

Banksy's "Barcode."

Graffiti and street art have become some of the fastest-growing and most popular segments of the fine art market in recent years. Beginning with 80's street artists including Jean-Michael Basquiat and Keith Haring, in recent years the genre has been continued by art market stalwarts KAWS, Shepard Fairey, and Space Invader. However, no artist has had as much impact on the collective imagination in the 21st century as Banksy, the British stencil artist whose transgressive works are found both on street corners around the world and at the finest auction sales. Michaan's Auctions is proud to offer one of his earliest stenciled works, "Barcode"



(\$40/60,000) in our Winter Fine Sale on Thursday, December 14th.

Banksy's "Barcode" is a 2004 screen print on woven paper, sized 19.75" x 27.25", and is edition 119 of 600. Centered in the frame is a leopard, walking towards the viewer with its mouth open, alert to its surroundings. Behind the leopard is a stylized rendering of a circus wagon which had presumably been the animal's cage. The

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bars of the cage are rendered as a commercial barcode, which is distorted to provide an opening from which the leopard has escaped. This scene is depicted upon a blank background, emphasizing the piece's origin as a stenciled image placed on the wall of a residential building in the artist's hometown, Bristol, U.K. This edition is offered with a Certificate of Authenticity from the Pest Control Office and is stamped in the lower left corner.

“Barcode” has garnered competing analyses that emphasize different aspects of the widely respected work. The traditional analysis emphasizes the inclusion of the leopard and its apparent liberation from a caged wagon, a vehicle closely associated with the circus and the historic abuse of animals. In doing so, critics claim Banksy is protesting the illegal wildlife trade, animal containment, and cruelty.

Unfortunately, this argument is undercut by the artist's use of live animals in early gallery shows, including “Barely Legal,” a 2006 Los Angeles exhibition that spray painted a live elephant to blend in with the room's wallpaper.

The second theory highlights the barcode standing in for a cage as a reference to the constraints of consumer culture. In this interpretation, the leopard, representing nature and the natural order, has broken free from the constraints of societal hierarchical systems. In doing so, Banksy references the growth of business interests in the U.K. since the control of Margaret Thatcher, as well as technological advances in systems and surveillance meant to increase business efficiency, for example, the barcode itself. In doing so, Banksy forefronts how the desire for consumer goods changes the nature of

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human life. This position places Banksy within a long European tradition of anti-consumerist artists which came to prominence in the United Kingdom and France as the countries opened themselves to American consumer goods in the years following World War II.

Banksy is an anonymous street artist from Bristol, U.K. who began his career as a freehand graffiti artist in 1990-1994 before becoming a stencil-based artist in 1999. This stencil represents one of the earliest works from Banksy, which first appeared on a wall in the artist's hometown in either 1999 or 2000. "Barcode" was featured in Banksy's first Los Angeles exhibition, a July 2002 show in a small Silver Lake gallery, and has been occasionally exhibited in the years since. The artwork is regularly sold at auction, with prices

having generally grown over the years, particularly as Banksy's notoriety reached a peak with his 2011 Oscar nomination for the documentary film "Exit Through the Gift Shop."

Michaan's Auctions Winter Fine Sale on Thursday, December 14th, features notable names leading the fine art, decorative, and jewelry departments. BANKSY's 2004 screen print "Barcode" headlines a sale featuring Tiffany Studios Bronze Lamp and Wisteria Table Screen, wristwatches by Omega and Hublot, and a brooch attributed to Suzanne Belperron.

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