

Graffiti as Protest: Mohamed Mahmoud Street

Introduction: Cairo, Egypt transformed shortly after the Egyptian revolution began on January 25, 2011. Widespread demonstrations called for “bread, freedom, and social justice” and brought an end to President Hosni Mubarak’s almost thirty-year regime. Although Mubarak was removed from power, the revolution continued because not all the demands of the people were met. Graffiti artists flocked to the streets to document the spirit, events, and hardships of this unfinished revolution. A variety of graffiti appeared, including political cartoons that mocked government officials and security forces, the names and faces of people who lost their lives, and slogans such as:

“Wake up, Egypt! The poor are hungry”

“To those who sacrificed their lives for the future of a nation: a salute of glory and pride to the Martyrs of the 25 January Revolution”

“Take to the Streets”

Graffiti, a previously uncommon sight in Cairo, transformed blank walls into open-air galleries. Mohamed Mahmoud Street became the most popular street for graffiti since it is a short walk from Tahrir Square—the main public square where tens of thousands of people gathered to demonstrate against Mubarak’s regime in 2011.

Today, the revolution is still ongoing as many Egyptians believe that little has changed in the years since Mubarak’s regime. Human rights abuses by the military and security officials remain common, and the continued lack of social justice leaves millions vulnerable to poverty, discrimination, and unemployment. New layers of graffiti regularly appear on Mohamed Mahmoud Street that comment on the lack of democracy in Egypt.



Mohamed Mahmoud Street became an even more popular location for graffiti after a massacre in Port Said, Egypt on February 1, 2012. Seventy-four men were killed and well over one thousand were injured. These victims had participated in the 2011 anti-Mubarak demonstrations and are remembered as “martyrs” of the revolution. Within a day of the massacre, artists began to create memorials for the victims, as seen above. Photo taken on April 13, 2012.