

**WS – GRAFFITI PAINT AND PROTEST – ep2 (BRAZIL) – 26'29" version**

BILLBOARD ep 2                      59" / 29"

**When football's World Cup came to Brazil two years ago, graffiti writers and street artists got angry. Their disapproval burst out of their spray cans.**

**So, how do they feel now, at a time of rising unemployment, political and economic chaos? Do they even CARE about the Rio Olympics?**

**OPTIONAL CLIPS 30"**

**PAULO: Not really. People are not concerned because the focus now is the political scene, you know?**

**NINA: I think people are just doing their own thing, and not really caring so much that the Olympics are happening... (There's quite a lot else going on in Brasil at the moment) – yes! We have a big political situation.**

**JOAO: We have message against the dictatorship, against the brutality of the police, we have message against corruption... there's a lot of commentary going on.**

**I'm Steve Urquhart. Join me in Brazil, for GRAFFITI: PAINT AND PROTEST – here on the BBC World Service, after the News.**

0'00"

NINA: The graffiti artists, they come from many different backgrounds – but the taggers usually come from a more humble background. All they want is to leave their mark in the world – just put their names and say, I'm here, I exist.

*FX SPRAY PAINT*

JOAO: If you see that you don't exist, professionally or socially, if you scream or if you die you won't be noticed... how do you react to it? You want to go and put your name where everyone else sees.

*(MUSIC UP)*

CLARISSA: Most people say, why these guys doing this? Because we can read nothing! But... these guys do this, to show the invisible social problem.

**From the BBC World Service... I'm Steve Urquhart. This is GRAFFITI: PAINT AND PROTEST.**

1'09"

**In Part One, street artists led me through Paris and Barcelona. They showed me bold, colourful murals, that make political and social statements: pro-equality, pro- human rights, anti-capitalism, anti-war... the messages are clear.**

**In Brazil, there is a lot of that kind of street art... in fact, much of it has actually been LEGALISED. But it's nowhere near as widespread as a very different, dangerous, ILLEGAL style of graffiti tagging that's exploded over the past thirty years, across São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. You're not going to see it on TV during the Olympics... but it's part of what we're going to hear about this week.**

JOAO: The first thing that caught my attention was seeing that it wasn't simply like some scribbling on a wall... that actually the letters, they had a harmony, or a lack of harmony, or

they have a composition, or an attitude, or they look almost like the skeleton of cartoons. They took originality seriously.

2'21"

STEVE: It's Thursday evening, and it's just starting to get dark. I'm right in the centre of São Paulo, near Praça de República, and I'm approaching a huge group of loud, very enthusiastic people – there must be about two to three hundred. Most of them are young, they're almost all male, they're standing, drinking, talking, passing notebooks around. At the end of the street I can see about four or five police cars keeping an eye on things... And if I look up – not just in this street, but in pretty much any street in São Paulo – if I look up at the buildings, right up to the top, the buildings are covered. Almost every blank space between the windows – quite often the windows themselves, the doors, the shop signs – they're all painted with thick, black writing. I've no idea what it says... and I'm told that many of the locals don't know what it's meant to say, either. But this group of people here, THEY know exactly what it says... because they wrote most of it.

3'25"

*MUSIC: NOCIVO SHOMON – 'Pixadores'*

NINA: The thing about the tag is where you place it. The more risk it poses to the artist's life, the more street cred you get.

CLARISSA: It's the most high, the most difficult place. Let people imagine – how, how the guy put the tag on that place? This is the magic of pixação!

4'00"

**“Pixação”, or “pixo”, is like an extreme form of graffiti tagging. Those who write it – the pixadores – they climb the outsides of buildings, they pull themselves up by window ledges, floor by floor, then they write their names, and draw their symbols, usually with paint rollers. Sometimes they even dangle themselves upside down from rooftops. It's as risky as it sounds.**

4'27"

NINA: Unfortunately some people actually died trying to do their tags... they either, like, really up high in a viaduct passing over a super busy lane, and they might fall, or in a super high building trying to tag the top of the window of the highest floor... even with the police, if they see someone tagging, they shoot first and ask questions later.

(MUSIC UP)

4'56"

Thursday is when many of São Paulo's five thousand pixadores get together for their weekly meeting. I've been invited by \*João Correia ("zho-ANN ko-HEY-a"), an art dealer who's following the movement.

JOAO CORREIA: Thursday night is like putting your thumb in the pulse of the pixo movement. (Without having to actually climb up a building and hang off it?!) Yeah, yeah! (It's the nearest that we're gonna do!) Yeah! And this is the point where they are planning an attack, they're discussing the way of doing a new letter in a particular font, they're discussing somebody who's new in the movement, or something unfair that the police did... anything that's somehow causing waves, be it political, be it social.

5'44"

\*João introduces me to several pixadores, including a man in a wheelchair, who broke both of his legs after falling from a building... although that doesn't seem to have put him off.

We go to a café across the road, to talk to one of the group's leaders.

*(CRIPTA DJAN IN PORTUGUESE)*

6'14"

"Cripta" Djan Ivson has been a pixador for twenty years. He tells me how he started at the age of 12, growing up in the suburbs of São Paulo, the son of a single mother, learning to defend himself on the street.

STEVE: Can you remember the first time that you did it – what that felt like?

*(CRIPTA DJAN IN PORTUGUESE)*

He says he and a friend were caught painting someone's house, they were chased, dragged to the floor, and had their faces painted as punishment. He says it was humiliating – but that it felt like a baptism, and that it chained him to the pixo movement.

STEVE: Has that happened to you again, that you've been painted after having been caught?

*(CRIPTA DJAN IN PORTUGUESE)*

**“Only a few times”, he says. One thing he’s learned is how to NOT get caught.**

*MUSIC: Sabotage – Respeito*

7'23"

**But lots of pixadores DO get caught. Over in Rio – which has its own, distinct pixo scene – the photojournalist Clarissa Pivetta, tells me she’s seen the authorities do exactly the same thing to her friends.**

CLARISSA: They normally take the spray can and paint all the body of the guy. Take off the clothes... they know it’s very difficult to take the paint off the skin... (Because this is really thick, acrylic paint)... yeah, it’s difficult to remove. (But where would they do that, just right there on the street?... ) Er, the last time I am saying to you, it was here in the centre of the city, on a Sunday afternoon, the securities take the guys and paint them. Lay down, lay down... (MAKES SPRAY SOUND)... it’s terrible, humiliating.

(MUSIC UP)

8'27"

**Why would ANYONE keep doing this kind of graffiti?**

*(CONCEIÇÃO SEIXAS IN PORTUGUESE)*

CONCEIÇÃO: Graffiti, as an artistic expression, comes to fill this gap of this young generation that doesn’t feel represented by the traditional ways how politics works. If you’re not represented by your vote, you could be represented by a scratch, or by pixo, for instance.

**\*Conceição Seixas** (*KON-say-son SAY-shass*) – whose words are translated

**here – teaches at the state university of Rio de Janeiro, where she’s been studying unconventional forms of political protest... which is exactly how she describes pixo. She insists it DOES have a purpose.**

9'20"

(CONCEIÇÃO SEIXAS IN PORTUGUESE)

CONCEIÇÃO: Pixo is the art of poverty that brings to light social segregation, racial issues... and these taggers – usually black young men – go to a rich, wealthy neighbourhood, and they show where they're from, their origins, they're from the outskirts. And the aesthetics of their work, of their expression, is not to be pleasing – it's not beautiful.

9'51"

**Art dealer \*Joao Correia (“zho-ANN ko-HEY-a”) says the message is straightforward: “I’m here. Don’t ignore me.”**

JOAO: The majority of people say – well, it's private property, you have no right to do it. And sometimes they will say, “WELL, I was there BEFORE the private property. I was in a territory in the middle of Sao Paulo, doing my stuff. And then, some private buyer kicked me out... And I'm called the vandal, the violent one? Hold on! I was kicked out of my area! This is like a concrete, physical aggression of kicking me out, and then I come back, I throw some paint on the wall – which comparatively is nothing!

CONCEIÇÃO: The pixo is to fight back. They put their expressions on the walls, that doesn't follow the rules of politics. That's exactly how they express themselves and make a difference.

MUSIC

11'00"

**What difference CAN pixadores make?**

**I meet Marcelo Lins – who's better known on São Paulo's walls as “Xuim”...**

XUIM IN ENGLISH: My pixo is Xuim, 30 years I make pixo here.

**Xuim is one of the pioneers of the pixador movement... he tells me very proudly how he was the first to paint upside down from a rooftop... he's generally considered to be a pixo legend...**

MAN SHOUTING AT XUIM...

**In fact, we keep getting interrupted by fans, who call him “the originator, the icon of pixo”.**

**But now, in his mid-40s – after three decades of writing on buildings – Xuim wants to go into “proper” politics, by standing in local elections.**

*(XUIM IN PORTUGUESE)*

**11'58"**

**He believes people are feeling a lack of politicians who actually represent them... that Brazil needs “politics for the people”, not “politics for politicians”... that because of all the volatility and uncertainty this year, there’s a massive opportunity to change the image of politics, and of pixo.**

STEVE: If you become a politician, can you continue being a pixador?!

*(XUIM IN PORTUGUESE)*

**Xuim says this might be difficult – but thinks he can convince people of the positive benefits of pixo, of graffiti, of all street art.**

STEVE: So you would continue? You would still climb buildings and paint them?!

**He points at his stomach...**

XUIM (in English): Look at that – I can’t! (laughs)

*MUSIC: Tim Maia – Rational Culture ... FX spray paint*

**13'07"**

**There is some historical precedent here.**

**In the 1930s, political candidates wrote their campaign messages all over São Paulo’s walls.**

**Thirty years later, students were spray-painting public buildings with the phrase “Abaixo a Ditadura” – “Down with the dictatorship”.**

**But despite claiming the support of his fellow pixadores, Xuim might struggle to persuade the vast majority of the public. Most people don't seem to "get" pixação, let alone accept it – they see it as ugly, destructive, meaningless vandalism, and certainly not as art. When I take some photos of pixação to go on the BBC World Service website, people look at me disapprovingly, as if to say "what, you AGREE with this?"**

13'58"

*MUSIC: Dorothy Ashby – Canto de Ossanha*

**Street art, however – that's much more appreciated.**

PANMELA: If people see some colours in the wall, they like it, they will support it. They look at it as art. Because here in Brazil we have so much dirt space, so much abandoned space... people are glad that we are covering with light and colours.

**Panmela Castro is one of the few people who's done both. She started out with pixo, but now she paints huge murals of women's faces – to raise awareness of women's rights.**

14'40"

PANMELA: Pixação can be completely different from the murals I do now, but what was moving me was the same thing, was the questions about gender... and about violence... It's to change the way that people see the woman in society.

**For women in Brazil, life can be dangerous. In São Paulo alone, a woman is assaulted every 15 seconds. Laws to protect women have been tightened – but Panmela wants women to feel empowered, to make the laws more effective, and to change the macho culture.**

PANMELA: The macho culture here in Brasil is super high. And the work that we do now is not just to promote the law, because now everybody knows the law, but to show, what are the details, how the woman can make the law happen.

15'39"



## **But CAN graffiti writers and street artists really change anything, practically?**

PAULO: Graffiti, street artists, we will not change the world, but it can change people's minds, and PEOPLE can change the world. I think it's about that.

## **This is Paulo Ito – whose street art is filled with social commentary.**

PAULO: ...so, I grow up in this neighbourhood...

## **As he shows me around Vila Madalena – his neighbourhood in São Paulo – he points out some of the many pieces he's painted here.**

PAULO: ...this one's mine, I was faking the Coca Cola brand with my name...

## **In fact, he's done so many, he can't even remember them all!**

PAULO: This is mine too, I forgot. (I'm looking for your name?) There is no name, I really forgot. (You just forgot to put your name on?) I guess so! (laughs)

*(MUSIC UP)*

**16'45"**

**Some of Paulo's political messages are easy to interpret. On one wall, he's painted a shifty-looking politician, wearing a suit and tie, brushing a huge pile of rubbish underneath a very expensive carpet. Other murals are clearly about poverty, wealth, the environment... but it's his more subtle work that can become the most controversial. One chilling piece suggests how certain people respond to video footage of a terrorist execution.**

**17'16"**

PAULO: The scene is, this family, they are laughing – but it's not about Islamic State, it's about the reaction, and how people are reacting to violence... And a lot of people were writing in the journal page – you are crazy, they're gonna be here, and they're gonna put bombs in Brazil – you know, kind of exaggerated reaction. But in some way, after I explained the painting, some people said – oh, I got it! So, sometimes, not that obvious, but you should do it... maybe it's kind of risk, I don't know. A lot of people don't like what I do, and sometimes people can be violent, but I know what I'm doing and I'm ready, and maybe that's the price, you know?!

18'14"

**Paulo's best known piece was painted days before the 2014 World Cup – it's an image of a crying, starving Brazilian child, with nothing on his dinner plate other than a football. It went viral.**

PAULO: It was in the right moment in the right place, very simple, and people were thinking about this. People were thinking, oh man, Brazil are going to do this Cup, and they don't have really a lot of money. They have poverty.

**The image of the starving boy seemed to chime with a lot of negative feeling in the run up to the World Cup. But what about the Rio Olympics – are people as passionate now?**

19'04"

NINA: During the World Cup we tried so hard, we protested, and the graffiti artists did these amazing protest pieces, and nothing happened – we had the World Cup anyway. So I think they're very discouraged about the Olympics!

**This is Nina \*Chini Gani [KEE-nee GAA-nee]. She runs the Rio Street Art Tour.**

I honestly haven't noticed a lot of pieces criticising the Olympic Games – I think people are just not caring. (There's quite a lot else going on in Brasil at the moment) – yes! We have a big political situation going on.

PROTEST FX

STEVE: Do people care about the Olympics?

PAULO: Not really. We are living this very complex moment... people are not concerned because the focus now is the politic scene, you know?

PROTEST FX

20'04"

**Photojournalist Clarissa Pivetta is worried about what's happening to her city.**

CLARISSA: Everything in the last two years are totally focused on Olympic Games in Rio. The result of this is, the city is a construction site, it's a chaos, for the people living here it's very very difficult.

CONSTRUCTION FX

CLARISSA: I think that you will see on TV the best of the Olympic Games, you know? The best. You will not see the protests, you won't see the people crying because they lost their houses... you will not see the transport problems in the city... you will not see this on TV.

21'06"

**Brazil is now in the grip of its worst recession for 25 years. Unemployment's rising, wages are falling... the president is currently suspended... and of course, there's the rapid spread of the Zika virus.**

(MUSIC UP)

**\*Milo Tchais [MEE-lo CHAISS] is a street artist who's just moved back to São Paulo, after living in London for a few years.**

21'32"

MILO: Brazil is a mess, for find of another world, in the political sense. Even in the communities, the moral issues going on, people are just lost. I don't feel very hopeful. You know, they took a government down, it's not looking good! The corruption is still gonna go on. We can't see anything going on that's going to change things anything that's been going on for 500 years here, and developed into that. Brazil is the way it is since... it's just, it's our history. It's difficult to get away from your old ways, isn't it. So, I don't know... it's difficult to say something about the political scene in Brazil right now.

22'28"

CLARISSA: It's a situation very shamed. Because if you talk with people who really know what's happening here, we don't have another word. It's shame, you know? And things will be very very difficult for us in the next years. This is my expectation for the future right now. But we have to keep the hope.

*MUSIC: Use A Sua Cabeça – Money Mark*

23'02"

STEVE: Here in Rio – right in the heart of the Lapa neighbourhood – there’s loads of pixação and graffiti... a lot of it’s political, supporting the president... some of it’s against the president... this piece simply says “VAI TER LUTA” – “we will fight”. And it’s right in front of a huge mural, maybe fifty metres high, showing five Brazilian athletes, running. So far, this is the only reference I’ve seen to the Olympics, on the walls of Rio.

*(MUSIC UP)*

NINA: For the Olympics we have these really big companies coming to Rio, and actually paying graffiti artists to produce murals for the Olympics. So it’s strange for them to paint this huge building with a graffiti pro-Olympics, and then paint a huge mural criticising the Olympic Games! So it’s like graffiti is being appropriated by these big companies. I’m sad that it’s losing its subversive character. But it’s also good that the artists are making money out of what they like doing and are good at doing, which is art, and graffiti.

**24’21”**

**One of the artists who’s getting paid by Nike to teach children how to paint graffiti, inside their favela in Rio, is Panmela Castro – and she makes no excuses for this.**

PANMELA: I’m giving something for the community. We are going to this Olympic village inside one of the most violent communities in Rio de Janeiro. And this project was so wonderful, that I accept it. And I’m working with the kids inside this Olympic village – not just for the event, but for their life for the next years, you know?

STEVE: And so, I suppose some people will say – but you’re still working with a huge company, so is it really graffiti...?

PANMELA: Yes – it’s special because it’s not just to change all that whole community, all that whole space, but they’ll continue to support for five years...

STEVE: ...so it’s not just for three weeks?

PANMELA: Yeah.

**25’23”**

*(MUSIC IN)*

STEVE: This must divide the community, surely, there must be people who are like – I’m never doing that!

NINA: Especially with the taggers, the pixadores. The taggers are like “oh my God, you’re such a sell out”. But I guess that’s because the taggers, uh...

STEVE: ...the taggers aren't getting invited!

NINA: No – they're not getting invited!

*(MUSIC UP)*

**Not that many taggers, or pixadores, would WANT to be invited!**

25'59"

CLARISSA: The pixação is the only way to put the message clear, in the streets.

*(MUSIC UP)*

CLARISSA: Pixação got the authorities crazy – because it is the best way of protest.

*(MUSIC UP)*

**GRAFFITI: PAINT AND PROTEST was presented and produced by me, Steve Urquhart.**

*(MUSIC UP)*

**It was a Falling Tree production for the BBC World Service.**

*(MUSIC FADES)*

26'53"

NEW SECTION FOR SHORT VERSION, TO REPLACE 7'23"-11'00"

But lots of pixadores DO get caught... and the consequences can be severe.

So why would anyone keep doing this kind of graffiti?

Above all, it's to be seen, to be noticed.

This is a generation that feels unrepresented, pushed aside, invisible... "I'm here – don't ignore me."

There's no question that they're changing the physical landscape... but what about the social and political scene?

I meet Marcelo Lins – who's better known on São Paulo's walls as "Xuim" ...

LINES FOR REVERSION

When I take some photos of pixação to go on the BBC World Service website, people look at me disapprovingly, as if to say "what, you AGREE with this?"

*It was a Falling Tree production for BBC Radio 4.*