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Urban artists at height

At Intermat in Paris, IPAF commissioned two artists - 'Mr Shiz' from Paris and 'Foundry' from Brighton - to create two, seven by four metre canvases celebrating aerial platform safety. The work was carried out using a JLG Toucan mast boom and a Genie scissor lift. The two 'works of art' are now on display at JLG Italy and at Italian training centre Formanentis. Reporter Ed Darwin spoke to Foundry about creating art with an aerial lift.



Foundry working

With little to no experience of using an aerial work platform, both Foundry and Mr Shiz spent a day at Facelift's Hickstead training centre in order to obtain an IPAF Operators Licence (PAL card). Although Foundry's experience as a climber and mountaineer prepared him for working at heights he said his initial training in a boom lift was quite nerve wracking and confessed he was slightly disconcerted by the bizarre nature of controlling a vehicle that can be up to 17 metres away. "It was like a magic mechanical carpet," he says.

The IPAF trainers were able to tailor the training to incorporate specific requirements the artists would need when using their equipment. "Training covered both scissor and boom platforms and we gained the IPAF Operators Licence for 3a + 3b category platforms," said Foundry. "It was a combination of both theory and practical testing."

But from a painting point of view, how useful was it being able to use a platform to move around the canvas?

"The platforms are extremely useful on such large scale murals. They allow a larger area to be covered at a greater height, but also to move between areas relatively quickly. Being able to check proportion and scale from a distance on a project this size is vital. The boom lift allows you to rotate the machine away from the canvas to gain a view - from a good distance and from a good height. Originally I had intended to set up a wireless monitoring system using a camera/laptop and wireless screen (ipad) to film the project from a distance - this is still something I would like to integrate for larger projects."

Platforms are used for a variety of tasks, how responsive did you find them, given the intricate nature of the project and the horrendous weather at the show?

"Obviously all platforms have their limits and the machines we used were restricted to winds of 12 metres a second. With the wind gusting above this at times, we were forced to stop working but they were stable enough for us to work from. The size of the platform was quite limited and it was strange at first not to be able to move around without operating the



Foundry



Mr Shiz

machine. But the more competent and confident I became the easier it was to move quickly between areas on the canvas. Boom lifts are particularly useful if you are moving between different areas but the scissor is great for working a large section for a significant period such as a photorealistic portrait."

Did using the platforms change how you planned to paint the canvas?

"Originally I intended to produce a piece of work that would be animated using pixels and to use the machine's capabilities to move set distances. Unfortunately due to the weather, requested design changes and the nature of the canvas this was not possible on this project."

"I have previously used scissor lifts for large scale works such as the 11 metre high wall at the Beautiful and the Canned festival in Brighton," he said. "The scale of my work was limited however by not being able to reach some walls safely. Scaffolding often covers the painting area from view and also requires a lot of climbing up and down ladders! The largest work I've done prior to this was painted using either scaffold, step ladders or extendable rollers."

"Being able to use this type of access equipment has literally opened a whole avenue of

opportunities, which I am keen to utilise and explore. Finding wall spaces and organisations willing to allow an artist to explore their own ideas is still a problem however - society is still wrangling with the issues associated with murals, aerosol and what has become an umbrella descriptor - 'graffiti'."

"However in the same way that architecture defines our environments there is no reason that visual forms, graphics and murals could not be allowed to add to an aesthetic of our urban environments in the same way we are bombarded with advertising. There are many people that complain about 'graffiti' but there are few creative outlets for young people to explore on this scale."

"I will definitely promote these machines to enable larger scale projects in the future and am currently negotiating using a platform for an up and coming street art festival that I have been invited to attend in Blackpool, as well as Milan - through one of the IPAF staff," he said. "I was happy with the finished IPAF product in spite of the weather. It wasn't exactly what I intended to paint, but flexibility is the key when working on projects of this scale. It was hard work but worth it in the end."