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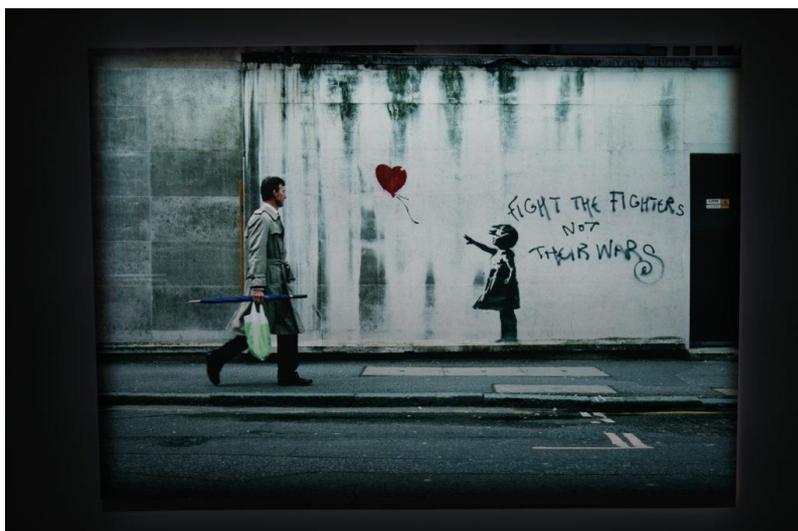
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Is Banksy Selling Out? After Years of Skirting the Law, the Street Artist Went to Court to Protect His Own Copyright—and Won

The artist accused the museum of selling unauthorized Banksy merchandise.

Caroline Goldstein, February 26, 2019



An installation view from "The Art of Banksy" exhibition in Miami Beach in 2018.

In a surprising about-face, the anonymous street artist Banksy, who usually flouts the authority of the law, successfully took legal action against an Italian museum for profiting off of his name and work.

The artist, who once said that copyright was “for losers,” brought suit against the Mudec Museum in Milan last year for selling unauthorized merchandise at an exhibition titled “The Art of Banksy—A Visual Protest.” The claim was filed through Banksy’s authentication handling service, Pest Control.



A fake Banksy graffiti tag. Photo licensed via CC, courtesy dumbonyc via Flickr.

Last month, a judge in Milan ruled in favor of Banksy’s request for all the merchandise bearing his name to be removed from the museum’s shop, saying that it constituted a violation of the artist’s trademark, according to Italian news outlet // *Giorno*. Promotional materials using Banksy’s name however, were allowed to remain.

It is the first known instance in which the artist has taken legal action against the rising tide of bootleg artworks, knickknacks, and of course, institutional exhibitions that bear his name. On his website, Banksy notes that “there has been a recent spate of Banksy exhibitions[,] none of which are consensual.”



Installation view from "The Art of Banksy" opening party in Miami Beach.

The website goes on to list the offending shows, for which visitors have been charged from about \$10-a-pop in Moscow to \$49 in Miami for a lackluster Banksy Blockbuster.

In keeping with his low-profile, the artist has only commented on these unauthorized shows through social media, but this suit could be just the beginning of his use of more official channels. But as one writer notes, the artist may find himself in murky legal waters, as any copyright claims he attempts to enforce would require the disclosure of his name.

Representatives for Pest Control and Banksy did not respond to requests for comment.