
What's behind a renaissance in the Arts?

September 2012

[Pauline Hadaway](#) , [Billy Cowan](#) , and [Clare Howdon](#) introduced a discussion on what's behind a renaissance in the arts.



The pin-up boy of New Labour's *Cool Britannica*, **Damien Hirst**, doesn't seem so hot these days, with his £36,800 [souvenir painted skulls](#)

on sale at the Tate gallery art shop coming across as a tad pricey in these recessionary times. Periods of economic decline though, often create a buoyant market for the arts as investors move their money away from longer-term productive investments. In times like these we usually hear the cry

[‘art is only for the rich’](#)

. That may hold true within the confines of the market, but there is evidence that people do value art, and recessionary periods also see a rise in attendance at galleries and museums, even when those institutions charge for admission (e.g. see

[Nanopublic](#)

).



However a recent [survey](#) of British institutions showed that arts students were least satisfied with their course compared to other students. Some students complained of being left to their own devices much of the time. John O'Boyle, director of academic services at specialist arts college Ravensbourne in London, though, may have highlighted a central reason for this when he says:

"Creative students are taught to be highly critical of everything around them, including their own experiences, I doubt that law students think, 'How might this law degree be different?'"

In a 'multicultural' society that gives equal value to all, criticism seems to have become the first casualty.



Whilst star systems for critical reviews is nothing new, there has been a greater emphasis put on opinion as opposed to criticism. And whilst it is questionable as to how much weight is given to opinion, by an audience, what cannot be ignored is the blurb writing approach to many reviews sections of newspapers and the amount of reviewing that has arisen in the blogosphere. If the reviewer (as the gateway to the arts) cannot take their own role seriously, then why should artists or audiences?

But even in an environment where talent seems to emerge only from shows such as the *X-Factor* or other phenomena such as slam poetry or flash fiction, all of which seem to exemplify a world that is steadily 'dumbing down', we find TV shows such as *The Choir*

, bringing high culture to council estates, we have galleries, such as the Royal Standard in Liverpool, opening up to provide space for new artists. Even new approaches toward art still find a hearing.

The New Aesthetic

art movement has been exciting quite a few people in the art world recently; though its attitude owes something to John Cage's chance approach it still suggests that there are new ways for the art movement to go forward and develop, even in these times of low expectations.

Listen again (variable quality)...

Speaker intros and most of the discussion in one go - click on the Play button: {mp3}renaissance-in-the-arts{/mp3}

Some background readings

[Why artists shouldn't accept state funding](#) , by Jan Bowman, spiked 19 October 2007

[Creativity as ideology](#) , by James Heartfield, Renewal 2008

[A New Renaissance in the Arts: Why Now?](#) by J. Scott McElroy, Crosswalk 5 January 2010

[Culture: it's not the economy, stupid!](#) , by Tiffany Jenkins, spiked 5 July 2011

[Criticism v Critique](#) , by JJ Charlesworth, Blog 5 August 2011

[How to direct a play](#) , review by Charlotte Starkey, Manchester Salon January 2012

[A Scottish License to kill culture](#) , by Dr Tiffany Jenkins, spiked 29 March 2012

[The New Aesthetic Needs to Get Weirder](#) , by Ian Bogost, the Atlantic 13 Apr 2012

[Embedded Criticism: some Arguments, an Offer and a Dare](#) , by Daniel Bye, Blog 20 April 2012

[Defending quality in public performance](#) , some thoughts by Georgina Kirk, Manchester Salon April 2012

[The role of the reviewer](#) , by Denis Joe, Manchester Salon April 2012

[In conversation with Ian Tilton](#) , by Emma Short, Manchester Salon May 2012

[UK cultural policy: using art to divide us](#) , by Dolan Cummings, spiked review of books May 2012

[A kick up the Arts](#) , by Denis Joe, Manchester Salon August 2012

[Bring back arbiters of taste](#) by Tiffany Jenkins, The Scotsman 9 August 2012

[Why major theatre institutions should be left to die](#) , by Lyn Gardner, Guardian 30 August 2012

On 12 and 13 October [The Right Ballerina](#) , written by **Billy Cowan** and produced by Truant, his theatre company is opening up at The Lowry. The starting point of the play is the true story of one of Britain's top ballerina's who was outed by The Guardian as a member of the BNP and then forced to resign. The play is a fictionalised account that goes a bit kafkaesque but it attempts to open up many important questions such as: When should private information be made public, when does direct action turn into censorship, should Arts and Politics be kept separate, and should artists who receive public money reflect the preferred views of their sponsors? These questions will be discussed in an after-show chat with Billy on Friday 12 October, chaired by [Rani a Hafez](#)

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There will be a short walk through of a sketch from the play to help illuminate some of the tensions involved in production of publicly funded art, and the scope available to be politically innovative whilst publicly funded.

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