

Stealth artists

From the guerrilla world of street graffiti, three Ottawa artists are going on to show their work in Europe, writes Paul Gessell.

It was a century ago — well, back in the 1980s, anyway — when Keith Haring mesmerized the art world with his graffiti in the New York City subway. The scribbles of an angry young man suddenly became the flavour of the month and, today, Haring's guerrilla outbursts of creativity tour the world like so many Rembrandts and Picassos.

This is all to say that high-brow graffiti art is not new. But good graffiti art, high-brow or otherwise, is still revolutionary. It must, by definition, rattle the status quo.

But there is also an inherent tragedy in graffiti art. The better the artist, the more likely he or she is to start applying paint to canvas, rather than to sidewalks and fences. The artist starts becoming part of the world once protested and, inevitably, ends up like Haring, the subject of scholarly essays and exhibitions in chic galleries.

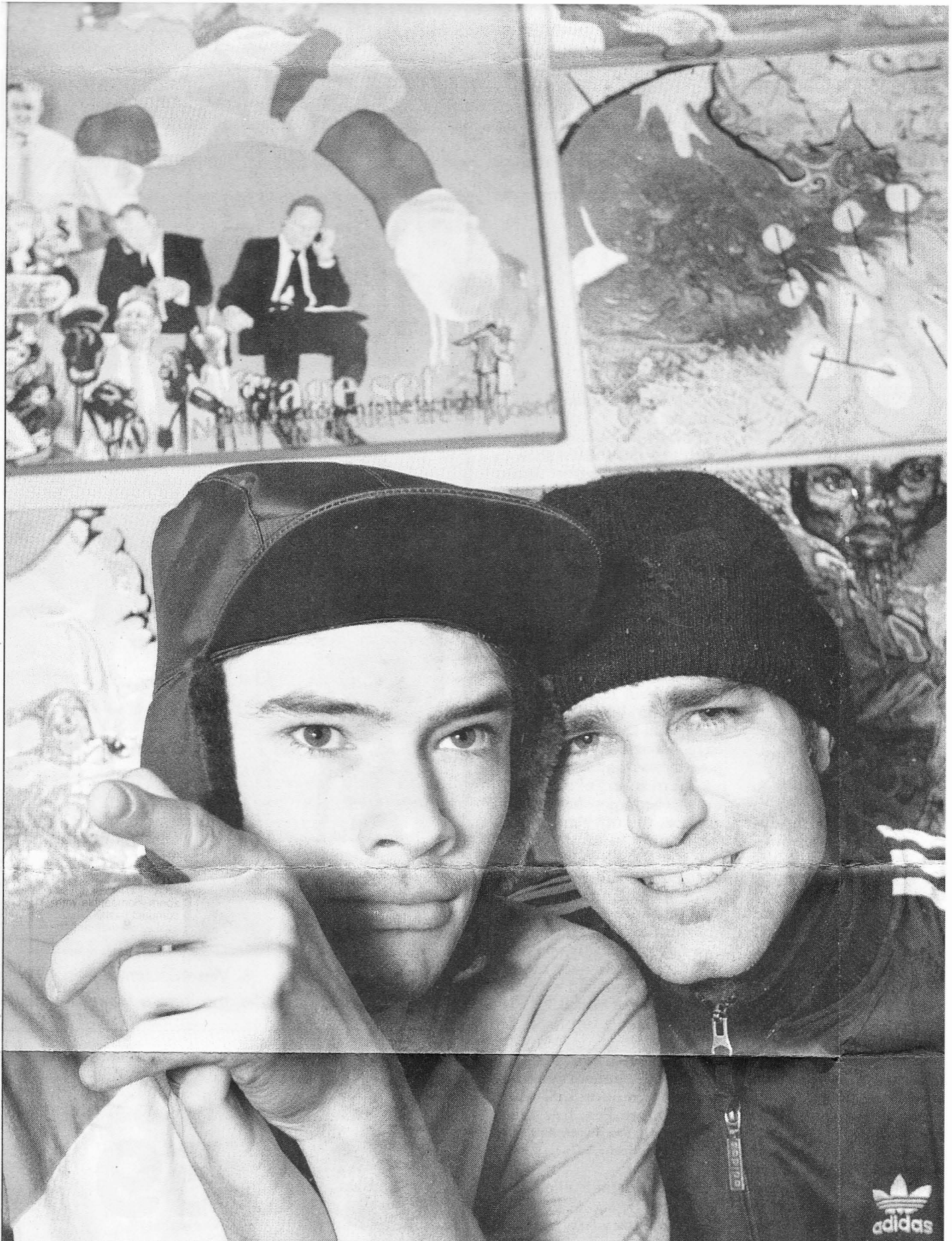
Three Ottawa artists with roots in the world of graffiti have embarked on such a path. Pat Thompson (a.k.a. Evoke), Juan Carlos Noria (a.k.a. Dixon) and a very elusive man best known as Rurick (a.k.a. Alexander Padolsky) are familiar figures in Ottawa's underground graffiti art scene. For better or for worse, they are moving up in the art world.

Thompson, for example, had a very successful solo show at Artguise, a gutsy little Bank Street gallery, last summer. And now the works of all three are off to London and Paris, thanks to the entrepreneurial skills of independent Hull art dealer and curator

Guy Berubé, whose large personal collection of contemporary, cutting edge art is far more intoxicating than any exhibition to be found in any public or commercial gallery in this region.

Berubé has a great eye. And his eye currently rests on this Ottawa threesome, who open an exhibition of about 20 works Feb. 20 in the London restaurant and gallery, The Victoria, and then move April 7 to the Paris restaurant, Au P'tit Bouchon.

OK, so it's not the Louvre or the Tate. But it is a beginning.



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Pat Thompson (a.k.a. Evoke), left, and Juan Carlos Noria (a.k.a. Dixon), well known in Ottawa's underground graffiti art scene, are off to show their work in London and Paris, thanks to the efforts of Hull art dealer and curator Guy Berubé. Another Ottawa artist known as Rurick (a.k.a. Alexander Padolsky) is also included in the exhibitions.

And it's also an inspiration to other young artists who have, so far, confined themselves to sneak aerosol attacks on public buildings.

Thompson and Noria were recently interviewed at Berubé's home, where they

displayed some of their London-bound works. Rurick could not be found that day, a not uncommon phenomenon, his friends claimed.

Noria appropriates very political images from newspapers and magazines — injured

Palestinian youths, post-911 scenes — to reveal his discomfort with the way the world works. Thompson's style is more reminiscent of traditional graffiti murals: Watch him deconstruct life in Kanata. Rurick is, well, Rurick,

all loud, messy juxtapositions of violence, sex and power.

Despite their clandestine artistic origins, the three seem frightfully average when asked to name their heroes.

See ARTIST'S on page B4

Artists: Forbidden art

Continued from page B1

They cite names like the late Beatle, George Harrison, environmentalist David Suzuki and the late Ottawa artist Mark Marsters. Not exactly lords of the underground. Thompson describes true graffiti art as "painting under pressure." It is, of course, done on the sly, with one eye on a borrowed wall and another looking for unfriendly cops. Despite this art-by-stealth, Thompson's outdoor art causes are downright homey: A need for more parks and maybe a basketball court.

The paintings on canvas

Thompson and friends now create are not done on the run so they are deemed to be graffiti-inspired and not true graffiti art. But the air of spontaneity, anger and protest remain. There is still the sense this is forbidden art.

The artists' graffiti roots are definitely showing. But for how much longer?

Haring's fame and respectability eventually led him to become a parody of himself. A revolutionary became a counter-revolutionary. True graffiti is, after all, scribbles on a subway wall. Sometimes, those scribbles are most profound when left on that wall.