

OF MICE AND MEN

Rats are to Banksy what Campbell soup cans are to Andy Warhol. To Banksy, they have a metaphorical meaning: "Rats exist without permission", says Banksy. "They are hated, hunted and persecuted. They live in quiet desperation amongst the filth. And yet they are capable of bringing entire civilizations to their knees. If you are dirty, insignificant and unloved, then the rat is your ultimate role model."* They can survive the nuclear holocaust, whereas we can't. In everything we do we are driven by a blind individualist furore, while their movements are always inspired by a collective rationale. Just as rats populate sewers, tunnels, the decaying and abandoned areas of modern cities, graffiti artists move about during the night in the same places, in tunnels, canals, railroad warehouses, architectural skeletons in disuse, to daub walls, train wagons, gates and rolling shutters with their spray, careful not to end up in the hands of the guards who are always lying in wait. In Banksy's works, rats become vandals armed with paint and paintbrushes, members of the middle class wearing a suit and holding an umbrella, burglars, rappers, laborers, saboteurs, skilled climbers, even terrorists who spread barrels of poisonous substances onto the streets and walls of the city.

* Banksy, *Wall and Piece* (London: Century - Penguin Books, 2006), p. 12.