

Q&A with Elliott 'Numskull' Routledge

Public art
has changed
our cities
for the
better but
can we have
too much of
a good
thing?



Charlick's building, Ebenezer Place Adelaide. Photo Ian Buckland

We first encountered the bold colour, graphic pop-iconography of Sydney-born artist Elliott Routledge (aka Numskull) more than eight years ago at his solo exhibition at Gallery on Weymouth. Since then we've followed his career as his canvas has gotten larger and the artist – who started graffitiing trains in Sydney – took his work to new heights around the world.

Urban Insider caught up with the artist after his recent trip to Adelaide for the Big Picture Fest, curated by local street artist Joel van Moore (aka Vans the Omega). Numskull spent four days surrounded by a five

Urban Insider was interested to learn what Numskull thought about the evolution of 'street art' during his career and the impact it has had on communities at the macro and micro level.

Urban Insider • How long have you been painting for?

Numskull • I have been painting since I was in around year 10 or 11 at school, which was 1999 or thereabouts. There were gaps of time along the way, but i've spent the most part of that time painting in various forms. My wife would agree that I've had paint on my clothes for almost all of my life.

How long have you been painting in public?

Painting for me kind of began on walls and in public, so I guess the same as above. Around 18 years! Wow, that feels weird to type. I should get a real job at some point.



Wetherill Park Library & Community Centre, Wetherill Park

What's made the biggest impact on your career? Was there a point you noticed when the public started to think, 'I don't like boring concrete walls?'

There's always been public interest in graffiti, street art and murals. There was definitely a boom in people's interest around the 2000's when the early adopters were pioneering the world of "street art". The

weren't necessarily educated in art.

The strangest part to me is that this never was an "industry" when I started. It's all happened so quickly. I always question whether it has an end point or not.

You know graffiti and you know street art as labels – are these sides still antagonising each other or is everyone keen to get paid?

A friend of mine painted a mural in Sydney last week and, half way through painting, the wall was tagged pretty brutally, so yes, the beef is still very much alive.

These days, what is coined as 'street art' is actually post graffiti/street art or *muralism*. I have no idea really what to label it as, but it's certainly not what it used to be for me. Money was the real game changer I think. What started out as a passion for some, turned into a well paid career option for many.

I think there will always be a problem between graffiti and street art, and over the years there have been times of real conflict between the two worlds. Mostly graffiti writers are taking back the walls that have been given to street artists. Walls that were once theirs to do whatever they wanted.

As time goes on, I've seen a lot of graffiti and street artists focus on the money. Everyone is keen to get paid. If you can paint walls and earn a living from it, why wouldn't you. I never ever would have thought I'd be earning money from painting. I just started doing it because it was fun.



A Sydney wall by Numskull interfaces with graffiti 'tags' to the left

What does large format art bring to a city?

If it's curated properly I believe it heightens the experience of a city and creates a certain personality profile of a place. If it's oversaturated with large format art, I think it can be a hinderance.

To a neighbourhood?

It's a talking point and a source of conversation for a community. Something they can embrace as their own.

To a street?

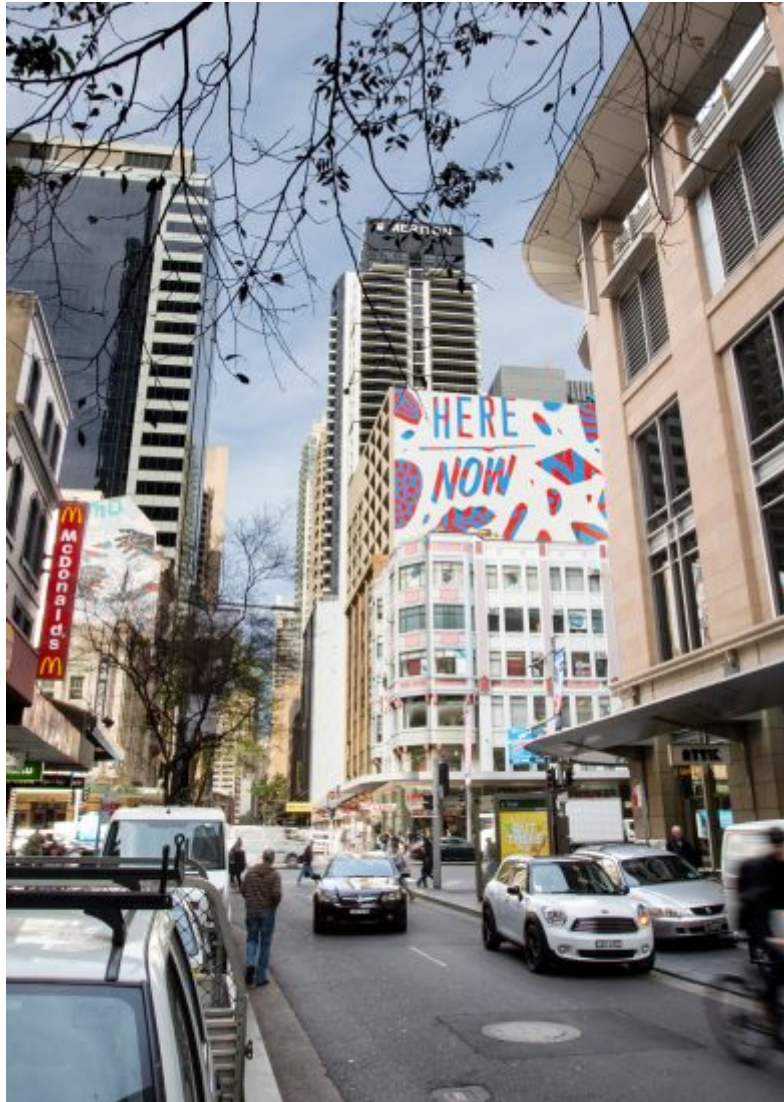
It's a landmark. The simplest of public art can burn into your memory if you experience or pass by it enough. Even if you love it or hate it.

Tell us about the company you and your wife, Billie, are setting up.

Funstudio was formed out of necessity. There are a lot of opportunities out there for artists these days. We try and hook onto the projects that have real integrity and passion, and help connect them to the artist in the most comfortable and honest environment. Artists and their artwork can often be mistreated so we aim to make sure that never happens. Ultimately we want to help create memorable and amazing art projects that artists, clients and the public are happy with.

What do you think about Adelaide?

I really love Adelaide!!! Ever since my last trip I've been bragging about it to everyone. There's something about the size of the city, its landscape and the personality of the people I've encountered. I know



Corner of Park Street and Pitt Street, Sydney. For the Art & About Festival

← NEXT

PREVIOUS →



City Collective

City Collective Melbourne

Level 13, 114 William Street
Melbourne VIC 3000



[Sign up](#)

Copyright 2017 City Collective