

The Art of Banksy



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He “probably f-ing hates it.” According to the originator of “The Art of Banksy,” an unauthorized corporate pop-up show opening February 17 in an as-yet-undisclosed Boston location, that’s how British street-artist Banksy likely feels about his work being exhibited without his permission, with tickets selling for up to \$77, at no benefit to the artist. Banksy’s former agent Steve Lazarides, who ended his professional relationship with the artist in 2008, conceived the show’s original embodiment in 2016.

Since then, more than a million people in cities all over the United States and 10 other countries have seen the exhibits, now managed by Canadian company Starvox Entertainment. The webpage for the Boston version of “The Art of Banksy” touts that, with more than 100 original works on view (largely screen prints on paper on loan from private collectors), it will be “the largest Banksy exhibit ever assembled.” The company didn’t return emails sent through the website, and multiple phone calls to the only number listed yielded an endless loop of wait-time music.

Banksy, who is known for making art that’s public and freely accessible to all, may well deplore the commercialization of his work. Banksy’s prints have fetched millions at auctions such as Christie’s recent *I can’t believe you morons actually buy this sh*t* sale, in which a print rigged to self-destruct fetched \$1.4m only to change hands at Sotheby’s for \$25.4m. Banksy doesn’t profit from such sales, though he makes enough to fund various social interventions. In 2020 he bought a decommissioned French Navy boat, renamed it after a French feminist, and outfitted it to rescue refugees attempting to reach Europe from Africa. He also released a low-cost series of limited-edition tee-shirts in solidarity with protestors in Bristol, England who were prosecuted for toppling a statue of the town’s benefactor, a 17th century “merchant” responsible for transporting some

84,000 slaves from Africa to the Americas between 1672 and 1689.

Starvox’s website says its Boston customers will see “\$35 million of Banksy art.” If the show’s like the others, they will also be proffered an assortment of unauthorized merchandise as they’re directed to exit, without a whiff of irony, through the gift shop. ■

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