

Getting to grips with graffiti

TERESA FISCHER

EVEN if you hate graffiti there is much to admire about the book *Painting Cape Town*, by Matthew Olckers, which is a comprehensive record of the secretive subculture.

What is it that makes someone spraypaint their name on a train or public wall?

The objective of the modern graffiti artist is to write their name in as many locations as possible in a stylish manner.

"The aim is fame," Olckers (24) explains.

"I am not going to argue that it is good or bad," adding that he hopes the book will start people thinking about a different side of graffiti.

Spending two years compiling honest and gripping interviews with 29 artists was a task that demanded persistence as some of them, shunned by society, are very secretive about their identity. There is little chance most people would be able to ask these artists about why they choose this form of expression.

"They have extremely fascinating stories," he says.

Olckers says his obsession with graffiti began at school in an attempt to balance his inclination for maths and school work.

"I soon learned that graffiti is not easily explained and that is exactly what fascinated me about it," he says.

His "insatiable desire" for graffiti, coupled with a "nerdy interest in computers", led him to start a blog called *Painting the town*.

It is through the blog he was able to meet active graffiti writers.

He discusses the graffiti bylaw passed in 2010 in Cape Town and its effect, including driving the artists underground.

He says many of the artists he interviewed asked their stories not be edited, resulted in an edgy conversational tone that is gripping to read.

The glossary also makes for interesting reading, with terms such as "bite" and "burn" explained. Bite is to steal another artist's ideas or lettering and to burn is to beat a competitor with style.

The book also includes a history section that gives an idea of where each writer fits in, as well as their impact on the Cape Town scene.

Originally from Fish Hoek, Olckers describes working on the book as a "roller-coaster ride" as he had to juggle the pressures of his Chartered Financial Analyst exams and a new job at an asset management



DEAR READER: Matthew Olckers signs a copy of his book *Painting Cape Town*.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED



POSTCARD PERFECT: The cover of Matthew



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