

BANKSY

AND MODIFICATION ART (DÉTOURNEMENTS)

The practice of “*détournements*” in painting was originated by the Danish artist Asger Jorn, who was one of the major exponents of the CoBrA movement and a theorist of the Situationist International. Jorn explored ironic and estranging pictorial *détournements* in his work under the title of “modification paintings”: he appropriated the reproduction of paintings by famous artists and canvases of scarce academic value, in many cases *naïfs*, by superimposing raw images of persistent gestural expressiveness onto them. This practice created pictorial conglomerates that were menacing and out of scale, as well as deliberately estranging compared to the pre-existing painting.

This artistic practice is related to the one used by Marcel Duchamp when he created his infamous L.H.O.O.Q. (1919/1964), a reproduction of *Mona Lisa* disfigured by a moustache and goatee.

Many people have emphasised the importance assumed by Situationist thought and action in Banksy’s works. In his practice of symbolic condensation of diverging elements that suddenly communicate with one another, the question of *détournement* (diversion) plays a crucial role. Banksy often resorts to existing images – photos, old canvases lacking in depth or even reproductions of well-known and important paintings of art history – on which he intervenes by superimposing estranged objects and images that are completely detached from their original context.

With Banksy’s *détournements*, he amplifies Asger Jorn’s method with political intent, explicitly warning us not to trust “ready-made” images as a threat could lurk behind their placid beauty.

The *détournement* is not only a powerful tool for commenting on political struggle and criticizing the art system: it is the dimension of turning symbolic and real contents upside down that is the motor in Situationist practices.
