

AUSTRALIAN STREET ART

To what extent can Australian street artists freely express and critique society?

A CITY FULL OF ART: MELBOURNE

Walking through **Melbourne's** streets, you can see huge, colourful murals, small graffiti pieces, and artworks covering the entire walls. Street art has become a big part of the city, and anyone walking past can become a part of the audience. But street art isn't just about making places look better; artists can also use their work to share opinions, talk about society, and start conversations about social issues.



Hosier Lane, Melbourne — one of the city's best-known street-art locations.



Matt Gondek — Melbourne, a colorful and controversial mural.

WHEN ART SPEAKS

Street art allows artists to speak about difficult or controversial topics. Because it is displayed in public spaces, their ideas can reach a wide audience.

Political street art is a good example: Artists can use humour, symbols, or famous figures to **express their opinions** about society and current issues.

However, this can also cause controversy when people disagree with the message or feel that the artwork does not belong in a public space.

CAN ARTISTS REALLY SAY ANYTHING?

To understand artists' views, I contacted two Australian street artists, **Rone** and **Happy Decay**.

Neither of them had personally experienced censorship, and both felt that Australian artists have a lot of freedom. However, they also explained that artists may still face limits depending on the project, the people involved, or the organisation funding it.



Rone
Tyrone Wright



Happy Decay
Bjarni Wark

WHEN STREET ART CREATES DEBATE



Merry Crisis — Scott Marsh's political mural about Scott Morrison.

MERRY CRISIS

Scott Marsh's mural about **Scott Morrison, Australia's former Prime Minister**, is an example of how street art can make a political statement: It portrayed Morrison in a Hawaiian shirt surrounded by flames, referring to his trip to Hawaii during the 2019 bushfire crisis. The mural used humour to criticise his decision and became widely known, but was painted over only a few days later by an unknown man. This shows how street art can express political opinions, but can also face limits once it is placed in a public space.

ONE IMAGE, TWO DIFFERENT OPINIONS

Another case was a controversial mural in Fitzroy. The artwork showed a woman in a bound and gagged position. Some found it inappropriate for a public place, especially around children, while others saw it as "shibari", a Japanese rope art practice, and defended the artist's freedom of expression. The different reactions became a challenge for the artist, with more than 1,000 emails being sent to Yarra Council.



Fitzroy mural — A controversial artwork by Lauren Ys that started a debate about artistic freedom.



Graffiti Is A Crime — Banksy's artwork questioning whether graffiti is really a crime.

ART OR VANDALISM?

Street art raises the question: **when does art become vandalism?**

Street art can be seen by thousands of people, but not everyone has the same opinion about it. While murals can be admired by the public, graffiti without permission can be seen as property damage. This shows that street artists have a lot of freedom, but their work can still create debate and make people stop, look and think.