

BANKSY: NEW WORD IN STREET ART AND GRAFFITI

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Banksy: New Word in Street Art and Graffiti

Street art is full of eccentric figures with their distinctive styles and ideas. However, none of them are as significant to the genre as Banksy. Today, the name of Banksy is known by all those who are somewhat familiar with graffiti, street art, and even contemporary art as a whole. He has revolutionized this genre and made it into an instrument for conveying social, political, and cultural ideas to the public worldwide.

The “calling card” of Banksy is his complete anonymity. Since he has started creating street art more than twenty years ago, reliable and verified information about who Banksy is in reality has never appeared. According to one of the latest theories about the artist's personality, he is the British musician Robert Del Naja.¹ However, irrefutable evidence of this theory is absent, which makes it not less likely than other existing hypotheses. Anonymity is not only a remedy (the British law defines graffiti as a criminal offense) but also as an element of the artist's message. By hiding his name and biography, Banksy expresses the idea that art is more important than artists and that it can live apart from them.² The content of his works and their locations are also important means of conveying Banksy's ideology: a kind of "guerrilla art" that criticizes and undermines established social realities. Banksy is not the first street artist who concealed his personality. However, he is the first one to make it genuinely appealing ideologically.

Despite his anonymity, it is possible to follow Banksy's career path. His first works began

¹ Ballinger, Alex. 2017. “Who Isn't Banksy? A List of the Theories about the Mysterious Bristol Artist.” *Bristol Post*. July 2. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/who-isnt-banksy-list-theories-148949>, para. 5.

² Duncan, Alexandra, and Kimberly Nichols. 2018. “Banksy Overview and Analysis.” *The Art Story*. <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-banksy.htm>, para. 4.

to appear in Bristol, United Kingdom, in 1993.³ He started as a freehand artist, creating every single work uniquely. His first drawing that attracted public attention was called "The Mild Mild West." The artist painted it on a Bristol city wall.⁴ It depicts a teddy bear ready to throw a Molotov cocktail into a group of policemen. Over time, Banksy has switched from freehand graffiti to stencils.⁵ He did this with a practical purpose, as employing stencils significantly reduced the time it took to create art. Using this style, Banksy created his most famous works: "Kissing Coppers," "Rage, the Flower Thrower," and "Napalm Girl." In a satirical, and sometimes even a brutal manner, all of them convey different socially and politically significant messages, mocking imperialism, a police state, or a military machine.

Graffiti works have been the primary form of Banksy's art for a long time. However, he has not been limited to it. The artist held a number of exhibitions, each time disguised to preserve anonymity. The largest of them took place in London and New York, in such respectable places as the Tate Britain and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, respectively.⁶ In addition, he has organized a number of modern art festivals, in which he involved various street artists. All of these events were interactive and included a significant concentration of performances. The

³ Mancoff, Debra N. 2018. "Banksy." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. June 26. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Banksy>, para. 2.

⁴ Ballinger, Alex. 2017. "Who Isn't Banksy? A List of the Theories about the Mysterious Bristol Artist." *Bristol Post*. July 2. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/who-isnt-banksy-list-theories-148949>, para. 2.

⁵ Ellsworth-Jones, Will. 2013. "The Story Behind Banksy." *Smithsonian*. Smithsonian Institution. February 1. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/the-story-behind-banksy-4310304/>, para. 1.

⁶ Mancoff, Debra N. 2018. "Banksy." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. June 26. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Banksy>, para. 1.

logical culmination of Banksy's art was the establishment of a permanent project called "Dismaland."⁷ In addition to it, the artist has written several books regarding the artistic and conceptual foundations of his works and even directed the 2010 film "Exit Through the Gift Shop." All these milestones in his career show Banksy's versatility as an artist and as a social figure.

Summing up, today, Banksy is a key and, without exaggeration, a cult figure in the genre of street art. Having started as an ordinary graffiti artist, whose works the law defined as vandalism, he has come a long way to recognition but managed to keep his ideas throughout the journey. Banksy is not just a visual artist but also a performer, a director, and a writer. His works convey deep ideological layers and social satire, which also makes him a prominent public figure who has a real impact on people's views. Due to all these factors, Banksy is one of the most influential and distinctive figures in street art and graffiti, as well as in modern culture as a whole.

⁷ Ibid., para. 4.

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