

Leicester Square again this morning.Â Score: Stalls, row H seat 5 for Cabaret! I've been needing a musical, after all of the heavy dramas I've seen of late. Not something too light, mind you. No, some singing Nazis ought to do the trick.

Then back onto the Piccadilly line to South Kensington to visit the Andipa gallery for a rare exhibit of Banksy. South Kensington is posh territory. A detached home in Kensington just sold for Â£80million if the papers are to be believed, making it the most expensive home sale in the world up till now (not for long, we are assured, there's a Â£95m offer in the works nearby). The streets from the tube stop to the gallery are lined with exclusive shops and galleries. The odd piece in all of this is the [Michelin House and Beidendum](#) (below) . It is a lovely building, but as if someone erected a grand McDonalds museum on Park Avenue in the 50's in Manhattan.



This shrine to the bulbous rubberman is charming, in its own way, and the Art Nouveau style is right up my alley. Out of place here, though.

From that shrine to commercial success of a century ago I went to a shrine to commercial success just as unlikely, in setting and style. [Banksy](#) is a street artist, a graffiti talent who can do with a stencil, paintcan and boundless wit what few other artists in the contemporary realm can. He can engage a larger public, as Warhol did, but he can provoke them to think and talk about larger issues, something Warhol I don't think ever really tried to do.

The comparison with Warhol is not incidental, I think Banksy seeks this comparison. He has even cribbed from Warhol in pursuit of his own mark on the world of Pop Art. Where Warhol sought out and craved attention, however, Banksy is so elusive that there is no documentation on who he even really is — no name, no confirmed sightings, and no retail chain of evidence connecting him to the sales of his works.



The show was marvellous, there were about 20 or so works in all, none of them direct from the artist but instead from the secondary market. Some are literally pieces of walls removed from buildings. The prices ranged from £10,000 to £250,000 each, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the show was sold already, even though it had opened just an hour before I arrived. The piece above (not a photo from the show, but this piece was in the show) was tagged at £25,000 or so. All told there was about \$10 million worth of work sold in a few hours, if the gallery folk are to be believed. I heard one on the phone with a reporter, which conversation leaves me in some doubt as to his veracity, however.

Ah yes, shrines. They are fungible things, as my next stop revealed. The Victoria & Albert Museum has two entire galleries devoted to the Cast Courts, which are an oddity in that they are collections of plaster castings of burial crypts, statuary, etc. from various royal courts. So, if you want to admire the replicas of actual historic artefacts, now made historic themselves by dint of their being displayed for so long at the V&A, have at it. This kind of reflected significance is lost on me. Unfortunately, the ceramics, musical instrument and several other galleries were closed for various reasons, leaving the V&A a disappointment for me. Onward! Oh, but first, here is a passage that struck me, from a replica of a monument for Emily Georgiana Countess of Winchilsea and Nottingham:

When the knell rung for the dying
soundeth for me

and my corse coldly is lying
 neath the green tree
 II
 When the turf strangers are heaping
 covers my breast
 Come not to gaze on me weeping
 I am at rest
 III
 All my life coldly and sadly
 The days have gone by
 I who dreamed wildly and madly
 am happy to die
 IV
 Long since my heart has been breaking
 Its pain is past
 A time has been set to its aching
 Peace comes at last

E.G.W. & N.

Call me sentimental (big surprise there) I like it. The countess died young, just 39 years, and had suffered the last of them. So, this was her parting gift to her husband. The beautifully sculpted monument by Lawrence Macdonald was his gift to her.

The next stop was the Science Museum and the new [Listening Post](#) exhibit. This is a wonderful piece, a visionary synthesis of technology into art. It is an enveloping experience: a machine which trolls Internet chatrooms, forums and social networking sites for words and phrases and then integrates them into sound, light and motion through spoken and written word. It is beyond verbal description, so I will stop there. Chase the link above for more details. I spent about a half hour in the exhibit, and it was time well spent. I attempted to take some snaps, but they are not so good. Go to <http://www.fortunespawn.com/gallery/> and search for Listening Post to see them.

LL has asked about the weather here. It has been wonderful so far. Daily highs in the mid fifties F, or 10 – 15 C, and sunny. As a matter of fact, it has been the sunniest February on record, which in England is saying something. Not the warmest, but in the top ten, and dry as well. Today it started to rain a little, only the second time in the 2 ½ weeks I've been here. In the rain I opted for the pedestrian subway back to the tube, and home again for a bite and nap before theatre.

The show? Oh it was good. I will say that the nagging problem with big name theatre in London is the masses of foreigners who have no sense of decorum. I know how absurd and elitist that may sound, but bear with me. The talking, and rustling of candy wrappers, crunching of crisps, etc. during shows on the West End is worse than anywhere else I have ever gone to theatre. Tonight it was the French family behind me on the right, the 20 year old daughter constantly leaning over to her mum and chatting away, despite my frequent shushing, and the German couple behind me to the left, who must have had a three course dinner, and discussed it all, during the show. What were Germans and Vichy doing at Cabaret to begin with? ☐

Oh, but back to the show. I was pleased, even before the show started, with the staging. The sculpted drop which serves as main drape had the word "Will-com-men" spelt out in three ranks, with the centre of the O a large iris, as in a camera. The play upon which Cabaret is based was itself based upon a collection of stories by Christopher Isherwood called "I am a camera," and this nod to origins was welcomed (pardon the pun). This particular staging (brilliantly designed by Katrina Lindsay) is very true to the original feel of Isherwood's stories, very tawdry and served with lashings of gratuitous nudity. In other words, a delightful night

out. Now if only we could exclude the Axis Powers from the theatre...