

NURIA MORA AND THE URBAN RENAISSANCE

The upsurge in street art in the world's major cities is just one aspect of creative urban regeneration that Johannesburg is catching onto. In an interview with Spanish street artist Nuria Mora, **Sarah Jayne Fell** looks at the beauty at the heart of this renegade artform.

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The vivacious, cosmopolitan city of Madrid – Spain's capital and largest city – is one of the world's most thriving artistic, cultural and heritage-laden hubs. It schooled the likes of Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali and boasts spectacular art collections that include formidable works such as Picasso's 'Guernica' and Hieronymus Bosch's 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'. The city is home to some of the oldest universities in the world and the largest bullring in Spain, Las Ventas, 'The Mecca of Bullfighting'. Its football club Real Madrid was voted by FIFA as the most successful club of the 20th century. In 2010, Monocle listed Madrid as the tenth most liveable city in the world.

In the 21st century, Madrid has also become increasingly renowned for its flourishing urban art scene. In this contemporary milieu, the work of the city's graffiti and street artists has long since left the realm of undesirable and unsightly scrawled tags. The vibrant colours and idiosyncratic characters inhabiting the large-scale creative masterpieces that adorn the city's walls actually invigorate public spaces, revitalise deteriorated neighbourhoods and bring art closer to the people. In Madrid, street art has become emblematic of the city's dynamic bustling energy – a visually inspiring tribute to the beat of its pulsating heart.



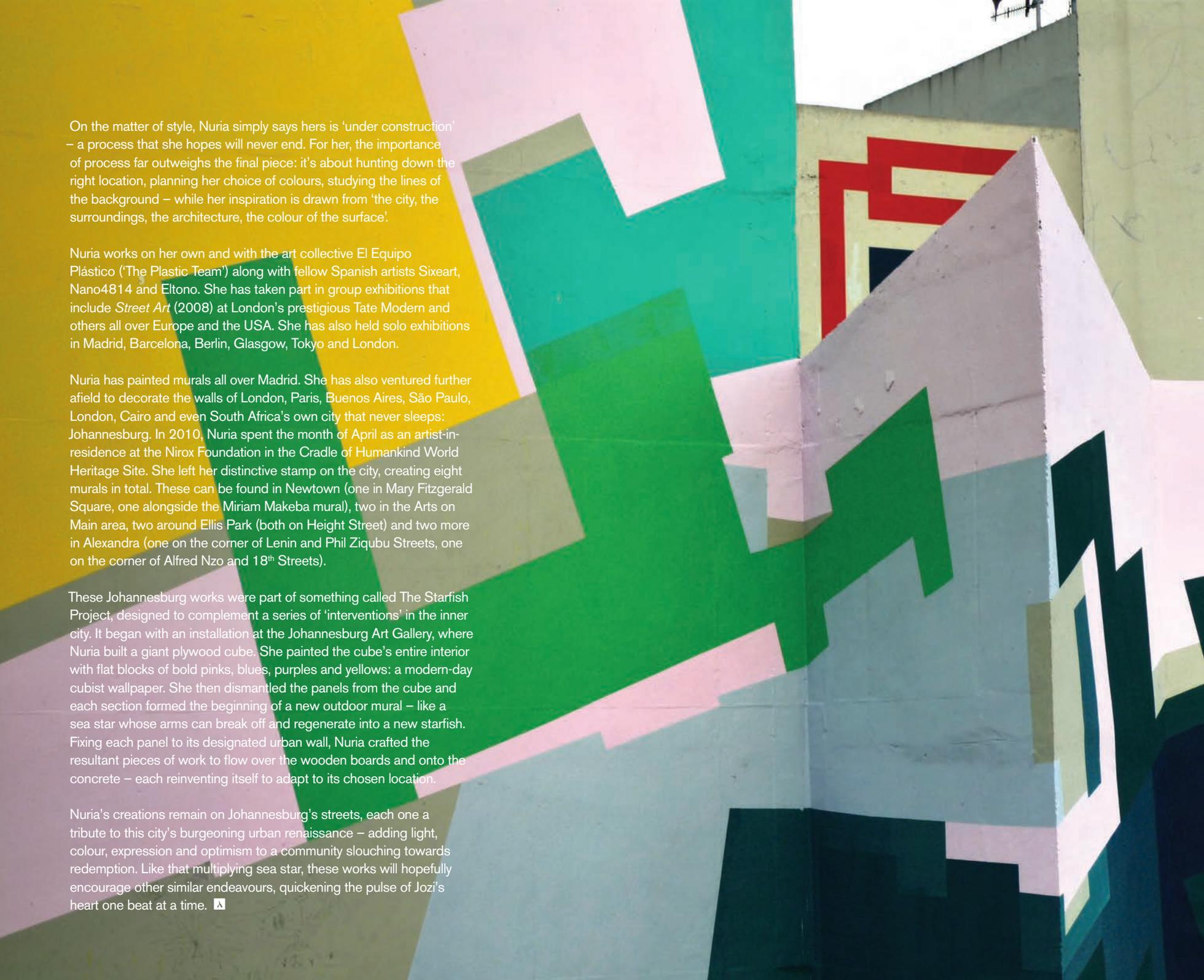


An inspiring project that recently emerged in Madrid speaks to this urban creative reawakening. The Walls Management Office is an independent organisation that seeks to connect wall owners with artists, encouraging street art that's legal and of a superior quality – because it's commissioned, well planned and not anonymous. Interventions such as these add to the beautification of the city's streets and, at the same time, give a positive spin to an artform historically held in contempt by many.

Nuria Mora is an artist who represents this urban renewal. Born and raised in Madrid, she has been creating street art for almost 12 years. As a creator and citizen of her city, she has always thought of the street as her ideal canvas and describes her work in this urban environment as if it were nothing less than her birthright.

Her trademark works are large murals of flat geometric colour, but many also incorporate floral and filigree motifs or more intricately detailed geometric designs. And while the world is usually her canvas of choice, she also works on actual canvas, watercolour paper, board and even a range of handbags created from a variety of textiles.





On the matter of style, Nuria simply says hers is 'under construction' – a process that she hopes will never end. For her, the importance of process far outweighs the final piece: it's about hunting down the right location, planning her choice of colours, studying the lines of the background – while her inspiration is drawn from 'the city, the surroundings, the architecture, the colour of the surface'.

Nuria works on her own and with the art collective El Equipo Plástico ('The Plastic Team') along with fellow Spanish artists Sixeart, Nano4814 and Eltono. She has taken part in group exhibitions that include *Street Art* (2008) at London's prestigious Tate Modern and others all over Europe and the USA. She has also held solo exhibitions in Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Glasgow, Tokyo and London.

Nuria has painted murals all over Madrid. She has also ventured further afield to decorate the walls of London, Paris, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, London, Cairo and even South Africa's own city that never sleeps: Johannesburg. In 2010, Nuria spent the month of April as an artist-in-residence at the Nirox Foundation in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. She left her distinctive stamp on the city, creating eight murals in total. These can be found in Newtown (one in Mary Fitzgerald Square, one alongside the Miriam Makeba mural), two in the Arts on Main area, two around Ellis Park (both on Height Street) and two more in Alexandra (one on the corner of Lenin and Phil Ziqubu Streets, one on the corner of Alfred Nzo and 18th Streets).

These Johannesburg works were part of something called The Starfish Project, designed to complement a series of 'interventions' in the inner city. It began with an installation at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, where Nuria built a giant plywood cube. She painted the cube's entire interior with flat blocks of bold pinks, blues, purples and yellows: a modern-day cubist wallpaper. She then dismantled the panels from the cube and each section formed the beginning of a new outdoor mural – like a sea star whose arms can break off and regenerate into a new starfish. Fixing each panel to its designated urban wall, Nuria crafted the resultant pieces of work to flow over the wooden boards and onto the concrete – each reinventing itself to adapt to its chosen location.

Nuria's creations remain on Johannesburg's streets, each one a tribute to this city's burgeoning urban renaissance – adding light, colour, expression and optimism to a community slouching towards redemption. Like that multiplying sea star, these works will hopefully encourage other similar endeavours, quickening the pulse of Jozi's heart one beat at a time. 