



ART FOR EVERYONE

Nathan Evans shares his love of street art, and how he achieves a flow state of creativity even in the middle of a busy city centre.

I was introduced to the world of graffiti at 14 and became addicted. Over the next few years I went on to paint countless walls, learning new techniques, collaborating with other artists and starting to develop my own style. Graffiti was the one constant in my life, so I decided I would aim to transform my hobby into a career. I'd seen many graffiti artists make the crossover into the design world, so I decided to study graphic design, later specialising in illustration. I made a conscious decision to marry together graphic design with large-scale work – the result is now a strong graphic style with typography at the core, supported by vibrant colour palettes.

There's something so honest and direct about typography and designing with the alphabet. You can deliver a crystal clear message to an audience, without any room for confusion. I also love how much history is tied up in the alphabet and how each character has its own structural rules and personality. I find great inspiration in altering the letters, to realise new forms that can still be identified with their original meaning intact.

I have my best ideas while I'm creating something, and more specifically during play and experimentation. Sometimes it feels like my body goes into autopilot and paints the mural itself, while my mind wanders. I'm a big advocate of the psychology of flow states, where you get so lost in the task that it becomes meditative and you reach a point of your optimal performance. I've always seen creativity as a form of meditation. It's more of a necessity than a choice. It feels like different areas of my brain are firing when I'm deep in the creative process and I'd love to find out more about the science behind that.

The very nature of working outdoors in the public means that you only have so much control over your working environment. You're very much at the mercy of the things going on around you. From the everyday hustle and bustle of city streets, to the ever-changing weather and overly enthusiastic pigeons getting too close for comfort. There's always something to keep you on your toes! It's less about creating a sense of calm and instead

embracing the dynamic energy of your surroundings. I'm quite lucky in the fact that every time one of these 'distractions' brings me out of my creative flow, I greet it with a smile and appreciate how odd my work can sometimes be.

It's a different story when I'm working on illustration projects in the studio. At my desk I have full control over creating a calm environment. That usually involves a tidy workspace – that's one of my biggest rituals: knowing where all my tools are at all times. It allows me to produce without disrupting the creative flow, instead of spending half an hour trying to remember where I left the sponge roller heads. I'm ritualistic with all my materials, from how I prepare them to how I mix my paint.

Planning my time on a mural also turns into a bit of a ritual. I break the painting down into a series of small jobs and then make a schedule of how long each one will take. When I look at the list I think it verges on mild OCD but it helps me plan my time. Then there's the most important ritual of all when working outdoors... checking the weather forecast religiously!

My most memorable project is the 'Hello & Welcome To Leeds' typography mural I did. The project was a big step in my career and also allowed me to involve my friends and family, which gave it a deeper meaning. The mural is located in a busy part of Leeds city centre and I had so many heart-warming conversations with local people while I was painting. It's amazing how many people stop to give you words of encouragement when you're creating something for everyone and those interactions are always magical moments.

The biggest joy is working in public areas that are otherwise forgotten. I feel it's in my nature as an artist to have a need to bring colour and form to otherwise grey, mundane spaces. I like areas where the painting can respond to architectural features within the environment and almost become an installation. I also love to create murals in outdoor places where everyone has access. I believe this is how art is supposed to be used.

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