

Texan studies
campus mood
by sampling...

Canned graphics

The mood of today's college students may well be found in the bathroom.

With this in mind, William Stranhan of East Texas State University sent out 277 letters to college papers two months ago asking students around the nation to send samples of their bathroom graffiti.

Stranhan became intrigued by bathroom walls after reading an article on subway graffiti.

"I was interested in what the intellectual community had to say through graffiti," says Stranhan. "We thought we could deduce the mood of college students — their feelings and so forth."

Replies have come in by the dozen. Some responses have come from New York, Delaware and Rhode Island, but the majority have come from the Northwest.

Stranhan is at a loss to explain the apparent bathroom wall fetish of Northwest students. "I can't understand it," he says.

A staff member at Georgia State University sent Stranhan a letter claiming Georgia State students were above graffiti.

"We have no use for such stuff," wrote the faculty member. "It is not necessary pastime here."

Other schools allow their students free reign in the bathroom.

So far Stranhan rates his bathroom wall samples as original and "significant."

"There's a lot of Kilroy was here stuff," he says "but then there's the intellectual stuff too."

Stranhan is particularly proud of this sample from a Providence, R.I. toilet: Professor James Fenly is an unreconstructed neoclassicist.

Stranhan at first wasn't quite sure what this meant, but he looked it up. "It's deep if you think about it," he says. "It's the tops in intellectual graffiti."

Good graffiti tends to spread from toilet to toilet, like venereal disease. Sitters see a graffiti they like and carry it with them to their next restroom. Hit graffiti can travel this way across the nation.

"Jesus saves but Moses Invests," "LSD consumes 47 times its weight in excess reality" and "To be is to do — Marx; To do is to be — Descartes; Do be do be do — Frank Sinatra," have all made the graffiti hit charts.

Different regions adapt the hits to fit their cultures. "Jesus Saves but Moses Invests," for example, in basketball-oriented North Carolina at Chapel Hill becomes "Jesus Saves and Espisto scores on the rebound."

Wall wipers destroy a good portion of the country's best graffiti, according to Stranhan.

"Universities have this thing about painting over graffiti," he explains. "A lot of original graffiti is lost this way. It's a shame."

Stranhan's own university, East Texas State, has been a victim of the wall wipers. He has yet to find a piece of usable graffiti in his home school bathrooms.

Although Stranhan placed a letter in the Emerald last quarter asking for University graffiti, he has yet to receive a reply. He suspects this University may also be a wall wiper victim.

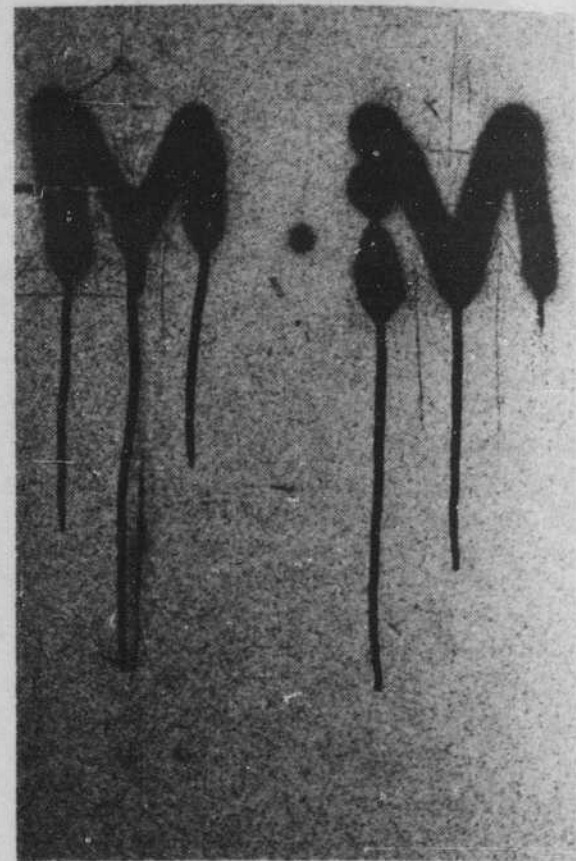
An inspection of University bathrooms proved him correct. Bathroom walls show signs of scrapings: the spore of wall cleaners. Aside from one wall talking about the crack of dawn and Kama Sutra time, nothing. A bathroom across from the Gay People's Alliance, formerly the site of a graffiti debate between gays and straights, has been blotted out and replaced by the penciled message: "Another new year, another blank wall."

Stranhan hopes to move classic graffiti from the bathroom to more permanent grounds. If response to his letters continues to be favorable, Stranhan will publish his graffiti collection in book or paper form.

"I think this stuff could be valuable," he says.

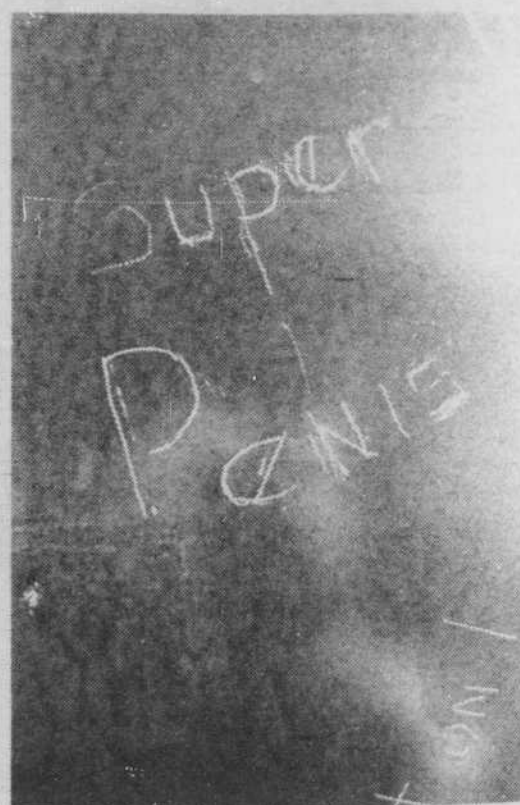
Stranhan hasn't quite figured out the social significance of these graffiti, but he's trying.

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