



WHAT ARE
YOU
LOOKING AT?

BANKSY

Street artist or criminal? Banksy is an England-based street artist famous for his stencil technique graffiti artwork which appears on public buildings around the country. “Banksy” is a pseudonym, and the actual person behind the artwork is unknown. This means that his artwork, which has appeared on streets, walls and bridges around the world, is hard to verify as genuine and attracts huge amounts of public attention whenever they appear.

All of Banksy’s work is satirical and subversive, which means the pieces are designed to go against what everything else is about. This might be a political message or a comment on society. The last interview Banksy held was in 2003, when he said that he’d had the idea to use stencils in his art while hiding from the police underneath a lorry. It allowed him to be quicker and reduce the risk of being caught by the police as graffiti is illegal.

Eventually, Banksy moved on from graffiti, though he continues to produce art in this way. He created his first “exhibition” in 2003 when he staged a carnival of surreal art in a warehouse. It features a cow with the image of famous artist Andy Warhol on the side and a chimpanzee dressed as Queen Elizabeth II. It was later that year that he moved into what can only be described as prankster-art.

Dressed in a dark overcoat, scarf and floppy hat, Banksy made his way to Room 7 in the Tate Britain art gallery. In a paper bag, he carried a nondescript oil painting that he had picked up from a local market that showed a scene of the British countryside. Over the top of it, he had stencilled blue-and-white police crime-tape. He named it Crimewatch UK Has Ruined the Countryside for All of Us and hung it in the gallery without any invitation. Eventually, it was removed by security and placed in their lost property bin.

Banksy wasn’t done. In 2004, he once again slipped into a museum—this time the Louvre in Paris—and placed his own version of the Mona Lisa on display. This time, the Mona Lisa had a grinning yellow smiley for a face. When it was removed from the gallery, it sold at auction for £56,000.



Perhaps Banksy's most famous trick came in 2018 at the famous auction house, Sotheby's. Sotheby's is world-renowned for selling art and antiques, and pieces there sell for big money. When one of Banksy's most famous pieces, Girl With Balloon, came up for sale, it was sure to go for a lot of money. In fact, it sold for just over £1 million. What the people at Sotheby's didn't know— what nobody except for the artist himself knew— was that Banksy had installed a motorised shredder into the frame of the picture. As the auction staff and public looked on aghast, the picture started to disappear into the frame and emerge as shredded fabric below. Perhaps luckily for the buyer, the shredder jammed halfway through, and the rest of the painting was saved. However, the stunt brought a lot of attention, and it is believed that the half-shredded painting is now worth more than when it was whole!

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What is a pseudonym?
2. Find and copy a phrase that tells you it is hard to check whether Banksy's work is real.
3. Write a definition for "satirical".
4. Find and copy a word that means something didn't stand out.
5. Find and copy a word from the text that means "filled with shock or horror".

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- E** What is the purpose of the first four words of the text?
- R** Where was Crimewatch UK Has Ruined the Countryside for All of Us eventually placed?
- R** In which museum did Banksy place an alternative Mona Lisa?
- S** How is Banksy's work different to most famous artists?
- I** Why might the half-shredded painting be worth more than it was before?