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Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne



Synopsis

Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne, MBP's first street-art book, stands as a contemporary classic of the genre. During the first few years of this century, Melbourne, Australia, was the global epicenter of stencil graffiti, with artists like MEEK, SIXTEN, VEXTA, and MEGGS cutting amazing stencils and getting them up all over the city. The variety and abundance of the city's scene attracted international attention, especially after BANKSY paid a visit. This was the first graffiti book to be published that focused on stencil graffiti, and while many stencil-centric books have followed, it remains the only one that documents a once prolific scene that will stand the test of time. The paperback edition of Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne brings all of the original's great photographs and interviews to new readers at the same size but lower cost. Marvel at the artistry and ingenuity of the stencils; read about feats of daring-do as told by the artists; laugh at the political puns and pop-culture references.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Carl Nyman is graphic designer and illustrator. Originally from Sweden, he has lived and worked in Melbourne and currently resides in New York City. Recent work includes a tour of five major Asian cities, bringing stencil graffiti to the Far East. He continually documents urban expressions of art. Jake Smallman has worked as a graphic designer in the United Kingdom and Australia. He has documented and participated in Melbourne's stencil-graffiti scene for years, gaining media attention and commissions in addition to exhibiting all over Australia and the United States.

Stencil art takes street art to a whole new level. It's awesome. I liked it so much I got it as a gift for a fellow artist.

What has happened to turn Melbourne into a stencilled graffiti capital? When did this happen and who is responsible? Furthermore, why stencils? Isn't the use of stencils a bit of a cheat? Stencil Graffiti Capital answers all these questions and more with a visual celebration for several artists and the themes which dominate their work. Interviews with the likes of Civilian, Dlux, and Ha-Ha illustrate how and why these artists live in, moved to, or visit Melbourne to practice their street art. Full-page and double-spread visual treatments within the book illustrate the artists' basic themes, which focus on politics, symbols, love/sex and war/death. According to the authors, Jake Smallman and Carl Nyman, the new trend toward stencilled work in Melbourne began in 1999 when graffiti artist Psalm tickled Melbourne's walls with "intricately detailed, vibrantly colored and visually arresting" work. His work was followed by Ha Ha's roughly cut, one-layer stencils which usually were painted in black. Syn and Dlux moved their graffiti skills to Melbourne from Adelaide in 2002, and they brought with them an influence which bonded the disparate talents already in residence. Commercialism of street art, especially stencilled work, is contentious and Stencil Graffiti Capital addresses these issues. The use of stencils instead of free-form spraying, in my opinion, is no worse than the fact that Norman Rockwell used slides projected onto his canvases to help render his realistic paintings. His practice - once discovered by the art world - evolved into a debate over the difference between commercial work and fine art during the mid-twentieth century; however, this debate fizzled once technology altered how artists rendered their work...it's difficult for a fine artist to criticize commercial work when he uses computers to render his digital images. The debates over legality/commercialism of stencilled street art might fizzle or continue to build, which is one of the interesting aspects to this movement. The other highlight includes the fact that these stencilled works aren't amateurish. Not surprisingly, the majority of street artists included in this book have graphic design or fine art backgrounds, an aspect that lends sophistication to the work. This background also supplies an understanding to the transition from the street to galleries. If this debate boils down to the fact that the "medium is the message," then street art is, perhaps, a marketing ploy for what is considered a new art form. The fact that the street artists sign their work, that they are willing to be photographed in the process of building their work, that there is a Web site devoted to the who, what, when, where, how, and why of stencilled street art all lend credence to the fact that Melbourne's streets have become visual marketing for these artists. While this fact might leave a bitter taste in the mouth of some artists and officials, the mere idea that a metropolis

could be influenced by street artists to the point that illegal activities are basically overlooked - at least for the moment - seems to be the real revolution. While *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne* could be seen as part and parcel of this trend in commercialization of graffiti art and artists, the book is needed to explain this trend and Melbourne's part in an artistic evolution. Additionally, the book becomes a visual record of a trend which waxes and wanes with politics and artistic whims. The writing is succinct, clear, and sticks to the facts. The writers and editors forged categories for the artwork, an idea that refuses to glorify any one artist and which offers the reader a banquet of styles and canvases used by the artists. The only missing information in this book is the actual dimensions of the artwork, although the photographs at times reveal the size in proportion to buildings and individuals. This book will appeal not only to artists, art lovers, and political guerrillas; it could add a significant contribution to any anthropologist's or historian's bookshelf as it addresses issues about the intent, talent, time, and politics which continue to influence every aspect of what is often considered illegal public property defacement.

I've been a little obsessed with Melbourne's street art scene for quite a while; actually, since the day I discovered Melbourne Mark's (that's how I think of him!) *State Of Flux*; a great site dedicated to the art in and around Melbourne (in case you hadn't guessed that already!). From then on I've been glued to that site and always enjoyed seeing all the new art as it was documented. I'm waffling...when I saw a while back that *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne*, by Jake Smallman & Carl Nyman, and published by Mark Batty, was coming out in the UK I was pretty excited and it's been well worth the wait. Just like the other Mark Batty books I own, *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne* is quality from the start. It's nicely bound and instantly demands your attention from the second you lift over the front cover. Before you even get to the actual stencil documentation you're pounced on by a couple of incredible night-time photography of city streets and their painters. These are not in-your-face trophy photos of writers and painter posing next to their pieces but beautifully artistic long-exposure shots where the city is the star and the writer is part of the environment. It's a great way to make you realise that this book isn't just about the art but more to do with how the art and Melbourne interact with one another. The introduction follows and tells us more about Melbourne's unique stencil history. *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne* is packed with themed chapters and artist profiles as well as being interspersed with the same high standard photography. That's not to say that the other photography in the book isn't worth mentioning though; it is. While many of the photos are documentary style (just showing the actual piece of art) there's a whole lot more that are just oozing class. Actually, it has some of the best street art photos I've seen. I digress. So, back to the

themes....roughly half of the chapters are theme based. The themes include faces, politics, war, robots, music, horror (a great couple of pages), guns and lots more. One of the most impressive themed chapters concerns itself with public galleries; lanes where, although illegal, artists are constantly putting up new pieces. By the look of the photos these streets are not just painted with the odd stencil here and there but quite densely populated with work, making them truly like gallery spaces. Many of the pieces are single layered hits but there are also some multi-layered beauties. A great collection. Of the many artists that have there own chapters I have to mention Meggs. His art makes perhaps the best chapter in the book with his cute, skyward looking, kids with devils horns. Fantastic imagery. He also has some cracking pieces that depict people throwing up some kind of crazy paisley pattern...nuts. Vexta also gets a mention here for not only having a great collection of pieces on show but also for having the second best photo in the book; an action shot of her hanging half way down a wall, in mountain climbing kit, painting the amazing police piece. Sixten's chapter is also great, especially his work in progress, and his finalised Call It Popart One More Time And I'll... piece. Sync also needs a mention as his screaming pieces had a real impact on me when I saw a couple of his pieces in NYC last year. Banksy also gets an honorary mention for hitting the place during a detour visit in 2003. Apparently he made such an impact with the pure quantity of pieces that he deserved the chapter that's dedicated to him. Last mention has to go to Rone, who gets the title for greatest photo in the book! It's a four-layer stencil of a guy high up in the air, maybe four or five metres high. It's perfectly placed and traverses different types of textures across the wall. Just like all the great street art photos that have been taken, this one becomes complete with some personal interaction. This time it's with the addition of someone throwing a skate deck in the air and making it look like the character in the stencil has been caught mid-trick. Fantastico! It's a shame not to mention all the other great artists included in the book but I've probably already said too much...this is the kind of thing you should discover yourself. I can't really claim to know much about Melbourne but Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne gives me the impression of it having a rich, and dense, tapestry of street art...perhaps more so than anywhere else I can think of (I'm willing to be put right on this one but that's the impression I get from the book). I remember writing that Melbourne looks like a colourful place to live. Seeing this book has made my image of Melbourne much more intensely saturated with colour and dynamic imagery, I just hope I can get over there to visit some day. Like all great books, Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne has made me want to know more about both Melbourne and it's rich streetart scene. I'll definitely be going back over all the photos at State Of Flux now that I have some solid reference material...I need to see more from these artists.

and this book does a pretty good job of covering the city's heavy-hitters, as well as documenting plenty of smaller and anonymous works. if you've followed stencil art in the past few years at all, you'll recognize some pieces, as well as some artists' names (meggs, meek, and sixteen to name a few). there are bios and interviews, and the artwork is divided up into themed sections. all of the photos are color, too, which is a nice bonus many other books on this subject seem to be lacking. at nearly 160 pages, and being hardcover, it's well worth the money.

I first heard about this book in a newspaper review and decided to buy it for my Mum for christmas. We live in Melbourne, which also made it extra special, although anybody would be able to appreciate the art. The book is beautifully presented and also very interesting to read as each artist has their own bio accompanying photographs of their work. I recommend this book to anybody who has an interest in street art, design or is just looking for a unique coffee table book. It also makes for a great gift.

SO i picked up this book to compliment my ever growing coffee table collection and I have to say... its alright. Now this one is strictly from Australia. there are other artists who have visited the country... but mainly home town heroes. You can't really go wrong with a stencil art book, but this one has nice pictures and a good, over-all look to the book. Just pick it up... you'll like it. And by the way, the INFAMY DVD, awesome graffiti video.

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