

The Turner Prize and Modern Art: But Is It Journalism?

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A breakfast tour of the [25th Turner Prize show](#) is a nice way to start my birthday, but did I really understand what I was seeing? In the end, all non-specialist journalism about contemporary culture returns to one question: Is It Art? All specialist arts journalism returns to another: will it sell? Neither are very interesting questions.

[The Sun reported](#) the latest Turner short-list in its usual sex-obsessed style in a desperate attempt to generate some controversy:

The semi-naked workman is part of a body of work by Enrico David whose exhibition includes a parade of bizarre toy-like characters as well as pictures of unclothed dolls.

The Guardian provides us with a more respectful [online photographic gallery](#), and asks the reader to 'judge for yourself', which is precisely why Britain's bourgeoisie will trot along to Tate Britain: to judge.

As it happens it is a very academic show with far less colour than the [Royal Academy's Kapoor](#) and less sex than the British Museum's recent [Indian art exhibition](#). It was perfectly pleasant visually but I don't think I would have been so interested without the wonderful expert commentary from our exquisitely educated curatorial guides.

Would you have cared so much about Richard Hiorns' pile of metallic dust if you didn't know it was made from ground up airliner engines? Does that lovely waxy shape have more resonance when you know it has cow's brains mixed in?

I personally enjoyed Lucy Skaer's elegant reworkings of found objects and high art and the way she forces you to slow down and take in the detail and layers of her work. But I am sure many of the subtleties would have passed me by if they weren't pointed out.

Contemporary gallery works produced by arts school graduates seem stylised and over-conceptual compared to the – often crass – brio of Brit Art. So it is a real challenge to the journalist to help the public make anything of it. Perhaps they are simply worlds apart.

One other thing puzzles me as the galleries seek to connect with the public through popularist projects such as the [Turner Prize](#). Why don't they let people photograph the art? The punters have paid for this through taxes – why shouldn't they be allowed to at least use their mobile phone cameras?

When you see people taking photos in galleries you can tell that they are sharing it with friends and spreading their pleasure and generating publicity for art. They are engaging with the objects in a much more personal way. Why do the galleries/artists allow copyright to contain the creativity?

The [Turner Prize website](#) is very neat and does a nice job of showing us 25 years of history. But again, there is no facility that I could see for people to register their views let alone ways to encourage people to do something artistic.

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