



As the economic crisis became deeper and public debate on possible solutions more heated, the walls of some cities in Portugal were once more populated with political paintings and graffiti. Portuguese street art specialist Ricardo Campos explains that public space and the walls in particular have been used by people to communicate with others since remote times because it is cheap and easy. "It is, we can say, the most democratic resource, for it is accessible to all citizens. Citizens that have no voice in conventional media favour the walls especially in times of crisis."

"Wall work" goes from simple sentences with a political or philosophical message, to more elaborate works that may even be considered art. According to Ricardo Campos what is more commonly found on the streets of our cities is graffiti, usually associated with hip-hop culture, which appeared in the seventies in the US and reached Western Europe a few years later. "More recently, we have seen the emergence of the so-called political walls in Portugal, which had been forgotten since the post-revolution period", says Ricardo Campos, referring to the specific phenomenon of wall paintings with messages of social protest. "While during the post-revolutionary period many of the painted walls were part of a political communication strategy by the existing parties (mainly left parties), we notice that nowadays those responsible for these wall paintings are normally isolated citizens, associations or non-formal groups of citizens", he adds.

The most interesting aspect, according to Ricardo Campos is that "nowadays, political wall paintings reappear mainly through the hand of citizens who do not belong to party organizations but who wish to have their voice heard in the public arena, expressing their convictions through the most accessible and democratic resource they have at hand: the street and the walls".

According to the urban art specialist “it is evident that the current economic and political circumstances favour the emergence of this type of phenomena” given that in periods of political and social turmoil “the street is one of the preferred stages for protest”, as we can see through the street demonstrations that take place all over Europe. The walls – which had been partly abandoned as a means of political communication since new methods such as digital media became major vehicles of political communication – are now increasingly being used, since they are an accessible and wide-reaching platform.

Walls are chosen as a means of expression since they are cheap, easy and bureaucracy-free. Furthermore “the impact largely transcends the local scope”, especially through the dissemination of photographs of these paintings on the internet. The relation between wall painting and the digital media is obviously a complimentary one. “Wall paintings are, by definition, ephemeral. They do not last long, since they are not officially protected. But now the digital platforms are a way to perpetuate them, they work as collections of visual memory”.