

Who is art for.

Image 1 Frieze art fair sign

My lecture today will begin by opening out some questions about the role and value of art and in particular I want to think about ideas around who art is for and what kind of audience do we imagine when we think about the spectators that go to galleries. Another important question for all of you as artists is how important is it to begin to think about an audience when you are making work..... and I want to suggest that it is absolutely vital that you have some idea of who it is that is going to look at your work when you start to make it. It's important to determine the kind of information you disclose in your work, the way the work addresses someone, whether you expect them to have some prior knowledge and whether you expect them to come with an anticipation of something.

And to all of you here who are studying as art I am presuming you will have faced this when you have presented your work at critiques or in your tutorials. Because one of the things you can assume in a university art department is that anyone who comes to see your work will come with the expectation they are going to look at something called art, in other words they have a really clear sense that what you are doing, no matter what it is..is in some way connected to the production and consumption of an artwork....and whatever it is you are doing it will be understood within the wider context of Contemporary Art.

And that is one of the things I would like us to begin to think about today – What is this thing called the art world? Where can we locate it? What are its values? And what place do you have in it? And I would like to suggest that art schools are a really important part of this larger notion of the art world.

So I want to start by looking at Frieze Art Fair and the Tate Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in London as two very interesting and important spaces and events, that in some way have shaped what it is that we understand art to be in western

contemporary culture. I want to open out a series of questions about the relationship between art and entertainment...so I want to think about what art's role is in a wider notion of popular culture – is art now a form of popular culture? Some critics and writers, and quite a few artists are really concerned about the way that art has turned into a form of mass spectatorship – or a form of mass entertainment.

I am sure one of the things that you are all very aware of is that art now is global.....it's not something that consists of small groups of artists, possibly in major cities, possibly not, making work in a particular locality with particular local obsessions and interests. One of the things that has changed in our understanding of art is that it has become a global network. In the last twenty years or so due to the internet artists are instantly aware of what is happening in the art world.

As part of a larger network, information about art flows in ways that it never did before...its now obviously part of a larger system and a larger culture so what was assumed to have been central to art practice and art consumption has fundamentally altered and there is now a mass market for it..... the Turbine Hall and an event like Frieze art fair in London are both really important examples of this. Here in China you have the big art biennale's such as Shanghai and Beijing for example.

Image 2 Frieze people

So if we take the Frieze art fair as an example – this huge art fair opens at the beginning of October in London every year – and it has become an event that has been described by many art critics as a fun..and entertaining event

And if you look back at the history of the avant garde in the twentieth century, fun was what many artists, critics and writers saw as the opposite of art...art was about hard truths and about the pursuit of truth. So we now see a shift in the

way that certain kinds of events associated with art are understood and perceived.

Image 3 Frieze – crowds milling about

Essentially Frieze art fair is an event where people go and look at galleries with art gallery's setting up in stalls to sell art to people that will buy it. It is vast and chaotic, and the days its open it will often attract around 20,000 people so it gets absolutely packed making it really difficult to look at art...its more like going into a crowd to look at a Rugby game or a concert. The crowd mill around and somewhere amidst this crowd of people there are artworks. Now for many people that kind of environment is antithetical to ways of looking at art...it certainly does not allow for any contemplation or repose or a sense of actually looking carefully at something.

You are literally scanning work.....In a way it is like opening up a couple of pages on your computer and reading about 6 things all at the same time... which is something we have all become very good at...I know when I work I am quite often looking at several things at once on my computer.. ..looking at emails coming in while also looking at the news channel or whatever. But on the whole this has not been traditionally the way we look at art, so we have to think about Frieze and the Tate Turbine Hall as particular kinds of venues for consuming art.

Image 4 (Phillippe Parreno, Anywhere Hyundai Commission Turbine Hall Tate Modern 2016)

Here is an image of a work exhibited in the Tate Turbine Hall in 2016 by French artist Philippe Parreno..the work is titled "anywhen" ...there is not an enormous amount to see and all the art reviews about this work flagged this up as a possible issue because the Turbine Hall is a very particular place to look at art and when you go into the turbine hall you want to see art that occupies it. So one of the things you are looking for when you enter the hall is 'spectacle' – a certain

kind of art that will take hold of this enormous exhibition space and provide you with something that captures and holds your attention.

The public opening of a new commission in the turbine hall along with the frieze art fair are two of many art events in the UK that all open during what's called frieze week – there are about 8 major museum openings, about 42 commercial gallery openings and there are 6 other art fairs in operation which are a mix of art, design and antique fairs. So over the course of one week in October, London becomes the centre of the international art world. Pretty much all of these people come for this week to sell, to buy, to curate...then they will move on to Paris and then on to another art fair somewhere else in the world ...so there is now a major art fair in a city somewhere in the world every week of the year.

This suggests that firstly - Art has global appeal, and secondly there is an enormous amount of money flowing in and out of the art world and thirdly there is a ready public throughout the world that want to see art.

Image 5 Frieze art fair

But what is interesting about Frieze is that it is not only a selling fair - it has all kinds of other events attached to it....there are performances, a big talk schedule, there is a sculpture exhibit and various other events in the park in which the fair is situated.

These other events are seen as really important in terms of ensuring that the fair has some kind of educational content. In other words Frieze is not just for people that think they might buy a work of art - the numbers of people that are usually expected are around 60,000 during the time it is open so the fair needs these other art related events as well as the booths that are selling work.

Image 6 people at frieze sitting

The other thing about frieze is that it is really exhausting...at the end of the day you see people that are overwhelmed by art...one of the problems about the art

fair is that there is so much work there that you really cannot look at anything in the end...in a sense you are looking at too much art in one go.

This connects to a phenomenon from the 19th century called Stendhal syndrome an illness named after a French author Stendahl who described his experience with the illness during his 1817 visit to Florence where he was emotionally overwhelmed by too much beauty.

Now its turned into the art fair syndrome where you wander from one thing to another, really not taking it in, but getting a sense that somehow or someway you have seen everything. So obviously the most accurate corollary of this, is window shopping – so going to an art fair becomes just like going window shopping, leaving open the question – is this an adequate way of looking at art? So I am going to try and tackle this question a little later in my lecture by thinking about a very different way we might consume or look at art.

However, for the moment I will show you some fairly recent works that have been exhibited in the Turbine Hall and how this has attracted a new audience for art that has emerged at around the same time that most of the major museums started to think about themselves as brands.

Image 7 - Tate Tuttle

This is a Turbine hall commission from 2014 – a very large piece of work by American artist Richard Tuttle. What was really interesting about this is that at the same time the Whitechapel Gallery in London put on a Richard Tuttle show of the work that he is most commonly associated with....this work here

Image 8 Whitechapel Tuttle

So this is the kind of work he has been making for the last 40 years or so – they are tiny adhoc constructions made out of little bits of thread, pieces of card glued together, a little bit of fabric hanging off but on average they are about this big.

Now one of the things that you suddenly realise in the turbine hall was that Tuttle faced an enormous problem – How do I scale up this work so that it occupies this massive space- one of the biggest exhibition spaces in the world...

Back to slide 7 turbine hall tuttle

.. one of the problems that people saw in this work was that by scaling up the work it actually undermined its concentrated power and it removed something from it. So, this Tuttle piece was thought by critics to be compromised because of its sheer size – so in its need to take hold in some way of this enormous space. A number of people suggested that actually it would have been an interesting proposition for him to have put about five or six tiny fragile handmade works of art in the vast space of the turbine hall.

So the turbine hall is a really interesting place because for a mass audience it demands enormous scale artworks. So one has to ask does this mean artists completely change their production for this exhibition space..... and on the whole people have said yes.

If you look at the artists that have installed their work in the turbine hall they have had to produce works of enormous scale and it has changed the dynamic of their work. And I wanted to talk about this because obviously this is something artists have to think about. Work that you make in the studio might not operate the same way when it enters the critique or an exhibition space. So the space within which work is shown, the non-private space is actually a really important consideration when you are making work – simple things such as how people will circulate around your work start to become important. How people will see it...how you frame it so that people understand your intentions – do you give it a title or do you not give it a title, in which case how do they know what it is that they are looking at.

Questions of audience and exhibition become really important once you take the work out of your studio space, your bedroom or wherever else you make your work. There are a whole different set of determinants that start to operate. One of the things that might be asked in a critique at art school – is why is it sitting on the floor? Why is it on the wall? How do you expect people to see it? These sorts of things have a really important impact on the meaning and the way people consume your work and it is these kind of things that are absolutely essential to a space like the Tate turbine hall in London.

Image 9 Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot Hyundai Commission Turbine Hall
Tate 2015

Here is an example of what I am talking about here - in a work by Abraham Cruzvillegas: Empty Lot and it was exhibited in the turbine Hall in 2015 ...as you can see here the only place you can really see this work is when you walk up to the platform and view it from above.

Image 10 Tino Seghal : these Associations Unilever Commission Turbine Hall
2012/13

So how an audience perceives a work of art become very important....so I just want to run through a couple of other examples of turbine hall exhibitions now ...because these have not only become major events for art audiences but also for thousands of tourists, which makes for a very large audience that are specifically drawn there. People have asked – what does this mean for the Tate as a space- how can it operate as an art gallery –as a space where you might go and look at something with that number of people passing through its doors. So artists who have been invited to make work for the Turbine Hall, have had to think very carefully about this.

Here we have a performance piece by Tino Seghal called “these associations”. Seghal set up the performance to specifically work with the crowds. The piece

consisted of about 130 or so performers who were choreographed to behave in certain ways within the hall.

Seghal 2 image 11

The performers would move amongst the throngs of people who were wandering around the space and at times they would run through it, move as groups together and sometimes they would just sit down...so here they are moving in unison through the space...some sitting, some standing, some just wandering around. There was a very dramatic moment when all of the performers would suddenly go to one end and then they would run through the space....as they ran the lights went off in sequence and as they moved back the lights would come back on. When this kind of thing happened everybody moved to the side and they felt they were in a performance. The thing that Seghal then did was to have all his performers split, move up to people and tell them a very personal story about themselves...so you are standing there watching this thing with a friend then suddenly comes up to you and says "I have just split up from my wife", or "I had a troubled childhood", or "I want to be a performer".

Seghal had his performers rehearse these stories, which would take hold of you and make you a part of the piece. This seemed to be quite an effective way of occupying the space and drawing on one of the characteristics of the turbine hall as a space...which was the sheer number of people in it.

Image 12 Tacita Dean film, Unilever Turbine Hall Tate modern 2011-

Another very dramatic piece shown in the turbine hall was a piece by Tacita Dean called "Film". It was an enormous vertical projection, which used a very complex system of masks on one 35 millimetre projection to construct lots of simultaneous images within the image itself..so multiple movements within one image. One of the things you saw when you went into the space and looked at this work was that lots of people would go up to it to become part of the projection – they would literally stand in the beam so in a very minor way this piece again became interactive. The audience became a part of the work, which

in fact Dean wasn't wholly enamoured with because this hadn't been an intention of the work.

One of the things Richard Tuttle said when looking back on his commission was that actually the audience is the work or it is a vital component – you simply can't ignore them and this fundamentally changes the meaning of the artwork.

Image 13 Carsten Holler , Test Site Unilever Commission Turbine Hall 2006

Another artist that fully embraced the audience in the Turbine Hall is a work made in (2006-07) by Carsten Holler, who installed three slides of varying heights throughout the space. There were big warning signs saying you participate at your own risk because the tallest slide was very long and terrifically fast. It was phenomenally popular and schools started bringing coachloads of kids to participate in this work before being taken to other parts of the permanent collection, so it became a kind of draw...almost like a bribe!

Image 14

Holler talks about this work in a really serious way....he talks about slides as a key modernist idea. He is also entirely serious when he says that modernist institutions, corporations and educational buildings should incorporate slides as it's a really efficient way of travelling, as well as being a moment of euphoria. He talks about his slide works as a test site, which is the title of the work...he says testing the body is one of the great things about sliding because you can't think while you are doing it – you are all body. You don't think about sliding you just experience it.... he also says that the work allows direct experience and a chance to test the body. So in a way he is providing the audience with a way of thinking about the art experience. What you have here is a form of art that doesn't allow you to step back and analyse it – as you are experiencing it you are doing it and you are doing it in a euphoric state.

Image 15 Olafur Eliasson , the Weather project Unilever Commission Turbine Hall Tate

And this work is another brilliant example of this...its probably the most famous and the most extraordinary work to be exhibited in the Turbine Hall ...its by Olafur Eliasson and its called "the weather project" and it was exhibited in 2003. He constructed an enormous glowing sun at one end of the hall, which was split by the mezzanine floor. The top half was constructed using mirrors as well having mirrors on the ceiling running the entire length of the building. He also filled the building with a light haze or smoke. So when you walked into the space, it was filled with an orange haze, which looked a bit like the sun going down on a beautiful summers day. It was spectacular and there was something that happened in this work, which the artist simply did not predict. People came to use the space as a social space and very quickly large groups of people would come and lie on the floor and do things such as form shapes while looking at themselves in the mirrors above. This wasn't just children that did this, large groups of adults would come in and spell out words with their bodies (often getting into groups to spell out words ...so a lot of negotiation going on in trying to figure out exactly how to do that (backwards)).

This work became very well-known with an enormous amount of media interest. It is a very interesting instance whereby an artwork has a life beyond the intentions of the artist and here an audience takes over the work and turns it into something else.

One of the lessons to take from this is that you simply cannot predict what people will do in front of your work – you will have to let that go and you have to be aware of that, because there is nothing worse and I am sure you have seen it in your critiques where a group of people start to talk about their response to a work and the poor artist says that's not what it is about –its about something else and I will tell you what it is about and the response back is ..well what I see in this work is this – so work has to have a life of its own and the Eliassen piece was one of the most dramatic instances of that. Works like this in the Turbine Hall, have attracted an enormous amount of coverage online and in the media.

Tate has become a brand, and part of the narrative around art and art institutions is that they are part of a much wider culture.

Image 16 Serra

Now, to illustrate this point further, we can take a look at another art museum, the 'Frank Gehry designed Guggenheim in Bilbao' in Spain which as a very successful tourist attraction, has single handedly regenerated the economy of a dying Spanish port. It is a building that people want to see - and the art in this building to a large extent was made to fit the exhibition spaces. Gehry made exhibition spaces to fit certain kinds of artworks. So as we see here in this image- if you go to this building there is a set of enormous Richard Serra sculptures ...that seem to fit perfectly into the space and have a very strong attachment to the building itself.

Image 17 Poussin

Now, just to move on to something different – I want to talk about a well known art historian called T J Clark and a book he wrote called the Sight of Death. In a chapter called experiment with art writing he wrote on an experience he had during a residency in America where he spent 6 months looking intently at 2 paintings, as a form of experiment to try and find out what it means to go back to a work of art and look carefully at something again and again, which you think you know. The two paintings he chose were painted by Nicholas Poussin - "landscape with a man killed by a snake"(1648) and "landscape with a calm" (1650) One of the things he wanted to do was to think about - not the art historical stories or narratives that one can spin around painting but about what was in front of him...the physical and material paint on a canvas and how that affected him. He wanted to explore the mental and emotional effect of looking at painting over and over again. He says in his introduction that this is a really rare experience – to return to something and look at it in that way. He says that one of the things that has got lost in art museums and galleries is the idea of contemplation, spending time with a work. Of course this today may seem very old fashioned because the media we use today does not really facilitate

contemplation....just think of the speed in which we look at Instagram or Facebook images.

This casual way of consuming art is the opposite of what T J Clark is suggesting we might do.

The other thing he asks for is a space that might be quiet and on the whole museums are not quiet anymore, he also asks for time for a slow mode of consumption. In a way one of the things Clark suggests is that you need to submit to works of art. You have to try and enter their space, but again how do you do this and how do you find the space to do that.

There is a great quote by Paul Klee (the German artist painting in the 1920's, 1930's) where he says "to look at a picture you need a chair". His idea is that you need to stay in front of the canvas or stay in front of the sculpture. Now what strikes me about this observation is that one of the ways in which we often consume images is entirely through second hand representation. What I am doing here is a really strange thing – I am projecting all of these images and they are all scaled in the same way...the Poussin's are massively overscaled the turbine hall images are underscaled – these images allow you to understand that space, because they make it manageable.

Something T J Clark talks about is the idea of the 'acquaintance principle', which is an idea in aesthetics where in order to really understand a work of art you have to see the real thing. Most of us consume or know art from reproductions – images from computers, phones, catalogues, books, slide shows in lectures. This does not give you any sense of the material quality of the work. One of the most important things about being an artist is getting out and looking at art and not just consuming it through the internet etc. because artworks can become really surprising.

Image 18 Warhol Brillo

Take a Warhol Brillo box..if you are standing in front of this work you can see its very rough and quite badly screen printed so no one could ever mistake it for a real brillo box with 500 brillo pads in it, however there is something about its hand made quality that really gets lost in all the reproductions. By going to see something – being acquainted with a work, can really change your understanding of it.

Image 19 Richard Serra, Fulcrum, Broadgate Circus, London 1987

I am going to finish by talking about two examples where a question of audience becomes really important. Firstly, I want to think about when audiences become a problem. Some artists such as Richard Serra deliberately position their work so that it becomes awkward or more of an intervention or something that causes disruption. In this case everyone that works in the buildings surrounding this work ...which is around Broadgate circus in London hates it, and in fact when they start to further develop the area, this sculpture will be removed.

People that work in the area complain that the work is in the way as they come out of the tube station. In fact it is beautifully positioned as another tunnel. As you come out you suddenly get hit by light as you emerge from the underground...then blocking you is this colossal steel structure, which in fact allows you to walk through it...there are entrances and exits but no one does. Everybody walks around it because in a way they know that this colossal piece of work that weighs several tonnes is simply resting on itself and it is the weight of each plane of steel that is holding it in place.

The whole structure has been placed in little grooves on the pavement so it feels both solid and fragile at the same time. On one hand it feels like it never could be moved and at the same time it feels precarious and dangerous. Serra is an artist that really revels in this sort of intervention. He has said that one of the great things about this work is that over a period of time it is going to rust because in British weather that is what this material does. So its the transformative nature of the steel in contrast to the perfectly shiny beautifully facaded buildings that

gives the sculpture its impact. He talks about this as site specific art – an art work that is made for a particular place and that the work is inserted in this place for a particular reason.

Image 20

The other example is a work of art that is seen by more people than you can imagine in London that no one knew was there was “Meanwhile across town” made in 2004 by the Welsh artist Cerith Wynn Evans.

Using the letters 'o' and 'i' from Centre Point's famous sign, Evans transmitted an extract from *The Visible and Invisible*, an unfinished book by the French existentialist philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. So the work appeared as an elegant and subtly perverse way of pointing to no more than the communication itself; through the archaic communication tool of Morse code.

From top of one of the tallest buildings in London the piece broadcasted one of the most difficult and philosophical texts you could ever read, with its message becoming, temporarily, an intrinsic part of the cityscape.

The work was controversial in that it was viewed as being elitist. It was seen by everybody and yet nobody knew what it was. There were only about three people that could even begin to decipher it because they needed to be able to read morse code. The work itself then became renowned because lots of people called up to report that there was a fault on the top of centrepoint because there were lights flashing on and off.

Commentators in the press were saying who on Earth is this for – its for an incredibly small audience, however the paradox was that it was being broadcast across London – an enormous number of people could see it without having any idea of what it was or what it was saying. In the popular press there was this idea that it was a really pointless piece of work.

Over the last few years there has been quite a lot of work made that has been seen to disappear, however the artist then faces an enormous problem because they then need to point to it in some way to distinguish it from what exists in the outside world.

You can see this is a major problem in terms of the relationship between art and popular culture. Even if art is really popular...how do you point to it and say actually there might be other things going on here, its not exactly the same as someone putting up something on a youtube, or blogging or even Hollywood cinema.

How you point to a work of art becomes really important, especially if you are concerned to try and find the space in which it is as near as possible to the thing it might be mimicking or replicating... so you might make a work that looks like a commercial thing or might look like a commercial object ...how do you mark it out from those ordinary objects.

Image 21 oda projesi, two events, istanbul 2009

Very finally I want to suggest that some artists have found a way out of this kind of problem by not having an audience and avoiding the gallery. This has become a really important theme in art making over the last 15 years where the artwork disappears within a collaborative practice. So here is an example seen in work by Oda Projesi - a group of three Turkish women who came out of art school trying to think about how to make work that addressed their local community. So they set up a space in their housing estate within which they effectively turned what could have been a gallery space into a play group, a music centre, a nursery school and a space for the local community to meet to talk about housing problems.

Oda Projesi have insisted that the last thing they want to do is make objects, so they see their practice entirely in terms of collaboration. They say that they take care to leave nothing behind after a project ends that could be considered a work

of art, merely producing a brief textual documentation. This sounds entirely honourable and a way out of that problem except Oda Projesi have shown in a whole series of Biennales across Europe over the last 10 years and what they show then becomes problematic. They have to point to something in their practice that somehow says “ this is not part of the event – so what is it that I am looking at or experiencing”.

One of the things that happens with work like this is that the brief textual documentation stands in for the experience in much the same way that the images I am showing stand in for the works of art I am talking about.

They don't really get round it, but we do have to think about it – the idea of an audience.