

Dear, Ulrich

It is good to receive this reply from you. I waited longer than usual because I was gathering all the information I intend to present in my thesis and reviewing what I have available.

For your context and for you to assess whether you believe you have something to contribute based on your studies, briefly, the story of what happened is this:

In February 2024, in Genoa (Italy), I met a young man whom I called “Kiwi” because he claimed to be from New Zealand. He told me he was 25 years old, worked as a digital nomad in programming, and, because of that, was able to travel while working. One detail struck me deeply: he carried on his backpack a keychain with the silhouette of two elephants, which he said he had drawn by hand with a Posca pen.

For about two weeks, we had an identical travel itinerary, but separated by 2 days: he would pass through a place, and I would arrive at the same destination about two days later. We would end up meeting for only a few hours, between one person’s arrival and the other’s departure. I did not get his real name or contact information. I also remember him showing me an app with a map marking all the places in the world he had already visited.

Months later, in August, the work attributed to Banksy appeared with an image exactly the same as the one on the keychain that “Kiwi” carried and claimed to have drawn by hand. This coincidence motivated an important part of my work.

For that reason, I would like to hear your assessment of the topic and, if possible, talk based on a few central questions:

What today can really be treated as solid and verifiable about Banksy?

How is it established that a work is in fact his?

What serious evidence exists about his identity, and what remains only in the realm of hypothesis?

Does it make more sense to think of Banksy as a single person or as someone surrounded by a team or collaborators?

How do you read the work of the silhouette of two elephants?

In light of what is known about Banksy, how would you classify a story like mine?

With documents, records, and audio recordings, to what extent is it possible to responsibly connect this account to Banksy?

What would, in your view, be the most responsible conclusion that I could sustain in the text?

Ulrich, if this topic makes sense to you, please let me know. I would very much like to have a solid foundation on this subject.

I would enjoy speaking with you via Google Meet, online; however, I understand if your availability is only by email.

Ulrich:

What today can really be treated as solid and verifiable about Banksy?

Depends on who you ask. I do research on B for 20 years now. I have no reason to believe it was not always the same person. There is one male person from Bristol behind this work. He started in the 1990s, dated works start in 1997. Works in printed sources in 1998. So your ca. 25 year old cannot be Banksy. I have more reasons than others to believe the person behind Banksy is Robin Gunningham, born 28. July 1973 in Bristol. The core about what is verifiable are his 5 books, his film, his website, the authorized interviews, nearly everything that was published before 2002, before he was famous.

How is it established that a work is in fact his?

Depends on from when it is, and if street or not. Street: Since 2000: What was on his website, later his Insta is more up to date. There are some blurry times before that (ca 1996-2000), here it depends on the source. Pictures published with interviews until 2002 are usually all genuine. Sellable, portable works or private murals: Greyzone. Banksy always sold more than was on display in exhibitions. In General: if a work is authenticated by PCO (Pest Control Office) you can be sure it is his.

What serious evidence exists about his identity, and what remains only in the realm of hypothesis?

This evidence exists, and I know who has this evidence. For me there is not much left I do not know for sure about his identity. I was always more interested in the work, the person is secondary for me.

Does it make more sense to think of Banksy as a single person or as someone surrounded by a team or collaborators?

Both. He is the architect. It is his creative input mostly. But he has a lot of helpers, always had. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. He had that in his Termal one project.

How do you read the work of the silhouette of two elephants?

This is of course my favorite question. The work is part 2 of a story. Read Banksy more like a film director, he gives info in the right order. The first one, the goat, established something. It could work as a work of art alone. When people saw it, they did not know yet that other work would follow that is linked close. The elephants establish the zoo in the story. They establish: more will come, and this story is about animals, zoo animals.

But: the work also exists on its own. From what I know about Banksy's way to approach works: Wall first, picture second. The series was ready in his mind before he started. He was

on the lookout for zoo enclosure locations all over London. It is important that one is in Richmond, the next in well off Chelsea. People are caged everywhere. This is not about elephants or animals or zoo animals, it is always about people, society. Male and female as well maybe, or old and young, as one elephant still or already has his tooth, the other not. They seem to like each other. And they are separated anyway. The first thing that came to my mind was Monty Pythons “The sense of life” or bible Be kind to your neighbor.(Mark 12:31, Leviticus 19:18).)

In light of what is known about Banksy, how would you classify a story like mine?

There are many roads to Banksy. I once had a similar experience, in Germany where I live, a few years ago a famous yet pseudonamous street artist called Barbara was very active. She lived in my home town. I suspected a friend of mine to be her. I like your approach, as it seems to be serious yet playful.

With documents, records, and audio recordings, to what extent is it possible to responsibly connect this account to Banksy?

Not 100% sure what you mean with “account”, Banksy’s Instagram? Your story? My bat guess: my answer to question 1.

What would, in your view, be the most responsible conclusion that I could sustain in the text?

The motif (“the two elephants”) is only a small part of the work. It is not that important, but the first thing you connect with. It lead you to dig deeper.

BTW do you know Alex Vallauri as you are from Brazil? A Brazilian stencil street artist who died in 1987 of AIDS, I did a lot of research on him, I can recommend his work to you.

Eu:

Dear Ulrich,

Thank you very much for your deep replies.

It took me some more time to restructure some sections of my thesis after all the news regarding Banksy's identity. No surprise that you were correct about it. Robin Gunningham = David Jones? 😊

I was reading the Reuters article and saw your name there, what a pleasure to have your presence in my Journalism thesis as well.

Besides that, I was already convinced that the young man I met at Genoa, Kiwi, wasn't Banksy himself because of his age, but I already knew about their "helpers". Now, this phrase in the article got me thinking. Do you have some more infos about the friends/partners Banksy circle? I read some articles about it and I want to check if there's any chance that a young 23 - 30 years old boy could be part of it? I'm 100% sure that the image I saw in his keychain was definitely the same as the 2 elephants art released months after.

1. "Casterline still has the photos. He is keeping them private, save for a tiny crop of the man's glasses he shared with us. He echoed what many say in Banksy's protective circle of friends, partners, collectors and critics."

Also, the article mentions that

2. "[...] In February 2024, Banksy held a secret exhibition in a Shoreditch basement, according to a collector who obtained photos from attendees. The source shared some of the surreptitiously snapped photos with Reuters. They included shots of previously unseen original Banksy works. The event, held in a building on Hanbury Street, was open only to collectors invited directly by Pest Control."

Around the same time, people from the industry were in the surroundings. In December 2023 I was in England, in February 2024 in Lisbon (ticket). The traveler (Kiwi) I met in March 2024 in Genoa had also recently been to London. I don't have his exact dates, but he showed me a map of the route he had been taking, and it showed that England had been one of his last 4 destinations, in the past 3 months. He showed me this track using the "Pin Traveler" app.

3. The hostel we met had a wall full of Banksy artwork, in the main living room, just to add it as one more coincidence. (Victoria House Hostel, picture here).

4. Last, if I'm still allowed to ask you something, I'd very much enjoy it if you could tell me what your interpretation of these 2 Banksy arts is. 1 of them is the original one I saw in Venezia, the other I was stuck at Banksy's museum exposition, in Lisbon in January 2024.

- Migrant Child (photo here)

- Waiting in Vain (photo here)

Below my answer in blue to your last email doubt:

With documents, records, and audio recordings, to what extent is it possible to responsibly connect this account to Banksy?

Not 100% sure what you mean with "account", Banksy's Instagram? Your story? My best guess: my answer to question 1.

By "account" I mean Banksy himself. But due to all the updates, now I "re-do" the question changing "Banksy" to "Banksy's helpers".

Dear, I kindly ask you to share with me your thoughts, please.

Ulrich:

Dear Luiza Rodrigues,

thank you, I'm afraid I still think this is all coincidence. We know now some helpers, the photographer Fragile is one, Robert del Naja and the war photographer mentioned in the Reuters article. I don't think Banksy would work with someone who carries around his sketch as a key ring. I think Banksy used an image that exists in several similar images, what made it a Banksy was the placement, the performance, the image is secondary. Sorry. For the interpretations, I think yours would be as good as mine, apart from the fact that the waiting man might be a hint a the Street Art pioneer Richard Hambleton and his Shadowmen. Apart from that: look at the location and its context plus the image and you got a good interpretation.