

Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
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Lecture - 20
Contemporary Trends: Breaking the Barriers

Welcome viewers to MOOCS online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art Movements and Artists. In this lecture today we will have a brief recapitulation of the major movements and moments in the modern art history which not only challenged the tradition, but kept on pushing the barriers and boundaries of art practice itself tradition or modern and that is the reason why we have titled this lecture today as Contemporary Trends Breaking the Barriers.

It is from this perspective that we can look back at the history of modern western art mainly from cubism onwards as a series of attempts at breaking the barriers or pushing the boundaries of the practice it itself or the concept itself. And this is how modern western art reached 1960s through radical movements like pop art, op art, abstract expressionism etcetera. This is how modern art raised a whole range of questions and issues which provoked the entire world to debate to ponder upon and to find out not merely the answers to those questions, but the possibilities of expanding the questions themselves further.

Now, I would like to quote from an essay called ideas systems and processors written by Daniel Marzona a very well known art critic based in USA and in that essay Daniel begins with a sub chapter titled an art without object. It is a very I would say very suggestive title and a very potentially very provocative title because this title of the subchapter clearly indicates a futuristic possibility of art where it is not the object anymore that is going to be the centre of activity, but the idea. If that is the case now if that is the case in contemporary art trends then it has to be believed whether we agree to it or not whether we like that or not that art has lost its earlier position. Art is no more about an object, but it is about an idea a concept.

Now the very opening line of this essay the first chapter of this essay is let me quote.

What is art? How is it in context to be defined? can art be created or perceived when it is no longer bound to an aesthetic object, can art be political or is art per se integrated into political contexts, can the discourse about art itself constitute art, how can the authority to make appropriate judgments on art be extended from a small circle of insiders to a large number of stakeholders.

I mean all these questions and as Daniel says these and many other issues were raised by various works which in the late 1960s radically questioned the traditional idea of what art was and which more for want of a better name than anything else lumped together under the term concept art or conceptual art. Now for in retrospect the artistic approaches and intentions of the artists involved in the foundation of conceptual art proved to have been far too heterogeneous for us to talk of a unitary style or even of an artistic movement.

Now, this term conceptual art is like an umbrella term it embraces a whole lot of art activities that have come into being from 1960s onwards till today in various disguises in various forms employing different kinds of mediums. So, breaking the barriers this very term suggests not only radicalizing your idea about art or what you expect from art, but it is also about searching continuously searching new mediums, new methods, and new concepts of art, where even object can be reduced to an idea or an idea can completely dominate art the idea that art is an aesthetic object.

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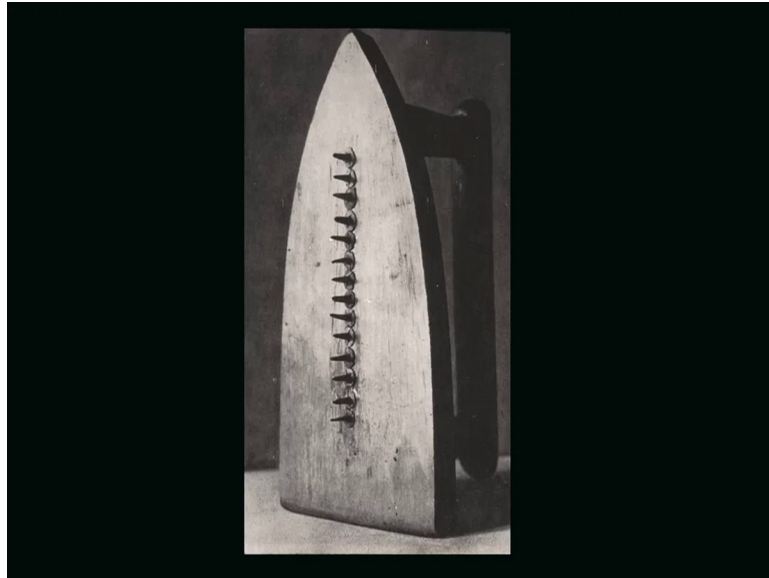
Undoubtedly it was in 1917 that the most radical breakthrough happened in modern art when Marcel Duchamp installed this porcelain urinal as an exhibit in an art exhibition.

Since then, various artists at different points of time have attempted a new form and idea of art that helped the history of modern art to push its horizon gradually and continuously.

And we have seen that happening quite early in 1917 undoubtedly that was the most radical moment when Marcel Duchamp installed this porcelain urinal as an exhibit in an art exhibition.

Since then various artists at different points of time have attempted a new form and idea of art that helped the history of modern art to push its horizon gradually and continuously as far as possible.

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In terms of medium, object, and once again idea, we have seen this extremely uncanny object placed as an artwork by Mandray way back in early 20th century.

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We have seen how Picasso used completely unusual objects like a bicycle seat and a bicycle handle, but juxtapose in a certain way appear to be something different like a bull

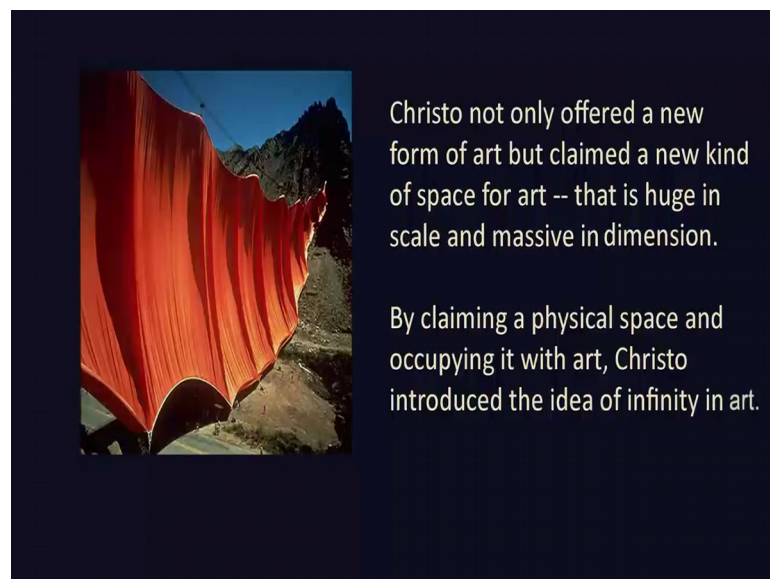
and he called it a bull.

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But still all these works are representational in nature until 1972 when Christo made this Valley Curtain in Colorado Valley in USA and radicalized the whole idea of what is art he changed not only the idea of art as an object, but he also changed the location of idea.

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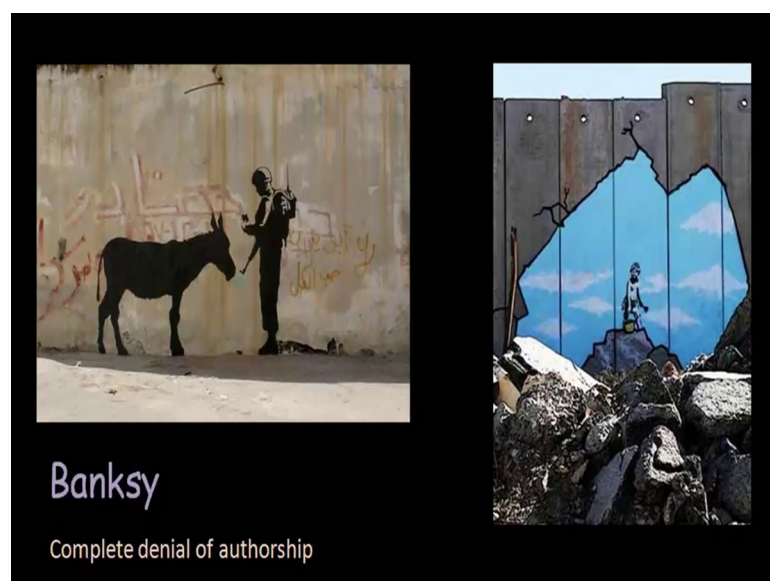


So, Christo not only offered a new form of art, but claimed the new kind of space for art and that is huge in scale and massive in dimension there by claiming a physical space and occupying, it with art, Christo introduced the idea of infinity in art like this one as well.

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Then we have a unique example like Banksy we do not know the real name of this artist, but he is popularly known as Banksy an artist who keeps himself underground, but he keeps doing this highly provocative and potentially political paintings on the walls of the streets of USA of England and various other places. So, graffiti in other words following Banksy there are many such graffiti artists who have radicalized the idea of art, the meaning of art, the use of art, the technique of art, by doing them on the wall not just as simple innocent mural paintings.

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But as highly social and political in terms of the content and in terms of it is objective probably that is why many of these graffiti artists have to remain underground also because there is a legal issue in occupying a public wall with your art which you do not own.

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Nevertheless this graffiti is by Banksy and other artists all over the world have become immensely popular and it has created almost a new genre in the contemporary art.

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Brazilian sculptor Nele Azevedo arranged 5,000 little ice figurines on the step of Chamberlain Square in Birmingham, U.K., to remember the men and women lost during WWI, including the civilians. The melting, ghostly figures, placed by volunteers, created a truly haunting image, and they were crowned by a red figure that seemed to drip a trail of blood down the steps.



We have already seen in one of our previous lectures this mind blowing work by this Brazilian sculptor Nele Azevedo who arranged 5,000 little ice figurines on the steps of

Chamberlain Square in Birmingham, UK to remember the men and women lost during world war one including the civilians. And what happened later if you remember that all these melting, ghostly figures, placed by volunteers, created a truly haunting image, and they were crowned by a red figure that seems to drip the trail of blood down the steps.

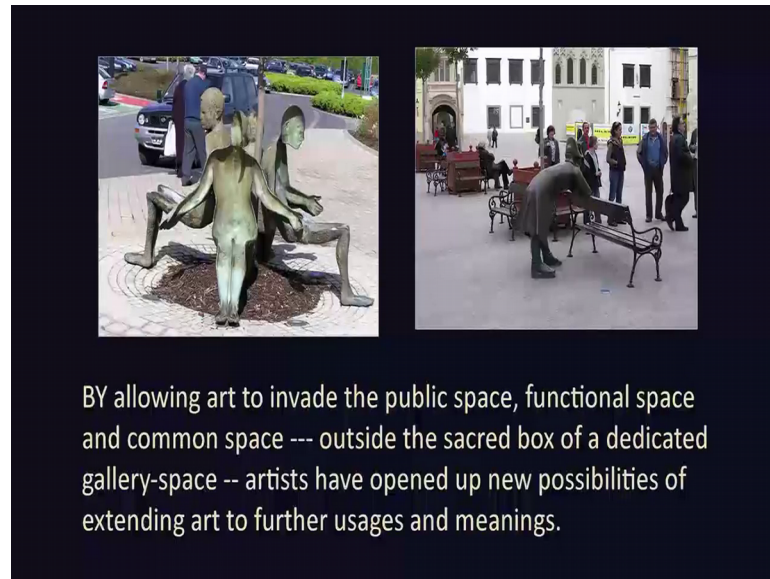
So, yes artists are object here art is representational here, but art is also happening here that is it is a kind of sculptural installation which has to be experienced over a period of time as the figures keep melting slowly and gradually.

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It is not a one shot or a one snap kind of feeling it had to experience has to allow the sculpture to run it is course right in front of the viewers and it is then that this kind of works makes some sense.

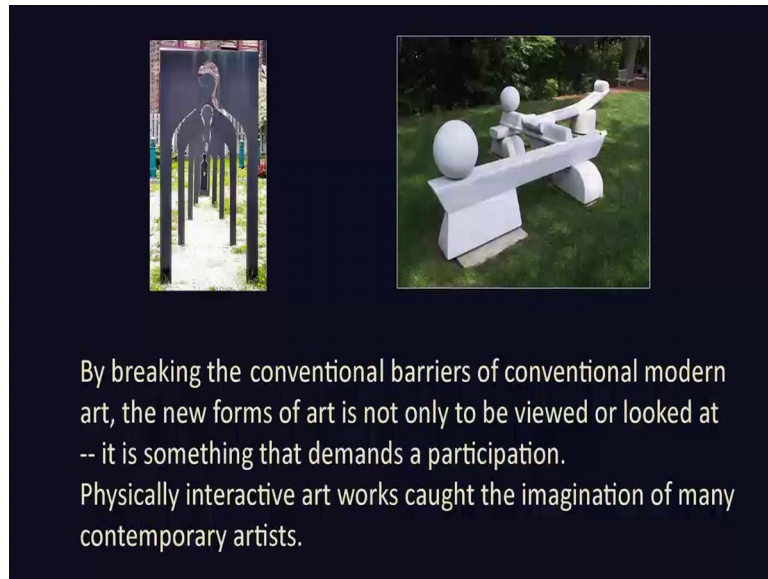
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By allowing art to invade the public space, functional space and common space, outside the sacred box of dedicated gallery-space artists have opened up new possibilities of extending art to further usages and meanings.

By breaking the barriers it is also meant that gallery space, or museum space is not necessarily the only space where art has to be viewed, where art has to be displayed art can be displayed in many significant spaces outside this white cube this is how a gallery is known in the west, because it is enclosed and it is sanctified and also according to many artists it highly commercial, but you want to make art meaningful for the public meaningful to the society.

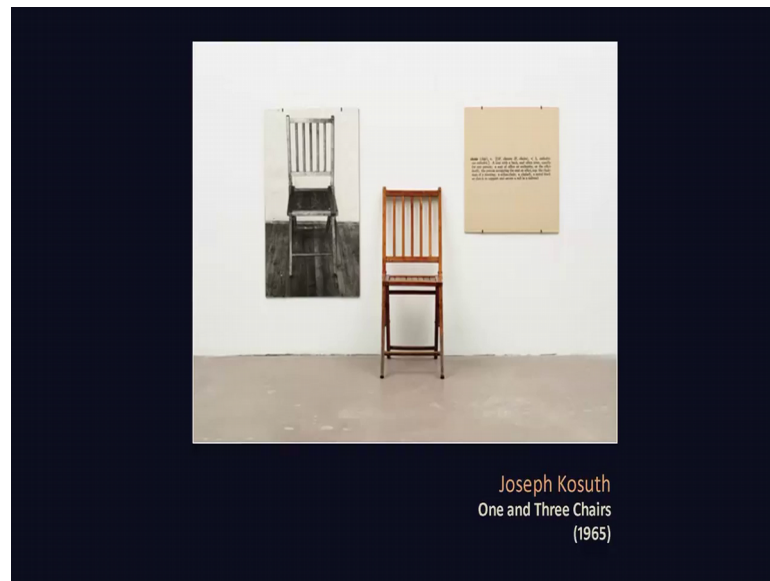
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If that is what you want then you need to take out of the white cube or gallery and there have been a lot of artists all over the world who were trying that out all the time.

And that leads us to this very interesting idea of making art interactive making people go through the art sit on the art touch the art and this goes extremely opposed to the idea that art cannot be touched it challenges the so, called sanctity of art. So, by breaking the conventional barriers of conventional modern art the new forms of art is not only to be viewed or looked at it is something that demands a participation physically interactive art works hence caught the imagination of many contemporary artists.

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And you have a whole range of examples of art works being done today where the viewers are expected to physically interact with the work of art and that is how the art becomes meaningful the art makes some sense.

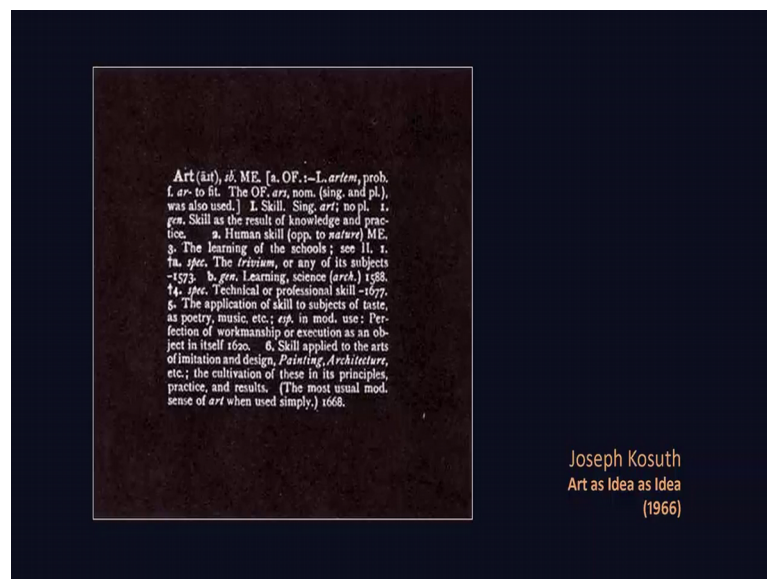
Now, talking about conceptual art which according to Daniel Merziona again is an idea that was cropped up in an American context in 1961 in his essay of the same name published in 1963 Henry flint an artist uses the term to refer to a kind of art whose actual distinguishing feature is the way it deals with language not the way it is with the visual language, but the verbal language the conceptual language. A few years later the term concept art had already been replaced by conceptual art this term was invented by Sol livit an artist whose works from the outside had not been exclusively language oriented. His essays like paragraphs on conceptual art 1967 and sentences on conceptual art 1969 brought the term to the attention of a broader public and in a sense specified what was to be understood by it.

In 1969 the English artists group art and language published the first number of the magazine art language which was subtitled the journal of conceptual art, and the same here the young concept artist Joseph Kossuth whose work we see right now on the monitor he declared that all art after Duchenne is conceptual in nature because art only

exists conceptually. Now it is difficult to engage with Joseph Kosuth's work, but once you know about it you read about his works it becomes increasingly clear that Joseph Kosuth's position vis a vis art or the idea of art is extremely different from whatever we have seen in the name of art. So, far till the last lecture till pop art.

Because he is no more dealing with art as a visual object, he is dealing with art as an idea, art as a concept, art as the language. So, that is why he problematizes even the idea of the representation through intellect, through language, and through various means like a photograph like a real chair and like reprinting what the dictionary or how the dictionary has to define a chair. So, for him it is one chair that has been defined in different ways, but it has also become 3 chairs and that is how he has titled this work 1 and 3 chairs.

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Now, Joseph Kosuth was the artist perhaps one of the earliest artists who have gone to the extent of creating a canvas where you do not find a single visual element it is entirely textual and he makes it very very clear in this title because the title of this work is art as idea as idea. So, art is not visual and remember that he made this piece of painting in 1966. So, when Daniel Marzona is addressing in this essay the definition of conceptual art the author says so, what is or was to be understood by the term conceptual art.

One way or another all the essays by artists mentioned about express the fact that within conceptual art there is an emphasis on the thought component of art and it is perception. In the course of the 1960s normative definitions of art began to crumble that is a conventional definition of art as an aesthetic object began to crumble and thus younger artists often with an excellent academic education started to reinterpret the essence of art in extended analysis. Thus not only art itself, but also its institutional context became the centre of attention, subjected to comprehensive criticism, in artistic practice, many artists expressed their worries about traditional forms of marketing art and. So, ways were sought of getting away from the idea of art works as decorative objects for well heeled buyers.

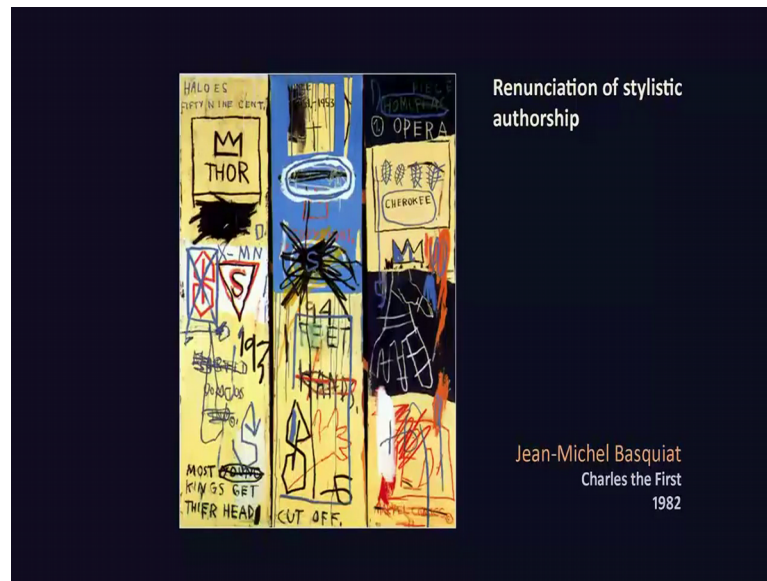
So, it created a problem also in the art market these new definitions of art this new ways of looking at the art.

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And there was an order group of artists like Jean-Michel-Basquiat who was up on his heels to Renountiate the stylistic authorship. For artists like him it does not make any sense to create a signature style by which a particular artist will be recognized or known, but one easy way out was like Rosenberg did like many other artists did previously to use collage. So, interestingly in many of the paintings Basquiat is not directly using collage.

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But he is deliberately and directly using different kinds of styles, which do not have any signature tune style, which do not claim any authorship they could be done by anybody to the idea is his own.

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And then of course, we have somebody like Joseph Beuys who was one of the Pioneers

in what we today understand as performance art, that art is no more about a particular aesthetic object, but if it is a performance it is different from performing arts like a theatre or a choreography, it is about all a real life performance where artists may put himself or herself in a huge risk yet this is something that have to be seen by the spectators and has to be understood in terms of the concept or the idea that is being explored through this performance.

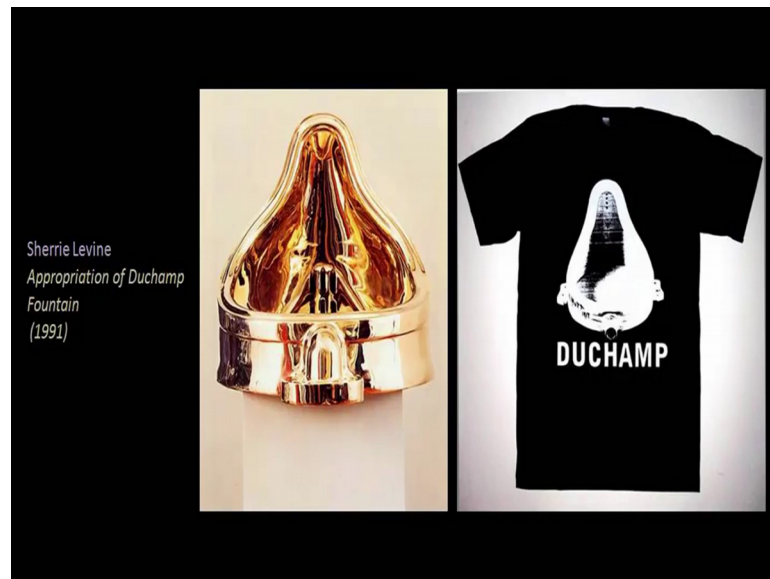
Now, at the same time it is also true that besides getting very conceptual and thereby getting very (Refer Time: 22:13) many artists all over the world from after 1960s from 1970s and very much in 1980s were also trying to explore the possibility of the new age technological devices like computer digital technology different kinds of new media and of course, the possibilities of interdisciplinary art.

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For example, there was a time, for example when you look at Shirin Neshats work when people had used their own body in exchange of canvas or a paper.

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And now we have raised a time, when people are going to use a very indirect method like a digital technology and an indication of that that how art has changed radically so, much that the masterpieces have become so, expensive has become so, much like a cult figure has been addressed by an artist called Sherrie Levine which has been titled very appropriately like appropriation of Marsal Duchamp fountain, but down in the 1991.

So, appropriating not only the cutting edge technologies, but also the previous works of art with a sense of irony sometimes with a sense of satire and sometimes by a sense of challenge has also been a way to break the barriers of reverence. In reverence has become which we have already seen way back in the movement, but in contemporary art it has taken new shapes and new ideas and new forms. At the end of this lecture I would like to show you 2 video clipping, in the first one you will see a wonderful piece of video installation by a Korean artist, and in the second one you will see a great piece of or have a glimpse from a very well known art fair called freeze art fair in England.

In both these videos we will have an idea that how exactly art has changed completely in it is form to the extent that an art exhibition does not look like a typical art exhibition it almost looks like a science exhibition, it almost looks like commercial publicity exhibition, it almost looks like a spectacular exhibition of creation of various kinds of objects which may be called art or not that was up to us, but there is a whole lot of innovations that has been going on.

To begin with we will look at a video installation art which was first shown in Santa Cruz Bolivia (Refer Time: 26:09) few years back. Now let us look at a clipping from a video which took some glimpse of the freeze art fair a few years back and this glimpse gives an idea about the enormous changes that have taken place once again not only in the form of art, but in the idea of art or what is to be called art or not. (Refer Time: 29:54).

So, the situation of modern art or contemporary art today can be looked at as something that is very complicated to say the least it is very complex, but at the same time it has also become extremely challenging and competitive both for the artists and for the viewers thereby making it even more interesting every day.

Thank you.