



Gospel Graffiti

Student Joe Domingo learned the art of graffiti on the streets of Honolulu, but now uses it to promote the gospel.

“Graffiti is a language that can be used to share God’s word and love with unbelievers,” says Domingo, a junior at VU. “I use it as a way to show that there’s more to being a Christian than what they think of a typical church service. There’s another way to worship God and use your art for good. That’s the main reason I do what I do.”

But finding the purpose of his art was a difficult process. Domingo grew up in Oahu where his father was the pastor of a church in a Filipino community. As a teenager, Domingo started skateboarding

and hanging around kids who illegally painted public surfaces with graffiti.

“I got pulled in and took [the art] more seriously than they did,” he says. “At first my parents were okay with it. I only painted boards around the house, but they didn’t know I was going out in the streets.”

For five years Domingo practiced his art in underground sewer tunnels, then more public places like poles, trash cans, bus stops and walls.

“I had gotten pretty good and I wanted an audience,” he says. “I was going through a rebellious stage, trying to figure out life. It was a big

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(left) An example of Domingo's gospel-inspired art. (below) Domingo with his "tag" or signature.

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thrill. But my friends and I never saw the serious side or the consequences of it."

In 2005, on his way to paint the town, Domingo and three of his cousins were arrested, mistaken for a different tagging crew. Though they were technically innocent, and were released, Domingo saw the hand of God in it.

"That night I had told myself I was going to go all out and put my name everywhere so people would see me," he says. "Getting arrested shut that down. I'm thankful. It was part of God's plan to save me and save other people's properties from destruction."

The arrest also shook up his family and church. Seeing how much trouble it brought, Domingo realized he had to stop doing illegal graffiti. He thought about quitting the art entirely, but a different avenue soon opened up when Gospel Graffiti, a group of Christian graffiti artists who use the medium for good, invited him to join.

"That was a confirmation that God was not done with me," says Domingo. "He can use me, and He has been."

His artwork and his motivation changed, and he began painting positive themes. In 2006, Domingo followed his older sister's path and came to Vanguard University on scholarship. Soon he was putting his graffiti gift to use at Vanguard and around the community. He painted a canvas during a

chapel service, and was recruited to make signs and posters for campus events.

His proudest work is on display in a youth room at The Crossing church.

"Ministry has become important to me. ... Through my graffiti I want to plant seeds of hope in people's hearts."

"I didn't have a sketch when I did it. I did it out of my head," he says. "Surprisingly, it came out pretty decent. Being able to do art for people is a blessing."

Ann-Caryn Cleveland, professor in the cinema and digital media department, says Domingo "has serious talent. He takes line and detail to a different place in his graffiti art. His work looks different than anybody else's out there, and that's not easy to do."

Domingo has made his art into a form of worship, she says. "He has a great heart for God."

The sizes of Domingo's works vary. Usually the wall or surface is bigger than

ten by eight feet. In San Francisco he and a team recently painted the name of Jesus on the rooftop of a three-story building.

"I'm in my own zone when I start painting walls," he says. I'm talking with God. That's where I can have my time and imitate God in creating something. Every painting is a learning experience."

Domingo continues to paint walls and buildings at youth centers, churches and Christian events.

"I have the chance to use it for God's glory. It's a way to redeem the art of graffiti," he says.

Taking an animation class at Vanguard has caused him to consider it as a career.

"It's already something I see myself doing in the future," he says. "I want to get into my own cartoons."

For now he is enjoying his time at Vanguard, especially the opportunities for missions work.

"Over time ministry has become important to me," he says. "Seeing the need out there, you can tell people are missing something. I want them to know about the hope that's out there. Through my graffiti I want to plant seeds of hope in people's hearts."

