

Rupert Dannreuther

# t8modern

## Introduction

London, I thought, was going to be a hive of cultural activity and Art was going to be bursting from the seams. However I was wrong, my favourite galleries were either closed in the adjustment period before a new exhibition or the art flowing from them lacked a certain quality, as with the summer display at the Saatchi Gallery, which definitely disappointed me after having a fondness to the gallery on previous visits. So with London destitute of new expositions which collared creativity, I decided to return home to a firm favourite of London's galleries, the Tate Modern. There are many aspects of the Tate Modern that I believe are very involving and highly interesting. Some of these attributes are listed below:

- The architectural feat that the Tate Modern has undergone , to remodel a harsh power station into a public building is incredible.
- The main collection of the gallery is a vast smorgasbord of international Art embracing a host of famous artists encompassing great masters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.
- Also the scheme of organising the pieces into themed sectors. The works are organised not in chronological, or similar artist styles but by the content of the pieces (for example History/Memory/Society). This method of administration is revolutionary and represents a new type of twenty-first century gallery.

I had now decided upon a gallery to focus on in this study, I had the task of deciding a theme to base this project on. With much deliberation and connotation I came to the conclusion that I should choose a selection of artists displaying their work at the Tate Modern. I reached the verdict that I should choose artists that I found interesting and some that are less well known but I believe their Art is worthy of debate and analysis.

The Artists and their pieces I have chosen are as follows:

- Louise Bourgeois - *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)*
- Cornelia Parker - *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view*
- Jean Arp
- Andy Warhol - *Electric chair*
- Katharina Fritsch - *Rat King*
- Henry Moore - *Recumbent Figure*

- Rebecca Horn - *Concert For Anarchy*
- Jenny Holzer - *Truisms*

## **T8**modern Louise Bourgeois

My first experience of Louise Bourgeois was when I saw her immense sculptures, *I DO*, *I UNDO*, *I REDO*, in the Turbine Hall of the Tate. These immense, awe-inspiring and even harrowing installations instantly made me a huge fan of her work. These installations were huge towers with spiral staircases to the top where bizarre, unnatural experiences await. There is a disturbing theme of childbirth in all three towers and they reflect painful experiences of labour and giving birth. Also in the series is a massive spider called Maman which is also inspiring, following the basic ideal of viewer involvement - interactive art. In Bourgeois's case this interaction is represented through the viewer being able to walk all round, through and in all of her sculptures. I believe this is why I really admire and appreciate her pieces, I felt like I was involved unlike any work I have seen.

But I am going to concentrate centrally on her sculpture: *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)*. This *Cell* is part of a series of sculptures (cells) which have a previously produced piece, inside a prison-type cell made of found doors and window panes. These enclose various groupings of furniture and sometimes (as in *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)*) include marble or wood sculptures depicting body parts and/or geometric objects. Besides referring to the most basic human component of the human organism, these cells have also been described as explorations of the 'psychosexual drama of the house' (*Tate Magazine 2001*) - the house being Bourgeois's childhood home at *Choisy-le-Roi* in which her father ran a tapestry restoration business and kept the children's governess, Sadie, as mistress alongside his wife. The artist's intention in making this series was to represent different kinds of pain, and the complex role of memory is played out by the use of symbols.

In the case of this piece, the cell is governed by a large marble element symbolising a pair of eyes, recalling a theme that Bourgeois had already explored in a number of earlier works. Here, the surrounding wire mesh and mirrors provide an additional psychological charge, revealing how the work is concerned with the ideas of observation and vision; inclusion and exclusion; vulnerability and protection; imprisonment and isolation. But unlike her works *I DO/I UNDO/I REDO* its enclosed, cage-like exterior preventing you from access, the cell also implicates the viewer as voyeur, as a kind of Peeping Tom, and embraces a further element of psychological fear.

I really enjoy contemplating the circumstances and the events which invoked these painful creations. The main characteristic that fascinates me upmost about Louise

Bourgeois's art is it is autobiographical. She produces her paintings, drawings, sculptures and prints full of memories of her own childhood and persistently depicting her concern with human isolation and with issues of gender. I like the way she expresses herself through art as a 'discharge' evolved from her emotions and experience; she has claimed 'My subject is the rawness of the emotions and the devastating effect of the emotions you go through'.

## T8modern Cornelia Parker

Again this artist instantly interested me through the incredibility of the work before me. The piece, *Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view*, was on show at the exhibition at the Tate Modern entitled '*Between Cinema and a Hard Place*' and explored the conceptual limits of art, questioning its conventions through an investigation of its relationship to the real world. This piece was very unique to me and opened my eyes to a new kind of experimental and exploratory art.

*Cold Dark Matter: An exploded view* was once an ordinary garden shed. Then Cornelia Parker filled it with junk, bought from various car boot sales, and asked the army to blow it up. A seemingly simple idea but I think it is captivating and a very compelling idea. She collected the wreckage and put them together as a collection of suspended fragments, frozen as if at the moment of detonation. The small elements including hair curlers, toy cars, and crushed tin cans are in the centre. Larger bits - uneven planks of wood, a bicycle wheel - are around the outsides. One 200-watt light bulb in the middle of the orbiting debris throws shadows onto the surrounding walls.

In Parker's hands, nothing is stable. Solid objects fall apart, collide, combust and are crushed, only to re-emerge from these acts of violence in new and surprising forms. She says 'I like to take man-made objects and push them to the point where they almost lose their reference, so that they become something else, take on other alliances'. This is the main reason I liked this work; her work simplifies what commonly people take for granted and makes you think about space in depth. Another great feature of her work is the sense of movement, chaos and destruction in a sculptural context. Parker rearranges the physical world on her own singular terms, finding poetry in the most prosaic of objects. She definitely inspires me to use objects as art in my work, learn to simplify and make my work more diverse, jagged and rough, rather than trying to make clean lines and curves.

## **T8**modern Jean Arp

The main interest I have in this artist is his use of curved shapes alongside a monochromatic colour scheme. I find the way he uses light and shade (shadow) and reflection. The simplicity and minimalist nature makes you explore further than just the stark sculptures in front of you.

A founder of the Dada movement in Zurich in 1916, Arp used the 'laws of chance' to determine his collages. Friendly with Surrealists and Constructivists, Arp created sculptures that he distinguished from abstraction by terming them 'concrete', being forms in their own right.

## **T8**modern Andy Warhol

As Marilyn Monroe affronts my face time and time again, I endeavour to investigate a deeper kind of print and sure enough, I didn't have to dig deep. But Andy Warhol probes in depth the other side of American life- 'the counterpoint to everyday frivolity' (Warhol). These are the death-related themes to which Warhol appeared to be strangely but intensely attracted. On the whole, the works document a chronicle of modern catastrophes, whether they be acts of God or feats of human intervention. Examples such as earthquakes, suicides, plane crashes, car accidents, the atomic bomb, and the electric chair. I am particularly interested in this collection of works as it represents the darker side of a very well-known old coin. I also believe strongly that the grainy, newspaper-type print reflects the circumstances which the picture is describing.

I am going to discuss a particular art work which falls under the category of 'Reports of Death'; Electric chair. I think the electric chair is excellent subject matter, as an execution device, it is (like much else in Warhol's work) - a typically American artifact. I particularly admire the way the vacant and solitary space is filled only by the chair, which is no longer a familiar, object of everyday life, has been transformed into a lethal seat of torture. The monochromatic effect, makes the piece into a stark, dystopaic picture. This monochrome leads me to refer to the phrase 'It's all there in black and white', which is usually referred to in newspapers' disaster stories. Black and white seems to keep things plain and simple, the moral blindingly obvious. I especially appreciate the subject matter involved as he dares to take art further than flowers and landscapes into gritty reality of which the Sixties flower-power generation lacked.

I have used this black and white Warhol style in a piece of mine called *Why?*, depicting the harshness of world poverty in an exhibition advert. I thought this black & white style made the piece more striking and thought engaging; But I also tried to lose some of the smooth pictures by adding black ink and paint and rephotocopying the images to make a rougher more discordant look to the piece. I believe Andy Warhol makes great

art because he uses a process of printing that is very appropriate to the subject matter highlighting it in bold and garish picture which are instantly recognisable.

## **T8**modern Katharina Fritsch

Although not a current exhibitor at the Tate Modern, I have seen this hugely diverse sculptor before at an exhibition in London, and the Tate Modern will embrace the artist in mid-September. I am very keen on her work as it is very smooth because it uses resin which appears to be a kind of plastic but I think must be a highly challenging media to use.

It is fair to say that Fritsch is a absolute perfectionist, her works may comprise of simple subject matter, but all are specifically crafted objects. Every detail, from the smallest edge to the precise colour tone, is subjected to her scrutiny until the ideal state is reached. The actual sculptures look like they have been put in a mould, as it is a type of plastic material, but it is in fact a complex process, hand crafted with tools and hand painted to get rid of the white. This lavish production process meant that during the 1980s, she produced very few works, creating great anticipation in the art world.

I consider Fritsch's art to be great because of a few reasons : The larger than life aspect of pieces like *Rat King* (In which giant-size identical black rats stand in a circle with tails entwined in the centre, the form the shape of a crown) makes you really contemplate the relative size of normal objects. Also the simple 1 or 2 colour scheme is highly effective at attention-grabbing and creates blocks of intensely bold colour making it easy to look at and have an instant attraction to it. I also particularly recognize and appreciate the way she works from an initial image to produce objects resembling mass-produced goods found in shops. But this sense of familiarity and the humorous quality of the work is outshadowed by feelings of ambiguity and unease, generated by the huge scale of the work, which is nearly three metres high and the sinister connotations of rats, traditionally a symbol of evil. Another favourite Fritsch piece is 'Company at Table' in which round a room-sized table sit eerily identical men. Their scale, monochromatic colours and stark expression evoke a compelling yet unnerving response.

## **T8**modern Henry Moore

I am a true fan of Henry Moore and his works in the Tate Modern are typical of his best. I particularly like his outdoor works where he brings the balance between human figure and the land. I like the way he was associated with many different artistic developments from Constructive art to Surrealism. Even abstracted works, such as *Composition (1932)* in woodstone from Africa, showed his liking of the female form. This tendency is epitomised by *Recumbent Figure*.

*Recumbent Figure* is one of my favourite of Moore's works, because of a few Moore style type reasons and few specific to this piece: The style, I like a great deal because of the curves (there are no perfectly straight lines), and also the actual simplifying of the human form down to unmistakable blocks. I like also greatly the way all the body parts flow into one another and do not have gaps or dead ends. This makes the piece a more vivid and interesting work than a normal whole body sculpture because he takes the figure almost until the realms of abstraction with only a few recognisable characteristics. Individual to this piece is the actual stone used which I think is the aspect that makes the piece; It is so rugged and at one with nature, so it goes outside but looks like a permanent feature of the surroundings.

I like Moore's works because of the way he takes the much sculpted human form and turns it to the point of abstraction which makes the pieces more interesting and intriguing.



## **T8**modern Rebecca Horn

I was unaware of Horn's *Concert For Anarchy* when I first visited *the* Tate Modern, so I was *shocked* to see a *concert* grand piano suspended from *the* ceiling, upside down. *Concert For Anarchy* effectively performs a *high-wire act*: *the* lid crashes open, and *the* separate keys *shoot* out, protruding from *the* body of *the* instrument at crazy angles. Gradually *the* piano reassembles itself, its keys *withdraw*, and it once again hangs silent, in wait for *the* unwary.

I find *this* piece utterly brilliant, as I love moving art and could sit and just watch people's reactions and responses to *the* crashing, eery sounding beast. I love *the* way *she* pokes fun and misuses a grand piano almost as if a subversive gesture toward *the* German *high* Romantic tradition and *the* grandeur surrounding musicians such as Beethoven or Brahms. I am fond of *the* way *she* makes *her* works highly subjective and as a *show* in a *theatre*, not of a gallery. *She* makes *this* leap from art to *theatre* by using electrical mechanisms to bring to erratic, quirky life a whole host of object from battered suit cases to ostrich feather fans. *She* has a nostalgic fascination with obsolescence which means that *she* uses things that are no longer functional and antiquated, for example opera glasses are used in one of *her* sculptures.

## **T8**modern Jenny Holzer

Truism was the first of Holzer's public text works. I find it fascinating to use the modern electronics of LED sign writing applied to the power of the written word. Phrases such as 'FREEDOM IS A LUXURY NOT A NECESSITY' or 'GIVING FREE REIN TO YOUR EMOTIONS IS AN HONEST WAY TO LIVE' have a neutral tone without any identifying

authorial characteristics; it is as if they have always existed. The reason why I appreciate this artist so much for this rather simple shop-front accessory is that I believe sometimes text can speak louder than pictures and these phrases makes this piece a thought provoking and highly diverse one.

## Conclusion

I believe that the Tate Modern is the most interesting gallery in London. I spent many a happy hour sitting reading as I overlooked the Thames from a view-point. I have seen these artists and have found their work very intriguing and enjoyable. I hope to use some of the techniques, styles and methods discussed in my own art work and hope to create some very well-thought-out and interesting work.

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