**No inspired creation under consumerism? y2k.gif challenge the paradigm of artistic genius**

Recently, I tried to pitch my excitement about *House on a Hill* to a friend over a cup of tea. I prefaced my explanation by stating that criticisms of the processes by which artworks are created and exhibited are important because they prompt improvements in ethics and efficiency within our industry. My friend agreed, and I continued: *House on a Hill* is a completely outsourced artwork; its concept, script, proofreading—*everything*—was completed by strangers hired and paid through the online freelancing marketplace *Fiverr*. The resulting work is laden with signifiers of commercial production by mid-market freelancers, as opposed to the signifiers of art school techniques and ideologies that saturate many of the artworks shown in contemporary galleries. The artists will perform in the space as consultants, waiting to engage gallery “customers” in an act that compares a gallery visit to a trip to a second-hand car dealership. *And why not,* the artwork asks. *What makes the act of consuming art so different, exactly, from any other act of consumption? What makes art-making so different, exactly, from commercial production?*

‘Okay, so it’s not y2k.gif’s work?’ my friend asked. ‘Well, it is their work,’ I supplied; ‘they organised all the outsourcing, and outsourcing aspects of the creation of an artwork is normal, anyway. Like, painters usually buy paint pre-made from art stores, but we still usually call a painting *the painter’s* work, right?’

“But the *concept* of *House on a Hill* is the Fiverr freelancers’,” she persisted. “It’s their *idea*.” She added sheepishly: “This is conceptual art, right?” I smiled in assurance, and agreed.

My first viewings of *House on a Hill* sparked a few threads of thought: on remix culture, and commercial aesthetics, and the art industry’s funny habit of conveniently forgetting (ignoring, or erasing?) the problems and politics of artwork production; but that conversation over tea prompted me to consider just how densely rooted my friend’s understandings of art and artists, given to her and so many of us by popular culture, are in idealism. In turn, I have been reflecting on y2k.gif’s subversion of idealist conceptions of artist and artwork through *House on a Hill*.

Idealism suggests that the artist is merely a vehicle for expressing *inspiration*—a supernatural spectre that bestows itself upon a creative elite—into concrete forms that can be absorbed into culture. F. Wellington Ruckstuhl describes idealism in art as ‘the poetisation, the spiritualisation of subject and thought,’ and criticises uninspired works as ‘meaningless productions,’ ‘no poetisation, no lifting spiritualisation, in one word—no CREATION.’[[1]](#footnote-1) This privileges artists as geniuses, able to access more information about ourselves and our world than ordinary folk. Ruckstuhl declares: ‘what lifts the artist above [meaningless productions] is just that one activity— Creation,’ and likens the artist to God though what he perceives as their shared ability to ‘lift the mind and soul above the commonplace’.[[2]](#footnote-2) This also privileges artworks as artefacts of supernatural worth: from an idealist point of view, every artwork holds absolutely unique, divine information. From an idealist perspective, we should say that if *House on a Hill* is indeed an artwork, it is rightfully the work of its Fiverr craftspeople; not y2k.gif; because its content reflects the unique insights of its designers, and those unique insights are the artwork’s identifying value.

In many contemporary art circles, this conception is understood to be archaic, simplistic, and steeped in wilful ignorance of the social systems that have decided, for centuries, who is and isn’t able to exert cultural influence through artworks. Even those of us (including me) with the most threadbare understandings of art history may recall that for thousands of years, career artists have employed or enslaved apprentices to labour on artworks that, upon completion, only bear the signature of the artist. So although the idea of the artist possessing access to divine inspiration has long dominated Western popular conceptions of art, history shows that access to “Creator” status has never been distributed evenly across societal groups. This history diminishes the idea of artist-as-Creator into an illusion for obscuring the social mechanisms that keep some people “in” and others “out” of positions of influence within art and culture.

Furthermore, the artist-as-Creator conception has demonstrably damaging consequences: othering artists as geniuses encourages the misconception that artists experience the world differently from ordinary folk, and so their behaviour should be judged by unique standards. This misconception is especially prevalent, and it demands urgent correction, amidst the current post-Harvey Weinstein outpouring of truths regarding the disgusting behaviours of powerful artists in the entertainment industry. It should be abundantly clear to all of us involved in creative work, in light of those revelations, that exalting artists as anything greater than fellow players in our economic systems shields artists from standard, reasonable expectations of workplace behaviour.

Those are both compelling practical reasons to try and disentangle idealism from popular conceptions of art and creative work— a complex process, so it is appropriate that *House on a Hill* only teases those tangles, prompting gallery visitors to loosen them through their own introspection (as they wonder what’s so discomforting or unexpected about being greeted at the gallery by a pair of zealous consultants), as opposed to attempting to blast them apart through political instruction that, at present, for most viewers, may read as premature and presumptuous.

y2k.gif’s performance as consultants is not the only element of *House on a Hill* that presents a departure from the usual stock at contemporary galleries. In my own practice, I am interested by traces of the machine’s hand, as a departure from the familiar presence of *the artist’s hand*— the detectable traces of authorship in an artwork. The artist’s hand was linked to idealism by Huyghe, who positioned the artist’s hand as ‘one of the faces of [the artist’s] soul,’ a sort of portal through which a viewer can access the artist’s ‘deeper, essential nature’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*House on a Hill* displays the artist’s hand in an entirely different way from what we’re used to as contemporary gallerygoers. Examples of the artist’s hand familiar to us include the brushstrokes of a painting, the fingerprints on an art object, and the editing of a film. These traces sign the artist-as-Creator by reflecting their *individual* influence upon the artwork. We are used to parsing traces of individual influence, so *House on a Hill* can be a challenging piece to access at first, as it presents the traces of many artist’s hands at once and in quick succession. Many works including television ads, public monuments, and feature films are usually necessarily collaborative works, but they are designed and tailored into an end product that reflects a single vision or brand. For example, the credits of a film reflect the many different perspectives that informed its production, but the film itself typically reads as driven by one seamless vision. y2k.gif have made no efforts to engineer the illusion of a seamless vision in *House on a Hill*, leaving the traces of each freelancer’s hand easily distinguishable. The video’s set styling is somewhat discordant with the tone of the actor’s performance, which in turn is somewhat removed from the script’s tone, which in turn is somewhat removed from the image’s tone.

Viewing *House on a Hill* means trying to keep up with several discordant perspectives at once, an uncomfortable process. I’d suggest that process is an apt reflection of the nature of art viewing within mass consumerism, particularly in our current era of rapid information consumption. There is an inevitable feedback loop between art and advertising, as town centres and social media news feeds alike expose residents and users to a steady drip of art and advertising on their daily travels, and the average citizen can’t necessarily discriminate the ironic punchy visuals of a critical artwork from the earnest punchy visuals of a corporate banner ad. As art industry workers and participants, we need to remain aware of this: to remain aware that the old boundaries between “uninspired” commercial content and “divinely informed” critical content grow fainter with every passing season. y2k.gif demonstrate an acute awareness of this shift through *House on a Hill*, an exciting debut by this new collective.

**Bethan Cotterill**

**y2k.gif**

***House on a Hill***

**1 December – 22 December 2017**

An artwork is a peculiar object. It is not a utility and therefore does not have a use value.

An artwork traditionally bears the mark of its creator, and so, within it, conveys the spirit of the artist. An artwork, because it is not a utility, has its value derived purely from the enjoyment of others, who recognises the soul of the artist in the work.

If we find this spirit in the artwork to be removed, much like Ancient Roman artworks, whose spirits are long lost, the works become found artifacts. Or, if we discover that an artwork has disingenuous intentions and was created in a cynical fashion, we are also likely to abandon it because it lacks an authentic spirit within which we can connect.

House on a Hill (2017) has been entirely outsourced. y2k.gif has employed people through Fiverr, an online marketplace where freelancers offer tasks and services. The services y2k.gif booked included someone to write a conceptual rationale, a script writer, proof reader, 6 spokespeople, illustrator, graphic designer, animator, business card designer and video editor.

During this process, y2k.gif did not offer any creative input. Besides the initial concept (to create a work via this platform), everything from the conceptual process of the meta-artwork to its execution was conceived of by Fiverr users. However, y2k.gif’s lack of instructions left them confused. With no management and direction, y2k.gif’s employees struggled to understand and create their part of the artwork. The unusual results reverberated and impacted upon the next employee’s task. The resulting artwork is a warped, inoffensive, factory-made product made for your consumption.

During the opening, y2k.gif will be performing as art consultants, sitting at a desk with business cards and answering any queries about the artwork. Simultaneously, the work will be up for silent auction throughout the exhibition. In this way and as inspired by Andrea Fraser’s Museum Highlights (1989), y2k.gif will be embodying their investigation into institutional critique.

y2k.gif is a collaborative project comprised of artists Damiano Dentice and ellen.gif. y2k.gif explores consumerism, post-humanism and digital cultures. Working in a variety of disciplines, the duo create installation works that engage and encourage the audience to participate. This project acts as the official debut of the collective.

1. Ruckstuhl, F. Wellington. "Idealism and Realism in Art." *The Art World* 1, no. 4 (1917): p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ruckstuhl, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Huyghe, René. "Art and the Spirit of Man." (1962) p. 28; p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)