

# Contemporary Art

Postmodernist Visual Arts (1970-present).

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Joanne Gair's illusionist nude portrait of Demi Moore (Vanity Fair, Aug 1992) Photograph by Annie Leibovitz.

The most famous of all [female nudes](#) in contemporary art, and one of the [greatest 20th century paintings](#).

## Contemporary Art (1970-present)

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Shop Until You Drop (2011)  
Stencil graffiti. London.  
By Banksy.

### **VISUAL ARTS CATEGORIES**

Definitions, forms, styles, genres, periods, see: [Types of Art](#).

## What is Contemporary Art?

No one seems to agree about the exact meaning of contemporary art. Critics, curators and historians define it in varying ways. One of the reasons for the confusion is that "Contemporary Art" is preceded by "[Modern Art](#)", and there is no precise agreement on when "Modern Art" ended.

To make things even more complicated, a third term "[Postmodernist art](#)" is sometimes used as a synonym for "Contemporary Art." Postmodernism denotes the main style-trend after Modernism, but it applies to dozens of other disciplines including architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, design, fashion, and technology, all of which have differing timelines, so it's hard to get a fix on exactly when postmodernism begins. Also, it's not synonymous with contemporary art. The latter refers to an era (a time period) while postmodernism is more of an attitude and style within this period. In due course, postmodernism will be superceded by a newer "-ism" but both will be forms of Contemporary art.



Woman Taking Off Man's Shirt in Two Stages (2003)

By Julian Opie (b.1958), graduate of Goldsmith's College, member of the New British Sculpture movement, and one of the more creative of Britain's postmodernist artists.



Dream Like Love (2005) by Li Wei. Contemporary Chinese artist who combines performance art and photography. Two important forms of [avant-garde art](#).

#### WORLD AUCTION RECORDS

For information about the world's most highly priced works of art and record auction prices, see:

[Top 10 Most Expensive Paintings](#)  
[Top 20 Most Expensive Paintings](#)

## What is a Simple Definition of Contemporary Art?

Skipping the theoretical stuff, there are three main meanings or usages of the terms "Contemporary Art."

- **Art produced after 1945.**

This is the definition adhered to by most museums when defining their collections of contemporary artworks. However, most art historians now consider this to be outdated.

- **Art produced in our era or lifetimes.**

This accords with the definition of "contemporary" used by general historians, but it's too vague for our purposes.

- **Art produced since the 1960s.**

This definition is the one most commonly used by [art critics](#), but disagreement persists as to the exact cut-off date. Is it 1964, for instance, or 1968, or 1969?

## How We Define Contemporary Art

In this article, we take the 1960s as marking the change-over from Modern to Contemporary, although it's true to say that the decade included both types. After all, artists around the world didn't just get up one day and become Post-Modernists! This is why we use 1970 as the cut-off date, because by then the transition was pretty much complete. For more chronological details, please see: [History of Art Timeline](#) (800 BCE - present).

## What Makes Contemporary Art Different from Modern Art?

The answer to this question requires an entire book. We only have a paragraph, so here goes. First, some background. [Renaissance art](#) established the basis for Western art after the Medieval era. Renaissance ideas and rules were disseminated across Europe through various Academies of Fine Arts, such as the Academy of Florence (*Accademia dell'Arte del Disegno*: founded 1562), the Academy of Rome (*Accademia di San Luca*: founded 1583), the [French Academy](#) (*Academie des Beaux-Arts*) the Royal Academy in London (founded 1768) and the later Royal Hibernian Academy and the Royal Ulster Academy of Arts, in Ireland. These academies taught art according to an unvarying set of

canons, which artists had to follow in order to earn a living. By the early 19th century, this academic approach had ceased to be relevant.

## Modern Era

It was Edouard Manet in the early 1860s along with the French Impressionists, whose revolutionary subjective style of painting ushered in the era of Modern Art. This period witnessed a succession of [modern art movements](#) - including Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism and Op-Art, to name but a tiny few. (For more, see [Art Movements & Styles](#).) Nearly all of these styles reflected the political and social trends of the period, such as World War I, the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, World War II, and its post-colonial aftermath. But despite recognizing the increasing fragmentation and lack of meaning within society during this period, "[modern artists](#)" still believed that works of art could provide the answer - art could do what other human institutions couldn't do - and provide the coherence and meaning which had been lost. During the 1960s, however, this optimism among artists began to fade, and it is this loss of optimism which marks the beginning of Postmodernism and the emergence of Contemporary Art.

## Contemporary Era

Post-modernists reject the idea that art can provide meaning. If life is meaningless, they say, fine - let's not pretend that art can do better. Let's just accept that it's nonsense, like everything else, and get on with it. This new Post-Modernist philosophy thus triggered a whole new set of priorities, which were greatly facilitated by the coincident arrival of new technologies, like television, video, and computers. [Contemporary art movements](#) focused on "how" art was created and disseminated, rather than "what" was produced. They emphasized ideas and concepts rather than precious objects and the skills needed to make them. In their attempt to popularize and broaden access to visual art, they introduced (or refined) a series of new art forms, such as Conceptualism, Performance, Happenings, Installation, Earthworks, Projection art, and in the process took full advantage of new media like video, computers and digital technology. It's all a far cry from Claude Monet and his lifelong quest to capture the differing effects of sunlight.

See below: [Questions About Contemporary Visual Art](#)

## What are the Main Contemporary Art Movements?

Here is a short list of selected schools/styles of contemporary art, arranged in rough chronological order. Dates are approximate.

- [Pop Art](#) (1960s onwards)

Although it began as an expression of late modernism, it rapidly developed strong postmodernist tendencies, as well as a new focus on delivery and style. See [Andy Warhol's Pop Art](#), for example.

- [Word Art](#) (1960s onwards)

A type of painting or sculpture centered on word or text-based images. Leading artists associated with this movement include Robert Indiana (b.1928), Jasper Johns (b.1930), On Kawara (1932-2014) and [Christopher Wool](#) (b.1955).

- [Conceptual Art](#) (1960s onwards)

The classic postmodernist art form in which the underlying idea (concept) is considered the essential component. good example of conceptualism was the exhibition entitled "The Specialisation of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilised Pictorial Sensibility" (2009) was held at the Pompidou Centre, in Paris. The show featured nine completely empty rooms.

- [Performance Art](#) (Early 1960s onwards)



A form of avant-garde art based upon a live performance in front of a live audience by the artist, or others. Examples include the mass nudity events staged by Spencer Tunick.

- [Happenings](#) (1960s)

A type of performance art in America, pioneered by [Allan Kaprow](#) (1927-2006). Inspired by Dada and Fluxus, a Happening is a theatrical artistic event. A recent development is the 'Flash Mob'.

- [Fluxus](#) (1960s)

A neo-Dada type of anti-art movement founded by George Maciunas, which first emerged in Germany before making its home in New York. Associated with Happenings and other street 'events.'

- [Installation Art](#) (1960s onwards)

A type of avant-garde art set in a physical space (like a room). By enveloping the spectator, or by intruding into his/her space, this artistic environment enables the artist to convey a message more powerfully. A prototype example is Schwitters' *Merzbau* assemblage, which eventually filled a whole building.

- [Video Art](#) (1960s onwards)

Increasingly popular postmodernist genre whose works may vary from a relatively normal-length piece of film, to a short loop of video containing 10-15 minutes worth of artistic content. Sometimes multiple monitors are used. Video clips are frequently employed as part of larger installations.

- [Minimalism/Minimal Art](#) (1960s onwards)

A category of abstract painting or sculpture marked by extreme simplicity of form, and shorn of all emotional, historical or artistic 'references'. The style is best illustrated by monochrome (or all-black or all-white) paintings; or sculptures, consisting of geometric often industrially-made materials. Important minimalists include [Agnes Martin](#) (1912-2004), noted for pencil grids; and [Ad Reinhardt](#) (1913-67) noted for his black-on-black paintings.

- [Photorealism](#) (1960s, 1970s)

A style of painting or sculpture (also known as Hyperrealism or Superrealism) executed in photographic detail. Photorealist works are often created directly from blown-up photographs. Famous photorealists include [Chuck Close](#), who specialized in huge self-portraits and [Richard Estes](#), noted for his urban window reflections.

- [Land Art](#) (1960s)

A form of wilderness art popularized by [Robert Smithson](#), involving the use of natural raw materials like earth and rocks so as to interact with the landscape and create artistic shapes. Although it began as an idealistic anti-commercial art movement, it rapidly declined once artists discovered that only rich people could afford to visit the earthworks created. For earthworks on a micro scale, see: [ice sculpture](#) and also various forms of [sand art](#).

- [Photography](#) (1960s onwards)

Contemporary camera art is driven mainly by portrait photography (Annie Leibovitz), fashion photography (Helmut Newton), street photography (Garry Winogrand) and documentary photography (Don McCullin).

- [Arte Povera](#) (1966-71)

An anti-commercial style of art - associated with a group of avant-garde artists in Italy, and championed by Enzo Sperone and Germano Celant - which was concerned mostly with the physical qualities of the materials used. Group members included Piero Manzoni, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giuseppe Penone and others.

- [Supports-Surfaces](#) (1966-72)

Conceptualist group of left-wing French artists who exhibited an ultra-minimalist type of 'painting' 1966-72.

- [Contemporary Realism](#) (1970s)

A style of painting which depicts down-to-earth subjects in a naturalistic manner. It embraces all postmodernist painters and sculptors who focus on figurative imagery, in order to portray the "real" rather than the ideal. Exemplified by the figure painting of Lucian Freud.

- [Post-Minimalism](#) (1970s)

Reacting against the arid formalism of Minimal art, post-minimalists typically concentrated on the physical and creative processes involved. The leading exemplar of post-minimalism is [Eva Hesse](#) (1936-70).

- [Feminist Art](#) (1970s)

An art movement involving female artists which addressed specific gender-based issues, such as motherhood, as well as wider issues like racism and employment conditions. Leading figures include Nancy Spero (1926-2009), Miriam Schapiro (1923-2015), [Judy Chicago](#) (b.1939), [Barbara Kruger](#) (b.1945), Joan Jonas (b.1936), Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) and others.

- [New Subjectivity](#) (1970s)

A style of traditional art (anti-abstraction, anti-conceptualism) associated with the participants in "New Subjectivity", an international exhibition in 1976 at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. Artists involved included David Hockney, R.B. Kitaj, Christian Zeimert, Michel Parre, Sam Szafran and others.

- [London School](#) (1970s)

Group of figurative artists associated with London in the mid-1970s. They included Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Howard Hodgkin, Frank Auerbach, and Leon Kossoff.

- [Graffiti Art](#) (1970s)

Popular type of outsider art which first emerged in the New York subway, later spreading to Europe and Japan. Graffiti artists painted with stencils and aerosol spray cans on subway trains, urban walls, roofs and billboards. Leading artists include [David Wojnarowicz](#), Jean-Michel Basquiat, [Keith Haring](#) and Banksy.

- [Neo-Expressionism](#) (1980 onwards)

A broad painting movement, established in opposition to lack-lustre Minimalism, which made use of colour, emotion, symbolism and narrative (that is, everything that Minimalists were trying to eradicate from their own work). In Germany, famous Neo-Expressionists include Georg Baselitz, [Anselm Kiefer](#), and Gerhard Richter. Further afield, exponents include [Robert Morris](#) (b.1931), noted for his 1980s "Firestorm" series (USA).

- [Transavanguardia](#) (Trans-avant-garde) (1979 onwards)

Italian variant of Neo-Expressionism associated with Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Sandro Chia and Mimmo Paladino.

- [Young British Artists](#) (Britart) (1980s)

Group of avant-garde artists supported by millionaire art collector Charles Saatchi, who took contemporary art by storm during the 1980s and 90s. Famous YBAs include Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread, Tracey Emin, Glenn Brown, Sam Taylor-Wood, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Mark Wallinger, Marc Quinn, Steve McQueen, Chris Ofili and others. See also: [Contemporary Irish Artists](#) (21st century) and [20th Century Irish Artists](#) (1900-2000).

- [Deconstructivism](#) (1985-2010)

Visually impressive style of architecture pioneered by Frank O'Gehry, and exemplified by Nationale Nederlanden Building (Prague).

- [Neo-Pop](#) (late-1980s onwards)

A revival of Pop-art forms (recognizable objects, images of celebrities), Neo-Pop also borrowed elements from Dada as well as Conceptualism. Exemplified by the sculptural creations of [Jeff Koons](#), the movement is also associated with works by Ashley Bickerton, Alan McCollum, and Haim Steinbach.

- [Body Art](#) (1990s)

A type of art in which the body becomes the "canvas". Most commonly seen in "performances" by artists like [Marina Abramovic](#), or in contemporary [body painting](#), as exemplified by Joanne Gair's illusionist nude painting of Demi Moore (*Vanity Fair* August 1992). Also includes mime, "living statues", tattoos and [nail art](#) as well as [face painting](#) of various types.

- [Cynical Realism \(China\)](#) (1990s)

A sardonic style of figure painting with a critical attitude towards Chinese authorities post-Tiananmen Square, its leading exponents included Yue Minjun, Fang Lijun and Zhang Xiaogang.

- [Stuckism](#) (1999 onwards)

British art group led by Billy Childish, whose members rejected Conceptualism,

Performance and Installation art, in favour of traditional representational styles of painting and sculpture. Launched the annual art exhibition known as "The Real Turner Prize Show".

- [New Leipzig School](#) (2000 onwards)

Traditional art school specializing in classical realism along the lines of mainstream academic art.

- [Projection Art \(Projection Mapping\)](#) (21st Century)

The computer software assisted art of mapping video imagery onto buildings or other large surfaces.

- [Computer Art](#) (21st Century)

Also known as Digital or Internet art, this category encompasses a wide variety of computer software-related art forms.

## Other Artist Groups

Other minor contemporary art groups, or styles, include:

Appropriation art, Artefactoria, Bad Painting, Bio art, COUM Transmissions, Culture jamming, Electronic art, Equipo Cronica, Fractal art, Froissage, Groupe Zebra, Holographs, Institutional Critique, Kitsch Movement, Late Modernism, Massurrealism, Metamodernism, Neo-conceptual art, Neo-Geo, Neue Slowenische Kunst, OuPeinPo, Pittura Colta, Pluralism, Process Art, Psychedelic art, Relational art, Renewable energy sculpture, Robotic art, Sound art, Tiki art, Vancouver School, Virtual art, and many many more.

## Who are the Top Contemporary Artists?

The period from the mid-1960s to the present day has witnessed a number of talented [postmodernist artists](#), across the genres. Here is a short selection of the most celebrated individuals in various categories of visual arts. Some, like Francis Bacon or Andy Warhol - today's most valuable artists - could be classified as 'modernists' of pre-1970 vintage, but are included here due to their essentially "post-modernist" approach.

### CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS

Include the surrealist [Francis Bacon](#) (1909-92); RB Kitaj (b.1932); the Pop cartoon-style painter [Roy Lichtenstein](#) (1923-97); the Pop artist and screenprinter [Andy Warhol](#) (1928-87); the Pop draughtsman [David Hockney](#) (b.1937); the semi-abstract impastoist and portraitist [Frank Auerbach](#) (b.1931); the figurative artist [Fernando Botero](#) (b.1932); the Neo-Expressionists [Gerhard Richter](#) (b.1932) and [Georg Baselitz](#) (b.1938); the subject painter [Jack Vettriano](#) (b.1951); and the figure painter [Jenny Saville](#) (b.1970). For contemporary abstract works, see [Cy Twombly](#) (1928-2011), famous for his signature style of painting, combining elements of calligraphy and graffiti; [Frank Stella](#) (b.1936) a pioneer of experimental minimalism; and [Sean Scully](#) (b.1945), noted for his large-format abstracts.

### Related Articles

- See also: [Contemporary British Painting](#).
- [20th Century Painters](#) (from Fauvism to Neo-Expressionism)

### CONTEMPORARY SCULPTORS

Include the conceptualist [Sol LeWitt](#) (b.1928); the New Realist [Arman](#) (1928-2005); the minimalists [Donald Judd](#) (1928-1994) and [Carl Andre](#) (b.1935), the large-scale sculptor [Richard Serra](#) (b.1939); the 'feminist' sculptor [Louise Bourgeois](#) (1911-2010); the surrealists [John De Andrea](#) (b.1941) and [Carole](#)

[Feurman](#) (b.1945); the sculptor and installationist [Antony Gormley](#) (b.1950); the monumentalist [Anish Kapoor](#) (b.1954); and the Neo-Pop artist [Jeff Koons](#) (b.1955).

### **Related Articles**

- See also: [How to Appreciate Modern Sculpture](#).
- [20th Century Sculptors](#) (from Cubism to Neo-Pop)

### **CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTS**

Leading figures in late [20th century architecture](#) include: [Frank O. Gehry](#) (b.1929), pioneer of deconstructivism; Daniel Libeskind; the firm Coop Himmelblau, (founded by Wolf Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky and Michael Holzer); Lars Spuybroek, Kas Oosterhuis, Peter Cook and Colin Fournier. Other leading contemporary US architects include: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, John Rauch, Michael Graves, Peter Eisenman, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, Richard Meier, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, and Bernard Tschumi.

### **CONCEPTUALISTS**

Leading exponents of conceptualism include the Nouveau Realiste [Yves Klein](#) (1928-62) - see also: [Yves Klein's Postmodernist art](#) (1956-62); and the postmodernist installation artist and sculptor [Damien Hirst](#) (b.1965).

### **PERFORMANCE ARTISTS**

Include the influential German avant-garde artist [Joseph Beuys](#) (1921-86), whose performances included the avant-garde "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare" (1965); and the postmodernist 'living sculptures' Gilbert Proesch (b.1943) and George Passmore (b.1942), better known as [Gilbert & George](#). More extreme forms of Performance include the genre of body art performed by the Serbian artist Marina Abramovic and the German Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen). Other celebrated performance artists include the avant-garde Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b.1929), known for her happenings; Joan Jonas (b.1936), noted for her performance videos; and the Brazilian experimental artist Helio Oiticica (1937-80), founder of *Grupo Neoconcreto*.

### **CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Postmodernist photographic art is exemplified by the controversial works of [Robert Mapplethorpe](#) (1946-89), [Andreas Gursky](#) (b.1955), and [Cindy Sherman](#) (b.1954). Contemporary portrait photography is best illustrated by the camera work of [Diane Arbus](#) (1923-1971) and [Annie Leibovitz](#) (b.1949). Contemporary fashion photography is exemplified by the works of [Helmut Newton](#) (1920-2004), [David Bailey](#) (b.1938), Mario Testino (b.1954), Patrick Demarchelier (b.1943), Nick Knight (b.1958) and David LaChapelle (b.1963). Contemporary documentary photography is represented by the camera art of [Don McCullin](#) (b.1935), James Nachtwey (b.1948) and [Steve McCurry](#) (b.1950); while street photography is best illustrated by the work of Garry Winogrand (1928-1984), [Ed Ruscha](#) (b.1937) and [Nan Goldin](#) (b.1953). Postmodernist pictorialism is exemplified by the work of [Jeff Wall](#) (b.1946) of the Vancouver School who specializes in "staged photography". See also the compelling b/w architectural photographs of [Bernd/Hilla Becher](#) (1931-2007).

### **INSTALLATION ARTISTS**

The text artist Jenny Holzer (b.1950); multi-media artist [Bruce Nauman](#) (b.1941); performance artist and filmmaker Rebecca Horn (b.1944); French artist Christian Boltanski (b.1944), noted for his installations of photographs; the celebrated YBA [Damien Hirst](#) (b.1965); the artist and curator [Tracey Emin](#)



(b.1963); and [Christo and Jeanne-Claude \(Javacheff\)](#) (b.1935) founders of *empaquetage* art.

## VIDEO ARTISTS

The South Korean multi-monitor artist [Nam June Paik](#) (1932-2006); and Bill Viola (b.1951) noted for his spectacular installations.

## GRAFFITI ARTISTS

Include the stencil artist [Banksy](#) (b.1973) and the former aerosol spray painter [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#) (1960-88).

## COMPUTER ARTISTS

The pioneering exponents of computer art, Harold Cohen (b.1928), John Lansdown (1929-99) and Manfred Mohr (b.1938), as well as Michael Noll (b.1939), Mark Wilson (b.1943), Orlan (b.1947), Gary Hill (b.1951), Christa Sommerer (b.1964), Christophe Bruno (b.1964), Dirk Paesmans (b.1965), Olga Kisseleva (b.1965), Feng Mengbo (b.1966), Laurent Mignonneau (b.1967), Sam Taylor-Wood (b.1967), Joan Heemskerk (b.1968), and Li Wei (b.1970).

## What is the Most Expensive Piece of Contemporary Art?

Measured by auction sales prices, the world's most valuable contemporary work of art is: *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969) by [Francis Bacon](#), which sold at auction at Christie's New York in 2013, for \$142.4 million. In second place is *Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)* (1963), painted by Andy Warhol, which sold at auction (Sotheby's New York) in 2013, for \$105.4 million. In third place is *Orange, Red, Yellow* (1961), by Mark Rothko, which sold for \$86.9 million Christie's New York 2012. In fourth place is *Triptych* (1976), painted by Francis Bacon, which sold in 2008 for \$86.3 million at Sotheby's New York. One of the highest-priced pieces of contemporary "sculpture" is *For the Love of God*, by [Damien Hirst](#). A human skull recreated in platinum and studded with 8,061 diamonds, it sold to a consortium which included the artist and The White Cube Gallery for a reputed £50 million.

## What are the Top 50 Works of Contemporary Art?

Here is a list of the Top 50 works of contemporary or postmodern art (from the late 1960s onwards), as selected by our Editor. They are drawn from a total of eleven categories, including: paintings (15), sculptures (11), architectural design (6), photography (9), installation art (3), earthworks (1), posters (1), body painting (1), graffiti (1), projection art (1), and graphic art (1).

## CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

**"A Bigger Splash"** (1967) Private Collection  
Acrylic Pop-Art painting by David Hockney (b.1937)

**"Mao"** (1973) Art Institute of Chicago.  
Expressionist portrait painting by Andy Warhol (1928-87)

**"Theatre de Gerard Philipe"** (1975) Unterlindenmuseum, Colmar  
Art Informel-style oil painting by Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-92)

**Three Studies for a Self-Portrait** (1979-80) Metropolitan Museum, New York  
Surrealist/expressionist oil painting by Francis Bacon (1909-1992)

**"Cabeza"** (1982) Private Collection



Neo-Expressionist acrylic/crayon painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-88)

**"Apocalypse Now"** (1988) Private Collection

Alkyd and flashe painting on aluminum and steel by Christopher Wool (b.1955)

**"Lot's Wife"** (1989) The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Example of Neo-Expressionist [Holocaust painting](#), by Anselm Kiefer (b.1945)

**"Bedroom at Arles"** (1992) Fitzhugh Farm, Robert/Jane Meyerhoff Collection

Oil and magna painting by Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997)

**"The Singing Butler"** (1992) Private Collection

Figurative oil painting by Jack Vettriano (b.1951)

**"No Woman, No Cry"** (1998) Tate Modern, London

Neo-Expressionist painting by Chris Ofili (b.1968)

**"Dancers at the Bar"** (2001) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Primitive-style oil painting by Fernando Botero (b.1932)

**"Woman Taking off Man's Shirt in two Stages"** (2003) Private Collection

Minimal-style figurative oil painting by Julian Opie (b.1958)

**"1000 Thread Count"** (2004) Gagosian Gallery, New York

Gestural-style oil painting by Cecily Brown (b.1969)

**"Rainbow City"** (2006) Private Collection

Expressionist acrylic painting by Marja Van Kampen (b.1949)

**"The Englands"** (2008) Private Collection

Vivid colourist oil painting by Ashley Hanson (b.1960)

## CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

**"Broken Obelisk"** (1969) Museum of Modern Art, New York

Cor-Ten steel obelisk-style abstract sculpture by Barnett Newman (1905-70)

**"LOVE"** Sculpture (original) (1970) Indianapolis Museum of Art

Cor-ten steel sculpture of the letters L.O.V.E. by Robert Indiana (b.1928)

**"Ice Cream Van"** (1970) Private Collection

Surrealist sculpture of melted ice-cream van by Salvador Dali (1904-89)

**"Model in Repose"** (1981) National Gallery of Modern Art Edinburgh

Superrealist nude figure sculpture by John De Andrea (b.1941)

**"The Time of All"** (1989) Saint Lazare Station, Paris

Assemblage sculpture of clock faces by Arman (1928-2005)

**"Puppy"** (1992) Bilbao Guggenheim Museum

Postmodernist topiary sculpture by Jeff Koons (b.1955)

**"Apple Core"** (1992) Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Gigantic Pop-Art sculpture by Claes Oldenburg (b.1929)

**"Balloon Dogs"** (1994-2000)

Series of 5 mirror-polished stainless steel pop sculptures by Jeff Koons (b.1955)

**"Aspiration"** (1995) The Treasury Building, Dublin

Climbing nude sculpture by Rowan Gillespie (b.1953)

**"Cloud Gate"** (2006) AT&T Plaza at Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois  
Stainless steel public sculpture by Anish Kapoor (b.1954)

**"For the Love of God"** (2007)

Platinum cast of a human skull studded with 8,601 diamonds, including the Skull Star Diamond, created by Damien Hirst (b.1965)

## **CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE**

**Pompidou Centre** (Beaubourg, Paris) (completed 1978)

Cultural centre designed by Renzo Piano (b.1937), Richard Rogers (b.1933)

**Nationale Nederlanden Building, Prague** (1992-97) (aka "Ginger and Fred")

Lead example of Deconstructivism, designed by architect Frank O. Gehry (b.1929)

**"Egyptian" Louvre Pyramid** (1998) Cour Napoleon, Louvre, Paris  
Series of glass and metal pyramids designed by I.M.Pei (b.1917)

**Experience Music Project** (1999-2000) Seattle

Deconstructivist-style music centre designed by Frank O. Gehry (b.1929)

**The London Eye** (2000) South Bank, London (Europe's tallest Ferris wheel)

Cantilevered observation wheel designed by architects Frank Anatole, Nic Bailey, Steve Chilton, Malcolm Cook, Mark Sparrowhawk, and the husband-and-wife team of Julia Barfield and David Marks.

**The Spire of Dublin** (Monument of Light) (2002-3) O'Connell Street, Dublin

400-foot high stainless steel monument designed by Ian Ritchie (b.1947)

## **CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY**

**"Teenage Couple on Hudson Street, New York"** (1963)

Contemporary photographic portrait by Diane Arbus (1923-71)

**"Preening in the Kitchen"** (1977) Museum of Modern Art, New York

Surrealist photographic self-portrait by Cindy Sherman (b.1954)

**"Misty and Jimmy"** (1980)

Contemporary close-up photo of transvestites by Nan Goldin (b.1953)

**Double portrait of John Lennon and Yoko Ono** (1981)

Taken 5 hours before Lennon's murder, by Annie Leibovitz (b.1949)

**"They Are Coming"** (1981)

Matching pair of erotic fashion photographs by Helmut Newton (1920-2004)

**"Afghan Girl"** (1984)

Celebrated colour portrait by Steve McCurry (b.1950)

**"Paris Montparnasse"** (1993)

Architectural photo of Le Corbusier-style apartment block by Andreas Gursky (b.1955)

**"A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)"** (1993)

Postmodernist pictorialism by Jeff Wall (b.1946)

## **"Self Portrait Suspended"** (2004)

Contemporary pictorialist photo by Young British Artist Sam Taylor-Wood (b.1967)

## **INSTALLATIONS**

### **"Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living"** (1991)

Tiger shark installation by Damien Hirst (b.1965)

### **"Field"** (1991)

Sculpture installation created by Antony Gormley (b.1950)

### **"Controller of the Universe"** (2007)

Installation (orchestrated explosion of a cosmic toolbox) by Damian Ortega (b.1967)

## **LAND ART/EARTHWORKS**

### **"Broken Circle"** (1971) Emmen, The Netherlands

Example of Land Art consisting of water, sand and rock, by Robert Smithson (1938-73)

## **CONTEMPORARY POSTER ART**

### **"Tennis Girl"** (1976)

Colour poster of photograph by Martin Elliott (1946-2010)

## **BODY PAINTING**

### **"Demi-Moore's Birthday Suit"** (front cover of *Vanity Fair*, August 1992)

Illusionist portrait by Annie Leibovitz, painted by Joanne Gair.

## **GRAFFITI ART**

### **"Shop Until You Drop"** (2011) Mayfair, London

Stencilled graffiti by Banksy (b.1973)

## **PROJECTION ART**

### **Milan Cathedral Projection Art** (Christmas, 2008) Milan

Projection of Biblical images onto the facade of the cathedral by Paolo Buroni (b.1964)

## **CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC ART**

### **"I shop therefore I am"** (1990)

Iconic photolithographic slogan, by Barbara Kruger (b.1945)

### **"Steve Jobs Head of Apple Quits"** (2011)

Cartoon caricature in acrylic paint and chalk, by Bryant Arnold (b.1970)

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## **What are the Most Famous Prizes for Contemporary Art?**

There are numerous awards given by foundations, museums and government arts bodies for outstanding works of contemporary art, in a wide variety of categories. Here is a short selection. See also: [Art News Headlines](#).

### **Artes Mundi Prize**

Awarded bi-annually at the Artes Mundi Exhibition in Cardiff, Wales, in recognition of emerging artists from around the world whose work comments on the human condition and humanity from different cultural perspectives.

### **Carnegie Art Award**

Annual prize for outstanding contemporary painting by artists born or living in the Nordic countries. Begun in 1998, it offers 3 prizes: of Swedish Krona 1,000,000, 600,000 and 400,000, as well as a scholarship of SEK 100,000 to a young artist. Based on nominations by 30 experts on Nordic contemporary art.

### **Deutsche Borse Photography Prize**

Awarded to a contemporary photographer of any nationality, who has made the most significant contribution to fine art photography in Europe over the previous year. Begun in 1996 by The Photographers' Gallery in London to reward the best of contemporary photography. Prize money is £30,000.

### **Hugo Boss Prize**

Bi-annual award worth US\$100,000 - administered by the Guggenheim Museum - to a contemporary artist (or group of artists) working in any medium, anywhere in the world. Candidates are selected by a jury of curators, critics and scholars.

### **John Moores Painting Prize**

Named after the Liverpool philanthropist, this is a bi-annual open painting competition with shortlisted entries exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery Liverpool.

### **Kandinsky Prize**

Award to promote outstanding contemporary Russian art, sometimes compared with the Turner Prize, which honours British contemporary artists. Nominees are selected by a jury of eminent Russian and international artists and curators, in addition to a renowned artist.

### **Larry Aldrich Award**

Named after a US philanthropist, this annual \$25,000 Prize is administered by the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum and rewards American artists whose works have had a significant impact on contemporary visual culture during recent years. Candidates are short-listed and judged by an independent jury of artists, collectors, critics, curators, and gallerists.

### **Marcel Duchamp Prize (Prix Marcel Duchamp)**

This annual award is given to an outstanding young artist residing in France, involved in any visual arts discipline including painting, sculpture, installation, photography and video. The winner receives €35,000 personally and a further €30,000 to finance a solo exhibition of their work in the National Museum of Modern Art at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

### **Preis der Nationalgalerie für Junge Kunst**

Started in 2000 by the *Verein der Freunde der Nationalgalerie* (Friends of the National Gallery), this €50,000 prize rewards outstanding work by a young contemporary artist living in Germany.

### **Roswitha Haftmann Prize**

This award recognizes outstanding achievements in the visual arts, usually by a living artist. Candidates are selected purely for the artistic significance of their work, without regard to their nationality, age, or chosen discipline. The Prize is officially awarded at the Zurich Kunsthaus.

### **Turner Prize**

Named after the distinguished 19th century landscape painter JMW Turner, this



annual prize - begun in 1984 - is awarded to a British visual artist under 50. Run by the Tate gallery, and hosted at Tate Britain it is now the most famous art prize in Britain. Latterly, and somewhat controversially, it has been dominated by conceptual artists. See also [Turner Prize Winners](#) (1984-2009).

### **Vincent van Gogh Biennial Award for Contemporary Art in Europe**

Awarded every two years to a European artist whom, it is considered, "will have significant, enduring impact on contemporary art." Instigated in 2000, and financed by The Broere Charitable Foundation in memory of Monique Zajfen. Works by selected candidates are shown at the [Stedelijk Museum](#), Amsterdam and the competition's jury is headed by the director of the museum.

### **Wolfgang Hahn Prize**

Set up in 1994 by the *Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst* and administered by the Museum Ludwig, in Cologne, this €100,000 prize rewards outstanding contemporary artists living in Germany.

## **Where Can You See Outstanding Collections of Contemporary Art?**

The two principal exhibitions of modern art are: The **Venice Biennale** (Biennale di Venezia), an international showcase of works by contemporary artists around the world, which is held every two years, together with the Venice Film Festival; and the **Whitney Biennial** in New York, which showcases works of contemporary American art, usually by emerging artists, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, USA. The show is seen as a major trend-setting event in the contemporary art calendar. For more postmodernist shows, see: [Best Contemporary Art Festivals](#).

## **Which are the Best Museums of Contemporary Art?**

Private galleries typically react faster to avant-garde works of art than city or state museums. Moreover, official public collections typically tend to be hampered by more conservative or outdated premises. Here is a short selection of the [Best Galleries of Contemporary Art](#).

- Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Connecticut)
- Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh)
- [Carnegie Museum of Art](#) (Pittsburgh)
- [Guggenheim Bilbao](#)
- [Guggenheim Venice](#)
- Institute of Contemporary Arts (London)
- Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston)
- [Irish Museum of Modern Art](#) (Dublin)
- Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art (Missouri)
- [Kunstmuseum Basel](#)
- [Metropolitan Museum of Art \(New York\)](#)
- Moderna Musset (Stockholm)
- Musee National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris)
- Museum fur Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt am Main)
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago)
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles)
- Museum of Contemporary Art (Tokyo)
- [Museum of Modern Art \(New York\)](#)
- Neue Nationalgalerie (Berlin)
- Neues Museum (Nuremberg)
- New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York City)
- [Pinakothek der Moderne](#) (Munich)
- [Pompidou Centre](#): French National Museum of Modern/Contemporary Art

- [Saatchi Gallery](#) (London)
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- [Solomon R Guggenheim Museum \(New York\)](#)
- Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam)
- [Tate Modern](#) (London)
- [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) (New York)

## Questions About Contemporary Visual Art

Since the 1960s, the "**arts establishment**" (meaning: government officials who control the Arts Budgets; directors/owners of galleries; curators of exhibitions; committees that run the important artist-organizations; teaching staff in arts colleges, and so on) as well as the contemporary art now being practised and encouraged, has become significantly more radical. This raises the following questions:

### Is it Art?

Few countries have witnessed more controversy over the value of post-modernist artworks than Britain, where the Turner Prize continues to arouse huge debate between the avant-garde and the rest. Its prize winning exhibits have included a dead sheep in formaldehyde (by Damian Hirst), a portrait of the Virgin Mary "painted" with elephant dung (by Chris Ofili), and a white room with a single light bulb that blinked on and off (by Martin Creed). Another strange entry (installation) which made it to the finals, was "My Bed" - an unmade bed soiled with condoms and tampons (by Tracy Emin). In 2002, when it was awarded to Keith Tyson for his creation of a large black monolithic block filled with discarded computers, not a single painter (reportedly) had been considered as a possible recipient of the prize. Instead, the jury preferred entries by Fiona Banner, (billboard filled with pornographic text), and Liam Gillick (ceiling constructed of multicolored plastic), to name but two outlandish works.

One can justifiably question the wisdom of the British arts establishment, when such things are held up as outstanding examples of art. Which was precisely what Kim Howells, the British Culture Minister, did in 2002 when he said (of the Turner Prize finalists' exhibits):

"If this is the best British artists can produce then British art is lost. It is cold, mechanical, conceptual bullshit."

The key question remains: "[what is art](#)?" Or to put it another way, what distinguishes contemporary conceptualist art from theatre, demonstration or entertainment?

### What's the Difference Between Good and Bad Contemporary Artists?

What artistic skills is postmodernist art hoping to encourage? In earlier days, one could distinguish a master-artist - in painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, and other art forms - by his theoretical and practical skills. However, in today's postmodernist era - an era still dominated by conceptual artists - sorting the good artist/art from the bad artist/art has become far more difficult. This lack of clarity continues to undermine the efforts of art colleges who struggle to teach basic fundamentals which no longer appear relevant to the attainment of artistic success.

### Is Contemporary Art in Danger of Becoming Elitist?

In the old days, art belonged to an elite few. Ordinary people were not considered to be sufficiently "cultured" to be able to understand or critique a

work of art. From the beginning of the 20th century all this began to change, as society itself changed. And in the 1960s, the Pop Culture revolution swept away most of the traditionalism that remained, leaving the field open to a new generation of radical-minded "arts professionals". The latter encouraged the emergence of new art forms (installation, performance, video etc.), most of which found their way into mainstream third-level arts courses. So far, so good. However, at the same time, instead of continuing to encourage excellence in traditional disciplines, like painting and sculpture, the new arts establishment appears to have positively discouraged them. Thus it is now possible (as our Editor discovered) to visit a Graduation Show at a prestigious art college, and find not one single example of oil painting or stone sculpture. Even this isn't a disaster. After all, times change. And maybe traditional art forms are no longer cool. Unfortunately, the new art forms (which - as far as students are concerned - are *extremely* cool because they don't actually require half the skill needed by the traditional forms) are beginning to be judged not by their "visual appeal", but by their "intellectualism". An installation, for instance, may be visually quite unappealing, but its underlying intellectual idea (as outlined in jargon-filled language in the exhibition catalogue) may be seen as "important" by curators and other "experts" - the new "intellectual elite". Trouble is, this sounds suspiciously like the old days, when ordinary folk weren't trusted to give an opinion on what they saw with their own eyes, but had to defer to the old elite.

A good example of this born-again elitism was the exhibition of "Nothing", held at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, in Spring 2009. The cutting-edge contemporary art on display consisted of exactly 9 empty rooms, and nothing else. The show was acclaimed by French art critics as the most radical show ever seen at the Pompidou Centre. According to Laurent Le Bon, curator of the Pompidou Metz, the exhibition was "at the frontline of artistic venture and art history".

And just to give you an idea of the elitist jargon-filled language used by the organizers of the show, here is the title of the exhibition: "The Specialisation of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilised Pictorial Sensibility."

- For more about postmodern or contemporary art, see: [Homepage](#).

