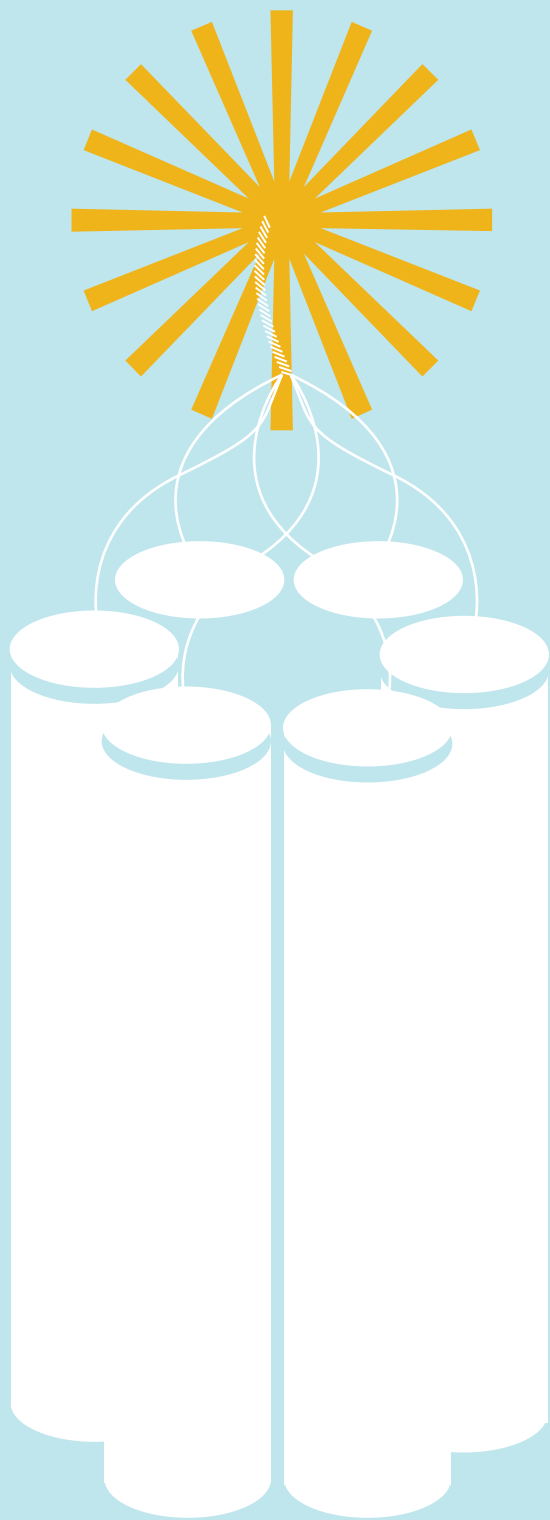


**ART THAT  
MAKES US  
ANGRY 1/2**



**APRIL 2014**



VOLUME 1 · THEME 4 · APRIL 2014

# ART THAT MAKES US ANGRY

## Production

Editor in Chief /  
Subscriptions & Development /  
Marketing & Communications /  
Design /

## Contributors

ROB ROCK  
KATHERINE GUINNESS  
P. GOMEZ & DANIEL CRUDE

## On the Cover

DAVID ČERNÝ  
*Gesture*  
2013

Czech sculptor and provocateur David Černý is well-known for his anti-communist stance. Days before the 2013 parliamentary elections in Prague, the artist placed an exaggerated middle finger on a pontoon in the Vltava river facing Prague Castle, the residence of the president. Reactions were mixed at best, with some demanding that the piece be blown up. Černý's work has incited controversy a number of times, and occasionally on an international scale. His first major dissension was in 1991, when he unveiled a Soviet tank painted bubblegum pink as a war memorial in central Prague.

QUESTION, COMMENT OR JUST A REALLY GOOD KNOCK-KNOCK JOKE? WE DON'T DISCRIMINATE!

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CONTENTS

# PROLOGUE

## UNDER THE SAME UMBRELLA

If we all got angry together something might be done.

*J.R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the King*

With our new theme we suggest that more than misery likes a little company. The essays that follow, each addressing ‘art that makes us angry,’ make space for empathetic discourse. Dialogue fueled by anger contradicts some of our age-old idioms, but whoever told us cool heads prevail was not around to attend the wake of Duchamp. Though we may want to make the distinction between an avant-garde urinal and a prosthetic penis prop, the trajectories parallel. The gaps between effectively provocative art and art that makes us angry are getting smaller. We thus offer this issue with an optimistic sentiment: that anger can be used as a catalyst for a productive conversation about why we react to art the way we do. This month, our contributors have edited and distilled their passion to write texts that are thoughtfully critical. They displace anger from the here and now, and subsequently foreground its significance to broader art contexts.

In her essay “Does Heath Franco Think I’m a Dickhead?” Katherine Guinness considers her reaction to the Heath Franco installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (and source of the earlier prosthetic penis prop

reference). Guinness moves past her initial hostility towards the work in an attempt to frame her experience. She asks of the museum, “is the intent to consume art, ‘get it,’ and leave?” Full of questions with few answers, Guinness’ essay is a humble acknowledgment of the potential use value in art that makes us angry. Hence the supplementary title of the essay: “How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Art That Makes Me Angry.”

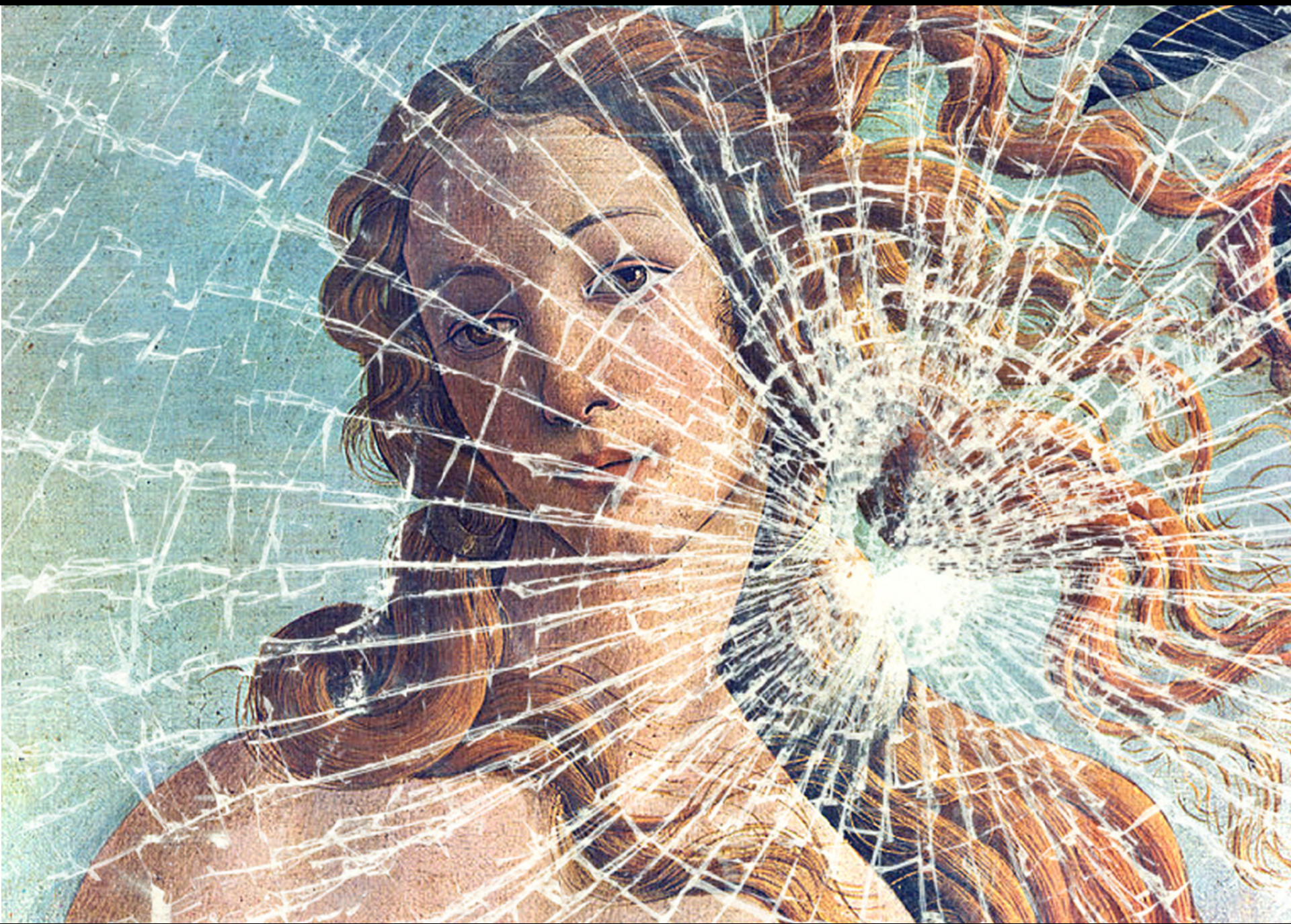
Rob Rock does not enter the museum “IRL,” instead navigating the museum virtually with AT&T. Try not be thrown off by the thought of an essay that philosophically interrogates a telecommunications company—Rock uses an AT&T television commercial as a backdrop for insightful commentary on the state of aesthetic standards and taste. The essay, titled “The Intellectual Antecedents of the AT&T Art Museum,” is not engaged to a bias. Rock is careful in his use of the ‘I’ but, like his co-contributors, makes room for the ‘we.’ On his cue, we are able to follow along with the commercial while reading; the essay offers a shared experience. Like we said, it is not only misery that loves company (pun intended).

Finally, the text most applicable to the idea of cultivating an empathetic discourse is P. Gomez and Daniel Crude's "Septic Haptic: A Tactile Quest through the Flimsier, Sinister Side of Art or Eat, Pray, Love." The text is a transcript of a conversation that makes a case for doing what you're good at, through topics that range from haptic poetry to Kurt Cobain. Gomez and Crude are, in the words of the former, "fighting for the real." The conversation is reflective of the present moment in the art world, particularly in its demonstration of the fact that no one knows what 'the art world' really means.

Looking backwards, but only for a moment: Aristotle wrote that the purpose of art is a catharsis, or a purging of emotions. This was in his Poetics, dated c. 335 BC. If we take up Aristotle (in a gesture towards bad history), the artists, and mobile phone providers, featured in the following essays may be getting something right. The question then becomes how to position a corporate commercial next to an artwork under the same umbrella. Each of the authors speak to this bleeding of high and low within contemporary art. Perhaps this is the root of art that makes us angry—a disruption of a historical precedent. If you disagree with us after reading this month's selections, we encourage a strongly worded letter.

Madly yours,

*The KAPSULA Team  
(Caoimhe, Yoli, Lindsay & Zach)*

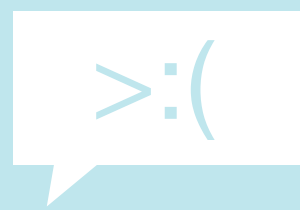


# ROB ROCK

## THE INTELLECTUAL ANTECEDENTS OF THE AT&T ART MUSEUM

### *Introduction*

A young man and woman are standing together in an unnamed art museum with a tour group. They have stopped at a painting, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, and we hear the docent begin to describe it. The young man listens intently while the woman looks up at him and then her cell phone jingles with a notification. She looks at the screen and sees a photo of three of her friends in what began as formal attire posing wildly at someone's wedding day. The young woman looks back up at the painting and sees the trio within the frame of the artwork. Next we see the couple walking across another part of the museum. They are approaching a life-size marble statue on the right of the screen. The woman's phone chimes again and she looks down at it. On the screen is a photo of one of her friends taking a self-portrait snapshot with the text, 'New haircut!' The woman looks up at the statue and it has become a marble rendition of her friend's photograph. Next we see our couple following the tour group and guide down a magnificent staircase. This time the man and woman are looking intently at something high up and to their left. But their reverie is interrupted by an elderly museum guard at the bottom of the stairs who turns to the woman and says, 'Us girls are going dancing tonight. You in?' He then turns away and reverts to his normal stoic expression as the woman smiles in a contemplative manner. She looks at her phone again where a small picture of another friend and an instant message with the museum guard's query has appeared.



As an announcer begins the voice-over with the sales pitch, the camera pulls back to give us a view of the entire screen of the phone. Pictured are the woman, man and friend with the haircut in a smiling, posed photograph that no doubt serves as the woman's wallpaper. Superimposed on the image is the other friend's dance request. As the announcer continues detailing the new innovations, another instant message from another friend pops up.

The above is a simplified (and polite) account of the action occurring in a television commercial for the communications company AT&T. It is also probably all that most American viewers saw when it ran frequently in 2013. Although the principal characters are moving slowly, the pace of the commercial is designed so that the only meaning picked up by viewers is that AT&T has now made it easier for anyone to stay in touch with friends regarding matters of extreme importance, even when trapped in a hopelessly boring situation. To someone seeing it from a different, perhaps more artistically-inclined perspective, the commercial may appear offensive due to the woman's preference for her associates' quotidian exploits over





the singular visual achievements of humankind, and the commercial's promotion of the woman's point of view. It broadcasts a forthright declaration that fine art is not only dead in the minds of young, cool people, but intolerably dull as well.

It is possible, though, that the spot is also a reflection on the aesthetic state of humanity today. It could actually be offering criticisms of 'fine art,' while simultaneously declaring that a definite shift in aesthetic taste has occurred. This paper will look at aesthetic thought through the ages that supports this shift. Art historian Martin Wolf said that, "The most deeply buried layers of the national character of a people find their expressions in art; it is here the heart of a people gives voice to its basic feelings, and it is here that the world must look for future manifestations of a nation's feelings." This particular commercial echoes that statement, although not always in a positive manner.

The clip itself may be found easily in any internet search for "AT&T museum commercial." To best follow this essay, watch the spot all the way through at least once and then stop along with the prompts. Our focus will be primarily on the first sixteen seconds. The colons and numbers in parentheses refer to the time elapsed in the commercial clip.

## I.

(:00-:02) The commercial begins with a young man and woman (for easier clarification let us name the man 'Ray,' and the woman 'Jane') standing in the centre of a tour group in an art museum before Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* painting. A docent is heard explaining the technique and some of the materials used in creating the seminal work of art, but a chiming sound that could represent Jane's cell phone ringing quickly drowns out their discussion. This is unlikely since most museum tours ask participants to silence their phones. The noise more accurately symbolizes the empty ringing

that cascades through Jane's head as she desperately tries to blot out the difficulty that contemplating such an artistic achievement would entail. These happy yet vacuous chimes follow us through the entire commercial, lending more credence to the idea that we are spending this time inside Jane's cranium. Jane wants exactly what she wants when she wants it, so it is doubtful that she would accept what sounds like one of the default ringtones available on the phone. This supports the idea that the constant jingling we are hearing could merely be Jane's subconscious performing the act of putting her hands on her ears and saying loudly, 'Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah,' justifying her attitude as she moves through the museum.

Jane and Ray's stances affirm their basic attitudes and possible relationship with each other throughout the spot. Ray is the one who wants to be here. He is standing comfortably with arms crossed and he is resting on one leg, a posture that allows him to lean forward and look closely or lean back for a more distant view of the artworks on display. Jane stands rigidly with both arms not merely hanging at her side, but tightly held against the sides of her body, creating a tension akin to a toddler's at the playground when the parent is attempting to pick her up and take her home for a nap. Are our two protagonists on a date, already a steady couple or just friends hanging out? Jane and Ray do not touch. A telling sliver of negative space keeps them close to each other but at the same symbolic distance that lies between God's and Adam's fingers on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. With a touch, Ray could send the aesthetic joy he is experiencing cascading through Jane's entire being, but for now, and for the rest of the commercial, the space between the two remains.

The choice of the *Birth of Venus* for the first work of art is interesting from a couple of standpoints. First, it could serve as an example of callousness on the part of the producers and designers of the ad. It should be mentioned that this is obviously an imaginary museum since neither of the two artworks featured are in American







institutions. The ad's creators probably began by performing an online search for the most famous artworks. When I Googled images of 'famous paintings,' Botticelli's work was 56th in line, all the way down in the eighth row. Narrowing the search I tried 'world famous paintings' and it did not even appear in the first thirty rows of pictures. 'Most famous paintings' brought the *Birth* up to row six, and then 'most recognizable paintings' pulled it up to number 17, in row three. Very few people go past the first few items when researching a topic, unless they are looking for something very specific.

A look at the artworks that placed before the *Birth* hints at why this work was chosen for the beginning of the commercial. On any of the searches I made, the top two works that appeared were the *Mona Lisa* and Munch's *The Scream*. The ad-makers could have seen Leonardo's painting as just too iconic—even individuals unfamiliar with art know that work is not in the United States. Munch's painting was probably rejected because it actually fits Jane's state of mind from being trapped in the museum, which does not allow for an interesting demonstration of the phone's new innovations unless Jane snapped a selfie in the restroom to show her mood. Even if that were so, it would not work for the purpose of the ad, which is to showcase keeping in touch with one's friends and not mere naval gazing. Going through the other paintings that appear before the chosen one, they are all from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thus making them too modern. The *Birth of Venus* fits the ideal of a work that is sufficiently old and stiffly classical enough for Jane to see naught but inanity within its frame. The fact that it is a mysterious allegory with a still-debated meaning removes Jane's need to think at all.

Although some thought did go into the choice of the artwork, obviously, it was thought directed toward finding a classic work that could be ridiculed as useless and boring to the modern, successful young person. The creators did not even bother to reproduce the work in

its proper scale. The painting is around five feet eight inches tall, meaning it should be as tall as the docent standing in front of it. It is over twelve feet in width, at least double what is depicted here. It is possible the designers merely needed it to fit within the screen along with the tour group. But it is as likely that the *Birth* was minimized in size to show its growing insignificance.

On the other hand, the painting could be representative of an idea the creators are subliminally making: that telecommunication is an even greater advancement of humanity than the Renaissance. One of the more popular theories regarding the meaning of the *Birth of Venus* is that it symbolically describes the Renaissance, and what this shift meant to the culture of late 15th century Italy. Botticelli created an intentionally 'artificial' composition in comparison to the original mythos of Venus/Aphrodite. Not bothering with the details of her actual birth, he shows her to us as the two zephyrs have just finished blowing her ashore where she is met with a royal cloak by an Hora of spring, indicative of the rebirth occurring in the arts and society as a whole. She has come from the mythological, classical era of pagan philosophy and arrived to merge with the Christian world that warmly welcomes her. This Neoplatonic ideal had spread through Italy for the previous century and was about to reach its peak in Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael. The *Birth of Venus* is the apotheosis of Christian and Classical thought merging successfully on the cusp of the High Renaissance.

This reference could be intentionally included by the creators of the commercial. All the art shown in this commercial is figurative and classically themed. The makers may have been aware of the Aristotelian breakdown of imitative representations of humans depicted as better than real life, as they are normally, or worse than they are. This allows for the level of integrity in an artwork. Venus is shown in an enigmatic pose of potential, moving from the middle of Aristotle's levels to the topmost one. Harwood describes Venus as such:





“Venus, for the moment, is alone and inactive; it is through no movement of hers that she will, in a moment, reach the shore; her fate is as inevitable as that of the falling roses. In her face we have rather an expression of an awakened soul than of sadness; there is a touch of reluctance, but the effect is of a fair being awaiting the full arousing which is to bring it into a complete personality.”

Is it possible that this description could apply Jane, who is reaching a level of awareness akin to Botticelli’s goddess? Is Jane also on a journey to complete her personality? Does this museum trip represent a very important stop on the pilgrimage?

## II.

(:03-:16) On the surface, the answer is no. Jane’s expression, even though it resembles that of Venus herself, can be interpreted as one of boredom and near disgust, not revelation. She looks up at Ray, who is totally enraptured in viewing the work. She views him with an air of bemusement mixed with incomprehension. This is when Jane’s phone signals a notification and she looks at it to see her drunken friends in their reverie. Perhaps Jane is reminiscing over the just-posted photo of the enjoyable wedding. It would seem it was a rather lowbrow affair, judging from the giant store bought plastic canister of cheese balls held by one of the principals. There are four figures in the Botticelli and Jane’s replacement photo contains only three figures. At first this may pass as trivial, but once again let us entertain deeper, more subversive thoughts on the commercial creators’ behalf. One could look at the *Birth* and see that the two zephyrs on the left could be combined into the woman in the wedding picture, although, unlike the zephyrs, she is looking directly at the viewer. Also, the pose and the actions of the two males in the photograph do not reflect the expressions of the other two figures in the original painting. Even if the figures are reversed, nothing really matches the painting. But the

figures reversed do work in another way. Perhaps one of the designers is a Botticelli fan (or educated hater) and wanted the chance to include a reference to another of the master’s iconic works. When reversed, the figures do correspond to the three sets of figures in *Primavera*, which also offers a symbol of regenerating thought and ideas after a long, cold, thousand-year winter of darkness (or, in Jane’s case, an afternoon of boredom). The woman in the wedding group fits with the nymph being abducted on the right side of the Botticelli, while the fellow in the middle strikes the pose and bemused demeanour of Botticelli’s central character, and the other male in the photo corresponds nicely with Mercury’s inattention to everything else around him while picking pomegranates (mirrored in the wedding photograph by the detached consumption of cheese balls).

After seeing her friends replace Botticelli’s work on the wall, Jane then wanders further into the museum, slightly behind Ray, showing again her total reluctance at being there, and continues to avoid looking at any of the art. The ‘haircut’ notification appears on her phone as she approaches a white marble statue. My research revealed the statue to be that of Hebe, goddess of youth, sculpted by the Danish artist Bertel Thorvaldsen in the 19th century. He did many versions of Hebe, the most noteworthy ones in marble in 1815 and 1816. This would be the 1816 version with the straps of Hebe’s toga up over her shoulders, covering both of her breasts, whereas one breast is exposed in the 1815 version. It may not have been the modesty angle that had the ad’s creators choose this version so much as the toga’s resemblance to the friend’s tank top. Jane looks up with more of a sense of awe at this artwork, perhaps hinting that she is indeed progressing along the path Harwood laid out for Venus. Then, of course, we see that her mind has again projected her idea of artistic beauty onto the work of an old master. At :16, when we see the full shot of the ‘new haircut’ in marble, in the far background we can also see a Hebe statue identical to the original. This could be read as a statement that old art is boring because it all looks alike—an obser-





vation that supports the idea that the chosen artworks illustrate contemporary advancement in qualifiers for artistic beauty. Thorvaldsen lived well into the Romantic era in Europe, but continued creating Neoclassical works his entire life. As a result of Thorvaldsen's influence, "Danish sculpture never lost its classical restraint." His works of "calm noble harmony" held an "exacting influence" for decades, and artists did not break free from this precedent for quite some time. Perhaps the creators and Jane see that current minds need to be rescued from such strict formalism.

Part of Jane's problems in the museum seem to stem from a lack of knowledge about the contexts of the painting and sculpture—the 'stories behind them.' Psychoanalyst Otto Rank states that:

A long and intricate path leads from the individual's creative will-to-art, through all the preliminary stages of creation and the artistic creative act itself, to the finished work which, when released from its creator, produces in the recipient that which is called aesthetic pleasure. The dualism (is)...one of dynamic expression and aesthetic enjoyment, the one being manifested in the psychology of the creator, and the other in that of the recipient.

The conundrum lies in whether or not the psychology of the creator is necessary for the enjoyment of the recipient. This could explain why Jane and Ray have taken a guided tour instead of walking around on their own. Ray wants to learn the contextual factors of a great work of art, while Jane believes she is 'educated' enough, perhaps.

We could interpret Jane's views from various directions, but any of those would take us deep into investigations of the myriad descriptions of the aesthetic, and would throw us head first into the objective/subjective melee that still rages in the world of the philosophy of art. I will touch very briefly on some thoughts that

may help us better understand Jane's representation of contemporary aesthetic appreciation. For example, we know that David Hume was the first to introduce the idea of relativism into aesthetics, dashing on the rocks centuries-old beliefs regarding established criteria for something being 'beautiful.' Since the Greeks, philosophers decided upon attributes of beauty and the properties of the mind required to appreciate these 'universal' beliefs. For example, Democritus suggests that, "It is characteristic of a divine mind always to think on something beautiful...The great pleasures are got from the contemplation of beautiful works."

Immanuel Kant played off Hume's thoughts by separating the previous definitions of the 'beautiful' into the 'beautiful' and the 'agreeable.' The beautiful still held the objectivist view of a universal idea of beauty while the agreeable served as the individual's enjoyment based on their particular tastes, thus also allowing for the subjectivist mindset. While Kant (sort of) argues that the subjective method is the only way, many modern scholars have seen this line of thinking as actually objectifying the act of viewing the object.

Gérard Genette continues this line of thought by stating that a person has the right to prefer low art over high art and that changing one's point of view to appear smarter or more in the loop to connoisseurs should never be done. This is certainly Jane's point of view regarding the art in the museum, and explains her ability to project her friends' photos on to classic works of art. Jane is also supported by Genette's declaration that "aesthetic judgment is without appeal," that is, autonomous and sovereign. "Only inward change, the result, for example, of growing older, or what is widely known as education, can alter it; and it would perhaps be still better to say that it alters itself." The problem with this statement is that, if aging and education change one's aesthetic judgment, outside forces inevitably influence judgement. Taking Genette into account, then, we may surmise that perhaps Jane is totally justified in her reactions to and assessments of the classic art





before her and the preference for the new ‘aesthetically beautiful’ Facebook photos of her friends (although she might not have been as rude about it). It is possible that she has turned Genette’s thought on its ear and defined the new aesthetic, asserting her right to prefer what was previously considered low art. Perhaps she is acting on her ‘autonomous and sovereign’ sense of beauty. The commercial’s creators complete this inversion of Genette by arguing that the new aesthetic must be followed to avoid being seen as smart, stuffy and old-fashioned. Maybe this offers a perfect compromise between the objectivist and subjectivist views —Jane can see these classic works as fitting the objective definition of beauty, and at the same time find them boring.

That said, some of us may still have a problem with the untold millions of social media images supplanting seminal artworks as the definition of the ‘aesthetically preferred.’ Today the number of images in the world has increased exponentially and the art-formerly-known-as-fine can easily get lost in the mix. The new aesthetic “judgment of taste” is summed up nicely in the vernacular by Thomas Pynchon: “Everybody’ll be shootin’ everything, way too much to look at, nothin’ will mean shit.”

## ROB ROCK

is an instructor of studio art, art history and humanities. A graduate of Frostburg State University and McDaniel College, he has presented papers at community college conferences regarding teaching the arts in the digital age, and most recently the Wilson College Conference on Humanities. This paper is taken from one of the chapters from his book project, *Principles of 21st Century Aesthetics*, a semi-satirical study of aesthetic thought today.





# Does Heath Franco Think I'm A Dickhead?

(Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Art that Makes Me Angry)

KATHERINE GUINNESS

For over twenty years the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney has held its *Primavera* exhibition, meant to showcase promising young Australian artists, and 2013 was no different. The museum rounded up a chosen few under the age of thirty-five and grouped them into overarching themes such as “portals into fictional realms,” “the role of language in the shaping of the self” and “family relationships.” There was a healthy mix of photography, sculpture, video work, painting and then, self-contained within a shack-like structure, a looping series of videos loudly informing the museum-goers that they were “dickheads.” The work, Heath Franco’s *Televisions*, depicts the artist with a penis on his forehead repeating the phrase “you’re a dickhead, you’re all dickheads” over and over again, along with several other oddly costumed characters also repeating various phrases and noises. With their early-aughts green-screen effects, crude absurdity and grotesquely enthusiastic performances that could make even Paul McCarthy ill at ease, the work often resembles the Adult Swim television program *The Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!*

The grating and childish abject tone is consistent throughout all the video works by Franco included in *Primavera*, but completely ignored by the museum’s wall text which focused instead on the “dense meaning” and what it deemed elaborate, elegant costuming.

The day I viewed this work, my fellow visitors seemed to take the wall text as gospel—all were performing the familiar gallery action poses of nodding, slow walking, thoughtful pauses, distinguished chin strokes, etc. Clearly, they were too impressed by the costuming and special effects to even notice that they were being insulted. I looked up expecting to see a sneer or catch a rolling eye—nothing. Surprised, I searched more fervently, hoping to find at least one proverbial old man who didn’t “get it” complaining in a dramatic stage whisper that this was all junk, that his kid could do this, that it was silly, stupid, that we were being called *dickheads* by a man with a *dick* literally *on his own head* for goodness’ sake! Still nothing. Just appreciation—even a couple of knowing nods of approval. Then it hit me: the sinking realization that



I, the supposedly in-the-know art historian with a PhD in Contemporary Art, was that old man, seeing nonsense and naked emperors where all others saw worth and pleasure-giving art. I was furious; I was enraged. Oh no Heath Franco, I'm not a dickhead! You are! It's not that I don't get it! You're just looking to get a rise out of the viewing public with your taunts and half-naked performances dressed up with odd wigs and hip faux-vintage technical edits! To shill shock! And it wasn't even working on *anyone but me!* Buy why not? And why me? Why, in this show full of "unapologetically bold makers, thinkers, and performers" was this the only piece making me feel anything—even if that feeling was overwhelming anger, a need to yell at everyone to wake up and punch Franco in his phallus adorned face?

In his book *What Do Pictures Want*, W.J.T. Mitchell asks of objectionable objects, including genitals, "What it is about images that give them such remarkable power to offend people?" But my own experience with Franco's work forces the opposite question: what it is about this image that takes that power away? Certainly some anger or provocation beyond my own was expected; the curator of *Primavera*, Robert Cook, called the videos "invasively shocking," and the museum made sure to put a content warning on the piece. So why was I the only person in the museum that day to show any emotion beyond enjoyment and approval? Anger towards art and images has, of course, a long and complicated history. From iconoclasm to urine-covered crucifixes, art that angers, that shocks, that offends, has been perceived as a danger and often treated violently. Who can forget the controversy surrounding Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* and its subsequent defacement at the hands of Dennis Heiner, an elderly Christian man? And art doesn't have to possess the loaded weight of religious beliefs to offend; Richard Serra's *Twain* sculpture, placed in downtown St. Louis in

1981, for example, is so reviled that urinating on it is seen as a point of good citizenship or tourism—go see the Arch, take in a Cardinals game, then relieve yourself on *Twain*. When pressed about this hatred, vague reasons of ruining the view, the cityscape, poor maintenance or space wasting arise. This was also the case with Serra's *Tilted Arc* in New York City, which was repeatedly vandalized until it was removed. Serra's works, when housed safely away within museums, are often critically acclaimed, and he was recently voted one of the six most important living artists according to *Vanity Fair*. Perhaps the space of the museum itself insulates Serra's work, but when the public passes upon it, not ready for an "art experience" in the outside world, it is seen as obtrusive, an eye sore to be removed. Could this be the reason for Franco's lack of shock value? If any one of the viewers I encountered at *Primavera* were to be accosted on the street by a sweaty man with a dildo on his head telling them that they are, in truth, a dickhead, I'm sure they wouldn't nod their heads thoughtfully in agreement or lean knowingly over to their companion and whisper "you know what, I really understand what he means when he says 'dickhead, what it symbolizes.'" No, they would try to ignore him, or gawk nervously, or perhaps even react violently and aggressively. Franco himself acknowledges this dichotomy stating, "If I was an artist, and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art."

Is the opposite true?

The museum is no doubt a separate space which one enters into with specific expectations, open to altered experiences and with a different set of value judgements. This can cause a seemingly inane artwork to become controversial when it "escapes" these confines, and, in the case of Franco's work, very odd and objectionable pieces to become almost blasé when framed within the heavy distinction of "important art." Take, for example, the current controversy surrounding Tony Matelli's *Sleepwalker*, part of an ex-

hibition being held at Wellesley College's Davis Museum. The sculpture, an incredibly realistic depiction of a rather dumpy, balding, overall innocuous man in his underwear, arms outstretched and eyes closed in a classic sleepwalking position, is located outside the gallery on campus grounds. The work is causing quite a lot of anger and protest, however, because of its external location. Its detractors argue that it could serve as a trigger for victims of sexual abuse who stumble upon it unknowingly. One must ask: if it were tucked away in the gallery space, would this issue arise at all?

Has the museum space castrated any potential shock or unease works like Franco's could hold over us? Does one simply not enter a museum expecting to feel certain things like anger or fear? Is the intent to consume art, "get it," and leave? Was my position as a scholar of art, someone who makes their living by researching it, putting me in a different headspace? One that allowed me to be angry? To be a bad consumer? This becomes a political problem—can art only be effective outside the gallery? But what does it mean to be effective? As seen with the Serra sculpture and my own hypothetical situation of Franco taking his performance to the street, once some of these works (especially unconventional works like Franco's) are taken out of the museum or gallery, the public can refuse to see them as art, which removes their power in an entirely different way. The Serra sculptures become covered in human waste and graffiti until they are removed, and Franco would ultimately be ignored if not eventually physically assaulted. In reality, the castration of any potential for shock or provocation Franco's work had was furthered by its particular position within the museum. Not only was it placed within the safe-consumer zone of the museum itself, but it was also cordoned off in a separate enclosed structure.

Before entering the space, one was met with signs warning of the indecent nature of what was inside, and that it might not be suitable for younger viewers. Any chance encounter between the public and the work's unique brand of uneasy playful abjection was destroyed; one entered braced and prepared for something potentially far more provocative, objectionable, angering.

Why does art anger? It can degrade one's beliefs, something of value, it can violate taboos or impinge on moral guidelines, be politically or religiously offensive, or even just confuse. And while seeing a realistic portrayal of male genitalia in a public place (not to mention the actual nudity Franco includes in his videos) may tick those boxes for some, I am not among them. Of course, the "offensive" images are just one part of the work. Mitchell makes it clear in his writing that images are not words; they cannot speak for themselves. But a video work can speak, and this particular work is saying that I am a dickhead. Am I offended at the words? Not particularly. Nor do I find anything about it entirely shocking. So why my anger? Anthony Julius writes in his book *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* that the biggest offense an artwork can make is to *not* be transgressive in any way, to fail to shock, stimulate or intrigue. Is Franco, with all of his juvenile vulgarity and lambaste simply trying too hard to transgress his audience and failing in the attempt? Is this failure (the ultimate failure according to Julius) what truly angers me? Perhaps. Although if the work had thoroughly "failed" in this manner, I doubt I would still be thinking and writing about it.

Mitchell echoes Julius' sentiment in a way, saying that, as much as it may not want to, the art world must acknowledge that, "a fair amount of contemporary art is a bunch of shit." Mitchell isn't swearing entirely for its own sake

here—he goes on to explain that most work is just unremarkable, forgettable plant-food. “Vast amounts of second-rate art have to be produced as a kind of mulch or fertilizer for the rare flowering of truly outstanding work. By now, one would think that a jaded, sophisticated crowd like the art world would have come to terms with this...”

In this instance he is describing (in particular) the group show of young artists at the Brooklyn museum that grew Ofili’s *Holy Virgin Mary*. So the question is: in the similar situation of viewing the Primavera exhibition of young artists’ work, is my anger at Franco because I stepped in a pile of shit? Or is that anger, that feeling, actually a rare flowering of emotion from a “truly outstanding work?” Either way, the work has stuck with me—whether on the bottom of my shoe or tucked, daisy-like, behind my ear, I cannot say. And perhaps the distinction isn’t as important as the work’s persistence.

## KATHERINE GUINNESS

recently completed her PhD in Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Manchester. Her thesis, *Rosemarie Trockel: The Problem of Becoming*, researches the creative practice of German contemporary artist Rosemarie Trockel through an associative analytical prism and the work of French author Monique Wittig and theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. She currently teaches at the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

P. GOMEZ AND DANIEL CRUDE

# SEPTIC HAPTIC

*A Tactile Quest through the Flimsier, Sinister Side of Art or Eat, Pray, Love*

**Daniel Crude:** My game was to try and play some sort of online version of art brut.

**P. Gomez:** Outsider art?

Ah shit, not outsider art, not art brut. I forget how it's called all the time. The game with the folded edge of the drawing that someone else continues.

Ooh that. Exquisite corpses.

Mhm. Do you know what haptic poetry is?

No.

Poems that are told through sound and texture. Mostly texture.

How?

They got popular during the rise of Dada and later, Fluxus.

I read that up now, yes.

And now are making some sort of comeback, with 3D printers.

Oh? So you write a poem and the printer makes it?

Well, nowadays, that's an actual possibility. I guess you don't actually write a poem. If you want a purified haptic poem, it has to be a moment of show, don't tell. Anyway. These art movements make me very inspired for fifteen minutes and then deeply depressed for two hours, until I forget and move on.

Very appropriate response. Haptic poetry. It sounds unpleasant.

The fifteen minutes of inspiration are for the two, or three, people in any given niche who are excited and experimental in the good sense. People who get off on the sense and idea of exploration. The art itself is superfluous to them. Then come the droves of fucking experimental 'artists', everything is superfluous to them. They just want to seem strange and unusual and sexy. But they're just lifeless and talentless and shit-smear.

Anyway, haptic poetry, if it was another decade, another century, I would try and give it a go.

But you can't now because?

I would imagine that a well-put metaphor in haptic poetry, pulled off properly would be a beautiful thing.

Because I figured out that my most beautiful form of art is to write simply...and I really, really like that. And I sincerely believe that you shouldn't do twenty things in art – do the one that you're great with. I wouldn't go see an eye doctor who's a plumber on the side, on weekends.

Don't you think that you can try a different medium but still express yourself?

No. The medium is a means to an end. The skill behind it is the crux. Would Soulages' painting translate to some really dark textured poetry? Absolutely not, he makes the fucking poetry as is, with paint. There's a difference between some-

one who's pretty good at seven things and someone who is brilliant at one thing. The second person is superior in every way, they have put in the time and they produce something that is irreplaceably theirs. The person who does seven things well...well, they're only as good as the person in the room who does eight things well. That really means that they can't do anything amazingly.

Does that mean that artists shouldn't attempt writing, or writers painting?

Yep. And sure, give me two exception examples.

No, I mean, somebody is known for one thing. I don't think expression in other mediums should not be attempted, but you figure what it is works best for you. Intuitively and you see the product, then you stick to it.

Well, it's not a matter of recognition at all, it's a matter of talent. And skill and passion and want. A known painter who decides they're wanted to write all along. Well, they got well known as a luck of the draw, and whatever swims inside their head, they simply can't express it with painting. Which means, they're a shite painter for all intents and purposes.

Sure, yes.

One of the best things I've ever heard about art came from a very cheesy source, it was an interview with Keith Richards.

Mhm?

The day after Kurt Cobain shot himself. And Keith Richards is a man who fulfilled his brilliance, he's an astounding guitarist. Not in the sense of, hey, my uncle, he plays guitar, he's really good, he likes the blues, blah blah. No one can play like this drugged out, old alkie. He was asked in the interview, how did he feel about Cobain dying, and he said:

'Well, he was a shite guitarist, wrote only a small handful of songs, got uber famous accidentally, right place in right time in history sort of deal...now he's killed himself because he's got no privacy or artistic

outlet. That idiot should have been a plumber, not a rock star...'

That sentence is beautiful.

I am not against that statement, I get the sentiment. A lot of things of this sort annoy me as well, deeply annoy me. I feel you are more annoyed than I am – fighting for the real.

Well, I've been reading about haptic poets, and yes, I am angered by this. I belong to a camp of people who think just suck it up already and be brilliant, or go do something else. There's no shame in it.

No, there really isn't.

Kurt Cobain would be alive and happy today maybe, if he discovered that fixing toilets made him fantastically relaxed. And I wouldn't have to know how shitty *Smells Like Teen Spirit* is.

Art is part of a subculture for young people. I mean, it was always a subculture and performed in some way as an identity. But today it's very synonymous with hipsterism.

Yes, but it's gained a level of abstraction that's bordering on grotesque, these artists float around like candles without wicks. They mean nothing, stand for nothing.

And it's severely annoying because it loses what its intent is right, the intent of art, to show a glimpse into the real. It's compromised by the irony of hipsterism, and it becomes a mess.

Oh, it's not just fucking hipsters, it's everyone. It's always been everyone.

Not because it succeeds at being ironic, but because there's still some feeble attempt at honesty at base.

Our generation just seems more sinister.

Not attempt. Accident. Honesty accident. Sure, and attempt. And it's bad.

The real terrifying problem is that if everyone attempts some form of art.

Well, art is super cool Daniel.

Then the basic boilerplate line of what art is –

Artists wear cool outfits and have interesting haircuts, lifestyles, emotions and friends.

Gets brought down, it plummets into absolute shit and then middling, mediocre artists become known as good ones by relativity.

## P. GOMEZ & DANIEL CRUDE

are the pseudonyms of a couple—a writer and an artist. Their work is published in a number of journals, and exhibited locally and internationally. Currently residing in Mexico City, they are working on their first collaborative project, the co-authored work *What is wrong with today's art and how it will likely not be fixed*. Originally from Europe (but not exclusively the EU), Gomez and Crude are planning to return and continue working on their independent and collaborative projects. Gomez is currently collecting 5 sentence bios from strangers for a work in progress—if interested in contributing, anonymously or otherwise, please contact:

