

## Shallows // Derek Piotr



I can think of few producers working today with the same dexterity as Derek Piotr. In equal parts sound-designer, singer and conceptual artist, Piotr never fails to confound expectations as he swiftly shifts between interests. Listening to his music may find you one moment lost in the clatter of gamelan percussion. Next, you could be skanking to an earthy dub, like a forgotten B-side of a Missy Elliot instrumental. In 2013, he released *Raj*, an album he described as an “attempt at making an all-out noise record”. As for his latest EP, *Shallows*, we see him jumping headfirst into the murky waters of drone.

As *Shallows* opens, we are beckoned into a restless malaise. Discordant juxtapositions of tone counteract one another like one of Eliane Radigue’s epic meditations. At its peak, time-stretched garbles hiss out at you and the creepy tapping of wood gets uncomfortably close to the ears. Perhaps the most striking feature of this EP is the omission of his signature lead vocals. His singing style usually comprises harsh cut ups and brutal auto-tune that make for trippy and heady listening. But on *Shallows*, Piotr remains silent. Instead, the odd buzzes and chirps speak for themselves.

On ‘Rivulet to Gulf’, Piotr shares a more gentle vision. Here, hushed whispers and soft murmurs surround the stereo-field, enclasp the listener in an airy cloud of ambience. It’s astonishing to think that this is the same musician that brought us last year’s *Bahar*. This was a colourful and vibrant record; full of life and zest. But *Shallows* feels hollowed out, barren. The artwork also takes a sharp departure. Gone are the sickly sweet yellows and images of Piotr holding fruit. Instead, we see a grey, barren sea and Piotr’s stare into an abyss. This is his existential record: his mortem opus.

With this in mind, only one thing appears to be constant for Piotr: change. It’s therefore tempting to reach for a hackneyed ‘chameleon’ analogy to describe Piotr’s instinct for reinvention. Like Bowie, his continued shape-shifting has become the defining characteristic of his work. But as Bowie often pointed out, chameleons merely blend in to their surroundings. The trick, rather, is to have an incongruous impact with each transformation. Perhaps a better analogy for Piotr would therefore be a hermit crab: endlessly outgrowing shells and seeking new ones. With every upgrade, a new dimension of his character can be seen.

Published Mar 22, 2016

Words by [George McVicar](#)