

DESIGN

Canadian graffiti

From public to paid, urban art goes mainstream

CONSIDERED by many as simply vandalism, graffiti, its supporters argue, is an art form with a history and conventions of its own. According to curators of *Painting Under Pressure: A Look at Graffiti* at the Art Gallery of Calgary, cavemen were the world's first graffiti artists, writing symbols and messages on cave walls. During the Depression, hobo signs were secret codes giving practical information on where to find food and shelter. Later, modern day graffiti became a medium for political messages and marking territory. And now, graffiti – Italian for scratch or scribble – is moving into the mainstream, appearing everywhere from ads for the Dairy Farmers of Canada to Toronto's staid Metro Home Show.

"If you look at mainstream art forms, they always have humble beginnings," says Mikey Richardson of Toronto-based ArtLab, a division of graphic design company AmoebaCorp. "Look at pop art in the 1960s [which at the time wasn't considered 'real art']. New trends in art always come from underground culture. I think graffiti



mural designers from around the world have been selected to paint murals on vinyl canvas, which will be displayed in the museum for two years.

"Although we recognize the repercussions of illegal graffiti, it is an inevitable art form that represents a social voice and we think that it is worth listening to," says Erin Nuttall, events coordinator for Graffiti Arts Programming, which runs programs out of the Graffiti Gallery.

Can graffiti have the same impact (or street cred) hanging in a museum or printed in a magazine ad as it does spray-painted on a building? Richardson and an increasing number of graffiti artists don't see a contradiction in working with corporations. "Artists are always considered to be starving artists. If they live in a little hole, they are artists. If they make money, they are considered sell-outs. We are trying to make a balance, where we can get our own mes-



ArtLab's Richardson (centre) says current urban art trends include stenciling, posterizing and tiled images. Bottom: Poking fun at its conservative image, the Dairy Farmers of Canada added graffiti to its humorous teen-targeted milk ad

sages out and create work that we and the client are happy with." He adds that reaching a wider audience raises the profile of graffiti artists for people who may not realize the talent and skill involved in creating these works.

– Kim Edwards

TOP PHOTOS BY NEIL COLLYER/BOTTOM ILLUSTRATION BY JASON WING

ILLUSTRATION

Marketing shadows

Silhouettes in ads bring new life to a modernist form

THE APPEARANCE of silhouettes in advertising reached a whole new level of saturation a few years back with the onslaught of those ubiquitous iPod ads featuring



Top: New iPod ad campaign
Bottom: Poster for War Child Canada benefit

black silhouetted people on brightly coloured backgrounds dancing to music. The concept looked familiar to Christina Yu, who had previously designed a similar campaign for Toronto urban radio station Flow 93.5 while she was an art director at Taxi. "We wanted to portray the Flow urban listener but didn't want to identify who that person was because it was actually a mixture of people," says Yu, now vice president, creative director at Lowe Roche in Toronto. A similar premise seems to lie behind the iPod ads:

strip away the details and get right to the product's message that everyone looks good wearing an iPod. "Fashion magazines always have people in them, you're always looking at the models and what not," says Yu. "Our strategy was to...show the vibe and thought it was more interesting to do it in silhouettes because it felt less identifiable and more iconic."

A silhouette of a break-dancer is the logo for War Child Canada's fundraiser Keep The Beat, which War Child Canada graphic designer Greg Durrell created in 2001. He has kept that consistent look over its last several ad campaigns. "If you trace it back stylistically to where it comes from, it's more from the modernist design movement, which was all about simplification of objects and forms to convey more clearly."

Some view the use of silhouettes as a trend or style, says Durrell, but others such as himself see it in a philosophical manner; approaching your work from a modernist perspective that is all about simplicity, clarity of information and reduction of form.

– A.M.B.

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does deserve to be recognized. Whether it should be recognized as much as realism, that's totally opinion based." ArtLab has designed graffiti pieces for companies such as Nike and for exhibitions, most recently the Metro Home Show.

Graffiti exhibits are also popping up in museums across Canada. The Art Gallery of Calgary's show runs until May 21. Curator Lori Ellis says it serves as an educational piece, to "bring to life some of the positive aspects that go along with the art of creating graffiti that people have overlooked or not thought about," such as its accessibility to artists who haven't received formal training.

The Graffiti Gallery in Winnipeg is hosting the International Mural Festival and Symposium this summer. Ten professional