



#Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simultaneous Simulation of Herself

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Sergina is a drag identity who searches for online-offline interactions through Instagram and sings about mobile phones, loneliness and the dichotomous disruption of personal technologies. [Elly Clarke](#) explores the effects of the digital over the physical, in terms of the object, body, and the way we experience them, as well as the way we live in our spatial and temporal conditions.

Tell us a story about #Sergina.

Elly: #Sergina started off as Serguey's drag. Serguey (Sehr Gay), who emerged in around 2008 for parties in Berlin, was a pretty sleazy supposedly Russian dude of uncertain sexual proclivities, who stays these days mostly in the closet - though aspects of him may be triggered by a particularly good gold necklace or an accidental butch gesture. Today Serguey is however probably more likely #Sergina's drag. But the lines are ever blurry.



Today #Sergina is a multi-bodied transferable at times even open-source identity, performed by more people than just me, often at the same time. She sings songs about love, sex and mobile phones in the time of digitalism and performs them live on several stages at once, and also online.

What is the impact of the ubiquitous photo-sharing platform on the art world? Is social media making the art world more democratic or less?

#Sergina: #Givelt #GetIt #ShareIt

Elly: I think the Art World isn't sure what the answer to this question is. To the old gallery model, the fetish of the physical is crucial. But when the physical is under threat, so too is that system. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing. An art world with no commercial arm could be quite a fabulous thing! And would be, I think, more democratic as a whole, as the gallery system always leaves out a huge chunk of artists anyhow, and leads others to produce work that is not always the work they want to make. Funding would have to come from other means. Social media has the look and feel of democracy, without the reality. The reality is orgies of algorithms, echo chambers and a danger of people forgetting how to listen to each other.. On the other hand, I think that especially within one's own pre-existing communities, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter do enable people to keep up with what you're doing, as well as for the effective spreading of ideas - and campaigns. So it's a bit of both.

What makes you gravitate towards art?

#Sergina: I make love not art.

Elly: I think art is a good vessel for many things in various guises and disguises, physical and non physical. Into this vessel most things can be put or contained, worked in and worked out. But I find that the art world itself is not always so sympathetic or effective as a medium or context through which these ideas can be shared or transmitted to the diverse groups of people I hope to reach. Which is why #Sergina (along with other projects of mine) drags herself out across other fields and formats, stages and platforms - because the art world context can be at once overbearing, and limiting. I am personally more interested in making work that speaks to people than in it being seen or measured (or even named) as 'art.'

What are you working on at the moment?

Elly: I have two major projects on the go, both long term. One is #Sergina, the other is The George Richmond Portrait Project, an audio and photographic documentary project that involves locating and visiting privately owned ancestral Victorian portraits by my great-great-great grandfather George Richmond RA (1809-1896) (who produced more than 3000 portraits during his career) to the same families that commissioned them, in order to photograph both the portraits and their current owners (descendants of those portrayed) in situ. Some of the families I have visited live in the same home their ancestors did, four or five generations ago. Like #Sergina, this project is about identity and, as I see it, also a form of drag. Like traditional (gender) drag, Ancestral Drag as I call it, has objects and gestures, costumes and histories that act as set, context and gaze in and for the construction, curation and performance of identity.

As for #Sergina this year, I would love to release an album as i have enough songs now... And I'd like to make three new music videos in three different cities - Berlin (#Waiting for Ice Cream), Birmingham (Drag in a Bag) and Belgrade (He Only Wants Me For My Network). I'm incredibly fortunate that in each one of these cities are brilliant people eager and happy to help me make these vids (the whole #Sergina project is extremely collaborative at every stage). I am also working on lectures and lecture performances to take place both online and offline in academic and private settings. And finally I'm looking ways in which I could insert AI and AR (/digital bodies) into and alongside the fleshy (organic) versions of #Sergina.



Do you think, in essence, works that perform well on social media must have enough of a presence to jump off a small smartphone screen and be shareable enough to become a fleeting form of a cultural currency?

Elly: Everything is transient on social media. Things can be shared intensely and repeatedly for a week or two across multiple platforms and then disappear. [yesterday was yesterday, today is now] so the challenge is indeed how to get things off that ever moving timeline to something that will stick around a bit longer. I believe that in this era of image saturation, music can do this perhaps the most effectively. It can also be experienced hands free and when the lights go out...

#Sergina: Touch my skin it's real.

Where did you grow up and what were you like? How has your background influenced you as an artist?

Elly: I was born in London but grew up in a small village in Essex, on the Suffolk border. We had dogs and chickens and little exposure to pop culture. Rationed TV! Instead I did a lot of music and rode ponies! But from an early age I was acutely aware of privilege and inequalities between different groups and of segregation between them due to different interest groups, class and schooling. Whilst I went to the local state schools all the way up, children of my parent's friends were at exclusive private boarding schools, which gave them a totally different outlook in terms of their present and their future, and also often of their past - which of course is partly what I am working with through the George Richmond Project.

#Sergina - Influences penetrate me with their pixels from all angles.

How you describe what goes into your creative process? How does drag performance inspire you?

#Sergina: If you change your hair colour, your name and your clothes, it will show you in a different light.

Elly: I see drag as a g(l)aze which can be applied to almost everything. But it is also very context specific. What is drag to me might be everyday clothing to someone else - and visa versa. I'm interested in how reduced the physical elements of a costume can be in order to still be (or feel) in drag. At what point does drag becomes invisible? And if it's invisible to everyone but the person in drag, is it still drag?

One of the most interesting outcomes of me being in drag however is how often people assume I am a cis guy. Gay men fancy me, buy me drinks, make way for me at the bar and dance with me. Through dressing more femme I gain male privilege for that evening. I do not like the lables faux or bio, simply drag. I feel there is often way too much emphasis put on what is beneath the clothes. Surely the whole point of drag is to leave whatever is beneath the garb behind: the destination is important, not the starting point.



What message do you want to leave behind?

Elly: I really just want to make people think twice about the way they (we) use technology. To continue to see the medium and the influence it has upon what and how we experience the world we're in.

What kind of clothes are you disgusted by? (you would never wear..)

#Sergina: it is a shame to wear anything that covers too much flesh. My skin is real.

Elly: I wouldn't say I'm really disgusted by any clothes. Since doing drag I feel I could wear pretty much anything - that's one of the fabulous freedoms that drag affords you. But as a teenager being made to wear certain kinds of feminine outfits to family weddings, for example, was a trauma. At the age of about 13 or 14 I managed to compromise by wearing a pair of horrible culotte style shorts and then the Laura Ashley blouse my mother picked out for me. And all anyone talked to me about at that wedding was why I was wearing shorts to a wedding. I realised early on that clothes were political and affected what people said to you and how they perceived you. Since #Sergina came into my life I can buy the very kinds of clothes that may once have (sexily) disgusted me - and wear them and perform the woman I am not (completely), with gusto and bravado - and every now and then #Sergina's wardrobe finds its way into mine.

On the list of your obsessions which place would fashion take?

#Sergina: #2

Elly: #5



How would you describe your overall aesthetic?

Elly: I think that my use of ready-available materials and tech has a huge impact upon my aesthetic. This is true for both my analogue work (35mm and medium format film photography and darkroom printing - as well as the way I often dress #Sergina) and digital (mobile phone photography and screen-grabs and use of commonly used platforms such as Google Hangout and Google Docs, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Skype and EBay). I enjoy taking things through processes that everyone uses, but to then angle it by one or two degrees in a different direction, which brings the tech back into view. Using tech that is 'free' imposes an aesthetic that makes the work at once visible (as everything is on social media) and invisible (as art). Context then determines how it is read further.

#Sergina - #AnOrgyOfAlgorithms

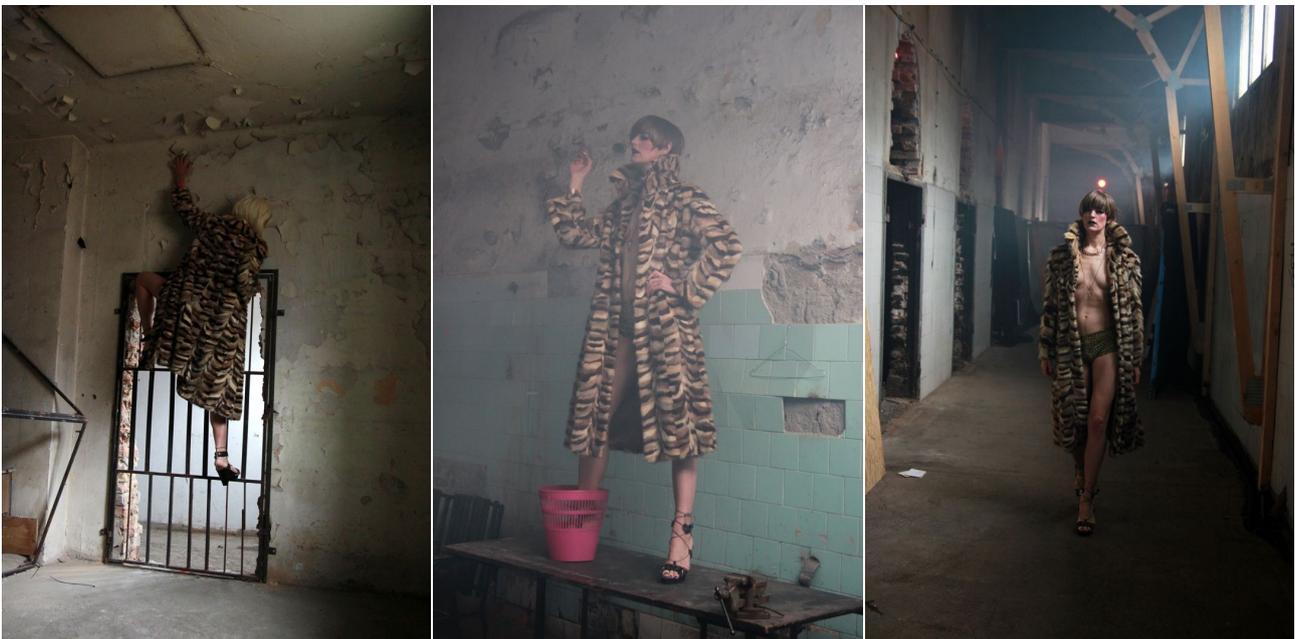
What is the best thing that happened to you in Belgrade?

Elly: It was so great to finally meet so many of the people I had got to know via photos and social media over the past couple of years, due to #Sergina's performances. And getting to know Vladimir better of course. Resonate was also pretty good.

If there was a soundtrack to your work, what it would be?

#Sergina: Instantaneous Culture.

Elly: probably it would be analogue chatter and digital feedback :)



Element of collaboration is really important in your process of creation. Who is your dream person to collaborate with (dead or alive)?

Elly: My dream people to collaborate with are actually those with whom I am already working. A slow rotating group of artists from so far four different countries, playing #Sergina, Handsome Boys and Tech Girls of All Genders, as well as a host of musicians, photographers and video makers and editors who have each taken on this project with such incredible enthusiasm it really means

#Sergina will and can never be solo again; she is a collaboratively constructed character who is ever changing. Aside from me, people who have embodied #Sergina so far are: Thomas Doherty (Birmingham/Berlin), Liz Rosenfeld (Berlin), Kate Spence (Bristol/Birmingham), Katy Pendlebury (Brighton), Raul de Nieves (Brooklyn) - and of course the very incredibly wonderful and talented Vladimir Bjelicic here in Belgrade, with whom I am now enjoying a more intimate 1-1 collaboration on a number of projects and lectures.

#Sergina: Klaus Nomi and a large throbbing pan-continental orchestra.

What links you to Belgrade? Do you have a special place here?

#Sergina: I have been here for years Darling!

Elly: Yes I hope so! I had a totally brilliant week in Belgrade. My collaboration with Vladimir is a bit of a modern day fairy tale. We rehearsed and performed together for 14 months online before we finally met in fleshy personhood in Berlin last September. Doing this shoot with Milica was fabulous, and I hope to return to Belgrade in the summer to shoot a new music vid. Will come for longer than a week next time!

Do you think there is still space for people to rebel (on instagram perhaps) or do you think that the policy of the approval culture and need for affirmation is now so strong that there is no hope?

Elly: Yes I do think there's space. But the challenge is working within a context in which your image or carefully worded post gets attention for as long as it takes to swipe past it. It also probably requires some kind of 'art gaze' to notice it...

#Sergina: Waiting for Recommendation

What would you like to be reincarnated as?

#Sergina: As myself.

Elly: Not as myself .

