

Scrubbed Out: Silencing Banksy's Protest Art

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On September 8th, 2025, a distinctive Banksy mural greeted passersby on the wall of the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Forty-eight hours later, it was gone.

Painted on the historic Queen's Building, the mural depicted a British judge in full ceremonial wig and robe, wielding a weaponized gavel mid-strike over a body on the ground – a protester clutching a sign stained with blood. Banksy confirmed the piece on his Instagram account, breaking over a year of silence to post a single caption: the location of the work.

The image spoke at far greater volumes than any caption ever could, which could be the precise reason for its swift removal.

Decoding the Symbolism

At first glance, the mural is dark and confrontational. A judge—representing state power, authority, and control—is caught in the act of violence, not justice. The protester, small, prone, and vulnerable, becomes a stand-in for the public voice: a civilian or activist challenging authority crushed under the weight of institutional force.

The red splatter—presumably blood—is the only color in the entire piece. It introduces urgency, alarm, and sacrifice, echoing a familiar theme in protest art. Banksy's image erases the courtroom's performative ideals: instead of impartial justice, the system is recast as silencer, aggressor, and perpetrator of violence against dissent.

Once decoded, the image is no longer only visual, it's visceral.

Protest Art Becomes Political Speech

Protest art is a form of creative expression that challenges authority, exposes injustice, and amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals. Unlike art created for purely aesthetic reasons, protest art is inherently purpose-driven. It thrives in public spaces because it is immediate, accessible, and often unsanctioned. Its power lies in the ability to speak without words and to say what mainstream media often won't.

Banksy built his career confronting war, inequality, political hypocrisy, and state violence. This mural falls into the center of that tradition. Placing it directly on the face of one of Britain's highest legal institutions wasn't a mistake; it was a calculated act of resistance.

The wall became his canvas, bypassing gatekeepers and opening a brief window of public dialogue and reckoning. But not for long.

Conservation or Censorship?

By September 10th, the mural had been scrubbed, only a faint outline remaining in its wake. Authorities said the removal was necessary to preserve the historic building and maintain its original character. But people were quick to call a bluff—this was wholehearted censorship being covered up by a word that starts with the same letter.

To many, the speed of the removal of the mural was telling. If this was a generic graffiti tag, how long would it have remained or gone unnoticed? Potentially weeks or days, but because it was Banksy—and because it made such a sharp statement about state's handling of protesters—it had to go. Fast.

The piece was erased and with it, its original message.

Silencing the Artist

Banksy is no stranger to his art being destroyed or painted over. But this urgent removal felt different. It wasn't just about the artwork—it was about shutting down the conversation it ignited.

The UK has recently expanded its power to curb public protest, and when activist groups like Palestine Action have been politically labeled as extremists, this mural challenged the growing

criminalization of dissent and the power of voice. Banksy is no fool. It wasn't just art work, it was accusation.

By removing the image, officials had no intention of preserving the building's history and foundation. They were trying to wash away public criticism.

The Remnants

Although the mural is physically gone, its impact still lingers. A ghostly outline sticks to the wall, a fitting metaphor for how dissent is often erased but never silenced. Banksy didn't comment on the removal, although he rarely does. But in true Banksy fashion, the silence speaks volumes.

The erasure of this mural is more than an anecdote of street art—it's a symbol in itself. A symbol of how power always has the final say, how power responds to criticism. In scrubbing the wall, the corrupt system may have revealed more than it intended.