THE CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

Miss Smith
The Contemporary Framework

• Traditional art thinking in Western countries from the 16th century through to the end of the 19th century was largely dominated by the influence of European universities which taught art as well as art theory.

• Traditionally art theory and the understanding of artworks and their significance can be roughly categorised as follows;
  – For an artwork to be significant in the artworld, it had to be one of the traditionally accepted artforms such as painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking.
  – An artist was expected to follow the accepted techniques of that artforms at that particular time.
  – Anything outside this category such as ceramics, tapestry, garment design and woodworking were seen as crafts, not art.
  – Art on the other hand, had no purpose other than to be aesthetically pleasing or to cultivate the human spirit in some way.
  – In this context the artist was seen as a creative genius who could inspire and elevate humanity.
In the artforms of painting, drawing, sculpture and printmaking, there was a clear distinction between what was called high art and low art.

High art consisted of painting, drawing, sculpture and printmaking which represented the pinnacle of artistic achievement in traditional art theory.

To be called high art the artwork had to have some sort of noble, emotional or academic purpose that would challenge the viewer at a higher emotional or intellectual level.

High art was often seen as the preserve of the rich and the academic elite.
The Collapse of the Distinction between Art and Craft and the Mixing of Techniques and Media

- In traditional art theory there was a clear distinction between artforms that were considered art and those that were merely crafts or decorative arts.

- That distinction has now been blurred.

- It is acceptable to mix materials and techniques such as creating a sculpture (traditionally art) from hand knitted textiles (traditionally craft).
The collapse of the distinction between art and craft and the mixing of techniques and media

- Australian Artist Louise Weaver (1966) is a good example of a contemporary artist producing works based on traditional craft techniques.

- Her exhibition Firestarter 2009 Weaver created work which consisted of crocheted woolen covers over exotic birds which had been previously preserved by a taxidermist.
Contemporary art is often a hybrid of traditional techniques such as a fusion of painting, sculpture and drawing with other disciplines such as graphic design, industrial design, architecture, electronics, literature and poetry.
THE COLLAPSE OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ART AND CRAFT AND THE MIXING OF TECHNIQUES AND MEDIA

- Consider the following questions:

  - Does the artwork involve what were once considered to be craft techniques or materials such as woodworking, tapestry, embroidery?

  - Does the artwork display a contemporary use of ‘mixed’ materials and techniques?

  - Does the mix of material and techniques include the use of traditional art techniques such as painting and drawing with craft techniques such as sewing or knitting?

  - Does the artwork display a contemporary use of mixed media such as oil paint, acrylic paint, pencil, texta, fabrics, canvas, paper and cardboard?
The Incorporation of the Moving Image Into Artworks

- One significant change in Contemporary Art has been the introduction of the moving image into artworks as distinct from the unchanging nature of traditional art objects such as paintings and drawings.

- In recent years the development of digital video cameras and editing programs has dramatically expanded the creative opportunities for artists.
THE INCORPORATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE INTO ARTWORKS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8spEbB3WfRE
Australian Artist Shaun Gladwell’s video *Storm Sequence*, Gladwell filmed himself in slow motion swirling around on his skateboard on a beachside promenade in front of a stormy sea.

The slow-motion effect gave the act of skateboarding an elegant ballet-like effect.
THE INCORPORATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE INTO ARTWORKS

• Artist’s videos or films often do not have a specific narrative or plot as seen in traditional television or film.

• Artist’s videos often rely on the use of continuous loop mechanisms and multi screen delivery which is quite different to the normal way of viewing films and videos at home or in the cinema.

• Multi screen delivery or projections add to the ‘immersive’ effect of the artwork.

• It is not uncommon to encounter video art online or screening in public spaces or specific outdoor installations. i.e. White Night & Gertrude Street Projection Festival.
THE INCORPORATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE INTO ARTWORKS

• Consider the following questions:

  – Does the artwork have moving images?

  – Are these images coming from a video or are they projected on a wall or are they coming from a computer screen?

  – Are their multiple screens or projections?

  – Are the moving images in real time or time based?
THE INCORPORATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE INTO ARTWORKS

• Consider the following questions:

  – Are the images moving in slow motion or have they been increased in speed?

  – Why has the artist chosen to incorporate moving images into the work?

  – What part does sound play in the moving image?
THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES

• Traditional photography has been challenged as a preferred artform because digital manipulation and printing is so much easier than in traditional photography.

• Images can be easily captured and recorded with digital cameras and mobile phones.

• With digital image manipulation, virtually every aspect of an image can be substantially and easily altered and then printed.
THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES

• One of the main advantages of digital manipulation of images is that it can create a convincing reality to otherwise imaginary images.

• This digital print of Rrap’s is so simple yet so real it has an unsettling effect.

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES

- Consider the following questions:

  – Does the artwork evidence the use of digital technologies?

  – Describe how digital technology has been used by the artist in the capture of imagery, the manipulation and editing of imagery and the printing or screening of that imagery?
INSTALLATION AS AN ARTFORM

• Installations often appear outside the normal gallery space such as in a public
INSTALLATION AS AN ARTFORM

• An installation incorporates a range of 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional objects, materials, film, light and sound to influence the way a viewer experiences or perceives a particular space.

• Installation is considered 1 artwork.

• Installation involves guiding the viewer’s attention away from a singular object onto a complex arrangement which transforms the gallery space or whatever space the installation is occupying.
About The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979-2005

Some links on this page may open in new browser window.

- The Gates will be unfurled in Central Park, New York City on February 12, 2005, weather permitting, and will remain through February 27, 2005.

- Christo and Jeanne-Claude developed the concept for The Gates in 1979. On January 22, 2003, the City granted permission to the artists to realize their vision.

- 7,500 gates, 16 feet high (4.87 m) with a width varying from 5 feet 6 inches to 18 feet (1.68 m to 5.48 m) will line 23 miles (36.8 km) of footpaths in the park.

- Free-hanging, saffron-colored fabric panels will be suspended from the top of each gate and hang down to 7 feet (2.13 m) above the ground.

- The Gates will be stationed approximately 12 feet (3.65 m) apart, except when low branches extend above the walkways.

- The Gates will create a visual golden river appearing and disappearing through the bare branches of the trees, highlighting the shapes of the footpaths.

- The luminous moving fabric will underline the organic and serpentine design of the walkways, while the rectangular poles will be a reminder of the grid pattern of the City blocks around the park.

- The project will provide employment for hundreds of New York City residents, hired to assemble, install, maintain and remove the installation.

- After The Gates is removed, most of the materials will be recycled.

- As always, Central Park will be open to the public, free of charge, during The Gates.

- The Gates is financed entirely by the artists, who do not accept sponsorships. The public will bear no expense of any kind.

For more information about The Gates please visit www.christojeanneclaude.net
INSTALLATION AS AN ARTFORM

INSTALLATION AS AN ARTFORM

- Consider the following questions:

  - Is the artwork an installation of objects?

  - Where is the installation set up? Is it in a gallery, a public building or in the open air?

  - Does the installation have video or sound elements?

  - Does the site of the installation have any particular significance to the meanings and messages of the work?

  - Is the installation arranged or set up in the space to symbolise another space?
Consider the following questions:

– What is the subject matter or theme of the things contained in the installation such as photos and found objects and videos?

– If there is sound is it music, voice or sounds from nature?

– Is there an ordered collection of things or a random/abstract collection of objects?

– What level of interaction with viewers is there in the installation, other than the viewer simply observing and listening?
THE SUPREMACY OF IDEAS OVER FORM

• Conceptual art is art which values ideas over form.

• Conceptual art offers an experience beyond the normal experience of viewing an art object.

• In many artworks which focus heavily on ideas rather than form, there is often a degree of interaction between the artwork and the viewer.

• This concept is called the dematerialisation of the art object – what this means is that art can now be virtually in any form that the artist chooses.
Installation art often has a highly conceptual basis in that the objects within the installation have no easily observed link with the intended meanings of the artist.

The viewer is essentially forced to read the artist’s statement to have any chance of understanding what the artist’s possible meanings and messages might be.
Australian artists Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, represented Australia at the Venice Biennale 2009, exhibited *Life Span*.

This artwork comprised 195,774 VHS video cassettes arranged into a single from (480 x 318 x 524 cm).

The artists’ intention was to create a visual monument to the average life span of a person’s life; 66.1 years represented by the combined running time of all the videos.

However, unless a viewer had read the catalogue explaining the work, this meaning would have escaped most viewers.
Another type of Conceptual Art that challenges traditional art theories is Ephemeral Art.

_Ephemeral Art_ is usually described as art which is intended to disappear or decay in a short space of time.

The notion of ephemerality counters the traditional notion that artworks were works of genius and had to be preserved for future generations by galleries and art collectors.
Andy Goldsworthy (1956) is a British artist who creates temporary sculptures in the landscape as well as permanent sculptures.

Goldsworthy works almost entirely in outdoor settings, using only materials which he finds in his location such as stones, leaves, twigs, water and ice.
For example, he will create an ice sculpture from ice from a frozen stream.

The sculpture will be positioned so that the rays of the sun will eventually hit the ice and melt the sculpture.

Goldsworthy’s intention behind this is to show the cycle of life and death in the natural world.

Nothing is permanent.
Another type of Ephemeral Art is performance art.

Performance art often deals with intense emotional issues or cultural issues such as race, class and feminism.

A critical part of the content of performance art has been its ephemerality.

Once performed ‘the artwork’ is gone.

Even if the performance is repeated it will never be the same as the first performance.
The Supremacy of Ideas Over Form

- Performance art challenges the boundary between theatre art and visual art.

- It also challenges the concept of art being a material product that can be bought and sold.

- This is particularly the case where the performance is not filmed or photographed in some way.
For example in 2008, Australian Artist Stuart Ringholt (1971) conducted ‘Anger Management’ workshops at the Art Gallery of New South Wales as part of the Biennale of Sydney.

Ringholt conducted these workshops in which participants were invited to “five minuets of anger followed by five minuets of love”.

When Ringholt was asked by a journalist how anger could be art?, Ringholt stated:

“It’s not about the traditional product, the sculpture on the plinth, it’s about a series of relationships, and that process becomes the artwork. It’s about discovering limits: how loud can you scream? How long can you do it for? Can you do it?”
In 2002, Mike Parr (1945) staged a performance titled *Malevich (A Political Arm)* for as long as possible at Artspace in Sydney.

- The performance lasted 30 hours.
- Parr nailed his arm to the wall and stayed there with tape over his eyes.
- He was deprived of food and was forced to urinate and defecate in his pants.
- The performance was broadcast over the internet and in the first day received more than 250,000 hits.
- The performance was intended by Parr to draw attention to the racist policies behind Australia's detention centres and the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.
To a certain extent, installation art is also ephemeral.

Because installations consist of multiple objects placed in a certain way by the artist or curator, every time the installation is moved and reinstalled somewhere else, the arrangement of objects will be different and therefore a ‘different’ work to the earlier installation.

This is particularly the case where artists use organic objects, for example food and this food decomposes over a short period of time.

When a painting or a sculpture or a drawing is moved to a different context it retains its physical composition.
The Supremacy of Ideas Over Form

- It should be noted that not everyone in the artworld, including artists agree with Contemporary Art Ideas.

- Many practicing artists are still influenced by the notion that art must be original and crafted by the artist.

- Many viewers still subscribe to the traditional theories about art and what it should look like.

- This is why art influenced and produced under Contemporary Art ideas often causes controversy in the art world.
THE SUPREMACY OF IDES OVER FORM

– Consider the following questions:

• What the artwork was created did it exist in a solid physical form that could be touched or looked at?

• When the artwork was created did it exist as an intangible ‘experience’ or ‘happening’ or ‘fleeting’ performance?

• Has the artist documented the experience or happening into a tangible physical art object/form by photographing or filming the artwork?
THE SUPREMACY OF IDES OVER FORM

– Consider the following questions:

• If the artwork did have a solid physical form when it was created, does that physical form still exist or has it disappeared because the artist knew that it would decay or disappear shortly after its production?

• Has the artist documented the physical object before it decayed or disappeared?

• If the artwork is an installation are there components of the installation which need replaying from time to time such as food products?
One of the essential principles of traditional art theory was that when an artist created an artwork it had to be an original creation of the artist and not based on copying or mimicking someone else’s work.

It was acceptable to be influenced or affected by other artworks but certainly not to copy!

The concept of originality was closely tied with the notion of the artist as a genius.

The artist had to create something new and original and this was the value placed on art by traditional art theory.
Contemporary Art ideas challenge the view of originality.

Postmodernism rejected the Modernist argument that the artist was the genius and that originality in artwork is a mark of that genius.

Postmodernist artistic methods include repetition, appropriation, imitation, plagiarism and violation of another artist’s ‘original’ artworks in order to refute the concept of originality.
Appropriation and the Attack on Originality

- Appropriation:
  - Occurs when an artist copies all or part of another artist’s work and recreates the image, forms or sounds in their own artworks.
  - The artworld recognized appropriation as a specific strategy whereby artists could highlight or parody out-dated values about such things as gender values, expectations of female beauty and racism.
APPROPRIATION AND THE ATTACK ON ORIGINALITY

– Appropriation:
  • Is also used as a specific strategy to highlight that in an age of mechanical reproduction, the copied artwork had lost its value as an original.

  • American Artist Sherrie Levine (1947) exhibited exact copies of works by Jean Miro, Walker Evens and Edgar Degas to parody the concept of originality and the genius of the (male) artist.
APPROPRIATION AND THE ATTACK ON ORIGINALITY

Original Image from Australian History Textbook

Gordon Bennett, *Possession Island* 1991, Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 162 x 260 cm

APPROPRIATION AND THE ATTACK ON ORIGINALITY

– Consider the following questions:

• Has the artist appropriated imagery and ideas from others?

• Has the appropriation been made from images from the internet?

• Is the appropriation obvious to the viewer?

• Why has the artist appropriated?
MODES OF PRODUCTION AND THE ABSENCE OF THE ARTIST’S HAND

• Until the 20th century, if an artwork was to be considered as authentic and original, the ‘hand of the artist’ had to be present in the work.

• This meant that the artist had to create the idea and then physically create the artwork.

• Making the hand of the artist irrelevant to the authenticity of an artwork is one significant element in Contemporary Art and one that makes it so different for the art of all earlier centuries.
MODES OF PRODUCTION AND THE ABSENCE OF THE ARTIST’S HAND

• Australian artist and art writer Roy Ananda states that the contemporary artist is often like a ‘creative director’ rather then a maker of artworks.

• Artists frequently delegate production tasks to assistants or ‘outsource’ the physical production of the work altogether.
“In Australia, some artists loath to admit they have a studio assistant. This disinclination may be due to the morality of taking credit for someone else’s work, or a fear that audiences will lose respect for artists if they discover the work is not ‘all theirs’. But generally speaking, Roland Barthes’ 1967 hypothesis of “the death of the author” which argues that the impression the work makes on the viewer carries more meaning than the individuality of the author or artist, is now broadly accepted in Australia.”
Modes of Production and the Absence of the Artist’s Hand

– Consider the following questions:

• Has the artist delegated or outsourced aspects of the artwork’s production?

• Has credit for the contribution of these people been acknowledged by the artist?

• Is the artist more of a “creative director” than a producer of art?
NEW WAYS OF SEEING AND EXPERIENCING ARTWORKS

• One significant concept under contemporary art ideas is the notion that artworks can now be viewed in a range of ways such as on the floor, on screens, on the external walls of buildings, in alleyways, in open spaces and on the internet.

• A gallery space is not the only way for the public to view artworks.

• Contemporary art ideas challenge the way a viewer has traditionally looked at art and offer new ways of seeing and experiencing art.
NEW WAYS OF SEEING AND EXPERIENCING ARTWORKS

• Viewers now experience the moving image as an artwork, often as part of massive projections which attempt to overwhelm the viewer.

• Installation artists are often seeking to create what is called an immersive environment where the viewer wanders through and/or is surrounded by objects, imagery and sound and sometimes smells.
NEW WAYS OF SEEING AND EXPERIENCING ARTWORKS

• In Spanish artist Cildo Meireles’s *Volatile* (1980-94), viewers enter a room of grey ash with a candle at the far end, while the air is permeated with the smell of gas.
Describing this work, critic Paulo Herkenhoff wrote that “when you come into contact with danger, your sense became more alert: you not only see but feel with greater intensity”.

In traditional art the viewer would look ‘straight on’ at an artwork and the only immediate sense stimulated was the visual.
NEW WAYS OF SEEING AND EXPERIENCING ARTWORKS

– Consider the following questions:

• Does the artwork require the viewer to experience the artwork other than just ‘looking’ at an object on a wall or on a pedestal in a well lit gallery?

• If the artwork is sited outside a gallery space what effect does this have on the viewer?

• Why has the artist decided to site the work outside a gallery space?
Contemporary art ideas reject the traditional view that the artist is the originator of all meaning in the artwork.

The artist is no longer the genius or master who tells the viewer what the artwork is about.

Under contemporary art ideas it is acknowledged that artworks should have multiple or open ended meanings and messages.

The artist and the viewer are in a sense ‘equal partners’ in the construction of meaning.

Therefore, your interpretation of a contemporary artwork does not have to be limited by what the artist has said about the work.
MEANING AND MESSAGES UNDER THE CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

• The viewer’s interpretation of artworks can be examined from 3 perspectives:

  – Firstly:
    • The viewer has to work harder to construct their own opinion.
    • Unlike traditional artworks, meanings and messages are a lot harder to formulate.
    • Majority of contemporary artists have an idea or issue which they then attach to an object.
    • Unless the viewer has read the artist statement, the viewer must construct their own interpretation if they are to gain anything from the engagement with the artwork.
The viewer’s interpretation of artworks can be examined from 3 perspectives:

Firstly:

- Contemporary artists often provide very general statements about their intension which provides minimal guidance for the viewers.

- Contemporary art ideas are not interested in concepts of beauty or aesthetics or even formal technical skills, therefore the question for the viewer is whether it is interesting or causes the viewer to think or causes the viewer to question some aspect of their own life.

- One of the most common complaints from viewing contemporary artworks is, “if you have to read a description of the work to understand it – what is the point of having the artwork?
MEANING AND MESSAGES UNDER THE CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

• The viewer’s interpretation of artworks can be examined from 3 perspectives:

  – Secondly:
    • In interactive works, viewers are actually involved in the ‘production’ of the artwork and therefore contribute significantly to its meaning and messages.
    • The act of participation or interaction (beyond just looking) has increased the meaning in the work for the viewer.
    • For example, in the installation by Santiago Sierra in the abandoned Jewish Synagogue, one participating viewer (who was gassed for 5 mins) stated: “I was afraid but I felt a sense of threat. It made me think how we must guard against extremist political groups who threaten the lives of individuals.”
MEANING AND MESSAGES UNDER THE CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

- The viewer’s interpretation of artworks can be examined from 3 perspectives:
  - Thirdly:
    - Contemporary Art ideas acknowledge the meaning in artworks will vary significantly for different viewers based on cultural differences such as gender, class and historical context.
    - Meaning is never fixed.
    - The meanings as messages of an artwork can be challenged or reinterpreted by a contemporary way of looking at artworks.
    - For example: Daniel Boyd looks at Phillips Fox’s painting *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770*. (Look at the PowerPoint on the Cultural Framework for more information in this!)
MEANING AND MESSAGES UNDER THE CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK

– Consider the following questions:

• What has the artist said about the meanings and messages in the artwork?

• Do you think an ordinary viewer would have been able to understand the meaning by simply looking at or experiencing the artwork without viewing the artist’s statement?

• Is the artist leaving ‘open ended’ meanings and messages in the artwork?

• Is the artist ‘telling’ the viewer what their interpretation of the artwork should be?
Consider the following questions:

- If the artwork has an interactive or participatory component how does this increase the capacity of the viewer to make their own interpretation of the artwork?

- Is the interactive component of the artwork frightening, awkward, amusing, peaceful or enlightening?

- In what ways could different interpretations of the artwork be obtained by a contemporary viewer who has different perceptions of gender roles, class, religion and politics that the artist?