

Committee(s):	Date:
Barbican Centre Board – for decision Port Health and Environmental Services Committee - for information	21 November 2018 27 November 2018
Subject: Banksy Artwork – Barbican Exhibition Halls	Public
Report of: Managing Director, Barbican Centre, Director of Built Environment and the Assistant Town Clerk & Culture Mile Director	For Decision
Report authors: Matthew Pitt	

Summary

In September 2017 two artworks by the internationally renowned street artist known as ‘Banksy’ appeared in Beech Street closely followed by a third work by another well-known artist, Danny Minnick. At their 19 September 2017 meeting, the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee considered the future of the artworks and agreed to measures proposed by the Barbican Centre to safeguard the artworks for the duration of its highly successful Basquiat Exhibition. At the time, it was agreed that following the exhibition the City would need to determine a longer-term strategy.

This report provides an update on the artworks, how they have been maintained to date, the public reception, associated reputational risks to the City of London Corporation and proposes a solution for the medium-term future.

Recommendations

Members of the Barbican Centre Board are asked to: -

- Approve the continuation of the Barbican Centre’s active management of the artwork and all associated costs; and
- Note that the Board has the right to review this position, in consultation with the wider City of London Corporation should the need arise.

Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee are asked to: -

- Note the contents of this report.

Main Report

Background

1. In September 2017, shortly before the opening of the Barbican’s Basquiat: Boom for Real exhibition celebrating the life and works of pioneering New York artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, two artworks by the internationally renowned artist known as ‘Banksy’ appeared overnight at the junction of Beech Street and Golden Lane

on the external wall of Barbican Exhibition Hall 1 (see appendices 1 & 2). A third artwork, by American artist Danny Minnick, also appeared shortly afterwards in response to the two Banksy works.

2. Due to the high level of public interest and cultural value of the works, the Barbican Centre took immediate steps to safeguard the artworks. The appearance of the artworks was met with significant publicity and social media activity. Members of the public regularly gathered in the highway around Beech in order to view the artworks and take pictures to be shared on social media. A security presence near the artworks was organised in the immediate aftermath of the artworks appearing and communication took place with the wider City of London Corporation to ensure they were not removed by cleansing.
3. Following the press night for the exhibition the artworks were protected by the Centre with clear Perspex sheet – a cost effective measure that had previously been used to protect similar artworks of this nature across in other locations. A critical opinion of the artworks is available at Appendix 3.

Current Position

4. Basquiat: Boom for Real was the most successful exhibition ever to take place at the Barbican in its 35 year history with 216,389 people visiting. Accordingly, it received 2,400 pieces of worldwide media coverage and was particularly successful at attracting a young, diverse audience measured against other Barbican activity. Many of those visitors also came to see the Banksy works. The artworks themselves attracted 296,000 'likes' and over 2000 comments across two posts on Banksy's official Instagram account. That account currently has 4.4m followers from around the world. The Barbican and the exhibition also received significant social media attention as a direct result of the artworks.
5. Since the exhibition came to a close, the artworks have remained in place, protected by the clear Perspex sheets. They continue to prove a considerable draw, bringing visitors to the Barbican and Culture Mile area. The works are also listed on Google Maps as well as various sources detailing the location of Banksy's work.
6. It should be noted that whilst coverage to date has been overwhelmingly positive (see appendix 4 for press highlights), previous examples where landowners and local authorities have removed Banksy artworks, either accidentally or otherwise, have also attracted media attention, usually negative. This would be a significant reputational risk to both the City of London Corporation and Barbican Centre if a decision to remove the artworks, completely or to another location, were to be made.
7. Although minor incidents of 'tagging' have occurred on the protective sheets or next to the artworks, these have been sporadic and their removal has been carefully managed by the Barbican Centre within their operational budgets. There have been no major or serious incidents caused as a result of the protection of these artworks.

Proposal

8. Following consideration at a management level and in consultation with colleagues across the City of London Corporation, the Barbican Centre have offered to continue their active management of the three artworks. This would enable the artworks to remain in place for the foreseeable future. This approach would enable continued public enjoyment, as originally intended by the artist, and thus avoid the likely adverse media coverage and negative social media comment that the City of London Corporation and Barbican would receive if it were decided the artworks should be removed.

Financial Implications

9. The costs of the proposal, subject to Member approval, would continue to be met from Barbican Centre operational budgets, as confirmed by its Buildings and Operations Director. Any costs associated with cleaning in the area not immediately surrounding the artworks will continue to be subject to usual City of London Procedures.
10. The Chamberlain has confirmed that whilst it is possible to insure the artworks, it would be a departure from the City's normal practice to insure artworks outside of the premises. Whilst the artworks are likely to be of great value the City did not purchase the artworks and would not suffer a direct financial loss from loss or damage to the artworks themselves.

Corporate and Strategic Implications

11. The continued presence of the artworks aligns with the City of London Corporation Cultural Strategy 2018-22. Objective one – Transforming our Spaces – calls for the city to be made more 'open' and 'culturally vibrant'. Objective two – Culture Mile – specifically identifies 'making cultural and heritage activity visible in the streetscape'.
12. The location of the artworks at the corner of Beech Street and Golden Lane positions them at the heart of Culture Mile and the 'culture spine' identified as key area for transformation within the Culture Mile Look and Feel Strategy. The artworks contribute towards one the agreed aims of Culture Mile's Strategy - 'to contribute towards changing perceptions of the City...' and 'to develop Culture Mile as a vibrant and welcoming cultural, creative and learning destination'.
13. Were the artworks to be removed at this time, it would call into the question the credibility the City of London's vision for Culture Mile at an early stage of its 10-15 year development.

Conclusion

14. When three artworks appeared on the side of Barbican Exhibition Hall 1 in September 2017, two by Banksy and the other by US artist Danny Minnick, the Barbican Centre took immediate steps to safeguard artworks from harm. The installation of Perspex sheets has since proved a successful and cost-effective way of the artworks remaining in-situ. Whilst the removal of the artworks, completely or to another location remains an option, this would attract significant negative publicity for the City of London Corporation and the Barbican Centre.

The artworks add interest and vibrancy to the site which lies at the heart of Beech Street – ‘the culture spine’ of Culture Mile and continue to attract visitors to the area. Members are therefore asked to consider the recommendations set out in this report which, if approved, would safeguard the artworks future at their current location for the foreseeable future.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Photographs of the artworks
- Appendix 2 – Confirmation of authenticity (Banksy Official Instagram posts)
- Appendix 3 – Critical opinion of the artworks
- Appendix 4 – Press highlights

Background Papers

- Minutes of the Port Health Committee – 19 September 2017

Matthew Pitt

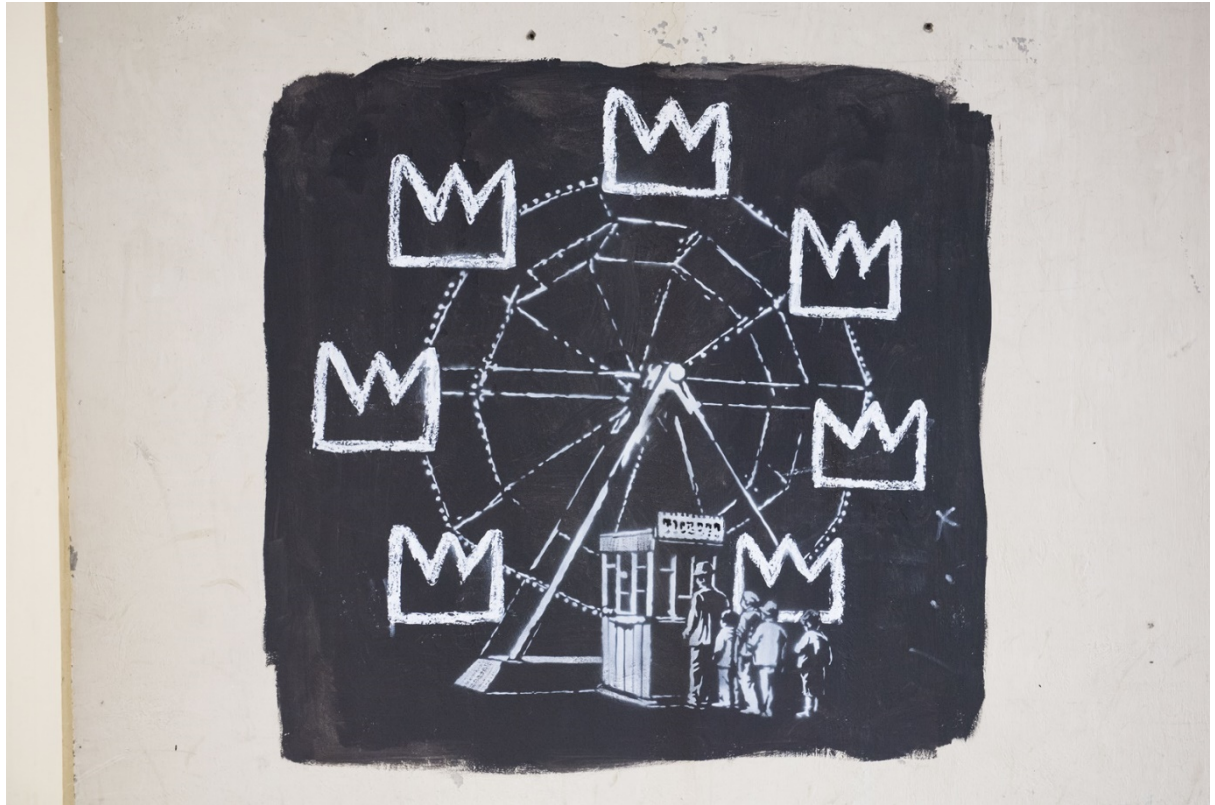
Town Clerk's Department

T: 020 7332 1425

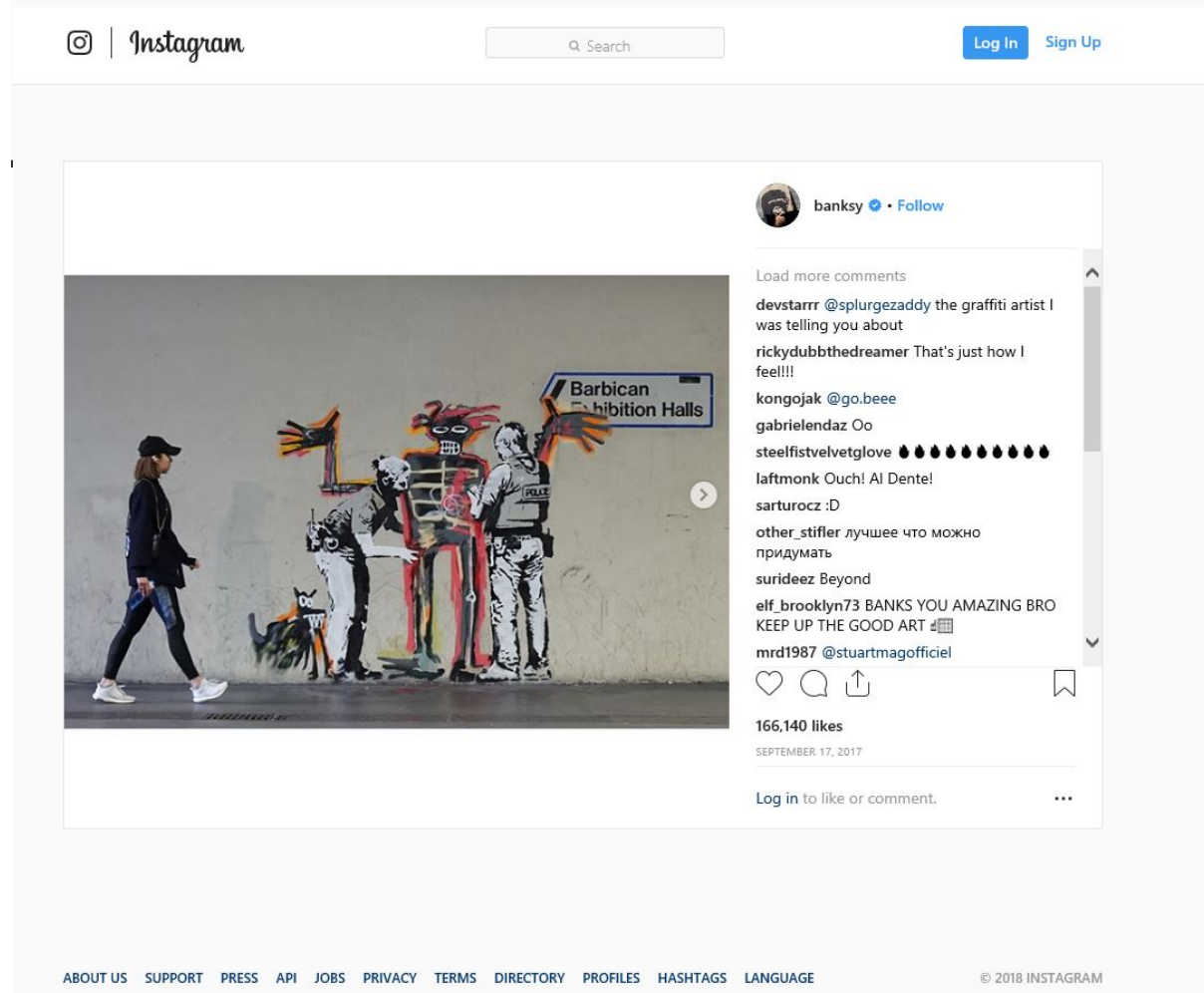
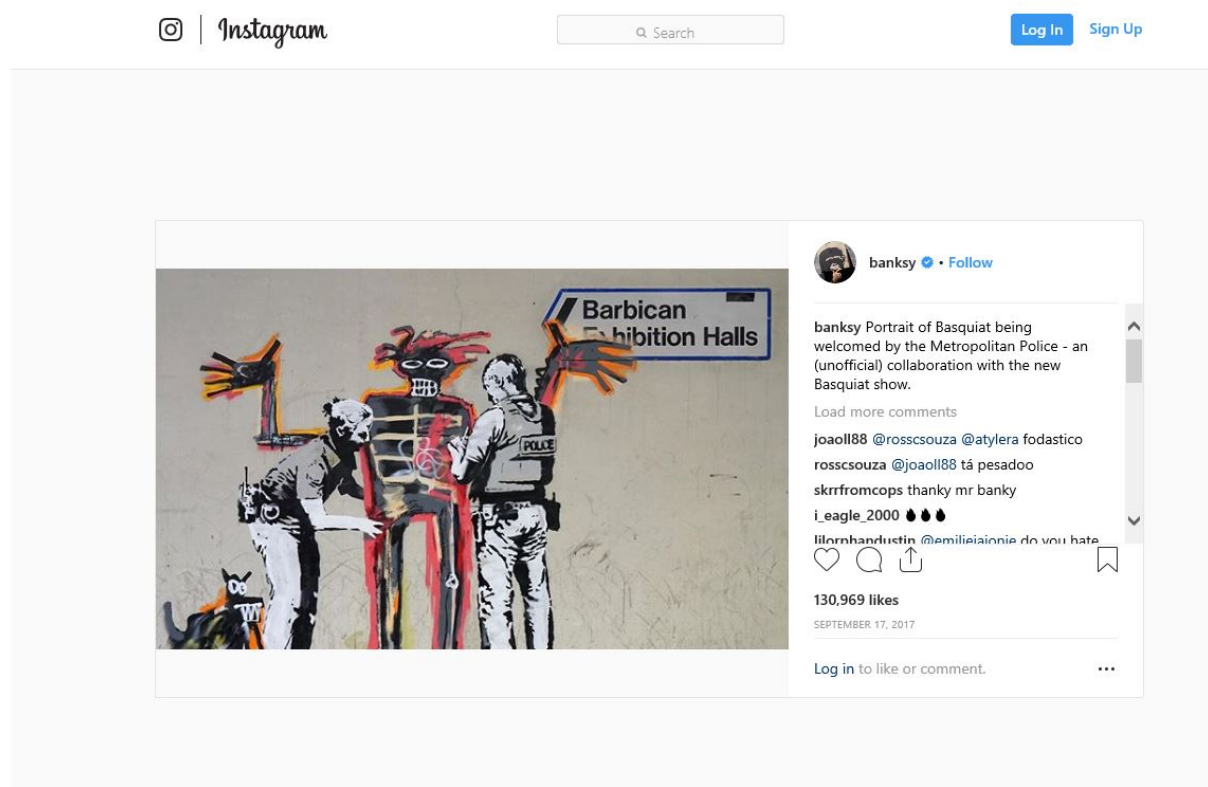
E: matthew.pitt@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Banksy and Minnick artworks





Appendix 2 – Confirmation from Banksy (official Instagram posts)



Appendix 3 – Critical opinion by Dr Rafael Schacter, UCL

BANKSY'S CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Most likely the world's most popular living artist, Banksy is an anonymous, notorious, equally celebrated and castigated figure who has achieved immense global success in spite of (or perhaps due to) his unorthodox artistic approach. Emergent initially from the practice of graffiti and, latterly, street art (of which he is acknowledged as of the key early exponents), Banksy first came to renown in his hometown of Bristol in the mid 1990s, the site in which he developed his distinctive stencilling technique. Forming a humorous, sardonic, incisive style, a mode in which an irreverent or anti-establishment message would be presented via a reduced, streamlined visual pun, the effectiveness of his aesthetic approach, alongside the artist's witty turns of phrase and increasingly daring public interventions (taking place in locations such as London Zoo and Disneyland, the British Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art) led to increasing attention far beyond the confines of the art-world itself. Whilst Banksy's practice continued to extend outwards onto ever larger (but still insurgent) stages – from documentary films to large scale festivals, dystopian theme parks to fully functioning hotels – all of his projects retained the same ability to capture the political and cultural zeitgeist: the same ability to capture huge media and public attention through his equivalently idiosyncratic yet highly accessible approach.

THE TWO BARBICAN WORKS¹:

In September 2017, shortly before the opening of the Barbican's *Basquiat: Boom for Real* exhibition celebrating the life and works of pioneering New York artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, two artworks appeared at the junction of Beech Street and Golden Lane on the external wall of Barbican Exhibition Hall 1. Self-attributed via Banksy's own Instagram page, the first, larger piece, shows two police officers searching a human figure – a character taken from Basquiat's 1982 *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump* – as his canine companion stands watching on. Moving from a position in the original work of playing joyfully within the spray of the pump's water, in Banksy's reworking the lead character (potentially but not definitively a self-portrait of Basquiat), is transferred into a position under the direct, repressive handling of the State. Captioning the installation *Portrait of Basquiat being welcomed by the Metropolitan police*, Banksy thus here decries the "stop and search" tactics of British law enforcement, in particular, it

¹ I will not be discussing the adjacent work by Danny Minnick

would appear, their statistically proven racial bias.² The second, more compact piece, depicts a group of five people queuing at a ticket booth adjacent to a Ferris wheel; here, however, the passenger cars have been replaced by a series of three-pointed crowns, a symbol implicitly related to Basquiat and an emblem utilized in many of his works.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

These “(un)official collaboration[s]”, as Banksy called them, had, as with almost every new work by the artist, a huge global impact. Undoubtedly, they brought extra attention to the Barbican exhibition, yet at the same time did in some way shift the focus away from Basquiat and toward Banksy (at what was the former artist’s most rigorous and multi-layered exhibition to date in the UK). Moreover, whilst the two pieces firmly placed themselves within important contemporary British political issues – in particular the first work’s exploration of the so-called Hostile Environment policies of the Home Office and the still prevalent institutional racism of the police – they also essentialise Basquiat as a Black artist, one standing in for all Black bodies and their exploitation by state and cultural forces: Whilst Basquiat did commonly focus on the relationship between African American citizens and law enforcement authorities (seen in pieces such as *Irony of a Negro Policeman* and *Defacement* in particular), he was hugely exoticized and fetishized by the institutional art world during his life, and even more so following his early death. The characterization of his art as “primitive” and of him as a “graffiti artist” implicitly located him as racially “other” to the normatively White art-world, both denying Basquiat’s complex biography and the breadth and depth of his artistic influences. As such, Banksy’s two Barbican works, whilst addressing hugely important political themes, could also be seen to further entrench Basquiat’s widely fetishized position as a “Black artist” (rather than an artist exploring themes of his own Black identity). Like much of his activist practice then, the street artist astutely and lucidly addresses issues critical to contemporary life, yet his ability to reduce complexity themes into simple ideas can, as we see here, diminish or reduce the more entangled and enigmatic nature of the issue in question itself.

² The Guardian (13th October 2018) writes that “black Britons are now nine times more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs than white people, despite using illegal substances at a lower rate”
<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2018/oct/13/racial-bias-police-stop-and-search-policy-black-people-report>.

Appendix 4 – Press coverage highlights

Summary

There was over 1,000 pieces that mention Banksy within the week after it appeared. News coverage of the two new Banksy works, which appeared in the Beech Street tunnel in response to the Basquiat exhibition, made an unbelievable number of headlines all around the globe. A few highlights include BBC News, London News, News 24 and local BBC stations, as well as receiving coverage from The Guardian, BBC News Online, Sky News, Metro, Londonist, Time Out, NME, Evening Standard, Reuters, and The New York Times.

Press highlights	
Sky News (broadcast and online)	A televised news piece including interview with Eleanor Nairne, and as Banksy's inspiration Katie Spencer, 21.09.17
The Guardian (online)	Report on Banksy pieces Nicola Slawson, 17.09.17
BBC News Online (online)	Report on Banksy pieces 18.09.17
The Telegraph	Report on Banksy pieces, with video. Helena Horton, 18.09.18
Daily Mail	Report on Banksy pieces Alex Matthews, 18.09.18
Evening Standard (online)	Report on Banksy pieces Sebastian Mann 18.09.18
Huffington Post (online)	Report on Banksy pieces, with video. George Bowden, 18.09.17
Sky news (online)	Report on Banksy pieces 18.09.17
Cape Times (South Africa)	Report on Banksy pieces 19.09.17