

ARTIST INTERVIEW - LUCKS

@luckylucks

Written and Interviewed by Atorina Saliba

For over than thirty years, Lucks has been skilfully sidestepping law enforcement by spray painting colourful images of rabbits, cats, and hares in laneways and galleries across Australian cities. Now he's teaming up with Dust Temple in an exhibit that celebrates the launch of NATION. I sat down with Lucks earlier this month and we spoke about DIY graffiti, Queensland laws, and the future of youth in the country.

Your entrance into the art world came via the hip hop scene in Brisbane. What was your life like around this time? How does the DIY attitude of graffiti impact your artmaking today?

It seemed like such a more innocent time now looking back, at the time it might have felt intense and challenging but now I look back there was no internet to influence or to be slammed on. Influence came from whatever books you could get your hands on and movies based around the hip hop scene in New York. The DIY attitude of graffiti is basically Get shit done, you know when painting on the streets no one would tee-up an appointment, a time, a day but it was more you see an opportunity then and there and jump onto it and maybe have to ask for forgiveness later.

I still run with this these days even when in the studio, ultimately, I need to produce works and even recently I had a commission and I was borderline on an idea and though it was too far off the clients brief, I did it anyway and ran with it - hey if they didn't like it when I delivered it I could always repaint it!

On the street, I imagine the artist sees a spot of real estate and claims it with a spray can, but the gallery changes that freedom of creation. Suddenly you're allocated a handful of square metres to play in. How different is creating artworks in these two spaces?

For me I don't see much of a difference, I just want to really utilise the space I've got to its full potential- so I tend to approach both environments the same.

Sure, sometimes if you are doing big corporate gigs then the ball games a little different and then all of a sudden you are dealing with protocol, paperwork and heaps of restrictions so I choose not to do many of them, I'm never keen to hand over the creative freedom.

In general, my paintings on the streets these days are similar to what I would place in the gallery.

In Queensland, two things are severely punished: owning a rabbit, and getting caught graffitiing. The fines and jail time for this crime is ridiculous when these resources could be allocated to manage serious crimes, such as assault and robbery. So, it's interesting that your work is dominated by a white rabbit motif; almost like you're calling on the audience to follow the white rabbit to mischief, not crime. Your art doesn't encourage people to break into cars or rob homes, rather it encourages creativity. How do you believe graffiti impacts the environment around you?

I love seeing graffiti everywhere, I still get a kick out of walking home or catching the train and seeing what has popped up or who's around, I really find it refreshing and it gives me a little charge. It's like kids interested in treasure hunts, I kinda get the same buzz.

Legally, I think for both the ownership of rabbits and graffiti, the punishment simply just out weights the crime.

Graffiti can be like five years in prison and Rabbit ownership is a huge chunk of cash. Youth get it harsh too, they don't necessarily even need to be busted doing graffiti they can simply be found with a can and then the harassment is huge which I just think fuels the burning fire - starting a downward spiral.

What does it say about the unimaginative grey architecture which dominates cities like Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Sydney, that would inspire someone to take a colourful spray can do it?

I Look at it like a house analogy - you can have some people living in houses with all blank walls, room after room with nothing on them, then you can go to another house and they have maybe one or two nicely placed painting or photos on their wall and then you have places like mine where the walls are covered top to toe with artworks, photos and visual stimulation- it's not every-ones cup of tea but I just couldn't live in such a blank environment - I find beauty and stimulation in colour and lots of it. Grey architecture is just like that, some people probably dig it but I much prefer hanging out in the parts of the cities and towns that have more colour, layering and creative saturation.

The bonus is that over the years those areas are creeping out into the grey areas.

Art is an important influence on youth. A few years back, the Philadelphia Museum of Art took a handful of classical paintings from their museum and reproduced them for the streets as part of their Inside Out program. You could find Paul Klee's Fish Magic in the hallways of a public school. Street art doesn't receive the same positive feedback. In fact, as a government method of trying to crackdown on "anti-social behaviour", hefty fines and jail terms are given to anyone caught graffitiing. How do you see this as impacting the youth in this scene?

Look, I think Kids and youth are going to do what they want to do, they are young, energetic and have a chunk of gusto - so I think if we want to have a positive impact which of course I do, we definitely need to change the harassment and suppression around graffiti.

What are you hoping for the future of graffiti and youth?

I would love the negative criminal connotations around it to stop or soften for the youth, it is not uncommon for guys my age to have heavy criminal records behind them from around this age, simply because we wanted to express our form of creativity. Of course, like every culture there is always going to be a bunch of dickheads but overall the culture is full of some incredible artists who would benefit heavily from a more Positive environment. As a whole, I feel Society is responding way better these days to graffiti I just think it's time for the legal elements to catch up!

It would be a shame to find that the next generation are all still getting long lists of criminal charges which can sometimes lead to a downward spiral.

ARTIST BIO

Life and Lucks

In so many endeavours, street cred speaks to legitimacy and is a foundation of success.

In the vexed world of art and what constitutes "art", legitimacy is often defined by the observer and not the creator - a third-party opinion influences aesthetes to determine whether or not a piece of work is "art".

But what if the opinions of others don't really count and, instead, the experiences of a life are mixed through the alchemy of brush strokes, spray cans and vivid colours to create a visual language that speaks for itself?

Where the street cred actually comes from the street. Where the legitimacy is legit.

He calls himself Lucks, and that's the theme he weaves through his art - luck, its symbolism, its indiscriminate randomness.

This Brisbane artist channels his observations of a life hard-lived into experiences on the canvas.

A former Catholic who still leans on the inculcation of faith and its symbols to influence his acrylic and oil media: a brightly spray-painted silhouette of the Virgin Mary, also representing the voodoo Goddess of Good Fortune, juxtaposes two religions that are in conflict yet share the same message of hope through the strong female archetype. Typical Lucks.

Horseshoes, rabbits (lots of rabbits), cats (black and white, both considered lucky and unlucky in different parts of the world) flowers, teapots (as symbols of tea-leaf reading in fortune telling), rainbows and roses, words and tags. Each is the story-teller's talisman and the spray can nozzle and paint brush give them expression.

Born in New Zealand and a resident of Brisbane for the past 38 years, for more than 30 years Lucks has employed the spray can to hiss and spit his visual stories into life, first as a street artist and now onto canvas.

"I find myself observing the contrast of life and the play off of each other to create a certain vibration in the surrounds I encounter," Lucks says.

"Light/dark, neon/black, black/white, religion/atheism, busy/calm, war/peace, spots/stripes and the "good and bad luck" thoughts and scenarios along my path.

"This contrast/balance and trying to achieve this has become a key focus in my painting practice - it's the craziness in the confined space of the canvas."

Lucks' "participation in graffiti" sparked a love of fonts and the written word and, together with his penchant for clashing patterns, has evolved into a collaboration on canvas through which he threads his representations of luck, good and bad.

Lucks' mentor, the renowned Australian artist David Bromley, is a fan. The two share a common experience of having painted commercial advertising and marketing signs to make a living.

"Lucks has a diverse relationship with art - from the streets, to digesting the world of art through travels around the world, and investigations based on a love of and an affinity for art," David says.

"Lucks has a great art vocabulary and sees the finest detail in everyday situations; he picks up on things that let you know all eyes are 'plugged in'.

"30 years of hard knocks and building his vision on the street, in galleries, getting by, and keeping the passion alive have all come out as this wonderful person.

"Lucks sees the world through fresh eyes, despite the dust that has hit those eyes, and in my opinion he has something great going on in that head and heart of his.

"Tins blazing, brushes flying, heart and soul intact, Lucks is one to watch."