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FELONY CHARGES AGAINST STREET ARTIST SHEPARD FAIREY EXCESSIVE & DISPROPORTIONATE

Communiqué d'Artsfex (The Arts and Freedom of Expression Network), dont l'Observatoire de la liberté de création est membre

The felony charges brought by Detroit police against the street artist Shepard Fairey are an excessive and disproportionate response to his alleged crime. The authorities' action threatens artistic expression, undermines Fairey's creative contribution to Detroit's revival as a city and challenges his First Amendment rights.

Commissioned to paint his largest mural to date in Detroit in May, Fairey told local media that he would also be taking time out to 'tag' other properties around the city without commission. When his signature art began to appear around the city, Detroit police issued a warrant for his arrest on May 19.

The two counts of malicious destruction of property carry a punishment of up to five years in jail and \$10,000 in fines. Fairey has had run-ins with the police before, but would normally only face a misdemeanor charge, bearing fines only. The raising of the charge to a felony and the threat of substantial jail time is an unjustified overreaction.

The encouragement of high-quality street art is widely seen as an important way of humanising and reviving long-derelict urban areas like parts of Detroit. Street artists have a long and deep connection with the communities who live in these areas and have won global critical acclaim, but their personal independence is central to their work.

What if, by his or her work, the street artist brings a moment of joy, peace or emotion? For this, a street artist should be credited, not disproportionately charged. Artists and vandals are not on the same level. *Street art is not a felony.*

We call on the City of Detroit to reconsider its disproportionate application of felony charges in this case and recognise Fairey's contribution to the city's creative life.

ARTSFEX *is a network of human rights defenders and civil society groups founded to defend the freedom of expression rights of artists and creative professionals worldwide*