

# A RASIKA'S TALE...

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*Abstract:*

*The paper will attempt to investigate the cultural context of the changing representation of Indian art, from pre modern to modern and the contemporary.. From Bharat's Saundarya Shastra to Baumgarten's Aesthetica. From the spiritual to the the visual, how Indian art practices have undergone changes and transformations from the Dancing girl Of Mohenjo Daro to the Kitchen of Subodh Gupta. Is the contemporary Indian artist looking for endorsement from the West? Or is the Indian artist coming of age in a global cosmopolitan work? Where does the legacy of art and craft find its space? As a subaltern voice or that of a contemporary artistic practice?*

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## From Making to Not Making.....

I naturally gravitated towards the bunch of people crowding near a T.V. monitor at the Arsenale in Venice. The occasion was the opening preview of the 54th edition of the Venice Biennale. And once I managed to find a foothold to squeeze myself in amidst the crowd, I dug in my heels and stood entranced. A huge movie buff, I was in heaven. I was viewing short crisp footages of movies centering around the clock. I found I was looking at the work of Christian Marclay. I was to discover that Marclay got the Golden Lion for the best artist at the Venice Biennale 2011 for his 24-hour film montage. Marclay, born in California, is an artist and composer who explores synchronicity among music, film and video in his works. "The Clock" features clips from such diverse films as "High Noon," starring Gary Cooper; "Titanic," with Leonardo DiCaprio; and the Arnold Schwarzenegger action movie "Eraser." Times shown on screen in "The Clock" are synchronised with real time.

This set me thinking about the authorship of art and the artist. From the sacred to the profane, from the spiritual to the visual, how traditional art practices have been transformed, translated, transmuted, morphed, digitized, from a fine art practice to the art of not making. Where is the aesthetics of art situated?

As an art historian and a cultural theorist, these concerns continue to dog me. In India, art and religion go hand in hand, whereas in Western art, it goes back to the Renaissance period, to the artist/artisanal relationship and to the Duchampian Legacy.

Let me begin by talking about film itself. There is no question that the director of the film is the one who is credited with having made the film. Even though the director may not have personally done the lighting, cinematography, sound, music, editing - let alone the acting - the director is the undisputed maker of the film. Continuing in the same frame is the canonical text of Roland Barthes, where, in an important essay in 1967, he wrote about the 'death of the author'. Barthes argued that an author's intentions or biographical context should not influence the reading of the text because assigning a single interpretation to it imposes limits on the text. Instead, since each piece of writing contains multiple layers and meanings, the meaning of a work depends on the reader's impressions, rather than the writer's tastes or passions. This assures that the text's unity lies in its destination, in its audience, and that every work is 'eternally written here and now' with each re-reading. As the reader 'writes' the text, then by extension, it is the viewer who produces the artwork. For Barthes, the meaning of a work is not determined simply by the maker.



CHRISTIAN MARCLAY, The Clock.

Barthes also believed that no author or

artist creates anything new or unique, and that everything is a recycled repetition of that which precedes it. This theory has had an enormous impact on visual arts and artists have responded to it in various ways. On the one hand, some artists interpret it to mean that it is impossible to assert authorship of a work, so no one can claim to have produced an original work of art. They therefore favour readymade or appropriated art as being more open, transparent and honest. They use the power of pre-existing imagery and signs to produce 'new' works that then reveal the meanings within and beyond the artwork. On the other hand, some have seen 'the death of the author' as a liberation from the tasks of production; a liberation that revives and preserves the artist's authority. If the original maker's context or intentions have no relevance to the work's meaning, then why dirty your hands with the making? Anyone can produce the work for you; its authorship lies elsewhere. Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami clearly fit here, with their hundreds of assistants producing the work of 'the artist' in factory-like conditions.

I would like to refer to the father of conceptual art Marcel Duchamp who is credited to place a Fountain and signing it R. Mutt. Later copies of it had to be authorised by him, thus keeping him in control of the work. Despite the way the process appeared, his readymades and Arp's 'chance' works secured and enhanced the artist's authority, rather than diminishing it.

Duchamp is believed to have invented the term 'anti-art', and his readymades are sometimes described as 'anti-art works'. However, while he was unequivocal in his aim to deify the artist, he was not opposed to art. What he was against was officially accepted museum art and traditional ideas of beauty and good taste. With this thinking, he was in league with his fellow Dadaists in Europe and the US, the ones who wanted to destroy official culture through anarchy and anti-bourgeois activities. When they talked about 'destroying art' and 'the end of art', they meant art as it had previously been known. They felt that past art was of a corrupt, materialistic society that had created World War I, which was then destroying Europe. They wanted to obliterate the old order and start fresh.

The Duchampian legacy was continued by the Dadaists. Hugo Ball encapsulates the Dadaist notion when he says, "For us, art is not an end in itself ... but it is an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in." Jean Arp (1886-1966) was one of the leading Dada figures in France and Germany. Best known for his biomorphic shapes in metal and painted wood reliefs, he challenged the existing notions of art and experimented with spontaneous and irrational ways of creation. Like Duchamp, he embraced chance as a means of giving up control and depersonalising the creative process. Circa 1915, he began making his 'Chance Collages' – he scattered torn up pieces of paper on a flat sheet and pasted each scrap wherever it fell. He claimed that these works were made 'without will' and that, 'Like nature, they were ordered "according to the laws of chance".'

Peggy Guggenheim, the American collector, was one of Arp's most important supporters. In fact, the first artwork she bought was his brass sculpture, *Tête et coquille* (Head and Shell), which she purchased in 1937, following Duchamp's suggestion. She eventually displayed a large collection in her villa in Venice, where Arp won the Grand Prize for Sculpture at the 1954 Venice Biennial. Thanks to this award, and to his relationship with Guggenheim, Arp collaborated with the master Venetian glassmaker Egidio Costantini (1912-2007) to make a series of small, curved or rounded glass sculptures. These works allowed him to have minimal control over the finished product – not only because he was employing a craftsman to make it for him, but also because he was led by the flow of the molten glass as it cooled. He was thus allowing the rules of chance to dictate the work's shape.

Costantini was one of the first examples of a modern fabricator – a specialist who is hired by an artist to make a work or to provide technical know-how. He collaborated with several leading artists – Alexander Calder, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, Oskar Kokoschka – and was considered a craftsman who could teach anyone how to render their artistic visions into glass. However, anything that he collaborated on was always credited to the artist and not to him. It was the artist who chose whether to declare the finished product a work of art, and so, the artist took credit for being the creator. This, then, reveals the paradox behind Duchamp's and Arp's theories – rather than deifying artists, as they claimed they were doing by removing their hands from the production, they were, in fact, elevating artists. Because without the artist's initial idea or concept, an object remains just an object; if not for the artist's intervention, it cannot become art.

As an art historian, and as a rasika who has been on a journey of Saundarya Shastra, or pursuit of beauty through rasa – Satyam Shivam Sundaram – I am also investigating the context of the Kantian Critique of Judgment where there is aesthetic judgment (individual judgments about what is beautiful in art and nature) and teleological judgment – purposiveness in things.

began to think about a number of issues. The first being: What makes an artist? Who is an artist? What makes an artisan? What is artistic production? Art for the sake of art? Creative collaboration as a means of artistic production? These issues are pertinent, now that the visual arts have welcomed new techniques and methods, and art has become more prominent in public spaces. Artists are discovering more options of producing work on a larger, more spectacular scale, and in a variety of mediums and settings. No wonder, then, that with this growing level of creative and technical ambition, artists turn to others for help in realising their art. The standard view of the artist as someone working alone and personally crafting each unique piece by hand no longer applies. More and more, we now see 'the artist' as being remote from the physical production and directing from the sidelines, while those with expertise do the heavy lifting or fine detailing.

With the return of the highly crafted aesthetic in the arts in the West, I would like to draw attention to the presence of the highly crafted tradition in the Indian fine art practice. I look at the three registers in the art historical narrative in the subcontinent. The first is Pre-Modern, in which primitivism, myth and magic played a major role. The continuity of myths was continued in early modernism, wherein artists like Ram Kinkar Baij brought the primitive into the modern (yaksha as guardian placed as dvarapalas in the Reserve Bank building). Raja Ravi Varma, from the princely house of Travancore in Kerala, gave a visual representation to the Indian gods and through his printing press, took calendar art into the homes of the common man. Late modernism, with the Progressives like M.F. Hussain, F.N. Souza, Gade, Tyeb Mehta and S.H. Raza, brought in trajectories of the Western visual language. Myths, allegories continued, but the contemporary artists became the true signatories of the cultural diversity of India.

Within this context, I would like to refer to the work of the above six artists and compare them with six artists working in Europe and America who are pushing the envelope of inventiveness and creativity. The six contemporary Indian artists whose practices I am investigating are Subodh Gupta, Sudarshan Shetty, Riyaz Komu, Bharti Kher, Thukra and Tagra, and Ravinder Reddy. They are icons of contemporary Indian culture where tradition and modernity walk hand in hand. Beginning with the father of all conceptual art, Marcel Duchamp, I move to Sherrie Levine, Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst and Jan Fabre.

## SUBODH GUPTA – B.1964

“I am the idol thief. I steal from the drama of Hindu life. And from the kitchen – these pots, they are like stolen gods, smuggled out of the country.”

“Art is about life. So I make my work about myself and what I know – art is valuable because it is about experiences which have nothing in common with art. If you ask me why I find objects that Indians need to have when they are travelling long distances so appealing, I would say that I'm more interested in the representation those objects carry and the associations of hope and dreams that each piece is weighted with. I've often stopped over in the Gulf while going to Europe and met with many of these migrants. I got familiar with this issue, their life their dreams... At the airport, I was always struck by the number and the weight of the luggage these migrants bring back from the Gulf. They carry electronic goods, gifts for their family. These items are so valuable that they pack them very neatly and with love. The journey for each piece is long... once in Delhi, they travel across state borders and onto trains, many times checked and bribed along the way to reach home safely.”

Gupta is best known for accumulating everyday Indian objects, such as steel tiffin boxes and thali pans, bicycles and milk pails into complex and phenomenal sculptures. These extraordinary structures made from ordinary items reflect on changes in India since Gupta's youth.



SUBODH GUPTA, Take off your shoes and wash your hands.



“All these things were part of the way I grew up. They are used in the rituals and ceremonies that were part of my childhood.” By appropriating everyday objects and transforming them into art works, he is following in the tradition of artists such as Duchamp. And he succeeds in finding a language that references everyday life in India but is understood internationally – subjects such as globalisation, international cosmopolitanism, international nomadism, being at home in the world.

His art consciously plays on clichéd images of everyday life in India and is inspired by his early days in Bihar, India's least economically developed state. His rural background has influenced his work as he reflects on the contrasts in India between tradition and modernisation as the subcontinent develops economically. His fondness for ordinary objects expresses a concern for the ceaseless deprivation of India's poor, which stands in stark contrast to the booming wealth of the middle class. Gupta's work also laments the accelerating disappearance of simple rural life in India. At the same time, his use of tiffins is about much more than practicality - it is about the love that goes into cooking and the importance it has in an Indian household. As he borrows from the most sacred place in an Indian home, ( a family's idols are frequently in the kitchen, so it is a place where a visitor has to remove their shoes), he says, “My work is about where I come from. Hindu kitchens are as important as prayer rooms. The mediums I pick already have their own historical and cultural significance. I put them together to create new meanings.”

While the viewer stands in awe of his imagination and creativity, Gupta himself believes that the key to his art is the transformation of everyday objects and he freely confesses that he does not create anything. “I transform. My job as an artist is to think, to conceive the ideas. My art is made up for me by expert artisans all over the world, the thali works were made in America.” His works are fabricated by others who follow his designs. His work has been exhibited in European cities like Venice, Moscow and Paris, and has even traveled to the U.S., finding a temporary home in Chicago and changing with each new cultural context.

## SUDARSHAN SHETTY – B.1961

“I find myself delving into and drawing from the unspoken, or in many cases the socially understated that ticks beneath the surface of all human interactions. I am interested in the idea of absence, a human absence, of being elsewhere. I think most of us are condemned to be elsewhere: I embrace this predicament and rejoice in it.”

“The ploy is to attract the viewer and then to disenchant them with the mechanical movement.”

“The idea is definitely to bring in the activity of a market place to the fore. This is also a ploy to bring in a passerby into this arena - to seduce with the familiar.”

“In setting-up of most of my shows, the artifice involved in 'staging' a show becomes an inherent part of the exercise. I am interested in playing out the fictional aspect in creating a sense of 'drama' or a 'spectacle', and at the same time, revealing the meaninglessness involved in doing so. And both these positions remain mutually inclusive and feed off each other in the work.”

Shetty is known mostly for his large-scale sculpture and installations, but he's also a painter who sometimes combines these forms in object assemblages. His work imagines a lyrical world of playfulness and freedom liberated from political issues and reveals an intriguing combination of the representational and the abstract. He frequently animates everyday objects, such as a fragile pot spinning on a sleek motor, or a moth-making machine, or automated walking shoes. By taking objects apart without dismantling them, he reveals the mechanisms within and thus decodes these objects. By experimenting with found objects in various media, he flirts with the idea of creating an emotionally charged experience. The incongruous association of objects bearing different meanings forms a new meaning and expresses his enduring fascination with the duality of free will and the darker side of the affair between people and objects. He foregoes traditional narrative and



SUDARSHAN SHETTY, This too shall pass, 2010.

symbolism, and unfolds a fascination for the mechanical, thus giving lifeless objects new life.

Shetty's earlier works centred on absence, death, the loss of body. His preoccupation with absence was an inherent part of shows like *Consanguinity* (2003), *Eight Corners of the World* (2006) and *Love* (2006). His kinetic works are frequently characterised by the use of a skeleton, which represents the lost body and evokes futility. He begins with a real skeleton, which he then takes apart, makes a mould for each bone, casts them all, and reassembles the skeleton in stainless steel.

In later shows, he has become more absorbed with futility and meaninglessness. Futility is linked with repetitiveness: mechanical shoes walk endlessly, vessels fill and empty, coats dip in and out of liquids. Transience and mortality underscore these recent works, where "the compulsions of an engagement with the world and the resultant disenchantment are two sides of the same coin." For Shetty, being part of the process and engaging with it are no longer choices – "only through an exercised distance with it I may have a chance to arrive at some answers." In *The more I die the lighter I get* (2010), he explores the questions of life, death, absence and emptiness. His installations highlighted the intertwined fates of the human, inhuman and non-human forces in a world that constantly negates the presence of death. *This too shall pass* (2010) is built around permanence and the "artifice" involved in presenting it. The exhibits play on the viewer's encounters with the everyday worlds of the city, home and street by incorporating images of everyday objects, machine parts and ready-mades, available in the streets around the artist's surroundings in Mumbai. Mumbai, with its diversity and visual abundance, is Shetty's main source of information and inspiration. His "day-to-day negotiation with this city" provides the backdrop for his explorations of the unfolding, unfurling and renting of human life.

## RIYAZ KOMU – B. 1971

"I strongly feel it is my duty to be political. I believe that my paintings should look back at the viewer rather than just tell a story or hang on the wall."

Riyaz Komu's work, spanning several different media and genres, carries strong political overtones. Influenced by his father's political leanings and his own brief associations with political student groups, he uses his work to "ring alarm bells" about the explosive urban situation in Mumbai. His body of work references the paradoxes of the city, where glamour (often imported) and abject poverty (frequently inherited) co-exist. Imbuing his pieces with equal measures of compassion and cynicism, Komu's work reflects both hope and dejection – a tribute to the spirit of all those who continue to survive the city and its paradoxes.

Komu's photo realist portraits depict ordinary, everyday people from his native Kerala. Although he is a Communist, his works reflect a less outspoken ideology and his concern for humanity is portrayed in highly charged images of faces. His portraits celebrate the humble person in the crowd, highlighting beauty in the unremarkable. Komu is that rare Indian artist who has broken away from provincialism and the well-worn dilemma about independence versus assimilation and appropriation. His art is genuinely concerned with the fate of the masses in India's rapidly developing and dividing society.

## BHARTIKHER – B. 1969, LONDON

"I am like a magpie that takes what it needs and turns an old shiny button into a beacon. Most of us are products of our lives."

"When I made some works over the years, I couldn't hold the thread that linked it all together... and then one day, being optimistic, I thought the world was a positive place where all things co-existed chaotically and awkwardly as life marched on, and so it was OK to lose the threads sometimes. There is no fixed strategy in my work."

Kher's paintings, sculptures and installations explore the notion of the self as a multiple and culture's openness to misinterpretation. She exploits the drama inherent in objects, delving into mythologies and the numerous diverse associations an object can evoke. Her works often incorporate bindis, which, for her,

become a filter to transform objects and blur the distinctions between the two- and three-dimensional. These bindi works, abstract and aesthetic, transmute a mass-produced consumerist item into artworks of sumptuous beauty. The bindis create intricate patterns that elicit memories of sperm and genetic chains.

Kher has been using bindis since 1995 and they have become her signature, a language that articulates and animates her themes. Bindi's swarm over sculptures, giving them with a cryptic second skin. They form "paintings" and their abstract patterns recall Western art while also mimicking cellular life or the confluence of oceans and continents viewed from above.

Kher is entranced by the bindi's duality and its multiple meanings. As she explains, "Many people believe it's a traditional symbol of marriage, but actually it's meant to represent a third eye — one that forges a link between the real and the spiritual worlds."

In contrast, her recent sculptures feature animals combined with human body parts to create hybrid female figures that are a mix of sexuality and monstrosity, at once elegant and alien. Arione (2004) and Arione's Sister (2006) are bare-breasted Amazons with equine legs, carrying cupcakes and shopping bags, and covered with bindis. Such creatures speak of Kher's interest "in the idea of the monster, the hybrid, the contradicting identities." They explore a woman's multiple roles, as well as the tendency to be perceived differently depending on who is doing the looking.

In her Solarum Series sculptures (2007), Kher draws upon the symbol of the tree as an oracle figure or magical device. The mysterious symbol of the tree is a motif in ancient cultures, occurring notably in both Greek and Indian mythology. In Solarum Series, she uses two sculptures to transplant the myths into a technological landscape, alluding to the advances of cloning while calling forth the rejection characterised by a fallen tree. The branches of Solarum Series do not bear leaves or fruit – instead, they produce the heads of fanciful creatures. Kher substitutes the organic liveliness of a forest with a darkly theatrical and fantastic vision, shrouded in the myth of the speaking tree.

## THUKRAL & TAGRA

### JITEN THUKRAL - B.1976

### SUMIR TAGRA - B.1979

"I never wanted to do things that others were doing. I come from a middle class family, very conventional; my mother used to paint and I learned drawing from her. My brother is an architect and my dad is a businessman. I really thank my parents for all their support and am glad to be an artist. My influences include: Pink Floyd, Sigmund Freud, Salvador Dali, Delhi Metro stations and lot of day to day observations." Sumir Tagra



THUKRAL AND TAGRA, Apoclytron.

"I belong to a small town: Jalander, Punjab. My dad is a wrestler and a famous artist in Punjab. I am highly influenced by him, but he wanted me to become a Pehalwan (body builder), which I never tried. I started working with him when I was a kid. We did two group shows in 1992. My influences include: toys, Punjabi underground music, Sikh movements, my dad, Stefan Sagmeister, Klan." Jiten Thukral

Designer/artist duo Thukral and Tagra work in a variety of media, including graphics, videos, music, interiors, product design, paintings, sculpture and installations. Their practice fuses the current influx of the Western mainstream with India's deep-rooted

humorous, it also raises questions about Indian identity, whether it is articulated by Indians themselves or projected on to India by the rest of the world.

Their vivid, color-charged work, like that of Murakami, displays a whimsical fascination with consumerism. Despite the global nature of consumerism and its prevalent existence, the pair examines the subject through a distinctly Indian lens. Given the immensely diverse stratification of India's economy, classes, and lifestyles, the result is a harmonious and beautiful clash.

They are prime examples of artists whose work is unmistakably rooted in the culture and aesthetic language of their homeland, but whose message is heard and understood by an international public. Whatever subject they address, they integrate it into a brightly coloured dream world; a world characterised by a rare mix of high culture and reflective, ironic kitsch.

Much of their work is often presented under the name of BoseDK Designs. This highly pejorative Punjabi expletive brings obscenity into the pristine world of the art gallery and also “brands” the artworks, deliberately and ironically commercialising their work. The brand of BoseDK extends into all facets of their work from design and retail commissions to paintings, sculptures, wallpaper and installations.

## RAVINDER REDDY – B.1956

“Through the addition and subtraction of material (in the initial process of sculpting the form in clay), I am led to the image making process. It is as if the form of the sculpture dictates itself in that balance, volume, geometry, texture and representation all come together to create a unified whole, a synthetic and ideal beauty. For me transient emotions and feelings do not play any role in the creation of an object. I am concerned with forms that are universally understood. A limitation of means (in pallet, material and subject) pushes me further to refine the form.”

Reddy is one of India's most celebrated contemporary artists. His huge decorated heads look out frontally, wide eyed, and seem to reference the earlier civilisations of ancient Egypt and early Greek. At the same time, these totemic forms owe something to Pop Art – they are loud, almost vulgar, defiant, expectant, tender and revealing. Beneath their crude flimsy glamour lies the expression raw feeling.



RAVINDER REDDY, Tara, Pompidou Centre in Paris, 2011.

Reddy began making his monumental heads in the 1980s. Modeled with remarkable skill and painted in dazzling colours, they represent a fusion of the Hindu sculptural tradition with a contemporary pop sensibility. In addition to creating a dialogue between traditional Hindu art and contemporary pop, Reddy also reflects the way young Indian women are recreating the feminine image to merge a reverence for tradition with an embrace of the contemporary world. Their elaborate hairstyles are adorned with hundreds of delicately sculpted flowers. Many are gilded, giving them the effect of religious icons. With rounded volumes and chiselled details, sporting flamboyant coiffeurs, Reddy's women are ethnic, distinctly common, suspended between the urban and the rural, a cultural hybrid. They are almost kitsch but nonchalant with a cool detached style.

## MARCEL DUCHAMP – B.1887, FRANCE

“My idea was to choose an object that wouldn't attract me, either by its beauty or by its ugliness. To find a point of indifference in my looking at it, you see.”

“I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste.”

“I don't believe in art. I believe in artists.”



“I thought to discourage aesthetics... I threw the bottle rack and the urinal in their faces and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty.”

“The creative act is not formed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”

“Art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art, and bad art is still art in the same way as a bad emotion is still an emotion.”

Within the content of western art practice Marcel Duchamp is literally the signpost of his times. Duchamp is considered by some to be one of the most important artists of the 20th century, a French artist whose work is most often associated with the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. His work influenced the development of post-World War I Western art. In addition, he advised modern art collectors, such as Peggy Guggenheim, and influenced the tastes of Western art. Duchamp challenged conventional thought about artistic processes and art marketing through subversive actions such as dubbing a urinal “art” and calling it Fountain.



MARCEL DUCHAMP, Fountain, 1917

In his early works, Duchamp experimented with classical techniques and subjects, as well as with Cubism and Fauvism. He studied art at the Académie Julian from 1904 to 1905, but was not a model student, preferring, instead, to play billiards rather than attend classes. He drew and sold cartoons which reflected his irreverent humor. Many of the drawings use visual and/or verbal puns. Such play with words and symbols engaged his imagination for the rest of his life. In 1905, he began his compulsory military service, working for a printer. There he learned typography and printing processes – skills he would use in his later work. By 1911, he was painting in a Cubist style and using repetitive imagery to suggest motion. He had become fascinated with transition, change, movement and distance, and, like many artists of the time, he was intrigued with the concept of depicting a "Fourth dimension" in art. Works from this period include his first "machine" painting, Coffee Mill (Moulin à café) (1911); Portrait of Chess Players (Portrait de joueurs d'echecs) (1911); and Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2 (Nu descendant un escalier n° 2) (1912), his first controversial work. After 1912, he abandoned Cubism and decided to leave “retinal art” behind. In 1913, he began working as a librarian and studied math and physics. His experiments with art and science included one of his favourite pieces, 3 Standard Stoppages (3 stoppages étalon), in which he dropped three 1-meter lengths of thread onto prepared canvases, one at a time, from a height of 1 meter. The threads landed in three random, undulating positions. He varnished them into place on the blue-black canvas strips and attached them to glass. He then cut three wood slats into the shapes of the curved strings, and put all the pieces into a croquet box. Three small leather signs with the title printed in gold were glued to each of the "stoppage" backgrounds.

In 1915, Duchamp decided to immigrate to the U. S. and there found that he was a celebrity, thanks to the scandal of Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2. Although he spoke little English, he quickly formed a circle of friends, including art patrons Louise and Walter Conrad Arensberg and Katherine Dreier, and artist Man Ray and other avant-garde figures. He earned a living by giving French lessons and eventually learned English.

Duchamp's "Readymades" were found objects which he presented as art. He wanted to question the very notion of Art, and the adoration of art, which he found “unnecessary”. Bottle Rack (1914), a bottle drying rack signed by Duchamp, is considered to be the first "pure" readymade. Prelude to a Broken Arm (1915), a snow shovel, also called In Advance of the Broken Arm, followed soon after. His Fountain, a urinal signed with the pseudonym "R. Mutt", shocked the art world in 1917. Fountain was selected in 2004 as "the most



influential artwork of the 20th century" by 500 renowned artists and historians.

In 1919, Duchamp made a parody of the Mona Lisa by adding a mustache and goatee to a cheap reproduction of the painting. To this he added the inscription L.H.O.O.Q., a phonetic joke that suggests that the woman in the painting is sexually aroused. It might also be a sly reference to Leonardo da Vinci's alleged homosexuality. According to American journalist and sculptor Rhonda Roland Shearer, this apparent reproduction is, in fact, a copy modeled partly on Duchamp's own face. Shearer has also speculated that Duchamp may have created some of the objects which he claimed to be "found objects".

## SHERRIE LEVINE – B.1947, U.S.

"I try to make art which celebrates doubt and uncertainty. Which provokes answers but doesn't give them. Which withholds absolute meaning by incorporating parasite meanings. Which suspends meaning while perpetually dispatching you toward interpretation, urging you beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrine, beyond ideology, beyond authority."

Levine's recontextualisation of other artists' work questions the authenticity and autonomy of art objects and its status as a commodity. She challenged Duchamp's concept of the readymade by having found objects, such as an animal's skull, cast in bronze. By using painstakingly polished and gilded metal, Levine turns these everyday objects into 'high art'. People state that these pieces refer to the work of modernist sculptors such as Brancusi or Arp. However, this was unintentional for Levine, an unexpected result of her use of others to produce the objects. "When I got the first one back, I was totally amazed at the reference to Brancusi and Arp. I was not expecting that at all, but once I actually saw it, the similarity was unmistakable."



SHERRIE LEVINE, Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp), Bronze, 1991.

Fountain (After Marcel Duchamp), 1991, bronze

With readymades and altered readymades, such as Fountain and Air De Paris, Duchamp challenged the idea of originality by taking the works of others and presenting it as his art. Levine appropriated Duchamp's conceptual stance by quoting his work and creating her own Fountain. She added another layer of complexity by having the porcelain urinal cast in bronze and utilising the skills of yet more hands that are not her own.

Deploying a wide range of media including photography, painting, and bronze, Sherrie Levine's work raises questions about art's relationship to originality, authorship, and authenticity. Since the late 1970s, much of her practice has been posited as an explicit, secondary return to prior works by mostly male modern masters, notably in her early photographs including *After Walker Evans* (1981), for example, created by rephotographing a familiar picture by Walker Evans reproduced in an exhibition catalogue.

Levine's *After Stieglitz* (2007) consists of eighteen digitized and pixilated photographic prints after American photographer Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents* series from the 1920s and 1930s; his analogue images of clouds were said to be abstract correlatives of the photographer's own experiences and feelings. In Levine's recent return, however, the artist transmogrifies Stieglitz's otherwise straight images, abstracting and digitizing them further—depersonalizing or repersonalising them, depending on the viewer's perspective. Like most of her work, *After Stieglitz* can be understood as a hall of mirrors—a series of pictures within pictures.

A related series, *After Cézanne* (2007), is a suite of eighteen pixilated photographic prints that transforms Paul Cézanne's painted and fractured nineteenth-century vision of the natural world including trees and rocks into a colorful, digitized matrix abstraction peculiar to our own twenty-first-century way of seeing. In

times when both disappear and other times when they're both visible. That vibration is basically what the work's about for me—that space in the middle where there's no picture, but emptiness.”

Levine's *Makonde Body Masks* (2007) is a set of polished bronze works cast after ritualistic masks belonging to the Makonde from southeastern Tanzania, and hung as a horizontal series of repeating forms. In their original cultural context, the female body masks were intended to represent a young pregnant woman and were worn by male masqueraders together with matching female face masks during initiation rites (the latter included songs and dance instructing youths in roles of gender and sexuality). Recast by Levine in bronze and presented as presumably expensive luxury art objects, the artist raises questions about the relationship between the ritual and exhibition functions of masks and the different roles and cultural significance that replication plays within each.

## JEFF KOONS – B. 1955, U.S.

"A viewer might at first see irony in my work... but I see none at all. Irony causes too much critical contemplation."

"There's a difference between being famous and being significant. I'm interested in [my work's] significance — anything that can enrich our lives and make them vaster — but I'm really not interested in the idea of fame for fame's sake."

Koons is an artist known for his reproductions of trite objects, such as balloon animals produced in stainless steel with mirror finish surfaces. His work has sold for phenomenal amounts of money, including at least one world record auction price for a work by a living artist. The largest sum known to be paid for a work by Koons is *Balloon flower (Magenta)*, which was sold at Christie's London in 2008 for £12,921,250 or \$25,765,204.

Critics are sharply divided in their views of Koons. Some view his work as pioneering and of major art-historical importance. Others dismiss his work as kitsch: crass and based on cynical self-merchandising. Koons has stated that there are no hidden meanings in his works, nor any critiques.



JEFF KOONS, *Puppy*, Bilbao.

## TAKASHI MURAKAMI – B. 1963, JAPAN

"What I've been talking about for years is how in Japan, that line is less defined. Both by the culture and by the post-War economic situation. Japanese people accept that art and commerce will be blended; and in fact, they are surprised by the rigid and pretentious Western hierarchy of 'high art.' In the West, it certainly is dangerous to blend the two because people will throw all sorts of stones. But that's okay—I'm ready with my hard hat."

"I express hopelessness."



TAKASHI MURAKAMI, 3 Meter Girl, Inflatable.



Murakami is one of the most thoughtful and thought-provoking Japanese artists of the 1990s. His work ranges from cartoony paintings to quasi-minimalist sculptures to giant inflatable balloons to performance events to factory-produced watches, T-shirts, and other products, many emblazoned with his signature character, Mr. DOB.

In addition to his work as an artist, Takashi Murakami is a curator, entrepreneur, and student of contemporary Japanese society. In 2000, Murakami curated an exhibition of Japanese art titled Superflat, which acknowledged a movement toward mass-produced entertainment and its effects on contemporary aesthetics. Murakami is also internationally recognised for his collaboration with designer Marc Jacobs to create handbags and other products for the Louis Vuitton fashion house.

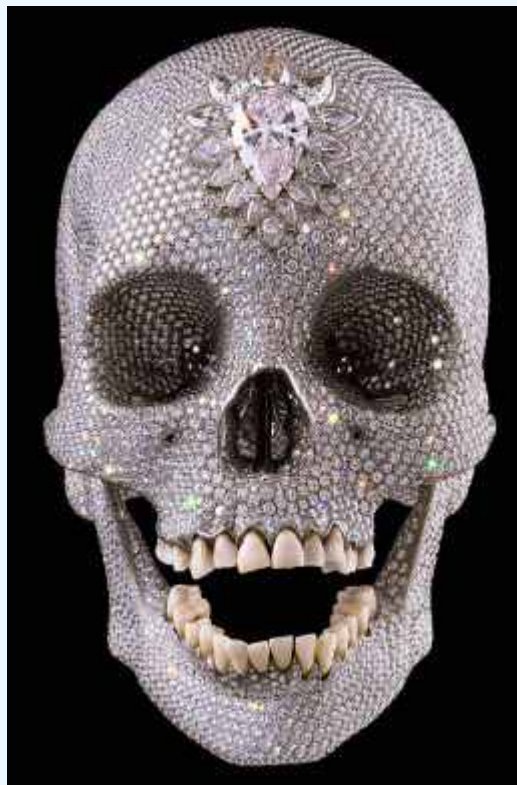
Murakami is one of the world's leading artists to have combined commercial and artistic successes. He creates paintings, sculptures, wallpapers, video, as well as consumer fashion products. All of his works are made by a large scale of fabricators, each with their own specialist craft skills.

## DAMIEN HIRST – B.1965, ENGLAND

Damien Hirst, eminent member of Young British Artists and British richest artist has regularly raised uncertainty enveloping the self and questioned the living existence with his works. Hirst's works spanning across paintings, medicine cabinet sculptures, and glass tank installations are tour through the thinking mind.

His first solo exhibition In and Out of Love at the Woodstock Street organized by Tama Chodzko in 1991 led him to immediate fame. In 1992 Hirst participated in Young British Artists exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery, which bespoke the alternative voice to the contemporary scene. The work Mother and Child Divided, showcased at the Venice Biennale in 1993, in a series of separate vitrines reinforced the mortality of the biological existence. Two years later, in 1995, Hirst won the Turner Prize. The twelve vitrines representing Jesus disciples under the exhibition Charity has been touted as the 'extraordinary spiritual experience'. In 1998 he curated a show Freeze with a group of young artists who were the leading voice of contemporary art in 1990s.

The work For the Love of God- platinum cast of a human skull- unveiled by Hirst in 2007 immortalizes the concept of memento mori. Unprecedented by any living artist, the show Beautiful Inside my Head Forever, in 2008, witnessed its complete selling. The Golden Calf, an animal with 18 carat gold horns and hooves, was sold at £10.3 million.



DAMIEN HIRST, Skull.

## JAN FABRE – B.1958, BELGIUM

“Drawing is for me the way I speak, a language with a directness of enlightened stammering, one approaching the border of pure thinking. It is a form of ecstasy, a swelling sequence of dreams and visions getting enclosed in the act of drawing. There, a new temporal and spatial dimension emerges: the labyrinth of night. As it is with our own astral bodies, also a drawing has its peculiar aura. I am fascinated with a thought that people could not only see my visual art, but also, actually hear it. It is for this reason that I am fascinated, obviously with a voice singing in the midst of fear.”

Drawing is “the simplest way to make out a magical rug of a[n ordinary] square. Or, to create a heavenly body out of an insect.

In drawing, anything is possible.”



Fabre has been a performance artist, theatre maker, choreographer, opera maker, playwright and visual artist. He is renowned for expanding the horizons of every genre to which he applies his artistic vision.

In the late 1970s, he caused an uproar as a performance artist with his 'money performances' where he set fire to bundles of money from the audience in order to make drawings with the ashes. He breaks the conventions of contemporary theatre by introducing the concept of 'real-time performance' – sometimes called 'living installations' – and explores radical choreographic possibilities as a means of resurrecting classical dance. He juxtaposes age-old rituals and philosophical questions with themes as varied as violence, lust, beauty and erotica. Since the early 1980s, he has explored the body in all its forms.

As an artist, he explores the relationships between drawing and sculpture. He also makes sculptures in bronze, among them *The man who measures the clouds* and *Searching for Utopia*, and with beetles. He's known for his figurative or abstract drawings done in blue ballpoint and his sculptures fraught with surface ornament. Fabre's works, which consider the weighty subjects of life, memory, and death by indirection, often strike the viewer as great feats of physical endurance.



JAN FABRE, *Le Bousier*, 2000.

At this point, I would like to go back in time, tracing the evolution of the artists, the artists' ateliers and art practices over time and space.

Artists as a distinct class came into being in the 16th century, whereas in the Indian subcontinent, the artists and their ateliers are very much present from the 3rd century B.C.E. Records of them are found in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. Over a period of time, the difference between art and craft started to develop. In England, the Arts and Crafts Movement was an international design philosophy that flourished between 1860 and 1910 (especially the second half of that period), and continued its influence until the 1930s. Instigated by the artist and writer William Morris (1834–1896) during the 1860s, and inspired by the writings of John Ruskin (1819–1900), it had its earliest and most complete development in the British Isles and spread to Europe and North America. It was primarily a reaction against the impoverished state of the decorative arts and the conditions by which they were produced. In India, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Rukmini Devi Arundale started a strong case for the crafts movement in India. For years, India has had a long and continuous tradition of art making, be it the icons of worship or tattoos and mark making on the body. Somewhere along the line came a huge divide between high art and low art; between classical arts and folk and tribal arts. The folk and tribal arts seemed to have been swept under the carpet and a snobbishness about temple art and classical dance, drama, painting and sculpture in the service of religion became the only arts to be recognised.

“In the end, it's not important whether an idea was the artist's or someone else's. The point is that you have created something new.” Tobias Rehberger

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