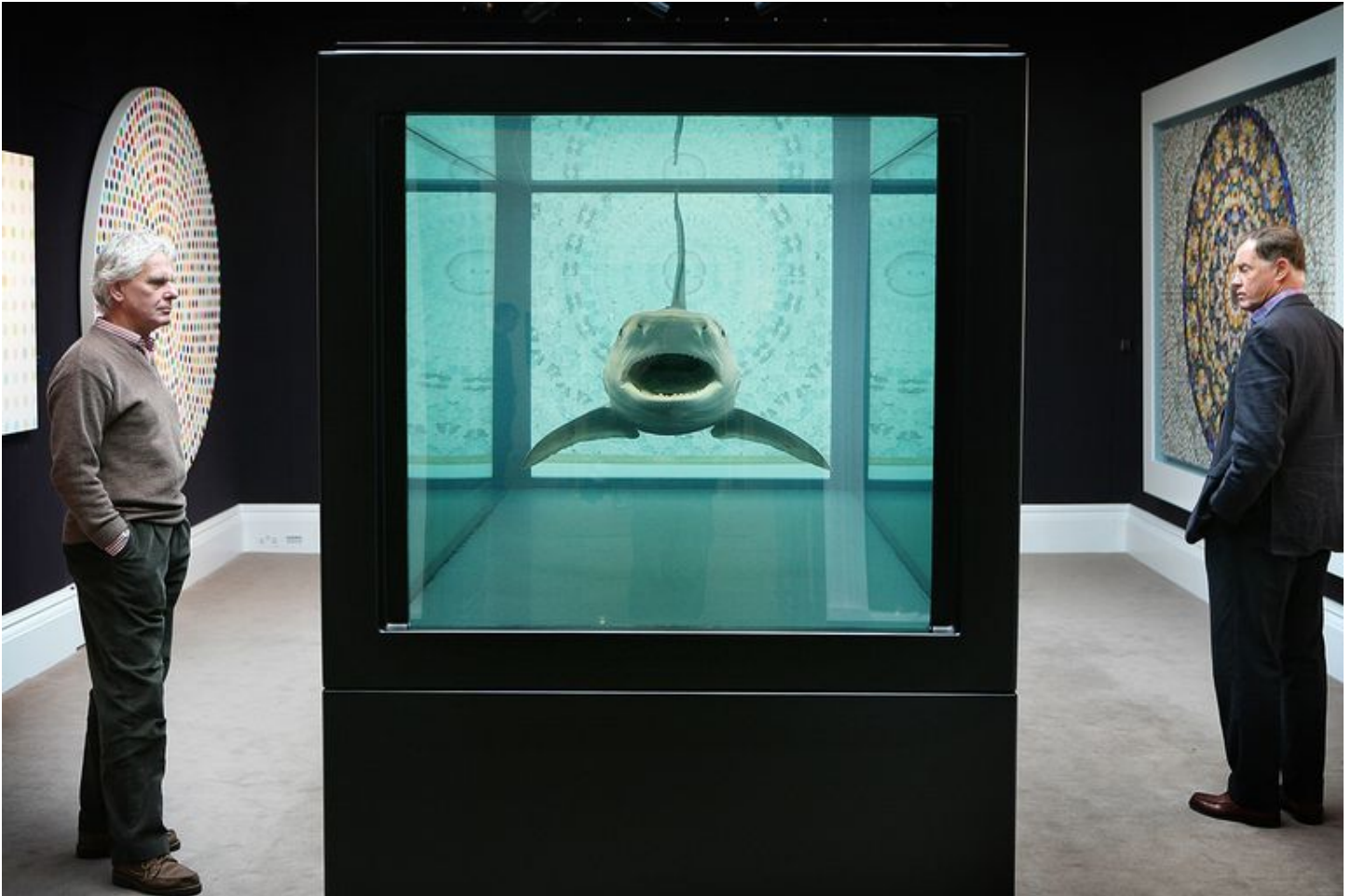


# What Is Contemporary Art?

The category is defined by globalism, cultural diversity, and technology



Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

There is a general answer to the question "What is Contemporary Art?" but there also is a more specific response.

The general answer is disarmingly simple: Contemporary [Art](#) is "art that has been and continues to be created during our lifetimes." In other words, it is contemporary to us.

The problem with that answer, of course, is "contemporary" can vary with the age of the person. If you are 96 years old, there is a certain

amount of overlap between "Contemporary" and "Modern" art in your lifetime—hence the need for a specific response.

# Contemporary Art Vs. Modern Art

Here are two good rules of thumb to distinguish between the two:

- **Modern Art** is art from the **Impressionists** (say, around 1880) up until the 1960s or '70s.
- **Contemporary Art** is art from the 1960s or '70s up until this very minute.

1970 is the cutoff point for two reasons. First, it was around 1970 that the terms "Postmodern" and "Postmodernism" popped up, meaning that the art world had had its fill of Modern Art and something new and substantially different had arrived.

The other reason is that 1970 seems to mark the end of easily classified artistic movements. If you compare an outline of Modern Art with an outline of Contemporary Art, you'll notice that there are many more entries on the former page, despite the fact that Contemporary Art enjoys far more working artists making far more art. That's possibly because contemporary artists are mostly working on "movements" that cannot be readily classified.

While classification can be difficult, Contemporary Art collectively is much more socially conscious than any previous era in art has been. A lot of art from the past 30 years has been connected with one contemporary issue or another: **feminism**, multiculturalism, globalization, bioengineering, and **AIDS** awareness, for example.

Modern Art, on the other hand, has been defined as the point at which artists first felt free to:

- trust their inner visions
- express those visions in their work
- use real-life (social issues and images from modern life) as a source of subject matter
- experiment and innovate as often as possible

Continued.....

# Hallmarks of the Two Art Eras

There are other hallmarks of these two linked categories. Modern Art has been described as art in which traditions have been cast aside and replaced by experimentation. [The Museum of Modern Art](#) traces Modern Art to the Industrial Revolution, which lasted from the 18th to the 19th century and spawned changes in manufacturing, transportation, and technology that profoundly affected the social, economic, and cultural conditions of life in Western Europe, North America, and eventually the world.

Contemporary Art, on the other hand, has been described as a reaction to modern art, reflecting a society that prizes globalism, cultural diversity, and technology. [My Modern Met](#) says contemporary art is thought to have begun with Pop Art, pioneered by artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein and defined by its interest in portraying mass culture.