

= Far Side Virtual =

Far Side Virtual is a 2011 album by James Ferraro , released digitally and on vinyl by the label Hippos in Tanks . The album marked Ferraro 's transition from his previous style of lo @-@ fi drone music toward a sharply produced electronic aesthetic . Far Side Virtual deliberately evokes the artificial style of corporate " elevator music " and obsolete computer sounds . Ferraro said he first conceived of the album for release as a series of ringtones , and that listeners using songs from the album as ringtones is the completion of the project . The album engages with concepts of hyperreality , simulacra , disposable consumer culture , 1990s retro @-@ futurism , advertising and branding , pop art , and musical kitsch . Critics have found Ferraro 's attitude toward his themes ambiguous , depicting the modern world as both bleak dystopia and uncanny utopia .

The album received generally favorable reviews , with many critics admiring its conceptual underpinnings as much as , or more than , the quality of the music itself . The album also had its vocal detractors ; particularly , its position as UK music magazine The Wire 's number one release of the year was met with contention from some readers . Far Side Virtual has been cited as one of the original catalysts of vaporwave , an underground electronic music movement that covers much of the same sonic and conceptual territory .

= = Release = =

Far Side Virtual was announced in May 2011 as Ferraro 's first LP for the label Hippos in Tanks . The label first released the digital EP Condo Pets , intended to preview the sound of the forthcoming LP . Karen Ka Ying Chan , writer for Dummy , identified the theme of the two releases as Ferraro 's " fascination of the surreal side of American living " . Amber Bravo of The Fader said Far Side Virtual had been " billed somewhat as a cultural critique as told through MIDI @-@ synths . "

Ferraro 's announcement of the album reads , in part : " all the proceeds from Far Side Virtual are going towards my facial reconstructive plastic surgery , my new face will be fashioned after CCTV 's satellite queen , Princess Diana. and you will be able to see it live in concert on the Far Side Virtual World Tour .. Always coca cola . " The tracks " Adventures in Green Foot Printing " and " Earth Minutes " were released in advance of the album . Far Side Virtual was released on October 25 , 2011 , as a digital download and a 1000 @-@ copy run of transparent vinyl records .

Ferraro later explained that his original idea had been to release the 16 compositions on the album as a set of downloadable ringtones , but wanted the songs to have the impact of a complete album but felt that few would want to purchase the music as a set of ringtones . Ferraro said , " Hopefully these songs [will be] made available for ringtone and the album will be condensed into ringtone format so the album won 't be the centerpiece , it will just dissipate into the infrastructure . The record is just the contained gallery space of these ringtone compositions . " Ferraro said that listeners using the songs from Far Side Virtual as ringtones is the realization of Far Side Virtual as a performance art installation .

= = Music and critical interpretation = =

The cover of the album displays iPads over a low resolution image of Google Street View . Explaining the title in an interview , Ferraro said :

Far Side Virtual mainly designates a space in society , or a mode of behaving . All of these things operating in synchronicity : like ringtones , flat @-@ screens , theater , cuisine , fashion , sushi . I don 't want to call it " virtual reality , " so I call it Far Side Virtual . If you really want to understand Far Side , first off , listen to [Claude] Debussy , and secondly , go into a frozen yogurt shop . Afterwards , go into an Apple store and just fool around , hang out in there . Afterwards , go to Starbucks and get a gift card . They have a book there on the history of Starbucks ? buy this book and go home . If you do all these things you 'll understand what Far Side Virtual is ? because people kind of live in it already .

The sources of most of the album 's sounds were described as " perversely commonplace " by a

music critic , and include the Skype log @-@ in sound , a Windows shut @-@ down melody and a synthesized voice . Ferraro created Far Side Virtual with the Apple audio software GarageBand , which brought out the " cheap digital sound " he desired , and called it a " [r] ubbery plastic symphony for global warming , dedicated to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch . This is ringtone music meant to be experienced on the post @-@ structuralist medium , the smartphone . " Ferraro frequently described it as a still life of the 21st century . Far Side Virtual was retrospectively tagged as one of the first , and most influential , releases in vaporwave , a genre mostly spread via the Internet and identified by its adoption of dated electronic " corporate mood music " and ambiguously ironic attitude .

Andy Battaglia compared the feeling of the music to online virtual world Second Life , city @-@ building game SimCity and the work of art filmmaker Ryan Trecartin . Adam Harper of Dummy called it a " pastiche [of] a kind of music you never knew you knew existed : techno @-@ capitalist stock promotional music for the era of the personal computer ... Each track is bristling with the maximalist promise of a world of possibilities waiting behind the screen for your double @-@ click , and evokes a time when we were much less familiar with and cynical about the virtual world technology has brought us into . " Bomb writer Luke Degnan wrote , " This is what Far Side Virtual does for 45 minutes ? it reminds the listener that these sounds were born digitally and will die digitally . This is a digital album for a digital age . "

Ferraro said , " When I made Far Side Virtual , I was really into grime . I lived in Leeds for a year and I used to hear to kids listening to instrumentals on their phones , rapping over the top . I love the way that sounds : the texture of super compressed digital beats coming out of a cellphone and just a voice over it . Far Side Virtual was inspired by hearing music like that . " Electronic musician Dan Deacon praised the album for its unaltered , standard MIDI sound . Commenting on the production style , Joseph Stannard of The Wire wrote , " In contrast to the audio soup of Ferraro 's earlier recordings , these tracks have a spacious , architectural feel that recalls Laurie Anderson , Philip Glass and Rush . "

Critics noted that the album abandons the veneer of noise that coats Ferraro 's previous releases while retaining ? and reimagining ? the form and ethos of noise music . Ferraro said " it 's still in the tradition of noise . " According to Bomb magazine writer Luke Degan , the album is unlike the " reverbed @-@ out , feedback @-@ laden noise music " of Ferraro 's earlier music , but instead represents the noise of the " digital age . " A Fact writer said , " there 's no distortion , no tape @-@ hiss , no obvious underground signifiers ... [but] this new cleanness and clarity to the Ferraro aesthetic hasn 't diminished the hallucinatory power of his music ... [the songs] will terrify you to the core even as they evoke the soundtrack of a third @-@ tier Melanie Griffith rom @-@ com or a forgotten Phil Collins B @-@ side . " Another critic said , " while Ferraro is interested in issues of distance and impermanence , there is no lo @-@ fi fuzz or warm nostalgic haze to temper how flat and ugly the music he 's referencing on Far Side Virtual is . "

Like Ferraro 's previous albums Night Dolls with Hairspray and Last American Hero , Far Side Virtual explores American culture of the present and recent past . A writer from French music blog The Drone described Far Side Virtual as a concept album inspired by the ideas of hyperreality and simulacra from the post @-@ modern cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard . Harper wrote , " Up until Far Side Virtual , many of James Ferraro 's albums were impressionistic lo @-@ fi portraits of bygone eras ? perhaps on Far Side Virtual he decided to represent the present as is and then let nature take its course , over time , and do the aging for him . Returning to it in ten or twenty years time , we might discover that it was ironically a victim of its own futurist acceleration , and is now about as up @-@ to @-@ date as a ten @-@ year @-@ old carton of milk . "

English music critic Simon Reynolds said that while the album 's song titles allude to the 21st century , the album is sonically reminiscent of the 1990s and that Ferraro shares interest in that time period with contemporaries like Oneohtrix Point Never . Reynolds wrote , " Far Side Virtual seems to undertake an archaeology of the recent past , conjuring the onset of the internet revolution and 90s optimism about information technology . But that recent past could equally be a case of ' the long present ' in so far as the digiculture ideology of convenience / instant access / maximization of options now permeates everyday life and is arguably where faint residues of utopianism persist in an

otherwise gloomy and anxious culture . "

= = Reception = =

Far Side Virtual was met with greater critical attention than Ferraro 's previous releases . Just over a year after its release , Marc Masters at Pitchfork wrote that " Far Side Virtual became Ferraro 's most discussed and divisive effort , landing on year @-@ end best @-@ of lists as often as it got dismissed as a joke . " At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream critics , the album received an average score of 77 , which indicates " generally favorable reviews " , based on seven reviews . Critics tended to agree that Far Side Virtual takes the state of 21st @-@ century consumerism as its subject , but there was no consensus regarding whether Ferraro intended to satirize , criticize or embrace this condition . Brandon Soderberg said that the album 's concept " seemed critic @-@ proof , which was frustrating ... Negative reviews could be dismissed as the listener 's simply not getting the joke . "

The Wire published a favorable review by Joseph Stannard , in which he wrote " If it is an elaborate put @-@ on ? and I suspect Ferraro isn 't averse to a chuckle at the expense of his audience ? Far Side Virtual still feels like the culmination of numerous releases ' worth of research and development Whether or not its creator is giggling through a bong smoke haze , Far Side Virtual is a convincing evocation of the digital dreamtime . " Stefan Wharton of Tiny Mix Tapes ' took the album as a statement about blurred boundaries between consumers and their technologies , citing the writing of Markus Giesler as a precedent . Wharton said , " Far Side Virtual succeeds in exciting the collective memory of that generation now so conjoined to its technological appendages . " In Pitchfork 's review , Soderberg wrote , " the songs here are exactly the same as what they 're ostensibly parodying , which is bold and maybe even the point You suddenly realize you 're listening to 45 minutes of utilitarian music that doesn 't really have a purpose . Can something be utopian and dystopian at the same time ? Probably . Maybe even always . "

Steve Shaw of Fact called the album " an intense immersive listening experience that is both deeply comforting and unsettling at the same time " and said " arguably , it is more a piece of art than a collection of music Compositionally , Far Side Virtual is truly frenetic , nothing safe from Ferraro ? s meddling , all elements completely malleable and at the mercy of his eccentric imagination . " Spin gave the album a three @-@ star review , and the staff reviewer wrote that Ferraro " makes a glowing , glossy album out of everyday digital detritus . If you can wade through the excruciating sitar @-@ synths , bank @-@ lobby melodies , home @-@ fitness techno , and infomercial drum breaks , Ferraro 's playfulness blips into view . "

= = = End @-@ of @-@ year acclaim and The Wire controversy = = =

Far Side Virtual appeared on several best of 2011 lists and features . In Tiny Mix Tapes 's end @-@ of @-@ year wrap @-@ up column on nostalgia in pop music , Jonathan Dean wrote , " You may want to throw Far Side Virtual against a wall upon hearing its relentlessly arch , kitschy blandness , but it manages to successfully turn pop against itself , which , like it or not , is a politically progressive project . Its pure , bold conceptualism stood out in a year that was dominated by the ' febrile sterility ' of post @-@ internet microgenres and tail @-@ swallowing postmodernism . " Music critic Jonah Weiner cited Far Side Virtual for his end @-@ of @-@ year article on contemporary protest songs , and called it " antagonizingly , alienatingly , wondrously bland . " Fact named Hippos in Tanks the best label of the year , listing the signing of Ferraro and subsequent release of Far Side Virtual as one of its finest accomplishments .

Tiny Mix Tapes included the album as its 21st @-@ best album of the year , and summarized the album as " hyperreal ... frivolous ... eerily familiar and scarily comfortable : pop structures moving one step closer toward the ' synthetic music box ' from Huxley 's Brave New World . " Fact ranked Far Side Virtual as its sixth @-@ best album of the year , and called it " [t] he finest , most accessible example yet of James Ferraro ? s ability to turn the detritus and dreck of US pop / commercial culture into gold ? or , at any rate , something stomach @-@ turningly psychedelic ,

mentally disturbing yet oddly celebratory . " Dummy named the album one of its " 12 albums for 2011 , " and Ruth Saxelby concluded that Ferraro " neither celebrates nor critiques the internet 's reign but simply observes it with deep fascination . Andy Warhol style , it reflects the ambiguity of consumer culture in the digital age back at us with a Pixar @-@ animated wink . " The album placed at 316 on The Village Voice Pazz & Jop poll , with votes from four critics .

Far Side Virtual topped The Wire 's top 50 releases of 2011 ? a choice that proved to be polarizing among readers . Writing to elucidate the " low mandate " for the album , editor @-@ in @-@ chief Tony Herrington noted that only seven of 60 voters included Far Side Virtual on their lists , and no voters chose it as their personal favorite . Herrington said the choice was " entirely appropriate in a year in which the abundance of choice brought on by digital technology reached such a tipping point as to make genuine consensus impossible you either swoon over the conceptual audacity of its deadpan appropriation of late capitalist @-@ era corporate mood Muzak , or you think it 's the worst record Dave Grusin never made . " Tiny Mix Tapes ' Dean wrote that after Far Side Virtual topped The Wire 's list , " discerning music nerds have felt the imperative to step to either side of a line , " and that Herrington 's column " amounted to a retraction . " While praising the magazine for its diverse taste , Seattle Weekly 's Eric Grandy jokingly commented that it was " no surprise " that the " willfully obscurantist " magazine would top their list with a " winking Windows ' 97 soft @-@ rock hellscape " .

= = Track listing = =

" Linden Dollars " ? 1 : 57

" Global Lunch " ? 2 : 13

" Dubai Dream Tone " ? 1 : 49

" Sim " ? 2 : 53

" Bags " ? 3 : 25

" PIXARnia and the Future of Norman Rockwell " ? 1 : 44

" Palm Trees , Wi @-@ Fi and Dream Sushi " ? 2 : 39

" Fro Yo and Cellular Bits " ? 2 : 19

" Google Poeises " ? 3 : 51

" Starbucks , Dr. Seussism , and While Your Mac Is Sleeping " ? 2 : 25

" Adventures in Green Foot Printing " ? 3 : 28

" Dream On " ? 3 : 07

" Earth Minutes " ? 4 : 17

" Tomorrow 's Baby of the Year " ? 1 : 49

" Condo Pets " ? 3 : 31

" Solar Panel Smile " ? 4 : 08