

ON THE WALL: FOUR DECADES OF COMMUNITY MURALS IN NEW YORK CITY

From the University Press of Mississippi catalogue...

<https://www.upress.state.ms.us/Books/O/On-the-Wall>

Energizing the visual landscape since 1968, New York City's community murals beautify, educate, protest, celebrate, and often motivate residents to action. Collaborations between artists and neighborhood groups, these painted walls reflect the social, cultural, and political climate of their times.

The results of six years of research and hundreds of interviews, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* brings to light murals that were hitherto "lost" to history or unknown outside their immediate surroundings. Documenting six chronological periods, the book highlights significant murals and introduces the artists and sponsors that created them. In relating the many fascinating stories behind the murals, the authors describe the interactions between artists and residents – including the controversies that have led to the destruction of several notable murals.

Gathering together 150 color images and providing a *muralography* or listing of the 500 outdoor community murals created in New York City since 1968, *On the Wall* offers an aesthetic perspective on the city's community murals in a lively and perceptive history.

ENDORSEMENTS

Art has too often been confined to museum-goers and private collectors and the world of commerce and profit. This book breaks through all barriers, takes us into the streets where people live, walk, play, and brings into our view the public art, the community morals that turn art into a collective and democratic project. Its images are simply wonderful. They breathe life and excitement and inspiration. They keep alive the idea of art by, for, and with the people. I found it a delight on every page.

– Howard Zinn

Author of A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present

Having lived for decades with many of these walls, it was a revelation to see so many others I'd never known. The authors have created a treasure trove of history and information on the vast variety of esthetics and politics reflected in the mural movement. This is art from the collective heart of New York's neighborhoods. The glorious colored reproductions offer models for the next generation of muralists.

– Lucy R. Lippard

Author of The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society

FOREWORD by Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan

New York City has a vibrant, rich history of community murals, as so clearly captured in this book, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City*. Art is powerful. It moves people. It inspires. It unites. It provokes the power elite.

The true power of these murals lies in their local, community impact: to see issues that resonate with real people, the oppressed, the poor, the overworked, the unrepresented. The process, the act of community building and collaboration, the beautification that community murals provide create intangible threads.

Murals are the anodyne to the dominance of advertising, to the juggernaut of commodification, to the din of billboards and digital signage. The public, and to an extreme degree, the people of New York City, are subjected to a constant barrage of slick ads and targeted marketing, when what we need is shared experience, struggle, community, information, and art.

Within these pages, works of art, as colorful and magnificent as they are transient, are immortalized and explained. As gentrification and privatization continue apace, we appreciate the message of the mural. Some murals shown within these pages, though many years old, remain in place, maintained, still a dynamic reflection of the community around them. Others are long gone, covered, painted over, weather-worn, faded. The rich history of community murals in New York City could not be more colorfully or compellingly documented.

What is the future of grassroots, community art in New York City? Affordable housing, community gardens, public health and public education, all vital components of a diverse city, are under attack. Whether this storied metropolis will live up to its history, whether support, vision, talent, and, yes, precious space, is devoted to the creation of community murals in this new, 21st century, has yet to be seen. Hopefully the images and stories within will inspire you, perhaps to join a mural project, or perhaps to pause in your busy day, and spend some time admiring a mural. Perhaps there is a fading mural in your neighborhood, silently echoing some community struggle about which you were unaware. You may be inspired to lend your voice at a community board meeting, or a city council hearing, fighting for arts funding, or to save a community center, or to stave off the next wave of gentrification. Or, you might even find yourself facing a blank wall, with a paintbrush in hand, making a mark in your community.

Amy Goodman is Host and Executive Producer of Democracy Now!, a daily, grassroots, global public TV/radio/internet news hour heard on over 650 stations globally and in the internet at democracynow.org

Denis Moynihan is the Outreach Director for Democracy Now!