

Britain's mystery artist thrills the world



[Photo: Banksy Instagram.]

He is the world's most famous unknown artist. He is called Banksy, but we do not know his real name. NURUDIN SADALI tries to find out more about him.

In a story that recently made headlines, Banksy published a series of photographs on Instagram with the caption “My wife hates it when I work from home”. Look at the photos above and you will understand why his wife complains. Banksy had decorated their toilet with a bunch of rats wreaking havoc.

Banksy, a graffiti artist, is probably the most famous living painter today. Even if you have not heard of him, it is very likely that you would have seen his work. Because he is so creative and so famous, Banksy's works are very expensive. It is not uncommon for people to pay more than a million dollars for Banksy's work!

However, Banksy does not do graffiti to make money. In fact, he has made it clear on many occasions that he does not like his work being sold for so much money. This can be seen in a prank that he pulled in 2018. He built a shredder into the frame of one of his paintings which was being sold at an auction. As soon as the work had been declared sold, the painting started shredding itself in front of all the horrified art collectors. This was captured on social media and Banksy himself posted it with the caption “Going, going, gone...”.

Art for everyone

Banksy has always firmly said that art should be for everyone, and not just for those who can afford it. This is why he paints his graffiti on walls all around the world. Although he started out painting walls in his hometown of Bristol, his works have appeared in places as far as Palestine, New York, and Melbourne.



This piece, titled “Season’s Greetings”, was found in Wales in 2018. In this picture, it looks like the child is licking snowflakes. If you turn the corner to the other side of the wall, you realise that it is not snow, but the ashes rising from a dumpster that has been set on fire. [Photo: FruitMonkey]



“The Grim Reaper” was found on the hull of a boat in Bristol in 2005. To protect it from being damaged by the elements, the owners of the boat removed the piece of metal it was painted on and loaned it to a museum. [Photo: Adrian pingstone]



The students of Bridge Farm Primary School had written to Banksy, telling him that they had voted to rename one of their school houses after him. He surprised them with this mural to express his gratitude. [Photo: Dunk]

Banksy uses his art to meaningfully comment on social and political issues. This is why communities treasure his work even though painting graffiti is illegal in many countries. Steve Lazarides, Banksy’s former manager, describes how Banksy’s work “was interesting — [while] so much art is boring”. He says, “The reason

people liked it is because they could get it. He didn't make people feel stupid. He **resonated** with people.”

In 2016, he surprised Bridge Farm Primary School in Bristol by painting a mural on one of its walls. The school had named one of the houses after him and to show his gratitude, Banksy secretly painted them a mural during a term break. He even left a note for the students, reminding them that it is “always easier to get forgiveness than permission”. Instead of being upset, Geoff Mason, the principal of the school, described Banksy’s work as “**inspirational** and **aspirational**” for the students.

In 2013, Banksy put on a disguise and set up a stall in New York’s Central Park. There, he sold his paintings for US\$60 (S\$85), but at the end of the day only sold seven. The following day, he posted about this experiment on social media. It is believed that the paintings that he was selling are worth more than US\$35,000 each (S\$50,000)!

VOCAB BUILDER

resonated (say “re-zo-nay-ted”; verb) = had a powerful effect.

inspirational (say “in-spi-ray-she-nel”; adjective) = giving hope or encouragement.

aspirational (say “as-pi-ray-she-nel”; adjective) = showing people that they can be better than they are now.

Who is Banksy?

Although Banksy has been active since the early 90s, his identity is still a mystery. Only a handful of people know who Banksy is. Many have tried to uncover his true identity. Nobody has succeeded thus far.

Some researchers claim that Banksy is actually Bristol-born artist Robin Gunningham. A man resembling Gunningham was caught on video at the auction where Banksy’s painting shredded itself. Others claim that Banksy is actually Robert del Naja, a famous British musician, who is also from Bristol. This is because wherever in the world Del Naja’s band Massive Attack plays, a Banksy mural will soon be discovered.

One journalist even claims that Banksy is not a person, but actually a group of people led by an unnamed woman.

However, despite all these exciting theories, as well as the multiple reported sightings and photographs of Banksy, none of the evidence presented has ever been convincing enough.

How does Banksy hide his identity?

In an interview with Sky News, Steve Lazarides spoke about his experience working with Banksy for 11 years.

Mr Lazarides revealed how Banksy would paint in broad daylight when he first started out. All Banksy did to avoid being caught was put up some cones and put on a high visibility vest — the kind construction workers wear. Mr Lazarides said, “I have seen police officers, I've seen everybody, walk past if people are wearing a high vis jacket.”

Despite knowing Banksy's real identity however, he has no interest in revealing it. He explained, “If I revealed his face, it's like telling a five-year-old that Santa Claus isn't real. Why would I do that? And I think, you know, the general public have constructed a folk hero, and I'm not going to take that away from them.”



This painting is named the “Crayola Shooter” and was discovered in Los Angeles, USA, in 2011. It was painted over by the building owner who referred to it as an act of vandalism. [Photo: modernrockstar]