

5-2008

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**Fear and Loathing in Contemporary British Art:
A Critical Analysis of the Banksy Phenomenon**

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

May, 2008

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& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The British artist Banksy has been writing graffiti and pulling artistic pranks anonymously throughout the western hemisphere since the early 2000s. Spreading his stenciled graffiti throughout London, he expanded to other cities internationally, exhibiting his work in galleries along the way. He also expanded to do work in other media, such as sculpture and oil paintings. This thesis will not delve into his sculptures, but rather will analyze the derivative nature of his oeuvre. It will also examine his most recent pranks, which have targeted museums with a combination of performance art, sculpture, painting, and technology. He entered several important museums in disguise, installed his own artwork while videotaping the process, then documented the duration of time that each piece remained in place. This thesis will explain his performances in relation to his background as a graffiti artist, including the philosophical views and issues concerning the subculture from which he emerged. It will then analyze specific performance artists who set precedents for Banksy. Furthermore, it will put the philosophy of these artists in relation to Banksy and his work, followed by an analysis of what his performances have to reveal about the evolving relationship of museums with their publics at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The Influence of the Graffiti Subculture on Banksy

Graffiti began in the 1970s in New York City as a form of urban street art.¹ While different writers had varying motives, graffiti was mostly centered around poor neighborhoods of black and Hispanic youths. Many practitioners simply wrote an alias

¹ Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 5.

name with which they identified themselves on surfaces in public areas as many times as possible in order to gain “fame” in the form of recognition by their peers. A common misconception regarding the graffiti subculture is that it started as a way for the poorer end of society to rebel against middle class values, targeting their most valued asset, property.² Rather, it became a means of self expression, assertion, and beautification of outdoor, urban spaces in otherwise desolate or unattractive neighborhoods. Graffiti was a form of art to which urban youth could relate, as opposed to art that was housed in museums and galleries with their connotations of “high culture.” Because this form of expression was not within the established limits of the art world and could not be controlled, it seemed to directly challenge authority.³

Since the 1970s the medium drastically evolved through periods of stagnation followed by intense output by the writers. Even the motives of the writers have changed and became more varied. Originally, different writers became known for distinct styles and performed their work with the same diligence as those in a legal profession. Artists generally remained anonymous from the beginning, using aliases only. In some respects, Banksy is largely a product of the graffiti subculture and its evolution, although he seems to capitalize on the hype associated with the medium’s notoriety as a way to establish his name.

Early graffiti artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat created graffiti in highly visible areas as a way to attract a following by the art world. Haring had a background in art school, which shaped his practices, but he achieved fame by

² Nancy Macdonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 2.

³ David Robinson, *SOHO Walls: Beyond Graffiti* (Singapore: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 6-7.

promoting his art on the street. In the 22nd Street Sculpture Studio in 1978, he created floor paintings that were visible to passers-by. He recounted in his journals that people would take time to watch him work, then would discuss their thoughts about the work with him. He specifically noted that the majority of the people were not gallery-goers, but rather regular people; he acknowledged, “There is an audience that is being ignored, but they are not necessarily ignorant. They are open to art when it is open to them.”⁴

The same year, Haring was creating cartoon-like designs with white chalk on black paper covering old advertisements in New York subway stations. People began to approach Haring here as well because they recognized his work from other stations, and would say, “So *you’re* the guy who did these drawings!”⁵ With this recognition, Haring realized the exposure he was gaining; consequently he developed a route where he travelled from station to station to create more art.⁶ As a further step to promote his work, Haring created buttons with his artwork on them and distributed the buttons in the subways. They became conversation starters amongst the wearers, and Haring noted in his journals, “I suddenly realized the power of a button!”⁷

Jean-Michel Basquiat employed similar strategies to gain attention by East Village artists and gallery owners, though his were more simplistic and direct. In the late 1970s, he and a friend began writing the pseudonym “SAMO” accompanied by cryptic messages on city walls in this area. Once people began recognizing this pseudonym, Basquiat worked alone to create large images on city walls in SoHo; he also frequented

⁴ Keith Haring, *Keith Haring Journals*, New York: Penguin Group, 1996, 28.

⁵ John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography*, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991, 69.

⁶ Ibid, 69.

⁷ Ibid, 73.

the galleries and night clubs where many artists were known to gather.⁸ Like Haring, gallery owners began noticing Basquiat's work, and then contracted him to sell. One final artist associated with this movement was Kenny Scharf, a friend of Haring from art school. He was also inspired by the graffiti style and used TV cartoon characters in his compositions in the same way that many graffiti writers used comic book characters.⁹ Ultimately, he did not achieve the same fame as Basquiat or Haring, but he served as another prominent artist practicing in the context of this movement.

Known to some critics as East Village Art, this movement began to gain momentum, and in 1980 an artists' group called Collaborative Projects, Inc., or Colab, hosted the Times Square Show. About one hundred artists installed work in an abandoned former bus depot and massage parlor on Seventh Avenue.¹⁰ Many graffiti artists met each other and networked through shows like this one. For example, Haring became friends with Fab Five Fred, Futura 2000, and LAII.¹¹ Though more artists were becoming involved, graffiti still was not recognized as "fine art" by institutions like museums. In his diaries, Haring explained what he perceived to be disrespect from such institutions:

As I see it, the problem is that I took all these shortcuts. Instead of having been cleared and verified by the art world, instead of having been explained by high culture, I jumped over the whole thing. See, art is supposedly first appreciated and digested by a small group of people - an intellectual and supposedly elitist group of people - and it finally sort of trickles down to the rest of the people, to the masses.¹²

⁸ Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*, New York: Icon Editions, 1996, 466-467.

⁹ Ibid, 472.

¹⁰ Ibid, 463.

¹¹ John Gruen, *Keith Haring*, 73, 80.

¹² Quoted by Keith Haring, John Gruen, *Keith Haring*, 123.

One should note, however, that Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Kenny Scharf all utilized strategies to promote their work and specifically targeted art-related areas of New York City. Other writers like Futura 2000 and Fab Five Fred came from the poor neighborhoods, and created graffiti mainly as a means of improving urban decay. Though the two groups collaborated, the former drew inspiration from the latter, and helped to promote the medium within the art world. The artists working in and around SoHo were more career-minded, like Banksy. It is ultimately these artists' strategies which he imitates. However, Banksy also exploits the controversial nature of graffiti itself for attention.

Like other graffiti artists, his identity has remained anonymous, except for his alias, Banksy. However several media sources have said that his real name is either Robin or Robert Banks.¹³ He began with free-hand graffiti, but was not fast enough to evade the police so he changed to the stencil technique.¹⁴ It is this technique that makes his work so recognizable. The subject matter of most of his work is socially conscious with strong satirical and political overtones, which remain in line with the newer ideals of the graffiti subculture and street art. However, Banksy differs from the origins of the medium in that he has strong anarchist tendencies. The original purpose of most graffiti was not, in fact, to create anarchy, but simply to decorate outdoor spaces with non-commercial art that reflected the tastes and values of the local youth. The practitioners in New York City began creating graffiti murals to decorate outdoor decay, not to vandalize public spaces. Moreover, Banksy reinforces the misconception of anarchist goals by promoting the idea

¹³ Carol Midgley. "The Face." *London Times* 1 November 2007, TimesOnline.
http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/celebrity/article2780212.ece.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of graffiti as vandalism. When questioned by a journalist about being labeled as an artist, he replied, “I’d never write that word on my passport, it’s a bit precious-sounding. I’m not trying to recast graffiti as art. The word vandal would suit me fine, a quality vandal that is.”¹⁵

He also differs in regards to his use of commercialism. Graffiti artists who turned to the art market to make a profit from their practice were frequently condemned and considered “sell outs” by their local communities. The main priority of many writers was to keep the subculture pure in the sense of being untouched by commercialism. By remaining unexploited, it could be a form of art that only the subculture understood, rendering it exclusive and anti-elitist. Graffiti artist Drax in the 1980s defended the subculture in *Graphotism Magazine*:

What if we do gain acceptance from these ‘powers,’ from the ‘main in the street,’ then what will happen? They will turn it, like everything else good, into a sick charade of Sun Newspaper like headlines: ‘graffiti is in,’ ‘This week we talk to the artists from the street who have made good,’ ‘Win a trip to New York’ and of course the art will have no depth, soul or meaning. Then as Mr. Byrite or Marks and Spencer’s sell off their last stocks of Wildstyle slippers or aerosol art knickers and decide not to restock, the powers that will be back with: ‘Graffiti is out,’ ‘Boy died after inhaling paint,’ ‘Stop this craze now,’ ‘Graffiti promotes drugs and violence,’ etc. And then it will be good-bye to this whole scene, good-bye to any respect from anyone anywhere, good-bye to our discredited history and good-bye to all those that encouraged the sell out as they’ll be living it up on a yacht somewhere laughing and then what will we have left? Nothing.¹⁶

Banksy has proved to be an example of an artist who comes from the graffiti tradition but takes advantage of the art market monetarily. One could argue that he employs a

¹⁵ Cosmo Landesman. “Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?” *London Times* 20 July 2003, Sunday ed., TimesOnline. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article845340.ece>.

¹⁶ Nancy Macdonald, *The Graffiti Subculture*, 174-175.

corrupted approach to his art practices. In September of 2006 he held an exhibition in Los Angeles called “Barely Legal.” (fig. 1)¹⁷ It remained unannounced until the morning of the show, and was located in a hard-to-find warehouse, yet celebrities like Brad Pitt attended after having been invited by Banksy’s publicist. Happenings such as these may cause doubt as to whether or not Banksy really believes in the anti-art approach for which he is known. He has, however, turned down major business deals with companies and collectors like Nike, Charles Saatchi, and Jamie Oliver.¹⁸ Neither does he attend his own openings nor accept face-to-face interviews. These strategies were first used by Marcel Duchamp as a way to mock the art world.¹⁹

Banksy also left a fake rat, one of his signature icons, outside of a Sotheby’s event with a sign reading “You lie,” thereby “flipping off the art world and begging it to notice him at the same time,” according to Cosmo Landesman.²⁰ He is quoted to have said “The art world is the biggest joke going... It’s a rest home for the overprivileged, the pretentious, and the weak.”²¹ He also asserted that he has “...never wanted work hung in a walled room to be seen by people eating vol-au-vents.”²² A large part of his popularity stems from his rebellious attitude, yet he has a contracted gallerist, Steve Lazarides, has sold through Sotheby’s and Bonham’s, and currently sells prints through an online site.

¹⁷ Lauren Collins, “Banksy Was Here” *New Yorker* (14 May 2007), 4.

¹⁸ Landesman, “Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?” *London Times*.

¹⁹ Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 143.

²⁰ Landesman, “Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?” *London Times*. 4.

²¹ *Ibid*, 9.

²² Midgley, “The Face.” *London Times*.

His works in the Sotheby's auction were even estimated between £150,000 – 200,000.²³ Gareth Williams, urban art specialist at Bonham's, also agrees that urban art has become mainstream, and therefore salable. Despite all of his anti-authority and anti-establishment propaganda, he has definitely benefited from the very establishments he satirizes by using them for their monetary advantages and prestige. The *London Times* has also quoted him saying "I'm the only one from my generation there. In some places you are meant to be dead 200 years first."²⁴ This statement indicates that he takes pride in being a part of these institutions.

His contradictory words and actions have led to the accusation by one journalist that he is a "moral sell-out by the self-styled anti-capitalist who claims he is not motivated by money."²⁵ Following the graffiti tradition, his gallerist poked fun at the fine-art market by saying "Suddenly, it's become all right amongst the proper art world to collect street art," but Banksy is largely cashing in.²⁶ People also began collecting graffiti-style artworks by artists like Keith Haring and Basquiat as early as the 1980s, so Lazarides is really attributing too much credit to Banksy. His installations in the museums contain this same anti-establishment and anti-elitist message, yet have gained him recognition by these very establishments.

²³ Edward Chancellor, "Popping the Art Bubble." *London Times* 7 Oct. 2007, Sunday ed., TimesOnline. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article2602589.ece.

²⁴ "Spray Paint Pimpernel With The Art of Getting Rich." *London Times* 22 Oct. 2006, Sunday ed., TimesOnline. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/article608909.ece>.

²⁵ "Spray Paint Pimpernel with the Art of Getting Rich," *London Times*.

²⁶ Ibid, 4.

Another famous street artist, Shepard Fairey, has been credited as a major influence on Banksy.²⁷ He also sells through galleries, such as StolenSpace, for his most recent show, but gained popularity by pasting his graphic posters to city walls around London and other major cities. Most of his work provides commentary on consumer society and capitalist countries (fig. 2). His art parodies advertising and his posters resemble a brand, but one without a product.²⁸ One of his most iconic images is a low-brow, black-and-white image of the boxer, Andre the Giant, featuring the word “Obey.” (fig. 3) Similar to Fairey, Banksy has publicized his ideas of what he calls “brandalism,” his own philosophy on the same subject, which will be discussed later in the thesis. Similar to Banksy and the original graffiti subculture, Fairey asserts ambitions to stay in touch with the public and those not considered typical art collectors.²⁹ Both do sell works through their galleries that are affordably priced, but Banksy does not acknowledge his fans.³⁰

Though Blek Le Rat is generally not credited as an influence on Banksy, he is another graffiti artist who predates Banksy and whose work is closely parallel. He is, however, credited by many as being the “father of stencil graffiti as an art form.”³¹ As his alias suggests, his most iconic stencil is a rat, which resembles all of Banksy’s rats (fig. 4,

²⁷ Virginia Blackburn, “Poster Boy With a Difference.” *London Times* 20 Oct. 2007, TimesOnline. <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/money/article2695895.ece>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Blackburn, “Poster Boy With a Difference,” 2007.

³⁰ I was able to speak with an anonymous colleague of Banksy in November of 2007 in a gallery that sells Banksy’s work. Upon being asked about fan mail, the colleague said, “He’s not into that sort of thing.” That statement ended the conversation about fans.

³¹ “Blek Le Rat.” *Juxtapoz* 16 Oct. 2006. JuxtapozOnline. http://www.juxtapoz.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=498&Itemid=62.

5). During his decades-long career in street art, Blek Le Rat has also created work with social commentary. For example, in 2005 after French journalist Florence Aubenas was kidnapped in Iraq, he pasted thousands of her images around Paris to keep her in the public consciousness in order to hasten her release.³² He serves as another example of the general trends in urban art that many artists, like Banksy, follow. Despite the humor of Banksy's rats around London, they remain essentially derivative.

Recycling Saatchi's Strategies

As cited by *London Times* critic, Waldemar Januszczak, part of what makes Banksy a success story is that he has been able to establish his name in the international art market and profit from his works without the endorsement of pre-existing establishments. He has essentially created his hype without being "discovered." One may wonder how he managed this seemingly impossible task. I propose that he followed the techniques of art collector and businessman Charles Saatchi, who has proven to be adept at manipulating the art market to his advantage. He initially made money through the advertising firm that he established with his brother called Saatchi & Saatchi, then through another firm, M & C Saatchi.³³ His expertise, therefore, lay in promotion. Later he began investing money into art by buying the contents of entire studios from artists in order to sell them at steeper prices. But before selling, he utilized his involvement and

³² "Blek Le Rat." *Juxtapoz* 16 Oct. 2006. JuxtapozOnline.

http://www.juxtapoz.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=498&Itemid=62.

³³ Josephine Hollis Meier, *To Market, To Market To Buy a Fat Pig: a Study of Contemporary British Art and the Collector*, Charles Saatchi, MA thesis (Washington U, 2002) 26.

power within influential art communities to boost the careers of the artists whose work he owned.

In 1982 The Tate Gallery exhibited thirteen works by the painter Julian Schnabel, eleven of which were anonymously loaned by Saatchi.³⁴ At the time Saatchi served on the board of directors; thus, the exhibition ultimately was an endorsement of Saatchi's new acquisitions, enhancing their value. After much criticism, he resigned from the board, as well as agreeing not to lend more works in future exhibitions to the Tate.³⁵ Three years later a similar incident occurred, after which he had to resign from the board of the Whitechapel Gallery, another non-profit institution. He allegedly purchased works by Malcolm Morley after learning of a future exhibition of Morley's work at the gallery.

These controversies represent a deeper ethical issue. Due to declining financial support of art institutions like museums from governments, donations from private collectors and corporations have become increasingly important. However, ultimately this financial support means that collectors become influential in the decisions concerning which artists to exhibit, thereby increasing the value of the donors' private collections through endorsement of museums. Moreover, when collectors like Saatchi are able to "support" a gallery or museum by providing a number of works for a show, they are really making a strategic promotional move in the best interest of their own investments. As the collector's name becomes better known in the art community, his or her buying and selling habits also affect the supply and demand of the particular artist's work, and consequently the monetary value.³⁶ Even before his name became prominent in

³⁴ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 28.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

the art world, Saatchi created hype around his persona in advertising. He became increasingly reclusive by avoiding the media, clientele, and important board meetings, all of which created a certain mystique.³⁷

Saatchi later was able to build the same mystique around his collecting practices. When discussing his collection with journalists, he does not allow direct quoting; all information must be paraphrased by the interviewer. Otherwise, questions must be faxed and all answers must be published verbatim. The number of works held in the collection, as well as their monetary value, is never disclosed to the media or public. Finally, those within Saatchi's professional circle of knowledge do not communicate about these matters to journalists. In the past, Saatchi has also endorsed insiders to anonymously "leak" approved information to the press.³⁸ Through such strategies, Saatchi has been able to stir up attention, while maintaining careful control over what the media knows about his collecting, and therefore the public perception of his practices. As a result, the shroud of mystery has been the cause of much curiosity, and therefore more conjecture and media attention.³⁹

Charles Saatchi has applied his advertising and promotional expertise to manipulating many artists' careers, ultimately affecting the market in much more profound ways. In 1990 he began purchasing the entire collections of recent art graduates, especially from the Goldsmith College of Art in London, thereby controlling their art supply. These artists would come to be known by the art world as the Young British

³⁷ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 26.

³⁸ Ibid, 26.

³⁹ Ibid, 67.

Artists (YBAs), and would take the place of the New York artists of the 1980s.⁴⁰ He published series of catalogues about his own collections, including *Art of Our Time: The Saatchi Collection*, and *New York Art Now: The Saatchi Collection*, which included essays by famous art historians paid by Saatchi.⁴¹ These art historians included Robert Rosenblum, Peter Schjeldahl, and Hilton Kramer.⁴² Following Saatchi's lead, Banksy also used the method of self-publishing in order to promote his career. Furthermore, Saatchi created his own gallery space in north London with a staff of professional curators to professionally exhibit his purchases.⁴³ Altogether, he produced six group exhibitions with publications.

When purchasing and exhibiting art, he generally selected works with a controversial nature that could attract media exposure, hoping to yield higher financial returns than artwork without this quality.⁴⁴ Some critics have also described the shock value as being a strategy for the works to market themselves without any formal advertising efforts.⁴⁵ By continually shocking the public, the artists stay in the media spotlight, and extended exposure often results in career boosts.⁴⁶ The incorporation of the word "young" in the name alone is arguably strategic because it implies characteristics like new, fresh, innovative, and especially rebellious.⁴⁷ Similarly, Banksy has managed to

⁴⁰ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 41.

⁴¹ Ibid, 29.

⁴² Ibid, 30.

⁴³ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 42.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 41.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 65.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 57.

stay in the limelight by continually making both acerbic and humorous commentary on society. He has boosted his own career in the same way.

Rather than buying more established artists, Saatchi pursued the newest and most controversial. He evaluated the latest trends within the market, then associated his name with these trends before others had a chance to by purchasing entire collections.⁴⁸ Several general characteristics of the artworks that have circulated in and out of his collection can be identified. Generally, they have styles similar to advertisements and utilize sumptuary presentations as statements about contemporary culture and prevalent illusions in advertising.⁴⁹ Within the group of artists, specific traits of each were highlighted, just as characteristics of consumer products are highlighted, to create a “brand identity.”⁵⁰ Banksy has taken the same approach, but coined his own comical term, “brandalism,” as part of his anti-art oeuvre.⁵¹ By stenciling his icon around cities, Banksy is technically vandalizing city surfaces, while in a sense branding them simultaneously.

The YBAs were also typically poor to middle class and had cynical, disaffected views of society, especially concerning the media’s role and influence on society.⁵² The advertising imagery in their works lent easy readability since contemporary life is flooded with continuous messages from the media. Their images in turn served to blend advertising into art and culture.⁵³ The visual aspects as well as the intellectual statement,

⁴⁸ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 51. Sumptuary presentations is an advertising term for aesthetically pleasing packaging.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁵¹ Landesman, “Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?” *London Times*.

⁵² Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 52.

⁵³ Ibid, 52.

or meaning, were both easily identifiable.⁵⁴ Damien Hirst, Saatchi's lead artist, has commented on how it is necessary, in order to reach mass audiences, to use visual aesthetics that these audiences can easily decipher without extensive scholarship, like those deriving from television and advertising. His work is not intended to be read as scholarly, as his audience does not consist of art connoisseurs.⁵⁵ Following an especially controversial exhibit entitled *Sensation*, positive reviews did surface from critics Sarah Kent, Peter Schjodahl, and Waldemar Januszczak.

In spite of criticism, or possibly because of it, Saatchi made a public statement about the artists whose work he collects:

artists are important because they assert unpopular views, put things in a different perspective, pose awkward questions or simply say what they feel. But by asking questions, they avert others to some of the pressing issues of the day. By demonstrating vigilance, skepticism and the refusal to be fobbed off, they offer an example of intelligent inquiry; of how to stand up and be counted; of refusing to let the genuine individualism die.⁵⁶

With media exposure and active social lives in "high society," the Young British Artists aligned themselves with popular culture. Articles in the media, however, tended to focus on Hirst's "bad boy persona" more than any analysis of his credibility as an artist.⁵⁷

Despite Saatchi's defense of their merit, the hype and propaganda ultimately remain visually and intellectually shallow, not lending themselves to real critical analysis.⁵⁸ In the same way, while Banksy's oeuvre continually stirs up controversy and amuses the public, it is difficult to find any substance beyond the never-ending hype.

⁵⁴ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 92.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 57.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 94.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 69.

Much like Charles Saatchi, Banksy also shrouds himself in mystery. While his work is always in the media limelight, his person remains behind the scenes, in the same way as Saatchi's. As stated earlier, he does not attend his own openings or grant interviews to the press. His circle of associates also does not divulge insider information. In a 2003 interview with Cosmo Landesman, he said that he remains anonymous because "I have warrants out for my arrest and besides I don't like dealing with the public."⁵⁹ He himself, however, acknowledges in his books that he has been arrested before. He also mentioned to journalist Morgan Falconer in 2005 that people tend to take him more seriously when they do not know his identity.⁶⁰ While Banksy has not opened his own gallery, he does not need to because he uses city walls as his gallery, even internationally, then displays his artworks and pranks on his website, www.banksy.co.uk. Using city walls provides limitless space without maintenance like in a gallery, and guarantees passing traffic. He used to have a link on his site with which he would advertise treasure hunts to find his most recent works in a city.⁶¹ Other sites like YouTube, where he posts his videos, provide him with even greater access to popular culture than the Young British Artists had.

In a recent *London Times* article, a passer-by allegedly saw Banksy painting a giant daisy on a building, snapped a photograph, then the press released it to the public.⁶²

⁵⁹ Landesman, "Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?" *London Times*.

⁶⁰ Morgan Falconer, "Give Me Monet, That's What I Want." *London Times* 11 Oct. 2005 TimesOnline. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article577204.ece.

⁶¹ Waldemar Januszczak, "Who's Afraid of the Big Guy?" *London Times* 23 Oct. 2005 Times Online. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article581227.ece.

⁶² Patrick Foster, "Banksy, the celebrated graffiti artist, is caught in the act for the first time." *London Times* 31 Oct. 2007 Times Online. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article2774359.ece

Strangely enough, the photograph was taken during the day, possibly the worst time for any graffiti artist to be working, especially one whose career depends so much upon his anonymity. The photo, however, was conveniently far enough away so that no facial features are distinguishable; in fact, the only thing one can make out is a sideburn (fig. 6, 7). Could Banksy have pulled a publicity stunt in true Saatchi style? The question remains to be answered.

Why then did Banksy not join forces with Saatchi rather than trying to “make it” on his own? In recent art history, artists have become more skeptical of Saatchi’s collecting practices due to his tendency to dump entire artistic outputs, sometimes ruining an artist’s career. Sandro Chia is an example of an artist ruined by Saatchi’s dumping.⁶³ In an interview in 2003, Banksy told a *London Times* journalist that if asked, he would not sell to Charles Saatchi because he would rather that his “work was in the hands of thousands than in the hands of one man.”⁶⁴ He kept his word. From a business perspective, it could be argued that Saatchi is keeping his collection fresh and new. There are probably many reasons why Saatchi re-sells work, but art objects, like consumer products, become dated and consumers tend to want the “new and improved.”⁶⁵ Banksy seems to be aware of business strategy and the desire for upgraded products, as his most recent book harbors the label “Now with 50% more crap.”

To be clear, I do not propose that Banksy always had a crystallized plan based on Saatchi’s methods in order to get famous. In fact, due to his upholding anonymity, I do not think fame was ever his ultimate goal. I propose instead that he started as any other

⁶³ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 104.

⁶⁴ Landesman, “Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?” *London Times*.

⁶⁵ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 58.

artist by making art that he liked, then realized trends he could use to sell his art, and with the help of other knowledgeable associates, began developing a strategy for building his career. I am not sure how this strategy developed, but in 2003 he granted an interview to a journalist from the *London Times*, then two more in 2005. Though his reputation has become internationally acknowledged very recently, in 2005 he did not have this recognition that he has since attained. The fact that he granted interviews directly to the press in his early career suggests that the interest in anonymity came with the development of a strategy.

Participants in popular culture are Banksy's target audience. For one of Banksy's first gallery shows, he painted a hoard of farm animals. During his interview with Landesman, he explained that his reasoning was to react against the "snobbish" graffiti establishment in London. Coming from Bristol earned him the label of a "country bumpkin." According to Landesman, Banksy said, "...I thought, right, I'll give 'em country bumpkin – I'll just get all these animals together and paint them."⁶⁶ Returning to the aforementioned concept of brandalism, he also explained that because contemporary culture is obsessed with brands, he wanted to parody the root of the word with cattle branding.⁶⁷ His promotional tactics again prove to be derivative of the YBAs. Another example of a way he used shock value for publicity was for a gallery show he had in 2005 at W2 on Westbourne Grove during which he released 140 live rats to roam the floor.⁶⁸ Though this strategy is unconventional, it is predictably shocking. Lastly, gallerist Steve Lazarides recently held another gallery opening including Banksy's work in which

⁶⁶ Landesman, "Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?" *London Times*.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Januszczak, "Who's Afraid of the Big Guy?" *London Times*.

he hired “burlesque acts, strippers and other risqué entertainment” in order to “inject a little anarchy back into the staid, serious business of buying art.”⁶⁹ The YBAs were once endorsed for similar practices by Norman Rosenthal, the secretary of exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Arts, who praised them for being more “in your face,” and for addressing important issues more often than other international contemporary artists.⁷⁰ Banksy apparently took note.

Other similarities exist with Hirst. Their pasts seem to resemble high school chums. Both are from Bristol.⁷¹ The alternative band *Blur* was friends with Hirst and even played at his final degree show. He later directed a music video for them in return.⁷² While Banksy has refused business with big names like Nike and Charles Saatchi, he agreed to design an album cover for *Blur*. Aside from shock value, Banksy also utilizes the same sense of humor as Hirst, who was once quoted saying, “I like the idea of rich people buying my burned-out fag ends,” referring to his sculpture, *Party Time* (fig. 8).⁷³ His statement sounds remarkably similar to the humor in all of Banksy’s books. Like Hirst, the media also focuses on Banksy’s mysterious, bad-boy persona rather than presenting real arguments concerning the merit of his work. In a 2006 article in the *London Times*, he was dubbed the “Spray paint Pimpernel.”⁷⁴ If one researches scholarly articles on Banksy, they are close to non-existent. While some similarities remain

⁶⁹ Luke Leitch, “How To Sell Banksy – Hire Some Strippers.” *London Times* 6 Oct. 2007 TimesOnline. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article2599545.ece.

⁷⁰ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 62.

⁷¹ Ibid, 101.

⁷² Ibid, 98.

⁷³ Meier, *To Market, To Market*, 96.

⁷⁴ “Spray Paint Pimpernel with the Art of Getting Rich,” *London Times*.

superficial, like the connection to *Blur* and their humor, Banksy represents a continuation of the same artistic trends that England has been producing.

Iconography

Like the Young British Artists, Banksy also uses simple imagery paired with acerbic commentary about contemporary society, and claims to be against advertising.⁷⁵ His view is cynical and disaffected as well. He does not focus exclusively on the role of the media, but instead criticizes multiple aspects of present-day affairs. He does, however, make equally controversial works; his primary medium alone, graffiti, serves as the catalyst of the controversy. Banksy acknowledges the controversial role of graffiti and street art in his installation at the British Museum. Uninvited and in disguise, he illegally installed his work by adhering it to a wall. It was a rock with marker pen on it depicting a cave man pushing a grocery cart with a bison in the background (fig. 9). Titled “Wall art, East London,” the inscription reads:

This finely preserved example of primitive art dates from the Post-Catatonic era and is thought to depict early man venturing towards the out-of-town hunting grounds. The artist responsible is known to have created a substantial body of work across the South East of England under the moniker Banksymus Maximus but little else is known about him. Most art of this type has unfortunately not survived. The majority is destroyed by zealous municipal officials who fail to recognize the artistic merit and historical value of daubing on walls.

PRB 17752,2-2,1⁷⁶

⁷⁵Falconer. “Give Me Monet, That’s What I Want.” *London Times*. This information is quoted directly from Banksy during Falconer’s interview.

⁷⁶ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 154.

One can note that he promotes the value of graffiti art and satirizes authority figures, but more importantly acknowledges himself for an entire half of the inscription, thereby promoting his own career. He also asserted in his most recent book *Wall and Piece* that this work was incorporated into the permanent collection of the museum. He lied in order to enhance his reputation. Not only was the work removed, but also a decision was never made to incorporate it into the permanent collection of the museum.⁷⁷ Banksy retrieved the work in order to show it in a commercial gallery so that he could still profit monetarily, while claiming that his work is worthy of a museum's holdings.

Overall, Banksy creates social cartooning with graphics similar to indie concert posters.⁷⁸ Besides his satire of high art, he often focuses on the cut-throat competition and relentless, chaotic pace of modern society. Many of his comic scenes are combined with a dark twist to prompt viewers to question their part in the rat race, hence the actual rat in the artworks mentioned earlier.⁷⁹ He has taken idyllic, pastoral scenes and inserted graffiti-style elements on country cottages, stenciled helicopters in the sky, security cameras, and crime scene tape to disrupt otherwise peaceful landscapes. He has also defaced religious images of Madonnas and the baby Jesus with commentary about suicide bombers, as well as criticizing capitalism with parodies of consumer goods like iPods.

⁷⁷ Hannah Boulton, Informal Personal E-mail, 9 Jan. 2008. She serves as the Head of Press and P. R. at the British Museum and responded to my e-mail on behalf of the Curatorial Staff of the Department of Prehistory and Europe. Her statement was as follows: "We didn't take a decision to incorporate it into the collection. The object was held here at the Museum for only a couple of days before the loan was requested. It was simply being kept here, it did not become part of the collection."

⁷⁸ Lauren Collins, "Banksy Was Here" *New Yorker* (14 May 2007), 2. The term "indie" is recent slang, short for "independent." Indie rock is a musical genre with an associated sub-culture, graphic style, sound, and fashion.

⁷⁹ Nigel Parry, "British Graffiti Artist, Banksy, Hacks the Wall" *thresholds 32 ACCESS* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006), 90.

Aside from his ideological art, many of his images, through their audacity, are simply designed to make people laugh.⁸⁰ Like Fairey's commentary on contemporary society, Banksy has jumped on the bandwagon of social critique. Towards the end of his career, Keith Haring also created posters with socially conscious messages. One such example was his "Free South Africa" poster designed to raise awareness of apartheid.⁸¹ Most artists choose one cause to promote, but Banksy lacks this focus. He stenciled an image of a maid lifting a wall, sweeping dirt underneath, symbolizing the Aids pandemic in Africa (fig. 10).⁸² In September of 2005 he painted a mural on the Palestinian side of the West Bank wall in Israel about the former's oppression by the latter.⁸³ This past Christmas, 2007, he painted murals on the security barrier around the town of Bethlehem. He explained to *The London Times* via a text message that it was to boost declining tourism for local residents, thereby fighting for the underdog.⁸⁴ In his "Barely Legal" show in Los Angeles, he rented a live elephant for the duration of the opening, which was supposed to represent global poverty (fig. 11).

Banksy has re-worked many famous artists as well, lending instant familiarity to his images. Some examples are Monet's lily pond with a shopping cart dumped in it, Van Gogh's sunflowers, but wilted and dying, and parodies of Jack Vettriano, Edward Hopper, and Andy Warhol. He explained his reasoning for his parody of Warhol's Marilyn to journalist Morgan Falconer: "I think Warhol started doing the Marilyns when the

⁸⁰ Landesman "Genius With a Spray Can, But Is It Art?" *London Times*.

⁸¹ John Gruen, *Keith Haring*, 129.

⁸² Waldemar Januszczak, "Banksy's Progress," *London Times* 11 March 2007, Sunday ed. TimesOnline. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article1484919.ece.

⁸³ Falconer, "Give me Monet, that's What I Want" *London Times*.

⁸⁴ Sheera Claire Frenkel, "Let Us Spray: Banksy Hits Bethlehem," *London Times* 2 Dec. 2007, TimesOnline. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2988367.ece.

glamour was wearing off, and so it seemed like the right time to pick Kate Moss. I mean, God bless ‘er, I think she’s great, but she’s our new Marilyn, isn’t she?”⁸⁵ Parody or not, his version is almost an appropriation of Warhol’s work (fig. 12). While Banksy has not dubbed any art objects as readymades, one installation in the Louvre was also almost an exact copy of a work by Marcel Duchamp. Banksy created an imitation Mona Lisa with a smiley face inserted over her face as an irreverent gesture towards idolizing Renaissance art. Duchamp titled his object “L.H.O.O.Q.,” which when read aloud in French sounds like “Elle a chaud au cul.”⁸⁶

Because so many famous master artists are either dead or aging and have their works in museums, contemporary art has become “a luxury brand” for rich collectors.⁸⁷ Skilled practicing artists can watch the market for trends, then use them in order to make their art more saleable. Banksy capitalizes on thematic and iconographic trends involving a range of social commentary, irreverent humor, and the instant recognition of old master painters’ works in order to make his art more saleable.

Performance Art: Philosophy, History, and Influence on Banksy

Part of Banksy’s notoriety has come from his performance pieces in museums mocking this institution. He entitled the section of his book documenting his installations “Making an exhibition of yourself,” highlighting the performance aspect.⁸⁸ His hoaxes

⁸⁵ Falconer, “Give me Monet, that’s What I Want” *London Times*.

⁸⁶ Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde, and Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp: Ready-Mades, etc. (1913-1964)* (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1964), 24.

⁸⁷ Chancellor, “Popping the Art Bubble,” *London Times*.

⁸⁸ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 138.

serve as a form of intervention performances, in which, "...some image, text or thing is placed in an unexpected context, thus drawing attention to that context: *eg* the museum or the street."⁸⁹ These installations are the most original contribution he has made to the art world because no artist to date has performed inside of a museum without invitation, and at the same time, he serves as a larger indicator of the state of the public's trust in museums. Performance art, however, is not an invention of Banksy. It has had a presence as a medium in the art world since around the beginning of the twentieth century. A more in-depth analysis of different artists key to its development will be discussed following an examination of the issues concerning the purpose and ideas of performance.

Performances generally have a component of playfulness and satire for entertainment value, and the goal is often to demystify observers of their notions of the "preciousness of art."⁹⁰ Established parts of the art world, such as critics or the old museum mentality of exhibiting work of dead artists, are frequently challenged. Performances have taken the forms of manifestoes, group events in theatres, cafés, and as both organized and ad hoc demonstrations in the streets.⁹¹ Artists commonly attempt to create art that can be experienced rather than only seen as a static object within a confined space. The medium attempts to question the basic criteria by which art is evaluated.

Through the course of its development, the genre has gained recognition from the art world in the form of festivals, conferences, and commissions by museums

⁸⁹ Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, London: Phaidon, 1998, 7.

⁹⁰ Roselee Goldberg, "Performance: A Hidden History" *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, Ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc. 1984), 25.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 26.

themselves.⁹² “How to” books have even been published on techniques and advice for performers, with philosophy and goals included. According to *The Guerilla Guide to Performance Art*, “The name of the game is preparation.” It continues, “If possible, one of the best things you can do is to stalk your spaces beforehand.”⁹³ The book also encourages each artist to archive and promote their work, at which Banksy has become very successful. Because of the ephemeral nature of performance art, the use of video and the internet are prominent methods for archiving.

Another entire section of the book is devoted to staying out of jail. Banksy successfully utilizes all of the aforementioned methods in his work. One U.K. newspaper, *The Independent*, noted his efficiency at performing illegal work. “Artwork being considered for display at Tate Britain usually undergoes a rigorous process of nomination. But under heavy disguise, Banksy bypassed the lengthy process by sneaking his work on the wall of Room 7 when no one was looking.” (fig. 13)⁹⁴ Journalist Fleur Britten also published an article for the *London Times* concerning the nature of guerilla artists. She described their code of conduct as maintaining “absolute secrecy,” refusing to explain their work, communicating only via e-mail, and using an alias to protect their identity.⁹⁵ While Banksy submitted to a few interviews earlier in his career, he now only communicates via e-mail or text messages, if at all.

Several major performance artists or groups set precedents in this medium which, consciously or not, form the basis for Banksy’s work. While the Dadaists made the first

⁹² Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, 6.

⁹³ Leslie Hill and Helen Paris, *The Guerilla Guide to Performance Art: How to Make a Living as an Artist* (London: Continuum, 2001), 210.

⁹⁴ Banksy, *Cut it Out* [N.p.: n.p., n.d.], 39.

⁹⁵ Fleur Britten, “Guerilla Tactics” *London Times* 11 Dec. 2005, TimesOnline.

substantial contributions, the Futurists before them practiced art in non-traditional ways that would develop into performance art. The group created more manifestoes than artworks and therefore more propaganda than production.⁹⁶ Filippo Marinetti, one of the primary members, presented a play entitled *Roi Bombance* in France that satirized revolution and democracy through its hero, l'Idiot. Like much of Banksy's work, the play was apparently not that revolutionary because it simply echoed past manifestoes.⁹⁷ Marinetti later preached in Italy against the cult of tradition and commercialization of art, although he was for militarism and war, which are opposed to Banksy's values. Banksy strongly criticizes war instead.⁹⁸ Theater, however, was not the only medium utilized by the Futurists.

Marinetti's colleague Soffici wrote that the spectator must live at the center of the painted action, referring to the medium of painting. His point was that though painting may be simply paint on a canvas, the process should be transformed into a performance by engaging the spectator.⁹⁹ As their ideas developed, the Futurists began to merge the different mediums into a synthesis of what would become performance art. They used art as a means of disrupting a "complacent public," like Banksy, by encouraging painters to go into the streets and "launch assaults" from theaters.¹⁰⁰ In fact, inciting a reaction from the audience was a primary goal. Further similarities with Banksy reside in their approach to art; their product was anti-academic, somewhat primitive, unexpected for the audience, and simple to produce. According to Marinetti, Futurist theater destroyed "the Solemn,

⁹⁶ Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, 11.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 15.

the Sacred, the Serious, and the Sublime in Art with a capital A.”¹⁰¹ Later Futurist theater began to turn more Synthetic, with an introductory scene, a punch-line, and quick exit.¹⁰² Banksy’s work could be described in similar terms: simple, recycled iconography with a sharp punch.

The Dadaists of the 1910s and 1920s also practiced an early form of performance art. Hugo Ball, a German writer, along with Emmy Hennings, opened the Café Voltaire in Zürich, Switzerland in 1916. They did not found it with the intentions of creating new art, but to establish a meeting point for all artists to collaborate. Ball intended only to act as a catalyst for production.¹⁰³ It became a haven for gatherings of avant-garde artists where different forms of art were performed in front of audiences.¹⁰⁴ On July 14, 1916, Ball performed what would be called a noise poem in a Cubist-inspired costume as a way to abstract himself (fig. 14). The costume served as a reaction against the arts of sewing and design, against permanence, and was meant to have an amateur, infantile aura, again like Banksy’s works.¹⁰⁵ As author Annabelle Melzer notes, the atmosphere of the Café had “the sensation of a group of highly sophisticated ‘bad’ kids, justifying the acting-out of their libidinal and asocial impulses within the institutionalized (although they would

¹⁰¹ Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, 17.

¹⁰² Ibid, 26. Author Goldberg explains that the term *Synthetic* comes from the manifesto, *Futurist Synthetic Theatre of 1915*, in which it is defined as an idea compressed into a few minutes, words and gestures, sensations, facts, and symbols. 26. The technique was lastly incorporated into film for a disjointed final effect; however Banksy’s YouTube videos are by no means disjointed. In fact, they retain a strong narrative element.

¹⁰³ Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ Dr. Darius Spieth, “Dada,” (lecture, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, October 26, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Annabelle Melzer, “The Dada Actor and Performance Theory” *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* Ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc. 1984), 42.

deny it) framework of a movement that, thereby, gave them the prerogatives of assembly, publicity, and pontification.”¹⁰⁶ While the performing arts are generally executed for the viewers, these performances were arguably equally intended to affect the performer him- or herself. In fact, a central goal was always to shock and arouse the audience in order to give the performer a more satisfying experience.¹⁰⁷ Performing in front of an audience, however, did allow the artist direct access to the reception of the art, thereby giving the artist more control over the presentation itself.

While Banksy pursues all of the aforementioned goals, he does lack this last advantage. Though he technically works in front of a live audience, he does so unannounced and in disguise, then simply uploads the performances onto the internet for viewers to see. The wide distribution of his book documenting his performances suggests positive audience feedback, since people are apparently buying the book. Banksy also uses objects that originate from the Dada tradition in his performances. At the beginning of his summary of the museum installations, he explains his irreverent attitude towards the institution of the museum. His ideas relate directly to those of the Dada artists.

The Art we look at is made by only a select few. A small group create, promote, purchase, exhibit and decide the success of Art. Only a few hundred people in the world have any real say. When you go to an Art gallery you are simply a tourist looking at the trophy cabinet of a few millionaires.¹⁰⁸

Marcel Duchamp, a part of the Dada movement in France, established another precedent for this type of art and attitude. His readymades, or mass-produced objects which he elevated to the status of art by declaring them as such, were intended to be a reaction against the traditional idea of the art object. Duchamp put the idea to the test that

¹⁰⁶ Melzer, “The Dada Actor and Performance Theory,” 1984, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 43.

¹⁰⁸ Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London: Century, The Random House Group Limited, 2005), 143.

works of art are shown in order to be judged as such.¹⁰⁹ He frequently included ironic elements into his works. While his objects were a reaction against the establishment, they were ultimately “consumed” in museum exhibitions and sold as art objects.¹¹⁰ For example, Duchamp wrote a nonsensical message on a comb, dubbed it a readymade, and commented that “It’s not easy to be nonsensical, because nonsensical things so often turn out to make sense.”¹¹¹ The comb today remains one of his notable readymade works. He proclaimed to be “avoiding the cult of uniqueness, of art with a capital ‘A.’”¹¹² But then, as part of an agreement with the Galleria Schwarz in Milan, he created reproductions of the readymades, thereby turning them into artificial multiples to be circulated within art institutions.¹¹³

One of Duchamp’s more famous readymades was his *Fountain* (fig. 15). He often produced works under aliases. The “fountain” was a urinal turned on its side with an “R. Mutt” signature, which Duchamp submitted to the jury of the Society of Independent Artists in 1916. It was of course rejected, but later appeared in a satirical review called *The Blind Man* with a photographic reproduction, the only evidence remaining.¹¹⁴ Any artist wishing to participate was supposed to pay an entry fee and then be allowed to exhibit; *Fountain*, however, was censored, allegedly for immoral content and

¹⁰⁹ Ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology and October Magazine, Ltd., 1996), 96.

¹¹⁰ Philippe Collin, “Marcel Duchamp Talking About Readymades” *Marcel Duchamp*, Ed. Museum Jean Tinguely Basel (Basel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 38.

¹¹¹ Dieter Daniels, “Marcel Duchamp: The Most Influential Artist of the Twentieth Century?” *Marcel Duchamp*, Ed. Museum Jean Tinguely Basel (Basel: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 82.

¹¹² Philippe Collin, “Talking About Readymades”, 94.

¹¹³ Dieter Daniels, “Marcel Duchamp”, 29.

¹¹⁴ Ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*, 116-117.

plagiarism.¹¹⁵ His use of irony lent comical value to the situation. Furthermore, he disputed the immorality accusation by questioning the “morality” of other bath room amenities, such as a bath tub. It is with artists like Duchamp that postmodern ideas about the destruction of commodifiable art objects began, according to writer and political activist Alexander Trocchi.¹¹⁶

While *Fountain* has boasted ironic, satirical elements, the underlying purpose was substantial and serious. Duchamp was effectively tackling artistic taboos. The context of the gallery rendered the urinal offensive, given that it was detached from its utilitarian function. Duchamp argued that he was elevating it to the status of art because he still had to choose that object for the gallery context. The object thus belonged to both utilitarian and non-utilitarian worlds, which Duchamp was asserting to be identical.¹¹⁷ He was challenging the unspoken rules about artistic creation, the conception of art, ideas of craft, and he attempted to expose the role of institutions and social groups in defining art.¹¹⁸

Another example of Duchamp making fun of the art establishment, was his *Wanted* poster (fig. 16). He again used a false name, Rrose Sélavy, without any mention of his real name on the poster except for his picture as the graphic element. The message was to “buy or take known or unknown paintings and sign them with the name of a known or unknown painter. The difference between the ‘style’ and the unexpected name for the ‘experts,’ was the authentic work of Rrose Sélavy and defies forgeries.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Dawn Ades, *Marcel Duchamp*, 127.

¹¹⁶ Hester Westley, “Is this the new brutalism?” *London Times* 31 Oct. 2007, TimesOnline. http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article2771881.ece.

¹¹⁷ Dawn Ades, *Marcel Duchamp*, 128.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 152.

¹¹⁹ Ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*, 107-108.

In keeping with his rebellion against the art world, Duchamp even satirized Tristan Tzara. In 1921, Duchamp and Man Ray collaborated to produce the only issue of an art review, *New York Dada*, in which they published Tzara's authorization to use the title Dada. Tzara had previously proclaimed Dada to belong to everybody. Later that year, Duchamp was invited by Tzara to contribute to a Dada show in Paris, to which he responded "PODE BAL," meant to sound like Peau de Bal, meaning Ballskin in English.¹²⁰ The bottom line was a refusal to acknowledge art with a capital "A" or the idea of taste and aesthetic systems. According to Duchamp, no single definition for art existed that could work at any given time, so the readymade was conceived to embody this idea. "So if we accept the idea of trying not to define art, which is a very legitimate conception, then the Readymade can be seen as a sort of irony, because it says here it is, a thing that I call art, I didn't even make it myself."¹²¹

Other performance artists later in the century made further significant contributions to the medium. These artists were commonly called the "media artists," a young group of New York artists active in the 1960s who created performances that purposefully meshed fine art with popular entertainment and autobiography with fantasy for a product that was easy for audiences to comprehend. Elements of punk music and the media were incorporated into the performances as well.¹²² These artists include, but are not limited to, Laurie Anderson, Julia Heyward, Michael Smith, Martha Wilson, Adrian Piper, Michael McClard, and Robert Longo.¹²³ As punk came into vogue, so too did new wave clubs catering to this culture; especially towards the late 70s, the New York artists

¹²⁰ Dawn Ades, *Marcel Duchamp*, 128.

¹²¹ Qtd. in Dawn Ades, *Marcel Duchamp*, 151.

¹²² Roselee Goldberg, *The Art of Performance*, 74.

¹²³ Ibid, 73.

merged their practices with this club scene, which in turn made performance art much more available to the general public.¹²⁴ Their ultimate goal was still to reach the “intelligenstia,” but it was also to reach the masses. These artists were a burgeoning generation who had grown up in a media culture with access to mass communication phenomena like magazines, television, newspapers, and movies. Because they were a product of this culture, they, unlike previous generations, understood how it worked and could effectively utilize it to connect with the masses.¹²⁵ Here, for the first time, one is able to see performance art paralleling popular culture, a method Banksy has imitated. However, the wide-spread use of the internet would prove to be a much more effective tool for becoming prominent in popular culture.

Yet another group of artists, The Guerilla Girls, three women who first organized around 1985, began protesting policies of male-dominated museums (fig. 17). Throughout their performances, they always wore guerilla masks to hide their identities in order to underscore that the key issue was not who they were, but rather the content of their message. They created videotapes poking fun at old “master” paintings, organized fashion shows, and created propaganda posters and art to expose discrimination.¹²⁶ Their purpose was social activism: to question the establishment and raise consciousness about gender and racial inequality throughout the art world.¹²⁷

While Banksy’s art is also related to activism, he does not have one coherent, unified message. Rather, he seems to have an opinion concerning every cause.

¹²⁴ Roselee Goldberg, *The Art of Performance*, 74-75.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 84.

¹²⁶ Guerilla Girls, “Distinguished Lecture Series” Wisconsin Union Theater (Wisconsin: 12 March 2002).

¹²⁷ Guerilla Girls, *Women Artists: The Other Side of the Picture*, Films for the Humanities and Sciences. DVD. (New Jersey: Princeton, 2003).

Furthermore, he has capitalized on the popularity of conceptual art as another method for making his own art more desirable. The entire purpose of the Guerilla Girls' work centers on holding the art world accountable and raising awareness of gender and racial inequalities. While Banksy also points the finger frequently at society's shortcomings, he has the luxury of avoiding responsibility for his claims due to his anonymity, thereby not allowing the public to hold him accountable. However, the underlying link between Banksy and the Guerilla Girls is that both have used anonymous but highly visible tactics in order to challenge the art world.

One final performance artist who most foreshadowed Banksy's work was Andrea Fraser. Her work represents a growing volume of criticism and theory concerning museums and their relationships with the public, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section of this thesis. First Fraser's work will be examined. Like Banksy, she also executed performance pieces on the premises of several museums, but was commissioned to do so by each institution. These performances include "Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk," at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and "Welcome to the Wadsworth Atheneum" in Hartford, New England. "Museum Highlights" was carried out in the winter of 1989 and supported from within the museum itself by the Curator of Education, Danielle Rice.¹²⁸ In summary, she led guests throughout the museum discussing different pieces of work and different rooms, while satirizing the museum as a whole. In her introduction, she referenced "the Museum itself," noting "...the 'itself' itself being so compelling."¹²⁹ She made a conspicuous effort to mention the Membership

¹²⁸ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser* Ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005), 110.

¹²⁹ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 96.

program, including the fact that “Many Members indicate that they joined the Museum because they perceive it to be an institution of the highest quality, one of the world’s great repositories of civilization.”¹³⁰ In other words, people join because the museum retained a form of snob appeal. Her comment was designed to prompt the audience to consider the role of museums and the purpose they serve for the public.

She reinforced this notion later, reminding the audience of the generally revered status of museums by saying, “The Municipal Art Gallery that really serves its purpose gives an opportunity for enjoying the highest privileges of wealth and leisure to all those people who have cultivated tastes but not the means of gratifying them.”¹³¹ If one happened not to have cultivated tastes, the museum could provide training, Fraser asserted. One needs to keep in mind the overt sarcasm throughout the performance. She also explained that within the museum, one could find satisfaction, contentment, pleasure, “the finer things that make life worth living,” and could be liberated “from the struggle imposed by material needs.” The museum provided ideal beauty and inspiration, so one needed to look no further.¹³² Her point was again to prompt the audience to think about why people go to museums and have such reverent attitudes towards museums, as though they were sacred spaces.

Later in the performance, the style of her dialogue shifted as she began to interject rambling, incoherent phrases between descriptions of art, like “the new poor; multi-problem families; the culture of poverty; disreputable poor, paupers, cannot cope, make

¹³⁰ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 97.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 98.

¹³² *Ibid*, 106.

noise, cause trouble and generally create problems...lower-lowers.”¹³³ Her speech repeatedly trailed off into tangents, juxtaposing ideas of refinement and class, as embodied by the artworks, with the notion of social types “lacking” these qualities. She seemed to be implying that the less fortunate in society could improve their lot by seeking the help of museums.

By highlighting these societal ideals and their association with museums, she was also able to draw a relationship between those who could afford to attach their names to museums through patronage, and how their name would ultimately benefit. She drew explicit attention to the relationship between donors and named spaces in museums with her fictitious program, Named Space Opportunities. She continued, “You know, I’d like to name a space, why, if I had \$750,000 I would name this shop um...Andrea. Andrea is such a nice name.”¹³⁴ Finally, the tour ended in the space between the telephones, coat room, and rest rooms after she finished praising the magnificence of the cafeteria, water fountains, and other service-related parts of the museum (fig. 18). The absurdity underscored the aforementioned reverent attitude people hold towards museums and their collections.

Before her work entitled “Welcome to the Wadsworth Atheneum,” she wrote a letter to the curator of Contemporary Art, Andrea Miller-Keller, in March 1991 in preparation for the actual performance. In this letter, she concisely stated her opinion of museums, which served as a basis for her performance: “I have come to see art museums as compromise formations set up to protect the interests of one class while responding, in

¹³³ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 101.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 107.

a displaced way, to the demands of another.”¹³⁵ The Wadsworth Atheneum was no exception for Fraser, which she vocalized in this performance. The historical aspect of her performance would only have been appealing to a certain audience, namely, attendees with ties to the historic families and investment in the area.

Her tour was an institutional critique.¹³⁶ Most of this performance was done outside of the actual museum, leading the audience from monument to monument. She began by discussing the role of any given museum in its community, noting that it “defines culture and its purpose as an institution according to its own history and according to the interests of its founders, its trustees, and patrons.”¹³⁷ Already the sarcasm was blatant. By defining the museum in relation to the interests of its founders, trustees, and patrons, she was pitting them against the general public. While the aforementioned categories play a large part in the functioning of a museum, a museum need not exist without its public. She also acknowledged that the city of Hartford intended to represent its history and heritage because of its pride in these things.¹³⁸ However following this statement, during a discussion of the heritage of the buildings

¹³⁵ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 115.

¹³⁶ Institutional critiques generally seek to expose the hierarchy of roles within institutions, in which “...galleries, museum officials, critics (etc.), who do not want art to change its traditional identity, depend for their vocation on the institutionalization of experience-as-art, aesthetics-as-art, even investments-as-art.” Within these institutions, critics assert that art serves as an experience for “polite” and “cultured” society. Artists like Andrea Fraser who engage in institutional critique attempt to dispel these notions of art. Ian Burn, *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1991, 126.

¹³⁷ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 124.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 124.

comprising the Atheneum, she was careful to note that the actual buildings of the museum were either patronized by or in honor of people who had no interest in art.¹³⁹

Much of her speech lead to one central point she made towards the end, when she asserted that the community should reestablish the seventeenth-century colonial values on which it was founded: “egalitarianism, love of family and God, rugged individualism, self-reliance, and good taste.”¹⁴⁰ The meaning behind this statement was to create a contrast between the old identity and values of the city, which were embodied by the Atheneum, with the contemporary identity, a very different one. She even got more explicit by lamenting the city’s degradation and attributing it to the influx of “...people from the South, from Puerto Rico, from the Caribbean, crowding the oldest, most blighted, most densely populated neighborhoods.”¹⁴¹ This statement reached the climax of ethnocentrism and elitism during her tour. She concluded by describing how she would like for the city to progress, and how she would like for its population to change. One final statement expressed the challenging message of her tour: “A little more successful, a little more sophisticated, a little more socially conscious.”¹⁴²

Ultimately, Fraser was juxtaposing what she considered to be elitist values of the museum and how they related to the historic city with the newer identity of the city, in order to suggest that the two did not correspond. Like her tour of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the tour around the Wadsworth maintained strong satirical overtones, encouraging the audience to engage in more critical thinking towards the institution. She essentially did what Banksy would later do, but interacted directly with her audience,

¹³⁹ Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights*, 125.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 131.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 133.

¹⁴² Ibid, 134.

rather than via the internet, and more importantly, was commissioned in both instances. Fraser played the role of a museum professional, while Banksy maintained a street identity. In addition, she used a rather ironic approach to the situation through thought-provoking tours. While Banksy's method differed by making direct, demeaning statements towards the institution, it could be argued that his point is analogous; but did Banksy have the same high-minded purpose, or was his performance merely meant to be provocative? His performances did not delve as deeply into the history or missions of the museums targeted, but he was still acknowledging the relationship between different museums and their public.

The examples of the performance artists above have been included in order to illustrate the precedents on which Banksy's performances rely. The ideas behind Banksy's work are recycled because they originated with other artists. The medium of performance art has seen a long history of artists challenging society's conceptions of art and art institutions. Though his stunts are not entirely original, no artist to date has performed inside major museums uninvited, which makes Banksy unique. While other artists have certainly mocked museums, none have taken their performances this far. Andrea Fraser has entered the threshold of museums before, but always as a commissioned artist. The institution itself has been evolving as a direct result of artists like these promoting their anti-establishment values. The public at large has also taken notice, and museums are having to evaluate their theoretical bases and practices.

The Evolving Institution of the Museum

Since World War II museums have been opening their permanent collections and scholarship to non-Western art, cultural artifacts, and significantly more contemporary art. Art historian William Hendon calls the evolution of the institution since the Second World War the “age of introspection” because museums have begun to acknowledge many more purposes for housing specific art, as well as more types of art than beforehand.¹⁴³ Art museums in the past have catered to a more elite audience that was better educated, wealthier, older, and consisted of more professionals than other types of museums.¹⁴⁴ Even the director of the museum of the State University of New York in the 1970s made a statement about how the public was not educated enough and that “the entry of people could be done best after written or oral general examination.”¹⁴⁵ This outlook represents exactly the elitism against which artists such as Duchamp, the Guerilla Girls, and Banksy, among others rebel.

The final section of this thesis therefore focuses on a growing body of criticism concerning the current relationship of museums with the public. Despite the fact that not all art historians and theoreticians believe that the museum institution is moving in a negative direction, most of the critics’ arguments presented do take a more negative view. One should keep in mind that more arguments exist; however, the scope of this thesis is not broad enough to include all current views. Rather, the views selected are those which parallel the basis for Banksy’s satirical performances.

¹⁴³ William Hendon, *Analyzing an Art Museum* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 32.

¹⁴⁴ Ed. Daniel Sherma and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 51.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 52.

James Cuno, director of the Art Institute of Chicago, published a book in 2004 devoted entirely to the issue of the public's trust in museums today. Part of the loss in trust, according to him, involves recent scandals involving museums, such as the Brooklyn Art Museum's conflict with Rudolph Giuliani in 1999, or the Guggenheim's opening of a museum in Las Vegas presented as an alleged branding strategy by its director, Thomas Krens. As early as 1953, cultural critic Dwight Macdonald accused the first director of MOMA, Alfred H. Barr, of turning it into a nine-ringed circus.¹⁴⁶ Included in the catalogue for the inaugural show of the museum was a statement by Barr praising AT&T, saying, "AT&T clearly recognizes that experiment and innovation, so highly prized in business and industry, must be equally valued and supported in the arts."¹⁴⁷ Criticism of the inclusion of this statement was based on the situation described earlier in this thesis concerning museums having to rely financially more on corporate sponsorships, foundation grants, admission fees, cafés, and retail. Hans Haacke concisely summarized the relationship of museums with corporations with the phrase "promotion for patronage."¹⁴⁸ With these supplementary strategies for financial support comes the need to serve the customer as well. Membership programs are designed to develop allegiance and guarantee that customers spend money during visits, critics say causing the institution itself to resemble a corporation.¹⁴⁹ Due to Banksy's stance against advertising, this corporate relationship could represent part of what Banksy is rebelling

¹⁴⁶ Ed. Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans, *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 6.

¹⁴⁷ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 272.

¹⁴⁸ Brian Wallis, "Institutions Trust Institutions," *Unfinished Business*, Ed. Hans Haacke (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 53.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 74.

against with his uninvited installations. The CEOs also could fall into his category of the “few millionaires” to whom the art directly or indirectly belongs.

Originally, however, the purpose of museums was quite different. Institutions like the National Gallery in London were established as places where all of the public could simply view “good” works of art without previous education or scholarship.¹⁵⁰ Those in charge of the National Gallery sought to deepen their visitors’ access to the pictures and foster a personal experience with the works’ historical, physical, and poetic qualities.¹⁵¹ Other examples include the British Museum and the Musée du Louvre, both created during the Enlightenment as public spaces for the “diffusion of knowledge.”¹⁵² In France, where access to art shifted from the context of a gentlemen’s salon to the former palace, which was made accessible to the public only after the French Revolution, artworks could serve as a starting point for conversations with the general public about societal issues. Broader debates about politics, public policy, philosophical problems, and cultural values followed suit.¹⁵³

In the 1920s when modern art began to be accepted into museums, a broader educational mission emerged. New relationships developed among artists, the public, and the media about how contemporary practices fit into the museum space.¹⁵⁴ James Cuno subscribes to that earlier, European philosophy that museums should cater more to the general public and provide them with the opportunity for an experience that will inspire

¹⁵⁰ Ed. James Cuno, *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁵¹ James Cuno, *Whose Muse?*, 45.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 140.

¹⁵³ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 210.

¹⁵⁴ James Cuno, *Whose Muse?*, 141.

and potentially change their view of the world. According to him, within the authority and responsibility of providing for the holdings of a museum, there lies the basis for the public's trust in the institution itself.¹⁵⁵ The public must therefore perceive the museum to be acting for their good and see a commitment to artists and ideas in exhibitions that represent their interests.

The more museums rely on money-making strategies and patronage by corporations, the less some critics think museums are able to cater to the public's interest. Just as corporations' public images gain importance equal to productivity levels, so do perceptible liberal-humanist value systems for museums.¹⁵⁶ With Banksy's multiple intrusions, he seems to be challenging the notion that museums are in fact committed to artists and their interests, as well as the interests of the public. Banksy's name has permeated popular culture and many people without formal training in art or art theory have taken an interest in his work. It could be argued that Banksy is posing the question of whether museums really do have the best interest of the public in mind. He went so far as to claim in his book, *Banksy: Wall and Piece*, that the National Gallery actually incorporated his work, "Wall art: East London," into their permanent collection, suggesting that the interest taken by the public in his work makes it worthy.¹⁵⁷ His claim, however, is false. The piece was in fact removed and no decision was made to incorporate it into the museum's holdings.¹⁵⁸

Some scholars assert that museums too often focus on their own professionalism rather than fulfilling the needs of the community. The aforementioned membership

¹⁵⁵ James Cuno, *Whose Muse?*, 73.

¹⁵⁶ Brian Wallis, "Institutions Trust Institutions," *Unfinished Business*, 53.

¹⁵⁷ Banksy, *Wall and Piece*, 154.

¹⁵⁸ Hannah Boulton, Informal Personal E-mail, 9 Jan. 2008.

programs serve as developmental strategies to raise funds through the public's support, but this involvement often becomes the public's primary form of involvement.¹⁵⁹ Rather than the "brick and mortar" community, the people inhabiting an area, the "museum community" sometimes plays a more prominent role in participation. The success of a museum, however, ultimately lies with the participation of the former. Without maintaining standards of professionalism, a museum's practices could potentially be judged negatively not only by peers with equal levels of education, but also by "outsiders" who could hold equal weight.¹⁶⁰ Banksy's opinions apparently do not yet hold equal weight with museum professionals like Andrea Fraser's do, since his works were all removed. Furthermore, allowing greater access to the public, perhaps in the form of increased participation, could "dilute our standards, or cheapen what we do, or leave us open to... pandering to the tasteless, the misguided, or the misinformed."¹⁶¹ Museum professionals would be more likely to group Banksy in these categories, although he seems to see himself as more of a Robin Hood of the art world, attempting to take influence from museum professionals and distribute it to the masses.

Some critics see the strategies of Thomas Hoving, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1966-1977, as a positive step towards maintaining the public's best interests. Though he did not increase visitor participation, he was able to successfully blend corporate with middle-class interests. He introduced banners advertising the traveling exhibitions to the façade, which attracted large crowds, while maintaining a

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations* (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 20.

¹⁶⁰ Weil, *Rethinking the Museum*, 21. The term "outsiders" here refers to the general public without any scholarly knowledge of art or museological theory.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 22.

level of “quality” with the exhibitions simultaneously.¹⁶² But some say the new theory concerning the public’s participation calls for more. The Canadian Museum’s Association synthesized an analogy of how the museum should think of its collections. Traditional museum’s programs are like a banquet to which the public is invited; however, it should instead be an “imaginatively composed” menu from which people can choose what they like.¹⁶³ While this analogy sounds uniquely progressive, it still does not quite take the position that people should create the “menu” themselves. The question remains of how far museums should go with methods to retain the public’s trust.

Still other theoreticians, like Griselda Pollock, have contributed to the discussion with a museum model that she calls New Museology. This model incorporates a political critique of the institution and its ideology as a part of a colonial and imperial history that constructs ideas of nation, race, and gender. In an age where, according to Pollock, economic forces and cultural modernization drive themselves, the museum has become a part of “liquid modernity.” According to her theory, no long-term narrative or goal of the institution exists, it just evolves with society.¹⁶⁴ Conversely, the more traditional model is one in which the museum positions art as sacred, extra-ordinary, and a source of moral authority.¹⁶⁵ It could be argued that museum architecture in itself suggests modern ceremonial monuments like churches, shrines, or palaces, which is underscored by the resources spent on their construction and decoration.¹⁶⁶ Banksy falls more in line with the New Museology model, though I am not suggesting he is even aware of its existence.

¹⁶² Brian Wallis, “Institutions Trust Institutions,” *Unfinished Business*, 51.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁶⁴ Griselda Pollock, *Museums After Modernism*, 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

However, he represents one of the cultural forces that could eventually steer museums in new directions with regards to curating principles and practices. He certainly has defied any sacred aspects of the art or the space.

Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate, also asserts that the process of viewing art is traditionally experienced as a ritual in which the grand entrance is followed by a reading of the Passage which the curator has constructed. At the end of the process, the visitor should exit enlightened.¹⁶⁷ Carrier includes an opposing argument in his book, though not directly in response to Serota. He asserts that curators impose their cultured, “enlightened” tastes through museums and visitors are expected to refine their own tastes by visiting, yet only a free, public discussion can determine general aesthetic values.¹⁶⁸ Andrea Fraser sarcastically hinted at this idea of refinement in her performances. According to this view, in reality, curators serve the rich because only the privileged are afforded the opportunity to learn to identify the best art.¹⁶⁹ Regardless of whether this statement holds true, by installing his work uninvited and by continually pointing the finger at museum professionals, Banksy is reinforcing arguments by scholars like Carrier. Perhaps Banksy is mocking the idea of fine art by including his own low-brow work in this context, or perhaps he is posing a more philosophical query concerning the cultural and artistic value of a broader spectrum of work than what is presently in museums.

Theoretical contributions to this debate run even deeper. A growing group of critics known as “museum skeptics” have further investigated the role of museums.

¹⁶⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Museums After Modernism*, 8. According to Pollock, the ritual originates from ancient constructed labyrinths, which served as disorienting ordeals where individuals proceeding through would be psychologically and spiritually transformed, then exit more enlightened.

¹⁶⁸ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*, 221.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 189.

David Carrier, one of these skeptics, stated that once art is removed from the living community, the museum “kills” it.¹⁷⁰ Due to the fact that the art market is commercial, once works of art find themselves in the holdings of museums, they are dead. They remain commodities, but are no longer part of the capitalist system.¹⁷¹ Following the removal of “Wall art, East London” from the gallery space, Banksy took the work back to an exhibition in a commercial gallery shortly afterwards, thereby re-inserting it into the art market.¹⁷² Skeptics also assert that the displays in public galleries of museums can be reduced to an accumulation of surplus value, that is to say, accumulated capital.¹⁷³ Temporary exhibitions serve as further evidence of this accumulation. They demonstrate the prevalence of multinational capitalism by showcasing a universal “culture” within their carefully defined value system.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, according to museum skeptics, historical narratives in museums are especially problematic because they provide a specific, cultural reading of history, which will inevitably reflect the ideology of the given culture.¹⁷⁵ Weil asserts that great potential always exists for any given museum to turn into “a disseminator of values.”¹⁷⁶ Rather than trying to completely eliminate the ideology or values present, however, the museum

¹⁷⁰ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*, 61.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 66.

¹⁷² Lindsey Breaks, Informal Personal E-mail, 23 Jan. 2008. Breaks serves as the Duty Curatorial Assistant for the Department of Prehistory and Europe at the British Museum. Her statement was as follows: “In answer to your question the 'rock art' piece was actually lent back to Banksy for his exhibition 'Outside Institute' in June of 2005, and was supposed to be returned to us by his agent once it closed, but his agent has never returned the piece and therefore it has not been incorporated into our collections.”

¹⁷³ Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum*, 186.

¹⁷⁴ Brian Wallis, “Institutions Trust Institutions,” *Unfinished Business*, 59.

¹⁷⁵ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*, 63.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

could instead bring a critical awareness of these to the public.¹⁷⁷ Is this issue the key question posed by Banksy's intrusions? Because his actions seem to align so closely with this ideological view, it is tempting to suggest that he has a deeper philosophical agenda behind his actions. It is likely he simply craves media attention, though, which in turn enhances the value of his work.

The institutions are essentially exploitative according to this ideology; they cannot escape from power, even if they attempt to be more inclusive.¹⁷⁸ Museums originated in Europe and are rooted in the imperialist history of Europe and America.¹⁷⁹ When these institutions display art as a continuous tradition, they link their current holdings with the past, which underscores their origins in European regimes.¹⁸⁰ The key problem is the fact that "museums need to attract the public and funding in a democratic culture while presenting collections using a top-down bureaucracy that comes from the old regime."¹⁸¹ The difference today is that museums are also financially supported increasingly by corporations, which has been a cause for criticism.¹⁸²

At the heart of the previous debate lies a key question. Is it truly a problem that museums are becoming sponsored increasingly by corporations and private donors, like Charles Saatchi? In the final analysis, museums need some source of money because they are public institutions. Many museums do not even charge admission fees, but for those that do, these fees simply are not always enough to keep the institution financially afloat.

¹⁷⁷ David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism*, 52.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 64.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 67.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 204.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 197.

¹⁸² Brian Wallis, "Institutions Trust Institutions," *Unfinished Business*, 57.

From where should the money come, if not from corporations or private donors? And does the purpose of the institution change when money comes from places other than the government? If it does, what should the “correct” purpose of a museum be and whom should it serve? To what extent should museum professionals rely on the voice of the public when making decisions concerning the museum’s holdings?

A sort of dichotomy exists, or a continuum of perspectives concerning the purpose of museums with some views reaching extreme polarities. Nicholas Serota’s ideas lean more towards an elitist view of the museum as a place for almost religious experiences and moral guidance, while critics like Griselda Pollock see room for change. Serota’s view is exactly what the performance artists have reacted against, while Pollock, like James Cuno, understands different perspectives and recognizes the importance of acknowledging current problems and progressing forward for the betterment of the institution.

One of the skeptics’ solutions to these questions is to align mass art with fine art in order to make the latter more accessible to the general public as popular culture.¹⁸³ They see mass art as being more likely to be understood by people without any art historical or scholarly background. Whether museums will come to accept this kind of art within their walls remains to be seen, however, museums have been making stronger efforts recently to reach out to different, especially younger, audiences. The Ministry of Culture in France has been encouraging efforts by curators to create itinerant programs with this goal in mind.¹⁸⁴ The Centre Pompidou has also tried to “overcome the elitism of

¹⁸³ Brian Wallis, “Institutions Trust Institutions,” *Unfinished Business*, 217.

¹⁸⁴ Ed. Daniel Sherma and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture*, 54.

ordinary museums and bring in a more popular audience.”¹⁸⁵ According to author Vera Zolberg, accepting new forms of art into the museum should not be seen as threatening, but rather as an enhancement of the institution that is accompanied by the art’s creators and supporters.¹⁸⁶

Some museum professionals are making attempts to be more inclusive. The act of curating has come to more closely resemble performance according to Judith Mastai. Because the museum evolves daily, it involves constant experimentation to stay at the forefront of the art world.¹⁸⁷ The identity of the institution is shaped by the nature of its collections and the use of its space; transforming these components thereby transforms the institution itself. The newer museum mentality places the building as the center of the exchange between the institution and the public, with the goal of merging the two and dissolving the former divide that has eroded the public’s trust.¹⁸⁸ As far back as 1987, museum professionals began to recognize the importance of the public’s trust. At the International Workshop on New Museology in Aragon, Spain, it was proposed that this new theory of practice “must be defined according to changing social realities rather than to a theory forced upon populations; methodologies should be based on specific social realities and should aim for the liberation, development, and transformation of society through the awareness and participation of the population.”¹⁸⁹

Aside from museums, the general art world has followed the lead in an effort to include younger members of the community. Janna Graham and Shadya Yasin created a

¹⁸⁵ Ed. Daniel Sherma and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture*, 59.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Museums After Modernism*, 30.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum*, 55-56.

performance of ballet on skateboards involving youth from the suburbs and the inner city of Toronto who collaborated with composer Terence Dick and choreographer Zoja Smutney. The piece was performed in two places where the skaters were usually banned from skating but had nonetheless skated anyway, thus demonstrating their talents as a form of art. At the time, Toronto was promoting a campaign for cleaning up the streets, especially targeting these skaters and their graffiti-artist friends. This program put a positive spin on the situation.¹⁹⁰

Graham and Yasin also collaborated with the Art Gallery of Ontario to produce another event, HYPE (Helping Young People Excel), where they invited grassroots hip-hop community leaders to speak to the youth about changing stereotypes and building community.¹⁹¹ One final example of the art world beginning to acknowledge and accept street culture is the Storefront for Art and Architecture organization in New York City. It sponsored a street stencil series, the art form for which Banksy initially gained recognition, where artists spray-painted statements about homelessness in gutters, on sidewalks, and in doorways to demonstrate that some city residents called these very places home.¹⁹²

These proactive examples are cited to further underscore that the dynamics of museums' relationships with the public may also be changing. With the recent attempts by art organizations to include more public interest, they have in turn progressed towards accepting the public's art on its own terms. Here again is where Banksy's involvement becomes significant. He has attempted to use guerilla tactics and his background in the

¹⁹⁰ Griselda Pollock, *Museums After Modernism*, 163.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 165.

¹⁹² Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152.

graffiti subculture to break traditions of museums and the fine art world by installing his idea of art into the museums himself. While his oeuvre may not be entirely innovative, he still has taken an unprecedented step in challenging the establishment and successfully maneuvering around it to build a career (fig. 6). With the more recent innovation of the internet, he has been able to successfully document his work and market himself as a saleable artist, while posing as an anti-art activist. Much of his philosophy and work stems from the precedents of Dada artists and others who followed in their footsteps. Many elements of Banksy's iconography are recycled from previous well-known artists or styles before him. Contradictions and shortcomings exist in his work; nonetheless, Banksy represents the most irreverent gesture in performance art yet and a physical indication of the evolving relationship of museums with their public.

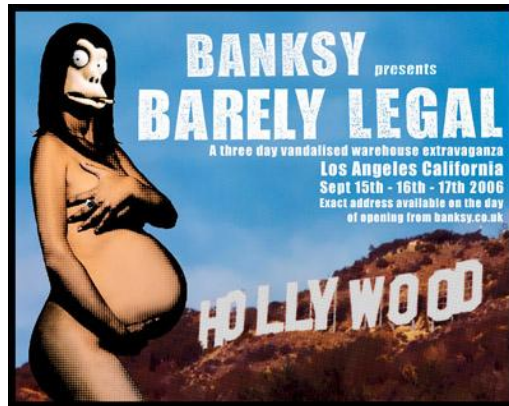


Fig. 1 Banksy, “Barely Legal” Poster for Exhibition, Sept. 2006



Fig. 2 Shepard Fairey, Poster from “NineteenEightyFouria” Exhibition, Nov. 2007



Fig. 3 Shepard Fairey, *Andre the Giant*, N.D.



Fig. 4 Blek Le Rat, Stencil-Graffiti Rats, Paris, N.D. Fig. 5 Banksy, Stencil-Graffiti Rat, London, N.D.



Fig. 6 Anonymous Photographer, “Banksy” caught in the act, *London Times*, Oct. 2007

Fig. 7 Banksy, Stencil-Graffiti Flower, *London Times*, Oct. 2007



Fig. 8 Damien Hirst, *Party Time*, from “Sensation” Exhibition, Royal Academy of Art, London, Sept. through Dec. 1997



Fig. 9 Banksy, *Wall art*, East London, British Museum, 2005



Fig. 10 Banksy, *Stencil-Graffiti Maid*



Fig 11 Banksy, *Painted Elephant*, “Barely Legal” Exhibition, Los Angeles, Sept. 2006



Fig 12 Banksy, *Kate Moss*, 2008



Fig.. 13 Banksy, *Uninvited Museum Installation*, 2005



Fig. 14 Hugo Ball, *Performing Noise Poem*,
July 1916



Fig. 15 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*
by R. Mutt, 1916



Fig. 16 Marcel Duchamp, *Wanted*, 1923



Fig. 17 Guerilla Girls, Poster from the “Always a Little Further” Exhibition, 51st Venice Biennale, 2005



Fig 18 Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, Performance at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989

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