

TEMPER'S



# BIOGRAPHY

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With very little support or encouragement from his school teachers, a young Arron Bird from Wolverhampton developed his drawing skills from a very young age. *"I spent a lot of time with my Grandad and he used to give me photos and pictures from World War 2 and he would ask me to draw them. My Grandad couldn't draw but he knew what looked right or not and was a great critic if it was wrong"*.

But it wasn't until Arron went to secondary school he realised he could draw quite well. At this time Arron had seen a news reel on TV (1981), about Rock Steady Crew and the whole Hip Hop phenomenon that was about to hit the UK shores from the USA, which would have an instant appeal to Arron. But in art class Arron was very frustrated because the art teacher would not spend time with him and develop his drawing ability. In the end because his school teachers already thought he was quite apt at art, they dedicated their time to the other students, leaving a young Arron to his own devices. *"School was uninspirational and it was through Hip Hop that I found my outlet for creative thinking"*.

Arron then had found out that the same sort of imagery that was on the news reel had emerged at a low level station in Wolverhampton. So Arron investigated what it was all about. *"I remember walking down there, and it was really dodgy, I turned the corner and saw massive pictures, one said 'Westside' another was 'Wild Bunch' and the next was 'B-Boys'. I couldn't believe the size, or what had done it. At the bottom of the wall were spray cans, then it all made sense. I later found out that it was done by Goldie (Goldilocks) and a guy called Page"*. Arron then couldn't control his need to try it for himself, he went to the shop and stole some tins of spray paint, all primary colours and attempted it for himself in a place called Ridal Green. It was some high rise flats near Arron's house which wouldn't get many people passing due to its reputation for street crime.

*"Picking up the spray can for the first time was like finding God or something, I knew it would be with me forever"*. That first painting by Arron in 1982 was called 'Street Level', an obvious statement to where he saw himself in society. At this time Arron kept all this secret, making all the school feel the way he felt with the Goldie paintings, how? why? what had done this? About six months later, there were graffiti crews popping up all over Wolverhampton which had materialised after seeing what Goldie had been doing. Arron had found some like minded people to form 'Street Level Crew' which was short lived, but then came 'Illegal Art Graffiti Team' (I.A.G.T) which became the leading crew on the Eastside of Wolverhampton. *"In 1984 I was in a B-Boy crew called 'Faze 7', I was in Illegal Art and I just ran around doing all sorts of stuff. Looking back it must have been mad for mom, a kid of thirteen going out in the middle of the night, not knowing what he was doing"*.

Arron continued to live this lifestyle for many years in and out of crews such as 'CND' (Cutting New Dimensions) 'The Warriorz', 'Street 7 Artist' (S7A), and in 1987 became a member of 'The Ruff Stuff', a crew from Heathtown with members Shine-e, Mr Biggz, Redé and Dennis painting on and off walls for years. Arron and Redé joined Goldie in 1991 to paint the Nike Painting. At this time Arron liked the idea of commercial work, after years of being anti-commercial, started thinking about how to go ahead with this.

In 1992 He did his first proper commission for Eastfield Youth Club, which had been such an important part of his youth. Like any young person from a working class background, Arron like many others would fall in and out of problems. *“Carl Buchanon from Eastfield Youth Centre would always be positive with me, without telling me what to do, he would put it in a way that I could relate to as an equal, and he taught me to make positives out of negatives, and you can do it. Rooster (Lloyd) this rasta guy always got me drawing too, he was cool”.*

In 1993 Arron changed his previous signatures (tags) to go back to his old nickname from school his friend Darren Muirhead would call him when he got angry, Mr Madtempa. His previous names were used for illegal paintings which he daubed on his home town. So with this new name, and a load of sketches, Madtempa would spend most of his time with his skater friends who would advise him to do some t-shirts. *“My friend Rah was the one, his excitement of them being on t-shirts alone triggered my interest”.* Madtempa set up a company BMC (Blind mice clothing), and it was through this business venture that enabled Madtempa to produce short run printed t-shirts. *“It got to the stage that I was really frustrated doing my day job and everyone I worked with said that I was wasting my talent and should be doing something that incorporated my graffiti work. At the time there were no real writers in the UK designing and producing their own clothing range, but I knew I wanted to make a career out of my graffiti and I saw the production of t-shirts would not only generate an income but would also get my work out to a lot more people”.*

in 1994 Madtempa became a Dad to his first child, and loses his lifelong best friend, his Grandfather. *“After so many ups and downs of that year it had convinced me life is short, and I wanted to make my daughter proud of her Dad, so I packed in my job to pursue my career”.* So Madtempa launched BMC. *“The first two designs were B-Boy and Gunner, the idea was like Yin Yang, one light spirited and one dark spirited. Kind of like how I was feeling at the time”.* Blindmice was a great learning ground for Madtempa, and would become a great impact on the underground skaters, DJ's and breaker's, who all embraced the vision. But Madtempa and his young family would also see the negative effects of this new venture. *“Living on the 10th floor of a high rise flat, no money and a family, was no joke. Tap water and bread for three weeks was a reminder of the importance of my success”.*

This lifestyle would continue for many years to come, but at this time like so many others, Madtempa would do anything to try to make ends meet, to provide for his family. His partner Kerry who he had been with from the age of 17, worked in a chip shop to provide money and the occasional left over chips. In her absence Madtempa would work on new drawings, plans for a future in amongst baby sitting his daughter. *“Blindmice became very hard to keep going, but I couldn't let it go, it was our only way out, I was sure. I would clean the print studio for my friend and in return he would print my t-shirts. I would take the labels out, Kerry would sew new 'BMC' ones in and I would pack them all and distribute them. Everything was done in the flat”.* Blindmice Clothing had more reputation than money, but Madtempa, despite hunger, money problems and stress of a despair family, hope was the word mixed with hard work. Madtempa continued to promote the brand, Blindmice had teamed up with Visual Grafix (graffiti video magazine) to promote the original ethos of Hip-Hop, Hip-Hop which he had dedicated his lifestyle to. Graffiti, B-Boy, DJ's, MC's, responsibility of the culture and good vibes, these nights were called 'Revival Pressure' and are still talked about to date.

In 1995 Madtempa quite often started writing 'Tempa', Blindmice was still moving on, Madtempa then with a few friends, painting a full gable end of a building, in the most prominent place in Wolverhampton, opposite the Molineux (Wolves football stadium) and called it 'Representin' Wolverhampton', considering the piece was illegal 'Tempa' got a full page in his local newspaper and got him painting again.

*"On the last day, the police saw me throwing my bag over the fence, and thought I had done a burglary, but when I told them I had been painting and showed them the paint in the bag, they said fair play and I was on my way."* That year also got him canvas painting, a new thing for Tempa, but he felt most comfortable at this point, with the idea of canvas.

A local club promoter approached Tempa to paint live at the notorious club night 'Stump Juice' in Wolverhampton, Tempa began to paint there regularly as a resident. Another noticeable appearance was 'Return of the Mack's' in Leicester in 1996 when Tempa would play a part in Britain's longest ever graffiti production; over a mile long, Tempa's section was 8ftx32ft long and was the first time Tempa would paint at a graffiti festival with writers from all over Britain, from London to Scotland. The concept of the festival was a battle of artists for wall supremacy. Tempa took inspiration from a Japanese cult movie 'Lone Wolf' (also known as Shogun Assassin), Tempa focused his attention on the 'Three Masters of Death' and completed these remarkable characters in a 'photo realistic' way, even now people of Leicester will comment on this piece which appeared at Western Boulevard. *"As a teenager I spent a lot of time skiving school around a mates house, practicing break dancing, drawing and obsessively watching Kung Fu videos"*.

Tempa also at this time would complete his first LP cover for 'Ruf Beats', a UK Hip-Hop label and would continue, over the years to complete six LP concept covers. Tempa also featured as one artist in a collaboration of artists for the 'Graffiti Bastards' exhibition at The Custard Factory, Birmingham, where he experimented with print and aerosol together on canvas. At the end of 1996 to September 1997 Tempa's domestic life had gone into turmoil after losing a number of members of his family in such a small space of time. This would take Tempa into ill mental health and with a series of problems was taking medication, having counselling and guidance through one of the darkest periods of his life. It took several months for Tempa to resurface through his treatment. The therapist had advised Tempa to continue with the planning of his first solo exhibition which had been planned prior to his problems, with careful consideration to his health and the continuing treatment. Tempa started painting his show 'Footsteps' titled with reference to 'One Step at a Time', this would be held at the Lighthouse Gallery in Wolverhampton. Within two weeks it had received over 3000 visitors. *"It was a bit strange for me, most of the paintings were off the wall for that time, but I was still holding back incase people saw my insanity"*.

In 1998 'Tempa' became 'Temper', officially the new start and 'Walls On Fire' graffiti festival organised by writer Banksy held in Bristol would be the first public painting by 'Temper', where he would paint 'Protection' dedicated to his daughter, a full concept where Temper had built his daughter's initials out of ancient armor, a style many people in the UK hadn't seen on this level before, a painting in which got the graffiti scene's tongues wagging and would catapult Temper into a new status. Promoters all over the country would then book Temper for live sessions and festivals. That year Temper painted live at Mojo (Warwick), Ballistic (Liverpool), Pressure (Coventry), Mofo (Blackpool) and Kaboom (Wolverhampton) to name a few. Experience from his illegal years would be valuable at this time, painting quickly in the dark made it very comfortable for Temper to bring graffiti to the clubs.

Airwalk skate brand also approached Temper and Temper completed a number of t-shirt designs in which he would design their biggest selling t-shirt design to date. Lee jeans also commissioned Temper to paint a skate park in Birmingham to promote their new street product. Temper now sees the birth of his second child, which drummed home once again the importance of success in his chosen career. After the success of 'Footsteps' and the ever growing interest in Temper's work. The lighthouse, in 1999, approached Temper for his second solo exhibition titled 'Visual Eyez' where Temper would first try painting one of his childhood hero's Bruce Lee. Attendance had doubled to his last show and the show saw every piece sold within two weeks. 'Visual Eyez' set a new standard for Temper and his interest in canvas work. The German spray paint company 'Belton' made Temper the official distributor for graffiti artists of their paint and advisor to the UK market.

Temper continued to paint throughout the country and the band 'Freestylers', who were in the charts at the time, had Temper paint live for them, he also became resident at 'Style Wars' in Manchester. The first Sprite Urban Games started in London's Clapham Common, Temper helped organise the writers and paint for the festival, which would represent lifestyle, skate, street and Hip-Hop. Approached by 'Marcity Developments', Temper worked on helping launch the first penthouses in Birmingham for Marcity with a piece entitled 'New York, New York' which featured a Central Park themed second floor which was to promote New York style apartments in a new, changing Birmingham. *"It was totally mad, I had painted the wall on one side, they had proper grass and trees put down there, it actually looked like a park"*.

This would be the start of a very important relationship between Temper and Marcity which continued to grow. 'Lucifer's Loft', a little space in a nearby town would now be Temper's first studio in the year 2000. *"It was tiny but got a lot of soul, I worked the space though. It had no lights or water or anything, I would paint canvases in candlelight and take water from home"*. 2000; the second 'Urban Games' which looked to be a yearly showcase of what was cool on the street. Temper would revert back to a 'Protection' style painting with a twist; he would paint a very different but unique painting called 'Graffiti Autopsy'.

*"I knew my concept, basically I wanted a painting different to what everyone was doing at the time, I just looked back at original graffiti where manipulated letter forms had no boundaries"*. That in mind Temper had distorted a lump of flesh to create the word Temper, using objects and shapes, a form of writing which would be more comfortable for Temper, who through therapy had been told he has a form of dyslexia. *"If you look at the piece properly, it has a flat line at the bottom which jumps into life, the syringe is a spray can, I was saying I want to put life back into graffiti"*. Which Temper did, for this painting would catch the eye of Coca-Cola officials. With the ongoing relationship with Marcity Developments they commissioned Temper in a two part project to decorate the external hoarding of their Newhampton Lofts. In total both pieces took eight weeks and is the longest Temper painting to date being 175ft long. The brief was to advertise the retail space of the building. *"They made me a scaffold system with a roof on it for me to use on the project. It was massive but the end result was very powerful"*.

With the Belton distribution deal there was a time where Temper would have to deliver the paint himself due to deadlines. One particular delivery to Manchester's FF3 festival was rushed and unplanned, but on delivery of the paint to the graffiti competition there was one space left where Temper would paint to avoid traffic jams on his return journey. Not originally competing Temper won the competition. Another festival in 2000 was 'Fresh' a yearly Hip-Hop festival, it showcased some of the legendary rappers in

history such as Big Daddy Kane. Temper was brought in by the 'Fresh' team to organise and oversee the graffiti section of the event which displayed some of the best writers in the UK, held at Birmingham's Custard Factory.

Also that year he judged the Midlands heat of DMC, the official scratch DJ Awards, which for a graffiti artist was a first. 2001 would now see the outcome of the eye-catching 'Graffiti Autopsy', with the release of Temper's signature Sprite can, where Coca-Cola had commissioned Temper to create imagery for a limited edition promotional can which hit the stores in 2001 and captured the imagination of the media and public alike. *"When I used to paint illegally I would try to get my name everywhere I could, with this project I had 100 million legal Temper tags on the street at one time, in the old days we called it Bombin', this was like next level Bombin"*. The Sprite experience would give a new national exposure to the artist giving him a bigger status than people would imagine a graffiti artist to achieve. *"I loved it, it shut the critics up, Coca-Cola one of the biggest companies in the world, a leading corporate company was using my art work to represent one of their main brands"*.

The special edition Temper can changed graffiti history in the UK forever and Temper was catapulted to the fore front of graffiti, he was now being looked at as the spokesman of the art form, a responsibility Temper handled in an honorable fashion. *"Graffiti happens on all levels, drunks in toilets, tags on buses or commercial, the only thing that connects all three, to me, is its application but the mental state is different on every level. I'm only responsible for my own mental state, I can only inspire others to think with responsibility"*. Not only in this year had Temper risen to different heights in status, but he would also change graffiti history again with his third show 'Minuteman' breaking all attendance records at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. It would be the first time a solo graffiti artist would exhibit in a fully bona fide government funded gallery space. *"Not having any art training at all, except in the subways, festivals etc., having this experience was mind-blowing, the crossover to such a mix of people was amazing; rich, poor, young, old, the comment books just kept filling with positive words. It still makes me emotional now"*.

Minuteman, sponsored by 'Marcity Developments' and help from 'Represent' made Birmingham a special place to Temper. The next event would be the Coca-Cola offices where Temper would paint for officials as a staff promotion. To follow on to the third 'Urban Games', he painted a piece called "Why do they call you Temper?" A question repeated in interviews, due to the polite and good-nature of the artist. Temper painted an aggressive technical painting that year to answer the same question. *"The original sketch I did on an un-primed canvass as a freestyle, I decided to paint this at the Urban Games. I wanted to show my critics that I'm not only a commercial artist but I can switch at any moment with my work, but it's all just Temper. People comment 'He hasn't got one style'. I think style becomes a format, format is static, my art is an extension of my personality. My personality and emotional content doesn't work at one level only, so my work comes on every level depending on what I feel or what I want to say"*.

'Minuteman 2' held in Manchester's Contact Theatre would be the next venture for Temper with new work added to the popular pieces from Birmingham, one of which would be 'Wolf in Wolf's Clothing', a style of painting which he was experimenting with at this time. 'Wolf' was one of the most popular paintings at this show.

Another nationwide project for the artist was a commission by Allsports (sports retail shop) to advertise their street-wear lines such as Nike, Ocean Pacific and so on. It was a two part project for their window displays, in which the artist would use a very commercial character style to target a much younger audience. Allsports have said it is their most exciting P.O.S. to date.

Kickers, the clothing brand released two limited edition t-shirt designs by the artist who, at that time is in demand for all sorts of projects, but one person who had been ringing Temper since the Sprite project was a guy called Chris who worked in London, he wanted his office painting by the artist, but at the time Temper took no interest in the project, he knew Temper was the man for the job and the pair became telephone friends more than anything. *"After speaking to a guy called Chris for over a year on the phone, I knew nothing about art or advertising but my manager at the time fell off his chair when I asked him who Saatchi and Saatchi was and a creative director had asked me to paint their office to inspire their team!"*

The Saatchi and Saatchi brief was for Temper to paint what he wanted, how he wanted, on a central wall over a weekend. Temper painted a very conceptual planned idea using the word 'Reaction', the word which connects Temper and what he does, to the Saatchi team and what they do, they both work around 'Reaction'. *"I really enjoyed painting there, coffee machines everywhere, all over the building and I needed them! I started at 8am on Friday and finished Monday morning at 7am, just in time for the staff starting their week. I had a couple of naps but I was just vibing, Chris is a 'wicked' bloke".*

Shortly after the Saatchi and Saatchi project, Coca-Cola once again called upon the artist, this time to do their main reception entrance area in yet another commission for the giant company. One of Temper's qualities is his versatility, his one proposed idea showed lots of small canvases with different images and styles representing the ethos and visual connection with the brand but would act as an one over all image of the 'Dynamic Ribbon', the brand identity. Forty canvases were painted by Temper for their UK headquarters in London which would be the first thing to view on entry. *"Coca-Cola has been a great company to work for, they seem to see the journey of me as an artist in such a positive way, I never feel intimidated by their size, they are really cool people with a cool brand".* The height's of the artist's professional career couldn't seem to get much bigger. The Sunday Times had announced him as 'The Next Big Thing' which would make the artist hot property for collectors, companies and people with a general interest in Temper's work.

After completing two illustrations for Bench clothing, Temper painted a 20ftx64ft long painting at the 'Grass Roots' festival, celebrating Hip-Hop culture, organised by Fresh. He incorporated two of his favourite rappers Masta Ace and Blade into his painting, the rappers and audience were amazed by the speed of his painting. *"One guy at Grass Roots said I was like Bruce Lee with a spray can, which I'll never forget, a compliment like that you don't forget".* At the Grass Roots festival, meeting Masta Ace was a personal thing for Temper, who has religiously bought every LP on its release date and Temper knowing Masta Ace used to be a graffiti writer in New York, got him painting 'Ase' his old graffiti name. Also on the music front 'DJ Noize', world DMC scratch champion, was about to release his debut 12" on Virgin's Wordplay label, for which Temper produced the cover art. Followed by Supernatural's 12" sleeve 'Cosmic Slop'. Working with a photographer and graphics guy Temper would oversee, create and orchestrate the imagery of the world freestyle rap champions debut.

After over a year of talks with Veejay Lingiah from The Artlounge, Temper started working on collections that he had planned more than five years earlier, but felt timing and outlets did not suite the collections he had wanted to do. Temper had held back the collection until meeting an outlet with a like minded vision of his work. *"Me and Veejay spoke, and after listening to alot of other gallery owners and agents it was like a breath of fresh air, someone who understood the innocence and importance of my work and who understood the journey"*. The first collection Temper would work on would be 'The Good Die Young', a powerful 'Photorealistic' collection inspired by a note in his sketchbook, back at the time of drama and loss of members of his family, the scribble in the book said 'Why do the good die young?'. A note which originally written about his cousin Helen who had died at the age of 25 of heart problems mixed with a number of different elements, the idea of v'The Good Die Young' collection emerged in The Artlounge.

*"It's a very complex thought process that went into the collection, but I understand it works on a commercial level but the intention was one of innocence, pain, respect, honor, bereavement, love and so on"*. Due to the delicate emotions of the collection, the Artlounge had gained the trust of both artist and clients and the collection sold out within four months. The 27 pieces were painted in shades of grey by and once again Temper was a pioneer, the first graffiti artist to paint an official collection in the UK. The popular pictures were so in demand, prints were produced. Temper's early years growing up were self explanatory, in his next collection 'Decade' images depicting ten years of his life would make this ten piece collection come to life with a very unique Temper style. *"I was trippin' painting this collection, not literally but I was just going down memory lane, I really enjoy thinking of good days of old"*. 'Decade' was also a sell out, the prints are still in production.

After the working projects with Marcity Developments, they had felt the importance of Temper's art in the UK market and felt it fit to award the artist studio space at their Newhampton Loft Apartments for the artist to continue his quest. So in 2003 the awarded space would become new work space for Temper. *"They're like guardian angels, it makes a great difference to the way I work now. I can grow and move forward, graffiti in these surroundings is mad but it's where it needs to go for me and Marcity helping this vision has done more for art than most art officials, I'm overwhelmed"*. The first project Temper created in the studio, which at the time was a building site, was for the 'Capoeira Twins' debut LP cover 'Reansville Heights' where Temper would yet again extend his abilities with something quite different in style to previous works.

The space was officially launched on 4th September 2003 where ex footballer and now television presenter Ian Wright would purchase 'Jimi Hendrix' from the 'Too Good to Die Young' collection, the rebirth of 'The Good Die Young' concept. Using colour, Temper will continue to complete his vision of the very personal challenge. The 'Popcorn' collection, utilising Tempers pioneering technique, uses a repeated stencil, first applied in Manchester's 'Minuteman 2' exhibition on 'Wolf in Wolf's Clothing', where the artist makes a realistic image using over twenty thousand repeated stencils per canvas. There will be no less than half a million repeated 'Temper' stencils in the collection. He is the only graffiti writer to paint this way. *"The Popcorn Collection was inspired by my love for comics and movies, I've always looked at comics, I don't read well so I've always been a comic fan, they tell stories without words. Funny though, now I'm making pictures out of words, strange I am"*. Temper recently completed a second project at Saatchi and Saatchi where he painted ceilings, pillars and carpets in another free painting spree at their London offices, as well as a collection called 'Aerosoul' using photorealistic style painting

soul legends like Donny Hathaway, Stevie Wonder and Curtis Mayfield for a new BBC Three music television show, hosted by Trevor Nelson, called Lowdown. June 2004 also saw the artist complete a commission for the ever growing drinks brand WKD. The 40ft x 8ft graffiti mural now stands as a landmark in the bay of Torquay. For now Temper's commitment is with several collections including the completion of 'Too Good To Die Young', concluding in an exhibition due in 2005 which will feature all the paintings from both 'The Good Die Young' collections for one time only. *"I've got the next ten years already planned, a few surprises, a few challenges but most of all some great projects i'm in meetings about"*.

So now welcome to the journey...

