

art features

Brazil's OSGEMEOS brings graffiti to Granville Island

Celebrated artists Gustavo and Otavio Pandolfo, aka OSGEMEOS, are painting their largest-ever public mural on Granville Island

by MICHAEL MANN on AUG 20, 2014 at 9:00 AM



STORY



OSGEMEOS's wildly popular street art, which includes this mural in Lisbon, Portugal, will soon grace six Ocean Concrete silos on Vancouver's waterfront.

IF BANKSY AND Shepard Fairey are the Stones and Beatles of street art, then consider OSGEMEOS the Beach Boys, if Brian Wilson were a Brazilian B-boy with an equally gifted identical-twin brother.

In the past year, OSGEMEOS (Portuguese for "THETWINS") has collaborated with Banksy during his wildly popular residency in New York, staged a triumphant homecoming show in São Paulo that drew huge crowds, and painted the 737 that was used to transport the Brazilian national squad during the World Cup.

(It's possible their iconic, smile-inducing, yellow-skinned faces, which adorned the plane, prevented 200 million Brazilians from ripping Seleção to shreds after its loss to Germany.)

Before this banner year, OSGEMEOS showed at the now-shuttered tastemaker gallery Deitch Projects in New York (2005), decorated the monolithic façade of the Tate Modern in London (2008), and

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took up a large chunk of real estate in the biggest retrospective of graffiti ever at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (2011).

Now that they've conquered the art world while somehow maintaining their immense street cred, the next logical career move is to execute their biggest public mural ever—in Vancouver, a city whose most revered piece of public art is the \$97,000 poodle on a pole at Main and East 18th.

Preparation for this massive undertaking, which was organized by the [Vancouver Biennale](#), began with a scouting mission back in December. While here, the 40-year-old brothers, Gustavo and Otavio Pandolfo, noticed a marked difference between Vancouver and their hometown of São Paulo, a topsy-turvy world where outdoor advertising is outlawed, heritage buildings are preserved, and tagging everything in sight is a popular daytime activity on Sundays.

“You don't see many murals or graffiti in the city [of Vancouver]. They really control and really go against it. That's sad. That's really sad,” Otavio, the more talkative of the two, recalls in a home near urban-art epicentre Brentwood Mall, in Burnaby.

“We don't think graffiti is vandalism. We think that the way the government governs the city, this can be vandalism. How they treat the people who pay tax every month, they steal and you don't know what they do with the money. They don't care. This can be vandalism,” he continues, and then adds: “If you don't use the city, the city's going to use you.”

His brother Gustavo is attentive and occasionally chimes in. However, he's also focused on prepping a stencil that will be used on the mural, a 360-degree, 23-metre-high public art project that will spread over the [six Ocean Concrete silos](#) on Granville Island. When it's unveiled on September 7 for the 2014–2016 Biennale, not only will the mural be a beacon for art enthusiasts around the world, it's certain to become the most Instagrammed landmark in Vancouver. (Apologies, gum-covered head of [Douglas Coupland](#). You had a good run.)

While the scope of the project is ambitious, the Pandolfo brothers have had ample time to prepare. Having drawn since they were four, the twins began brandishing spray cans at age nine, after spotting some guys tagging near their home. “When I saw the spray cans, I wanted to draw with them. So the next day our parents bought us spray cans, one for each of us, and we sprayed my parents' whole house,” Otavio says with a grin. “In the '80s, you had to find ways to play. We liked to destroy things and burn things.”

Unfortunate for their family home and, possibly, the one they're staying at in Burnaby, but it's a good thing they got comfortable with the tools of the trade at such an early age: they're going to use 1,400 cans on the silos, a large number of which will be their signature yellow.

“Yellow is a very magic colour, a very strong colour. We believe it can make a lot of change in a good way,” an impassioned Gustavo pipes up. “We believe in our own world,” he elaborates, shamanically. “It is a place that we go after we pass away. All the drawings that we do, most of them come from this place.”

This dreamy otherworld Gustavo speaks of is an idea they developed symbiotically at an early age. In it, downtrodden, colourfully dressed vandals, *gostas*, musicians, children, and other assorted neighbourhood characters are all presented with a playful dignity. It's the sort of work Diego Rivera might have produced if he'd watched *Wild Style* on Repeat during an ayahuasca trip.

Today, their surreal visions are in such great demand that people

come at OSGEMEOS's noncommissioned street work with masonry saws and dreams of selling the slab of concrete at Sotheby's. But the two are quick to point out they don't believe their career is simply some Basquiat-esque rags-to-riches transition to becoming contemporary-art-world darlings.

"Our school is from the streets, but we see our work as more than painting a wall or painting inside a gallery. It's more spiritual for us. We need to find space that we can create our universe, this universe that we believe. That's why we started to work with galleries, because we get the empty space, white space, and could transform all this into the world we believe in sharing with the people," Otavio says. "Spirituality for us is positive vibrations—bring positive things and give positive change. This is one of the important reasons to make art."

With Emily Carr University of Art and Design poised to relocate in 2016, OSGEMEOS and the Vancouver Biennale are ensuring that art will always be an important part of Granville Island. While the two don't have immediate plans to give our city walls any additional gifts, the Biennale is running a crowd-funding campaign on Indiegogo to help offset the costs of the endeavour. (The budget is only about \$28,000 more than the poodle's.) One of the donation perks is a limited-edition lithograph of the finished mural, which is sure to sell out and be much easier to frame than a slab of concrete.

However, if, over the next few weeks, you see a pair of similar-looking fellas with a ladder around Main and 18th, and then hear the unmistakable rattle and hiss of spray cans, don't call the cops. It likely means OSGEMEOS are giving that bloody mutt a much-needed make-over.

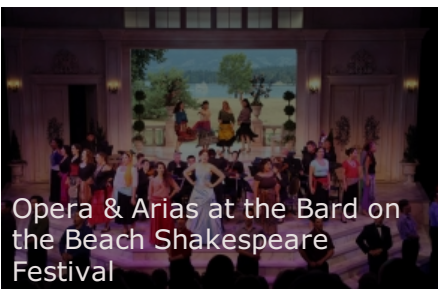
OSGEMEOS's mural is scheduled to be unveiled on September 7 at Ocean Concrete on Granville Island.

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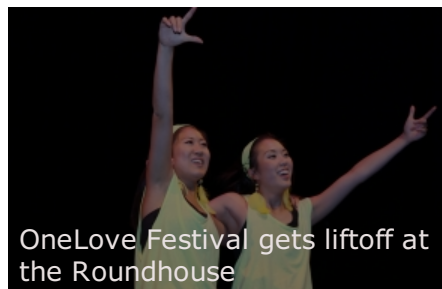


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