

Editorial, or, why a bag of rubbish is not just a load of garbage

Christodoulos Makris

I will always view conceptual art as people who can't actually paint or sculpt.

Was he being prankish, playfully pricking establishment balloons, or was he making a serious point?

I'd say he was desperately searching for a niche to occupy. Most art works derive from a combination of skill and imagination which can set the bar high for those of us imbued with more imagination than self discipline.

You can reduce the skill element to nearly zero and that's fine as long as the burner is turned way up high on the imaginative side. Which is where the "pretension" of much conceptual art comes in. It's not that it's "difficult". It's more that imaginative input is so limited, and the output too meagre to justify the sometimes staggeringly overblown claims made for the work.

To read the catalogue entries you would think that capitalism, Western Civilisation and possibly reality itself were about to crumble under a relentless assault of "interrogations" and "investigations" and "interventions". But the work itself rarely delivers on the promise, and is often not to be very challenging to those often-invoked "preconceived notions" at all. It turns out that taking on the Establishment requires a bit of effort after all.

Duchamp knew this, and went to extraordinary lengths to achieve his goals. He should be invoked, not as a commendation, but as a rebuke to much of the conceptual art that came after him.

Its all a bit silly really isn't it? The only problem with allowing anything as art is that when the silliness eventually stops we will discover that in fact we have no real art left. Perhaps that's what they want.

... and you will always be mistaken in so doing.

I think that pyramid of oranges is just taking the pith ...

The orangement didn't a peel to you?

It's always interesting to see the reaction of those who claim to be fans of the "anything goes" school of conceptual art.

They always claim that they seek to "open minds".

But then it turns out that their own minds are completely closed when it comes to assimilating other, critical views.

3 is essential. It is what separates art from everything else in the world.

That reminds me, the blinds need a clean.

Utterly meaningless nonsense, but then that's conceptual art, the art is in making up the bullshit about what its supposed to mean.

I worked at Tate in 2004. There was a long standing urban legend or myth amongst the staff there that on one occasion the cleaners removed part of Tracey Emin's work, which at the time had it's own room at Tate Britan, because they thought it was quite literally rubbish. So "Conceptual art: why a bag of rubbish is not just a load of garbage", well for the most part it actually is just that.

Sadly/happily, we no longer have any need for these officially sanctioned cultural explorers and commentators, because the internet has removed all the gatekeepers and arbiters of fashion, allowing anyone with an idea, subversive or otherwise, to stare it with the world with a simple click of the mouse. Conceptual art only retains its gallery status because it's been monetised by people with a financial interest in conserving its value as an investment. Most of the rest of us have yawned and moved on.

Is absolutely anything art, if its creator says it is? Of course not – that's self-evidently bollocks.

To be a piece of art, 99.99% of the population would agree that something has to fulfil 3 criteria:

- It must have no utility (if it does, it's a piece of design, not art)
- It must be primarily created to evoke an emotional reaction in those who encounter it (viewer/listener/person who touches it etc)
- There must be some craft skill involved in its creation.

3 is the problem for a number of people who claim to be artists – the best known being Emin. She can't draw, can barely write, and has no material-handling skill whatsoever.

Emin and the others like her aren't artists, they're exhibitionists – they seek to express their psyche in physical form. These physical manifestations may have a certain voyeuristic interest as an insight into the mind which created them. But because there's no, or at best very little, craft skill involved, only a fool or a charlatan would claim them as art.

Yes, and? I'm well aware of that ridiculous public stult which shamed her. RCA? The woman can't draw – the evidence is overwhelming from her work.

OK, let's be fair – maybe she CAN draw, but deliberately draws incredibly badly in her work as some kind of "statement". I doubt it though.

Nobody seems to be willing to define what either of those things mean.

Paul Daniels skills – sleight of hand and misdirection – are easy to define and even to describe but hard to master and execute. His imagination meant he was able to create illusion after illusion (with the help of Ali Bongo) from basic magical techniques.

Conjuring is a great example of the problem with a lot of conceptual art. It's easy to conceive of a great trick, but bringing it off is another matter.

Conceptual art essentially fudges the bit in the middle where you saw the lady in half.

"In this work I will challenge the patriarchal notion of identity (insert artwork or performance) ... ta-daaa! I have now challenged the patriarchal notion of identity. I thank yew."

Hoogstraten is just a thug, and not a particularly imaginative one at that.

I can barely muster the effort to be uninterested in this. Something for the imbeciles I suppose.

Brian Seawell on contemporary art: "We pee on things, we pee into things, we pee over things ... and call it art" Brilliant

There's no doubt that it spawned all manner of vacuity

Nailed in one.

It isn't possessable. You can't buy it; it doesn't exist. All the same, it's free if you want it. You simply have to conceive of it, to let the idea occupy your imagination.

To be honest, this is the only thing going for it; that it can't be mercantilsed. And a thought can now be classified as art.

As E. H. Gombrich remarked, 'All art is conceptual'. In other words, the concept is what the artist starts with, or sets out to discover, not where he or she finishes. The value of the concept is decided by the skill and imagination with which it's materialised. Conceptual artists seldom get out of the blocks, i.e. beyond the initial, all too frequently banal, concept. That they might say they don't want to makes no difference.

I simply don't understand how anyone could describe Jimi Hendrix's records as "music". A child could make those noises with a guitar easily. I suppose that's why people took drugs to listen to it – it made it more tolerable.

As for L'Origine Du Monde, hardly original, I've seen hundreds of those IRL and in the fap magz I buy out the all nitre gargle lololol

All the 'artistic' effort is not in the work itself but in the bullshit words spun around it.

Damien Hirst is the grand master.

As a terribly passe and unfashionable Oil Painter I have to agree with every word.

... and another thing, why do galleries have to put my paintings between some pile of crap made out of chicken wire and something that involves sticking!

No doubt some conceptual art has merit, unfortunately, to most people, much of it is just another case of the emperors new clothes.

We are told that the "trick" is differentiating the vacuous nonsense from the meaningful insight. Thereby placing all responsibility of discerning any meaning on the viewer not the artist.

Is it really "art" if any meaningful/communication is restricted to a few nave/-gazing blatherers?

I'm currently showing my collection of fish pants, that is underwear made out of old half-consumed fish-based meals. Come early to get a complimentary gas mask...

Conceptual art is a byword for rubbish.

Nope ... I've tried ... and it's still crap ... sorry which way to the Edwardian room?

Part of Conceptual Art's brilliance, also in the fact that it was the last frontier towards freedom in art, but it also opened the door to the myriad of clones and trick-benders that have distorted contemporary art as it is and abundantly littered it with crap.

Never, never was it so hard to separate substance from debris...

yet I still hate it.

Once I did rip out the last pages of a novel whose ending I didn't like. Library book or your own copy? Just so we know.

I think the problem is with conceptual art is it's obsessed with how "radical" and "disruptive" it is despite having long ceased to be either of these things.

While the first guy who submitted a canvas painted entirely one colour to an art gallery might have been making a disruptive statement about what is or is not art, the tenth such "painting" is just laziness.

I find conceptual stuff mostly incredibly boring. There are the odd good bits, but you have to put up with seeing a heck of a lot of dross if you want to find any hidden gems.

My favourite bit isn't even officially conceptual art.

It's the library of books, all locked up in steel cages in the basement of the Rilksmuseum.

I have, in the past, found myself trying to find some artistic meaning in an electric light switch, only to find it was a real one, or being respectful towards heaps of floor cloths and a bucket, not sure if it was supposed to be art, or just not cleared up yet.

I've carefully stepped over a jig-sawed snake of brightly coloured cushions, only to find later, they were not "art", but for small children to sit on, during a school outing.

Cheese is more socially useful.

only because he's 40 years too late. And sounds rather lazy if he doesn't mind my saying

Keith Arnatt's Self-Burial (Television Interference Project) 1969 was way over my head ...

Number 2 seems to have worked on you. You're wrong about number 3.

ha ha – well it certainly wasn't about being as mad as a box of frogs like her! probably the person who has glamourised it most and made the most fucking enormous pile of money out of it!

When it's done well, so-called conceptual art has [as far as i can see] pretty much the same intention as any other kind of art – what's the best way of getting this thing that i see/ this idea in my head/ this sense or feeling i want to convey – out of MY head and into the viewers' head. Painting or sculpting or printmaking or any kind of inherited form are of course just as good a 'carrier' for these kinds of information as conceptual art and generally speaking the public like them better and trust them more because of the level of craft and skill that goes into their making. There is no reason why a piece of so-called conceptual art shouldn't be able to convey the same information/ idea/ feeling as traditional artforms, and once you ask yourself the question – what is the best way of conveying what i want to convey? the answer may well be NOT to paint or draw, but to do something else. And the answer to the HOW is not necessarily the same every time either – Miss Van der Rohe – a form follows function. Reinvent it every time. Someone like Helen Chadwick is a good example of that. Surprised the article ignored her. Of course alot of conceptual artists get stuck in formal dead ends where they are known more for a particular 'kind of thing' than as people trying to communicate ideas... style over substance... and the public are quite right to be suspicious of them just as they are of politicians.

Of course what ends up happening is that just as alot of traditional artists get obsessed with paint and expressive line and the nuts and bolts of the actual making, the need for elbow grease, the endless research and refinement of technique, alot of conceptual artists become obsessed with surface and context and the catalogue notes and a certain kind of reductive 'one idea at a time' parsimoniousness, popularly known as the one-liner, but usually without the wit that that suggests... In both cases 'the work' can end up being about 'the work' and the start point [all those years ago] of trying to respond to and think about the world around you, to people, to ideas, trying to find new ways to communicate that, all that gets totally lost, all you end up trying to communicate is that you are an artist, and thinking about your your next move should be as an artist, you stop worrying that you shouldn't repeat yourself, you start imitating yourself, before you know it, you've run out of ideas completely. It's a feature of conceptual artists just as much as it is of painters. The trouble is – they realise it – but they just won't stop. So all the public gets is a well made attractive looking surface. There was a short historical period where conceptual art gave them something else to chew on. Let's hope another bus is coming along soon...

your argument is not sequitur.

And to save confusion I'm just relaying an experience I had whilst I worked at Tate all those years ago. Linking that experience to the destruction the planet is just silly.

I think we have loads of art left, it just isn't labelled Art. People go on designing and making and doing, everywhere. Only a fraction of it is classified as Important Serious Art by the critics, but there's still lots of great stuff outside that definition.

I'm aware that what I'm saying is exactly the opposite of what the author intended. The intention was to open out the definition of what art can be, but the impression made on the public is that Art is about being tremendously clever, and if you don't get it then the fault is with you. In the meantime people go on enjoying music and fashion and design and animation and painting, but with a sense (and maybe it's just me) that what they are doing is not true, real, pure Art. Art is something for hyper intelligent billionaires and their friends.

I know that's not true, and what I'm saying is a bit unfair, but I think that's a received idea that is floating in the air. Not that it matters.

But sometimes a bag of rubbish is indeed just that – rubbish. Calling it art doesn't change that.

Thanks so much for such an hilarous contribution...!

there is of course a certain amount of truth in this. As art colleges expanded far cheaper to get students junk modelling when as with say at St Martins only three could fit in the welding basement (Charing Cross Road) at one time! But fuck we were good with filth.

I am all for public funding of art, much more than this philistine country allows; I was just pointing out that conceptual art and the monetarisation of intellectual property go hand in hand, they are not in tension. Now, not all are successful at the game, but to pretend that conceptual art is pure, or above commercial values, or some form of higher critic of capitalism compared to more traditional forms of art, is too simplistic.

Ideas aren't you thing, are they.

The thing is a distillation of culture etc, is actually clever. A witty reposte against pretension. Whereas a stack of oranges is, even if allowing the public to take the fruit of the artists labour, still a stack of oranges.

Good art, is good art.

Bad art is bad art, however it chooses to define itself.

A rose is a rose is a rose.

And a bag of rubbish is a ...

It's fine to not like something or not to "get" something but art is often taken out of context. Art if often a response to the world, response to art history. People see these pieces of work in a newspaper, with little to no understanding with why it is there or it's impact if you see it in person.

You have comprehensively demonstrated that your quest for "no meaning" is over.

Conceptual art didn't come from nowhere. It had an ancestor in the plegmatic form of the surrealist Marcel Duchamp, whose readymades radically shattered conventional notions of art as a result of skill...

Nobody actually buys this shit, oh wait, yes they do:

'Artist's Shit is a 1961 artwork by the Italian artist Piero Manzoni. The work consists of 90 tin cans, each filled with 30 grams of faeces...'

What a bunch of morons.

the last paragraph says it all putting conceptual art in a gallery and than giving it an economic price destroys its significance

i can't say whether it was true or not, hence calling it a myth. But I will say this, if staff and management are talking freely about such things it gives a pretty good insight to how the establishment itself thinks about and views the state of contemporary art.

I think you're wrong about three. Skill can be very subjective though. I actually think emin can draw very well. Reminds me in style of schiele of whom I'm a big

Fan. The problem with much Conceptualism is that it raises the question of who owns art. Is it the practitioner and associated categories such as galleries? Or

Is it the audience? If it's the practitioners are we supposed to listen as if to priests in a pulpit? My view is that

Art belongs to the audience which I believe to be fundamentally sceptical to conceptualism. A lot of conceptualism can be entertaining. What's not to grin about at a pyramid of rubbish. You may read some political point the artists are pushing. You may agree. But art isn't a vehicle primarily for political expression which has plenty of avenues. Nor is it

About vicarious thrills. I speak incidentally as a graduate in Fine art from goldsmiths. I was a conceptualism when young and it was undoubtedly exciting to practice and imparted an illusion of topicality and engagement to the practitioner. Now I paint again

Whether something is considered "art" depends completely on how good your P.R. is.

For most people a stack of oranges or cans of soup signifies a supermarket rather than an "art" exhibition – and we see plenty of unmade beds, at least in our house.

So for "art" to be worthy, there needs to be more. Much more. I would suggest that for a piece to deserve consideration, for it to entertain the senses or offer an alternative view of some concept it needs to have three fundamental attributes:

- it must be non-trivial. The artist must have invested some extraordinary amount of artistic talent in its production. This knocks on the head pieces like piles of bricks, stacks of oranges, etc. It also includes pretty much every photo ever taken.
- it must be deliberate. The actions that made the art must have been considered, non-random (sorry Jackson Pollock) and necessary for the whole.
- it should explain itself. While many pieces are pretty, sensually engaging and would make excellent wallpaper or ornaments, they fail as "art" if the subject is not apparent. It a viewer has to ask "what is it?" then it cannot be said to communicate, in the same way that a literary masterpiece in a foreign language says nothing to people who cannot read it.

This isn't to say that pieces that don't meet these criteria have no value. They can still be very attractive, desirable, even informative and influential (the Vietnam war photo of Phan Thi Kim Phuc being a prime example), possibly even valuable if the P.R. is good enough. But art? Not for me.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles

You clearly don't understand Wittgenstein. There is a clear line between the concepts expressed in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and the idea that stealing and destroying a book from a library, or putting up a pile of fruit and inviting people to eat it, are art. Anybody who thinks such a connection is just plopping a random name into a pretentious piece of writing, and total bollocks, must be a philistine.

It was something that came to attract me to this kind of work – work that could not be bought or sold, or even owned. Happenings were one – but of

course, you can now buy photographs and films of those ephemeral events. Suzi Gablik wrote a lot about this when I was a student. One 'art work' she described that appealed was a woman who was artist in residence in NYC, not sure for whom, and her work of art consisted of going around and shaking every sanitation workers hand. Conceptual stuff is often considered over cool and intellectual, but it needn't be. Keith Arnatt shows that as well – the artist disappearing is hilarious, and burning books is truly unsettling. But a lot of it (most) seems like masturbation to me.

Care to list out any major discoveries made through the medium of conceptual art?

I see a lot of 'challenging' and 'investigation' but very few concrete or useful results.

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you can thank the postmodernists and the commodification of the art market (see Panama papers) for the current state of Art. The YBAers are merely taking their queue from recent history and the wealth generation associated with it. Damien Hirst's ashtray is a prime example of the snide cynicism and contempt that this group has towards the investors considering acquisition.

Mind the Oranges Marlon!

and those that force through library closures.

what utter tosh. W made people understand that language was like a handful of rice that was thrown at something 'the object' and SOME of it stuck.

I can't decide if the flashing advert is an example of the genre in question or not – it's certainly the best of the lot if it is!

It's entertainment. Often Cabaret, frequently Karaoke.

But Latham didn't read the book. Instead, he invited friends, students and fellow artists to his house for what he called a 'Still and Chew' event.

Didn't the Nazis do a similar thing but with fire...unexpected godwin!.. I win!

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But it was also a product of philosophy, the restless questioning of Wittgenstein brought to bear on the arena of the visual

Eh? Wittgenstein was not a restless questioner? quite the opposite, he was a logician who thought that meaning and knowledge (epistemology) was reserved to questions of semantic logic. Spent most of his time fussing over truth statements.

He would have 'literally' found conceptual art meaningless.

and yet he was the progenitor

To be honest, this is the only thing going for it; that it can't be mercantilsed.

Oh yes it can:

A Line Made by Walking 1967

Collection Tate

Purchased 1976

Conceptual artists may create work out of thin air: they don't live on it.

The art is in making up the bullshit about what it's supposed to mean

Yep.

I actually think emin can draw very well. Reminds me in style of schiele of whom I'm a big Fan.
'sharp intake of breath' can't believe you just made a link between Emin and Egon Schiele.

Let's cut the crap, shall we? It wasn't "unsettling" then and it isn't "unsettling" now.

I like conceptual art and some people like Justin Bieber.

I don't know about rubbish, but certainly, I know (for a fact) that the lack of resources/materials was a pressuring factor in pushing ideas in other directions and opening options. Also, portability and time: art on the spot and the moment; it has a lot to do with it.

This sounds like it will be a must see exhibition. I think the trouble with a lot of contemporary art today is that it still follows some sort of "fashion". You get this a lot with painting. And there are just as many cliches in conceptual art as there is in traditional art, especially those artists who obsess over aesthetics and taste. I'm not really into the sublime and trying to be "poetic". It reeks of insincerity.

The problem with most conceptual is that when you dig into it, the concepts aren't particularly interesting or profound.

Conceptual art has tried to unhitch the intellectual value of a work from the nature of the work itself, but then what are you left with? An artist's opinion, or powers of persuasion. Or, as in the case of someone like Damien Hirst, just their bullshit. Like an aggrandised car salesman fleeing people for money.

it was a very simple reason most carried W. at St. Martins, the reach to go beyond Structuralism thought of course by artists, intuitively. The breaking of the syntactical bonds or internal boundaries,which in sculptural practice oftimes involved the relationship between the "prop" which held a piece 'up' or in place, as syntax in language holds a noun or verb – subject matter – in place. The relationship between that and a more asserting component if you like. The simple Orange piece of RL above has no prop other than itself. Even the inside of a marble carving had a different identity to the topological surface, the drawing was gone there and just a marble lump. And of course bronze cast was empty inside or plaster supported on an armature.

These explorations seem perplexing to most people still, yet simply continued the edicts of Cubism – the opening up of the closed form.

Dangerous really and a disservice not to have a proper Art Historian or of course an Artist – to write rather than this sad Journalese. Talking about Vermeer/sacks of rubbish. Because of course they are equal. Vermeer was able to insert an apparent bowl of light between a building and the front of the canvas using perspective, chiaroscuro, hue and tonality. Probably having spent 15 years grinding pigment with oil as an apprentice and "marking" just as Long with his walking, tedious repetitive sections of his masters work – like any factory worker! He didn't just drop off the fucking genius tree one day. And we can't expect human beings to go on living as they did 300 years ago! Oh and there's no such thing as nothing

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yes but Brian only liked dog piss

A common feeling of experiencing conceptualism in galleries is the coincidental feeling of creation and destruction, the sense ofrevealing the potential of individuality and sexuality and also the nihilistic self absorption of the self and the futility of the human condition.

A coincidental sense of the futility of experiencing conceptualism in galleries is the common feeling of the creation and destruction of the human condition, self absorption, individuality, sexuality, and the nihilistic potential of the human self.

I love sentences that keep on being equally meaningful whichever order you put the words in.

unless you have misunderstood me

My cousin studied at St Martins and now lives and exhibits in New York. I want to boast that I'm his cousin his hanging tea towels are an embarassment.

and if the world didn't need any more paintings of dogs and horses?

well look it's fine for you to be cynical if that makes you feel safe because frightened people can be very dangerous and join all kinds of woo-woo freak outfits and splinter groups! You know, want to blow other people up or whatever because they are different. The modern mind can't just be left to those who can do the maths – like you I suppose. Human consciousness has to evolve, that's a collective thing and yes as you so rightly point out simple discourse has it's bitsy parts and play

Excellent article – well-written, thought-provoking and informative. One of my favourite artists is Cornelia Parker, whose pictures, photographs and

installations fit broadly within the category of conceptual art. It is worth mentioning her because she is not part of the commercial mainstream, she creates aesthetically beautiful art that is both unconventional and intellectually stimulating and she is passionate and sincere about what she does, as anyone who has heard her speak will know.

The point is that many people are quick to dismiss all conceptual art (for whatever reason: lack of technical skill, boring, pretentious etc...) without attempting to understand the artist or without applying any clearly defined criteria in their judgements. Such sweeping generalisations are as useful as saying "all 17th century Flemish portraits painted in oils are good", or "all paintings that resemble photographs are technically clever and good".

There is good conceptual art and there is bad conceptual art and one would hope that anyone interested enough to read this article would want to spend some time making informed and discerning judgements. I guess those taking the trouble to visit the exhibition will at least go with an open mind and will not leap straight into stereotype mode. Should be a fascinating exhibition!

Given that the urinal as we know it really is a purely conceptual work (the original, if it ever existed, having long disappeared) the alleged suppression of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhovens involvement is a vindication of Duchamp and the whole idea of conceptual art. Citing evidence of provenance really does miss the point.

Enjoyed the article. Regarding Latham's treatment of his library book... Once I did rip out the last pages of a novel whose ending I didn't like. It was a great feeling.

that it was a colossal drag to have to wash the little vests and dump nappies for a mere one or two kids? OK Emin doesn't have them for not meeting a Prince. Mary Kelly was one of the angriest women I ever met! I think she must have had post partum depression! To wear the badge of the burden of the gift of your children still seems profoundly neurotic for someone who only has to be an artist and not say, a Prime Minister or Brain Surgeon! A feminist is one thing of course but an artist is another. Yes Barbara Hepworth farmed hers out a lot – but she was pretty overloaded! Interesting that neither of these ladies addressed maleness much, maleness and parenthood even.

Again G&G walked in the tradition of the well established double act – the music hall/comedians like Morcombe and Wise, Nauman and Klein! <http://www.sitebuilder.com/website-templates/site/41087317/desktop/G2ZICxpI6D-s2OoRSAjkrOrV2xaKSO>

"It had an ancestor in the phlegmatic form of the surrealist Marcel Duchamp..." Oh, here we are again, chanting the same old mantras. Try reading 'Duchamp's Urinal? The Facts Behind the Facade'

I think your point is really fascinating. What will happen when /if the consensus shifts? When the critics decide that conceptual art is no longer worth the astronomical price tags? Someone somewhere stands to lose a substantial sum of money, and will there be anything to take its place? Or will there instead be a levelling, a rebalancing, a democratisation?

And if art is not longer such a dependable investment, where will the money (and the hype) go?

Conceptual art didn't come from nowhere. It had an ancestor in the phlegmatic form of the surrealist Marcel Duchamp, whose readymades radically shattered conventional notions of art as a result of skill.

Conceptual art came into being because Duchamp couldn't draw horses or dogs.

I bet it provoked some juicy responses for its appealing form.

John Latham via his book chewing stunt sounds like an utter fool. Conceptual art in that vein is for those with no discernible skill other than the ability to spout bullshit using an impressive vocabulary.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8H4H4tzo>
a professional little-tattler

ohn Latham estate, courtesy of the Lisson Gallery, London
This says all we need to know about conceptual art. Like traditional art, it is about money so fails straight away.

and the idea that the public don't 'get' this kind of stuff is wrong – look at something like Rachel Whiteread's House, or that Roger Hiorns crystal room, or Parker's exploded shed, or Richard Wilson's rotating disc cut out of the front of a building – these things can be easy and accessible enough if someone has a good idea and executes it without dressing it up hiding it behind walls of 'art-drive'. The challenge for the artist of course is then to come up with another good idea, instead of making endless variations on the one they have had already. The reason why Whiteread House or Wilson's disc or Chadwick things 'work' is because the artist is not telling you what to think – they are giving you something open-ended – a generous 'make of it what you will'. There's no footnotes. And Wittgenstein don't enter into it.

You win Obscure Cultural Reference of The Day for that one :D

Even by Cf standards, this is a pathetic attempt at summarizing Wittgenstein's thought.

because it was not "a summary of 'soppy' at all, but the sculpture student's take, or rather what they needed to take in relation to help making work 'VERY SIMPLE REASON" – do you see. Obviously trodden on your hallowed ground – but hey keep your wig on, don't be so defensive.

A good article for, what was, the golden age of conceptual art in the UK. I wish I could go and see the exhibition itself.

I'm happy to admit that those old conceptual artists of the 60s and 70s inspired me. Their ideas of challenging the stuffy establishment of the artwork as to what constituted an artwork, and the idea of concept, and how it should be implemented, is something I can relate to. It's just a shame that the YBAs sold it all out like they did. They've turned it into what it once detested – the establishment.

However, in saying that, I find it odd that some still refuse to accept that the likes of Emin and Hirst as artists. I may not like their work, but I wouldn't deny them what they are. Whenever I read some criticising conceptual artists with the usual 'emperor's new clothes' statement in pretty much every article like this, with comments that always mention Emin and Hirst, dismissing them as artists, I have to wonder what other prejudices do they have?

What other things do they reject that they can't, or simply refuse to, understand?

nah mate you can 'ave your cake and eat it, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Searle
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q00f9CKq8w>
if there is no duality – how can anything 'reside' there

It's the thought that counts...

Olivia Laing has disintegrated the ideas and intentions of conceptualism and those who involved themselves in it pretty accurately. There are some minor quibbles. Duchamp can be understood as a surrealist but there are other ways of looking at his work. It wasn't just Wittgenstein's questioning that went along with conceptualism. Vic Burgin used to go on and on about Barthes and semiotics. Also, I think it helps to see where some of the conceptualists went next. Clearly Arnatt was following a kind of formal logic. Bruce McLean went back into modernist painting, printmaking, sculpture etc through reaction – because painting had become the one thing that he wasn't supposed to be doing. The living sculptures are mostly remembered now because they have produced large, buyable, usually brilliant photographic artworks – the broken barrier between art and life becoming a quirky sideline, their artistic private life. A kind of template, in a way, for the YBA story.

But overall, Ms Laing, job done.

haha... yeah, where's the room with the bloody impressionists in it?

well perhaps you just don't have an enquiring mind?
<http://physics.stackexchange.com/questions/49940/what-exists-in-the-space-between-quarks>

http://hubblelite.org/hubble_discoveries/dark_energy/de-what_is_dark_energy.php

But then how to explain that conceptual art has accompanied the rise of the monetarisation of everything? After all, this is a time that has also been the rise of intellectual property rights, ie, precisely the mercantilisation and monetarisation of thoughts. Far from being free from the capitalist mechanism, it has mirrored capitalism's capacity to assign value. It might have had a revolutionary spirit in the beginning, but by now it has been completely coopted and it has exploited, and been exploited by, capitalism fully and fruitfully. Add to this that, in order for conceptual art to engage, the concepts have to be original, interesting, imaginative, ie, the product of such a mind. But many of these artists seem to be anything but.

That probably doesn't matter as you likely can't afford it. As a rule, only other people's money can afford this stuff

in a way you can say it's the search for NO meaning. Conceptual Art. Which really has just as much chance of delivering terra firma as all this fucking 'meaning' humans have been chucking around since the year dot?

And the manuscripts of Shakespeare plays and Bach concertos ended up as pie bases. You need to keep an eye on the staff, is all we learn from this.

The last great period of art making, everything that came after is either derivative or a step backwards.

you couldn't have Tracey Emin without Mary Kelly

and then Bruce McLean

A kind of template, in a way, for the YBA story.

I suspect that there may be those who want to requisition artists in this exhibition to give the YBA's a pedigree, reinforcing the rewriting of history with artspeak. I think Bruce McLean went into painting because that's where he thought the future was, in large paintings.

I still don't get it.

Some of it is fun, some of it is crap, some of it is ugly and empty, some of it beautiful and thoughtful, and some of it is as pretentious as older forms, so no change there

yes such a lot is seen as a competition these days! perhaps you watch too much TV?

What does "best " meansafest? most sure? God forbid we don't know what we are doing eh!

Schiele, self-portrait <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/566257353123409631/>
Emin, self-portrait <http://renowedart.com/418.jpg>

Oh and while I admire the subversive actions of John Latham, as a concept, he should have replaced that book. Only nazis destroy book

Publishers destroy millions of books (unsold copies) so do people clearing out their homes to make more space. Latham fought the Nazis but if it is clear he knew his actions would shock. For more, see my book John Latham – the incidental person – his art and ideas (Middlesex University Press, 1995).

Yeah and detective novels apparently.

the thing is there are alot of choices of how to make things, multi-media,hybrid this and that, video site-specific, etc, [the modern artist has a large palette at their disposal] but in the end it just comes down to whether a particular thing is memorable or interesting to look at or resonant, whether the artist was thinking about Wittgenstein or Benjamin or Derek Jarman or Japanese woodcuts or The book of Kells or Norman Wisdom's interior decor is sort of irrelevant, ... if clues to any of that is built into something, people will, if they can read the sign, be pointed in that direction...but in the end background is just background, detail is detail, if the thing in itself is dumb or dim no amount of background will help. You don't have to have read Greenberg to see why chewing up an art theory book, bottling it then returning it to the library it came from 'works' as comment/ and as object, or is funny

Olivia, a brilliantly written and well thought through article.

A common feeling of experiencing conceptualism in galleries is the coincidental feeling of creation and destruction, the sense of revealing the potential of individuality and sexuality and also the nihilistic self absorption of the self and the futility of the human condition, how depressing. To place ourselves and what we do first! Perhaps it was the times, in many ways the late sixties and early seventies were a bleak period of political sourness and the genuine realisation that socially both in terms of class and sex what had gone on before was a form of imprisonment. The break form modernism around the mid eighties allowed artists to adopt many of conceptualism's thesis in an environment fun and hedonism were allowed as virtues. Perhaps this was the conceptualists greatest achievement, that they played a part in allowing the greater freedom that we enjoy today

How stupid of me? Must have missed that bit. I thought the Tractatus was about ordering truth statements and language propositions relating to thoughts and facts? Not objects? Feel free to elaborate.

Do you think Justin Bieber likes conceptual art?

Indeed.

yes. You're not really getting the Zen of this Conceptual business are you. I'm afraid you're going to have to do your own research. I'll maybe say this in this though, the dark and light of Andy's Exploding Plastic Inevitable still holds more menace today, or it should

... emperors new clothes
You lost me with that overused saying.

There may be some element of that. But they did challenge the idea of what mediums could be used to create art. They seemed to be saying that you didn't need the most expensive sable brushes or paint, or the finest Italian marble to create a work of art.

For me, the importance of a piece to be considered art depends on two things, relating to the artist rather than the artifact. First, the artist has a concept. Then the artist must possess the ability to bring the concept into existence. Given those two elements, art can be almost anything. I have

difficulty appreciating some presentations of 'art', but that does not signify as to their quality.

Have you seen her drawings?

Conceptual art ought to be encouraged. After all, life can be pretty miserable and people do need something to laugh at.

he liked Westerns.

Don't worry about it, if you don't.

Most Conceptual Art resides in the realm of duality. For me, the very best art happens in an arena of non-duality.

Nihilism.

i don't think many of the artists mentioned have been successful. Long is a notable exception. Latham, Maclean, Harrison, Kelly, Arnatt didn't exactly make it rich did they? Because artists critique blatant commercialisation they, apparently, aren't allowed to make a living. Sometimes the voices calling for the de-funding of 'pretentious crap' via the public purse are the ones that call such artists out for 'selling out' and making commercial work. The inherent contradictions seem to escape people...

The word concept is art in and of itself. It is totally unique for every person who has one... I think this article is art. It is all impermanent, has only value to those who think it does. Art is subjective and totally perfect

Really? Jesus wept.

We are all available artists. Why we must assume discernible differences between who is and who isn't, what is and what isn't, is problematic. Religious scholar Matthew Fox questions the power at play in staking such claims on what is and isn't art, and in allowing certain power structures to define (defy) what art is, the "rest of us" are denied the beauty of creating art that is our birthright. Art isn't really special, except that it is.

We are all artists. Art is meditation. It is for all of us to create. It is necessity. Lest we forget....

well thats enough about your hobbies!

Maybe my comment was pretty unfair... There are legions of people and institutions working to make conceptual art accessible. So thank you to those guys.

My point is:
There's loads of art out there to be enjoyed

Obviously... there is no other way to verbally say it.

It's not what these guys wanted. As the article says, they were rebelling against the present and confining notions of what art was. Trying to wrench it away from the snobbery in the art world.

They succeeded to a certain extent. However, Brit art in the 90s regressed these original ideas back into the galleries of commercialism and elitism.

How do you know they did? You're making assumptions that because they did their art differently, that they couldn't draw.

It's the idea that such things should be a pre-requisite that they were trying to break away from.

It is now, because it's been made that way since the 90s.

Conceptual artists seldom get out of the blocks, i.e. beyond the initial, all too frequently banal, concept.

That initial concept that you believe to be "banal" is the raw creative energy of the first idea. Something that hasn't yet been corrupted by further processes. A good conceptual artist wants to get that out as quickly as possible before he has time to mutate into something else. It's one of the things that I can relate to with the concept artists of the 60s and 70s.

The strict rules you list is the type of thing these concept artists were trying to break free from. Such rules become confining, suffocating even to creativity.

In the 1970's Bruce McLean's band 'Nice Style' never played a note, they were the world's first pose band. Bruce McLean's theory was that everyone is a poser to some extent because we all have to do things we don't want to do.

But there is a link with minimalism. Bruce McLean worked with composer Michael Nyman when they collaborated on "The Masterwork" Award Winning Fish-Knife'.

A student at Croydon School of Art, while Bruce McLean was teaching, who called himself 'the Martian' started a band and asked students if they wanted to join. The Martian lived in a squat which he called the Mars Hotel after the Grateful Dead's 'From the Mars Hotel' LP. In the evening he would entertain his entourage by playing his New York Dolls LPs sometimes roaming the streets of Croydon in his sheep's fleeces coat wearing a wolf mask, until he was brought back by the police. His band 'The Martian Warlord's Martian Underworld' were booked to support Greenslade at the Croydon Greyhound.

On the night fifty students who had been asked to join the Martians' band turned up without an instrument between them. Greenslade refused to let them go on stage and the Martian was told he could return at a later date. That night no-one he had recruited for his band turned up. The Martian smartened himself up and went on to study at St Martin's where he got his diploma in art and design.

Earlier that year Malcolm McLaren had managed the New York Dolls. Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid had been students at Croydon School of Art in the late 1960's. Inspired by the Situationists whose artwork and slogans could be seen on the streets of Paris, they organised the occupation of the art school dining hall and broke down some partitions of cubicles where some students worked. Artistic genres collided when Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid started their multi media Punk Rock project. Malcolm McLaren organised a media campaign to promote the band he was managing, the Sex Pistols. Jamie Reid provided the artwork for the records and the advertising campaign. Ian Dury's Kilburn and the High Roads had played their first concert at Croydon School of Art in December 1971, later John Lydon was seen in their audience and Vivienne Westwood designed their clothes. Some of these clothes are under threat because Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's son Joseph Core is threatening to burn his collection of his parents clothes and his Punk memorabilia lest it be absorbed into the mainstream. Some of Vivienne Westwood's clothes were inspired by the garments Zena Perrett was sewing for his and Hers bondage clothes catalogue. Malcolm McLaren also asked if he could manage Pete Perrett, but Pete Perrett turned him down, preferring to retain his artistic integrity. John Lydon who hated hippies, the middle classes, art students, and Malcolm McLaren's intellectualisation of Punk rock, formed Public Image Limited, not just a band but an artistic concept. Punk, conceptual and performance art often vilified by those whose criticism often amounts to little more than a one line put down.

Another one that insists that art should have restrictive rules.

Emin and the others like her aren't artists, they're exhibitionists – they seek to express their psyche in physical form. These physical manifestations may have a certain voyeuristic interest as an insight into the mind which created them. But because there's no, or at best very little, craft skill involved, only a fool or a charlatan would claim them as art

No, she does, because she's the artist.

Art is always going to have "fashions".

Bringing

<https://luchte.wordpress.com/under-the-aspect-of-time/>
<http://www.floscifcas.unam.mx/~tomasiini/ENSAYOS/Time.pdf>

And here I was making an ass of myself by thinking it was all a bit of a laugh. Goes to show one most always think these things through, what with all the vanishing points and unsettling spaces between objects and ideas and all that.

A conceptual sense of futility in galleries is the creation of the human destruction, self sexuality and the individual potential of the nihilistic experience.

A common feeling of experiencing conceptualism in galleries is the coincidental feeling of creation and destruction, the sense of revealing the potential of individuality and sexuality and also the nihilistic self absorption of the self and the futility of the human condition

I know what you mean, I get that all the time.

If you most know, I've been often described as "one of the most inquiring minds of our time", mostly by myself though... but still, I like to think I can discuss quarks and dark energy bubbles with the best of them.

must try harder!

haha well space/time isn't really "numbers" so I dunno, try LSD?

John Latham's Time Base Roller, 1972.

The image reminds me of some of Supports/Surfaces sculptures though the visual similarity is doubtless coincidental. In any case, the article leaves me uncomfortable with this official narrative of 'British' conceptualism, a little forced...

Would be nice if curatorial vision and critical retrospection grew up, and outward.

funny I was thinking about Helen too.

Here's a typical PhD student taking 230 pages to tell people how the asylum has taken over the lunatics? https://research.gold.ac.uk/8000/96/ART_thesis_Kosmogoglou_2012.pdf

I'd have to agree with that. The YBAs simply took it and sold it out, and others since have, in turn, copied them.

no it wasn't for you to read in particular! really about the fact that there is so much "middle management " as you say trying to manipulate what people think.

The pared minimalism and formalism that preceded the more even based work did certainly lean on instruction from W. to unhook as it were from the 'footnotes'.

However I do still think good critique is needed to weed out the 'style from the substance' as obviously all this new marketing bollocks can push things a long way and clog up all the arteries if allowed to?

& of course if someone likes CP I don't think it any harm for a critic to point them to Gustav Metzger say, or be given to understand an organisation like Artangel.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto-destructive_art

Obviously some don't offer much in the way of a pedigree. But then there are those whose later work embraced the capitalist wiles of the art market, as Laing puts it. That's where the YBAs come in. As for McLean in particular,

he seemed to latch on to something that had been developing for awhile. I can remember students switching from doing environmental work, film and performance to knocking out Bacon or Hoylandesque painting when I was at art college in the early 70s. Not that Bruce McLean was particularly sub-Bacon it what he did. He seemed to singularly guided by good taste.

Then you're probably missing the point of it.

When I was at college in the mid seventies we were told if we had a thousand pounds to get a video camera. I was at Croydon for a few months, and Bruce McLean taught there. He put me in a little room with no windows like a dark room with an overhead projector and said make your pictures larger, that where the future is, in large paintings. I didn't listen, I left soon after but he was right. Charles Saatchi has one of his paintings in a reception room in his house.

Follow the crusty old people carrying the Daily Mail.

A Rose Has No Teeth

I'm a bit sceptical of her drawing ability. I get what you mean if you are referring to drawing being about marks, but she's definitely no Picasso. I highly doubt she can render a figure (realistically) like I could for example and I've spent years doing life drawing. If you do a lot intensively you learn how to draw really well. I know she has done some in the past, but it hasn't been a life pursuit. She is a good conceptual artist, but I think she years to be taken seriously for her ability in drawing and painting (just like Damien Hirst), but she's just not talented in that way. She said that it took her years to do a painting that would take me 5 minutes.

sure, but primary texts are different (l)

it's the search for NO meaning
great... I've got no project.

I don't think Wittgenstein had much of an impact, or if he did, it was a willful misreading.

The only criterion that matters:
4) Can galleries and collectors make money from it?
A truly radical art would ban all trade in art.

Bruce McLean is an exceptional artist, and besides his conceptual art he is also a painter. I remember one of his students, I'll call him Martin. He designed the cover for the Rolling Stones LP that Decca put out after they left the label. The Rolling Stones took out a full page advert in the music papers denouncing the LP and its cover. It is unlikely to be shown at the exhibition of Rolling Stones memorabilia at the Saatchi gallery. Martin also designed a poster for London Transport which showed people waiting for a bus but he added a mouse at the end of the queue and by the time anyone noticed the poster was all around London inside the busses. He got the sack for that. He had a breakdown, and after eating at different restaurants in the Beckenham area and refusing to pay as was his legal right if he decided the meal was not of sufficient quality, he was warned by the police. He had a go at burglary, he was ill, and put the items he intended to steal on the doorstep and ordered a taxi, but did not realise the occupants of the house were in the bedroom and instead of the taxi the police turned