

Imported street artist cops a spray

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MELBOURNE City Council has used ratepayers' funds to fly a British graffiti sprayer to paint a gigantic mural in a city laneway.

Mohammed Ali, aka Aerosol Arabic, has mixed street art and Islamic calligraphy in the work, to be unveiled in Spark Lane, off Flinders St, today.

The council and **British Council Australia** have sponsored the mural as part of the International Arts Festival, primarily sponsored by the State Government.

But **Graffiti Hurts Australia** chief executive Scott Hilditch said any graffiti, council-approved or not, would lead to more vandalism in the area.

And earlier this month, Premier John Brumby denounced Tourism Victoria for promoting graffitied city lanes at Disney World.

Over the past three weeks, Ali has designed and painted Crooked Rib, a 14-piece art collective for young Muslim women that spruiks the importance of saving water.

Ali said legal graffiti spaces were an important canvas for youth expression.

"I make it crystal clear to the young people I work with that I don't support illegal graffiti, but that I promote the techniques of street art.

"Aerosol art is like art spilling from the galleries; it brings positive messages to the people who don't go to conventional art spaces," he said.

Cr David Wilson said the city was strongly against illegal graffiti, but approved "wall art" that added a creative, quirky element to the CBD.

A government spokesman said no state money had gone to the project, and while the Government was a festival sponsor "it is not our role to decide its content".



United Kingdom graffiti artist Mohammed Ali paints a mural commissioned by the Melbourne Arts Festival in the city. Picture: Andrew MacColl



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