

Interview by eRman for "99 kayip cocuk" zine in Istanbul Turkey

* After viewing your works in Wooster Collective, I immediately lit a cigarette and began re-thinking just how far street art could venture. Afterwards I entered your Web site with astonishment and viewed your other works. When I saw that giant sperm-like thing at the seashore, I thought to myself "Man, this guy is crazy". Later on I decided that I was not mistaken when I saw your arrangement in Hirshorn. To be honest, I believe that whatever happened there was much beyond "placebo". For the introduction, could you please mention how you started working on all these tape stuff?

I started doing tape sculpture while living in Rio de Janeiro. I had been working on writing fiction and was taking a break messing around making a tin foil ball. I decided to make another one from tape but I didn't have enough so I figured out a way to cast the tin foil ball in tape instead. After that I began casting other objects in the house: spoons, fruit, coffee pots, even my toilet. Finally I decided to cast myself and soon after, the first Tape Man was born. There wasn't a lot of premeditation about any of it. It just happened.

* I would like to mention one difference that I happened to notice in your works: there are all these tape men you have been creating constantly, and those giant spiders roaming around despite the 2 year long interval between! When we consider these seemingly independent figures, could we say that your works are progressing in two different dimensions?

Yeah, I think the Spider Probes and Tape Men have a different feel. The Spiders have a kind of lurking quality whereas the Tape Men stand out and so they don't seem "threatening" although they do creep some people out. But even though the two bodies of work are different, they seem like they could co-habitate well and I think in the future I'll try a couple installations with both "species." The main thing with the probes is that since they're made from beach umbrellas they fold down easily. In a couple minutes, I can set them up in front of the Capitol, on a beach, or in a sewer. And so I do stuff with them when I only have a half day to commit to a project.The Tape Men installations are a lot more time intensive. I usually scope out several locations before deciding which one to hit. With the Hirshhorn installation, this was a virtual piece. I photographed the Hirshhorn and then dubbed in the Tape Men with photoshop and put it out on the internet. Some people from the press thought it was real and I heard some of the Hirshhorn employees were looking out the window when they heard about it to see if it was actually going on. Maybe this summer I'll take the Tape Men down there for a visit. See what happens.

* I believe that you consider street art as an extension of conceptual art. Or am I mistaken? How else can we explain why a sculptor would come out of exhibition centers and would have the instinct to conquer all streets and all reachable social places with an army tape men exclusively created by himself? I think that is why people labeled you egoistical. However, I wish to add that I believe there is an emotional link and love for streets behind the reasons of your utilization of streets. To be honest, as an enthusiast and performer of street arts myself, I do wish to know more of your opinions on this issue. That is to say, in both our country and academical environment there is the opinion that conceptual arts is imposed on us by the USA like every other thing. So some people think that plastic arts should have priority and taking conceptual steps without building such an infrastructure is in vain, whereas some others struggle to earn money via meaningless and hollow works. What can you tell us about this subject?

Yeah I do think street art opens/extends art into a wider conceptual realm. Whereas an isolated sculpture in a gallery contains only the idea within itself (and even gets suffocated by the gallery or museum showcasing it) street art, by interfacing with the immediate environment, adds a whole new dimension. And yeah, I love doing art on the street. Putting something out there that is a visual outlier turns the world instantly into a sort

of live scene-based drama. Also, people on the street who come upon my work usually don't know what it is. They ask me "What am I doing? Is it art?" And they look at me like I'm some crazy guy. I did an installation yesterday in DC and a guy got upset because he thought it looked "suspicious"--that this little tape boy I'd made holding a ball sitting on a curb, could be a bomb. The unpredicatability of how the event will go gives it a quality that is for me addictive.

And yeah the USA (and Western Europe) viewpoint on art history with itself as the focal point is fucked up. Fortunately, I think with the internet (and sites like Wooster for instance) there'll be a lot more international bleeding going on. Now people don't have to wait to be spoon fed by ArtNews or history books, they can just go out on the web and see some artist's work and experience it first hand--like a studio visit. And I think this will allow for other international perspectives to weight more heavily into the world focus on art. Its great.

* Recently, while chatting with an old friend of mine, he unintentionally gave an impressive reply to all wannabes forcing themselves for the sake of conceptual art. What he mentioned was briefly that a Conan comic book that you can purchase from any street vendor had a much deeper conceptual integrity when compared to all the existing mumbo-jumbo created for the sake of art nowadays. I completely agree with him! So, if we consider conceptuality as an existing platform in this context, can you tell us in which ways do works on conceptual and street art differ from the others?

I agree with your friend. Street art being what it is, is a much more pure form of art than art which is bred for galleries. And Frezetta, the guy who did the Conan stuff, yeah he's an amazing artist with incredible vision and I don't think he was ever interested in being embraced by the art world. A lot of artists out there are trying to cut it in the art/gallery scene by chasing what is trendy and are compromising themselves in the process. The art world likes to turn artists into exotic animals-like thoroughbreds running with critics calling the race and museums and galleries offering cash, fame and trophies. But I think the art world infrastructure has painted itself into a corner and artists are realizing that much of it is bogus. Likely, something new will birth that is outside of it. Maybe this is street art. Guys like Bansky for instance are punching a hole in this world.

* Thank you for this small interview and everything else Mark. We would like to see you here in Istanbul if you have the opportunity. You can find different places and shores here for your tape men. Respect.

And yeah, I'd love to do some street installations in Instanbul. I'm sure it would be a blast. I'll just have to save my pennies to get over there. And thanks for your interest in my work and I'm as interested in the work of the artists in Istanbul and would love to see you doing street art in DC. It would be a positive impact.

-eRman