

UPFRONT

We're always on the lookout for interesting, unusual or humorous stories and pictures for this section, so if you've got something special—send it in!

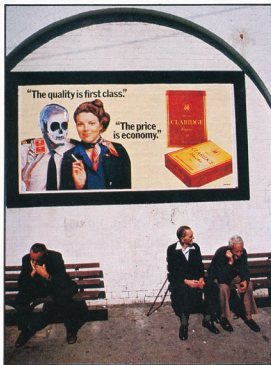
Billboard
Uttilising
Graffitiists
Against
Unhealthy
Promotions

photos
BERND and
BLISS SWIFT

words
Q.U. BUSCH



If you live in Sydney, you may have followed the development of billboard graffiti over the last few years, particularly on billboards advertising the tobacco industry. It began in 1975 when a phantom sprayer began defacing billboards advertising cigarettes near Sydney University.



How did it all originate? What happened in 1975, that eventually led to the coming of age of graffiti as an artform?

In 1975, a man called Bill Snow shifted to the country. As a reformed smoker, his awareness of smoking as a 'dying habit' was highlighted by the clearness of his environment. This new feeling for a better quality of life was intensified by seeing people smoking around him, and that those who didn't smoke showed no inclination to help. Bill decided that rather than try to cure the symptom of what was to him a social disease, he would tackle the cause of it. He was going to take on "the real drug pushers" and set out an action programme of great variety. Bill Snow began his campaign!

When the billboards in Victoria Street, Rozelle were included in the phantom's list of billboards to be defaced—within 24 hours of their first appearance or renewal—some began to see a method in the madness. Sure enough, it wasn't long before billboards along major

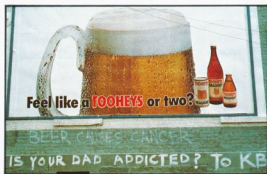
highways started showing certain not-so-subtle alterations. Soon it became clear that the Phantom Sprayer no longer could be thought of as a singular entity. We were witnessing the birth of an action group.

Finally, in October 1979, phantom sprayers started identifying themselves as a group by signing their works BUGA UP, which stands for **Billboard Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions**.

Despite the persistence of BUGA UP graffitiists, the tobacco companies on the other side show no sign of scaling down their billboard advertising campaigns. In spite of their claim that the annual cost of replacing "buggered-up" billboard posters has risen to \$50,000, billboard advertising is still deemed a profit generator by marketing experts who rationalise their position by stating that BUGA UP's changes to the posters attract people's attention to the billboard, while making no significant impact on the original advertising statement.

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His mobile home, an old blue and white Morris van with a billy can tied to the ladder on the back of it, was covered with anti-smoking slogans like "Tobacco Stinks" and converted to liquid gas fuel to not add even more to air pollution. Bumper stickers were printed, badges designed, written information on the subject compiled and all distributed from the van. Eventually Bill moved into town, in order to be closer to "work" and got an unlisted phone number to avoid the frequent harassing calls he was beginning to receive.

In 1979 Bill was apprehended and charged with willful damage and malicious injury (to a billboard) and subsequently spent 17 days in jail for refusing to pay the fine. He felt it was a valuable exercise in public relations for the group.

The standard of billboard graffiti has shown increasing sophistication over the years and in some the artist's

signature seems well-warranted. There is a belief in certain quarters that BUGA UP graffiti is a significant contemporary visual art.

Today BUGA UP is engaged in a wide range of activities besides the utilization of billboards and financial backing which was for a long time non-existent is now forthcoming from the Health Commission's Drug and Alcohol Authority.

BUGA UP is gaining credibility. In a loose relationship with their sister group MOP UP, who tackle the issues on more of an official level, BUGA UP claim to have been effective in the removal of Paul Hogan from cigarette advertising. A scheme is also in progress to persuade bus drivers and conductors to refuse work on buses carrying cigarette ads.

BUGA UP hope that their persistent efforts will eventually successfully halt what they consider to be immoral advertising from billboards right across the country.

