

Exhibition Information

DIAMOND DUST PORTFOLIO VOLUME ONE

To a meteorologist it would mean a type of precipitation composed of slowly falling, very small, crystals of ice floating down from a clear, blue sky. For someone working in the field of industrial cleaning, it would suggest a highly abrasive and efficient scouring agent. If, on the other hand, you talked to someone from the art world they would almost certainly associate diamond dust with the work of Andy Warhol.

In 1979 Warhol began partially encrusting the surfaces of many of his paintings and silkscreen prints with this gritty, glittering, sharply coloured material, producing his famous series of "Diamond Dust Shoes" in 1980. Many critics interpreted the glitzy and scintillating effects of such works as a commentary upon the superficiality of modern life, its obsession with glamour, illusion and showy extravagance. Yet the shimmering light twinkling across the diamond dust granules simultaneously seduces the eye and frustrates it, reflecting vision back upon itself, preventing the imagination from projecting itself unselfconsciously into the image that lies "behind" this surface mirage. Diamond dust offers a come-on and a knock-back, as alluring, deceptive and fascinating as all those pleasurable things that are probably bad for you.

All the works in this exhibition are responses to Warhol. This is no secret; the very title of the "Diamond Dust Volume One" portfolio draws attention to it. Like Warhol, all these artists use a crisp, vivid and memorable image (usually drawn from everyday culture) as the basis on which to develop their ideas. Our familiarity with images of Elvis and The Beatles, for example, is generally so ingrained that Peter Blake can reduce them to the near invisibility of white on white, yet still manage to recognise them instantly. Distilled to almost nothingness, Blake's images nevertheless trigger a wealth of associations, ranging from the history of modern art (Kazimir Malevich's series of ground breaking White on White paintings begun in 1917) to more immediate pop culture references (Pop artist Richard Hamilton's cover design for The Beatles' 1968 White Album).

Warhol and his contemporaries recognised that in the age of the camera and mass media all images (including works of art) become increasingly equalized and interdependent. Thus Linder's portrait of Morrissey ("Mon coeur ne bat que pour Morrissey") is a densely layered, multi-referential thing.

On the one hand, it contains a chain of processes, techniques and selections that link it to Warhol's work: it is a silkscreen print - incorporating diamond dust - derived from a photograph taken by the artist of a celebrity. At the same time, however, it reminds us that Morrissey's own visual image as a pop star is modeled to some extent on that of early Elvis. When we then recall that Warhol himself made prints and paintings of Elvis, the whole process of cross-referencing becomes even more complex and fascinating.

Photography and digital technology speed up the processes of making and circulating images to such an extent that they are rendered obsolete almost immediately. For Peter Saville it is a question of trying to slow down this process. His Waste Paintings are made by digitally reprocessing and recycling his earlier work as a highly successful and influential graphic designer (work often incorporating elements pirated from art history), thus turning time back on itself. In bewitching the eye and temporarily distracting it from the underlying image, diamond dust also plays its part in rescuing the image from high velocity oblivion.

Once we become aware of the cross-referencing between all the images surrounding us it is hard to maintain the old distinctions between "high" art and the rest of everyday culture. This, however, is a mixed blessing. It may lead to a democratisation of art (although this is certainly not guaranteed), but it may equally lead to a blanket aestheticisation of everyday life in which everything is judged and evaluated in terms of style and surface appearance. Under such conditions, as Simon Periton seems to suggest in "Eclipse", even the anarchists' symbol can be converted into a streamlined corporate logo, a snappy trademark or commercial branding device.

Despite the apparent expansion of choices available to us today (ever more images to choose between) the truth is that, as economic power becomes concentrated in ever fewer hands, our real options diminish. Increasingly, there are no substantial differences between this and that brand of detergent or breakfast cereal, between this and that political party, between this and that TV channel. Social life becomes a matter of style choices ("lifestyle") where we are asked, as Peter Liversidge's work points out, to "Just Think About The Good Things In Life". We are enticed by surface appearance (the tinsel glitter of diamond dust), only to find that the differences lurking behind are as insubstantial as white on white.

John Calcutt, 2004

Gallery events

Gavin Turk will give a talk at the end of August. Please call or email to confirm the date and time and to book a place.

Tel: 0131 557 2479

E-mail: gallery@edinburgh-printmakers.co.uk.

Interest Free Print Purchase Scheme

Did you know that you can take home a Gavin Turk or Peter Blake print for around 100 pounds per month? Contact staff for details.

GAVIN TURK: "FACES"

Like Marilyn Monroe herself, Warhol was famous for the ambiguity of his statements. Were they the naive utterances of an innocent or did they contain some deep truth? "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol," he once said, "just look at the surface of my paintings and there I am. There's nothing behind it." Paradoxically, it was precisely because he cultivated such a transparent persona that he became an object of intense speculation. In many cases, Warhol even became more famous than the celebrities he depicted. Everything and everyone he touched became bathed in a shining glow of glamour.

In his "Faces" portfolio, Gavin Turk cleverly plays with some of these aspects of Warhol's legacy. In 1980, for example, Warhol produced a set of prints based upon his own photograph of Joseph Beuys, the only living artist at that time who could match his celebrity status. But in turning Beuys into a diamond dusted "Warhol", the canny American triumphed over his German rival, undermining the seriousness of Beuys's self-proclaimed political commitment by presenting him merely as the latest in a line of celebrity images (identifiable, almost like a commodity, by his "trademark" double-brimmed trilby hat). The publicity image of the artist, he appeared to suggest, is more important than his or her work.

Turk, however, has escalated this process, trumping both Warhol and Beuys along the way. In "Red Beuys" and "In Memory of Silver Beuys" he has not only unashamedly mimicked Warhol's image, technique (presenting a 'reversed', or negative image), materials and colours, he has also substituted his own face for that of Beuys. If Beuys was originally turned into a "Warhol", now both Warhol and Beuys have been turned into a "Turk".

Unlike other political figures such as Mao, Lenin and Nixon, Che Guevara never featured in Warhol's work, yet in Turk's hands his iconic image has become both Warholised and Turkified. Although not based on a Warhol, it has the generic look of a Warhol (complete with diamond dust) and, whilst the face may look like Che's, it is actually Turk's (something slyly hinted at in the title "Gavara Reversed"). Things become even more intriguing when we realize that the image of Che already occupies a place in Turk's own oeuvre. In 2000, for example, he displayed a waxwork of himself as the revolutionary leader, exhibited a billboard size poster based on the same famous image and, in 2001, presented a performance in which he adopted the role Che for a period of days.

Should we treat all of this simply as an elaborate art world in-joke? Almost certainly not. Much of Turk's work has concerned itself with questions of identity and empathy. Not only has he entered into the image-space of Che, but in "Pop" (1993) he also presented a waxwork figure of himself as Sid Vicious as Elvis Presley. In "Another Bum" (1999) he presented another waxwork figure - this time of himself as a grimy down-and-out as Sid Vicious as Elvis Presley.

That Turk is not alone in exploring this kind of role playing is suggested by Douglas Gordon's 1996 photograph of himself in a blonde wig entitled "Selfportrait as Kurt Cobain, as Andy Warhol, as Myra Hindley, as Marilyn Monroe", and by Austrian artist Irene Andessner's decision to "become" Marlene Dietrich for a few months in 2001 - even marrying a Mr. Dietrich in order to officially change her surname!

It is also perhaps significant that Turk has titled this current series of prints "Faces", rather than "Portraits". We expect a portrait to tell us something about the individuality of the depicted subject, his or her personality, status or psychological state. A face, on the other hand, is more akin to a mask, something that can conceal as much as it might appear to reveal (untrustworthy individuals are "two-faced"). Faces can also often be anonymous ("just a face", "a face in a crowd", and so on).

As far as governments, police forces, advertising agencies and multinational corporations are concerned, our identities are a matter of statistics and bits of scientifically verifiable data: passport numbers, national insurance numbers, credit card numbers, incomes, finger prints, mug shots, iris structures, DNA profiles, signatures. Where are "we" in all of this? Where is the "real" Gavin Turk? Where do we look for the signs of "true" identity?

John Calcutt, 2004

Gallery 1

Peter Saville

Featured Artist wall

Edinburgh Printmakers Members

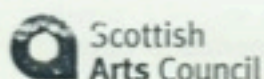
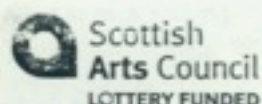
Gallery 2

Gavin Turk *Faces*

Print Viewing Room

Diamond Dust Portfolio

Saturday 24th July - Saturday 18th September 2004



In association with the Paul Stolper Gallery, London

Edinburgh Printmakers 23 Union St. Scotland EH1 3LR 0131 557 2479
gallery@edinburgh-printmakers.co.uk www.edinburgh-printmakers.co.uk