

BANKSY, THE “RAT”

Everybody knows Banksy – but no one knows, who he is. The street artist is the phantom of the art world. And the mystery around his identity has long since become part of Banky’s oeuvre. His works are controversial and are auctioned off for outlandish sums. Even when they sometimes self-destruct after being sold.

Text • Oliver Roscher | Photo • DeptfordJon • Flickr



Where to start? With Banksy’s origins, his works, his unknown identity? All this plays an important role. Banksy is what you might call a total work of art. Artists and art merge to form a fascinating symbiosis.

So, let’s do this chronologically and begin with his origins. Fact is that Banksy was born at the beginning of the 1970s in Bristol. There, in England’s Southwest, a bustling art scene developed during the 1980s, which expressed itself through

graffiti and trip-hop. The so-called Bristol Sound became the soundtrack of the rebellious youth. One of whom was Banksy. He became part of the graffiti scene and denounced grievances in his hometown by means of Guerrilla communication – the opponent was the authorities.

Which takes us directly to his works. Initially, Banksy sprayed freehand. Later, he began using templates, which is frowned upon in the scene, but has an unbeatable advantage: With the

help of a template, any motif can be applied to a wall in no time at all. It is the ideal technique for any secret and illegal activities. Freehand takes a lot longer.

But Banksy doesn't just create interesting images. He has a message. Some of his works have found their way into the collective memory of society, such as the picture of the boy playing with a superhero-like nurse doll, instead of Batman or Spiderman, which are both in the bin ("Game Changer", 2020) – Banksy's way to thank the medical professionals who have worked unceasingly throughout the Covid pandemic.

To list all his works would take far too long. But he always finds a raw spot in our society and pokes it with his pictures: Environmental pollution, migration crisis, pandemic and so on come together to form the subject of his work. Observers, representing society, are forced to look into a mirror and to reflect on their failings.



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Photo • Dismaland • Kent Wang • Flickr

Authentic Banksies are often located on house walls or street corners: "A wall is a very big weapon. It's one of the nastiest things you can hit someone with." As a result, most of his art is among us and is just waiting to be found. He also incorporates the immediate surroundings into his work; for instance, an abandoned bicycle becomes part of the motif or two figures appear to dance on top of a bus stop shelter.

But Banksy's art is so much more than just template art. Such as his very own morbid theme park, "Dismaland". Or he secretly sneaks his art into some of the most famous museums in the world – which happened in 2005, where his works appeared in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Louvre in Paris. In short, He doesn't want to let anyone or anything take control of him. It will be interesting to see how long he manages this. And talking of humour: His masterpiece in this regard was probably seen in 2018. Then, his probably most famous picture to date, "Girl with Balloon" was auctioned for around one million Pounds. But shortly after the final gavel blow, a shredder hidden inside the picture's frame destroyed the picture. Only because the shredder stopped working halfway through, was part of the picture preserved. Of course, this auction was part of his plan. He later renamed the picture "Love is in the bin". Perfect marketing with a large pinch of humour. Banksy also issued a statement that his intention was to criticise the art market. And yet, the mechanics of the art market still went to work. The original buyer just sold the half-shredded work in October 2021 for now 16 million Pounds.

But who is behind all of this? Can it really be only one person called Banksy? There really is no decisive clue. The most common names to come up are Robert del Naja and Robin Cunningham. Both came under scrutiny because sprayer and DJ Goldie once mentioned a Rob from Bristol in a 2017 podcast

and claimed that he was Banksy. Del Naja is part of the world-famous band "Massive Attack". And interestingly, the band's tour dates match the appearance of new Banksy works in various cities. However, the musician denies these claims. His counter: Banksy is a Massive Attack fan, which is why his works keep appearing in the band's vicinity. The second Rob, Robin Cunningham, is at home in the street art scene, like Banksy. According to research done by the Queen Mary University in London, there is a 75 percent probability that Cunningham and Banksy are the same person. And once again, new Banksy works seem to appear when Cunningham happens to be nearby. But he too denies being the famous artist.

In any case, Banksy's work is definitely movie material. Let's let our fantasy run riot. Imagine, Banksy is actually a self-made millionaire, who roams the streets at night to metaphorically kick society in the arse for its ignorance and arrogance. Or: Banksy is a world-famous popstar. After his concerts, he sneaks off in secret to follow his true calling. Or perhaps, Banksy is a collective – which is how he manages to place his art in several places simultaneously. Movie material!



Photo • Niv Singer • unsplash

One of Banksy's repeating motifs is the rat. And according to the Chinese horoscope, rats are full of creative energy and prefer to follow their own rules. Well that pretty much tells you, who Banksy is – a rat.

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