

# STREETS



address. An audience that, according to Blek, is developing worldwide.

When questioned as to whether anyone can become an artist, Blek responds: "We all have a creative potential. I don't believe in a natural skill. It is linked to your sensitivity." Art school can help in learning techniques "but it does not guarantee you will be a great artist". He mentions the poet Arthur Rimbaud as an example of someone who expressed his creativity, simply by writing about himself.

Social issues are a hot topic at the moment in France with the approach of the presidential elections. Blek is very perturbed by the French attitude towards anything new. Although he admits to not knowing the English system very well, it appears to him that it is more flexible and open than the French. "English people, although they keep certain traditions and are quite conservative, have always had an open mind to other cultures, to the world." Racism, unemployment and homelessness are all issues that are major problems in France and are not being adequately dealt with. "France is like a sinking boat. It is experiencing a very difficult time, with deep hate between people because of skin colour, culture, religion. French people are against change in general. We are closed to modernism, to what other people can bring."

His disillusionment with the political system is profound. "I don't want to be associated with politics. I don't believe in politics anymore." Blek is appalled by the prevailing attitude in France of merely providing temporary solutions to deep-rooted problems, then giving up on the consequences when failure ensues. "Nobody



cares about the homeless! It's horrible!" he says.

In November, he is going to put up images of a homeless man in a sleeping bag everywhere in Paris. Blek is an ordinary citizen who believes that he has a responsibility to deliver a message to help change the life of others. "We need a John Bird in France. We had Coluche (a French comedian who died in a road accident in 1986) who was an ordinary man who committed his life to changing the life of others." Coluche set up an association, 21 years ago, that now distributes over 60 million meals a year through Les Restos du Coeur, using more than 40,000 volunteers. "It is a good concept, but unfortunately it does not resolve the problem in the long term. We do not need a politician or a religious leader; we need an ordinary citizen who inhabits a real life. It is a good thing that guys like John Bird exist. His commitment is real, he is positive and guys like him will save

**"The problem with graffiti is that it is an aggression. I really want to avoid that. I have a responsibility doing graffiti; I'm spreading a message that thousands of people will see. The message has to be thoughtful"**

the world." He praises The Big Issue for enabling homeless people to work, not just giving them a handout. "The Big Issue interested me because it was about making people work to earn their own money and not controlling their money."

Recently, Blek kindly donated 25 of his canvases to The Big Issue Foundation to raise money. It was the first time he had made such a donation and the reason he chose The Big Issue was because he was enthused by its self-help ethos. Mike Snelle, who is currently selling Blek's work at Leonard Street Gallery, had introduced Blek to The Big Issue.

Blek is deeply involved in social action through his art, as one more step to a better society. "My message is a social one. I think you should mean something to the world." Leonard Street Gallery, 73 Leonard Street, Shoreditch EC2 [www.mikesnelle.com](http://www.mikesnelle.com)