

## Alternative Art

### A new tour explores Paris's street art stars.

A couple of years ago visitors to the French capital might not have looked much further than a quick dash round the Louvre and a twilight cruise on the Seine to tick the boxes for their perfect weekend, but now there's a thoroughly 21st-century attraction to add to the list – street art. 'Though Berlin would like to claim it, Paris was the originator of street art,' says Demian Smith, a former *tagueur* and founder of Underground Paris ([www.undergroundparis.org](http://www.undergroundparis.org)) street art tours.



Posting up political art on Paris walls began as early as the 19th century, was a form of resistance as people defaced German propaganda during the Occupation, and re-emerged in 1968 with the '*atelier populaire*' at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts that produced iconic posters exhorting Parisians to strike and protest against the government. Now the work of artists such as Space Invader, Jérôme Mesnager and Nemo have become city landmarks and the Mairie has even established a massive billboard, Le M.U.R. (Modulable Urbain Réactif), on rue Oberkampf for a new street artist to daub every few weeks. 'Street art is less political today,' says renowned street artist Fred Le Chevalier. 'It's more about wanting to speak to a wider audience than through a gallery or book. It's also immediate; you don't have to jump through hoops.'

The excitement of going on one of Alternative Paris's street art tours is that the canvas is changing all the time. One work might appear on a wall and before long there's a cluster, all mixed in with half-torn Communist Party posters and blue street signs. On place Maurice-Chevalier in the 20th, a makeshift homeless shelter is watched over by various artworks, including the upper half of a Zoo Project and a Le Chevalier figure holding a heart.

'London's the commercial capital of street art, with works going for tens of thousands of pounds,' says Smith. 'But there is more of an underground scene in Paris. Street art is always being gone over, but people push to keep things going.' Look up from this guide for a minute and you'll see exactly what he means.