

The Relevancy of Banksy

By Jamie Shepherd 20th of August 2024

The city of Melbourne is renowned as a canvas for ever-evolving street art. Recently, the city has embraced its artistic spirit by hosting "The Art of Banksy: Without Limits" – an exhibition featuring over 180 of the world-famous artist's provocative works, a remarkable display of the crude world we live in.



Banksy's Paint Pot Angel (Image: City of Melbourne)

It's no secret that the world we live in is plagued by political unrest and various other social atrocities. One way we decide to cope with these issues is through making and viewing art, and though that in itself can be controversial, the Banksy exhibition currently making its stop in Melbourne shows just how important consistent activism can be.

The district Docklands is currently hosting the travelling exhibition dedicated to the work of Banksy, inviting you to step into the mind of the anonymous artist. Arguably the most famous street artist of all time, the mysterious Banksy creates politically charged artworks that appear in urban landscapes overnight, captivating a global audience.

The entry into the exhibition is part of the gallery itself – you go through a security checkpoint, with two officers waving their scanners at you before they let you through. This theatrical installation is an echo of Banksy's many artworks about authority figures and the police. From there, you are greeted with a full timeline of Banksy's work. The timeline is expansive and detailed, but if you choose to skim it, each work throughout the gallery has a corresponding plaque that explains the piece you are viewing.

Complete with a giant castle archway, the first main portion of the gallery displays pieces from the 'Dismaland Bemusement Park' collection. This begins to open the visitor's mind to Banksy's typical themes of, well, bemusement.

As an artist, Banksy focuses on themes surrounding anti-consumerism, anti-war, and various instances of social hypocrisy. His work is largely political, and is displayed throughout the entirety of the gallery, as his peace sentiments have lasted the entirety of his career. Famous for his anonymity, he has granted himself the ability to challenge societal norms and not face harsh personal repercussions or censorship. In particular, the anti-war imagery Banksy has consistently produced remains incredibly relevant, and has made for brilliant talking points for the visitors to the gallery.

Though some of the anti-war sentiments by Banksy are over a decade old, many of them echo into our minds with familiarity today. On display at the gallery is a piece dedicated to the current ongoing warfare between Israel and Palestine, as well as a number of pieces commentating on the warfare in Ukraine. For Melbourne residents, very used to seeing and attending protests in the streets of the city, such politics are not alien to us.

Melbourne is artistic, as it is political, and such a gallery as this blends into the culture of the city quite well. Street art has always been a politically charged art form – allowing artists to express their views in a public setting. Mockery of political figures appears to be one of Banksy's favourite things to stencil, and mockery of political figures appears to be a favourite topic of many Melbournian street artists.



A view of the gallery. (Image: City of Melbourne)

One reason millions of people have visited this exhibition as it has travelled across the globe is to get a look at some of Banksy's most famous works, such as 'Girl With Balloon', or 'Kissing Coppers'. Works such as 'Kissing Coppers' are brilliant examples of Banksy's uneasiness with authoritarian figures. This piece in particular depicts two male police officers engaged in a kiss. The general consensus about what this piece means is that Banksy uses the imagery of homosexuals, an oppressed group, as a means to urge viewers to question the moral authority of such individuals as police, or even that of the royal family.

Plenty of Melbourne's street artists create works of their own in a very similar fashion. One walk down Hosier Lane in the CBD, and you'll notice political commentary everywhere – from murals, to stuck-up posts, to stickers. It's not just seen in specific alleyways, but all over our streets, across train lines, and inside our buildings. Not only is this form of art celebrated in our city for its contribution to culture, but it also reflects the social injustices we face and promotes community engagement. The idea is to get people talking, and discussing changes we would all like to see.

As such, Banksy's artwork has greatly inspired a generation of artists to express themselves. His ability to transform public settings into colourful, thought-provoking installations encourages artists to push boundaries and experiment with their mediums, as well as pushing for more people to use their work as a platform for activism. As a result, their controversial artistic techniques act as a catalyst for conversation through guerilla-style installations, making activism accessible and immediate – just as Banksy has done.

Ultimately, this pop-up gallery is a museum level exhibition that will capture the hearts and minds of any Melbournian, Banksy fan or not. As we live in an urban climate challenged by the social injustices the world throws at us, the city's name as the art capital of Australia remains solidified. Banksy is an artist that any resident Melbournian can connect with, and understand in a fashion unknown to many.

"The Art Of Banksy: Without Limits" is on display at the District Docklands for a limited time.

You can find tickets for the gallery here: <https://feverup.com/m/131814>