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SYDNEY'S BILLBOARD BANDITS CAPTURED IN NEW EXHIBITION

In the 1970s and 80s a group of protestors calling themselves BUGAUP scrawled anti-tobacco messages on billboards across the country, leading to an Australia-wide ban on tobacco advertising and making the group world pioneers of a movement now known as culture jamming.

Culture Jammers, a new photographic exhibition at the Museum of Sydney opening 11 February, features for the first time the work of award-winning photojournalist Dean Sewell as he followed a small group of Sydney culture jammers, documenting their activities between 2003 and 2007.

Deriving from 'radio jamming', a type of censorship used by totalitarian regimes to block foreign broadcasts, culture jamming is a form of political and social activism that involves subversively altering mainstream advertising messages to cast a critical spotlight on governments, corporations or individuals, and question commercial culture.

Motivated by a range of social issues, from environmental causes to the war in Iraq, Sewell followed a group of activists known as *The Lonely Station*, as they altered billboards and posted messages across Sydney, allowing their creative processes, daring acts and outcomes of their interventions to be captured on camera.

Museum of Sydney Curator Inara Walden says, "Several members of *The Lonely Station* were law students at the time these photos were taken and risked potentially career destroying penalties if caught and charged.

"In many cases, the culture jammers also risked their lives to take part in this action, using arborist techniques to scale great heights.

"On one occasion they abseiled down the Spirit of Tasmania during its maiden voyage to hang an anti-logging banner, while on another they climbed a tower at White Bay, so high that one member of the team froze, leaving his companion to complete the job.

"Some people consider culture jamming to be illegal graffiti, while others consider it to be a legitimate form of social commentary or protest, even calling it political art. The activists see what they are doing as a way to question commercial culture and consumer manipulation by corporations.

"Sometimes *The Lonely Station* strategically planned actions to take place in the day during peak hour so that onlookers would assume they were witnessing the legitimate installation of advertisements, not the work of activists.

"They targeted Sydney because it is a global centre and the naming and shaming of corporate misdeeds through city billboards is more pertinent and stinging, with the potential to be seen by more people.

"Dean first met members of *The Lonely Station* during a protest at Pine Gap. He soon became a trusted media photographer and the group began tipping him off about their plans. As an outstanding documentary photographer with an amazing eye, Dean is also switched on to what culture jamming is all about and this really shows in his photographs.

"The secret to BUGAUP's success was their larrikin sense of humour and their actions were reminiscent of a schoolyard prank but on a grander scale. *The Lonely Station* took it to a whole new level, scaling heights and using new technologies, but like BUGAUP many people appreciate the humour in what they are doing," says Walden.

The exhibition features over 40 of Sewell's photographs as well as a short film highlighting the intricate processes behind each campaign, from photographing, to the making of each artwork on the ground, before climbing to affix giant banners and graphics at height.

***Culture Jammers: Dean Sewell* 11 February – 10 June 2012 at the Museum of Sydney,
corner Bridge & Phillip Streets Sydney, General \$10, Concession \$5, Family \$20,
More Info hht.net.au or 02 9251 5988.**

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