



Birmingham: It's Not Shit loves Birmingham, its people, arts, animals, buildings, parks, grass verges, factories and bus stops. We've even got a soft spot for the Black Country.

BiNS runs The Brummie of the Year Award, Talk Like a Brummie Day and organises odd stuff like spending all day on the eleven bus.



Danny Smith: Tag nuts

25 January 2010
By Danny Smith

So I spoke to the Editor* about what to write about this week and he gave me this, probably to wind me up, which suggests that ten people are responsible for most of the graffiti in Brum. I knew my feelings on graff have been documented ad nauseum in other places. Also I find the weary 'is it art?' argument nonsensical and unhelpful and am at loathe to drag it out one more time. So, for once, I thought it would be good to give someone active in that world a chance to reply. The guy I spoke to didn't want to be named so I haven't.

What do you think of the thought that there only ten people responsible for the graffiti in Birmingham?

I doubt the council see it like this to be honest, I can imagine they have a wanted list a lot longer. But who knows. They will have probably whittled it down to their top ten targets who they have literally charted as the top ten. However what they don't realise is that if your a "tagger" part of that concept is to get up. As many times as possible. More than anyone else. So in a way with this approach they may encourage some of them to go harder. Get to number 1. If they publish this list. Its possible there will even more tags on road then before... There's so many factors involved its really hard to say.

Do you think you're one of the ten?

No. I am probably about number 40. This might encourage me to work harder as I was just saying. No in reality I rarely "tag" these days and if I do I think about the size, the placement, the camera's... The problem with a lot of the younger kids these days is they just write on anything, anywhere without thought. The whole problem with "tagging" itself, lies in there somewhere.

How about the fact that 10% of the city was 'blighted', is it a blight? Where do you think that figure comes from?

It's a media figure. A bullshit figure. 10% of a city is a lot no? Maybe its 1% I just don't really understand what they are trying to say there to be honest. It makes little sense. With regards the concept of "tagging" being a blight, in some respects yes it is, mainly due to what I was referring to in the previous question. A nicely placed, crafted, practices, hand-styled tag to me is beautiful. And people need to remember, all this scrawling and seemingly messy paint they see on the street are TAGS, Bombs... This is NOT "Graffiti Art" these are two separate entities. Although someone reading right now will cuss me for saying that.

Do you make a distinction between 'good' graff and 'bad' graff - where should toys learn if not on bus stops?

Good question. Half of the problem with "graffiti" in a broader sense is related to legal spaces and understanding of it as a culture. But hey, a bus stop is only a bus stop. It's a public space. Its everyone's isn't it? Write what you want on it I say, but maybe just try and be positive with what that is. And maybe do write on a bus stop, but NOT on someone's garage or garden fence, you know?

Is what you do an act of aggression against the city?

Not at all. Not for me. But for a lot of the angry youth of today maybe it is. Their way of marking their territory. But a lot of the tags in Brum, you might see in other places. Its not all about Brum, Its about the UK, the world for some of us. To a lot of older artists the street becomes their platform for freedom of speech. Sometimes that will be aggression towards an area, more often it will just be something they want to say. Anything from political messages about the system to a simple "I love you" to someone. We need some kind of freedom of speech out there. The street fills the gaps.

What would you suggest to answer the graff 'problem'?

In Birmingham and in this current situation, the powers that be need to think about this whole thing in a bigger sense. They need to do their research; they need to watch films like Bomb It and Inside/outside. They need to communicate and reach out rather than trying to come down with an iron fist. With this heavy approach they will simply lose. Some of these younger writers (who I know will be in the top 5 say) some of them are angry young people with no other outlet. Like I said earlier a big top ten wanted list will probably just up the ante, up the potential fame. I remember years ago I "got up" on the front page of the local rag. I loved it. It was king of the town in certain circles.. top of the wanted list. I never got caught either. Fame.

Any thing else you want to add?

To all the bombers, taggers, dub writers, people, just try and think a little. Everyone gets drunk and smacks a tag where they shouldn't sometimes, but just think a bit more about where your putting your name. And go paint a piece! A proper piece, somewhere out the way, take your photo's and enjoy it. Its not all about getting up. Its much more fun than tagging a shop and running away from the police. To the establishment, as I said, do your research and try to understand this is a culture. Not just gang style youth's going mental out there... for some of the kids, its all they have. A little empathy?

*when I say Editor, I of course mean Jon Bounds, but I like to think of him as my editor with a cigar in his mouth, cursing and shouting 'GET ME PICTURES OF THE SPIDER-MAN'

The opinions of Danny Smith do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers of this blog, its affiliates, or any sane adult human beings. He currently lives in your cupboard, watching, always watching.

Tags: Birmingham, birmingham uk, culture, danny smith, graffiti

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Julia Gilbert 1 year ago
Really interesting interview, nice one Danny.

I think his advice to fellow taggers is excellent, really glad that he sees a difference between public and private spaces. Seeing quick and dirty lazy tags on people's fences or other boundaries around people's homes or businesses really depresses me. But I used to love looking at the more elaborate tags that people have spent time on in deserted spaces near the railway when I used to get the train into town, really brighten up a dull journey.

Jo Ind 1 year ago
I really like this. It's so important to get the perspective of someone who actually does it. Thank you. I learnt a lot.

Nick Booth 1 year ago
I've also learnt a lot but please don't spray paint on public places.

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BiNS is mostly by Jon Bounds, a Birmingham based social web consultant, producer and writer. You can hire him to work on your stuff, or follow him on twitter. There's also the odd bit of stuff from Danny Smith.

Feel free to send us anything you're interested in - or think we might be. If you've got gigs to promote, best to chuck them on the talk board.