Data Accumulation of Baltimore’s Street Art and Graffiti scenes

Jonathan Dimes, MFA
JDimes MediVisual Communication
@themuralhunter
Began in 2014 as a hobby after noticing several murals in my Highlandtown neighborhood and elsewhere.

Just photography initially, and only murals.

Joel Bergner’s “Across the Waves”
Began locating online materials to help expand my search. Many of these described past mural initiatives:

- BOPA
- Open Walls Baltimore
- The Love Project
- Articulate: Baltimore
- Slum Lord Project

Billy Mode & Chris Stain’s Wall for Articulate: Baltimore
Became very interested in the artists and the stories behind the art, and a lot of information was being accumulated.
At the same time while out photographing murals began noticing all of the additional forms of street art in the city.
Two things occurred to me:

1. A lot of this art was fleeting. Fading, peeling, crumbling, and much of it was on buildings that would be torn down.

2. No one appeared to be doing an overreaching inventory of it.

My first objective was to begin to document and archive everything I discovered.

My second objective would be to expose the art and promote the artists to those who might not otherwise be exposed to it.
This way, when magnificent pieces like this wall by Italian artist Pixel Pancho are torn down (as it was in 2016), there will still be a record of it.
So how to organize all this data?

- The city was broken down into areas loosely based on neighborhoods but more so on the city’s divisions based upon its street art scene.
- Every piece of art receives an identification number based upon its geographical location and artist’s last name.

For example, the Joel Bergner wall, which appears in Highlandtown/Canton area, is assigned: HC-10-Bergner
Data is then placed into four different locations:
Step 1: The photographs are downloaded into iPhoto.

- Each photo is assigned an ID number. (i.e. Bergner-(HT-10)-DSCN2353-Highland+Bank)

- All photos of a particular artist (who has created 2 or more works) are placed in the same folder.

- Others - as well as works by unknown artists – are placed in common folders based on geographic location.

- All file and folder information is fully searchable.
Step 2: (After any post processing) the photographs are copied onto a hard drive, but now organized by geographical location.
**Step 3:** Data is entered into a Filemaker Pro database.
Step 3 cont: Representative photos are included.

Fields include:
- Artist name
- Title of work
- Site number
- Year created
- Street address
- City/State
- Type category
- To do
- Notes
- Date seen/photo taken
- Direction facing
- Associated mural project

![Image of a spreadsheet with fields for mural details, including artist name, title, site number, year created, street address, city/state, type category, to do, notes, date seen/photo taken, direction facing, and associated mural project.]

Right around the corner and one of my favorites. Tremendous artist. I need to find his first mural. This mural explores and celebrates the history, including the European immigrants that arrived during the 1800's until the 1950's. The right side celebrates the community as it is today, diverse and experiencing a large wave of Latino immigrants.
Step 4: Place into proprietary Google Map.
Step 4 cont: Art works are assigned categories in the map and database.

Archiving a wide range of public art, both sanctioned (legal), and unsanctioned (illegal).
In 2015 after meeting a couple of prominent local graffiti writers I began archiving that genre as well.

- It needed to be handled differently because of the more secretive nature. (i.e. Not revealing faces or names, or making locations public.)

- From an archive perspective, things are sorted by location rather than by writer, since many locations contain dozens or more pieces by different writers.

Siek  Droid, MTN, Fisho, and Donut
I made a separate map for the graffiti, one based on locations. (This map will never be made public.)
In October of 2015 I created the @themuralhunter Instagram account, where I would begin posting some of my photographs along with the artists’ names and corresponding information.
My data currently contains:

- Street art – 12,000+ photographs representing 1,108 data points (individual art works) on the Baltimore Street Art Map
- Graffiti – 7000+ photographs representing 1000+ individual graffiti pieces contained in 242 locations in the Graffiti Map.

Additional benefits

- Meeting hundreds of artists and graffiti writers as well as numerous city residents whom I would otherwise never have met.
- A greater love of the city of Baltimore.
What to do with this data?

Would like to see it utilized in some way that benefits the city and its residents.

Tourism
- BOPA
- Visit Baltimore

Art appreciation and the promotion of artists.
- CANVS
- Mural Tours

Other
- Geoloom
Is Geoloom the right place for this data?

- Art & Culture objectives make it a good fit. Can help promote local artists.

- I always anticipated this data to be used for entertainment or educational means, not for civic/government purposes.

- Is only a subset of this data valuable in the Geoloom format?
The Geoloom experience for information seekers

- Tools are easy to use
- Searching options good
- Aesthetics satisfactory
For any database tool, it’s only as good as the information that has been entered.

- Data must accurate and up to date or else it loses credibility and will not be utilized
- Tools for data providers must be efficient

Too many fields left empty and some are confusing. (i.e. school number) = Distracts from information that IS there. Can code be written so that only filled-in fields appear?
The data provider experience

- Works well for those uploading minimal data
- Not as efficient for those uploading considerable amounts of data or certain types of data.
- Some fields are not defined and are confusing.
Some areas for improvement:

1. Ability to work in real time. Currently one must wait 2-4 days until someone reviews data. Impossible to see if what you are entering is working as you are entering it.

2. Inability to drop pins/points onto specific locations. No entry field for coordinate points. Dependency upon a street address system. Often street art (and certainly graffiti) is located on non-address locations.

3. There is an option to upload photos, but no specs are provided (i.e. pixel dimensions, file formats etc.).

4. No credit line for those uploading data, which then brings up the discussion of who owns the data.

5. Data entry fields do not match data search fields. (i.e. You can search on “murals” but there is no way to designate data being uploaded as “murals”
Thank you for listening. I hope you found this helpful.

I look forward to discussing ways in which my data can be utilized on the Geoloom platform.