

Thoughts from the Manse 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Most of us have driven along a motorway and witnessed the 'tags' of graffiti artists on bridges. Many underpasses are the canvas for graffiti, and I remember in the town in which we grew up the first underpass created was initially fair game. Then the council 'commissioned' artwork from the local secondary school to decorate the walls of the underpass, and the un-licensed graffiti ceased.

Street art or building art came to prominence in the 1970's as we witnessed the growth in murals on the ends of houses in Ireland, mainly paramilitary focused. They were colourful but hid a menacing message. As the years went on it began to appear elsewhere, with less politically motivated messages.

Perhaps the most famous street art of recent years is that produced by Banksy, mainly in and around Bristol. Living for some years in the South West and having reason to drive around Bristol for



meetings it was always interesting when you came across a Banksy. They are cultural comment designed to challenge and highlight anomalies in our society. One, I have seen 'in the flesh' and which I have subsequently purchased as a print is 'The mild, mild west', a comment on the rise in police 'anti-riot' activity against unlicensed raves around a particular area of Bristol. The question being asked is are we so very different from those westerns of the wild west?

In the 1990's we came across a form of street art in the Netherlands. We used to go on busman's holidays near the border with Belgium and on one visit



noticed that the water tower, a famous landmark near Oostberg, has been repainted. It shone in the sun, a cream tower against the skyline. It wasn't until we drove past that we saw just how creative the repaint had been as a very realistic 'crack' had been added near the top and drops of water cascaded down the side. I returned to take photographs and using my telephoto lens discovered that within each drop of water there was a scene. It was an amazing piece of art and is a lasting memory of our times in the Netherlands.



A few years later we went to the Netherlands for a 'proper' holiday and once again visited the area in the south, although we were staying further north. A trip to the Netherlands was never complete without a trip to the harbour in Breskens. When we took our scouting trips we sailed on the Olau line to Vlissingen and then crossed to Zeeland on the local ferry to Breskens. It was a small harbour town and there were a few fish restaurants in the harbour area as well as Erasmus's a fish shed where you could purchase fresh fish but also freshly cooked 'fish and frites'. The fish came in many varieties from deep-fried mussels to smoked eel and 'kibbling', deep-fried fish pieces and we loved trying the different options, even if only once! On this particular trip we came across some new street art, the whole side wall of what I believe was the Seamen's Mission had been painted with a picture of five loaves and two fishes. It was wonderful, with a poignant message, and of course I took a photograph.



A few years ago a question arose about ownership of street art when someone tried to claim and sell a Banksy which had been painted on the side of a building used for a youth group that was running short of funds. No one knew what the intention of the artist had been but in the end Banksy indicated he wanted the youth group to benefit. So, who does own street graffiti, the artist or the owner of the building used? For me street art is a part of community life and therefore is not owned as such but lent to the community.

To see more wonderful examples of street art take a look at <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/milnmary/street-art/>