

MURAL PAINTINGS IN LYON (FRANCE)

Maria Manuela Oliveira da Silva¹

(manuelasilva1983@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

This article describes two mural paintings, in the French city of Lyon. These murals were assigned by the City Hall to the company "CitéCréation". "Le Mur des Canuts" (Wall of the Silk Workers) and "la Fresque des Lyonnais" (Famous Lyonnais' Wall) introduce the history of the region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes to local residents and international visitors.

RESUMO

Este artigo descreve dois murais na cidade francesa de Lyon. Estes murais foram confiados pela Câmara Municipal à empresa "CitéCréation". O mural "Le Mur des Canuts" e o mural "Fresque des Lyonnais" expõem a história da região de Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes aos habitantes da cidade e aos visitantes internacionais.

KEYWORDS

Mural Paintings in Lyon | Co-operative Cité Création | Mur des Canuts | Fresque des Lyonnais

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Murais em Lyon | Cooperativa Cité Création | Muro da Seda | Fresco dos Lioneses

¹ Student of French Culture for Business I (Master in Intercultural Studies for Business – 2022|2023), supervised by PhD Professor Ms. Maria João Cameira.

INTRODUCTION

Lyon, capital of the French region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, is known for its famous peculiar gastronomic delicacies and attractive nearby mountainous landscapes. Lyon also offers alternative inspirations in cultural art for visitors who research the city's history, by wandering into the streets' sophisticated essence.

To express this cultural art, the City Hall frequently commissions mural paintings to Lyonnais companies specialized in this field. These murals are spread throughout the city. The "Mur de Canuts" and the "Fresque des Lyonnais" are two examples of artistic visual tourist attractions. These realistic murals, painted on emblematic buildings in the streets of Lyon, as requested by the City Hall to the company "CitéCréation", highlight the city's expertise in cinema, science, politics or gastronomy.

DEFINITION OF MURALS

Defined as a touch to decorate surroundings, contemporaneous murals, as the ones exposed in this article, are graphic paintings brushed in a wall's surface (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023).² This technique uses colours and a thematic treatment, transforming its wall into a three-dimensional design.³

This ancient artwork, firstly displayed in prehistoric caves, is regularly supported, by the City Hall of Lyon. (Atlas Obscura, 2021).

The buildings of Lyon become, therefore, a free-of-charge and open-air museum to illustrate historic moments and personalities of the Region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. (CitéCréation, 2023).

Gérard Collomb, former President of Greater Lyon, once considered this trending painting tool as a beneficial investment to inspiring a community' identity (Direction de la Prospective et du Dialogue Public, 2010).

CITÉ CRÉATION: ENCOURAGING URBAN ART IN LYON

Lyon's passion for mural painting started more than four decades ago, when a group of local students, the upcoming founders of the mural art company "CitéCréation" considered that the Art had become a form or expression largely confined to galleries and museums. These

² Definition of street art provided by Underground Gallery, a Norwegian Urban Art store.

³ Cf. definition in Encyclopaedia Britannica website, 2022, (<https://www.britannica.com/art/mural-painting>).

students, embedded with patience and resistance, have decided to bring fine art to ordinary people through the form of free legally painted murals, as ordered by the City Hall of Lyon.

"Cité Création" is the company responsible for the conception of the murals described in this article. The company is a Lyon-based cooperative, established in the 1980s. "Cité Création" is led by muralist painters, followers of the trompe-l'oeil movement, popular in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴

The company's staff, composed by its own designers, architects and painters, enjoy a direct approach to urban storytelling, by creating unique murals in association with the cultural identity of the city where the mural is staged, as a means of social inclusion and innovation. As Lyon's citizens will live daily with the murals, residents are always engaged in its artistic planning - Cité Création's mural project models keep its progress thanks to the locals' collective memory. Companies such as "Electricité de France" and the "Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français" or personalities, as the Gastronomy Chef Paul Bocuse, have already trusted "Cité Création" to visually enhance their buildings.⁵

"Cité Création" is an awarded (2019) "socially useful company", as its projects aim to attract real estate, business and visitors. The company has achieved international commendation, as it already produced murals outside of France, namely, the *Barcelona Balconies*, required by former Mayor of Barcelona Pasqual Margall. This mural can be found near the *Sagrada Familia*, in Barcelona, Spain. (The New York Times, 1995).

"Cité Création"'s emblematic murals, subject of this article, "Le Mur des Canuts" and "La Fresque des Lyonnais", already originated a tour regarding touristic painted walls. Both paintings are regularly updated corresponding to yearly events, as community eventually changes demographically.

⁴ "Trompe l'oeil" is defined as to deceive the viewer concerning the material reality of the object, meaning, the viewer thinks that a painting is a 3D object. Cf. definition in Encyclopaedia Britannica website, 2022, (<https://www.britannica.com/art/trompe-loeil>).

⁵ "Cité Création" has a list regarding the mural paintings and clients (section: "quarante ans d'expérience": <https://citecreation.fr/40-ans-dexperience/>).

"LE MUR DES CANUTS": WALL OF THE SILK WORKERS



Image 1: The "Mur des Canuts" | Source: "Cité Création" website:
<https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-canuts-lyon-france/>

"Le mur des Canuts", designed in 1987 by "Cité Création", has 1.200 m² and is located at the *Boulevard des Canuts*, Croix-Rousse, in Lyon. Before being embellished by "Cité Création", this wall used to be a display for advertising panels.

This mural has portrait transformations from 1997, 2002 and 2013 modifications, as the panel frequently considers the transformations of the district, embodied by a living neighborhood: people characterized in the painting will similarly age in each painting renovation as they do in real life. This wall symbolizes the Croix-Rousse district of the "Canuts", workers employed in the silk workshops, located in Lyon, in the 19th century. Nods to Lyon's culture are present, such as the *Théâtre de Guignol* and the *velo'v*, Lyon's self-service bicycles. A distinctive central staircase shows the hill between the high buildings of the district and provides a spectacular impression of depth. In 2013, "Cité Création" adds a green wall to represent the existing ecological issues of the region, regarding sustainable economy. The renovations allow the

viewers to experience the previous versions of the mural as they are also depicted in a small section of the building, providing, consequently, a sightseeing of the mural's evolution.⁶

"Cité Création's" first concept - the "Mur des Canuts" - was quickly followed by the "Fresque des Lyonnais".

"LA FRESQUE DES LYONNAIS": FAMOUS LYONNAIS' WALL



Image 2: The "Fresque des Lyonnais" | Source: "Cité Création" website: <https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-lyonnais-lyon-france/>

The 800m² mural, painted on the front of a six-store building, between 1994 and 1995, is nearer the Saône river and the *Place des Terreaux*. This wall painting resembles a theatre and represents thirty historical and contemporary figures, born or resident in Lyon, regardless of social status, gender and field. The "Académie des Sciences, Belles-lettres et Arts de Lyon" is one of the entities responsible for the selection of the people painted.⁷

⁶A detailed description as well as the construction storyline of this mural painting is found in "Cité Création"'s website: <https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-canuts-lyon-france/>

⁷ The previous Mayor of Lyon, Michel Noir, commissioned a mural painting, using the same concept of the *Barcelona Balconies* (1992).

Viewers visit the past as they climb the floors. Each character is identified by its notorious work background⁸: André-Marie Ampère; Laurent Mourguet and Guignol; Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and his “little prince”; Edouard Hériot and Tony Garnier; the Lumière brothers⁹; General Martin and Jean-Baptiste Say; Antoine de Jussieu, Marcel Mérieu and Claude Bernard; Chef Paul Bocuse¹⁰ and Bernard Pivot. As it is not possible to paint all characters in the same wall, the mural painting also has an angle with other characters: the emperor Claude; Pierre Puvis de Chavanne and Jean de Varrazane; Joseph-Marie Jacquard and Philippe de la Salle.

This art design also includes: two unknown commuters; the Lyonnais cork; an artist who paints himself; even an electricity box, from "Électricité de France", has been painted. Two windows, representing the FNAC store, are also drawn in a *trompe-l'oeil* style, allowing the visitor to consult a list of the depicted Lyon's artists.¹¹

Both murals 'sections are extremely detailed. Each mural takes two to nine months to finish.

CONCLUSION

Apart from being known worldwide as the capital of gastronomy and ski resorts, Lyon is also the capital of murals, as there are more than a hundred tall wall tales, retracing the city's history.

The city has seriously taken the art of modern urban wall painting, depicting everyday life so realistically that a viewer can almost walk into this type of art.

The murals depicted in the article were assembled as perspective illusions and social mirrors, tricking the eye in a perfect detailed proportion.

This article shows how art can become both the expression of creativity and the imitation of reality, to create emotion to be shared and interpreted.

⁸ The visitor can easily find the name of each character, floor by floor, thanks to an explanatory list, drawn in the panel.

⁹ The Lumière Brothers also have their own honorary fresco, created by “Cité Création”, called “Mur du Cinéma” (1996), resembling the entrance to a cinema.

¹⁰ To honour Chef Bocuse and his engagement to the Gastronomy of Lyon, “Cité Création” designs two frescos entitled "Rue des Grands Chefs" (1993) and Fresco “Paul Bocuse” (2015).

¹¹ More information of this mural painting is found in “Cité Création”'s website: <https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-lyonnais-lyon-france/>

WEBOGRAPHY REFERENCES

Retrieved from Atlas Obscura (2021). *Look What Happened When Lyon Got a Fresh Coat of Paint*. In <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/lyon-trompe-l-oeil-murals>

Retrieved from Blumberg, N. (s.d.). *Definition of trompe l'oeil (painting)*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* | <https://www.britannica.com/art/trompe-loeil>

Retrieved from Cité Création (s.d.). *40 ans d'expérience*. In <https://citecreation.fr/40-ans-dexperience/>

Retrieved from Cité Création (s.d.). *40 years of original aesthetic creations*. In <https://citecreation.fr/en/40-years-of-original-aesthetic-creations/>

Retrieved from Cité Création (s.d.). *Réalisations*. In <https://citecreation.fr/realisation/>

Retrieved from Direction de la Prospective et du Dialogue Public (2010), *Cité Création à Lyon*. In <https://www.millenaire3.com/Interview/2010/cite-creation-a-lyon>

Retrieved from Encyclopaedia Britannica (s.d.) *Mural definition*. In <https://www.britannica.com/summary/mural-painting>

Retrieved from Gripon, L. and Sangouard, A. (December 2003). *Trompe-l'oeil*. In https://www.trompe-l-oeil.info/Trompeloeil/details.php?image_id=3408

Retrieved from Kuiper, K. (s.d.). *Definition, History and Techniques of Mural Painting*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica* | <https://www.britannica.com/art/mural-painting>

Retrieved from The New York Times. (1995). *A Modern 'Pearl' Inside Old Barcelona*. In <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/10/arts/a-modern-pearl-inside-old-barcelona.html>

Retrieved from Only Lyon. (s.d.). *Lyon, a city of Museums*, In <https://en.lyon-france.com/discover-lyon/culture-and-museums/museums>

Retrieved from Only Lyon. (s.d.). *Murs peints: un incontournable Lyonnais*, In <https://www.lyon-france.com/je-decouvre-lyon/idees-de-balades/murs-peints-un-incontournable-lyonnais>

Retrieved from Only Lyon. (s.d.). *Street Art in Lyon*. (2023). In <https://en.lyon-france.com/what-s-on/bon-plan/street-art-in-lyon>

Retrieved from Underground Gallery. (s.d.). *Definition of Art. In*
https://www.undergroundgallery.no/a/pf_preview?id=5b8d9558-6b09-4b41-ac06-533aa6a229f2

WEBIMAGES REFERENCES

Image 1. Retrieved from Cité Création (s.d.). *Fresque des Canuts. In*
<https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-canuts-lyon-france/>

Image 2. Retrieved from Cité Création (s.d.). *Fresque des Lyonnais. In*
<https://citecreation.fr/realisation/fresque-des-lyonnais-lyon-france/>