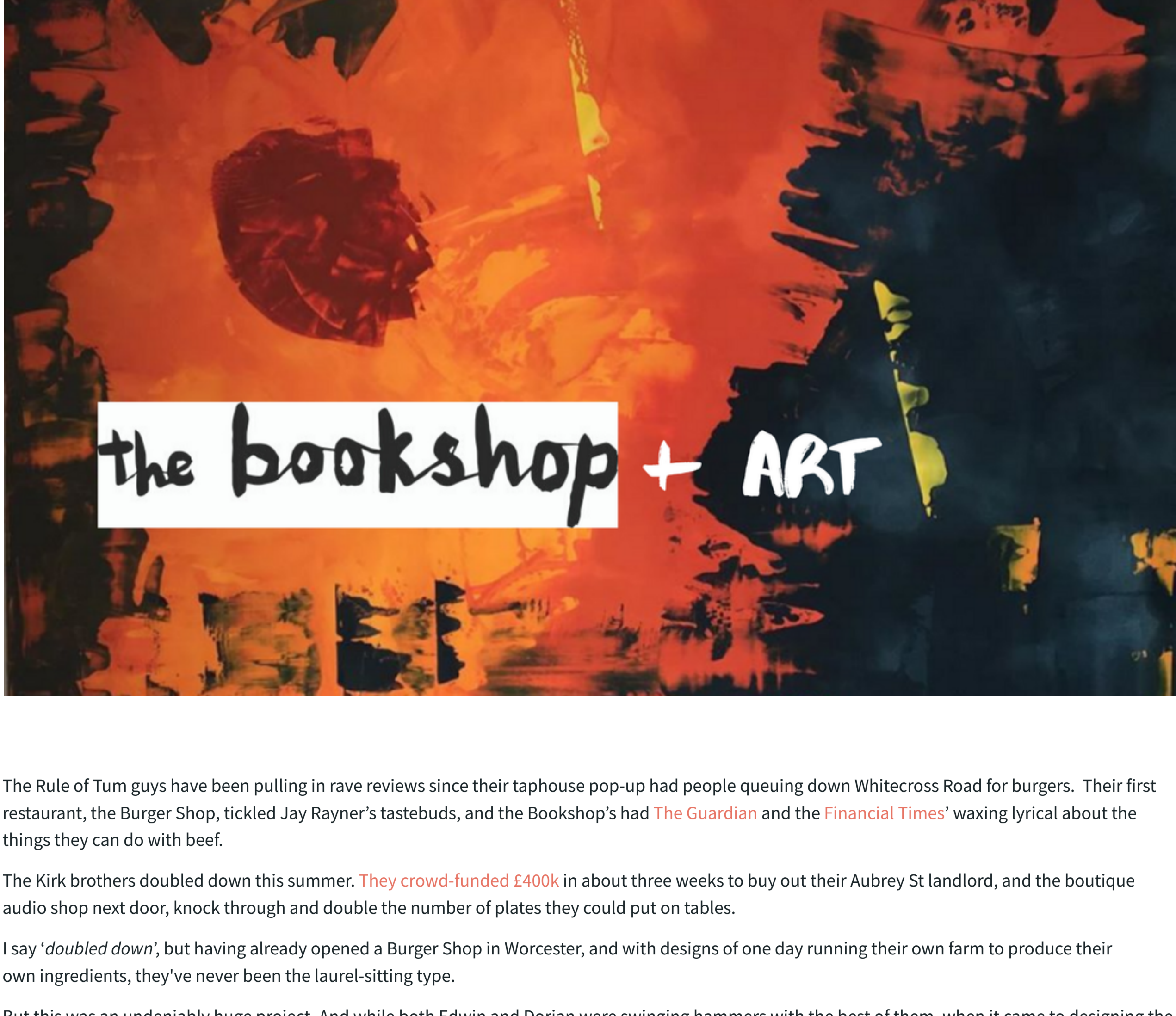


HOW HERFORD'S BEST-TASTING RESTAURANT ALSO BECAME ITS BEST-LOOKING

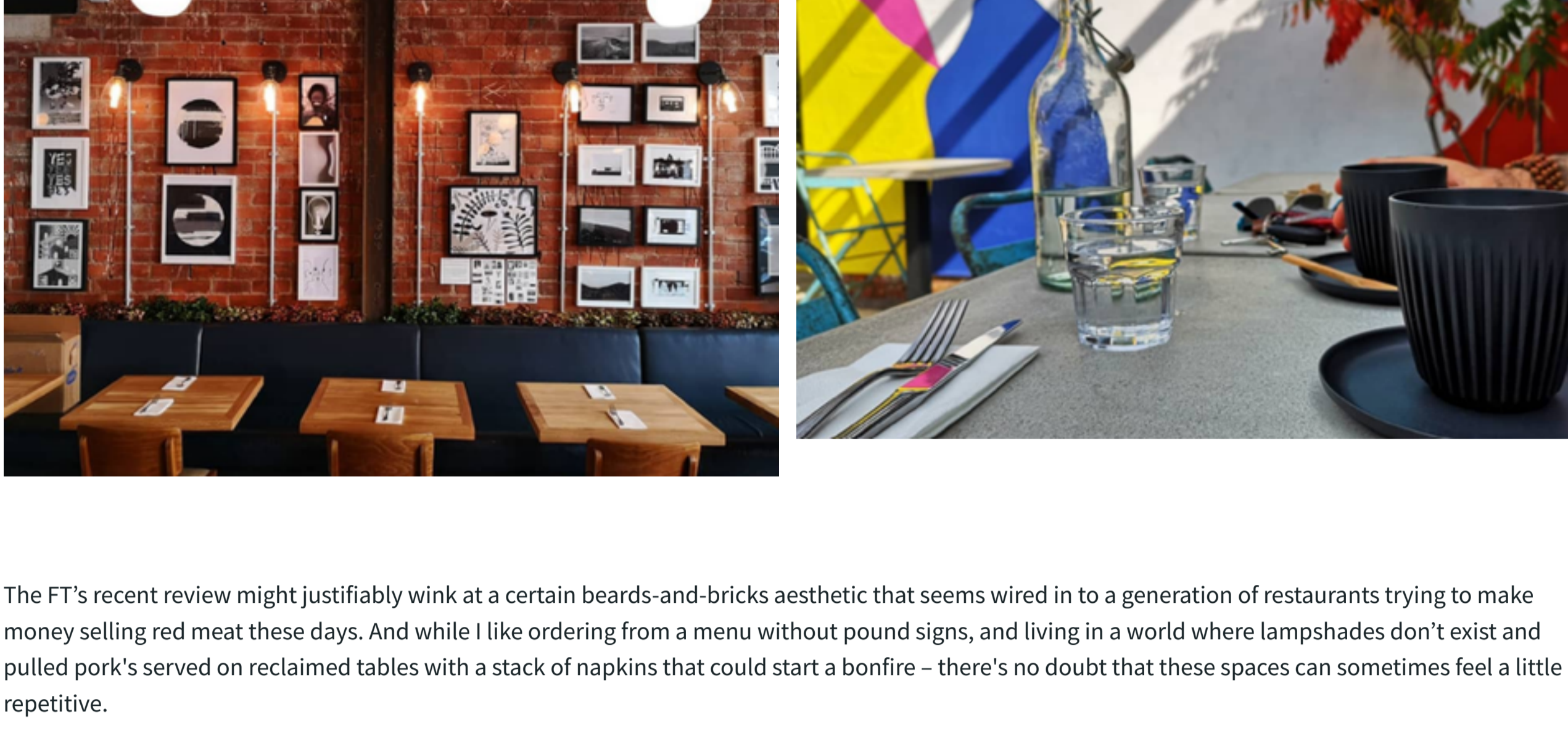
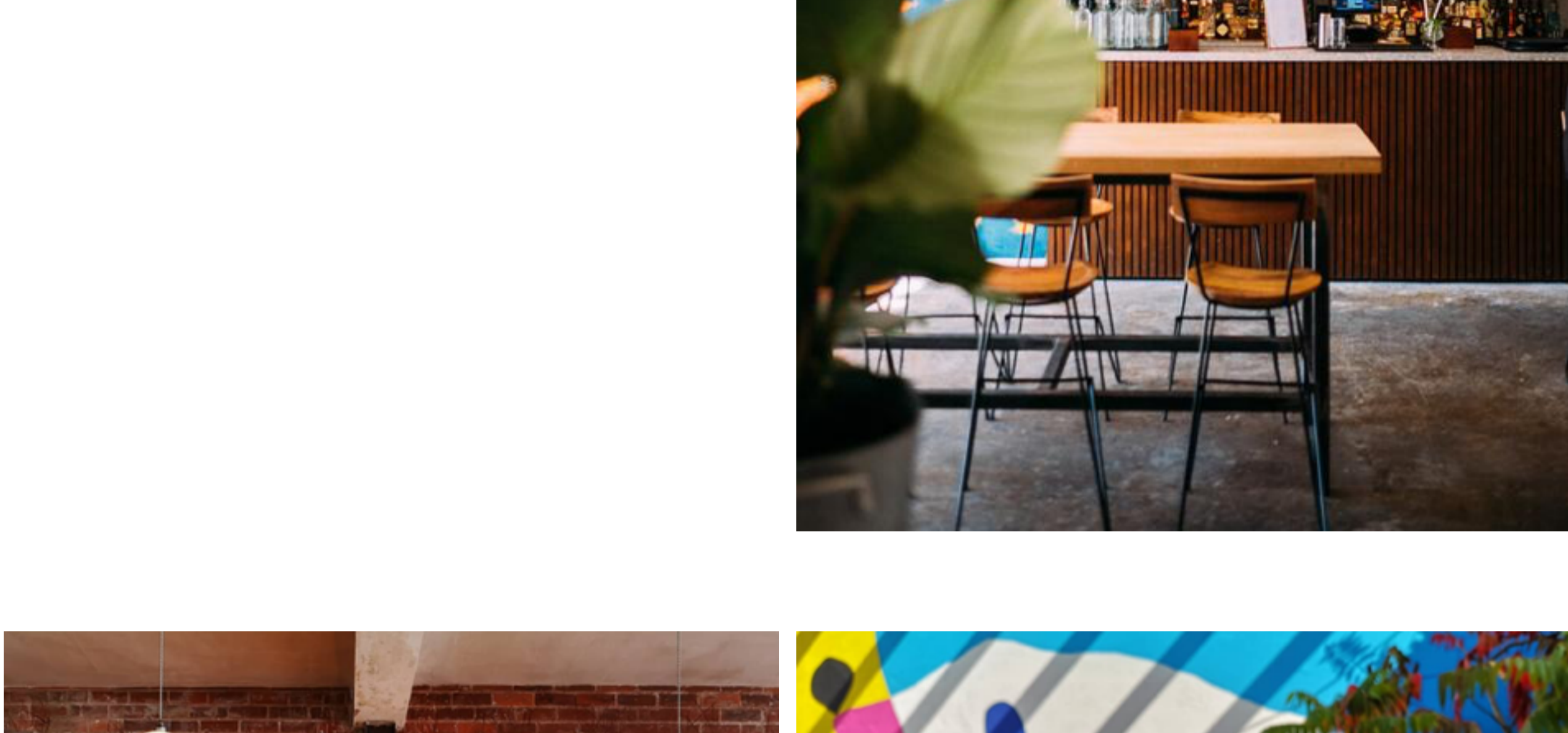


The Rule of Tum guys have been pulling in rave reviews since their taphouse pop-up had people queuing down Whitecross Road for burgers. Their first restaurant, the Burger Shop, tickled Jay Rayner's taste buds, and the Bookshop's had *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times* waxing lyrical about the things they can do with beef.

The Kirk brothers doubled down this summer. They crowd-funded £400k in about three weeks to buy out their Aubrey St landlord, and the boutique audio shop next door, knock through and double the number of plates they could put on tables.

I say 'doubled down', but having already opened a Burger Shop in Worcester, and with designs of one day running their own farm to produce their own ingredients, they've never been the laurel-sitting type.

But this was an undeniably huge project. And while both Edwin and Dorian were swinging hammers with the best of them, when it came to designing the space - easily their biggest restaurant to date - they brought in architect *Matthew Wood* and *Ledbury-based artist Sunny Todd* to put some personality on the bare bricks.



The FT's recent review might justifiably wink at a certain beards-and-bricks aesthetic that seems wired in to a generation of restaurants trying to make money selling red meat these days. And while I like ordering from a menu without pound signs, and living in a world where lampshades don't exist and pulled pork's served on reclaimed tables with a stack of napkins that could start a bonfire - there's no doubt that these spaces can sometimes feel a little repetitive.

Enter the artists.

The Rule of Tum team know how good what they're putting on your plate is. They brought in Sunny to help ensure what they were putting on their walls were as well. And from seven-foot frescos by the incredible contemporary architectural art studio Aster Muro, to hand-chosen black-and-white prints and photography framed in clusters and submitted as part of a call-out by Sunny on Insta, they ended up with an aesthetic that has colour and personality and, without being intrusive, is memorable in a way that so many new restaurants don't have the courage to be.

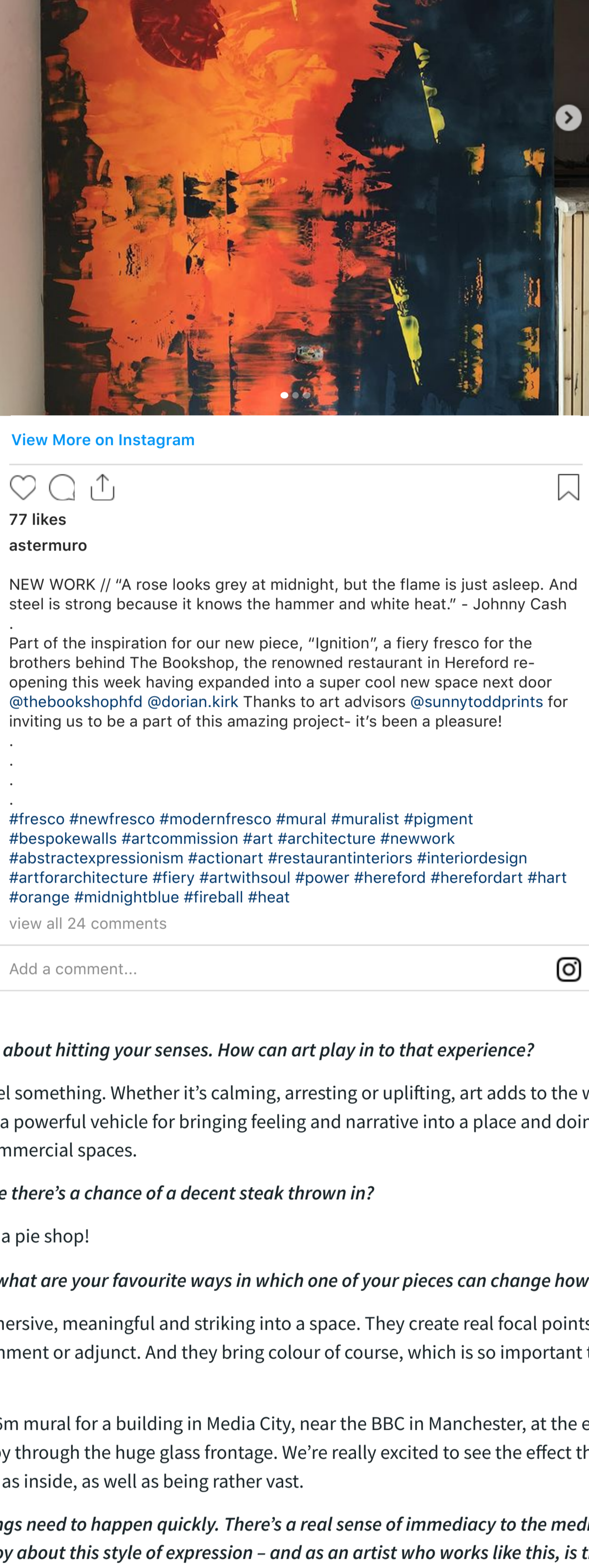
We spoke to three of the artists involved in the project; Charles Snell who created an original fresco for the Bookshop, Dermot Clarke who designed and painted the exterior wall that sets the tone for a suntrap of a terrace at the rear of the building, and Sunny himself, who curated the art on the walls, but whose textile prints also make an appearance.

*(Side-note - the RoT team "just" closed the doors on the Burger Shop next door for a revamp. Keep your *** peeled.)*

CHARLES SNELL

When you sat down to start thinking about the project, what's your starting point for creating a piece of work for this kind of space?

We usually have some sort of instinct or a 'colour feeling' after meeting a client. We always try to get a sense of the space, how it's being used, and by who, the architecture, the local context. So with The Bookshop piece we were thinking about all these things but had a strong sense from the beginning that the piece should be fiery and intense. The Cash quote on Instagram came in as part of the concept and moodboard that we developed along these lines before we went to experiment in the studio.



Restaurants - good restaurants - are all about hitting your senses. How can art play in to that experience?

Good art should move you, make you feel something. Whether it's calming, arresting or uplifting, art adds to the whole experience of being in a space. Frescoes in particular have always been a powerful vehicle for bringing feeling and narrative into a place and doing this in a contemporary, abstract way fits well into modern restaurants and commercial spaces.

How many commissions do you do where there's a chance of a decent steak thrown in?

One of our earliest commissions was for a pie shop!

Thinking of other projects you've done, what are your favourite ways in which one of your pieces can change how people view a space?

Our frescoes bring something lively, immersive, meaningful and striking into a space. They create real focal points - but we love that they work very much with the architecture not as an embellishment or adjunct. And they bring colour of course, which is so important to how people feel, and to interior design.

We've been commissioned to create a 16m mural for a building in Media City, near the BBC in Manchester, at the end of this year. This will be visible to residents but also to everyone walking by through the huge glass frontage. We're really excited to see the effect this will have in the area as it will be able to be appreciated from outside as much as inside, as well as being rather vast.

My understanding of frescoes is that things need to happen quickly. There's a real sense of immediacy to the medium, the artist is creating on the clock, and at times on the fly. What do you enjoy about this style of expression - and as an artist who works like this, is there a tacit appreciation of the high-pressure environment chefs cook in?

Good point - there is definitely a similarity to how chefs work (respect) - with both disciplines there is a lot of preparation involved, followed by practice and then a high-energy performance. It's creative, physical, fast and exciting. We're very much inspired by Abstract Expressionism and Action Art so this informs how we work.

And there is a special window of time when the pigmented plaster is alive and animated and then it begins to set - so we are building up layers and creating the composition with all this friction and negotiation of time and material.

I read a quote on your website: why do you think, that William Blake thought, that frescoes were better?

Perhaps because there is an element of the material being alive? You're not working with something inert and the way plaster and light work together is unique. It takes a long time to master plaster in a creative way.

Blake was referring to traditional fresco which historically is found as murals in ecclesiastical settings and is religious in theme. Traditional fresco is specialist way of painting onto setting, wet, lime plaster. What we do with Aster Muro is our contemporary innovation on this, harnessing a very beautiful and powerful medium but making it relevant for today. And for us it is really important to bring this sort of forgotten art form into spaces which people use daily, places where it will have a positive and uplifting effect, places with big walls.

What's your studio space like? And how's life in the Wye Valley?

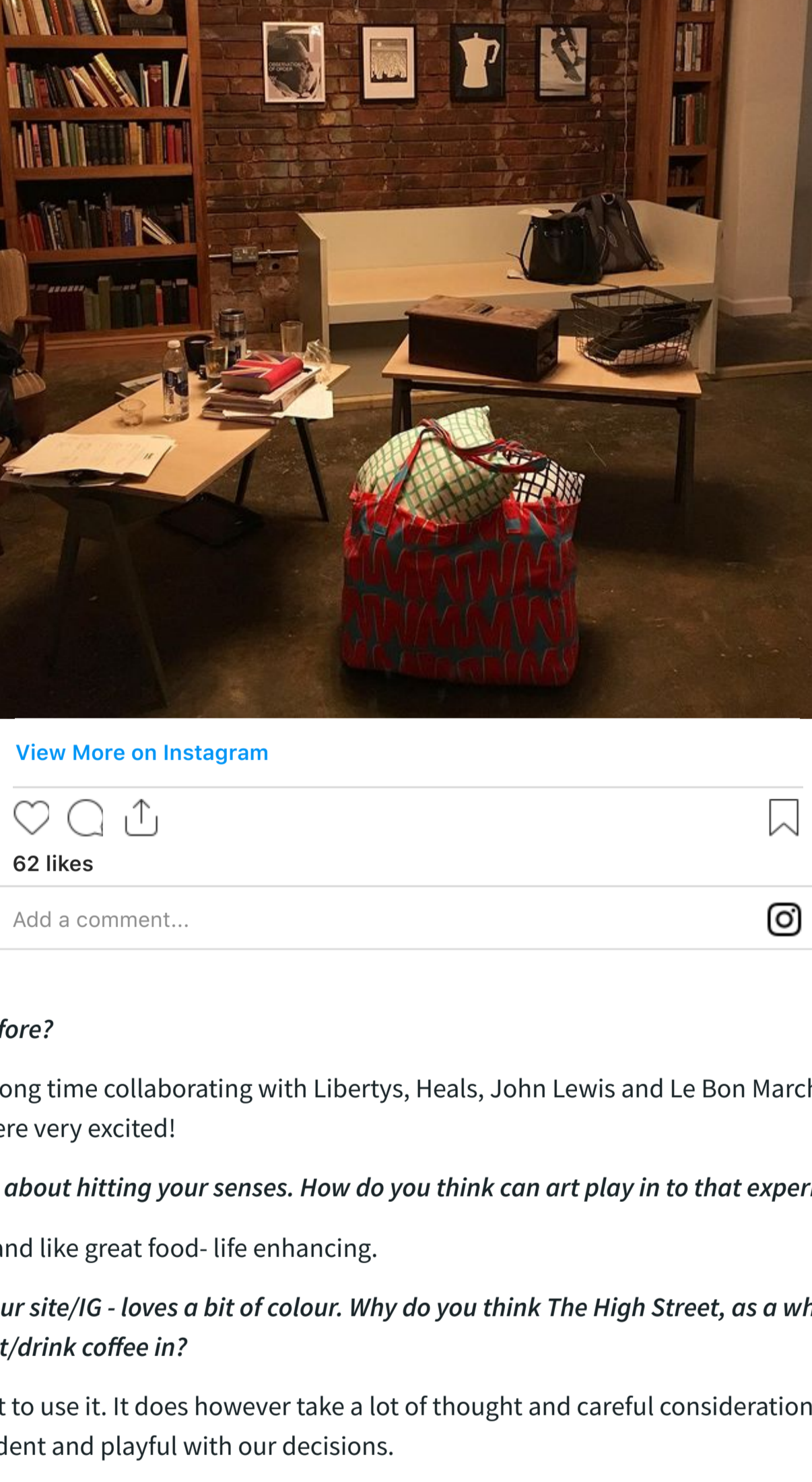
Our studio is bright, white and spacious, which is well-suited for mixing colours and doing large practice frescoes. It's recently spruced and expanded so is temporarily looking neat and tidy. It's pretty rural and next to some grassy fields so our neighbours are a herd of sheep - and sometimes there are surprising noises when bears fall onto the roof.

We feel very lucky to be based in the Wye Valley. It's such a beautiful, peaceful and inspirational place that feels tucked away from it all, but really it's not too far from Bristol, London or anywhere, which is great for work.

SUNNY TODD

To start - just talk us through a little bit on how you got involved - it feels like art was right at the middle of things when it comes to the guys' idea of what to do with the new space, how early were those conversations happening and how did you go about managing the open call?

We got together at the beginning of the Summer, we had always wanted to work with the 'Rule of Tum' guys in some way. We were very excited to hear that Dorian wanted the art in the restaurant to be given the same thought and respect the food is.



Have you ever done this kind of thing before?

We have been working in interiors for a long time collaborating with Liberties, Heals, John Lewis and Le Bon Marché in Paris. But we have never worked on the interiors of a restaurant - so we were very excited!

Restaurants - good restaurants - are all about hitting your senses. How do you think can art play in to that experience?

Art and Design is a truly beautiful thing and like great food - life enhancing.

Our own work - from clicking around your site/IG - loves a bit of colour. What do you think The High Street, as a whole, tends towards the safer end of the spectrum when it comes to places we eat/drink coffee in?

We love colour and always feel confident to use it. It does however take a lot of thought and careful consideration. Attention to detail as with food is very important. But we love to be bold, confident and playful with our decisions.

With the Bookshop - and sorry for the massive journalistic cliché - but if you had to sum up what vibe you were going for IN THREE WORDS, what is it?

Sophisticated, Exciting, Dramatic.

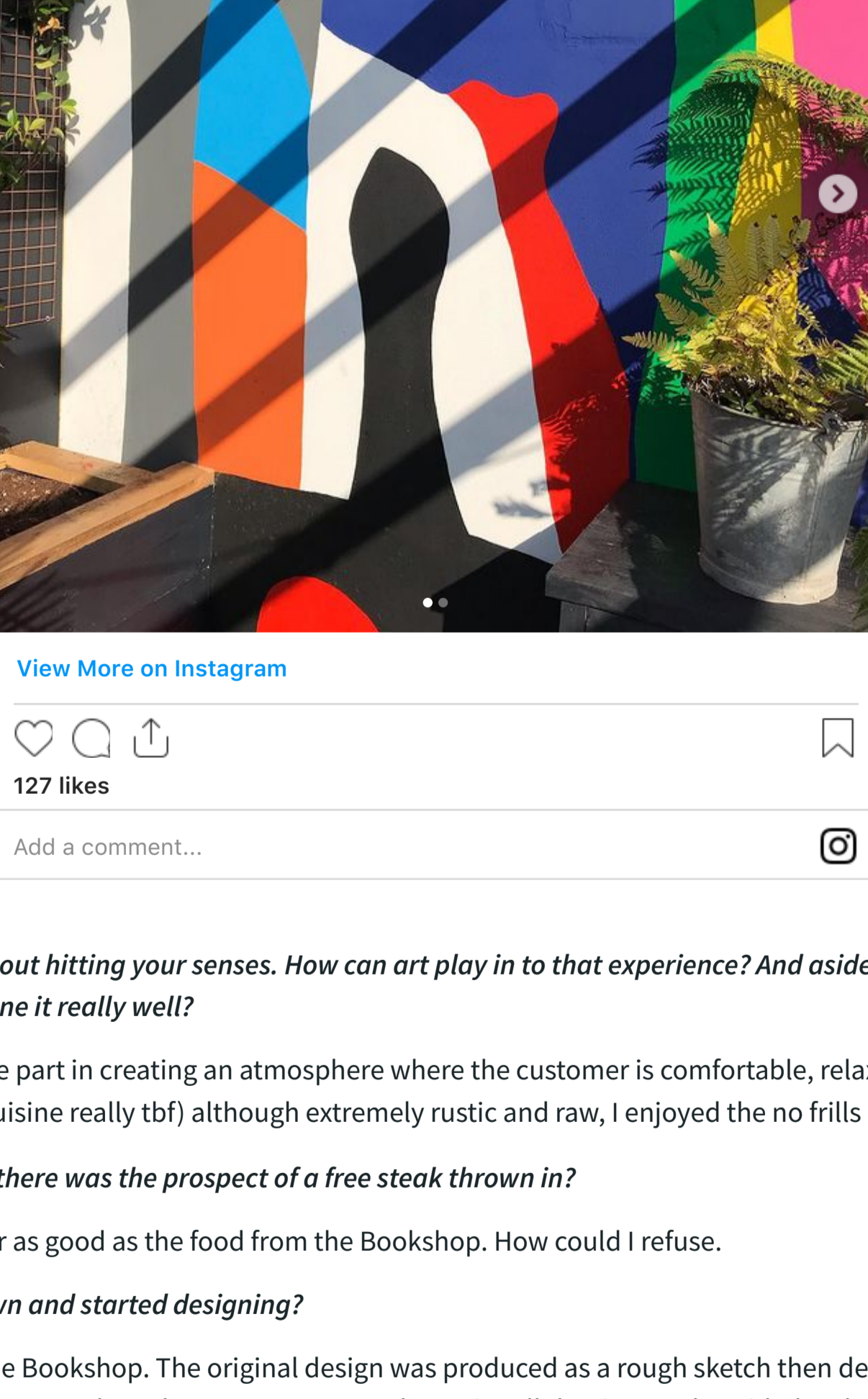
Are all the works permanent installations, or is there scope for further Artist Call-outs for smaller pieces?

We really want to keep the artwork and will update it regularly. We would love to become a place known for great art and design as well as great food. Claire Woods, Astermuro, and Dermot Clarke will be permanent, and we would love to do more with these artist in the future and the 'Open Call' will give regular opportunities for artists to show their work in this incredible venue.

DERMOT CLARKE

How can big art change spaces?

Not only can large-scale artwork make a space memorable, it can also alter people's mood without them realising. As humans we are hardwired to naturally respond to colour and shapes. The intention of my work is to boost people's mood, improve their day and raise energy levels.



Restaurants - good restaurants - are all about hitting your senses. How can art play in to that experience? And aside from the Bookshop, are there any eateries that come to mind who have done it really well?

Again I think colour and form play a large part in creating an atmosphere where the customer is comfortable, relaxed but stimulated. I visited the ruin bars in Budapest (not known for there cuisine really tbh) although extremely rustic and raw, I enjoyed the no frills but stylish aesthetic and the fun.

Have you had many commissions when there was the prospect of a free steak thrown in?

I have worked for food before - but never as good as the food from the Bookshop. How could I refuse.

How big was the piece when you sat down and started designing?

I really enjoyed applying my design at the Bookshop. The original design was produced as a rough sketch then developed and adapted digitally before the decisions were made and the paint was purchased. 10 years ago I used to paint all the time and avoided technology as a rule. This was due to me being a bit of a technophobe but I love the combination of traditional and digital techniques in my work now.

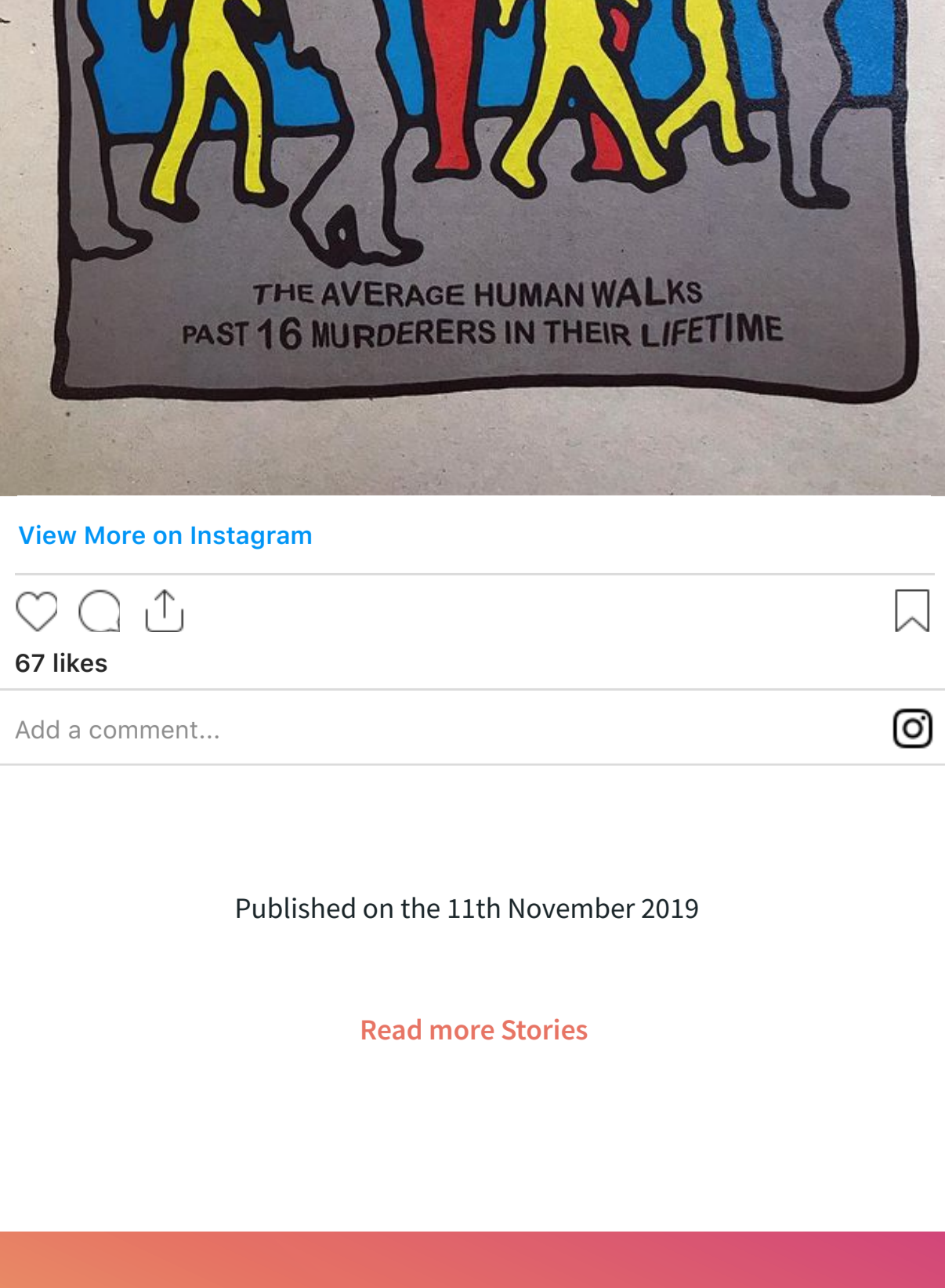
When you were designing the wall, did you have any idea about the joists/ how their shadows cut lines in the sunshine?

When I created the design I wanted to take into account the fact that it would be seen when people may need a little fresh air or a break from the table. Also for the large number of staff members at the bookshop and the rule of tum to enjoy on their breaks. I worked in catering for a few years and can remember how intense it can get in the kitchens and restaurant floor.

I knew the wooden frame was going to be there and was very pleased regarding the shadows. Who doesn't love seeing high contrast, sharp shadows on a sunny day???

Where can people find more of your stuff?

I post regular original artwork on my Instagram account @dermotclarke. The work I hope, is playful, contemporary and thought provoking. Well this is my intention anyway. I use Instagram as a vehicle to practice techniques and play with ideas the majority of my posts are available as quality prints for purchase.



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