The Idea Of Commercial Street Art

The appeal of street art in urban areas is thriving. Seen by the ignorant as merely an underground reflection of adolescent rebellion, street art is being recognised as much more than just vandalism. It is powerful and culturally valuable, giving us all a captivating reason to look up in an era where we're so used to looking down.

Now before I continue, it's important to note that the difference between street art and vandalism lies in their intention. Tagging – the act of scrawling a crude image or nickname with spray paint or markers – is akin to a dog marking its territory. It's a slandered, foul and threatening form of self-expression. A quick glimpse outside the train window on my commute to work and there's walls thick with layers upon layers of senseless crap as far as the eye can see. For the love of god, if you're going to make a mark, the least you can do is create something with substance.

On the flip side, I'm sick to death of the visual litter – we're affronted by mind-numbing ads that constantly poke at our sensitive spots – they tell us we're not good enough, not wealthy enough, not slim enough, and we've learned to slap a forced grin on our faces and simply succumb. Don't get me wrong, I don't hate advertising (I'd be in the wrong industry if I did) but for goodness sake, please do or say something to draw my eye. Marketers have a myriad of choices when it comes to connecting with consumers and bombardment is not the answer. I, for one, would rather someone's artistic outpouring on our city walls over a billboard any day. Authentic street art inspires commentary. It's the evolution of a concept, brought to life by a passionately creative artist.

'Brandals' are injecting life and individuality into dark and dreary spaces with ads that don't look like ads, so it's unsurprising advertisers are enlisting them to lure people outside – then inside – their stores. From gritty inner-city laneways to the swanky outskirts of Prahran and Fitzroy, commercial murals flank the streets of Melbourne as brands turn to guerrilla tactics in an effort to amp up their advertising. Companies are cashing in on the public's fascination with street art purely because it entices people more than lacklustre street marketing. Not long ago, digital was at the forefront of the advertising industry's fascination, focusing on how to grab the tech-savvy consumer's attention while they're trawling through their feed or shopping online. But it's becoming business as usual, so its time brands think outside the box.

Commercial street art ¬– not just the end result, but the entire creation process – catches more eyes in a way that run-of-the-mill marketing cannot, sparking conversation and real brand awareness. A study by the Outdoor Media Association (OMA), which was conducted using the Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) where partakers wore eye-tracking glasses and had devices attached to their hands to track what they were looking at, shows consumers are two times more alert and likely to act outdoors compared to on their screens at home. Similarly, figures released by the OMA suggest out-of-home advertising reaches nine out of 10 people, with 92.6 per cent of people exposed to advertising outdoors compared to online, TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. But while many see art, there's bound to be a few precious pessimists who see red. Last year, Moscow authorities commenced a city-wide clean of all graffiti to create space to advertise the World Cup. In the weeks leading up to the event, all street art was

erased, coinciding with the government's "My Street" restoration program in a bid to revamp Moscow's modern history. FIFA reserved 539 exteriors for official World Cup partners, and the entire nation soon followed suit by removing all legal graffiti to comply with its responsibility to FIFA and its sponsors. This caused uproar among local street artists whose work had been painted over, with many arguing that commercial murals are killing the sanctity of graffiti. But it doesn't have to – brands, building owners and artists have the opportunity to work together within sanctified spaces to draw more eyes in ways never possible before.

Then there's the illegality of graffiti culture. Governments have drawn a hard line between graffiti and street art, but we shouldn't be blaming artists for becoming involved in these ventures. They've resorted to patronage due to lack of support and have been relentlessly struggling against public opinion for decades to distinguish graffiti as an art form.

Though they butt heads, there's a real opportunity for artists and advertisers to collaborate as some kind of ingenious, wildly creative hybrid. Progressively interacting with one another in the public space can allow advertisers to experiment with ads that appropriately replicate street art, and artists are given more opportunities to explore new and innovative ways in which they convey their ideas and designs, all while gaining a huge amount of exposure. There's no denying our cities look miserably similar. We're walking past the same dreck day in, day out thanks to a better-safe-than-sorry attitude that only intensifies homogeneity. But how do we find a happy medium when we're stuck between spray-painted genitalia on the subway and monotonous ads around every street corner? Art and advertising share a similar purpose – to stimulate the viewer's curiosity, leave a lasting impression on their consciousness, and provoke conversation. By blurring the lines between the two, ads plastered on the walls of back-street offices, and the artists who create them, can be given the credit and appreciation they deserve.