



Mucho Micha

Too cool for school designer, artist, VJ and agent provocateur Micha Klein makes the pretty lights swirl and all the kids swoon with his mellow brand of visual terrorism.

By Joe Shepter

New Yorkers tend to dress as though they're about to climb into a coffin, but the same can't be said for Holland's [Micha Klein](#). In a rainbow-colored shirt with a healthy tan, Klein looks radiant as he views the first projection of his work in the city. His subversive little icon, the Pillman, dances across the screen with a goofy smile on its face. "It's wonderful," he says.

It's hard not to fall under Klein's spell. Tramping across New York with a sack full of videotapes, he never stops smiling, even when a grim-faced bouncer denies him entry to a club. Every building enchants, every bridge offers a photo op, and Times Square provides a virtual epiphany. "Wonderful," he says, looking at the new Nasdaq sign, an enormous curved screen that wraps around a building. In his mind's eye, the Pillman is probably dancing a cancan under the ticker.

At a youthful 36, Klein seems rested and ready for the challenge of bringing his message of peace, love, and video projection to the States. With good looks and an exuberant personality, he is a rare mixture of acclaimed fine artist and popular VJ in his native Netherlands.

"It's great as an artist," Klein says, "not to be limited to an art world where most of the clients are older. It's great to have real contact with your own generation, which is making real changes in your own society." A second later, he catches himself. "I know some very nice art collectors too."

Klein's success in both pop and high culture may stem from his own two-sided background. Trained as a painter, he came of age in the depressed art market of the late '80s. Rather than fret, he turned his interest in computers into a job as Holland's first Quantel Paintbox operator, and spent a few years putting the proper sheen on high-end car commercials.

"Most people don't realize it's very difficult to do that kind of work right," he says. "But as an artist trying to reach people today, you have to compete with commercial art that's very, very good. I kept wondering how I could capture people's attention."

From the Paintbox, Klein graduated to the SGI machine, buying his own (again, one of the first in the Netherlands) and working on 3D modeling programs. One lucky day, he came up with the idea of augmenting DJ music with video projections. "The videos really add to the scene," he says, "and you miss them very much if they are not there."

Later, Klein added a triple-deck video mixing board and a Barco projector, and VJing (at least its Dutch version) was born. The VJ in this sense is not the person on MTV who announces the songs coming up. The professional VJ performs together with a DJ at a huge dance club. Rather than simply throwing random, looped projections on a screen, Klein works with hundreds of tapes, and keeps time with the music.

The VJing in turn influenced Klein's static art, and made him push for something more ethereal in his paintings. "The new music," he says of the European house scene, "sounded like it came from space, and I wanted to do something like that."

In his work, gorgeous people (some of them computer-generated) frolic in a techno heaven, lounging on crystals and dancing with icons. His VJing is a similar mixture of organic shots, 3D worlds, geometric shapes, and the goofy little Pillman.

From his triumphs in Europe, Klein is now eyeing the rather strange climate of the States, where VJing is nearly unknown. He's had a show at the Armory in New York and designed a restaurant, B.E.D., in Miami's South Beach district, where patrons lounge on beds while surrounded by his projections. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art recently bought his "Artificial Beauty," a work that visually satirizes supermodels by morphing several of their faces together. Currently, a showing of his work is taking place at the prestigious, if notorious, Mary Boone Gallery in New York.

Asked why he doesn't rest on his comfortable Dutch laurels, Klein replies that he enjoys trying to grab people's attention. "If you're VJ and you don't do well, nobody pays attention," he says. "They don't care who you are."

Adobe.com Senior Editor Joe Shepter was most impressed by Micha Klein's skill in helping him avoid more than \$100 in club cover charges in a single night in New York City.