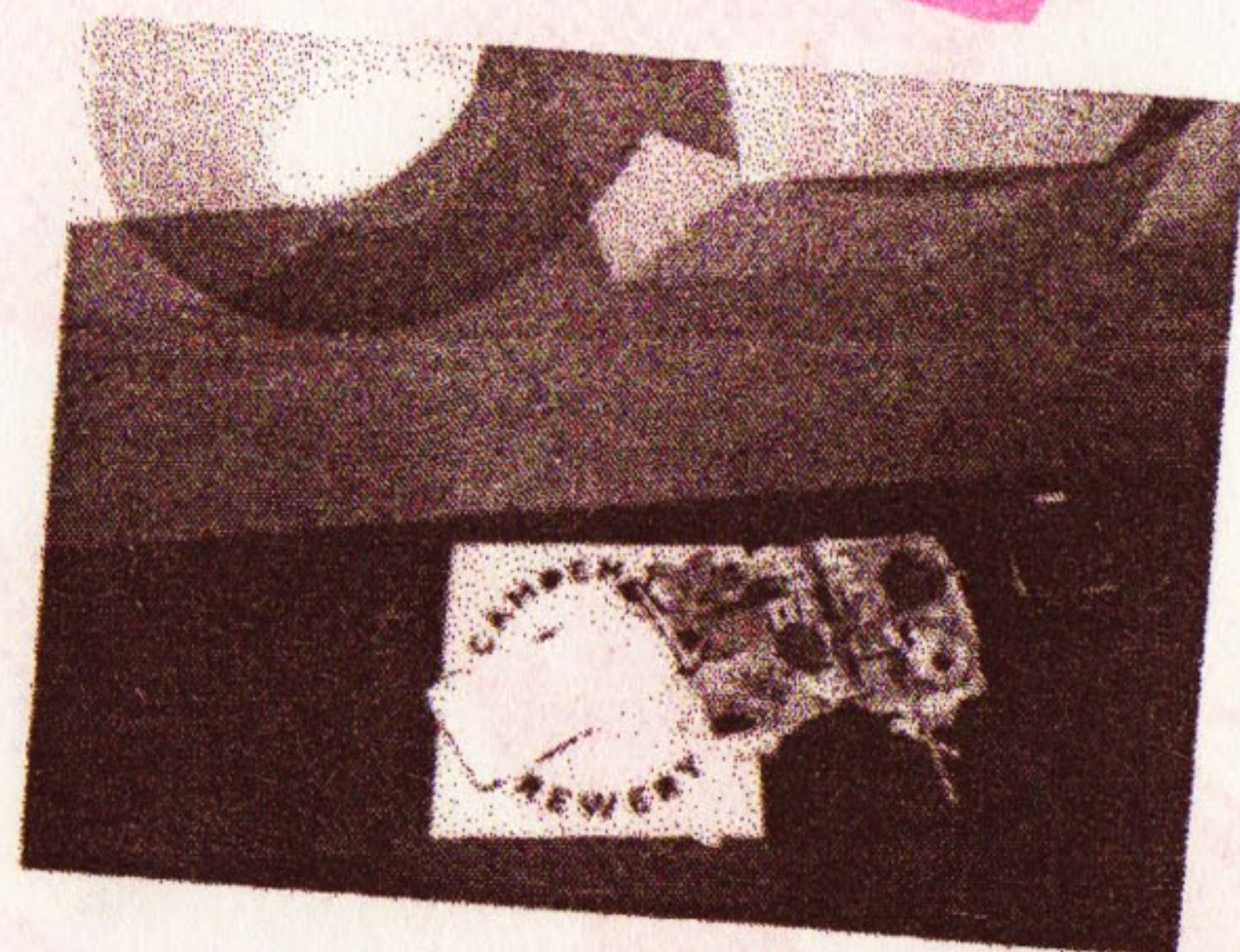


TALKING SHOP WITH NATHAN EVANS

With over a decade of experience painting walls, muralist and illustrator Nathan Evans knows a thing or two about creating art in the most unlikely places. His colourful, quirky work has been featured in Bristol's Indie Shopping District, Reading and Leeds Festival, and most recently our very own Little Camden Beer Room. But how does he do it?



Muraling: it's thirsty work...

What got you started in illustration and mural painting?

Around the age of 14 I took up breakdancing. After a short period of failed attempts at one-handed handstands, I soon realised it wasn't for me... However, breakdancing was my introduction/gateway to the subculture known as Graffiti. I'd always been good at drawing, so took to Graffiti a lot better than dancing.

After a few years of painting and developing my skills I made the decision to turn my hobby into a career by studying Graphic Design at university. It was there that I specialised in illustration and I had already developed the skills to produce my work at a larger scale for murals.

Often there seems to be an element of music influencing your work. Tell us a bit about that.

Music is a huge source of inspiration for me and always has been. Around the same time I started painting Graffiti, I was introduced to boom bap Hip-Hop. Over the years my love for beats, wordplay and the whole culture surrounding Hip-Hop has continued to grow and the do it yourself attitude within Hip-Hop still remains a core value which has fuelled my creative career.

I also often compare my illustration style to how Hip-Hop producers make beats. I constantly collect inspiration, rework and sample it, add my own flavour to the mix and the final result is a unique visual language that is my own.

What exactly goes into the muraling process. How does it differ from digital illustration, or physical work that's on a more traditional canvas?

Preparation is everything! You have to consider designs, clients, measurements, access, match your colour palette and select the best paint solution for the surface. It's also a very physical way of creating work. You use your entire body to produce a mural, giving the work more movement and sometimes transforming the process into a kind of meditative performance.

You're creating a mural in our Little Camden Beer Room during our Hello Leeds week. What's the concept behind your design?

It's no secret that I work with lettering, so I knew immediately it would contain a typographical element. Camden Town Brewery also use a lot of interesting and bold type in their branding, so it seemed like a perfect marriage stylistically.

The design reads 'Love Lager'. I used a strong bold sans serif typeface for 'Love', representing the strength of the word and the structure of a pint glass. For 'Lager' I chose a more free-flowing script lettering, reflecting the pouring of the liquid. For this mural I wanted to explore some new ideas. I wanted the overlaying of the two words to subtly reference the visual you get when you look through a beer glass.

What's the most interesting place you've created a mural in, and what was the biggest challenge?

There was a challenging incident painting in Moscow a few years back, where halfway through a mural I had to convince

a Russian speaking security guard that I had permission to be painting, using only smiles and a thumbs up.

Your work has popped up across the world, but do you feel a certain sense of pride working on projects in your home city?

It always makes me feel like I'm creating something for the city itself, almost a gift for the city in return for everything it's provided me with over the years. I think my work is also best known in Leeds and for that reason I feel like the people in the city place more value in it and truly appreciate the effort that goes into it.

Last year you were commissioned to create the 30 meter long 'Hello & Welcome to Leeds' mural. What was the initial response like, and how do you look at the work today?

One of the best responses I got came from an older local gentleman of around 70 years old. Whilst I was painting the lettering, I felt a light tap on my right shoulder. I turned around to face him and without a pause he said "This is a credit to you... I will write to the queen and have you knighted." I never found out if he wrote to the queen, but I am yet to be knighted.

There were endless moments like that throughout the painting and those were the highlights for me. The mural still remains very dear to me, not just for the work I created or the impact it had on my career, but the journey it took me on and the things it allowed me to provide for others around me.

An increasing amount of young creatives are self-taught. Do you think the industry has become easier or harder to break? And what advice would you give to illustrators and/or muralists starting out?

I think that being self-taught is a brilliant thing. All of my mural and illustration skills were self-taught and it gives you a great sense of creative independence and the ability to make all design decisions.

Social media and access to a ready made platform has meant that everyone can share as much of their work as possible without any quality control filter. It's a double edged sword in my opinion and although it's brilliant more people are given a platform for their creative voice, I think a lot of creatives are not taking the time to develop their craft to a high enough quality before sharing their work with the world.

More recently I've been thinking about the sheer volume and quality of work that young creatives are exposed to. You can argue that it inspires them to create, but I have also seen an adverse effect. Seeing such a large amount of high quality work from industry professionals has become overwhelming and intimidating for some younger creatives and this paralyses them creatively.

My advice: If you decide that this is what you want to do, keep doing it no matter what.

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