

WHAT IS **Modern & Contemporary Art ?**





CONTENTS

what is__? talks series	page 03
introduction: modern & contemporary art	page 04
how soon was now? what is modern and contemporary art? -francis halsall & declan long	page 08
further reading	page 20
glossary of terms	page 21
modern & contemporary art resources	page 25

THE WHAT IS

IMMA talks series?

There is a growing interest in contemporary art, yet the ideas and theoretical frameworks which inform its practice can be complex and difficult to access. By focusing on a number of key headings, such as conceptual art, installation art and performance art, this series of talks is intended to provide a broad overview of some of the central themes and directions in modern and contemporary art.

03

This series represents a response to a number of challenges. Firstly, the inherent problems and contradictions that arise when attempting to outline or summarise the wide-ranging, constantly changing and contested spheres of both art theory and practice, and secondly, the use of summary terms to describe a range of practices, many of which emerged in opposition to such totalising tendencies.

Taking these challenges into account, this talks series offers a range of perspectives, drawing on expertise and experience from lecturers, artists, curators and critical writers and is neither definitive nor exhaustive. The intention is to provide background and contextual information about the art and artists featured in IMMA's exhibitions and collection in particular, and about Contemporary Art in general, to promote information sharing, and to encourage critical thinking, debate and discussion about art and artists. The talks series addresses aspects of Modern and Contemporary Art spanning the period from the 1940s to the present.

Each talk will be supported by an information leaflet which includes a summary, the presenter's essay, a reading list, a glossary of terms and a resources list. This information can also be found on IMMA's website along with more detailed information about artworks and artists featured in IMMA's Collection at www.imma.ie.

WHAT IS Modern & Contemporary Art?

introduction

The Irish Museum of Modern Art is the national cultural institution for the collection and presentation of Modern and Contemporary Art in Ireland. IMMA exhibits and collects Modern and Contemporary Art by established and emerging Irish and international artists. The Temporary Exhibitions Programme features work by established and emerging artists ranging from painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video and performance. IMMA originates many of its exhibitions but also works closely with a network of international museums and galleries. IMMA's Collection includes artworks spanning a range of media and genres, acquired through purchase, donations, loans and commissions, many in association with IMMA's Temporary Exhibitions Programme and, on occasion, IMMA's Artists' Residency Programme.

In this introductory text we provide a brief overview of Modern and Contemporary Art. Terms associated with both Modern and Contemporary Art are indicated in CAPITALS and are elaborated on in the glossary on p.21. We invited Francis Halsall and Declan Long, lecturers in Visual Culture in the National College of Art and Design and co-ordinators of the MA Art in the Contemporary World to write an essay *How soon was now? What is Modern and Contemporary Art?* This essay provides an overview of Modern and Contemporary Art, identifying some of the challenges that arise when attempting to define this complex and contested sphere of theory and practice. Their essay includes examples of modern and contemporary artists and artworks, some of which are included in IMMA's Collection. By focusing on IMMA's Collection, we hope to draw attention to the range of artworks in the Collection that span both Modern and Contemporary Art, including paintings by Jack B. Yeats, Cecil King, William Scott, Louis Le Brocquy, Tony O'Malley, Sean Scully and Elizabeth Magill; drawings by Kathy Prendergast, Tom Molloy, Alice Maher and Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland; sculptures by Dorothy Cross, Iran do Espirito Santo, Louise Bourgeois, and Rebecca Horn; prints by Victor Vasarely, Robert Motherwell and Antoni Tàpies; installations by Gerard Byrne and Liam Gillick; and lens-based work by James Coleman, Willie Doherty, Jaki Irvine, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno. We also hope to highlight the potential of IMMA's exhibitions and Collection as resources for further investigation and enquiry into the subjects of Modern and Contemporary Art.

what is modern art
and what is
contemporary art?

Within the context of art history, the term MODERN ART refers to art theory and practice, predominantly in Western Europe and North America, from the 1860s to the late 1960s - the period associated with MODERNISM. Modern Art is defined in terms of a linear progression of styles, periods and schools, such as IMPRESSIONISM, CUBISM and ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM. In general usage, there is considerable overlap and confusion between the terms MODERN and CONTEMPORARY, both of which refer to the present and recent past. Modern is a term which has a broad application depending on the context in which it is used. It can refer to the present or the contemporary. In terms of social, political and philosophical discourse, modern refers to the period that began with the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century. More generally, modern can be used to refer to all things since the early RENAISSANCE. The relative and temporal nature of the term resists a clear or fixed definition, and is subject to considerable debate in terms of meaning and timeframe.

The term CONTEMPORARY ART refers to current and very recent practice. Attributed, approximately, to the period from the 1970s to the present, it also refers to works of art made by living artists. Contemporary Art tends to be assessed thematically and subjectively, drawing on an expanded range of theoretical and practical disciplines. Contemporary Art can be driven by both theory and ideas, and is also characterised by a blurring of the distinction between art and other categories of cultural experience, such as television, cinema, mass media, entertainment and DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY.

The period from the 1970s onwards is also described in terms of POST-MODERNISM, a social, cultural and intellectual movement characterised by a rejection of notions of linear progression, grand totalising narratives and critical consensus associated with Modernism, favouring an interdisciplinary approach, multiple narratives, fragmentation, relativity, contingency and irony.

In art history, the period associated with Modernism, 1860s - 1970s, is characterised by significant social, cultural, technological and political developments in the western world. Industrialisation, urbanisation, new technology, the rise of the middle class, the secularisation of society and the emergence of a consumer culture resulted in new conditions in which art was created, exhibited, discussed and collected. The open market replaced patronage as the means of financing art, giving artists the freedom to engage in more experimental and innovative forms of practice. Inspired by new developments in technology, in particular PHOTOGRAPHY and FILM, traditional practice and methodologies, including perspective and representation, were discarded in favour of more experimental approaches, such as ABSTRACTION, resulting in new forms of expression. Such innovative practice was referred to as AVANT-GARDE, and Modernism comprises a series of successive avant-garde movements, such as Impressionism, FAUVISM and DE STIJL. The modernist period was characterised by a belief in the progressive tendencies of modernity, evident in movements such as Cubism, CONSTRUCTIVISM and FUTURISM, and in architecture in the INTERNATIONAL STYLE and movements such as the BAUHAUS.

During the course of the twentieth century, disillusionment with aspects of the modernist enterprise: the impact of industrialisation, global war and developments in military technology, resulted in some artists adopting strategies of disruption and subversion, evident in movements such as DADA and SURREALISM. Alternatively, some artists resorted to more personalised and emotional forms of practice, such as the EXPRESSIONIST movements DER BLAU REITER and DIE BRÜCKE. After World War II, the centre of Modernism shifted from Europe to America and was dominated by ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM. Underpinned by a theoretical framework of FORMALISM, which emphasised form rather than content in both the creation and reception of the artwork, this 'art for art's sake' argument contributed to the increased objectification and commodification of the artwork.

Social, cultural and political changes during the 1960s resulted in considerable shifts in arts practice. Artists were concerned with the increasing commodification of art and the role of the art institution – the museum or gallery – and its relationship to broader socio-economic and political processes. Informed by new developments across a range of theoretical and practical disciplines, such as FEMINISM, POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, PSYCHOANALYSIS and CRITICAL THEORY, and drawing on earlier strategies of disruption, artists devised new forms of practice, such as temporary, textual, performative or DIDACTIC work, to complicate the perception of the art object as commodity. CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS emphasised the primacy of the idea over the material art object. Rejecting assumptions about art historical continuity and critical consensus associated with Modernism, artists pushed out the boundaries of what was possible in the creation, presentation and reception of art. Experimental forms of practice, such as FLUXUS, MINIMALISM, POP ART and PERFORMANCE ART, emerged in response to the perceived constraints and limitations of Modernism.

Emerging concerns about the ecology and the environment are evident in LAND ART and ENVIRONMENTAL ART. Reconsideration of the relationship between the artwork and its context, in particular its relocation outside the parameters of the museum or gallery space, contributed to the development of SITE SPECIFIC, INSTALLATION, SOCIALLY ENGAGED and PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE. Equally, feminist and postcolonial discourse concerned with identity formation, challenged the linear narrative of Western, Eurocentric, male-dominated art history, favouring multiple narratives and HYBRID practice.

Advances in technology, particularly in FILM, VIDEO and Digital Technology, contributed to the development of NEW MEDIA ART. The disestablishment of the museum or gallery as the primary locus of display and consideration of art, resulted in the emergence of a broader range of forums, such as BIENNIALS, PUBLIC ART and ARTIST-LED Initiatives.



07

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rise of the art market resulted in an increase in the number of GALLERIES, COLLECTORS, DEALERS and ART FAIRS, and also the establishment of many large-scale ART MUSEUMS and galleries in major cities. A growing trend towards collaboration between artists and curators contributed to the raised profile of the CURATOR. In the late 1990s, a renewed interest in the role of the viewer as participant and in situating the artwork within a social context, contributed to the emergence of new forms of collaboratory and RELATIONAL practice.

Contemporary Art in the twenty-first century comprises an ever-expanding field of practice. Concerns with regard to the commodification and objectification of the artwork continue to inform both the production and critique of contemporary art. Attempting to identify the way forward, some theorists and practitioners are revisiting the possibilities of Modernism, while others identify the need for a new modernism, what the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud refers to as ALTERMODERN, which addresses the globalised, transient, hybrid nature of Contemporary Art.

Lisa Moran, Curator
Education and Community Programmes

Sophie Byrne, Assistant Curator
Talks and Lectures Programme

How soon was now? What is Modern and Contemporary Art?

Francis Halsall &
Declan Long

1 - In a dark room

(i)

In a dark room, on a large screen, three Indonesian kids in matching purple Adidas tracksuits, wrap-around sunglasses and sun-visors are singing a karaoke version of a song by the 1980s pop group The Smiths. It is equally serious and joyous. The piece is part of Phil Collins's work *The World Won't Listen*. It is a great work of contemporary art and Phil Collins is an important artist because his work is richly suggestive of a number of significant questions about national identity, popular culture in a global context, and the role of the mass media in representing these.

(ii)

Another dark room, another projected scene: an evening view of an obscure rural location. In the near-distance we see an odd elongated piece of architecture: a fragile but imposing shelter, an elaborate cylindrical tent that seems simultaneously out of place and yet somehow at home in this natural landscape. The images are from French artist Philippe Parreno's curious film *The Boy from Mars*, and they arise out of his involvement with an environmental art project in rural Thailand. Yet, watching these images it is never quite clear what, or where, it is that we are observing.

Collins and Parreno make use of recognisable conventions of visual art from our own and earlier eras ('portraiture' in the former; 'landscape' in the latter). Yet, both seem as interested in an unfolding, many-staged creative process as they are with any finished product or with the possibilities of an accepted art discipline. As such, they practice types of art, that, as the influential curator Nicholas Bourriaud has argued, remain "around the edge of any definition" - drawing on much from what would customarily be considered beyond the 'frame' of art, urging us to consider the place of art in the contemporary world, while offering up images and experiences characterised by uncertainty or disconcerting intensity.¹

2 - what does modern mean?

The two examples above were both made in the last ten years. But are they also modern? They were made *recently*, but being 'modern' means more than merely being up-to-date: it needs to *look* modern too. For example there's a Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum, who has spent the last 30 years trying to paint like Rembrandt. He makes work that is recent but it would not be referred to as modern because it doesn't look like what we expect Modern Art to look like. Instead, it is deliberately old fashioned. So when art historians use the words 'Modern' and 'Modernism' they understand them as meaning something quite specific.

(i) When was Modernism?

In the sense of 'modern' meaning up to date, all art was modern once. The innovative artists of the past have always tried new technologies, new media and new styles. Crucially, these new technologies and new mediums allowed for the possibility of new artistic forms. For example, when Giotto was painting the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, 1305, his use of fresco (watercolor on wet plaster) as a medium was innovative and modern, and it allowed him to achieve the integrated aesthetic scheme of the painting cycle. Over 500 years later Impressionists like Monet were not only responding to the challenge of photography and its ability to capture an impression of the world, but also using portable easels and the newly invented, industrially processed, readymade tubes of paint to make pictures outside of the studio in the open air.

But, if art has always been modern; does it ever reach a sell-by date? Can it be that what was once modern can cease to be modern? Other art historical periods do not have the same associated problems. So, whilst there may be some disagreement as to the specific dates of the Renaissance, Rococo, Baroque or Neo-Classicism, it can be agreed that they were periods that had beginnings, middles and ends.

Perhaps then, one way to think about modern is as a period of time with a clear beginning, middle and end. Thought about in these terms modern might mean the period of 100 years that began with Manet's painting *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, 1863, which was seen as shocking and rejected from the prestigious Salon of fine art, not only because it was 'badly' painted with rough brushstrokes and inaccurate perspective, but also because it showed a contemporary scene of public nudity. This period is often regarded as ending with Pop Art in the mid 1960s, when art became increasingly difficult to distinguish from everyday consumer objects and the output of the mass media. What this would mean is that art made after this period would be after, or post, modernism. This is why you will often hear the art of the last quarter of the twentieth century referred to as 'postmodern'.



10

However, such neat slicing up of the history of art is problematic. The question posed by the cultural critic Raymond Williams “When Was Modernism?” is a tricky one. On the one hand, art seems to lag behind modernism in other fields. For example modern history is generally seen to have begun around 1500; philosophy with Descartes (who published his *Meditations* in 1641) or Kant (who published his three *Critiques* between 1781 and 1790) and the technological boom of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century is also seen as an origin of modernity. On the other hand, art historians squabble as to where Modernism began; perhaps with the Renaissance when artists began to be recognised as ‘geniuses’ with their own distinct styles, or perhaps with the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1863 and the exhibition of art refused by the academic institutions. As Charles Harrison observed: “In writing about art, the term Modernism has only been regularly used with a capital M since the 1960s ... Before the ‘60s the term ‘Modernism’ was generally used in a vague way, to refer to what it was that made works of art seem ‘contemporary’ whatever that meant.”²

(ii) How is Modernism?

Another way of thinking about what modern means in art is to think of it as an attitude to making. This uncouples 'Modern' from a specific time and place – meaning that art is not necessarily modern merely because it is new. It would also mean that examples from history could be identified as modern in their outlook, such as El Greco, the seventeenth-century painter whom Picasso claimed was the originator of Cubism. Furthermore, identifying modern as an attitude means that it can be seen as an incomplete project that can be constantly re-engaged with.

This is probably what Jackson Pollock had in mind when he made this claim for his own modernist art:

My opinion is that new art needs new techniques. And the modern artists have found new means of making their statements. It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age of the aeroplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique.³

Just as the times change, so too must art. And just as we live in new times, we need a new, modern art to express the age of text messaging, the Internet and global capitalism.

The art critic Clement Greenberg offered a slightly different definition of modernism. He claimed that modernist art was art that was *about art*. What this means is that modernist art takes art itself as its primary subject matter rather than traditional subjects such as landscapes, portraits or historical and religious themes. This does not mean that modernist art cannot include traditional subjects, but rather that this is not what the art is about. Look, for example, at the William Scott painting *Jug*. The subject matter is a jug and a bowl. Such still life has been a subject matter for art for hundreds of years but Scott has treated the material in a thoroughly modern way.

(iii) Defining Modernism

The definition of modernist art that emerges is thus: that it provides a meaningful expression of, and gives artistic and aesthetic form to three things: (i) the specific time and place where it was made, (ii) the medium that it is made of, and (iii) how it was made. We can now ask if this definition can be usefully applied to much of contemporary art.

3 - when, what and how is contemporary art?

(i) Contemporary – Whatever That Means

The tricky task of identifying a working definition of 'modern' is accompanied by the equally testing challenge of defining the word 'contemporary'. Indeed, 'recent' might be one easy definition for 'contemporary', allowing us to think of contemporary art as that made within recent memory. Another closely related and very straightforward meaning of 'contemporary', and one that is entirely true to the linguistic sources of the word, is 'with the times' (from the Latin 'con', meaning 'with', plus 'temp' meaning 'time'). As such, to be contemporary is to be alert to the conditions of a particular moment in time, to be moving with the tides of living history. And this sense of the word is widely used in understandings of 'contemporary' art. Back in the 1980s, for instance, curators at the Tate Gallery in London decided that the "art of the past ten years, on a rolling basis", would provide a suitable set of parameters as they made plans to develop a new 'Museum of Contemporary Art'.⁴ 'Contemporary' art in this regard, comes pretty close to 'modern' art – particularly, perhaps, to Jackson Pollock's claim that the art of "each age" should find "its own technique".

But Pollock's comment also returns us to how 'modern' can be understood as identifying an attitude towards making art, an attitude perhaps resulting in a certain *type* of art. Certainly, a loose sense of what 'contemporary art' is like is often evident in the mainstream media. Coverage of exhibitions such as the annual Turner Prize show, for instance, will often be based on hostile presumptions about the prevailing tendencies in art today, with artists regularly being characterised as pranksters or self-promoting provocateurs rather than masters of a recognisable medium. However accurate such pictures are, it is of course essential to remember the vital role played not just by the media but also by the art market in manufacturing particular versions of a contemporary art 'world' (as has always been the case throughout the history of art), with certain forms of art reaching prominence as a result of their marketability.

But cast an eye over art magazines such as *Artforum* and *Frieze* – expensive colour publications packed with ads promoting the interests of the commercial art scene – and the difficulty of finding stable commonalities across what is celebrated is quite apparent. Such magazines will often introduce us to much that is overtly 'edgy': radical performance art that claims to question moral norms, for instance; or varieties of activist art that propose creative models of political resistance; or versions of installation and conceptual art that confuse us as to what, and often where, the 'art' actually is. All seem to sit comfortably side-by-side in such publications. Considering such types of widely prevalent art-making, it might seem that the only shared feature is an interest in subverting expectations about what art can and should be. Such tendencies would, of course, be true to a legacy of avant-gardism in the arts, and in our effort to capture something of what is 'contemporary' in art we could choose to prioritise the continuation of a kind of rule-breaking spirit.

Yet, many celebrated contemporary art practices frustrate this view. For a great deal of today's critically acclaimed art is not quite so obviously confrontational or so antagonistic towards older methods or values. If, for example, a great deal of recent art shows hostility towards principles of aesthetic refinement in art, there remains a significant strain of art, highly regarded by 'contemporary' critics, curators and collectors, that is concerned with retrieving, or positively re-imagining, seemingly outdated notions such as craft and beauty. The paintings of William McKeown for instance, make a sophisticated and unorthodox case for beauty in art today, hinting to us that this idea is essential as a way of freeing, and at the same time grounding, our imaginations. Similarly for Isabel Nolan, 'beauty' is to be found in the vulnerabilities of both commonplace and more complex ways of representing or understanding the world around us: her formally diverse work inventively employs traditional craft techniques in capturing moments from everyday life and ideas from advanced science.



Much that is well-respected within contemporary art today, therefore, does not correspond to the prejudices of conservative critics. Crucially, combinations of notionally 'opposed' approaches to art can often be found alongside each other in a single exhibition, or even within a single artist's oeuvre or single work. Indeed, commentators on contemporary art have often stressed the diversity of possibilities in art today – and definitions and descriptions of contemporary art will often stress the unregulated openness of this 'industry', acknowledging its resistance to definition and description. As Linda Weintraub has written, "contemporary art embraces the maverick and the traditionalist ... no topic, no medium, no process, no intention, no professional protocols, and no aesthetic principles are exempt from the field of art".⁵

Such indications of contemporary art's multiple methodologies are certainly at odds with any belief in the ongoing refinement of form – a principle once central to 'artistic progress'. For the philosopher and critic Arthur Danto, the innovations of art after the 'modernist' era have therefore brought about, in effect, an 'end' of art. This does not mean, he argues, an end of people making art, but rather an end of a particular way of understanding art that focused on the constraints of certain disciplines and mediums. Since pop art, Danto suggests, "There is no special way works of art have to be".⁶ It is this plurality of possibilities which most obviously gives us clues as to what contemporary art 'is' today. Yet how we choose to position ourselves in relation to this plurality remains one of the most testing questions for those of us hoping to engage with this era's most challenging 'contemporary' art.

14



(ii) Themes in Contemporary Art

Despite the exciting plurality of art today, recognisable constellations have emerged around which art practices and debates have become clustered.

a) Participation

Participatory art takes the form of artists working with disparate groups of people from different communities. This is not only a way of generating works of art, but is also part of the work itself. Here are three examples: *Untitled 1992 (Free)* a working kitchen in a New York gallery set up by artist Rirkrit Tiravanija; *Tenantspin*, 1999, a TV channel for the elderly residents of a Liverpool housing estate set up by art collective Superflex; and *Pimp my Irish Banger*, 2009, a collaborative art project in which artist Terry Blake worked with young people from Dublin to paint car doors and bonnets that were later displayed in a outdoor space at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. The art historian Claire Bishop has identified this trend within contemporary art as a 'Social Turn', arguing that the while models of participatory art vary enormously "all are linked by a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas".⁷ These are forms of art that ask questions about who is involved in the making *and experience of* art.

b) Site/place

Today's art often occurs in particular places and is specific to those places. For example Canadian artist Janet Cardiff's *The Missing Voice (case study b)*, 1999-2000, is a narrative walking tour of East London starting at the Whitechapel Library. Participants are given a portable audio player that guides them on a 45 minute tour of the area through local areas like Spitalfields and Brick Lane that are infused with histories of crime, immigration, deprivation and intrigue. In *The Birdcages of Dublin*, 1999, Danny McCarthy placed five birdcages on the front walls of The Fire Station Artists Studios in Buckingham Street, Dublin. Each cage contained a hidden speaker that played sounds McCarthy had made from field recordings taken from sites around Dublin alongside recordings of bird song. Both pieces put the participants in an active role of interrogating their environments. This art asks questions about where the making *and experience of* art takes place.

c) Cinematic

Many contemporary artists are interested in the moving image. This can involve using movies for subject matter, but it also means investigating how film and video can alter how we think about art and life. Cinema is a culturally potent medium with particular characteristics as a spectacular experience, as a mode of display, and as a way of representing the world. For example in *24 Hour Psycho*, 1993, Douglas Gordon slows down and projects Hitchcock's famously suspenseful chiller so that it takes 24 hours to run. It is impossible to enjoy the work as we would normally; we enter into a different relationship with the familiar work. Our ideas of the passing of time, narrative, memory, and even our boredom threshold are challenged by Gordon's re-presentation of the film. Comparatively, a work such as *Twelve Angry Films* by Jesse Jones, 2006, brings out an aspect of 'participation' in film culture, but through a process of collaborative production (working with community groups) and by creating a dedicated public space for screenings in the form of a drive-in cinema. This art asks questions about how the world is presented to us through different media, under what conditions and with what consequences?

d) Medium

Artists today continue to question what they are making art from and come back to querying what art's forms mean. In *Box (ahhahreturnabout)*, 1977, James Coleman presented a 16mm film on a continuous loop with an accompanying soundtrack. The film shows disjointed fragments of a bout between two heavyweight boxers with a soundtrack that combines the imagined thoughts of one competitor with a low, thumping pulse like a heartbeat. It is a disorientating, profoundly physical experience. The grainy and obscure flicker of the film, when coupled with the jarring jump cuts, becomes part of the meaning of the work. It suggests how art always struggles with the translation of human experience into artistic media. Whilst Coleman addresses media that are becoming obsolete in today's increasingly digital world (film reels, slide projectors), many artists have also returned to one of the oldest artistic mediums – painting – to continue to ask questions about it. Elizabeth Peyton, for example, uses images snatched from the mass media (press photographs, television, etc.) The images are used in such a way that you would never mistake the pictures for photographs; instead they encourage you to think about what it means to put wet paint on a surface and move it around. This art asks questions about what is employed in the making *and experience of art*.



image: dorothy cross,
Parachute, Frith Street Gallery, London, 2005.

conclusion

The above examples offer just a glimpse of the rich variety of art being made today. It can take many forms, address many audiences and raise many questions. It can often be baffling, infuriating and inscrutable. There is more art now than there has ever been, and in a greater variety. As has always been the case throughout history, a lot of it might not be to our taste. But the best art, be it from the distant past, the modern age or our contemporary times, opens up new worlds for us; new worlds of thought, of expression and feeling, new worlds of poetic and political possibility. Art in the contemporary world is art of this world: it can be by turns richly distracting and frustrating, thrilling and testing; it is full of communicative difficulties and new possibilities; it brings the challenging effects of today's reality home to us in all their vivid strangeness. It tells us how soon *now* really is.

- 1 Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, p. 25.
- 2 Charles Harrison, *Introduction: Modernism, Problems and Methods*, The Open University Press, 1983, p. 15
- 3 Jackson Pollock in an interview with William Wright, (1950), in Johnson, Ellen H., ed., *American Artists on Art from 1940 to 1980*, Harper & Row, 1982.
- 4 See Tate Glossary, www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary
- 5 Linda Weintraub, *Making Contemporary Art: How Today's Artists Think and Work*, Thames & Hudson, 2003, p. 8.
- 6 Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 47.
- 7 Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn', in Francis Halsall et al., *Rediscovering Aesthetics*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 239.

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19

declan long

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modern &
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**ABSTRACT
EXPRESSIONISM**

American abstract art movement in the 1940s and 1950s which emphasised a non-figurative, emotionally engaged approach. Predominantly New York-based, it included artists such as Jackson Pollock and Willem De Kooning.

ABSTRACT ART

Artwork that is non-figurative, non-representational and which is concerned with the physical properties of the medium rather than the representation of subject matter.

ALTERMODERN

A term coined by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud to describe arts practice in the twenty first century which is concerned with globalised culture and communication and which is realised through social and technological networks.

ART FAIR

An event, usually held annually, to network, showcase, market and sell art. Art Fairs have become an important mechanism in the art market for Modern and Contemporary Art. Notable examples include Frieze, ARCO and ArtBasel.

ART MUSEUM

A venue for the collection, preservation, study, interpretation and display of significant cultural objects and artworks.

ARTIST-LED INITIATIVES

Projects or organisations, such as studios or galleries, set up and run by artists, often on a collective or co-operative basis.

AVANT-GARDE

French for advance guard or 'vanguard', a military term to describe an advance army group. The term is used to describe innovative, experimental or cutting edge artists and practitioners.

BAUHAUS

An influential school of art, architecture and design founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar Germany in 1919. Influenced by Constructivism and De Stijl, the Bauhaus style, associated with the International Style, emphasised practicality, harmony between function and design, and lack of ornamentation.

BIENNIAL

A large-scale exhibition of international Contemporary Art hosted by many cities every two years. The Venice Biennale was the forerunner of what is now a growing trend in exhibiting Contemporary Art.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

The technical term for motion picture photography, which involves the manipulation of the film in the camera, the arrangement of lighting and the printing of the film.

COLLECTOR

Someone who acquires artworks based on personal taste or for investment purposes. Many collectors donate or loan their collections to museums and galleries.

CONCEPTUAL ART

Originating in the 1960s, Conceptual Art pushed arts practice beyond the conventional limits of the art object, placing an emphasis on the idea or concept rather than a tangible art object. The ideas and methodologies of Conceptual Art inform much contemporary art practice.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

An abstract art movement founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia around 1915, which embraced developments in modern technology and industrialisation.

CONTEMPORARY

Refers to the present or recent past.

CONTEMPORARY ART

Refers to current and very recent art practice. Attributed to the period from the 1970s to the present, it also refers to works of art made by living artists. Contemporary Art can be driven by both theory and ideas, and is also characterised by a blurring of the distinction between art and other categories of cultural experience, such as television, cinema, mass media, entertainment and digital technology.

CRITICAL THEORY

A range of theories, drawn mainly from the social sciences and humanities, and associated with the Frankfurt School, which adopt a critical approach to understanding society and culture.

CUBISM

An early twentieth-century movement led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque which focused on the physical qualities of painting rather than the subject matter. It is characterised by the breaking up of the picture plane, merging of figure and ground, the adoption of multiple viewpoints, and simplification of form into geometric shapes. It is considered to be the forerunner of Abstract Art.

CURATOR

A person who makes decisions with regard to the selection, acquisition, display and storage of artworks. A curator may be independent or freelance, or may be affiliated to a museum or gallery. The curator of Contemporary Art is concerned with display, research and preservation, but is also interested in experimentation and innovation.

DADA

An anti-establishment and anti-war art movement founded in 1916 which used abstraction, nonsense texts and absurd performances to protest against the social and political conditions prevailing in Europe during World War I. Associated with the work of Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp and Marcel Duchamp.

DE STIJL

Meaning style in Dutch, an art movement founded in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian which emphasised abstraction and purity of form

and design. Also known as neoplasticism, De Stijl influenced subsequent developments in art, architecture and design.

DEALER

An art dealer represents an artist, promoting the artist's work and negotiating opportunities for the exhibition and/or sale of the artist's work.

DER BLAU REITER

A German expressionist art movement from 1911-1914 which involved Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc.

DIDACTIC

To adopt an approach which conveys a message, knowledge or information.

DIE BRÜCKE

A movement of avant-garde German Expressionist artists formed in 1905, including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde, who rejected the constraints of the prevalent academic style in favour of a more expressive approach to painting.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Electronic data storage and transmission technology that enables immense amounts of information to be compressed on small storage devices, such as computers and telephones, that can easily be preserved, retrieved and transported.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART

A form of art practice which emerged in the 1960s in response to growing concerns about environmental and ecological issues. Tra-

ditionally associated with site-specific and installation practice, contemporary Environmental Art encompasses a broad range of media and methodologies.

EXPRESSIONISM

A form of artistic practice which emphasises the expression of feelings rather than the depiction of reality. Colour, form and the application of paint are employed to convey the artist's feelings. Most notably associated with a number of avant-garde German artists involved in Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter in the early twentieth century.

FAUVISM

From the French 'Fauvre' meaning wild beasts, a post-impressionist movement in the early twentieth century which placed an emphasis on colour and brushwork rather than pictorial representation. Considered a precursor of abstraction.

FEMINISM

A social, political, intellectual and philosophical movement advocating equal rights and representation for women in all aspects of society.

FILM

The medium used for the creation of still or moving images. The term is also used to describe a motion picture which is a sequence of images projected onto a screen, collectively referred to as cinema. In Contemporary Art, film is referred to as an art form.

FLUXUS

An international, avant-garde, art movement in the 1960s which included artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians creating experimental, multi-media work in film, video and performance informed by social and political activism.

FORMALISM

Emphasises the formal elements of an artwork such as the materials and qualities of the work, colour, line, form, etc. External, contextual elements are not considered relevant.

FUTURISM

Early twentieth-century movement which originated in Italy and embraced all things modern, including technology, speed, industrialisation and mechanisation. It also embraced violence and nationalism and was associated with Italian Fascism.

GALLERY

An internal space or series of spaces dedicated to the exhibition of artworks.

HYBRID

Something of mixed origin or composition.

IMPRESSIONISM

An art movement originating in France in the 1860s which experimented with colour and painting outdoors in the depiction of landscape and everyday life.

INSTALLATION

An art work made for a specific site or location which engages with its context and audience.

INTERNATIONAL STYLE

A style of architectural design, named after an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932 featuring the work of architects associated with the Modern Movement. The International Style was characterised by simplicity of form, lack of ornamentation and use of industrial materials, and is also associated with the Bauhaus.

LAND ART

A US art movement from the 1960s which emerged out of environmental and ecological concerns and the perceived limitations of the conventional art object or sculpture to respond to these concerns. Artworks were created within the landscape, often using the materials of the landscape.

MINIMALISM

An abstract art movement developed in the US in the 1960s which emphasised the use of simple, geometric forms and modern materials drawn from industry. It was an extension of abstraction focusing on the properties of the materials used but also a rejection of the ideology and discourse of Abstract Expressionism.

MODERN

Generally refers to the present or the contemporary, it is associated with the period of Modernism from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth

century. Modern can also be used to describe the period since the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century or the Renaissance in the fifteenth century.

MODERN ART

Refers to art theory and practice from the 1860s to the late 1960s and is defined in terms of a linear progression of styles, periods and schools, such as Impressionism, Cubism and Abstract Expressionism.

NEW MEDIA

A range of materials and technologies developed relatively recently and utilised in the creation, presentation and dissemination of New Media Art.

NEW MEDIA ART

Artwork created using new media, such as film, video, lens-based media, digital technology, hypertext, cyberspace, audio technology, CD-ROMs, webcams, surveillance technology, wireless telephones, GPS systems, computer and video games and biotechnology.

PARTICIPATORY ART

Places the emphasis on the input and active reception of the audience for the physical or conceptual realisation of the work.

PERFORMANCE ART

Involves an artist undertaking an action or actions where the artist's body is the medium. Performance art evolved in the late 1950s and is closely associated with video art as this was the primary means of recording this ephemeral art form.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The process of recording an image, a photograph, on light-sensitive film or, in the case of digital photography, via a digital electronic or magnetic memory.

POP ART

An art movement which developed in the UK and US in the 1950s which drew on aspects of popular culture and entertainment as subject matter.

POSTCOLONIALISM

An intellectual discourse of the late twentieth century drawing on theories from literature, film, philosophy and social and political science, concerned with the cultural legacy of colonialism in terms of national and cultural identity, race and ethnicity.

POSTMODERNISM

A social, cultural and intellectual movement characterised by a rejection of notions of linear progression, grand totalising narratives and critical consensus associated with Modernism. Characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, multiple narratives, fragmentation, relativity, contingency and irony.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

A theoretical paradigm for understanding human behaviour, and a form of intensive psychotherapeutic treatment in which free association, dream interpretation and consideration of resistance and transference are used to resolve psychological problems. Developed by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth

century, there are many strands of psychoanalytic theory, including Object Relations Theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

PUBLIC ART

Artwork located outside the museum or gallery, usually sited in a public space and supported by public funding.

RENAISSANCE

A French word for rebirth, the Renaissance was a cultural movement originating in Italy in the late fourteenth century, prompted by the revival of ancient classical sources. Extending until the sixteenth century the movement spread throughout Italy and Europe affecting all aspects of social, political and cultural life. Characterised by the adoption of a humanist approach, Renaissance artists placed an emphasis on naturalism and the use of linear perspective.

RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

Term coined by the French curator Nicholas Bourriaud in his book of the same name published in 1998. He describes a set of art practices which place an emphasis on the social context in which the work is created and/or presented, and on the role of the artist as facilitator, where art is information exchanged between the artist and viewer. He calls examples of this practice Relational Art.

SITE SPECIFIC

Artwork that is created with the intention of being located in a specific site or

context, wherein removal from that site or context would change the meaning of the artwork. Often associated with Installation Art.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED

Art practice which is created and realised through engagement, collaboration and/or participation between an artist or artists and a specific social constituency, such as a youth group.

SURREALISM

An anti-establishment, literary and visual art movement founded in 1924 by Andre Breton and influenced by Dada, psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious.

VIDEO ART

Artwork created using a video recording device. Video Art emerged as an art form in the 1960s and 1970s due to the development of new technology, and it is a prevalent medium in Contemporary Art practice.

modern & contemporary art: general resources

The following is a select list of resources. A more detailed list can be found on IMMA's website
www.imma.ie

Information Websites

Intute

Online service providing information about web resources for education and research.

www.intute.ac.uk

STOT

Platform providing online links relating to Contemporary Art.

www.stot.org

Artcyclopedia

Internet encyclopedia on art and artists.

www.artcyclopedia.com

The Artists

Database of modern and contemporary artists.

www.the-artists.org

Museums and Galleries

International Museums and Galleries

Art Institute of Chicago

www.artic.edu

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Victoria

www.accaonline.org.au

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

www.balticmill.com

Centres Georges

Pompidou, Paris

www.cnac-gp.fr

Dia Art Foundation,

New York

www.diacentre.org

Guggenheim Museum,

Bilbao

www.guggenheim-bilbao.es

ICA

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

www.ica.org.uk

Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

www.kw-berlin.de

Maxxi, Rome

www.maxxi.parc.benicul-turali.it/english/museo.htm

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

www.metmuseum.org

Moderna Museet,

Stockholm

www.modernamuseet.se

MOMA

Museum of Modern Art, New York

www.moma.org

Mori Art Museum, Japan

www.mori.art.museum/eng

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

www.mcachicago.org

Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Finland

www.kiasma.fi

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

www.moca.org

Musee d'Orsay, Paris

www.musee-orsay.fr

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

www.mca.com.au

New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York

www.newmuseum.org

Reina Sofia, Madrid

www.museoreinasofia.es

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

www.sfmoma.org

Saatchi Gallery, London

www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk

Serpentine Gallery, London

www.serpentinegallery.org

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

www.guggenheim.org

Stedelijk Museum,

Amsterdam

www.stedelijk.nl

Tate Modern, London

www.tate.org.uk

Whitechapel Gallery,

London

www.whitechapel.org

White Cube, London

www.whitecube.com

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

www.whitney.org

Witte de With, Rotterdam

www.wdw.nl

Irish Museums and Galleries

Butler Gallery, Kilkenny

www.butlertgallery.com

Catalyst Arts Gallery,

Belfast

www.catalystarts.org.uk

Context Gallery, Derry

www.contextgallery.co.uk

Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork
www.crawfordartgallery.com

Cross Gallery, Dublin
www.crossgallery.ie

Dock Arts Centre, Carrick on Shannon
www.thedock.ie

Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin
www.douglashydegallery.com

Draiocht, Dublin
www.draiocht.ie

Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane
www.hughlane.ie

Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin
www.farmleighgallery.ie

Fenton Gallery, Cork
www.artireland.net/system/

Four, Dublin
www.fourdublin.com

Gallery of Photography, Dublin
www.galleryofphotography.ie

Galway Arts Centre
www.galwayartscentre.ie

Green On Red Gallery, Dublin
www.greenonredgallery.com

Hallward Gallery, Dublin
www.hallwardgallery.com

Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda
www.highlanes.ie

Irish Museums Association
www.irishmuseums.org

IMMA
Irish Museum of Modern Art
www.imma.ie

Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
www.kerlin.ie

Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin
www.kevinkavanaghgallery.ie

Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork
www.glucksman.org

Limerick City Gallery of Art
www.limerickcitygallery.ie

Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo
www.modelart.ie

Mother's Tankstation, Dublin
www.mothersankstation.com

Pallas Contemporary Projects, Dublin
www.pallasprojects.org

Project Arts Centre, Dublin
www.projectartscentre.ie

RHA
The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin
www.royalhibernianacademy.com

Rubicon Gallery, Dublin
www.rubicongallery.ie

Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, Dublin
www.templebargallery.com

Taylor Galleries, Dublin
www.taylorgalleries.ie

Biennials and Art Fairs

Documenta, Kassel
www.documenta.de

ev+a, Limerick
www.eva.ie

Freize Art Fair, London
www.freizeartfair.com

Istanbul Biennial
www.iksv.org/bienall1

Liverpool Biennial
www.biennial.com/

Manifesta, European Biennale of Contemporary Art
www.manifesta.org

Moscow Biennale
www.2nd.moscowbiennale.ru

Bienal de São Paulo
www.bienalsaopaulo.globo.com

Shanghai Biennale
www.shanghaibiennale.com

Skulptur Projekte Münster
www.skulptur-projekte.de

Venice Biennale
www.labiennale.org

Journals and Magazines

Art Forum Magazine
www.artforum.com

Art Monthly
www.artmonthly.co.uk

Art Newspaper
www.theartnewspaper.com

Art Review
www.artreview.com

Circa Art Magazine
www.recirca.com

Contemporary
www.contemporary-magazines.com

Critical Inquiry
www.criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu

E-flux
www.e-flux.com/journal

Flash Art
www.flashartonline.com

Frieze Art Journal
www.frieze.com

The International Journal of Cultural Policy
www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/10286632.asp

Irish Arts Review
www.irishartsreview.com

Journal of Visual Culture
www.sagepub.com/journals/titles/09528822.asp

Modern Painters
www.modernpainters.co.uk

Printed Project
www.visualartists.ie

Third Text
www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09528822.asp

The Visual Artists New Sheet
www.visualartists.ie

The Vacuum
www.thevacuum.org.uk

Variant
www.variant.randomstate.org

what is series 1?

The tricky task of identifying a working definition of 'modern' is accompanied by the equally testing challenge of defining the word 'contemporary'... As such, to be contemporary is to be alert to the conditions of a particular moment in time, to be moving with the tides of living history.

Francis Halsall and Declan Long

What is Modern Art and Contemporary Art? is the first in a series of talks and booklets which aim to provide a general introduction to key concepts and themes in Contemporary Art. *What is Modern Art and Contemporary Art?* provides a brief overview of Modern and Contemporary Art, identifying some of the challenges that arise when attempting to define this complex and contested sphere of theory and practice. This is accompanied by an essay by **Francis Halsall and Declan Long**, titled *How soon was now? What is Modern and Contemporary Art?*

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