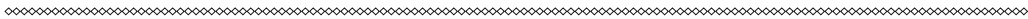
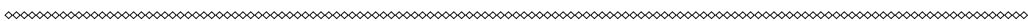


❖ ⚙️ ♦ Don't call me an Artist ♦ ⚙️ ❖

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Mark Farid is, in his own words, a “multimedia conceptual artist who investigates the perceived autonomy of the individual”. He graduated from Kingston University in 2014 with a First-Class degree. Mark won the 2015 Commission from Cambridge’s Art/Technology collective Collusion and put on the exhibition “Data Shadow” in Cambridge University, exploring the privacy sacrificed by using internet-connected mobile phones. He is still working on the “Seeing I”, a project which will place Mark, through the use of VR, in the eyes and ears of another individual without pause for 28 days.



Describing Mark’s projects is difficult. What he tells or shows to the viewer is the brush; the painting is their reaction. “Am I in an art project right now?” I ask him excitedly at the start of our interview, as, like I’ve just done, he sets his phone down on the table to record everything we say. He often takes over the interview, asking me searching questions like, “So is art for the artist or for the viewer?” But that should be no concern of Mark’s because he resists calling himself an artist at all.

What does that word mean these days anyway? In between musicians and writers, you have those called first and foremost “artists”, a label somehow applied to painters, sculptors, and Shia Le Bouf staring at you in an empty room...and, perhaps, Mark Farid. Let’s say, he suggests, that an artist is someone who puts something in a gallery space to be observed. That’s how the art world operates today: if you can convince a gallery to exhibit something, whether it’s something you made or found on a beach, it’s art, and you’re an artist. Maybe this is why Mark resists including himself within the profession: he doesn’t want to give galleries the power to validate his work. He blames Duchamp, who, as World War I tore apart people’s lives across Europe in 1917, found the time to masquerade a urinal as a piece of art in a gallery. “His intention was to ruin art. He says this very openly, and he did,” Mark says, although he clearly admires Duchamp for his execution. “When you put that in the gallery, the power goes to the gallery, not to the artist, not to the work. The context dictates what it is. The fact that it’s art.”

The result is that art now moves forward not by trends towards, for instance, realism, or abstraction, or anything else, but by threatening its own boundaries. Mark has to resist calling himself an “artist”: that resistance is an integral part of his work. He works in gallery spaces but subverts their power by recontextualising what the viewer brings inside with them, not what they find there. For instance, in his new project *Data Shadow*, the individual’s data from their mobile phone, such as their private pictures and texts, are taken by a Wi-Fi connection and projected on a wall in front of them in the shape of their silhouette. It’s not an everyday object like a urinal that has been elevated to “art” by the authority of the gallery; it’s something personal to the viewer, which they brought with them in their pocket.

Getting the viewer involved is a welcome change to the atmosphere of most galleries. “You go into a gallery,” Mark says, “it’s very church like, it’s sterile, there aren’t windows, you walk slowly, you whisper, you are made to feel inferior to it and if you don’t get it, you aren’t supposed to ask why.” Mark, on the other hand, often waits on the other side of his art projects, ready to converse with his audience about the project and defend himself against the odd charge that his work is a series of massively expensive ways to make completely pedantic points (certainly not a view this magazine holds). The elitism he levies at most galleries reminds me of Catholic services in ye olde times: they were delivered in Latin, brandishing their incomprehensibility as a virtue.

Of course, Mark doesn’t just utilise gallery spaces — he also gives lots of talks (they pay the bills). He’s making two documentaries and developing a TV program, and also exhibiting his ideas in methods which are harder to classify. For instance, he will soon start broadcasting all the data from his various email and social media accounts live across the internet. So, what are you, Mark, exactly?

“I like to describe myself as someone who studied fine art at University who is the son of two psychiatrists.” A sentence long description, thanks. Perhaps that is where interconnected humanity is at: our activity has diversified to a point where singular terms serve only to confuse.

Or he could just say he is an artist. Which he does, when he is trying to get on and make things happen. We could call him a creatively minded journalist or an emotion terrorist or whatever the hell we want. The only continuity between Mark’s outputs is the subject matter.

“They all centre around the same thing, of individual autonomy, or lack thereof.” If you want a healthy dose of paranoia about the invisible forces that are directing your life, makes sure you catch one of Mark’s art projects. Just because your paranoid doesn’t mean it isn’t true.

At the Palace, Mark will be giving a talk on getting funding as a young artist. At twenty-four, Mark has enjoyed an elongated dose of beginner’s luck securing funding on a career path that normally takes off at forty if at all. He might actually know what he’s talking about.

“How do you get funding for stuff, how do you actually make a living from it?” he asks me, still maintaining power in the interview. I don’t know. “It is just knowing what boxes to tick. And no one tells you that. Until someone tells you. The secret is putting yourself out there.” I am sure he’ll specify which boxes specifically at the talk. “It helps to have rich parents,” he adds, in case you haven’t considered doing that. Despite managing to navigate through the art world very successfully, Mark seems disenchanted with the isolated, elite role it plays in our culture today. So am I. Let’s hope he does something to change it.

By **Hamish Roberts**