

Two glances meet at a bus stop, two faltering voices, two smiles, two..., two..., two...

Love at first sight, without any doubt, was what happened between street artist Banksy and Vhils in the city of London in 2008. Banksy, the incredibly well-known British graffiti artist and yet anonymous up to now, invited Alexandre Farto (Vhils' real name) to the exhibition *The Cans Festival*, which he was organizing at that moment. A bit of space was made for 39 artists from all over the world in different corners of the emblematic city under a common project, which had nothing to do with the glamour of the festival held in France. For young Vhils, this was a unique opportunity to have one of his works on wall right next to one of Banksy's creations. But this love at first sight doesn't end here, for he was soon the protagonist on the cover of *The Times* with one of his faces sculpted on wall.

If we think about the beginnings, whatever the goal might be, they are always hard. There are many attempts, illusions that come into play, work and more work... How many talented artists are lost on the way? A high percentage of young artists, full of enthusiasm and passion, lose their chance to offer the best of themselves. For many reasons, it is vital to be in the right place at the right moment. Street artist Alexandre Farto, who was born in Lisbon 1987, is a clear example of how to get internationally known due to the combination of good work and good luck. Since the beginning of the year 2000, being an adolescent, he has been developing graffiti with a very particular character, reflecting his visual poetry in the city. After approaching graphic design and audiovisual animation, he moved to London in 2007 to study Beaux-Arts at the *Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design*, where he started his career as a muralist. He was conscious of being at a key position in the world of art, he knew how to take advantage of the chances the city gave him. It was not a long time until investigation fields were open, as well as very experimental actions within the public spaces in London. He used templates and other unconventional means of working without any prejudices, with the purpose of expanding boundaries and transgressing the limits of visual expression. He made it both in indoor and outdoor spaces, individually or in group in VSP (Visual Street Performance). It is from here onwards that Banksy gives him a chance in *The Cans Festival*, and his work *Scratching The Surface* becomes so acclaimed.

Scratching, digging, sculpting, tearing. The medium is unimportant, Vhils transgresses and bites. That is the *modus operandi* repeated along his prolific artwork. From partially demolished walls which have been integrated in the context of the city, to drawings with old advertising signs, engravings on wooden boards, or metal sheets treated with acids.

But among all his creations, his big format mural portraits, which he leaves on the walls all over the world, are to be highlighted. He is permanently travelling from London or Lisbon, the cities where he lives, to different places, such as Berlin, Sao Paulo, Moscow, Bogota, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Chile, Australia, Stockholm and Shanghai among others. Using stencil technique as a basis, he traces lights and shadows in the faces that he will later excavate on a wall with his usual tools; hammers, chisels, jacks... Destruction and creation are constantly interacting. As he takes chunks out of the wall, he is able to discover its hidden identity. That's to say, the city's past. He considers his work as a contemporary archaeological process, since 'discovering our past we'll know many things about our present and future' he says. At the same time, he feels captivated by the ephemeral, the transformations of the city. So he lays his work bare, as well as his natural evolution in this context.

And talking about 'laying something bare', the looks in his portraits sometimes look at us and disturb us. They are anonymous characters who have been photographed by himself in each of the neighbourhoods where he displays his works. His portraits represent ordinary people, the every day hero. There is an evident attempt to give its lost human character back to the urban environment. In some exceptional cases, he reinforces the message and interaction with the audience through written messages. The location of his works is not either a product of sheer chance. He usually chooses ruined buildings that contrast with other absolutely ostentatious buildings, integrated in a more urban scenery.

Under the idea of transgression and showing bare walls, Vhils doesn't want to cease being an outsider. However, after his collaboration with Banksy he starts working in the art gallery of his agent, Steve Lazarides, in London. He is currently linked with Agência Vera Cortês, among many other projects. Without any prejudices, he distinguishes a type of art that allows him to earn a living, and a type of art through which he is free to create wherever and whenever he wants to.

Can an artist be free when there is a demand and a market? How long does love at first sight last?

Love at first sight should be sudden, should be intense, should arouse surprise and pleasure. Love at first sight should arouse expectations, it doesn't abandon itself to routines. An artist shouldn't be repetitive, otherwise, the affair vanishes.