

## *Banksy: Genius or Vandal*

*Banksy: Genius or Vandal* is due to arrive in Hong Kong on the 20th of December, marking the exhibition's first venture into Asia following shows in Moscow, Madrid, St. Petersburg and Lisbon. The exhibition, which has attracted over 700,000 visitors in its previous locations, features over 70 of the artist's provocative pieces, including an immersive audio-video installation that seeks to dismantle Banksy's mysterious façade. As with all other exhibitions dedicated to Banksy, this exhibition remains unauthorised by the artist, preserving his famed anonymity and refusal to succumb to the rules and regulations of the system.

Banksy is recognised for his outspoken protest art and subversive use of humour to attract and intrigue viewers. Merging and manipulating well-known artworks or figures with comical, outspoken and occasionally lewd twists, the artist takes an unfiltered approach in his creation process sparing not even the Queen. Banksy has struck a particular chord with youth, perhaps because of his bluntness, perhaps due to his disregard for authority, or, perhaps as his position as a political spokesman against capitalism, war, totalitarianism, fascism and injustice. Although superficially amusing and entertaining, a closer analysis of Banksy's work shows how he highlights acute problems within society through the guise of shock-factor and comedy. A prime example of this is reflected in *Napalm (Can't Beat That Feeling)*, on show at the exhibition. Banksy's work is a rendition of a heart-breaking photograph from the Vietnam War titled *The Terror of War*, taken in 1972 by Nick Ut. The original image depicts Vietnamese children fleeing from a napalm blast that struck their village, centred around a young naked Vietnamese girl, seen in Banksy's version holding hands with Mickey Mouse and Ronald McDonald. This jarring juxtaposition between the clearly distressed child with two famously happy and beaming figures is further intensified by their apparent lack of concern for her terror. The artwork highlights issues of commercialism and consumerism in America, while simultaneously bringing to light socio-political issues of violence, poverty and injustice.

The artist is also known for his elaborate hoaxes and hijinks. Just last year, Banksy pulled his most controversial stunt – shredding the infamous *Girl With Balloon* after it had sold at a Sotheby's auction in London for US\$ 1.37 million. He later posted the unprecedented manoeuvre on his instagram page, quoting Picasso, "the urge to destroy is also a creative urge." Those wishing they'd had a chance to observe the now world-famous piece before it was shredded should worry not, for the silkscreen from the same series will be on view at the exhibition.

Although undoubtedly controversial, the same *Girl With Balloon* stencil that Banksy had cheekily shredded was voted as the UK's most loved work of art in 2017, outranking the likes of Da Vinci, Van Gogh and Picasso. Many have questioned whether this title was deserved as critics are quick to categorise his graffiti art as glamorised vandalism, his political statements as vague and shallow and his work boosting society's underdogs as corny or downright childish. But Banksy's appeal cannot be denied. His satire, contemptuous dark humour and distinctive stencilling technique carry certain endearing qualities, as they convey messages of kindness, humility, self-expression and hope. We leave the question to you: is Banksy a romanticised criminal, or a quiet genius in our midst?

**Where:** PORTAL 6311, 1/F, FTLife Tower, 18 Sheung Yuet Road, Kowloon Bay

**When:** 11:00 – 20:00, from 20 December 2019 to 1 March 2020

**Ticketing:** From HK\$180, available at [www.banksyexhibitionhk.com](http://www.banksyexhibitionhk.com)