

Graffiti 'artist' goes to work

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Carla Danaher

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ADIDAS has come under fire for using graffiti to market sneakers, just a day after a graffiti vandal was jailed for three months.

The company is paying graffiti artist Nuroc -- described as having a "long and esteemed history in Melbourne's graffiti culture" -- to paint a billboard in Punt Rd.

On Wednesday, Noam Jason Shoan, 25, was sentenced in the County Court to three months' jail over 42 counts of criminal damage.

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It is believed to be the first time in the state that a graffiti vandal has been sent to prison for that length of time.

Adidas was yesterday branded irresponsible for the marketing campaign.

Residents Against Graffiti Everywhere spokesman Steve Beardon said it sent the wrong message and urged the public to contact adidas and complain.

"It's trying to legitimise what is illegal activity," Mr Beardon said.

"They are sending out a message that vandalism is acceptable. They are being irresponsible and should look at promoting their products in more responsible ways."

But adidas argued graffiti was a legitimate form of art.

The sportswear giant has commissioned graffiti artists from around the world to design a range of sneakers to be sold in Foot Locker stores.

The company said it did not endorse illegal graffiti, but wanted to provide a legal avenue for graffiti

artists to display their work.

Adidas spokesman Cameron Baranski said the project encouraged young people to make a living out of graffiti art, instead of writing on walls illegally.

"There's a big difference between what Nuroc's done up there and vandalism and tagging," Mr Baranski said.

"What Nuroc has done up there is a piece of art. I challenge anyone to say it's not a legitimate piece of art."

Nuroc has spent five days in a cherry picker spray-painting the Punt Rd billboard.

He knows Noam Sloan but says he now shuns the practice of painting unsightly "tags" all over the city.

"I don't want to be compared to that at all," he told the Herald Sun as he put the finishing touches to his billboard.

"I am an artist and have works in the National Gallery (Australian Prints and Works On Paper) collection.

"I'm annoyed. But I know this guy, so I prefer not to talk about it at all."

Mr Baranski would not reveal how much the company was paying Nuroc.

He said adidas had not asked the graffiti artist if he had a criminal record.

"It's not a usual question we'd ask someone we'd employ on a contractual basis."

Citylights Projects public art curator Andrew Mac, who commissioned the billboard, said Nuroc was one of the best artists in Melbourne.

"Adidas and Foot Locker are really happy with it.

"Nuroc has a unique style. The brief was quite open so it's largely an expression of what Nuroc wanted to do."

He said Shoan's three-month jail term was ridiculous compared to other crimes.

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Graffiti or art? graffiti artist Nuroc works on his billboard design in Punt Rd as controversy engulfs adidas which commissioned the striking design. Picture: Jay Town

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