

Grown up on the street

Graffiti and urban art used to be seen as vandalism, but times have changed. This week, a new awards ceremony celebrates the form, writes **Emma Love**

Twenty-five years ago I was doing one-man shows and street art was outcast; people thought it was outrageous. It was pretty hairy in those days, when graffiti artists would go out and paint trains. Then, it was all about getting your train seen from one side of the city to the other,' recalls Goldie, one of the contenders for the first Street Art awards on Thursday.

Street art has come a long way from the days when it enraged commuters. Now, with the likes of Banksy and Adam Neate – who earlier this month did a free art drop in London, leaving 1,000 pieces of art worth £1 million in total on the streets – and Bonhams auction house, which holds dedicated urban-art sales, street art means big business.

Which is partly why Mark Bracegirdle, whose Auction Saboteur website allows buyers and sellers of urban art to trade without

auction-house fees, has decided to celebrate the art form. Alongside the awards, he's raising money for the charity Single Homeless Project by auctioning off custom pieces of work on record covers or vinyls which have been donated by more than 60 artists, many of whom have also been nominated.

The awards themselves will be split into two categories, street and urban art (street art is on the street, urban art is for inside) which the public can vote for online. On the night, winners will be whittled down from a shortlist with the final deciding votes cast by those attending the awards.

Graffiti has also gone international. 'There's everything from cut-and-paste to fine art,' says

Spencer Hickman, manager of the Rough Trade East record shop

in London, where the awards will be held. 'The German duo Hera and Akut, who paint together as Herakut, do huge photo-like graffiti pieces and there's a two-year waiting list for their work. Another prolific artist is Know Hope from Tel Aviv, who creates intricate 3D cardboard lanterns which he leaves on the streets for people to appreciate on their way to work.'

Then there's Baroness Carrie von Reichardt, perhaps best known for 'The Treatment Rooms', where she covered the exterior of a house in mosaic art. She's been nominated in the urban art category for her picture of Jesus on an aerosol can.

For Bracegirdle, though, accessibility is the best thing about the art form. 'Anyone can be a street artist, anyone can be the audience and anyone can be the critic, from a taxi driver to a schoolboy, everyone has an opinion on what they think is good and that's a relatively new thing.'

For information about the Street Art Awards, see streetartawards.com

