



Roxie Theater

“Saving Banksy” is built around an effort to preserve a mural by the famed street artist.

# Street art and its uncertain road to commodity status

By Charles Desmarais

Early in the lively documentary “Saving Banksy,” we are shown a street-art image, stenciled on a high wall, of a boy with a paintbrush and pail. Scrawled beside it, in red, a simple legend reads, “This will look nice when it’s framed.”

The metamorphosis in the public mind of graffiti, a gang-related eyesore to many, into much-admired mural art is well along. A 2011 exhibition, “Art in the Streets” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, brought international artists of the form under the institutional roof and into the art world canon. This season’s San Francisco Opera production of “Aida” was designed by one of that show’s participants, Marquis Duriel Lewis, better known as Retna.

So it falls a bit flat when, halfway through the film,

## Saving Banksy



Documentary. Directed by Colin Day. (Unrated, 80 minutes.)

To see a trailer: <https://youtu.be/C1QcjQIT6U0>

the French artist Blek le Rat laments, “When will we be recognized by the people in power?”

And yet, the question of value when it comes to works left unguarded in streets and alleyways — specifically, their worth in dollars and cents — has yet to be resolved. Does a renegade art mural become something else when removed, remounted and presented on a gallery wall? Does something that was offered freely to a community, made for a specific setting, become worthless out of context? Or, shielded from the vicissitudes of weather and vandalism, is it trans-

formed into a collectible commodity?

These may be questions only an art wonk would ask, but they underlie this entertaining depiction of a San Francisco man who sets out to “save” a work by British street artist Banksy by cutting an entire wall from the side of a Haight Street Victorian. Through the course of the story, primarily told by Ben (“I was a graffiti artist and now I’m a street artist”) Eine, we also get a brisk introduction to the controversial, often dangerous art medium.

Characters ranging from the benighted to the unsavory to the perfectly slimy populate the film, alongside the only figures who really have anything of substance to say: the artists themselves.

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