

# Why some great artists do not want fame



[Photo: Pixabay.]

## *NURUDIN SADALI finds out why some artists throughout history stayed anonymous.*

People do all sorts of things to get famous. Some writers and musicians struggle for years in the hope of becoming well known someday. Others might even film themselves doing silly stunts hoping that the videos will go viral. On the other hand, there are some artists who choose to remain **anonymous**. Even when their works get famous, they would much rather remain unknown.

One such artist is the mystery book sculptor of Scotland. Not much is known about her except that she is “a woman, who had been a girl whose life would have been less rich had she been unable to wander freely into libraries, art galleries, and museums”.

She gained international attention when she left behind a series of intricately carved books all around Scotland between 2011 and 2013. She would carve sculptures depicting scenes from various stories, on nothing but old worn out books. Along with these sculptures, she would also include a note which usually ended with the phrase, “because reading matters”. When asked by the BBC why she would rather remain anonymous, she simply replied, “Why

would you focus on one ordinary individual? Libraries, galleries, museums etc are a better focus and a lot less ordinary.”



“Tea, cake and a book” and “Lost in a good book” by the anonymous Scottish book sculptor, on display at Edinburgh Central Library. [Photo: Delphine Dallison]

### Choosing to be unknown

This practice of remaining anonymous is not limited to secretive street artists (see our other story on Banksy) or book sculptors. Sometimes, there are artists who enjoy performing to an audience, but they would much rather avoid the **limelight**. Musicians Daft Punk are one such example. The French duo have been making and performing electronic music for almost 30 years.

Although they are very famous and have performed all over the world, most of their fans don't even know what they look like. This is because the duo wear robot helmets when they perform. There are hardly any photos of them without their helmets on. In an interview with Rolling Stone, they joked that they “are not models — it would not be enjoyable for humanity to see our features”. They also added how being anonymous meant that they could do everyday things without “people constantly coming up” to them.

Sometimes, artists release art anonymously because they want to try something new. Take the British virtual band, Gorillaz. In this band, all the members are animations with their own names and personalities. Even when they play live, the animations will be the ones performing on a screen, and sometimes even as holograms!



The band Daft Punk has toured the world giving concerts, but most of their fans do not know what they look like under their helmets. [Photo: TNS Sofres]

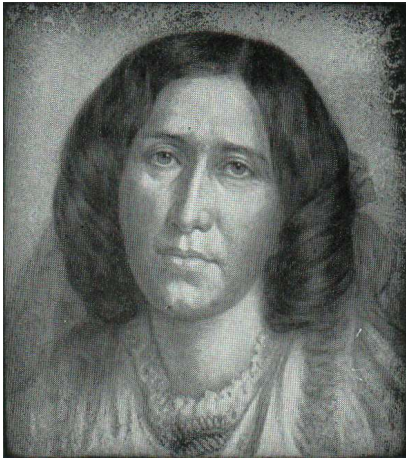
It was later revealed that Gorillaz was actually created by Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, both of whom were famous artists. Albarn was the frontman of Blur, one of the most popular bands of his time. Hewlett, on the other hand, is a famous comic artist, who some speculate is Banksy.

Forming Gorillaz allowed them to **experiment** and create something without being judged for it. It allowed Albarn to create music which was totally different from his previous band. Being anonymous also created a lot of excitement when the band first started — listeners wanted to know who was behind the band and were curious to see how these animations would perform live.

## ***Why do artists remain anonymous?***

Some artists chose to hide their identity because society was not ready to accept them. One such person was Mary Ann Evans, an English author from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When she first started out, Evans used the pen name George Eliot. At that time, people thought female writers were only good at writing lighthearted romance stories. It was believed that only men could write serious novels.

Evans knew that if she wanted her writing to be taken seriously, she had to use a male name. However, her anonymity was short lived.



Her novels were so well received that other people tried to claim credit for it. Evans (left) had to reveal her identity and, together with her publisher, managed to convince the public of the truth. She then went on to become one of the leading writers of her time. She wrote several novels which are still widely read today. In fact, her novel *Middlemarch* has been described as being one of the greatest novels written in English.

While Evans's name is still remembered today, some artists' names have been forgotten even though their art still remains. Historians are able to establish if an artwork is made by the same person by studying it closely. Art historians refer to these artists as using "notnames". These are invented names used to give an identity to artists whose names have been lost.

One famous example is the Berlin Painter, a Greek vase-painter who lived more than 2,000 years ago. Art historians marvel at how his vases have given "so many insights into the life of ancient Greeks". Another example is the The Essankro Master, whose sculptures were found in the Ivory Coast. These artists may have been forgotten, but their art offers us valuable windows into the times they lived through.



A piece of ancient pottery  
believed to be by the Berlin Painter.  
[Photo: Daderot.]

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**VOCAB BUILDER**

**anonymous** (say “e-naw-ni-mus”; adjective) = not known by his or her real name.

**limelight** (say “laim lait”; noun) = the focus of public attention.

**experiment** (say “eks-pe-ri-ment”; verb) = to try a new way of doing something.