

Transcript of Podcast 069: Street Art

{Intro:

MOMTAZ: Wherever you go in the world I really recommend seeking out, admiring, and enjoying street art. It really can elevate a trip and give you a whole new way of understanding the local culture and its people.

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{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

While on the phone recently to Laura, she told me something about the way she views my podcast. She says she always willingly, and without prompting, recommends my podcast to other people. This is A Good Thing. What she also said, however, big caveat here, is that she adds a disclaimer, she says it is really good BUT my unmedicated ADHD is clearly audible in my podcast and therefore it's something she feels the need to tell people. Something about a lack of structure. I'd like to think I plot my podcasts and stick to the subject most of the time.

{maniacal laughter}

Yeh. That's more or less what I suspect too.

I would change, but, like I'd be able to, but also, Laura says I'd lose some of the charm if I did. Jeepers, imagine if I had a similar-minded co-host? Have you *heard* the Or Learn Parkour podcast? Yeh ...

Anyway.

Leg update, The Friday before I issued my last podcast (but the Friday before I *should* have issued my last podcast) I went to the doctor to discuss the x-rays of my lower leg. So, on the one hand they didn't show evidence of a stress fracture. My doctor said 'yeh, these things often don't appear on the first pass',. On the other, they showed some kind of dubious repair on the opposite side of my leg, at roughly the same point, Exactly the spot on the outside of my leg where I have an ache on the inside of my leg. Much confusion commences. Anyway, the doctor's recommendation was that I have another x-ray and he'll specifically make sure that he chases the results up in much quicker time than previously, so it doesn't take four weeks for them to come back. Like, I can just about walk without my stick now, so I don't really know what else it's meant to prove!

Nor, as it happens, did the radiographer. I popped along on the Monday to get my x-ray; she took one look at the referral and went '... but why? It's not going to show anything new, and indeed if it's healed a bit it'll even show even less than the previous one, especially if you've not done yourself an injury in the intervening time'. She gave me one, in the end, but we were both a wee bit confused as to the purpose. By the time my doc gets the results I'll probably be moving fairly normally again.

Or at least I hope so. I'm off to Malta in a week, over Easter, and Laura walks a lot.

Probably not Parkrunning though. I volunteered last weekend for the first time since the week after my injury, and it was fine, and I'm volunteering again this coming (as I type this) weekend too. It will have been my local Parkrun's 100th edition, which is something noteworthy. I'll have done about a third of them, which isn't too

bad a proportion, It's also the only Parkrun I've volunteered at (so far, seven times).

I don't have any other housekeeping, only that at the time of typing, my Twitter followers are confused by my wearing my glasses in the shower. 'Don't they get steamed up?', apparently not, or at least not as much as everyone else's seem to? I don't know if I just have always had showers with lots of air space, or a lack of a top panel, or if I tend to have my showers slightly cooler than everyone else (38 C). I can't not wear my glasses, partly because I can't see well without them but mainly cos I hate hate hate the vibe of water on my face and especially my eyes. In my younger days I had a habit of wearing swimming goggles (about the only use they ever got!), but then point one kicked in and I felt being able to see was more important than having my eyes completely covered.

I've never understood baths. "Hey, let's lie in a pool of your own dirty water for twenty minutes, getting progressively colder".

Anyway. On with the show.

{section separation jingle}

So, Street Art. It's such a vague term, I think. There are many definitions of what 'Street Art' is, and most of them are subjective. One thought comes from Sarah Irving, The Urban Wanderer, who sees a lot of it on her walks around her local suburbs.

{Sarah Irving

To me there are two kinds of street art, and both have their place. There's the commissioned kind, that you're likely to enjoy on the walls of Brussels with pretty maps that you can follow, and then there's the graffiti kind of street art, the type that matches the Oxford Dictionary definition, that it is artwork that's created in a public space, typically without permission. There is, of course, also the less typically aesthetic graffiti style, like the scrawled dick pic or comment like 'your dad sells Avon', which also has a space in the street art scene, mainly because you're likely to experience more of it than of the other two examples.

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And yes, when many people think of it, I'd imagine their mind would automatically go to either the painted murals that bedeck many a city building, or more likely, and maybe with a slight dismissive edge, it's the chaotic tagging and random lettering and doodling is what comes first to mind, as well as perhaps old posters and peeling stickers. Sarah goes on to mention this.

{Sarah

When I think of street art in Manchester, I picture the flapping card edges of wheat-paste applied paper images battered by the Northern weather, layered by dozens of other images covering the pre-war bricks of the murky back alleys of the Northern Quarter. Or the lamp-posts decouped with political and activist stickers pimping a plethora of causes. Or simply a mini-portfolio of an artist I'm yet to discover. Wherever they are, they always catch my eye.

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Obviously people have been painting on walls since prehistoric times. Some of the earliest cave art, you know, which we usually associate with images of eland and arrows, was actually more like doodles – maybe an early form of tagging, in the same way I will often mark my presence in more temporal spaces with a crude drawing of a daisy. And while tagging as we associate the concept today really came into its own in the USA in the 60s and 70s, this was a modern spin on something people have been doing for millennia – saying 'I was here, this is me'.

And while, to my knowledge, no 'our village needs a revolution' cave art exists, I'm 100% certain that for as long as there have been administrative power structures, there have been people challenging them. And indeed our word 'graffiti' derives from Ancient Greek 'grapho' – to write – via the Italian 'graffito' – a scratch. As in, a

scratch on a cave wall. Or a toilet door.

An article on The Vintage News website suggests one of the earliest surviving examples of such graffiti is in Ephesus, in Turkey. It's scrawled into a stone wall, and shows a heart, a woman, and some wine, and gives a direction. The suggestion is this is the pre-Jesus equivalent of one of those business cards you used to find pasted to the inside of a telephone box. You know the ones. That promise to show you 'a good time'.

The rise of tagging in the USA was, as far as I can tell, the first application of the wider 'street art' movement. This was initially popularised amongst the urban Black population of places like Philadelphia and New York City, at first on the local metro systems, and then later on walls and roofs as the trains became more policed. Partly the colours and vibes were added because individuals wanted to theirs to stand out, but also of course the very act of doing it was a political act, a way to tell white-middle-class-dominated politics 'we' are here. Understandably, this political class was very resistant to graffiti and a whole culture developed which derided it and only ever saw it in a bad light. And yet, meanwhile, some of this street-art was being bought by galleries and collectors. But more about the art industry later.

My friend Adam, one of the peeps in the town I used to live in, has thoughts on the dichotomy of graffiti

{Adam

I do like seeing graffiti about, particularly when it's done well, I think it looks amazing.

I think it's frowned on by generations who are quite prudish, they're not very open to things being different, they like it very prim, proper, grey, boring, dull ... {laughs} ... "I want everything to look Birmingham, without being Birmingham". They don't tend to like a lot of colour, in many different guises which is always quite sad.

I think the bolder, the brighter, the bigger, more illustrated stuff works better than the garbled mess that people can just end up randomly painting in a single colour on a fence or a toilet wall or on someone's car or whatever, no invention goes into it all, there's not really any artisticness in it, it's just bullshit. I don't like tagging when it's not done very well, I think graffiti tagging, if you do the really big bold 3D-style lettering, there's lots of different colours, that's definitely, whichever artist it is and that's their style, that's their tag, it's very unique and they can replicate that wherever they go, but it's very ... it's less 'gang tagging' where it's just some squiggle with a single colour of spray paint, and instead it's just a huge mural of 'yep, that's my wall'.

I've never been a fan of the shit graffiti on the inside of toilet doors in marker pen though, that's not even remotely inventive, just scrawled some shit on the wall and hope for the best, and I think a lot of the time when I look at that, I'm like 'You didn't really put any effort into that did you, when you wrote 'dick' on the wall'. It doesn't really say anything, it doesn't really have any artistic expression, it's just 'I'm a twat with a biro, look at me go'.

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And while 'tagging', the act of painting your identity on a wall, often over the top of someone else's work, is a valid, if less-respected by society, form of street art, there's a whole myriad of other expressions that also come under the same banner. From casual graffiti to full-scale wall murals, from wall stickers and spray-painting a traced 'negative' image, to large sculptures in town squares designed to liven up a place and make it feel more picturesque. The exact nature of these sculptures is often unclear, if not downright dubious, as you'll hear. Sometimes street art is spontaneous, a reaction to local conditions and mood. Sometimes street art is directly sanctioned by the local council in order to improve aesthetics or provide a 'legal' way for people to produce their art. Each of these aspects tells its own story, and we'll hear more about that side of things later.

Street Art in general is also often deeply political. As we heard earlier, a lot of the rise in its popularity was because it was a way for, especially Black and People Of Colour in the USA, to get their voices heard and to increase awareness of their issues. When you're in a situation when the politicians and the media don't listen to you and don't give you a voice to tell your stories, then one way of telling the world how you feel and what you need is to take matters into your own hands. And under-represented and under-valued people the world over now do the same. This is why street art is often quite revolutionary in scope; the only way to make a change is to change everything, and the only way to rouse support for that is to do it outside the boundaries of normal

media. I saw a Communist Party of Great Britain sticker on an electric's box outside Queen's Park the other day. They're not my onions, but I found it interesting it was there.

In more general terms, street art is a way to promote local issues, and looking around a suburb at what's being painted, stickered, etc, shows you what's important to the people in a given area. Around here it's mostly 'Stop Cambo' (a proposed oilfield west of Shetland), 'Improve Public Transport' (stop sniggering, Laura), 'LGBT and Trans Rights', and stickers promoting Refuweegee, a local charity that provide assistance to refugees newly arriving in Glasgow. You can maybe get an impression from this of what kind of place my suburb is. And that's the point.

Kate-Frankie, from the blog "This Could Lead To Anywhere", agrees with this vibe of what street art is.

{Kate-Frankie

Okay, so Street Art. So you might know I love Banksy, and I think the going to places and finding like areas of street art, like in Melbourne I remember kind of like walking around there and just thinking 'this is really very cool', but on a much deeper level I think there's a real like societal and political importance for street art, I think particularly with Banksy that really comes to mind, that kind of political side of it and that having a voice, and people being heard, and that artistic expression, and that's hugely me, a lot of my values, and I really think it's important.

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One might also argue street art includes performance art - mimes, flash mobs, etc. I'm indifferent about this. I have been in a flash-mob; it was at a friends' wedding - they hated the idea of doing a 'first dance' so they arranged a few of us to jump in after 20 seconds of them swaying awkwardly as the DJ switched from some cheesy romantic track to 'Saturday Night' by Whigfield. It ... raised a few eyebrows, it must be said.

I remember when the 'fourth plinth' of Trafalgar Square in London was given over to a rotating piece of public live art every hour. I was almost tempted to suggest something, but it would probably have been kinky. And would equally probably therefore have been allocated the 3am-4am slot. I did not apply.

Though. I always had an idea that it'd be cool to have a public display in a city square with a live-action space-invader game, where rows of people move in regimented lines while someone a few metres away throws tennis balls at them. Probably something for the Edinburgh Fringe. Which I've never been to, because, frankly, holistically, it sounds like Hell.

{section separation jingle}

So now we know what street art covers. The next question is, what do we like about it.

{Adam

Street art, very cool thing, particularly graffiti more than anything else I think was the street art I latched on to the most. But stuff that's properly mind-bending as street art is very very cool. I like the stuff that plays with your mind a bit. I like seeing the giant 3D mind-bending chalk drawings that get done on the floor, I think they're phenomenal. The ones that are so realistic they look, you don't realise it's painted on a wall, very much like a Warner Bros Wil-E-Coyote Road Runner cartoon where they paint the tunnel on a wall, it's that real, you'd run into it, that sort of stuff's very cool.

So yeh, I like it when it's surprised. You go to a city that you think is quite 'ooh, very posh and whatever else', but then you walk a corner and there's a giant chameleon painted up the side of a building. It adds a lot of vibrancy and variety to those cities.

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Someone else who likes Street Art is Amanda Kendle, of the Not A Ballerina blog and Thoughtful Travel podcast. Indeed she did a whole episode dedicated to it a couple of years ago. Here she is now, though, talking

about why and what she likes about it.

{Amanda

So, I really really love coming across street art when I travel, I think, love that street art is so accessible, you know, it's just there, it's in front of you, it's open to everyone, it's fun, it's interesting, it's sometimes educational. Everyone can see it, you don't have to decide to go to an art gallery etc. And I mean one of the most fun experiences I've had with street art was in Penang in Malaysia, travelling with my son, and he was, I think, almost four, so you know pretty young, and not necessarily easy to keep entertained. But the masses of street art throughout Penang, especially, there's a series by a ... oh I think he was a Lithuanian artist, which is kind of random and weird, but they were just really, I don't know, really fun and really, just, you know, you could stare for ages and, like, an enormous mural of a girl on the side of a tall, maybe three or four storey building that towers over you, you know just really engaging kind of street art.

So I often look up street art information ahead of visiting somewhere new. I love it.

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I also want to bring in Momtaz. This is a lady I was introduced to at the Traverse Conference in Brno last year; our mutual friend Dave saying 'here's someone more colourful than you'. To be fair, colour is Momtaz' entire brand, and she even has a podcast called 'Hello Colour'. You heard her in the introduction to this pod, but here she is talking about what she likes about street art.

{Momtaz

Hi, I'm Momtaz and I love street art. Wherever I go in the world I always track it down. It could be on a city break or even in a random fishing village, it's always possible to find an incredible hand-painted mural or even just a bit of a classic graffiti tag.

One of the reasons I really like street art is because I'm absolutely obsessed with colour. So wherever I go away, I do this thing called 'rainbow hunting', which is a bit of an activity where I literally just walk around seeking out colour. It can come in so many different forms; it could be in the architecture, it could be in the shops, but more often than not, I actually find that in the street art.

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It's hard to explain why it interests me. I'm drawn to it partly for it's slightly illicit nature, its out-of-placeness, similar maybe to why I like abandoned places and post-industrial dereliction. And the two often go hand-in-hand, for sure. But seeing a colourful painting on the side of an alley wall, or the shutters of a closed shop, make me go 'coo, I wasn't expecting that there, then'. Like Momtaz I'm attracted to colour, but also to content; pure tagging doesn't interest me so much, even if it's a bright and bold tag. I like my street art to tell a story in one picture, to fire the imagination, or to be something which meets other interests of mine; a scene that feels like it's come from a fantasy or sci-fi story for example, or a well-drawn cartoon-style image, or ... well y'all know some of my other interests, hobbies, and preferences. And I'll happily veer into a side-street if I suddenly spot something interesting, or even journey right back a mile or so to take a closer look at something I've seen from a passing bus – which I did in Santiago de Chile incidentally.

One caveat: I'm not a very 'arty' person, and, for example, traditional art galleries bore me. Granted traditional art galleries often have entire floors devoted to 16th Century religious icon-ography, and to be honest once you've seen one sepia depiction of the virgin Mary having given birth, you've seen them all, but I'm also talking about art in general. 'Oh there's a painting of a vase of sunflowers.' And? 'It's one of the most expensive paintings in the world'. Why? I've no interest in the subject matter when it's in front of me in real life, so why would I fawn over a painting of it? It's ... I find a lot of 'still life' quite dull. Landscapes are okay, but I'm British and there's a tendency for predominantly English-based landscape artists to paint predominantly Middle England, because of reasons of class. And when I'm hiking, I prefer to do so in the more hilly, cliffy, rocky scenery of The North than the endless fields and farms south of the A47. Alas traditional painters tended to be Southern. 'Oh look there's a farm wagon in a river; isn't that a spectacular representation of rural England', well yes it's painted well but it's a boring subject; it's a flat field with some trees, and a river with a wagon in it. If I

were hiking I'd probably pass by without noticing. Because it's ... it's the green equivalent of beige. Give me wild open spaces, give me rocky paths, give me ruined huts above vast lakes, give me distant hills capped with snow while streams roll through broken mossy land through boulders.

But the price of art is largely set by rich businessmen with no imagination.

Adam has views on the modern art world, which initially felt out-of-scope for this pod, but as I'm very unlikely to ever do a pod on contemporary art itself, because it felt relevant to thoughts on public art and artists who sell-out, and simply because it amused me, I've slotted it in.

{Adam

I usually have a little bit of a bugbear with some of the more contemporary stuff, some of the modern stuff, and it gets to that point where ... when I went to the Tate, years ago and it was when they had the display of the woman who had done the 'untidy bed', and it had just got to the point where you could make anything in your world 'art' as long as you can have a justification for it, and a little plaque that describes why and you could just say 'there you go, it's art', cos I joked about doing something, I was like can we just take a fence panel and smash it to bits and just call it 'the rickety fence', and it represents the decline of humankind as we know it in society, it was once a strong structure and now it's fell apart, and that's it, and some twat would buy it, you know they would, they'd be just sitting there and go 'oh my god yes, 45,000 pounds for your fence panel'. Could I do it again, get a different coloured fence panel, smash that up, and put 'the decline of society part two' and sell it for as much, and for me it takes the actual artistic value out of something that took a long time to do, some energy, some effort, some imagination to go into creating something that was really really cool looking, but whether it was abstract or super realistic, either way.

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And maybe that's a part of it. 'Street Art', however you want to define it, is largely that of the people, rather than the corporations and the art world. It's a bit more raw, but it's also a bit more genuine, It's created more with the vibe of what matters, of what people want to create, rather than what sells.

Plus, essentially, I like the concept of street art because it's more relatable, it 'means' more to my personal experiences, but I guess more importantly it makes me think; why that, why here, why then. It's not a question of quality, it's a question of accessibility. I can't relate to a farm wagon or a bowl of sunflowers, but I can relate to a barefoot girl lying in the grass or an image of someone dropping an object out a high window and it landing on someone below. The former was the image I trawled through Santiago's suburbs for, while I saw the latter in Brussels; as we'll hear later, Brussels is weird.

Sarah Irving also talks about this sense of community and belonging, and it's a subject we'll come back to later too.

{Sarah:

I think street art offers a sense of belonging. Whether it comes from the group of artists you see regularly painting together, the shared social and political messaging, or the way to publicly express yourself anonymously. It's a link between people and the city. It can brighten your day with a spot of humour, some colour in a typically dank part of town, and open up conversations about the messages being shared. The colourful murals that brighten the street encourage you to explore and learn about an area. They often tell stories and invite you to know the space better through the work and through the location. Brightly-coloured angular artworks along the canals bring a simple joy to an often forgotten space in urban settings. And the scrawled dicks and sayings bring a smile to your face when you're going about your regular business. Someone took the time to write or draw something in the public domain, to share something that was on their mind. The least we can do is pay attention.

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But just back to the idea of artists 'selling-out'. This is slightly beyond the scope of this pod, but it's worth mentioning that most street artists don't earn a living from it. In these days of Instagram and TikTok etc, they

can use their work as a kind of portfolio, encourage people to follow them, and gain a career that way, but that, like in the travel blogging world, only happens to the select few. Given culture and society tends to look down on street art anyway as being everything from 'not really art' all the way to 'vandalism', many street artists use pseudonyms and protect their identity in other ways - in a sense actively *not* drawing attention to themselves outwith their own peer group.

Momtaz has a thought on promotion of street artists.

{Momtaz

One of the things I feel a bit nervous about photographing street art is that it's actually quite hard to sometimes find the artist and then to credit them. So whenever I take photos of street art, and I am that person that will stand in front and do a selfie, or ask someone to take a photo in front of a gorgeous colourful mural, but then later on it's actually quite hard to know who to thank for painting it. And sometimes I think it's actually really mean to post some street art and say how great it is, and then not to credit the artist, so I am a bit torn with that. I do try, I look for their tag, if they've got their Instagram up there I will try and use it, but it's not always possible.

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And then you get artists like Banksy. A genuine street-artist who's transcended into something of a pop-culture icon, worth millions. His style tends to be politically-charged stencil art - quick to apply, and to-the-point, and he's obviously got a very large and cult following. And yet if anyone else did exactly those kinds of things, the council would clean it up quicker than you can say 'Balloon Girl'. What makes Banksy different? Has he sold-out to capitalist culture? How has he managed to create a brand when others can barely create an alleyway? Does he feel he's sacrificed anything to get that level of prestige and, in a sense, immunity? Obviously I'm not in a position to ask him that. If I was, I wouldn't be doing this pod.

It does bring back to mind though the question of 'what is art?', and if the answer is 'what capitalism tells us it is', then what does that tell us about our society, our tastes, and our prejudices? How can we be certain what good 'talent' and 'creativity' are? Especially given art culture is often seen as white, male, very middle-class, and allonormative, while street art ... generally isn't.

I can't answer that. All I can tell you is what I find aesthetically attractive in art. Not sunflowers, at any rate, If only he'd painted a vase of daisies.

{section separation jingle - Brussels}

The city that, in my experience, has the most street and public art though is Brussels. Indeed it's one of the main attractions of the city, as well as being (obviously) one of the cheapest. There's something pretty much on every street, if you look hard enough, from paintings on the walls to sculptures on the street corners.

As a culture in general, Belgium is very much 'cartoon central' - several incredibly popular cartoon strips have been created in the country, notably Spirou, Lucky Luke, and of course Tintin. The culture of cartoon art is so strong, there's a museum dedicated entirely to it in Brussels - the 'Centre Belge de Bande Dessinée'. It's built on several floors, displays extracts from all manner of cartoon strips, and has a very in-depth biographical section of many of the area's most famous and influential cartoonists, complete with examples of their work and items from their studios (so you get to see, for example, the desk layout that Marc Sleen would have used). Many famous cartoon creations are present, including mini statues of creations like Tintin, but also, although not mentioned anywhere within the centre itself (because both original creators were French, I guess), my personal favourite, Asterix.

Comics, also known as the Ninth Art (one wonders what the other Eight are!), have always been very big in Belgium - to be honest it's big across Francophone Europe, although there is a strong Dutch contingent too in Belgium (including Sleen and Willy Vandersteen). "Comic" and "Cartoon" are sometimes seen a bit of loaded words in English, as they imply 'drawings for kids, usually with comedic effect'. While many of these Belgian cartoonists do draw/write to create 'laughs' amongst the readership, they are often satirical, parodic, and with adult themes and jokes. It's a serious art form, and indeed the phrase 'ninth art' can be seen to demonstrate

the 'artistic' nature of them not just the content.

The city is full of representations of comic art on the streets too, in the form of murals. Some of them represent characters fundamental to Belgian culture – often drawn by the creators themselves, but many of them faithfully in their style. For example the characters of Tintin and the Thomson Twins appear, accurately drawn, on one wall despite Hergé having been dead since 1983. Other characters that have entire tower blocks devoted to them are much more famous domestically than internationally; one such is a drawing around three storeys up on a blank wall, of what appears to be an anthropomorphic cat building a wall. This is “Le Chat”, a famous character in Belgium drawn by Philippe Geluck, whose standard ‘schtick’ is to appear in one-panel cartoons with a somewhat surrealist and absurdist bent.

Many of the scenes drawn though don't depict famous characters, but instead are bespoke to the environment they're in. Some of them are humorous, such as one artwork that makes use of a tall thin wall that would otherwise have been blank or daubed in tagging graffiti – a boy at the top drops something out of a window that hits a man walking at ground level). Others are created to artistically set a particular scene, such as one drawn in a very 1920s American 'film noir' style, depicting a well-dressed man and woman leaving a bar at dusk. Still others are socio-political; gay rights, urban regeneration, etc.

The majority of them though merely appear random; just simply pretty works of art that brighten up otherwise blank walls. If only all cities did this.

It's probably not surprising that you can get a town plan of the city centre and find the designated murals listed on it – in effect you can take yourself on a self-guided street-art tour, although be aware there are so many of them that if you want to see them all it's a huge undertaking that'll cover the majority of the day and seriously smash your step count. Also note that while the map tells you roughly where they are, it doesn't give you a precise location (so some of them take some searching for – hint: look up), nor does it give you any background information about them. I find it fun to find out more about them in research afterwards, but again your mileage may vary.

Aside from those murals, Brussels is one of those cities, like Stockholm and Moscow, whose metro system acts as an art gallery. As you'll hear later, I am sure my friend Adam would approve. Notable stations I came across (your mileage may vary) include:

- * Houba-Brugmann, where both sides of the rail tunnel are painted with artwork laid out like a set of film slides or depth-of-field photos of a woman dancing. She starts off standing still and plain at one end of one of the platforms, but by the other end she's dancing with a flourish. The opposite side of the platform has the same on the walls, but with more people and a much more obviously motion-blurred background. {pause} It's not relevant that she's barefoot. Not at all.

- * Sainte-Catherine, plain white walls laden with what have the effect of hand-drawn, large, flowers of various species – roses, daffodils, etc, and

- * Maelbeek, where the artwork on the walls takes the form of simply-drawn outlined heads in a rather modernist, almost cartoonist, style. Apparently these are portraits by the Dutch artist Benoît van Innis. Nope, no clue.

{section separation jingle - short}

Now, I briefly mentioned Stockholm there. Stockholm is of course very famous for its metro system; three lines and 100 stations, many of which are artistic destinations in their own right. Indeed it's believed at least 90 of them have some kind of art installation, either sculpture on the platform, or art along the walls, or even just in the way they've been designed. Of the lines, the most interesting for decor is the 'blue' line, the newest (but even so it's about 2 weeks younger than I am!). As a whole, the system has been called 'the world's longest art gallery', and each of the artworks is unique to that station, so every station is completely different.

Some of the stations on the line look like they've been literally built into a cave in the rock, including Stadion where there's a weird painted rainbow effect – if you search for Stockholm Metro this is likely to be one of the first you'll see, along with Rådhuset and Solna Central which is very striking with red rock ceilings and a red/green forest scenes along the station walls. Other interesting stations include Thorildsplan, which has been decorated in images that seem to have come out of an 8-bit computer game, Tensta with its graffiti-like signs and doodles in different languages (research tells me it's a strongly immigrant area), Rissne with what I've found

out is basically the whole history of the Rissne area written in handwriting on the sides of the walls, and Solna Strand which is great if you like looking at weird cubes of sky.

{section separation jingle}

Another place with government-approved street art, albeit for a different reason, is Quebec City. Under the bridges that mark the junction of routes 440 and 175, just NW of the city centre, is a part-building-site, part-derelict-land-posing-as-a-car-park. It's been like this for several years; indeed I was introduced to it on my previous visit to the city in late 2013, and it looked exactly the same 5 years later. Its unloved vista made it the haunt of many a local graffiti and street artist, and no sooner did the council clean it up, so they returned. Eventually, the council caved in and allowed the street artists free reign over the columns that support the flyovers.

Largely self-policing, this is the end result. Incredibly ornate and fancy artworks that turn an otherwise drab part of the city into something with a bit of colour. Murals that cover the column from bottom to top, different on both sides, visualising everything from fantasies of Persia to fairy tales to cartoons. I'll grant you the surrounds still look ugly, but at least it's a start.

To be fair it's not jarring when compared with the rest of the city, or even the rest of Quebec province. Montreal itself is full of street art and its one of those cities you could probably easily fill a couple of hours walking around plotting it all.

But this seems like a perfect time to talk more about a similar scheme, somewhere much closer to home.

{section separation jingle - Glasgow}

Now, I currently live in Glasgow, as you know, and it might surprise you to know that this city is actually quite noted for its art scene, especially its street art.

The main focus is the Glasgow Mural Trail. This is a series of (currently) 29 pieces of wall art scattered all around the city centre (and a couple of spots just outside). The idea is to turn otherwise vacant or tired areas into more lively and aesthetic places that look pretty; places in the city centre that would be likely to be seen by at least some locals and tourists, and encouraging people to visit previously lesser-popular parts of the city centre, which has the knock-on effect of helping local businesses,

The first of these pieces of art was painted in 2008, and it's still an ongoing process, so no doubt that 29 will expand in the years to come. There's no real pattern to them; the idea is to make them appeal to all tastes so if you don't like one, the next one could be right up your alley.

Some of the murals represent themes specific to Glasgow. For instance, near the University of Strathclyde complex is a painting (by the artist "Smug") of the two saints long-associated with the city, St Enoch cradling the child St Mungo. A sibling piece of an older St Mungo, again by Smug, is nearby. There's also two murals (both by the artist "Rogue One") commemorating local icon Billy Connolly.

Rogue One is also responsible for two pieces I often end up walking past. One (on a side street in the very centre of the city) is of a taxi being lifted by balloons (and the piece is called 'the world's most economical taxi'), the other is just off one of the main streets and near a pub I frequent, and features two girls blowing bubbles.

You can see the variation of these murals already.

Others include a 200m celebration of the University of Strathclyde, a couple of representations of Glasgow culture and life from times past, a swimmer and a badminton player to commemorate the Commonwealth Games (there's a similar mural over in the western suburb of Partick depicting a rugby player), a panda, a crocodile, some birds, and a series of cats, and, of all things, a painting of a chocolate bar and commenting cynically about the rising costs of a childhood sweet.

Over in the west of the city, in Partick, there's an old warehouse and car park next to a railway viaduct, sandwiched between a student area and a very industrial zone. It used to be a galvanizers, from the ship-

building days, and their associated yard space. Now though, this is the setting for SWG3, an indoor indie market and outdoor street art exhibition. Local graffiti artists can be seen painting on the maze-like walls in the open air, whilst the old warehouse has been converted into a monthly themed market and real ale arena – there's a DJ in residence too and the back room looks like it works as a nightclub-type venue.

Now. If I ever do a podcast on Glasgow I'll talk more about the venue in general, but in this pod I'm going to concentrate on the street art side.

Every year they host a street art and graffiti festival called 'Yardworks', and indeed the next one as I type is in just over a month's time, over the weekend of 5-7 May 2023. Sadly I'll be in Italy then, but I'm sure there'll be other opportunities. SWG3 themselves describe it as being "a riotous celebration of colour, creativity and collaboration", and present are scheduled to be many notable artists from over the world. Including Morf (Metamorfeus, with an 'f'), one of the most well known street artists, Jay Kaes, a Spanish artist who's done a lot of murals around London's Brick Lane, and Epod, who uses his skills as a draughtsman and fashion designer to create some unique and distinctive art.

Outside of the festival though, SWG3, through the Yardworks subsid, provide a safe environment for urban artists of all types to develop and learn. Just after the festival they'll open up a specialist studio, but otherwise they run a whole series of community-focussed projects allowing artists to create while at the same time improving the ambience of otherwise derelict or ugly places which would be the target of less-aesthetic tagging and miscellany,

One of the main examples of this is they're in partnership with Network Rail. Now, you probably all know that railways and graffiti are a very common mix. This partnership allows artists to paint safely and legally in areas which would otherwise be off-limits (because nothing cramps your artistic style like being hit by a train; I remember all those 1970s Public Information Films), while at the same time improving the look of places that Network Rail might otherwise be less inclined to clean up, Partly because a clean wall might attract rogue street artists, including the railway viaduct arches that pass close to the SWG3 site, which is claimed to be Scotland's largest outdoor street art site, as well as many railway stations across Glasgow and beyond (even including Edinburgh Waverley). Some of the artists involved have also been those responsible for the Glasgow Mural Trail, too, like Smug and The Cobalt Collective.

Adam points out this is one of his favourite forms of street art:

{Adam

I love street art for the most part. It's like any art, it's subjective to individual taste. I always liked really big, bold, interesting graffiti I used to love seeing it on like the sides of trains and stuff, particularly when I went to France. The entire side of a train carriage and stuff, and I used to like when I'd go on trains, going through train tunnels and you'd see it all on bridges and the outside of tunnels, inside of tunnels, on the walls. It always made the journey a little bit more decorative than just looking at buildings when you're going through residential areas and built-up areas as opposed to obviously going through nature.

Yeh, my favourite places to see it I think are motorway journeys, train journeys, very long, boring, monotonous, repetitive, sort of scenery that you're gonna get, when it's just intermingled into that in some way shape or form.

}

Note the art created by SWG3 is regularly updated and painted over with new concepts, to keep it fresh and pertinent - this included some direct environmental themes during COP26, the site of which was in direct eye-line to the artwork!

Other community projects they do include holding informative talks about street art in general, working with local residents and associations to brighten up everyday communities, and work with people at all levels from individuals to corporations to offer bespoke artwork, just like an artist would. This means you, yes you, could have a genuine street art composition of your liking hanging on your wall. Or on your wall, to be honest. I've no idea how much it would cost. And my tastes are niche. Tempting, though.

Kate-Frankie also talks about this community aspect to street art.

{Kate-Frankie

But also it's kind of owning the area and putting a stamp on it and the residents of a place kind of having some say over how it looks and what kind of happens there and it can be really inspiring, and really creative and actually quite beautiful. Or shocking and different.

I remember Bologna as well, walking around there and particularly the kind of student, well it's a big student city but like, some of the streets there where a lot of students would hang out, a lot of really interesting and kind of thought provoking art, and I just think there's a real place for it.

And I think I'd like to go and explore more and see more street art as well. And maybe also get to meet artists and people who are reviving places kind of with their artwork, that would be really cool.

}

{section separation jingle}

In a city with a lot of street art, one of the ways to explore it is on a tour. Now this can be self-guided, with a published map, guidebook or website detail, or even an audiobook. Both Brussels and Glasgow have websites that list where all the murals are, what each of them is, and even how to find them (hint: look up). Alternatively, some cities have guided tours with a tour-guide, who'll take you around all the interesting spots. Quite often these are run by the same people who do those free walking tours of the city, although note street art tours tend to be specialist and therefore payable and bookable in advance, rather than just 'turn up and go'.

I've taken specialist tours like that in quite a few cities, including Bucharest, London, and Prague, as well as street art being well-indicated on general walking tours in places like Santiago and Valparaiso in Chile, and Derry and Belfast in Northern Ireland - the latter two I've gone into much more detail about in my previous pod on my Northern Ireland trip, suffice to say if you think street art can get political, oh my do I have a few streets for you to explore!

The tour in Bucharest was advertised as more an 'alternative' tour, covering the backstreets of the city, and indeed sometimes literally down streets that felt off-the-map, that were still derelict from Communist days, past buildings that were glorious in façade but which were mere hulks inside which was desolation, and which were theoretically up for rent but which had been used by squatters for some time. A side of the city that people don't normally see. That tour also took us into a couple of art gallery-cum-cafes, and at one point went up inside a 5-storey car garage whose slipway walls had been painted by street artists.

So obviously there's a strong connection between those communities and street art, so on the tour we also got to learn about the different people who left their marks on the city, including an artist called Cuibi who draws what are described as 'Square Cats'. Look, it's easier to see than to describe, but essentially, imagine someone drawing a fantastical representation of a cat, but with corners instead of curves. Research suggests he was the first graffiti artist in Romania to have an album published, back in the day. I visited before Instagram had really taken off. The other artist we saw a lot of was Creaturi Dragute, or 'Cute Creatures'; her signature was to stick very colourful small images of very artistic representations of frogs, axolotl, cats etc onto walls. Research suggests she's now working as a tattoo artist in Bristol.

Someone who went on such a tour on one of her travels was Amanda Kendle.

{Amanda Kendle:

I was up in Broome in the north of Western Australia, and I happened to meet a guy who ran a street art walking tour, and I thought well that sounds amazing, I'd love to do it, so I went along and it was just a perfect experience. So Broome is a town with lots and lots of parts to its history and background, from indigenous people, there's been a pearling industry, consequently large Chinese and Japanese population, all sorts of different things, you know, very different to other parts of Australia, and, the cool thing that they've done up

there is the guide explained to me something like this, I think I've got it right, that developers who were building in the city, in the town sorry, were required, if their development was over two million dollars, they were required to spend 1% of their budget on public art. They could either do public art themselves, or they could give money to the shire to use. I think a lot of them did the latter. But as a result, there is public art, street art, all throughout the centre of Broome. And it was just such a fabulous way to learn more about the history and background of the town. And I think if you just are there, even as a 'I'm just going to go up and hang out as a tropical warmth tourist', you're still going to see it and question it, oh, what's this one about, oh what's this about the pearling industry, and you just inevitably learn something from it. And of course it's attractive and interesting and, you know, just all-round good.

}

It helps on these tours to be guided by someone in the local scene, so they can answer questions you have and bring a bit of background and explanation, rather than just passing a mural and going 'yeh, this is famous, this was painted by Smug, let's move on'. And this seemed to be the issue that Momtaz had one time, as she explains.

{Momtaz

I prefer going on my own street art wanders than going on organised street art tours. One of the reasons is that I once booked a street art tour in Sofia, Bulgaria, and the problem was they were rushing us around so much; I actually wanted to stop and take photos but they just wanted to rush through the history, and at one point I was actually so busy taking a photo, that I didn't realise the tour had moved on, and I actually got lost and separated from them. Believe it or not I found them an hour and a half later. So I still had the drink at the end in the bar, but I missed out on what they saw, and I vowed after that I'm just going to stick doing it my way.

}

{section separation jingle}

Another place with a selection of street art is Palestine, and Momtaz talks about her visit there.

{Momtaz

The best street street art I've seen has to be in Palestine. Now there's an area in Bethlehem where you will find Banksy's hotel. It's called the Walled Off hotel, and it's surrounded by the walls that go around Bethlehem. It's politically charged, it's filled with emotion, and it really is something that will completely captivate you. There's actually a shop, Banksy's shop, that sells spray can art which you can actually buy and contribute to these walls. What's really interesting is that you won't really see this street art reported if you're in that part of the world. You're probably going to be told that that's an unsafe place to visit. But actually, if you do make the trek to go there you are in for an absolute treat, because the work there is so personal, it's really going to fire up your emotions and I really recommend seeing that kind of artwork and comparing it to the more planned murals that you get in city centres.

}

I have been to the region, though it was almost exactly 10 years ago, so I'd imagine a lot of the artwork I saw and vibe I experienced there has changed. I probably ought to do a pod on that journey at some point, in another of my series of 'past adventures in the pre-smartphone era'.

Obviously there are wider political, cultural, and moral implications about a visit there, but on the subject of Street Art alone, it's definitely a place worth seeing. It's amazing how pretty you can make a 10-metre tall concrete wall. Obviously much of it is very political in outlook, with references to freedom, oppression, culture, and history, but whatever side you're on, it's definitely worth looking.

{pause}

Was that neutral enough? I don't want to be on a hit-list from either side!

{section separation jingle}

Speaking of walls and politics, it would be remiss of me to not mention the East Side Gallery in Berlin. This is that famous piece of preserved Berlin Wall on the eastern side of the city, in Friedrichshain. It's just over 1300 metres long, and in a way channels its previous existence as a barrier.

See, back in the day, although the East Berlin side was, obviously, clearly out of bounds, there was more-or-less access to the wall itself from the West (the East German wall guards didn't like it as technically the entire wall was in East Berlin territory but the legal border was often unmarked and they mostly didn't cause a scene about it). In the late 70s this section of the border itself was entirely replaced with concrete blocks some 4m high (shorter than Palestine, yes), and obviously a concrete wall is going to attract graffiti and street artists.

When the wall fell, this section remained standing for long enough for it to be the gathering point for a whole street-art movement, and for historical and memorial purposes, it was allowed to remain in place. It was officially opened as an open-air art gallery in late September 1990, less than a year after the first break. I guess it's fitting that the remains of the wall have continued to serve the same kind of protest/political vibe today as it always has done.

There is of course much more to Berlin street art than The Wall, and the city as a whole is well-noted for its general 'alternative' scene; sometimes indie/political, sometimes positively hipster, especially near Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain.

The scene takes many forms; old buildings turned into cafes and shops, or disused railway yards that have now become hip nightspots. In some areas (I'm thinking of Schwarzenberg) there is a feeling that maybe the original ethos has 'sold out'; squatters living freely have become gentrified and their pads now go for among the highest rents in the city.

The art itself is varied; much is mere 'tagging' (more so than, say, Chile), but there's a fair amount of political comment as you might expect. Some is, however, odd - life-sized stencil-like dancers are scattered across the city under the tagline 'it's time to dance', whilst elsewhere random mushrooms and aliens adorn stone walls.

If you can tell a lot by a place by its street art; Berlin's tells me it's quite a random and funky place.

{section separation jingle}

Ah, Chile. It's the only country in South America I've visited, and I'm fully aware that the street art in Argentina, especially, is worth visiting on its own. It's on my list. But in Chile I visited, amongst other places, Santiago de Chile and Valparaiso, two neighbouring large cities each with their own individual vibe.

Both cities are noted for their street art, which is quite varied in style and detail, but it's everywhere. Examples I came across in Santiago include some kind of dystopian cyberpunk scene with a square-headed woman being taken prisoner by a robot with a human head and hundreds of teeth, a chess pawn type figure with a yin-yang style face and a pointed cone where its nose would be, and two deep-sea divers on the shutters of a fishmongers.

Many of them that my general walking tour guides pointed out were by the artist Inti. He was born in Valparaiso but operated for over a decade in both cities, as well as attending Fine Arts school, and is now apparently quite a global name (my visit was in mid-2014). Much of his work is huge - covering entire building's walls from top to bottom - and has a tendency to use imagery that directly references indigenous and Andean cultures, concentrating on figures that often resemble dolls or puppets.

Valparaiso itself is quite a hilly city - approximately 40 of them, although some are more populous than others - and each of the hills has its own little character; so a couple are artsy, one bohemian, one near the port is pretty much seen as the 'no-go' area, not that that really means anything other than a touch of elitism. Part of the city is also a UNESCO world heritage site, due to the layout, design, and colour of the houses - some of which is due to residents snaffling things off boats (eg the corrugated metal used as ballast on boats has been added to the outside of a lot of the houses to make them rain-resistant, whilst the houses are oft painted with

left-over paint from ships, hence why the houses are all different colours). This alone would count as street art, but the city is much more than that. Many of those hillsides are also covered with small alleyways, which, as an aside, add to the charm, although making it tough to fight fires – which are more common than you'd hope because of the wild and wonderful electricity cabling (and people illegally 'connecting' to the network).

Obviously many of these alleyways are covered in street art – here, residents have offered their walls to street artists to brighten them up a little, and to prevent the same walls being used by graffiti 'taggers' (there's a tacit understanding between the two). This means that walking up and down the many hills (or taking the many funiculars), you get to see a lot of small, almost bespoke, pieces.

One of the roads in the city, a steep cobbled slope, has a long mural across the top that reads 'We are not hippies, we are happies'. Obviously I took a selfie. And a foot-selfie.

{section separation jingle}

Now, I've talked a lot in this pod so far about street art in relation to paintings and stickers, predominantly 2-dimensional art. However there's another form of street art to consider, and that's what you might also term 'public art'. Here I'm talking mostly of sculptured artworks, statues, arguably even ornate fountains, and art created for a particular purpose and theme.

By its very nature, most public and street art of this kind is financed by at least the local councils; putting up a 3-dimensional piece in a public square would be very quickly stopped and the artists arrested on anything from a public order offence to destruction of property, from violating planning regulations to blocking a public highway.

Much of this art is created for a specific purpose - to either commemorate a person or an event, or to promote something about the place in general and make it seem more welcoming or interesting. The city of Perth, in Australia, for instance, has a small grassy park just off one of the main streets in the city centre, where there are three life-sized silicone bronze kangaroos. These were cast in 1998 by Charlie Smith and Joan-Walsh Smith, as part of the 'Perth - A City For People' project overseen by the government of Western Australia. You can walk up to them and pose next to them. Like a tourist would. Like I did. Obviously.

Similarly, nearby Fremantle has The Rainbow, a 9m high, 19m long, 66 tonne installation made up of 9 shipping containers each painted in a different colour. I am aware how many colours are in a rainbow, I'm not Marcus Canning, I didn't create it, It's designed as a symbol of hope for the future, while still referencing Fremantle's part (as a shipping port). It's also not the sort of thing you can put up at 2.36am and hope nobody notices.

Another piece in Fremantle was the Arcs D'Ellipse by Felice Varini, which involved him sticking pieces of yellow foil across many of the buildings along High Street. This was installed in October 2017 as part of the celebrations for the High Tide public art project and the Fremantle Festival, and was a very intricate optical illusion. From the street it just looked like random pieces of yellow foil, but standing at the end of the street, on a bank next to the sea, the angle of viewing made the pieces join together to form what looked like concentric circles. This, however, showed up one of the problems with street art, even that funded and implemented by the local government, since there then became an argument about who'd pay for the repairs to the buildings if the foil damaged them. Which it did. The city, apparently, and therefore the taxpayer. Just so's you know.

Government-funded art projects can be quite odd. On a hillside overlooking the Kosovan town of Mitrovica, which lies directly on the river that divides the Serbian-majority part of town from the Albanian-majority part, is ... a monument. It's 19m tall, made of concrete, and looks a little like the Greek letter Pi. It was erected in 1973 by Bogdan Bogdanovich, and a friend in the town told me it was part of a series of symbolic statues all over the Yugoslavia commissioned by then-president Tito, each of which related to the place in question.

Mitrovica is a mining town; the nearby Trepça mine is one of the leading employers in Kosovo and one of the main issues in Kosovo-Serb relations. The name Mitrovica itself means 'womb of money' & there was a phrase 'Trepça works, Belgrade creates' that summarised the relationship between the two (Mitrovica being where the wealth came from that Belgrade spent). Allegedly, this monument represents a 'cradle' (continuing the 'womb')

theme) to show this is where Yugoslavia's 'power' was created & nurtured. It's also designated as a memorial to those miners who lost their lives in World War Two, as obviously a mine as important as this would be very much a powerhouse in the war effort.

Much smaller, and much closer to home, is another piece of public art dedicated to industry, albeit in this case a long-dead one. Just outside Bolsover Town Centre, on a dead railway line that's now a public footpath, the Stockley Trail, is a sculpture from 2000 called "Breaking The Mould". It's by Andrew McKeown, who works primarily in iron and steel, and has created many local-interest pieces around the country; this is the first of 21 in a series called 'Changing Places', which symbolise the changing nature of many of the UK's ex-industrial heartlands.

This specific work is of an old industrial moulding, broken and no longer used, but in the centre a seed is sprouting - representing the change of the town from its industrial past to its new future. Bolsover has a few new business parks and a motorway junction was recently opened to serve the town directly; there is a growing hope here.

Similar 'A New Hope' type sculptures and public art pieces exist in many of the old mining and industrial towns around the UK, especially in my old home area of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Indeed Kirkby-in-Ashfield itself, as well as the cricketing statues, now has a weird 'flame'-shaped object built out of metal, in the crossroads in the very centre of the town. It's possibly a leaf. It's a little unclear. It says something about not forgetting the past but letting it be reborn in new industry. It seems to have been mostly ignored.

In nearby Clipstone, in the Vicar Water Country Park, is a 10m high metallic statue of a golden hand. Weirdly, no-one seems to know why, other than it was commissioned around the turn of the Millennium by the Cycling group Sustrans, who are responsible for a lot of the dead railway lines becoming cycle- and footpaths. Possibly it's a beckoning to the old mining industry - the unused headstocks of the local pit are visible behind it and themselves have long been the subject of a 'do we knock them down or do we count them as art these days' dispute.

Over in Rhyl, a seaside resort in North Wales long past its best, the local council have used public art to try to prettify the town after years of neglect. It's what's known as "Drift Park"; the idea being to create sculptures, pavement- and wall-art, and interactive features such as water jets that evoke a sense of the sea, the beach, and the way the seashore creates a natural and unique environment. Examples include a metallic relief sculpture of a girl playing/running - presumably in the sand, and a display known as 'postcards from Rhyl', where events and people from the town are printed on tiles on a wall, itself shaped like a sea's wave.

Not all public art is quite so ... aspirational. Rotterdam, for instance, is noted for a statue of Santa Claus holding a Christmas tree. At least, that's the official explanation. It was constructed in 2001 by American artist Paul McCarthy and has moved about the city a bit since then. Mainly because it ... doesn't look like a Christmas tree. In fact, when I saw it I hadn't got a clue what it was supposed to be, but I was fairly sure it wasn't supposed to be what it looked like. What it looks like, as all Full Swap Radio listeners will already know, is a butt plug. That it's about the same size as the statue of Santa himself, doesn't help matters.

{Adam

It was meant to be a Christmas Tree but it looked more like a giant green butt-plug. I just want to know who was there making decisions for that one.

}

Don't we all, Adam, don't we all.

Sometimes public art can seem a little out-of-place. In Chesterfield, in the UK, in the grounds of the parish church, is a sculpture of a bee. It's called "The Queen Bee", for ... fairly self-explanatory reasons.

The story behind it is twofold. Following a storm in early 2014, a couple of fairly old and substantial trees were blown down, leaving only the stumps in the ground. The church authorities wanted to replace them with

something, and hit upon the idea of a commissioning a sculpture (rather than just replanting the trees, they wanted something that would make a statement). Meanwhile, the the local council had organised a conference about the plight of bees and the effect of bee loss on the local Peak District, and wanted something to remind the people about the issue; the two parties came to an agreement and this was the end result.

The sculpture is made of wood (specifically the trunk of an oak tree), sits on the remains of the blown-down trees, and was carved by a local sculptor Andrew Frost. It weighs around a ton (just over 1,000kg), and on the side is written the biblical verse "Out of the strong came something sweet"; a somewhat 'dodgy' and slightly unfair riddle asked by Samson and referring to bees inside a lion's carcass. Bees don't tend to make nests inside lions; it's not something that would be terribly reasonable for either party, but still ... it's a church and that seemed appropriate I guess.

Quebec City is another place with a defined public arts trail. Two of them involve chairs. On the path along the canal, and without any real apparent reason, is a series of rows of school classroom chairs and desks. Like the sort of thing you'd find in an old primary school, with the desk and the bench seat attached, and designed for one child to sit at. Except they're plastic and bright yellow. It's from local artist Ludovic Boney, and is designed for the precise purpose to just sit and be free to read, work, daydream, whatever. A bit like school. In practice!

Elsewhere in the city, in front of the railway station, there's 40 chairs lined up in different patterns, each with writing from a Quebecois poet. It's said to express 'movement' of the city, from foundation to the present day. Or something. This is by another Quebec sculptor - Michel Goulet.

Another place with public art is London. I mean, we all know London as a whole is noted for street art. So noted, in fact, that the area around Brick Lane would itself be enough for a pod on its own. And, to a letter extent, Camden, but we don't talk about Camden. But one area worth noting is in the far south. I mentioned it in passing in my podcast on South London, but the Borough of Sutton, especially Sutton. Town Centre, is notable for its large variation in both street art and public art. Note of course this is Middle England (35% of the Borough's area is garden, remember), so if you're thinking of street art in terms of murals of cartoon-like styles in psychedelic colours with political undertones, this is not the place.

Now, some of it is traditional wall art, such as the Sutton Mosaic. This was commissioned in 1994 to celebrate aspects Sutton's history and legacies, and is made of painted porcelain constructed by two genuine mosaic artists. Some of the local items represented on it are a couple of old country houses, one of the first iron railways built in the world, lavender, and an old coaching inn.

But other art is more sculptural. For example, Sutton railway station has the most 'artistic' and 'designed' seating I've seen - who needs rusting benches or formica seats when you can have wood design with plants in the armrests. While in the town centre itself are any number of unusual sculptures, including a couple of random wooden reptiles on the pavement, just, you know, there. While Sutton's obligatory 'Millennium' acknowledgement is a strange-looking object called an 'armillary'. This is a representation of an old-fashioned timepiece (and plotter of celestial objects), but here not only does it tell time, it gives distances to nearby places like Kingston and Croydon. It was commissioned by, and represents the aims of, Rotary International. Finally, while technically off-scope for 'public art', the centre of town has a Grade II Listed old-fashioned signpost still in situ, that originally served as the sign for the Cock Hotel, that old Coaching Inn and overnight stop on the road out of London. Although the Inn was demolished in 1950, the sign and post remain.

Adam talks about a couple of other public art pieces that caught his eye, including being equally fazed by the sculpture in Kirkby-in-Ashfield.

{Adam

Yeh, public art, sculptures, stuff like that, there's some that are just again amazing. I can't think of any that are coming to mind. You'll get them at like seasonal events and they're pretty cool, and then they get taken down and they'll go away but they're really really pretty. There was a guy who made an angel of a load of donated knives and swords cos they were cutting down on knife crime, I remember that was incredible, but yeh the weird flame thing in Kirkby is like, what the fuck's that meant to be, it's just some local artist's wet dream, 'i made a thing, looks like fire', it's got no meaning behind it, it's just a big silver firey thing, so no I don't understand that.

There was like a nature reserve in the middle of the sort of NW corner of Vancouver when I was in Canada, it was hidden away in their National Park, the National Park in Vancouver is like 4 miles across, and right smack bang in the middle, a giant fish, a hand-carved wooden fish that's sat partially submerged in water outside some little random animal sanctuary that's got aquatic wildlife and your mammals and your regular sort of wildlife in it, but that was a beautiful piece of art to see, and there was quite a few big, sort of, artistic stuff, statue-y type sculptures, I think there was one that looked like it was a killer whale made out of Lego, it was on the waterfront, that was pretty spectacular. Wasn't made out of Lego, it was made out of some other stuff, but that was pretty cool.

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Once again though, for the pinnacle of public art like this, we can't do much better than Brussels. Like, Belgium's most famous 'resident' is the Manneken Pis, which is actually much smaller than you'd imagine. Seriously. Wikipedia says it's 2' tall, but as it's in an alcove on a pedestal and not easy to get to, it's hard to verify.

Y'all know him? Like, there's no polite way of putting this, so here we go. It is a statue of a boy having a piss, hence its name (literally 'little man pissing'). There's been a statue here since the late 14th Century; this particular chap was designed in the early 1600s. He's stuck away behind railings because, as you might imagine for such a small, notable object, there's a tradition of him keeping getting pinched. A second tradition has him being dressed up in seasonal/festival clothing – and since the Belgians love a good festival (seriously, whatever weekend you're in the country, there's a fair chance you'll be able to see some local tradition!), this happens quite oft.

There's a whole host of stories and legends that try to explain his existence, from the 'defensive valour' (child urinates on advancing armies/enemy bomb's fuses) all the way to the 'lost child' (goes missing, search conducted, child found happily peeing on the side of the street, oblivious to it all). Personally I think it's just an example of the quirkiness of the Belgians, as sort of 'why not?'.

Now, if that's not quirky enough, more recently he's been joined in Brussels by two other similar statues. The 'Jeanneke Pis' (a girl squatting and urinating) was installed in 1987 pretty much as a 'companion' to the Manneken Pis, in an early example of equal opportunities. Contrary to popular belief, she was not modelled on the hordes of young British hen parties that have lit up Europe since the invention of the package holiday.

More recently still (1998), as if a boy and a girl were not enough, the Het Zinneke (and, importantly, not the Zinneke Pis) was created. This is a dog cocking his leg up on a bollard. Maybe Brussels felt that the boy and girl needed a pet, or maybe by this point the city council were past caring. Notably though, this particular sculpture is in the fashion district, so there's a feeling that just maybe this was a damning indictment on the fashion industry. Or maybe it's simply that the Belgians are urologically-obsessed? Incidentally, the term 'Zinneke' is a nickname for people from Brussels, and originates from the name given to the stray dogs that congregated around the River Zenne in the city, hence its name.

There are other weird and wonderful sculptures scattered around Brussels too. Most notable are the Anspach fountain, complete with crocodiles that look like they've been captured in mid-dance, and the statue of commemoration to some of the brave but oft-forgotten soldiers of WW1 – Brussels has the only memorial I've ever seen to war pigeons.

{standard separation jingle - short}

Sometimes though, public art can be conceptual, ephemeral, and barely even related to anything physical at all. Sometimes the art is in the action of creating the art, rather than the art itself. Something truly guerilla that really speaks to the concept of street art in its purest form, completely at odds with government, something anarchistic in scope.

One example of this is yarn-bombing. This is the practice of decorating public places with knitting. Even in my old home town of Kirkby-in-Ashfield the local knitwear shop occasionally had a habit of decorating the local bollards, lampposts, and even the cricketing statues with crocheted and knitted patches and jumpers. While it

never lasts very long, it's certainly striking when it does happen; it also has the added benefit, at least as far as the authorities are concerned, of not leaving any lasting damage. Which, as you heard about Fremantle, is not always the case even with government-sanctioned art installations.

Yarn-bombing and equivalents aren't just a UK phenomenon though.

{Adam V23

When I was in Trondheim, in Norway, one of the weird traditions they had there was they knitted jumpers for trees, so in a way it was like street art cos you're walking through and there are trees that are planted into concrete or into the floor or just leading up into more rural areas, and they've just got this big multicoloured rainbow sock up them. It was such a quirky thing to find but it was really beautiful.

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However, when it comes to guerrilla public art, it would be remiss of me to mention the most well-known, dare I say, iconic, piece of public art in Glasgow. It's one thing that many people know about the city, after all. And it's also, er, technically illegal and not at all what the original artist intended.

In 1844, Franco-Italian sculptor Carlo Marochetti, famous for statues, memorials, and tombs (he constructed several in Pere Lachaise) created a statue of Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, for Glasgow (he also made one for Leeds). He's also responsible for statues of Victoria and Albert, elsewhere in Glasgow. Anyway. This particular statue was of pretty much no significance, other than, you know, being a statue of a war general and former Prime Minister (albeit not for very long, I did a previous podcast on that), and statues like it remain unperturbed to this day across the country. This particular statue is a Category A listed sculpture, but I imagine that's quite common for statues. We do like our statues in this country, and seek to protect them at all costs. Even if someone decides to pull them down and throw them in the river, like they did a couple of years ago in Bristol. Part of me thinks you couldn't do that in Glasgow; it'd probably float.

However, for reasons lost in the mists of time, but all reports suggest it had something to do with alcohol, at some point in the 1980s (no-one's quite sure but a BBC news article in 2000 said it had been there 10 years; other sources suggest this is an underestimate), an unknown person on an unknown date climbed up the statue and put a traffic cone on its head. This is the sort of student hi-jinks that is generally forgotten about the next day, the cone removed, and no-one gives it a second look - it just becomes a funny story to tell at parties.

Except on this occasion, it came back.

I have genuinely no idea what possessed someone to be determined enough to repeatedly return the cone to the statue's head, and while in the months beyond it might have been the same person, clearly it soon became a cultural movement rather than just one drunk reveller with a cone. Dyspraxic me is wondering how they even climbed the statue with a cone while inebriated.

Anyway, it's still there now.

In 2013, so maybe 25 years after the first hat, the city council tried to prevent this by proposing to raise the plinth by 6 foot (just over 1m80). This was for two reasons: firstly the statue was becoming quite damaged by the repeated cone-clambering (as early as 2005 it was reported his spurs and half his sword had gone, while the scenes of the battle of Waterloo on the statue's plinth had been badly worn), but also genuine fears for safety and liability - the plinth is pretty high up as it is and the statue is on a horse, pretty life-size, so it's a long way down if you slip and fall while attempting the cone retrieval. It was also calculated that removing the cone cost the council (and therefore the taxpayer) £100 per pop, which adds up over the course of a year. There was also a feeling the cone was becoming, er, 'old hat', and not something the council wanted Glasgow to be known for. After all, there's so much else here. {pause} I've blogged about Glasgow before, and there will be a Pod on it later in the year.

However, by this point the cone had become such a strong part of Glasgow culture that a counter-petition on change dot org garnered over 10k signatures, while according to STV, a corresponding Facebook Page got 72k likes in 24 hours. A day later the council backed down, leading to a celebration at the statue where people sang 'we came we saw we cone-quered'.

The petition, by the way, read: "The cone on Wellington's head is an iconic part of Glasgow's heritage, and means far more to the people of Glasgow and to visitors than Wellington himself ever has. Raising the statue will, in any case, only result in people injuring themselves attempting to put the cone on anyway: does anyone really think that a raised plinth will deter drunk Glaswegians?"

They had a point, And anyway, back in 2000, the then Lord Provost (Alex Mosson) said: "The statue of Wellington has become famous for the cone on its head. The image typifies the unique mixture of culture and humour Glasgow has to offer. After all, the humour of the Glasgow people is the city's greatest selling point."

Since then, the cone has changed to reflect circumstances, It was gold to celebrate the 2014 Commonwealth Games, held in Glasgow, then later that year a 'Yes' cone was added during the Independence Referendum. On the day Brexit became A Thing, in January 2020, a cone in the EU colours was seen atop the statue, while in March 2022 a cone in the colours of the Ukraine Flag was in situ to protest the Russian invasion.

As an aside, on my way to Czechia in September last year, I walked past it and it was cone-less. Just like the ravens at the Tower of London, was this a harbinger of chaos and societal collapse? I never found out why, but it was a couple of days after the death of Queen Elizabeth II so I suspect other factors were at play. It's back now.

And yes, there's CCTV in place to see who's doing it. But oddly, nothing's ever been done about it ...

{section separation jingle}

So what have we learned this week? Street Art is as old as art itself, and comes in many forms, from simple graffiti to huge council-approved art installations. Some is designed to promote the artist, some to promote a cause, and some to just simply be. There's no real limit to its scope, arguably not even the imagination, since many a council-approved artwork makes you go '... who thought of that?'. And sometimes the art is in the application and not the original concept.

But let's end with a word from Sarah Irving.

{Sarah Irving:

While many people think street art is something of a crime and antisocial, I think it's the opposite. A social form of artwork inviting everyone to participate. There are no complicated descriptions which only an art graduate can decipher. You can discover the ones that catch your eye and by-pass the ones that don't. And also open your mind to new possibilities and viewpoints. Take me to the streets and I'll find some art.

}

{end pod jingle}

Well, that's all for this episode. Join me next time for another exploration 'beyond the brochure'. What the episode will be on rather depends on how dedicated I am before my trip to Malta. I know what it should be on, but the episode you're listening to took longer than normal to edit so we'll see. Until then, look around every corner, as you never know what you'll find. And if you're feeling off-colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}