

Cultural Daily

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Bristol: Europe's Street Art Hub

Stephen Hayles · Thursday, September 18th, 2014

An Introduction to Bristol Street Art and Graffiti



Bristol's *See No Evil* public street art project. Photo: Ben Merrington

Nestled beneath one of the world's most famous bridges, designed and built by one of history's most famous engineers, Brunel's Clifton suspension bridge acts as an all seeing eye. Gazing over an area of the United Kingdom that has become a leader in creativity, largely with its foundations in non-traditional and non-academic platforms, Bristol continues to amaze, break new ground and be ahead of the game, time after time.



The work of Aryz on Bristol's world-famous Nelson Street.

If you are not aware of Bristol, you should be. Actually, you probably are, but you just don't know it yet. When cities boast of their achievements, the traditionalists amongst us turn to the pot of statistics that all local authorities have, such as crime, schooling and financial wealth. Bristol though has the alternative, balancing heritage with free-thinking progression. If Bristol was a person it would be Richard Branson, tattooed from head to toe. You know the type: those who work damn hard, take the right risks and don't really care for convention.

So why this type of introduction to an article about Bristol's world renowned street art and graffiti? Well for those of you that haven't had the pleasure of spending time in our happy city, the photos you'll see of 50 metre tall painted buildings and whole streets decorated from top to bottom just don't do it justice. It's like your first visit to New York City—those skyscrapers are truly wonderful, but similarly to Bristol, it's the content in which they live that really give it that indescribable X factor.

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Referencing New York is no mistake and although early forms of graffiti go back to ancient times, it was the resurgence in the late 70s and early 80s in the subways of New York that caught the attention and imagination of the creative and, some might say, destructive streak of a few lads in the smaller, lesser known city of Bristol.



Epok and Smug collaboration at Upfest 2012

A catalyst of underground music, rebel attitude, and the introduction of aerosol paint fused together to bring the world the Wild Bunch. Active member '3D,' alternatively known as Robert Del Naja and member of the UK band Massive Attack, is one of the most widely known names and influencers of this era. The wild style lettering continues to influence today's graffiti artists, otherwise known as graffiti writers.

It was the second and third generation of Bristol graffiti artists inspired by the Wild Bunch that has really given Bristol its reputation as a publicly creative hub. Artists such as Inkie, Cheo, Paris, Nick Walker, Xenz, Jody, Kato, FLX One, Lokey, Turo, Dicy, Dale Vn Marshall, Feek and some guy called Banksy, to name but a few, went a long way to paving the way for the rest of us.

Since the *Walls On Fire* graffiti event in 1998, the city and its artist have led the way as street art has reached further into the accepted public realm, drawing in all manner of artist from illustrators such as Andy Council and Mr Jago, fine artists such as Andrew Colwill and Guy Denning, to contemporary artists like Lee Ellis.

For those within Bristol's urban art scene, the explosion of community and council support can in a large part be attributed to one artist: Banksy.



Ok, we had to show one Banksy! *Naked Man* is found on Bristol's Park Street.

From the city's perspective, the Banksy Vs Bristol Museum exhibition in 2009, which saw over 300,000 visitors, reportedly brought £10 million into the Bristol economy. These allowed Bristol to strengthen its position as one of the world's foremost cities for this form of public art. In 2013, Bristol played host to Europe's largest street art festival, *Upfest – The Urban Paint Festival*, accommodating 300 artists from across the globe and 30,000 visitors. After a year off, the festival will return in August of 2015, once again drawing the attention of international observers on to our extraordinarily colorful and creative city, Bristol.

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