

My Secret Life: Gavin Turk, artist, 43

Interview by Charlotte Philby

Saturday, 28 August 2010

My parents were ... My dad is a jeweller; my mum worked as a journalist for a while, but stopped when I was born.

The house/flat I grew up in ... was a detached Victorian house with a very 1970s interior. It had a big garden with fruit trees and a large beech hedge.

When I was a child I wanted to be ... an explorer. I was quite keen on geography and biology, and had an idea of a rainforest somewhere which needed studying.

If I could change one thing about myself ... I wish I'd learnt other languages earlier on.

You wouldn't know it but I'm very good at ... picking things out in odd spaces. I often find myself standing with people and being the first to see something.

You may not know it but I'm no good at ... singing. But I'm a firm believer in not being good at things; it's something I am drawn to.

At night I dream of ... I don't often remember dreams, but the ones I feel most connected to are when I'm moving from inside the dream to outside the dream, one geography to another.

What I see when I look in the mirror ... I certainly don't see a reflection of what it feels like from the inside. We don't really have a mirror in our house, though I have some around to make sure I don't leave the house with a lump of toothpaste on my face.

My favourite item of clothing ... was a shirt which I've now worn all the way through. The collar totally ripped off, and it's in tatters. I still have it, as an aide-memoire.

I drive/ride ... bicycles, motorbikes, scooters, vans, lorries, horse boxes and caravans.

My house is ... a Victorian terraced house; lots of stairs and on a nice street.



KALPESH LATHIGRA

Turk says: 'My favourite item of clothing was a shirt I've worn all the way through. It's an aide-memoire now'

My favourite work of art ... At the moment I keep looking at a painting called 'Pictorial Content' by René Magritte. It's a mad, extraordinarily-endless, super-lucid painting – more about madness than about dreaming.

My favourite building ... is the MAC building in Rio de Janeiro, an amazing structure on a stem with a pink twisting ramp. It's what you'd want to do if you were an architect.

A book that changed me ... I was quite moved by the first part of 'Robinson Crusoe', which I read during my wanting-to-be-an-explorer stint: the idea of being abandoned by culture and spending 15 years on an island and having to remember vaguely what it was all about. It's a rich, provocative sensibility.

Movie heaven ... I remember going to see 'Mad Max' one, two and three, and 'Lethal Weapon' at a Scala all-nighter: everyone was drinking and smoking, throwing paper darts at the screen and whooping. It was a riot, a truly interactive cinematic experience. That was definitely a kind of heaven.

The last album I bought ... I was just given 'Kittow's Moor' by Louis Eliot & the Embers.

The person who really makes me laugh ... Who knows? I'm a very changeable person – I'm predictably unpredictable, consistently inconsistent; as a person I have many different sides – so what I laugh at varies.

The last time I cried ... I shed a small tear last weekend watching a Wall of Death performance with my eldest son, where these guys ride around and around in a wooden cylinder. It was absolutely terrifying and somehow nostalgic and I was overwhelmed by such an inane, weird and wild experience.

What's the point? To make the most of it, and to try to celebrate life.

My life in six words ... Me, you, we, they, us, I.

A life in brief

Gavin Turk was born in Guildford, Surrey, in 1967. One of the original YBAs, he studied at the Royal College of Art and often casts himself as a character in his work. He lives with his partner, Deborah Curtis, and their three children in east London. Gavin has donated an artwork to the 4th Macmillan De'Longhi Art Auction on 28 September, which raises money for Macmillan Cancer Support. For tickets, call 020-7343 3142

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