The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Street Artist Banksy Finally Comes to Moscow

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June 18, 2018



"Heavy Weaponry" **Courtesy of Central House of Artists**

The first solo exhibition of works by Banksy in Moscow has finally opened at the Central House of Artists.

Banksy is an enigmatic street artist from the U.K. who has never been seen in public or revealed his identity. He rose to fame in early 2000s after several provocative and subversive performances and became known worldwide after directing the award-winning documentary "Exit Through the Gift Shop."

Before Banksy became the world's most famous street artist, he was involved in Bristol's underground scene. He cites 3D from the band Massive Attack as one of his inspirations, which led many people to believe that Banksy and 3D are the same person.

Banksy's Moscow exhibition has been a long time coming. A major retrospective was

announced in the fall of 2014 at the Manege exhibition hall, but it fell through in the end because several British owners of key masterpieces declined to take part.

This year's exhibition was organized by IQ Art Management, headed by the famous entrepreneur Alexander Nachkebia. Nachkebia chose an easier path by partnering with the Lilley Fine Art gallery, which owns a large collection of Banksy pieces. Other items are on loan from several private collectors and museums.

The exhibition takes up the entire second floor of the Central House of Artists — nearly 3,000 square meters. On view are various sketches, prints and original art objects numbering about 100 items in total.

Unfortunately, there are very few real art objects, like a rat painted on a door or street signs with graffiti. The majority of the items are prints, mostly copies with numbers like 560/600 on the tags.

Ironically, the most impressive items at the exhibition are large scale photos of Banksy's original works on the walls of the actual buildings in England, in the U.S. and in Palestine with detailed explanations and the stories behind them. Banksy favors stencils — images drawn or printed on pieces of paper, then cut out and glued to the wall. The show has his favorite subjects: rats, apes, policemen, soldiers, and children.

The exhibition emphasizes Banksy's political activism. His messages are usually anti-war, anti-capitalist or anti-establishment. Two of his most recent projects — Dismaland and the Walled Off Hotel — are well detailed. Dismaland was a joke on an amusement park near London that tells the stories of refugees stuck in Europe's camps. The Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem introduces tourists from Israel to the harsh realities of life on the other side of the wall dividing Israel and Palestine.

While there is much of value in the show, there is also a certain sensationalism that is reflected in the exhibition's official title "Banksy: Genius or Vandal?" Visitors are greeted by a sometimes malfunctioning two-channel video installation with disjointed episodes from Banksy's life, and there are several non-art installations based on Banksy's art objects, one even featuring a hooded man meant to represent the elusive artist.

The exhibition runs until September 2.

10 Krymsky Val. Metro Oktyabrskaya, Park Kultury. www.banksyart.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/06/18/street-artist-banksy-finally-comes-to-moscow-a61868