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In this photo taken on Aug 8, 2021, a stencil of children playing at being sailors is the subject of a graffiti artwork by street artist Banksy on the wall of a bridge in Everitt Park in Lowestoft on the east coast of England. — AFP photos



A cyclist rides past a Banksy stencil of a gull about to swoop down onto a carton of chips in Lowestoft.



A woman stands beside a Banksy graffiti artwork of a rat drinking a cocktail at North Beach in Lowestoft.

BANKSY SHOWS OFF HIS SEASIDE 'SPRAYCATION'

Banksy, Britain's most famous street artist, on Friday confirmed what many had already suspected - that he is indeed the author of a number of works that have appeared recently in British seaside towns. An Instagram video clip, just over three minutes long and entitled "A Great British Spraycation", shows the elusive artist taking a summer road trip in a beat-up camper van with cans of spray paint stashed in a cooler.

In one work on the concrete sea-defense wall of a British beach, a rat lounges in a deckchair, sipping a cocktail. In another, sticking to the seaside theme, a mechanical claw dangles above a public bench - as if anyone who sits there is about to be plucked up like a prize in an arcade game. Another shows a giant seagull swooping down to snatch some out-sized chips - French fries to US readers - from a waste skip or dumpster.

A fourth shows three children in a rickety boat. One looks ahead while another is busy bailing out water with a bucket. Above

them, appears the inscription: "We're all in the same boat." On the roof of a bus shelter, a couple also dance to the tune of a flat-capped accordion player, in a black and white painting evoking the faded, down-at-heel feel of many of the country's once-prosperous seaside resorts.

In recent years, the Bristol artist, who cleverly maintains the mystery of his identity, has kept the attention of the contemporary art world with his social commentaries and causes - migrants, opposition to Brexit, denunciation of Islamist radicals - as well as stirring the excitement of the moneyed art markets. Last March, a work honoring caregivers fetched a record £14.4 million (about \$20 million). The proceeds went to a hospital charity, Christie's auctioneers said at the time. — AFP



A woman looks at a Banksy stencil of a child digging in the sand in Lowestoft.



A couple take a selfie below a Banksy graffiti artwork of an amusement arcade grabber on a wall in Gorleston-on-Sea on the east coast of England.



A man waits at a bus stop below a Banksy graffiti artwork of a couple dancing to an accordion player on a wall in Great Yarmouth on the east coast of England.

Why a Hong Kong artist chose 'self-exile' in Taiwan

As he queued to board a flight out of Hong Kong to Taiwan last month, dissident artist Kacey Wong was painfully aware of the extra immigration officials brought in to scrutinize each departing passenger. Wong, 51, was one of the city's best-known provocateurs, an artist who specialized in satirizing and criticizing those in power.

But as China's crackdown on dissent gathered pace in Hong Kong, he decided he had to leave. But would authorities let him go? Multiple dissidents have been arrested at the airport and Wong wondered if he too was on a watchlist, especially when a group of extra immigration officials arrived as his flight was called.

remolding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image in response to huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019. A sweeping new security law, imposed on the city last summer, has criminalized much dissent. Prosecutors dusted off a colonial-era sedition law to target political opinions and an official campaign was launched to purge the city of anyone deemed unpatriotic.

'Time to go'

Cornell-educated Wong knew he probably did not fit the profile of a "patriotic" Chinese artist. In one famous 2018 performance-art piece called "The Patriot", he performed China's national anthem on an accordion while inside a red metal cage. Such a performance would be illegal now under new laws passed in Hong Kong last year that ban any "insults" to China's flag and anthem.

Wong said he was initially determined to stay and test boundaries. But the mass arrest of more than 50 prominent opposition figures earlier this year under the national security law set off a "big alarm". "My emotion says I will never leave Hong Kong but at the same time I am looking at the data of the battlefield always unfold almost on the daily basis ... The data tell me it's time to go," he said. "I will not return to Hong Kong any more. That's why when people ask me 'Why you are here?' I say I am in self-exile."

'Go underground'

Among the memorabilia Wong packed was the final issue of Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper and the accordion he used in "The Patriot". Apple Daily collapsed in June after officials arrested its senior executives and froze the company's assets using the national security law. Wong predicts that critical political art will slowly disappear from the city, taken over by "more and more decorative items".

"A lot of these Chinese communist proxies are trying to please Beijing so they will go to the extreme" to pursue anything deemed politically challenging. That's why people are saying this is like Cultural Revolution. It's happening. It's not as severe as in mainland China in the sixties but it's getting there," he said.

The advice he gives to artists in Hong Kong is to "go underground" and "keep the fire burning" by showing their work at home to friends and close contacts. He vowed to continue to "advocate for the freedom of Hong Kong" and urged others who have gone overseas to do the same. "I don't think I left Hong Kong. I think Hong Kong was being forced to leave me because Hong Kong was kidnapped," he said. "From now on Hong Kong will live inside my heart because the Hong Kong as I know it does not exist anymore." — AFP



This photo taken on Aug 5, 2021 shows Hong Kong artist Kacey Wong reading the last edition of Hong Kong's Apple Daily newspaper during an interview at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung, central Taiwan. — AFP

"About 20 steps away from the gate, they spread out as if they were playing American football, and just watched everyone who was boarding for a last-minute tackle maybe," he recalled. "I was able to come to Taiwan so that's good. But emotionally it's very scary," he added. "These were very, very intense moments."

'We'll meet again'

Wong announced his relocation last week with a black-and-white Facebook video in which he strolled along the city's famous harbor singing a rendition of Vera Lynn's wistful ode "We'll Meet Again". It struck a chord in a city where tens of thousands of families have fled overseas. "I left because I am seeking 100 percent freedom of artistic expression and that's why I came to Taiwan," he told AFP, speaking from the Taiwanese city of Taichung.

He used his time in quarantine to edit his farewell video. "I think the most important thing is when I come here, I can continue to advocate my beliefs and practice my art but I doubt I can do that in Hong Kong anymore." Hong Kong was once regarded as a bastion of free speech within authoritarian China - a place where artists, writers and residents could speak their minds without fear of prosecution.

But over the last year China has begun

How Yemeni fish became Djibouti's national dish

of Djibouti, it's a little memory."

'The chilli is most important'

Several times a day, fishermen deliver sea bream, mullet and other offerings to the many Yemeni fish restaurants or "moukbasas" dotting the port city, which is separated from Yemen by the Gulf of Aden. Then, it's time for the chefs to get to work. The fish is cut lengthwise and salted, before a paste made from mild red peppers-imported from Ethiopia-is applied using a paintbrush.



A cook bastes split fish with seasoning before searing it in a traditional open-flame clay oven.

"The most important thing is the chilli," says one of the cooks, beaded with sweat, as he secures the fish to a long metal rod, before plunging it into a traditional terracotta oven, which resembles an Indian tandoor. The finished dish - retrieved 15 minutes later - owes both its gentle heat and its intense red color to the peppers.

Across Djibouti City, Yemeni fish is eaten with pancakes and "fata", a paste made from bananas or dates, and usually sold for around 1,000 Djiboutian francs (\$5.60). Restaurateur Omar Hamdani credits his grandfather's "world-famous"

recipe for his establishment's enduring popularity, nearly a century after he emigrated to Djibouti from Yemen. Not much has changed at "Chez Hamdani" since then, but for the addition of a second floor.

Its walls are still adorned with earthenware and traditional moldings. A small dining room in the back is reserved for women who wish to dine alone. And the recipe remains the same. "My grandfather brought it back from Yemen, he opened this restaurant, then my father took over from him, and now it's my turn to take the lead," the bearded entrepreneur, who is in his late 30s, tells AFP.

Taste of home

The Yemenis are the third largest ethnic community in Djibouti, behind the Issa and the Afar. Migration and trade between the two countries have existed for millennia. But in recent years, their shared history has taken a tragic turn, with thousands of Yemenis crossing the Bab el-Mandeb strait to seek refuge in Djibouti and escape the war that has ravaged their country since 2014.

After fleeing Sanaa for Djibouti, former civil servant Amin Maqta set up a mouk-basa called "Le Kaaboul" with two other immigrants - a reflection of their desire for a fresh start and their longing for a taste of home. "As long as I am in this restaurant, I eat here, I am surrounded by my compatriots, I feel good. Because everything I had in Yemen, I have it here," the soft-spoken 45-year-old tells AFP.

He is both moved and amused by the local craze for Yemeni fish, which is only one among dozens of delicacies in his home country. In the end, "demand is stronger in Djibouti than in Yemen", he says with a smile. — AFP



Omar Hamdani, proprietor of one of the city's oldest restaurants, Chez Hamdani, serves up Yemeni fish to lunchtime customers at his restaurant in Djibouti on April 11, 2021. — AFP photos



Kitchen staff knead ground flatbread before blending with either ripe banana or dates to make alternative delicacies that are a popular accompaniment for Yemeni fish.



Customers at Chez Hamdani enjoy Yemeni fish.



Flattened dough and split fish are seared in a traditional open-flame clay oven.