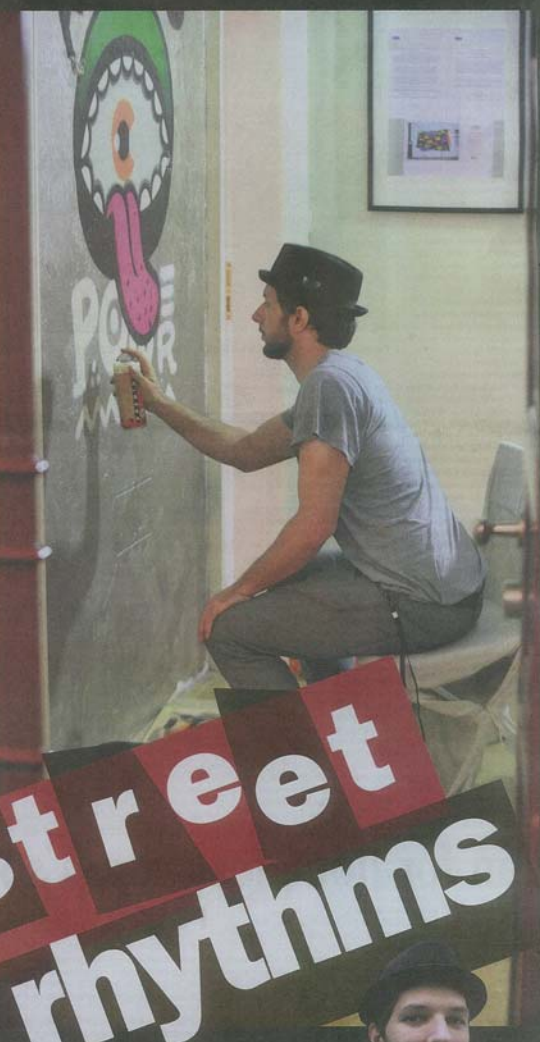




Chase places his works within categories he calls "campaigns," as he says they are grouped by common message.



By Jacy Meyer
FOR THE POST

Street art by definition is outdoors and, obviously, on the street.

Does bringing it indoors negate its message?

The Chemistry Gallery's latest exhibit, "Kokoro Power" by the street artist known as "Chase," poses just such a question.

"Whenever I travel, I paint and connect with people," said Chase, originally from Belgium but now living in Los Angeles. "It's a way of letting go of energy and attracting energy."

Chase, who says he changed his name at age 15 because he thought he should be able to choose his own moniker, came to Prague earlier this summer with his girlfriend. Through fellow artist Damien Mitchell, Chase participated in live painting at the United Islands of Prague festival. There, Mitchell introduced him to the Chemistry Gallery's director, Petr Hájek.

"I originally wanted to do a live painting exhibition here at the gallery in August," Hájek said. "But when I saw Chase's work, I scrapped that idea and asked Chase if he wanted to do something here. He gladly agreed."

All the work in the gallery's two small rooms was created especially for this exhibition. They feature two of Chase's "campaigns," a name he gives to his artwork because, he said, it conveys a message. One is titled *The Awareness Geceers* and features the theme of a pair of eyes, one looking a bit skeptical, the other open and accepting.

"The eyes are surrounded by messages, like an aura field in a way, put into textual form," Chase said. "The words are what they are ready to talk about, and viewers can do their own thinking about the discussion."

The messages accompanying the images are uplifting: "Do what you love," "We are all one."

Chase said he believes his work has two purposes.

"The first is to beautify the outside world," he said. "The second is to make people question what they believe in and why they think it in the first place."

The second campaign, *Remember Who You Are*, is less heavy and more soothing. Done in the bold colors that Chase seems to favor, there is a portrait of a child, quietly staring at the viewer. Looking almost admiringly, the text here simply reads "Remember who you are."

"Children have a sense of wonder, they speak the truth and are full of joy," Chase said. "We lose track of it, live in a world stressed out about the future. Kids don't worry about tomorrow."

The works on display at the Chemistry

Gallery are a mix of the two themes, along with a few additional works, all of them spray-paint on canvas. A third group of five paintings shows reoccurring eyeballs in shifting hues. Chase said it's to express the idea that we are all one. There are two additional paintings that Chase calls uplifting collages, in which inspirational sentences cover the canvases.

"The focus is strictly on the messages in an alley-texture kind of way," he said. "It feels more like a design piece than a painting, a controlled chaos type of feeling."

Growing up, Chase was a tagger, or one who puts graffiti messages in public settings. Moving to Los Angeles to pursue his skateboarding dreams, he cut out the illegal painting, but was nonetheless still drawn to the medium. He started practicing, buying drywall and painting on his balcony.

"Word of mouth, e-mail lists, traveling and meeting people," Chase said of how people discover his work. "Then calls start coming, some for private work, some for public and some for big global brands."

Chase has painted murals around the world, from Barcelona to Hawaii, Berlin to Los Angeles. He's also done work on ad campaigns for Puma, Levi's and Western Union, among others. He says he tries to balance street work with gallery work.

"I may spend three to four months on the street nonstop. Then, when I have to go inside, the size can become confining and limiting," he said. "At the same time, if I'm in the studio for commissions for a couple of months, I end up in front of a wall and I paint too small."

While there is one large painting on display at the Chemistry Gallery, most are moderate in stature. The gallery itself is housed in a Prague 2 flat; the exhibition space is two connecting rooms, creating an intimate feel but with space to move.

"This is a unique opportunity to see top international street art in Prague," Hájek said. "It's an honor. Fans and nonfans should come have a look."

Jacy Meyer can be reached at feature@praguepost.com

KOKORO POWER

Where: The Chemistry Gallery, U Kandıly 4, Prague 2

When: Open Wed.-Fri. 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., Sat. and Sun. noon to 6 p.m. Runs through Sept. 5

Admission: Free
Thechemistry.cz

street rhythms

Belgian artist Chase takes his irreverent talents indoors at Prague 2 gallery

