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# urban identities on display

Maximiliano Battaglia and Gaby David – February 6, 2026

• identity • visual anthropology • iconography • photography • image walls • postcolonial • transculturality • diversity • immigration • vernacular images

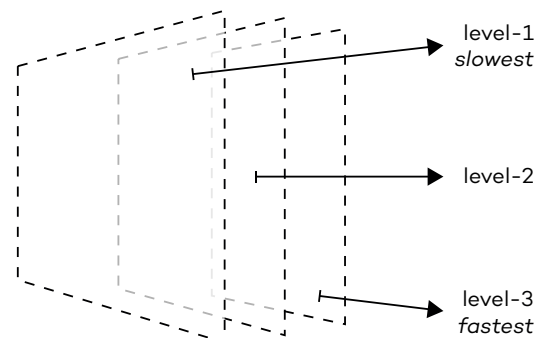
At the intersection of photography, ethnography, and visual sociology (Pauwels 2023), *Urban Identities on Display (UID)* explores image walls in two Afro-Maghrebi heritage neighborhoods in France: Château Rouge–Goutte d’Or in Paris and Wazemmes–Moulins in Lille (2023–2024). Both territories carry colonial histories, exemplify multiculturalism, and foster contemporary transculturalism (Buono 2011). Image walls—whether in museums, galleries, private collections, or on the street—are surfaces covered with multiple images grouping a visual unit (Reverseau *et al.* 2022). *UID* employs three complementary methodologies: visual production examines the aesthetic and material dimensions; ethnography situates the work within lived experiences; and visual sociology provides the theoretical framework for analysis. Set within an urban context shaped by successive waves of immigration from former French colonies (Ben Boubaker 2024), this interdisciplinary approach shows that image walls do more than reflect social realities—they actively shape identity negotiations, meaning-making, and power dynamics in these spaces. Images are understood not merely as representations but as cultural actors capable of affecting people and actively participating in culture (Mitchell 2005). These image walls, sometimes ephemeral, serve as intangible cultural heritage and transmit collective memory and cultural capital, granting symbolic visibility to their authors (Bourdieu 1979). Firstly, we used Krase’s walking method (2012) and applied a walking methodology to localize the image walls, noticing that they did not appear as mere backdrops but as symbols of belonging. Secondly, using photo elicitation (Douglas 2012), we conversed with the actors who had created them. Finally, we repurposed our photographic documentation to create a panoramic

collage that emulates the syncretic visual essence of these neighborhoods. Thus, *UID* explores how people from the diaspora produce and display their visualities, contributing to shaping these visual identities. Entering public and semi-public places, our accents immediately marked us as non-French mother tongue (Bourdieu 2014) and as one South American—Uruguayan, diaspora cohabiting with many other African ones within the same urban context. For those unfamiliar, the shop windows—full of goods from Algeria, Senegal, Mali, Congo, Tunisia, etc.—might appear exotic or disorienting (Bouly de Lesdain 1999; Chabrol, 2014; Silhouette-Dercourt, 2014). Yet this very maximalist heterogeneity reveals the dynamic nature and richness of the many cultures condensed there, where the colors, music, food, and languages are all entry points into these areas. Migrants carry migratory images with them: visual signs and artifacts that communicate and reshape imaginaries, cultural histories, and “scapes” (Appadurai 1996). Far from being a past, these migratory images challenge fixed notions of temporality and identity, reconfiguring what we remember, how we see, and how we inhabit the global world. By integrating political and symbolic imagery, *UID* explores vernacular and emotional uses of popular images (Chalfen 1987; Glevarec 2021). The latter emphasize the resilience and empowerment of the communities, preserve and shape collective imaginaries, and strengthen cultural identity in diasporic contexts. Thus, *UID* not only showcases the cultural capital of Afro communities (Bourdieu 1979; hooks 1992), but also emphasizes empowerment and resilience, contributing to the meaning-making processes that emerge in transnational spaces of shared belonging (Szulc 2023; Marin 2022). To conclude, as Hall and Du Gay (1996) remind us, identity is never static but always in motion.

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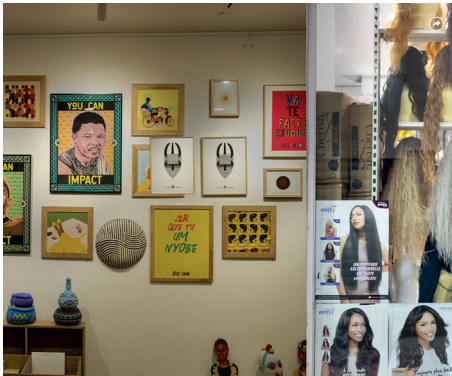
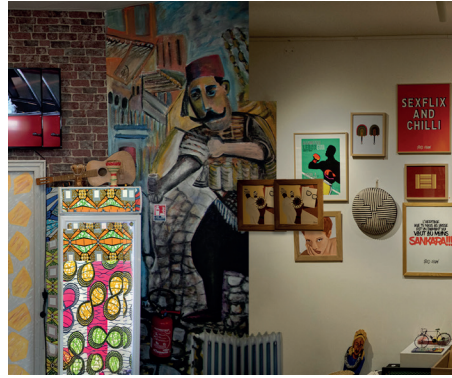
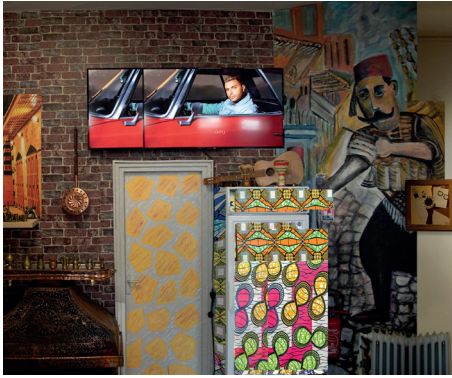
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## with the support of

Institut pour la photographie Hauts-de-France

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**Maximiliano Battaglia** is a Uruguayan–Italian filmmaker and educator. He holds an MFA in Photography and Image-making from Paris College of Art and a BA in Mandarin Chinese from Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU). His documentary work explores poetic forms and polycentric perspectives.

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# to cite this article

Battaglia, Maximiliano, and Gaby David. 2026. "Urban Identities on Display." *able journal*: <https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities>

MLA	EN	Battaglia, Maximiliano, and Gaby David. "Urban Identities on Display." <i>able journal</i> , 2026. <a href="https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities">https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities</a>
ISO 690	EN	BATTAGLIA, Maximiliano, and DAVID, Gaby. "Urban Identities on Display." <i>able journal</i> [online]. 2026. Available from: <a href="https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities">https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities</a>
APA	EN	Battaglia, M. & David, G. (2026). Urban Identities on Display. <i>able journal</i> . <a href="https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities">https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities</a>
DOI	EN	<a href="https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities">https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.25032.urbanidentities</a>