



SCRAWL'S ALL THAT

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Graffiti has made its mark on advertising

By DIANE HESS

Graffiti has grown up. Once the province of trouble-making kids, urban scrawl is now a marketing tool for companies looking to capture the attention — and spending power — of a younger, hipper demographic.

Nike just tapped legendary street writer Futura 2000 to create 26 icons and symbols illustrating Lance Armstrong's life story. The graffiti-like marks now grace Armstrong's Tour De France time-trial bike.

Time magazine tried to up its cool quotient by hiring well-known scrawler Cope2 to paint a billboard that debuted last month in SoHo.

"We want to get young people talking about topics of relevance to them," said Ari Merkin, creative director at Time's ad agency Fallon New York. "That is why we chose graffiti. We wanted to start a discussion and to provoke a bit."

The corporate-sanctioned graffiti comes as advertisers find it harder to reach younger demographics through traditional media. "Graffiti is a lot more immediate than a print ad," said Marisa Brickman of marketing firm Cornerstone Promotion. "It's very much in your face."

Even the king of self-promotion, Donald Trump, caught on to the value of graffiti as a marketing tool. In an episode of "The Apprentice 3" this year, his job candidates used Harlem graffiti artists to advertise a new video game.

Some of the art used by companies is obvious — such as splashing large Coke and Snapple logos on urban buildings — while other ads are more discreet, such as one in Philadelphia for Reebok that uses edgier images and a barely legible brand name.

Many of the top graffiti taggers



now in demand by Madison Avenue first practiced their trade on the MTA trains running under the famed advertising avenue. Tats Cru Inc. began as three Bronx teenagers illicitly creating subway "art" two decades ago. Now the firm has a blue-chip list of clients including Tommy Hilfger, Bloomberg, McDonald's and Coca-Cola.

Just last month, Tats Cru, whose preferred medium is aerosol, painted a second billboard in New York for the new Hummer H3. Meanwhile, a spate of graffiti media companies are cropping up around the city.

Two years ago, Noah Shapiro launched Critical Massive. Using a network of national graffiti artists and legal mural spaces, the company has done campaigns for Adidas, Cartoon Network, Comedy Central, M&M's Candy, Reebok, Snapple and White Castle.

And while some graffiti artists are thrilled that they can now make money doing what they love, other urban scrawlers feel that shilling for Corporate America is selling out. In Chicago, a graffiti mural done by Critical Massive for Axe deodorant was defaced last month.

"Someone from the neighborhood, who didn't want art to be used for commercial purposes, decided it was his right to paint over it," said Shapiro. But his company was quickly back on the case. "We've already fixed it," he said.

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