

A Typeface Created From Berlin Wall Graffiti Is a Sobering Reminder of Why Freedom Matters

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On Nov. 9, German nonprofit Die Offene Gesellschaft (The Open Society) sent a letter to the White House urging the president to reconsider his position on a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border. The heartfelt plea wasn't written on paper, but rather a piece of the actual Berlin Wall, which was erected in 1961 as a way of separating East and West Germany during the Cold War.

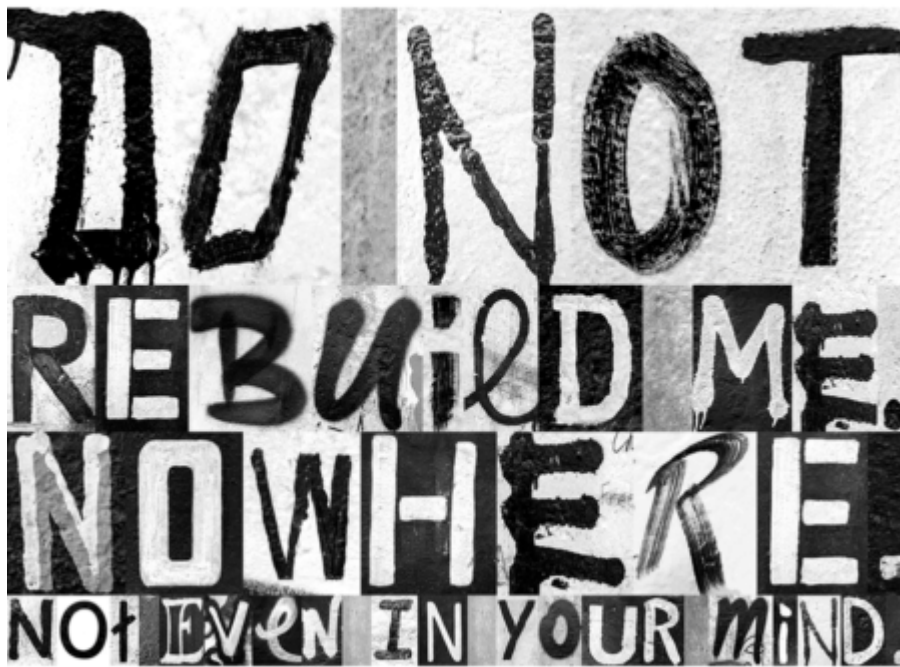
Stretching across 27 miles and standing at 12 feet, the wall separated many Germans from their loved ones, leaving them unable to make contact. Before its fall in 1989, about 80 people died trying to cross to the West—and it's remembered now as a relic of brutality, oppression and significant loss. With that in mind, the organization's message was clear: Walls don't work.

Another group, a collective of street artists known as The Cultural Heirs, has created a campaign that is both a celebration of the Berlin Wall's demise and a sobering reminder of the atrocities that the wall's existence incited.

With the help of Berlin-based creative agency Heimat, The Cultural Heirs has launched "Voice of the Wall" to explore one question: If the Berlin Wall were alive, what would it say? Using actual graffiti from the wall itself, the short film takes on an anthropomorphic perspective as the "wall" shares what it saw, from the many incidents of bloody violence that punctuated its history to, decades later, freedom.

Underscoring the dialogue are sounds of gunshots, sirens and strife that bring viewers right into the action. It's appropriately terrifying, the wall having witnessed horrors that only those who were there would understand. All of this culminates in one evergreen conclusion from the campaign's centerpiece: "If I could ask you for one thing: Do not rebuild me, nowhere. Not even in your mind."

Accompanying the film is a website where users can generate their own messages of reflection, freedom and love, presented in a font created with authentic graffiti from the wall. The typeface was created from photographs and research of the remaining wall, which The Cultural Heirs gathered over three months.



From there, the distinctive lettering will carry messages of healing wherever visitors decide to post the final graphic, which will most likely grace social media headers. While the images without context may register to some as a trendy means of decor, the association hopes that they'll prompt others to

dig a little deeper and learn more about the origins of the art.

And, hopefully, “Voice of the Wall” will serve as a reminder that those who fail to learn from history—especially those with immense power—are doomed to repeat it.

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