

**Curation:**  
**the imagined display space**

A minimalist gallery space with white walls, a dark wooden floor, and track lighting on the ceiling. The text is displayed on the back wall.

**Level 4 Contextual  
Practices**

# **Context in curation**

# How context changes meaning

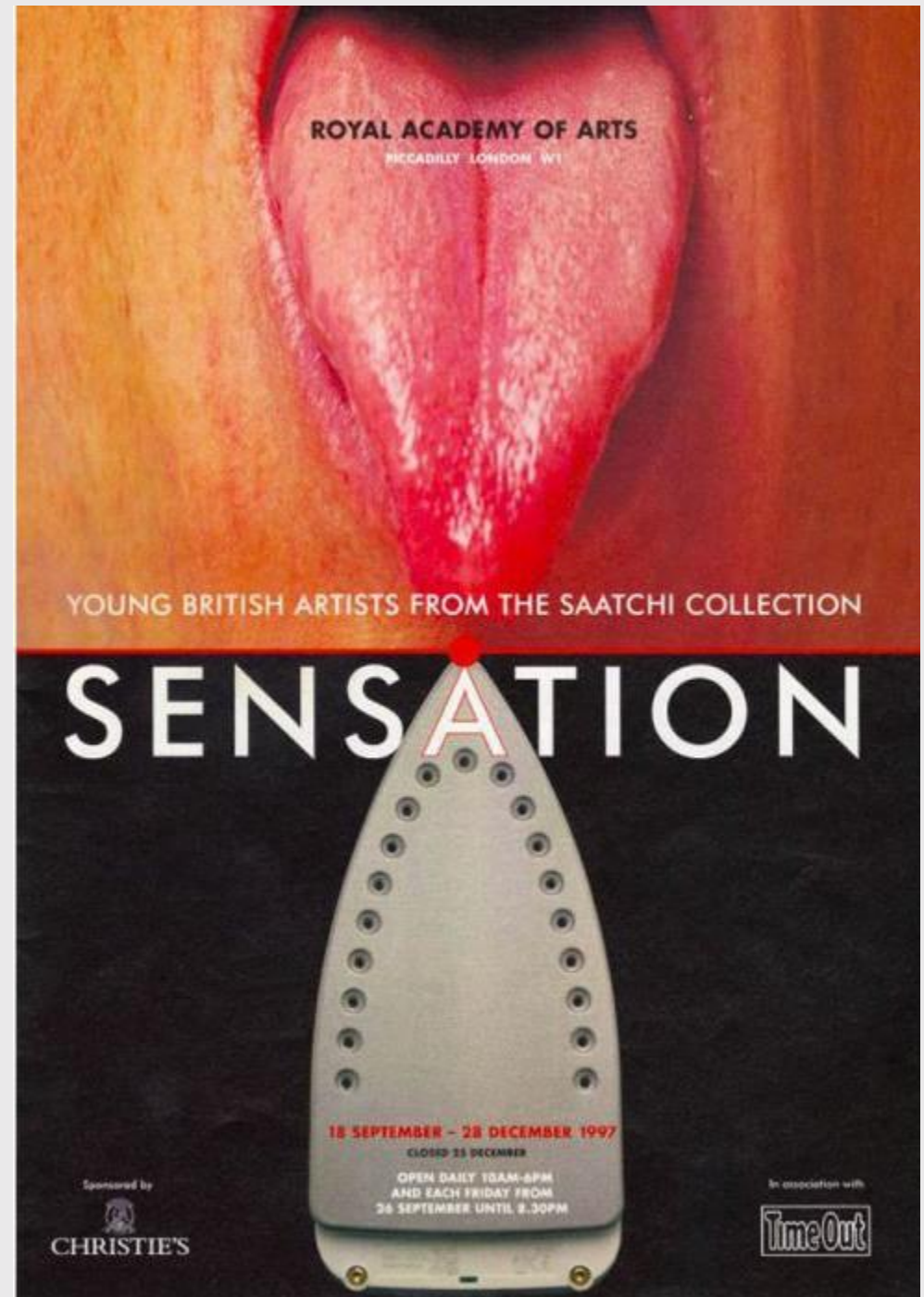
To fully understand or contemplate meaning, it is necessary to consider the cultural, economic, political, social, personal and philosophical circumstances that provide the setting for any artefact, event, statement or idea.

Put simply, proximity to something literal or hypothetical, can change meaning.

So it may help to consider into what kind of world/situation are you presenting your collection of artefacts?

These contexts can allude to (but are not limited to) issues around race, gender, sexuality, faith, class, law, conformity, wealth, identity, geography, spirituality, etc.

# Sensation Exhibition Royal Academy of Art 1997



The *Royal Academy* posted this disclaimer to visitors on entry:

‘There will be works of art on display in the *Sensation* exhibition which some people may find distasteful. Parents should exercise their judgment in bringing their children to the exhibition. One gallery will not be open to those under the age of 18.’

Private collector and advertising magnate, Charles Saatchi exhibited his private collection in the British art institution, *The Royal Academy*. Founded in 1768 to raise the status of the artist, it is home of the longest established art school and the annual open-submission *Summer Exhibition*.

The *RCA*'s endeavour to promote the appreciation and practice of art automatically provided kudos to Charles Saatchi's exhibition of the YBA's.

The title *Sensation*, is interesting on two levels:

Firstly, as an advertising identity and strategy, it embodied the intentions of exhibiting this collection of work.

Secondly, it referenced a term embedded in the concept of a critical approach known as Affect Theory.

# Affect Theory

Affect Theory has its' roots in psychology and works at the opposite end of the perceptive spectrum. It is less about what we see, but more about what we feel.

In this case it is what occurs when we 'encounter' an artefact.

Lawrence Grossberg, a cultural studies commentator, highlights the antithetical position of affect theory in relation to representation, describing it as follows:

‘Everything that is non-representational or non-semantic – that’s what we now call affect.’ and he succinctly expresses it as:

‘... what it feels like to be alive ...’

(Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. 2010: 316)

Affect is visceral, a nonrational evocation, experienced through an intervention or an encounter with art.

With affect our response is intensive rather than extensive. Unlike many cultural theories like semiotics, it does not insist on a single ideology. It is a fluid construct; it is spontaneous and personal.

Affect operates not metaphorically but phenomenologically (from direct experience).

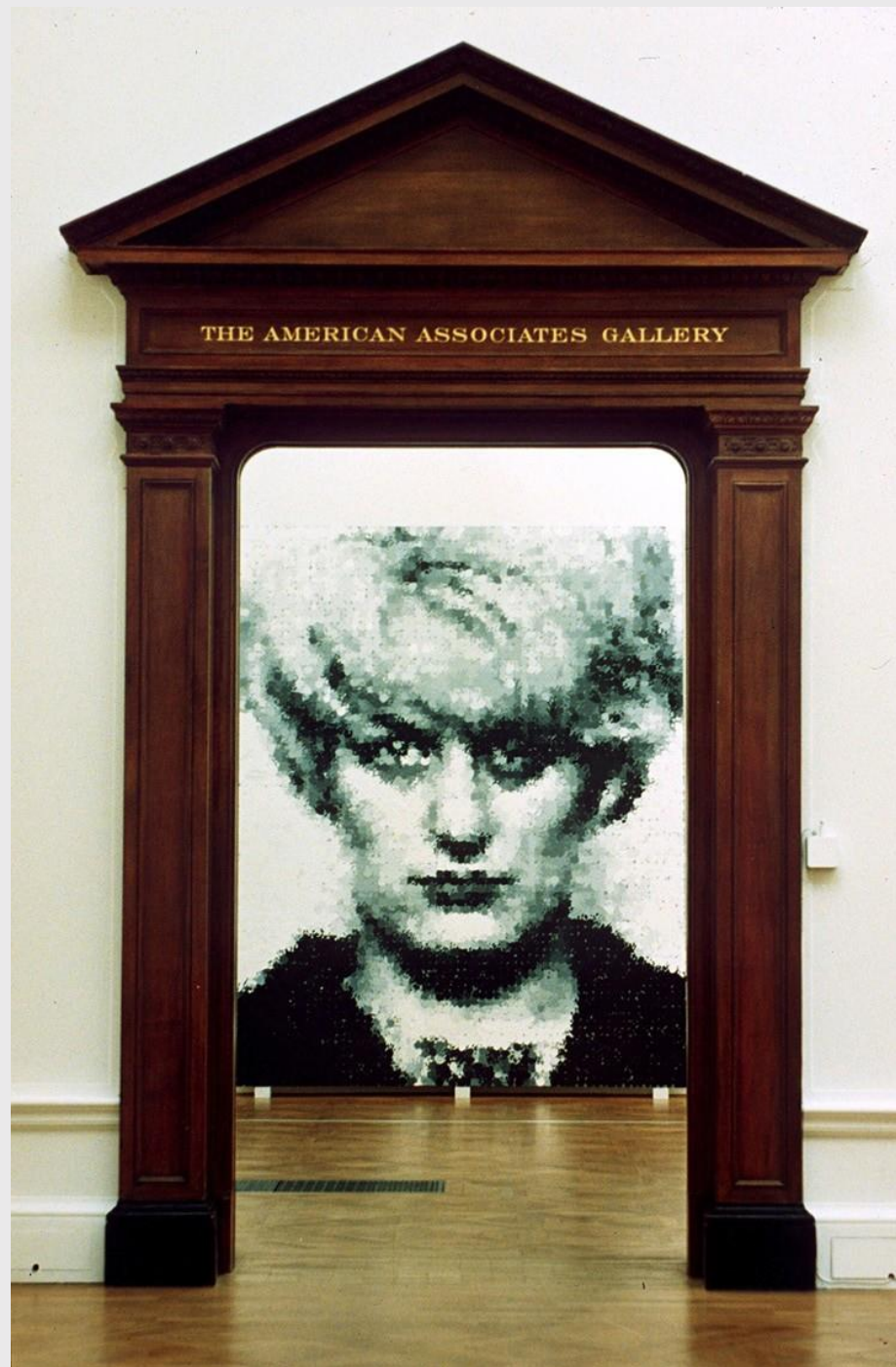
In line with Martin Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology, this means the internally processed conscious, personal experience of the world (being present), and not an external experience that shares a predetermined and agreed meaning.

(The Basics of Philosophy: 2017).

This is some of the curated works that  
created the *Sensation* ...



Marcus Harvey, 1995. *Myra*  
[acrylic on canvas].  
Private collection.



Although Marcus Harvey's portrait is metaphorical in its' use of child hand prints and mass media representation, it can be argued that it's primary intention is to evoke an emotional response rather than an intellectual one. It did.

At the same exhibition Marc Quinn externalised the internal. The context of natural matter, (pasteurised blood from the artist) is explicitly reversed.

Quinn forces us to confront the breakdown of the distinction between ourselves and '*the other*', which is a cultural concept described as abjection.

(Kristeva, Julia:  
1982).

The intention is to remind us of the fragility of existence. In terms of curatorship it is another example, alongside Harvey's *Myra*, that deals with identity as a central theme.

In terms of materiality and presentation, it once again sits within the overarching exhibition concept of sensation.



Marc Quinn, 1991. *Self* [blood (artist's), liquid silicone, stainless steel, glass, perspex and refrigeration equipment].

At the same exhibition Tracey Emin exhibited her famous 'tent' which was later destroyed by fire in 2004.



Tracey Emin, 1995. *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963 - 1995*  
[Appliquéd tent, mattress and light]. At: Saatchi Gallery, London.

‘This piece is less about sexual intimacy, as it is about general human intimacy. Furthermore, the small size of the tent and the way in which the viewer had to enter the tent to view the names suggests a sense of intimacy and places an emphasis on the emotional connection gained from sleeping side by side, rather than a sexual conquest.’

(Souter, Anna: 2019)



RANK  
BERBEE  
LUCY  
BAXTER  
GARY  
RWOOD  
E SMITH  
JOHN  
RFIELD

ROBERTO  
NAVIKAS

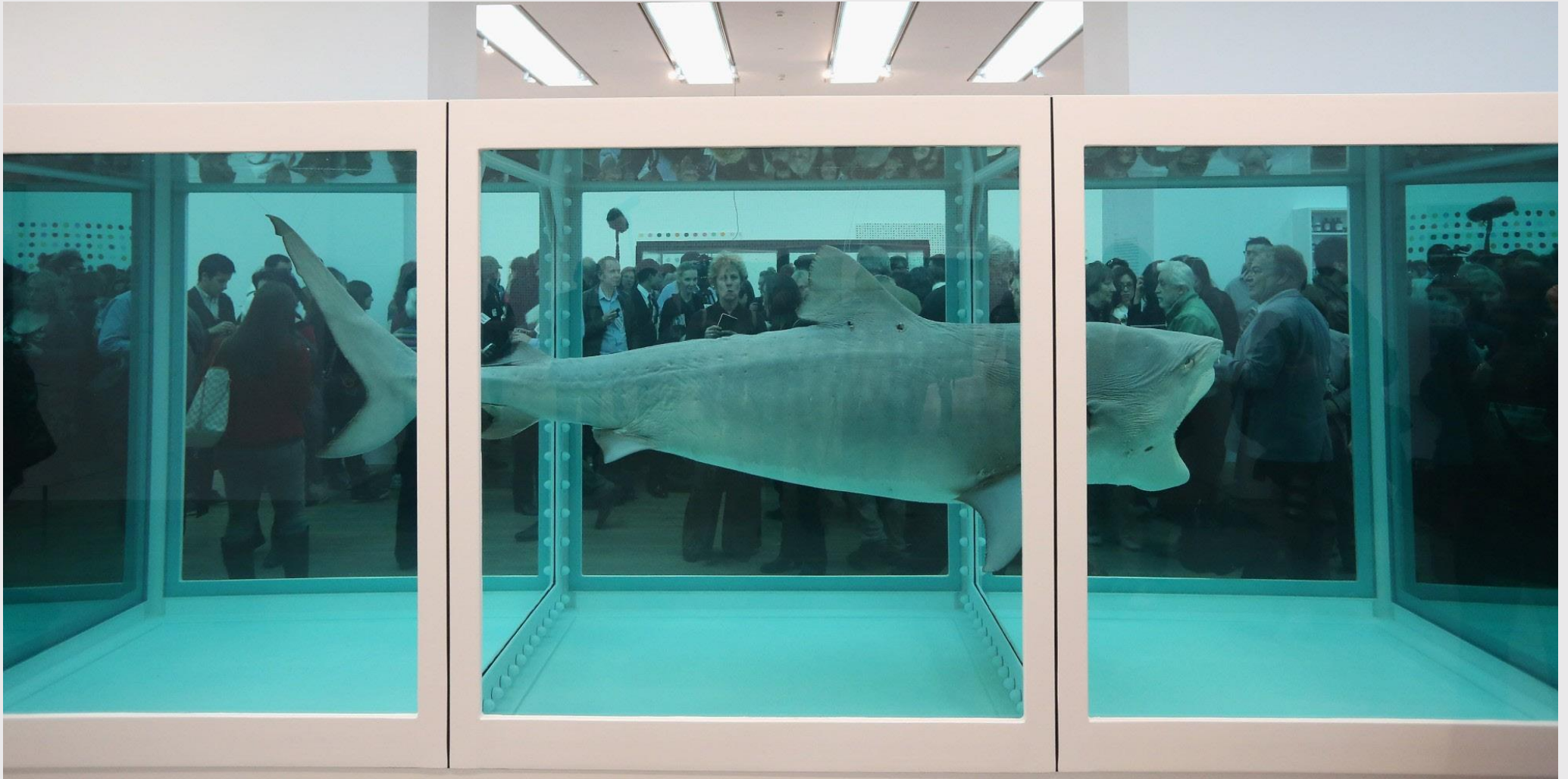
BILLY  
CHILDISH

CHRIS  
SAUNDERS

TRACY  
HORN  
SUSAN  
MARLOW  
MARI  
TANTO

WITH  
MYSELF  
ALWAYS MYSELF  
NEVER  
FORGETTING

Damien Hirst's sculpture *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* works predominantly through context. The intention for the artefact is to isolate the marine creature and statically preserve it. It is then presented in a gallery context so the audience can have a direct experience with a creature they would not normally encounter. The title of the artwork derives from this concept.



Damien Hirst, 1991. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* [Glass, painted steel, silicone, monofilament, tiger shark and formaldehyde solution].

‘... we have a direct experience of the shark, not mediated through any media. Thus we are forced to consider the shark in a new and different context and re-evaluate how we perceive the animal. In Hirst’s piece, we come face to face with the reality and physicality of this familiar image and are forced to consider it in a new setting.’

(Stanska, Zuzanna:  
2019)

Context in curation:

# **Outside the gallery space**

# Yarn

## Bombing

The start of this contemporary movement is often attributed to textile artist Magda Sayeg. Mostly visible since 2005, objects in the public domain such as street furniture, plants and statues are hijacked or 'bombed'. The practice draws attention to, and redefines the 'ordinary'.

The activity is derived from graffiti but its materiality and craft skew meaning. Unlike painted graffiti it is perceived as sentimental, human and tactile connoting closeness, familiarity and intimacy.

# Subversi on

Yarn bombing subverts norms about knitting and how it should be employed and enjoyed. It takes yarn into the publicly experienced environment and places it on every day objects for all to enjoy. In many ways it provides an antithesis to our digital world.

The recontextualisation is often used by 'bombers' to subvert ideas about femininity and domesticity by taking a 'homemaker' medium into society.

Others are drawn to the peaceful protest aspect of yarn bombing, often rallying around activist movements such as feminism and anti-consumerism.



Point Loma Nazarene University, California.



An excellent subversive example of yarn bombing was applied to the *Charging Bull* on Wall Street in the financial district of New York by Ms. Hemmons in 2010. The bull is the epitome of aggressive, masculine, financial optimism and it is its' context amongst financial institutions that largely defines its' meaning.

However, through an act of yarn bombing it was metamorphosed and tamed. The fierce and powerful charging icon is dismantled into something more compassionate and empathetic. It's appearance was transformed to provide a stark contrast to its' original metaphorical value in the context of the financial district.





Kristen Visbal, *The Fearless Girl* statue on Wall Street, 2017.

# **Appropriation and recontextualisation**

The [britart.com](http://britart.com) promotional campaign raised the question 'what is art?' through appropriation. In the spirit of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, manufactured objects in public spaces were reimaged as artefacts through an ironic exhibition labelling system. The application of the descriptive labels written in a gallery style recontextualises the mundane raising their stature to works of art.

## **Pavement 1962**

concrete slabs, cement, shoe prints,  
dog excrement, chewing gum.

8000 x 15050 x 10cm

*Regimented mosaic.*

*Companion piece to road by the same artist.*

art you can buy **britart.com**







## **Bus Ticket      2000**

paper, ink, fingerprints.  
3.4 x 11cm

*From the performance piece, "Ding-ding. No room on top";  
a satire on social mobility.*

art you can buy **britart.com**

## **Bus Ticket      2000**

paper, ink, fingerprints.  
9 x 4.6cm

*From the performance piece,  
"Ding-ding. No room on top";  
a satire on social mobility.*

art you can buy **britart.com**

artalizers™

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TURN YOUR OFFICE INTO A GALLERY

**Colleague 2000**

two faces, thin skin, nice smile  
48 x 169 cm

*Three-dimensional piece on the schism  
between friendship and rivalry.*

**Brief Case 1985**

leather, papers,  
pornography, sandwiches  
43 x 30 x 10 cm

*Portable treatise on status and depletion  
in the workplace.*

**Mouse Mat 2000**

rubber  
23 x 15 x 0.5 cm

*Artist's miniature exercise mat for  
electronic rodents.*

**The Boss 2000**

nice suit, fat wallet,  
high blood pressure  
60 x 158 cm

*Follows on from artist's previous works,  
'Brown Noodle' (1997) and 'Knee Padder' (1999).*

**Water Cooler 1997**

plastic, water, coolant  
40 x 150 x 40 cm

*Casual forum for informal and pointed  
cultural details.*

**Telephone 2000**

plastic, handprints, breath  
60 x 45 x 45 cm

*Interactive work allowing communication  
with other people's voicemail.*

**Bin 1980**

plastic, metal  
100 x 60 x 60 cm

*The artist's meditation on the ongoing  
futility of British sport.*

**Computer 1988**

plastic, electricity, footprint  
60 x 50 x 15 cm

*On permanent display with the artist's  
companion pieces, 'IT Person' and 'Seiver Box'.*

**Fridge 1995**

steel, rubber, plastic, mouldy 'thing'  
165 x 58 cm

*The Dixon High street collection*

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Door 1972**

wood  
298 x 90 cm

*Hung as to the artist's specification*

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Table 1989**

mixed media: steel, glass,  
aluminum  
365 x 287 cm

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Toilet 1972**

porcelain, blue freshener  
45 x 37 x 40 cm

*Interactive sculpture inspired by  
Rodin's 'The Thinker'*

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Chair 1998**

mixed media: wood,  
aluminum, comfy cushion  
87 x 87 x 30 cm

*Upholstered by artist, 1 of 6*

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Bird cage 1995**

wire, sand, paper  
60 x 45 x 45 cm

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Window 1972**

glass with wood surround  
365 x 287 cm

art you can buy **britart.com**

**Wall 1956**

bricks, mortar, drainpipe  
34,365 x 287 cm

*signed by artists 'Trev 'n' Gail'*

art you can buy **britart.com**

# Situationist International (SI)

The Situationist International were founded in 1957 and were associated with the 1968 Paris strikes and riots. They were notably active until 1972.

‘They believed that advanced capitalism bred dissatisfaction and thus human desire needed to be fulfilled by finding alternatives to capitalist society. They suggested for this “the construction of situations,” through the avant-garde, psychogeography, urbanism and art.

(Britton, Amy: 2012)

A central facet of Situationist ideology was the belief that changes in the way people behave are a result of the situation they find themselves in, rather than their behaviour being a personality trait. Punk was a great proponent of the Situationist theory.

# The Royal Jubilee 1977 and the Sex Pistols

On 7th June 1977, at the height of the Royal Jubilee celebrations, a rented river boat, *The Queen Elizabeth*, launched from Charing Cross Pier.

On board were the Sex Pistols.



# **Marina Abramovic, The Artist is Present**

This was an extended performance piece that lasted for 8 hours a day for nearly three months in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abramovic sat across from another wooden chair, where members of the audience were invited to sit and lock eyes with the artist.

This meant the audience were central to the piece of art, without which there would have been no artwork.



Marina Abramovic, 2010. *The Artist is Present* [Performance].  
At: Museum of Mordern Art, New York.

“Nobody could imagine...that anybody would take time to sit and just engage in mutual gaze with me,” Abramovic explained. In fact, the chair was always occupied, and there were continuous lines of people waiting to sit in it. “It was [a] complete surprise...this enormous need of humans to actually have contact.”

(MoMA: 2019)

It was the context of the audience that provided the meaning. Without viewers playing a part, the work would be incomplete. Participation and audience involvement were essential.

# Simulation and hyperreality



*Dismaland* is a pastiche of *Disneyland*.



Banksy's dystopian theme park *Dismaland* is a pastiche of a simulacra (image or representation). However, one seeks to hide reality (Disneyland), the other seeks to uncover it (Dismaland). Dismaland exists in the context of the unreal entity Disneyland. It imitates a hyperreal representation of the world which it relies on for its' meaning to function.

French cultural theorist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929 - 2007) wrote extensively about simulation and hyperreality.

‘According to Baudrillard, what has happened in postmodern culture is that our society has become so reliant on models and maps that we have lost all contact with the real world that preceded the map. Reality itself has begun merely to imitate the model, which now precedes and determines the real world.’

(Felluga, Dino: 2003)

‘Baudrillard believes hyperreality goes further than confusing or blending the ‘real’ with the symbol which represents it; it involves creating a symbol or set of signifiers which represent something that does not actually exist, like Santa Claus.

Baudrillard in particular suggests that the world we live in has been replaced by a copy world, where we seek simulated stimuli and nothing more.’

(Felluga, Dino:  
2003)

*Dismaland's* context is political, social  
and philosophical.



The physical context is significant for *Dismaland* to work. By choosing the *Tropicana Lido* in Weston-Super-Mare nostalgia comes into play. The lido could be any UK lido. It represents childhood and family holidays. It's disuse is a reflection of the modern condition. It's a place where memories were made. Unlike *Disneyland* it's context is grey Britain. In perceived contrast, the whole experience is underwhelming and other worldly.

## 0 The Gallerfu

Dismaland boasts three large galleries which together comprise the finest collection of contemporary art ever assembled in a North Somerset seaside town.

## al) Bio Rig Jig

A masterpiece of post-industrial assemblage art - sltwo tugger mauts performing ballet by Mike Ross.

## \$ Amusements

Win big prizes on hook-a duck, and then hooling gallery. Knock over an anvil in David Stmoley's game of skill and aiming. Navigate the high seas with Banksy's Mediterranean boat ride.

## G Circms1ent

A oothe sculpture pork in a lilly big top 1,111.

## e Modal Vliage

Jimmy CaJlty's hand crafted miniaturworld will delight and amaze

## e Cinderella's CasUe

Step inside the fairy tale and see how it feels to be a rent princess

## 0 Guerilla Island

Features a blis-mounted museum library, gallery of guerrilla art, Con, radio Advice Bureau and workshops in how to hack billboards.

## e Ben long

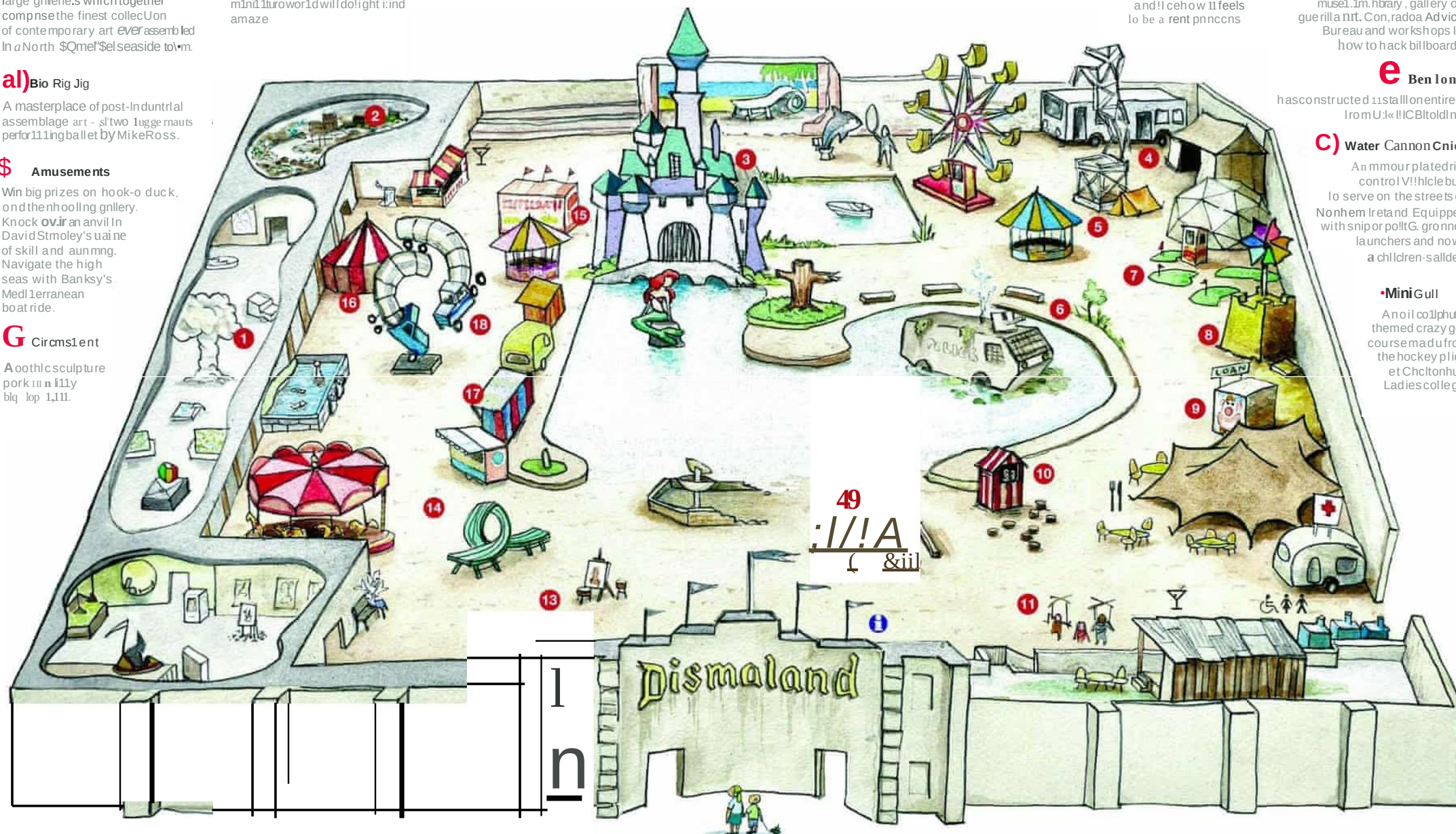
has constructed a stall on entirely from UK ICBolding,

## C) Water Cannon Cniet

An mmour plated riot control vehicle built to serve on the streets of Nonhem Ireland. Equipped with sniper rifle, grenade launchers and now - a children's salade.

## •MiniGull

A noil colphu11 themed crazy golf course made from the hockey pitch at Cheltenham Ladies college.



## (9 Cinema

Truck-mounted outdoor screen playing a rolling program of short films day and night. Cushions not provided.

## OD Plcnic Area

The humble picnic table proves a rich source of artistic inspiration for American furniture twerker Michael Beltz.

## (D Pon rait Antst

Nothe Wnkefield renders your likeness in an exquisite pencil drawing, but only the back of your head. Surprisingly revealing.

## f) Jelfmy Archer Memorial FirePit

Warm yourself around an authentic real open fire ceremonially lit each day by burning one of the famed local peljurer's novels.

## G) Puppets

A puppet revue show constructed entirely from the contents of Hackney skips - It's 'Flynp Theatre' by Paul Insect and Bfull. 581 top, raked.

## <n) Punch and Julla

The infamous Jull!!! BurchUl hasolven this seaside staple a good kicking. Now includes rolences to Jimmy Snile and Filly Shades or Gley.

## 0 klds Enclosure

Strictly for the little ones. A safe area that combines sort play and loan shop.

## Q Giant Pin Wheel

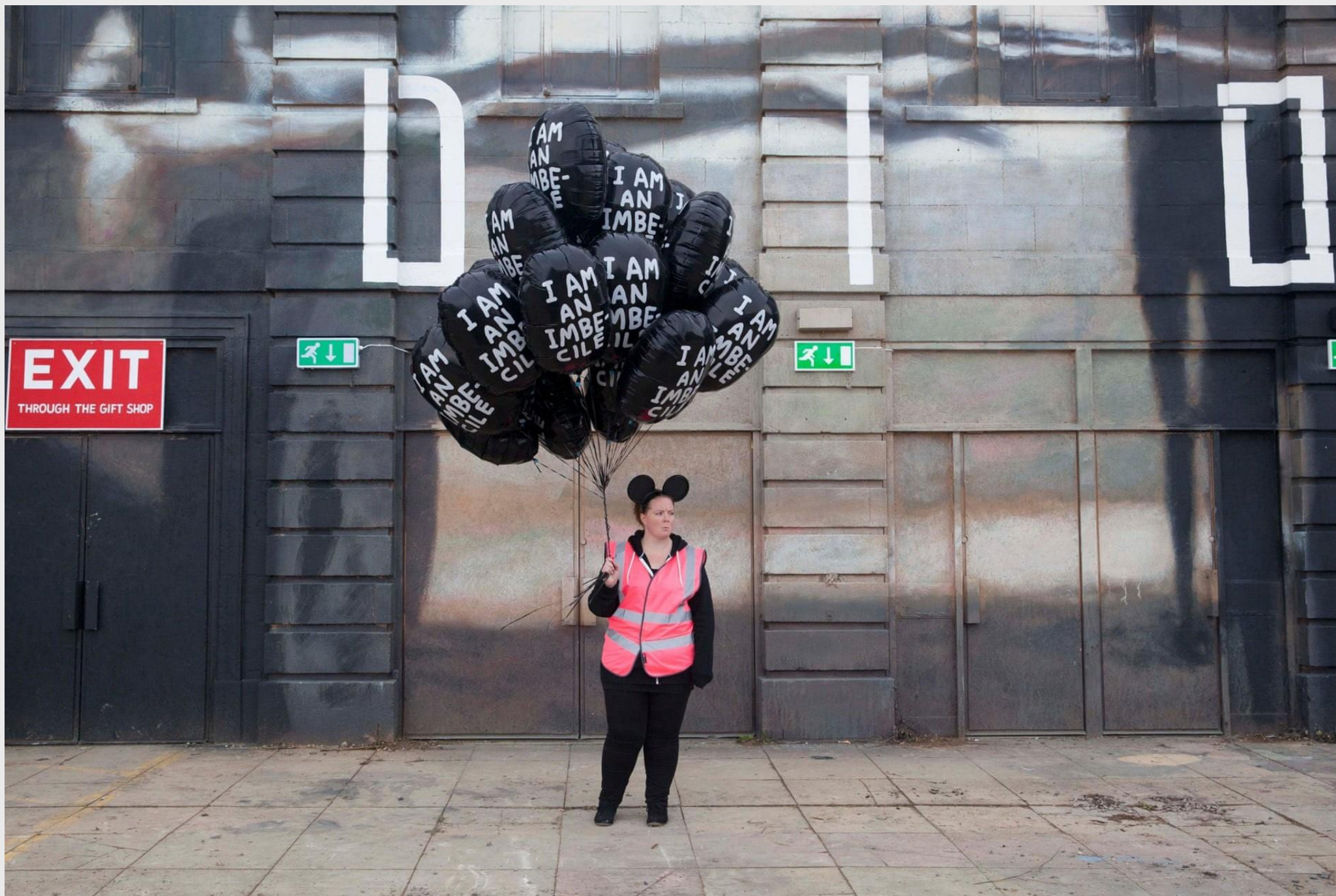
Commissioned by Banksy to power the tin fire site. It turns out this ecological marvel has trouble charging more than two mobile phones at once.















# Time and place



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChS6ABBN3t0>

# The National Gallery Grand Tour Campaign

For 12 weeks in 2008, forty four sites around central London were chosen to exhibit exact reproductions from the collection of Old Masters from the *National Gallery*. The locations were chosen to compliment the replicas and an information plaque was placed next to each 'painting'. Expert critical commentary was also available online and could be accessed through mobile devices.



The *National Gallery* also offered themed tours, audio commentary and the campaign was propagated through photosharing on social media.







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# Context and the human form

As we have seen, meaning is often derived from surroundings (context). Another example we can consider is the human form in the landscape;

We will look at:

one urban,

one natural,

one surrounded by air,

the other surrounded by water,

one isolated,

one interacting with the community.



Marc Jenkins, 2011, *Tape sculpture*. [Tape, clothing].

Seven years later, as part of *Project 84*, Jenkins also produced 84 hooded figures and placed them on top of the ITV Broadcasting building to raise awareness about male mental health in 2018. It's context was essential to publicising its' presence, using a news media company as a platform or plinth for the artworks themselves.



Antony Gormley also works extensively with the human figure. *Another Place* is made up of 100 cast iron sculptures. These static effigies on the Mersey Estuary at Crosby Beach face the constantly turning tides and will most likely continue to do so for a long time to come.

At the same time our transient lives pass them by, as if with some sort of human superiority. Their static, stoic presence emphasises our vulnerable, mortal existence. As this fragile relationship unfolds, the passing of time is marked by the ebb and flow of the tide, and everything is witnessed by the magnificent sky.

Antony Gormley, 2011, *Another Place*. [100 cast iron figures].  
At: Crosby Beach, England.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpA0-8G\\_ogY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpA0-8G_ogY)

# David Lynch and the internal space

Surrealism and dreams figure largely in filmmaker David Lynch's work. The work exists in the physical world but it lives in the internal world. It provokes uncertainty.

Lynch inhabits a metaphysical place dealing with abstract concepts of time and space; of being and (not) knowing, exploring the very essence of reality and compounding the relationship between the mind and matter.

‘... he ... confounds his audience’s expectations by incorporating surrealist imagery and vignettes that disrupt the continuity of the narrative.’

(McMahon, Jennifer: 2011)



Henry Spencer from the 1977 film *Eraserhead*.

‘Like most films by David Lynch, *Eraserhead* (1977) presents a challenge for its interpreters. Any attempt to come up with a coherent interpretation of this film must acknowledge that the film is comprised of several narrative sequences that interweave and interrupt each other and, in doing so, make it increasingly difficult to determine what the film is actually about.’

(Southworth, Jason: 2011)

Lynch's 'exhibition space' is our perception. He uses our inability to cope with the uncertainty of reality as a source for creative exploration.



Still from *Rabbits*, 2002.

“In a nameless city deluged by a continuous rain ...  
three rabbits live with a fearful mystery” (IMDb)

‘Our world is not inherently logical—we impose logic upon it to make sense of the random and absurd happenings all around us and to create a sense of order out of chaos. The beauty of the work of filmmaker David Lynch is that he not only recognizes this basic truth about the absurdity of human existence, he celebrates it to create his own unique worldview by showcasing distortions and manipulations of reality, and logical paradoxes and fallacies used as the basis for his characters’ actions.’

(Arp, Robert and Brace, Patricia: 2011)

Scene from *Twin Peaks*, 2017. (series 3, episode 3)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEkdR5-8Kss>

‘I don’t think that people accept the fact that life doesn’t make sense. I think it makes people terribly uncomfortable. It seems like religion and myth were invented against that, trying to make sense out of it.’

**David Lynch**

It seems that Lynch uses the unconscious mind as his imagined/ actual space/place to share his work.

# **The importance of context**

To conclude we have looked at a few examples of place/space:

In a museum

In a public place

On a boat

In an art gallery

In a 'theme park'

On top of a building

In an estuary

In the subconscious

# **The importance of curatorship**

The artefacts/performance you choose is one aspect of the curation process, however where you place the artefacts can, and will, fundamentally affect the meaning and the experience of your exhibition/concert/show.

Your challenge is to manage and enrich this encounter.

**Question  
s?**

Next week:

18.02.25

**Swansea Open Gallery visit**