

Serious Fun

Contemporary Artists Using Humor

Overview

From conceptual artist Duchamp to Dutch performance artist Bas Jan Ader, we discuss the central role that humor has played in art over the last 100 years. 'Unlock Art' is Tate's short film series, offering a witty inside track on the world of art. Previous films have featured Doctor Who actor Peter Capaldi, rock duo The Kills, comedian Frank Skinner, and Girls star Jemima Kirke amongst celebrity art fans introducing some of the big ideas that have shaped art history. A new film is released each month, with topics ranging from the history of the nude and the nature of the art market, to Pop art.

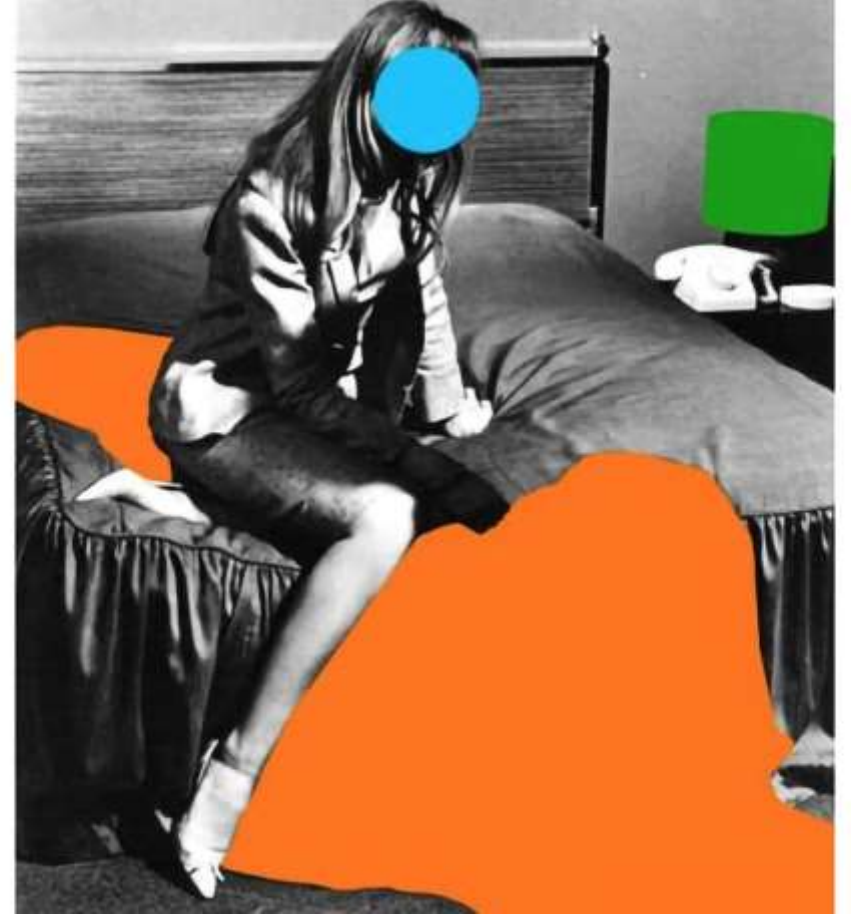
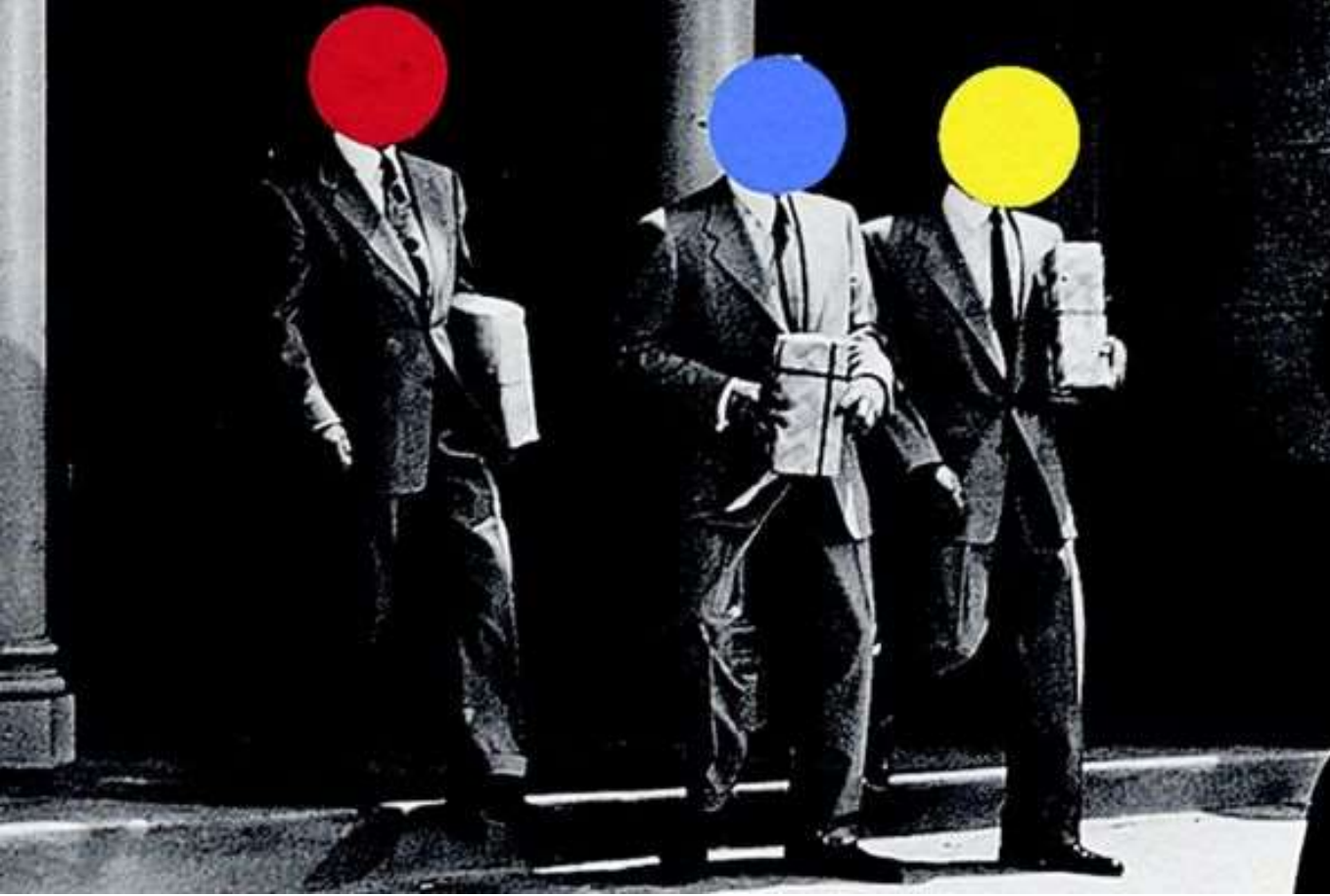
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrNynqaFrRA> (5 mins)

John Baldessari (1931-2020)

It's hard to overstate the impact that John Baldessari has had on the art of his time, in part because he has been something of an index case for a particular breed of conceptual art that has spread to all corners of the art world. Beginning in 1970, when he took all of his paintings from his San Diego studio—a decade's worth of work—and incinerated them as part of his "Cremation Project," Baldessari has systematically tested the boundaries of what can be considered art, creating strangely joyous works out of gestures as simple as hitting various things with a golf club (which he did for a series of photos), waving at ships (ditto), and placing dots over the faces of figures in old Hollywood film stills. As for how these documentations of conceptual gestures were able to function as art objects, well, Baldessari said, "the aesthetic takes care of itself."

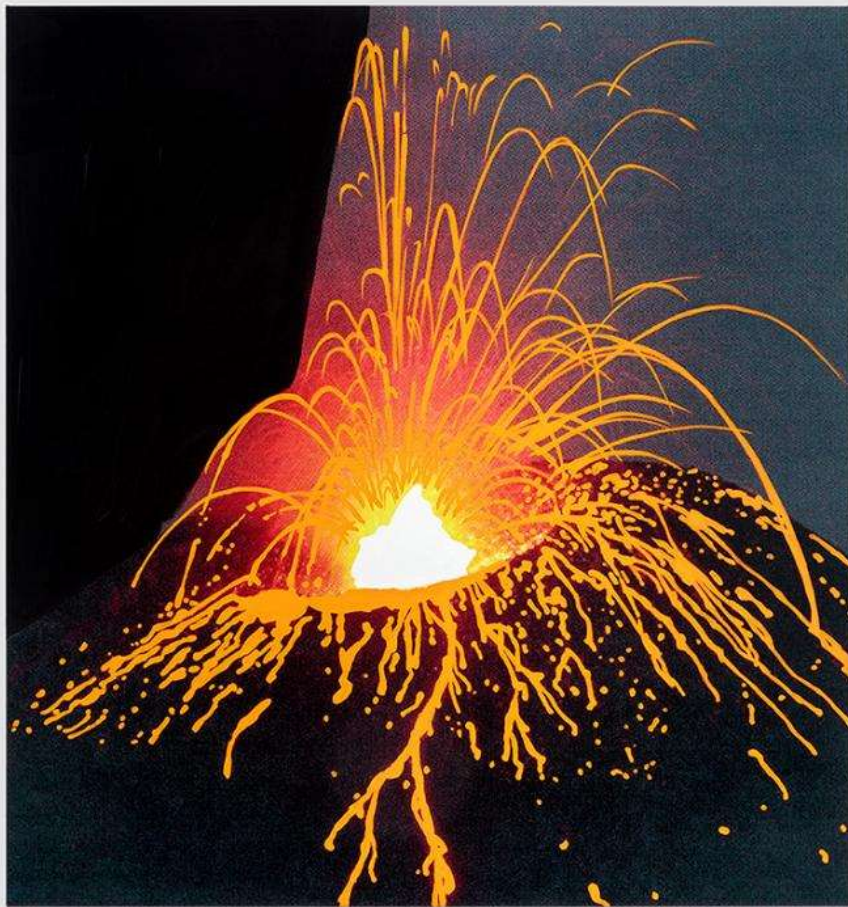
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eU7V4GyEuXA>



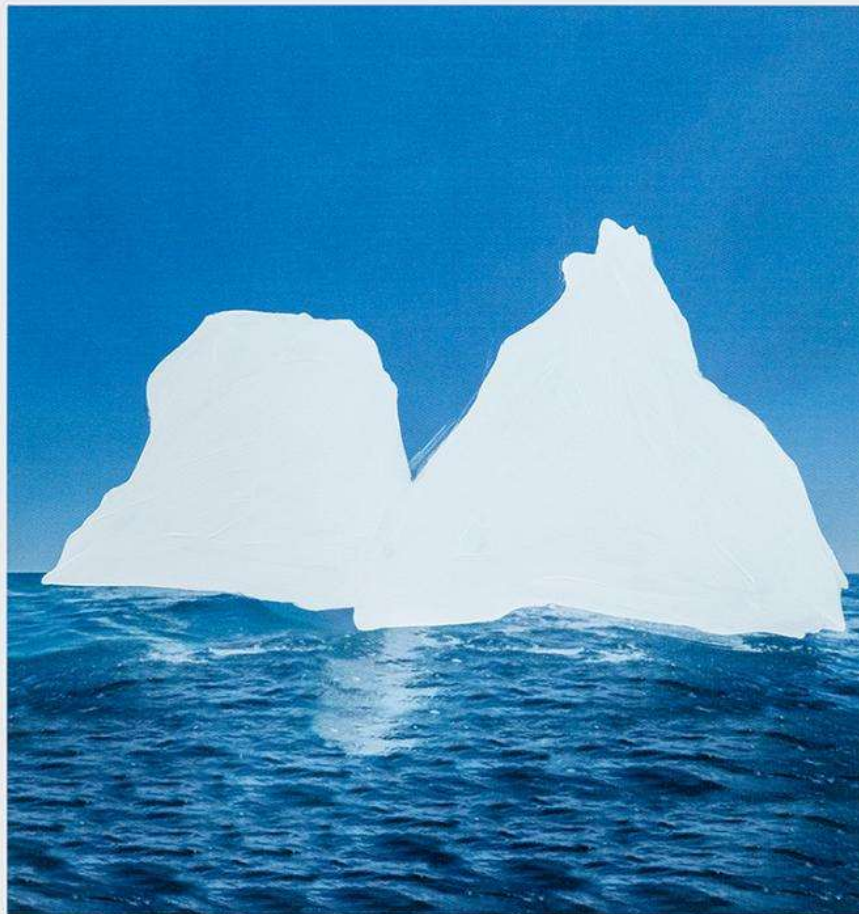








YES, THANK YOU



BETTY

There's one called....Window...
something with a window.

David Shrigley

David John Shrigley OBE is a British visual artist. He lived and worked in Glasgow, Scotland for 27 years before moving to Brighton, England in 2015.

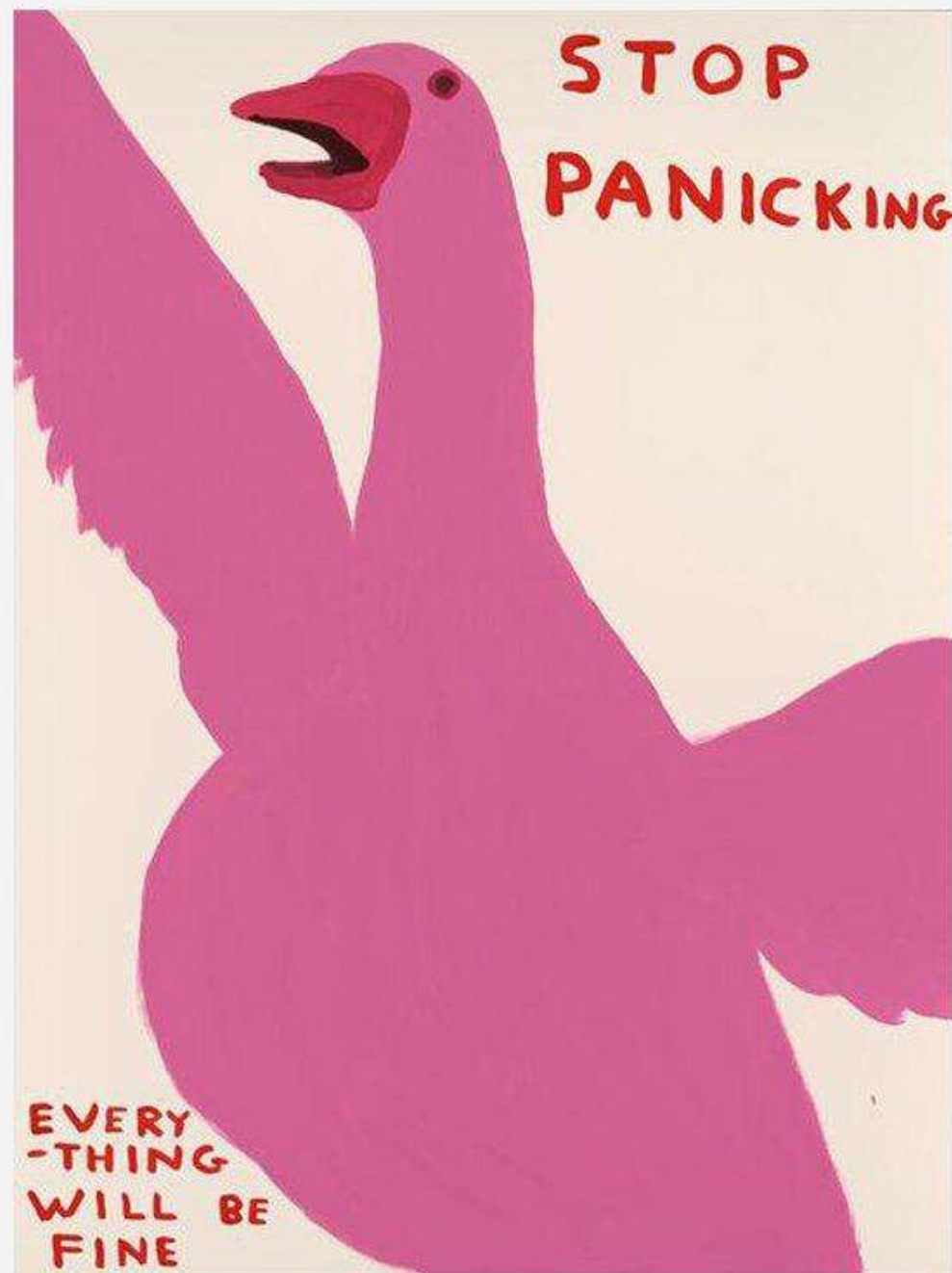
- <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/david-shrigley>



I ATE YOUR CREDIT CARDS



THEY WERE DELICIOUS



I'VE NEVER SEEN
YOU

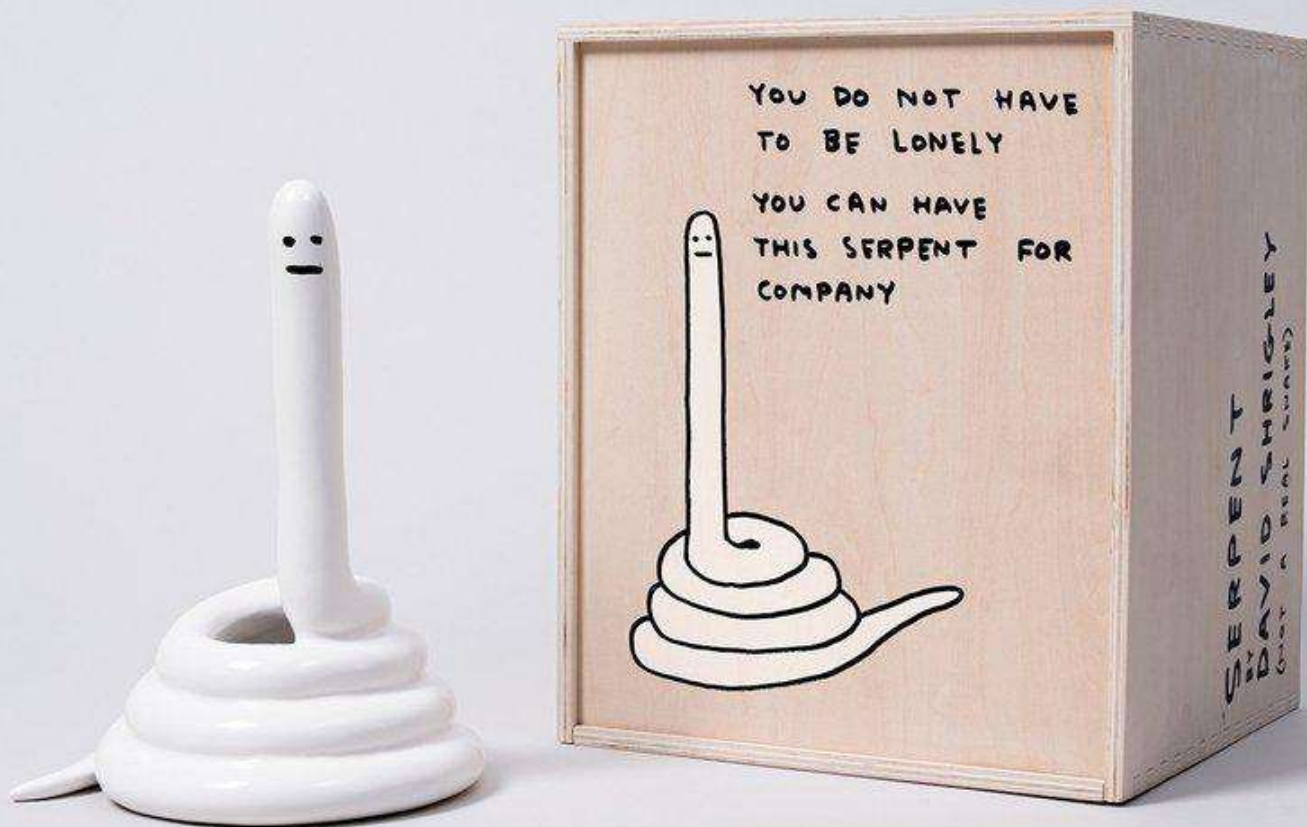


BUT KNOWING YOU ARE
THERE MAKES ME HAPPY

I'M SORRY



BUT I
CAN'T
PROMISE
IT WON'T
HAPPEN
AGAIN



ABSOLUTELY NO PROBLEM AT ALL
EVERYTHING IS TOTALLY FINE



WINE



DRINK IT
QUICKLY

BEFORE THEY
TAKE IT AWAY
FROM YOU

EXHIBITION
OF
CLEAN LAUNDRY



Feona Rae

Fiona Rae RA is a Hong Kong-born British artist. She is one of the Young British Artists who rose to prominence in the 1990s. Throughout her career, she has been known for having a portfolio of work that includes elements of energy, and complexity.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6FUXZ3DfAE>









Elizabeth Murray (1940-2007)

Elizabeth Murray was an [American painter](#), [printmaker](#) and [draughtsman](#). Her works are in many major public collections, including those of the [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum](#), the [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#), the [Museum of Modern Art](#),^[2] the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#),^[3] the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#),^[4] the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), the [Carnegie Museum of Art](#), and the [Wadsworth Atheneum](#). Murray was known for her use of [shaped canvases](#).

- <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s2/elizabeth-murray-in-humor-segment/>









Charline von Heyl

Charline von Heyl is a German abstract painter. She also works with drawing, printmaking, and collage. She moved to the United States in the 1990s, and has studios in New York City and in Marfa, Texas.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ddIreXQMIw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2XCoJ5YINA> (carefree things 20 mins)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CRd0H2o5uY> (interference colors)









Mary Reid Kelley

Mary Reid Kelley was born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1979. In videos and drawings filled with punning wordplay, Reid Kelley presents her take on the clash between utopian ideologies and the realities of women's lives in the struggle for liberation and through political strife, wars, and other historical events. Performing scripted narratives in rhyming verse, the artist—with her husband Patrick Kelley and various family members—explores historical periods through fictitious characters such as nurses, soldiers, prostitutes, and saltimbanques. Adopting a stark black-and-white palette while synthesizing art-historical styles such as Cubism and German Expressionism, Reid Kelley playfully jumbles historical periods such as World War I and France's Second Empire to trace the ways in which present concerns are rooted in the past.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaHDT_nOzaE&t=66s (her explaining)
- <https://www.maryreidkelley.com/video/this-is-offal>
- <https://www.maryreidkelley.com/video/the-thong-of-dionysus>





LORN
GREEK PEEK
RNS
RODEO PHOTO!
RE-VEAL'D!

PROSE

ROMANCE COLUMN
ONIAIST SEEKS ORGANIST
SHEIK SEEKS SKIS
MOOOO
MYTHED YOU
HERA
QUEEN SEEKS BOVINE FRIEND
OLYMPIAN SEEKS LITERAL

SLUMBER DOLT

GIN DEAR

SALE
YOU
B

WITE-A-NOW

FOR ART'S SAKE





Alex Da Corte

Alex Da Corte creates vibrant and immersive large-scale installations that include wall-based works, sculptures, and videos. Colorful and surreal, his work combines personal narrative, art-historical references, pop-culture characters, and the glossy aesthetics of commercial advertising to reveal the humor, absurdity, and psychological complexity of the images and stories that pervade our culture. Da Corte's juxtaposition, remixing, and flattening of disparate images and icons detaches them from their original meanings, allowing him to tell new stories about familiar characters, with a mixture of empathy, criticism, comedy, and the macabre.

- <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/alex-da-corte-57-varieties-short/>







Arpana Rao

A prolific artist from India and now living in Whitstable, UK. Striving to establish a versatile practice embracing the possibilities of various mediums for fine art expression from painting, printmaking, sculpture and performance, and adept in handling these forms.

Artist and TED Fellow Aparna Rao reimagines the familiar in surprising, often humorous ways. With her collaborator Soren Pors, Rao creates high-tech art installations -- a typewriter that sends emails, a camera that tracks you through the room only to make you invisible on screen -- that put a playful spin on ordinary objects and interactions.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJLDl2uDNaA>
- https://www.ted.com/talks/aparna_rao_art_that_craves_your_attention?language=en



Helen Johnson

Helen Johnson is an Australian artist producing large-scale paintings who also works as a lecturer, researcher and curator. Her artworks and practice reflect her views on colonialism, consumerism, the environment and personal accountability.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XvgXRnk_HM&t=174s







Bryan Zanisnik

Bryan Zanisnik is a contemporary artist working in video, performance, photography, and installation. Zanisnik's multidisciplinary practice uses objects en masse to explore American culture, Freudian psychology, and familial relationships.

- <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/bryan-zanisniks-big-pivot/>







Alicja Kwade

Alicja Kwade is a Polish-German contemporary visual artist. Her sculptures and installations focus on the subjectivity of time and space. Kwade lives and works in Berlin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhSu5g1CtYY&t=110s>







Pars Pro Toto

Pars Pro Toto (Alicja Kwade, 2021), reaches for the cosmos while staying grounded in the geological history of our planet. Twelve stone globes scattered across the quad resemble a galaxy of small planets, as if the cosmos had been laid down at our feet. Each stone represents a self-contained world or universe, drawing on the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, which suggests that all possible alternate histories and futures are real. The positioning of the globes was determined by chance: The artist threw tiny spheres onto a model of the Stanford Science and Engineering Quad to dictate placement. The natural stones come from several different continents of our Earth. The material of the stone itself, with layers that have formed over billions of years, acts as a kind of timescale. Each corner of the world and layer of Earth yields a multitude of stone varieties, colors and textures so that no two stones are alike. True to the meaning of the Latin phrase pars pro toto – “a part for the whole” – the stones individually and collectively evoke the micro and macro scales of our existence.





Rivane Neuenschwander

Rivane Neuenschwander is a Brazilian artist. She is known for work that explores language, nature, geography, the passing of time and social interactions. At times her works are interactive, involving viewers in spontaneous and participatory actions.

- <https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/video/41/>









Tony Cragg

Unlike the work of many of his colleagues, Cragg's sculptures are on the whole immediately intelligible and require no special mediation. It is the diversity and the deadpan experimental playfulness that instantly catch the eye and mind.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2017-12-26/tony-cragg-on-brilliant-ideas-video> (24 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cSnJHs1qW4>

<https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/tony-cragg-video-sculptures-houghton-hall-norfolk>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9cS3hPpCco>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faNTGkk8Pml>



















Carsten Höller

Carsten Höller (b. 1961) is a German artist. Höller – who often employs a scientific approach to his art – is particularly known for his major interactive installations such as ‘Test Site’ (2006) – a series of giant slides installed in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall. Höller has exhibited worldwide including at the 50th, 51st, 53rd and 56th Biennale di Venezia (2003, 2005, 2009 and 2015), Tate Modern in London, MASS MoCA in Massachusetts, Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria, Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, 28th Bienal de São Paulo (2008), Guggenheim Museum in New York, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, New Museum in New York and National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. He lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden and Biriwa, Ghana.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3EfVCgxyDc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb47196X4cl>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdKPi62Wurw>







EXIT

ONLY





Olaf Breuning

Swiss artist Olaf Breuning pushes the boundaries of contemporary art with his keen sense of irony and idiosyncratic visuals. His practice is definitively interdisciplinary: from photo-collages to installations, and from performances to paintings, Breuning's work is provocative, relatable, and inherently humorous. Released concurrently with the artist's retrospective at the NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, the eponymous book OLAF BREUNING documents and showcases the cross-section of the prolific artist's oeuvre.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLcc89meMLs>









Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg

In their apartment and studio, sculptor-musician duo Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg create playful and bawdy clay-animation films and installations that riff on fables, allegories, and myths. Djurberg's intuitive process of handcrafting clay figures, building sets, and meticulously photographing the tableaux to create each frame reveals the mix of dark and sweet impulses that motivate the work. Berg, with his roots in Berlin's electronic-music scene, creates the hypnotic compositions that bring the animations to life.

- <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s9/nathalie-djurberg-hans-berg-in-berlin-segment/>





Assignment Suggestions...

- Create a humorous piece by juxtaposing two unlike objects—play with scale
- Design a cape to protect you from a personal phobia
- Use pop art colors and shapes in an artwork
- Create an abstract work with a sense of humor
- Play
- Create a three-frame comic strip