

Street art around New York has much to say

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.09.15

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A mural by artist Marina Zumi adorns the side of a building in New York City. Sept. 10, 2015. Photo: AP/ Mike Balsamo

NEW YORK — A woman in a head scarf gazes piercingly from a painting on the side of a Brooklyn building. A flock of spray-painted birds breaks free from shackles on a Manhattan building. In Harlem, a giant teal gazelle is shown against a black background, barren trees and a peacock feather.

They are among about a half-dozen murals painted around New York City and Jersey City, New Jersey. Their purpose is to draw attention to journalist Maziar Bahari's campaign for press freedom and educational access in Iran. He spent 118 days in a jail in the repressive country after an appearance on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart."

Bahari, whose story was told in Stewart's film "Rosewater," hopes the street art will attract the attention of diplomats attending the United Nations General Assembly and spark a conversation about human rights. He also has founded a

nonprofit group, Not A Crime, to focus on journalism and education for Iran's largest religious minority, the Baha'i. The group believes in one God and emphasizes that humans are equal and diversity should be cherished.

"When world leaders, different delegates come to New York in September, at least some of them will talk about the situation of the Baha'is in Iran, some of them will talk about the journalists in Iran," Bahari said.

Joke Didn't Go Over Well

Bahari was working for Newsweek magazine in June 2009 when Iran's Revolutionary Guards took him from his mother's home in Tehran on espionage charges. The charges were based on a video of him joking with a "Daily Show" correspondent about being a spy. During four months in Tehran's Evin prison, he was beaten, held in solitary confinement and suffered psychological torture, he said.

After four months, Bahari was released on bail and soon after, left the country. He later was sentenced to more than 13 years in prison on charges including spreading propaganda against Iran, collecting classified documents and insulting the supreme leader.

With more than 30 imprisoned journalists, Iran is second only to China in jailing reporters, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Cases like those of Bahari and Jason Rezaian have turned a spotlight on the issue. Rezaian is a Washington Post reporter held in Evin prison for more than a year on espionage charges.

Let's Get ToTalking

The Brooklyn mural is a likeness of Atena Farghadani, an artist and activist serving a 12-year sentence in Iran. She created a cartoon that criticized a law limiting women's access to birth control. The mural, created by artist Faith47, shows her without a mouth.

Another artist, Ron English, is painting a large, official-looking warning suggesting that photography is not permitted.

Street art is a perfect vehicle for delivering political messages, he said, "Everybody experiences it."

Argentine artist Marina Zumi, who created the Harlem mural, said she hopes the work sparks conversations about social justice.

Free To Express

Parris Douglas was passing by and was drawn to the gazelle Zumi was painting.

"I feel like this is liberating," he said after asking Zumi what prompted the mural.
"It's the fact we're allowed to express how we feel with anyone saying or telling us what we can and can't do."

Quiz

- 1 Which answer choice describes the relationship between two CENTRAL ideas in the article?
- (A) A journalist named Maziar Bahari appeared on "The Daily Show." Later he visited New York again to start a political art campaign.
 - (B) A journalist named Maziar Bahari appeared on "The Daily Show." Then Bahari was arrested and tortured in a prison in Iran.
 - (C) Artists are painting murals in New York City and New Jersey. The purpose of the murals is to raise awareness about repressive conditions in Iran.
 - (D) Artists are painting murals in New York City and New Jersey. Some artists are criticizing laws that restrict access to birth control for women.
- 2 Which of the following details is important to a CENTRAL idea of the article?
- (A) A woman in a head scarf gazes piercingly from a painting on the side of a Brooklyn building.
 - (B) Their purpose is to draw attention to journalist Maziar Bahari's campaign for press freedom and educational access in Iran.
 - (C) Another artist, Ron English, is painting a large, official-looking warning suggesting that photography is not permitted.
 - (D) With more than 30 imprisoned journalists, Iran is second only to China in jailing reporters, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.
- 3 How is the final quote in the section "Free To Express" important to the article?
- (A) The quote defines the concept of street art.
 - (B) The quote provides insight into the mind of a street artist.
 - (C) The quote is an example of the connection between political freedom and street art.
 - (D) The quote is an expression of an individual reaction that shows some people support street art.

- 4 Based on the article, which of the following conclusions can be drawn?
- (A) Bahari views art as a catalyst for change.
 - (B) Bahari is a political street artist in New York City.
 - (C) Bahari's art campaign is capturing the attention of the United Nations.
 - (D) Bahari is passionate about various forms of art.

Answer Key

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