

AFK: street-art

*Inscriptions*¹

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Since the early 1980s street-art has emerged as an outsider in the world of art, and a world of art for outsiders, making use of graffiti, paste-up, stencils, painting, and installation as forms. In so far as street-art is painted on public or private property it is illegal; however, in its gentrified version street-artists are hired to decorate walls or other parts of private buildings on commission. Banksy is the most celebrated and known street-artist today, while in Norway the street-artist Dolk (“Dagger”) holds the highest credibility.

Bergen has been a particularly fertile ground for street-artists in this country, with support from prominent politicians and private proprietors and galleries. AFK emerged on the local art-scene with a large-scale decoration at a public transport hub in 2013, and in the national consciousness with a paste-up of a crucified Norwegian Minister of Justice, Sylvi Listhaug, shortly after her resignation.² AFK has later created public work that shows Julian Assange, the imprisoned founder of WikiLeaks, in a prison robe from Abu Ghraib. It was a paste-up placed in Bergen, as well as outside the Westminster Magistrates Court in London in conjunction with Assange’s hearing there last year.

Due to the controversial nature of his art AFK, as many other prominent street-artists, prefers anonymity. In an interview with the magazine *Kunst* (“Art”) he discloses “a simple upbringing,” with visits to the opera, ballet, and art-galleries with his mother and sister.³ Fascinated by the work of Banksy and Dolk, AFK wanted to build further on their forays into “public consciousness.” In the view of AFK, street-art is able to reach audiences that wouldn’t otherwise visit art galleries, and therefore serves as a significant channel

for popular art production. His work has appeared in several European countries.

AFK is known to exhibit significant technical skill in his art, which, combined with high productivity and apt social commentary, has found resonance with large audiences. Many of his works depict vulnerable groups and outcasts, children and refugees, and comment on current topics, such as human trafficking, or the climate crisis.

“In a perfect world I would give expression to the beautiful and pleasant. But we live in a time where truth is perceived as a threat, and the establishment appears as untouchable. When we are deprived of truthful information we feel uncertain in the face of controversial questions. These are the causes of our general social apathy today,” AFK says.

On the following pages we introduce a selection of work by AFK photographed by Øistein Jakobsen and by the artist. The images are reproduced courtesy of the artist and photographer with the CC-BY-NC license.

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²Listhaug has since been reappointed as a Minister of Government, with the no less prestigious oil and energy portfolio.

³Ina Gravem Johansen, “Gatekunstner AFK.” In *Magasinet Kunst*. Forthcoming, January 2020.

AFK made the large-scale “Awakening” on a wall next to a busy thoroughfare in Bergen in 2016. The “piece” became a cherished part of an otherwise unexciting building surface, and when it was finally removed by the National Roads Authority it caused an outcry, culminating in a change in their policy regarding street-art.



“Awakening”: paste-up, Smørstroen, Bergen, Norway; 2016.

During Easter last year this piece by AFK, showing a crucified Norwegian Minister of Justice Sylvi Listhaug, emerged on a wall in Bergen shortly after her resignation. It became a hotly debated image in the national media, not in the least because of its ambiguous message.



“Making a martyr – distraction by polarization”: paste-up, Hans Holmboes gate and Foss-winkelsgate, Bergen, Norway; April (Easter) 2018. Photograph by Øistein Jakobsen.

AFK's image of Julian Assange, dressed in a prison robe from Abu Ghraib and featured at the intersection of a cross appeared on Westminster Magistrates Court, as well as in Australia and in Norway around the time of Assange's hearing in London last year.



“The persecution – lest we forget”: paste-up, Westminster Magistrates Court, London, UK; Adelaide Terrace, Perth, Australia; and Bergen city centre, Norway; 2019.

AFK's work often ventures into the realm of commentary, making surprising connections between familiar images and apt statements in our present condition, such as in this paste-up from 2016.



"In case of emergency, break the system": paste-up, Smørstøen, Bergen, Norway; 2016. Photograph by Øistein Jacobsen.

In “The great migration” AFK exhibits the kind of skill and dexterity he often uses to elucidate complex topics.



“Dreams of greener pastures – the great migration,” mural, Bergen airport, Norway. Photograph by Øistein Jakobsen.