WHAT IS
Modern and Contemporary Art?
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.

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.
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 coordinators 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 Espírito 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.
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 BLAUE 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 re-location outside the parameters of the museum or gallery space, contributed to the development of SITE SPECIFIC, INSTALLATION, SOCIALY 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.

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 collaborative 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.

For bibliography and further reading see page 20.

Lisa Moran, Curator
Education and Community Programmes

Sophie Byrne, Assistant Curator
Talks and Lectures Programme

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 Bay 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 Nicolas 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.

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’.

Francis Halsall & Declan Long

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

(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’. This ‘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.
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.

(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 an 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 while the 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 (ahhareturnabout), 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.
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.

Contemporary Art: bibliography and Further Reading


ArT MuSEuM

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 cooperative 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.

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.
which emphasised abstraction in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg 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.

A curator of Contemporary Art is concerned with display, research and protection, but is also involved in experimentation and innovation.

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 may be affiliated to a museum or gallery.

A curator of Contemporary Art is concerned with display, research and protection, but is also involved in experimentation and innovation.

DADA
An anti-establishment and anti-war art movement founded in 1916 which used abstraction, nonsense texts and absurd performances, and the use of simple, geometric shapes. It is associated with the Bauhaus.

DE STIJL
Meaning style in Dutch, De Stijl art movement from 1916-1943. Artists formed in 1918, including 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. Traditionally 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 Die Blaue Reiter in the early twentieth century.

FAUVISM
From the French ‘Fauve’ meaning wild beast, 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.

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
A broad term applied to a range of arts practice which involves the installation or configuration of objects in a space, where the totality of the objects and the space comprise the artwork.

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 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 1960s and is closely associated with Video Art as this was the primary means of recording this ephemeral art form.
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 Nicolas Bourriaud describes a set of art practices which place an emphasis on the social context in which the artwork 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, Land Art and Public Art.

SOCIALLY ENGAGED
Art practice which is informed by a social agenda and 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 André 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

Artyencyclopedia
Internet encyclopedia on art and artists.
www.artyencyclopedia.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.accqaonline.org.au

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead
www.balticmill.com

Centres Georges Pompidou, Paris
www.cnap.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.parcculturali.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/en

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
www.mca-chicago.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.wdwa.nl

Irish Museums and Galleries

Butler Gallery, Kilkenny
www.butlergallery.com

Catalyst Arts Gallery, Belfast
www.catalystarts.org.uk

Context Gallery, Derry
www.contextgallery.co.uk
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 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?