

Tate Modern

Materials and Objects

Boiler House (North) Level 4 West

14:00-14:45

Laurence Shafe

Materials and Objects (Level 4 West)

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- This is based on the new hang in Level 2 East on 27 May 2016.
- Works marked with “*” are key works not to be missed and the others are optional.
- Each work is shown with the artist followed by the talk itself (typically 3 to 5 minutes), followed by bullet point notes designed to answer possible questions. The section ‘Visual Aids’ at the end contains additional images that may be used to illustrate related works or ideas.
- Optional sections are shown in square brackets. All quotations are in bold and names are underlined.
- In general, start with the title and the artist followed by a description of the work and end with a link to either the theme or the next work. Avoid dates, movements and ‘isms’ unless directly relevant. Only refer to other works or historic events if they help explain the work being presented.

Introduction

1. Welcome to Tate Modern. My name is Laurence and I am your guide for the next 45 minutes.
2. I have a hearing loop for anyone that requires it and if you need a seat there are folding stools over there.
3. We are in Tate Modern, named after Henry Tate, a wealthy nineteenth-century entrepreneur who made his fortune selling sugar cubes. In later life, he gave a lot to charity including what became Tate Britain and, about 100 years later, this building was opened to hold the ever-expanding collection. This building is a converted power station, called Bankside, and we are in the part known as the Boiler House. Down the centre is the Turbine Hall and over the bridge is the Blavatnik Building. This ten-storey extension opened in June 2016 and increased the display area by 60%. On this side of the building, the Boiler House, there are four permanent galleries, two on this floor and two on floor two.
4. Tate Modern is one of the most popular international modern art gallery in the world and we have managed to keep our permanent collection free by charging for temporary exhibitions, some Government funding and the use of volunteers like me. Please help us remain free by having lunch here, buying a book or giving a small donation.
5. I will be showing you a wide variety of work illustrating how artists used different materials and objects.
6. We will be looking at about ten works that I have selected as representative and important and we will finish in the final room where I will leave you to continue looking round the gallery. The next tour starts 15 minutes after this one ends. I am happy to take questions as we go around so let's get started in the first room.

Notes

- **The Founder.** Henry Tate (1819-1899) was the son of a clergyman and set up his own grocery shop when he was 20. He expanded this to a chain of six shops which he sold and became the owner of a sugar refinery in 1859. This was 26 years after slavery had been abolished in the British Empire (1833) and 52 years after Britain had abolished the slave trade (1807). In 1872, Tate bought a German patent for making sugar cubes from Eugen Langen and it was this that made his fortune. The same year he opened a refinery in Liverpool. Towards the end of his life he gave money to many colleges, hospitals and founded Streatham, Balham, South Lambeth and Brixton libraries. In 1897, he spent £150,000 (some say £80,000) on building the National Gallery of British Art ('Tate Gallery' in 1932), endowed it with his personal art collection of 65 contemporary paintings and gave it all to the nation. The famous portico was designed by the architect Sidney Smith. It was separated from the National Gallery in 1954. Tate Britain was extended twice by Joseph Duveen, an art dealer who also paid for an extension at the British Museum, and in 1987 Charles Clore funded the Turner wing.
- **Bankside power station** was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960) who designed Liverpool Cathedral and many of the red telephone boxes. He was the grandson of the prolific Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) who designed the Midland Hotel at St. Pancras and the Albert Memorial. The façade of the building is made from 4.2 million bricks. The chimney is 325 feet (99m) and was designed to be lower than St. Paul's Cathedral opposite (365 feet, 111m). At its peak, the power station generated 300 megawatts but it became uneconomic and too polluting and was closed in 1981. The turbine hall is 509 feet (155 m) long, 115 feet (35 m) wide and 85 feet (26 m) high. The conversion was carried out by Herzog & de Meuron at a cost of £134 million of which £50 million was from the Millennium Commission. Tate Modern opened in 2000 and had become one of the most visited museums of modern and contemporary art in the world.
- **Attendance.** According to Wikipedia and the Tate Annual Report 2014-15 the four Tate galleries received 7.9 million visitors and Tate Modern 5.7 million. The Louvre was number one with 9.7 million, number two was the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art with 6.1 million, the British Museum was number three with 5.6 million and Tate Modern was number four.
- **Extension.** Within four years of opening our success meant we started planning to expand the gallery. This new extension, again designed by Herzog & de Meuron, cost £260 million and opened on 17 June 2016. This ten-storey extension, now called the Blavatnik Building, increases the display space by 60%. Len Blavatnik is the UK's richest person and has been a UK citizen since 2010.
- **Gender balance.** Nearly 40% (38%) of the artists on display at Tate Modern are women and 50% of the monographic rooms are by women.
- **Management.** The Director of the Tate is Maria Balshaw who was previously Director of the Whitworth (University of Manchester) and Manchester City Galleries, and Director of Culture for Manchester City Council. The previous Director, since 1988, was Sir Nicholas Serota (b. 1946). The Director of Tate Modern is Frances Morris and of Tate Britain Alex Farquharson.
- **Materials and Objects.** The display looks at the inventive ways in which artists around the world use diverse materials. Increasingly over the last hundred years, artists have challenged the idea that certain materials are unsuitable for art. Some employ industrial materials and methods, while others adapt craft skills, or put the throwaway products of consumer society to new uses.

Rudolf Stingel (b. 1956), *Untitled*, 1993



- **Audience as artist.** This is *Untitled* by Rudolf Stingel; it's a wall covered by an orange carpet. You are welcome to make your own marks on the carpet which means that you are adding to the art work. This challenges the convention that the artist makes an art work and we are just passive viewers. This carpet, or one like it, was displayed at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Before that he produced abstract paintings using gauze and spray paint but in 1989 he provided a 'do-it-yourself' manual in several languages explaining how anyone could create one of his paintings. The idea of the viewer interacting and taking over the artist intrigued him and led to the idea of this carpet, a surface that could be marked but the marks could also be erased.
- **Transience.** In this case the properties of the material are essential to achieving the artist's aim. Stingel wanted a material that can be marked easily but the marks can be erased so that it can be used repeatedly. This perhaps also reflects modern life where trends and fashions come and go as rapidly as the marks on the carpet.
- **Parody**, i.e. the imitation of a style with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. It has been suggested that the carpet is a parody of a conventional urban living room but he has turned the carpet ninety degrees onto the wall to turn it into an art work.
- **Readymade.** The colour was specified by the artist and the carpet made to order but basically it is what we call a 'readymade', an object the artist has just bought with the minimum intervention by the artist. We will hear more about readymades later when we look at Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*.
- **Artist.** Rudolf Stingel is an Italian artist whose work explores the idea of artistic creation. He was born in Merano, Italy in the South Tyrol and he now commutes between New York and Merano.
- **Next.** In the next room, we have two artists that start with conventional materials but use them to create extraordinary objects.

Background Notes on Rudolf Stingel (b. 1956), *Untitled*, 1993

- *Untitled* 1993 consists of a wall entirely covered with orange Savannah custom colour carpeting. Stingel challenges artistic conventions by exchanging paint on canvas for carpet mounted directly onto the wall and allowing the viewer to make their own marks on the surface. The result is a work of art that relies on an audience for its completion, undermining traditional notions of artistic authorship. Stingel explained he '[allows] painting, but not by [his] assistants who carry out [his] concept but by a public that inscribes its own individual response in a material way into the work'.
- The carpet is 5.2 x 9m and the pile is 1.5cm. The carpet is described on the Tate website as 'Savannah'. Savannah is a type of Wilton carpet, that is a high-quality carpet with looped or cut pile, and Savannah & Kensington is a carpet manufacturer.
- Stingel was born in Merano, near Venice, Italy and now works in both New York and Merano. During the 1990s he created installations that covered the floors and walls of the exhibition space with carpets. He has used carpets in other installations and Styrofoam board that visitors can permanently mark. His two-dimensional works are normally carved out, imprinted or indented by the artist. More recently he has worked on a series of painted portraits based on photographs by famous photographers. One series are self-portraits of various stages of his life painted using a grey-scale palette. Also in the early 1990s, Stingel started his inquiry into the relationship between painting and space by developing a series of installations that covered the walls and floors of exhibition spaces with monochrome or black and white carpets, transforming the architecture into a painting. In 1993, he exhibited a huge plush orange carpet glued to the wall at the Venice Biennale.
- At a Christie's New York auction in 2015, Stingel's *Untitled* (1993), part of his series of silver paintings, set a new world auction record for the artist at \$4,757,000.

References

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Richard Deacon (b. 1949), *Art for Other People #14*, 1984



- **The material is the work.** It is no surprise that in a gallery dedicated to materials we find Richard Deacon. He has spent his career exploring a wide range of materials such as wood, steel, iron, marble, clay, vinyl, foam and leather, so that each sculpture is defined by its materials. He explained in an interview [in 2005], '**Changing materials from one work to the next is a way of beginning again each time**'.
- **Fabricator.** He describes himself as a 'fabricator' rather than a sculptor to emphasize the construction behind the finished object and he often leaves the process of construction visible, such as leaving oozing glue exposed and screws protruding. The term 'fabricator' also implies that he is making up something, creating a fiction. His work is often defined by exploring the possibilities of the material and the space it occupies, such as investigating the ways in which wood can be bent and twisted at the same time and the ways that shape will fill and alter the gallery space.
- **Meaning.** They are all small scale works that could fit into the home. Deacon is less concerned with meaning than with the joy of fabrication. He said, '**I don't think there is ever someone who 'gets it'. I don't get it particularly ... I hope people get pleasure from the work**'.
- **Construction.** This work is made from flat plates of brass with foam sandwiched in between. It is held together by exposed chrome rivets and screws. The plates intersect at right angles and therefore appear to flow through each other. The structure has the appearance of a renaissance armillary sphere such as this one (Visual Aids) or its curving lines suggest a model of some organic structure. In other words, I see it as exploring the contradiction between hard scientific structures and soft organic forms, also expressed by the soft foam sandwiched between the hard metal plates.
- **The artist.** Richard Deacon is a leading British sculptor who was born in Bangor, Wales and went to St Martin's School of Art. His work was first acclaimed in the 1980s when he was in his 30s and he won the Turner prize in 1987.
- **Background.** This work is part of his series *Art for Other People* consists of over fifty works that was begun in 1982. There are two other works in this series in the room, #12 (1984) and #24 (1987). #12 is the small work in that display case that uses marble and leather to create what *The Guardian* described as half orchid and half ovary. #24 is that work on the floor made from galvanised steel, bronze and PVC that I think looks like false teeth.

Background Notes Richard Deacon (b. 1949), *Art for other People* #14, 1984

- Also in this room is *Art for Other People* #24 and *Art for Other People* #12. The series explores the idea of art being owned and enjoyed by anyone. The pieces will sit on a table or alongside the furniture in a home. The *Guardian* wrote, '*Art for Other People* #12 (1984) uses marble and leather to form something I can describe only as half orchid, half ovary (the marble looks like a gynaecological drawing, the leather like the thick petals of some monstrous botanical rarity)'.
- Deacon is a Welsh sculptor who studied at Saint Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art which he left in 1977 and then studied part-time at Chelsea School of Art. His first one-man show was in Brixton in 1978. His work is abstract and suggests mathematical or scientific surfaces but also anatomical parts and functions through metaphor and through the titles. His work is often constructed from everyday materials such as wood, metal, glass, terracotta, leather, marble, brass and even linoleum. His early work tends to be lyrical, sleek and curved and his later work bulkier. He has produced small-scale works such as the *Art for Other People* series as well as large pieces for gardens and specific events. *After* (1998) is one such large work that has been described as 'an enormous articulated worm'. He won the Turner Prize in 1987 for his touring show *For Those Who Have Eyes* (a large light-bulb shaped object made of steel strips). He is a well-known international artist represented by galleries around the world. The Tate held a retrospective in 2014. He is a Royal Academician, a former trustee of the Tate, a CBE and a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.
- The sculptures are abstract, but hopefully not threatening, he said. **'What is the meaning? There isn't a straightforward answer to that question. But it's not meaningless.'** He added, **'There's a huge range of understandings about the way people approach work. There are people who appreciate it on the level of its material qualities and people who talk about it in relation to other issues.'** Deacon has an interest in language and philosophy which pervades his work. He uses the word 'fabricate' to describe his process of production as it conveys a sense of make-believe as well as construction. His work suggests the joy of construction, like Meccano, and is beautiful and often extremely suggestive of ideas and objects.
- He became dissatisfied with conventional sculpting and began to explore philosophically interesting topics such as the contradictory nature of opposites: brittleness and strength, the organic and the geometric, grace and awkwardness. **'What seems to me particularly interesting in the rolling, twisting, bending operations with material [is] that the enclosure or volume created [has] nothing to do with weight or mass ... It is empty and therefore connected to meaning in a way that is independent of causality or rationality (that is to say that the outside is not caused by the inside).'**
- Deacon collaborates with many other artists such as Bill Woodrow with bronze and glass, Anna Zimmerman with ceramics, Matthew Perry with laminated wood and sheet-metal, Glasgow shipbuilders on steel work and Gary Chapman with steel.

El Anatsui (b. 1944), *Ink Splash II*, 2012



- **The work.** This is *Ink Splash II* by El Anatsui. Both Deacon and Anatsui use everyday materials but Deacon draws attention to the process of making and Anatsui transforms his mundane bottle tops into a shimmering metal surface. Anatsui has connected interwoven strips of flattened aluminium bottle tops with copper wire. The overall silver, metallic sheen has spots of blue and yellow suggesting an ink splash. The blue appears spattered from top left to bottom right and 'leaks' out onto the floor. *Ink Splash II* is part of a larger series of works that started with *Ink Spill* [in 2009].
- **Junk to beauty.** Anatsui is a Ghanaian artist who now lives and works in Nigeria. The work suggests Western artistic practices, painting in oils on canvas, but it retains its African roots by using cheap, local materials. The materials could be described as junk or recycled products but he has broken away from their normal association with the evils of consumerism by creating a beautiful object. The brands of drink can still be identified and so they bring along their old histories but they no longer refer just to themselves but to a wider range of possibilities for the society in which they are used including a sense of wonder.
- **Slave trade.** Anatsui wrote, 'I saw the bottle caps as relating to the history of Africa in the sense that when the earliest group of Europeans came to trade, they brought along rum originally from the West Indies that then went to Europe and finally to Africa as three legs of the triangular trip...The drink caps that I use are not made in Europe; they are all made in Nigeria, but they symbolize bringing together the histories of these two continents.'
- **Local industry.** When Ghana was a British colony (the Gold Coast), alcoholic drinks were manufactured in the UK but when Ghana achieved independence in 1957 it started to brew its own beer.
- **The artist.** Anatsui was associated with the 1970s Nsukka Group which promoted traditional art in Nigeria to raise questions about ethnic identity. Traditional Nigerian uli art, which has a flat, decorative style usually drawn onto the body, was used to inspire contemporary Nigerian art.
- **Next.** If we now go into the next room we can see a small Picasso that is one of the first works to use conventional materials to construct a work of art.

Background Notes, El Anatsui (b. 1944), *Ink Splash II*, 2012

- El Anatsui is a Ghanaian sculptor active for much of his career in Nigeria. In 1999, Anatsui found a bag full of metal seals from African liquor bottles. Since then he has received great recognition for a series of wall-mounted installations or assemblages made from seals. He crushes this material into circles or cuts into strips and then sews together with copper wire. He has drawn international attention in recent years for his iconic "bottle-top installations". As well as bottle caps, he has also used found materials that range from old milk tins, railway sleepers, driftwood, iron nails and printing plates. His use of recycled African materials highlights that there are some places in the world where people must re-use materials out of necessity, rather than as a choice. He hasn't just turned something discarded into something beautiful. The use of bottle caps hints at broader topics such as global consumerism and its history, including slavery. His themes are consumption, transformation and the environment.
- The artist explains, 'the most important thing is the transformation. The fact that these media, each identifying a brand of drink, are no longer going back to serve the same role but are elements that could generate some reflection, some thinking, or just some wonder...[T]hey are removed from their accustomed, functional context into a new one, and they bring along their histories and identities.'
- Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* wrote, '...the works evoke lace but also chain mail; quilts but also animal hides; garments but also mosaic, not to mention the rich ceremonial cloths of numerous cultures. Their drapes and folds have a voluptuous sculptural presence, but also an undeniably glamorous bravado.'
- When Ghana was under British control as the Gold Coast, from 1874 until 1957, Britain outlawed the distillation of local beers and spirits and imported its own. After Ghana gained independence in 1957 it produced its own alcohol. West African companies like Star beer and Club beer helped to turn the local economies around by establishing a local supply for an existing market.

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- <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/who-is-el-anatsui>
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Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), *'Picture of Spatial Growths - Picture with Two Small Dogs'*, 1920–39 (Room 2)



Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), 'Picture of Spatial Growths - Picture with Two Small Dogs', 1920-39

- This looks like an assemblage of rubbish and that is exactly what it is. It is by the German artist Kurt Schwitters and it is called '*Picture of Spatial Growths - Picture with Two Small Dogs*'. After the First World War Schwitters's art changed dramatically. He wrote, '**Everything had broken down and new things had to be made out of the fragments**'. He joined the Dada group in Berlin and started to collect rubbish and various items of printed ephemera and to assemble them into collages.
- Dada is an art movement that developed towards the end of the First World War when artists rejected logic and reason as it had led to the war and millions of deaths. Instead they created nonsense and works that rejected the aesthetic ideals of what they regarded as a corrupt capitalist society.
- Schwitters started this piece in 1920 but nearly forty years were to pass before he completed it. In the interim he was a successful artist in Germany but during the 1930s his work was labelled as degenerate by the Nazi Party. His close friend and his wife and child were arrested and Schwitters heard the Gestapo wanted 'interview' him. He fled the country and joined his son in Norway and when Germany invaded Norway he fled to Scotland. While he was in Norway he collected discarded items including two small china dogs and he extensively reworked this picture that he had started nearly forty years before. He added the swirling painterly effect across the piece, added the circular wooden and cardboard discs, the wooden knob and the scraps of lace at the bottom left that he overpainted. He cut a hole through the picture plane and added a cardboard box containing two small china dogs and a newspaper cutting and he renamed the work *Bild mit 2 kleinen Hunden (Picture with 2 small dogs)*.
- Although Schwitters did select items with personal associations he claimed he did not know the address on the envelope nor the person who picture is included. He did also sometimes witty allusions to current events but in this case he is using fragments of found objects to create an aesthetic assemblage.
- During the war he was an 'enemy alien' and was moved from one camp to another until he ended up in a 'camp' on the Isle of Man, actually a row of terrace houses. It became known as the artists camp and there were over one thousand artists, writers and intellectuals and Schwitters became popular as a character and a raconteur. During his internment he produced over 200 works of art and even exhibited. In 1941 he was released and moved to London where he met his future companion and started exhibiting. He later moved to the Lake District and in 1948 was granted British citizenship and he died the following day. Many artists cite Schwitters as a major influence on their work.

Notes on Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), '*Picture of Spatial Growths - Picture with Two Small Dogs*', 1920–39

- Schwitters was born in Hanover to a middle-class family. When he was fourteen he suffered his first epileptic seizure which exempted him from military service until near the end of World War I. Schwitters worked in several genres and media, including Dadaism, Constructivism, Surrealism, poetry, sound, painting, sculpture, graphic design, typography, and what came to be known as installation art. He is most famous for his collages, called *Merz Pictures* and for his installations known as *Merzbau*.
- Dada developed in reaction to World War I in Zurich, then New York and then Paris, the Dada movement.
- Collage is an art work made from an assemblage of different forms such as newspaper clippers, photographs and found objects.
- Schwitters called his work of this type *Merz* after a word he found on a scrap of paper that originally read 'Com**merz** Und Privatbank'.
- When Schwitters reworked the picture in 1939, he added many pieces of printed and other ephemera and concealed most of the original composition, excepting the areas discussed below. The printed ephemera added in 1939 is all in Norwegian. It consists of theatre and concert tickets, receipts, chits, stubs, chocolate wrappers, blotting paper, newspaper cutting, translucent packing tissue, black paper and transparent foil, among other things. Two dated pieces of paper point towards material being collected over the previous years (an envelope, bottom centre, is postmarked April 1937, a theatre ticket to the National Theatre is dated August 1938).
- The black frame is integral to the work and was originally blue-green until he overpainted it in 1939.

References

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Man Ray (1890-1976), *Cadeau*, 1921, editioned replica 1972 (Room 2)



- **Erotic function.** This is called *Cadeau* or *Gift* by Man Ray and is one of the most famous icons of the Surrealist movement. It is a flat iron which was heated on a stove but May Ray had glued 14 tacks on the bottom. This is a Readymade like the carpet by Rudolf Stingel we saw earlier. You might think Man Ray was trying to subvert the function of an iron or make a humorous point about the need for flatness. However, May Ray had much deeper intentions. He wrote about its sadistic and erotic implications. He used it to tear a dress to shreds and then '**asked a beautiful eighteen-year-old coloured girl to wear it as she danced. Her body showed through as she moved around, it was like a bronze in movement. It was really beautiful**'. Man Ray does not destroy but enriches an object's function. In this case the flat iron has been given a new role by the nails but we can only guess at its new function.
- **Construction.** He made the original art work after visiting a hardware store in Paris on the day his first solo exhibition opened in Paris. He bought the iron, some nails and some glue and made it immediately. The original piece was stolen that same afternoon and this is a copy made over fifty years later. It is one of five pieces he made in 1972 using different models of flat iron as by then it was difficult to find enough old 1920s and 30s flat irons of the same type. It also proved difficult to find a glue to hold the nails in place. The nails are used in making tapestries and the whole piece has been varnished perhaps to protect the artist's inscription written in oil crayon.
- **Photography.** Man Ray is best known as a photographer and he often made objects in order to photograph. The original object was lost, destroyed or re-used as the photograph was the primary art work. In the 1960s and 70s there was a commercial interest in objects and so Man Ray arranged for some of his artworks to be produced in limited editions.
- **Next.** Man Ray met Marcel Duchamp in New Jersey at a time when Duchamp spoke no English and Man Ray no French but they both had a passion for chess, were both subversive and both had an irresistible desire to invent and they remained lifelong friends. In 1913, at the Armory Show in New York Duchamp showed *Nude Descending a Staircase* and it caused a storm of outrage. This is the work (Visual Aids). Let us now look at another of Duchamp's works.

Background Notes (1890-1976), Man Ray, *Cadeau*, 1921, editioned replica 1972

- Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky, 1890–1976) was born in Philadelphia of Russian Jewish immigrants. In New York he was influenced by the 1913 Armory Show and Cubism and he met Marcel Duchamp in 1915 and became a lifelong friend. In 1921 he moved to Paris and married Kiki de Montparnasse a model and celebrated character. In 1929, he began a love affair with the Surrealist photographer Lee Miller which ended when she returned to New York in 1932. Miller is now thought to have taken many of the photographs previously assumed to have been taken by Man Ray. He spent most of the rest of his career in France. He contributed to the Dada and Surrealist movements, although his ties to each were informal. He produced major works in a variety of media and although he considered himself a painter he is best known for his photography, and he was a renowned fashion and portrait photographer. Man Ray is also noted for his work with photograms, which he called "rayographs" in reference to himself.
- A copy of the original version was made in c. 1958 and is owned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Another copy of the original work was made in 1963 and is owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Tate version is one of approximately five trial pieces made by Man Ray in preparation for the edition of eleven, published by the Galleria Il Fauno, Turin, in 1972. All five were made using different irons dating from the interwar period, and the edition itself comprised different types of irons, as it proved difficult to find sufficient numbers of identical irons dating from the 1920s and 1930s. The Smithsonian American Art Museum owns number 6 of the eleven. In 1974 shortly before his death in 1976 he made an edition of 5,000 and they could be purchased for about £1,000 each.

References

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Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1974 (Room 5)



Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1974

- To understand this artwork by Marcel Duchamp I would like you to imagine it is April 1917 and this is a board meeting of the American Society of Independent Artists in New York. It is in the middle of World War I in Europe and thus many European artists have come to New York and you are planning to take over from Paris as the leading centre for modern art. To help achieve this aim you have announced to the press that artists could be certain that whatever they send would be exhibited. However, you have just been called to an emergency meeting as an artist called Richard Mutt has submitted this—a urinal turned 90 degrees with the title *Fountain*, signed 'R. Mutt, 1917' and mounted on a black pedestal. You must now decide if it is a work of art. What do you think? Is it a work of art?
- Would you like to know what the board decided? By a narrow majority they decided it was not an artwork. Some of the board thought it was indecent, indicated by newspapers referring to it as a 'bathroom appliance', and some unoriginal, I assume this meant that the artist had not used any physical skill in making it but had simply bought it from a shop.
- What the board didn't know was that the work was submitted by a fellow director, Marcel Duchamp using the false name 'Richard Mutt'. Because of the board's decision not to accept *Fountain* Duchamp resigned in protest together with fellow director Walter Arensberg. He felt that the heart of the matter was that no committee could or should judge whether a new, innovative work was art or not, it was arbitrary censorship.
- Why a urinal? Was Duchamp testing the committee? Undoubtedly. Duchamp told a New York newspaper, '**A great deal of modern art is meant to be amusing**'. That is another possibility. He had been experimenting with the idea of found items he called 'readymades'. He had already mounted a bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913) and had chosen a bottle dryer (*Bottle Dryer*, 1914) as readymades. So what is a readymade? You might think he selected the urinal because the curves of the basin are beautiful or because the shape is like a hooded Madonna or a seated Buddha but we know he did not select them for their beauty.
- He was making the point that a work of art was created simply by an artist choosing an object and presenting it as a work of art. He was bypassing the association of art with physical skill and craft and presenting an idea, was exposing the role of institutions in defining what is art and was drawing our attention to the particularity of an otherwise anonymous mass-produced object. In 1959, Duchamp was asked on BBC Radio if he considered the readymades art and he gave a more profound answer, he said they were '**a form of denying the possibility of defining art**'.
- *Fountain* became one of the most discussed works of the twentieth century. In 2004, 500 British art experts voted it the most influential work of art of the twentieth century. It remains enigmatic and sits there, still raising the question 'Am I art?'

Background Notes Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1974

- Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp (28 July 1887 – 2 October 1968) was a French, naturalized American painter, sculptor, chess player and writer whose work is associated with Cubism, conceptual art and Dada, although he distanced himself from the Dada group.
- Duchamp was a well-known in New York by 1917, in fact notorious, as the avant-garde French artist who had exhibited *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* at the Armory Show in four years previously (1913) and he arrived in New York in 1915.
- Readymades came in existence almost accidentally. The first was when he felt like mounting a bicycle wheel upside down on a wooden stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913). Another was a cheap reproduction of a winter evening landscape on which he added two small dots, one red and the other yellow. Another was *Bottle Dryer (Bottlerack)*, 1914. Another was a snow shovel on which he wrote, '*In Advance of the Broken Arm*'. Another was *Comb* (1916). They were studio objects. The idea of exhibiting them only came later. Two were shown to little effect in 1916, it was only with *Fountain* in 1917 that there was a public reaction. Duchamp recalled that *Fountain* resulted from a discussion with Walter Arensberg and the artist Joseph Stella.
- The titles of the Readymades (that had titles) were not intended to explain, they did not act a signifier to the signified but they clashed with the object and prevented an explanation by surrounding it in a cloud of mystery. Duchamp was aware that history decides the value of an artwork so he limited the number of Readymades each year and selected them in such a way that history is unable to decide. Duchamp was asked in 1959 if a readymade is a work of art. He said it was a difficult question as every age defines art in different ways meaning there is no one essential way of defining it. The readymade is a sort of irony because it says '**here is a thing I call art; I didn't even make it myself**'. Etymologically art means to make and instead I take it readymade '**so it was a form of denying the possibility of defining art**'.
- Duchamp was working on *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (the Large Glass)* (1915-1923) at the time.
- The Society of Independent Artists exhibition opened on 10 April 1917 at The Grand Central Palace New York. Walter Conrad Arensberg (1878–1954) was a wealthy American art collector, critic and poet. He was a friend of Duchamp and director of the Society of Independent Artists. He resigned at the same time as Duchamp when *Fountain* was rejected.
- In Europe, art had largely ceased and galleries had closed because of the war. Americans thought they could use the opportunity to assume leadership in art. The Society of Independent Artists was formed in December 1916. The rules said all art works would be accepted if the artist paid the \$6 fee. The board argued it was not an art work as no physical craft was involved. A secondary argument that it was indecent was not covered by the rules and it is unlikely it would have broken any US laws regarding decency or pornography.
- The original urinal was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz and published in *The Blind Man*. It was then lost and there are now 17 replicas commissioned by Duchamp in the 1960s.
- The scandal created by *Nude Descending* in 1913 resulted in the sale of all four of his exhibited paintings. This funded his trip to America and he decided to emigrate to New York in 1915. He immediately became involved in the anti-culture, anti-art, anti-reason movement called Dada in New York through Francis Picabia and Man Ray.

- Duchamp bought a Bedfordshire model urinal from J. L. Mott Iron Works and took it to his studio 33 West 67th Street. By some accounts he oriented it ninety degrees to the normal position. In a letter to his sister he said it had been submitted to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition by a woman friend ('une de mes amies'). There are two candidates for this mystery woman Dadaist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven or Louise Norton. The latter's address at 110 West 88th Street is partially visible on the paper entry ticket attached to the object, as seen in Stieglitz's photograph.
- Duchamp has written that he intended to shift the emphasis with art from physical craft to intellectual interpretation. Also, he wanted to 'de-deify' the artist.
- The title *Fountain* suggests an outflow of liquid rather than a receptacle. Duchamp has therefore inverted the normal order and assumptions. It is also likely but not certain that he inverted the orientation by laying it on its back. One effect of this is to disrupt the normal visual recognition of its function and the protruding water inlet functions as a simulated penis. It is a urinal that is peeing back at us. The original was porcelain but the copies are glazed earthenware painted to look like porcelain.
- The name 'R. Mutt' may refer to the German word 'armut' ('poverty') or 'urmutter' ('great mother'). If we separate the capital and lowercase letters we get 'R.M' and 'utt', 'R.M' would stand for Readymade which is the fountain itself and 'utt' when read out loud sounds like 'eut été' ('had been'). Duchamp used puns, as in his modified Mona Lisa, titled L.H.O.O.Q. a pun on 'Elle a chaud au cul', 'She has a hot arse' or as Duchamp translated it 'there is fire down below'. The name R. Mutt is a play on its commercial origins and on the famous comic strip of the time, Mutt and Jeff (making the urinal perhaps the first work of art based on a comic). In German, Armut means poverty, although Duchamp said the R stood for Richard, French slang for 'moneybags', which makes *Fountain*, a kind of scatological golden calf.
- The American Society of Independent Artists was, to some extent, derived from the Eight, the 1910 Independents Group and the Armory Show. The latter introduced astonished Americans to Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism for the first time in 1913, but it was, from the beginning, based on the French Société des Artistes Indépendants. Duchamp and Francis Picabia (1879-1953) arrived in New York in 1915. The board consisted of 14 members, William Glackens (president), George Bellows, Rockwell Kent, Maurice Prendergast, three women Katherine Dreier, Regina Farrelly and Mary Rogers, Walter Pach, Duchamp, Man Ray, John Covert, Joseph Stella, Morton Schamberg and Walter Arensberg. The Society's announcement said artists could be **'certain that whatever they send would be hung'**.
- Duchamp adopted the female identity Rose Sélavy in 1920. The name, a pun, sounds like the French phrase Eros, c'est la vie, which may be translated as "Eros, such is life". It has also been read as arroser la vie ("to make a toast to life"). Sélavy emerged in 1921 in a series of photographs by Man Ray showing Duchamp dressed as a woman. Through the 1920s Man Ray and Duchamp collaborated on more photos of Sélavy. Duchamp later used the name as the by-line on written material and signed several creations with it.
- Philosopher J. L. Austin defined statements that accomplish an action 'performative' and the word could be applied to what Duchamp was doing. However, he was not elevating to the status of 'art object' but separating them from their surroundings to raise the question 'What is art?'
- Duchamp was challenging conventional assumptions, especially regarding physical craft or skill, he was exposing the role of institutions in defining what counts as art and he was making us aware of

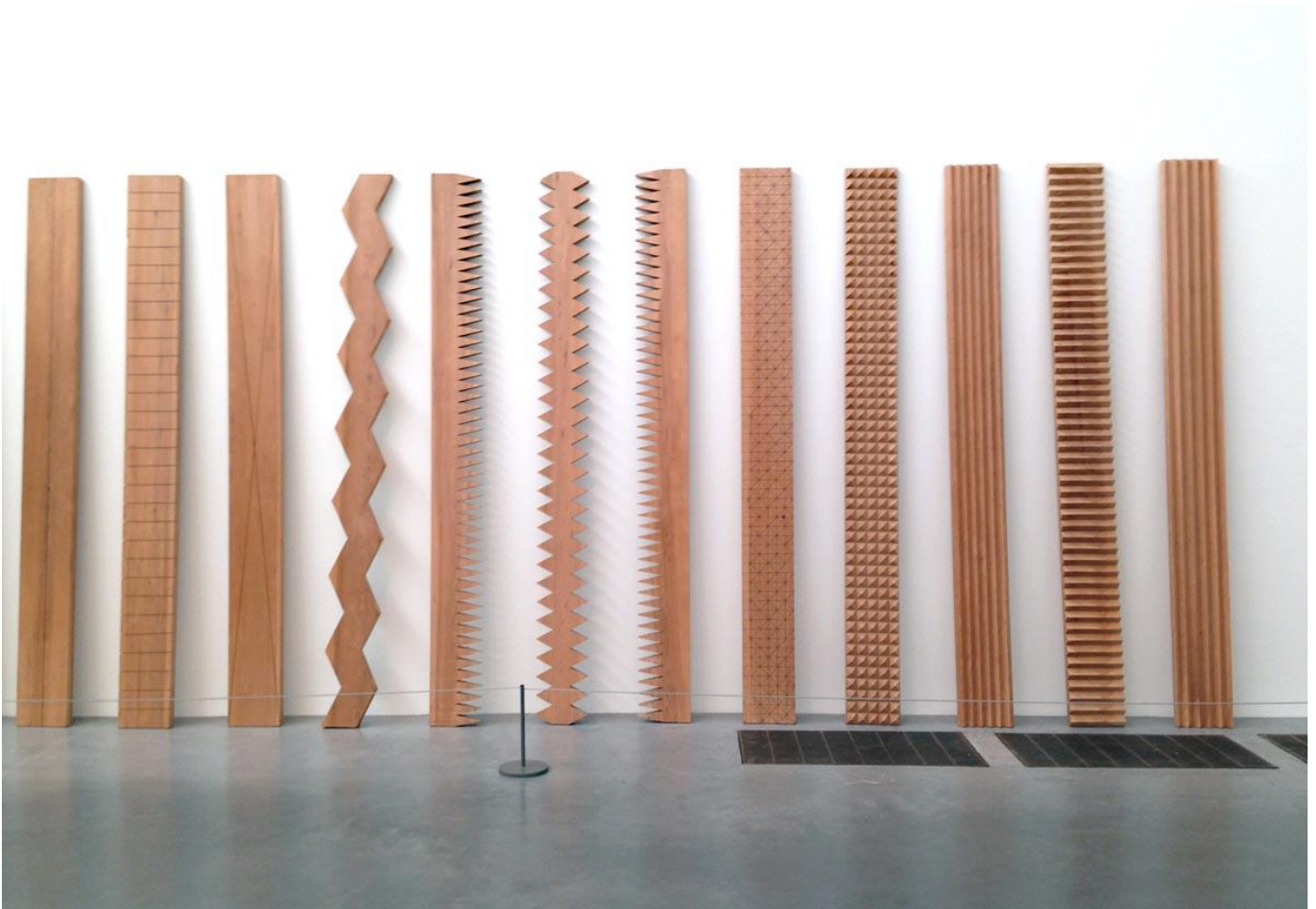
the intrinsic otherness of each mass-produced, otherwise anonymous, object. From the Renaissance, onwards there has been a gradual shift from the value of craft and manual skill to the value of conception and inspiration. Arguably, the late eighteenth-century Romantic movement valued creative genius more than skill. During the nineteenth century, the criteria for valuing art were challenged by many artists but Duchamp was sceptical and saw that artists were still producing art to satisfy a market. A work submitted to a 1910 exhibition was produced by tying a brush to a donkey's tail. The donkey was called Lolo but its work was entered using the pseudonym Joachim-Raphaël Boronali from Genoa. The painting was literally Fauvist ('wild beast'). Rather than compete with 'even a child (or a donkey) could do it' Duchamp produced no work at all.

- Duchamp firmly rejected the idea that he chose Readymades because of their beauty. Selection was never made based on 'aesthetic delectation', as he put it. They were chosen by of their 'visual indifference'. The creation of a readymade is a kind of event that takes place at an instant of time that can be recorded.
- Duchamp's concept of the 'infra-thin' is the subtle yet real difference between seemingly identical objects or events in either time or space. An object at one time then a second later is infra-thin. The warmth of a seat that has just been left, a stare and twins are infra-thin objects; they are identical but separated in space or time. Infra-thin smoke exhaled from a mouth takes on its own three-dimensional form.
- Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' suggests that the way people perceive objects is determined by their cultural and history. Historically, works of art had an 'aura' – an appearance of magical or supernatural force arising from their uniqueness. The aura includes a sensory experience of distance between the reader and the work of art. The aura has disappeared in the modern age because art has become reproducible. Think of the way a work of classic literature can be bought cheaply in paperback, or a painting bought as a poster. Think also of newer forms of art, such as TV shows and adverts. Then compare these to the experience of staring at an original work of art in a gallery, or visiting a unique historic building. This is the difference Benjamin is trying to capture. The aura is an effect of a work of art being uniquely present in time and space. It is connected to the idea of authenticity. A reproduced artwork is never fully present. If there is no original, it is never fully present anywhere. Authenticity cannot be reproduced, and disappears when everything is reproduced. Benjamin thinks that even the original is depreciated, because it is no longer unique. Along with their authenticity, objects also lose their authority. Contemplation of art is replaced by distraction which replaces thought by moving images.
- As an extra twist this urinal at the Tate is not the original which was lost, it is one of 17 copies produced in the 1950s and 60s and authenticated by Duchamp, thus further removing the aura associated with works of art.

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Susumu Koshimizu (b. 1944), *From Surface to Surface*, 1971, remade 1986



Susumu Koshimizu (b. 1944), *From Surface to Surface*, 1971, remade 1986

- **The work.** This is called *From Surface to Surface* and is by Susumu Koshimizu. It consists of twelve planks of wood. Koshimizu investigates the substance of wood by sawing planks into different shapes, exposing their surface qualities through different kinds of repetitive cuts. The cut lines are made with an industrial saw and contrast with the slight irregularities of the natural wood.
- **Mono Ha.** Susumu Koshimizu began his career just as students in Japan were violently protesting the Vietnam war [in 1968]. He and other artists started working with natural materials in protest to capitalism and modern art. The artists were later called Mono Ha which means the '**School of Things**'. Mono Ha artists denied they were involved in the violent protests but their work is informed by the unease and disillusionment with post-war Japanese modernity.
- **Lee Ufan.** Another, slightly older, Mono Ha artist was Lee Ufan, whose work *Relatum* [1968, 1994] can be seen in the middle of the room. It consists of a hundred two-metre long, stainless steel bands. Ufan saw that an artist's ability to make things had been nullified by technology. He rejected traditional ideas of representation in favour of revealing the world as it is by engaging with materials and exploring their properties.

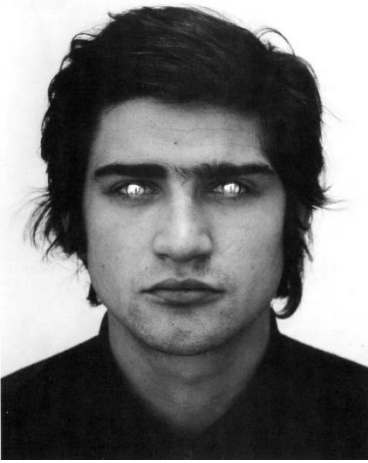
Background Notes Susumu Koshimizu (b. 1944), *From Surface to Surface*, 1971, remade 1986

- Susumu Koshimizu is a Japanese sculptor and installation artist. His first solo exhibition was in 1971 and he represented Japan at the 1976 and 1980 Venice Biennales. He has received more attention in the US since 2012 when *Mono Ha* was first reviewed in a Los Angeles gallery.
- Koshimizu was part of Mono Ha ('School of Things', 1968-75), which reacted against the embrace of technology and visual trickery in mid-1960s Japanese art. They sought to understand 'the world as it is' by exploring the essential properties of materials, often combining organic and industrial objects and processes. It was stridently anti-modernist and worked with basic materials such as rock, sand, glass and metal often displayed with the minimum of artistic intervention. The term Mono Ha was disparagingly coined by critics after they had begun to exhibit their work. Except for Lee Ufan, who was a decade older, most of the Mono-ha artists were just beginning their careers when the violent student protests of 1968–69 occurred. The protests were against the dominant position and interference of the US and the binding of Japan into providing logistical support for the US war in Vietnam. The protestors were critical of US imperialism and wanted to establish Japanese identity.
- Mono Ha artists met to discuss how to transcend Western Modernism by ending representation. The sentiment in post-war Japan was to re-examine their indigenous culture to bring attention to the physicality of things. It shared many commonalities with Arte Povera in Italy, and Minimalism in the United States.
- I am not sure what kind of wood it is, possibly Japanese pine or cedar.

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Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947), *Breath 5*, 1978



- **The work** consists of three terracotta sections roughly joined together to form a one and a half metre tall vase shape. It is by Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947) and is called *Breath 5*. It was made by a pottery firm near Turin in Northern Italy in 1978. The compressed area running down one side is an imprint of the artist's clothed body. Penone first made a cast of himself and then stacked coils of clay against the cast. He then removed the cast leaving the imprinted clay around which he moulded swirling clay forms. At the top is a clay cast of the inside of his mouth. The overall effect is to suggest the billowing forms of air as the artist leans forward and breaths out. He began to explore the notion of breath in 1977 and this is one of nine vase-like clay forms he made the following year.
- **Infra-thin.** Penone was interested in the idea that the air we breathe out forms a sculpture, '**a sculpture that lasts an instant, but is already a sculpture**'. The sculpture gives monumental shape to something that was temporary and invisible but a fundamental condition of being alive.
- **Duchamp's** This idea of an almost imperceivable difference, in this case between the air around us before and after we have breathed out was described by Marcel Duchamp's as the '**infra-thin**'. It is the subtle yet real difference between seemingly identical objects or events in either time or space. It is the difference between a urinal and *Fountain*, the difference between identical twins or between a chair someone has been sitting in and an empty chair.
- **The artist.** Penone was born in north-west Italy in the mountains near the French border and he trained for a year at the Accademia di Belle Arte in Turin (1970). His early work was concerned with sight, so, for example, *Reversing One's Own Eyes* 1970 involved the artist wearing reflective contact lenses as he struggled to orientate himself within natural surroundings. He has had a recurring interest in vegetation and trees and has investigated the notion of breath throughout his career. He has been associated with the development of *arte povera*, a term coined in 1967 by a critic and which refers to a group of Italian artist who used everyday materials, such as earth and newspapers, to undermine the commercialisation of art. *Arte povera* has similarities with Mono Ha (mid-1960s) in Japan and Minimalism (1960s) in America.
- **Next** let's look at a more recent work from India that combines two very different materials.

Background Notes Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947), *Breath 5*, 1978

- Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947) was born in the Garessio forest in north-east Italy near the French border. Penone's work is concerned with establishing a contact between man and nature. Penone was born in a forest area and the tree is a central element in much of his work which also uses everyday materials such as lead, iron, wax, pitch, wood, plaster and burlap. One of his early works was an iron hand gripping a tree trunk and another was trees pierced with nails and laced with metal wire. He is a member of the Arte Povera group which explores the link between nature and culture. He has always been interested in using his body as the main subject or the source of the work.
- **Arte Povera** (pronounced art-ay povera, 'o' as in 'hot') was a radical movement that took place between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in major cities throughout Italy. They attacked government, industry and culture by using unconventional materials and styles. They used only simple objects (the term literally means poor or impoverished art) , their art is often related to the body and they find meaning in the everyday. Their work is often concerned with energy and dynamism and nature and industry appear but without complex symbolism. Like Duchamp they challenge what can be defined as art but without detracting from the importance of art and its ability to transform our lives. Michelangelo Pistoletto was one of the founders.

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Sheela Gowda (b. 1957), *Behold*, 2009



Sheela Gowda (b. 1957), *Behold*, 2009, human hair and car bumpers

- **Materials?** This is called *Behold* and was produced in 2009 by Sheela Gowda, an artist from Southern India. Can you tell what the two materials used here are?
- **Superstition.** This work consists of four kilometres of human hair and twenty car bumpers. In Bangalore, where Gowda lives, the hair and car bumpers used in *Behold* are everyday materials with ritual significance. Short strands of human hair are commonly knotted around the bumpers of vehicles to ward off accidents and bad luck.
- **Industry.** Both hair and bumpers refer to Indian industries. When pilgrims visit a temple to fulfil their sacred vows, they have their hair shorn as a mark of humility. The valuable hair is donated to the temple where it is woven into talismen and sold by the priests for profit. Longer hair is in demand for wigs and hairpieces and for keratin used in beauty products in the West.
- **Organic v. inorganic.** The shiny, clean metal bumpers contrast with the organic, dark, mat strands of hair. The hair is both linear and coiled in places in a balance between the abstract and the human. The spheres of hair suggest heads, the nets spider webs and the loosely hanging strands entrails. The hair takes on a new role as it inverts the normal hierarchy of fragile human body against a hard metal machine. The hair is the strongest element as it can ward off accidents and prevent damage to the delicate machine. Gowda commented that the pairing of these materials is '**a coming together of fear, superstition, belief and a need for comforting action in the framework of modern life**'.
- Let's next look at a more formal work but one made from a surprising collection of materials.

Background Notes, Sheela Gowda, *Behold*, 2009

- Sheela Gowda (b. 1957) is a South Indian artist living and working in Bangalore, Karnataka, who references human beliefs and superstitions. Gowda began her career as a figurative painter and moved towards three-dimensional works in the 1990s as her interest in using indigenous and locally relevant materials grew. She said, 'I was unable to find the means within painting to translate certain strong reactions to immediate issues. I do not like to use my work as a vehicle for making strident statements, and needed subtler means.' She uses materials such as incense and cow dung that are associated with everyday rituals in India.
- She exhibited *Behold* at the Singapore Biennale in 2011 and the Venice Biennale in 2009 and had a solo exhibition in London in 2010.
- In *Behold*, she uses four thousand metres of rope hand-woven from human hair. Each rope has hundreds of individuals hair of all genders and ages. Hanging entangled within this black, knotted mass are twenty steel car bumpers. She wanted to contrast the organic material with the industrial car bumpers. It is the apparently weak organic material that is believed to protect the hard steel from damage through its talismanic power. The strength of the hair is shown by using it to suspend the bumpers. *Behold* is one of Gowda's largest installations to date. The Arsenale, where the piece was installed in Venice, was used by the Venetian navy as a rope factory centuries ago. This industrial heritage is mirrored by the tradition of motorists in Bangalore tying woven hair to car bumpers as a talisman for their safety. The hair comes from temples where pilgrims shed their locks in ritual sacrifice, and the material is then sold on for wigs or for industrial use.
- The installation fills a room, the two contrasting materials forming a three dimensional drawing in space, in which thin yet strong strands of hair are used to suspend and support the shiny metal bumpers in an abstract configuration. Coils and spheres of hair on the floor are suggestive of the human form. For Gowda the piece communicates '**a coming together of fear, superstition, belief and a need for comforting action in the framework of modern life**'. She does not wish her work to be seen as beautiful as she feels this is superficial as the underlying layers are dark.
- The braiding of four kilometres of hair suggests intensive physical labour. Gowda says, '**Most of my works are labour intensive, but I do not like to make the process immediately apparent ... I feel it adds to the intensity of the work while remaining seemingly simple and minimal.**'

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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AA28QmJTap0> (8 minute interview)

Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), *An American Tribute to the British People*, 1960-64



- **The work.** This is *An American Tribute to the British People* and it was made from objects found on the streets of New York by the artist Louise Nevelson. It is an abstract gold sculpture consisting of 35 open-faced shallow wooden boxes. It is three metres long with a lower group of boxes that projects out at right angles at each end enclosing the space so that it looks like a church organ. The boxes are filled with fragmentary wooden objects arranged mostly vertically, like organ pipes. Some of the wooden components, such as furniture legs, are identifiable and most were collected from the streets of New York.
- **Secret rituals.** She said the title refers to its cathedral-like aspect and gilded splendour which made the work particularly appropriate to a monarchical country as it presents the viewer with an altar-like structure to kneel before to receive a royal blessing. The work is formally elegant but it also projects a feeling of power based on secret rituals. She associates gold with sunlight and prosperity and wanted to transform and elevate the natural material. The title was not before it was donated to the Tate in 1965 and so was evidently chosen as a description of the artist's gift
- **The artist.** Nevelson was born in Russia but here family emigrated to America in 1905. She studied in Munich and New York and started to make sculpture in 1932. In 1944 she started to experiment with abstract wooden assemblages and it was towards the end of the 1950s that she started to make these 'sculptured walls' for which she became internationally famous.
- **Next** I want to take you on a few rooms to the largest art work we have seen today.

Background Notes, Louise Nevelson, *An American Tribute to the British People*, 1960-64

- Nevelson collected wooden material from the streets of New York and from 1958 she started filling boxes with the found objects. The boxes were then arranged vertically and often re-arranged later. It was donated to the Tate in 1965 and consists of boxes that have been reused from other works.
- Nevelson has been painting her sculptures mostly mat black since the 1940s but she experimented with gold in the 1960s. She made an immersive environment of gold boxes for the 1962 Venice Biennale. Nevelson associated the colour gold with natural materials and sunlight but also with prosperity. In 1976 she explained: **'I think the gold enhanced the forms, enriched them. I loved it'**.
- In the late 1950s, Nevelson's move towards an almost architectural scale brought much-delayed critical and commercial success. The combination of formal originality and monumental abstraction saw her work likened to celebrated contemporary abstract expressionist painting.
- Her dealer said, **'Mrs Nevelson does, in fact, feel that this particular work is especially appropriate for your monarchical country. Its cathedral-like aspect, which seems to present the viewer with an altar at which to kneel, perhaps to receive some royal blessing, and its gilded splendour (which needs re-doing with ordinary gold spray paint every two years or so) were considered peculiarly appropriate.'**
- Nevelson was born in Kiev and her family emigrated to America in 1905. She studied in Munich and New York and started to make sculpture in 1932. In 1944 she started to experiment with abstract wooden assemblages. It was towards the end of the 1950s that she started to make these 'sculptured walls' for which she became internationally famous. They have a great formal elegance but also a strange ritualistic power.

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Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930), *Embryology*, 1978–80



- **The artist.** This is *Embryology* by Magdalena Abakanowicz a Polish artist who, sadly, died on 21 April 2017 aged 86. Abakanowicz is a descendant of Mongolian warrior Genghis Khan on her father's side and Polish aristocracy through her mother. Abakanowicz is one of the most revered Polish sculptors and since the 1960s she worked primarily in textiles and organic forms. A recurring theme in her work is the human body but in this work, we see a landscape of organic forms.
- **The work** consists of hundreds of stuffed hessian [burlap in America and Canada] sacks that were made between 1978 and 1980 by hand. Their bolder-like forms vary in size and form groups. They appear as something between soft bags and hard rocks. They look like cocoons which is also suggested by the title *Embryology* [the study of embryos and their development]. The bags also suggest storage trading.
- **Background.** In the 1960s Abakanowicz began the earliest versions of these forms that she called *Abakans* (a derivation of her family name and the Khaka's word for 'bear's blood'). The artist's poverty meant she was reduced to creating art from sacks using threads made from discarded rope. During the 1970s she discussed the development of the animal nervous system and regeneration with scientists and this work reflects on those ideas. Abakanowicz describes the work as '**monumental, strong, soft and erotic**'.
- **Meaning.** The work is concerned with change and metamorphosis through the endless multiplication and disintegration of forms both large and small. We are in a landscape which may consist of hard boulders without life but which on closer examination evolves into organic forms growing and dividing. Her work also relates to her childhood memories, for example, of sacks of potatoes.
- I would like to end with something Abakanowicz said, "**Art will remain the most astonishing activity of mankind born out of struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our mind.**"

Background Notes, Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930), *Embryology*, 1978–80

- Magdalena Abakanowicz was born near Warsaw in Poland and suffered from the political upheavals and events of the Second World War. Her work is bound up with these hard times although she has said she wants her work to 'touch universal problems'. In the early 1950s the Soviet leadership insisted on all art conforming with the dictates of 'Socialist Realism'. Since 1965 has taught at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poland and is now a professor and visiting professor of the University of California, Los Angeles. She has seven honorary doctorates and numerous awards. She was a descendant of Polish nobility and began work as an independent artist in 1956 and currently lives in Warsaw.
- Her early work in the 1960s was based on woven structures known as **Abakans**, a derivation of her family name. These works arose from her limited materials and trying conditions and she said, 'I could build three-dimensional reality; soft, full of secrets, protecting me, being a shield to me, and at the same time being my own creation, an integral part of myself'. The Abakans were an unnerving break from the pop art and conceptual art of the period but were admired by critics and delighted audiences and they launched her international reputation. Although she mostly worked with textiles she also produced paintings and drawings. Her later work generally contains hard surfaces, generally repeating forms and sometimes of the human body, or animals or trees. Much of her later work is in bronze, stone or concrete. She has appeared in over 100 group and solo exhibitions and her work is in museums around the world. She wrote, 'Soft, they contain an infinite number of possible shapes of which only one can be selected by myself as the right, meaningful one. I create space for them in exhibition rooms where they radiate the energy I have given them. They exist with me, they depend on me, I depend on them ... Without me they make no sense, like discarded body parts separated from the torso.'
- *Embryology* is made from burlap (jute or sisal), cotton gauze, hemp rope, nylon and sisal. They look like something between hard rock boulders and soft embryos or giant monster eggs.
- The Khakas, or Khakass, are a Turkic people, who live in Russia, in the republic of Khakassia in southern Siberia. They speak the Khakas language
- "My work comes from the experience of crowds, injustice, and aggression...I try to bewitch the crowd."
- "Art will remain the most astonishing activity of mankind born out of struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our mind."

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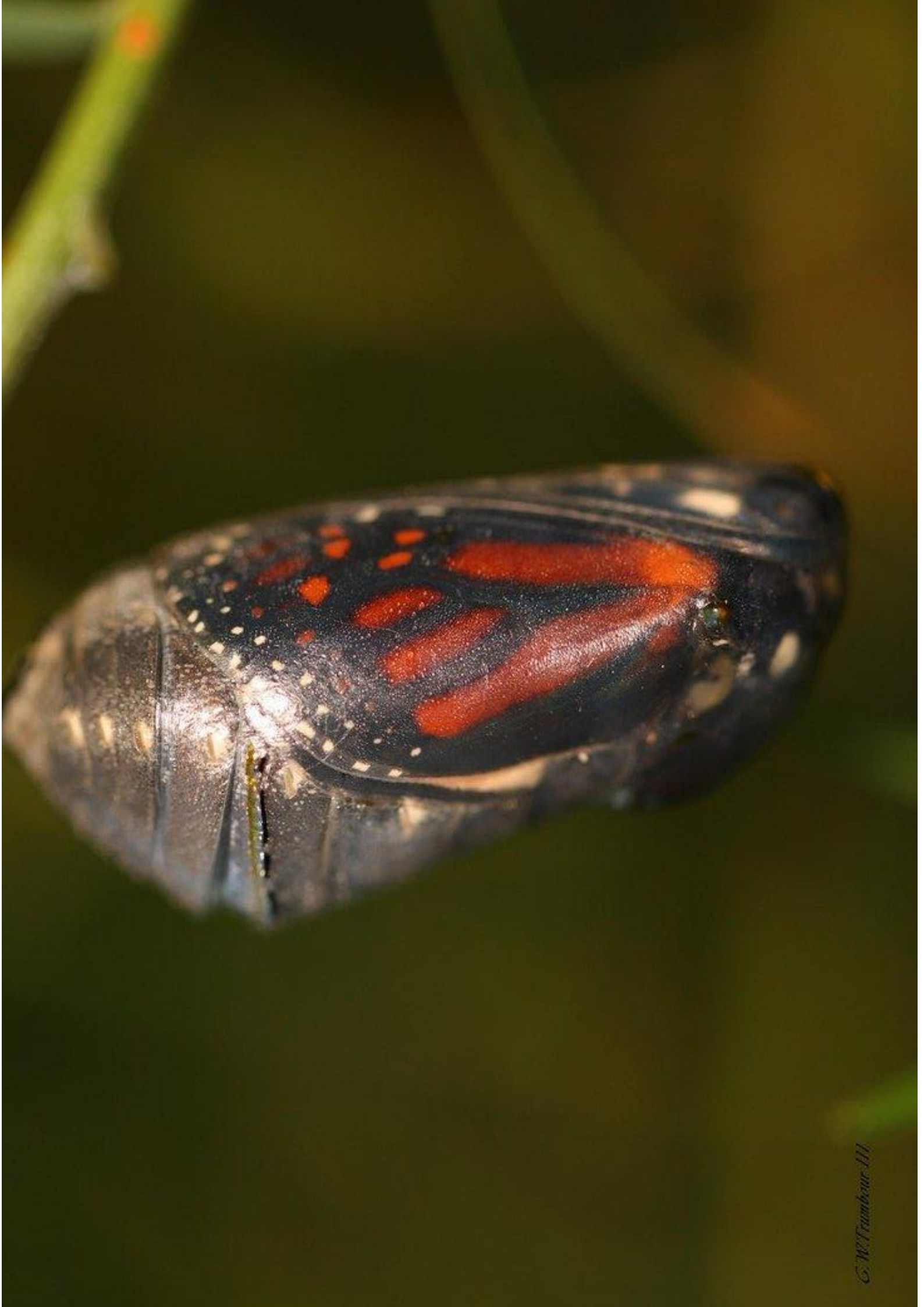
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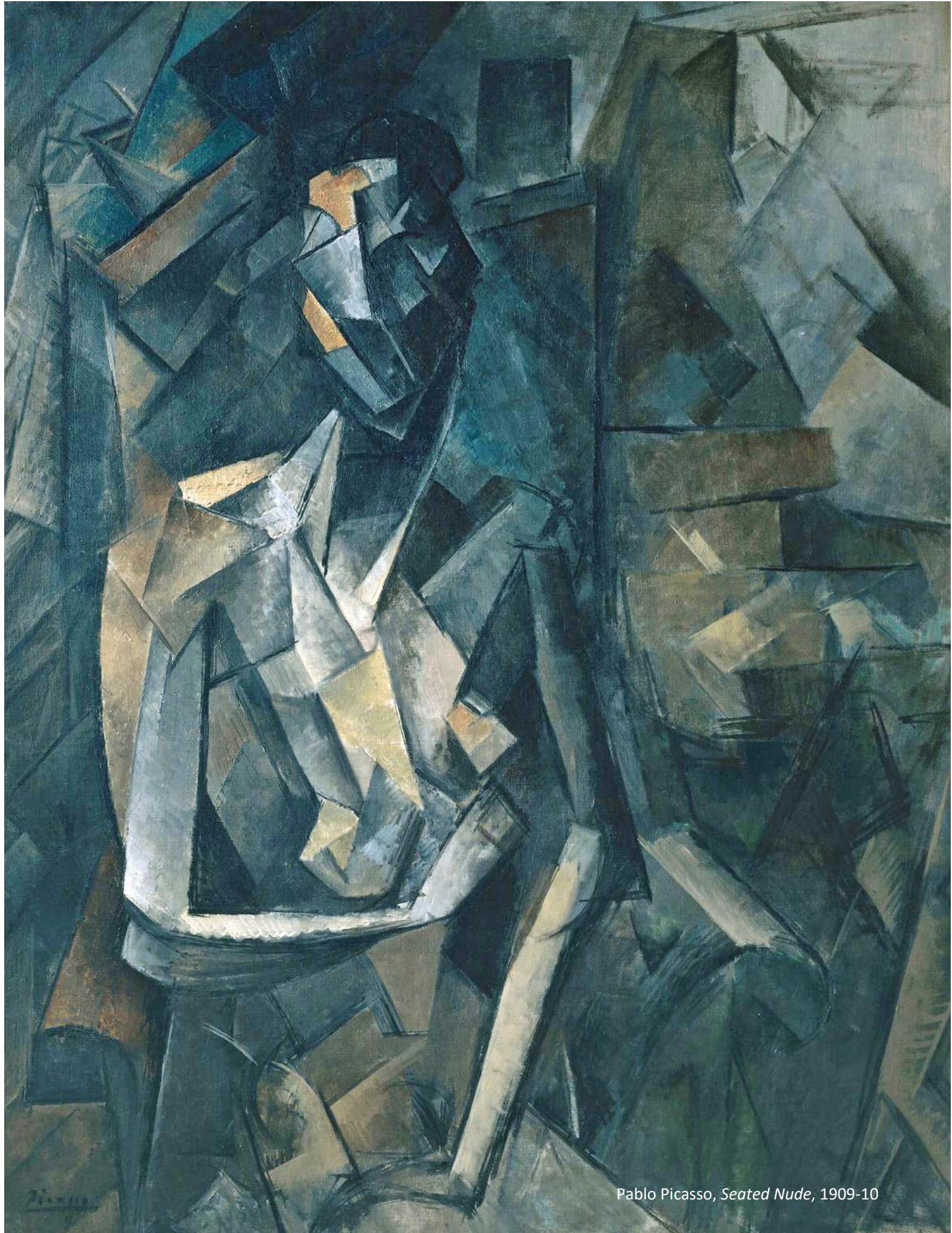
Visual Aids

- John Rowley, English Ptolemaic armillary sphere, c. 1700
- Butterfly cocoon or chrysalis
- Pablo Picasso, *Seated Nude*, 1909-10, Tate (not currently on display)
- Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art
- Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Dryer*
- Sheela Gowda in front of a car



John Rowley, English Ptolemaic armillary sphere, c. 1700





Pablo Picasso, *Seated Nude*, 1909-10



Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912

NU DESCENDANT UN ESCALIER

M. DUCHAMP

Marcel Duchamp
Bottle Dryer



Sheela Gowda



Summary of 'Materials and Objects' (14:00-14:45)

Rudolf Stingel (b. 1956), *Untitled*, 1993.

Savannah custom colour carpet. Audience as artist. The transience of modern life. Parody. A type of Readymade. 1989 provided DIY manual. 1993 first carpet at Venice Biennale. He also uses Styrofoam board which cannot be erased. He commutes between Merano in the South Tyrol and New York. Highest price \$4.75m.

Richard Deacon (b. 1949), *Art for Other People #14*, 1984.

The material is the work. **'Changing materials from one work to the next is a way of beginning again each time'**. Fabricator – assembling and inventing. He works with wood, steel, iron, marble, clay, vinyl, foam and leather. Brass which sandwiches foam held together with chrome rivets and screws. There is no 'meaning', he said **'I don't think there is ever someone who 'gets it'. I don't get it particularly ... I hope people get pleasure from the work'**. Exploration of organic v. inorganic, cocoon v. armillary sphere. #12 small, marble and leather and #24 galvanized steel, bronze and PVC. Born Bangor, St Martin's School of Art. Turner Prize 1987.

El Anatsui (b. 1944), *Ink Splash II*, 2012.

Discarded materials become beautiful objects. Aluminium bottle tops have been flattened and sewn using copper wire. The blue and yellow suggest a splash of ink which has 'leaked'. He is a Ghanaian artist who lives and works in Nigeria. The materials suggest a time when Europeans brought rum and manufactured goods to Africa to trade for slaves. When it was a British colony alcoholic drinks were made in the UK but after independence in 1957 it made its own. The drink caps used are made in Nigeria and symbolize its history. The work suggests chain mail, quilts animal hides, mosaic and ceremonial cloth.

Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), *Picture of Spatial Growths - Picture with Two Small Dogs*, 1920–39.

After the First World War Schwitters's art changed dramatically. He wrote, **'Everything had broken down and new things had to be made out of the fragments'**. He joined the Dada group in Berlin. Collected rubbish. Dada rejected reason as it led to war and created nonsense. Started 1920 reworked Norway 1939 renamed *Bild mit 2 kleinen Hunden*. Degenerate artist fled Germany to Norway, then Scotland, then Isle of Man. Died day after made a British citizen.

Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky, 1890-1976), *Cadeau*, 1921, editioned replica 1972. A flat iron with 14 tacks glued to the bottom. This is a readymade which you might think is a humorous attempt to subvert the point of an iron. Man Ray saw it had erotic potential and used it to shred a dress and then **'asked a beautiful eighteen-year-old coloured girl to wear it as she danced. Her body showed through as she moved around, it was like a bronze in movement. It was really beautiful'**. The original was stolen the day it was made and this is a copy made 50 years later. He could not find the same flat iron and so bought five different types and this is one of them.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1974. Imagine April 1917 New York and this is a committee meeting of the American Society of Independent Artists. You must decide whether to accept this work. It is WWI and you want to take over from Paris as the centre of the art world and you have already told the press you will accept all works submitted. You decided to reject. It was actually submitted by Marcel Duchamp who is one of your fellow director and he immediately resigned. He was testing the committee. Although he said, **'A great deal of modern art is meant to be amusing'** he gave a more profound answer later **'a form of denying the possibility of defining art'**. It is a Readymade, an artwork created by selection, and it was voted the most influential work of the 20th century.

Susumu Koshimizu (b. 1944), *From Surface to Surface*, 1971, remade 1986. This work consists of twelve planks of wood that explores the qualities of the wood through different kinds of cut. The precision of the cuts contrasts with the slight irregularities of the natural wood. Koshimizu began when the Vietnam War protests were taking place in Japan. He and others artists were called **Mono Ha ('School of Things')** and their work was a protest against capitalism and modern art. The Mono Ha spokesman was **Lee Ufan** whose work *Relatum* (1968, remade 1994) is a hundred steel bands intertwined. They both reject representation in favour of revealing the world through raw and industrial materials.

Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947), *Breath 5*, 1978. The work is three terracotta sections roughly joined to form a vase shape. The compressed area is an imprint of the artist's body. He pushed clay against a model of his body. At the top is a model of the inside of his mouth. The work suggests his breath coming out and is one of nine vase-like shapes he made. He said our breath is '**a sculpture that lasts an instant, but is already a sculpture**' and he is exploring Duchamp's concept of the **infra-thin**, a subtle but real difference between two objects or events. He used everyday materials as was a member of the Italian **Arte Povera** which has similarities with **Mono Ha** in Japan and **Minimalism** in America (all mid-1960s).

Sheela Gowda (b. 1957), *Behold*, 2009. Four kilometres of human hair hand-woven into ropes and 20 car bumpers. In Bangalore, Karnataka, pilgrims have their hair shorn as a sign of humility. The hair is sold by the temple for wigs, hairpieces and beauty products as well as to produce talismen that are wrapped round bumpers or the fronts of cars to protect against accidents. So the usual role fragile body and hard machine is inverted. Gowda describes it as '**a coming together of fear, superstition, belief and a need for comforting action in the framework of modern life**'. The work is labour intensive but Gowda adds to the intensity by keeping it '**seemingly simple and minimal**'.

Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), *An American Tribute to the British People*, 1960-64. Both works by Nevelson in this room are made from objects found on the streets of New York. There are 35 open-faced boxes with boxes projecting each end. It looks like a **church organ** and is painted gold. Nevelson was born in Russia but her family emigrated to America when she was 6. She studied in Munich and New York and started to sculpt in 1932. She started to make these 'sculpted walls' in the 1950s. The reference to 'the British People' is because it is '**appropriate for your monarchical country**'. She associates gilded splendour with the monarchy and the altar-like structure is one we could kneel before to receive a royal blessing. It projects a feeling of **secret rituals**. She associates gold with sunlight and prosperity and wanted to transform the natural material.

Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930), *Embryology*, 1978-80. There are hundreds of stuffed hessian (burlap) sacks made between 1978 and 1980 by hand. They suggest soft cocoons or hard rocks. The idea of cocoons relates to the title *Embryology* (the study of embryos). In the 1960s she started making these *Abakans* and because of her poverty they were initially made from discarded strands of rope. She was interested in animal development and regeneration in the 1970s. She describes the work as, '**monumental, strong, soft and erotic**'. She is one of the most respected Polish sculptors living today and continues to work mostly with textiles. The work is concerned with change from rocks to living forms, both small and large, growing and dividing. They have also been seen as storage sacks for potatoes based on her childhood memories. '**Art will remain the most astonishing activity of mankind born out of struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our mind**'.