



- Welcome, my name is Laurence Shafe and I would like to take you on a journey through art history.
- I am a guide at Tate Modern and in this talk I would like to show a few of the major works in one gallery called Materials & Objects. The works on display change on a regular basis and so I have selected works that have been on display during 2018 to 2019. Note that some of the works I discuss are no longer be on display.

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

- **Audience as artist.** This is a work called *Untitled* by Rudolf Stingel; it's a wall covered by an orange carpet. When you visit 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. It also has historic references as expensive woven art works, tapestries, used to be hung on the wall.
- **Readymade**. The colour was specified by the artist and the carpet made to order but basically it is what we call a 'ready-made', an object the artist has just bought with the minimum intervention by the artist. We will hear more about ready-mades later when we look at Marcel Duchamp's Fountain.
- **The 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.

Notes

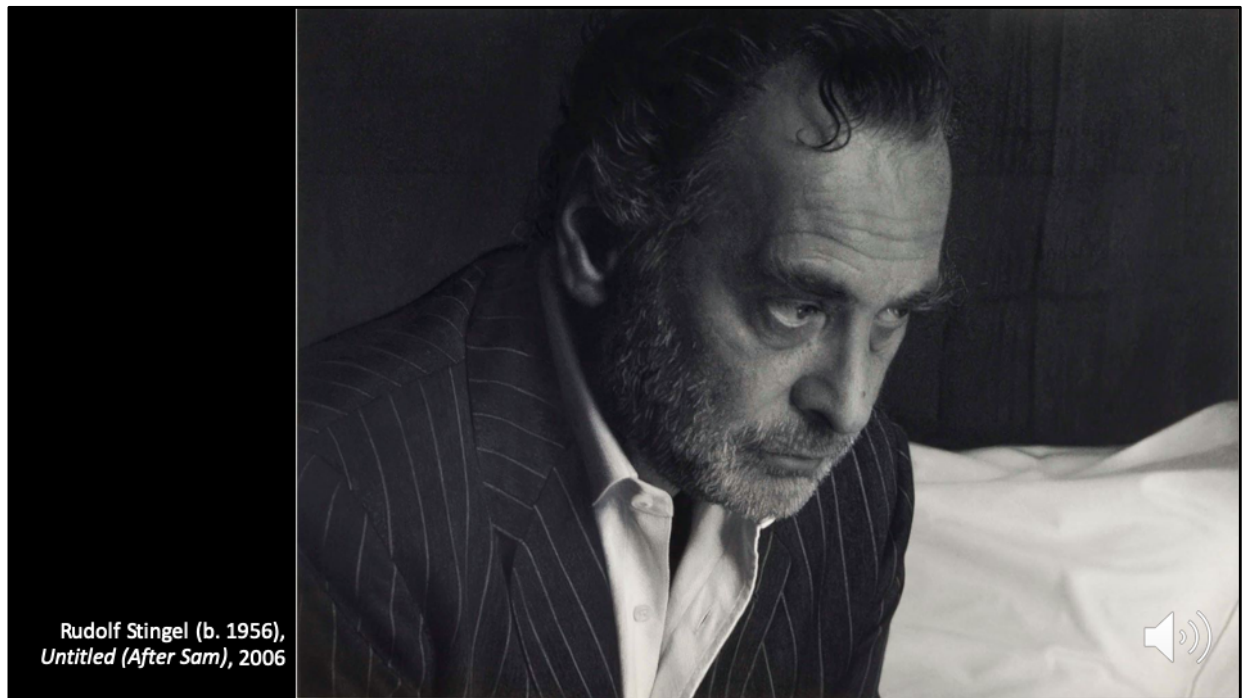
- *Untitled* (1993) consists of a wall entirely covered with orange Savannah custom colour carpeting. Stingel challenges artistic conventions by exchanging paint on canvas for carpet mounted directly onto the wall and allowing the viewer to make their own marks on the surface. The result is a work of 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, Stiegel 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.

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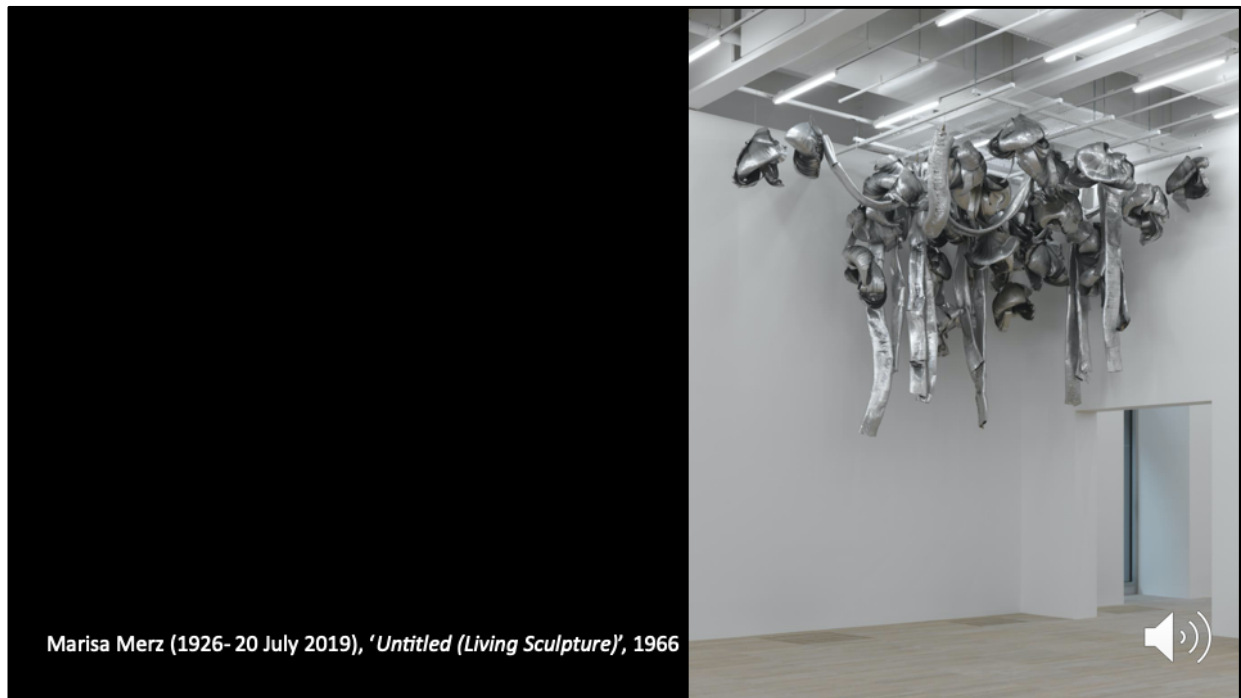
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Rudolf Stingel (b. 1956), *Untitled (After Sam)*, 2006, 335.3 × 457.2 cm

- At a Christie's New York auction in 2015, Stingel's *Untitled* (1993), part of his series of silver paintings, at the time it set a new world auction record for the artist at \$4,757,000. His latest work is a series of oil paintings of black and white photographs. One of these, ***Untitled (After Sam)***, 2006, a photorealistic self-portrait based on a photograph by Sam Samore, sold at Christies in 2017 for over \$10.5 million.



Marisa Merz (1926- 20 July 2019), 'Untitled (Living Sculpture)', 1966

- This suspended sculpture is created from twenty-six hollow aluminium tubes stapled together. It was created by the Italian artist Marisa Merz the most prominent woman among a group known as Arte Povera. They challenged the elitism of conventional art by using inexpensive, ordinary materials and this is one of the earliest works she created. It was created in 1966 to hang in her kitchen and was exhibited the following year and bought by Tate in 2009.
- The work is irregular and the parts hang at different heights. The work dominates the space but also defines it and it is subtly rearranged in each gallery room to create a relationship between the space and the work. Merz enjoyed the flexibility of the work which meant it can never be pinned down and is constantly evolving.
- Merz was one of the leading artists of the Arte Povera movement but was overshadowed by her husband who was also an artist. Recently,

her work has been increasingly seen as some of the most significant work of the period. Sadly, she died in July 2019 aged 93 and in her obituary in the New York Times she was described as a 'Bold Explorer When Art Was a Man's World'.

Notes

- Marisa Merz was an Italian artist and sculptor. In the 1960s, Merz was the only female protagonist associated with the radical Arte Povera movement. In 2013 she was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. She lived and worked in Turin, Italy.
- The term 'Arte Povera' was coined by Italian critic and curator Germano Celant in 1967 and translates as 'poor art'. This references the group's shared concern with using inexpensive and readily available materials to subvert the elite status of the art object. They would work with soil, rags and twigs rather than more traditional materials such as oil paint on canvas, bronze or carved marble.

References

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/merz-untitled-living-sculpture-t12950>



Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971), *'Scruff of the Neck'*, 2016

- This is by the Iranian-Armenian artist Nairy Baghramian and is called *'Scruff of the Neck'*. It turns the usual convention of entering a space by moving forward. Imagine entering backwards by the *'scruff of the neck'*, a vulnerable and sensitive part of the body. It is associated with control and violent parenting or schooling. She is also interested in how we interpret the façade of a building as its face and asks us to consider entering the building by a more circuitous route.
- Her works of this type are organic white forms braced by inorganic, polished metal armatures. In a humorous way the sculptures borrow from the science of dentistry, the polished metal braces and cosmetic implants. This does not mean they are tied to this association. They are free, enigmatic and full of contradictions and puzzles.
- Baghramian moved to Berlin when she was a teenager and still lives and works there. She has exhibited internationally and many of her

works explore the body and examine it or recombine parts of it to make a political or artistic statement. Her works often look as if they are on the point of collapse and their fragility throws new light on the way sculptors have represented the body.

Notes

- In the 1930s and 1940s, interior design was a haven for women like Janette Laverrière. In 2007, Baghramian tracked down the 100-year-old Laverrière, inviting her to collaborate on a project for the Berlin Biennial. A highlight of the event, it put both women firmly on the international art map and marked the beginning of a series of joint projects that continued until Laverrière's death in 2011.

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Richard Deacon (b. 1949), *Art for Other People #14*, (not on display)

- **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.

Notes

- 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 was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1984 and won it 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*. He represented Wales at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and Tate held a retrospective of his work in 2014.
- 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 has always been a great collaborator and has worked 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.

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El Anatsui (b. 1944), *Ink Splash II*, 2012 (not on display)

- **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. It can be seen as a purely abstract work but 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. Although most of the artists in the Nsukka Group are men uli art was traditionally practiced by women.

Notes

- El Anatsui is a Ghanaian sculptor active for much of his career in Nigeria. In 1999, Anatsui found a bag of 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.
- “Kente is a strip-woven cloth that is made by the Asante peoples of Ghana and the Ewe peoples of Ghana and Togo. It is a festive dress for special occasions--traditionally worn by men as a kind of toga and by women as an upper and lower wrapper. Adinkra is a system of graphic symbols that appear as two-dimensional designs on dyed and stamped textiles and as three-dimensional motifs ornamenting carved and cast objects, including jewellery. Dark-coloured adinkra cloths are funerary attire, while those of brighter hues may be worn on other special occasions. Both kente and adinkra patterns communicate cultural and philosophical meanings, social codes of conduct, religious beliefs, political thought and aesthetic principles. On a global level, kente cloth has become an overriding symbol for African-ness.” (see afria.si.edu)

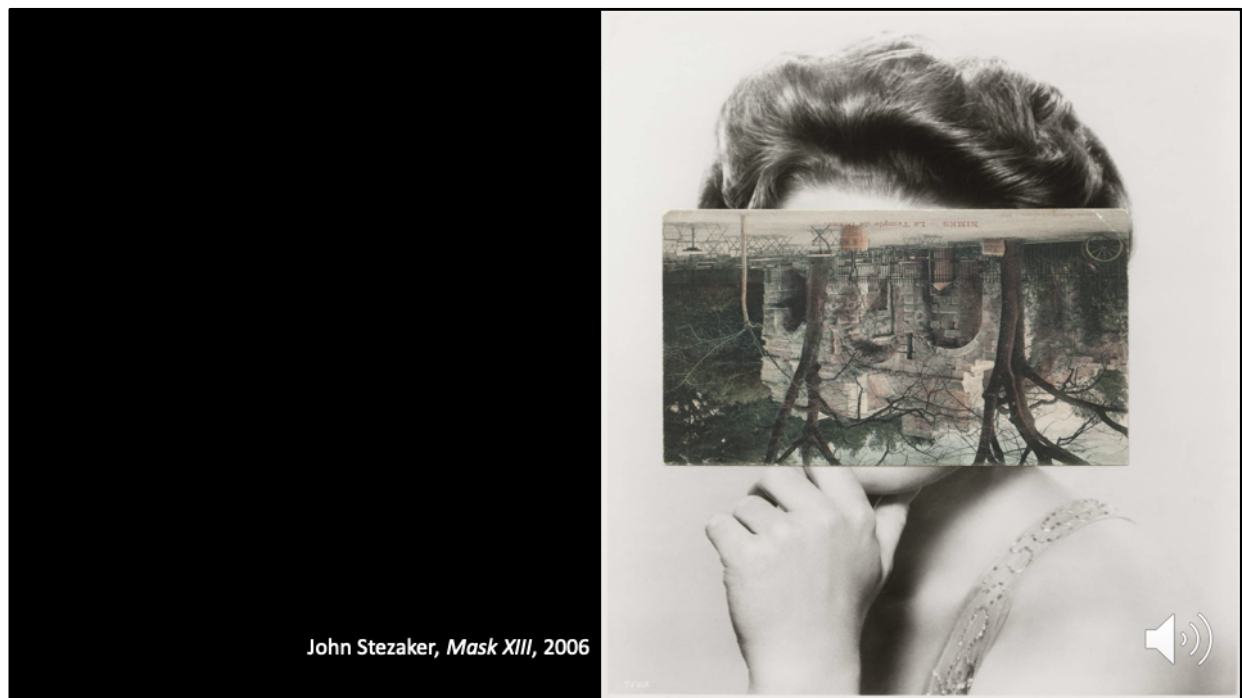
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<https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/gawu/artworks.html>



John Stezaker, *Mask XIII*, 2006, postcard on paper on photograph, black and white, on paper, 24 x 19 cm, purchased 2007

- This is *Mask XIII* by John Stezaker (pronounced 'STEZ-occur'), one of a series of old movie stills of long forgotten movie stars covered by a postcard of a monument, a ruin or a landscape feature. The postcards are typically inverted and carefully positioned to create the illusion of facial features. In this case the dark foliage looks like an extension of her dark hair and the inverted arches look like eye sockets and a nose. The inverted top of the ruins look like an upper jaw with teeth giving the impression of a skull. Written on the postcard is 'Nîmes – Le Temple de Diane' which identifies the ruins as the temple of Diana at Nîmes in France.
- This is part of a series of *Mask* collages based on an idea that he first developed in the 1980s. The postcard acts as the mask and the actresses face is also a mask. Stezaker began collecting film stills in

1973 but he was unable to afford the portraits until their price dropped in the 1980s after the movie stars had been long forgotten. In a letter he mentions that he was teaching a course on the origins of art and he focused on the mask as '**the origin and point of convergence of all the arts**'. The reason is that the mask is empty but creates an identity and a meaning that hides another identity.

- Stezaker has been described as a Surrealist because of his anachronistic combination of images but he invokes a power through using old nostalgic images that he collects and ponders upon for years. Stezaker feels that old photographs retain a power. He collects them and calls them 'orphans' that he rescues by channeling their power in new directions.
- The Temple of Diana has romantic association with the Greek goddess, but it is in fact based on a false attribution. The building was incorrectly named when it was discovered in the 17th century when a statue of Diana was found in the ruins during its excavation. The true purpose of the building is not known but it is believed to be a sanctuary built around a spring during the reign of the Emperor Augustus (63BC-AD14). The image is thus a form of mask in which its apparent appearance as a romantic invocation of the goddess Diana covers or hides its true purpose as a source or spring. The idea of a spring is central to another work by Stezaker called *Mask XI* in which a stream cascading down the rocks invokes a painting by Gustave Courbet (1819-77) called *The Source* (Musée d'Orsay). Courbet's painting shows the back of a naked woman playing with water cascading from a rock.

Notes

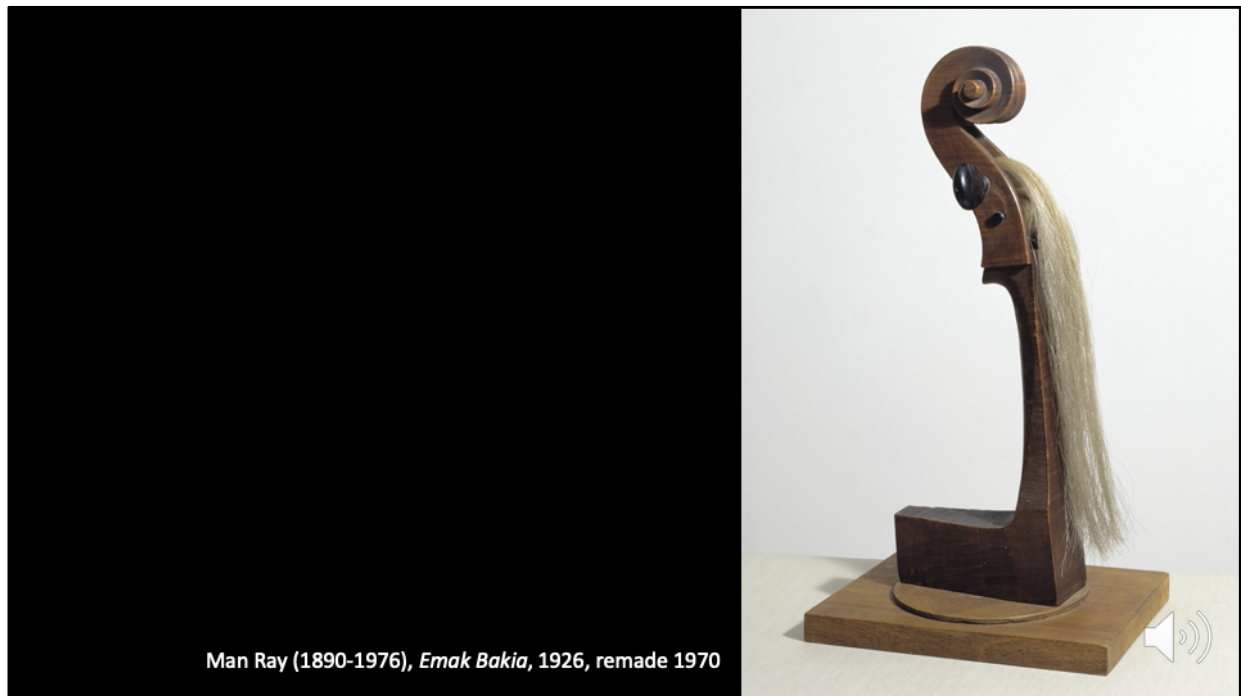
- John Stezaker was born in 1949, in Worcester and graduated from the Slade. He now lives and works in London. His work consists of manipulated photographs of 1940s and 1950s movie stars. Many of the images are partly covered by a postcard of a monument, ruin or landscape. The images of movie stars, mostly long forgotten refers to a past time of glamour and romance. Stezaker has referred to the posters of movie stars outside cinemas that formed part of the nostalgic recreation of his youth. His work questions the nature of

truth and the significance of memory in creating symbols of modern culture.

- Stezaker as, for more than 30 years, an influential teacher at Goldsmiths, Saint Martins and the Royal College of Art. He made his collages in private for 40 years and they are now being exhibited in major galleries around the world since his retrospective in the Whitechapel Gallery in 2011.
- Anonymous actors who were photographed for publicity stills, but never actually made a film are called 'virgins'. Stezaker has spent 40 years collecting such photographs.

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Man Ray (1890-1976), *Emak Bakia*, 1926, remade 1970, wood and horse hair on wooden base, 510 x 197 x 260 mm, 1.4 kg

- This object is by Man Ray who is better known for his photography. It is called *Emak Bakia* (pronounced 'em-mac barkia') and consists of an upright part like the neck of a cello, but the strings have been replaced by a flowing lock of hair. It was made in 1926, although this one he remade in 1970, and the original wooden upright was made from the broken neck of an old cello he bought in a flea market in Paris. It was very old and worn and Man Ray joked that he would give it a long white beard and he paired it with light-grey horse-hair. The long, flowing hair and the curvaceous form feminises the object. He was particularly fascinated by the spiral form of the cello head. And he once said, **"Nature, from the sea-shell to the galaxy, is full of spirals: when I was a young man I was already obsessed by this form; when working as a draughtsman I was fascinated by curves,**

spirals, parabolas, hyperbolas”.

- The title is unusual as it is in the Basque language and means ‘leave me alone’. It is the name of a house Man Ray stayed in the year before he made this piece and he made an avant garde film of the same name. In 1970 he made ten editions in silver and one in wood, this one. The Tate owns seven different objects made by Man Ray later editions. This is because many of his earlier objects have been lost as he made them to photograph and then discarded them. The other reason is that in the 1960s and 70s there was a commercial interest in these objects and he, like Marcel Duchamp, arranged for some of the objects to be produced in limited editions.
- Man Ray said, ‘There is no progress in art, any more than there is progress in making love. There are simply different ways of doing it’. He also said, ‘I have been accused of being a joker. But the most successful art to me involves humour’ and his epitaph read, ‘unconcerned, but not indifferent’.
- **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.

Notes

- 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 although he was forced to go to New York due to the Second World War. He married Juliet

Browner, a trained dancer, in a double wedding with Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning in 1946. 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.

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Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1974
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz at 291 (an art gallery) following the rejection of the work by the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition, with entry tag visible. The backdrop is *The Warriors* by Marsden Hartley (1877-1943) and American Modernist painter, poet and essayist.

- 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 as no skill was involved in its production. 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 'ready-mades'. He had already mounted a bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913) and had chosen a bottle dryer (*Bottle Dryer*, 1914) as ready-mades. 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 ready-mades 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?'

Notes

- 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 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 Ready-mades (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 Ready-mades 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 Rrose 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 Ready-mades 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 of

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.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573/text-summary>



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 artists 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.

Notes

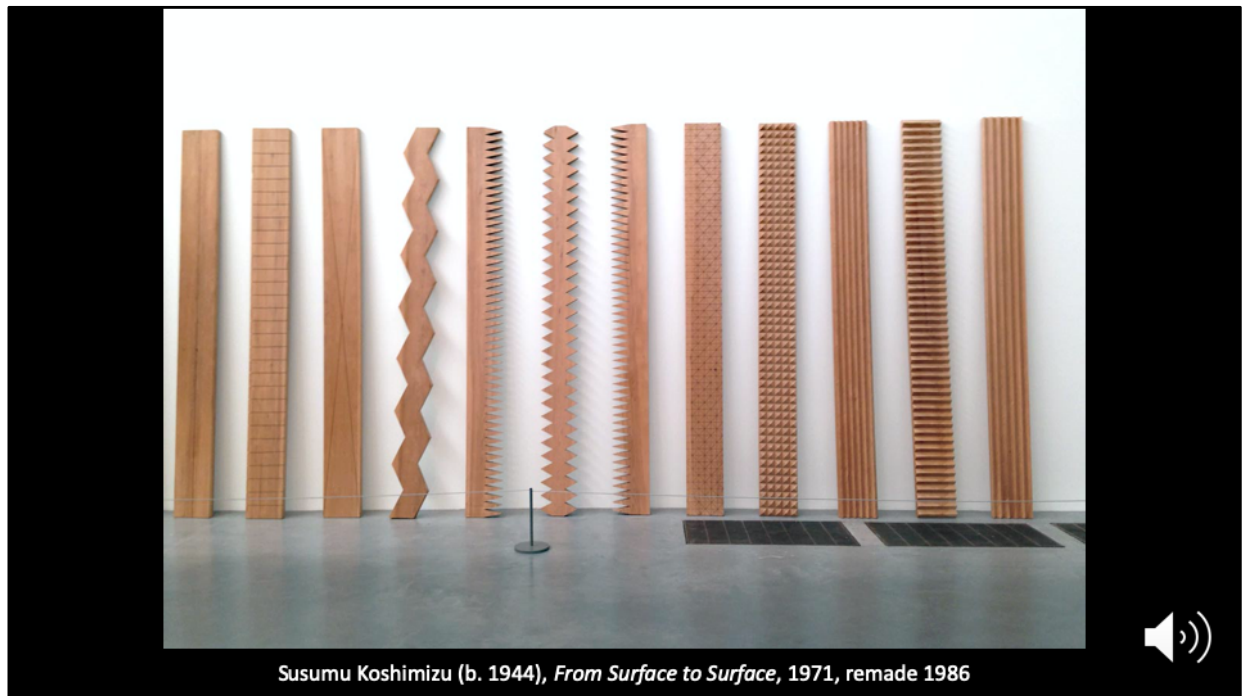
- Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947) was born in the Garessio forest in north-west Italy near the French border. Penone's work is concerned with establishing a contact between man and nature. Penone was born in a forest area and the tree is a central element in much of his work which also uses everyday materials 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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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 (b. 1936), 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.

Notes

- 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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Tunga (1952-2016), *Capillary Xiphopagus among Us*, 1984

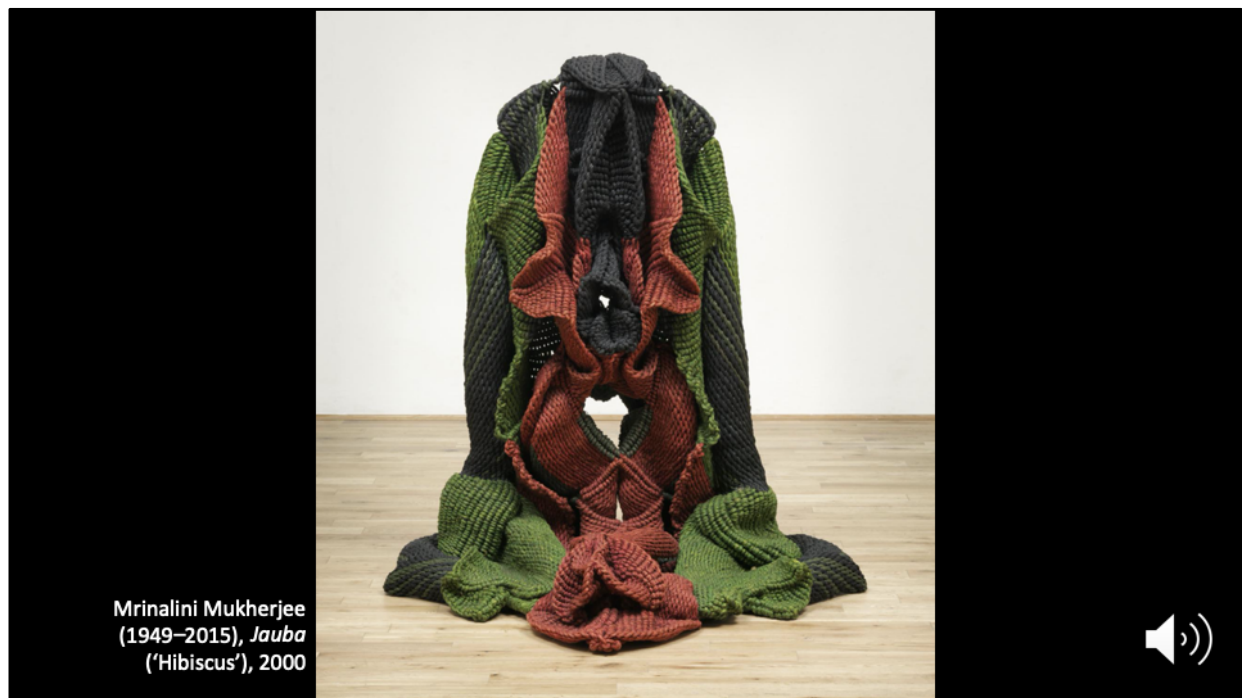
- Brazilian artist Tunga's legendary performance featuring twin adolescent girls connected by their hair was staged at Tate Modern during July and August 2018. This signature performance work is called, *Xifópagas Capilares entre Nós* (pronounced 'chifo-pagas capularease zentray nos', and loosely translated as '**Capillary Conjoined Twins Among Us**') reflects the artist's fascination with the uncanny and surreal. This work demonstrates the artist's desire to create unexpected and inexplicable worlds through his inventions, blurring the boundaries between reality and myth.
- *Xifópagas Capilares entre Nós* was first staged in 1984 and features twin adolescent girls who appear unexpectedly and sporadically in the galleries. Tunga is interested in blurring the boundary between reality and myth and based the performance upon a myth of conjoined Nordic girls whose existence caused conflict in their

homeland. He also published an essay of the same title, which describes the myth amongst a variety of unusual occurrences.

- The myth was that two girls were born joined only by their hair. Their village were worried by this omen but couldn't decide what to do. They agreed that when the girls came of age they would allow them to decide between agreeing to have their hair cut to separate them or being killed. When they came of age they decided not to be separated and were decapitated and their heads hung in a tree. This cause dissension and revolt across the country. An old woman came across the tree and took down their heads and sewed a purse from their har and the strands turned into gold.
- Tunga's exploration of materials and the uncanny manifests itself in the form of his large sculpture *Braid*, c.1983. Hair, and specifically the braid, is a recurring symbol across much of his work, which often used materials such as copper and other metals. The sculpture currently on display is made entirely of lead and remains one of the earliest and largest of the series. It can be displayed snaking across the floor or curling up the wall.
- Tunga does not just work with hair but with a wide variety of bodily organs and functions, and other organic matter, and his materials include bones and skulls, teeth and viscous liquids as well as hair.

Notes

- Antonio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (1952–2016, pronounced 'more-er-oo') known professionally as Tunga, was born in Palmares, Brazil, and was one recognized as one of the leading Brazilian artists of his generation. Working across multiple disciplines including sculpture, installation, video and performance, his practice addresses a wide set of themes such as archaeology, mythology, philosophy, psychology and literature. Tunga's work is spread across international collections, including institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, and Stockholm's Moderna Museet.



Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949–2015), *Jauba* ('Hibiscus'), 2000, hemp fibre and steel, 143 x 133 x 110 cm

- This is call *Jauba* a freestanding sculpture made from knotted hemp over a metal frame. The yarn has been dyed and hung over the metal frame to create this organic form. It has been made by the Indian artist Mrinalini Mukherjee and the title *Jauba* means hibiscus in Bengali. The botanical form with the name of a flower reminds me of the close-up paintings of flowers by the American artist Georgia O'Keefe, like this one (see Visual Aids).
- Hemp is a widely used material in rural India and Mukherjee started experimenting with the material in 1971. She started as a student as a painter reworking traditional crafts and as she expanded her sculpture she worked in ceramic and bronze.
- In India she is seen as an innovator who has moved away from European models of modern sculpture although her interest in

natural materials aligns her with Italian Arte Povera and Japanese Mono Ha artists.

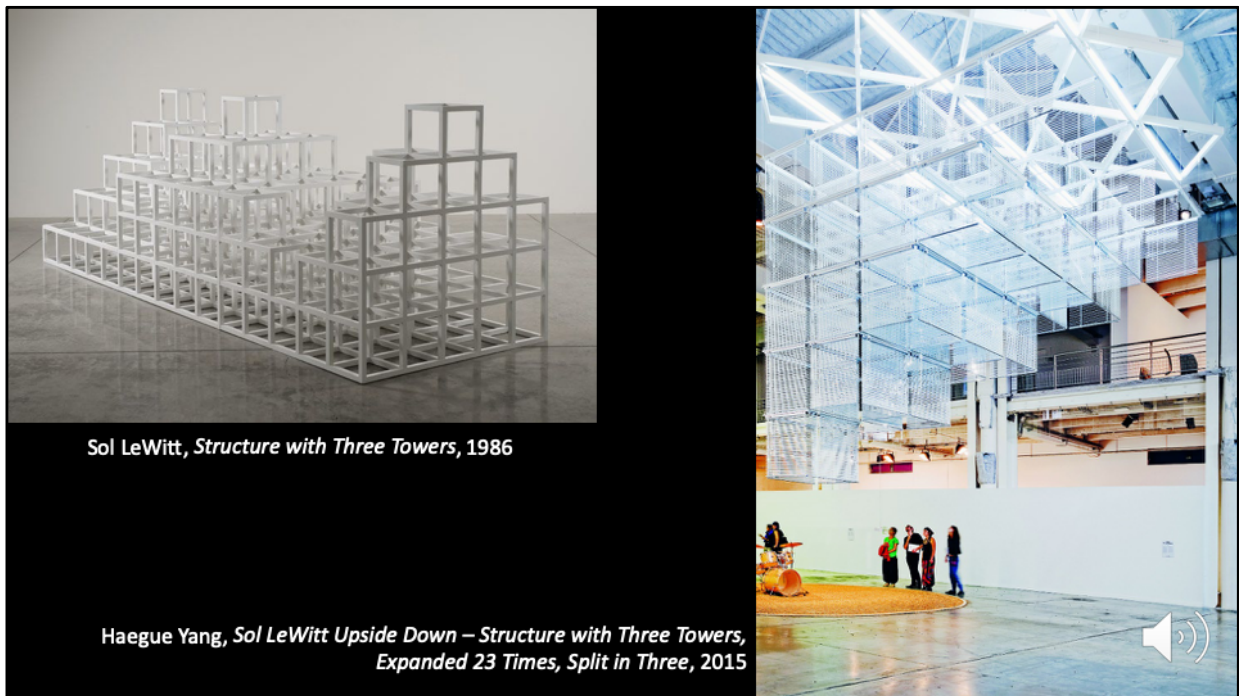
- The form of the object and the central pink area has sexual associations which have been discussed with respect to her work. Yet, Mukherjee, like Georgia O'Keefe rejects any simplistic sexual reading. She has said, **'I work emotionally and intuitively and do not like analysing my feelings during the work process'**.
- One book on contemporary Indian art describes her as a 'unique voice in contemporary Indian art' and adds 'The sculptures knotted painstakingly with hemp ropes in earthy or rich glowing colours evoke a fecund world of burgeoning life, lush vegetation, iconic figures.' The compelling hold the work has on the viewer is related to the sensuous, sexual and tactile quality of the many mysterious folds and orifices.

Notes

- Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949-2017) was an Indian sculptor who was born in Bombay and studied at Baroda (now called Vadodara), in Gujarat, western India, before receiving a scholarship to study in Surrey, England. The main metaphor for her work is the organic life of plants and her work suggests a gradual unfolding of organic forms like the stirring of life in the spring.
- One book on contemporary Indian art describes her as a 'unique voice in contemporary Indian art' and adds 'The sculptures knotted painstakingly with hemp ropes in earthy or rich glowing colours evoke a fecund world of burgeoning life, lush vegetation, iconic figures.' The compelling hold the work has on the viewer is related to the sensuous, sexual and tactile quality of the many mysterious folds and orifices.
- Mukherjee died in 2015, aged 65, following a brief illness, just as a major solo exhibition of her work was opening in New Delhi.

References

- <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mukherjee-jauba-t14458>



Haegue Yang, *Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three*, 2015, Powder-coated aluminium, steel, plastic, LED lights and nylon

Sol LeWitt, *Structure with Three Towers*, 1986

- The title of this piece is '*Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three*' by Haegue Yang (pronounced 'hae-GYOO Yang'). It consists of five hundred venetian blinds hanging from the ceiling and was produced in 2015. The title refers to another artist Sol LeWitt who was a pioneer of conceptual art and who first came to fame in the 1960s. In 1986 Sol LeWitt produced this sculpture (see Visual Aids) called *Structure with Three Towers*. Haegue Yang has replaced the cubes with venetian blinds, magnified it twenty-three times, divided it into three parts and suspended it upside down from the ceiling.
- Why? She uses venetian blinds in a lot of her work because of the

way they manipulate the light so that what you see depends on your position. At one point they are opaque, another translucent, they create layers and discrete groups creating an immersive structure that is both familiar yet resists being perceived as a familiar object.

- This is one of a number of her works that are all based on Sol LeWitt's original piece. He described his sculptures as 'structures' and they consisted of open, modular designs based on lines and shapes. He was concerned with the idea behind the work of art and produced deliberately vague sketches that could be interpreted and implemented by his assistants. He often worked with lines, basic colours and simplified shapes and neither the skill of production nor the authority of the artist nor meaning were important to his work.
- Yang produced a series of works based on LeWitt's structure, some are small, floor-based works and others are larger than this one. They are all constructed from aluminium venetian blinds. She is a South Korean artist who was born in Seoul in 1971 and now commutes between Seoul and Berlin. She works with a wide variety of domestic objects ranging from tea cosies to cans of Spam. She removes these objects from their original context and rearranges them into abstract compositions. Her aim is to communicate in a primitive, visual way without language and she often adds scent, sound, lights and tactility. Her work is a contemplation on work, our emotional connections and dislocation and here she references a work of abstract art by another artist.

Notes

- Hague Yang (pronounced 'hae-GYOO Yang') is a South Korean artist who was born in 1971. She now lives in Berlin and Seoul and her work has been exhibited at major art institutions around the world where she has had seven solo shows on three different continents. She had an exhibition at Tate Modern in 2012 called 'Dress Vehicles'. She works with a wide variety of domestic objects ranging from tea cosies to cans of Spam. She removes these objects from their original context and rearranges them into abstract compositions. Her work is a contemplation on work, our emotional connections and dislocation and she frequently makes a reference to works of abstraction

through art history.

- Sol (Solomon) LeWitt (1928-2007) was born in Hartford, Connecticut to a family of Jewish immigrants from Russia. After graduating he travelled to Europe before serving in the Korean War.
- Haegue Yang wrote, 'My driving interests and motivations are often concrete, but my artistic language is one of abstraction. Abstraction is, for me, a way of thinking and working through collective and individual narratives across different histories, generations and locations. They coincide and overlap, becoming comprehensible on a personal level in linguistically unexplainable ways.'
- 'Venetian blinds – with their binary properties of folding/unfolding, and transparency/privacy – provide a rich visual and sculptural framework, as well as an apt metaphor, for many of the themes Yang is interested in exploring, including issues of barriers, borders, and dispersion.' (*Huffington Post*). Yang has referred to their 'permeability to perception'.

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Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017), *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 boulder-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."

Notes

- 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

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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Niki de Saint Phalle, *Shooting Picture*, 1961

- This is *Shooting Picture* by Niki de Saint Phalle (pronounced 'faal'). It was created by firing a rifle at bags of paint fixed to a white canvas. Before the shooting the canvas was painted white and the rifle shots punctured the bags of paint and allowed them to spatter and run down the white canvas.
- Between 1961, when this was produced, and 1970 Niki de Saint Phalle produced a series of works that involved shooting at cans or balloons of paint. She used darts, pistols, rifles and miniature canons either herself or fired by other artists or members of the public. These events became 'happenings' whose violence attracted the attention of the press and other artists. This work was created in a gallery in Paris where Saint Phalle and the American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns fired at the canvas. At other happenings members of the audience were invited to participate.

- Although Saint Phalle was not a member of the Women's Liberation Movement she did see these works in gendered terms. She was a former fashion model and would dress for her happenings in fashionable white overalls and black boots or a smart red dress. The symbolic act of self-destruction was not just to her own work, but she referenced the work of other artists and asked them to participate in shooting these models of their own work. The apparently destructive act of shooting the canvas was itself, ironically the creative act of creating the artwork.
- Saint Phalle was born in the suburbs of Paris and lived in New York before moving to Spain, Switzerland, and then Paris. She had no formal training in art but collaborated with well-known artists. Although she suffered from chronic health problems brought on by the experimental materials she used, she continued to create prolifically until the end of her life. She has been described by one critic as **'one of the most significant female and feminist artists of the 20th century, and one of the few to receive recognition in the male-dominated art world during her lifetime.'** At a time of minimalism, she insisted on exuberance, emotion, sensuality and bold colours.

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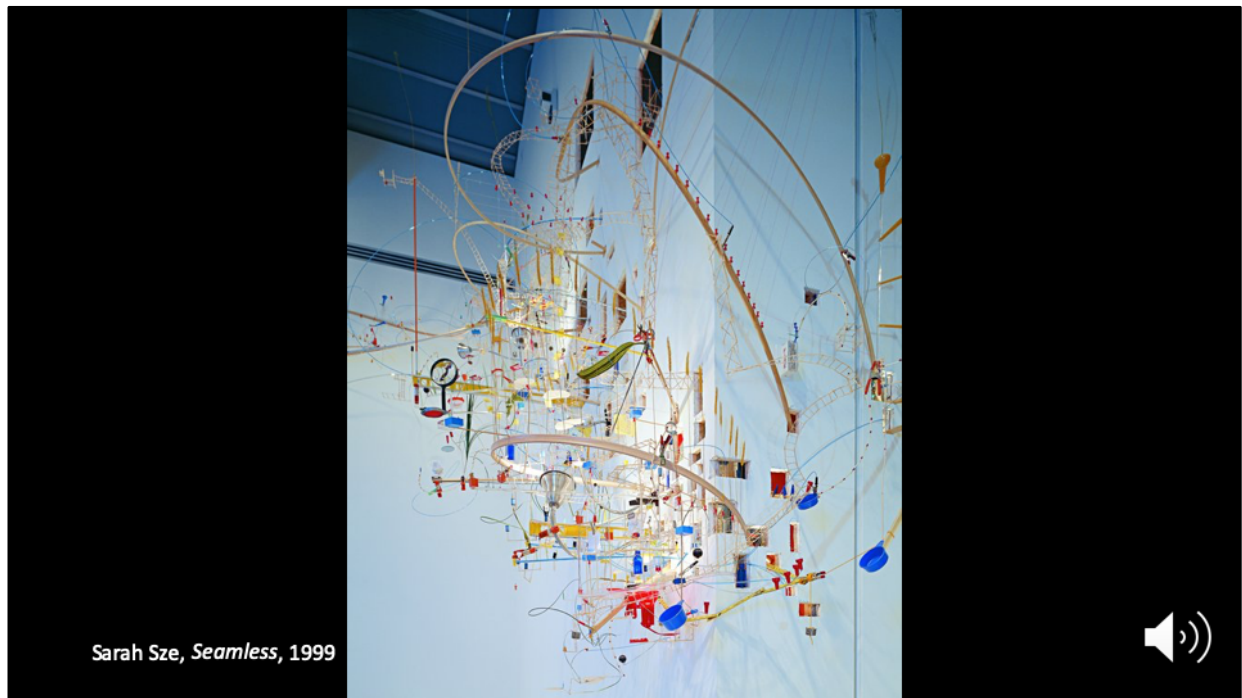
- Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002, pronounced 'pal'), was a French-American sculptor, painter and filmmaker. Niki de Saint Phalle was a truly global artist – born in the suburbs of Paris, she lived in New York before moving to Spain, Switzerland, and Paris again. She had no formal training in art but collaborated with well-known artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and the composer John Cage. She worked closely with Swiss artist Jean Tinguely and he became her second husband. Later in life she suffered from chronic health problems brought on by the experimental materials she used in her art, but she continued to create prolifically until the end of her life. She has been described by one critic as 'one of the most significant female and feminist artists of the 20th century, and one of the few to receive recognition in the male-dominated art world during her lifetime.' At a time of minimalism, she insisted on exuberance,

emotion, sensuality and bold colours.

- Between 1961 and 1970 she created a series of works that involved shooting at cans or balloons of paint. She used darts, pistols, rifles and miniature canons either herself or fired by other artists or members of the public. These events became 'happenings' whose violence attracted the attention of the press. Saint Phalle used her work to explore the roles of women in art in society, through pieces such as Shooting Pictures, in which she fired a .22 rifle into bags of paint strapped to a canvas, and the "Nanas", her bold and colourful sculptures of monstrously feminine figures.

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Sarah Sze, *Seamless*, 1999

- This is *Seamless* by Sarah Sze (pronounced Zee) produced in 1999. She finds beauty in the clutter of domestic commodities. She uses everything from cotton buds and tea bags to light bulbs and toilet rolls. She was trained in painting but is now best known for her sculpture and installation. She may be attempting to organise the universe of day-to-day objects by creating a fragile, personal system of order. She is a bold artist who integrates her installations into the architecture of the gallery, they pierce the walls and reappear like a funfair ride or a map of the brain.
- Her mass-produced materials are purchased new, and she doesn't use trash. **"I'm not interested in the romance of detritus. I don't like objects to have a history."** Although she does sometimes hide personal mementos and local souvenirs in her shows. Critics have tried to understand her work by cataloguing all the objects she

includes but she has rejected this. She wrote, **'The whole point of my art is that logic breaks down ... When you put it in a list, it feels very literal. The experience of it can only happen in space.'**

- Her works are a nightmare for museum curators who must decide what parts to replace and what to clean, dried flowers are allowed to yellow and grow old but aspirin tablets are replaced before they crumble. Shiny objects are polished every few months and dust is removed.
- Sarah Sze was born in Boston and graduated from Yale before spending several years in Japan working with the children of poor families. She quickly established her signature style of assembling ornamental collections of mundane everyday objects and she now lives and works in New York. She is exhibited around the world and in most of the leading modern art galleries and in 2013 she represented America at the Venice Biennale.

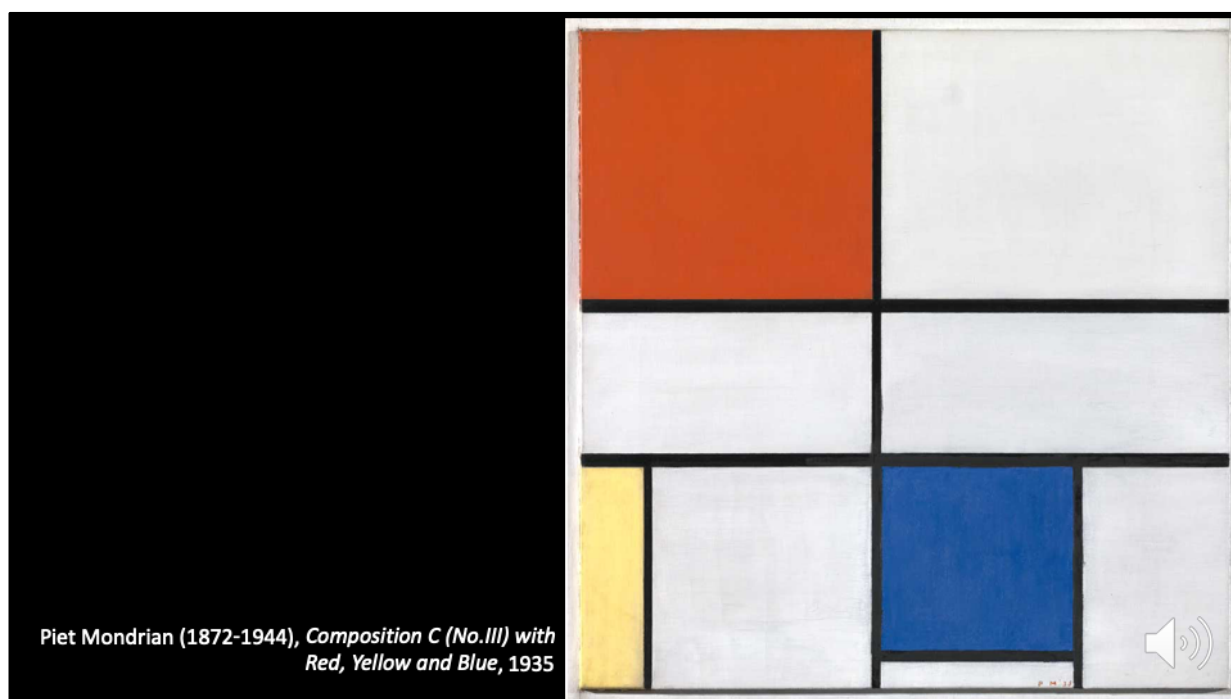
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- Sarah Sze (pronounced "Zee") was born in Boston in 1969 and now lives and works in New York. Her father is a famous architect of Chinese descent and her great grandfather was the first Chinese Ambassador to the United States and her grandfather helped create the World Health Organisation. She studied painting at New York's School of Visual Arts but is now known for her sculptures and installations exploring ideas of time and space and the relentless flow of information of the digital age. She was awarded a MacArthur fellowship (also known as the "genius grant") in 2003 and represented the US at the Venice Biennale in 2013. A professor of visual art at Columbia, Sze lives in New York with her husband, the writer and oncologist Siddhartha Mukherjee, and their two children.
- Sze wrote, 'I'm interested in the idea of how something is seared into your memory. We have all of this information... How does something stick with you?'

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Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), *Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1935

- **Description.** Piet Mondrian is one of the best known abstract artists but perhaps the most misunderstood. You might think he produced these painting in a few hours using a ruler and primary colours straight from the tube. In fact, he never measured or used a ruler, he carefully painted every area and line. What appear to be squares are often rectangles. This is *Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue* and the red square, for example, is slightly wider than it is tall and the vertical black line is not central. Mondrian would only use vertical and horizontal lines and he fell out with his friend Theo van Doesburg [whose work is on display round the corner] over the use diagonal lines. The colours are built up from layers of mixed paint, never squeezed direct from the tube. One day an art dealer (New York, Sidney Janis, 1932) came to his studio to buy a painting and

Mondrian told him it was not quite finished as one small area of blue needed a further coat of paint. The dealer later said, '**I didn't get the picture for a whole year**'.

- **Background.** So, how did he arrive at these grid-like paintings? His early work was representational and he painted conventional landscapes but in 1908 he came under the influence of the spiritual and philosophical writings of the Theosophy Society. He spent the rest of his life searching for a way to represent that spiritual knowledge in art. He simplified and simplified as he looked for the essence of the objects.
- **The artist.** Looking at these black lines and flat areas of colour some people think of his paintings as 'cold' and 'calculated' but he was a deeply passionate artist. When he was 39 (1911) he left his fiancée and his job in Amsterdam to move to Paris and pursue a new type of art. In order to integrate with the Parisian avant-garde, he changed the double 'aa' in his name to a single 'a'. He had few personal contacts when he first moved but it was a very productive period artistically. The other influence on his art was music; he loved jazz and his use of the word 'composition' in the title invokes musical associations. Later, he was labelled degenerate by the Nazis and moved to London and then New York.
- **Avoiding balance.** He thought long and hard about achieving balance but he also wanted to avoid symmetry and he often put a large area of colour on one side of the painting. He argued with other artists about this as they sometimes found his paintings unbalanced and the colours inharmonious, but this was intentional as he was seeking for a different form of balance. Balance is easy if it involves one thing cancelling another but he wanted to retain vitality and energy in the painting. Mondrian regarded the vertical as the spiritual, the male, the inner mind where the ideal resides and the horizontal as the material, women, the outward form, the sea, the horizon and nature. He thought that harmony could be achieved by combining the vertical and the horizontal in certain ways.

Notes

- Pieter Cornelis 'Piet' Mondriaan (after 1906 Mondrian, 1872–1944)

was a Dutch painter who contributed to the De Stijl (1917-1928/31, pronounced 'duh style') art movement founded by Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931). Mondrian evolved a non-representational style which he termed Neoplasticism (or De Stijl). He was an artist of great integrity who wrote, **'the emotion of beauty is always hindered by particular appearance of an 'object'; the object must therefore be abstracted from any figurative representation'**.

- His father was a drawing teacher and Mondrian started to draw at an early age. He began as a teacher and a landscape painter. His early work was representational but he became influenced by pointillism and Fauvism. Mondrian's work may be inspired by the horizontals and verticals of the hill-less Dutch landscape and he began to move towards abstraction in 1905-08. His art was linked to his spiritual studies and in 1909 he joined the Theosophical Movement founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and others. For the rest of his life his work was inspired by the search for spiritual knowledge underlying nature. He believed that his vision of modern art would transcend divisions in culture and become a new common language based on the pure primary colours, flatness of forms, and dynamic tension. He wrote, **'What art makes us see and feel ... is...beauty, truth, goodness, grandeur, and richness – the universe, man, nature...universal equilibrium.'**
- Mondrian gradually decluttered his home and studio and they became a place of pilgrimage. The artist Ben Nicholson described the astonishing quietness and repose. The paintings were never framed as they were extensions of the world; the world reduced to the simplest possible forms and colours.
- He was an artist who thought he could elevate us all and make the world a better place. He wrote, 'I wish to approach truth as closely as is possible, and therefore I abstract everything until I arrive at the fundamental quality of objects.' As Maurice Denis said (in 1890), 'Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude, an anecdote or whatnot, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.' In the terminology of Clive Bell (1914, Bloomsbury Group) it is the 'significant form' which he defined as 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and

- relations of forms, [that] stir our aesthetic emotions'.
- He was labelled a 'degenerate' artist by the Nazis and just before World War II (1938) he fled Paris for London and then New York. Mondrian loved dancing, jazz and the energy of the Charleston. In the mid-1920s he bought a record player and began to collect records and his studio became a place to dance. Music is an abstract art and his paintings reflect a lot of the syncopation and energy of jazz. Mondrian called this his 'boogie woogie' and in New York he painted *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1942-43, MoMA). He never married and thought women were put on earth to be dancing partners. Mondrian danced 'very stiffly, awkwardly and seriously', usually with the wives or mistresses of other artists and he never looked at his partner or spoke on the dance floor.
 - The Greek philosopher Plato (c.429-347 BCE) wrote, 'I do not now intend by beauty of shapes what most people would expect, such as that of living creatures or pictures, but ... straight lines and curves and the surfaces or solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares ... These things are not beautiful relatively, like other things, but always naturally and absolutely.' Plato thought that world we directly experience is but a shadow of an absolute world of pure ideas, such a truth and goodness. Therefore, most representational art takes us further away from understanding this world by making a representation of a representation.
 - See the article on 'Mondrian's Balance' by the University of Maryland. They have tested people using genuine Mondrian paintings and Mondrian-like paintings and people choose the Mondrian so his paintings are not as easy to copy as the naïve viewer might believe.

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Lenore Tawney (1907-2007), *The Queen I*, 1962, Linen and bamboo, 406.4 x 76.2 x 1 cm, on long-term loan, presented by Lenore G. Tawney Foundation

- This room contains a neglected art form known as fibre art. In the centre of the room is *The Queen I* by Lenore Tawney, one of the leaders in this form of art. Fibre art took off in the 1960s and 70s as artist experimented with new techniques that allowed hung or free-standing work that was two or three dimensional and could vary in size up to many stories high. The women's movement of the same era was important in contributing to the rise of fibre art because of the traditional association of women with textiles in the domestic sphere; indeed, many of the most prominent fibre artists are women.
- The basic material is a fibre from a plant, such as cotton or flax or an animal such as wool or silk. Fibres are spun or twisted into yarn which can be dyed. One way in which yarn is turned into cloth is by

weaving where the yarn is wrapped on a frame called a loom and held vertically, this is called the warp. Then another strand of yarn is passed back and forth passing over and under the warp, this is called the weft. In Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries large woven pictures, called tapestries were hung on walls for decoration and warmth. The picture is made by manually manipulating different coloured weft yarns in and out of the warp. There are many other techniques such as knotting tufts of wool to produce carpets and quilting. All these techniques are associated with domestic use and this has proved a handicap to artists seeking to produce fibre art. Fibre art normally communicates some message or emotion, but this gallery is concerned with art focused on the materials.

- The work is called *The Queen I* and the work behind is by the same artist and is called *The King I*. The titles were given to the works by a friend of Lenore Tawney, the artist Agnes Martin whose work is in the first room of the 'In the Studio' gallery on the second floor. Agnes Martin was a close friend and for a period they named each other's pieces. The queen is a more coherent structure with a more ornate head piece and the king is split down the middle between two contrasting colours but I don't know whether this played a part in the naming.

Notes

- American artist influential on the development of fibre art. She left home in 1927, when she was 20 and took night courses in art in Chicago. She married in 1941 but her husband died within 18 months. She travelled to Mexico and on her return studied further and then in 1949 went to Paris and travelled around Europe. In 1957, she moved to New York and met Agnes Martin. She worked on various commissions including tapestries for churches and in 1961 held her first solo exhibition in New York.
- In the 1970s, needlework was reclaimed by the Feminist Movement. This began the reintroduction of textiles and fibre in 'high art'. Judy Chicago founded the first feminist art program in the United States, and proceeded to coin the name Feminist Art, with many artists

working with fibre arts. Chicago created one of the first pieces of 'high art' using needlework and fabrics, called *The Dinner Party* (1979).

- Fibre artists and museum curators are nervous about using the term 'craft' as it is associated with utility, repetitive construction and manual labour. The distinction between decorative art and fine art is often blurred and fibre artists are important pioneers in exploring the difference between a craft and an art and the decorative compared with the museum piece. It is important to ask, 'Who constructed the distinction and why?' and 'Does the distinction help to clarify something important or does it simply denigrate one at the expense of the other?'