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## Behind the Exhibit: Banksy and More in New Zealand

Watch a city become an outdoor gallery

Written by Rachel Barber

Street art's moment in the spotlight isn't over yet. From March 26-June 15, New Zealand's resort city of Tauranga will host an art festival that's breaking all the rules. See the newest works from international and local street artists, including Banksy, Faile, Paul Insect, Swoon and Anthony Micallef. The first of its kind [Paradox Street Art Festival](#) will also include new installments that are completely unique to the area and will be visible for years to come on the city's walls.

We talked to George Shaw, the artistic director for the event and enthusiastic collector of Banksy pieces with his wife, Shannon Webster. Shaw and Webster's collection, Oi YOU!, includes the largest assembly of Banksy pieces in the southern hemisphere and will be on view at the festival. Says Shaw of his work with street art, "Since 2010, we have produced a series of street art shows both in New Zealand and Australia attracting broad audiences, but this is our first on the North Island and we are fond of Tauranga, a city you wouldn't connect with street art in the first place. We assembled a group of outstanding artists from these shores and abroad who will come to the city to create unique installations and paint stunning murals both inside the Tauranga Art Gallery and out on the streets." The festival will bring together locals and tourists through not just art, but through a range of events surrounding food, music and dance, as well as art. Here, Shaw talks his collection and the piece you can't miss.



*Jacob Yikes*

### **What first attracted you to collecting street art?**

Buying a shirt changed our lives! My partner, Shannon, talked me into buy a rather loud shirt for a party and on the back of it were a couple of large stencil characters. The friend throwing the party used to live in Bristol, and a number of her friends from there came up for the party. One of them asked me if the stencil characters were by Banksy, a street artists from his hometown. My reply was, "who?", and he proceeded to tell me about this guy who had, uninvited, placed his work in major galleries across the northern hemisphere. I was hooked—we bought our first Banksy print within a week. Very quickly, an interest became a passion that transformed into an obsession, and the Oi YOU! Collection was born.

### **Tell me about the Oi YOU! Collection.**

Shannon and I spent much of our spare time visiting street art shows both in the UK, where we lived at the time, and overseas. We saw Banksy's 2006 landmark show, *Barely Legal*, in L.A. and then *The Village Pet Store and Charcoal Grill* in New York a couple of years later. The Collection rapidly grew through this period, to the point where we ended up with over 80 works,

including 22 by Banksy. Other artists heavily featured in the collection are Brooklyn legends Faile, UK artists Antony Micallef and Paul Insect and the amazing American female artist Swoon.

**Do you have a favorite piece or one that you're really excited for people to see?**

Banksy's *Flower Thrower Canvas* is always a firm favourite. It is so iconic and inspiring.



*Luke Shirlaw*

**Why is Tauranga the right city for this exhibition?**

Tauranga is the fastest growing city in New Zealand, and as such, is very forward thinking. This is the first time that a street art exhibition has taken over the whole of a major art gallery in New Zealand, and for Oi YOU! to have the opportunity to curate the whole show is an amazing opportunity. It's also the first time that a major collection of works by Banksy will be seen on New Zealand's North Island. To have the opportunity to feature it alongside installations by such prestigious street artists such as Askew One, Charles and Janine Williams, Jacob Yikes, Sofles, Fintan Magee, Rone and Lucy McLauchlan, makes it the perfect place.

**Do you think social media will play a role in this festival?**

Social media always plays a big part in our events – we have a relatively big following and some of the artists have a huge presence. Things tend to build slowly on the run-up to an event and then explode when a show opens and the general public get involved and then ramp things up through their outlets.

*Main image credit: Luke Shirlaw*



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