Artist pulls off another prank: He shreds work after $1.4 million sale
By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff
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950L

LONDON, England — A famous artist just pranked the art world.

Banksy is known for his street art and trickster ways. On October 5, one of his paintings was set to be sold at an auction house in London. This is where people bid, or offer how much they are willing to spend, on an item. At an art auction, people can spend a lot of money. This Banksy painting sold for $1.4 million. Then, it suddenly self-destructed.

In an Instagram post the next day, Banksy claimed the dramatic artistic moment had been years in the making.

The painting, called "Girl With Balloon," fetched more than three times its pre-sale estimate price. It matched a record sale price for the artist.

Then, as an alarm sounded, the painting ran through a shredder embedded in the frame. It left half the canvas hanging from the bottom in strips.

Painting's Destruction Featured On Instagram
A picture on Banksy's official Instagram page showed the moment — and the shocked reaction of those in the room — along with the words "Going, going, gone..."

A video was later posted on the Instagram page, stating: "A few years ago I secretly built a shredder into a painting in case it was ever put up for auction." The video showed images of a shredder being implanted into a picture frame along with footage of the auction stunt.

Banksy’s spokeswoman, Jo Brooks, confirmed that the post was genuine.

Sotheby's is an auction house in London where expensive paintings are often put up for bidding. The company had mentioned before this sale that the work's fancy gold-colored frame was an important element of the artwork "chosen by Banksy himself." The auction company appeared as shocked as anyone else.

"It appears we just got Banksy-ed," said Alex Branczik, head of modern European art at the auction house.

Is It Worth More Shredded?
Sotheby's said it was "in discussion about next steps" with the buyer of the work, whose identity was not revealed. Some art experts say the work could be worth even more in its shredded state.
"We have not experienced this situation in the past, where a painting spontaneously shredded, upon achieving a record for the artist," Branczik said. "We are busily figuring out what this means in an auction context."

Switzerland-based artist Pierre Koukjian was at the auction. He said the buyer was "very lucky" to own a now-historic piece. He called Banksy's prank "a turning point in the history of contemporary and conceptual art."

Koukjian, who has met Banksy, said he is sure he caught a glimpse of the artist in the sales room during the confusion of the moment.

"What he did is really shocking, in a good way," Koukjian said. "I think it will be historic and people will talk for a long time about it."

Brooks would not say whether the artist had been at the auction. She said Sotheby's had been "100 percent" unaware of the planned stunt.

**German Artist Used Acid To Eat Away His Own Work**

Banksy is not the first artist to destroy his own work. In the years after World War II, German-born artist Gustav Metzger pioneered "auto-destructive art." He created paintings using acid that ate away the fabric beneath.

Banksy began his career spray-painting buildings in Bristol, England. He has never revealed his full identity to the public. Still, he has become one of the world's best-known artists. He makes mischievous often humorous images with political messages, often spray painted on city walls. In one work, two policemen are kissing. In another, armed military police are drawn over with yellow smiley faces. A different painting shows a chimpanzee with a sign bearing the words "Laugh now, but one day I'll be in charge."

**The artist also has a history of wild pranks.**

One happened in 2005 at the British Museum, the famous history museum. There, he hung what looked like a cave drawing of an ancient human holding a spear while pushing a shopping cart. The piece remained for several days before being discovered. The next year he smuggled a life-sized figure of a U.S. military prisoner into Disneyland. In 2015 he erected a full-scale theme park — "Dismaland" — by the British seaside.

"Girl With Balloon" shows a small child reaching up toward a heart-shaped red balloon. It was originally spray-painted on a wall in east London and has been endlessly reproduced, becoming one of Banksy's best-known images.
Directions: Use the information found in the article to identify the **best** response for each item.

### R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly

1. What is the name of the artist featured in the article?
   - A. Sotheby
   - B. Banksy
   - C. Jo Brooks
   - D. Alex Branczik

### R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says implicitly

2. Read the inference below.
   Banksy's artwork is incredibly popular.
   
   Which sentence from the article provides the **BEST** support to the statement above?
   - A. The painting, called "Girl With Balloon," fetched more than three times its pre-sale estimate price.
   - B. Sotheby's is an auction house in London where expensive paintings are often put up for bidding.
   - C. Some art experts say the work could be worth even more in its shredded state.
   - D. He called Banksy's prank "a turning point in the history of contemporary and conceptual art."

### R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases

3. Read the following paragraph from the article:
   The painting, called "Girl With Balloon," fetched more than three times its pre-sale estimate price.
   It matched a record sale price for the artist.
   
   What is the meaning of the word *fetched* as it is used in the article?
   - A. to go get something and bring it back
   - B. a trick
   - C. the distance traveled by wind or waves across open water
   - D. to achieve a particular price when sold

### R2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text

4. Read the paragraph from the section "German Artist Used Acid To Eat Away His Own Work."
   One happened in 2005 at the British Museum, the famous history museum. There, he hung what looked like a cave drawing of an ancient human holding a spear while pushing a shopping cart.
   The piece remained for several days before being discovered. The next year he smuggled a life-sized figure of a U.S. military prisoner into Disneyland. In 2015 he erected a full-scale theme park — "Dismaland" — by the British seaside.
   
   Why did the author include this paragraph?
   - A. to explain how Banksy's artwork is similar to other popular artists.
   - B. to describe how Banksy began his artistic career
   - C. to highlight how Banksy's recent prank is a new aspect of his artwork
   - D. to show that Banksy has a pattern of staging elaborate pranks