

"In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."

Sol LeWitt

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Conceptual Art became an established movement in the 1960s, following the dissolution of the linear narrative of modern art. And perhaps it was the only possible outcome, following the trajectory of modern art, that art should look back at itself with such rigorous criticality. Some art critics suggest that conceptual art was the result of the modernist determination to distil art objects down to their elementary form, only to find the form disappeared entirely. The art object 'dematerialized'. The essential form of art was exposed as idea. And while the term 'Conceptual Art' refers to a particular movement in time and space, it is now used as a descriptive phrase to denote strategies or trajectories of contemporary art practices.

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"The moment of conceptual art was relatively short-lived, barely spanning a full decade. And yet its legacy is wide-ranging, covering a vast terrain in terms of its effect on traditional modes and categories of artistic production, exhibition, and distribution. Indeed, one could argue that the influence of conceptualism can be found in almost all ambitious contemporary art practices [...] As an international movement that transcended national borders voicing common concerns about the role of the artist, the artwork, the public, and the institutions involved, the questions and problematics posed by conceptual art continue to be as important today as when they were initially raised in the 1960s and 1970s."

Alexander Alberro

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"[Conceptual art] has in recent years spread to become a tendency, a resonance within art practice that is nearly ubiquitous."

Terry Smith

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All art exists in a game, within a set of rules established by mutual agreement; an agreement regulated by dominant art

institutions, discourses and histories. This 'agreed' system validates art as art, and insists its value, both commercially and as cultural artifact. Of all the various forms of art, conceptual art is perhaps most reliant on the structure of this game. It is easy to recognize a painting as art, but to recognize an idea as art necessarily relies on external co-ordinates, or the 'playing board'. A conceptual artwork is not unlike a chess piece. Isolated, and removed from the board, it signifies nothing in particular. It becomes useless and abstract. Beyond the game, the piece has no inherent function, value, or meaning. Its meaning exists only within the parameters of context, within the discourse of fine art, relative to a certain history of ideas, objects, theorists, critics, artists and audiences.

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"While all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists."

Marcel Duchamp

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"Conditions to actions, the rules of game play, produce a boundary for chance."

Josh Ginsburg

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The conceptual art object is the mnemonic device in favour of an idea, establishing non-linear ways of thinking. And because ideas are intrinsically language-based, conceptual art employs a metalanguage of references, intertextuality, sly asides, or nods of acknowledgment, puns and jokes and word-play. And as the idea of a conceptual artwork is paramount to its representation (in words, performance or object), traditionally esteemed characteristics of art objects become obsolete. Originality, craftsmanship, and aesthetics lose their currency. 'Readymades' are perfect examples of this attitude towards the visual component of conceptual art, and herald a significant turning point in artistic practice and art historical discourse. Coined by Marcel Duchamp, the term refers to a selected common-place (often mass-produced) quotidian object raised to the position of artwork. An object created without any sense of artistic concerns, aesthetically unassuming. Conceptual art has extended, and continues to extend, this gesture of appropriation further, from everyday objects to existing artworks; forever remixing and reinventing the known.

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Conceptual Art For Consumers

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"I don't see any necessity in producing images myself — everything that I would need exists, it's just about finding it."
Oliver Laric

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"The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more."
Douglas Huebler

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"When we made videos on vaporetos in Venice, we were with thousands of tourists who were doing the same thing. It's just that at that particular moment, one is doing it oneself as an artist."
Fischli and Weiss

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"For example, an empty wine bottle sits on top of an apple that sits on top of an eggcup, while a plate balances on the cork of the bottle, held in place by a counter-balance of a fish slice and a ladle, the latter holding an onion in a net."
Fischli and Weiss

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What then of aesthetics? Conceptual art both negates the ideal of aesthetics as an intrinsic quality of the art object, and expands the notion of aesthetics from the perceptive (or visual), to the unseen, the cognitive. Its complex relationship to perceptive 'beauty' insists the idea of the work as paramount to its representation.

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"Do I suffer from good taste?"
Fischli and Weiss

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"Duchamp once said that an artistic decision in favour of a particular object as a ready-made comes from a certain kind of 'indifference' – that it is no longer a matter of taste in the sense of deciding whether the object possesses beauty or not."
Jörg Heise

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"Everything became equally valid: aesthetic or non-aesthetic, art or non-art, form and content or no form and no content. Many things look like art, but are not. And many things do not look like art, but are art, or not."
Anna Hjort Guttu

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"This is art, it's beautiful."
Attributed to a Kodak advert

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"When someone says it's art, it's art"
Donald Judd

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"Art is either plagiarism or revolution."
Marcel Duchamp

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"A work of art becomes consequential when it counts as art"
Terry Smith

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"Either nothing is art, or everything can be."
Thierry de Duve

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"For us, art is that which we find under this name: something which simply is, and which doesn't need to conform to laws in order to exist; a complicated social product."
Robert Musil

A Vague Introduction To Conceptual Art I

LUCIENNE BESTALL