

Stony Brook University



OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

**Re-facing Societies Through Art
Faith47: A Heroine for Hope**

A Thesis Presented

by

Stephen Louis Francis

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History & Criticism

Stony Brook University

May 2014

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Stephen Louis Francis

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

**Barbara Frank – Thesis Advisor
Associate Professor, Department of Art**

**James Rubin – Second Reader
Professor of Art History, Department of Art**

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

**Re-facing Societies Through Art
Faith47: A Heroine for Hope**

by

Stephen Louis Francis

Master of Arts

in

Art History & Criticism

Stony Brook University

2014

Areas of the world that are facing hardships of all kinds bare the same signature that is visible to all: a dilapidated infrastructure. A first step in improving the areas that are struggling is to give the citizens something to be proud of when they look out of their windows. The work of South African street artist Faith47 is the kind of art that can provide such pride and also hope for a better future. Using Faith47's native country, I am proposing a socialist regime of art to both physically and emotionally improve the areas and citizens who suffer each and every day. In this thesis I will elaborate on the work of Faith47 as she juxtaposes awe-inspiring characters and elegant animalistic creatures with, historical contexts that still ravish South Africa today. I will also document her work as a socialist beneficiary striding to make the world a better place for all through art.

Table of Contents

**Page 2: Re-facing Societies Through Art
Faith47: A Heroine for Hope**

Page 22: Bibliography

Street art as it stands today is a misunderstood genre of art, but what cannot be denied is that it is one of the most influential art movements of the 21st century. As observers to this dynamic modern movement of street art, its future lies in the hands of scholars whom understand its tumultuous history and recognize those artists whom are battling the elements in their journey to leave their mark on society. By doing so, we can then elevate this genre to its rightful place as a crucial part of art history, and not merely the aggrandizement of graffiti and the post/neo-graffiti¹ era we are in today.

This scholarly position is one of an ephemeral and influential revolution and as a relatively newly established construct, artists of this genre are coming from each and every reach of life: from established artists and designers experimenting outdoors, to rogue practitioners armed with only their backpacks of equipment and hoods over their heads. Somewhere in the middle lies such an artist as Faith47: a woman who has her enigmatic roots all over the decrepit and malnourished walls of South Africa. In this paper I will elaborate on the work of Faith47 as she juxtaposes awe-inspiring characters and elegant animalistic creatures with, historical contexts that still ravish South Africa today. I will also document her work as a socialist beneficiary striding to make the world a better place for all through art.

The style of Faith47 has its roots in graffiti, therefore, I believe it is also necessary to discuss how in the early days of this street art movement, in the 1960s and 1970s, the genre was able to gain popularity throughout the United States and Europe. Thus, because of a select few individuals, street art, in particular the graffiti-esque style that has still yet to be properly

¹ Marc Schiller, *Wooster Collective: What The Hell Should We Call It?.... The Initial Responses*. Wooster Collective, 2004.

categorized in the art history canon, did not fall by the wayside and cease to exist, but in contrast flourished, praised by the burgeoning lower-middle classes and urban youth.

The graffiti style of Faith47 and many other street artists of this genre lack a proper label, and while the classifying of contemporary styles are at times unnecessary and trivial, because many artists do not adhere to any overarching style, I think a differentiation from graffiti is needed. This is due in part to how the history of graffiti and its subcultures have been labeled under the sphere of criminal activity. This newly flourishing construct differs however from the malicious “graffiti tags” and “gang signs” that have given the public painting of facades a bad rap. The difference comes down to the removal of the esoteric ideology that encapsulated early graffiti work and writers. Works that I will be discussing throughout this essay belong to the genre of my creation: urban re-facement graffiti.

This new style can be identified by two main components, firstly, its positive engagement with its locale, and the second deals with the legality surrounding the practice of graffiti. Where as graffiti survives until the owner of the façade places a complaint, urban re-facement either deals with walls whose owner has abandoned all responsibility towards maintenance or the artist gains permission to work. These two factors are what separate urban re-facement graffiti and its roots in defacement graffiti. By differentiating between typical graffiti and this newly coined term, the history of art can be constructed to better fit the goals, processes, and artists of this new form of 21st century art.

Faith47 is bridging the gap between art for arts sake and artist as advocate for change. The strictly labeling of Faith47 as one thing or another is an issue I will touch on throughout my discussion. She is neither strictly a street artist, though her roots are in graffiti, the delinquent

child of the genre, nor is she definitively a studio artist, for her work echoes the urban nature of her street art. I will begin this paper by exposing the character of Faith47 as a caretaker of the deprived urbanites through her heartwarming street art, then discuss her studio work which hints at the kind of socialism she executes in open air. I will conclude with a didactic look at the street art she has executed throughout the world, specifically that of her native South Africa, and champion her as an emissary for social justice through art.

Born in 1979 in Cape Town, South Africa to a single mother, Faith47 has been battling against diversity since birth. Raised with her younger sister, Faith47 became aware of the dire situation of Apartheid in South Africa at a very early age while spending countless hours traveling on the over crowded trains to and from school in suburban Cape Town. It was these interactions and experiences she had from these train rides coupled with her free time spent on the streets that formulated her awareness of the troubles had, not only by blacks, but by all South Africans.² These issues shaped her childhood and continue to shape her as a person today and are undeniably present in all of her works.

Molded by the streets, Faith47 has been working to become one of the most prolific street artists attempting to do more than just create beauty where it is void of it. In a field dominated by men, she has embraced her feminism and creates graceful works that embrace not only her roots as a female and a white South African, but identifies herself in the context of her country and the world of art history. For many street artists, their roots lay within the place they display their work. Usually coming from humble/rough beginnings, the style, which is common for this growing culture of street art, comes from graffiti. Growing out of the late 1970s and early 1980s hip-hop, punk rock, and avant-garde culture in New York City and Philadelphia, graffiti was a

² Matthew Jacobs. "Faith47 Interview."

rebellion against the establishment in which the youth took to the streets to express themselves. This outward expression, thwarted by political officials, blossomed against all odds in which a new wave of style emerged. This street style gave way to an entire culture that, once it started to grow, could not be stopped.³

Bound by nothing but locale and means of production, artists are free to express their creative processes and innermost feelings. In a street artist's case, the location and tools are virtually limitless due to the availability and price of their sole equipment: the spray paint canister. With this boundless opportunity, the ability to express one's own creative process burgeoned. Yet, in its early years, due to the high volume of gang related graffiti, known as tagging, graffiti, and street art in general, was given a bad rap. These gangs would crudely though sometimes quite stylistically paint their crew name or symbol upon city walls to mark their territory, market themselves, and sometimes, it seemed, just to simply vandalize.

While there has been "graffiti" for millennia dating back to ancient Rome, Greece, and even Egypt in the pyramids,⁴ street art in its context as an aesthetic contribution socially, politically, and egotistically is a new phenomenon. Just as any new form of expression, graffiti and street art have emerged from a singular form, becoming engulfed in the society and swallowed by the culture that cultivated it. Through this transformation from a declaration of personal enunciation, to the charged justification of the artist in hopes of enlightening the masses, this new phase of art history has a place in history as a catalyst in many revolutionary instances.

³ Roger Gastman, and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. New York: Harper Design, 2010. 5-6.

⁴ "Graffito". Oxford English Dictionary 2. Oxford University Press. 2006.

The general public understood street art as a threat; as vandalism, and any mention of an artistic appreciation was immediately dismissed.⁵ However, in 1979, graffiti artist Lee Quinones and Fab 5 Freddy would begin the change of the art world's view of street art through a gallery exhibition in Rome by art dealer Claudio Bruni.⁶ For many outside of New York and Philadelphia, it was their first encounter with this art form.

As the popularity of graffiti grew, some sympathizers of the genre eventually began to recognize graffiti as a bona fide art form and categorized it under the realm of public art. As a growing art form simultaneously struggling for acceptance within the bureaucratic hierarchy of both the city and art world, these artists continued to fight, just as they had done their entire life, for the right to create outside the normative walls of the artistic establishment, and off the accepted canvas. By using the materials that they did, aerosol paint and wheat pasting, both seen as crude instruments normally reserved for rudimentary painting such as covering up unwanted damage, scratches, or scuffs, and as ephemerally and easily created advertisements, the technique itself brought upon scrutiny, even before any subject matter was established.⁷

The same temperament felt towards this new form of artistic expression is not alone in the history of art. Much like the photograph, which was first understood as nothing but a product of a tool and an assistance to science with no place in the art world, street art and graffiti were excluded from the mainstream accepted hierarchy of art. Yet thanks to the early exhibitions by Bruni and the more recent *Art In the Streets* Exhibition that took place in 2011 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, the graffiti and street art movements are finally gaining

⁵ Ibid. 7-8.

⁶ Eric Felisbret and Luke Felisbret. *Graffiti New York*. New York: Abrams, 2009. 298.

⁷ Ibid. 300.

recognition.⁸ As more and more individuals practiced this art form, it became clear that this happening stood for something more than the skillful use of an aerosol spray paint can. It represented the ideal of giving back the ability of expression to the populace, and in a way that was not detrimental to society.

The first major U.S. museum survey of graffiti and street art, curated by LA MOCA Director Jeffrey Deitch and Associate Curators Roger Gastman and Aaron Rose, the exhibition traced the development of graffiti and street art from the 1970s to the global movement it has become today. The exhibition concentrated on key cities such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, and Sao Paulo, where unique visual languages and attitudes have evolved. The exhibition featured paintings, mixed media sculptures, and interactive installations by 50 of the most dynamic artists and emphasized Los Angeles's role in the evolution of graffiti and street art.⁹

While a concentration on South African street art was absent from this critical exhibition, it is indeed a key locale in the narrative of this art movement. Just as ghettos throughout the United States became home to graffiti artists, the deprived townships and cities of South Africa became spheres for activism. Street Art in South Africa has a tumultuous history aligned with the apartheid regime that dominated all of society. Yet while the white minority National Party, who was responsible for apartheid, controlled nearly every aspect of the country there was still one part that could not be taken away from the populace, their voice. This voice, the voice of the downtrodden, is the essential element in the practice of street art, and particularly graffiti, the root of many street artists such as Faith47.

⁸ Jeffrey Deitch, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose. *Art in the Streets*. New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli, 2011.

⁹ Ibid.

In the 1980s, such public displays in New York City fueled an entitlement of color and expression where freedom on the streets was being obstructed by cultural norms, a repressive government, and a prejudice economy. In South Africa, the ideals of those who were being repressed were in a much more clamorous situation. The political situation in the United States fails in comparison to that of the apartheid regime. Just as the history of slavery and discriminative nature of the United States left the African American society scarred, so too did apartheid. But what separates the United States with South Africa is how contemporary apartheid was and its drastic use of public violence and cruelty that dominated the second half of the 20th century. These two locales have parallel histories in dealing with discrimination, and due to the globalization of the later 20th century, the street art movement was prominent in both places.

By taking to the streets as activists, supporters of an equal and colorblind society contributed to this new artistic model and through the capabilities provided by the newly emerging techniques, the ability to express ones hopes and desires multiplied. This synthesis of political and artistic principles allowed the South Africa Poster Movement of the 1980s to successfully and anonymously be the irascible voice of the repressed.¹⁰ However, what differentiated between the South African movement and the United States and European street art movements was that in South Africa, there were a lesser number of stores where aerosol spray cans could be acquired. Therefore, improvisation through collective endeavors of activists allowed art in the streets to be exhibited, even if they were only for a very limited amount of time. Also, while graffiti throughout the world was and still is today a punishable crime, in South Africa it carried with it an increased sentence. This was because during the apartheid regime, any

¹⁰ Judy Seidman. *Red on Black: The Story of the South African Poster Movement*. Johannesburg: STE, 2007. 7-10

public outcry against the government, which the majority of graffiti was, was deemed a political crime. Therefore the graffiti culture was a much slower developing one than the in the United States and Europe.

By linking the cultural activism with the growth of community art centers, this movement successfully enlightened the streets with revolutionary ideals in the fight against apartheid through the production of posters. Arguably, this movement and the process of exhibiting their thoughts throughout the city, was a precursor to the street art of today. The posters themselves had a graffiti like aesthetic, in which they were created and hung overnight and had only a couple of days, if not hours, of life before being torn down by the Afrikaner nationalists. This ephemeral nature created an even more desperate sensibility and, much like today, street and graffiti artists must work diligently to keep their work on view for an extended period.¹¹

Faith47 is an embodiment of the history of graffiti. Growing up a poor Capetonian she became well informed by the streets and the troubles from which people were suffering. With her background a closely kept secret, it can be assumed, through other known street artist discourses, that Faith47 began tagging and using the city walls as her expressive outlet, for this is what her limited means allowed her. Yet, as she has become recognized and accepted as a practiced and professional artist, the majority of the work she does now is legal and commissioned. In true graffiti artist nature though, Faith47 still holds many things, like her real name, a secret. By hiding behind this veil, she keeps her roots close in hand and embodies graffitiists and recognized street artists alike.

¹¹ Ibid.

For a street artist to successfully represent the destitute locales and deprived aspects of society, one must first and foremost do so in an aesthetically, both visually and idealistically, appealing nature. For if it appears ugly in nature and stimulates negativity rather than positive emotions, then the work will suffer the fate of removal. If so, then the successful street artist cannot offer his or her art to interpretation, critique, and the broad spectrum of audiences which are essential. In comparison to some contemporary artists of today, where abstraction and the concept of theoretical discourse outweighs the visual aspects of art, whom only appeal to and are thus only seen by a small minority, the successful street artist is a stark antithesis.

This in part lies with the most basic facet of street art, the fact that it occupies public space, and not that of the restrictive “white cube” of the gallery or the ivory tower of the museum. By creating work available for all to see free of charge, the intimidation factor circumscribing art institutions are negated. The exclusive nature of today's art world will only lead to a furthering of separation of art and the populace, this is the exact opposite our ever-growing grisaille world needs.

When looking at the street art movement in contrast to the accepted art history canon portrayed throughout textbooks, it differs in the fact that what and where the works of art are portrayed do not follow the typical nature of art. Whereas the most prominent patrons of the arts throughout history have been kings, popes, emperors, wealthy merchants, and the like, street art occupies the complete opposite realm. The former, those all-powerful men of nobility, advocated their art to depict scenes that portrayed their majesty and power of their grand institutions. Yet for street art, the feeble and ordinary are the subjects. In contrast to the modernist notion that Charles Baudelaire praised in the 19th century, which captures the grand nature of one's own time, the street art of today portrays the elements of life left behind in the rat race of life. This is not to

say that street art is bland by any means. Artists such as Faith47 express the humbleness of life in a grand manner that highlights the cracks in society rather than hide them.

Like any artist, Faith47 is inspired and motivated by what she knows and has experienced first hand. As a youth growing up during apartheid and post apartheid, she was interested in juxtaposing the vast difference between official policy and the promises of a better life brought in with the "New South Africa".¹² This post-Apartheid South Africa was brimming with the harsh realities of a nation divided with the lives of most South Africans living on the streets fighting to survive, let alone get ahead. Growing up as an impoverished white, although not quite as underprivileged as a black South African, Faith47 was able to relate to the situation at hand.

This relationship that an artist has with his or her locale and history is especially paramount in South Africa. Faith47's place in the world is one of inclusion, her art, and the subjects she portrays give off the comforting and inspiring aura; an aura that reveals the collective ancestry as a South African. With apartheid and its lingering effects still prominent today, an important aspect that artists from South Africa must deal with is how to deal with this history. Does one ignore it and create art that is separate from the atrocity of the past's politics, or embrace it as a platform for debate through art. For Faith47, it is not enough to settle on one side of this issue. Her work embodies both sides of this guilty struggle as a white artist.

In Faith47's artistic campaign against the political barbarousness that still lingers in the post-apartheid South Africa, she tackles the repressive politics of space used by the nationalist Afrikaners by reclaiming said space. By converting these spaces of deprivation into territories of inclusion and beauty through art, Faith47 reclaims the space for the populace. This function of

¹² Faith47. Faith47.com

art as a way of bridging the cultural gaps of human experience is what I believe makes Faith47 a leader in this new construct. She not only restores the hope for change through her art, she goes a step further and actively mends the wounds still bleeding from apartheid.

The outward struggle of an artist to deal with travesties circumscribing oneself is the purist form of expression possible. For Faith47, her inspiration comes directly from this. In an interview for CIMA Magazine, Faith47 describes how her art has become a form of psychotherapy for herself in dealing with the history of South Africa and global issues of trauma. In speaking on the locales of her earliest work Faith47 says:

I was inspired dramatically from this. The world's chaos and the sea of desperation. The violent crime and ignorance contrasted with the open heartedness of the people. The contradictions were confusing. I felt somehow responsible and helpless. I felt shame for the color of my skin, that's really lame I know, but I think this country twists you up like that.¹³

Channeling her feelings through her art, Faith47 goes on to say how she has gained a clearer view of the world as a whole, an Earth where the true grit and madness rarely make it to the eyes gazing upon the daily paper. In her therapeutic way of expression, Faith47 takes aim at issues that are dismissed and brushed under the apartheid rug. This dysfunctional manner of South Africa, as is still evident from the extreme wealth inequality, is tackled directly and bluntly in the streets where protests for such rights took place.¹⁴

Faith47's Freedom Charter series, done in 2010 in several South African cities with the majority in Johannesburg, encompasses the goal of South Africa's 1955 system to give all South

¹³ "Faith47, Street Art and South Africa's Contradictions." Interview by Bsrat Mezghebe. *CIMA Magazine*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Africans equal rights. The Freedom Charter was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; "The People Shall Govern!"¹⁵ Through the use of fifty thousand volunteers, the ANC went into the townships and rural countryside to collect "freedom demands" from the people of South Africa. Demands such as "Land to be given to all landless people", "Living wages and shorter hours of work", "Free and compulsory education, irrespective of color, race or nationality" were combined into the final charter. However, the Freedom Charter and the ANC were denounced as treason, which led to the inevitable arrest of 156 activists including Nelson Mandela.¹⁶

With each work focusing on a different principal, Faith47 breathes new light into these so called "promises" made by the government that were abandoned during the reign of the apartheid regime. *The People Shall Share In The Country's Wealth, 2010*, is an example of the fine styled calligraphy present in not only Faith47's 'Freedom Charter' series, but in her overall oeuvre as well. The elegant typography, grand scale, and recognizable motif represent the similarities between the graffiti tags, which consists mostly of letters and words, and urban re-facement graffiti.

After Mandela's release from jail and the ANC regained power in the country, the Freedom Charter was revitalized. However, these guarantees made by Mandela's post-apartheid government are still haunting the townships and lurking in the shadows of those who received the benefit of being fair skinned. Through the placement of these articles on the walls that still

¹⁵ "Our World, the African Continent and Our Country." *African National Congress*, Web. 26 May 2013.

¹⁶ African National Congress. "The Freedom Charter." www.ANC.org.za

brandish the signs of decrepitude, Faith47 brings the still active battle for equality to the forefront of society. By going back in history, Faith47 brings the past back to life and by doing so, places herself and the viewers into an enlightened sense of understanding of the issues still at hand.

For the typical black individual during the apartheid era, the daily struggle had its roots in the ability to sustain oneself and family. For many blacks, unemployment was a day to day endeavor in which luck played a large part in determining if one could feed their family or not. For photographer and Faith47's friend Alexia Webster, the documentation of the daily struggle became her way of enlightening those to the pains of waiting. Webster's series "Waiting for Work", humanizes the individuals who for the most part were passed by and ignored on the side of the road, unless some type of manual or trivial work needed done. Faith47 takes inspiration from this series and uses wheat pasting¹⁷ to depict several iterations of different individuals waiting in her series: *The Long Wait*. Through the depiction of real subjects in gray scale, Faith47 shows the somber mood and disparity of those who wished for nothing but steady job, regardless of what kind of work. Placed throughout populated urban locales, these posters remind the passersby that not too long ago, the streets were crowded with people in dire need of work. A quote from her interview with the 21 Icons Global Project, celebrating the people who shape the 21st century, sums up the reality of this work and what it represents,

Miners are waiting for justice. Workers are waiting for a living wage. People are waiting for service delivery. Refugees are waiting for assistance. Men are waiting for jobs. We are all waiting for an honest politician. So many people are waiting for others to do things first. To take the blame. To do things for them. To take the fall. To build the country. To

¹⁷ Wheat paste is a liquid adhesive made from wheat flour or starch and water. It is a common tool used by street artists to adhere paper posters and notices to walls.

admit defeat. There has been so much waiting in this country that much time has been lost.¹⁸

This sense of loss, whether of time, opportunity, rights, or even life, resonates throughout Faith47's work. In *Land and Liberty*, executed in Cape Town in 2010, a loss of the right of shelter is demonstrated through the depiction of a woman protester with her child strapped to her back. Known as backyarders because of their forced residency on the backyards of houses and businesses, men, women, and children protest and demand for suitable housing that was promised in the Freedom Charter. Using her colorful style along with the monumental scale, Faith47 sympathizes with these unfortunate citizens and brings them into the public view and out of their backyard shacks.

As a woman working in a field dominated by men, Faith47 exemplifies the grace and charm of a woman's touch. Looking for a representation that embodies the zealous and strong woman figure that Faith47 is herself, the artist looks at none other than the biblical figure of Mary. In *London You Beast*, executed in London in 2013, Faith47 depicts both the caring nature and tenacious power of the female. As a monumental work on the exterior of a decaying housing complex, *London You Beast* shows a nurturing Mary figure holding a swan that appears to be marred. Yet this towering figure is able to bring comfort and peace to this struggling beast, where it might have been discarded and left to die. This swan, and the use of animals throughout Faith47's work, is a personification and juxtaposition of the conflicts that ravage both man and beast alike.

¹⁸ "Faith47, Street Artist." Interview by Allon Persson. *21 Icons Project*. Faith47, 9 Aug. 2011.

This tenderhearted womanly figure comes up in many of Faith47's work, in the form of Mary as well as the blind woman of justice who cares for those wrongly accused. A part of her Freedom Charter series, *All Shall Be Equal Before the Law*, completed in Cape Town in 2010, is an example of such a figure. The Freedom Charter series is a prime example of the amalgamation of beauty and the social enlightenment of issues that street art should tackle.

In her more recent work, a preoccupation with the natural world and the disappearance of such magnificent wonders once prominent on the earth, becomes more pronounced. A human connection to animals and nature, the reflection of ourselves within the world around us and how humanity can learn from the nature is also reflected by the introduction of images of nature into urban environments.

The Taming of the Beasts, 2011, created in Shanghai, uses the depiction of the spectacular white rhinoceros in juxtaposition with a decaying urban environment to represent the destructive nature of the growing population and urbanization. With a large portion of the responsibility of the rhinoceros as endangered lying in the hands of the Chinese due to their rhinoceros horn, bone, and meat market, Faith47 chose Shanghai and this decrepit spot in particular, because of its shared doomed nature with the beast.

With the fall of communism in China, and Shanghai in general, the old communist houses that had communal kitchens and bathrooms are being torn down and replaced by high-rise apartments. This replacement of the old and installment of the new, demonstrates the status quo of modern society. Those who are being left behind and refuse to move out are called 'nail

families'.¹⁹ These people are stuck in terrible, dangerous, and unsanitary living conditions, just as those living on the streets of South Africa. By taking an aspect of issues arising in Asia and juxtaposing it with an African problem, Faith47 sheds light on matters that threaten innocent and helpless beings. Faith47 stated in an interview with Mail & Guardian (an African online news source):

It is so rotten; it is really bad. The government knocks down the infrastructure around them and just leaves them to move out in their own time. I assume it's some kind of tactic to get them to move. The fact that they are becoming extinct resonates with the plight of the rhinos that are also being lost due to expanding civilization.²⁰

With the interactions between passers by and the work being an important factor to street and graffiti artists alike, Faith47 has successfully created an effect that undermines and exemplifies all of the parties involved with *Taming of the Beasts*. This effect of wonder, confusion, and awe that Faith47 embodies in most of her work has been successful on and off the streets.

The urban environment in which she operates influences Faith47's studio work, although they are viewed in an entirely different context to her street art. Surfaces are often created from found material, old doors, sign boards, window shutters, and then worked into using combinations of oil paint, spray paint, graphite and collage. In *Horridas Nostrae Mentis Purga Tenebras*, 2012, which is Latin for: "Amid the darkness our minds are purged", Faith47 takes a damaged and pre-written on wooden panel and incorporates her holy saint with a light glowing

¹⁹ Matthew Krouse. "Streets Ahead in the Realm of Public Art." *The M&G Online*. Mail & Guardian Africa, 26 Oct. 2012.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

through her crossed hands. This shining light represents not only Faith47's success and her rise from turmoil, but the ideology that beauty can come from that which is regarded as refuse.

Her signature style is clearly recognizable from her street work. Other elements are often referenced from material that she has procured, seen and collected from the street and then replicates it. Examples include phrases and drawings created by people on the streets, under bridges and on the walls of abandoned buildings, newspaper cuttings and signs at bus stations.²¹ The technique of using found objects is commonplace for such artists who don't have the privilege, means or the desire to work on canvas, and while it is popular in Africa, it is not a specifically African artistic ideal.

Although Faith47s studio work is shown in gallery spaces, as opposed to existing on the streets, she has retained the heart of her street work and the grit of the inner city has been incorporated into the work. Faith47's "Fragments of a Burnt History" exhibition was her first solo exhibition and was held in Johannesburg. The work is drawn from the artist's experience of her own country, particularly the city of Johannesburg. While the work is not a direct interpretation of the city, her experience of Johannesburg as a representative African city is revealed with the energetic transformation and endless possibility, as well as the evidence of the harsh realities of day-to-day life.²² This exhibition in relation to Faith47's oeuvre can be seen as a retrospective of issues she wants to address in her art. By bringing together motifs that have been placed all around the world, "Fragments of a Burnt History" is a testimony to Faith47's history and inspiration. Through the exhibition, she designates that the conflicts she deals with

²¹ Andy Davis. "Faith47 | We Close Our Eyes to Stay Blind." *Mahala RSS*. 21 Nov. 2012.

²² Jacqueline Nurse. "Exhibition: Faith 47, Fragments of a Burnt History." *David Krut Publications*. David Krut Gallery, 5 Sept. 2012.

are global in nature and just as she works in all corners of the world, so too are there problems everywhere.

An artist endowed with such a talent and heart as Faith47, uses her abilities as part of a greater goal than an aesthetic expression of herself. This facet of social change through art is the next wave of responsibility for the successful artist. As I have mentioned earlier, Faith47 tackles many issues in her art that pertain to the injustices happening around the world, but she goes a step further in her most recent project. Entitled #ANOTHERLIGHTUP, Faith47 has teamed up with Design Indaba and Thingking, to create a mural that seeks to create a community level change through the duality of art-based social impact. The mural, entitled *The Harvest*, is an image that represents the nurturing feminine spirit that Faith47 has become famous for incorporating into her murals. This African Madonna, a life-giving symbol of fertility and abundance expresses the kind of love the area desperately needs. The background is subtly adorned with the sacred geometry of the triangle and the “Flower of Life”, which gives shape to a golden tapestry radiating from the Madonna’s center. It is with tender eyes that she “watches over the city, with her palm open as if to ask, surrender, challenge, give, calm, request or quietly symbolize her intention of peace.”²³

The aim of the project is to fund the installation of a street light system in one of Cape Town's more dangerous neighborhoods, Monwabisi Park, Khayelitsha. The multi-story artwork has a visual feedback loop: the wall lights up at night each time enough money is raised for one new light to be installed on the 700 meter pathway in Monwabisi Park. For the people of Monwabisi Park, their only access to free, clean water is from public municipal water taps. The 'emtonjenis' (public tap spaces) have thus become communal gathering areas, however, these

²³ Design Indaba. #ANOTHERLIGHTUP. Anotherlightup.com

spaces and the pathways leading to them have become a target for crime, as they are not lit up at night.²⁴ In informal settlements there is a direct correlation between light and safety. Installing lights is one practical move towards creating a safer space for the local residents of Monwabisi Park. The intricate lighting pattern is an artistic endeavor that also serves as a reminder that there are communities in the world that lack the luxury of light, which is a major public safety concern.²⁵

Founded in 1994, Design Indaba is a multidisciplinary platform that champions the notion that a better world is possible through creativity. Aside from its international creative festival and media channels, Design Indaba also supports initiatives designed to have a socioeconomic impact on real people's lives, through the not-for-profit Design Indaba Trust. Thingking is a design consultancy geared towards electronic integration and the realizing of projects loosely based on experiences with a particular interest in community.²⁶ Initiated by Indaba Design, Faith47 was selected as lead artist for the project as she is known throughout South Africa and specifically Cape Town from her Freedom Charter Series done in 2010.

The organization VPUU (Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading) is providing the light installation services. A crowd-funded initiative, this project empowers individuals with the potential to be active agents in change. The VPUU, a partnership between the residents of low-income communities, the City of Cape Town, the Western Cape Government, the German Development Bank and local leadership, is supported by the government sector, private business,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

academic institutions, national government and individuals who hope for a better community and world.²⁷

Collaborations such as this are what the world of art needs. I believe that street art is the best place for such beneficial partnerships, for as its name implies, it occupies the street or essentially, art that is open and accessible to all. The receptiveness of street art, free of an admission price, or “donation”, allows those who are in most dire need of the beneficial powers of art to relish in it. Where as most prominently today, commercial advertisements are given an unfair advantage in the fight for the right to occupy public space.

Like most aspects of society, money rules everything, which is why the wealthy corporations control the advertisements plastered throughout the world. It is unfortunate that this is true, for the vast number of blank surfaces deserve so much more in life than to be covered in trivial bids for money. Living in New York City, one becomes used to the constant bombardment of advertisements on billboards, buildings, throughout every aspect of public transportation, the media, and just about anywhere money can buy an empty space. The downfall of such advertisements lies in its goal of persuasion and encouragement of capital gain for the endorser. It is easily understood that the end all be all of commercial advertisements of any kind is the increase in revenue, and while extensive work is done in the design and marketing process to appeal to its intended audience, if it fails this proposal, then money has only exchanged hands with no good to show from it. An exception to this strictly capitalistic venture is the public service advertisements, which are comparable in means of street art. While their goal is informative, these public service advertisements do not entice the viewer quite as well as such styled work as street artists do.

²⁷ Ibid.

By replacing such advertisements with works of art that not only complement the spaces and architecture they occupy, but entice the eye of the passer-by as well, then I believe an overall increase of happiness and well-being shall overcome societies who embrace this order. As is seen from the works of Faith47 in which I have cited, vibrancy of color, elegance of composition, and allure of style when combined with the enlightenment of social inequalities are the main proponents of this art I am championing. Programs such as Faith47's #ANOTHERLIGHTUP project must deepen their influence and affluence if we are to see an Earth of equality and prosperity. While life of a street artist may never become as luxurious as an artist using canvas and sculpture due to its free-to-see nature, a more felicitous and fulfilling one are indeed possible.

Faith47 represents a beacon of hope of a better world for all its inhabitants. A street artist with enigmatic beginnings, she strives to create beauty in locales in desperate need of more than just that; a humanitarian who lives each day with a watchful eye on her surroundings and the effects of a global culture. Her artwork has the ability to cut through even the thickest of differences of viewers to reveal our inner compassion for one another. Whether placed in decaying townships or developed cities, Faith47's art gives us something to look at in awe, something to revel in its magnitude, and something to replenish certain values that are harder and harder to come by, that of faith and love, for each other, and ourselves.

Bibliography

- African National Congress. "The Freedom Charter." *South Africa's National Liberation Movement*. African National Congress, 2 Mar. 2011. Web. 15 May 2014.
- Banksy. *Banksy Wall and Piece*. London: Century, The Random House, 2005. Print.
- Davis, Andy. "Faith47 | We Close Our Eyes to Stay Blind." *Mahala RSS*. N.p., 21 Nov. 2012. Web. 26 May 2013.
- Deitch, Jeffrey, Roger Gastman, and Aaron Rose. *Art in the Streets*. New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli, 2011. Print.
- Design Indaba. "#ANOTHERLIGHTUP." *#ANOTHERLIGHTUP*. Design Indaba, n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.
- Faith47. *Faith47*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 May 2013. <faith47.com>
- "Faith47, Street Art and South Africa's Contradictions." Interview by Bsrat Mezghebe. *CIMA Magazine*. CIMA, Oct. 2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2014. <cimamag.com>.
- "Faith47, Street Artist." Interview by Allon Persson. *21 Icons Project*. Faith47, 9 Aug. 2011. Web. <faith47.com>.
- Felisbret, Eric, and Luke Felisbret. *Graffiti New York*. New York: Abrams, 2009. Print.
- Ganz, Nicholas. *Graffiti Woman: Graffiti and Street Art from Five Continents*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006. Print.
- Gastman, Roger, and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. New York: Harper Design, 2010. Print.
- "Graffito". Oxford English Dictionary 2. Oxford University Press. 2006.
- Jacobs, Matthew. "Faith47 Interview." *Senses Lost*. N.p., 22 Nov. 2012. Web. 26 May 2013.
- Iosifidis, Kiriakos. *Mural Art: Murals on Huge Public Surfaces around the World : From Graffiti to Trompe L'oeil*. Mainaschaff. Germany: Publikat, 2008. Print.
- Krouse, Matthew. "Streets Ahead in the Realm of Public Art." *The M&G Online*. Mail & Guardian Africa, 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 26 May 2013.
- Nurse, Jacqueline. "Exhibition: Faith 47, Fragments of a Burnt History." *David Krut Publications*. David Krut Gallery, 5 Sept. 2012. Web. 26 May 2013.
- "Our World, the African Continent and Our Country." *African National Congress Home Page*, ANC, n.d. Web. 26 May 2013.
- Pybus, Rowan. *Faith 47*. Berlin: From Here to Fame, 2011. Print.

Ruiz, Maximiliano. *Walls & Frames: Fine Art from the Streets*. Berlin: Gestalten, 2011. Print.

Schiller, Marc. "Wooster Collective: What The Hell Should We Call It?.... The Initial Responses." *Wooster Collective*. Wooster Collective, 7 Jan. 2004. Web. 16 Apr. 2014.

Seidman, Judy. *Red on Black: The Story of the South African Poster Movement*. Johannesburg: STE, 2007. Print.