

# What is a Banksy?

Banksy is the term used when referring to any work created by Banksy, a legendary, stealthy street artist from England. Since the early 1990s, he's created political and social commentary art on streets, walls, and bridges in cities around the world.

When he was in San Francisco in 2010 for the release of his *Exit Through the Gift Shop* documentary, he stenciled the Haight (pronounced like eight with an h) Street Rat on the side of a bed-and-breakfast. For the art, Banksy stenciled a rat sporting a Che Guevara-like cap. The rat holds a pen in his hand and the start of a long, red line. At the other end of the line were the words "This is Where I Draw the Line." Banksy uses rats in a lot of his art because "They exist without permission. They are hated, hunted, and persecuted. They live in quiet desperation amongst the filth. And yet they are capable of bringing entire civilizations to their knees. If you are dirty, insignificant, and unloved, then rats are the ultimate role model." ~ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*)

Unless a community goes to great lengths to save a Banksy, his work doesn't last long. Whenever people hear of Banksy being in a location, they flock to the area and watch for a Banksy to pop up. When it does, there's a media and social media frenzy, and people try to remove pieces of the Banksy to keep ---even if it means removing walls bit by bit. His street art is THAT in demand. Some people want a piece of a Banksy because of their love of street art; however, others remove pieces to sell for profit. If it isn't removed, the owners of the properties often paint over it, considering it vandalism.

Therefore, it's rare for most people in America to see a Banksy. Art collector Brian Greif wanted to change that and to bring Banksy to the masses. So he paid more than \$40,000 to the bed-and-breakfast's management to cover repairs to the structure in order to take down the wall. Art-restoration specialists mounted the wall slats on corrugated aluminum.

His dream was to give it to a museum, but when he was unable to find a museum that would give the Haight Street Rat a permanent home --- because the art could not be authenticated --- Greif put the Haight Street Rat on tour, providing the host site be free to the public and promote the value of street art. If sold, it would currently bring in \$1.7 million. (The way to know if a Banksy is authentic is if the street artist posts a picture of it on his website, which he did with the Haight Street Rat; however, museums want more documentation, which Banksy can't provide and keep his anonymity.)

## When you come, make sure you ...

- ▶ Sign the guest book
- ▶ Ask for a commemorative pin, while supplies last
- ▶ Try your hand at street art
- ▶ Enter the "What Would the Rat Say?" contest to win Banksy-related items
- ▶ Let the kids try to win art supplies with "Find the Rat"
- ▶ Purchase a shirt, while supplies last
- ▶ Pick up an After Banksy brochure to find building murals and other art-related places of interest around Kokomo