



BLEK LE RAT

WOODBURY HOUSE

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Overview.

PG: 8-19



"I had no other intention
than to speak via my
stencils."

Blek le Rat



Blek le Rat, Rat

Overview.



Blek le Rat

Born in 1951, Xavier Prou (better known as Blek Le Rat), was one of the first graffiti artists in Paris, and is the founder of the international stencil art movement.

During a trip to the United States in 1971, Blek was introduced to the 'wild style' graffiti prevalent in New York City, which left a lasting impression on him. Inspired by what he saw in New York, Blek began painting the streets of Paris in 1981, choosing a different technique – the stencil – as more appropriate for the French architecture.

Blek's first stencils were black rats, seen to be running along the walls throughout the centre of Paris. The rat, also an anagram for 'art', is in Blek's mind 'the only animal to survive the apocalypse'. In 1983 Blek began to paint life-size stencils, which alongside his rats, have become his trademark and have influenced generations of street artists around the world.

When Blek le Rat visited New York in 1972 this was the very first time he had ever seen graffiti in his life. When he came back to France with colourful graffiti images in mind, Blek enrolled at Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris to study etching, serigraphy and lithography. He then went on studying architecture, learning the impact of space and the creative possibilities of the urban environment. He started stenciling the walls of Paris in 1981 – when street painting had not yet become associated with criminal activity – spray-painting small black rats running along the walls of the fourteenth Arrondissement.

"Meet Blek Le Rat, The Father Of Stencil Graffiti."

Forbes



Blek le Rat, Andy Warhol

The French artist's work is inspired by the compositions of Old Masters such as Caravaggio, Michelangelo, Guido Reni, and Leonardo da Vinci.

His street art has appeared in cities across the world, and he has exhibited in New York, London, Los Angeles, Melbourne, and beyond.

The artist's interest in social commentary through graffiti has had a major influence on street artists around the world, including the anonymous Banksy. There is no doubt that street art's political connotations have been essential to its charm, and Le Rat's work is no exception.

Within his oeuvre, topics such as religion, the economy, the military, and art history are approached with a wit that reflects the quick sensibilities necessary to make art on the streets.

Born on November 15, 1951 in Boulogne-Billancourt, France, he studied printmaking and painting at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Le Rat lives and works in Paris, France.



Blek le Rat, Angel



Blek le Rat, Napoleon & Sheep



Top: Blek le Rat, Spaceman
Bottom: Blek le Rat, Diana & Angel



Top: Blek le Rat, Madonna
Bottom: Blek le Rat, Rat



Top: Blek le Rat, Computer Head
Bottom: Blek le Rat, Florence Aubenas

Top: Blek le Rat, Running Man
Bottom: Blek le Rat, Propaganda at Wunderkammern



Blek le Rat, Tango



Blek le Rat, David



Blek le Rat, Sheep

Early Life & Work.

PG: 20-35

"Every time I think I've painted something slightly original, I find out that Blek le Rat has done it, too, only Blek did it 20 years earlier."

Banksy, Daily Mail



Early Life & Work.



Top: Blek le Rat, Centaur / Bottom: Blek le Rat, Sheep

In the early 80s, Canadian artist Richard Hambleton came to Paris and brought his work over from the US. By that time, Blek was already making rats, but when he saw Hambleton's large shadow human figures, he got the idea of making bigger pieces, so he soon began doing larger works, as well as self-portraits.

Today, Blek is credited as the first to transform stencil from basic lettering into imagery, and the one to invent the life-sized stencils. He creates most of his stencils by hand, crafting each to perfection to allow for the best detail possible upon application, and works mainly in black and white.



Blek le Rat, Solider



Blek le Rat, Spray Painting

"I chose rats as a symbol of the urban environment, and also of the invasion and profusion of those animals that populate our cities and provoke fear in us."

Blek le Rat

1680

Blek le Rat, Man Who Walks Through Walls





Blek le Rat, Horse, Dog, Cowboy



Blek le Rat, Rat

Pochoir.



Blek le Rat, Stencilling

Blek chose stencils because he could use them to draw and prepare an image quietly at home, and then go out to reproduce the same image all across the city. The quality was good, considering the number of images to be done at speed. With every stencil, Blek became better acquainted with the technique, and two years after having stencilled rats and other small characters, he decided to design life-size stencils.

As a student in the 1970s, Blek had been impressed and inspired by the work of David Hockney, whose exhibition he had seen at the Claude Bernard Gallery near the École des Beaux-Art. Blek still considers Hockney's film *A Bigger Splash* (1974) to be a turning point in his life: in this film, Hockney paints a large picture of one of his friends onto an apartment wall in Los Angeles with brushes and colour.

Blek never quite forgot the relevance of this scene.

His first life-size character, the Old Irish Man, was created in March 1983.

"In the 1980s it took me over a week to produce one stencil. I spent much time on the preparation, the drawing and the cutting out of the final stencil."

Blek le Rat



Blek le Rat, Rat

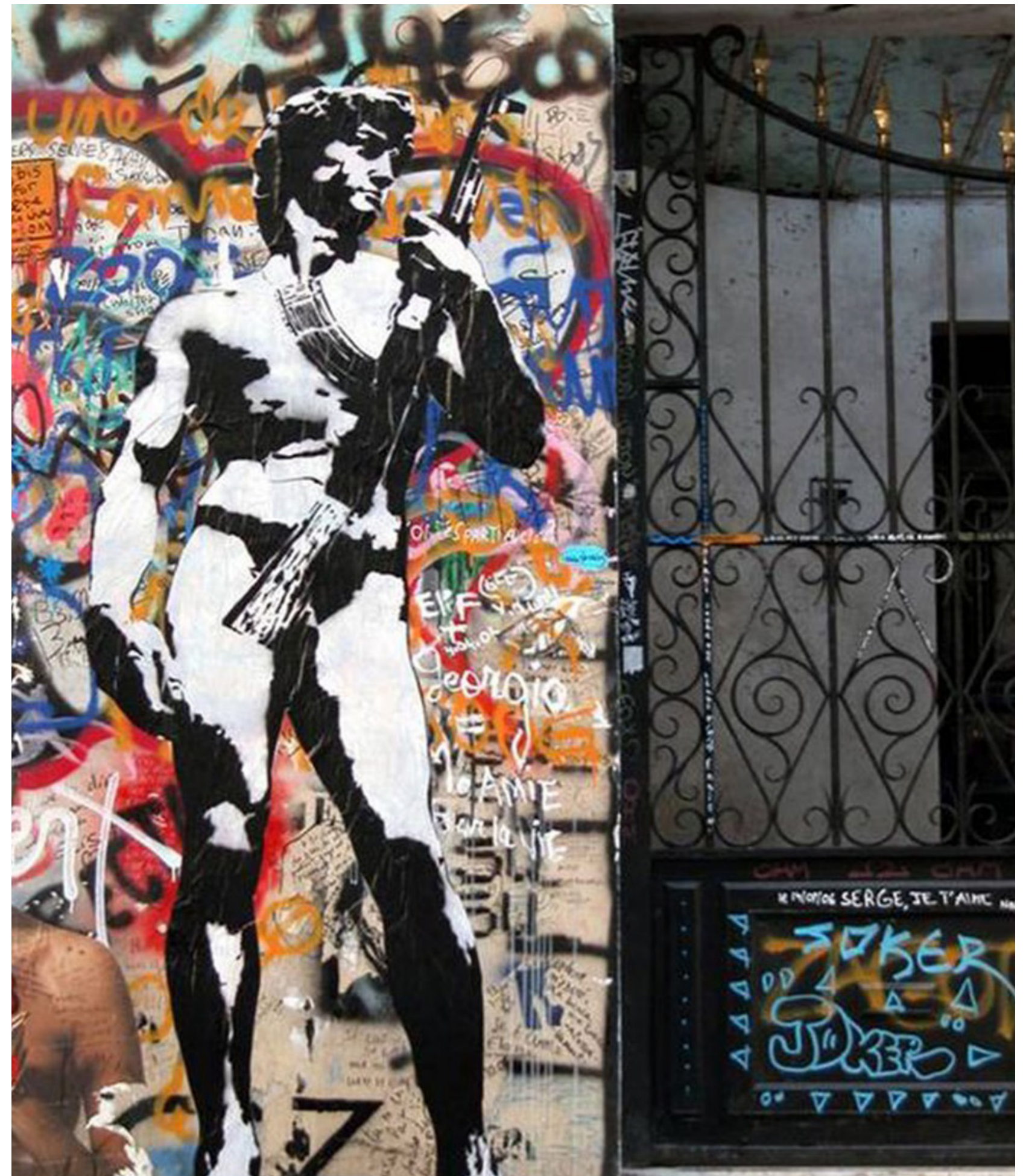
In the summer of that year. Blek exported the character from Paris to other French cities, including Avignon, Aix-en-Provence, Grenoble, Toulon and Lyon.

Blek left his mark in these cities, and became known throughout France as a result. But when Blek took him elsewhere in Europe, the Old Irish Man took on different identities according to the places he was painted: he was called everything from 'Buster Keaton' or 'Charlot' (like Charlie Chaplin), to 'the anarchist', 'the derelict' or simply, 'the old man.'

That was when Blek realized that the same character sprayed in different places could convey completely different messages or impressions to people. He also began to understand that the poetry of an image on a wall depended entirely on its environment.

Blek's work thus became centred on the interplay of image and space, which is clearly vital for many different varieties of graffiti. This essential juxtaposition, and the concept of working in urban spaces without a frame or a traditional canvas, is of the greatest importance in understanding the authenticity of Blek's art.

As the Old Irish Man proved a success, many other life-size stencils followed in his wake. These included Tom Waits, a portrait of Blek as a child, Andy Warhol, a man in the style of Salvador Dalí's Tuna Fishing, another old man holding a cane, the Greek Lady and a Woman from Bangladesh. After these came a Russian Soldier, President Mitterrand, a Faun, the German artist Joseph Beuys, a Running Man Screaming, Jesus Christ, Two Dogs Mating, a Woman in Suspenders, a couple of Tango dancers, and classic characters inspired by Old Masters such as Michelangelo and Caravaggio.



Blek le Rat, David



Blek le Rat, Poster

Posters.



Blek le Rat, Rat

By the 1990s, the French urban landscape had changed dramatically. The latest wave of American writing had reached Paris, and stencils were covered up by tags and pieces, a social phenomenon related to hip hop and urban counter- culture. 'I didn't mind because I like any kind of graffiti, but it was difficult to find even the tiniest little space on which to stand my ground, with all the different tags and pieces popping up everywhere,' Blek remembers. Given his troublewith the police in 1991, and the new laws that attempted to curb the graffiti movement, it was time to find a safer way to investigate urban spaces. To do that Blek needed to find a new technique. So he switched from using pure stencils to stencilled posters. Working on paper changed Blek's approach to creating art in urban public spaces for ever. This technique opened up new projects in areas where he could never have intervened with proper stencils. What was originally thought to be an emergency solution gave rise to a new artistic dimension.

It all began with small seriographs that Blek produced at home before pasting in the streets. Blek wanted to stress his continuing presence through a series of self-portraits, pasted on the city walls. The message was clear: 'I'm still here.' These self-portraits were followed by pictures of his family, including his grandmother from Thailand, as well as people who had made an impression on him at some point in his life, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit (leader of the student protesters during the May 1968 riots in France) or a member of the mafia whom he had met in Naples years before.

Despite new trends and new legislation, Blek proved that he would not disappear or give up his new technique: nothing could stop him from talking about his existence.

Press

PG: 36-45

"I had the idea of making characters from paintings walk out of the museums and back into the streets, therefore becoming accessible to everybody."

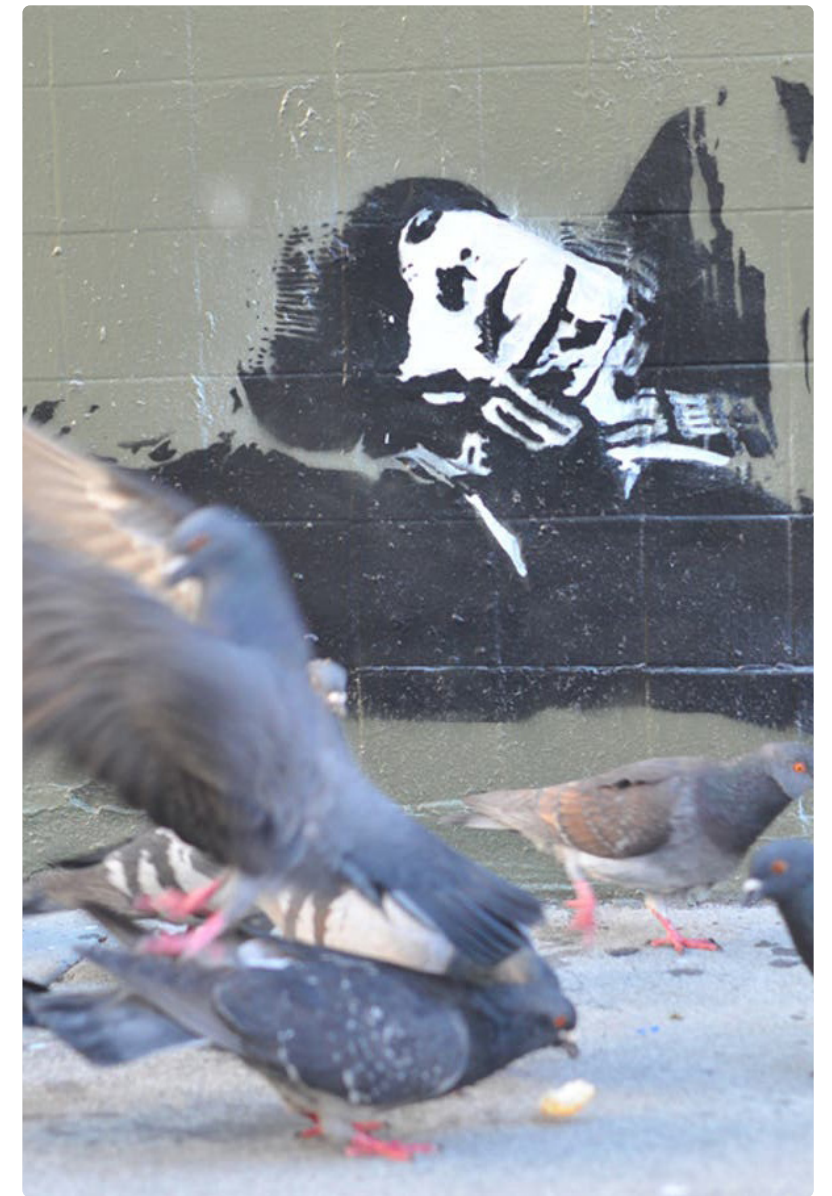
Blek le Rat





Blek le Rat, Mona Lisa

Press.

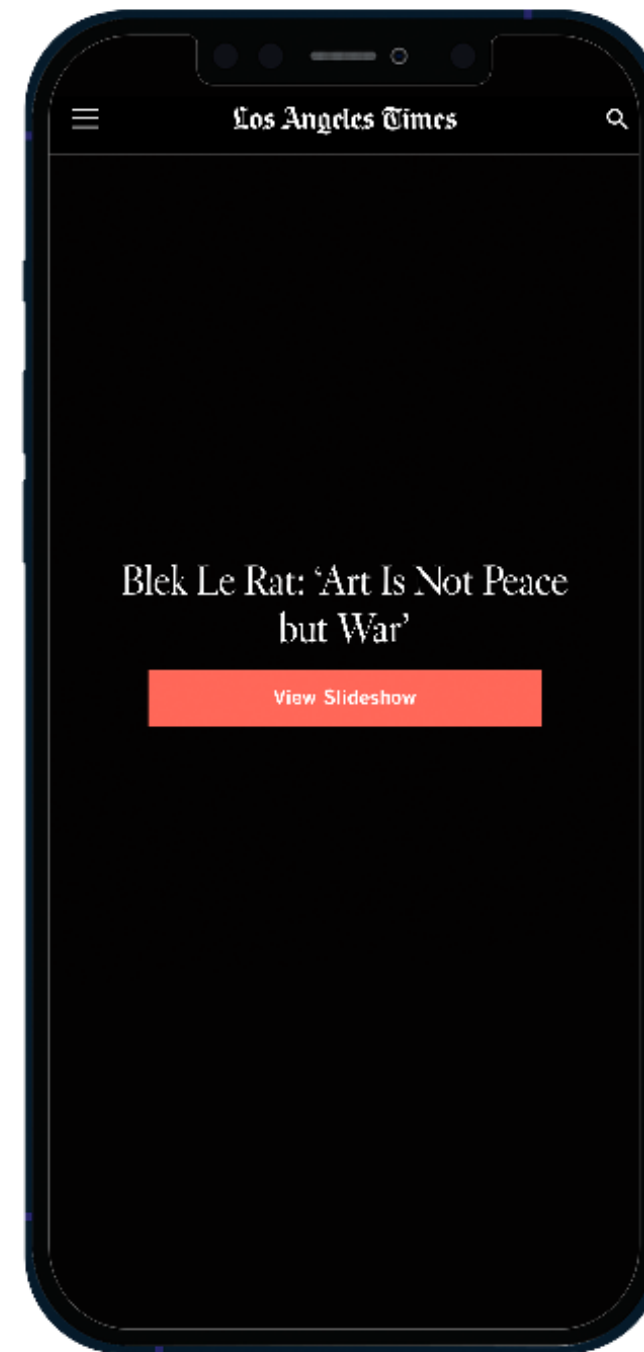
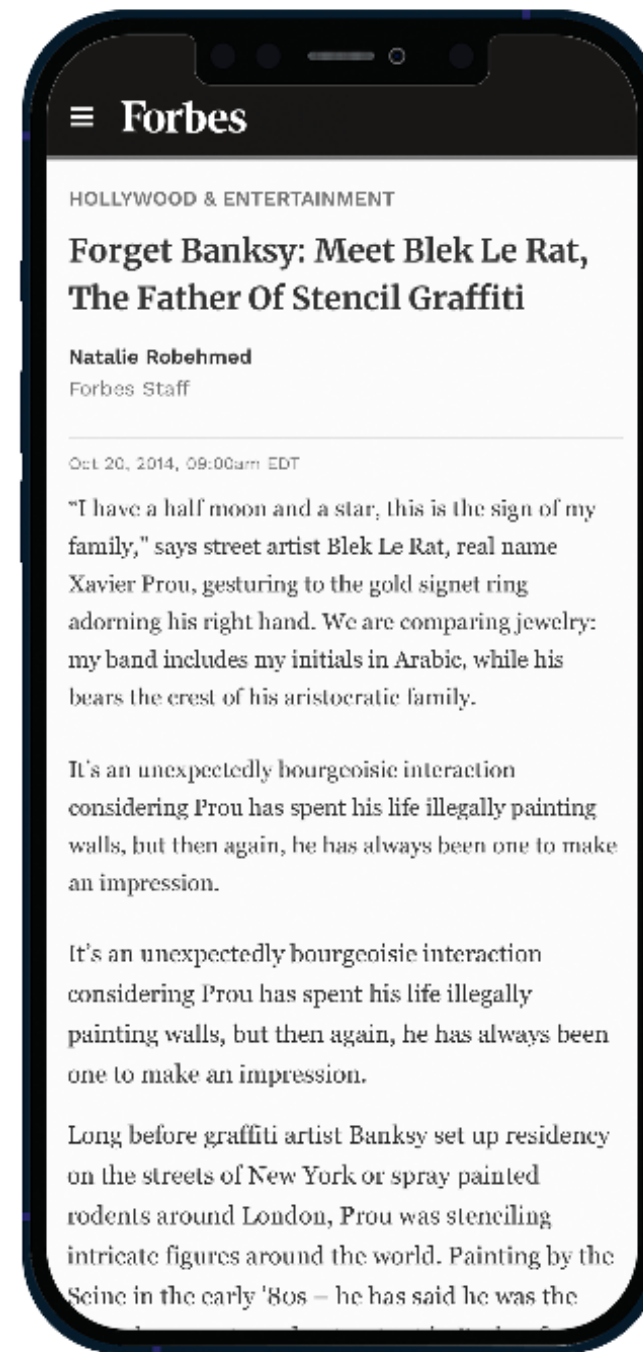
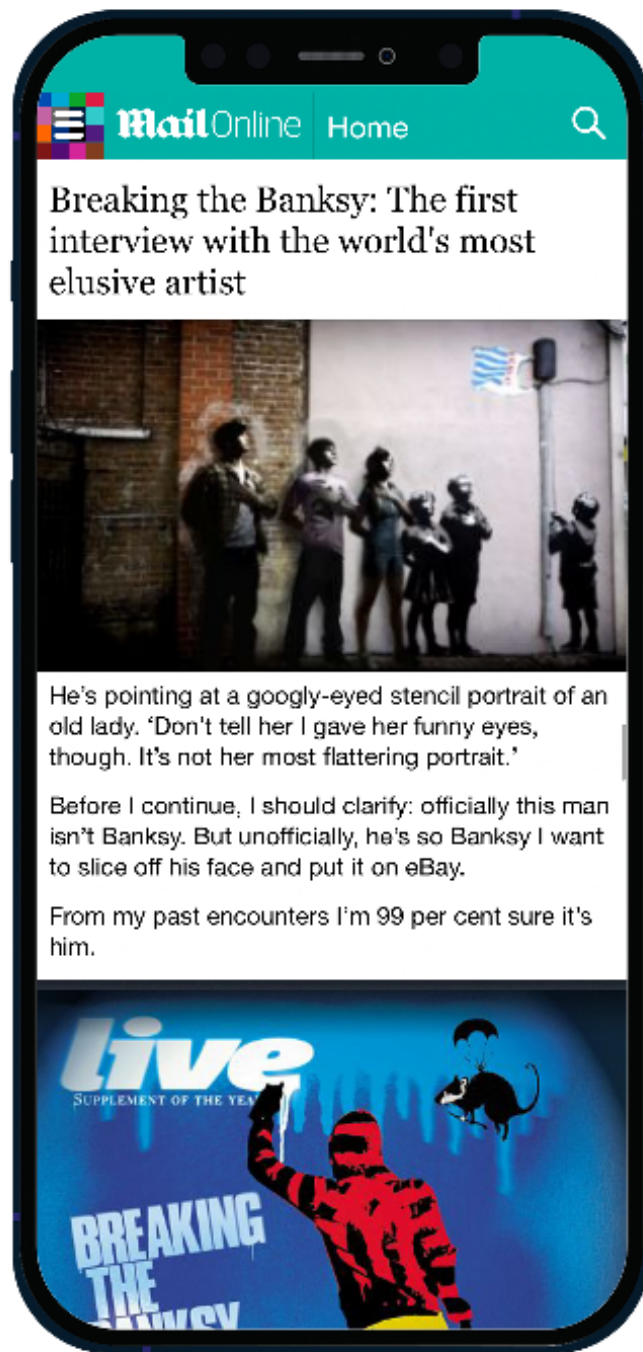


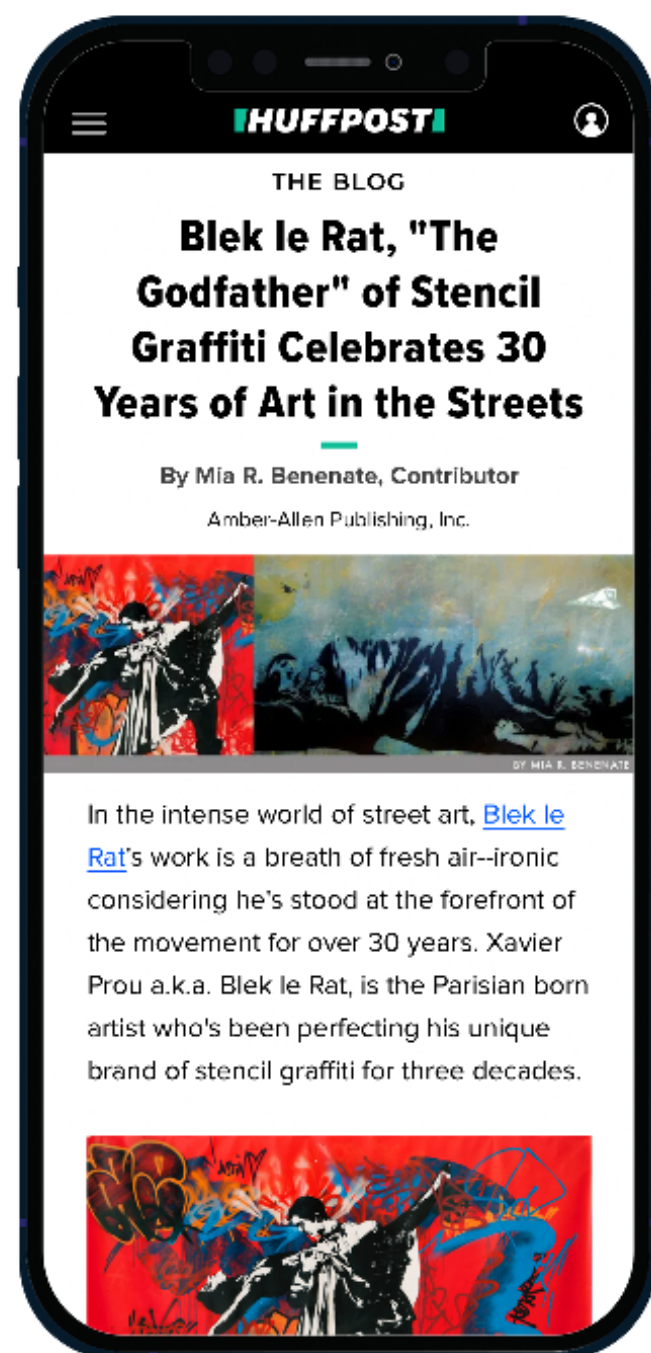
Blek le Rat, Begger

Blek has been widely recognised by respected publications and featured in press articles globally over the years.

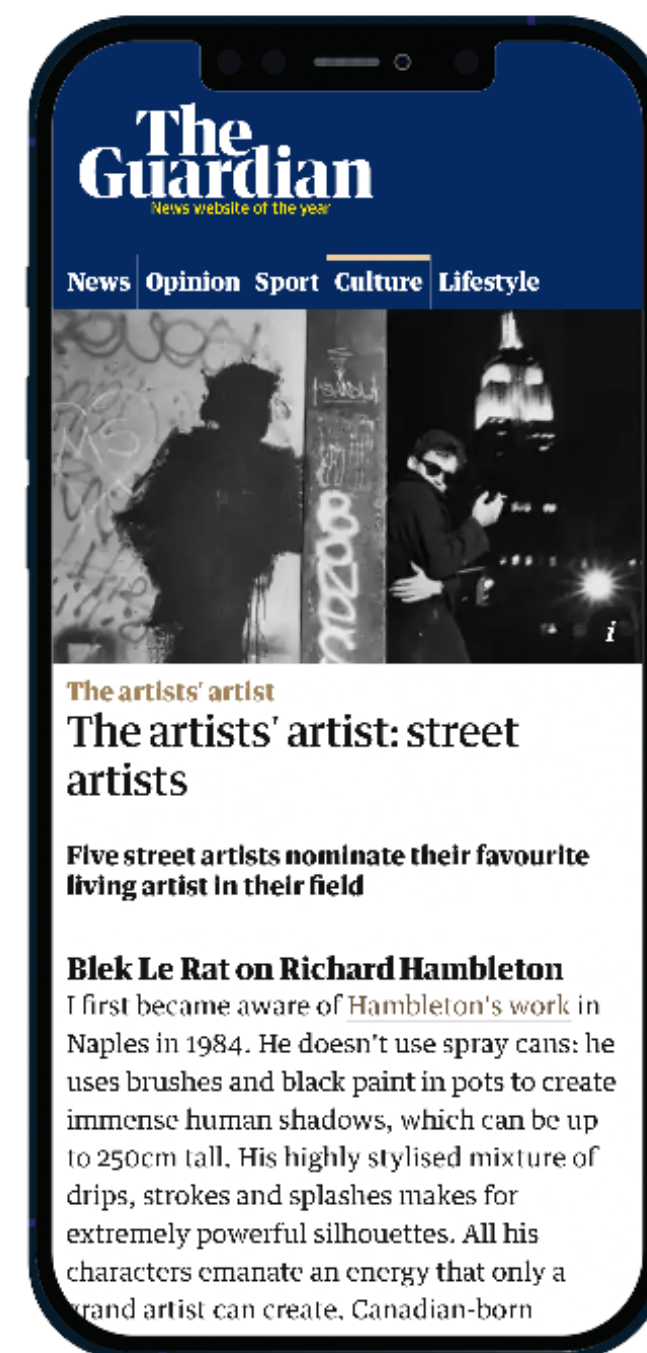
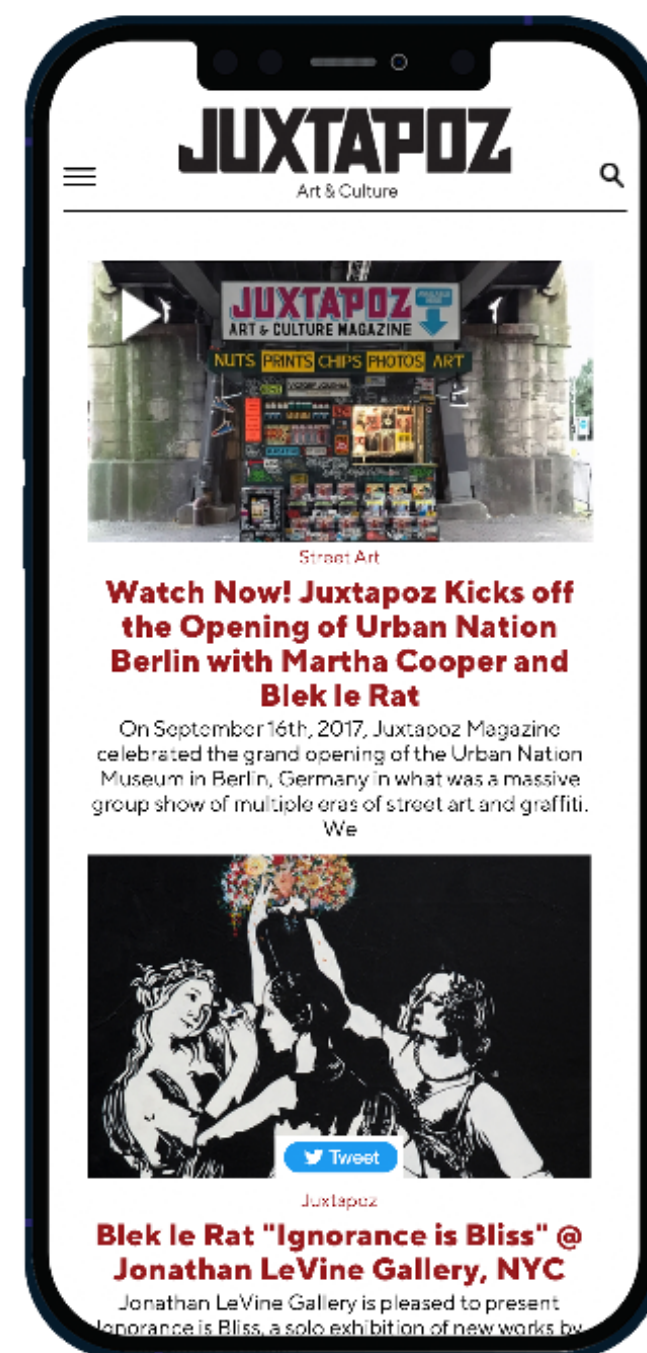
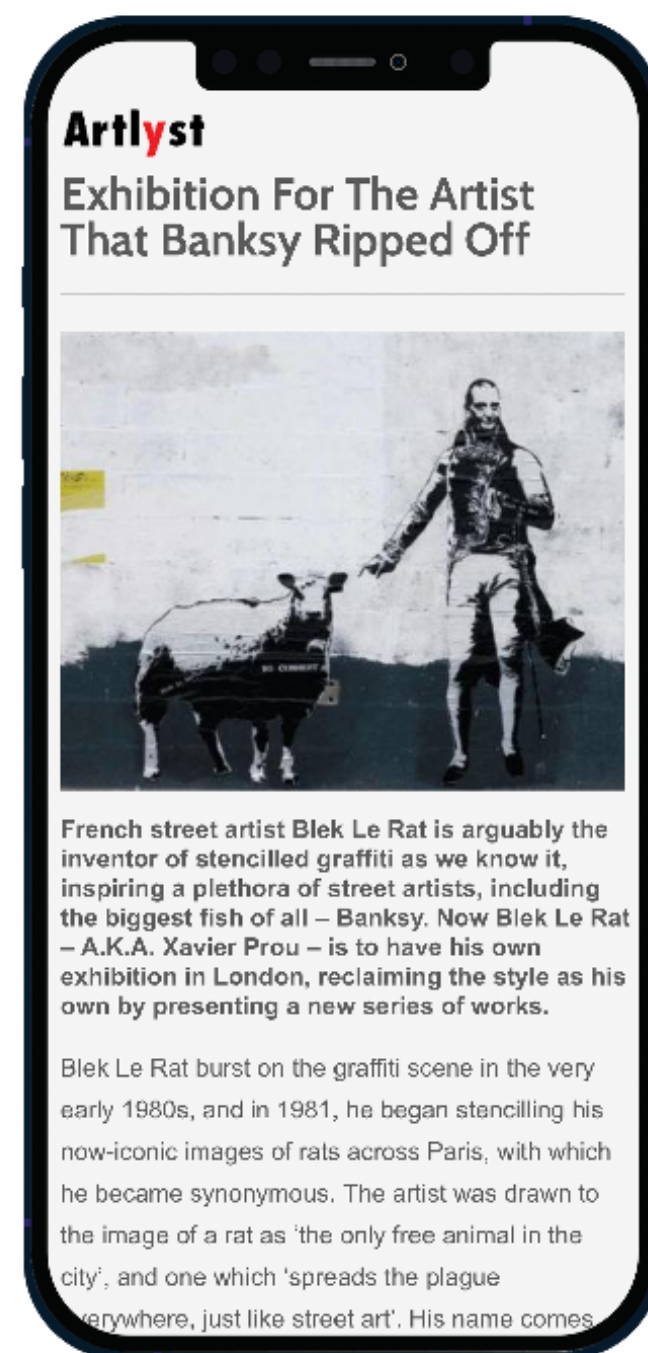
His work has been exhibited world wide and is a fundamental player in the art world.

A selection of the publications he has featured in have been highlighted including features with Forbes, FAD Magazine, Independent, Daily Mail alongside many more.





Blek le Rat, Press Features





Blek le Rat, Christ



Blek le Rat, Spaceman

Appendix Of Shows

PG: 46-50

"When I started using stencils in 1981, I was hoping to provoke other artists to express themselves in the same way."

Blek le Rat



Appendix Of Shows.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016

Propaganda. Wunderkammern. Milan Italy
The Man Who Walks Through the Walls. Galerie Kronsbein. Munich, Germany
- 2015

Your Kids Can’t Do This. Curated by Luke Cornish. Ambush Gallery. Sydney, Australia
- 2014

Escaping Paris. Curated by DK Johnston. The Quin Hotel. New York, NY
- 2013

Ignorance is Bliss. Jonathan LeVine Gallery. New York, NY
- 2012

Blek Le Rat. Opera Gallery. London, UK.
- 2009

Blek Le Rat. Metro Gallery. Australia. 2008 Paris—NY, NY—Paris. Jonathan LeVine Gallery. New York, NY
- 2008

Art Is Not Peace But War. Subliminal Projects Gallery. Los Angeles, CA.
Blek le Rat // Life Before Banksy... Kunstachometer. Palma de Mallorca
Blek Le Rat Retrospective. Black Rat Gallery. London, UK.
- 2006

Blek Le Rat in London. Leonard Street Gallery. London, UK.
- 2002

Blek Was Here. Urban Art Gallery. Berlin, Germany. (first exhibition since 1993)
- 1993

Grafitti in the Castle. Castle Paul Ricard. Paul Ricard, France.
- 1991

Blek le Rat from Paris to Tokyo. Takarashi Gallery. Tokyo, Japan.
Stencils on Wood. Galerie Christophe. Paris, France.
Exhibition Schabonen Graffiti Blek le Rat. Ephemere Gallery. Leipzig, Germany.
Performance. Concert Hall of Elysée Monmarte. Paris
- 1990

Permanent Exhibition. Galerie Christophe. Paris, France.
Installation. Galerie Patrick Riquelme. Vannes, France.

- Installation. Huber Volker Gallery. Lisbon, Portugal.
- 1988

Exhibition. French Institute of Mainz. Mainz, Germany.
Nuit du Palace. Le Palace. Paris, France.
- 1987

Performance. Salon du Livre. Sainte-Etienne, France.
- 1986

Installation. Forum of Rock. Montreuil, France.
- 1985

Peinture Sauvage. Galerie Saint Claude. Paris, France.
- 2016

Sons of Pompeii. Gregorio Escalante Gallery. Los Angeles, CA
- 2015

Urban Patriot. Reem Gallery. Camberley, UK
URBANPOTT. 44309 Street Art Gallery. Dortmund, Germany
Oh, The Places We Have Been: Rediscovering the Past. Jonathan LeVine Gallery. New York, NY
Sleeping Beauty. Magda Danysz Gallery. Paris, France
- 2013

America’s Finest (and Others). Belgrave Gallery. St. Ives Cornwall, England
Writing’s on the Wall. Metro Gallery. Australia.
- 2012

Off The Wall. Contemporary Wing. Washington, DC
Stock Show. Metro Gallery. Australia.
Graff the Peace! Opera Gallery. Paris
Arts & Toys- Collection Selim Varol. Me Collectors Room. Berlin, Germany
Black’ n White. Galerie Kasten. Mannheim, Germany
Look Closer. Warrington Museum and Art Gallery. Warrington, England
Streets of the World. Opera Gallery. New York, NY
- 2011

Paris Forever 100th Exhibition. Madga Danysz Gallery. Paris, France
Late to Dinner. Carmichael Gallery of Contemporary Art. Culver City, CA
Outside: Urban Street Group Exhibition. 34 Fine Art. Cape Town, South Africa
Street Art- Contemporary Prints. Galerie Kasten. Mannheim, Germany
Urban Art Show 2011. Belgrave Gallery St. Ives. St. Ives

- Street Art- Contemporary Prints. Galerie Kasten. Mannheim, Germany
Urban Art Show 2011. Belgrave Gallery St. Ives. St. Ives Cornwall, England
Shadows and Reflections. Madga Danysz Galerie. Paris, France
- 2010

Winter Group Show. White Walls Gallery. San Francisco, CA
Never Judge...? Stolenspace Gallery. London, England
Street and Studio- Von Basquiat bis Seripop. Kunsthalle Wien. Vienna, Austria
Street Smarts. Affirmation Arts. New York, NY
Fourth Element II. The Watermill. Aberfeldy, Perthshire, Scotland
Blek le Rat & Above. White Walls Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Girls, Girls, Girls. Signal Gallery. London, England
Five Year Anniversary. Jonathan LeVine Gallery. New York, NY
Wreck the Walls. Subliminal Projects. Los Angeles, CA
Friends with Knives. Crewest Gallery. Los Angeles. CA
Faces in the Mirror. White Walls Gallery. San Francisco, CA
Looking East. Yves Laroche Galerie d’art. Montreal, QC, Canada
On the Wall: International Street Art Group Show. Metro Gallery. Australia.
- 2009

From Style Writing to Art. 18Galelry Shanghai- Bund18, Shanghai
108 Christmas Exhibition- Little Pictures. 108Fineart. Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England
The Northern Art Fair. 108Fineart. Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England
Installation Five. Anno Domini. San Jose, CA
Blue Print for Space for Art Basel 2009. Art Center. South Florida, Miami Beach
Whole in the Wall. Helenback Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008

Off the Wall- From Vandalism to Urban Art. Wilde Gallery. Berlin, Germany
Apocalyptic Colors. Galerie Gabriele Senn. Vienna, Austria
The Cans Festival. The Cans Festival. London, England
Titanium Expose. Fecal Face Dot Gallery. San Francisco, CA
- 2007

Streets of Europe. Jonathan LeVine Gallery. New York, NY
White Noise. Black Rat Press. London, UK
- 2006

11 Spring Street. Curated by Marc & Sara Schiller of Wooster Collective. New York, NY

2005
Urban Wallpaper. Taipei Artist Village. Taipei, Taiwan

2003
Workshop in The Open City: Models For Use. Kokerein Zollverein. Essen, Germany.

2002
Blek Was Here. Urban Art Gallery. Berlin, Germany
Installation with Lee Quineones. Reitschule. Bern, Switzerland.

1993
La Belle et la Bête. Galerie Arnaud Brument. Paris, France.

1992
L'Art Vif, la Revue Parlée. Centre George Pompidou. Paris, France.
L'Art Vif. Espace Carnot. Lille, France.
Un Regard sur l'Art. Musée Creusot. Creusot, France.
Fin de Millenaire. Espace Belleville CTFD. Paris, France.
Graffiti in Cavern. Galerie Le Cailar. Le Cailar, France.

1991
Street Art. Globus Gallery. Leipzig, Germany.

1989
Les Rencontres de Marrakech. French Institute of Marrakech. Marrakech, Morocco.
And der Wand (On the Wall). Kunstverein Wiesbaden. Wiesbaden, Germany.
Schablonen Graffiti (Stencil Graffiti). Kunstverein Heidelberg. Heidelberg, Germany.
Schablonen Graffiti (Stencil Graffiti). Gemeentemuseum. Helmond, Netherlands.
Cannes Biennial. Palais des Festivals Cannes. Cannes, France.
Art Urbain (Urban Art). Hotel de Ville Buffemont. Val d'Oise, France.

1988
Graffiti in the Street, Exhibition in the Institute. French Institute of Naples. Naples, Italy.
Histoire des Rockers. La Villete. Paris, France.
Shadow and Light. Lara Vinci Gallery. Paris, France.

1987
Musée International de Graf. Galerie L'Autre Rive. Paris, France.

1986
Pochoirs (Stencils). Agnes B Gallery. Paris, France.
Emotion. Ministry of Culture. Saint Quentin, France.
Stencil Graffiti in Tullles. Peuple et Culture. Tullles, France.
Urban Art Show. Galerie Jean Marc Patras. Paris, France.

In Between Out. Palais des Papes. Avignon, France.
Verbes d'États. Centre National des Arts Plastique. Nice, France.

1985
Les Artistes au Telephone. Galerie Pierre Lescot. Paris, France.
Affiches Detrounees. National Center of Contemporary Art. Paris, France
Frescoes on Walls. French Ministry of Culture. Paris, France.



Blek le Rat, Grise Romance



Blek le Rat, Old man Mini



Blek le Rat, Le Miserable Mexico



Blek le Rat, Pioneers

BLEK LE RAT

WOODBURY HOUSE