

CRIME

If a nation's culture survives, then so too does the nation.

These were the words that passed through my mind as I waited with eagerly awaited the train. The London underground was a strange place at this time; a place where the underclass crawled from their hidden tenements and stalked the night.

Nobody knew my habit; by day I was a pretty normal teenager. I generally kept myself to myself, and didn't ruffle any feathers. By night, I was François McCandle; graffiti artist and vandal. A wise man once said that graffiti breaks the hegemonic hold of corporate and governmental style over the urban environment and the situations of daily life. As a form of aesthetic sabotage, it interrupts the pleasant, efficient uniformity of planned urban space and predictable urban living. For us, graffiti disrupts the lived experience of mass culture, the passivity of mediated consumption.

It was through graffiti that a nation's culture was truly exhibited; expressing the wider societal frustrations and problems that went unaddressed by the oligarchs who controlled every aspect of our daily lives. It was our way of striking back, decorating the streets as we saw fit,

spreading a message that many tried to ignore, messages that those in power did their best to censor.

Most of the carriages were empty at this time; I had to ensure that there were no witnesses to my crime. I dropped to the floor. The spray can hissed as I filled in the gaps. When I'd finished, I discarded the stencils, stood up and viewed my work in all of its glory; the black and white image of a homeless man sleeping on the tube. In the bottom left corner, my insignia was written in silver; François McCandle with a small, melting candle next to it, illuminating the whole piece.

I'd taken inspiration for my name from the Haitian slave who'd resisted French colonial rule in the 18th century. His was a story of true rebellion; organising escaped slaves, and sending them out in a guerrilla war, poisoning the water supplies of the colonial masters. For his crimes, his punishment was severe; burning at the stake, a warning to other slaves of the price of resistance.

I'd taken my inspiration for this piece from an incident I'd seen on the tube no less than three weeks ago. A homeless man had been forcibly ejected from the train by the police for sleeping in the carriage. The poor man had been publicly humiliated, and as he was restrained and forced from the carriage, he'd turned to the apathetic onlookers and in a deep gravelly voice, he said "What do you want from me? Just

because you don't want to see it, doesn't mean it's not happening. I'm just going to be homeless somewhere else!"

His words resonated with me that night. I wondered where he'd slept, squirreled away out of sight and mind, in some decaying squat in the city, or in a multi-storey carpark that stunk of diesel and petrol fumes; the effluence of affluence.

As soon as he was out of sight, everyone in the carriage turned their faces back to their phones, forgetting the homeless man immediately. Well, I wanted his image to stay in their minds; I wanted it to be the first thing commuters saw on their way to work.

Through this small act, I was rebelling against the powers that be, the ones who believed that a problem could be solved by pushing it to the periphery. The ones who thought that anybody who had been failed by the dominant capitalist ethos was a failure to themselves, and could be treated as sub-human waste.

I grinned at my work, as the train pulled up the next station. I stood by the doors, ready to make a speedy exit, but the doors remained shut, and the train stationary. The sound of somebody entering the carriage made me freeze up with panic; I hoped against hope that the doors would spring open and I could make my way to freedom.

I turned to face the person who'd entered. I looked at his badge, hat and

epaulette as he marched towards me. He reached down to the handcuffs that were holstered at his waist, withdrawing them and holding them up.

I stood, frozen to the spot, the last bastion of resistance against a regimented phalanx, threatening to steamroller through this isolated pocket of rebellion. At last, my act of rebellion was to be struck down, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

Q: Where did Francois McCandle take the inspiration for his name?

A: From a Haitian slave who'd resisted French colonial rule in the 18th century,

Q: What did Francois wonder about the homeless man he'd seen on the train?

A: Where he slept, and what it was like.

Q: What does Francois mean by 'the effluence of affluence'?

A: The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The homeless man is the by-product of exploitation.