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## A Belgian Court Has Seized 58 Banksy Artworks Worth Over \$15 Million From an 'Illegal' Brussels Exhibition

The court determined the uninsured works, belonging to Steve Lazarides, were being held without the owner's permission.

**Henri Neuendorf**, November 26, 2018



A version of Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* at Bonhams in 2007. Photo: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images.

It turns out Banksy isn't the only one hanging up works by Banksy without permission.

A Belgian court has shut down a Banksy exhibition in Brussels, known as “Banksy Unauthorised,” as questions swirl around who is the rightful owner of the 58 works on view. On Thursday at midnight, bailiffs loaded up and drove the works to an unidentified location, where they will be held until the next court hearing in January, according to the *Guardian*.

The dramatic move comes after show’s organizers were accused of illegally holding the works without permission from their owner, who is reportedly Banksy’s former manager and gallerist Steve Lazarides. In all, the trove of street art is said to be worth more than \$15 million.

A lawyer for the show’s organizers, the local non-profit Strokar Inside, said his clients were caught in the middle of a dispute between Lazarides and a shadowy German intermediary that once specialized in selling meat. (You can’t make this stuff up!)

According to Strokar’s attorney Stanislas Eskenazi, the non-profit is an unwitting victim of some kind of scheme. The lawyer said Strokar Inside simply provided a venue for the show after the intermediary German company, On Entertainment, got in touch claiming it had presented a version of the show in Berlin and wanted to bring it to Brussels. The non-profit gratefully accepted the offer and staged the Banksy show in a former supermarket in a leafy suburb of the Belgian capital.

What seemed to good to be true may have been just that. Shortly after the show opened, lawyers representing Lazarides from the London firm Mischon de Reya came knocking, accusing Strokar Inside of illegally possessing the works. The dealer’s legal team said On Entertainment had no right to bring the works to Belgium. After a week-long back-and-forth, the non-profit elected to go to the Belgian courts to let them settle the dispute.

“My clients are two very nice people,” Eskenazi told the *Guardian*. “And they have been shitting it.”

The lawyer continued that Strokar’s decision to unburden themselves of the show was based on a lack of insurance for the works. “When my clients didn’t get reassurance from On Entertainment that the art was insured, they just wanted to get out [of] this situation. We also by then had discovered that the company had recently been involved in selling meat. It was very strange.”

On Entertainment could not be reached for comment.



Curator and former manager of Banksy Steve Lazarides. Photo by Darrian Traynor/Getty Images.

In its ruling, the Brussels court sided with Lazarides. The court's statement affirmed that "the disputed works do indeed appear to be exposed, without the agreement of the legitimate holders of rights over them, in the premises, where they do not appear to be regularly insured," adding that "there are reasons that it would seem necessary to secure them as quickly as possible."

Another "unauthorized" Banksy exhibition is set to go on show in Miami next week, which also claims to be from Lazarides's collection. Neither Steve Lazarides nor the organizers of the Miami exhibition responded to artnet News's request for comment.

On his personal website, Banksy warns fans of a series of "fake" exhibitions of his work. "Members of the public should be aware there has been a recent spate of Banksy exhibitions none of which are consensual," an announcement reads, next to photos advertising the show in Brussels and Miami, among others, each listed with its ticket price. "They've been organised entirely without the artist's knowledge or involvement. Please treat them accordingly."