

Showing Rage and Resistance: Bristle: Political Street Expressions in Bristol and the South West

Jamie Dockery

Bristle *bris'l v.i.* – to show rage or resistance.

Alas, Tony Blair's recent announcement that he was to clamp down on those assaulting our sensibilities in the towns and cities across the UK did not signal a new era of respect for public spaces and an end to corporate hectoring.

As Blair leads his crusade to reclaim the streets from "neds" and "chavs", activists in Bristol are engaged in a battle to rescue the streets from a much more dangerous enemy, big business and their corporate mouthpieces in the advertising industries. *Bristle*, the radical Bristol autonomous collective, and arts magazine, has produced a photo compilation showcasing political street images and actions produced in the city since 1999. Unsurprisingly from the town that gave rise to Banksy, stencils feature prominently, but they do not dominate the selection.

Reflecting the political activism demonstrated in various forms the book is packed full of images, some more obviously "artistic", others clever and many both daring and amusing. In contrast with Banksy's most recent coffee table tome, 'Wall and Piece', *Bristle* is a mere A6 size but packs in almost 500 colour photos into a pocket edition. Covering stencils, graffiti, billboard actions, subverts, "hangings", murals and street art, the work is a catalogue of actions carried out over the period.

"We don't want to live life as one long commercial break. Instead we choose to break the commercials", says one participant summarising the mood.



If some of the images are obscure or have a too local appeal, the biggest strength of the book is in the "how to do" features. Penned by the artists themselves, there are tips on dismantling billboards, subvertising, and stencilling. Some articles have been gleaned from the pages of *Bristle* magazine and may be familiar to those in the South West, but the book packs a lot of interesting material, both visual and written, into a powerful small package.

It is also worth noting that all this is happening in the city which prides itself on the Bristol Graffiti Partnership; an arrangement between the city fathers and Bristol's Art Colleges whereby, among other things, any student convicted of graffiti "crime" will be expelled from their studies.

Attractively designed and having a useful location directory for all the works, at £6 the book is a snip and an asset to anyone involved in this criminalised sort of stuff. As an alternative guide to Bristol it would be an essential companion to any visit to the city. While the small format is handy for slipping into your pocket, there is a disadvantage in that some of the photos are hard to decipher and, after all, some slogans are supposed to be intelligible. If it is also the case that some of the works are actually not great, the *Bristle* collective are to be thanked for producing the book and recording the pieces for posterity and, more importantly, for inspiration. The book bears the legend "Volume 1". We look forward to Volume 2 but a bit of selectivity may not be bad thing. Recommended.

Available for £6 (inc post) from 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY or online from www.fugazi.net/dswat/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=922
www.bristle.org.uk
www.bristol-city.gov.uk

