

Q/A NIK KOSMAS

<http://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/qa-nik-kosmas>

Why did you decide to end your career as a young and successful visual artist?

At some point, I had the feeling that I couldn't explain what I was doing, with conviction, to a stranger. The subjective nature of making "work" in a field where basically anything goes: critical or non-critical, aesthetic or conceptual, material or dematerialized – as long as you want to call it "art". I felt suffocated by potentials and missed having a method for evaluating options. Possibly I was also suffering from some kind of imposter complex, where I felt like anyone at any time would notice that everything we were doing made no sense. These deep-seated anxieties probably reflect the fact that art is no longer very relevant. As a member of the collective AIDS-3D, I belonged to that genre of art called Post-Internet, which had something to do with "discussing the digital lifestyle and implications ...". At first we did this with a witch-house post-apocalyptic tech-dystopia flavor, but then this evolved into projects like The Jogging and a lot of sculptures of running shoes, water droplets, and lots of cheap stuff stacked or melted on top of each other and sold in big editions for €3k-12k. I just didn't think there was a point or a respectable future in endlessly critiquing or arrogantly joking about innovations coming from other fields.

To continue making art after you reach a certain level of success, you have to have a mixture of talent, ego, and pragmatism. You have to suspend the disbelief and doubt about your self-centered and marginal mini-territory of custom-made industrial process hacks, and "themes", all the time struggling to stay relevant and inspired while the upper-class gallerists and collectors – who are your only real support system – make the magic happen. It's really fragile. There are just too few people involved in the whole "discourse" for it to have the stability of a healthy market. So your existence and sustenance is actually quite vulnerable. You can survive if you stay inside the art bubble: writing grants, teaching, getting the odd public commission (especially if you come from one of those small, rich, socialist European countries that pay artists ridiculous amounts of money to do things that are questionably useful :)). I wanted to engage in the "real" world, where things are much more competitive, and also, yes, dumbed down for a more general audience (and for that same reason so much more effective and important).

Together with Daniel Keller, Nik Kosmas established the artist collective AIDS-3D in 2006. Their work was Internet-based (Post Digital). AIDS-3D disbanded in 2013. Since then, Kosmas works as a thinker, educator and entrepreneur.

THE BATTLE FOR BAHAUS, Paul Glader, 2012

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/the-battle-for-bauhaus-how-a-movement-failed-to-protect-its-name-a-807202.html>

Germany's famous Bauhaus school, 1919-33, forged new boundaries in art and design. However its brand and legacy has been under threat for 5 decades from a large German home goods retailer that took the title and trademark "Bauhaus" in 1960 and now has 190 stores around Europe.

Bauhaus Home stores have expanded from selling building materials to home goods. Its brand logo uses the colour red and block letters to spell Bauhaus, echoing the graphics of the historical design movement. A spokesman with Bauhaus AG, says Gropius' Bauhaus school has some things in common with the store franchises. *"We offer products that are very helpful for your house and garden,"* he says. *"The story of Bauhaus in Dessau and Weimar is very similar to that. It's very functional and for the people."*

But Bauhaus Archive Director Annemarie Jaeggi offers an altogether different take. *"If you look at their products,"* she says, *"you can see it has absolutely nothing to do with what (the original) Bauhaus wanted to do."*

"It's particularly challenging for members of the public who didn't grow up knowing about the Bauhaus tradition and ideals to identify or understand what it is now," says brand consultant Arthur Cohen: *"It has been diluted to a different category and an everyday aesthetic."*

When he was in Sweden recently he told people he worked for Bauhaus, *"they all thought I was standing by the saws or something."* His office regularly receives calls from people asking where to buy wood or other building materials. *"In 50 or 100 years, no one will know there is a difference,"* between the historic school of Gropius and the home goods company, says Bauhaus AG spokesman Köhler. *"Perhaps in Germany (people will know the difference). But not in other countries."*

JPEG by BURNRATE, 2015

Visual art is image based. The Internet is now the main platform for the dispersion of images. The Medium is the Message...and the Message is the Internet, Web 2. Most images circulate on the Internet as jpegs, therefore the main visual art form today is the jpeg. The advent of the printing press and photography radically changed society and culture. The next radical change (revolution) is the Internet. The Internet has irrevocably changed all cultural production and Contemporary Art. Contemporary Art Now = Jpegs.

Contemporary Art presents itself as an "eternal": there will supposedly always be a Contemporary Art. Instead of endlessly repeating this eternal we should speak of current culture (that indeed may not be art at all). Contemporary Art is only a late 1980s term primarily promoted by the Market and the two major auction houses. However, so powerful is the human attraction for authenticity and the eternal Contemporary Art has become a hegemonic term almost impossible to escape. Contemporary Art ≠ Art Now. Contemporary Art will end.

If we know when an epoch begins we can also see that it will end. All epochs end or mutate so much as to meld into what happens next. The reason Contemporary Art seems so all-embracing now is that it has annexed virtually all the world into its constructed orbit, its art products. As Hito Steyerl says: "Contemporary art is a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything". On the surface Contemporary Art seems to be pluralist but in reality it is radically homogenous and has its own "look" or style. It is the fact that Contemporary Art looks like everything else in the world, only repositioned *into* Art, that makes it paradoxically both "empty" and hegemonic. Contemporary Art is a McGuffin (a plot device that has no specific meaning or purpose other than to advance the story; any situation that motivates the action of a film either artificially or substantively). Even most paintings now look readymade, as in so-called Zombie Formalism.

We must attempt to visualise a **Post Contemporary Art**. We must leave the *known*. Bauhaus (*More Than a Homestore*), especially their newest flagship store on Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, challenges the supremacy of Contemporary Art. Bauhaus stores aim to create an immersive environment, a total artwork, with huge visuals and graphics and state of the art product displays. From Duchamp onwards Art has plundered hardware and the real, now let us reverse this flow and go back to the source. This is why:

BAUHAUS IS WINNING THE WAR!
BAUHAUS MEANS VICTORY!
BAUHAUS IS VICTORY!

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CONVERSATION BETWEEN HITO STEYERL AND DANIEL ROURKE, 2013

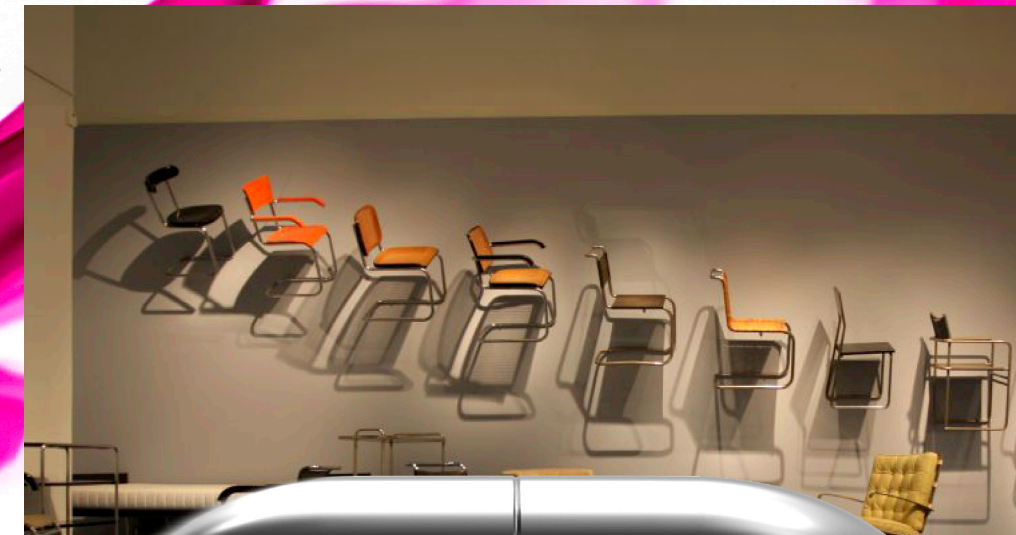
[HTTP://RHIZOME.ORG/EDITORIAL/2013/MAR/28/ARTIFACTS/](http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/28/artifacts/)

What place does art have in confronting the digital, when today's most successful digital expressions apparently come from contemporary art outsiders?

Hito Steyerl: ...today people use cellphones, Kinect sensors and After Effects to deal with the present and shape it. And if artists do not expose themselves to the workflow and economies that come with contemporary means of production, they become souvenir peddlers. Or worse trying to conveniently package a bygone radical moment as a collectors item.

The most interesting and challenging contemporary art was rarely acknowledged as such in it's time and often took place outside the artfield. So the real question is: could one build something outside of the existing artworlds? With what means? It's happening as we speak, because people fortunately don't usually care what Artforum thinks they should do or even about art as such. It's happening as you said on tumblr and sites like jogging and many others. Its massively happening in the streets of Syria and Egypt, which are or recently were vanguard laboratories of new media development, with the online dissemination of protests and actions against sexual violence from Delhi to Stupidville or slave labour in the artworld. New media are brought into the world through contemporary social conflicts by the midwives of violence, boredom, perpetual distraction. Enhanced by rumour and glamour, by uncertainty and intense speculation. Into an aggregate state of matter which is beyond art or the next art or non-art or after art as David Joselit wrote, expressing the tensions of globalising media worlds within post-democracy and accelerated capitalism. Its artifacts may be art or facts.

...many contemporary artworlds are irrevocably digital; beyond their incorporation of digital art. Their infrastructure and whole mode of operation deeply relies on digital technology. People dropbox their works which unfold in galleries like inflatable chutes. But this economy is also fundamentally based on digital technology, including hedging, betting, reputation engineering, accelerating circulation, aggregating jpegs, tele-exploiting interns, regurgitating 3D point clouds as deconstructive atriums where weapon manufacturers and oligarchs hang their dot paintings. This is the digital base of the artworld; embedded in its modes of operations.



„Contemporary art is a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything“-Hito Steyerl

