

**Luiza:**

Okay, Will, as you already may know, I'm doing that research from my thesis from journalism college.

I give you some context before. I understand that you might not be able to help me so much, but the way I'm going to do this interview, I will do some questions to you. If you feel that you are not the best way to answer, feel free to just say next question. This is a very, very open minded way of thinking here.

My first question is more related to Banksy's ecosystem. So when you look at Banksy's career, do you think the most revealing question today is no longer who is he, but rather what kind of ecosystem makes Banksy possible to exist?

**Will:**

Yes, I think it is an interesting question, not for general followers of Banksy who really want to know who he is more than anything, just like the whole mystery of it.

But actually, how much does Banksy do and how much does his team do is an interesting question. Yeah. And I don't know if I knew the answer.

I've written about it. It's very difficult to know.

**Luiza:**

Also related to the layers of the people around Banksy. In your view, what are the main layers of people around Banksy? So creative collaborators, logistical helpers, photographers, intermediates, and also gatekeepers of Banksy? Because I already saw in some literature that we have these gatekeepers of Banksy. So my answer now is, in your view, what are all these main layers related to him?

**Will:**

Right.

My experience with him is he has someone who deals with the press. She's been with him for a long time, and that's a major gatekeeper. He's changed managers, but that was the second major gatekeeper.

And he also has one of his companies, Pest Control, which also can help. So he's well-protected. And for instance, when I wrote my first book about Banksy, I went to the woman who deals with press inquiries and said "could we have an interview with him?" And she came back to me and said, "if you show us your manuscript, we would consider giving an interview".

And the publisher and I decided that we were not going to show the manuscript. Because who knows what would happen? He might have said "no" right, fine. "Thank you."

"I don't like this manuscript, and this is what's wrong with it." "No, I'm not going to give you an interview. Or I'm only going to give you an interview if you take up this, that, and the other."

So he said no. I didn't mind that, but it was a way of him being protected.

In terms of collaborators, the honest answer, really, is I don't know how much collaboration he has.

But I think the ideas are probably or certainly his, and that's what makes him the artist, really. You know, Hearst didn't do all the spot painting himself. He had other people to paint the spots.

Banksy, I think, does go up and does put up the pieces, but with help. But he has the idea and he's there. I don't think he sort of sends teams out and sits back and sees how well they've done.

And it must be a, and this is, again, not knowing exactly, but I would think it must be a fairly loose collaboration. Like when he was working his month in New York, he probably needed quite a team of people to help him. I'm just trying to remember where it is now. The big exhibition he did on the coast near Bristol. He obviously had a team of people setting up that exhibition. So it depends.

But I think it's him plus whoever he needs at the time, and probably one or two others who are more there with him, talking about ideas, talking about things, who he has around him. And I'm not going to go into this whole big Reuters expose, but when he went to the Ukraine, he had a Massive Attack man with him. So he's obviously a good mate who will help when needed.

Good mate from olden days.

**Luiza:**

That's a very good answer, actually, because I also imagine while you were answering that, that if we start talking about how this team of helpers, at least in the action of painting, all the murals and all the stuff, if we start talking about how this team might function, we would just be "imagining" things because we cannot affirm that.

Do you agree or no?

**Will:**

Imagining is, I think, the wrong word, but I think we would be constructing what is likely, but it's not particularly evidence-based. But there have been times when he's painted in full view of people, and he's had people as part of the act, if he's been up a scaffold, they've been part of the pretending to be builders or whatever. They've been there helping.

**Luiza:**

My next question is related to mostly how ideas could or do exist before Banksy's work appears. Before Banksy's work appears to the public, how might a visual idea exist in the world as a sketch, as a fragment, as a conversation, a prep, a shared reference? Or this is really not a possibility? Again, we might be putting some evidence that we cannot use as a base, but this question is related to the story I've lived. I saw the perfect sketch of those two elephants like seven, six months before it appears in a wall.

So I'm just trying to understand with the evidence I have and with the people I can be related to, all the research I can do, if this is a possibility, like the work of Banksy, how might a visual idea exist in the world? This is the question.

**Will:**

He has on some occasions, like his Glasgow exhibition, there have been hints at sketches beforehand. And there must be some.

You can't cut those stencils without seeing how it's going to work to a point. Was the man you met, was he an artist himself?

**Luiza:**

He didn't tell me he was an artist. He told me that he was an IT guy, that it's related to computers and stuff, but he was travelling abroad because his job and his work could be done by a computer, so like a nomad.

So he didn't mention anything about being an artist.

**Will:**

So you'd think, it's difficult, isn't it, because you'd think, well, if he was a young artist who helped conceive this whole, not conceive, but helped on the whole London project, then you could see him thinking, "right, I'm going to draw this on my key chain." But if he had no history of art behind him, and there's no reason why he should be lying to you, then it seems odd that Banksy would be using him to create something like that.

So I'm not... when I'm sure Banksy draws in people when he needs them, and maybe people go away and think, well, I've helped him on that, and I'm going to make a little sketch of what I've helped him with. But he seems, to me, an improbable helper of Banksy. It's not like it was just before it happened and he was helping set up things or helping cut the stencils.

He might have known someone who'd known someone who showed him these, but he doesn't, from what you say, unless you have any other clues, he doesn't seem particularly like he would be a sort of freelance who's helped on the team, is my view.

**Luiza:**

Now I would like to go for a more journalistic point of view.

**Will:**

Can I just interrupt for a moment? Yes. The exhibition I was thinking of, I couldn't think of the name, Weston Supermare, where he had his big exhibition on the old Tropicana site, and he must have had... it was a major exhibition, wonderful exhibition, and he must have had a team of people working for him there.

I mean, for instance, he had some of the people who, on the entrance team, went to sort of actor training school for a weekend or so, so they could be as gloomy as possible. That's what they had to be. So how many of them met him, I don't know, but there must have been a team of people saying, hey, let's do this, and with him in control, his ideas, them putting in ideas, changing things and making it happen.

Sorry, I interrupted you. Next question.

**Luiza:**

No worries.

Thank you. My next question is related more to the journalistic point of view. So, if a journalist encounters a story that feels too meaningful to ignore, but too fragile to prove, what is the most honest way to investigate it? It's a very journalistic question.

**Will:**

Oh, my God. Well, you had no contact details for this bloke you met.

**Luiza:**

No contact, no contact, and either his real name, because at any point I've asked him, because it was the nickname of Kiwi, so I have no contact.

I searched the hostel to try to get his name, but due to the legal things related, they obviously cannot give me his name, but I've tried.

And since we have also almost no time together, like every day was just one hour and then we met two days ahead, he was leaving and I was arriving, so no contact was noted.

**Will:**

So, you've tried him and where he stayed and everything.

If you're determined to, it's a point to see whether he was a helper, is that what would you say? You're trying to find out whether he was one of Banksy's helpers?

**Luiza:**

Correct.

**Will:**

I think after that I'm going to choose your answer, I don't know. I mean, actually, I don't know what you'd do then.

I mean, I could say, oh, you go on to his press officer or something or other, and that would get you nowhere. You would have to be somewhat immersed in the Banksy scene. You'd have to be here, I think, and trying to meet people and then asking about him.

But it seems to me that in the end, he was the person who came and went. And even assuming he was helping Banksy, you'd be very lucky if you found anyone who remembered him. I suppose you've researched whether there are any other elephants drawn in the way that Banksy drew his and you've come up without any.

There are no sort of predecessor elephants. And you've looked at the pictures on the wall and seen how close they are to the picture he showed you. Did he show it to you just out of interest? Did you feel like he was showing something special to you or did you just happen to glance at it?

**Luiza:**

No, not at all.

Actually, he didn't show it to me. I saw it first and I asked because all the time that keychain was ding-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling in his backpack. And I pointed at it and I said, like "oh what a great sketch of two elephants"

And then he talked about this with me, but he was not gathering himself. He didn't show it to me. I pointed it out and I talked about it.

So it was not special.

**Will:**

And what was his explanation?

**Luiza:**

Of the two elephants? It was a very quick explanation that he was thinking about in the pandemic time, that it was representing two people across in two different windows, crossed from each other. I don't know the name in English for that elephant thing.

**Will:**

Trunk.

**Luiza:**

Yes, the trunk was long that would be able for them to connect with each other even apart. So even in two different windows.

It was like that. He was talking about the pandemic time and era.

**Will:**

That's quite an interesting explanation, isn't it? Because it sort of goes with the Banksy elephants, really.

And he wasn't sort of saying, hey, look at me, I've got a... I think that's how Banksy would probably describe his elephants.

**Luiza:**

Anyway, it's a very tricky question. That's why it became my research.

Okay, also in this subject of the evidences and journalistic things. So, what kinds of evidence would be meaningful? Straighten a case involving possible proximity to Banksy's circle. And what kind of details are narratively striking but evidentially weak?

Because I have this idea that it's a very tricky situation and I cannot affirm anything without a kind of evidence.

But anyway, that's it.

**Will:**

Yeah, because you have the evidence of the timing. You have the evidence of what he said to you, which I think is really interesting.

I mean, it's circumstantial, but it is the feeling of the Banksy work. You have, by talking to people, you have a feeling that Banksy takes on people to help him at various times. So you have that evidence, but you don't have any... it's all very circumstantial.

And I don't think at the moment you would win a law case with it. And I'm sorry, I can't see what you would do next other than hang about in London and find the Banksy team or the West Country to find the evidence.

**Luiza:**

Yes, great.

So, one of my last questions are related to the topic you brought in the email of the public right to know. As we discussed and I explained it there, I wasn't pushing this topic to my research until now. But this got me thinking and I personally already have an opinion, but obviously I cannot work only with my opinion.

So I would like to do a question related to this topic you brought.

**Luiza:**

So, do you think the public's right to know Banksy's identity is a legitimate journalistic question or does it risk misunderstanding what anonymity is doing with his work?

**Will:**

I don't think there is a right to know Banksy's identity. I think it's a good journalistic investigation and I don't mind them journalists finding out who he is. And I think the Reuters investigation in particular where they went to New York City and found the charge sheet from 2000 was really interesting where he actually admitted his guilt.

But I don't think there's a right to know. And I remember when I first looked at this (Reuters investigation) and looked at the Daily Mail investigation, as I think I said in the book, the comments underneath the Mail investigation, the first one was something like "why do you do this? Why have you done this?" People enjoy not knowing. And also, you have a name and now you have a different name as well.

But it's very different from having a name and having a person. He doesn't do interviews. You don't meet him or his wife or his children.

So, people know a name that they don't want to know on the whole. But he's sort of saying, "okay, but you don't know **me**." You have a sort of feeling of who Damien Hirst is because he's not just Damien Hirst, he's a person who gives interviews occasionally and he becomes much more of a rounded being.

But... and the same with other artists, but Banksy, there's just a **name**, and that's not... that doesn't mean much.

I'm sorry, I'm (0:48) straying from your... I don't...

I think what this latest investigation does is make it more difficult for him as an artist, that if he does a piece on a private house or something, it's probably going to be okay, but if he did... if he now does something like the piece he did on the Royal Courts of Justice, the police know who he is.

There's no doubt about it, that the New York police docket shows who he is. They can find him, and I think they would find it difficult now. Politicians would be saying, "you know who this man is, arrest him."

He's claimed his... if he claims he's done it, which he does, you should arrest him. Now, police are probably not on the whole going to enjoy arresting him, because they're going to, but it's going to be more difficult for him. That's a pity, but I don't feel like, "oh, it shouldn't have happened."

It's a risk he takes, and he almost got away with it, or he got away with it for 25 years, and I think he would still get away with it if he came and painted on my house. I'm not going to go, "I know who you are. I'm going to the police", but if he painted on another piece on the Royal Courts of Justice, I think people would say, you know who he is, arrest him. So it does make it more difficult for him, in some cases, not in all cases.