

Street artists show their skills at hip-hop summit

by Sarah Stevens

Graffiti artists from around New Zealand and Germany joined forces to showcase their work at Disrupt The System in Auckland last month.

The event was part of the 2003 Aotearoa Hip-Hop Summit and was an opportunity for 18 street artists to demonstrate their skill on a large wooden wall in Aotea Square. They were given a day to produce a piece from scratch.

Street art is not widely accepted by the mainstream art scene, but event organiser Elliot O'Donnell is not concerned.

"I don't know that we are necessarily looking for validation from the art scene or general community.

"We all know why we do things. We don't feel we need to justify it to anyone. There are definitely a lot of fans out there," he says.

Mr O'Donnell says about 6000 people came to see the artists over the weekend.

Atom, one of the German artists, would not give his real name because street art is illegal in Germany.

There are more graffiti artists in Germany, he says, but the quality of work he has seen in New Zealand is very good.

Many of the young fans knew his work and were keen to get him to sign or tag their books.

He does not care what people think about his work. "I am an ego type. I don't care about the people."

One of the Auckland-based artists, Ben Work (aka Dyle) says a lot of people don't understand graffiti.

"They think it's about pretty colours, and that there is a message.

Sometimes there is no message. It is just our name.

"What I do is draw it over and over to get the style. What you aim for is your own style."

Mr Work sees his art as an opportunity to express his God-given talents.

Mr O'Donnell expects to re-exhibit or auction the work from the weekend.

"The work from the last summit has been touring the country as part of an exhibition called Respect," he says.

As a new artist it can be difficult to get into the scene.

Mr Work does not encourage young artists to do illegal graffiti, but admits that many people view working legally as "selling out".

"They think it's about pretty colours, and that there is a message. Sometimes there is no message."

Hooking up with a crew has helped him to develop his writing and improve his style. He has learnt fading effects, how to finish his work and use colour effectively.

Mr Work and Mr O'Donnell both belong to The Most Dangerous (TMD), a leading Auckland based crew.

"A lot of people have a different definition of a crew, but really basically what it is is a group who paint together," says Mr O'Donnell.

"We push each other stylistically, give each other support, work together on projects to get a larger space covered in the a quicker amount of time."

Mr Work advises someone coming through to "get around someone good".

"You can't get a wall, like some dairy, if you are a new guy and they don't like your work. If you are not good, you can't go and do the hard-out thing. I went through years of being ugly."

It is possible to make a living from graffiti.

Mr O'Donnell is a director of Disruptiv, a business set up to generate income from street art. Disruptiv publishes a magazine and has developed clothing labels.

"We are trying to be as entrepreneurial as possible," Mr O'Donnell says.

"I have been really involved in this for 10 years now. It has taken me a lot of cool places and introduced me to a lot of cool people and pretty much opened up a lot of doors for me. It has been a really positive force in my life."

"I don't want to do anything else. So why would I want to keep it as a hobby?"

"I don't think there is any magic formula that any kid is going to be able to apply to suddenly stop being a tagger and being a full time artist.

"If you are an adult and you are smart and able to communicate with people and create situations for yourself where you can make money from your work, then you will do it."

There are opportunities to do commission work in New Zealand. Mr O'Donnell says he has a broad client base.

"Everything from educational stuff with schools through to the Auckland Festival, large outdoor events and dairy owners. I am painting the side of a Laundromat right now."



PHOTO: SARAH MAC LELLAN

CAN IN HAND: Graffiti artist Atom in action at hip-hop summit.

Students squeeze in to launch Kiwi Kombi flick

by Stephanie Rice

Local director Grant Lahood found a novel way to promote his film *Kombi Nation* — by holding competitions around the country to see how many people he could squeeze into a Kombi van.

"We've just been pulling up to places and grabbing people in," Mr Lahood says.

Twenty-three students crammed into the small van in the AUT quad to win tickets to the film's Auckland premiere.

Kombi Nation opened in cinemas nationwide on October 16 after six months of uncertainty.

The film was due to be released in June, but ran into financial trouble when Wellington's Kahukura Productions collapsed and left its future in jeopardy.

Mr Lahood had to fight to buy the film back from the liquidators. He says to finally have it on the big screen is really exciting.

"All films take a long time to make, but this one is really special."

He had just returned from two sold-

out screenings of *Kombi Nation* in London and said he was thrilled with the response the film has received.

"What's really good is that people are actually liking the film."

He says he primarily intended to get a laugh out of audiences, and after the initial screenings that's the reaction he has been met with.

"I've never seen people laugh like that during a New Zealand film."

Kombi Nation follows the adventures of four Kiwis traveling through Europe in a Kombi van.

Liz (Loren Horsley), Maggie

(Genevieve McClean) and Sal (Gentiane Lupi) meet Scott (Jason Whyte) in London and invite him on their big trip.

Scott soon starts causing trouble and the girls realise he's not who they thought he was.

"Kiwis travelling to London is a core part of who we are and a lot of those people choose to experience their OE in the back of a Kombi," Mr Lahood says.

The film was shot for a month in 1999 and uses elements of many reality TV styles, which, Mr Lahood says,

makes the trip something a lot of young New Zealanders can relate to.

He says there's something really special about Kombi vans, and one of

"All films take a long time to make, but this one is really special."



PHOTO: STEPHANIE RICE

SQUASHED: AUT students cram into a Kombi van in a bid to win tickets to the *Kombi Nation* film premiere.

the reasons he wanted to make the film was the number of stories he had heard about people's tours in the back of a Kombi.

"The van is like the star of the film."

Kombi Nation's first Auckland screening was met with loud applause from the audience, many of whom said they felt a real connection with the film.

"There's something about Kiwi films," says Jillian Dutton (21). "You can just sit back and relate to so much of it."

Film studies student Dianne Tanner says: "They included just the right amount of scenery in it so that you felt like you weren't just watching the story unfold, but also travelling with the actors.

"It's made me get really itchy feet."

Kombi Nation comes in a year when New Zealand films have been receiving strong international recognition.

The film was showcased at the UpOverDownUnder Film Festival in London.

Mr Lahood hopes to take the film to other destinations following its New Zealand release.