



The role of the art object in contemporary art

Abigail Diamond

Nottingham Trent University, England

<AbigailDiamond@aol.com>

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It has been argued by Andrew Harrison that knowledge in art and design needs to be communicated by demonstration rather than via precepts. If we follow this line, it leads us to consider the outcomes of art practice as needing to be viewed as 'objects of knowledge in their own right'.

However, active engagement in research in the field has led me to change my perspective on the role of the art object, within contemporary art at least. This paper outlines the reasoning behind this shift. The idea that the conveying of knowledge in art and design needs to be communicated via demonstration rather than via precepts was initially persuasive. This has been reconsidered since recognising that referral to other artists work, both within and outside art education, usually takes the form of studying reproductions and not first hand experiences of art objects themselves. The direct experience of the art object in fine art is considered in relation to Andrew Benjamin's book *Object Painting*. Benjamin sets out to offer his understanding of the contemporary art object and yet begins the book by stating that 'today the question of the art object seems a distant concern'.

The paper draws upon interviews conducted with the following: Julian Stallabrass; an art historian, critic and the author of 'High Art Lite'; Morgan Falconer, an arts journalist; Patricia Bickers the editor of *Art Monthly*; the curator Neal Brown; and a number of contemporary artists including Peter Halley, Aleksandra Mir and Beatriz Milhazes. The art object is seen as something intimately entwined in contemporary fine art as a social belief system and activity, rather than an entity unto itself. This is argued in relation to Jonathan Vickery's position that art may appear 'to the uninitiated as arbitrary and self indulgent', if 'detached from any system of values-embedded constraints'. A consideration of value constraints we impose upon art practice, in both the contemporary art world, art education and particularly in fine art research, will also be undertaken.

The paper will argue that the relation of theory to practice in fine art research needs to be considered in light of Danto's theory of art, and in relation to Kosuth's view that 'the means of expression in art is not unlike language'. The role of art discourse is explored and subject to the critiques offered by the linguist Roy Harris.

The focus of the paper is thus a consideration of the role of the art object in the contemporary art world, and the implications of this for the role of the art object in art education and research. Consideration of the roles of the artefact and discourse in contemporary art is intended to contribute to the exploration of what differentiates artefact-based transactions from linguistic ones.