



City teens seek positive image for their art

Duo utilizes graffiti for airing views

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Armed with flashlights and backpacks full of spray-paint cans, 19-year-old Victor Zarate and his partner, 17-year-old Michael Marrocco, use building walls on the city's northeast side to live out the poem, seen below, which Zarate wrote.

Theirs is not an art which can normally be practiced out in the open. Many would argue that's it not art at all, but simply vandalism.

In fact, when asked what words are exchanged when a police officer discovers him practicing his craft, Zarate replied with a smile, "Nothing — we just run."

Therefore, twilight hours and obscure locations are the likeliest combination for graffiti produced by Zarate, better known as "Range," and Marrocco, who goes by the nickname "Sno."

In many instances, one must walk through fields, over railroad tracks and/or behind warehouses to come upon one of Range and Sno's works.

However, unlike amateur graffiti artists — known as "taggers" — who mark up walls with nothing more than their names, Range and Sno take their work seriously.

"We put a lot of time into it," said Range.

A typical Range/Sno painting will create images of, or send messages to, particular groups of people: girlfriends; family members; the police; and, in one case, a friend who died last year.

And, because of their talent, painting graffiti is beginning to evolve from an outlaw activity to a legitimate business for the two youths.

Rather than being vandalized by taggers, many of this Hispanic neighborhood's storefronts are now becoming beautified by Range and Sno, said Gus Sepulveda, an outreach worker for Puerto Rican Youth Development and Resource Center Inc., 997 Clinton Ave. N.

In late 1992, Sepulveda obtained a grant from the City of Rochester, enabling Range and Sno to spray paint for willing store owners. With the grant money covering supplies, their work was done at no charge on 12 neighborhood buildings.

Walk a couple of blocks in any direction in the Clifford Avenue-North Clinton Avenue area, and you're bound to see a configuration of bright-colored swirls accompanied by the two artists' nicknames.

"This (grant) was so they could do it legally and get some positive recognition for it. We wanted them to get exposure," Sepulveda explained.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Victor 'Range' Zarate (left) and Michael 'Sno' Marrocco sit on the railroad tracks near a warehouse bearing the duo's insignia, 'RangeSno.' Zarate, a senior at East High School, is a parishioner of Rochester's St. Michael Church.



Range & Sno's official logo.

enjoyable means of survival for Range and Sno in a tough inner-city environment.

"Here on Clinton Avenue, the main topic is to survive. That's the first thing you think about," Sepulveda emphasized. "You have to know the streets, know the people and make peace with the people."

"You know there's money out there, so you create things that people might like," Range reasoned.

Range and Sno, however, also realize that their line of work will never be understood and accepted universally.

"People from the suburbs, they don't understand. They were never born and raised in this community; they never lived in the ghetto," Sno remarked. "To me, they should stop being racial, saying it's just Hispanics and blacks who (graffiti). There are people in England who do it, and there are white people who live in the ghetto who do it."

"They just say it's vandalism, but these are just our thoughts," Range added. "The city (politicians) make their decision-making, but they don't ask the youths how they feel. So (graffiti) is how we express our feelings."

*Citizen by day
Graffiti artist by night
That's the way I live my life.
'Cause so much is said
But nothing is done
To help the children have some fun.
So the rest of my life
Or as long as I'm alive
Graffiti art will never die.*

Victor "Range" Zarate

That exposure has seemingly helped. Range and Sno, who have worked together for approximately two years, have begun to spray paint on some storefronts for profit. In addition, their clientele has expanded to other parts of the city.

Along with his graffiti work, Range, a senior at East High School, is employed part-time as a silk-screener for a local

T-shirt shop. He is also an adept canvas painter.

Range acknowledged that he and Sno are hoping to carve a career out of their craft.

"We're thinking about going to college (to study art)," said Range, a parishioner at St. Michael Church, 869 Clinton Ave. N. "I'd like to open a shop someday."

Graffiti has evolved as an



This piece by Zarate and Marrocco is displayed in a typical out-of-the-way location, on the back of a warehouse in a field near the Rochester Public Market on North Union Street. The duo's work is also beginning to appear in more public areas.

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