



MASTERS OF SPRAY-CAN VENGEANCE

You MAY NOT have realised it, but much of the graffiti and other creative artwork you see smeared across billboards is part of a well-planned campaign to raise consumer consciousness and improve community health. At least that is what the perpetrators say.

The group behind it, at least in Sydney, is BUGAUP — Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Un-healthy Promotions.

BUGAUP is particularly concerned about billboard advertisements for cigarettes. One of the group's most active members, Mr Bill Snow, has been arrested several times for his furtive activities with spray cans of paint.

He is not too worried about serving short jail sentences, and he is even, rather flippant about the idea of having to pay compensation as a result of his handiwork. He told one billboard firm that he'd love to see it attempt to get it from him.

"I said, 'You want to get it, OK, I'll go and do another 30 boards", he recalled. "I said to them, 'If you think you can intimidate people by exploiting their fears, to buy the product to supposedly counter that fear, a bit of intimidation back to you might even things up a bit' ".

Mr Snow knows only five seriously committed billboard sprayers at work in Sydney, but he says they cover a lot of territory.

The graffiti Mr Snow and his fellow spray-can manipulators do is some times witty, usually thoughtful, and always in reasonably good taste.

That is supposed to be the difference between BUGAUP's activities and the smutty smearings of adolescents who never learnt to spell.

Mr Snow is convinced that the work of BUGAUP is having a definite salutary effect on the health of Sydenysiders. A number of people have told him that his graffiti may well have influenced their decision to give up smoking.

"When I'm talking to people I'm sometimes introduced: 'Oh, this is the mad graffitist — the phantom sprayer'" he said. "They say, 'You're the one — I probably quit smoking because of your stuff or, 'I used to go past White Bay and see it there — it used to really make me realise what I was doing to myself.

"That sort of feedback keeps me going. The effect against advertising in general is strong. It makes people realise that they're having unhealthy stuff foisted upon them wherever they go"

He said BUGAUP urgently needed more recruits. Had he any tips for young hopefuls desirous of taking up the spray can and making a bid for public attention, if not public appreciation?

Practice was the key to success, he said. "The more you do, the better you get at it", he commented. "Obviously, using spray cans is part of it — knowing how to keep them going — knowing how to get them cheap.

Target stores are the ones, they're so much cheaper than regular places".