

**myspace blogs**  
**on art for arse' sake**

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### 35. "Striking Poses With Our Faeces"

I'd make a shit artist, me. Or so I'm told.

You'd have thought that being a dilettante, dangerous<sup>1</sup> or otherwise, would fit with the modern notion of celebrity. After all, "What's Picasso doing *now*?" is no dafter than, "What's Paris Hilton been up to *this* time?"

Not so, apparently.

Half a decade ago, I was going out with *la japonesa* (see my pics), an MA grad (art curatorship) of the notorious [Goldsmith's College](#) and the only other person I've met who thinks [John Lennon](#) fucked up [Yoko Ono's](#) career. Goldsmith's is the place that gave the world (well, Britain, anyway) such [Young British Artists](#) as [Damien Hirst](#) and his pickled livestock; a place that discourages its art students from *making* anything. Concept is all, the *idea* reigns supreme ~ I met a graduate who confessed he used to sneak into studios to construct things under cover of darkness, lest his tutor found out and marked him down!

And *la japonesa* always argued, with some justification, that artists who appear to be one-trick ponies do have an advantage in the marketplace. If I see a head cast in frozen bodily fluids, or a concrete cast of the inner space of a toilet bowl, a refrigerator or a whole bloody house, I'll know they're probably by [Marc Quinn](#)<sup>2</sup> or [Rachel Whiteread](#) which probably means those who are impressed by such things would be impressed if I owned one, which means my bank manager would be impressed if I asked for the barrow of cash to buy one. Which I won't. It's not a new phenomenon. My old mate, [Quentin](#), used to say, 'If I were to drag a huge piece of marble onto this stage ~ with a hole in it ~ you'd all say "It's a [Henry Moore](#)!" But,' he'd add, 'if I were somehow to drag *Henry Moore* onto the stage, none of you would have the *faintest* idea who he was!' That may not be so valid today, when Moore is a bit dead and being an artist is as much about a public profile as doing art; about being seen at the right shows and parties with the right supermodels and porn stars. Or at least I like to think so ~ if not, those damn paintbrushes are going straight in the bin.

So you see, it's not just a question of talent, which I lack in abundance, those pimping skills I sighed for in blog 32, or even motivation/application ~ things in which I set new standards in devoiditude. It's something they now call *branding*. You gotta specialise, have a recognisable product style, plough one monotonous furrow to create ~ and maintain ~ that demand.

Whereas your humble blogger is a diverse dabbler, a dilettante ~ or 'waster' as they say here in sunny Scotland. Sunday painter, writer, *flâneur*, sculptor, poet, installationist; a born-again Renaissance man ~ or, as the old saying goes, 'Jack of all trades, crap at the lot'.

[Tracey Vermin](#) snapped, at someone who dissed her for getting rich by not making her bed, that she didn't make her fucking living from big fucking works like *Bed* but by selling her fucking drawings. Maybe so, Trace, darlin', but given your fucking draughtspersonship, who'd buy the fucking drawings but for the notoriety of your fucking bed?

Her other famous piece was the tent on which she embroidered the name of everyone she'd ever slept with. I'm always so embarrassed to think what a small tent I'd need ... I do have a small collection of drinks coasters with family crests ...

So there's the problem for Yours Truly ~ no, not the size of my tent! How to get the celebrity, the exposure, the infamy in the first place? All suggestions gratefully considered ...

<sup>1</sup>Try Googling the title

<sup>2</sup>I do wish Quinn would cast his head in nasal mucus and call it *The Bogyman*!

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**36. Quite Annoying, Quite Annoying**

I'd make a shit gallery curator, me, curator, me.

No, that's not fair, not fair. I have curated one show and it went quite well, quite well. But I do have some odd ideas about what and where art is or could be, could be.

It all comes from what you might call the imp of the perverse, the perverse. Or not, or not. *La japonesa* knew tons more about art theory than I ever could and she made her case very well, very well. That just made it harder to resist winding the woman up, woman up.

Her point was that art, particularly modern, conceptual art, has to be placed in galleries and labelled and labelled. Otherwise how is the public to know that this unmade bed or stack of bricks *is* an art work, art work? And if they don't know that, how will they ever get to engage with the concept, the concept?

So of course, your smartarsed correspondent just made sure his suggestions got wilder and wilder and wilder. The electric kettle, toaster and other household contraptions 'plugged in' to a tree on Hampstead Heath did have a label and a title attached, but they were removed by the council before anyone had a chance to wonder about meanings and subtexts and subtexts. My claims that the arms in a tub or the pink kids' chairs in a Parisian back street were installations by fellow 'guerilla artists', got wackier as she got rattier, got rattier.

Come to think of it, given her temper, I was living pretty dangerously, pretty dangerously. I did stop doing figurative stuff while I was with her, due equally to her contempt for such outmoded forms of expression and my attachment to my testicles, my testicles. Not that she was impressed by my installations in paper shredders either, shredders either.

Okay, I went back to doing badly-drawn girls once the coast was clear and, ironically, my portrait of her, *Daizo no Keiko*, is probably the best thing I've ever done ~ where best is a relative term, relative term. Probably because it's not just a copy of life ~ there is now a concept behind the work, even though I can't put into words what it might be, might be. Because I've no idea, no idea. All great art is conceptual ~ not all conceptual art is great, is great.

But ideas can gain a momentum that allows them to outstrip their most vainglorious origins, vainglorious origins. And, as future blogs may explore more deeply, the question of what can or can't constitute 'art' out there in the wider world is still up for grabs for grabs. Whether or not the public knows it's there or what it is ~ what does that matter, that matter? And not just street installations, or, as I like to call them, exstallations, but performance art too, art too. In an act of creation, where exactly does the art 'work' reside, 'work' reside?

For instance, the typing of this very blog is, or rather was by the time you read it, a performance piece in which I typed the last two words of every sentence twice, sentence twice. So this is merely a record, an after-trace of that piece, that piece. The actual artwork was the typing, the typing.

Which means you've missed it, missed it.

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**38. Selling Out (I)**

**Apr 29**

I'd make a shit art historian, me. Like with the rest of life, I have a magpie approach, absorbing fascinating snippets of information, ignoring the boring bits and inventing stuff to fill the gaps. Improvisation means never having to say you don't know ~ and the best facts are always the ones you make up, after all. So take the following, like anything I tell you, with a large pinch of salt.. I make Wikipedia look like a Gospel.

As a reaction to the materialism inherent in the art market, many Twentieth Century artists turned to other forms of expression, such as performance art. A performance piece only existed during its moment in time and could not be bought and resold, ending its days in some rich collector's vaults, at least without contravening any number of laws relating to kidnapping or slavery. Come to think of it, the idea that some family could one day have a cellar where the descendents of a captured Carollee Schneeman are forced to reproduce and to perform [Interior Scroll](#) on demand would be the final victory of capitalism over the rebelliousness of art ~ were it not for my latest plans.

Joseph Beuys (1921-1086) is probably the godfather of performance artists if you want to start googling anywhere but one guy who took this side of things even further is Gustav Metzger (1926-), the inventor of Auto-Destructive Art. He made an art form not just out of the stuff we throw in the trash but also out of the act of trashing it. This and his political activism have, according to plan, not exactly brought him celebrity or a lot of cash ~ at least a performance artist can pass a hat round for donations but there's not much point doing that if the work consists of burning it and its contents afterwards. The downside is that it hasn't achieved much exposure for what he's trying to say either. Hmmm...

Apparently I saw Metzger once: I was at London's White Cube for a Damien Hirst show, when la japonesa pointed out what appeared to be a shuffling old tramp clutching a plastic carrier bag and assured me it was him. But maybe *she* made stuff up too.

But since the 1980's, the time of Thatcher, Reagan, Monetarists and Yuppies, the market seems to have won the war. The arts are more commoditised than ever and half an art student's course will be about business administration, pimping and finding dealers. No one wants to be a Van Gogh, selling one work to buy materials for the next, for them to become valuable only after death. Far better for Tracey Emin to be pissed and swearing on every chat show going now and have her tent destroyed in a tragic and accidental warehouse fire just after it becomes yesterday's news, than to have posterity chattering with fascination about who she slept with in centuries to come. Sod posterity, give us the money ~ now!

So, when la japonesa's old chum Michael Landy destroyed everything he owned in a London store, he made sure that sponsorship and spin-off book sales more than compensated, at least in replacement-cost terms and, these days, what else matters?

So where am I going with this? What's my solution, or at least my suggestion for the next stage in the march of Art? You'll have to tune in next week to find out ~ why not subscribe to get notified the minute it hits the web?

I'm feeling too lazy to link so Google any names you want to know more about, let me know your musings on the question and have a lovely week. This being the start of la ninfa celestial's birthweek, everybody's karma will receive a free gift of 1,000 brownie points, just for reading this blog.

## myspace blogs on art for arse' sake

### 39. Selling Out (II): This Time It's Profitable

In *Peanuts*, Charlie Schulz created a classic character in 5 (full name, 555 95472), whose father, weighed down by so much bureaucracy, reducing him to one code number after another, changed the family name to match their zip code. "Is that his way of protesting?" asks Charlie Brown. "No," comes the reply, "it's his way of giving in." Well, it looks like art has given in to the idea so wittily expressed by 10cc: "Art for art's sake ~ money for God's sake!"

But was it not ever thus? Didn't Leonardo compete with Michelangelo for the juiciest commissions? I'll bet there were cave men who quickly sussed out that folks give them a share of their latest kill for peek at their latest bison mural. Even more if it had a few 'fertility symbols' in it. But we prefer to think not. I know an artist has to eat and drink ~ particularly drink ~ but I cling to the romantic notion that even the best-paid daubers from the Renaissance to Rothko were driven, first and foremost, by the desire to say something ~ something other than, "The *whole* ceilin'!? Oooh, that'll cost yer, guv!"

It just looks as if the primary need now is to *sell* something. But maybe that's how it *always* looked. Maybe it's only when the artist is beyond the need for bodily sustenance, shelter and naked Thai women, that we can maintain our noble illusions of them.

The Russian Futurists of the early Twentieth Century came up with the notion that a lot of our response to art depends on *unfamiliarity*. Yep, however refined we like to think our artistic sensibilities may be, they operate between the poles of novelty and tedium. But, as time goes by, two forces have had an accelerating and distorting effect on this. Mass communication is one; and it arrived just in time to interact with the other ~ the ritual bottom-scraping of the barrel of new ideas. It took a very long time before everybody had even *seen* perspective in action, let alone tired of going "fuck me, that looks almost real!" but, for some odd reason, sticking lumps of elephant poo on a childlike painting rapidly became a cliché.

Sure, the shrinking global village throws up more ideas, more issues and more ways to do art; so we're no longer tied to doing tempera portraits of our masters in the Church or State, but the pace of change and the demands of that Ozymandian tyrant, the Market, mean the chase gets ever more dizzying and futile. Art *will* eat itself ~ as soon as it catches its tail. Hence post-modernism, throwing all the shit we've got so far in the air and sticking it back together in the hope that at least one arrangement will entertain, illuminate something or at least pay the rent by fooling some of the people some of the time.

But maybe there is one slightly new idea that has something to say ~ why not define the *act* of selling as the performance, the art work *in itself*? For instance, my sketches of people are hardly very saleable, despite the nudity that marks them out as 'art', but what of a 'performance piece' in which they are sold, perhaps in some unusual way: an odd pricing system that perhaps makes an inverted comment on the law of supply and (lack of) demand? The crapper the pic, the more it costs, the fewer that are left, the cheaper they get, a reverse auction ... the possibilities would be endless, if they weren't so limited.

An intriguing thought strikes me, regarding that much-loathed figure the taxperson. In the above example the sketches are *not* the art (you only have to look at them to see that), so the money received is *not* artist's income, merely the proceeds of selling some junk (and one could be selling anything ~ as I soon will be). Therefore it is not subject to income tax. Honest. (The test case would be a performance work in itself!) The proceeds might be subject to capital gains tax I suppose, if enough was made ~ and the artist was honest. But then UK law says goods *worth* over £6,000 and I could argue that no one in their right mind would value one of my drawings that highly, even if they did pay more as part of some crazed art-frenzy.

But what of countries, like Ireland, where the creative artist is not taxed on his endeavours? The stuff on sale is then better defined as art. Thus we see how cultural differences alter our perception of art ~ 'tis all commerce after all.

I've had a number of ideas based on this broad concept already and will no doubt be sharing them with you in blogs to come. Meanwhile what do *you* think, gentle reader? Send your ideas, along with a large donation, to the "Paying Dai to Read My Ideas" performance art project, care of Paypal ...