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Street artists on show in Australia's biggest exhibition Graffiti art

SIMON PLANT HERALD SUN FEBRUARY 15, 2012 12:00AM



Street art in the car park at Emerald House, South Melbourne. Picture: Stuart Milligan

THE spray cans have gone, the paint fumes have faded. Australia's biggest exhibition of graffiti art is ready for inspection.

Last month 800sq m of carpark space at South Melbourne's Emerald House was sprayed, scribbled and stencilled by some of the world's best street artists.

Businessman and 2011 Melburnian of the Year Harold Mitchell invited them in as a way of enlivening three floors below his new York St headquarters.

Project Melbourne Underground, as it's been dubbed, goes on show this Sunday for all to see.

"Carparks anywhere else in the world are boring - this one is interesting and exciting," Mitchell says.

"We put no editorial control on it at all. We simply trusted these people would be responsible. It's not political, it's not sexist and it's not religious. There's nothing there that offends."

Apart from its cultural value, Project Melbourne Underground has helped build the confidence and self-esteem of artists - young and older - who rarely get the chance to legally exercise their talents.

"The social benefit is people have been able to relax, to laugh, to feel good about themselves," Mitchell says. "There's been great inclusion here."



Street art in the car park at Emerald House, South Melbourne. Picture: Stuart Milligan

Co-organiser Andrew Bourke confirms Project Melbourne Underground has "already opened up plenty of doors", with new commissions and workshops for some of the 90 artists involved. Mitchell plans to publish a book about it.

"We don't agree with illegal street art, full stop," he says. "But we could see some wonderful work was being done. So this is an expression of people which can become part of the community. I hope this leads to a further acceptance of it."

PROJECT MELBOURNE UNDERGROUND

Open day, Emerald House carpark, 105 York St, South Melbourne

Sunday, February 19, 11am-6pm. Small entry fee. Visit: projectunderground.com.au