

Banksy: The world's most wanted graffiti artist

In 2014, members of a Bristol youth centre woke up to find graffiti on the side of their building. Rather than expressing anger, the leader of the youth club, Mr Stinchcombe, was overjoyed. "I'm so happy," he said. The reason for his elation? The painting – *Mobile lovers* – was by a famous graffiti artist known as Banksy. It was very valuable. Mr Stinchcombe decided to sell the painting in order to raise money for the club. But many local people were not happy. "Street art belongs to all of us," said Katie Lyle, a local resident. "Taking it off the wall is vandalism."

Isn't it ironic, don't you think?

How times have changed. When Banksy started his career as a graffiti artist in the 1990s, he was accused of defacing property. Now he is a recognised artist, and people who remove his paintings are accused of being vandals. Town councils find themselves in the strange position of trying to preserve his work because it has become so valuable. At the same time, they try to discourage other graffiti artists. Christina Aguilera paid £50,000 for one Banksy painting. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie paid £1million for several Banksy paintings.

Man of mystery

Banksy is a pseudonym. His identity is secret. He is famous not only for his spray-painting, but also for infiltrating museums and art galleries, and leaving his own artwork behind. For example, visitors to the British Museum were surprised to see a piece of cave art that showed a man going hunting with a shopping trolley. Two months earlier a Banksy portrait had appeared in the Brooklyn Museum. It showed a colonial-era soldier with a spray can. The soldier has sprayed the words "No War" on the wall behind him. Banksy has also gone into the penguin enclosure of London Zoo. He wrote "We're bored of fish" in 7-foot-high letters.

Satirical art

In his art Banksy combines striking images with slogans. His work often satirises war, capitalism, hypocrisy and greed. Common subjects include rats, apes, policemen, members of the royal family, and children.

In addition to his two-dimensional artwork, Banksy is also known for his installations. Pedestrians in London walked past a murdered phone box. The phone box was lying against a wall. There was red paint on the pavement that looked like blood.

Banksy is also famous for his subversion of classic images. For example, Monet's beautiful series of water lily paintings have been repainted with the addition of drifting trash and debris. And idyllic nineteenth century pastoral scenes have been repainted with the addition of CCTV cameras.

Can I buy one?

Banksy's art is hard to buy. But art auctioneers have tried to sell his street art. The problem is how to take it away. There is one unintended side-effect of Banksy's graffiti: house prices have risen because the side of the building has Banksy's art painted on it.

The price of success

Since the success of the movie documentary, *Exit through the Gift Shop*, Banksy has a world-wide reputation. Now his work is liked by the people he mocks – the rich and the powerful. Before the opening of his art exhibition Banksy was bemused. He said: “This is the first show I've done where taxpayers' money is used to hang my pictures on a wall, and not to take them off it.”