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Is Modern Art Really Rotten to the Core?

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As the [Turner Prize](#) approaches once again, much debate has erupted in the media and elsewhere about the validity of the prize and modern art itself. Each year outside Tate Britain the [Stuckists](#), an art collective headed by Billy Childish, a former boyfriend of Tracey Emin, have demonstrated their antipathy towards the prize and the man behind the Tate museums Sir Nicholas Serota, come rain or shine.

In 2010, the philosopher Roger Scruton, together with the BBC, made a documentary titled *Why Beauty Matters*, in which he gave an eloquent and impassioned plea for a return to the beautiful aesthetic, pointing towards the unifying and spiritually uplifting qualities of beauty. Scruton ardently stated that "beauty and good taste have no place in our lives", his reasoning was that second wave Modernism had polluted our culture to such an extent, that the very notion of beauty has become irretrievably lost.

The dissenting view of contemporary art, at its core, is that the lack of emotional coherency, civility and intellectual content have mired it in an unflinching state of self-absorption, unable to really achieve anything other than immediate disgust and revulsion, appealing only to our most basic desires, thus this has had a deleterious effect upon modern culture as a whole. The idea of freeing art from the shackles of beauty, transcendentalism etc was once the preserve of a few marginalised bohemians, who came in to being during the late 19th century, and the critics narrative is that they, the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti etc, set modern art on a course of self-destruction, which firmly closed the door on beauty. Today, so they say, contemporary art is an impenetrable fortress of anti-perfectionism, self-gratification and emotional detritus.

The argument is that the vast majority of artists are today suffering from collective arrested-development, instead of learning from and being inspired by the past, like children modern artists repudiate and pour scorn on past artistic achievements at every opportunity, in the manner of Marcel Duchamp's [L.H.O.O.Q.](#) The critics point to academia as the continuing source of modern arts stagnation, along with arts funding bodies such as the Arts Council, local county councils etc, who are seen to reward only the most putrid of artistic projects, and the Turner Prize is the cherry on a very ugly cake.

The opinion of the majority, outside the citadel of the art establishment, is that contemporary art has indeed slipped into a cesspit of feculent imagery, with the likes of Abstract, Conceptualism etc, trumping all others. However, though the views of Roger Scruton, Robert Hughes, and Alexander Stoddart *et al* are accurate in regards to the majority of contemporary art, they still fall foul to an overzealous streak of pessimism, and for all their disgust at what art has become over the past 150 years, they offer us no alternative. We all completely understand why they don't like Damien Hirst, but if all the hype surrounding him and his ilk are unfounded, then where is the art that is truly great?

The fact of the matter is we do not have to look very far to find artists who embody all the unique and wondrous traits that the critics of contemporary art say have been lost. British artists may not be creating anything of merit, but further afield artists hold beauty in high regard, in fact the very essence of the beautiful aesthetic lays at the foundation of all their work, such as [Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian](#), [Hadieh Shafie](#), [Farid Saleem Kamboh](#) and so on, who occupy a unique place in the art world, which is expanding each year. They have shown us that art doesn't need to be doused in urine or geared towards shocking the public to get the message across, but instead subtlety, craftsmanship and intellectual curiosity are the keys to success.

In 2009, when the Scottish installation artist [Richard Wright](#) won the Turner Prize, many assumed that the winds of change had finally ushered in an age, where beauty would regain its place back at the top table, sweeping away the iconoclasm of the past century. Unsurprisingly this was not the case; the supposed return to artistic civility was ephemeral. However, rather than being a tragic stitch in art history's long tapestry, it was a sign that a shift had occurred. It was no longer an objective truth that the usual suspects would take home the prize. It is not just this, in the words of artist Richard Scott, "the global financial crisis has thrown the art institutions off balance. The traditional modes of exchanging power are shifting. That, coupled with the

democratising force of the internet, has put more power into the hands of the artist and shifted power away from the galleries, art historians, and critics."

In the second decade of the 21st century, former certainties are now disappearing, the public are becoming less influenced by art institutions and artists are finding alternative methods to reach a wider audience, mainly the internet, so beauty is no longer being drowned out. Globalisation and the progress of technology is showing us that modern is not, as previously thought, rotten to the core.

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