

# Graffiti art of the streets in gallery

by Owen Hembry

In from the cold, but still dangerous. A new Auckland art gallery aims to show that graffiti is more than just an unwanted eyesore.

The Disruptiv gallery on Karangahape Rd celebrates graffiti and street art with exhibitions of work by leading artists such as Elliot "Deus" Stewart and Elliot "Askew" O'Donnell.

Artist and gallery owner O'Donnell says the gallery gives the public the opportunity to appreciate graffiti as something more than just a nuisance.

"There's a difference between good and bad art, and between good and bad tags. The thing that annoys me is when people don't think it's art."

Spray paint on canvas gives his work richness and depth, while the glossy finish makes you feel that to touch it would leave wet paint on your fingers.

Stewart's work appears to be less traditional graffiti, if the word traditional can be used, and more a mixture of artistic styles.

His use of old pieces of wood and artistically altered business signs give the gallery a curious feel. It's as if the artwork has, just moments before, been ripped from a derelict lot, and hung with a price tag.

Street artwork, often illegal, has a raw energy and adrenaline associated with the risks of arrest, O'Donnell says. But he



ELLIOT "ASKEW" O'DONNELL: The artist and his work.

also finds working on canvas, with the luxury of space and time afforded him by his studio, very satisfying.

O'Donnell says he has been arrested in the past for painting a train, but with his company, Disruptiv, growing strongly, he doesn't have the time and can't afford the risk of illegal street work.

Set up two years ago, Disruptiv promotes itself as New Zealand's only professional aerosol art company. Responsible for many murals seen around Auckland it also produces New Zealand's only graffiti and street art magazine.

As organisers of Disrupt The System, a live graffiti painting event held every year in Aotea

Square, it has attracted the best street artists in the world to Auckland.

"I think we've got a very special and unique scene because we live in such a special and unique place," O'Donnell says.

His talents have got him into trouble but also taken him around the world, visiting artists of different nationalities,

cultures and religions.

"I think it's given me a lot of understanding of people and an openness I might not otherwise have had."

O'Donnell says his artistic home will always be the street, but laughs at the irony that his latest project was on a Ponsonby billboard for a mortgage company.

## Controversy over killer star

by Andrea Jutson

The distributor of New Zealand killer film *For Good* says the controversy over its inclusion of a real killer is just "a storm in a teacup".

John Davies, managing director of Arkles Entertainment, says Video Ezy's publicised advice to withdraw the film from rental shelves has been blown out of proportion.

**"It is unjust to punish an innocent party whose intention in making this film was to highlight the very issues facing the Burrows family."**

*For Good* depicts the killing of a young girl in small-town New Zealand.

Ron Burrows, father of murdered six-year-old Coral Burrows, complained to the chief censor, requesting the film be reclassified, after seeing her real-life killer Steve Williams in a scene from the movie.

Video Ezy notified its stores of the complaint, a move some have called unjustified and unnecessary.

Dominic Sheehan, executive director of the New Zealand Writers' Guild, calls it a "knee-jerk reaction".

"The New Zealand film industry works on a shoestring at the best of times, and it is vital that

every movie made here is able to maximise returns from all income streams, including DVD and video rentals," he says in a guild press release.

"It is unjust to punish an innocent party whose intention in making this film was to highlight the very issues facing the Burrows family."

However, Video Ezy's joint managing director Russell Clark says the chain's franchisees were not instructed to remove the film.

"The choice to remove or not remove the videos is down to the franchisees."

He says the impact of Ron Burrows' complaint has not been significant, as only 31 out of 145 Video Ezy stores had stocked the video.

Davies says he is aware of only one store that has removed the video from its shelves, after a direct request from the family of Coral Burrows.

Williams appears only briefly in *For Good*, in a crowd scene filmed while he was visiting his mother's pub, before the murder of Coral Burrows — two years ago.

Makers of the film say that to remove the shot would be prohibitively expensive and unnecessary.

Davies says the publicity over the appearance of Williams in the film may increase the film's hitherto lukewarm popularity.

"Commercially it's now more valuable than it was before."

## The beat of taiko – Japanese style



DRUMS: Made from wine barrels and cow skin.

by Ridma Mendis

The first Japanese drumming group (taiko) in Auckland is gradually shaping up but has had to do it the hard way, using drums they made themselves out of wine barrels and cow skin.

A member of the new Auckland Mai Takio group, Miyuki Stonebridge, says she came up with the idea to create the taiko group when her dancing troupe Haeremai performed in Rotorua. She saw other taiko groups on stage.

"We met Takane Midare (a Japanese taiko group) when they came to perform in Rotorua. They showed us taiko and when we came back we were interested in making our own group."

The only two other taiko

groups in New Zealand are the Wai Taiko group of the University of Waikato and a group from the International Pacific College in Palmerston North (ICP).

"There are no taiko groups in Auckland. So we thought we should have one," says Stonebridge.

The vice president of the New Zealand Japan Society of Auckland (NZJSA), Kumiko Imai-Duxfield, says it was difficult to form the group because resources were limited.

"The drums were so expensive we couldn't afford them. The cheapest was about \$5000."

But Brian Grove, a member of the Haeremai group, came up with the idea of making their

own drums after finding a web site.

The group had to learn everything from scratch. The first drum they built made a dull sound because the skin was not stretchy enough.

"The internet site said to use the thickest skin you can get so I used bull skin but it was very hard to stretch," says Grove.

"The next time I used cow skin and car jacks to stretch it. It turned out a lot better."

Grove spent 70 hours building the drums but says each drum is getting a lot quicker to make. He originally joined the NZJSA to learn Japanese but ended up being part of the Auckland Mai Taiko group.

The group has 12 members and is self taught but aided by a few ex-ICP members playing in the group.

One of those, Midori Uenoya, says the group has only been together for two months and it will take time and practice to be as good as the professional players.

At the moment they practice twice a week using chairs and rubbish bins.

"We have to try and practice where we don't bother too many people because the drums are very loud. We are still trying to find an appropriate venue," says Grove.

The Auckland Mai Taiko group has performed a few times already and last month's Japanese cultural day was its biggest performance.

They hope to hold a combined performance of New Zealand groups.

"We've only got two and a half drums at the moment but we're making progress," says Grove.