

Contemporary confuses me;

-Existing or happening now, therefor seeming modern.

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-belonging to the same period, or to a stated period in the past.

(Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

I've never understood the use of the terms modern or contemporary in trying to define an artistic period. In an art historical context, contemporary art is the follow up of modern art. But if we look at it from a linguistic standpoint, modern and contemporary are almost synonyms. If we describe something (not art) as modern, we are referring to its use of recent ideas and methods. Contemporary (as in something made in the now) is not necessarily modern, but modern is always contemporary, otherwise it wouldn't be making use of the latest ideas. And also, as contemporary could also be used in reference to periods in the past, it is an illogical choice to use it to mark the artistic period after modern art. Both modern and contemporary don't refer to any substance found in its periods. They both refer to a timeframe, that is the present or latest, but that's everchanging. Something that was modern 50 years ago isn't modern in this day and age. From a linguistic standpoint, the term post-modern shouldn't exist. In multiple occasion I have found its double meaning (that of modern) to be an initiator of misinterpretations. Contemporary doesn't have that problem yet as it defies the period we are in now. That's why I am mainly talking about modern, because we are already supposed to be past the modern era thus it is excellent example where the future problems of contemporary could already be showing themselves. I could definitely see these problems applying to both modern and contemporary. Will there one day be a post-contemporary? Isn't it a bit self-centric to name things with synonyms for the now, as if our time will always be the most important time there has been. Wouldn't it be a better idea to pre-emptively choose a different term? Take for example Renaissance, it is a clear linguistic term that refers to one of the main inspirations behind the discourse. There is no discussion possible here about the term in itself. What defies the modern era and what differentiate it from the contemporary era? Or are we going to keep on searching for even more synonyms to define the now?

But then again what are we actually trying to define with contemporary? A period or a discourse? Modern art is viewed as a period, containing different discourses like expressionism and cubism, defied by the leading roles of experimental niches. The 'modern' isn't a neutral chronological category and this doesn't benefit the linguistical discussion of the use of modern either. I wouldn't say that all art made in the modern era is modern art. As the contemporary is its successor it should self-evidently also be a period containing different discourses with some kind of overall legitimate theory behind it. Therefor I ask is it possible to not make contemporary art in the now? Yes, it is definitely possible to defy the principles of this era in the art one makes and then again no, because all that is made now, is made by my contemporaries and thus contemporary. My contemporaries are maybe not the same as yours. I'm born in 2001. To me, contemporary cannot be made before 2001 because I was not here, born on this earth yet. I haven't existed with its time of creation. I cannot say I have shared its time of emergence and thus it is not a contemporary of mine. Once again this feels like a linguistical problem at its core and an inefficient discussion to have if the term contemporary is not quickly replaced by something else.

Or if we look at it from another standpoint, do we just look at the terms as plain reflections of

historical era's? But when does the modern era end then? There are multiple arguments for multiple events. The end of WW2? The end of the Cold War? Either way most people believe the modern era ended with the post-world-war or post-cold-war period. (the term post-war is too broad linguistically and could be interpreted differently depending on cultural and geographical contexts). Hence does that mean that the contemporary we are talking about could be interchanged with post-world/cold-war? But is it possible to define a period without it having an end? Harari would happily argue that the post-world/cold war era has already ended because it is rather the free market that is the leading agent in progression since the start of the 21st century and not politics anymore. They are struggling to catch up with each invention and regulating their purposes, instead of saying they want something and then looking for an invention or something to make it happen. (2018) As a person of the gen Z generation, I identify our society more with this than with the post-world/cold-war. That leaves us with two options, extend the modern era until the 2000's or create a chronological category in between. But is this rapid succession of periods not just because our recollection of events fades away over time? What seems relevant now may become obsolete in the future. Maybe in 500 years the modern era will be thought to extend until the 23rd century.

How do these historical periods translate into art? Philosophical tendencies of the time are expressed through the arts but are art and philosophy secondary to history? Or vice versa? Or do they have their own timeline? If we accept art's autonomy then we should not let history be reflected in its (art history) chronological categories. But what a coincidence it is that they always band together. Why did modern art end then? Fredric Jameson argues that many of the contemporary postmodern artists are not so different from the modern artists during its high tide. (1997) Art for art's sake is more present than ever in contemporary art. Yes, we have grown accustomed to the more experimental nature of artistic practices but with the upcoming revelations in AI and digital media we could soon be contending with yet another image making machine, or the further dematerialization of artistic processes, all part of the automatization that started with modernity. Experimental, meta, artistic practices are very much in fashion right now. We mustn't forget that to the general public these practices are still incomprehensible without any prior theoretical knowledge. It could well be just a continuation of modern principles like the idea of mass image culture and art losing its dominance over the image to an even more efficient mechanism than mass media, AI. Maybe these processes have just begun? There is no way of knowing yet.

Some say that the value of contemporary art is dependent on the art market. This should be something different to all other periods as a defining factor of the contemporary. And that the contemporary art canon is now truly based on the art people want. This isn't true. A museum that chooses his art by how well it sells, will not stand in acclaim (in the art world). They'll definitely have a lot of visitors and social media attention from influencers but not from critics and real art enthusiasts. The art that is most valued is the art that is written about and how does one end up writing about your work, you exhibit in a respected museum, gallery or artist run space. But then you'll have to be chosen by academics, critics or curators who do not favor commercial art. Academics and critics want to be challenged, while the mass of people wants to be pleased. This also doesn't differ from the modern era, the artists that make up the canon come from niche discourses that had to fight for a place in the art world. The impressionists were not allowed to exhibit in the Les Salons, which was the most influential art institute and thus mostly determined the art market. Groy's mentions that the globalization and mediatization of the art market has made it incapable of capturing what is contemporary and present because it doesn't access art's historical memory. (2008) Barring that there are gradations to how commercial an artist is, if the contemporary is fully based on the biggest, best-selling artist, why is someone like Banksy not the most defining artist of our

contemporary art period. There are a lot of insanely famous artists nowadays that rarely get mentioned in any art theory classes.

Modernism hasn't brought the contemporary equal artistic rights, rather only equal aesthetic rights. We are free to exploit every visual language possible without getting any weird looks from the artistic world. With tendencies and streams of thought it is different. Good art is often seen as a meditation of the period or movement that is in fashion of the time, or as a critique of it. Art is viewed through a historical perspective by critics and alike, to judge whether or not it adds something to the table. We are always looking for the next revolutionary. The one to capture the Zeitgeist. This is how you get into these respected spaces. This is when they will write about you and thus end up in the art historical canon. Sadly, there is no such thing as a global art history and when we are talking about art history, we are talking about the Western art history. If we name something art, then we are discriminating all different creative practices. Different cultures have their own alternatives and perceptions to art. Their artistic practices are not based on the Western art historical discourse. Concepts such as the white cube or curatorial practices are of no value to them. But now they are supposed to be critiqued on them. How can they ever compete with a practice that fits in to the confines of Western art? By appraising the coming of equal aesthetic rights, we are homogenizing all notions of art into that of Western art. I do not mean that equal aesthetic rights are in any way a bad thing. Rather that we are only halfway there. Why would one want to complete a journey they don't care about, even though they are allowed to join? And then criticize them because some parts of their route overlapped with the Western one but they didn't wind up in the same place as you or didn't pass all the same checkpoints. One of the problems at play is also that art has become a term to strive after without taking in consideration the historical discourse it carries. I do not think art can ever fully attain a global status. Art depends on art history which is too dependent and overly dominated by its Western ancestry. We must broaden our views to incorporate art that may not be valuable to the Western art discourse. But there is no possible way for art history to become global because back then there were no globalized societies. Our world is global in the sense of connectiveness but global art is about accepting all forms of art which is in itself a completely different concept. It isn't possible to globalize art history because we can't unify all alternatives of art and their respective histories into one and we also definitely shouldn't. Rather they should coexist and contain the beautiful diversity our world has to offer. Western art must become only one of the many notions of what art could be rather than being the defining definition of art. The contemporary has broadened the playing field of art in terms of mediums but those pushing the contemporary agenda have a distinct preference of subjects that may not be as interesting to those who apply an unaccustomed alternative of art.

The problem for me is, frankly, I really don't care about the Zeitgeist. Although I am compliant and aware of the fact that my work follows certain notions of the Western art discourse. Our priorities are not the same. Ignoring the context I am presenting in, would be very naïve. But that does not mean I am trying to achieve the same goals.

I value art history not because of its succession of styles and tendencies but because I value everything that stands the test of time. To view what keeps on impacting us and didn't just go out of fashion. With contemporary art I can never say for sure. It's only educated guesswork. Don't get me wrong, I find it exiting to try and predict these things. But I know not to take it too seriously. This in combination with art trying to reflect our fast-paced capitalist consumer society often makes me question the holiness some people smother over "the contemporary" as a notion.

The contemporary as a theory could well be the sanctuary of repressed experimentation, but we should not try to predict the future or project the interests of a few onto the whole art world. Maybe we should first of all be certain that we have passed on beyond modernity before moving on to other things. If we pre-define a period and keep on following the trend in which we value artworks by how they reflect the period they are made in, then we are creating a confirmation bias for critics to be stuck in and where artists are no longer the revolutionizers but the ones writing the theories are. Artists would make work to fit in to this box of repressed experimentation. This could lead to a set of unwritten rules followed by the majority of artists. To be completely fair, art will always be a place of rebelliousness but for those with less of a rebellious spirit, there will be a set of confines, that confirm these pre-written theories, wherein their work, which still could be good or even great art, will be produced. If it's experimentation we value this would not be beneficial to the educated artist. And thus, confirming the fact that since modernity art has never reached the level of her own theory. Not because the art isn't great but because the theory pre-exists to the artworks.

Let us resolve the linguistical problems around contemporary and modern. Let the contemporary be just a term to define everything made in the present day and let us look for another one to define a legitimate theory. But don't define it now, define it when the present has already become the past and let art loose so it can find its own way. I understand that we want a replacement for modern. Even though we can't be too sure that we have passed on from it yet, we also can't be too sure we are still in it. Let us change modern to a term that refers to some substance of this period. If experimentation and a break with the past are overall defining tendencies of the time, wouldn't 'anti-traditional', anti-trad in short, not be a better term? Another problem is that we don't acknowledge the fact enough that art history is for some part based on the subjective interest of those with influence and that good art isn't the same for everyone, definitely those who don't follow the art discourse of the West. My interests and priorities in making and critiquing art may differ from yours.

Art first, theory later.

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