

# MARSEILLE L2 WALL MURALS



■ **NUMBER OF SITES:** 12 ALONG THE 9 KM

**IMPACT TO THE CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE:** NONE

**COST OF THE PAINTINGS:** 29 EUR/M<sup>2</sup>

**COST OF CLEANING GRAFFITI TAGS:** 14-28 EUR/M<sup>2</sup>

# URBAN ART IN ASCENDANCE

**Visually stunning artwork now adorns the concrete walls of Marseille's L2 urban motorway, as a result of a unique partnership forged between the project and local communities.**

Partial completion of an urban motorway through Marseille in southern France in the early 1990s, left a substantial expanse of concrete exposed for the city's graffiti artists to apply their signatures to – with varying levels of artistic talent. Now, contractors are busy finishing the L2 motorway and street artists have been given access to work on the walls again, but this time in a more controlled manner.

The work of teams of urban artists is now visible at a number of sites along the 9km length of the L2. A colourful and striking appearance has been added to what would otherwise weather to a dull grey even if it wasn't gradually covered in graffiti tags. Furthermore, some positive relationships have been

formed between the construction project, local artists and community groups.

The initiative is the brainchild of Société de la Rocade L2 de Marseille (SRL2) – the private sector consortium which holds a concession contract with the French Government for the design, construction, financing and operation of the L2 until 2043. The road runs in deep concrete box channels and tunnels over large parts of its journey beneath the eastern side of Marseille, which means a lot of concrete walls. Many of them are **visible to surrounding residential areas**, at junctions with other roads and at tunnel portals where the carriageway dives under the city.

Responsibility for the **maintenance** of the road lies with SRL2, so it faces a hefty bill if it's going to be continuously cleaning graffiti from the L2 walls. But the company's artistic initiative was not motivated purely with money in mind, says SRL2's director general, Inouk Moncorgé.

"Historically the concrete structures of the L2 have been tagged a lot, creating what many would describe

as an unsightly mess. Completion of the motorway through Marseille was going to create more exposed walls, all with the potential for more tagging and its associated social problems," Inouk says.

"A previous initiative had given artists opportunity to work on the side of buildings in the city. So we thought, why not replicate that on the L2 walls, to discourage or even prevent tagging and to forge some positive links with local artists in the community at the same time? That was our start point."

The idea came quite early on at the start of the latest construction project, towards the beginning of 2014. Work on building the subterranean motorway progressed over the following







three years, with a wide variety of different companies and organisations involved. “Whatever we were going to do, it was always going to be in partnership,” Inouk says.

Over the following months the directors of SRL2 built a working relationship for the gestation of the L2 murals project with Planète Émergences, a Marseille based artistic and cultural group. “From there, with the help of Planète Émergences, we started to build political and cultural relationships to make the project happen,” Inouk says.

“We were looking to build links with local communities and we also needed to find the right artistic teams - people that would be able to help us turn this into an **educational project with local schools**. Planète

Émergences suggested Jean Faucheur for connecting with the community of street artists. His role was crucial for that.”

Jean Faucheur is a prominent figure of France’s urban art scene, a founding member of The Brothers Ripoulin collective and Le M.U.R ‘renewable painted wall’ association in Paris. His work has also been exhibited on the streets of New York, but, he says, the task of artistic director for the L2 walls project presented an altogether different experience.

“As an artist, the challenges involved were new to me, as they were to just about everyone involved,” Jean says. “For the people of Marseille, the structures of the unfinished L2 had stood as a ghost and a free ground for graffiti artists for nearly 30 years.



## **BUILDING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Société de la Rocade L2 de Marseille** (SRL2) was formed as a special purpose vehicle for carrying out the L2 project by Meridiam as 35% shareholder, with its partners in the project - the French public sector financial institution CDC (35% shareholder) and the contractors Bouygues (17.5%), Spie Batignolles (7.5%) and Egis (5%).

SRL2 is responsible for the **design, construction, financing and maintenance of the L2 for 30 years up to 2043** under the terms of its concession with the French Government. Meridiam’s contribution to the financing of the €620m project comes from a €10m investment from the Meridiam Infrastructure Europe II fund.

This is a **vital project for transport connectivity and economic and social development in Marseille, France’s 3rd largest city**. It provides a north-south motorway to the east of the city centre. Effectively a new peripheral Rocade ring-road connecting with other radial routes, **the L2 will increase Marseille’s road capacity by 50%**, removing a lot of traffic from central Marseille and opening up large tracts of the urban area to new green space and residential and commercial development. ■

“For me, I discovered the project was partly about orientating the art and artist into the landscape. It was interesting to have such a strong graphic point to bring to life and it was a good experience because of the different people involved, at Planète Émergences and SRL2, but overall it was nearly four years in the making. We had to take it step by step.”

The project developed gradually, in liaison with SRL2’s client, the French Government’s Department for Transportation; and **overseen by a steering committee** including Inouk, Jean and other members of SRL2 and Planète Émergences.

“We all agreed that it was important to recognise the Marseille artists and SRL2 wanted to involve as many different people as possible,” Jean says.

“I approached some I knew from Marseille and others were introduced to us locally, or I called upon from my experience of the Paris and wider national street art scene. Those interested all had to put ideas to the committee for the artwork they wanted to produce. It was Inouk that said we had to be open to what the artists wanted to do.”

The project steering committee

played a central role in selecting the artists from Jean’s suggestions. All were asked to produce examples of their work on individual panels before the committee made its selections. Teams were built to work at **12 different sites** along the length of the L2, led by one or two lead artists and supported by local crews, five to eight strong, to produce murals up to 200m long and over 20m in height in some places.

**The work displayed includes that of local artists**

Philippe Lacoste and Sébastien Martinez – aka Noypys and Veter – and Say, a leading figure of the Marseille-Paris street art collective Crew 132. Plus, among others, there’s L’Outsider (Brittany born Yann Le Berre), Reunion resident Jace, Paris native Seth and the artists Chad, Rish, Heng, Twix, Vega and Milkaone from Marseille’s PM art collective.

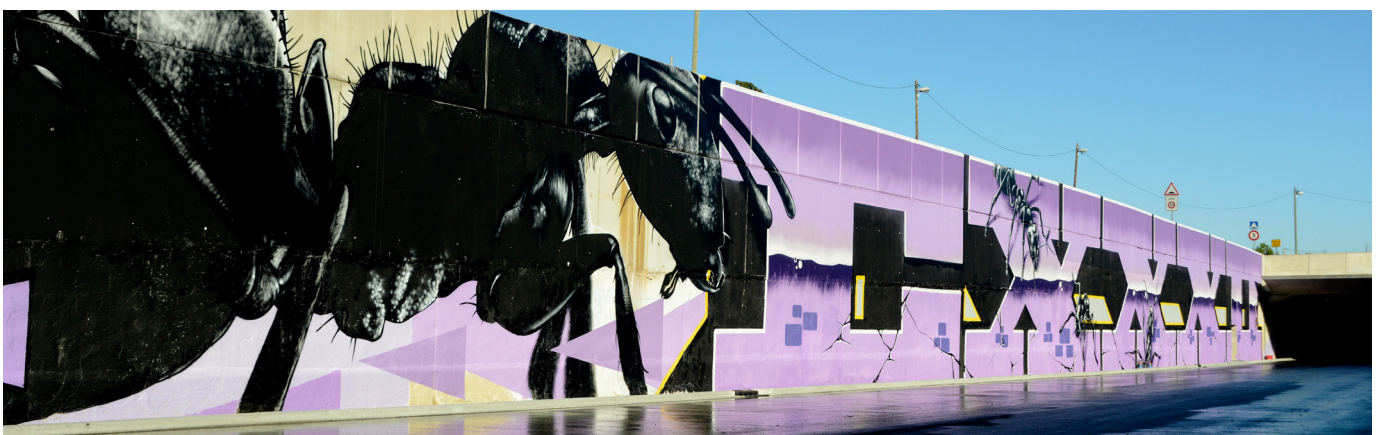
A variety of different styles was deliberately chosen, says Jean. Some had an infantile, comical approach, while others portrayed more serious subjects. YZ and Maksim Lopez, for instance, have ‘illustrated the passing time, life and death with angelic characters representing the transitory nature of life, but also the resurrection and eternal life’. Jace, on the other hand, is more commonly known as the artist behind the

‘gouzous’ characters that can be found on the streets of Paris, Rome, Amsterdam, Lisbon and Tokyo. “Some of the artwork produced on the L2 walls is truly amazing,” Inouk says. “It was produced from very little preparatory design work and after the artists had been selected, their work benefited from minimal direction from us, other than some minor changes requested when we thought too much detail would take too long to finish.”

Now that it’s possible to stand back and view the finished murals, the project can be seen to have helped the new L2 and its many concrete walls to fit into the urban environment. The project’s work in the Marseille community with Planète Émergences has also added substantial social benefits (see last page).

Considerations of cost and potential savings have also come into it. Important contributions from SRL2 were the site safety inductions, supervision and equipment necessary to ensure the artwork was performed safely – much of it applied at height from mobile or fixed access platforms.

**The artists worked for periods of two to six weeks**, within a carefully crafted







schedule so as not to impact the progress of the construction works.

Overall, SRL2's calculations **show a cost of €29/m<sup>2</sup> for each mural painted.** This can be compared with the costs of cleaning graffiti tags from walls – estimated at between €14-28/m<sup>2</sup> per occurrence (under traffic and above 3 meters high). It's likely that wall cleaning would have been needed more than once at numerous locations along the L2, but the murals initiative has not just cut long term costs for SRL2. It has also **improved safety for maintenance crews** by reducing interventions and their exposure to highway traffic hazards.

So far the murals seem to have prevented graffiti tagging altogether, Inouk says. It's unclear how effective they will be over the long term, or how long the murals will last before requiring maintenance or repainting. "But they should remain permanent

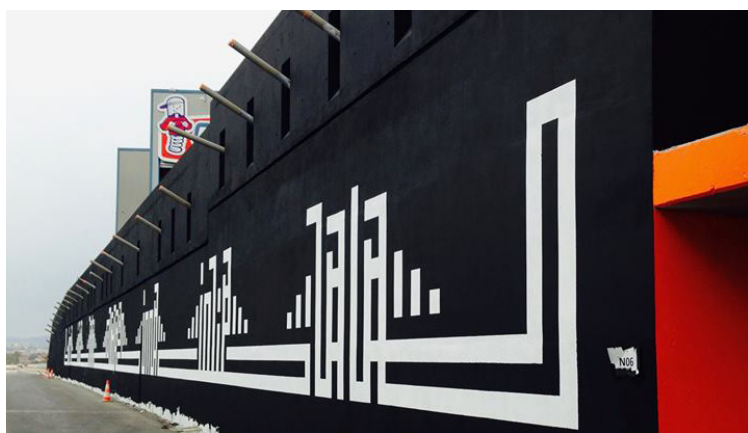
for five to ten years at least," he says in the spirit of what "ephemeral art" is. "We opted for a combination of two types of paint and a primer for durability, which was an important consideration. We also looked into the merits of applying clear coatings over the murals to make cleaning much easier, but found this generally wouldn't provide a significant added benefit for the cost, other than at two particularly vulnerable tunnel portals where the protective material was applied.

"Overall, we invested a considerable sum and substantial effort in making sure the artwork could be done, paying the artists themselves and providing the necessary materials, equipment and oversight. It's likely that the savings will be at least equal if not greater than the costs, but the objectives were principally about **contributing to the acceptance of the construction project and building relationships with the local**

**community;** things that are hard to quantify," says Inouk.

Maintaining a close relationship with Planète Émergences as a non-governmental association was vital for contributing to the urban environment, with local artistic and cultural links and contact with local schools, Inouk adds. Children visiting the site have been taught about the artwork, its connection with local heritage and the construction project as a whole.

Asked how the murals have been received locally, Inouk says: "Everyone has been very positive about the project as a whole." And could it be repeated elsewhere? "Yes if the environment and the time frame are appropriate. Other similar opportunities seem likely – certainly for building links with local artistic groups. There will be other sites with plenty of exposed concrete in a dense urban location, so why not?" ■





## ART FOR EDUCATION'S SAKE

Signature work of artistic teams arising from the L2 murals project has been appearing in a number of notable places along the L2. At the Agora social centre on Rue Busserine, for example, local artists have paid tribute to respected figures of their neighbourhood on the walls leading up to the Agora.

This was one of several **educational and community focused projects** sponsored and carried out in the city under the auspices of the **partnership between Planète Émergences and Société de la Rocade L2**. Artists Kowse, Merzak, Abu were involved, as was the Addap 13 youth support association, leading groups of young people in contributing to a mural reflecting on the cultural history of the Busserine area.

Elsewhere, the 'Outside the Walls' project, has seen the Marseille artists Noyps and Veter apply their work to the facade of the Font-Vert MFA Housing and Family Association building. Other local artists have been getting involved through this community project with SRL2, Planète Émergences and MFA, bringing

together groups of young people from the Busserine and Flamants-Iris neighbourhoods in cleaning and painting the walls of the MFA.

The L2 murals Artist Director, Jean Faucheur, has been instrumental in developing **work with local communities, guiding and inspiring young people** in the process. With the local artist Acet1, Jean led one such project, giving eight young people from the Picon-Busserine and Malpasse areas of Marseille the opportunity to create a unique piece of artwork based on his 2014 Nuit Blanche exhibit in Paris.

The four girls and four boys, all of ages between 16 and 21 and from Marseille's 13th and 14th districts, had no previous artistic experience. But, with additional input from members of Addap 13, they came away with the knowledge that their work would be exhibited at numerous places as it toured the city on a shipping container; and some valuable insight into the work of urban artists of international and local renown. ■



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