



## Exit Through the Gift Shop

### Discussion Guide

Director: Banksy  
Year: 2010  
Time: 87 min

#### You might know this director from:

EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP is Banksy's first film, but his graffiti artwork has been visible in streets and galleries all over the world. A small number of Banksy's works can also be found in the movie Children of Men (2006).

## FILM SUMMARY

EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP was originally meant to be a film documenting the street art movement. But when mysterious street artist Banksy realized that filmmaker Thierry Guetta lacked the ability to turn the hundred of hours of footage into a cohesive film, Banksy gave him a task: you become a street artist, and I will become filmmaker.

The result is a film directed by Banksy, who follows the movements of Guetta as he is introduced to some of the world's most recognized street artists. Yet there is still one enigma that Guetta chases around the world—Banksy. When the two finally meet Guetta is on cloud nine, until Banksy encourages Guetta to release his film. Suddenly everyone realizes that Guetta is indeed not a filmmaker. Not wanting to lose the footage, Banksy takes on the task of filmmaker and challenges Guetta to ditch the camera and become a street artist. Viewers watch Guetta's rise to fame under the pseudonym Mr. Brainwash, including a turn of events that was impossible to predict—even by Banksy. EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP culminates into a provocative, fascinating study of street art, vandalism, money, and fame, which brings up many questions but offers few answers.

## FILM THEMES

Banksy does not ask direct questions in *EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP*, but many questions about the nature and purpose of art arise. Can Banksy even be considered an “artist?” Is this film a real documentary or just a hoax? The answers aren’t clear. Use these themes to help guide your discussion.

### **STREET ART: ART OR VANDALISM?**

Public art is a powerful vehicle for expression and for starting important dialogues. With permission, traditional graffiti and street art is considered public art. Without permission, graffiti and street artists are committing vandalism and are, by definition, criminals. While it’s true that some street artists are motivated by fame or destruction, other street artists like Banksy and Shepherd Fairey see their markings as a way to claim space from ever-increasing corporate control.

### **THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF ART**

Many people see art as something separate from commerce—something authentically created by an inspired artist. But, as *EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP* reveals, this isn’t always the case. Thierry Guetta had no training as an artist, and yet, through clever marketing and endorsements, he managed to create an art show that became a great commercial success.

### **STREET ART AS POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

Street art is more than just painting something beautiful or cool on a public wall. It’s about the people who decide what should be shown in public space, the messages that are advertised, and how the messages affect us all. Banksy has made himself known for doing politically inspired pieces of artwork—for example, by critiquing entities like capitalism, war, and hypocrisy.

### **POLITICAL SATIRE**

Political satire is often used to analyze one’s society and policies. It is simultaneously humorous and smart while exposing something which the satirist perceives as wrong or ridiculous. Banksy’s is known for using satire in his work. *EXIT THROUGH THE GIFTSHOP* is, in itself, satirical commentary on various aspects of the art world, from the commercialization of contemporary art to the endless subjective debate on what constitutes an art.

**“The thing I hate the most about advertising is that it attracts all the bright, creative and ambitious young people, leaving us mainly with the slow and self-obsessed to become our artists.... Modern art is a disaster area. Never in the field of human history has so much been used by so many to say so little.”**

Banksy



## FILM FACTS:

- EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP has won 15 awards during 2010 and 2011. On top of that, it was awarded runner up in four awards and nominated for another 13 awards, including “Best Documentary” at the 2011 Academy Awards.
- In 1985, Allan Schwartzman wrote a book called “Street Art” about early street art pioneers like Richard Hambleton, Keith Haring, and John Fekner, as well as artists in the graffiti camp like Lee and Futura. Today, Schwartzman is one of New York City’s top contemporary art advisors.
- The Underbelly Project brought about 100 artists into an abandoned shell of a subway underneath New York City. Graffiti stars like Faile, Swoon, Revok, and Ron English were all included, but two big names were absent from the project. It’s no surprise that Banksy did not participate, but Shepard Fairey didn’t get into the station either.
- A famous example of art that was installed in a public space without the city’s permission is the Charging Bull statue, known as The Wall Street Bull in New York City. Artist Arturo Do Modica developed the concept, created the sculpture, trucked it to Lower Manhattan, and installed it as a Christmas gift to the people of New York. It was initially removed and then returned and has now been there for over two decades.
- In 2011, street artist JR won the TED Prize, which awards \$1 million dollars to an extraordinary individual with a creative and bold vision to spark global change. JR has created a large-scale participatory art project that transforms messages of personal identity into pieces of art. His posters display a vibrant world of diverse communities.
- Thierry Guetta owned a lot of property in Los Angeles, and street artists often asked him to provide walls for them to paint on. This small, but important piece of information was left out of the film, Exit Through the Gift Shop, but explains how Guetta was able to film so many artists.
- “A Love Letter For You” is a series of murals by Steve Powers in west Philadelphia. They were organized by the Mural Arts Program, which is responsible for thousands of murals in Philadelphia since the mid-1980s. What’s surprising about the collaboration is that Steve Powers began his art career as a graffiti writer in Philadelphia, and the Mural Arts Program began as part of Philadelphia’s Anti-Graffiti Network as a program to cover and deter graffiti.
- In 2011, Mr. Brainwash held a solo exhibition at the Opera Gallery in London. The exhibition sold out in two days.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share the film: Encourage others to watch the film and discuss the questions raised.
2. Watch street artist and TED Prize winner JR’s TED talks about his project “Inside Out.”
3. Write a letter to your local government officials (city, county, or state) and tell them what you think about the street art movement. Share your opinion about what stance your city should take on whether or not street art should be tolerated.
4. Do some research into the broad range of street art being made today. Mr. Brainwash, Banksy, and their cohorts are just a handful of the people participating in this movement. The diversity of street art being created is impressive: A good place to start your research is [StreetArtUtopia.com](http://StreetArtUtopia.com).