

Visual Representation and the De-Racialization of Public Spaces

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Abstract : In 1998 Winston James called for more research on the Caribbean diaspora and this ethnographic study, incorporating participant observation, interviews, and archival research, adds to the scholarship in this area. The research is grounded in the discipline of cultural studies but is cross-disciplinary in nature, engaging anthropology, psychology, and urban planning. This paper centers on community murals and their contribution to a more culturally diverse and representative community. While many museums are in the process of reassessing their collection, acquiring works, and developing programming to be more inclusive, and public art programs are investing millions of dollars in trying to fashion an identity in which all residents can feel included, local artists in neighborhoods in many countries have been using community murals to tell their stories. Community murals serve a historical, political, and social purpose and are an instrumental strategy in creative placemaking projects. Community murals add to the livability of an area. Even though official measurements of livability do not include race, ethnicity, and gender - which are egregious omissions - murals are a way to integrate historically underrepresented people into the wider history of a country. This paper draws attention to a creative placemaking project in the port city of Bristol, England. A city, like many others, with a history of spacializing race and racializing space. For this reason, Bristol's Seven Saints of St. Pauls® Art & Heritage Trail, which memorializes seven Caribbean-born social and political change agents, is examined. The Seven Saints of St. Pauls® Art & Heritage Trail is crucial to the city, as well as the country, in its contribution to the de-racialization of public spaces. Within British art history, with few exceptions, portraits of non-White people who are not depicted in a subordinate role have been absent. The artist of the mural project, Michelle Curtis, has changed this long-lasting racist and hegemonic narrative. By creating seven large-scale portraits of individuals not typically represented visually, the artist has added them into Britain's story. In these murals, however, we see more than just the likeness of a person; we are presented with a visual commentary that reflects each Saint's hybrid identity of being both Black Caribbean and British, as well as their social and political involvement. Additionally, because the mural project is part of a heritage trail, the murals' are therapeutic and contribute to improving the well-being of residents and strengthening their sense of belonging.

Keywords : belonging, murals, placemaking, representation

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