

UP

43

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IN FOCUS:

LEON
SICK
AROE



GRIP

COPENHAGEN STYLE
MASTER INTERVIEW



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SKETCHIN' *with* SOTEN

TOP OF THE LINE: MAD OUT VANDALS





“I recognise most CSG cars and license plates”

aficionados. This has resulted in anything from arbitrary searches on the street, being fired from work or having CSG security constantly waiting in a car outside your apartment.

“I recognise most CSG cars and license plates,” Sick says calmly.

It took about six months for Sick to paint his first train, and it’s been rolling on ever since, quite literally.

“Right now I paint about three train pieces a week; some weeks it’s four or five, others two. It worked really well when it was really cold last winter. The cold and all the chaos in train traffic offered several opportunities for writing.”

Sick shows a picture of a piece on a

commuter train that he has made a few days previously.

“I did a piece with TomCat from Denmark, Get and another guy. It went well, but was painted over in grey when it went into traffic. A day or so later, Get and I each did a panel, and they’re also rolling greypainted now.”

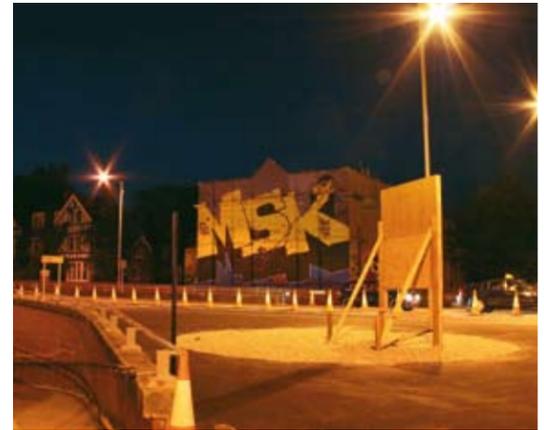
How much time do you need for a piece?

“On commuter trains I usually work for a good 10-12 minutes, but on the subway it’s often about five. I like the fact that you can paint a bit longer on the commuter train, and you can almost always get a picture of the piece in traffic. What’s more, I’ve mostly hung around the commuter trains,





Revok, Aroe, Germany



UK



UK



Slovenia

Malcolm McLaren video for Buffalo Gals, it proved hard for him to attain the desired results in his own pieces, and Aroe concentrated on a career in tagging.

"This is something I now regret very much and the few pictures I have from

"I am unable to paint my favourite surface here in the UK. My career in illegal activity has been tailored by various legal issues which have littered my teenage and adult life. To be honest I feel that perhaps the last problems came at a good time.

■ My career in illegal activity has been tailored by various legal issues which have littered my teenage and adult life. ■

these sparse outings don't really do justice to how much I loved and pursued everything graffiti at this young age," says Aroe.

Ironically, it was the authorities' attempts to stop him that got Aroe onto a track that would make him known around the world for his graffiti.

This has forced me to work harder on the pieces,"

Aroe has developed his own style, at first inspired by his countrymen The Chrome Angels and later by the angular blocky styles from the Eastern bloc and Berlin from the early 2000s. Always laced



I like a really phat spray production, but it isn't everything.

Is the procedure around writing more important than the piece?

Graffiti should exist in certain environments. A legal wall doesn't really give me a

I enjoyed every second, of course. There's something about standing in the Möllan quarter in the middle of the day, painting nice stuff that will roll around the hood until I repaint it. The feeling is similar to doing a pieces on trains and then seeing them in traf-

You do both characters and letters. What requires most practise?

I think it depends on what drives you and what's fun. If you're having fun, you can succeed in whatever you do. Now I almost only do characters. Sometimes I just do a

■ you can't compare creative kids writing with people who run around shooting each other's kneecaps. ■

thrill. The pictorial language easily gets a bit flat and depends on the surroundings.

You do seem to like writing legally, though. Your trucks, as a recent example.

I was in a small traffic accident, and the trucks were a perfect substitute for what I love to do. The mission was to do all the trucks in two weeks so that nobody got there first. I asked the hawkers and they said "paint, paint!".

fic all the time. Of course I do legal pieces too. It's a good way to create and hang with the boys. But in a strange way, it isn't graffiti to me.

What inspires you stylistically?

Day-to-day visual impressions, classical painting, tacky shit and comics get filtered through my brain and become my shit. Sometimes, I choose not to look at the work of other writers I like, just so I won't bite them subconsciously. Stupid, huh?

really nice background for a crewmate. I don't even sign them that much anymore. Lately, I like to do things that talk to everybody, not just graff nerds. Unfortunately, the majority of Scandinavians are so brain-washed by the media that they look away in distaste when they see "scribbling". They don't even bother to see if there are spray letters involved. Characters give me an extra set of eyes to communicate with the public.

Why is it important that others than

■ Cursed be those who steal a style and characters and apply it to their name and think they're somebody because they paint a bit ■

80's



Rages 1987



Stone, Sone 1988



90's



Copenhagen 1991



Copenhagen 1994



1990: "One of our as-ugly-as-possible-on-purpose pieces, because I was tired of everything having to be as clean and fresh as possible. Sek and I did a lot of purposely ugly pieces, among them a window-down on the S train on which it said Remoulade, with a couple of huge balls with a candle on them, and the wax running down the ballsack. It didn't mean anything, we just liked to play with words. Haha, that got buffed straight away."



1991



TAV whole train. We had three hoses, a hundred litres of silver paint and forty litres of black. But the guard dogs sat in the train all night. We had to dump everything and never managed to try again, it was too much hassle to carry everything around at night. In the morning, we were really pissed off, so when the guard left, we went in and threw all the seats in the sixteen cars out into the depot and went home to cry."

Hip hop came to Europe in 1984. Rens rode BMX and caught sight of pieces in American BMX magazines. He himself drew, and liked what he saw.

Many students at his school had break-dancing or graffiti names, which they painted in bubble letters. Rens painted his sneakers and became the crew writer for some breakdancers. He painted jackets and bags for them. And then he started writing on walls. He was arrested on one of his very first outings.

"I had to ride in a police car to the station. While the cop who was driving was talking about 'This'll cost you and your parents will be mad', I hid the can between the seats. Since I didn't have anything on me, they released me at once."

What did your parents say about graffiti?

"Nothing. When I was 14, I'd say I was going to a party, go into the garden and collect a backpack full of cans. And when I showed my mother some train pieces, she didn't want to see the pictures."

In upper school, many people focused on parties and girls. Rens thought it was more fun to write, even though graffiti didn't give him a status with girls. He signed himself Rages and hung out with Shaky, who painted characters. When Shaky was expelled and gave up writing, Rens continued. Early one morning along the tracks, he encountered Sek. Together they created the crew The A-Line Vandals, TAV.

Many first-generation writers quit after a few years. In 1988, the train company DSB started buffing the S-train lines. A maintenance train painted the walls grey. Rens and Sek would follow the train drawing lines along the newly-painted walls. The SS-guards led the trains in service, dressed in black uniforms with a red SS, and unafraid of chasing suspected writers onto the tracks or stopping trains in traffic. The writer Flace was caught and fined 370,000 Danish kronas. Copenhagen graffiti entered a new phase.

"It was fun to paint walls. Trains were

just trouble. There was always a lot of messing around with walkie-talkies, and keeping at least one lookout. Often I'd only just had time to fill in when someone would shout 'Guard!' into the walkie-talkie."

When the German writer Hot visited Copenhagen, Rens acted as a lookout. But Hot was too slow to hide when a train passed by.

"I ran up to him and said 'Get out! The cops'll be here in 5!' He didn't quite believe me, so he kept on while I stood next to him, jumping around and shouting 'Get out of the yard, now!' Finally, I grabbed him and dragged him out."

Soon after they left the depot, a whole group of police stormed in through the trains with dogs.

"Hot turned a bit pale," Rens chuckles.

Rens discovered that trains weren't guarded in the daytime. On Sundays, he could stand around all day doing colour pieces, which would circulate on Monday morning.

Eventually, DSB also installed daytime guards, and parked trains in front of each other rather than beside each other. Rens started painting trains at the station in the middle of rush hour instead.

"I avoided the guards, but there were plenty of people on the trains. You had to cover the windows quickly so no-one could see you."

Weren't you ever afraid?

"No, not really. I always prepared carefully, anything so I could go home and get some sleep after writing. Most writers only gave security some thought after something had happened."

Rens was using a ski-mask already in the 80s, and in the Danish graffiti film 'Top of the Props' [1993], he wiped off fingerprints from all his cans.

"I saw that and thought, wow, that's the way to do it," says the Danish writer Tele.

Together with Sek, Rens figured out escape routes, used walkie-talkies, al-

His simple, brilliant style was a breaker



Vifi, Y1 Train



Poko, Freight Train



Mets, Regional Train



Ohel, Regional Train



Vifi, Regional Train



Cars, Freight Train



OSR, Regional Train



RTWO, Regional Train



Walk, Regional Train



Wumr, Regina Train

OUT TO BURN!

What is a burner really? Indisputably, the concept is as accepted as it is subjective. Björn Almqvist has taken on the task of putting together a book exclusively on burners, and letting the writers themselves define what it is. UP asked Björn a few choice questions.



What is Graffiti Burners?

A collection of really good graffiti pieces from the past two years, and the writers' own thoughts on the burner concept. Even if most writers have an idea on what a burner is, it isn't really defined. Some think a tag or quick piece can be a burner and it's just a matter of the style of the lettering. Others are more of the opinion that it is a full-blown piece that beats everything else by the combination of technique, choice of colour and style, that is should be a thorough piece.

Others have the criterion that it should be a classic piece to qualify as a burner. I wanted to show the most topical stuff, hence the 2009-2010 timeframe, and some of the pieces in the book will definitely become classics, but it's hard to say which now. Time will tell.

Are there any silver pieces in the book?

Yeah, the odd silver piece. But most of the contributors brought colour pieces. My thinking in working on the book is

that they should be thoroughly worked-out pieces, and then if they were silver or colour was less important. And there are also some simpler, well-made pieces in the book, but no tags.

Is it all walls or are there any trains?

It's mostly walls, but a few trains pop up too. I've mainly used the criterion that they should be worked-out pieces rather than where they were made, even though one might argue that location might be the thing that makes a piece a burner.

What is the most unexpected thing you encountered while working on the book?

That Swet (TWS) still hasn't done a burner, according to himself.

Do you think you have a clearer idea of what a burner really is after all the work?

Yes and no. The concept has been thoroughly discussed at the UP editorial board over the years, resulting in stalemates. Asking the question to some of the world's foremost writers around the world

has partly clarified what a burner is, but also shown that it is a highly personal and subjective judgement. Vans The Omega, for instance, says that a burner should have a "wow factor that makes you feel like a kid standing in front of greatness, something bigger than yourself and that transforms you into another world or dimension".

Some writers may not find that what is as good as their own pieces or the slightest bit worse is a burner.

Which writers have contributed?

Writers from around the world: Europe, the US, South America, Australia, and so on. Among them are Revok, Rime and Aroe from MSK, Bates, Great, Cazter, Puppet, Egs, Kaos, Kacao77, Poet, Os Gemeos, Smash 137, Ether, ZZ Top, Jabba, How and Nosm, Vizie, Nomad, Yes 2 and many more.

Graffiti Burners will be released in the spring of 2011 by Dokument Press