

**Art Wednesday** : 'An Interview With Gavin Turk', November 30th, 2012



## An Interview With Gavin Turk

Gavin Turk earned himself a bit of a reputation as a jokester after his infamous degree show in 1991 (for which he was denied a degree!) at the Royal Academy of Art for simply hanging a plaque stating "Gavin Turk worked here, 1989-1991", as a commemoration of his existence as an artist at the college. Now 20+ years later, Turk hasn't let a minor set back of no degree stand in his way and continues to create works that deal with signature, authenticity and process, whilst bringing iconic imagery and art historical references into the ongoing and ever-expanding conversation.

For his upcoming group show at Sumarria Lunn Gallery, titled *The Fabricated Object* and curated by Michael Petry and Sumarria Lunn, Turk has been placed beside the likes of Mona Hatoum and Mike Kelly, among others, in a questioning of the conceptual role assistants, and outsourcing plays in the way work is perceived by both the artist and viewer. We wanted to have a good natter with Gavin about his inclusion in this show, and to delve deeper into his contribution and how it illustrates his own process of creating. As he said himself when we talked: "the more it goes on the more difficult it is to be understood in a straight forward way." To which we mused that that was definitely a good thing.

Art Wednesday: You have said before that your work deals with the 'authenticity of the artist' and this show, specifically, deals with taking the authorship of an artwork outside of the artist's hands either through studio assistants or outsourcing. We're hoping you could elaborate on how your work specifically fits into that category?

Gavin Turk: In terms of an exhibition being an illustration of an idea, and in this case the idea was the idea of not making. Somehow art was created through a conceptual transfer and that you weren't interfering on a physical level with what you were making. Why this work comes up is because I was using a foundry to make these works and, in a way, the works themselves look like they've been picked up out of the bin. I suppose one of the things about those two objects, which is not the case with all the objects I make, but with those two things, are that they are the basic and raw materials that artists might use. Or the way artists themselves recycle materials. It's looking at raw materials and perhaps past the object itself and then into the way that the object might refer to your background. I mean certainly in terms of the toilet roll – maybe it also refers you to Marcel Duchamp.

AW: And to the idea of the found object?

GT: Yes, the found object. There is something within the process of finding an object. At what point is the object found? Is it found by the audience or is the object found by the artist? And what is this "finding it?" In the case of the Match, people might not even see the work as it's quite small. Within the pieces that I've chosen for this show they are both very small, kind of walk-passable, and they are very over-lookable, but both of them have this sort of inherent conversation and dialogue. But they also, because they look just like real things, don't essentially belong to me. Apart from the fact that I've signed my objects I haven't actually done anything else to them. I let them be what they are.

AW: Coming back to The Fabricated Object in relation to the artist's hand, obviously these works were cast outside of your control at a foundry as you said. But in terms of the painting and the photo realism that was applied to them, was that something you yourself did or a studio assistant?

GT: I think maybe that Match was painted by me and maybe the toilet roll piece I'm showing was painted by someone else, but I've painted other ones myself. It doesn't really matter to me. It's just that it comes out and looks like the thing it used to be. It's more of a process. There isn't an artistic language being employed within the painting of it. I mean you have to be relatively skillful in order to achieve the trompe l'oeil, but you know with a small amount of training and a certain amount of application, I would say that anyone could do it.

AW: So we're curious to know what your studio process is like then?

GT: My studio practice is really varied from piece to piece. There are lots of different ways that the works that I make get made. I enjoy making myself, but that is not necessarily how I make my work, if that makes any sense?

AW: Completely.

GT: I like experimenting and coming up with ways of doing things and achieving finishes and playing around and understanding the way of making things. And I think the way of making things and the possibility of what can be made will guide me in terms of how I'm able to think of what it is I want to make. But quite often the

actual "making process" is not important, weather it was done by me or not. As long as it's done in the way that I want it done.

I mean also, if we go into the question of what makes an artwork, you know, I don't make all the paint myself. I don't melt the metal myself. At what point within the process do we or can the artist fully identify that they have totally done everything? That they have woven the canvas, that they have manipulated the tree and made it into a stretcher. At what point can the artist fully claim authorship and signature over what they have made and, in a way, there isn't a point [that they can] except for simply the fact that they did author it.

AW: In your work, you use your name and your face so often that this has, in a sense situated you as an artistic brand. At the start of your career you did it to be ironic, but over the years it has self-legitimised itself in a way and you've continued to employ it as a strategy. Could you talk about that and how your relationship to the signature has changed?

GT: I think before when I was using my signature, it was the signature of an unknown. It could simply be that the content of the artwork could more generally talk about the ways that art requires a signature. It could almost talk about "signature", per se. I think now it is more complicated. Now when I'm making work it's the work that belongs to the work of Gavin Turk, who is an artist has a reputation or is known in some ways for recycling or reusing his signature. Before I think it was more classical and more modern in the way it was being used and I think now it has become more post-modern. We're putting a box within another box.

AW: The reading of it has dramatically shifted?

GT: There is a point that the more it goes on the more difficult it is to be understood in a straight forward way.

AW: But we think it's probably good to complicate it a little bit.

GT: It's good and bad. Where you've achieved something and gained something you've lost something as well.

AW: So what else do you have coming up?

GT: I'm currently working on a show in New York for the beginning of next year. I'm putting together a monograph now that will be out next year and working on a project for the Venice Bienalle. I'm putting together a neon exhibition in County Durham. And I have this long-term project that I've been working on that is a fortune telling machine, but it's been so slow. It's been about three years!

**The Fabricated Object is on now until 18 January 2013. For more information [click here]**

Words by Devon Caranicas & image of Gavin by Richard Hubert Smith/ Live Stock Market.



364131322626, 2011 by Gavin Turk. Painted bronze 110 x 50 x 50mm. Courtesy of Gavin Turk/Sumarria Lunn Gallery



Spent Match, 2005 by Gavin Turk. Painted bronze 2 x 2 x 30mm. Courtesy of Gavin Turk/Summaria Lunn Gallery