

The Art Issue.

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# Editorial

Why does Art Matter? Art is the expression that complements Philosophy's articulation; the artist stands on the frontier of the unexplored, where creative inspiration is like possession by a spirit. The unknown shines through a great work of art; we gaze upon it in wonder because it is revelatory – it reveals something of the nature of reality to us.

The artist should be an outsider, an explorer of new territory. There is only the possibility of true creative freedom from within a state of enslavement to an order. Meaning can only arise in art that contends with something; art born out of a void of order and common culture is empty inside.

Much of the current art world is in a state of shallowness, incompetence, ugliness, and transnational homogeneity. All we can do for consolation is to look back in time and lose ourselves in art that was aspirational, beautiful, and revelatory, art that existed in sophisticated tension with society, that expressed through myth and symbol mankind's folly and greatness in single image. We hope that an aesthetics of the future rediscovers the possibility of setting forth positive visions informed by ideals, and thereby inspires us to a higher state of being.

We would like to thank all the contributors to our 'Philosophy of Art' issue. We are extremely grateful for the input and support from Keith Chan and Professor James Wilson in the production of this issue. We warmly invite you to revel in all that Bentham Digest has to offer.

# SO FAKE!

Jack Verschoyle examines what it means to be fake.

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*Pietro Sanguineti*

**fake**

2015

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In the piece above, one may observe an utterance of the word 'fake'. In this essay I will discuss the consequences of the sign predicating itself. I will suppose that an instance of a word is fake if, though intended perhaps deceitfully to be considered meaningful, there is no consensus amongst the language speakers as to its being understandable in any primary occurrence. It seems there is some parallel between this piece and the liar paradox, but without an infinite regress. It appears one's starting point determines one's unhappy conclusion. One starting point naturally dominates, and this is the first point of view I will explain.

Signs (in the layman's sense of the term) often predicate objects. The sign with 'fire exit' written on it, put on a door, appears to mean 'this door is a fire exit'. What is it that Sanguineti's sign is predicating as fake? Supposedly, the piece is commenting on the status quo, however, I would like to suggest a more radical (probably not intended) interpretation that the sign is predicating itself, i.e. that it (as it were) claims, 'I am fake'.

Firstly, how could the sign be calling itself fake? Signs predicate the things in close proximity to them, like fire exits. The only thing in constant close proximity to the piece (apart from the wall) is itself, and with its bright, glossy and colourful aesthetic, it really does look a bit fraudulent. For those who consider a sign being a sign for itself too far-fetched, consider why you might laugh if you saw a sign that said 'sign' on it.

If one accepts that the sign is an instance of the word 'fake' and that it predicates itself, it (as it were) says 'there is no consensus amongst the language speakers as to the word "fake" being understandable in a primary occurrence'. But this is obviously false.

# SO FAKE!

*Continued*

It could be that some kind of felicity condition or speaker rule has been broken. This way of becoming meaningful – by denying one’s meaningfulness – upsets us, like the claim of the wise Socrates – that he knew he knew nothing – upsets us. Thus, our attitude to the sign may change.

Suppose we deny the piece to be an utterance of a word, rather we consider it a random collection of characters, materials and colours, perhaps intended to contain a deceitfully meaningful utterance but failing to secure consensus among language speakers as to its being understandable (like a collection of clouds closely resembling a word) [ed. I don’t think this is a valid option]. But in this case, it now seems true that the piece satisfies our conditions of being an instance of a fake word. We know that this is the very thing the piece would say of itself if we were to consider it to contain an instance of the word ‘fake’, but we already know the consequences of approaching it that way: falsehood and maybe infelicity.



**JACK VERSCHOYLE**

# Expression of Art

*Dylan Ngan contemplates the cultural positioning of Art.*

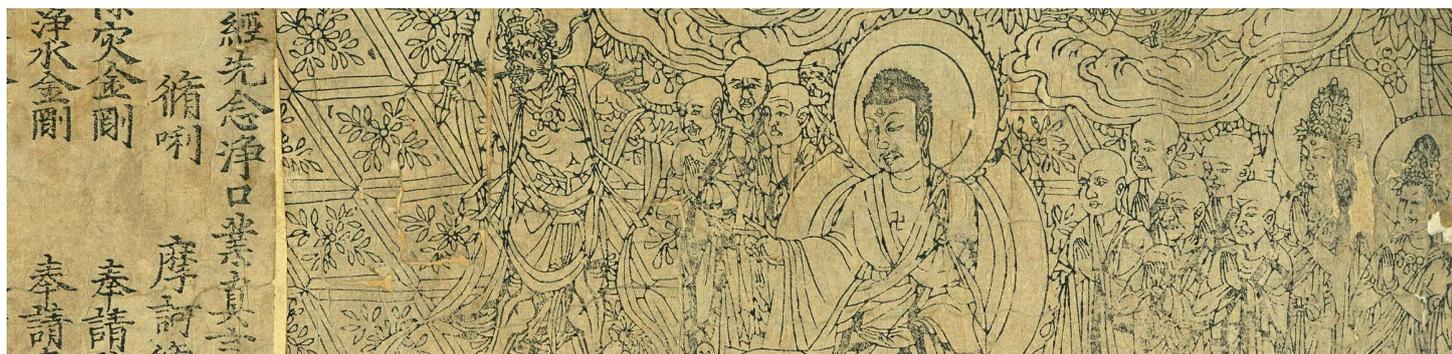
Art is quite often seen as a way of expressing how one perceives the world. We see the world around us in a certain way. Through the medium of painting, we refer to what we see or have seen. In contrast, I recently heard about a story, where perception of the world is not seen as a source for art, but rather art is the world itself.

The story I've come across relates to a skilled Buddhist sculptor, who has dedicated his life to impressive and revering statues and figures of the Buddha and other Buddhist deities carved from stone. When asked about his work, he merely replies that the figures themselves already reside within the rock, and his contribution is simply the removal of what is unnecessary.

Perhaps, the religious connotation here is that the potential for enlightenment lies in all of us; what we need to do is to refine ourselves, our habits, and our thoughts. Possibly, truth lies in nature. The sculptor does not see art as expression, but rather as a mastery of skill that allows him to seek truth. He seeks not to convey meaning; instead, he seeks to comprehend what can be derived from nature. Taoists often paint scenes of nature. Similarly, the basis of the Chinese language and its accompanying characters are derived from natural imagery.

Water flows without trying, its movement unguided but purposeful. We should live, like water, in a way that is in accordance with nature, acting harmoniously. By acknowledging our control and responsibility over our minds, and our lack of control over the impermanence of the physical world, it helps us to maintain an objective, content, and peaceful outlook over our lives.

I consider art to be a mastery of skill, accompanied with recognition of purpose and result. A true artist of the game of chess, for instance, knows and plays every move with a purpose. In painting, it is the mastery of the skill of using one's tools, the knowledge behind the composition, and whether one is able to deliver what one intends to. Art, for me, is far from mere expression; it is feeling, understanding, and embodiment.



*Frontispiece of the Chinese Diamond Sutra*

# ***THE MATHEMATICS*** of ***VINCENT VAN GOGH***

*Eloise Knight-Smith considers the role of mathematics in Art.*

Mathematics and visual art are considered to be at a point of complete polarity. The former is a field of objectivity and challenge, very much at the forefront of human innovation, whilst the latter strays more in favour of the subjective and, though it demonstrates equal if not greater development than the field of mathematics, is lauded only in select circles and thus ultimately takes the role of deuteragonist in favour of scientific development. Despite this, however, there is a perpetual link between the two concepts that renders them entirely inextricable. This fact is in no case clearer than that of van Gogh, an artist famed as the forefather of the expressionist movement. This branch of art presents works solely from a subjective perspective, thus often featuring radical distortion in order to reflect one's mood or ideas, a concept that seems entirely antithetical to the definite nature of mathematics.

Within this field, van Gogh is best known for the unique method by which he depicted his perception of reality. This is most apparent in the famed 'Starry Night', his 1889 masterpiece depicting the view from the room of his asylum room at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. The piece is conducted almost entirely in cadmium yellow, contrasted with the adversarial Prussian and ultramarine blues, a pairing that guided most of the artist's later works, and is famed for the stylisation of starlight as having a spherical overtone.



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*Starry Night*

Oil paint

June  
1889

Vincent  
Van Gogh

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# THE MATHEMATICS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

*Continued*

However, the most interesting facet of this work is not the aesthetics of the piece itself but instead the basis on which the conceit of the circle came to be key in van Gogh's works. This is because it seems to demonstrate an understanding of the complex mathematical concept of non-Euclidean geometry, a branch whose discovery aligns almost perfectly with the birth of the artist. First published by both the Russian Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky and the Hungarian János Bolyai in 1830, this subsection of mathematics was later developed and popularised by renowned mathematician Bernhard Riemann in 1854, just a year prior to the birth of van Gogh.

Non-Euclidean geometry takes familiar two-dimensional geometrical concepts such as Pythagorean and Circle Theorems from a rectilinear plane to a spherical or curved manifold, hence allowing for geometrical practices to be applied to the surface of our planet, rather than a mere flattened vignette of it. In short, where Euclidean geometry saw parallel lines remaining eternally equidistant from one another, non-Euclidean always has these lines either meet or, in some cases, diverge and remain eternally disparate.

There is, I would maintain, a necessity for mathematics in aesthetics, insofar as that which is pleasing and familiar acts in accordance with set laws of proportion that can be attributed to geometry. This notion is exemplified by the existence of works such as da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' or even the technology-driven works of modern artists such as Ryoji Ikeda, who primarily bases his works upon particle physics.



*Ryoji Ikeda at EYE Filmmuseum, Amsterdam*

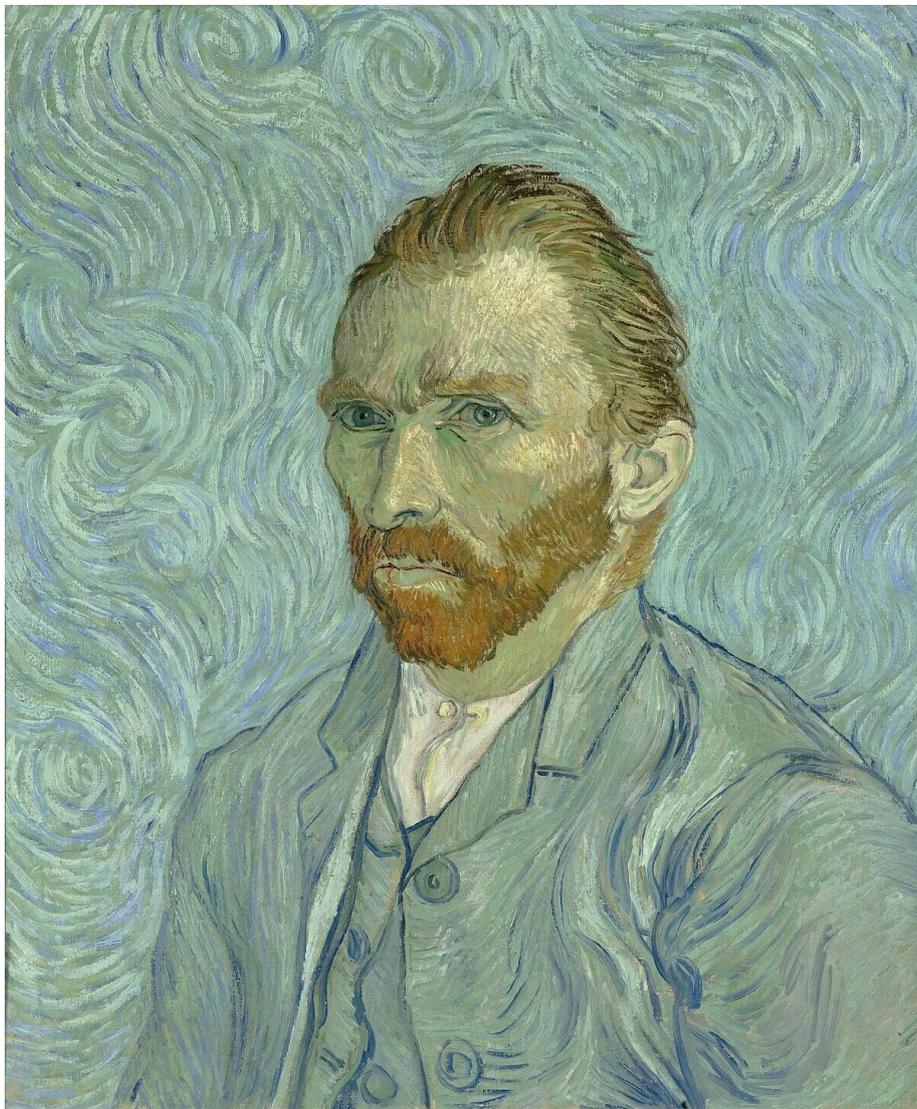
Even those works that appear to be entirely severed from mathematics act only as the exception that proves the rule as the observer is drawn to what is an evident violation of the familiar and so, whether consciously or not, seeks the scientific element to which they have become accustomed. This stance is highlighted by the impact of the discovery of non-Euclidean geometry upon Kant's treatment of human knowledge.

# THE MATHEMATICS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

*Continued*

Kant conceived an understanding of reality wherein Euclidean spatial perception is a necessary condition of knowledge of objects, which is derived neither from the senses nor any degree of logic, but instead is inherent and thus present from birth. However, the discovery of non-Euclidean geometry invalidates this, as it demonstrates different possible geometries that exist beyond intuitive understanding.

Ultimately, this demonstrates how, at their core, art and mathematics are inseparable in that they were founded and developed in an attempt to comprehend and describe the world both as and beyond our regular perception and are, by consequence, fundamentally identical.



*Self Portrait*

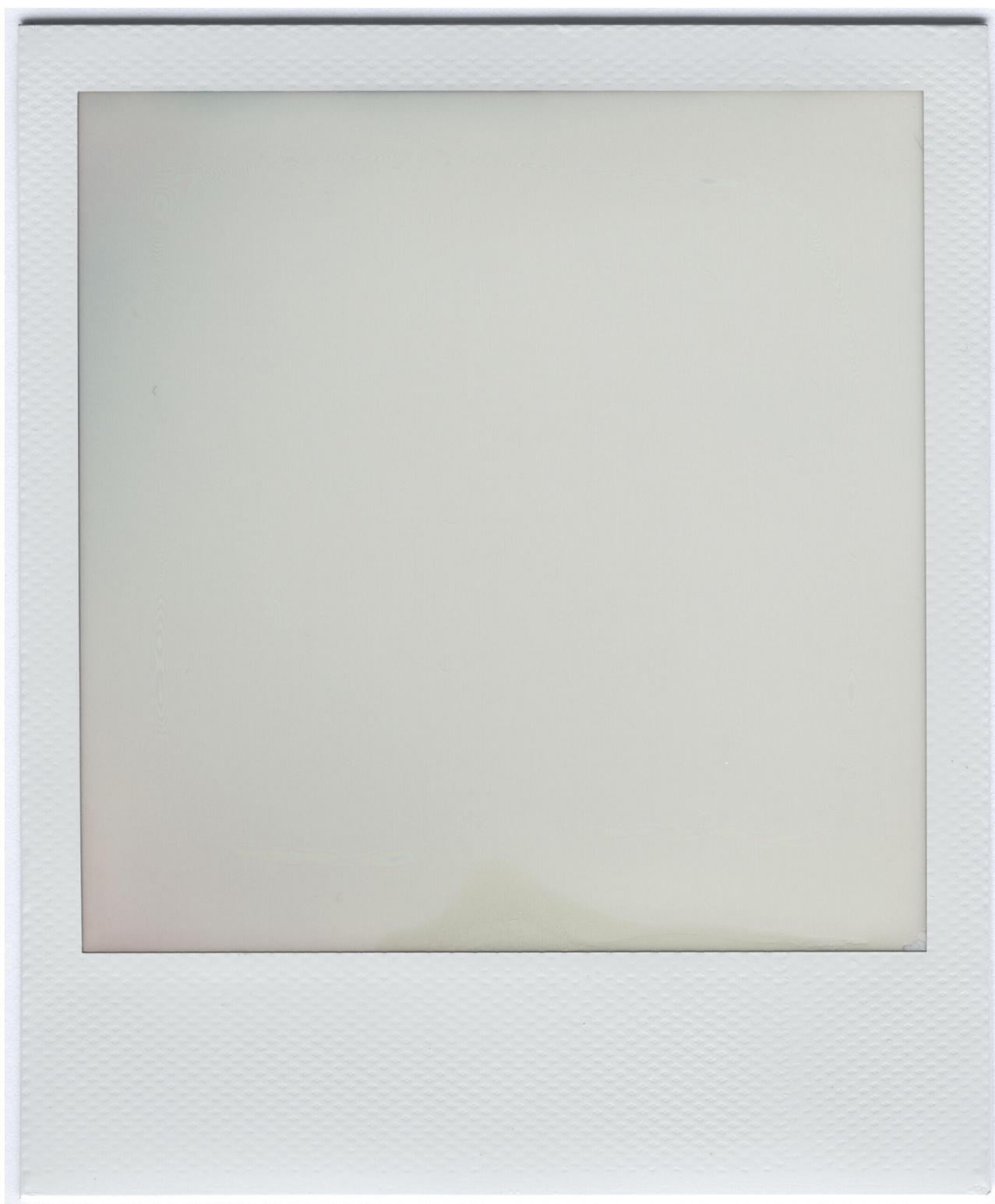
Oil on Canvas

1889

Vincent Van Gogh

**PHOTO**

**ESSAY**

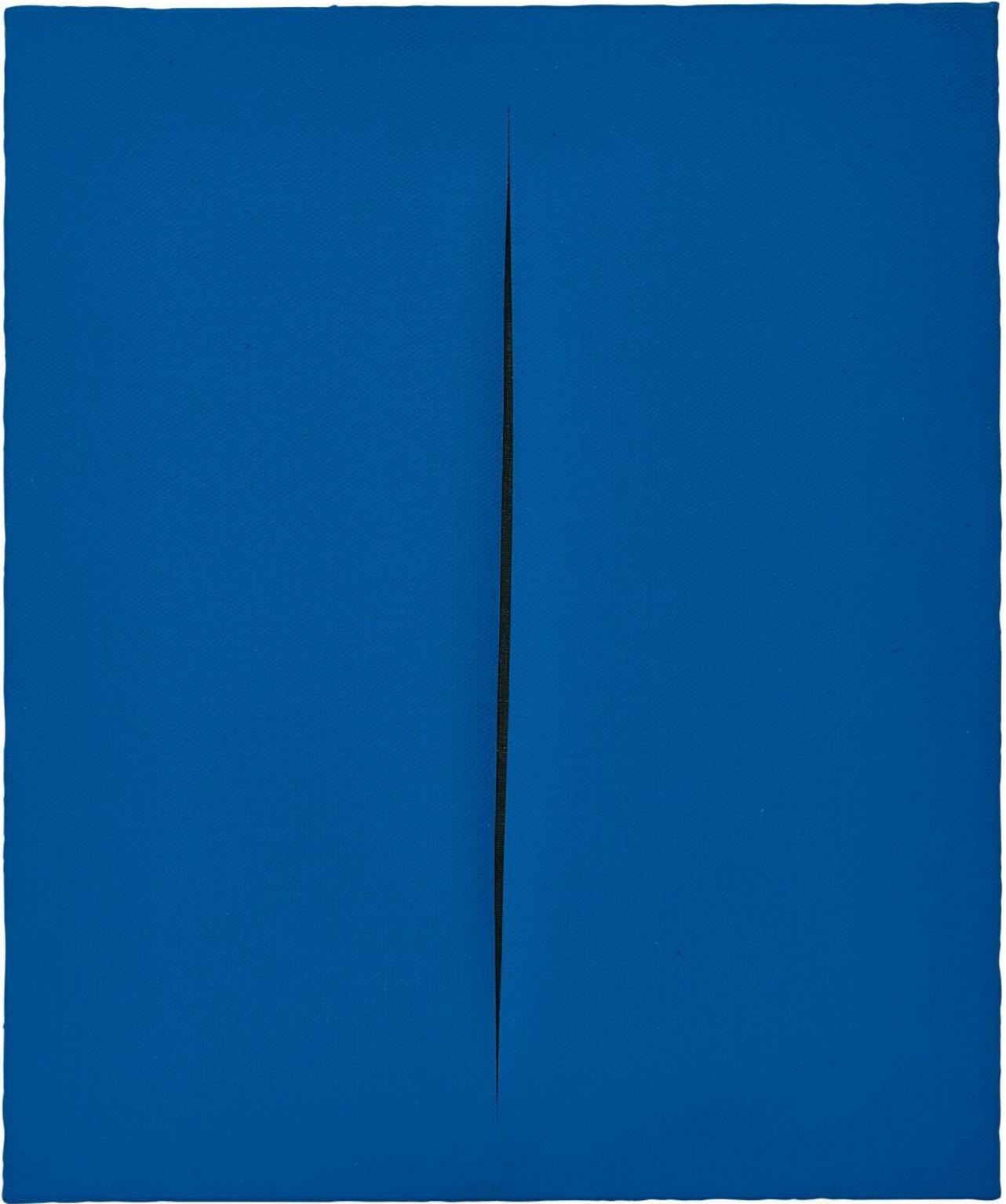




TIM OSWALD, 'VOID', 2015, POLAROID PHOTOGRAPHS



GREGORY CREWDSON, 'MOTHER AND DAUGHTER', 2014



LUCIO FONTANA, 'CONCETTO SPAZIALE, ATTESA', 1964, WATER BASED PAINT ON CANVAS



ANDREA MANTEGNA, 'THE LAMENTATION OF CHRIST', C.1840, TEMPERA ON CANVAS



3. *Andrea Mantegna, 'The Lamentation of Christ', c.1840, tempera on canvas*

ALBERTO BURRI, 'FERRO SP', 1961,  
WELDED IRON SHEET METAL, OIL, AND NAILS ON WOOD FRAMEWORK



SAILEE KHURJEKAR, UNTITLED, 2016,  
WATERCOLOUR AND INK ON BLOTTING CARD



JENNY SAVILLE, 'THE MOTHERS', 2011, OIL AND CHARCOAL ON CANVAS

*END.*

# Doing Philosophy Spatially

*Crisa Stef focuses on Lyotard's Les Immatériaux exhibition.*

The 1985 exhibition *Les Immatériaux* - curated by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput at the Centre Pompidou in Paris - is cast as a pre-1989 event that foresaw the advent of globalisation as a melancholic anticipation of the changing role of contemporary art in this era of accelerated exchange, and as a moment in a history of exhibitions in the wake of what was called, until recently, aesthetics.



However, *Les Immatériaux* has the distinction not simply of intersecting with philosophical questions, but actually of being the work of a philosopher, arguably even a work of philosophy, even if it was not recognised as such at the time. Far from the informational ideals of ‘communication’, *Les Immatériaux* presented a condition of unease and a sense of disarray, facilitated by the great aesthetic figure of the labyrinth. Lyotard hoped to recast Malraux’s old question of ‘silences’ in terms of his own idea of making visible, audible, and thus ‘think-able’ what cannot be seen, heard, or thought, and to recast the ‘imaginary’ side of the museum accordingly.

“*Les Immatériaux*” roughly translates to “the immaterials” or “the non-materials”. These materials are new in that they newly challenge our relationship to the world, whether through the dehumanization of technology or by the faltering of man’s mastery over nature. And so, the exhibition was filled with computers (often malfunctioning), but also artificial skin, Kevlar, and works by artists including Giovanni Anselmo, Daniel Buren, and Dan Flavin.

The experience was intended to be full of slippages, a bewildering dramatization of what the profound uncertainty of our contemporaneity feels like. The critics hardly warmed to such a chaotic atmosphere, yet artists who saw the show felt quite differently. “What I think was really beautiful”, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster recalled, “was the exploration of all the dimensions of light and sound by means of infrared and text. The viewer’s movement was taken fully into consideration”.

What would such a thing be as a philosophy of the exhibition, or even, more radically, a philosophy that itself takes on the form of an exhibition? Could there be a way to understand, or rather do, philosophy spatially, so that the exhibition medium – if the term “medium” is still useful here – would present a possible solution to the problems of conceptual articulations, which thereby would cease to be purely conceptual, and instead come to exploit the field of the sensory, tactile, auditory, and visual? This question no doubt appears exorbitant in relation to normal philosophical discourse; why would thinking in a spatial and sensory fashion, and even more so in the mode of an exhibition, at all matter to philosophy?

One of the central questions explored by Lyotard is the potential of immersive space. The very concept of immersion is at the centre of Spacing Philosophy. But that’s the way it is with art: it always has a value as an expression of its time, but there’s also a way in which it can always be perceived as lying outside of the time that produced it. There’s something that turns a work of art into a transhistorical truth, and that’s the part of the art that I think of as “philosophical”.

*feature piece:*

# - Artistic Forgeries +

*Liane Wergen delves into the world of forgeries.*



*Kunisada Forgery*

Are forgeries actually any worse aesthetically than genuine artworks? When assessing an original artwork and professional forgeries of it for potential aesthetic differences, it's important to be clear on the underlying definition of “aesthetic”. There are two readings of the term, either (1) formal properties which are synonymous with all the perceptible and artistic traits of the artwork, or (2) non-formal properties alluding to further background knowledge which informs our evaluation and appreciation of art (as maintained by Nick Zangwill).

Claiming that all difference between originals and forgeries is based on the implicit “snobbery” of the art world is not a sufficiently feasible argument. In his article *Categories of Art*, Kendall Walton indicates that crucial aesthetic properties cannot be discovered only through the perceptible. Background knowledge is required for us to know how to appreciate the artwork correctly by associating it with the right genres and considering the artist's intentions, as well as cultural background. In turn, we can also evaluate the artwork.

# - Artistic Forgeries +

*Continued*

As soon as historical knowledge is afforded, forgeries must be evaluated on those standards and may merit different aesthetic value than their original counterparts, since an aesthetic valuation would in my view involve the non-formal properties. Considerations that may affect the evaluation of the artwork aesthetically mostly relate to the artist themselves, their intentions, history, social status, material and cultural artistic restrictions, and originality. Dennis Dutton characterised the problem with forgeries as misrepresenting human achievement. The object of our perception may not change, but our perception does. Art is the end-product of human activity. Even though forgeries aren't void of all achievement, the aspect of misrepresentation makes them reprehensible and subject to a different aesthetic evaluation.

One aspect that Dutton wanted to draw the focus away from was that of originality since it is associated with novelty in art and is therefore a contentious basis for analysis. While it is a valid concern that it would be difficult to find an appropriate threshold for sufficient originality for art, especially within the same genre, it nevertheless is inevitably of high significance for our conception of forgeries.

A further potential origin for our preference towards original art over forgeries may be explained through our apparent metaphysical bias that we have with regard to historical objects themselves. In the formerly presented theories, the history surrounding the creation and production of the artwork affects the aesthetic, but I want to further assert that there is some value to the object in and of itself, regardless of who created it and its effects.

A metaphysical bias is grounded in the belief that art can influence history and culture as much as it is a by-product of them. When approaching a piece of art, what interests the observer beyond what was achieved by the individual or group who created it, is what implications its existence had. It does not need to have had direct/immediate influences on history, since its discovery advancing our historical understanding of a culture could equally award it some unique historical value.

# - ~~Artistic Forgeries~~ +

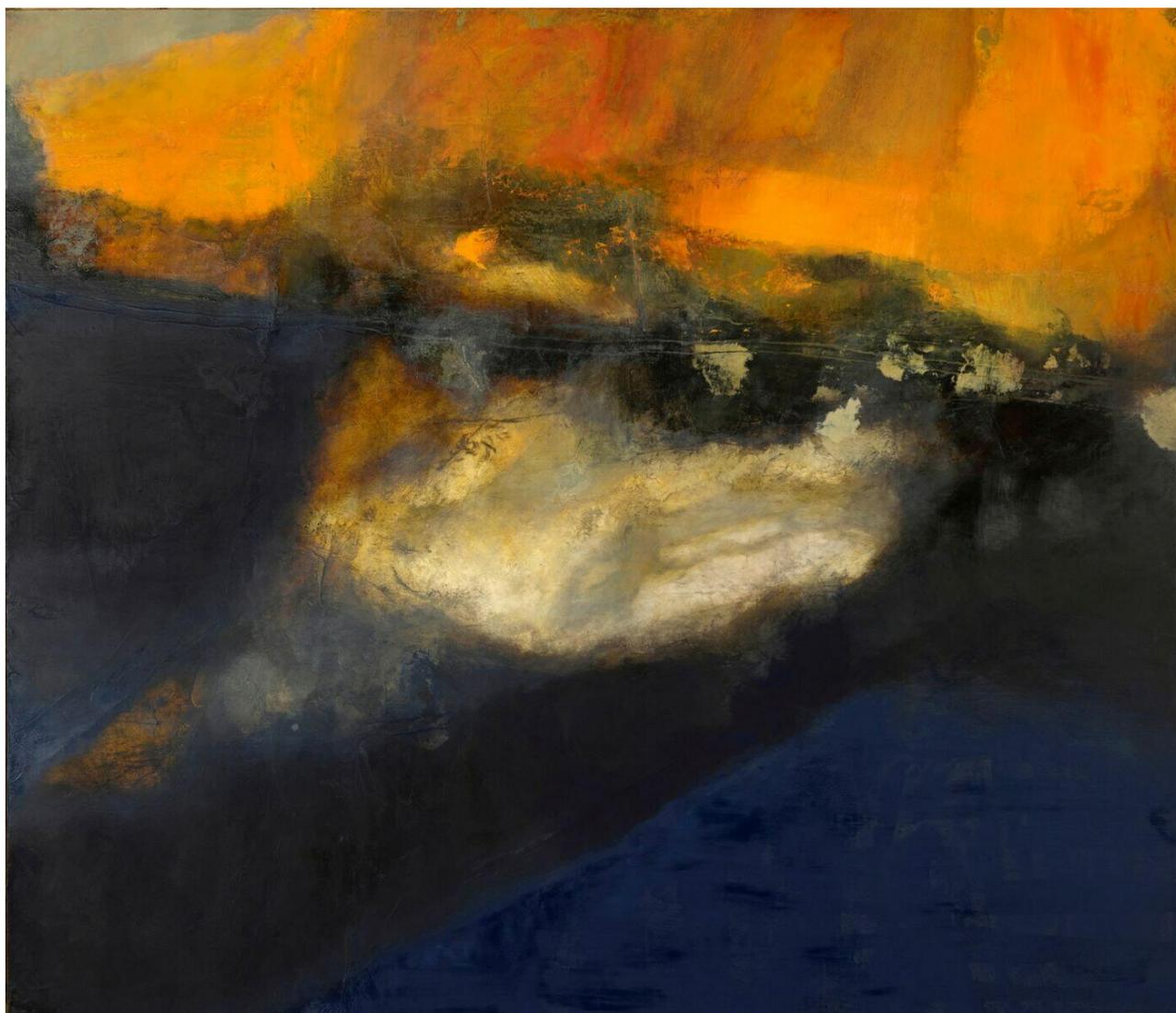
*Continued*

Dutton's definition of forgeries as 'misrepresentations of achievement' and my theory of 'metaphysical biases' both allude to the importance of history when it comes to assessing an artwork. Additionally, we can learn more about a historical period by analysing individual art objects. Forgeries, once detected, may have some positive effects in educating our approach to art, and they also undermine the institutional art world of prestigious critics and collectors, diminishing the economic value of celebrated art objects.



*One Mona Lisa, two Mona Lisa...*

Some forgeries become valuable, even when they are known to be forged, because they revolutionise the art world, make political statements, and change society's perception of art. It is important to remember that the formal properties of an art work may not be dismissed even if the non-formal or cognitive aspects stand in high regard in the art world. This is because the inquiry can only be triggered based on a genuine analysis of the physical objects. We distinguish forgeries from originals by paying attention to formal properties to conclude about non-physical information, which in turn informs the way we approach formal aspects of an artwork.



HUGHIE O'DONOGHUE, 'TAWNANASOOL (FIELD OF THE EYES)', 2001,  
OIL ON LINEN CANVAS

# An Interview With

# ROGER



# SCRUTON

SCRUTON ON THE STATE OF ART IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY SPHERE.

TIM OSWALD

**Would you concede that modernist buildings are expressive of the spirit of their era, which you merely happen not to like?**

I don't think this is the right way of looking at the matter. Some modern buildings are not modernist, but nevertheless express the spirit of the era, in that they create an environment that people are at home with – think of Poundbury, which is sneered at by the architectural establishment, but nevertheless much loved by its residents and visitors. To say it does not express the spirit of the age, when people living now enjoy it and value it, is just a piece of aestheticist snobbery. Anyway, all that stuff about the spirit of the age is the residue of a discredited Hegelian way of seeing history, and we should not be taken in by it. It is not modernism per se that I object to – I am an admirer of Aalto (up to a point) and Fry. It is the habit of imposing purely functional 'drawing-board' architecture on our towns, without any concern to fit in or to obey elementary rules of scale, materials and proportion. People are beginning to wake up to the disaster of the 'glass cube' style, which is not a style but an abuse, a way of chasing residents from the centre of the city and creating a cultural desert where only faceless businesses have a stake in what is built. The striking thing is that everybody agrees about this, except architects, who have a financial interest in mouthing all that nonsense about the spirit of the era.

## **Is contemporary art a fair reflection of the shallowness of our age or a discipline gone awry?**

Contemporary art is not a single thing. There is shallow, attention-seeking art, sure, and the art schools produce quite a lot of it. But there is a growing school of representational art that shows both genuine skill, and an attempt to explore the real spiritual meaning of our age, and what it is like to be living now. Lantian D's studies of people on the tube have had quite an effect on me, and caused me to look at London life in another way, in a spirit of sympathy and forgiveness. It is true that we need to rediscover the true discipline of painting and drawing – the discipline that enables an artist to show the reality shining through the appearance. And that is not taught in the art schools. But look at the other arts – poetry, the novel, theatre, music, opera – and you will see manifold attempts to produce works that are true to the human spirit, and which show that our age is not as shallow as those celebrity artists who pretend to speak for it. (Examples: Don Paterson and Ruth Padel in poetry, Ian McEwan and John Lanchester in novel writing, Jez Butterworth in theatre, James McMillan in music, Thomas Ades in opera, etc.)

## **Where do you think contemporary art is going wrong? Is it its internationally homogenous character, its lack of universally resonant meaning (its excessive subjectivity), its lack of expressive depth, or something else?**

All art goes wrong when it is infected by the 'me' virus. 'Look at me!' is the underlying formula of so much modern art, and was made canonical by Warhol and his immediate disciples. The real task of art is contained in the imperative 'Look at this!', and by means of that, 'Look at you!' Art should be a vehicle of self-understanding, not self-exhibition, and therefore involves a long apprenticeship in humility. (Think of Shakespeare: we don't know what he believed, whether he was an atheist, sceptic, Christian, even a Catholic recusant! We don't even know if he wrote those plays, or whether he knew how to spell his name. But he changed our knowledge of the world. Think of the Thousand and One Nights. Who wrote them? Why? Was he/she a Muslim, a Sufi, a cynic – well, what matters is the love of life, the sense that each lived moment matters, and matters to others and not to the self.)

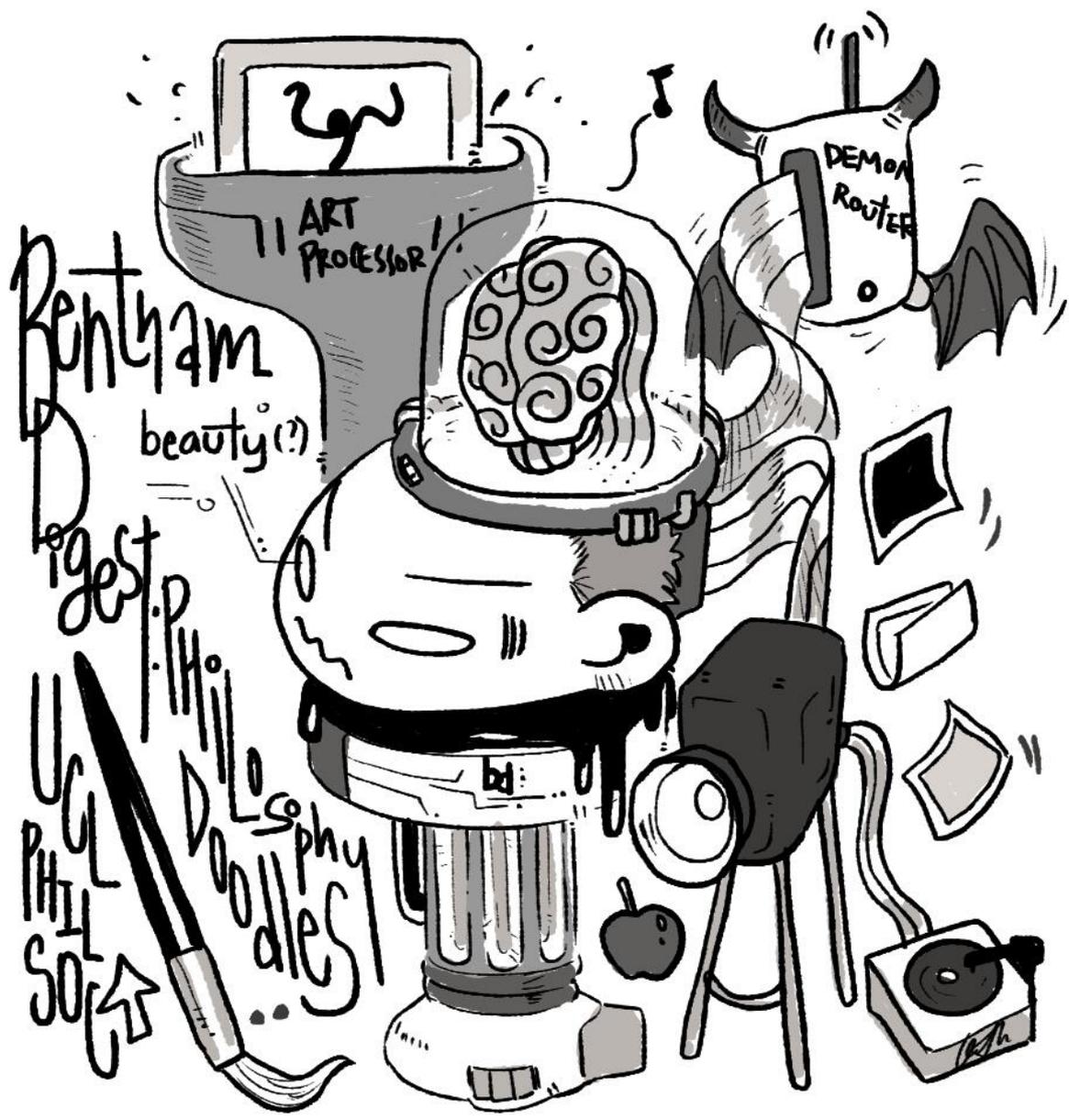
**20 years from now, what do you think art will be like?**

Celebrity art will be the same kind of crap that it is today. But there will be circles of enthusiasts around serious artists. I think the representational 'atelier' movement will grow, and there will be a return to traditional portrait painting. There will be a growth in video media, through YouTube and similar platforms, maybe introducing new kinds of drama, escaping from the sci-fi fantasy world that is taking over the cinema. Classical music will finally shake itself free of the atonal straight-jacket, and maybe will re-discover melody. But most people will be unaware of the efforts made by artists to instruct them since they will have their noses buried in social media, absorbing the dreadful stench of anonymous malice. What to do about this, I do not know. Maybe a great artist will appear who will liberate us from Twitter in the way that Dryden and Molière liberated us from puritanism by showing it to be inhuman.

**IN MEMORY OF ROGER SCRUTON, 1944 - 2020**  
**REST IN PEACE, SIR ROGER.**



**A PORTRAIT OF ROGER SCRUTON**  
**OIL ON CANVAS, 120 X 60 CM**  
**LANTIAN D. 2014**



ART PROFESSOR

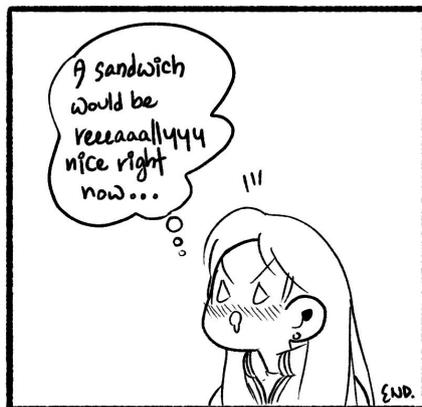
DEMON Router

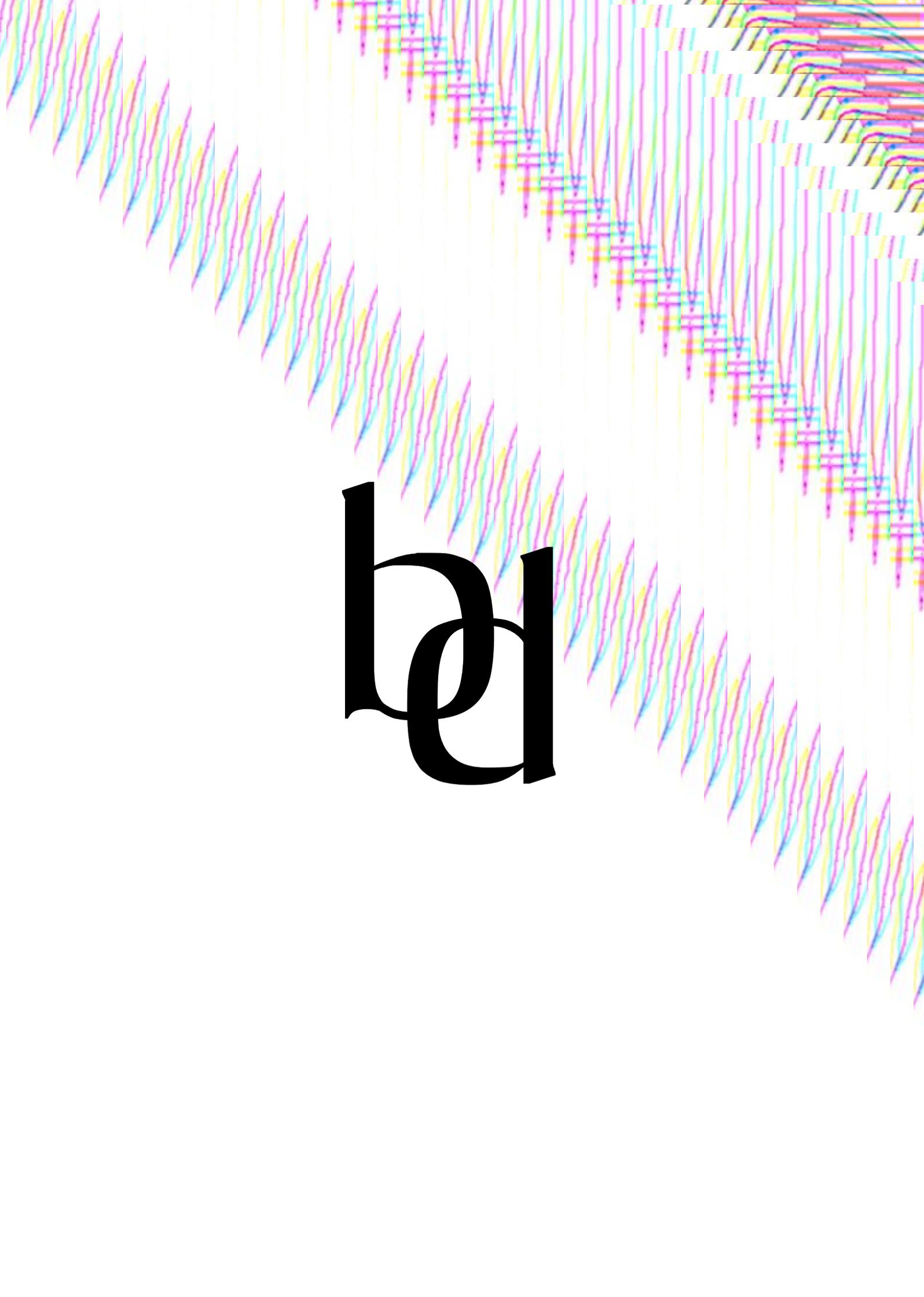
Rentyam  
beauty(?)

Digest  
U.C. PHIL SOL  
D.L.O. Solphidest  
D.L.O. Solphidest

DEMON Router  
Lamp  
Record Player

# "UNOWNED IMPRESSIONS"





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