

CONTEMPORARY **AUSTRALIAN** STREET ARTISTS

YOUNG & FREE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

26.07.11

941 GEARY ARE PROUD TO PRESENT, **YOUNG & FREE: CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN STREET ARTISTS**, THE LARGEST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN STREET ART, EVER.

"I like renegades – there's something so attractive about their natural instinct to defy convention." Anon.

Some call Australia the 'lucky country', but we've always made our own fate. From a rebellious past we've forged an identity steeped in cunning ingenuity, creative discontent and unorthodox flair. We've staged rebellions over rum, gained notoriety and won Nobels. We invented cask wine and Wi-Fi and we've won countless world titles. There may not be a lot of us, but we've always packed a punch.

So it is no surprise that with nothing more than a can of paint and a glint in their eye Australians are taking the street art scene by storm. It's time for the rest of the world to sit up and take notice.

Young & Free will be the most significant exhibition by Australian street artists ever seen in the United States. The show will feature fresh work by thirteen of Australia's finest urban art guerrillas – from the already internationally acclaimed to the burgeoning up-and-comers.

This tribe of artists comes from a variety of backgrounds: brilliant new work by notorious 80's train painters through to the sublime subtlety of a modern day Rembrandt armed with a spray can. **Young & Free** is a reflection of Australia's

ANTHONY LISTER / KID ZOOM
DABS & MYLA / DMOTE / NEW2
BEN FROST / MEGGS / HA-HA
REKA / RONE / SOFLES / VEXTA

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thriving street culture with a strong grounding in the past and a firm focus on the future. These artists are modern day bushrangers, patrolling the lanes from Melbourne to Manhattan.

This show features a mix of direct sprays, stencils and paste-ups, representing the rich and varied groundings from which these artists have grown. No matter their age, medium or style, the **Young & Free** artists all share one thing in common: they want to give the urban landscape a fresh coat of paint.

There are many similarities between Australia and San Francisco. Both have famous bridges, internationally established street art cultures and, of course, trams. What is different is our beginnings. Australia's criminal foundations have seeped into our national persona – Aussies are born with a spirit of rebellion. As the opening lines from our national anthem proclaim, 'Australians all let us rejoice, for we are **Young & Free!**'

The cans have been capped, the wheat paste stirred, and the stencils packed: this is the most important Australian street art exhibition ever, mate.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES:



LISTER

A trendsetter with an international following and a general disregard for borders, prolific street artist and painter Anthony Lister has managed to marry the empathy and abjection of 20th Century figuration with the irreverence of the street. His work shows a genuine affection for the human body, and also a tender understanding of the ways in which the demented, destructive, playful and powerful collide and coalesce.

From Brisbane, Lister moved to New York in 2003 and it was there that he found a visual language of his own. He shifted his focus to painting superheroes and this shift gave his work newfound forcefulness. He retained his distinctive approach to mark-making, but began appropriating and re-imaging comic muses, relatable characters that act as classical mythology's pop equivalents. These characters have become proxies for Lister, allowing him to react to the world as he sees it and pursue tongue-in-cheek philosophical explorations – explorations that raise more questions than they answer.

Lister exhibits extensively worldwide and appeared in the publication 'Beyond the Street: The 100 Leading Figures in Urban Art', cementing his place in the history of the movement.



DABS & MYLA

Melbourne natives Dabs and Myla are a dynamic duo who relocated to Los Angeles in 2009. They are both members of the infamous SDM CREW from Melbourne and recently joined the World Famous SEVENTH LETTER collective. Dabs started painting graffiti in 1995, and began teaching Myla the ropes of graffiti writing about ten years later after meeting in art school where they became friends and eventually fell in love. Soon afterward, they decided they liked their collaborative pieces better than their individual work, and from that point on, they worked together exclusively, as Dabs Myla. Inspired by graffiti, travel and their wonderful chaotic life together as a couple, their paintings play Dabs' mischievous and sometimes ribald characters off Myla's photorealistic cityscapes. Since their move to California, they have never spent more than a few hours apart. They say, "I guess we are pretty lucky... two peas in a pod! Two crazy, workaholic, mad dorks in a pod! After years of living, painting walls and working together, we have only become closer, stronger and even more in sync. Every day we wake up, paint all day, and keep each other entertained with constant chatter and stupid jokes. Who could ask for more out of life?"

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KID ZOOM

Kid Zoom has been anointed with the title, 'Rembrandt with a spray can' by none other than the master painter, Ron English. Kid Zoom's incredible talent, and his paramount technical proficiency in using solely free-hand aerosol to create his work is changing the brash connotations of the medium. Last year saw him go from relative obscurity to being one of the most exciting new talents in the street art movement, exhibiting alongside Shepard Fairey, Banksy, Jean Michael Basquait and Keith Haring. Starting his career in Perth, he now resides in New York where in December 2010, he had his successful solo exhibition 'This City Will Eat Me Alive'. His art combines precise photo realism, expressive distorted pop imagery and aggressive street and gallery installation work. Combining astonishing spray can ability with classical painting technique, Kid Zoom is tipped to be a star of his generation.



DMOTE

Sydney born Shannon Peel is not only known as legendary Australian graffiti writer Dmote but also as an internationally acclaimed designer, illustrator and painter. In 1985, at the age of 15, he started painting the Sydney streets and he has played a substantial role in the underground Australian graffiti scene. His talent has taken him to subways, streets and galleries the world over, including the United States, Japan, Italy, Spain, Canada, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Croatia and Bosnia. He currently lives and works in New York. He has curated exhibitions and festivals around the world as well as being published in countless publications and videos (i-d, Dazed and Confused, The Face, Refill, Warp and Rolling Stone just to name a few). Dmote continues to stay true to the fundamentals of the art form and remains active as a street writer and artist.

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NEW2
New2 began painting in Australia in the early '80s. A few years later, he became a member of the Da Mad Artists (DMA) crew who were prominent figures in the early Australian writing movement. He was part of the first generation of street artists to get art world recognition, which is ironic taking into consideration that art class was "squandered" - as he was repeatedly told - by preparing sketches for the coming nights' trains and walls. New2 is still writing and also investigating other areas of his creative field, exploring with ceramic versions of his lettering, wooden sculptures, drawings, works in spray-paint, and, of course, his first timber spaceship. He has been exhibited in both group and solo shows in Australia and Europe and currently lives in Belgium. Whilst being modern, his pieces honor the writing traditions of the past. New2 believes that writers' works are as expressive and emotive as any visual art form.



MEGGS
Growing up in Melbourne, Meggs, from an impressionable age, immersed himself in the worlds of drawing, cartoons, sci-fi films and skateboarding. In the early 2000s he began being recognised around the city for his stencils and poster art which progressed into freehand aerosol art and large-scale mural works, showcasing his extensive painting skills. Meggs is one of the founding members of Everfresh Studios, Australia's most renowned and respected street art collective. His painting style has graduated from more simplistic street-based work to technical, layered and expressive mixed media artworks, exploring a unique balance between graphic form and painterly abstraction. Meggs travels his art widely, having had solo shows in Australia, Hong Kong, London and Los Angeles, as well as participating in many group exhibitions around the world. He continues to be very active on the street and is well-documented in numerous street art catalogues and publications. Most recently Meggs' artwork is included in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Australia and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, as well as numerous private collections.

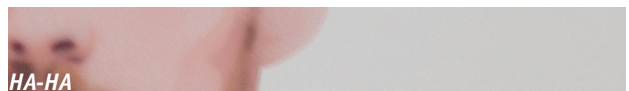
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BEN FROST
Ben Frost is known for his kaleidoscopic Pop Art: mash-up paintings that take inspiration from areas as diverse as graffiti, collage, photorealism and sign writing. Over the last ten years he has been exhibiting throughout Australia and internationally, including solo shows in London, New York and San Francisco, as well as group shows in Beijing, Mongolia, Amsterdam, Berlin and Singapore. By subverting mainstream iconography from the worlds of advertising, entertainment and politics, he creates a visual framework that is bold, confronting and often controversial. In print, his work has appeared in countless magazines and newspapers including Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Oyster, WeAr, Monster Children, Ok!, HQ, Eyeline, Australian Art Collector, Broadsheet, and Art Monthly. When not designing and painting, he co-founded the online art portal StupidKrap.com and also began, and still runs, the international paste-up event 'Paste Modernism'. He resides and creates in Sydney.



HA-HA
HA-HA is a master stencil technician graduating from the streets of Melbourne. Without the aid of Photoshop, his cutting technique produces almost lifelike imagery easily recognisable as his signature work. His choice of figures and characters reflects his opinions on society and culture - bushrangers, the effects of consumerism, signs of our obsession with the media and the portrayal of society, all lightly dusted in an air of sarcasm. He has been exhibiting for over nine years; he has held sixteen solo shows in Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Sydney, and is represented by galleries across Australia. His work can be found in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, State Library of Victoria, City of Melbourne, and private collections across Australia, NZ, UK and USA. Hailing originally from New Zealand, HA-HA now calls Australia home, working and living out of his studio above one of Melbourne's most notorious graffiti-strewn laneways.

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REKA
James Reka is a contemporary artist based in Melbourne. With influences in pop culture, cartoons and illustration, Reka creates his own world of mysterious creatures and characters that communicate through colour, movement and texture. Since 2002 (and as a founding member of the renowned Everfresh Studios), Reka has established himself as a pioneer in Melbourne's burgeoning street art scene, painting in an abstracted surrealist style that has influenced the work of artists both nationally and internationally. Reka's paintings are populated by bold colours and strong lines with a meticulous attention to detail and technical proficiency: it is sleek design meets urban graffiti, held together with a can of paint. His handiwork can be seen on both street and gallery walls from Melbourne's inner suburbs to high-rises in Japan. Reka's work has been recently acquired by the National Gallery of Australia for their permanent collection, cementing his place as one of Australia's most respected contemporary street artists.



SOFLES
Sofles has been both reviled and embraced by the media over his ten-year career that began as a graffiti artist in Brisbane. Following years of perfecting his craft, he burst onto the scene in the late 2000s with various sold-out exhibitions, collaborations with artists such as Anthony Lister, Ben Frost and Revok, and contracts with the likes of Red Bull and Adidas. With many a finger in many a pie, his work spreads across illustration, tattoo, canvas and any markable surface. Sofles' imagery is wide and varied, with collages of mind-bending abstraction melting into intricate form, perfect snapshots of the artist's wild imagination. Sofles' bold use of colour renders pieces so distinctive that they have firmly set his reputation as one of Australia's most-watched contemporary artists. Constantly working, be it in the studio or on walls in Brisbane, Sofles continues exploring new techniques and mediums, keeping the ever-building snowball rolling.



RONE
Rone's posters are some of the most iconic in Australia, hiding under overpasses throughout Melbourne. He is renowned for the stylised images of girls' faces - it wouldn't be a stretch to say that he has had more posters in Melbourne's streets than any other artist in the city's history. Rone is one of the original members of Everfresh Studios where he still works daily. His 'girls' come with him as he travels and now appear on the streets of Los Angeles, New York, London, Tokyo, Barcelona and Hong Kong. Of all the stencil artists from the initial Melbourne stencil boom of the early 2000s, he is the only one remaining who still is consistently getting his work up. His art was acquired by the National Gallery of Australia last year, and he recently sold out his first ever solo show in Melbourne before it even opened, highlighting his status as the literal poster boy of Australia's next crop of street artists.



VEXTA
Sydney-born, Melbourne-residing artist Vexta is well known for her stencils, paste-ups and large-scale street murals across the country. A self-taught artist, her visions started appearing in the mid 2000s and can now be seen across Australia and in Paris, Berlin, London and Bogota. Vexta's psychedelic, neon drenched images are influenced by a personal symbolism and a greater urban mythology which connect the dots between the personal and the universal. She is also a seasoned curator, leading the art direction for a range of shows seen not only in commercial galleries but also held in derelict buildings. Vexta's creativity has now extended beyond wheat paste, stencils and paintings and she is experimenting with assemblage sculptures and installations of found objects such as animal skulls, bones and old wood. She is at the forefront of women in the street art movement and was recently acquired as part of the National Gallery of Australia's 'Space Invaders' project.

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GALLERY INFORMATION

Established in 2010 in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, 941 Geary is an innovative exhibition space housed in a 3,000 square foot converted warehouse. 941 Geary highlights the works of internationally recognized contemporary artists and provides them with a space in which to activate the projects, installations, and exhibitions that push the boundaries of their own creative practice. Building on the success of White Walls and Shooting Gallery, founder Justin Giarla dedicates this exhibition space as a gift to San Francisco, offering its programming to the local and global arts venue as a way to engage in a cross-cultural dialogue and present 941Geary as the flagship gallery of the Urban Contemporary genre.

ALL MEDIA ENQUIRES:

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Media Opportunities:

Interview with the artists featured in

Young & Free

Interview with co-curators *Sandra Powell and Andrew King*

Interview with owner/founder *Justin Giarla*

High-resolution images available upon request

Event Information:

Young & Free: Australian Contemporary Street Artists

Opening Reception – September 10, 2011, 6-9 pm
On View through October 22, 2011,
@ 941 Geary (www.941geary.com)
941 Geary St, San Francisco, CA

WWW.YOUNGANDFREEART.COM

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