



a s i s

quenches the mind

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"With Banksy: Charlie Burn" copyright and courtesy Julia Kim Smith ©

At Home with Banksy

JULIA KIM SMITH

Much to the dismay of the Daily Mail, who seems to have cracked the mystery of the identity of Banksy, to most of us he remains an ever elusive and much revered street artist.

With a keen sense of humor and sharp wit, Banksy's art covers subjects such as politics, culture and ethics. And although the locations of his artworks and his distinct style can be spotted a mile away, the artist's refusal to do interviews and fierce protectiveness of his identity has left us wondering. What would it be like if we bumped into him on the street? What if he stopped by for breakfast?

Baltimore-based conceptual artist and mother of three, Julia Kim Smith's latest series of photographs, *With Banksy*, explore life with Banksy in everyday situations; taking out the trash, eating breakfast, and doing household chores.

Smith, whose work explores issues of identity, memory, and the artistic, social, and political landscape, visualized the images as film stills with actors aware of the roles that they were set to play.

How would you describe yourself?

Artist, daughter of Korean immigrants, wife, mother of three... The most scandalous thing you can say about me is I drive a minivan.

How was your transition from graphic designer to artist?

I am a crossover artist with absolutely no regrets. My parents are immigrants from Korea in the US, and I had to be practical: I studied graphic design and worked as a designer though I had always wanted to be an artist, and for a while was doing both. Immigrants are practical people—Andy Warhol's parents were immigrants and he also started as a commercial artist.

You work with different mediums, which do you feel most at ease with? And what are the mediums you'd like to explore next?

Prints and photography; I would like to explore web-based work.

What is common between all your art works?

I am interested in exploring issues of identity and in mapping the artistic, social, and political landscape. I work on what interests me.

In your latest project- you depict Banksy in different everyday scenarios - why did you choose Banksy in particular to portray?

I had just watched his film "Exit Through The Gift Shop," a funny, smart commentary on the art world. It got me thinking about Banksy's work. He pulls off an impressive feat by being both the anonymous artist and the famous artist at the same





"With Banksy: Keep It Tidy" copyright and courtesy Julia Kim Smith ©

time. But by being anonymous, he is like Virginia Wolf's anonymous woman—"Anonymous was a woman."—or I suppose he is like a woman in a burqa. Anyone can appropriate his identity. Which is exactly what I did: I appropriated his hooded identity and placed him in my own scenarios.

What significance do the Smorkin' Labbit by Kozik, the jar of Marmite, and Charlie Brown have in the portrayal?

I "stole" Banksy's work from his website (apologies to Banksy) and placed them in my photographs: The Bad Artists Imitate, The Great Artists Steal; Charlie Burn; Tesco Value Petrol Bomb; Keep Britain Tidy.

In addition to the "Where's Waldo?"-esque appearances of Frank Kozik's Smorkin' Labbit (I'm a fan of Kozik's), I placed tributes in the photographs to artists and writers who inspire

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Julia Kim Smith. Photo by Steven Parke ©



me, in the form of “artifacts” (books, a brochure, a zine, and Rabbit):

With Banksy: Great Artists Steal

Artifacts: The Surrendered by Chang-Rae Lee, Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart, Forget Sorrow by Belle Yang

With Banksy: Charlie Burn

Artifacts: Brochure from Luis Camnitzer’s retrospective at El Museo Del Barrio (next to milk bottle on kitchen counter), Nigella Express by Nigella Lawson, A Day At El Bulli by Ferran Adrià

With Banksy: Keep It Tidy

Artifact: Smorkin’ Rabbit by Frank Kozik
The Marmite and Weetabix are just staging.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently working with Linked by Air in New York on what we hope will be a monumental website, 100 Survivors, scheduled to go live in October. I have a show opening in Platoon Kunsthalle in Seoul between the 19th and 30th of September. And two works in progress: Miss DMZ (photo project) and Dear/Great Leader (tentative title, sculpture).

What would you like to be best known for?

I always hoped to be known for and to get by on my looks, but there was no demand for 5’3” (160 cm) super models. I hope my work stands the test of time and is still relevant years from now. I joke that I want to be worth more dead than alive.

What are your thoughts on the art world these days? Is there too much emphasis on the money?

I am fascinated by what is going on the web... If so much content is available for free on the Internet, what are the implications for artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers and for the quality of art, music, film, and writing on the web? It will be interesting to see how it all plays out for artists.

I am also excited by work that’s coming out of China. I recently saw Wang Qingsong’s photographs and video at International Center for Photography (ICP) in Manhattan—fantastic, epic portrayals of a society’s transformation from being closed to being open, from just surviving to facing temptation from an embarrassment of consumer riches.

I think it’s ironic that there is so much emphasis on money in art and yet very few artists are actually making a lot of money.

What would be your advice for an aspiring artist?

You have to figure it out on your own. The world is changing. There is no one-way to do it.

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