

□ How is recent British Art represented at Tate Modern? □

The Tate Modern opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2000, in what was once Bankside Power Station and is now a masterpiece of architectural conversion with almost iconic status in the world of art galleries. The new space was designed by the German Architects Herzog and De Meuron, who were chosen for their plan which proposed the least drastic changes to Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's building, and was concerned more with highlighting the original design. Brought into being by Sir Nicholas Serota, the museum has been a key part in the revival of London as a world class centre of modern art, in answer to Paris's Pompidou centre, Bilbao's Guggenheim, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

From the Thames side galleries, viewed through glass walls, Wren's undeniably iconic dome is the answering view across the river. This visual is enhanced by a physical link in the form of the only recently opened Millennium Bridge which crosses the Thames in front of the Tate Modern. The Gallery rests firmly in its prime South Bank location, with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on one side, and The Royal Festival Hall, National Theatre and Hayward Gallery on the other. The Tate Modern is able to take full advantage of the Capital's history and rich culture, drawing on the flow of visiting academics, tourists and culture aficionados as well as attracting a wide sweep of the general population. The annual visitor figures for the Tate Modern are greater than that of its partner Tate Britain, and of the National Gallery. In its opening year the museums visitor numbers were roughly 5 million, with 71% of visitors coming from within the UK.

So what brings these people to the Tate Modern? It was evident to me as I walked through the galleries one Saturday recently and found the greatest concentrations of people at the windows admiring the impressive view, that one of the key attractions of the Gallery is undeniably the building itself. A number of the visitors to the Tate Modern are not interested in the art contained within so much as with the building itself. Experiencing the architecture is more important to them here than it would be for example at the Tate Britain. However, the fact remains that a huge number of people visit and it would be impossible to ignore the art completely, especially when you are confronted by it in the manner, for instance, of Anish Kapoor's new sculpture for the Turbine Hall '*Marsyas*'.

So how, in a British Museum of Modern Art that attracts a favourable number of visitors each year, is the recent work of British Artists represented?

Kapoor, an Indian born Artist, is one of Britain's leading sculptors. He represented Britain at the 1990 Venice Biennale and won the Turner prize in the same year. '*Marsyas*' is part of the Unilever Series and currently occupies the whole of the Turbine Hall. This is one notable representation of recent British Art at the Tate Modern.

The period from 1990 to now has seen the rise of a number of now well known names who have become key players in the British art world and created vast amounts of

work and often controversy. The monumental scale of the building's £134 million redevelopment serves to highlight the importance deemed of the Tate's collection of modern Art. But when it comes to the recent work of these British Artists, I find that the collection seems somewhat lacking in the pieces that brought the attention of a wider audience back to London in the early 90's.

'Sensation', an exhibition of works owned by the collector Charles Saatchi held at the Royal Academy in 1997, showed work by Artists who are now considered the epitome of Young British Art. The pieces exhibited included Damien Hirst's shark suspended in formaldehyde: 'The physical impossibility of death in the mind of something living', Tracey Emin's Tent: 'Everyone I have ever slept with' and Rachel Whiteread's cast of mocked up room: 'Ghost', to name but a sample of the substantial collection. 'Sensation' brought in some of the Royal Academy's highest ever attendance figures, and the Artists included continue to represent recent British Art now.

The collection owned by the Tate cannot be expected to hold anything like as much recent British Art as is owned by Saatchi. It would be impossible given the nature of its funding. The collection at the Tate Modern is a survey of Modern and Contemporary Art from 1900 to the present day and recent British Art can only be shown in proportion to that of the rest of the world.

Personally, I would loosely define 'recent British art' as work executed within the last decade or so. Artists' new work is usually only shown as part of a temporary exhibition or as a newly completed commission, such as '*Marsyas*'. Of course the problems involved with acquiring new works are clear. The Artists show their work through private dealers' galleries such as that of Jay Jopling and Victoria Miro. Here prospective buyers; private collectors, companies and firms, will come to choose new pieces for their collections, with more money to spend on this kind of work than the Tate and no requirement for them to justify their purchases. The only other way to acquire new work is to commission it or, in the case of the Unilever series, have it commissioned on your behalf.

The collection is in fact not lacking in recent British art, it just appears that way from the current hanging. There are relatively few examples on display of the sometimes scandalous and often shocking pieces that we often hear about. The pieces currently on display, the majority of which are by Sarah Lucas, represent 5 artists in all, and are a tiny sample of the work of contemporary British artists.

The recent work of British Artists is sometimes represented in temporary exhibitions at the Tate Modern, along side the work of their contemporaries and predecessors. Though this is not unusual as this is how the rooms are already arranged, temporary exhibitions allow more focus to fall on the pieces included because they are generally fewer in number and are often key works. A prime example of this is the first temporary exhibition that was held at the Tate Modern. 'Between Cinema and a hard place' ran for just over seven months from the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2000. This first exhibition, featuring 22 contemporary artists in all, included pieces by the British artists Anish Kapoor, Anthony Gormley, Julian Opie, Rachel Whiteread and Cornelia Parker.

'Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis', a vast exhibition focusing on 9 major cities, each at a different period in their history. By featuring London, 1990 to 2001, the Tate was able to showcase recent British Art as driving force, to the best of its abilities.

The Tate Modern now has something else to worry about in the form of Charles Saatchi's new gallery; due to open in what was County Hall, on London's south bank, early next year. Saatchi's vast collection of recent British art will likely overshadow any attempt that the Tate Modern can make at representing recent British Art as a single and prominent movement. So the Tate Modern must be content with the collection that is available to it: a fine survey of modern art of the Western world from 1900 to within the last decade, taking a few examples from each movement, country and region and stimulating comparison through its atypical hanging of work by genre.

The less recent work of British Artists such as Bacon, Freud and Hockney is to be found in the galleries of the Tate Britain, together with the work of their distant predecessors Turner, Blake, Gainsborough and so on. As Modern British Art, should the work of the new British artists go into the Tate Britain, or the Tate Modern? Then there is the Turner prize, held annually at the Tate Britain. Should this now be moved to the Tate Modern where surely it would be the ideal way of representing recent Contemporary British art?

Exhibitions at the Tate Modern show the work of the YBA's but do not favour them above any other movement. This is true also in the gallery in general. Recent British Art is represented at the Tate modern in proportion to everything else, and in the context of the modern art which came before it and exists around it. For me it just seems a shame that some of the pieces by key Artists are not the best examples of their work. As a national collection of Modern Art in London, in my opinion I would like to see a better sample of recent work by contemporary British Artists including one or two more key pieces. Perhaps unfortunately for the Tate, but fortunately for those amongst us who are looking to find this in the Capital, we will be able to find this in the new Saatchi Gallery in the next few months. Whether this will have a positive or negative effect on the Tate Modern we shall soon see.