

Philosophy of pixels

– Mark Khaisman's tape art



Mark Khaisman

Mark Khaisman is a highly recognised Ukrainian visual artist. Born in 1958, he studied art and architecture in Moscow Russia and is currently living and working in Philadelphia, USA. Most of his creative life he spent working on his unusual artistic technique. He is applying layers of translucent packing tape on clear Plexiglas panels, creating vivid and realistic portraits. Only for "Digital Design Magazine" he decided to reveal the secrets of his artistic process, details of his unique technique and hidden meaning of pixelation.

Why are you using this technique?

It looks right.

Is your art all about unconventional medium?

No, the overlapping of the layers of tape gives me the effect that I can not achieve otherwise.

Let's say you can achieve the same effect with some traditional medium, egg tempera, for instance, or thin layers of oil, what will you lose besides the light?

The feeling of instantaneousness.

Mark Khaisman's images have inexplicable affect of vanishing, of instability, or sometimes simply jittering. They may be compared with the fading memories of human mind save the continuousness



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with which they perform their vibrating trick. Like the high art paintings they create precise visual images out of chaotic strokes energizing the space around them with the luminous surface glow. Unlike paintings, they are not material enough; in fact they may disappear with a turn of a switch; but when the light is on, the jittering seems to come not from the quality of the florescent lamps behind the images, but from the trembling of the strained muscle of Time kept from passing. Images seem to be the artist's attempt to stop the Moment, to catch the Present with the uncanny purpose in mind to examine it, but all he is able to discover by ecstatically applying his accelerated old mastery technique, is the revelation that there is no the Present, instead, there is a missing bit between the Past and the Future.

On Pixelation:

I think that my art may be dubbed as post-digital, because although it has been inspired by the pre-digital movie media and developed in the context of digital pixels, it bypasses virtual reality finding itself in the blizzard combination of light, disposable plastic, and calculated rhythms of imaginable music all holding together with the stuck familiarity of random cultural references.

When I hear people reacting to my work, there is no lack of references to my medium. The appeal of tape is clear: everyone held a roll of 3M in their hands or identify with the happy tactile sensation of opening a parcel. The attractiveness of Film Noir scenes rendered in such material is clear, too: both have an uncanny correspondence with one another simply by being monochrome, being film, and being displayed on lit screens as it cinema or light boxes. As for the unnoticed trick, it is in the energy of vibrations perceived by the viewers no



less than felt by me in the process of working on my pieces, because what I am dealing with on unconscious level is not the image but the count. It is all about ratios of intersections of tape and the optical geometry of light beaming through the tape openings.

As soon as I pick up a 2-inch tape and start blocking the light streaming through the Plexiglas screen in attempt to render the image, the abstract field of intersections occurs. It consists of lighter and darker polygons with different lengths and angles of sides, which I refer to as "pixels". To be immersed in the field of their vibrations and never loose photographic realism of an image woven into the fabric of rhythmic scores and luring into deception that image is all there is, is just too much fun. My goal can be roughly put into three subtasks, which are managing the scale, figuring out the ratios, and controlling intensity of light.



The scale is the property of tape regardless to the size of the image. Once I worked on a larger screen and decided to use a 3-inch tape together with usual 2-inch tape. The resulting disaster gave me a clue that the vibration affect the successful image depends on is hidden in the grid of tape.

One of my drives is to maximize the ratio between the size of the pixels and image itself without losing its readability. Another ratio is in the polygons and their interplay. I am seeking excitement in the pure clarity of geometry, in changing proportions between the lengths of polygons' sides, and in modifying angles of their intersections. The variations are endless and the ability to create moods by rearranging lines of tape intersections blows my mind. Light has a well-known affect of dispersing in geometrical cones, so that the greater the distance from the light opening the larger it seems. I play with the size of openings, placing the lighter and smaller ones next to the wider and darker ones to create contrast.

On Tape:

My works are pictorial illusions formed by light and shadow. Tape allows for images that communicate what I'm interested to do in a very direct way. My medium consists of three elements: translucent packing tape, clear acrylic or film panels, and light. By superimposing layers of translucent tape, I play on degrees of opacity



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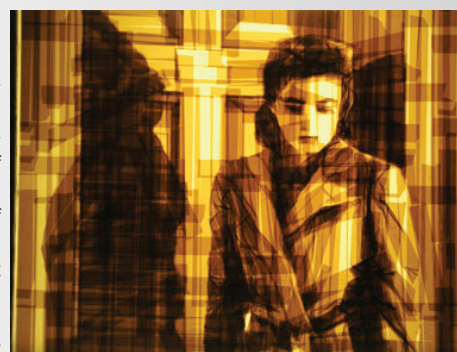
that produces transparencies highlighted by the color, shading, and embossment. There are some qualities of tape that make it unique for me as an art material: its banality, humbleness and its "throwaway" nature; its default settings of color and width; its unforgiving translucency; the cold and impersonal attitude that tape surface suggests.

On Process:

I apply a stripe of brown translucent tape on a clear backlit acrylic panel, and if I don't like it, I peel it off. If I peel off less frequently than apply, a chance is that an image emerges. The whole process is reminiscent to the red room photo development in the pre-digital era, in a way, as my hands do the job, and my mind is witnessing the appearance of the image, then the only concern becomes to not under - or overdevelop it. Though I try not to lose control completely, I am not aware of every move I am taking, so by the time the piece is done, I don't exactly know how it has happened, so I feel compelled to start a next image to make sure that I can do it again.

On Layers:

Layering tape, and even peeling it off, gives me a strange satisfaction. The only explanation for it I can offer comes from the Eastern cultural perception of the self as an onion, according to which if you peel off the outer layers of the onion you find more layers underneath. It makes you want to peel off more, and more, and more to find the pit, but when you finally peel it off to the very last layer you are left with nothing. I do it in reverse, but the feeling that it is only the different direction of the same process feels liberating.



SELECTED AWARDS AND EXHIBITIONS:

RED DOT DESIGN AWARD 2008 Best of the Best
EPICA Awards 2008 Press & Poster Silver
CANNES LIONS 2008 Design Silver
D&AD Awards 2009 Winner in Illustration
AS IF ITS REAL...., Absolute Art Space, Barcelona, Spain
BERLINER LISTE 2011, Contemporary Art Fair, Berlin, Germany
PULSE NEW YORK 2011, Contemporary Art Fair, New York
ART MADRID 2011, Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid, Spain
ST-ART 2010, Contemporary Art Fair, Strasbourg, France