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Os Gemeos and *The Giant of Boston*

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Chapter 1

On August 1st 2012, the Institute of Contemporary Art introduced the work of the twins Otavio and Gusavo Pandolfo, otherwise known as Os Gêmeos. This was the first solo US museum exhibition of the artists, who are possibly the best-known street artists of Brazil, and who have shown their work at Miami Art Basel, the Armory Show, P.S. 1, and the Tate Modern. The display consisted of two murals within the city of Boston, the most notable of the two commonly referred to as *The Giant of Boston*. The 70 foot by 70 foot crouched figure with a hidden face was situated within the local park, the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy (figure 1).¹ In August 2013, news channel Fox 25 broadcast a segment in which passersby called it "Bart Simpson in a Mujahedeen outfit" (figure 2.).¹ The location of the work and its close proximity to a main site of urban transit brought up intimations of terrorism. Immediately visible from Boston's South Station, the mural became a source of debate in the case of public opinion versus artistic expression within the context of the Rose Kennedy Greenway's emerging public art program. As a mural that was physically conceived to be temporary even before any notion of its imagery came into play, the destruction of this site-specific work was inevitable.

In this paper, I discuss temporary public art and its ability to present controversy, drawing on the case of Os Gêmeos's, *The Giant of Boston* and the ability of temporary art to become a mirror for local politics. This project can be seen as an example in which the art institution, in an attempt to bring urban art into a productive and interactive landscape – the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy's aims in this case - were subverted by the actual aims of the artists themselves, who had no such desire to assimilate. The artists' idea of interactivity was unrelated to the commodity status of the work as considered in terms of tourism and attraction by the park in which it was located. This mural was dually tied to advancement of a public development projects as an economic tool to revitalize the park. Paradoxically,

¹ The mural is meant to remain from August 1, 2012-October 2013, dependent on condition. As of May 2013, the fluorescent yellow paint is slightly faded, but the mural has stayed largely intact.

the subversive nature of the artwork in fact served as publicity for the park in which it was located. Although technically it did not commission the work, the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy had both a financial contribution and a vested stake in the work insofar as it sought to emerge as a major player in Boston's public art scene. In the end, the very temporality of the work provided the Greenway with much-needed publicity without consequences sometimes otherwise associated with public art--namely, the displacement and destruction of site-specific work.

Image not available due to copyright

(Figure 1.) The Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy

The Giant of Boston is an interesting case of temporal art: bound up in the history of clandestine street art practices, it was allowed a certain legitimacy afforded to it as present within the status of 'authorized' art. Despite the circumstances surrounding its inception, the work nevertheless offers a look into the possibilities of short-term pieces of 'challenging' large-scale public artwork within the street art movement. Despite the work's rapid appearance and eventual – and intentional – disappearance, *The Giant of Boston* serves as a case study to highlight the manner in which temporary public artworks can have long-lasting effects on the institutions that serve to manage and implement them.

Background and Controversy

Os Gêmeos, was commissioned to paint a large-scale outdoor mural as part of their ICA retrospective. Their work has been popular for its playful, fantastical figures, illustrative quality and intricate details inspired by traditional Brazilian patterns. The *Giant's* clothing for example, is rendered in bright primary tones of red, blue and yellow, which create a startling contrast to the grey and blue Boston skyline. The image is dynamic and appealing in its cartoonish quality. The image evoked in the Greenway Conservancy's website is of a little boy, hiding among the tall buildings surrounding him. Both the surrounding skyscrapers and the architecture of the Intake Structure itself influenced the subject matter of the mural: a giant, yellow-colored character in brightly mismatched clothes who appears to have squeezed himself in between the towering buildings that surround him. However, while easily seen from South Station, it is difficult for emerging riders to gain enough physical distance appreciate the work as located within the landscape of skyscrapers and surrounding buildings. Only one side of the Air Intake Structure is covered, permitting viewers to approach the mural from only one side. Although the mural is arresting visually, the brilliant figure stands separate from its setting: closely surrounded by buildings, the perspective of a giant playing hide and seek would perhaps be the most difficult to obtain for the viewer on foot.

During the construction of the mural, the intricate patterns covering the clothing were the first to be completed. The controversial details of the figure's face covering were only seen during the last stages of painting. The head was simply blocked out in yellow and white, in a helmet-like shape, giving little indication of the final design. The mural depicts a yellow figure crouched low, contorting his body into a small space. Despite the open air surrounding the building, the figure appears boxed in and vulnerable. The figure appears to be wearing a head wrap, through which only the eyes of the face are discernible. The head and lower face are completely covered. A buttonhole in the fabric indicates that the head wrapping is a makeshift covering made from a piece of clothing. The pocket on the right side of the body is in a contrasting checkerboard pattern and secured by one ornate button, which visually

suggests a military patch. A positive interpretation of the mural-- set forth by members of the ICA and the Greenway in the wake of negative press-- is that the figure is a child playing hide and seek.

Image not available due to copyright

(figure 2) Os Gêmeos *The Giant of Boston*. Credit: Fox News

However, the lack of expression hinders this interpretation. The figure is doubtless hiding, but from whom? In the context of Os Gêmeos' other work in Boston, the figure appeared as a possible portrait of a graffiti artist. While the headwrap or facemask is often used to hide the identity of graffiti artist, it plays a dual function in protecting the artist from inhaling spray can fumes. But it was political and militaristic connotations of the headwrap that were controversial. In the breaking Fox News story, its homepage described the mural as "an outfit that could be associated with terrorism."² Fox News also posted a blurred picture of the mural on its Facebook page, inviting viewers to comment. News and arts sites such as the Boston Globe, Salon, the Huffington Post, Juxtapoz, and others soon picked up the discussion as well.

² "Greenway mural interpreted as little boy, terrorist," *Boston Fox 25*, August 6, 2012, <http://www.myfoxboston.com/story/19196024/2012/08/04/controversy-over-mural-on-the-greenway>.

Soon after the controversial Fox News story broke, over two dozen people reportedly wrote to the Boston Arts Commission in regards to the mural. The response was immediate, provoking a reply from the American Civil Liberties

Union who cited “freedom of expression.”³ The ACLU director, Carol Rose, mentioned the 2012 mass shooting of a Sikh temple in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The shooting had occurred the day after the ACLU spoke to the Metro. The same climate of political unease was reflected in former Boston Mayor Thomas Menino’s statement to Fox News.⁴ “We’ve got enough division in our country today. We don’t need somebody out there to divide us and saying that’s a racist thing,” said the mayor.⁵ Both Rose and Menino staunchly insisted that the mural depicted a child in pajamas. Despite these assertions of neutrality, the overt militaristic associations of associations of the headwrap were further augmented by the political connotations of the temple shooting.

The use of a jacket as headwrap in *The Giant of Boston* renders the figure ambiguous. Regardless of whether the jacket was meant to signify a means of protection or aggression, the image possessed connotations of protection from airborne chemicals. Headwraps were commonly used to shield graffiti artists worldwide from toxic paint fumes, as well as from identification by the local police. Moreover, there was little distinction in the media coverage between the more neutral associations of the burqa or niqab or of face wraps used to conceal the identities of insurgent groups. The conflation of what appear to be Middle Eastern bodies with Muslim terrorism is explained by Jasbir Puar in “The Turban is Not a Hat.” Puar describes, “The production of terrorist corporealities, navigating the figures of the

³ “The ACLU supports exercising freedom of expression, and that’s what the artists ‘Os Gêmeos’ have done by getting a permit to create a mural depicting what the curator says is a little boy in pajamas with a shirt on his head,” ACLU of Massachusetts executive director Carol Rose told Metro today.” Morgan Rousseau, “ACLU Responds to Bigoted Comments on Boston Mural,” *Metro* [Boston], August 5, 2012: <http://www.metro.us/boston/news/2012/08/05/updated-aclu-responds-to-bigoted-comments-on-boston-mural/>.

⁴ Menino was Boston’s Mayor during the mural’s exhibition.

⁵ “Mayor Menino weighs in on controversial mural,” *Boston Fox 25*, June 11, 2013, <http://www.myfoxboston.com/story/19221870/2012/08/07/mayor-menino-weighs-in-on-controversial-mural>.

Muslim terrorist, the turbaned Sikh man so often mistaken for him, and the woman in hijab who must be rescued from them.”⁶ *The Giant of Boston* remains in a state of flux between separate bodies: moving without separation from the image of hiding child to threatening insurgent.

At stake in this debate was the multiplicity of suggested political meanings, as surrounding a massive piece of public art that dominated the Boston skyline from the vantage point of the most trafficked point of public transportation in the city. The implied connection was not simply as Rose said, “[made] by people who seem to equate all head coverings with terrorism.”⁷ Public art may acquire different meanings over time- or otherwise during specific times, as seen in the case of New York City’s *Triumph of Civic Virtue*.⁸ As a temporary piece of work, Os Gêmeos’s *The Giant of Boston* was not intended to acquire the multiplicity of new meanings possible for public art in the span of a year.

A Distinctly Brazilian Energy

Os Gêmeos cannot be understood within the same context as street art in the United States. Os Gêmeos’s *Gigantes*, which have been created all over the world, are a product of a participatory movement of urban beautification in Brazil. In 2009, Brazil passed Amendment 706/07, relating to a federal law concerning the defacement of monuments and urban building. As Tristan Manco details in [Graffiti Brasil](#), this amendment allows street art to be created with the permission of the owners. Street art in this case can be seen as collaboration between the artist and the community.⁹ Whether financially or altruistically motivated, these works may be perceived as, even though they are largely temporary, an attempt to realize a more durable type of urban vision. The terms for Brazilian graffiti artists differ

⁶ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 173.

⁷ Rousseau, “ACLU Responds to Bigoted Comments.”

⁸ Originally meant to depict moral government conquering vice and corruption, it became a focal point for time-specific politics throughout the last hundred years, most recently for politician Anthony Weiner. For a more detailed discussion, see Michele Bogart, “The Rise and Demise of Civic Virtue,” in *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, ed. Harriet Senie & Sally Webster, (D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1998), 175-189.

⁹ Although later amendments prohibiting the use of advertising were added in San Paolo.

according to types of locations in terms of city property; locals are permitted to paint over decaying or underused walls, and painting over existing works is discouraged. In these cases, the permission of the government or the building owner or owners allows for larger scale works to be completed in daylight, with resources that would otherwise be unavailable.

While street art is traditionally perceived in the United States as contributing to lowering property values or of gang violence and disruption, Brazilian artists such as Os Gêmeos can be understood as adding to the value of commercial and local properties inexpensively and creatively.¹⁰ These beautifying attempts in Brazil do not exclude the impetus behind traditionally considered street art worldwide- where the tags (signatures of the artists) and the artwork are the same.

Moreover, Os Gêmeos's body of work must also be read in reference to the use of graffiti to express political ideas. Strongly influenced by the graffiti world of New York, Os Gêmeos also draw from the Brazilian political graffiti writers of the 40s and 50s named the pichação (directly translated as 'wall writings'), whose work was meant to counter images of political propaganda. The public condoned nature of collective Brazilian street art differentiates 'art' from the political activity of the pichação that largely disappeared in the 1970s and was revived in the 1980s as largely gang related.¹¹

The recurrent image of a secretive tagger within their work appears incongruous without knowledge of their background. Despite their status in the world of high art and the recent acceptance of graffiti in Brazil, Os Gêmeos' work has always retained outsider elements, often hinting at the subversive nature of street art with images of taggers often caught in the act of creation. Discernibly, *The Giant of Boston* can be visually interpreted as a 'bomber' himself - a graffiti artist who covers his face as protection from paint fumes as well as to evade identification by the authorities.

¹⁰ Or even that of a specific artist. The Let's Color Project, for instance, was an initiative with the Delux paint company who donated 2,000 liters of paint for a community wide project.

¹¹ Tristan Manco, *Graffiti Brasil*, (London: Thames & Hudson Limited, 2005).

The Planning of the Giant:

The circumstances surrounding *The Giant's* approval and implementation can be seen as a case study of transgression and co-option within an emerging institution, aided and abetted by local politics. The Greenway stands as an example of an independent organization attempting to assert itself as an authority on public art. Yet the circumstances surrounding *The Giant's* reception by the Boston public were complicated by the Greenway's haste to push a potentially image-enhancing project forward, demonstrating the difficulties inherent in institutional planning and public perception.

The Greenway is an upscale park that is directly situated between Boston's downtown financial area and South Station, a major public transportation hub. Within the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDot) owns the land on which the park resides. As a nonprofit with federal funding, the Conservancy only manages the park. Subsequently, the Os Gêmeos project was proposed to the Boston Art Commission, by the Greenway, rather than the ICA.¹² The Conservancy's direct connection to the MassDot, which owns the Air Intake Structure where the mural is located, would seem to be a continuation of their existing relationship and speak to the Greenway's suitability in assuming management of the mural. However, in light of ongoing friction within the Greenway and MassDot, the location appeared to be an assertion of the Greenway's ability to obtain notable attractions.

At the time, the Greenway's desire to establish itself as a public institution for temporary art appeared as a bid for public support. The Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, although a nonprofit, is currently provided forty percent of its budget by the state for park upkeep.¹³ All programmatic additions are privately funded. As the Greenway manages the park but does not own its own land, their 2008

¹² The Boston Art Commission (as of 2014) is a five person mayor-appointed group, nominated by Boston cultural institutions who approves all new works of public art, temporary and permanent on city-owned property.

¹³ As of November, 2013, according to the Rose Kennedy Greenway's public financial documents.

temporary lease with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation was set for five years. Since 2011, however, MassDOT has suffered fiscal constraints.¹⁴ Its subsidy agreement with the Greenway, for the fiscal year of 2013 stated that the Greenway would continue to develop a long-term financial plan that “outlines how the amount of operating income derived from the state can be reduced to zero within five years.”¹⁵ This plan was largely driven by an attempt to structure a Business Improvement District with the cooperation of local owners and would also “include other options to generate revenue.”¹⁶ In other words, the Greenway was under pressure to be financially self-sufficient. The mural arrived amid pressure to remove state funding issued by the Department of Transportation parallel with a newly launched five-year public art strategy run by the Greenway, supported by Fund for the Arts, an offshoot of the New England Foundation for the Arts.¹⁷ According to the Greenway’s Visual Manager Katelyn Kirnie, the mural would, “set the Greenway apart for public art as part of a contemporary mission,”¹⁸ that would promote the park as a new and accessible ground for temporary works of art. The Greenway sought to establish itself as a destination for contemporary public art in order to maintain funding for their current programs. In the case of *The Giant of Boston*, the Greenway can be seen as publicly staking the artwork - one of the largest and most ambitious works of public art within Boston in the last few years, created by two highly appealing visual artists - as a frontrunner for the initiation of their new program for public art.

The Institute of Contemporary Art selected the artists for exhibition and partially funded the work, but the Greenway largely assumed administrative responsibility for the mural and its construction,

¹⁴ In 2011, MassDOT was unable to provide fifty percent of the Conservancy’s budget and capital budget. They instead provided ‘in-kind’ support, such as office and operational support. This in-kind support continued through 2013.

¹⁵ Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy’s Subsidy Agreement with MassDOT for Fiscal Year 2013.

¹⁶ Letter to Secretary Richard A. Davey, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, January 26, 2012.

¹⁷ However, the removal of primary state funding has put plans for a BID on hold. Richard Davey, State Department Secretary refused to renew the Greenway’s lease if they did not agree to implement a plan to become financially independent at the end of their new five year lease. With this lack of security, however, local business owners were hesitant to finalize a partnership with the Greenway.

¹⁸ Personal Interview, May 16, 2013.

providing sponsorship for the proposed project to the Boston Art Commission. The proposal for the work was hurried by the Greenway through two separate vetting processes: both the Greenway's own, and the Boston Art Commission.¹⁹ The ICA gave neither agency any idea ahead of time of what the artistic content of the mural would be. The expeditiousness of this process was also most likely due to the Greenway's pressing need for an attraction and to cement their newly launched program for public art. The ICA's curator, Pedro Alonzo had already begun talks with the city when scouting locations. Familiarity with the proposal also helped to accelerate the project, as the exhibition had already been made known to the Boston Art Commission by the ICA. Pedro Alonzo had also previously negotiated the approval for the public artwork in Shepard Fairey's *Supply and Demand* (2009). Curiously, the Conservancy not only partly funded the *Giant* mural but also aided the conditions for its approval. Although technically the Os Gêmeos project was under the guidance of the ICA, it marked the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy's first step in a new public art strategy.

Programs for Street Art:

The ICA's multiple exhibitions of street artists appeared to suggest their mainstream appeal. The ICA also exhibited the work of the street artist and activist Swoon in 2012, as well as the work of graffiti artist Barry McGee. As seen in the case of artists asked to work outside museum walls, attempts to transition graffiti into sanctioned public art would prove more difficult. As Cher Krause Knight describes, graffiti has been traditionally linked with clandestine acts: either as a form of vandalism or a means of political protest. Since the end of the ICA's temporary public art program *Vita Brevis* in 2003, their two most notable (and controversial) public art projects have commissioned street artists - Shepard Fairey and Os Gêmeos.

¹⁹ As well as the Department of Parks and Recreation.

A more thorough examination of the Institute of Contemporary Art's collaborations with street artists only serves to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which public art may become a center-point of time-specific politics on either a local or national level. In 2009, as stated in the ICA's press release for *Supply and Demand* the museum exhibited the "first museum survey of one of the most influential street artists of our time", Shepard Fairey.²⁰ Unlike its displays of McGee and Swoon, the ICA commissioned Fairey and Os Gêmeos to complete works of art outside the museum. During his guest stint as a DJ for the ICA's Experiment Night, Fairey was arrested by the Boston police in 2009, "on two outstanding warrants for property defacement, one for an image pasted on a railroad trestle under the Boston University bridge and one for a work in the city's Allston area. A representative for the Boston Police likened the acts to graffiti."²¹ Prior to the arrest, Fairey's street works legitimized his persona as an alternative artist. At the peak of his artistic success, it was Fairey's own commodity status as an artist that enabled him to be used in local politics.

Fairey's arrest coincided with tensions that had arisen between Mayor Thomas Menino and the Boston Police department on an unrelated matter, resulting in a yearlong wage freeze for the Boston Police.²² Menino, a member of the Boston Art Commission, had welcomed Fairey publicly to Boston, permitting a banner advertising his ICA show to be placed at City Hall as well as one of his temporary works, *Peace Goddess* (2009). The very public arrest, on the night of Fairey's sold out 'Experiment' for the ICA, was on the basis of two works that had been verified as Fairey's and were completed on unauthorized property.²³ Speculation at the time about the possibility that the arrest might be police retaliation against the mayor was unverified. Given these circumstances, when the ICA held its second

²⁰ Shepard Fairey's show, *Supply and Demand*, ran from February 6 to August 16, 2009.

²¹ "Fairey Arrested Outside ICA," *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, September 2, 2009, <http://fr.blouinartinfo.com/features/article/30328-fairey-arrested-outside-ica>.

²² Reportedly forced by the discovery of 25 Boston police officers found living outside of residential city lines.

²³ Fairey was to guest DJ at a dance event called "Experiment Night," which had sold more than 750 tickets. He spent the evening in a lockup in Boston's South End before being bailed out on Saturday morning.

major show of street art, created in collaboration with the City of Boston and featuring art works on municipal property, the ICA was anxious to obtain the proper permits for what was intended to be a project of monumental scale.²⁴ It seemed like all would go well. Mayor Menino was a supporter of both the Fairey and the Os Gêmeos projects, both of which were privately funded. Fairey was funded by clothing brand Levi Strauss and private donors.²⁵ Os Gêmeos was funded by the Deutsche Bank, the Brazilian consulate, and by their two locations: The Rose Kennedy Park Greenway, a notable tourist attraction, and the Revere Hotel who also co-sponsored the Os Gêmeos project.²⁶ Both organizations stood to profit from their support of the project.

The process of the Os Gêmeos mural creation occurred swiftly and largely under the radar. The artists were given the leeway to have presented no information about their planned work; indeed, both the Boston Art Commission and the Greenway Conservancy were willing to indulge them. According to the Greenway's Katelyn Kirnie the lack of prior information about the mural was seen as ostensibly specific to the spontaneous nature of street art, which is often rapidly executed.²⁷ The artists viewed, chose, and developed the mural on the basis of the location two months before beginning work, but did not offer any sketches or descriptions to the ICA or the Greenway. Based upon the constraints of their medium and the largely secretive nature of their process, and purportedly because of the impromptu quality of their work, the Boston Art Commission agreed to review the proposal on basis of past work.

²⁴ Lawrence Harmon at the Boston Globe (one of the reporters who tracked the controversy with Fox 25) mentioned that in his own interview with Jill Medvevow, head of the ICA, she had placed particular emphasis on the ICA's deliberate attempts to ensure that all work was processed through the proper channels. Alonzo, the curator for both Fairey's and Os Gêmeos' show, also worked to publicize the project within the necessary commissions. Personal interview, May 10th, 2013.

²⁵ See the ICA's website for further details: <http://www.icaboston.org/exhibitions/exhibit/fairey/>

²⁶ It is interesting to compare the advent of commercialized graffiti artists in the United States as well as internationally- this was touched upon in the 2007 documentary, *Bomb It*, which also features Os Gêmeos (before the formal legalization of graffiti, there were certain underlying understandings between the artist and the city officials. They were also established artist- as early as 2004; they created a mural for the Olympics in Athens. This is particularly significant in terms of tourism, visibility, and acceptance that come into play within the Giant of Boston).

²⁷ Personal interview, May 16, 2013.

The Brazilian artists had already completed several large-scale public art pieces in conjunction with art institutions, the most notable of which being their participation in the 2008 Tate Modern exhibition *Street Art*. Os Gêmeos had also completed many similar '*Gigantes*' (of a similar type of figure as *The Giant of Boston*) in different countries, as well as on the 2008 Houston Street Wall in New York. Giving the artists the benefit of the doubt, the Boston Art Commission stipulated only that the piece contain no nudity or obscenity. This lack of disclosure also meant that there was no kind of model or image presented for public introduction during this time.²⁸ Moreover, the lack of prior approval also signified a willingness by both the Commission and the Greenway Conservatory to gamble on a much-hoped-for tourist attraction with high artistic credibility.²⁹

Os Gêmeos only stayed in the city for two weeks, but had approved the choice of the Greenway site in communication with ICA Curator Pedro Alonzo ahead of time, viewing it in a brief visit two months prior to installation. The project took nine days in total and was painted by hand. Despite the Greenway's financial difficulties, the costs of the project were ultimately divided evenly between the Greenway and the ICA. The ICA funded the artist's travel, services, and paint. The Greenway used the remainder of private donations that the park had raised for the mural to pay for the building preparations, as the face of the building needed to be wrapped in vinyl and coated twice with a special solvent for later removal. All problem solving was done in advance of the artists' arrival by the Greenway, who also paid for the mechanical lift used by the artists and the final removal.³⁰

²⁸ This omission was not repeated. The following work by artist Matthew Ritchie, also on the Dainty Dot building was announced in the Boston Globe more than a month before installation. The article was accompanied by a model of the projected piece. Geoff Edgers, "Matthew Ritchie Named to do Newest Dewey Square Mural," *Boston Globe*, August 3, 2013: <http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2013/08/02/matthew-ritchie-named-newest-dewey-square-mural/T8i0AdDMQUlyCJL8CiFTSJ/story.html>.

²⁹ The Greenway also made this clear in a presentation of their public art strategy on February 7, 2012, stating that public art, "meets (the) expectation of a world class city."

³⁰ The Greenway also organized a farewell party, which was erroneously reported by the Boston Globe as locally founded. The Boston Globe wrote, "fans of the mural in the pouring rain, hosted a 'Goodbye to the Giant' gathering." The Greenway also provided food vendors and live Brazilian music.

Site and Image:

Arguably, the press's discomfort around the mural could also have been bound up with the speed of its execution. A participatory sense of creation and interactivity with the artists would have contributed to greater public support for the project. The absence of this participation was augmented by the lack of information provided about the work. Information was limited to a small plaque at the foot of the building, and other information online where only a select few, already familiar with the artists, would have sought it out. The ICA's comprehensive exhibition of Os Gêmeos work ended months before the scheduled removal of the mural.

Importantly, this was not a work that was associated simply with the ICA. The Greenway occupies the open stretch of land before the most highly trafficked station of public transit, placed within a park both enclosed by highways and touching on either ends, the North and South Stations of Boston. To a majority of commuters who traveled through South Station, *The Giant of Boston* was fully visible from a distance. The lack of context surrounding the imagery and artists, combined with the mural's startling physical presence underscored the discomposure that this rapidly appearing image evoked. The vivid graphic design of the mural was intended to provoke discussion, and the choosing of the site and building can be seen as an attempt to connect with all viewers, local and visiting.

Os Gêmeos's concurrent mural at the Revere Hotel further demonstrates the politics of visibility at play in the controversy. In the second and significantly smaller mural, viewers approached the work when entering the hotel or crossing the street. The mural could be glimpsed from no more than a block away and engendered no complaints. Similar to the Dewey Square Mural, the Revere Hotel mural also pictures figures with covered faces where two hooded figures braced each other to tag the artists' name on the wall. However, attributes such as a plastic bag filled with spray paint cans (as seen at the Revere), which rendered the figures recognizable as graffiti artists are absent in the Greenway mural.

Defense of the Mural in Public Media:

The mural's controversy did nothing to detract from the aims of the Greenway and the Institute for Contemporary Art. According to Kirnie, "both the art world and the major media came to the defense of the mural very quickly."³¹ As with Richard Serra's sculpture *Tilted Arc*, support from 'high' cultural institutions such as the progressive news website Salon and art blog Hyperallergic raised questions of elitism. Support for the work in the media was structured around art's ability to provoke controversy and evoke emotion. Yet what the supporters of the mural failed to address was the climate of public anxiety that seemed to tie the image to real concerns surrounding the safety of Boston's public facilities. These concerns originally engendered the negative backlash against the mural. The MTA's public transit security systems had undergone multiple rapid upgrades in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The complexity of the artwork and its ability to provoke discussion is, according to Patricia Phillips, a crucial aspect of public art: "Public art does not need to be user-friendly to succeed...Public art's most fruitful strategy is to connect with viewers and participants through compelling, challenging, and palpable images."³²

The ability of art to become a source of critical discourse for a mass audience is perhaps even more possible (and perhaps necessary) with temporary art, in which viewer experience is a crucial part of the artwork's fleeting existence. The passing work may be afforded an extended life in collective memory. Nevertheless, the news coverage of the mural sidestepped a more complex living dialogue between public art and public space; where public space inevitably entails local politics and the social climate of a community. Open discussion of post 9-11 political tensions and fears about Muslim extremism as well as the apparent public concerns about the vulnerability of public transportation to terrorist attacks that came to light after the mural's erection were largely unmentioned by all supporters

³¹ Personal interview, May 16, 2013.

³² Patricia C. Phillips, "Dynamic Exchange: Public art at this time," *Public Art Review* 15, no. 4 (1999): 5.

of the mural, excepting the ACLU. After the Fox News story broke, the ICA's director responded in the *Boston Globe*:

"Art is a language," advises Jill Medvedow, who commissioned and financed the work in her role as director of the Institute of Contemporary Art. She suggests people learn some vocabulary before forming their opinions. Os Gêmeos, she explained, often accessorize their characters in mismatched clothes, whimsical hats, scarves, and colorful hoods. These figures are best appreciated in the context of "a distinctly Brazilian energy."³³

However, the artwork itself was brought into the context of its specific location. For viewers encountering the work, the mural was shaped by the local experiences of the surrounding area who had little or no introduction to the artists outside of the ICA retrospective. Medvedow's statement affirms the mural's status as high art rather than acknowledging its place within the public sphere.

Conclusion

How then should the *Giant of Boston* be understood? Although unintentionally, the piece became a focal point for the discussion of a temporary public art program: the first of this scale since the ICA's short lived *Vita Brevis*. As a work of art *The Giant of Boston* can be read within Os Gêmeos' own history of subversive political influences as bringing to light the shifting consciousness of temporary works to open up new conversations. *The Giant of Boston* highlights the politics, local and national, of a specific point in history. Moreover, it serves as an example of a local institution's attempt to open a new artistic dialogue into the discursive and highly contested arena of city space. Although the circumstances around its conception may have been vague, the *Giant* nonetheless reignited awareness of the land within and around the Dewey Square Park. Ultimately, the piece was successful in drawing attention to the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy's newly launched public art strategy. The initial foray of the Greenway's new public art program urges greater attention to ways in which public art may be

³³ Lawrence Harmon, "Boston Mural Ignites Culture Clash," *Boston Globe*, August 18, 2012, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2012/08/17/boston-mural-ignites-culture-clash/OXWoHiEAAyoF86ygVuRN3J/story.html>.

introduced, founded, and executed. The *Giant* stands as an example thorough which the multiple ways in which temporary art may become an intersection of politics, urban development, and collective experience.

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