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Taggers raid Melbourne street art

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TAG ATTACK: condoned graffiti defaced by taggers in Hosier Lane. KYLIE ELSE N40ME406

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THE State Government's tough anti-graffiti laws are being blamed for an increase in vandalism.

Melbourne taggers are increasingly defying their own "silent code" by defacing the works of their peers.

Highly detailed street art murals commissioned by councils and private property owners have been sprayed with tags.

Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said the large street art mural in Union Lane, off the Bourke St Mall, commissioned by the council was continually tagged. Yarra Mayor Amanda Stone said council officers reported a "spike" in tagging of murals in shopping precincts, including Smith, Swan and Brunswick streets.

Adrian Doyle, founder of the Blender Studios and manager of Melbourne Street Art Tours, said he had

noticed a "massive increase in tagging" since graffiti laws tightened in 2007.

Under the Graffiti Prevention Act, it is illegal to graffiti and possess graffiti tools without a valid reason and police have graffiti-specific powers to search and seize.

Mr Doyle - no relation to the Lord Mayor - said the taggers, mainly young people, were thinking less about where they were putting their tags because of fears of getting caught by police. "They are more paranoid so they are taking less time - tags are less detailed," he said.

He said defacing others' work could "lead to real violence" and that youths were willing to take more risks: "(The laws) are forcing kids into drains and warehouses."

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But Cr Stone said Yarra Council supported the strict laws as part of a wider graffiti-reduction program .

"Many of the young people involved in the council's Napier Studio have reported that the new laws, as well as opportunities to be involved in legal public art, have made them less likely to commit illegal graffiti," she said.

Marcus Black, the owner of Fitzroy video production business, Liquid Creations, said he was annoyed when two works commissioned for the front of his business were defaced by taggers two months in.

Mr Black said he felt the young taggers had "nothing better to do" and were tagging to "get notoriety within their own scene".

The State Government did not respond by deadline.

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