

behind the mask

A popular street artist strikes out on his own.

Those who live in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch will recognise the work before his name. Chances are you've walked past the painted creatures and cheeky, stylised objects on your daily walk or drive – street art that brings character to otherwise bland, blank public buildings and a smile to locals.

The artist is Andrew J Steel who, for the past decade, has worked with another street artist under the alias BMD. Hailing from New Plymouth, BMD gained a strong following in the underground art scene, painting their messages, often political but always fun to look at, across forgotten walls and discarded buildings. Soon they were taking their paint cans and rollers across New Zealand, Australia and Bali, getting aboard scaffolding and creating sky-high murals.

BMD disbanded last year, giving Andrew the chance to step out from behind his painter's mask (he was rarely seen in the media without it, preferring for the art to speak for itself) and allowing for the respect and calibre of his work to open doors to new projects. And the doors have been opening. Private commissions have come thick and fast from residents who appreciate his work. And his signature creatures and objects now decorate the walls of design studios, cafes and restaurants alike, including the stylish headquarters of fashion label I Love Ugly.

Presenting a more public image means that younger artists have easier access to advice from Andrew, who wholeheartedly recommends Resene, the perfect paint for his art. "People ask what I use and I always

recommend Resene. If it's outside mural work it stands the test of time. If it's interior work the finish is always perfect. It simply is the best product."

Perhaps fitting for an artist with a post-graduate diploma in science, he's also having a lot of fun experimenting with various Resene specialist products.

With Resene Write-on Wall Paint, he sees potential for a colouring-in wall that allows the public to collaborate and bring colour to his painted outlines – time and time again. A simple wipe and the canvas is clean and ready to go again. He's also experimenting with Resene Waterborne Aquapel, water-repellent coating – which protects concrete from the natural effects of water – painting the pavements with art that stays invisible until the rain falls.

It's important to take time to be creative, instead of getting too busy with the administration of making art happen, says Andrew.

"Visit other people's studios and meet with other artists and creators. Go to the library. I consciously make time to read a book or draw during the week."

And his advice to those street artists seeking it? "Roll up your sleeves and get right into it. Start drawing lots, and working with people rather than against people. Walk down the street and meet the community and engage them, and show them your drawings. You may get a lot of nos. But if you're hungry enough, one yes may be the start of something great." **H**

See www.andrewjsteel.com.

Below left: Some of Andrew's interior wall art.

Below right: Andrew with one of his commissions at the I Love Ugly headquarters in Auckland.

- Resene
- Half Duck Egg Blue
- Resene
- Gumboot

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