

Street Knowledge

King Adz

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Street Knowledge, by artist and author King Adz, is a groundbreaking, encyclopedic insider's guide to the world's fantastically diverse urban landscapes and the arts cultures that identify each of these places as unique neighborhoods.

But why do we need a printed guide? Isn't this concept counter to the subject's inherent spirit of rebellion? Shouldn't we be able to check out these places easily enough by typing 'street art' into a search engine?

Scottish author Irvine Welsh's foreword to the book explains the purpose of this lavish assembly of places Adz has traveled to and the art, fashion, food, and people he encountered. "It's 2010 and we're all down with the latest thing," says Adz. "Nothing is hidden; everything is instantly accessible." Welsh goes on to question whether the Internet brings "everything that's good up into the light?" Food for thought. In his collection, Adz has gathered magnificent images and interviews and offers low and high art for us to consider together. Welsh suggests we look into his book and try shaking off the ways we are "being force fed" the polished and carefully formulated world on our screens that has been increasingly manufactured by marketing professionals. He suggests perceiving the world as a richer, more complicated place than one that identifies "art, literature, travel, cooking, crime, romance, thrillers, classics" as simply things to just consume.

Street Knowledge incorporates the history of old-school graffiti legends as well as current thinking concerning avant-garde street artists, photographers, filmmakers, DJ's, designers, writers, and spoken word artists. It includes work and interviews from some of this arena's most infamous artists, such as Banksy, David LaChapelle, Kelsey Brookes, Quik, Tony Kaye, Tama Janowitz, The KLF, Shawn Stussy, Obey, Irvine Welsh, Martha Cooper, and Benjamin Zephaniah, as well as rising talent. The book may be read in two ways, both valuable: as a reference tool or a narrative journey. See the section called "How to Use This Book as a Time Machine." Using the journey approach, there are clues to follow; the way the reader jumps around sifting through layers of assembled history isn't that different from flipping through an artist's sketchbook or a museum collection's database, building knowledge as you explore. As he takes us from the pop culture of MTV to the present work of Know Hope, Adz invites us to dip into websites and blogs that expand upon his subjects and even recommends the best places for snacks in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong. "Don't be afraid of eating street food as it is the absolute bomb," assures the author. If you're looking for an adventure, so is this book.

PAMELA AYRES (March / April 2011)

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