

New ways of being an artist

The Renaissance Artist

Many of our ideas about what artists do come from the Renaissance. Prior to the Renaissance Artists were seen more as artisans. Artists such as Benvenuto Cellini and writers such as Giorgio Vasari helped change peoples perceptions of artists by creating a special aura around artists as individual personalities.

Leonardo Da Vinci can be described as the perfect Renaissance artist in the way that he undertook work in a variety of disciplines. He is famous for his groundbreaking use of light and dark(chiaroscuro) in painting but he was also a sublime draughtsman, a designer, inventor, anatomist, writer and scientist.

Many Renaissance artists employed large numbers of assistants to help them complete the hugely ambitious projects commissioned by kings nobility and the church.

During the Renaissance new patrons for art appeared such as the Medici family. Powerful merchants/bankers based in Florence their keenly ambitious patronage of art propelled the city to become a centre of cultural life to rival Rome. The involvement of patrons such as the Medici was important in developing the idea of art as a valuable commodity - aside from any religious or moral purpose.

The Romantic Artist

The role of the artist has constantly changed through history. In the 18th Century artists produced work in an increasingly secular context, and for a changing audience, of rich merchants and the middle classes as well as the traditional elite.

Artists competed fiercely for a share of the market and artists whose work was the most innovative and daring were often the most successful. Artists became increasingly conscious of their public image.

The idea of the artist as being somehow removed from the mainstream of society began to become important. Delacroix or Gericault played on their reputation for being a bit 'dangerous'. William Blake saw himself as a prophet or visionary. Artists as diverse as Courbet and Caspar David Friedrich pictured themselves in their work in a self consciously dramatic way that had not been seen before.

Van Gogh and Gauguin were artists who took the idea of the artists as seer or visionary to extreme. Gauguin went to live in Tahiti to try and find a pre industrial 'unspoilt' world. Van Goghs struggles with mental illness were in part made worse by his idea of the singularity of his role as an artist.

The Modern Artist

The idea of the romantic artist persists in some modern artists. The idea of the self destructive genius reached its zenith with artists like Modigliani who lived a rock and roll lifestyle well before his time. Picasso was always very keen to control his image and to self mythologize. The last flowering of the Romantic idea of the artists could be said to be the Abstract Expressionist movement in post war America, Jackson Pollock's life was as wild as his art appeared to be.

Artists working in the inter war years created another way of being an artist based mainly on socialist principles where art could be part of creating a better society. Constructivist artists in The USSR prior to Stalin's purges in the late 1920s and Artists associated with the Bauhaus in Germany shared a desire to blur the boundaries between fine and applied art in a an attempt to democratize the best new ideas from both fields.

The Dada movement challenged the way art was made and used and questioned the role of the artist. Dada artists studiously avoided making any objects that could be commodified - bought and sold- although many artists had made work that was uncommercial in the past, making this an article of faith was a new step. Marcel Duchamps use of everyday objects as art works, his 'readymades', e.g. Fountain 1917, constituted the biggest challenge the role of the artist in the 20th century. If a mass produced object could be selected and made into art by an artist the traditional role of skill in art production was redundant. The idea of 'de-skilling' gathered pace as the century progressed, and it is this lineage that is the most significant when looking at what artists do today.



Sarah Carne "I Love my Yugo", Artists Book 2004

No longer the genius loner. The Contemporary Artist.

Themes and observations

- **Collaborative partnerships** from Gilbert and George to Webster and Noble, Jake and Dinos Chapman. Erosion of notion of individual 'genius'
- **Groups** of artists such as Fluxus, Art and Language, Bank where individual recognition is not a primary aim.

- **Artist as Ethnographer** see recent work of Grayson Perry or work from the 70s by Fred Wilson. Taking objects and artworks from different time periods and contexts and putting them together in new ways to talk about the world today
- **Artists as Curator** form earliest ideas of Marcel Broodthaers and Institutional Critique to less political, more pragmatic model of like minded artists promoting each others work. E.g. the show 'Freeze' by Damien Hirst. Curators such as Hans Ullrich Obrist embody a newer idea still, that of the Curator as Artist.
- **Artist as facilitator, relational* art, socially engaged practice.** Could be summarized to be about the artists as Producer not producer. Artists undertake projects with non artists and the results are partly theirs and partly the artists. Tiranivanija cooks for and talks to visitors to his shows – and that is the show. Juneau projects get kids to make music and draw posters. See also Liam Gillick, Thomas Hirschorn, Jeremy Deller, Phil Collins.
- The relationship between **Collector and Artist** still persists as does the rampant commercialization and commodification of objects. Damien Hirst is reknown for shocking works such as animal filled vitrines. His relationship with the collector Charles Saatchi however is similar to that between Florentine Artists and the Medici.
- **Artist as Archivist**, for example Tacita Dean, an artist who makes connections between seemingly disparate events and images building an archive, parts of which are exhibited in different forms.
- Many **Artists are now filmmakers** in a quite traditional sense, people like Matthew Barney with his Cremaster series, make complex films with big casts and budgets, Barney alludes to this with references to Busby Berkeley musicals!
- New approaches to **non-gallery art**. Web based, computer programmes, artists books etc. - these are a long way removed from traditional methods of making art, but many have the attraction of being away from the gallery system, its competitiveness and its emphasis on commodities
- How artists actually work, the studio for instance how many artists go into the studio every day and paint? Not many, it is more likely that artists will spend their time organizing, curating, writing and researching. However some contemporary **painters** such as Cecily Brown and Tomma Abts buck the trend by painting every day.
- AKA Relational Aesthetics

A lecture by Andy Parsons, 2007.