CHELSEA ARTS UK

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COVER STAR GAVIN TURK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMUR CELIKDAG

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CHELSEA ARTS UK 2004–2005

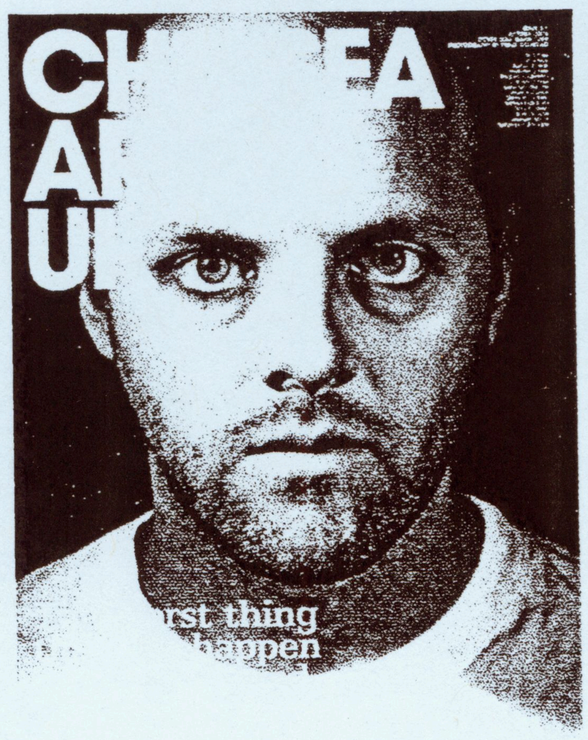
A moving issue

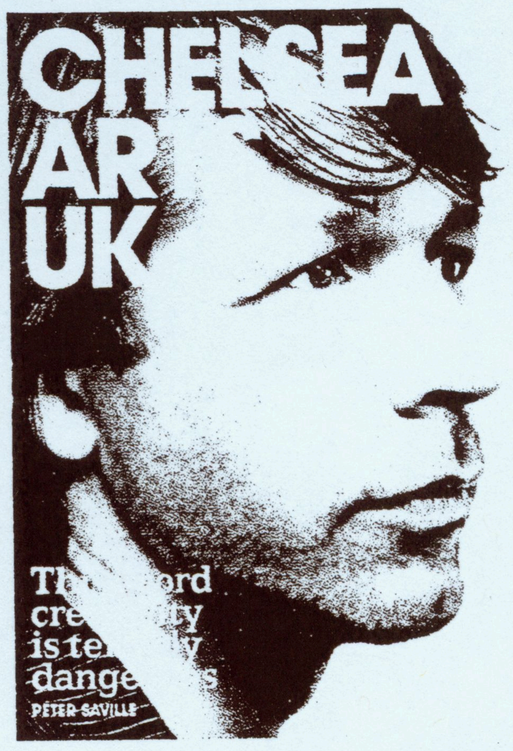
The worst thing
that can happen
is to be ignored

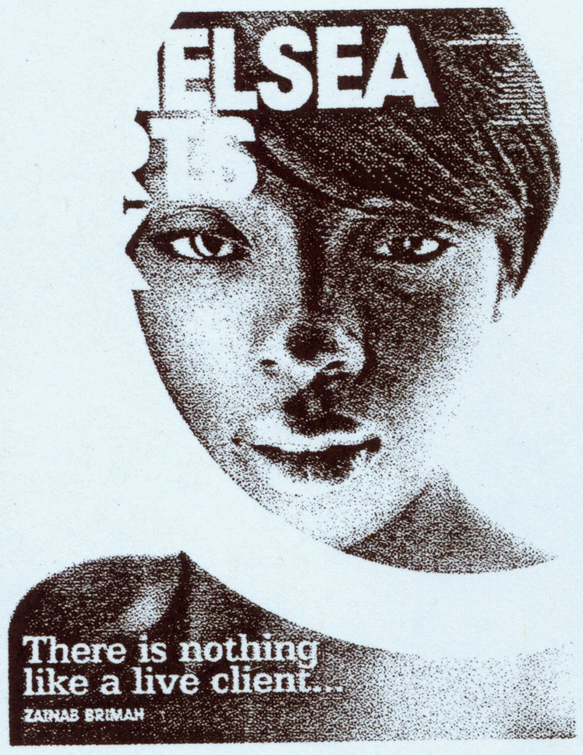
GAVIN TURK

Gavin Turk Chelsea graduate and acclaimed young artist talks to James Anderson about parties, The Pistols and pop sculpture. Page 85
Photography by Timur Celikdag

Peter Saville Art Director and external examiner for BA Design Communication talks to Geoffrey Thomas-Shaw about his 'auto designer' fear. Page 105
Photography by William Seldon







Jemima Gregson A Textile Design graduate leads the way in our showcase of new talent. Page 26
Photography by Gemma Booth
Hair and make-up Lucy Wearing

Zainab Brimah A Spatial Design graduate on taking her new skills into the real world of work. Page 121
Photography by Franklyn Rogers
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Opposite: Leona Clarke, BA Honours Design Communication

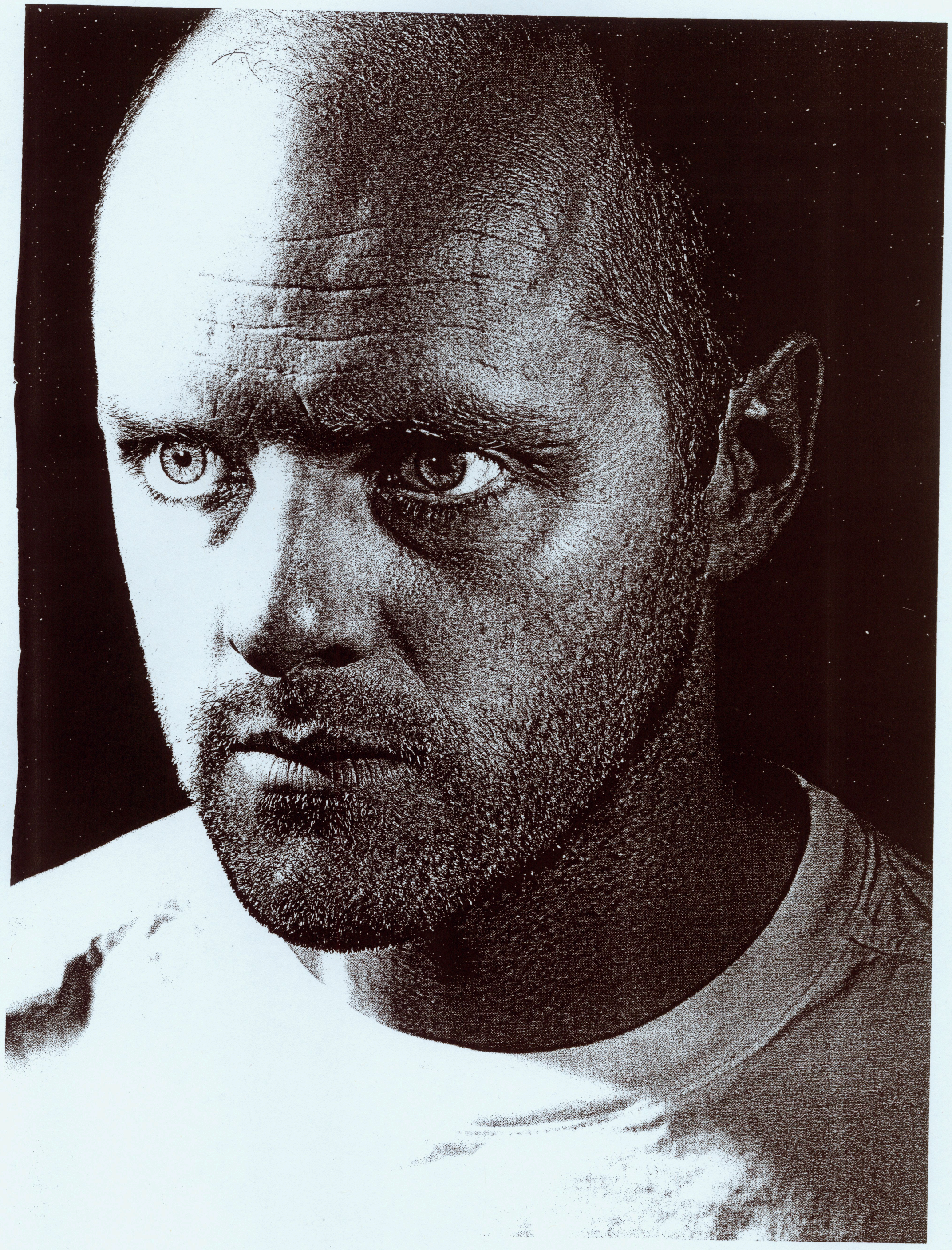
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMUR CELIKDAG
PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANTS JORDAN GRANT AND TIM FULDA

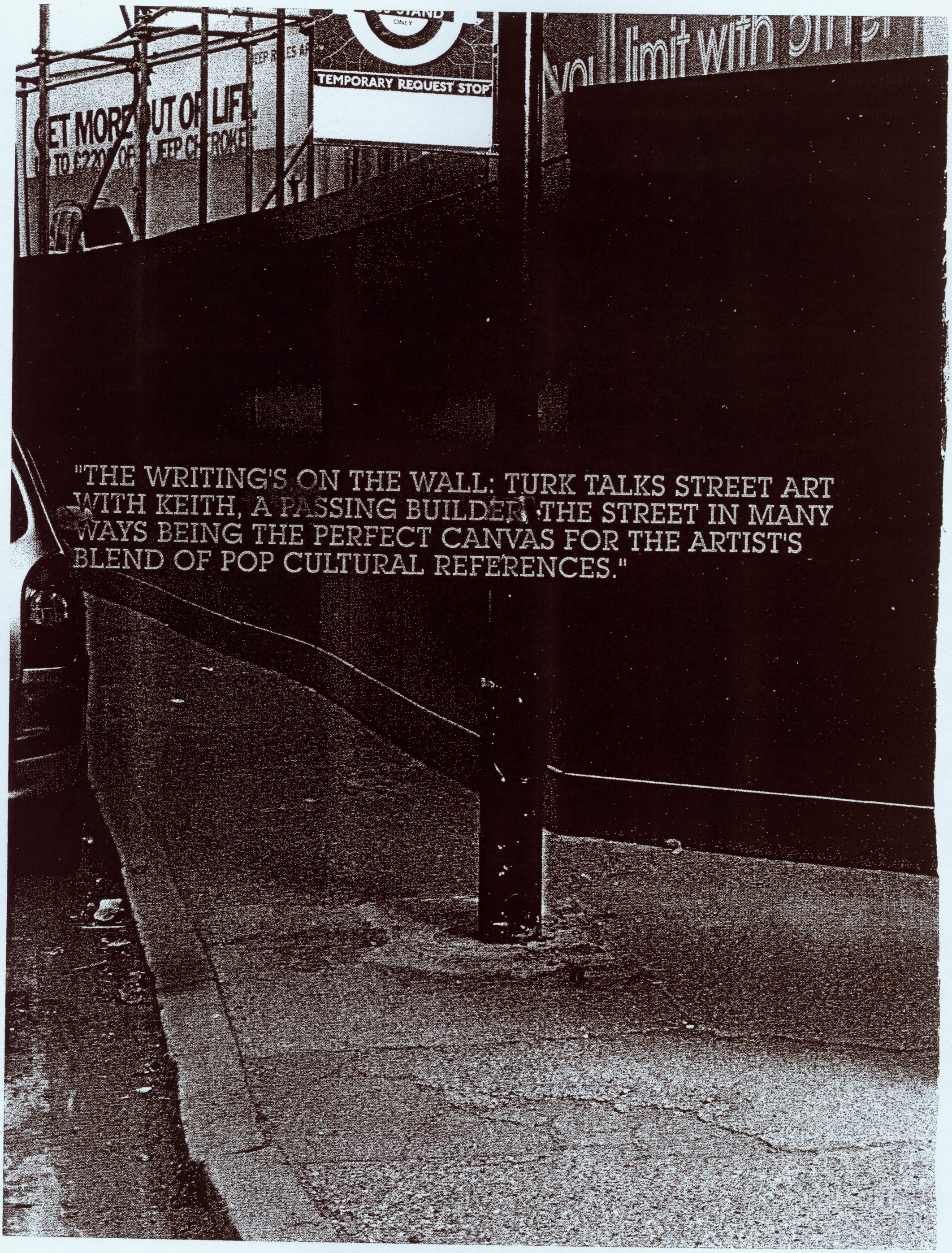
CAVE PAINTING

Gavin Turk graduated from Chelsea only to then fail his MA. James Anderson asks: is that why the artist dresses like a tramp?

Born in Guildford in 1967, Gavin Turk completed his degree in Fine Art at Chelsea, before creating a furore with Cave, his final MA exhibition at the Royal College of Art, in 1991. This consisted of an empty room, with a blue English Heritage plaque fixed to the wall, that simply stated: 'Borough of Kensington, Gavin Turk, Sculptor, Worked Here 1989–1991'. As a result he was not awarded his MA, though this has not prevented him from subsequently becoming one of the UK's most talked-about and talented contemporary artists, whose work is exhibited all around the world.

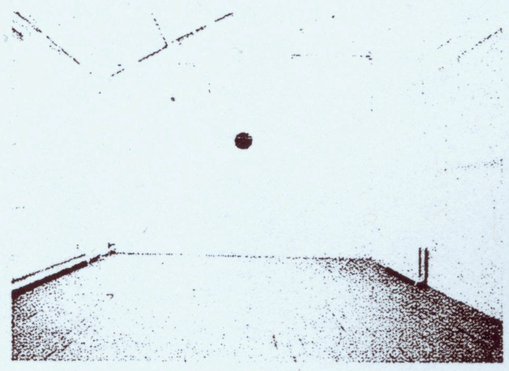
Throughout the 1990s and up to the present day Turk has produced works which possess myriad layers and meanings, often united by concerns of authenticity and status. Paintings based on his and other artists' signatures, for instance, or Pop, the life-size waxwork sculpture of 1993, which fused the iconic figure of punk star Sid Vicious with Andy Warhol's Elvis paintings from the 1960s. Other works, such as those seen in The Stuff Show, 1998, have been totally concealed by canvas and string, or not-quite-literally a load of old rubbish - as witnessed at this year's Pile, which saw an array of bronze-cast replicas of bulging bin bags arranged across the floor of the White Cube gallery, in London.

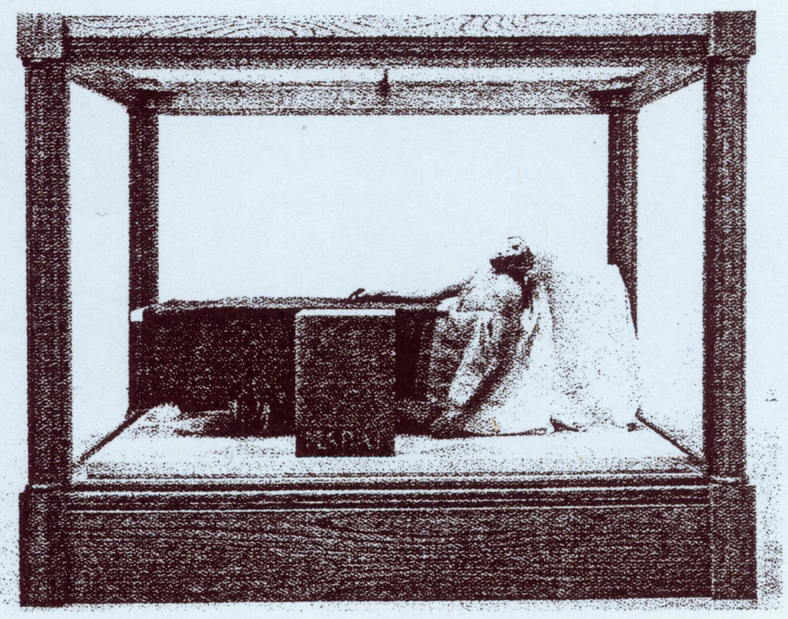




"THE WRITING'S ON THE WALL: TURK TALKS STREET ART WITH KEITH, A PASSING BUILDER, THE STREET IN MANY WAYS BEING THE PERFECT CANVAS FOR THE ARTIST'S BLEND OF POP CULTURAL REFERENCES."

This page left to right. *Cave*, 1991. *Another Bum*, 1999. *The Death of Marat*, 1998. Facing page *Pop*, 1993. All images © the artist Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube





Were you inspired by art as a child? I remember once saying to some friends, when we were playing outside, 'Let's go inside and do some drawing!' But they didn't want to, so I went off on my own and did some. I was always quite a severe critic of my work, even then, and so used to end up screwing up most of my pictures, rather than saving any of them.

What made you choose Chelsea as a college in which to pursue a BA in Fine Art? Before applying I went and visited various London colleges on several different occasions, off my own bat. I talked to some of the students and based my decision on conversations I had with them. I remember one guy telling me if I wanted to be part of the 'new school of artists' I should go to St Martins, though... I also went to all the degree shows. I picked Chelsea because it was very open, and I wanted to keep an open perspective on art and gain lots of experience. I didn't want to make up my mind at that stage about what type of art I would make.

You were denied your MA at the Royal College, due to the nature of the Cave installation. But had you been made aware previously that this might happen? I did have a slightly curious conversation with one of the external assessors beforehand, which may have set alarm bells ringing. But I didn't actually know about it until after the private view. I didn't want to fail my course. As far as I was concerned, I had done all my course work and I saw the final show as being an opportunity to create a summation of that course. The installation was the whole room, and required that emptiness - the charge, the tension - to work.

How was life immediately after you left the cosy confines of higher education? Initially I expected to go abroad for a while, but instead I got involved in putting together a group exhibition. Not long after that I became associated with Jay Joplin (White Cube gallery founder) and then just carried on working.

What made you pick punk icon Sid Vicious as subject matter for the Pop sculpture? I was looking at cultural stereotypes, and started thinking about Madame Tussauds as a tourist phenomena. As a continuation of that I became interested in things that might be quintessentially English. I felt the punk movement was very touristic, and so surmised punk as the Sex Pistols with Sid Vicious as an icon of that moment in time. It was an intellectual reduction, a simmering down... after all, his own persona was already a parody of a persona.

You turned up dressed as a tramp for one of your own private views, and have wrapped and concealed sculptures in the past too. Are you obsessed with the idea of disguise? Not so much disguise, as using myself to fulfil certain roles as almost a performance-based art practice. To be an artist itself seems to have a performance element to it anyway - to make a painting you demand that the audience sees the artist's psyche, sees how the artist thinks.

What's the worst comment or reaction that a critic or member of the public has made or had about your work? Well, the worst thing that can happen is to be ignored, or arouse no interest. Art production is quite involved with an audience, and I do make my art with a conscious idea of an audience. All too often, though, current artists get used on a fairly superficial level to, say, justify a good party, or be in an nice photograph, or generate real estate. But there's something more complicated and problematic about art itself than that. It's a long term project, and I see myself making things that go into a historical place.