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, 13.

35 Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things," *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

36 Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), 4.

waste, garbage, left objects, extreme weather conditions, and are often associated with gangs, homelessness, and other markers of poverty and violence.[37] Ironically, post-graffiti is also used as an attempt to clean up the streets by beautifying the community through their vibrant colours, narratives, and messages. Seeing these images in real time demonstrates not only the dual realities of the city of Montréal, but also their vitality as active agents in the world, which can often raise awareness to societal issues.

Observing post-graffiti in their outdoor environments enables the audience to see the ephemeral quality of the materials through the slow organic decay or through immediate interventions (be it human or otherwise). Furthermore, Montréal itself serves as an art piece; the city adds character to the images in play with its visual, aural, olfactory perception, and tactile interactive elements. The city also serves as their bearer, and thus takes the brunt of any and all consequences of the images' destruction, either through passive means such as litter, or via active protests by viewers. The evolution of these art pieces will continue to produce an effect as they take on these various transformations of wear, tear, and decay. New materialism demonstrates that art objects can self-organize and evolve autonomously in ways similar to humans. This process communicates how the art piece transcends the artists' goals and attempts to eliminate the gap between human beings, other sentient beings, and objects to create an egalitarian society in which art objects play diligent roles.[38]

Some of the persuasive force behind a new materialist approach for Greco-Roman post-graffiti art may be located in affect theory. Jane Bennett, like Brown, claims that objects when imbued with agency have "thing-power," a vitality that encourages affect (creates emotional influence) through the discharged feelings of shock and insight.[39] It comes as no surprise that people have a strong connection to the objects they encounter on a daily basis. Thus, whether superficial or profound, Greco-Roman post-graffiti in Montréal imposes emotions

37 It is important to note, neither gangs nor unsheltered people equate to the former listed materials or behaviours; these are harmful stereotypes used to justify graffiti and post-graffiti as being destructive and detrimental to the value of neighbourhoods.

38 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 11.

39 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

on people by invading the senses through material, colour, and narrative. These manipulated public happenings, in turn, create an emotional connection or repulsion within the spectator, and lead to responses that are conscious or unconscious, verbal or silent, and physical or non-physical. Sara Ahmed states that when people analyze objects, the emotional response draws the body towards or away from it – a physical response to how the object in question has pleased or dissatisfied them.[40]

Materiality helps the subject to create and engage in a practical yet aesthetic event that demonstrates who people are and how they project themselves, both as individuals and as a collective. On an individual level, viewers may relate with one or more of the artworks' or artists' characters, paralleled circumstances, or living conditions. On the other hand, people may collectively identify with the imitative effects of the art in general, as these pieces are both a model for, and reflection of, the ways in which society bridges the gap between the past and the present, the conventional and the non-conforming. While, to many, post-graffiti will always be stigmatized as outsider art, these artists have made efforts to prove that they aim to incorporate inclusivity through open accessibility and through popular culture as their artworks display integrative ways of demonstrating respect for the natural cycle of an urban environment.

Case Studies

Though post-graffiti is controversial, it is nevertheless a powerful means of bringing people's awareness to the streets and commanding the attention of the world around them. This is done by skillfully engaging with colour, texture, and subject matters with which they are familiar yet take for granted in their everyday lives. As a result, the future of post-graffiti practices rely on the current generation of artists to identify with the movement and the people of their city. According to Jason Botkin of the street art collective *En Masse*, these artists will take action in new and creative ways to respond to and confront serious issues within the public sphere.[41] To this end,

40 Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 30-31, 35.

41 Jason Botkin, "Guest Lecture," *Graffiti and Street Art*, Lecture, Concordia University, Montréal, April 6, 2017.

Figure 1. Dodo Ose - Ashop Collective. *Inclusion*. 2017.

some notable artists are already using unconventional methods to revitalize the cityscape and give fresh meaning to the term street art. Dodo Ose, Mathieu Bories, and Rubén Carrasco along with Damien Gillot are innovating their art by incorporating Greco-Roman themes in their works. While these artists' images share common themes, they are created for their own unique purposes and goals according to the artist's design decisions.

The subject of my first case study ***(fig. 1)*** is the piece entitled *Inclusion* (2017) by French artist Dodo Ose, a member of the *Ashop* and *K6A* "crews." To elaborate on this term, Anna Wacławek states that "crews are loosely organized and function as a peer group of friends who paint together in order to share ideas and innovations, and to aid each other in the field. It is not uncommon for a writer [graffiti artist] to be associated with multiple crews."[42] Born in Lyon, Ose currently resides and practices in Montréal. His interests lay in both the worlds of graffiti and high art. As a teenager, living in Southern France, he acquired a fondness and expertise in graffiti while receiving his education in "Fine Arts in Cannes."[43] He made a name for himself here through exhibitions in established gallery spaces. When he relocated to Canada in 2010, Ose began experimenting with different media to form a unique blend of spray paint and watercolours.[44]

Ose's *Inclusion* is a dramatic piece of art. The audience first encounters two reined, hyper-muscular, winged horses. They are either pushed forward in an act of urgency and support, or held back as a sign of restraint, demonstrating a fear of instability by a male figure in a red garment. The horses are toppling down a fluted Greco-Roman column. The background is bursting with vibrant colours including blue, green, pink, orange, red, and yellow. Theuse of yellow invokes the breaking of a new sun after a time of darkness. The light in the background hints to the audience that the male figure is the sun god Apollo. Here, Apollo is shown with his chariot, bringing the dawn of a new day to the human world. The composition of the piece displays elements of both Realism and Naturalism. It is Realistic because the spectator is clearly confronted with horses and a human body that both appear as they would in the real world, but is also Naturalistic, as the proportions are exaggerated for idealistic and aesthetic purposes.[45] This is demonstrated through a magnification

42 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 26.
43 "Dodo Ose Portfolio," *ASHOP Productions*, accessed May 27, 2020, https://www.ashop.ca/dodo-ose.
44 "Dodo Ose Portfolio," 2020.
45 Steven Stowell, *Medieval Art and Architecture*, Lecture, Concordia University, Montréal, Quebec, September 17, 2015.

Figure 2. *Apollo.* West pediment of the Temple of Zeus. Mid-fifth century BCE.

of both animal and human anatomy, while the grey hue of the bodies imitates ancient marble sculptures, which originally in Greece would have been painted in bold and bright colours.

Apollo was an especially beloved god within the Greek and Roman cultures. He was the god of the sun, music, healing, archery, disease, shamanism, and plagues.[46] While in the Greco-Roman period, Apollo was considered the "aristocratic ideal of vigorous manhood," he was also a protector of women, as is seen in the epic story the *Iliad*.[47] Here, Apollo places a plague on the Greeks for kidnapping the daughter of the Trojan priest, Chryses.[48] Another example is displayed at the temple of Zeus: where a statue of Apollo halts a centaur from abducting and raping women, with his outstretched arm ***(fig. 2)***. Additionally, as Apollo was the god of shamans, he was said to possess both male seers and female mediums. The most famous people he possessed were the *Pythia*, female virgins who became the prophetesses at the Oracle of Delphi.[49]

46 Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth* (Harlow: Pearson, 2015) 168-169.
47 An epic poem in iambic pentameter which is attributed to the bard Homer around the year 800 BCE.
48 Powell, *Classical Myth,* 169.
49 Powell, *Classical Myth,* 177.

Inclusion, situated at the streets Décarie and MacDonald, does not directly indicate a decolonial perspective, but the Saint Laurent district, in which it is exhibited, is an area associated with intersectional activist groups and communities, especially those most impacted by and fighting against climate change, housing, and mobility crises.[50] The title of the piece, along with the destruction of the temple column, reinforces the message behind it.[51] As the ancient *mouseion* was the inspiration behind the structure of museums in art, it is not surprising that construction of modern museums (18th century to present day) commonly utilizes Greek and Roman temple structures and decorative motifs for inspiration. While it is true that European empires in the Imperial Age, such as France and England, saw themselves as civilizations marked by progress, they also heavily romanticized and appropriated the achievements of the Greco-Roman past, much like the Romans did with Greek culture.[52]

Basing their own buildings on Greco-Roman architecture accomplished two main goals for European society. First, it elevated the aesthetic perception of the present by emulating the highly-praised styles and techniques of the past. As Europe entered the Industrial Revolution, the rise of material culture, commerce, and consumption brought with it many anxieties around the purchasing and use of worldly goods. Class differences posed a threat to Victorian sensibilities. Initially, museums were spaces made to minimize the hysteria that was thought to come with bourgeois tendencies of acquisition, and became repositories of goods for the European nation, elite or otherwise, since they were accessible to all for public consumption. Museums, therefore, were used to rally and educate the poor; with the working population given access to public museums on weekday nights and weekends, the museum became a moralizing tool to avoid social turmoil or upheaval, and to bring harmony between the classes.[53]

50 Trans. Josée Lafrenière, *On a Just Feminist Ecological Transition in Montréal* (Montréal, Quebec: Conseil des Montréalaises, 2022). Here, I understand the use of the term women to include BIPOC and transgendered women.

51 One could read that the column Ose depicted in this mural is meant to symbolize the museum as an institution.

52 Suzanne Zeller, "Classical Codes: Biogeographical Assessments of Environment in Victorian Canada," *Journal of Historical Geography* 24, no. 1 (1998), 20.

53 Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 25, 27.

The second goal that European appropriation of Greco-Roman museum architecture accomplished was that museums effectively reduced the authority of the church by creating a public place for all denominations to enjoy.[54] Art was, and continues to be, understood as a vessel of beauty and truth that facilitates cathartic release.[55] As society became increasingly secular, museums became a constructed microcosm of universal secular splendor, knowledge, and certainty.[56] Through their grandiose architecture and curious artifacts to connect the heavenly with the earthly realm, museums became places where people could experience the spiritual away from the church. Of course, as England and France invaded and colonized new territories (including North America, and by extension the Montréal area), the peoples of those lands were also subjected to temple architectural aesthetic models of classical antiquity, with their iconic columns, friezes, and decorative motifs. It is important to note that these peoples' cultural, spiritual/religious, and artistic items were also forced into relationship with the imperial museum, as these "exotic" items were stolen or looted by colonizers and sold to museums for display. These items, imbued with cultural and often religious meaning, became fragmented displays of travel and wealth, devoid of their original religious context.[57]

Over time, art objects in the museum became sources of exclusivity and envy. It is because of this shift in priority that museum authorities began changing their policies by limiting public access, creating entrance fees, hiring security, and, in stricter cases, concealing objects and even entire collections from the public all together. The job of the curator became more about the preservation and care of the delicate objects rather than the education for, or contribution by, the audience.[58] As the value of art increased, the public's access to museums became ever more limited and classist. Museum spaces, increasingly, came to be seen as inaccessible for those who "did not have the good fortune to be white, middle class,

54 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 107-8.
55 McClellan, *The Art Museum*, 21.
56 Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals,* 8.
57 William Ryan Chapman, "Arranging Ethnology: A. H. L. F. Pitt Rivers and the Typological Tradition," *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 22-23.
58 McClellan, *The Art Museum*, 156.

or male."[59] While marginalized and/or racialized individuals were not granted access to these spaces, art produced by those communities remained cherished collection items, demonstrating the "history of colonialism that locates such material almost exclusively in anthropological museums and ethnographic collections."[60] By separating the works from the still-living communities that produced them, museums continued to investigate traditional forms through the Salvage Paradigm, an "anthropological term that describes the notion that it is necessary to preserve the so-called 'weaker' cultures from destruction by the dominant culture."[61] Through this paradigm, Europeans justified their claims to various lands and resources by stating that the natives were lower on the cultural and evolutionary scale. Therefore, Indigenous peoples were considered unqualified to manage their own affairs and, effectively, their own cultural heritage. European paternalism dictated that non-Europeans needed someone with greater knowledge to preserve their culture for them.

Figure 3. Chief Lady Bird and Aura. *Hoop Dancer*. 2017.

59 Linda Nochlin, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews.com*, November 18, 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/.

60 Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, eds., *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization 2002), xiv.

61 Janice Gurney, "The Salvage Paradigm," *Panya Clark Espinal*, 1990, http://www.panya.ca/publication_salvage_paradigm_introduction.php

Ose's work suggests that the Greco-Roman post-graffiti of Montréal can be used to promote artistic multivocality, and as such, can be a useful tool for decolonization when used in tandem with other post-graffiti created by artists of Indigenous descent. Chippewa and Potawatomi artist Nancy King (Chief Lady Bird)[62] and Oneida artist Monique (Mo) Aura Bedard (Aura)[63] ***(fig. 3)***; Red Bandit[64] ***(fig. 4)***; Kanien'kehá:ka artist Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde,[65] Wolf Clan and Tagé Cho Hudän artist Lianne Charlie,[66] Métis-Saulteaux-Polish artist Dayna Danger,[67] Anishnaabe (bear clan) and Sagkeeng artist, Jessica Canard[68] ***(fig. 5)***, and Ojibway First Nation artist Cedar Eve Peters[69] ***(fig. 6)*** are some of the many artists who have created decolonizing post-graffiti in the city of Montréal that speak to Indigenous issues, such as: the epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people[70], historical truth telling, expression of spiritual and cultural practices (such as hoop dancing) and healing, and solidarity with non-Indigenous peoples in creating non-violent modes of resistance and recognition.[71] This plethora of female and Two Spirit[72] Indigenous artists are ritualizing the very landscape by urging people to take notice and invest in the art and the cityscape around them. Métis (*otipemisiw iskwew*) scholar, Zoe Todd, from Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton), Alberta, suggests that "material as bridge - between people and non-human agents" creates mutual understanding as one encounters

62 "Chief Lady Bird (Artists) - Strong Nations," *(Artists) - Strong Nations*, accessed April 15, 2021, https:// www.strongnations.com/gs/show.php?gs=6&gsd=6494.

63 Monique (Mo Thunder) Bedard, "About ," MO THUNDER, accessed February 13, 2025, https://mo-thunder.com/about.

64 Laurence Desmarais and Camille Lavirée, "Take Back the Streets," *Canadian Art*, October 30, 2017, https://canadianart.ca/features/take-back-the-streets/.

65 "Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde," *Pacific Opera Victoria*, accessed April 15, 2021, https:// pacificopera.ca/per- son/lindsay-katsitsakatste-delaronde/.

66 Aubryn O'Grady, "Session 4: Keynote," Yukon School of Visual Arts, accessed February 13, 2025, https://yukonsova.net/session-4-keynote.

67 "About," *Dayna Danger*, accessed April 15, 2021, https://www.daynadanger.com/.

68 "April Art Jam: Show and Tell," *Mentoring Artists for Women's Art*, accessed April 15, 2021, https://mawa.ca/ groups/view/april-art-jam-show-and-tell.

69 Alexis Walker, "Cedar-Eve Peters - EncycloFashionQC - McCord Museum," *McCord Stewart Museum - EncycloFashionQC*, February 1, 2019, https://encyclomodeqc.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/entry/cedar-eve-creations/.

70 The social crisis of this systemic violence is often referred to as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit people (MMWIG2S) phenomenon.

71 Lorenza Mezzapelle, "Indigenous Representation through Street Art," *The Concordian*, December 10, 2019, http://theconcordian.com/2019/12/montreal-toronto-street-art/.

72 Indigenous-created umbrella term of identification for historic and contemporary gender diversity and variance.

Figure 4. Red Bandit. *No Silence While My Sisters Suffer*, 2014.

Figure 5. Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde, Jess Sabogal, Elizabeth Blancas, Melanie Cervantes, Swarm, Lianne Charlie, Dayna Danger and Jessica Canard. *Aikako;nikonhraién:ta'ne*'. August 2015.

Figure 6. Cedar Eve Peters. *Honouring My Ancestors.* 2014.

another's enlivened spirit.[73] Post-graffiti reaffirms the vital properties of emotional attachments that help form relationships with, and create interventions in, the urban and natural world. Thus, art and the outdoor environment mingle together like instruments in a musical score to create a symphony between the people and all other non-human natural and human-made agents.[74]

Situated on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation, the island of Montréal is known as Tiohtià:ke in the Kanien'kehá:ka language, and the land has historically been a meeting place for many First Nations peoples.[75] The western art canon, used by settlers since the earliest phases of colonialism, projected their own culturally specific ideals onto Indigenous peoples, lands, customs, and sacred objects. While some may interpret analysis and critique of street art as a continuation of the traditions of the western art canon, many who value and study this medium of artistic expression ground their analysis in explicitly anti-colonial frameworks that

73 Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environment and Epistemology*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (Open Humanities Press, 2015), 248.

74 Unceded Voices, "Decolonizing Street Art," *Art/iculation*, April 7, 2018, http://www.articulationmagazine.com/ decolonizingstreetart/.

75 "Territorial Acknowledgement," *Concordia University*, accessed January 25, 2021, https://www.concordia.ca/indigenous/resources/territorial-acknowledgement.html.

identify the land itself as collaborator in the creation of these artistic expressions. Similarly, our analysis acknowledges that it is only through demonstrating the harm done to the land through graffiti and post-graffiti that we can begin to alter this narrative, and to tell the whole story of Montréal and Canadian history.

While it is beneficial to know the artists' point of view and intentions, in that it encourages the audience to be in tune with the artist's objectives, the role of the audience is to draw their own conclusions about the pieces in question. All forms of visual culture allow for multiple interpretations, and audience interpretation often deviates from the artist's intention by reconstructing the piece's narrative in a way that was neither considered nor intended. This reinvention of the narrative does not render these interpretations less accurate or authentic that the author's original intention. Rather, it brings new insights to the image, and to a narrative that was otherwise thought to have been fixed. Reclaiming narrative through symptomatic (unintentional) and adaptive (altered) readings provides humanity with new models of thinking to demonstrate the dynamics of power, accomplishment, and progression. This authorizes innovative forms of self-representation that Indigenous and other marginalized peoples were denied in the past.[76] Put another way, Greco-Roman post-graffiti artists command recognition from the "high art" world due to their great skill and depth of historical knowledge, and yet, these artists also utilize fine art tropes to critique elitist art institutions. This not only shows that, over time, art loses its value through mass production, as Walter Benjamin proposed,[77] but also that these art forms are no longer on display exclusively for members of elite society. Audience members who would not be able to see such pieces are now being exposed to them. On the one hand, this may invite positive reactions, such as joy, enthusiasm, gratitude for free and open access to these great feats of innovation, scale, and aptitude. While on the other hand, it may also conjure feelings of the opposite effect for the marginalized and settled alike, by imposing feelings of loss, rage, guilt, or fear.

76 H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 98, 99, 101.

77 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) [orig. German version, 1935].

Figure 7. Mateo. *La pomme du savoir.* 2017.

Greco-Roman post-graffiti art provides a hope for new global opportunities, such as supporting and helping to facilitate other polytheistic figures and themes from around the world that have been suppressed. These post-graffiti projects affirm the impact nature and art have on one another and demonstrate the transformative qualities of the landscape. They also highlight the histories and identities of both the artists who created these pieces and residents, in whose communities the art has been created and displayed. As such, Greco-Roman and Canadian Indigenous post-graffiti art perform in tandem to express the complex historical context of the city.

The second post-graffiti piece under consideration, *La pomme du savoir* (2017)[78] is a mural painted by Mathieu Bories ***(fig. 7)***. Born in France in 1985, Bories, who prefers to be acknowledged by his street-art name Mateo, received a Master's degree in Fine Arts in the city of Toulouse. He then immigrated to Montréal where he found work as a graphic designer. Upon his arrival, he decided to pursue art

78 Translated as "The Apple of Knowledge" in English.

as a full-time career, balancing his time between the street art scene and studio spaces.[79] *La pomme du savoir* depicts a monochromatic, statuesque, white female figure with an ancient hairstyle that is curled and attached behind her head. She is wearing a semblance of a *stola* and *palla*, a traditional garment worn by Roman women after the 2nd century BCE. In her left hand, she holds a red apple with an arrow through its core. The background is a mixture of textured patterns and solid colours of purple, black, yellow, gray, and turquoise. The patterns are reminiscent of traditional carpet and silk designs historically made by women.[80] Stencilled, coloured leaves and books are scattered around the central figure. The female figure is a possible nod to Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom[81] since her presence rationalizes the books in the background and relates the piece back to its namesake. However, none of Minerva's attributes, such as her war helmet or owl, are there to distinguish her from her fellow gods. She may, however, also represent the Roman goddess, Venus, through the association with the golden apple that was awarded to her by the Trojan prince, Paris, for being the most beautiful goddess in the world. This narrative is the precursor to the tale of the Trojan War – in exchange for the apple, Paris was promised the most beautiful woman in the world as his prize. This would have been successful if the woman[82] he was guaranteed as a prize was not already married to another man.[83] An additional mishap committed by Paris was his violation of the Spartan-Trojan bond of *Xenia*,[84] that was formed upon Paris' arrival, in Sparta, to claim his reward.[85]

According to the *Religio Romana* (Roman religion), Venus is the goddess of love.[86] The neoplatonic Renaissance scholar and philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, was of the opinion that she is not the goddess of lustful

79 "Biography & Statement," *Mateo Wall Painter*, accessed May 28, 2020, http://www.mathieubories.com/biography.
80 "Biography & Statement," *Mateo Wall Painter,* 2020.
81 Known as Athena in Greek.
82 Helen.
83 Menelaüs.
84 Guest-host relationship made between travellers and locals in exchange for protection in foreign lands.
85 Powell, *Classical Myth*, 551.
86 The Greek equivalent of this goddess is Aphrodite.

Figure 8. Mateo. *La pomme du savoir*. 2017.

love,[87] but aristocratic love and *humanitas* – the Ciceronian formula for ideal oration. Humanist thinkers believed that their scholarly pursuits maintained a variety of virtues that were satisfactory for both an active public life and domestic private life.[88] Ideally, to embody Venus, a woman would have to be a faithful and obedient life partner to her husband, and provide healthy offspring to increase the wealth of her new family. The association with Venus in this manner could be read as the artist wishing the Jean Talon market well as he brings forth new expressions of prosperity for the city's streets.

The Jean-Talon outdoor market, where *La pomme du savoir* is located, is in the neighbourhood known as Little Italy. The location of the market in relation to the Roman image could suggest that the vendors make daily food offerings to the deity with the laying out of their fresh produce every day. Both Minerva and Venus, with their own narratives and reputations, may be common knowledge for the Italian residents of the neighbourhood, perhaps imbuing a sense of pride in the neighbourhood's cultural heritage. A further explanation of this work is to see the image simply as an allegory for knowledge itself. In this case, it would not be a Greco-Roman

87 This was the domain of her son Cupid, or Greek Eros, after her sexual union with Mars, or Greek Ares. Although Cupid's (Eros') lineage is contested; some claim that Eros in Greek mythology was a primordial god born out of Chaos. Meanwhile, others say he could also be the son of Jupiter (Zeus), or Mercury (Hermes), depending on the source.

88 David Chambers, "A Sophisticated Programme for Botticelli? Letter for Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, c. 1477," *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 97.

image at all, but instead an image that takes familiar iconography from popular culture. The artist is possibly equating an apple with the fruit from the Garden of Eden that provided the first humans in Biblical history (Adam and Eve) with knowledge of good and evil, possibly commenting again on the value, and perceived danger, of intellectual pursuits.

In February 2020, *La pomme du savoir* was altered slightly, not by Mateo himself, but by a graffiti writer who took the liberty of writing "V8" and some other indistinguishable markings in brown spray paint across the lower portion of the image ***(fig. 8)***. The significance of these signs is unknown, but it is clear that that this disruption of the original piece upset many and became all the more urgent as the original mural is a temporary mode of art. Reasons for the destruction or covering up the artists' work can vary. Street art is subject to harsh weather patterns in Montréal, which tarnish or erode it. Often a mural is destroyed due to construction or cleaned away by maintenance workers of the city. Sometimes it is vandalized by other members in the street art world, who sense the work and method of payment is a "way of selling out" to authority. These other members might also want to be seen by the public and associated with street artists' work, though they could also put their signifiers on the wall beside the official piece rather than on top of it. Instead of deterring graffiti writers from writing on the walls, post-graffiti ultimately does the opposite by encouraging it. However, that does not suggest that all additions to street art is collaborative, as some graffiti writers may viewed commissioned street-art murals as acts of invasion, taking up space and the stealing the territory of the local writers – the legality of the commissioned piece throwing into stark relief the "otherness" of non-sanctioned forms of street art. The graffiti writers are, then, enriching the piece by incorporating local marginal voices, adding messages of both repression and resistance to the legal street art, transforming it from a piece that takes up space to a piece that provides space for participation. As of August 2020, *La pomme du savoir* was restored by Mateo, removing all traces of vandalism. It is interesting to note how the artwork had transformed without the artist's intervention, and to hypothesize how much the city around the piece will transform again in the future.

Figure 9. Mateo. *La Nature Sauvage D'Artémis*. 2018.

La pomme du savoir is meant to be juxtaposed with another of Mateo's pieces called *La nature sauvage d'Artémis* (2018),[89] which is located in the alley behind the corner of Casgrain and Castelnau (***fig. 9***). Artemis[90] has a sprig of Myrtle wrapped around her right leg. Myrtle is associated with the goddess of the moon and symbolizes her power to both cause epidemics and source healing.[91] She is shown holding her bow tautly, but her arrow is the one that Minerva, Venus, or the allegorical figure holds in her hand. This is why Mateo suggests that these two images should be considered together – not only to create a scavenger hunt in the city to find and bring these two pieces of the puzzle together, but also to show the balance between global disasters that can lead to food insecurity and malnourishment.[92] Someone without the knowledge of Greco-Roman imagery, who walks along the street, meanwhile, may see this image as a warrior woman defending and protecting the natural world. That said, no interpretation is automatically wrong or invalid, even if it deviates from the artist's original intention.

89 "The Wild Nature of Artemis."
90 Artemis is the twin sister and complementary counterpart of the god Apollo. She is the goddess of the moon, hunt, and fertility. Her Roman equivalent is named Diana.
91 "MATEO - Outside Work," *Mateo Wall Painter*, accessed December 13, 2019, http://www.mathieubories.com/ outside#/mural/).
92 "MATEO - Outside Work," *Mateo Wall Painter*, 2020.

It is easy for market goers to (likely unintentionally) benefit from and/or promote settler-colonial conventions of overconsumption, as the market itself promotes a fantasy of abundance without highlighting the labour that produces this fantasy. It is not widely discussed in Canada that a slave market existed in this land for over 200 years. Before the height of the transatlantic slave trade, Indigenous peoples of the Americas were enslaved, forced to convert to the Catholic religion, and were bought and sold by French and English settlers. It was French colonizers who asked King Louis XIV to authorize the enslavement of Africans in New France in the late seventeenth century, as they were already doing so unofficially since the beginning of 1600s. Free manual work was performed both domestically (through cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children), as well as outdoors in fields, forests, mines, and on ships. Many were even forced into trades and craft professions, always at the will of their masters.[93] The systemic racism of the early colonial period continues in the present-day, as demonstrated by rates of food insecurity that disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous families in Canada.

In 2022, according to Food Banks Canada, "39.2 per cent of Black households, and 33.4 per cent of Indigenous households (not including Northern Canada)" were living in food-insecure households.[94] This food insecurity is a consequence and feature of systemic racism in Canada, wherein government and social institutions establish policies, practices and procedures that legally manufacture, make allowances for, and memorialize rampant inequity and injustice that disproportionately affects BIPOC people(s) and communities. [95] These communities are further dispossessed via unfair and unsafe labour conditions in Canada, some of which have been compared to modern-day slavery and/or indentured servitude. Canada has recently come under scrutiny by the United Nations (UN) for the treatment of temporary foreign workers from Mexico, Guatemala,

93 Slavery in Canada was only abolished in 1834. Natasha Henry-Dixon, and Celine Cooper. "Black Enslavement in Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 16, 2016. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-enslavement.

94 "Welcoming Racialized Communities," *Food Banks Canada*, March 20, 2024, https://foodbankscanada.ca/welcoming-racialized-communities/.

95 Corey Mintz, "The History of Food in Canada Is the History of Colonialism," *The Walrus*, March 27, 2020, https://thewalrus.ca/the-history-of-food-in-canada-is-the-history-of-colonialism/.

Figure 10. Carrasco, Gillot, and et. al. *Philopoemen Blessé*. 2016.

and Jamaica who work in the agricultural sector. It has been said that not only do migrant workers fall into debt coming to Canada in order to participate in these work programs, but once they arrive, they experience unsafe and abusive work conditions (including sexually harassment), their wages are often reduced without explanation, and they are subjected to other forms of exploitation.[96] Often the most vulnerable communities, such as migrant workers, refugees and newly settled immigrants, are the communities most likely to experience food insecurity, and so it is possible that *La pomme du savoir* is visually rebuking the market-goers for the abundance of reasonably-priced food that locals and tourists alike can buy from local farmers when as local community members go hungry.

96 Leyland Cecco, "Un Envoy Calls Canada's Use of Migrant Workers 'Breeding Ground for Slavery,'" The Guardian, August 13, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/13/canada-foreign-workers-un-report.

Finally, the piece entitled, *Philopoemen blessé* (Wounded Philopoemen) (2016) is located on Chemin de la Côte-Saint-Paul in the St. Henri district. This mural was created by Mexican artist, Rubén Carrasco, and French artist, Damien Gillot (***fig. 10***). As a child, Carrasco's mother enrolled him in art classes. He had extensive art training in Mexico, where he joined the Visual Arts Institute and the Anahuac University of Cancún, and in Montréal, where he studied at Dawson College and McGill University. The artistic polymath has "worked as a tattoo artist, set designer, muralist, photographer, graphic designer, and digital artist."[97] Fellow artist, Damien Gillot, was born in northern France, and he studied at the Institut Saint-Luc art school in Belgium. Upon arriving in Montréal in 2008, he began to showcase his artworks in various art galleries where he met and worked with a number of Québec artists.[98] Gillot joined the *IPAF Collective,* which is based on Saint-Ambrose Street. This is how Gillot and Carrasco became acquainted.[99] As part of their initiative to give back to the St. Henri district, the neighbourhood in which they both resided, the two artists created this mural in collaboration with the program of the *Carrefour jeunesse-emploi du Sud-Ouest* (CJESO), an organization that holds workshops for the youth of Montréal from ages 16 to 29 in finding employment.[100]

This image shows a male figure with shoulder-length hair and facial hair, with a stylized helmet on his head. Like all the other Greco-Roman images described and analyzed in this article, the figure is painted monochromatically to resemble an aged marble sculpture.[101] Unlike the previous works mentioned, the background of this image exposes the rusty red and brown brick wall. Organized in two rows of four, the only colour featured is the vibrant turquoise used to highlight the rosettes that adorn the face of the figure. A reason for the mural's absence of colour is likely because it is painted on a three-story apartment building. A piece on a building

97 "About Ruben Carrasco," Ruben Carrasco, accessed May 30, 2020, http://rubencarrasco.com/about/.

98 "Biographie," *damiengillot*, accessed August 31, 2020, https://www.damiengillot.com/bio.

99 Justine Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," *Journal Métro*, July 17, 2018, https://journalmetro.com/local/ sud-ouest/1669000/nouvelle-murale-a-saint-henri/.

100 Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," 2018.

101 Aged marble is the neutral color of the marble as it was presented upon acquisition. As time went by, the brightly coloured paints that often covered the sculptures faded away, this is how people see them today.

Figure 11. David d'Angers. *Philopoemen*. 1837.

of this relatively small size has likely been commissioned privately by the building's owner, or funded through a group donation made by the residents of the building. The location of this image, suspended above the speed limit street signs, suggests easy access for community members and pedestrians who can encounter the mural on a leisurely walk through the neighbourhood. Pieces like *Philopoemen blessé* have often been commissioned with the intent purpose of dissuading graffiti artists from spray-painting the wall with tags and other graffiti styles. In the graffiti subculture, there are a number of unwritten rules and codes of ethics with which most artists comply. In this subculture, writing over someone else's work is seen as an act of aggression or "war," as the act of covering another artist's work questions the skill and integrity of the other artist. Therefore, murals that cover the entire wall strive to create a more palatable alternative in theory, if not always in practice.[102]

This piece represents Philopoemen, the Greek military strategist of the Achaean League and democratic freedom fighter. Carrasco and Gillot were directly inspired by David d'Angers' *Philopoemen*, which was sculpted in 1837 and now resides at the Louvre (***fig. 11***). As Gillot states, "Au combat, Philopoemen reçoit un javelot en pleine cuisse, mais se relève et y retourne. C'est un peu ce qui se passe avec la gentrification, qui repousse ceux qui ont fait l'âme du quartier. Il leur faut beaucoup de force et de courage pour continuer à se battre."[103]

102 Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 27.

103 Gravel, "Nouvelle Murale à Saint-Henri," https://journalmetro.com/local/sud-ouest/1669000/nouvelle-murale-a-saint-henri/. English translation: "In combat, Philopoemen received a javelin to the thigh, but he got up and kept going. This is a bit like what happens with gentrification which pushes back those who made the soul of the neighbourhood. They need a lot of strength and courage to keep fighting."

Thus, as Gillot suggests, this post-graffiti art is meant to encourage a sense of belonging and dignity for the youth of the St. Henri streets. In getting young people to actively participate with the establishment of their neighbourhood through art, the hope is that this will give them a sense of power, and help to nurture an environment built on democratic freedom, power of choice, and the ability to revitalize their neighbourhood. To get their message across, Carrasco and Gillot decided to only paint Philopoemen's head. This decision brings the figure's suffering to the forefront while reinforcing a fervent resolution to continue fighting against oppression. Hence, Philopoemen's heroic actions of continuous battle in life deified him after death. Similar to the Greco-Roman heroes of mythology, his immortal spirit has lasted throughout history, connecting people through shared experiences of suffering and resistance, and inspiring young folks to take action, promoting a sense of personal, intellectual, and emotional growth.

Anti-racism work in the post-graffiti scene is not only the responsibility for BIPOC communities to carry out, as settlers too have a role to play. Without the vocal support of settlers, progress is significantly slowed as money is not raised, change is not seen, and equity is not delivered.[104] Without white voices, transformations that need to happen cannot be done systemically. While settler artists implicitly understand and often participate in their dominant culture, many allied artists have shown that settlers do not have to perpetuate damaging elements of this dominant culture. The style highlighted in this article, this alternative approach to classicism, aims to encourage innovation and experimentation and promotes participation in creating new public narratives. Audre Lorde famously stated that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"[105] and while some may firmly identify Greco-Roman figures and aesthetics as symbols and tools of colonialism, I argue that these case studies use the language the white majority are familiar with in order for the message to be better absorbed by the masses. The strategic use of these artistic styles and images aims to reduce power

104 Nneka Allen, *Anti-Racism in the Workplace* (Lecture, Vancouver: University of British Columbia, July 15-21, 2024).

105 Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 1984, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 1.

imbalances between street artists of different backgrounds through the elimination of competition, and the facilitations of greater contact between dominant and marginalized groups.

Conclusion

Streets are the pathways that direct people and shape the movement of their lives. While streets are just one piece of the urban environment, they are loaded with social and political power. Streets are, in some cases, signifiers of advanced technology, wealth, convenience, and consumption, but also sites of poverty, exploitation, and crime. Classical street art in Montréal displays this complexity of meaning by bringing the pomp and repute of the high art world of the museum into the ordinary lives of the average person. It has become a platform to critique concepts of "high art/culture," and it raises socio-political awareness in the city, spotlighting the needs of the local inhabitants and marginalized communities. These post-graffiti images have allowed street artists to express their thoughts and concerns about issues of social exclusion, economic disparity, and contemporary movements of decolonization to all city residents. In doing so, the art allows for the opening of discussions that at once engage with a global audience and unify local urban dwellers.

Nothing in the artistic landscape of city of Montréal is neutral; its architecture is dominated by Art Deco, Gothic Revival and Brutalist architecture, and other French and English colonial styles that, through banalization, continue to propagate the assumption of Euro-American cultural supremacy. Post-graffiti comments on the banality of the art forms that the dominant culture lauds as setting universal standards of beauty and function, manipulating these "classic" forms to provide new meaning. While Greco-Roman culture was, and continues to be, revered by Euro-Americans, the original religious and societal context has been stripped from these figures and art forms, changing the original meaning to now common assumption that these situated, culturally and religiously specific, figures and forms are now the western canon, the "common heritage" of the West. Religious or not, their power today is valid, authentic, and felt by many by its supporters and critics. Street

art showcases a bottom-up organizational structure[106] and a new universalist approach through artist-artist, artist-audience, and artist-land solidarity through its materiality.[107] Pieces of street art are unique bursts of energy that take the viewer out of their mundane routine, and give them something to be enthused about as we, the viewers, help facilitate and alter its meaning and significance. Street art gives me hope for a more holistically-informed and ethical future as it attempts to unite the world by igniting, or reigniting, a shared love of art, humanity, and the environment in which we all live.

106 This is an open, participatory approach where every inhabitant (no matter how different an opinion or position in life) has a say in the goals of any given society.

107 Boris Groys, "Towards a New Universalism," *E-Flux*, no. 86, November 2017, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/ 86/162402/towards-a-new-universalism/.

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