

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)

Course Title

Visual Perception and Art: A survey across the cultures.

Lecture - 20

Challenges of Visual

by

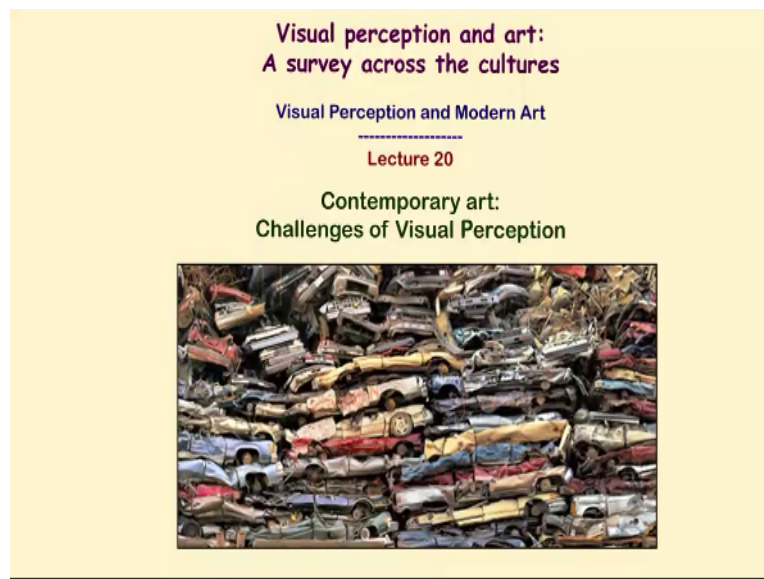
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Visva-Bharati

Hello viewers welcome to mook's online course on visual perception and art a survey across the culture.

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This is the 20th and last lecture of this course and in this lecture we will be looking at how contemporary art has not only challenged or visual perception, but even looking very difficult looking in the sense of looking at a work fought, looking at a sculpture, looking at a painting, because in the first place and number of examples of contemporary art activities or contemporary artistic products do not believe in art object anymore.

A and B many of them, do not involve only visual perception, because they introduce sound, they introduce specific kind of location, they introduce different non-artistic materials to address an idea. So it is not that only our visual perception gets challenged, it is also about what are the other perceptions that we need to include within the overview of visual perception if we are to address or it is understand or look at contemporary art of the certain kinds.

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Contemporary Art challenged the notion of Visual Perception in many ways.

The Visuality in contemporary art itself is more solely dependent on visual perception. To a great extent it involves conceptual ideas and intellectual experiences which are far beyond any visual perceptions. Yet, many contemporary art forms effect our visual perception deeply.

And, most importantly, the contemporary art does not refer to simply painting or sculpture. Contemporary art tends to use various kinds of non-conventional and unusual materials to create artworks or make visual statements to convey an idea.

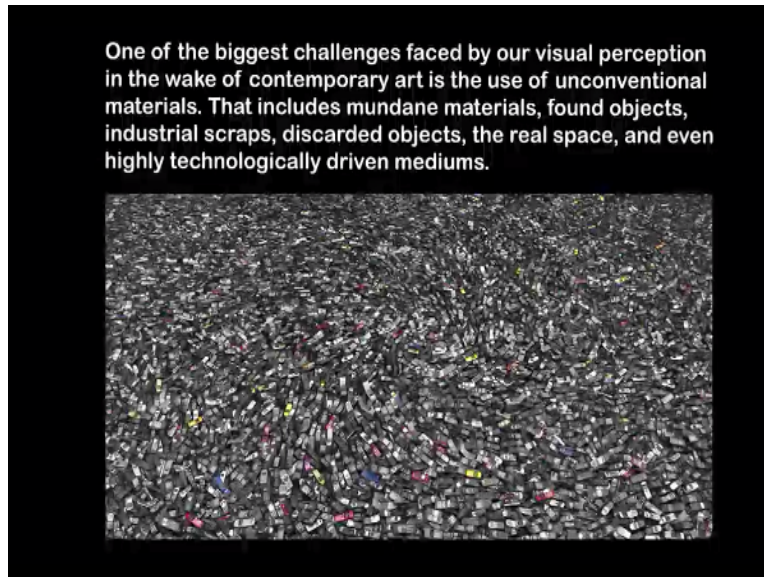
Clearly, there is a shift from 'representation' to 'idea'.

Now contemporary art challenged the notion of visual perception in many ways. The visuality in contemporary art itself is more solely dependent on visual perception. To a great extent it involves conceptual ideas, intellectual experiences which are far beyond any visual perception. Yet, many contemporary art effect our visual perception only. So in other words, if we look at it from the point of view of visual perception actually the visuality that we seen contemporary art is no more about only visual perception.

It is actually more about ideas, it is more about intellectual experiences. But on the other hand it has deeply impressed our visual perception. And, most importantly, the contemporary art does not refer to simply painting or sculpture only. So the looking becomes a difficult process now, the looking is not only it has become a very difficult process, but looking itself is in crises. Because you are not only supposed to do, you are also to hear, you are also suppose to read, you are also suppose to think while you are looking at something.

Now contemporary art tends to use various kinds of non-conventional and unusual materials to create artworks or make visual statements to convey, an idea. So this is another important aspect that one has to make sense of this unconventional materials that a contemporary art is disusing. So clearly, there is a shift of idea from representation to idea, from representation to concept or you can also say it the other way from narrative to concept.

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Now one of the biggest challenges faced by our visual perception in the wake of contemporary art is the use of unconventional materials, I just told you. Now that includes mundane materials, found objects, industrial scraps, discarded objects, the real space, and even highly technological driven mediums. For example, when you look at this painting which is there right on your screen now, looks like an abstract painting, but actually it is not a painting it is a photograph of assembly.

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And only when you look at them very close you realize it is a whole heap of discarded mobile phones. So this kind of art work has a name for itself it is called junk art or junk sculpture. Now never before modern art has anybody tried to use junk, of course we have seen in early modern art artists like Picasso using scarp material, but do not exactly junk, not exactly things which people have discarded once and for all.

Now conceptually we can understand the purpose of making such a junk sculpture, because it is connected to an eco-friendly concern, it is connected to environmental concerns. But at the same time how do you look at it first of all because the visual perception that is generally used to understand, enjoy and appreciate the work of art is mostly about representation now if you said this also respiration of an idea of decade of a discarded material of the whole state that now our world is full of such discarded junks so art cannot way kind of pretending cannot pretend as something that is very beautiful then soothing because a world around as become a complete junk yard.

So when I am think about these things these ideas, we can make sense of it but then by going through this thinking we have already informed our visual perception to aspect this kind of work. (Refer Slide Time: 06:56)



As work of art, so when you look at these photograph very closely what looks like an abstract pattern almost like a junks full of painting from distance it kind of exposes itself to terrible kind of situation of modern life which is nothing but a world that is full of junks and discarded objects like this.

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So when artist begin using this kind of junks in scarp.

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To create art works then sometimes it is difficult to even use the term art work because when you see this kind of works in progress or in it is final stage you can also feel that it is less about art per say and it is more about a very strong visual statement in association with a specific concern, so those junk sculptures or compositions that we have just seen at certainly a visual statement about a very specific concern so is this.

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Contemporary art practices like installation art, video art, new media art have challenged and re-defined visual perception in significant ways.

One of the major factors that affected our way of looking at art is the introduction of real time as an essential part of a work of art.

Thus visual perception ceases to remain exclusive to visual signals only.

A short clipping from a video art can illustrate this point very well.

Now it is also true that contemporary art practices like installation art, video art new media art have challenged and redefined visual perception in significant ways. One of the major factors that affected our way of looking at art is the introduction of real time as an essential part of a work art particularly when you are looking at video art when you are looking at an non going installation when you are looking at a new media art where things are or a moving image is being displaced and when you are looking at a work of art not as something static anymore for something that is continuously progress.

Which is very different from the kind of visual perception when we have when we look at sculpture or painting as fixed static object but here we are looking at sculpture and painting we are actually not looking at sculpture and painting we are looking at certain artistic process which are always emotion, so the visual perception sees to remain exclusive to visual signals only when it encounters this kind of box.

Because one as to as viewer one as to take care the auditory signals one as to take care of the sounds that this box are emitting one as to take care of the texts that are running through this box of art because all these things make a contemporary art very contemporary in many sense of the term, so just to have an idea now let us look at short clipping form a video art and because that can illustrate the point that I am trying to make particular when you see that unless you put it on pause you cannot see anything more than a fraction of a second A and B you do not know what this video art is actually expressing or interpreting may be it neither expressing nor interpreting it

is a could be it could be a experiment with the new possibilities of this new media now let us look at the video then we will come back to the lecture.

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Now having seen this for moment let us get back to the history way back in 1921.

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Way back in 1921, Man Ray made this work called 'The Gift'. The entire work is made up of readymade objects or materials. The work does not represent any object though the form clearly suggests a flat-iron.

The work/object represents an 'idea'.



American artist who let us settled in Paris Man Ray made this work called The Gift, the entire work is made up of readymade objects or materials, the work does not represent any object though the form clearly suggests a flat-iron. So the work object represents an idea A and B the fact that the artist has not made or created anything by himself he has only picked up the readymade objects from around or may be shop or from industry and factory and used it in a way so that it becomes if not a work apart but a new visual statement a new visual communication.

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And this is what meaning of this art is whether it is man Ray or Marcel Duchamp there were thinking about rather than representing or expressing they were thinking about making a very strong a visual comment a visual statement on an idea or on a concern or on a particular issue, now when Marcel Duchamp way back in 1930 uses a bicycle wheel and keeps it moving during the exhibition.

Then again a people in general and our visual perception in particular where in a fix I mean because none of the element that you see here is made by the artist himself here you do not see a work that is manually met by an artist he is simply collected the bicycle he put a motor he is getting it moving and rotating all the while and he just got it fixed on the top surface of his stool, so the art is something that an artist makes by her or his hand is not an issue here.

So this is what our visual perception is habituated with and this is what our visual perception fails to find here.

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Duchamp said of Bicycle Wheel,
"In 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a
kitchen stool and watch it turn."

Bicycle Wheel is a kinetic sculpture that depends on motion
for effect. Although Duchamp selected items for his Ready-
mades without regard to their so-called beauty, he said, "To
see that wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting.
. . . I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames
dancing in a fireplace."

By encouraging viewers to spin Bicycle Wheel, Duchamp
challenged the common expectation that works of art
should not be touched.

So again it needs a major kind of overhulling and transformation now, so to challenge acceptance notions of art what Duchamp selected was mass produced often functional objects from everyday life for his art works which you called readymade he did this to shift viewers engagement with a work of art from what he called the retinal there to please the eye to the intellectual in the service of the mind.

Now if visual perception is understood to be entirely a retinal thing then of course when we encounter works by Duchamp or Man Ray we have to we have our visual perception has no function there but probably because Duchamp was aware of the fact that even visual perception is also somewhere engaged with setting pre-operation and intellectual kind of engagement so instead of using the term visual perception here he uses the term retinal.

So this is what you want to do to engage the viewers with the intellectual aspects of a work of art rather than the retina and by doing so Duchamp subverted the traditional notion that beauty is our defining characteristic of art, no beauty is not a defining characteristic of art anymore that has already been established also by constructive ways and many other artists and by using this non-conventional materials and methods and medium Duchamp is further establishing this idea that art is no more about beauty it is about visual statement it is about the materials it is about the techniques it is about the more intellectual concerns.

Now the first now lost kind of object thus made was made in 1913 almost 40 years earlier because the materials Duchamp selected to be ready-mades were mass produced he did not

considered any ready-made to be original now this is another very crucial thing for our understanding of art because as far as our understanding of art is concerned we know one work of art exist as a unique base in the world.

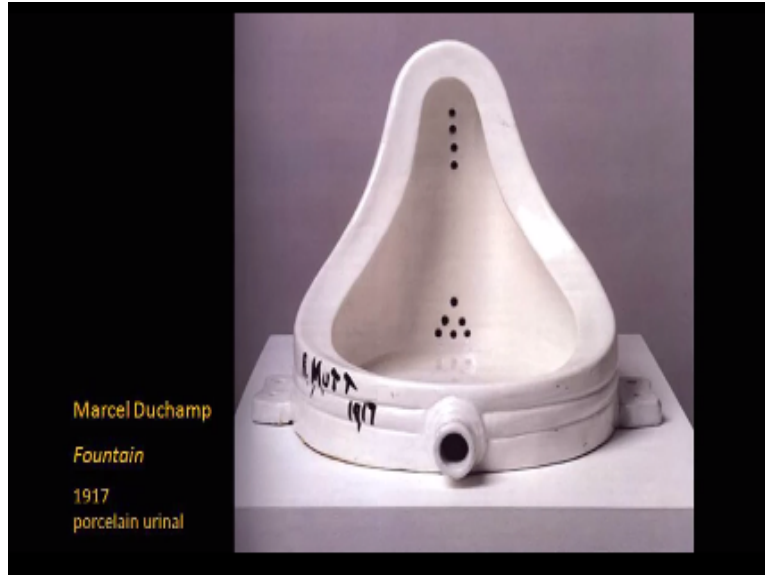
You do not have two Monalisa's right you do not have two agenda paintings you have one set of agenda paintings or one Monalisa but now in contemporary art from way back in 1919 early 20 century some of these people like Duchamp and Man Ray since they were working with Ready-mades so it naturally suggest that work of what can again be made because you are working with ready-mades industrial product you are not making it by your hand.

And because of this possibility now that there is possibility of making this work again so the idea of original work is completely a irrelevant now, but the kind of visual perception with which we have pin looking at a work of art so far we always knew that a particular work of art can be made only once in one life time if you repeat that it can only be a copy but original will remain original and so there is the whole kind of interest and a faith in the originality or the original these of a work of art. Duchamp completely brushes away all those ideas and what Duchamp said about bicycle wheel was also interesting because he said that is 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to kitchen tool and just watch it turn.

So it is a whole ideas to watch it turn so bicycle wheel is a kinetic sculpture that depend on motion for effect. Although Duchamp selected items for his ready-mades without regard to their so called beauty he said, "To see that wheel turning was very soothing it was very comforting I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. So he is certainly investing, certain lotion of beauty and visual pleasure even in this sculpture which is nothing but a bicycle wheel.

So by encouraging viewers to spin the bicycle wheel Duchamp challenge the common expectation that works of art should not be touched, so this is also interesting. A work of art should be only visually perceive, visually seen and visually made sense of but here Duchamp is actually inviting the viewers to touch the wheel and to rotate the wheel to move the wheel, so it is not about visual perception only as for as this work is concerned it is about touching and making the art work in a certain way, so what kind of visual perception then we need what kind of chances we need in our visual perception to accept this kind of experiments.

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Or for that matter this one, the very famous sculpture by Marcel Duchamp which is called fountain made in 1917 and it is not sculpture at all because it is simply an industrially available and factory mate, postline udinal kept upside down.

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But then we have somebody like Picasso who also created and he loved to create and ambiguity between material and representation so there is a sculpture which also looks like an object. For example, this bull which made in 1942 but when he say he made in 1942 then immediately comes the question that did he actually made it or he simply assemble it. Because what you seen here that is not a single element which Picasso made by his hand, he used a bicycle seat and he used a bicycle handle.

But placed in and just suppose they mean such a way that it looks like a bull head, so again it is not the handmade product that has any role to play here but it is idea, it is an intelligence that the moment and it is also an artistic kind of ability to see things which are not there nobody would ever see the head of a bull in a bicycle seat but Picasso saw that and Picasso also saw that if he could place the handle bar of the same cycle with the cycle seat and touch to it in a certain way it might look a bulls head with a pair of horns. So there is an artistic intervention a very accretive intervention in a way that.

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Our new kind of visual perception begins to emerge, now that in fact prepares us also to accept this kind of works where you do not find anything hand painted but full of materials elements collected from the market like this work or this work.

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So where then is the artist involvement of course there is a visual perception, visual idea to envisaged to be able to imagine of work of art like this and there is also a great faith and ability to see one's own idea in the industrial and commercial objects like this which are very mundane, very common and often ethically also known very refined. But after one is able to imagine the possibility of using them in a certain way then it is definitely, it begins to assure it definitely begins to assure not only meaning but begins to assure an intellectual life.

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Or for that matter this one, again a readymade object but turned into a work of art in the form of a visual statement.

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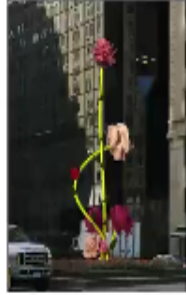


Visual Perception gets considerably meaningful and socio-culturally informed even in a painting like this.
It is the meaning or content of the painting that alters our visual perception.

Now visual perception may get considerably meaning for and socio culturally informed even in a painting like this. it is the meaning or the content of the painting that alters our visual perception, so what we look at in this painting here is of course the figure of a human begin then immediately we noticed that this figure the anatomy of this figure is made up of various kinds of commercial brands and nothing is, so this figure is actually a consumer I mean so this very clean that what you think is a normal human being is heard identity has turned in to consumer a kind of impulsive and un stuff able consumer of this new market economy.

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PUBLIC ART in public space



And we also have what we can public art, public art in public space can be found all over the world and there you will see.

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That not only the visual perception of the space changes the very ability of the art is to turn materials in to visually viable elements or shapes and also the ability of the artist to see or image a place transforming itself in to something completely new. Now this gives real jolt to the viewers.

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And it changes the landscape of that place and it also changes.

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Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain* (Rifle, Colorado), 1972



Our visual memory visual perception of a place and particularly when in this work by Christo which is famously known as the valley curtain which made in 1972, kind of covering a huge valley across with curtains and it was difficult in the beginning for viewers to accept it or to also know how they would take this work why it should be called a work of art. Why a work of art had to abstract the natural landscape of a place.

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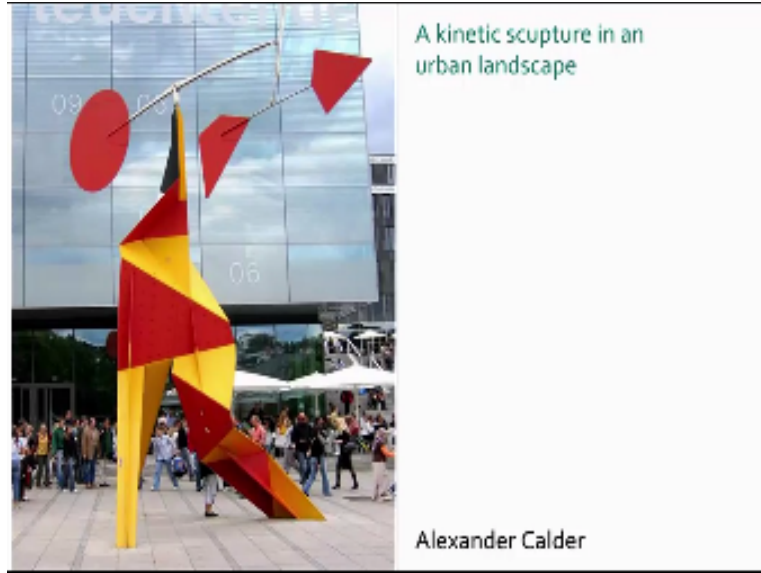
But never the less Christo went on with this projects and he could actually demonstrate that.

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It is possible even if it is for a temporary period of time to change and alter the visual perception of an entire real space with this artistic interventions like when he covers raise stark in world is huge government building straight building with polythene all over and he kept it for a few days you can well imagine that how the visual perception of not only the architecture historically very important architecture but also the visual perception of the whole place and also the visual perception of that meaning of an architecture changes considerably in the mind of the viewers.

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So when one installs like Alexander Calder a kinetic sculpture in an urban landscape which is suppose to rotate and move continuously, so what you see here is not only a static object but an object that is moving that is rotating and this very rotation and movements creates different kind of visual surprise every movement so then we train our visual perception also to expect surprises, also to expect unpredictability, also to except something very new which it has not send before.

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So surprises and unpredictability which is very much of part and partial of contemporary got ideas gas to negotiated with by our visual perception in a very big way in a very significant way. Otherwise what apparently looks like a very funny thing in actually turn in to a very meaningful experience when we look at and how to installation like this.

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Or this.

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Or this a simple kind of figure kept right on top of a tree and you know very well that it is a handmade product figure of an animal of a monkey in this case but the very placement and that to not within the ambiance of a gallery of an exhibition rope, a room but it a natural space like on the top of a tree.

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Or like this construction or structure made out of tweaks can change the entire visual of the landscape.

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And this is a very interesting work where the artist simply hangs a mirror on the tree and the immediately mirror begins to reflect the space behind and thereby expanding the idea of the space latterly of course the space is not expanding it is only the mirror view of the space behind but it continuously creates an illusion of a large expanding space and then there is constant struggle on our part without visual perception to negotiate this experience in a given space.

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Public art / public sculptures follow many of the following features:

1. Permanently installed in a specific site (Also known as site-specific sculptures).
2. Integrally related with nature and earth; and hence this kind of sculptures are subject to the changes in nature (Also known as Land Art).
3. Temporary works for a limited period of time. Non-permanent mediums are used intentionally to ensure its short life.
4. Deliberately made non-permanent. Sculptures thus made are left to decay, disintegrate and disappear eventually.
5. Interactive, playful and light-hearted to engage the public without any conceptual baggage.

And then there are some interesting issues with regard to public art, which are also pertinent to the practice of contemporary art. For example when a public art is permanently installed in a specific site which is called site specific sculptures then we need to accept that as happening that has permanently change the look on appearance of the space now public art often could be integrally related with nature and earth and hence this kind of sculptures are subject to the changes in nature.

We have come across various kinds of public art which area also known as land art or earth art which is subject to decay that disappears that decay that is integrate like the natural objects hence temporary works of art and temporary works may for limited period of time has also become very important idea in the contemporary art and also real more public art.

Because non-permanent mediums are used intentionally to ensure its short life now deliberately made non-permanent public art and contemporary art is of course there so sculptures thus made left to decay disintegrate and disappear eventually then large part of contemporary art is also about installations I mean that works of art cannot be experienced unless it is installed.

And very complicated in complex installations are there in the contemporary art right after this will look at the clipping of a video of freeze art fare which takes place in London and this is the video from one of those previous freeze art fares and even this short clipping reveals at most of the contemporary art works as so much about installation that the moment that works of art is taken out from the gallery it see to existence.

It not only installed some were but it requires so much of gadgets these works requires so much of technologies and technical devices since that you simply can't leave it of work of art in your storing in the room what you get back after the show is over is a box full of straps and junks which you need to reassemble again if you are to show it to some other people and some other place.

And it also makes which cushion impact already experimented which is bicycle we will when we asked to viewers to touch that many contemporary art works in public art could be interacted which could be playful which could be light-hearted also to engage the public without any conceptual baggage by enlarge many contemporary art won to engage the public they don't want the public or the viewers to simply look at the works they want them to become a part of their work in some way.

So simple visual perception is not going to help visual perception at the basic level is always require but then we need to match you that in order to make sense of what contemporary art is trying to do. Thought after this lecture immediately after this lecture we looking at a small video clipping from this freeze art show which is highly contemporary in nature and there even hardly come across any single painting and sculpture.

Mostly we will see art works which are either establishment in nature or it is moving or it is very much gadgetry weapon and most of this art works require a different kind of engagement part of the viewers not just to be perceive visually but it to perceive by awakening all the possible senses that we regarding thank you.

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