

Cleaning with a Purpose

Words Jamie Christian Desplaces

Dirt art, clean tagging, reverse graffiti, green graffiti, dust tagging and grime writing are all names given to a concept that involves creating words and/or images by the process of cleaning.

Paul 'Moose' Curtis, Godfather of reverse graffiti, came up with the idea whilst working in a UK kitchen a decade ago. Cleaning a small mark on the wall he simply made it look worse and cleaning it some more he soon realised that the bigger the clean area became the worse the rest of the wall looked until he ended up cleaning the entire thing. Moose is now commissioned to carry out his artwork worldwide, often to create environmental slogans across whole swathes of filth-ridden public spaces. The contrast of the images upon polluted brick or concrete provides the perfect medium for getting that eco-message across.

Jo Cook and her partner Chris Wesley came across the concept whilst surfing the net and thus set up Clean Advertising, the first of its kind in New Zealand. They admit that it takes a while for some to get their heads round the idea and others still consider it simply a different form of graffiti or vandalism, but on the whole public response is positive. The aim of the company is to alter people's perception of what advertising can be.

"It's a sustainable and innovative form of advertising," says Jo. "There's no chalk or chemicals involved, it's actually cleaning the footpaths!"

The project they are most proud is their 'Safe Driving' campaign which involved leaving messages across driveways and around schools to remind drivers to take that extra look before reversing or pulling out. Other endeavours include campaigns for Auckland's Starship Hospital, the Rugby World Cup, Rialto Cinemas and New Zealand's Mental Health Association. Last Christmas they even embarked on a feel-good eco-poetry assault of Dunedin, whereby inspirational verses were left dotted around the town's streets and walls.

"We're not saying that we're going to take over from newspaper or magazine advertising," says Jo. "But there is a most certainly place for this."

For further info visit www.cleanadvertisingnz.com

"It's a sustainable and innovative form of advertising," says Jo. "There's no chalk or chemicals involved, it's actually cleaning the footpaths!"

