

Post Modern Artist: Banksy

According to Julian Stallabrass, the definition of postmodernism is “popularized modernism.” Globalization through the web has made it easier than ever to popularize art. Social media has allowed artists to bypass the elitist world of fine art museums, collectors and galleries by giving them the ability to feature their work on their own terms. Advances in technology have also given artists the ability to photograph their work faster and better than ever before. This allows them to digitize and share it almost instantaneously. Street art was never even acknowledged by the elite art world as anything more than degenerative litter and was considered a criminal act by authorities. The public thought of it as an eyesore and paid to have it washed away as soon as it was discovered.

Social media has helped to legitimize the practice by allowing artists to share it with their followers, who then popularize it, pushing museums and galleries to feature it alongside modernist paintings. Where there had once been a deep divide between what is popular and what is considered “fine art”, there is now an inescapable pressure to feature the popular artists alongside high class work. With everyday people now involved in the push to see their favorite artists’s work displayed, public opinion is too present in culture to ignore.

The figurehead of the street art world is the enigmatic Banksy. He has made a name for himself by capitalizing on the divide between street culture and the elite art world. Ironically, his image as the black sheep of the art world has launched him into art superstardom, and his work now stands alongside art giants at auctions, selling for astronomical amounts of money.

Banksy displays distinctive satirical street art all over the world and is often termed a “guerrilla artist”. He utilizes walls and city landscapes as his canvas and his work often appeals to the everyday man. As the primary medium used by Banksy is graffiti, often referred to as anti-form art, the process and product of his art ironically mocks internationally controversial issues.

In the late summer of 2005, Banksy spray-painted nine works at the Israeli West Bank barrier, which separates the country from the landlocked Palestinian territories. This achievement reminded many viewers that Israel’s 425-mile-long West Bank barrier separating Israel from the Palestinian territories is considered illegal by the United Nations. In one of the works, Banksy displays a horse caged in the wall. Banksy implies that the wall “essentially turns Palestine into the world’s largest open prison”. During his trip to the West Bank barrier, Banksy claimed that the place is “the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti writers”. Notice how Banksy described the artists as “graffiti writers”- he not only creates art, but he also creates and popularizes satire by “writing out graffiti”.

Although Banksy is not yet considered a contemporary artist of this period, his popularity exceeds many artists who are highly regarded in the art community. Some critics may argue that Banksy’s works are simply vandalism, however Banksy has made such a great impact on pop-culture and perception of post-modern art by exhibiting irreverent humour and parody, tackling social and ethical issues.

Despite the controversial popularity he receives, his identity clearly fits the concept of post-modernism as he recreates art and brings graffiti art into vogue. His works are all over in social media and although his identity is still unknown, the public acknowledges Banksy’s works and the messages behind them.