

BANKSY PUNKED

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Artwork Completion Date: March 1, 2009 + Publication Date: May 1, 2009

INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN STREET ARTIST ‘BANKSY’ was punked in response to altered Paris Hilton CD inserts that were placed in British record stores last year.

According to artworld insiders, this prank has Banksy’s closest American associate – Shepard Fairey of Obey Giant / Obama ‘Hope’ poster fame – being punked by Los Angeles artist LG Williams. Williams punked Fairy with an idea which sparked 300 posters being sold and exhibited in art galleries here and abroad. Adding insult to injury, Williams also supplied the artist with the very source image on which the punked artist based his posters.

Background

A year ago, a couple of newspapers reported that the American mega-celebrity, Paris Hilton, had been ‘punked’ – today’s common slang term for ‘tricked’ – by internationally known British graffiti artist, Banksy.¹ The supposed high-minded visual arts caper, known in art circles as *The Punking of Paris Hilton*², consisted of Banksy digitally altering inserts in some of Miss Hilton’s newly released music CD³, and then ‘reintroducing’ them back into U.K. record stores. In one picture her dress was repositioned to reveal large, bare breasts; in another her head was severed and replaced with that of a dog; elsewhere it was a grossly distorted face attached to a mutilated body shown in the act of fornication with a hermaphrodite, and so on. The artist then re-inserted the altered CD inserts back onto the record store shelves for pre-teen and teenage allowance-saving consumers to purchase.

Exactly what high – or lowbrow aesthetic insight could a pre-teen or teenager possibly derive from purchasing such smut?

Certainly, everything about this ruse cried foul to Williams. For instance, the prank’s public violation of a woman’s personhood appears not as artistic, but as horrible and repugnant. Next, the artist exposed unwitting adolescents directly and carelessly to adult sexuality, pornography and violence in record stores. Then, the appearance of unexamined, insensitive media coverage of this bizarre event appeared as validation, hence, glorification of male brutality against women, providing another insensitive affirmation of the public humiliation of a woman, and



Grossly distorted adult images by the artist Banksy of Paris Hilton in a UK record store.

thus further promotion of public sexual abuse of women by men in the popular culture and media.

But, even the very proclamation that Paris was ‘punked’ is delusional: Banksy’s purported punk didn’t hit its intended target, so it cannot be a punk.

The Fallacy Of The Banksy-Hilton ‘Punk’

Putting aside the above obscenities for a moment, one thing becomes clear, very clear: Banksy may have mystique, but this punk has no merit. In the first place, Ms. Paris Hilton was never ‘punked’. Rather, a few of her foreign music CDs were repackaged. In fact, Ms. Hilton lives in sunny Los Angeles, some 5,000 miles away from the dreary country where the exploit took place. The very limited number of “pranked” CDs make the results of the prank practically negligible, owing to the fact that only a tiny fraction of a percentage of Ms. Hilton’s entire music CD sales⁴ were actually altered. Because of the fact that this

impotent incident was discovered almost immediately only a handful were, in fact, purchased unwittingly by fans.

Almost all of the punked contraband was quickly removed from the shelves by store managers before any significant amount of adolescents were harmfully exposed, making the incident more of a desperate publicity stunt and hack news report than a genuine act in the noble line of artistic pranksterism.⁵

Since these wholly inappropriate actions, bizarre accolades and false allegations went completely unchecked both in the artworld and media, Williams wanted to challenge this nonsense. He concocted a pointed response, critical critique and prank of his own. Now that this punk has thoroughly run its course and covertly passed the test of time, the moment is right for it to be brought to light and declared a complete success. Furthermore, since this punk was no small feat, "*Banksy Punked*" will serve as a valuable lesson and reminder to future artists, pranksters and reporters on how artist's appropriately 'punk' one another.

Williams Punks Banksy

With this thought in mind, Williams's first task was to select and target an appropriate person to punk.⁶ In this regard, Williams looked upon members of Banksy's local posse in Los Angeles – rather than distant Hollywood stars. To be fair, Williams chose the seemingly most popular figure at the moment, who also happens to be Banksy's close friend⁷, the "formulaic but terrific"⁸ designer Mr. Shepard Fairey.⁹

With a target selected, Williams next sought out participants close to the target to broker an idea,¹⁰ and, in a blink of an eye, the punk was essentially a done deal: the punked designer was lured into making a limited edition poster (300 ed.) and exhibiting it for an upcoming exhibition.¹¹

The limited edition punked poster by Mr. Fairey was released to the public in Los Angeles on June 30th, 2007.

All Elements Of Williams's 'Banksy Punked' Trump And 'School' The Distasteful And Ineffective Banksy

All of the elements of Williams's punk trump and 'school' the distasteful, ineffective, and simpleminded Banksy pseudo-action, to put it mildly.

First, it is important to note that the very target of Williams's punk did get punked. Banksy couldn't do that and he didn't do that.

Secondly, the punked target was an active, not passive, agent in the deceit. In fact, Fairey was not only prompted to make the punked limited edition poster, but he then paid to have the punk poster printed, exhibited the punk poster in an art exhibition, promoted the punked poster and posted the punked poster on his website and affiliate websites¹² – all the while Williams's full orchestration and oversight of the entire prank was completely hidden from view.



Shepard Fairey, Merry Karnowsky Decade. Limited Edition Poster, 2007. Source: Wikipedia (i)

This is punked.

Yet another significant distinction of the Williams punk-prank, as compared with the lame attempt by Banksy, can be seen in the fact that the Williams prank would net a lot of dollars and cents – at no innocent victim's expense. Only the target got duped – while getting paid. Indeed, this profit-making-punk-prank would immediately net the tricked artist and retailer a nice sum instantly on the day of the poster edition's release due to historic high demand for such juvenilia.

The Original Source Image For The Punked Poster

Actually, the most profound and hilarious aspect of the Williams punk is that the punked designer based his design on a remarkable image from an unlikely source: an original photograph taken by none other than Williams himself. This photograph by Williams lies at the heart of Mr. Fairey's 'punked' poster. In that sense, far from being hidden from view, Williams has wickedly spun his cunning deceit in such a way that his hidden magic-hand manages to be visible all



The original source image for Banksy Punked. Photo & Copyright © 2007. Source: Wikipedia. (i)



Paris Hilton Promoting her Cell-phone Video Game: "Jewel Jam", May 2006
Photo by [Glenn Francis](#). Source: Wikipedia. (i)

over the final punked product. But only after the 'punking' has been revealed.

Let's face it: this caper took a hell of a lot more creativity and creative imagination to conceive, conjure and coordinate, than hideously destroy, after the fact, the breathtaking, international beauty of a 26 year old Hollywood starlet.

This is how you do it.

Banksy Punked by LG Williams has Banksy's friend, now punked designer, not only 'punking' himself with a concocted idea and a concocted image, but promoting the punk in every conceivable place, while the punk-prank made a lot of money and got into a large number of credible hands – all this without harming any innocent women or children.¹³ Banksy will never in this lifetime ever accomplish such a comprehensive coup d'esprit.

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LG WILLIAMS received his M.F.A from the University of California, Davis and B.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute. He also holds an honorary Ph.D. from ISSA, Cedar Rapids, IA. Williams has taught art, art history and art appreciation courses at the University of California-Davis, University of Southern California, California College of the Arts, and the University of Hawaii, to name a few. Author of many books and publications on art, art criticism, and poetry, Williams has appeared in *Modern Painters*, *Juxtapoz*, *Artweek*, *Art Papers*, *Village Voice*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Honolulu Bulletin*, *Sacramento Bee*, *LA Weekly*, *Maui Weekly*, *SF Weekly*, and *The Bay Guardian*.

His most recent book, *Drawing Upon Art: A Workbook for Gardner's Art Through the Ages* (Wadsworth Publishing/Cengage Learning), was published January 2009.

Williams is also an established visual artist with an extensive national and international exhibition schedule. His works have been shown at various venues, among them the *Lance Fung Gallery*, *Steven Wirtz Gallery*, *Gallery Subversive*, *Yerba Buena Center for the Arts*, *di Rosa Art Preserve*, and *Lucerne Kuntzpanaorama*. His artworks are featured in many important museums and private collections. According to Kenneth Baker, an art critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Williams wants to hold open a space in which painting might resume in earnest." Three catalogue raisonnées are devoted to the artist: *Point of No Return: LG Williams, 2003-2005*; *LARGE: LG Williams, 2002-2003*; and *LG Williams: An Appreciation, 1985-2000* ([PCP Press](#)). His most recent major artwork is the [House Where The Bottom Fell Out](#), Iao Valley, Maui, 2008.

Recent Articles of Note:

1. The Paris Hilton Recovery Plan: <http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/channel/Finance/news/875788/editors-blog-paris-hilton-stimulus-plan/>
2. Video -- Paris Hilton Responds to John McCain Presidential Ad: <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20217116,00.html?xid=rss-topheadlines>
3. Street Artist Shepard Fairey Arrested On Way To Event At ICA - The Boston Globe: http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2009/02/07/street_artist_arrested_on_way_to_event_at_ica/
4. Obama Artist Shepard Fairey In Legal Storm For His Audacity Of Hope Poster: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article5671077.ece
5. AP Blasts Obama 'Hope' Artist for Copyright Infringement – Wired News: <http://blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/2009/03/ap-blasts-obama.html#comments>
6. Obama's Team Of Losers – Counterpunch.org: <http://counterpunch.org/donnelly03242009.html>

Footnotes:

¹ Banksy, born 1974 in Bristol, is an internationally known English graffiti artist. See: Banksy (www.banksy.co.uk); Banksy Wikipedia (<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banksy>). Photos of Brad Pitt & Angelina Jolie at Banksy's 2007 Los Angeles Exhibition: <http://www.topnews.in/light/brad-pitt-and-angelina-jolie-spend-%C2%A31m-british->

[%E2%80%98guerrilla-artist%E2%80%99-banksy%E2%80%99s-art-2752](#). For The Punking Of Paris Hilton read: Jack Schofield, "Banksy spoofs Paris Hilton CD (updated)", Guardian [UK], September 4, 2006 (http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/technology/2006/09/04/banksy_spoofs_paris_hilton_cd_updated.html#); Claire Truscott and Martin Hodgson, "Banksy Targets Paris Hilton: 'Guerrilla Artist' Replaces Heiress's Cds In Shops With Doctored Versions", The Independent [UK], September 3, 2006, (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/banksy-targets-paris-hilton-414468.html>); "Paris Hilton Targeted in CD Prank", BBC News, September 3, 2006, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/entertainment/5310416.stm>); "Paris Hilton 'Dogged' by U.K. Artist", Stephen M. Silverman, People, September 04, 2006, (<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,1531448,00.html>); and "British Artist Sabotages Paris Hilton Album Launch", Elizabeth Goodman, Rolling Stone, September 5, 2006, (<http://www.rollingstone.com/rockdaily/index.php/2006/09/05/british-artist-sabotages-paris-hilton-album-launch/>)

² The Punking of Paris Hilton, Banksy, 2007, (<http://www.ubu.com/film/banksy.html>)

³ Paris Hilton's debut album, entitled *Paris*, released on her own label, Heiress Records, in association with Warner Bros. Records, debuted in the U.S. on August 22, 2006.

⁴ The album sold approximately 607,000 copies in the U.S. and over 1 million copies worldwide. The album entered the United World Chart selling over 147,000 copies within it's initial week of release.

⁵ Recent examples include: "Swiss Newspaper Falls for Prankster's Fake Gucci Ad", Associated Press, February 27, 2007, (<http://gucci-news.newslib.com/story/7182-409/>); The Yes Men, (<http://www.theyesmen.org>); Tim DeChristopher Throws Utah Oil And Gas Drilling Leases Auction Into Chaos, Paul Foy, Huffington Post, huffingtonpost.com, December 18, 2008, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/21/tim-dechristopher-throws-n_152661.html)

⁶ Though Williams saw Banksy when he came to install his recent exhibition here, in Los Angeles, CA., Williams decided that it was completely ineffective, and, thus, remotely absurd gesture to punk somebody who lives 5,000 miles away, across the Atlantic. Additionally, it's another equally impotent gesture to punk somebody working outside one's field of expertise, in this case outside the visual arts. Really, what fun can a visual artist derive from deceiving a glamorous Hollywood pop star, luxurious accountant, a flashy florist or an enticing television executive? Distant target profile characteristics are insignificant to a good prank.

⁷ "He's a good friend" says Fairey of Banksy. See: "BANKSY", Shepard Fairey, Swindle: Issue 08, (<http://209.85.141.104/search?q=cache:3VEMdzkeH7UJ:swindlemagazine.com/issue08/banksy/+shepard+fairey+fri+ends+with+Banksey&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us>)

⁸ New Yorker, Hope And Glory: A Shepard Fairey Moment, by Peter Schjeldahl, February 23, 2009, (http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/artworld/2009/02/23/090223craw_artworld_schjeldahl); or "Hello Kitty With Pretension", Shepard Fairey at ICA Boston, Christopher Knight, Los Angeles Times, March 23, 2009, (<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/03/shepard-fairey.html#more>)

⁹ Frank Shepard Fairey, born February 15, 1970, is a contemporary artist, graphic designer, and illustrator who emerged from the skateboarding scene. See: Shepard Fairey Wikipedia

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shepard_Fairey); ObeyGiant.com (<http://www.obeygiant.com>); The Giant: The Definitive Obey Giant Site (<http://www.thegiant.org>); Studio Number One (<http://www.studionumberone.com>)

¹⁰ Protégés of the (now convicted) Tamara Bane Gallery, a Beverly Hills "cheesecake art business, art dealer and publisher known for selling soft-core erotic paintings and prints of female nudes". See: (Artist) Sorayama Prevails Over Art Dealer", Mike Boehm, Los Angeles Times, September 22, 2007,

(<http://articles.latimes.com/2007/sep/22/entertainment/et-pinupart22>), and Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamara_Bane_Gallery)

¹¹ Poster: Shepard Fairey, Merry Karnowsky Decade Poster, Edition of 300, 2007, Photo Source: Wikipedia (i). Exhibition: *Decade: Merry Karnowsky Gallery 10th Year Anniversary Exhibition*, June 30th - July 28th, 2007, Los Angeles, CA.

¹² Furthermore, the resounding effect of the Williams punk was doubly magnified throughout the artworld, in that galleries and patrons themselves would doubly proclaim, pimp, and pump-up the punk.

¹³ In all fairness and disclosure, there is one aspect of this punk which Williams did share in common with Banksy: Never once was Williams offered a complimentary poster or word of gratitude for the idea.

(i) Wikipedia (March 1, 2009) : "Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation; with no Invariant Sections, no Front-Cover Texts, and no Back-Cover Texts." Additional Fair Use rationale: Image is a low resolution image, under 300 px wide, by an artist or company, representative but without being unnecessarily high resolution; illustrating an educational article about the image that the image represents. Furthermore, the image is being used in an informational capacity and thus contributes to the article as a whole. Because it is a unique image there is almost certainly no free equivalent. Any substitute would fail to convey the meaning intended, would tarnish or misrepresent its image, or would fail its purpose of education, identification or commentary.