

Public space, urban art and social inclusion: a Street Art festival in Aix-en-Provence

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About the project initiators

The association “La rue est vers l’art” – literally translated as “The street leads to the art” – is a group created in November 2015 by six young people between 22 and 27 years old. All of us are studying cultural management in a joint master’s degree at Sciences Po and at the Institute of Public Management in Aix-en-Provence. We came from different academic backgrounds and from three different countries, but we were brought together by our shared passion for urban art. After having realized that the opportunities to discover Street Art in Aix were both rare and isolated, we decided to get involved and to set up the project “Légendes Urbaines”.

About the project

Aix-en-Provence is a city of about 140.000 inhabitants located in the South of France, which hosts a **large diversity** of cultures and heritages, but also major social and economic **inequalities**. Sadly, the different groups of population usually stay away from each other: the differences **act as barriers**, instead of being perceived as a source of cultural and social wealth. We saw in Street Art the opportunity to address this issue. As a matter of facts, urban art builds bridges between disciplines and techniques and everyone can find **his own way** to enjoy urban works of art: in a museum or in a street, as witness or as artist. Street Art also carries **strong values** – such as freedom of expression, solidarity and tolerance – that have **universal appeal** across cultures, generations and backgrounds. Willing to make our project be part of a long-term process, we decided to create a Street Art festival, with various actions throughout the year.

“Légendes Urbaines” is a cultural project with social implications. Its major purpose is to offer a **quality cultural program**, which is meant to be **accessible and attractive** to as many people as possible. To this end, the project directly addresses groups of population that are poorly integrated in the cultural life of the city, because of social, economic or geographical reasons. Through Street Art actions, the association plans to build **platforms for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue** among the people of Aix, while fostering the construction of a shared identity.

In the meantime, the project aims at encouraging the **development of the urban scene** in Aix. This city is well known for its rich historical and cultural heritage. Many buildings are classified as historical monuments and the city hosts several major high culture events. Thus, there is little room left for the street culture! While the nearby city of Marseille is a heaven for Street Artists, these **have a hard time finding their place in Aix**. And yet, several cultural players have been making great efforts to implant urban art in the city. They have already been setting up some actions, but their initiatives remain occasional and isolated. The project “Légendes Urbaines” is meant to unite these associative and institutional players, as well as Street Artists, in order to go forward together. We are convinced that the variety of existing Street Art techniques is wide enough to **elaborate an appropriate offer for Aix**, which would respect the identity of the city. By building a solid network of cultural players on the local scale, we will then be able to **broaden our range of action!**

This process of gathering cultural and social structures from the region around our project is **already ongoing**. The **Gallifet Art Center**, which is one of the city’s most prominent institutions for contemporary art, will host several of our actions. This art center is willing to welcome new audiences, and especially young people. It has already hosted different Street Art projects and has been supporting our initiative from the beginning. Then, the association **Ka Divers**, which organizes Street Art shows and workshops in sensitive neighborhoods, has become one of our major partners. In the last few months, we met a large number of **local artists** and **artist collectives**, who showed great interest in our project. We also made a point of involving academic institutions and students, by building relationships with different **students organizations**. Finally, we already contacted several **social centers** and **retirement homes**, which would be glad to organize Street Art activities for their publics with our support.

Our first action, a **conference** on the institutionalization of Street Art, took place in February at the community café “Le 3C” in Aix. We invited Street Art professionals to present their understanding of the current graffiti and street art movements and we showed several **short movies** about Street Artists by Jeanne-Marie Laurent. The audience was mainly composed of local people, who showed great interest in the development of artistic and cultural actions around Street Art in the city, which encouraged us to continue the adventure.

For the forthcoming months, the project “Légendes Urbaines” includes three main types of actions:

- **Creative workshops** will be organized with different groups of population, in order to introduce Street Art to a large amount of people, starting in June 2016. We plan graffiti workshops with students and young people from peripheral neighborhoods, as well as “yarn bombing” workshops with students and seniors working together.
- La rue est vers l’art will also **invest in public space**: On Saturday, October 1st, we will organize an afternoon of Street Art activities, combining creative workshops and live-painting performances. We are negotiating with the public authorities to install works of art in the city center, where they would legally remain for a couple of days or weeks.
- Finally, we plan a **two-days festival** at the Gallifet Art Center. This event will feature *in situ* creations, workshops, performances, projections, conferences and an indoor and outdoor exhibition, which will be presented until the middle of November.

Through all these events, we hope to make people **get together and go beyond preconceived ideas about art**, but also to rethink together major concepts like diversity, tolerance and identity. We believe that Street Art will help the people of Aix to **find their way in** the cultural life of their city.