

Artist Gavin Turk on Paris

The artist lived in Paris as a student in the 1980s and still loves the city, particularly the Marais

Interview by Rick Jordan

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[Jump to comments \(21\)](#)



Gavin Turk, right, loves Paris's Marais region, where he lived as a student. Photograph: Corbis

The historic Marais area of Paris is very close to my heart. The views across the rooftops are like something out of *The Aristocats*. I lived in an apartment there for three months during the late 1980s, while I was studying for my MA: the Royal College of Art has a studio there, and I always go back – I love going to all those archives and conservatoires and collections of great cultural stuff.

When I first lived there, in the 80s, Paris was trying to understand what it might be again. Lots of grand Mitterrand projects were happening – such as Jean Nouvel's Institut du Monde Arabe – and the Pompidou Centre was really being used a lot.

I love the Pierre Huyghe exhibition at the Pompidou. It's very experiential. There are three machines that throw water, steam and ice on you, and a white dog with one purple leg walks around the exhibition.

There used to be a hip scene out in the 13th (arrondissement, south-east of the centre). They tried to develop the area by getting all the young, happening galleries in. But it got expensive and fell far away and now the galleries have mostly moved back to the Marais, around Rue Louise Weiss. Make sure you visit the GB Agency which has some really interesting young artists, such as [video artist] Omer Fast and Pratchaya Phinthong from Bangkok; it's full of energy.

Try to come for the annual Nuit Blanche in October, when all the galleries stay open late – until at least 9pm. Walk into any gallery in the Marais and ask for a gallery map – you can then run from one to another and grab a glass of wine in each. It's fantastic fun.

The revamped Palais de Tokyo near the Trocadéro, looks like a Tom Ford version of Bladenrunner. I would recommend both the vegetable couscous in the Tokyo Eat cafe, and the exhibition of Philippe Parreno installations (until 12 January): Parreno is one of the most thought-provoking figures in modern art.

Paris nightlife isn't that good. Well, it enjoyed a flamboyant and exotic heyday, but it seems more private these days. It's a difficult place to luck into. I used to drink at a bar called the Madame Deux, on rue de Sévigné. It wasn't arty but was where all the firemen went; the crowd was effervescent and didn't mind a "rosbl" drinking with them.

I wouldn't want the place filling up with Guardian readers, but the food at Chez Marie Louise in the 10th arrondissement is delicious. It's a tiny restaurant with just two waiters who know so much about the food and wine, you feel they're the ones who put the menu together. If you're a vegetarian, people look at you as if you're ill. They're shocked that a ham omelette isn't considered a vegetarian meal.

There's only so much height in Paris. You can see the Eiffel Tower from everywhere. When I come back to London, I take a deep breath because we're getting all these skyscrapers.

I know it's a cliché but Paris is actually very romantic, in a relationshipy way. Maybe people there are just more keen on expressing themselves outwardly.

For a day trip outside Paris, head to Senlis, a medieval town that's home to the Fondation François. It's a perfectly formed private art museum where I'm showing and part-curating a show called Vestige next February. It deals with waste, both human and material, and features pieces by Florian Süssmayr, Jake and Dinos Chapman and Subodh Gupta.

If I spent Christmas in Paris, I would like to spend my time visiting graves in the Père-Lachaise cemetery. I'd look out for Modigliani's grave.

Gavin stayed in Paris as a guest of onefinestay ([onfinestay.com](#))

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