

# Look around you! The city's streetscape is resplendent with graffiti art

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Shanghai, a city known for its eye-catching urban landscape, is undergoing an artistic revolution in wall art and graffiti.

From iconic artworks by renowned artists to hidden gems adorning back alleyways, the streetscape is being turned into a living gallery of urban art.

"Shanghai is a city where from one neighborhood to the next, everything changes," said French graffiti artist Paul Dezio, who started creating street murals in Shanghai in 2007.

"I find a lot of my daily inspiration when I go around and look at color in my environment."

And colorful it has indeed become, thanks to an array of street artists.

In 2017, Italian graffiti artist Millo created a mesmerizing mural called "Twist of Fate" in Yangpu District. The artwork features a black and white cityscape with towering green water lilies in the foreground.

It is meant to symbolize curiosity and the significance of exploring the world, reflecting the city's abundant opportunities for new discoveries.

French artist Julien "Seth" Malland has also left his artistic footprint in multiple local sites, especially in the ruins of old city neighborhoods awaiting demolition.

His artworks feature children playing, making music and embarking on adventures.

In the downtown Jing'an District, Malaysian graffiti artist Kenji Chai's mural entitled "Numen of the Spiritual Homeland" portrays a woman wearing a traditional Chinese *qipao* dress.



A popular graffiti painting about giggling textile ladies at the M50 art hub — IC

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**Jin Jiangbo**

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Shanghai's wall art not only adds beauty to the city but also serves as a powerful medium for expressing grassroots culture, historical symbolism and the evolving urban life of the city, according to Jin Jiangbo, executive dean of Shanghai University's Academy of Fine Arts.

Jin said Shanghai's mural paintings — found in local communities, industrial heritage sites and even under bridges and roads — showcase the culture, history, personal stories and human

emotions that comprise the city's distinctiveness.

Unlike Western murals that often carry strong political messages, Shanghai's murals focus more on celebrating its cultural legacy, Jin noted.

"These murals play a significant role in community enrichment, fostering a sense of belonging, promoting urban renewal and inspiring the younger generation to engage with Shanghai's heritage," Jin told Shanghai Daily.

Jin led a wall-art project along the Pengyuepu River in

downtown Jing'an, which depicts the area's transformation and its impact on the younger generation.

Other districts have also embraced wall art to revive urban memories and express development concepts through artistic symbols.

Wall art has become a medium that aligns with the aspirations of the public," Jin said. "It enables people to observe, experience and appreciate art, boosting cultural exchange and community bonding."

Modern street art movement

officially began in the 1960s in the US city of Philadelphia. In China, the tradition of wall murals dates back centuries.

The most celebrated examples in China are the intricate religious murals created over a thousand years in Buddhist grottoes in Dunhuang and Longmen. The oldest of these treasures date back to the 5th century.

Shanghai's modern wall art has its own unique characteristics. It incorporates elements from traditional comics and cartoons, making it more accessible to the general public, Jin said.

A 600-meter-long wall along Moganshan Road in Putuo District was one of the earliest sites for modern mural art in China. Created in 2005, it became a popular tourist attraction.

However, the wall was demolished in 2020 to make way for the construction of the Tian An 1000 Trees shopping mall. The original wall graffiti art has been preserved in the nearby M50 art hub.

The M50 art district along Suzhou Creek contains 50 buildings that once housed the New China Textile Co, one of the best preserved industrial history sites in downtown Shanghai.

Artists have been invited to create new embellishments to complement the historical ambience of the area.

On a water tower, a local artist Wang Hongyi painted a group of giggling textile workers to express to passers-by the happiness of factory labor.

"Crossroad" depicts an Indian traffic policeman, once a common sight in the city, standing on a street corner.

In another work, a rusty old iron gate is turned into an enamel cup, much like those