

# He came, he spray-painted, he got New Yorkers talking

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.11.13

Word Count **727**



In this Oct. 19, 2013, file photo, a woman looks at work by British graffiti artist Banksy in New York City's borough of Brooklyn. The secretive street artist ended his self-announced monthlong residency in New York with a final piece of graffiti, a \$615,000 painting donated to charity and, of course, a debate: Is he a jerk or a genius? Photo: AP Photo/Alyssa Goodman, File

NEW YORK — No one has ever photographed British street artist Banksy, but that doesn't mean people all over the world don't know who he is. Recently, New Yorkers got a chance to see his work. That's because the graffiti artist just ended his self-announced monthlong stay in the city.

Banksy began his work as an artist by spray-painting buildings in Bristol, England. Artworks placed in public areas and usually without permission are called street art. Banksy is one of the most famous street artists in the world. He is known for his one-of-a-kind stencils. He also opposes popular government ideas through his art.

During his 31-day stay in New York in October, Banksy created surprise objects and spray-painted stencils and words. Every day, the trickster created a new picture, video or event. The art ranged from a stencil of a dog to a boy holding a hammer to spray-painted messages. Banksy put his art on streets, under bridges and on building walls.

By the time he left, New Yorkers were debating: Is Banksy a jerk or a brilliant artist?

## **Citywide Hunt Hatched**

Banksy put pictures of his work on a website and gave New Yorkers clues about where it was in the city but he never revealed a street address. Fans had to track down his art. Once they did, large crowds gathered to get a glimpse of Banksy's work.

Before he left New York, Banksy donated a painting that he drew on. The original \$50 painting was of mountains and a river. Banksy added a Nazi soldier from World War II to the painting. Then he re-donated it to a Manhattan thrift store called Housing Works. The store raises money for sick people. The store put Banksy's painting up for sale. It eventually sold for \$615,000.

Some New Yorkers like Banksy. Sean Lynch is one of them. Lynch thinks Banksy is "a captivating artist." He said it was magical visiting Banksy's works around the city. He liked hearing people talking about art that Banksy's work inspired. He said that all different types of people were sharing opinions and stories. "The walls started to talk to them, in a way," Lynch said.

But Banksy's art did not make everyone happy. Some New Yorkers see Banksy as a street punk and not an artist. They urged him to go back to England by posting on social media websites like Twitter.

## **Stirs Up Controversy**

Many New Yorkers were particularly offended by an essay Banksy wrote criticizing the building replacing the World Trade Center. A terror attack destroyed the World Trade Center in 2001. Banksy called the new building boring and added, "It so clearly proclaims the terrorists won." He offered his writing to The New York Times. The newspaper wouldn't print it, so he posted it on his website.

The essay upset New Yorkers like Brian Major, 51, of Brooklyn. "Enough!" Major said. "Shut up, Banksy! Go home!"

A lifelong New Yorker, Major says he understands graffiti as an art. But he doesn't think Banksy's art is all that good. He does think that he is good at selling his art.

Professor Radhika Subramaniam agrees. She says that Banksy is an expert when it comes to promoting his work to the general public.

Subramaniam says Banksy is among a group of graffiti artists whose work will one day be respected. She says that Banksy brings a new topic to the conversation about who owns public spaces and what can happen there.

### **"Full Of Hot Air"**

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg helped clean up New York City's public spaces. Bloomberg calls graffiti a sign of a city being run down and a "loss of control."

On his last day in New York, the British graffiti artist tagged, or signed his name, on a building. The building is located in Queens, one of the five boroughs of New York. But instead of using spray paint, Banksy spelled out his name with giant balloon letters. The inflatable letters were stuck to one of the building's walls and later taken down by police. The police did not consider the letters art.

But before he left, Banksy explained his balloon exhibit. He said the work paid respect to the most well known form of graffiti, called tagging. He said that it was especially important in New York City. Tagging was invented there.

The graffiti artist then joked, "Or it's another Banksy piece that's full of hot air."