

WonderWalls!

Waterford Walls brings fresh colour to the city

Strolling (and driving) through Waterford last week, watching bare walls being rejuvenated while 'older' works were painted over and replaced with new visages, wildlife and patterns, really was a treat. And it really is hard to believe that 'Waterford Walls' has only been with us for four years given the stunning visual impact it has made within our city.

From Shane Sutton's space walking astronaut on the Fitzwilton Hotel on Bridge Street, to Louise McKenna's elephant on Stephen Street to the stupendous 'graffiti guy' rendered by French artist Mantra on the 'gable end' of Michael Street, there was so much to take in and savour.



Artist 'Mantra', (kindly sponsored by the French Embassy in Ireland), putting the finishing touches on his piece on the Michael Street/New Street/Apple Market junction during last weeks' 'Waterford Walls' Festival. | Photo: Julien Behal

Observing Louis Masai Michel carefully working around the Mount Sion Avenue street sign (an art work in itself) as he worked on his 'Endangered Species' piece, and noticing interested locals pausing to watch him work, it was clear what a triumph this festival has become. Art can be incorrectly perceived as being some stuffy, other level, slightly removed pursuit and product which the 'hoi polloi' shouldn't concern themselves with. But it's anything but that. Waterford Walls has underlined that. Art is something we can all enjoy, as practitioners or as observers.

And to stand on certain streets in our city which have been calling out for a lick of paint - in some cases for years - and to see that lick applied with such finesse, fun and love, was a genuine pleasure. That we'll benefit from these works for years for come is an added bonus. That the city, its residents and business have bought into the Waterford Walls concept is evident by the fact that there's been precious little vandalism of any of the works since the festival was first staged in 2015.

In fact, that may well be the event's ultimate legacy: a near universal level of acceptance from locals, derived, one suspects, from a sense of gratitude that someone felt their street, avenue or laneway would benefit from a magical dash of colour.

According to Festival Manager Edel Tobin: "We thought it would be unfair to constrain (artists) with too much of a brief, so we tell them that the festival is about Waterford, where Waterford is at, and how they would re-imagine Waterford. The impact it has on the city is huge." And that represents another inspired decision on Edel's behalf.

The network of street art which has developed around Waterford since 2015, and so beautifully augmented last week by the 50-plus visiting artists, has not only added colour to the city: it's sprinkled some stardust too. Well done to everyone who has made Waterford Walls such a wonderful and welcome fixture on our arts calendar.