

Gough, Paul, "Banksy: What's the fuss and why does it matter?" in Joseph M. Siracusa (ed.) *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences: It's everyone's business*, Routledge. 2016, pp. 1-13.  
ISBN 978-1-138-20555-0

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## **"Banksy: What's the fuss and why does it matter?"**

Paul Gough

Prankster, polemicist, painter, Banksy is arguably the world's most famous unknown street artist. To the press and public, the question of Banksy's identity is more intriguing than the legitimacy of his work and the price that celebrities, dealers and other wealthy patrons are prepared to pay for it. His greatest triumph has been his ability to keep that identity swathed in mystery, even though the artist's name is said to be in the public domain beyond all reasonable doubt, readily available on *Wikipedia* and subject to myriad press revelations in the past five years. Anonymity is less important than the impact of his art, which is more than likely created, fabricated and situated by a group of collaborators. For this reason alone Banksy might best be

understood as a 'he', 'she' or even 'they', but for all intents and purposes Banksy is widely-held to be a white male, now in his early to mid-forties, born in Bristol, western England and brought up in a stable middle class family, a pupil from a private cathedral school and a one-time goalkeeper in the infamous Sunday soccer team *The Easton Cowboys*. At least that is what we think we know. These are the known unknowns.

Notoriously cryptic, darkly humourous, Banksy is a global phenomenon, a personality without a persona, a criminal without a record, and a paradox within the world of art. *The New Yorker* described how Banksy tries to flip 'off the art world...[and begs] it to notice him at the same time.' For his part he has described that same world as 'the biggest joke going...a rest home for the overprivileged, the pretentious, and the weak'.

Banksy has amassed a remarkable reputation for his provocative, wittily politicized interventions, what one critic has termed his 'red nose rebellion': he has radicalized the art of stenciling; painted peace motifs on the West Bank barrier in Israel; secretly located an

inflatable figure of a Guantanamo Bay prisoner in Disneyland's *Rocky Mountain Railroad Roller-coaster Ride*; and hung hoax artifacts in the greatest museums in the world. He is 'both a lefty and a tweaker of lefty pieties', he is a champion of just causes and in the same breath a caustic lampooner of those very same causes. His art appears to takes sides, but he rarely does. At a London anti-war demonstration in 2003, he distributed stencilled signs that read 'I Don't Believe In Anything. I'm Just Here for the Violence.' He has that disarming habit of 'satirising his own sanctimony', or to put in his words: 'I have no interest in ever coming out, I figure there are enough self-opinionated assholes trying to get their ugly little faces in front of you as it is.'

Contrary by instinct and with a love-hate *rapport* with his home city in England, it was no surprise that he chose an adversarial title for his 2009 blockbuster retrospective show: 'Bansky *versus* Bristol Museum'. 'This is the first show I've ever done', he is said to have commented, 'where taxpayers' money is being used to hang my pictures up rather than scrape them off.' Few of the hundreds of thousands of visitors who attended were put off by the

provocative title. Indeed its anti-cultural message may have aroused and encouraged them to queue patiently to enter, possibly for the first time, the marble halls and civic grandeur of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Greeted by a burnt-out ice cream van, which doubled as an information booth and anchor-piece for the show, the artist's work was secreted throughout the labyrinth of rooms, corridors and galleries, hidden amongst the fossils, the stuffed animals and the museum's notable collection of Chinese pottery. Few visitors were disappointed; indeed, most were delighted and invigorated. Not only had Banksy radically re-mixed the permanent art collection but he, and his team of fabricators, scene painters and animatronic engineers, had mastered the art of surprising and irreverent juxtaposition, mixing wit with outright vulgarity. In addition to his trademark stenciled paintings there were walls of wittily modified canvases and a menagerie of life-sized stuffed and animated beasts: a muzzled lamb; a rabbit applying lip-stick; a cheetah transformed into a fur coat; Classical plaster cast statues laden with Gucci shopping bags; aquaria full of wriggling fish fingers; a full-size policeman clad in riot-gear gently bobbing on a child's rocking horse, and hotdog

sausages that writhed disturbingly inside their buns.

Nearly 309,000 people flocked to the six-week long event in Bristol. Most had queued for an average of just under three hours. Popular reviews were ecstatic. Visitors from all over the UK, from Europe and beyond spoke enthusiastically of the wit and the subterfuge, the caustic edge, the colourful cynicism. How, wrote one commentator, could you not like someone who said about his own exhibition:

The people of Bristol have always been very good to me – I decided the best way to show my appreciation was by putting a bunch of old toilets and some live chicken nuggets in their museum. I could have taken the show to a lot of places, but they do a very nice cup of tea in the museum.

Banksy as ever was notoriously elusive. Apparently, one of his staff told a journalist trying to get an interview, that 'Mr. Banks is away polishing one of his yachts'. Elusive perhaps but always in full control. Banksy and his team laid down strict guidelines about

opening times, sales of related merchandise, and the fulfillment of a carefully drawn up legal contract between the museum, the city council and his office. As one rather disgruntled former collaborator told me during an interview for my research; 'The one thing you have to remember about working with Banksy: everything gets done by his rules. Never forget that.'

Through such exhibitions and interventions Banksy cocks a snoot at 'high' culture whilst acknowledging its impact on his own formation. Many critics feel otherwise, regarding his exploits as merely the interventions of that fondly regarded folklore character, the harmless renegade. A significant segment of the city's elders have little time for cocky graffiti artists with their mindless scribble, their unreadable 'tags' and their wanton vandalism of 'innocent' property. To many citizens Banksy and his posturing is far from cosy: his work is held to be offensive by some, criminal damage by many. Banksy's art is predicated on the tension between these two positions; he thrives on gross dichotomizing, on wilful polarization, what has been termed the modern 'versus' habit. One thing must always be opposed to the

other not in the Hegelian hope of achieving synthesis, or a negotiated peace, but with a determination that neither side should concede, that total submission of one side or the other is the only resolution.

### BANKSY'S STREET ART: DOES IT MATTER?

As a painter and polemicist Banksy's work appears to matter to a wide range of constituencies. It matters to those who seek access to an art form that is relevant and risky; it matters to those who regard the very idea of cultural regeneration through popular street art as threadbare. In another dimension, it matters to those who want to take a commission from the sales of original works or multiple impressions that are occasionally released into the market. It also matters to the underworld of street artists, 'writers', and graffitists who recoil against the middle-class appropriation of one of their kind but also enjoy his frequent patronage, and it matters to those who have strived to revive and promote the iconography of the stencil. Above all, and perhaps most unquantifiably, Banksy's work matters to Banksy as a creative

individual, an urban interventionist who is constantly pushing at the limitations of his, her or their own capability to be disruptive and meaningful.

## ‘WALL AND PIECE’: THE IMPACT ON THE STREET SCENE

‘Street art’ connects with contemporary and urgent themes through activism, reclamation, and edgy subversion. Pitted against the combined weight of civic authority, communities and public property, its multiple formats have allowed artists and street writers a transgressive platform to reach a broader and more diverse audience than many traditional art forms. As a vernacular cultural form, street art has branched out from the clandestine self-naming celebration of ‘I am here’ and ‘here I draw’ to a didactic and highly polemicized display achieved largely through pasting and stencils. Banksy has largely achieved this with little more than the innovative use of a stencil, a simple graphic design format once intended entirely for utilitarian and military use.



Contemporary graffiti artists, or 'writers' as they are known, work within a strict hierarchy that self-ranks ambition, daring and calligraphic innovation. At the apex are those writers who create the imposing *wildstyle* exhibition pieces, large-scale vivid inscriptions that call for a high degree of graphic invention and daring. At the other extreme are the wheatpasters (bill stickers) and stencil-cutters, who are regarded within the subculture's peer community as lesser writers, an underclass who rely on craft skills that are held to be quaint, even fraudulent. Their work is often dismissed as being mass-produced and reprographic rather than singular and autographic.

Inevitably, the arena of graffiti is a highly contested and fragmented one. Like many other street 'writers' who have gained commercial and reputational standing, Banksy's position is regarded by current practitioners as heavily, and irreversibly, compromised. Not only because he earns considerable sums from the sale of his work but that he has built a reputation around a very limited creative format - the stencil - and relies increasingly on the contribution of a more talented and creatively gifted group

of collaborators. In Banksy we can see evidence of the continuing post-industrial feud between the authorial voice and the machine-run, mass-produced, standardized art run.

A common refrain amongst his peer group is that 'Banksy is ruining graffiti'. His work in stencil has given rise to a flood of uninitiated neophytes saturating the public realm with weak imitations. As Luke Muyskens argues:

Not only is their work generally shoddy and uninspired, but their etiquette is practically blasphemous in most graffiti circles. These Banksy emulators are doing nothing more than mimicking the work and stylings of another artist – which, in a culture built on originality, is missing the point entirely.

Bemoaning the 'Banksy cult', Muyskens vents his frustration with the 'wannabes' who lack respect for the 'established' graffiti scene. Fellow writer Eros AKB endorsed this irritation stating, '[s]ome seem to not have any respect for those that obtained the space prior to them. I think that in the future there will be a fight for the

space between the wheatpaste/stencil artists and the graffiti artists'. There is of course a profound irony about all this: the stencil is essentially an egalitarian format, an artistic practice that is firmly rooted in the notion of community. Furthermore, it is a practice that can be readily, if not expertly, 'mastered' by all, constituting what commentators such as Emily Truman have described as an 'informal document of citizenship' which links the originator with the wider community through the act of 'think[ing] up an idea, put[ting] it on a piece of paper or plastic, cut[ting] it out and paint[ing] it somewhere'.

Street art thrives on rivalry and competition; it also embraces the ephemeral. Writers outcompete each other to create their works in the most outlandish locations and in the most inaccessible sites in the urban environment. Writers also compete to create the most elaborate and baroque iconography. *Wildstyle* is perhaps the most extreme form of highly-stylized competitive calligraphy: a matrix of interwoven and overlapping forms (intricately drawn as arrows, curves, flares, or letters) with a volumetric appearance, as opposed to the lineal signature of the plainer 'tag'. So radically transformed

is the visual language that – to the eye of non-graffiti practitioners – the ‘piece’ is rendered quite arcane, indecipherable as language, and impenetrable. Larger set-piece wall drawings and paintings are known as a *production* and are invariably drawn by a ‘crew’ (a gang of accomplices). Yet even these extraordinarily ornate wall works have a short lifespan. Many are painted out by rivals or fellow ‘writers’ within days, sometimes hours, despite the efforts that have gone into their creation:

On the other side of [Leake] street is a lone artist with about a dozen cans of paint at his feet. He is wearing goggles and full breathing apparatus to protect himself from the paint fumes, so he looks more like a welder than an artist [...] he has been here since ten this morning, painting a piece which suits his name, planes exploding like darts out of everywhere. He is not using stencils, but it is not traditional graffiti, rather it is freehand graffiti without a letter in sight; he is using the spray can to paint what he wants without following any of the rules.

To watch a group of practiced street artists at work on a large *exhibition* piece, is to witness draughtsmen (the scene is highly gendered) their notebooks and preparatory sketches in hand, the vast 'canvas' of by a large wall, prepared for a lengthy (invariably illegal) engagement, armed with little more than plastic carrier bags crammed with aerosol paint-cans. What matters most to such artists is the very act of marking the wall, and of passing on the innate knowledge accrued through the very illicit act of doing. 'Kids', concludes one artist, 'will only aspire to what they can see. And that's why you do your best work, so that kids can look and aspire to master the craft'.

The challenge - of the wall, of the law, of each other's talent - is what also really matters. Either through envy, turf war, or base rivalry Banksy has had a running battle, now nearly a decade long, with a fellow crew. The bitter competitiveness with 'Team Robbo' has been wilfully lost in the mythologies of the graffiti fraternity, but it inevitably results in any new piece of public artwork by Banksy being damaged, overpainted or defaced by his rivals. Quite how this merits press coverage as 'vandalism' is to stretch

the tautologies of illegal wall painting too far, but it has added immeasurably to the mystique that surrounds both sets of perpetrators.

## ‘BEYOND THE WALL’’: THE IMPACT ON THE MARKET

How does Banksy make a living? Indeed, how does any artist whose canvas is the urban realm make his or her money? In 2004 Banksy established his first company in the form of his own gallery in London. ‘Pictures on Walls’, or POW as it is known, is a ‘front of house’ salesroom for his own work and a highly select cadre of fellow-artists. It was an attempt to bring some order to the haphazard selling, circulation and recirculation of editions of prints with unknown print runs, numerous signed and unsigned proofs and uncatalogued extras. Indeed, Banksy’s first ever print run, *Rude Copper* – a stencil of a British police constable ‘giving the finger’ in an offensive gesture – had a print run of 250, of which fifty were ‘signed’. Sold then, in 2002, at £40 a piece, today they each may fetch £8,000, possibly even £13,000 for the select few that have a hand-sprayed background. POW corralled Banksy’s

creative works within a recognisable commercial organisation, tapping into his innate business acumen, but by 2008 his value (and standing) as a serious artist was being compromised by theft, fraud and plain incompetence. His stencilled work, after all, was easy to forge and fake; a sequence of unauthorised exhibitions of one-off paintings, multiple copies of the same image, and unnumbered editions of prints was causing mayhem in the art and auction market. Forgers were facing prison sentences for selling fakes through elaborate on-line scams. In January 2008 a new Banksy company was formed, fully owned and commanded by POW. *Pest Control Office Limited* took over control of Banksy's work and tried to bring order to the flood of fakes, forgeries, and unauthorised fine art prints and 'original' artworks that had been circulating from London to New York, but mostly via eBay where fake receipts, trumped-up email exchanges and other ruses had been contrived to prove a trail of false provenance.

*Pest Control* put a stop to this illicit trade. For £65 anyone could have their Banksy print authenticated. If it was a genuine artwork the office would issue a certificate of authenticity which had

stapled to it one half of the 'Di face Tenner', a £10 note faked by Banksy with Lady Diana Windsor's face on it. The 'banknote' had a handwritten ID number which could be matched to the number on the other half which was held by Pest Control. It is, as journalist Will Ellsworth-Jones cheekily notes, 'A fake to prove that you do indeed have the genuine article - what could be more Banksy than that?'

Pest Control's rigorous process of verification cleaned up the market and regained some control over Banksy's intellectual property and commercial rights, but there were unforeseen consequences. There are many buyers who possess what are without doubt genuine prints or canvases by Banksy but which his office refuses to authenticate as genuine.

There are those, on the other hand, who queue for many hours for limited edition prints or unique artworks and then advertise them often within minutes for higher prices on eBay or other internet sites. Indeed there are many who believe that the Banksy sales phenomenon would not have happened had it not been for eBay.



Commentating on how the painter's notoriety seemed to coincide with the advent of online shopping, one dealer said:

No one flipped art before then. It just hadn't happened. But with Banksy people queued for four or five hours for a print and by the time they were out of the queue it would be on eBay.

It was, said Banksy's first manager Steve Lazarides 'a new gold rush':

You could go out and buy a Banksy print at 250 quid. The next day you could sell it for two and half grand. What other investment is going to make ten times your money overnight? And the next owner, if they were lucky, could sell it on again for five grand... so it was a no-brainer in those days of easy credit.

Fascinated by the dark humour and edgy irreverence of Banksy's art the public have become equally obsessed by the sale prices of

his work. Single items bought in minor group exhibitions in the late 1990s for a few hundred pounds have since fetched tens of thousands of pounds, but only where they have been vouched for by the Lady Di Tenner. In 2002 it is estimated that he needed to sell fifteen different prints to make just under £500,000; four years later in 2006 a run of six prints first shown in Los Angeles raised over £1 million. In 2009 he could make the same sum by selling just a few of the same print. During his 'artist's residency' in New York City in 2013 a pop-up market stall was stacked high with images stencilled on canvas each selling for sixty dollars a piece. Few sold on the day. Those that did can now command a price of up to 200,000 US dollars. It is not only auction rooms that have done extraordinarily well out of Banksy, canny buyers who are willing to face daunting queues and laborious gallery hunts can track down original artwork or multiples with guaranteed provenance as 'originals'.

Although it is not easy to access exact figures, Banksy has been estimated (in a *Forbes* Lifestyle article) to have a net worth upwards of US\$20 million. True or not, that figure (and the

interest shown in it) clearly irks the artist. In the hardcore street art fraternity commercial success has long been regarded a mark of failure for a graffiti artist. To many of his former allies his subversiveness does rather diminish as his prices rise. But that is changing as the art market adjusts to the street art phenomenon. 'I'm kind of old fashioned' Banksy has put on record, 'in that I like to eat so it's always good to earn money'. There is little doubt that he does make significant sums from his work, but it is also clear that he could make more than he does. In an authorized 'interview' he told *The New Yorker* magazine:

I have been called a sell-out but I give away thousands of paintings for free, how many more do you want? I think it was easier when I was the underdog, and I had a lot of practice in it. The money that my work fetches these days makes me a bit uncomfortable, but that's an easy problem to solve – you just stop whingeing and give it all away. I don't think it's possible to make art about world poverty and then trouser all the cash, that's an irony too far, even for me.... I love the way capitalism finds a place – even for its enemies.

To compensate for his nervousness at becoming too estranged from his street roots Banksy frequently donates work to political causes. In 2011 he gave £200,000 from the multiple sales of a single print to the Russian art collective *Voyna*, a group that performs public protest happenings in the face of oppressive Soviet authorities. The funds helped secure the release of two its members from Russian prison in 2011. The same year he created a limited edition souvenir print of a *Tesco Value* petrol bomb only days after the high street convenience chainstore had been torched in a Bristol street riot. Proceeds were given to local charities to pay legal fees for local squatters and those arrested during the disturbances. Long regarded a tolerated, if sometimes favoured, son of the city, the Leader of the Council warned the artist that this act of defiance was provocative and unhelpful. Her admonishment that 'Banksy will lose a lot of friends' will have lost the artist little sleep.

What does cause Banksy and his office, managed by the estimable Holly Cushing, more concern, however, is the trade in his work over which they have no control. Banksy's extraordinary street

value has not only led to a glut of copying but also a cult of robbery, most notably of the wall paintings. Two of the wall stencils painted in Bethlehem, 'Stop and Search' (which depicted a young girl frisking an armed soldier) and 'Wet Dog' (a white silhouette of a dog shaking itself dry) were hacked from their moorings on the wall and transported to the US as part of an illicit show of seven stolen walls in 2011. Apparently 'Wet Dog' nearly crumbled to dust at one checkpoint, but it was eventually conserved and displayed in a sturdy metal frame at ART Miami. Banksy's office will not authenticate street works. They consider their removal an outrage. 'I think it's morally wrong to take these pieces off the streets', said his former dealer Steve Lazarides, 'They were put there for the general public, not for one person to take away. I think London is the poorer for the loss of all these pieces. As for the argument that they're being removed to protect them, that's just bullshit.' Banksy has been equally dismissive:

Graffiti art has a hard enough life as it is, before you add hedge-fund managers wanting to chop it out and hang it over the fireplace. For the sake of keeping all street art where

it belongs, I'd encourage people not to buy anything by anybody, unless it was created for sale in the first place.

Such imprecations have had little impact. In the UK, in the Middle East, the USA and Europe his wall works have been relentlessly destroyed, vandalized, ripped off, and removed only to re-appear in auction rooms or in backstreet sales lots, invariably at extravagant prices. Ironically and despite the hugely expensive efforts required to retrieve such wall works from their original site, sales are rarely guaranteed. Without the necessary authentication by Pest Control, sellers are lambasted by the street press and ridiculed by artists. However, this has not prevented the practice.

In October 2013 Banksy launched a self-proclaimed month-long residency in New York City, posting one unique 'exhibit' a day in an unannounced location, and sparking a thirty-one day 'scavenger hunt' both online and on the streets for his work. Chris Moukarbel's subsequent film of the extraordinary scenes that unfolded during that month 'Banksy Does New York' tells us less about the artist, the locations, or the artwork and much more

about the local graffiti artists who tagged or defaced the works, or the property owners who promptly removed or hid the piece in the hope of a quick sale, or even the streetwise locals charging the hordes of Banksy fans to simply photograph one of the pieces. The closing scenes of the crowd-sourced, multi-platform film replays the moment where a string of bubble-shaped balloon letters (which spell out the word 'Banksy') are displayed near 5 Pointz, the soon-to-be demolished graffiti landmark in Queens. The film shows that as a crowd formed below the work a group of men attempt to remove it, prompting an outcry and scuffles captured by videos promptly posted to Facebook and YouTube. 'It's like the Internet's almost the graffiti wall,' said one New Yorker. Others have argued that the residency could only be seen in person, it was a performative and a participatory activity, 'You can't re-blog this. You have to experience it.' The truth is that both positions are valid: Banksy needed social media during the month in New York City just as social media needed Banksy. The laconic audio guide on Banksy's website noted, rather grandly:

The outside is where art should live, amongst us, where it can act as a public service, promote debate, voice concerns and forge identities. Don't we want to live in a world made of art, not just decorated by it?

The shambolic scenes at 5 Pointz mark a memorable end to a curious movie, a documentary without an on-film lead character, a collage of impressions gathered from multiple anonymous sources, its key narrative made manifest by the hundreds, possibly thousands, of aficionados, addicts and the merely curious scouring the city for their daily helping of the artist's work. Not far behind the genuine fans are the robbers, the police, the city officials, and on the odd occasion a sceptical art dealer sniffily casting doubt on the long-term quality of the artist's work.

#### 'RINGMASTER': THE IMPACT ON OTHER ARTISTS

Banksy's global reputation has become ever burnished by his ability to create city-wide spectacle and engagement in places as far flung as New York, Gaza or in the migrant camps near Calais.



These spectacular interventions require panache and participation. His ability to muster the energies and creativity of a loyal band of supporters to create his 'own' work has frequently been extended to the wider street art community. Ever keen to retain an edge of credibility, to remain urban rather than merely urbane, Banksy has been acting as champion of other street artists, acting as a canny choreographer of global talent. Through adventurous collaborative events he has gained a reputation as organiser and promoter of artistic events often on an epic scale. In 2007 he organised 'Santa's Ghetto Bethlehem' which brought together the work of a number of esteemed contemporary artists intent on revitalising tourism to the beleaguered town on the West Bank. Offering 'the ink-stained hand of friendship to ordinary people in an extraordinary situation' the exhibition raised a significant sum for charitable causes. A string of other group events followed. In late 2015 Banksy staged perhaps his largest-scale extravaganza *Dismaland*, in the West Country seaside resort of Weston Super Mare, which featured over 58 artists from 17 countries. A satire on theme parks, *Dismaland* attracted some 150,000 paying customers, amongst them many A-list celebrities, to wander the installations, effigies and

mock-spectacle of a 'family theme park unsuitable for children'. In addition to such renowned artists as Damien Hirst, Jenny Holzer and Jimmy Cauty, artists from Australia, North America and the Middle East were invited to participate. Banksy's reputation as a ring-master, 'mad, bad and dangerous to know' was further endorsed by the queuing public and the frenzied press attention, though critical acclaim appeared to have dried up. A visit to *Dismaland*, wrote one critic, offered a sustained opportunity to assess Banksy as an artist. He concluded that '[h]is one-dimensional jokes and polemics lack any poetic feeling. Devoid of ambiguity or mystery, everything he has created here is inert and unengaging.' In the face of such withering criticism Banksy – and his entourage – are regarded as little more than 'media-savvy cultural entrepreneurs.'

This may be a little harsh, even sour, but it has become a refrain in critical quarters. Yet it is important to remember what Banksy (a mere stenciller) has achieved; he has been lauded as the standard bearer for a new movement in contemporary art; he has positioned himself in the vanguard of a global population of practitioners

which now extends from street graffiti writers, stencil artists and wheatpasters, to yarnbombers who crochet their own 'knittiti' and adorn our cities' street furniture and urban trees. From a movement of disenfranchised hooded renegades spraying and scrawling on downtown surfaces, the movement has crashed through the wall, off the streets and into a much wider (and readily embracing) public consciousness. In academic circles his work and that of his fraternity arouses the analytic interest of many disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. No longer 'needling, discontented and detached' street art dictates its own terms and has created a near-mainstream following. It is easy to see why Banksy cares little for sniffy critics.

It is tempting to mourn the passing of an era of innovative and engaging graffiti or tough street art that has been so dominated by a single artist. But perhaps we should more readily embrace the 21st century opportunities for counterculture commentary, to applaud an art form that remains energetic and didactic but which now adopts filmic or performative conventions to convey its mixed ideologies. As Banksy's team demonstrated in New York a

third of the 'residency' output took non-graphic forms – advertising iconography was followed by dramatic performance, an actor cleaned the shoes of a fibreglass po-faced Ronald McDonald, installations travelled the city in trucks, cinderblock debris was recycled in a poignant sphinx-head tribute to the Middle East, and messages and images were conveyed by Instagram, Twitter, and a *faux* audio guide. Three years earlier, his Oscar-nominated film *Exit through the Gift Shop: A Banksy Film* even coined a new subgenre, what the *New York Times* described as a 'prankumentary'.

This radical shift to film and installation, and the ready absorption of his contemporaries into the gallery system, offer compelling evidence of the counterculture becoming a further part of the mainstream but also at times seeming capable (at times) of remaining revolting as well as stylish. 'Street art' is now mutating into (and shaping) the expanded field of contemporary fine art practice. By moving into film Banksy's work has shifted from the temporary towards the temporal. This trend towards non-graphic art forms is in one respect an attempt to create works that cannot

be easily ripped off, copied, or repeated *ad nauseam*. Furthermore, it could be argued that Banksy, and his accomplices, are throwing down a challenge to the mainstream in its new 'public streets' with a generation of 'weaponry' – cheap video, demotic photography, social media – that assures an instant global reach. Borne of dissent and rage street art has clearly come of age. The jagged diction of 'low' art has been internationally embraced and extended by a diverse body of artists, blending the distinctions between street and gallery, and creating a genuinely democratic form of urban communication.

### **References and further reading**

Portions of this chapter have been adapted from my study of the artist in Paul Gough, (ed.) *Banksy: the Bristol Legacy*, Bristol: Sansom and Company, 2012. The artist's own words and images are best located in Banksy, *Banging your Head against a Brick Wall*,

London: Weapons of Mass Distraction, 2001; and Banksy, *Wall and Piece* London: Century, Random House Group, 2005. Important insights into the street art milieu are to be found in Alison Young, *Street Art: Public City, Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination*, Taylor and Francis, London, 2014; and Will Ellsworth-Jones, *Banksy: The Man Behind the Wall*, London: St. Martin's Press, 2013. Briefer accounts of street activism can be found in Emily J. Truman, 'The (In)Visible Artist: Stencil Graffiti, Activist Art, and the Value of Visual Public Space', *Shift: Queen's Journal of Visual and Material Culture*, 2010, and Luke Dickens, 'Placing post-graffiti: the journey of the Peckham Rock', *Cultural Geographies*, 15:4, 2008. Extensive coverage of Banksy's work can be found on blogsites and in popular journalism, often with such novel headlines as 'Something to Spray', 'Keeping it Real' and 'Breaking the Banksy'.

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National War Memorial, New Zealand. In addition to roles in national and international higher education, his research into the imagery of war and peace has been presented to audiences throughout the world. In addition to an exhibiting record he has published a monograph on Stanley Spencer: *Journey to Burghclere*, in 2006; *A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War* in 2010, and *Your Loving Friend*, the edited correspondence between Stanley Spencer and Desmond Chute, in 2011. Books on the street artist *Banksy* were published in 2012, and on painters John and Paul Nash, 'Brothers in Arms' in 2014.

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