

opinion

Street art is still art - and we should respect it

After a long – and let’s be honest – pretty rubbish past year-and-a-half, I, like many others, was delighted to see that one of Britain’s biggest and best artists had made his way to East Anglia.

Over the past week or so, world-renowned, stealthy street artist Banksy visited a number of our seaside towns, leaving his mark in locations such as Cromer, Gorleston and Great Yarmouth.

A three-minute video posted to Banksy’s official Instagram last Friday entitled ‘A Great British Spraycation’, shows the artist making his way across Norfolk and Suffolk, adorning various walls and surfaces with that famed, signature spray paint art many people (myself included) have come to know and love.

Sea walls, brick walls, sides of houses – you name it, it was given the Banksy treatment. Even the Frederick Savage statue in King’s Lynn was altered after the notoriously elusive artist put a removable model ice cream and tongue on the monument.

If you ask me, it really brightened up the area and helped shine a spotlight on the region.

It certainly got us all talking – and after the last year of ‘Covid this’, and ‘pandemic that’, it really made a pleasant change to have something else to talk about and bond over.

So you can imagine my disappointment when I saw one of the pieces had been defaced just a day after Banksy claimed it as his work.

The graffiti, which shows a rat lounging in a deck chair with a cocktail in hand on Lowestoft’s North Beach, was unfortunately

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covered over in what appears to be white paint.

It just begs the question ‘why?’. Why would you go to the trouble of ruining someone else’s art? Whoever Banksy is, he has put in a lot of hard work and dedication to pull this project off, so for someone to damage it in such a way is really sad to see.

People have been known to pay top dollar for a slice of the Banksy action.

Just earlier this year, a woman in Bristol had her house price boosted by millions after a Banksy original appeared on the side of her home. Originally on the market for £300,000, the property was later revalued at £5 million after the spray paint art appeared on its wall overnight.

If one Banksy piece can do that to a house, then imagine what a series of his works can do for an entire town.

Art lovers travel the world over to catch a glimpse of Banksy. Anytime a new piece pops up somewhere, it becomes an entirely new tourist attraction in itself. Just think how many more people are considering taking a trip to our region’s coasts who might not have thought to visit before. Pure gold for the economies of these towns.

Just because it’s public art doesn’t mean it’s any less worthy of respect. You wouldn’t dream of going into the Louvre or The National Gallery and defacing one



The Banksy artwork on Admiralty Road in Great Yarmouth

of the paintings – street art should be no different.

East Anglia is a proud hub for creativity, with an arts heritage that goes back centuries.

Throughout the years, we’ve produced a number of wonderful artists who have gone on to have such a profound impact on the rest of the world.

Think Constable, Gainsborough, Crome, Cotman, Munnings.

With such a deep-rooted, thriving arts community, we should be welcoming not just Banksy, but anyone else who wants their exhibit their work across our wonderful counties – whether that be street art, or more traditional mediums.

If the vandal who defaced the rat art in Lowestoft is reading this – shame on you.



Art by Banksy on North Beach in Lowestoft being covered up after being defaced with white paint

Let’s just hope the rest of the contemporary art scene doesn’t tar all of us with the same brush. And if on the off-chance Banksy

is reading this, I love what you’ve done. You brought a smile to not just to my face, but thousands of others. Thank you.