

## Public Space

The sculpture titled *Shoe Shine* was created by Banksy in the summer of 2013 for his New York City Artist in Residency, which took place in October 2013. A larger-than-life fiberglass clown defending its palace of golden arches is no unfamiliar sight. In this work however, Banksy chooses to confront viewers with the iconic imagery of Ronald McDonald and corrupt its perceived effortlessly clean image through injecting humanity and reason into the narrative which the McDonalds Corporation have fought so violently for. We are met with a sculpture which is constructed from fiberglass and features a stoic and demanding Ronald McDonald getting his excessively large clown shoes polished by a real human being. The sculpture's foot is propped up on a green milk crate, which acts as the line of separation between the human component, and the corporate construction. The actor is seen wearing worn out clothing, and a hat, which I believe acts as a layer of separation between Ronald and the actor, giving the Ronald power, through the sense of surveillance over the other. This work was featured as the unsanctioned artwork for day sixteen of Banksy's Artist in Residency in the city of New York. This sculpture started in front of the McDonalds in the south Bronx but was moved each day for two weeks. At each location, the sculpture was placed on the sidewalk outside the restaurant around lunchtime, after which the actor polished the shoes for a few hours. Simultaneously, a second component of the sculptural work appeared in the form of an audio guide for the piece, which was posted on Banksy's website for anyone to listen to. The audio guide featured a tongue and cheek narrator who attempted to divert and diffuse the uncomfortable subject matter with dry humour. Towards the end of the audio guide, the narrator begins to toy with the listener, pitching ideas and possibilities which are likely not the case. The following line often dismisses the previous statement, making the narrator's words lose meaning by the end of it. The listener is left unsure what is a truth and what is a lie and therefore must explore the possibilities themselves.

This work focuses on, and tackles issues and impacts from the excess of labour and waste required to upkeep a perfect marketable image for a mega-corporation like McDonald's. Through the artist's audio guide, we are let into the creative process of constructing the work, nuance details of the work and some interesting insight into why this work was created. Banksy argues that Ronald McDonald is the second most sculpted figure in history, other than Jesus Christ. This is due to the sheer size and scale of the McDonalds Corporation and the harmful amount of money and energy spent on maintaining the perfect image of their beloved and iconic mascot. Interestingly, the face of this sculpture is borrowed from a sculpture made in 340 BC which depicts Hermes, the god of commerce, thieves, and merchants. The reaction from the public was skewed, as the artist's project that this work was a part of, had a large almost-cult following, so the piece was swarmed each day by people who carried preconceived notions with them. That is not to say the artwork is not extremely powerful, it just means many people saw it, but only a portion of them were even concerned at what they were looking at. The rest of the patrons had their minds made for them, just wanting to obtain a photo of something other people said had value.

In response to this work, I desired to create a work which could sit alongside *Shoe Shine*, and expand further on the dialogue which Banksy had opened up. I agreed completely with the statement he was making but felt he did not go deep enough. *Shoe Shine* focused on the "feet of clay" of the McDonalds Corporation in a global context, in relation to how it impacts the people who live their lives, making the products they need to maintain a squeaky-clean corporate image. In my work, I wish to expand on the idea that Ronald McDonald is the second most sculpted figure in history. This thought is horrifying to

me. How could an image constructed by a despicable mega corporation be so close to a saint? To understand this question myself, I looked towards the employees of the restaurant, who were working inside while all the commotion was taking place. The people that give up their time and individuality for the greater good of the corporation each time they clock in for a shift. Are they simply corrupted or is it me who is not seeing the whole picture?

I recreated a depiction of Christ during his crucifixion on the pole of the McDonald's, which is on the roof, sitting above the Banksy sculpture. I wanted to create a dialogue between my work and theirs, drawing on the notion of corporations being perceived as deities. By having Shoe Shine sitting on a different plane than my work, it allows for the works to be beside each other, but not directly connected. My inspiration with this was to create work which can be read sequentially and understood as existing in the same canon, while maintaining individuality between works. This felt necessary as I am more interested in exploring the local repercussions of McDonalds Corporation, as opposed to the global repercussions which Banksy explored. My goal with this work was to express my frustration towards the McDonald Corporation, while empathising with the employees of the establishment, who are dehumanized by customers and overlooked by the very company which employs them. In the depiction of Jesus, we see the crown of thorns being replaced by a McDonalds uniform visor, one of the most iconic employee uniform items for the last two decades of the McDonald Corporations branding. Jesus's bare chest is loosely covered with a blue polo shirt. On the front of the uniform, is a white nametag with "worker #5" printed in the center in a sans serif font. The nametag is purposely uncapitalized, and features a stand-in name, which reduces the employee down to easily replaceable number. A spatula is placed in Jesus's hand, to further help identify him as an employee. This idea stemmed from stumbling upon the term lamb of God while doing research into Christ's pictorial forms. A lamb of God is willing to make sacrifice, in an effort to abolish the sins of others. Jesus was the Lamb of God, sacrificing himself for the sins of others, despite being sinless himself. Are the employees of McDonalds any different? It is them who are making personal sacrifices, covering for the countless sins happening behind the closed doors of McDonald Corporate offices. Employees feel obligated to the corporation because McDonalds signs their paychecks but the numbers on the paycheck are carefully sculpted to keep their employees feeling obligated. This acts as a constant source of Lambs, ready and willing to make sacrifice for just \$7.25 an hour.

Below is an image of my concept to help illustrate my idea.



Lamb Burgers of God

Wooden beams, fiberglass and acrylic.

20' x 7' 6"

## Research

[https://youtube.com/shorts/fi\\_cRjNMcxE?feature=share](https://youtube.com/shorts/fi_cRjNMcxE?feature=share)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY7pxhkJBnA&ab\\_channel=StreetArtNews](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY7pxhkJBnA&ab_channel=StreetArtNews)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/Herm\\_Hermes\\_Propylaios\\_340\\_BC\\_Museum\\_Delos\\_A\\_7756\\_ZdeDelm210.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/Herm_Hermes_Propylaios_340_BC_Museum_Delos_A_7756_ZdeDelm210.jpg)

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<https://untappedcities.com/2013/11/04/photos-all-31-days-banksy-nyc-residency-better-out-than-in-map-of-locations/?displayall=true>

<https://untappedcities.com/2013/10/16/banksy-in-nyc-day-16-shoe-shine-a-sad-ronald-mcdonald-with-enormous-shoes-in-the-bronx/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb\\_of\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb_of_God)

<https://dol.ny.gov/history-minimum-wage-new-york-state>