



Banksy
(British, born 1974)

Biography

Banksy's identity remains unknown, even after being involved in the graffiti scene for over twenty years. It is commonly believed he was born as either Robert Banks or Robin Cunningham in Bristol, Southern England, around 1974.

Banksy began as a graffiti artist in the early 1990s, in Bristol's graffiti gang DryBreadZ Crew. Although his early work was largely freehand, Banksy used stencils on occasion. In the late '90s, he began using stencils predominantly. His work became more widely recognised around Bristol and in London, as his signature style developed. In Bristol, he also partnered with Inkie and other notable artists who still work with Banksy today. Around 2000 he moved to London where he soon obtained a cult-status, especially in the Hackney neighbourhood where most of his street art appeared.

Banksy's artwork is characterised by striking images, often combined with slogans. His work often engages political themes, satirically critiquing war, capitalism, hypocrisy and greed. His anarchistic, even nihilistic, approach is combined with a dark humour with a playful and childish imagery as a result. A great admirer of Blek the Rat, a French street artist, who started working with stencils in the early 1980s to differentiate himself from the graffiti art that had emerged in New York in the previous decade. The Rat is a recurrent and recognisable image in the works by Banksy.

Whether plastering cities with his trademark parachuting rat, painting imagined openings in the West Bank barrier in Israel, or stencilling "We're bored of fish" above a penguins' zoo enclosure, Banksy creates street art with an irreverent wit and an international reputation that precedes his anonymous identity. "TV has made going to the theatre seem pointless, photography has pretty much killed painting," he says, "but graffiti has remained gloriously unspoilt by progress."

The use of stencils also has a practical aspect. The fact that spraying graffiti in public places is still illegal created the need for Banksy to work quickly, which is facilitated by using stencils for his main images. Stencils are traditionally hand drawn or printed onto sheets of acetate or card, before being cut out by hand. Most often using the mix of spray paint and stencils, Banksy has crafted a signature, immediately identifiable graphic style - and a recurring cast of animals, cops, soldiers, children, and celebrities - through which he critically examines contemporary issues of consumerism, political authority, terrorism, and the status of art and its display. A common technique in Banksy's art is furthermore to play on the perspective and edges of the item on which he is stencilling. Examples include 'trapdoors', 'criminal rats', 'photo opportunities' and 'peeing soldiers'.



The growing exposure and interest lead in turn to the first official exhibitions and several publication of his work in the United States (Los Angeles) and the United Kingdom in the early 2000s. These exhibitions were mostly provocative and sometimes also secret happenings of three or more days. In 2003, in an empty warehouse in East London, Banksy exhibited cattle painted with faces, arrows and a range of commercial motifs, which was protested against by several animal rights watch organisations.

Building on the growing interest and the commotion of his work, also the commercial interest grew exponentially in this period. In 2006 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. Notwithstanding his commercial success, up to this day Banksy has not revealed his identity. Which is probably due to the controversy surrounding his work and the political and social engagement it entails.

In reaction to his commercial success and increasing auction records in 2018 the artist famously had his iconic Girl with Balloon shredded right after it had been sold at Sotheby's London for a record £ 1,004,000. The piece consequently has been announced to be exhibited at the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden in 2019.

Banksy has gained his notoriety through a range of urban interventions, from modifying street signs and printing his own currency to illegally hanging his own works in institutions such as the Louvre in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Tate Britain in London. On 4 August 2005, the BBC reported that Banksy had painted 9 images on the Palestinian side of the Israeli West Bank barrier, including an image of a ladder up and over the wall and an image of children digging a hole through the wall. This was followed in 2015 with a video about the Gaza Strip titled "Make this the year you discover a new destination".

Bucking his economic success - demonstrated by the painting Morons - Banksy changed his focus on large scale installations and directing movies. Starting with the installation Elephant in the Room (2006) another success was the movie Exit through the Gift Shop in 2010, which featured friend and street artist Mr. Brainwash. The documentary examines the relation between commercial and street art; it premiered at the Sundance Festival and was later also nominated for an Oscar. Iconic examples of his work, including a life-size image of two policemen kissing, were also featured in the bleak 2006 futuristic film Children of Men.

In January 2015 a show stopping auction was held at Bonham’s in London, selling 32 prints by Banksy, bringing a total of over \$ 675,000, demonstrating that the interest in works by Banksy has no sign of diminishing. In 2019 Banksy’s Di-Faced tenner was included in the permanent collection of the British Museum, the first of the artist’s artworks to have been included in a major museum.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2023
 - Cut and Run*, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland
 - Banksy Exhibition Tour*, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Russia; Madrid, Spain; Lisbon, Portugal; Las Vegas, USA; Hong Kong, China; Japan
- 2017
 - Modern Masters*, SmithDavidson Gallery, Miami, USA
- 2015
 - Dismaland*, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, United Kingdom
 - Solo: *Keep it Real*, Lionel Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2014
 - BANKSY The Unauthorized Retrospective*, Sotheby’s, London, United Kingdom
 - The stealing Banksy exhibition* (unauthorized by the artist), Sincura Group, London, United Kingdom
 - Better Out than In*, street/museum exhibition, New York City, USA
- 2012
 - Beyond Banksy: Not Another Gift Shop*, Street Museum of Art, London, United Kingdom
- 2011
 - Cardinal Sin*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, United Kingdom
- 2009
 - Solo: *Banksy vs Bristol Museum show*, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol, United Kingdom

- 2008
 - Solo: *Village Pet Store and Charcoal Grill*, New York City, USA
 - Group exhibition, *The Cans Festival*, London, United Kingdom
- 2007
 - Banksy Exhibit* (unauthorized by artist), Vanina Holasek Gallery, New York City, USA
- 2006
 - Solo: *Barely Legal*, Los Angeles, USA
- 2005
 - Westbourne Grove*, London, United Kingdom
- 2003
 - Group exhibition, *Warehouse*, Alexandria, Sydney, Australia
 - Solo: *Turf War*, Warehouse, London, United Kingdom
- 2002
 - Solo: *Existencilism*, 331/3 Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

Selected Publications

- Banksy has published six books featuring his art and opinions.
- 2012 - *You Are an Acceptable Level of Threat ...*
- 2005 - *Wall and Piece*
- 2004 - *Cut it Out: Banksy; Vol. 3*
- 2002 - *Existencilism*
- 2001 - *Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall*