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READING COMPREHENSION

Read the following article by Seth Hugel, and then answer the questions.

To the Trained Eye Museum Pieces Lurk Everywhere.

A Out-of-town visitors are excused if they get overwhelmed walking down a busy New York street. There's so much going on that no-one can possibly take it all in.

Natives long ago learned to filter the sensory onslaught: some exclusively people watch (looking for fashion trends, seeking potential mates); or building watch (admiring architecture, envying brownstones), or even nature watch (identifying street trees, counting rats).

A rare tactic, and one well worth trying for the weekend, is to focus exclusively on street art, the un-commissioned, un-commercial forms of expression that pop up on buildings, sidewalks and street signs and go way beyond traditional graffiti.

B Marc Schiller, co-founder of the Wooster Collective Web site, which exhibits photos of some of the best street art in the world, knows most people walk straight past street art until they start looking for it. "Once you give them a doorway", he said, "they literally go crazy in that they start to see New York has a whole other level of creativity that they had no idea existed."

Street art can be drawings on paper that have been wheat-pasted onto the side of a building; images stencilled right onto walls; sculptures screwed onto a stop sign pole; even tiles arranged to form 1980s video game aliens, which the French street artist, Space Invader, put up dozens of during a recent visit to the city. Did you notice? Thought not.

But a well-planned walk with a trained eye through neighbourhoods like Chelsea, SoHo and the lower East Side in Manhattan, and Williamsburg and Dumbo – especially near the waterfront – in Brooklyn can change that.

C First, the eye training. Where to look? On and around doors, on shuttered windows, above your head, near the ground, on poles and street signs and traffic signals and newspaper boxes and scaffolding. In other words, everywhere. But not anywhere: side streets and alleys work best, but street art also has a strong survival instinct in our gentrifying city, clustering on a few buildings where property owners are either more tolerant or lazy.

Also, beware smoke screens: if a wall has been doused by unattractive graffiti, don't look away: you'll miss other subtle art that often lurks around and near and under.

Finally, judging street art is not like judging a coin collection: just about nothing is in mint condition. But that's part of the charm. Pieces are supposed to decay over time, either naturally or sped along by human hands. A years-old image half torn down or covered with other images (often in homage) is part of the experience.

D Street art changes enough that pointing out specific works is dangerous. But a recent visit to the far western end of 21st Street, at 11th Avenue, found several great pieces visible to anyone looking. Two Space Invader mini alien figures lurked on opposite corners, on high and one low; a couple of stories up on a building down the block, some sort of three-headed goose serpent hovered. By the corner, the artist Judith Supine had left a slightly-peeling red-and-green-trimmed female figure, perhaps a virgin of Guadalupe.

Doing a little homework will vastly improve your experience. Several Web sites will help you get to know the most prolific artists, and then you'll be able to spot them on the street. No art history

background required; it's not like distinguishing Cézanne from Matisse, it's more like Michelangelo vs. Roy Liechtenstein.

E The Wooster Collective is a good place to start, but then go to less-filtered, more New York-centric Streetsy.com because you can sort by artists and get to know their styles. You can also load a Google map marked with Brooklyn and Manhattan hotspots (on Streetsy's "About" page). Dedicated students can move on to Flickr, the photo-sharing site, where searches for specific artists yield oodles of examples.

Among the names you'll see again and again these days is Gaia, whose intricate black-and-white line drawings of people and animals are wheat-pasted onto buildings from Chelsea to Bushwick in Brooklyn. He's a bit of an artist-of-the-moment, and prints of his that were for sale at a recent exhibition at Ad Hoc Art in Bushwick sold out. Aside from him, try Elbowtoe, Judith Supine, Faile, Swoon and the robot-obsessed Stickman.

F In an oxymoronic twist, you can now see a lot of street art in galleries. It's a trend that concerns some – "like going to a museum and looking at pictures of food," said Jake Dobkin, who runs the Streetsy.com site. But it's good for your weekend if it starts raining.

One champion of street art is the Jonathon LeVine Gallery in Chelsea. You may have missed their "Streets of Europe" exhibition last December, which featured big names like Blek the Rat, and D*Face, as well as Space Invader. But the 2008 schedule is full of good ones, including the Brazilian star Titi Freak.

In a far less glamorous setting, Ad Hoc Art also has some good names coming up: starting March 21 and lasting a month, they'll have Pink Lady and Aiko. If you make the trek out to Bushwick, and then decide you can't stand street art that's not on the street, take a walk down the block to the corner of Morgan and Grattan: there's relatively untouched work by Gaia next to a Stickman robot superimposed over a "Where's Waldo" page. Or, there was.

Choose the Best Answer a, b, c or d

1) Street art

- a) emerged in New York.
- b) is mainly to be found on Web sites.
- c) is beginning to be found in galleries.
- d) goes hand in hand with graffiti.

2) What is Marc Schiller's approach to street art?

- a) He believes it is well worth investing in.
- b) He wants to open people's eyes to this phenomenon.
- c) He doesn't like it when people walk past it.
- d) He co-founded a Web site dedicated to prolific artists.

3) What does the author say about where to look?

- a) Street art is pretty much everywhere.
- b) Smoke screens are to be avoided.
- c) Even unattractive graffiti should be appreciated.
- d) Ad Hoc Art is an interesting place to begin looking.

4) According to the author, what makes street art so unique?

- a) There are so many examples.
- b) Certain street artists are beginning to sell.
- c) It is very often in an unkempt condition.
- d) It is an art form that is way beyond traditional graffiti.

5) Why does he use the term “oxymoronic twist”?

- a) To point out how different each artist is.
- b) To point out the irony of the gallery setting.
- c) To emphasize the fact that street art is a trend.
- d) To highlight that some people are concerned about the trend.

1) The names of several street artists are given in the article. What comments do you have to make about these names?

2) Explain in your own words why the author says that no art history background is required.

3) Why does Jake Dobkin say *..(It’s)...like going to a museum and looking at pictures of food.*”?

4) Try to explain the following in your own words:

- ...Also, beware smoke screen;

- ...our gentrifying city;

- ...once you give them a doorway...

5) In which part(s) of the text (A – F) are the following mentioned:

- the ways in which street art can deteriorate or disappear (_____)
- the fact that street art is not like mainstream art (_____)
- the basic definition of street art (_____)

- the various activities one can focus on in New York (_____)

COMPOSITION. Write a short composition (ca 200 words) on the following theme:

- In the form of a short article, attempt to convince art collectors about the possible advantages of investing in the work of street artists.