



# evolutionary creativity

Inspired by Darwinian Voodoo, the work of art collective Fantich & Young is naturally selective

BY MAHA MAJZOUB  
PHOTOS COURTESY FANTICH AND YOUNG

These pages contain some graphic content; discretion is advised. This is how any magazine spread or blog carrying the work of East London based art duo Fantich and Young should probably kick off. These artists water down their insights for no one and so are not afraid of stirring some controversy along the way. With some unsettling images the pair attempts to settle some of the issues racking their brains, with the concepts of nature and super-nature figuring heavily in their work. They oftentimes take jab at Charles Darwin's theory of evolution with elements of supernatural ceremonial ritual. It is a process they cheekily refer to as Darwinian Voodoo.

Fantich and Young is what happens when you put Mariana Fantich, a digital media specialist and artist, together with Dominic Young, a professional musician and artist. The former a native of the Ukraine and the latter English to the bone, they both have a BA and MA in Fine Art – and they also happen to share the same mailing address. The hus-

band and wife team were plucked from oblivion when their "Apex Predator" project – a sculpture they created using human hair, glass eyes and dentures – went viral.

Stemming from their Darwinian Voodoo concept, the work features a Savile Row's Suit, which was customized in hair, bones and eyes as well as male and female shoes that are laden with dentures on the soles. Clearly, those shoes were not made for walking. They were, however, made for talking, having pushed people far and wide across the world to join in on the conversation – and the interpretation – of the "Apex Predator", a representation of the ruling elite who are at the top of the food chain and have no predators of their own. Oasis caught up with Fantich and Young and discussed life before and after "Apex Predator".

## What sparked the idea of the "Apex Predator" project?

The "Apex Predator" critically reflects the political philosophy of Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism concept and the



Fantich & Young ©

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related Economic Darwinism theory. The project was created in 2010 in response to the 2008 financial crisis. “Apex Predator” highlights the bailout and whitewash of the financial crisis, which accumulated in the political policy that some banking institutions were too big to fail but were too big for trial.

**This project has received tremendous media attention. Why do you think makes it so attractive?**

The work initially received mainstream media attention in September and October 2012 and was perceived as spooky and kooky in a Halloween holiday tradition aesthetic. The work then took on a life of its own; its original concept got blurred as people projected their own personal narrative on what kind of person would wear such a suit and shoes as this. The fact that so many diverse people from around the world connected with the work made us smile. The work straddled the creative disciplines of fashion, design and fine art, so in hindsight the demographic audience was always going to be larger than our other artworks.



**You collaborate on fantastical projects. Could you explain to us the dynamics behind your relationship – who does what and how the creativity process unfolds during the brainstorming sessions?**

The dynamics behind our relationship is a belief in collaboration and compromise. The secret of a successful collaboration is to gang up on the problem, rather than on each other. We initially started working together because we saw more creative possibilities open to us than working individually. When you work as a team, you can critically dissect and develop the ideas off each other, fresh perspectives can be sought and discussed and you feel able to solve theoretical and practical problems much easier. Our art practice aims to skewer symbolic ready-made materials and subvert their meaning and relationship to each other. All materials are chosen to endorse the concept of the specific work in question.

**Is it tough at times being a husband-wife art collective, or has the process been smooth so far?**

We thought that if we could make artwork together then married life would be easy, and it is.

**Your work surely raises eyebrows. What was the weirdest or the most intriguing remark that you have ever received concerning your work?**

“Your art looks a bit subversive, isn’t it?”

**Your work mixes the grotesque with the satirical, revealing the true “animalistic” nature of humans. Do you think human beings have failed to evolve beyond this nature in spite of their scientific and technological breakthroughs? And what ought to be done, in your opinion, to outgrow these psychological relics that we’ve inherited from our evolutionary past?**



Humans have evidently failed to evolve from their animalistic instincts in spite of their scientific, technological and artistic breakthroughs because as mammals we are intrinsically animals. The word evolve implies the word evolution, which itself implies a process of progress that has been guided by a belief in a Homosapien destiny. We prefer Charles Darwin's description of the word evolution that is "descent and modification". To counter Social Darwinism's ideologies, we would advocate universal altruism and creativity, though we concede this could be perceived as being idealistic and naive.

**From Charles Darwin to Richard Dawkins, what is the single most important insight that you have learned from these evolutionary thinkers/biologists/naturalists?**

The most important singular insight we have learned was from the paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould who articulated with Niles Eldredge in 1972 the concept of Punctuated Equilibrium. Through reading his books and essays, we came to appreciate that the environment (endorsed by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1859) is of equal importance to the Selfish Gene reductionism of Richard Dawkins. Gould and Eldredge concept allowed for a fresh perspective to be introduced in academic biological circles that caused much conflict between Darwinists and is still being fiercely debated today; these theoretical discussions are known as the "The Darwin Wars".

**"Mascot", "Double Games" and "Loser" are three distinct powerful works yet the idea of competition seems to be the common thread binding them, isn't it?**

"Mascot" symbolizes Dwight D. Eisenhower's concept of the Military Industrial Complex. The vaulting horse was selected due to its historical use in the European military since the 15th century. The military ribbons that were used were selected from specific wars of the 20th and 21st centuries that represented not only military rank, status and hierarchy through color coding, but also the occupation and resources of specific countries. The junior sport javelins represented voodoo pins and the vaulting horse the voodoo doll. The work represents the wounding of the Military Industrial Complex through pagan ceremonial ritual. The work examines the intrinsic contradictions of science and magic, nature and super-nature. We describe this process as Darwinian Voodoo.

"Double Games, Red In Tooth And Claw" deploys 300,000 razor sharp Stanley blades to subvert the competitive attributes of vintage school gymnasium apparatus. The work endorses and repels internal and external competitive impulses and traits within oneself or within a collective. As the film director Lindsay Anderson of the classic film IF... stated, "School is a microcosm of society". "Double Games" critically reflects many of Social Darwinism ideologies in sculptural form with its overtly hostile declaration of a war against the weak.

Meanwhile, "Loser" examines the Pseudoscience of Eugenics and was inspired by the George Dyer quote "When I die, they're going to open me up, and they're going to find loser tattooed on my heart".

So yes, competition, winners and losers, invaders and the invaded, persecutors and the persecuted and the grey areas in between inspired these works.

**In the same vein is "Winner", right?**

"Winner" was collaborative project with an artist who was also the model of the photographs. The artist/ model declined to be co-credited in the work; we have respected her request for anonymity. "Winner" should be viewed as the continuing narrative of "Double Games". The works are intrinsically connected. If we except that "Double Games" is a metaphor for school days then "Winner" says that there is now a physical consequence to failure as well as physiological.

**Do you denounce the notion of competition?**

No, not at all, but competition is overrated and collaboration is underrated.

**What are the challenges you've been encountering?**

Fantich & Young agree with Marcel Duchamp's observation that the viewer – whether public or critics – adds an important contribution to the creative act. Before the Internet viral success of "Apex Predator", we struggled to connect our work to a wider audience. Though we exhibited in small independent galleries and were published in specialist art books for which we are grateful, we were connecting with a small niche market of admirers and friends. As any artist, we create the artwork with intention to connect and to be seen by the widest possible demographic. We were fortunate that the Internet was invented in our lifetime.

**What are you currently working on?**

We are currently working on two vaulting horse pieces, one that deals with monarchy and the other with military interrogation techniques. We are also working on variations of the "Apex Predator" concept.

[www.fantichandyoung.co.uk](http://www.fantichandyoung.co.uk)