

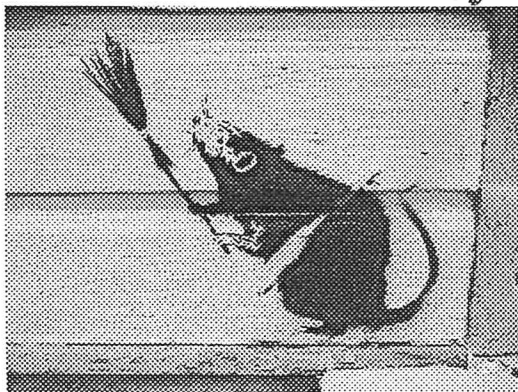
## About Banksy: The "Biography" of a Graffiti Street Art Legend



The name Banksy ignites controversy, starts conversations and piques curiosity. Banksy is undoubtedly the most controversial street artist to emerge on the global stage. The fact that his identity remains unknown after 20 years on the graffiti scene only adds to the intrigue that surrounds his work. The works of Banksy have appeared in America, Australia, Canada, England, France, Israel, Jamaica and Palestine. Wherever Banksy goes, he makes an impact. His pictorial and satirical messages cross the boundaries between art, philosophy, politics, sociology, humor and narcissism. Banksy is the godfather of a new form of pop art that originated on the street. He used a foundation created by peers to spread powerful messages using accessible street art. Anyone can see Banksy's stencil art, which enables him to reach a large audience and to make strong statements. City officials have the power to paint over works or allow them to stay. Even when his ephemeral art is destroyed, it draws attention to political issues.

Such strong attention, that when most people visit our gallery of Banksy art, it leads to hours of browsing.

### Code Name: Banksy



*Banksy's Broom Rat by Infrogmation of New Orleans*

The works of Banksy are often inspired by other street art luminaries and classical artists. This is another controversial area. Banksy has credited 3D of the British band Massive Attack as a source of inspiration. However, connections to the French graffiti artist Blek le Rat, who is known as the Father of Stencil Graffiti, have caused much more commotion.

Although Blek was initially pleased to inspire other artists, he has publicly challenged Banksy's copycat style. On the other side, Banksy has said that every time he does something, he finds out that Blek Le Rat has done it twenty years earlier. Similarities between the rats pictured in Blek's work show a distinct overlap. Whoever Banksy is, he has made an unforgettable impact on the world and experienced tremendous commercial success. As an unrivaled phenomenon, Banksy's irreverent, socio-political style is paving the way for future street artists and perhaps changing the way that graffiti is seen.

Banksy may recycle old ideas, but he also inspires new creations from talented and not-so-talented artists. The recent commercial success of other street artists has been dubbed the "Banksy effect."

### **Who is Banksy?**

This is an inevitable question whenever Banksy is discussed. Although the artist's identity is technically unknown, there have been several theories as to who the mystery artist is. The most popular of these theories is that Banksy is a Bristol native named Robin Gunningham. The UK's Daily Mail published an extensive piece on Gunningham where they interviewed schoolmates. A photograph showing a man believed to be Gunningham working on stencils in Jamaica is the lynchpin in this theory. The man that the Daily Mail spoke to said that Gunningham was one of three artistically inclined students in his class. According to this report, Gunningham attended the prestigious Bristol Cathedral Choir School, which has an annual tuition of £9,240. A neighbor told the Daily Mail that Banksy left school at 16 and began working in graffiti often traveling for months at a time and eventually leaving home altogether. Journalist Simon Hattenstone of The Guardian newspaper is one of the only people who interviewed Banksy in person. He said that Banksy wore jeans and a T-shirt to the interview. Banksy was also sporting a silver tooth, a silver chain and one silver earring.

If Banksy is Gunningham, which he has denied, he was born in 1973 and had surgery early in life to repair a cleft palate. Banksy also created a pseudo self-portrait that features a picture of Gunningham. Recent news reports have followed Mrs. Banksy, a political activist known as Joy Millward. According to anecdotal reports, the artist has successfully concealed his identity from his family and in-laws.

### **The Early Years**

Banksy has been active on the graffiti scene since the early 1990s. He was first associated with a gang of underground street artists in Bristol who were known as the DryBreadZ Crew (DBZ). In Bristol, he partnered with Inkie and other notable artists who still work with Banksy.

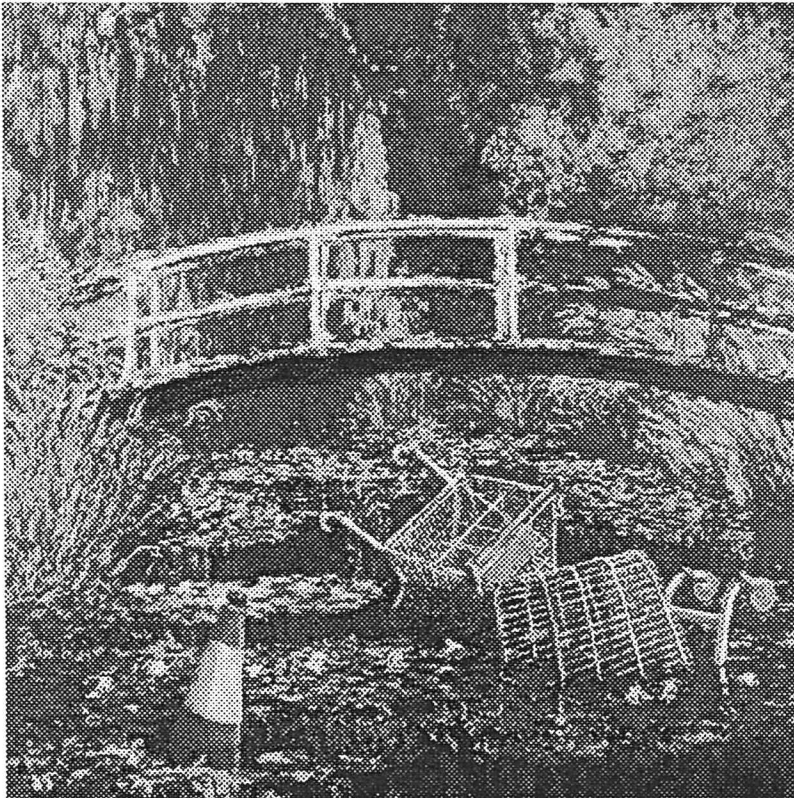
Based on personal comments, Banksy developed his stenciling technique after a brush with the law. Banksy said he was 18 when he attempted to paint bubble letters on a public train. The police came, and everyone in his gang fled. Banksy ended up hiding under a garbage truck. While lying

on the ground in a puddle of oil, Banksy contemplated ways to make the graffiti process faster. At that moment, he saw stenciled letters sprayed on the bottom of the truck, and his new style was born.

By 2000, Banksy moved to London and stayed with friends Luke Egan and Jamie Eastman. Eastman worked at a record label that used several of Banksy's illustrations. Banksy was reportedly staying in a flat in London's Hackney neighborhood when numerous works of art began appearing in the area. While in London, Banksy's work experienced a great deal of exposure and gained notoriety that led to a series of international exhibits.

### International Works

Banksy's first international exhibition entitled Existencilism was held in 2002 at L.A.'s 33? gallery. This was followed by a 2003 exhibit in London entitled Turf Wars, which was held at a secret location in an East London warehouse. This controversial exhibit featured cattle painted with faces, arrows and a variety of commercial motifs. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) said the conditions were suitable, but animal activists ironically protested the exhibit that was ostensibly raising awareness about animal exploitation.



*Banksy's "Show Me the Monet."*

These popular exhibits were followed by a variety of subversive versions of popular paintings and a series of prints featuring Queen Victoria in an explicit position as a lesbian. Christina Aguilera purchased the original Queen Victoria print for £25,000. Banksy's subversive works include

variations of paintings by Andy Warhol, Monet, Edward Hopper and Leonardo da Vinci. Banksy has a unique way of satirizing the works of the great masters while paying homage to their acclaimed pieces.

Between 2003 and 2004, Banksy completed an exhibit in the Alexandria suburb of Sydney that was attended by 1,500 people. By 2004, Banksy was producing a number of new works for future exhibits. The most famous in this era was his spoof on the British £10 note, which features the head of Princess Diana. The notes also featured altered text that read Banksy of England instead of Bank of England.

#### *Banksy of England £10 Notes*

These notes were distributed at the Notting Hill Carnival and at the Reading Festival. While some tried to spend them at local shops, a few of the notes have sold for £200 on eBay. Several limited-edition posters featuring 10 uncut notes sold for £100 on the anniversary of Diana's death. Several years later, the Bonhams auction house sold one of the posters for £24,000.

#### **The Big Time**



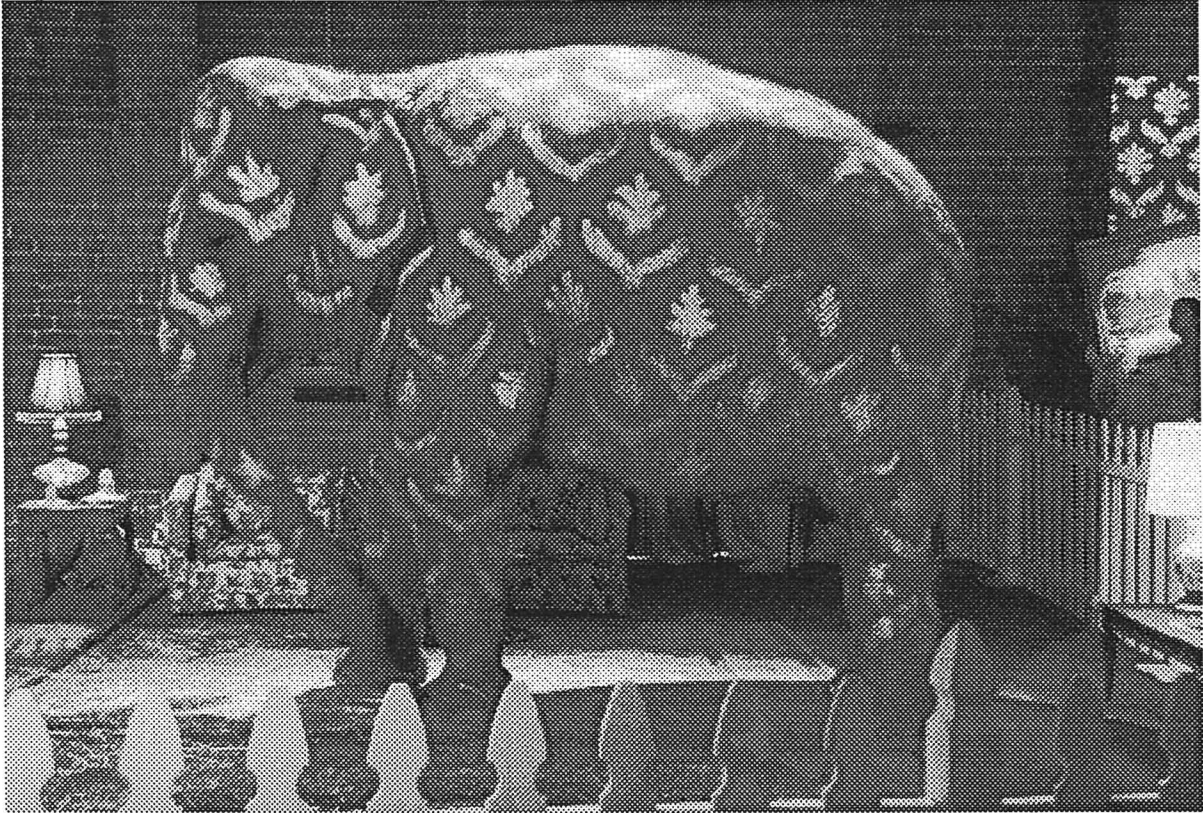
*Bethlehem Wall Graffiti by*

*Pawel Ryszawa*

By 2006, Banksy was a fringe street artist who had reached the big time in a big way. In 2005, Banksy traveled to Palestine and the West Bank where he stenciled nine images on the



Bethlehem Wall. These works show children digging and playing near the wall, an armored dove with an olive branch, a girl frisking a soldier, a ladder ascending the wall, a girl floating over the wall with balloons and several other pieces. This groundbreaking series led to a second exhibit in Los Angeles entitled *Barely Legal*. This three-day exhibit featured a variety of vandalized art and a pink “elephant in the room,” which symbolizes the ever-present issue of world poverty. The elephant featured a flashy Indo-style print with gold motifs set over the elephant’s painted skin.



*Elephant in the Room*

At the same time, Banksy was crafting a series of prints featuring British model Kate Moss. These silkscreen prints done in the style of Andy Warhol sold at Sotheby’s for £50,400, which was five times the estimate. During the same auction, a stencil of the Mona Lisa with paint dripping from her eyes sold for a record-setting £57,600. These groundbreaking sales turned Banksy from an outsider into a commercial success.

### **Banksy at Auction**

Due to demand, a number of Banksy’s works sold for prices that exceeded all expectations. *Bombing Middle England* sold for £102,000, *Balloon Girl* sold for £37,200, and *Bomb Hugger* sold for £31,200. Several other works received incredible amounts. *Ballerina with Action Man Parts* sold for £96,000, *Glory* sold for £72,000, and *Untitled (2004)* sold for £33,600. In 2007, a new record for Banksy pieces was set when *Space Girl & Bird* sold for £288,000 at Bonhams of London.

The various mediums that Banksy uses make it difficult to preserve his pieces and to market them, but this hasn't stopped people from trying. In 2007, a Bristol couple attempted to sell their home, which featured a prominent Banksy mural. Although offers fell through due to logistics, the couple is marketing the property as a mural with a house attached.

In Norfolk, a couple listed a mobile home that Banksy doodled on a decade earlier for £500,000. According to reports, the couple purchased the home for £1,000, which would be quite a profitable investment. Whether Banksy is pleased with the profits remains a mystery. In a post on his website, the artist featured a picture of auction attendees with the caption "I can't believe you morons buy this sh\*\*!"

### Major Installations



*Banksy's Stonehenge by Rodu*

Bored by his success, Banksy embarked on a new mission to organize collective exhibits and major installations. The most famous of these was Banksy's Stonehenge. This monumental installation featured at the Glastonbury Festival was built entirely from portable toilets in an archetypically Banksy manner. One of Banksy's most iconic works is a crumpled phone booth that is lying on its side, stabbed with an ax and dripping blood. This installation appeared on a Soho street in 2006 and was quickly removed by Westminster officials.



*Banksy's Crumpled Phone Booth*

In May 2008, Banksy organized the Cans Festival, a street-art pun on France's famous Cannes Film Festival. This event was held in an abandoned tunnel and featured 39 international street artists, including Mr. Brainwash, Blek le Rat, Jef Aérosol and many others.

After the Cans Festival, he put together his first official exhibition in New York. Opening in early October, the Village Pet Store and Charcoal Grill exhibit featured a variety of animatronic pets, including a rabbit applying makeup and a mother hen tending her McNugget babies as they pecked at a container of barbecue sauce.

### More International Appearances



*Rocking Chair Man by Infrogmation of New Orleans*

While visiting the states, Banksy embarked on a stenciling tour of hurricane-ravaged New Orleans that included his signature rats and a variety of human figures. Taking advantage of derelict buildings in the Lower 9th Ward, Banksy stenciled looters entering windows and a boy swinging on a rescue tube. He also stenciled a man in a rocking chair under a no loitering sign, and he painted a hooded KKK member hanging from a noose. This final work was quickly covered.

### **Success or Bust**

Always upping the ante, Banksy is breaking boundaries and taking street art to places where it has never been. In 2009, the Banksy vs. Bristol Museum show opened at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in his purported hometown. The show featured 100 unique pieces, including animatronic displays and large installations. More than 300,000 visitors attended the exhibition.

During his career, Banksy's work has made many controversial appearances. In 2005, he placed subverted paintings in several prominent New York museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, The Met, the Brooklyn Museum and the American Museum of Natural History. He also hung a primitive cave painting depicting hunter-gatherers pushing a shopping cart in the British Museum of London. This piece was promptly destroyed.

In 2006, Banksy replaced 500 copies of Paris Hilton's first CD with a mix of Danger Mouse songs and his own digitally altered cover art. The tracks included "Why Am I Famous?" and "What Have I Done?" Only a few copies were sold before workers pulled the items. Copies of the altered CDs have sold for £750 online. The same year, Banksy placed an inflatable doll dressed as a Guantanamo prisoner in California's Disneyland theme park.

Banksy's stencil art has appeared at the Bristol Zoo and the London Zoo where he printed animals' thoughts. He also created a series of pieces commemorating the 2012 London Olympics. These works include a pole vaulter jumping over barbed wire and landing on an abandoned mattress. Another stenciled image featured a javelin thrower aiming a surface missile. This was designed to highlight a military installation that was defending the site.

### **Keep it, or Clean it?**

Despite Banksy's status, city officials, property owners and fellow street artists have destroyed his work. One piece in Melbourne, Australia, was protected by Plexiglas, but a group of artists managed to pour silver paint behind the sheet, which completely obliterated the image.

Banksy created seven pieces in Toronto, but most of the images were destroyed. In Detroit, an art group excavated a piece of Banksy's work for preservation. Even in Banksy's home country, officials struggle to cover up the stencils as quickly as he makes them. However, there have been several instances of inadvertent destruction. A Muslim community center painted over an image on the side of their new building, and a team of plumbers in Australia accidentally destroyed a parachuting rat that was applied in the late 1990s.



## Other Works

In addition to his status as an acclaimed artist, Banksy is a successful author and filmmaker. His 2010 film "Exit Through the Gift Shop," which featured Mr. Brainwash, was nominated for an Oscar. Before the premier at the Sundance Film Festival, he created 10 pieces of street art in Park City and Salt Lake City, Utah, to promote the premier. To date, Banksy has published six books featuring his art and opinions. Wall and Piece was published by Random House in 2005, and Banksy: "You Are an Acceptable Level of Threat" was released in 2012.

Although critics say that Banksy is merely a vandal and his work is dazzlingly clever to idiots, his fame is undeniable. Virtually every aspect of Banksy's work is controversial, and perhaps that is the secret behind his success.



*line Flower by Paolo Redwings*

Pollard Street Road-