

Dismaland

Visitors to Dismaland, Banksy's "bemusement park" project, are being asked to bring ID to confirm they have not bought their tickets from touts, as touted tickets fetch up to £600 a pair online.

The proof-of-purchase checks on the door of the attraction on the Weston-super-Mare seafront have sparked accusations of hypocrisy against the street artist, who is known for his critiques of the UK's surveillance society.

Some of Banksy's most recognisable works reference Britain's obsession with surveillance, including murals of secret agents holding recording devices by a telephone booth and a child painting the slogan "one nation under CCTV" while watched by a policeman.

However, one visitor has told the Guardian that although the terms and conditions of her ticket stipulated that she had to bring ID, she wasn't asked to produce anything on the door other than her printed e-ticket.

Clare Halls, 27, an English and media studies teacher from Bath, said: "I understand why they are asking for ID, but I get the irony as well though. At the same time, ticket touts are bad, aren't they? It does say on the ticket that they shouldn't be resold."

Dismaland, billed as "the UK's most disappointing new visitor attraction", has become one of the country's hottest tickets since it opened last week. Its [website](#) crashed minutes after sales first opened last week and organisers had to bring in an outside company, See Tickets, to manage the process.

The popularity of the attraction has led to a roaring trade in resale tickets. Entry to the attraction officially costs just £3, plus a £2 booking fee. However, the Guardian has found touts offering tickets on eBay for as much as £600 a pair.

Halls, who visited Dismaland with her boyfriend, said throngs of visitors were waiting to enter the attraction by the time it opened for their tranche of ticketholders at 7pm. Security guards checked their bags before directing them to entry booths where their tickets' QR codes were scanned and they were waved through.

“Banksy covers so many big issues in creative ways that considering the IDing of the event seems sort of irrelevant,” said Halls, who also edits a music website, Southsonic. “If there wasn’t a ticketing system, it would mean a lot of people would show up and be disappointed because they’d be over capacity all the time. It’s more important to have a process so that more people can see the park, even if it does mean more T&Cs.”

Dismaland, Banksy’s biggest project to date, has been built on the 2.5-acre site of a crumbling former lido in Weston-super-Mare, with works by nearly 60 artists poking fun at the hypocrisies and ironies of modern society. Dozens of people have been hired as miserable “helpers” wearing pink hi-vis jackets and cheap Mickey Mouse ears.

A new promotional video for Dismaland shows a typical English nuclear family touring the park’s distinctly child-unfriendly attractions. Doors are shut in their faces, the young son endures a stringent search and the parents are left nauseated after viewing Banksy’s sculpture of Cinderella surrounded by paparazzi after a fatal coach crash.

The video showcases some of Dismaland’s most heavily trailed attractions, including its “pocket money loans” shop, a play on the payday lenders proliferating across the UK’s poorest areas, its scale model of a city on police lockdown after a riot, and its sculpture of Disney’s Little Mermaid deformed by radioactive pollution of the seas.

It ends in appropriately dystopian style. The final shot shows the mother, in the passenger seat of the family car, looking back contentedly at her sleeping children, then looking across to the driver’s seat, where her husband has fallen asleep at the wheel.

Dismaland has caught the imagination of the public, and Halls said many different types of people were visiting. “I’m not sure if they all understood it, but I’m sure that a lot of things went over my head as well,” she said.

Demand was such that the Dismaland website was not working last Friday before the park’s opening. People attempting to buy tickets expressed their frustration on Twitter, even asking if the whole thing was a hoax. Others speculated that the ticketing problems were all part of the satire.

Recently Banksy spoke out against “predatory art speculators” who he said were endangering the “valid and important art form” of graffiti.

In a Q&A with the Guardian Guide (see below), the artist said making street art was hard enough without the added risk of someone removing it to sell to a rich private buyer. He criticised the art market as a whole for discouraging risk and rewarding artists for being able to deliver recognisable works on a regular basis.

Banksy is the best-known street artist in the world and has been leaving his comic, subversive mark on the urban landscape since the early 1990s. But with his rise has come a growing private market for his work, and many of his spray-paint murals have been removed from their original settings and sold for huge sums.

* This is the end of this weeks report, but please read on if you would like to learn more. (Simon)

Q&A Interview with Banksy:

What is this thing?

In essence it's a festival of art, amusements and entry-level anarchism. A place where you can get your counterculture easily available over the counter. A theme park for the disenfranchised, with franchises available. I guess you'd say its a theme park whose big theme is – theme parks should have bigger themes.

Where is this thing?

It's situated in a former lido that stretches across two-and-a-half acres of heavily fortified beachfront compound, comprising a pool, sun terrace and small amphitheatre. I asked myself: what do people like most about going to look at art? The coffee. So I made an art show that has a cafe, a cocktail bar, a restaurant and another bar. And some art.

Why is this thing?

If you're the kind of person who feels jaded by the over-corporate blandness that passes for family light entertainment, then this is the bespoke leisure opportunity that will connect with your core brand dynamic. It doesn't so much ask the question, "What is the point in art now?" as ask, "What is the point in asking, 'What is the point in art now?'"

You've described low-income families as "the perfect art audience". Why?

"Low-income holiday makers" are the perfect art audience. There's something very evocative about the British seaside experience. This show is modeled on the failed winter wonderlands they build every December that get shut down by trading standards – where they charge £20 to look at some alsatians with antlers taped to their heads towing a sleigh made from a skip. Essentially this is a theme park that Lawrence Llewelyn Bowen would endorse. The advantage of putting art in a small seaside town is you're only competing with donkeys. I think a museum is a bad place to look at art; the worst context for art is other art.

What do you care about showcasing other artists?

Curating can be surprisingly creative: you get to learn from people, draw parallels and create meanings, all without having to pick up a pencil or get out of bed.

Have you turned your back on street art?

For this show, yes.

How do you feel when your work is resold or removed?

I don't think much about it, but for the art form as a whole it's unhealthy. When you paint illegally you have so much to contend with – cameras, cops, Neighbourhood Watch, drunk people throwing bottles at your head – so adding "predatory art speculators" to the mix just makes things even harder. Graffiti is an important and valid art form, it would be a shame if it was killed by venture capitalism.

Do you think that the art market poisons creativity?

The art market certainly doesn't encourage creativity. Like most markets it rewards being able to reliably deliver recognisable product on a regular basis. Which isn't necessarily a recipe for exciting art. I heard someone on the radio, it might even have been Richard Ashcroft, say: "It's not art unless it has the potential to be a disaster." Which is why I've spent months making distorted fibreglass fairground sculptures to install in a dirty lido miles from anywhere.

Did you vote Tory at the last election?

No.