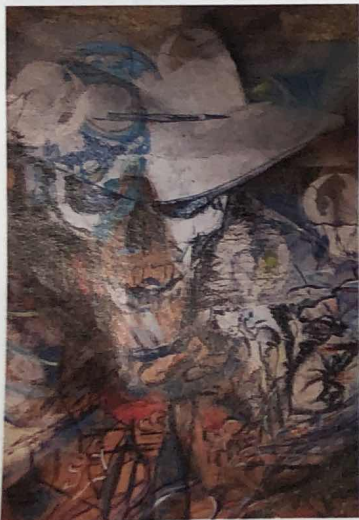


Mandara Takowsky is an L.A. based artist who produces multi-media events in art, music, fashion and photography.

For further information on art exhibits or to schedule a consultation on planning an art event, grand opening, after hours networking, cocktail party or business open house.



LA ART SCENE

BY MANDARA TAKOWSKY

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Low Brow for the High Brow

The beginning of February saw street art and pop culture blogs set ablaze with sightings of new works by mysterious guerilla super street artist Banksy. This elusive British graffiti artist has become a phenomenon in the art world and amazingly this year even made the short list for an Oscar nomination. His easily identifiable stenciled graffiti is only part of his intrigue; he keeps his identity concealed, giving us glimpses of his newly unleashed imagination only when the mood strikes him.

Banksy makes no apologies for his contempt with the government for labeling graffiti as vandalism; easily shown by the satirical street art he paints on public surfaces; from walls to billboards to bridges around the world, any public surface is his canvas for the dark humor that has become his Ninja art trademark. A cult following over the last few years has made him a prominent figure in the L.A. art scene and his work was sold through private art auctioneers who attempted to sell his on-site work leaving the problem of removal to the highest bidder; raising the interesting question of how public art and private market intersect.

Within days of sighting his latest pieces, they were being removed and defaced. The most notable was the large billboard around the Sunset and Fairfax area on an advertisement for the Light Group, known for its luxurious and hedonistic clubs in Vegas. The piece entitled "Living the Dream" depicted an inebriated Mickey and Minnie mouse, in debauchorous acts. Immediately CBS Outdoor who owned the billboard had it removed, even though an \$10,000 offer popped up from the gas station where the billboard stood—to buy it. At first thought to be trashed, the art piece is now rumored to be in the hands of the

Light Group and likely will find a home in one of its venues. Other pieces like the "Charlie Brown Firestarter" painted on the side of a building off the infamous Sunset Strip depicted the beloved Charles Schulz

character with a cigarette and can of gasoline. Within hours the wall had holes drilled through it and the building owner had offers not only for the old, fire destroyed building, but the piece of pop history adorning it. The owner initially covered Banksy's art to prevent further damage to the building, but opted to save it, and cut the art out of the wall to keep—a smarter and more lucrative move.



The only piece not removed, but unfortunately defaced was the "Crayola Shooter" piece in Westwood. The make art nor war statement was covered with paint and tagged. An attempt to clean the art was made. Even Beverly Hills received its own Banksy stamp of pop culture with a wall size "Peeing Dog" on the side of a building on Santa Monica where high brow meets low brow.



There is no question about his marketing genius. The only questions that remain are whether this was a publicity stunt for Banksy's upcoming Oscar-nominated picture "Exit Through The Gift Shop" or if the elusive artist will show up to collect his award wearing a money mask as he has inquired if he can. Although this isn't Banksy's usual MO, this sudden explosion conveniently was just in time for the Oscar ballot deadline. Most artists never get their work seen. Banksy gives you no choice. It is art culture through living, walking and driving in traffic throughout our fair Los Angeles streets. ●

