

Skye Sherwin, 'Artist of the week 108: Keith Farquhar', The Guardian, October 2010

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Artist of the week 108: Keith Farquhar

With his arrangements of empty clothes and cardboard cutout statues, this Scottish-born artist critiques a society in which even our humanity is cloned and reproduced

Skye Sherwin

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The installations of Keith Farquhar can be as eye-catching as a high-street window display, with whole tribes constructed from sweatshirts, jeans, Pringle jumpers and bomber jackets lining gallery walls in frieze-like displays. Yet Farquhar's configurations are far from family-friendly. Whether crouching low or slouching with hands in pockets and hoods up, his clothed cardboard cutouts are more than a little menacing. Are they the urban dispossessed or something more sinister? Their humanity - the flesh-and-blood individual that might fill each fabric shell - is absent. Only the generic is there, in a disgruntled pose.

Born in 1969 in Scotland, Farquhar studied at London's Goldsmith's college not long after the YBAs. Influenced by Duchamp as well as kindred spirits like Martin Creed and Tatham and O'Sullivan, he has steadily attempted to subvert what art can be with a bit of "now you see it, now you don't" dematerialisation. His installations are fleeting things, easily assembled, packed up and sold on as artworks or given away as what they originally were: clothes.

More recently, Farquhar has created "flat-pack statues", translating hand-painted nude bodies into cardboard cutouts like those lifesize film star replicas that line cinema foyers. These riffs on the classical nude begin in his studio, where he splashes models with paint like a latter-day Yves Klein or Jackson Pollock. He then photographs the results and turns them into 2D sculptures with visible 3D supports.

Reproduction has had more ominous implications in Farquhar's work. Referencing Michel Houellebecq's dystopian novel of the same name - in which cloning ultimately renders sex (and men) pointless - his 2005 installation for New York's Nyehaus gallery, *Atomised*, is a good example. Here white hooded tops and jeans are placed in sitting positions, in the manner of a tribal gathering, around a stack of factory-folded white jumpers. This reaches to the ceiling, a collection of clones: sexless, impotent and marginalised. It's art that speaks to an age when everything from street style to DNA can be infinitely transmitted, reproduced and disposed of.

Why we like him: Farquhar's 2006 installation *Drunken Maria 14 Units* resembles a giant cocktail umbrella, its stick made from Calvin Klein women's vests. With a title referencing both a song by The Monks and the advised weekly alcohol limit for women, it conjures the atmosphere of a boozy liaison.

Mother's little helper: The artist has often collaborated with his mother, drawing on both her skills as a dressmaker and her common sense (he says it helps keep his ideas grounded).

Where can I see him? Keith Farquhar's *More Nudes in Colour* is at Studio Voltaire in London until 4 December.