

Visual Dialogues

The Ghost in the Machine



Tate Britain's *Visual Dialogues* programme stretches perceptions – extending the possibilities of works of art and our experiences of them. Young people from diverse backgrounds develop their ideas with artists of different disciplines. This results in remarkable and offbeat interpretations of art. Accompanying the display is a series of events which is part of the Strategic Commissioning partnership programme with four regional art museums for museum and gallery education.

Tate Britain's programme opens with radical interpretive interventions by the Visual Dialogues participants with artist Nick Hornby and musician Soweto Kinch linking the historic and modern displays to Tate's Triennial exhibition. The programme is part of Young Tate which enables young people to play an important part in the life of the gallery, sharing their knowledge and ingenuity with artists, staff and visitors while opening up ideas and prospects for their own development into professional life.

Felicity Allen
Head of Learning, Tate Britain

To me, interpretation is a keyword. There is an old Hebraic rule, that says: a text only has a value if it is commentated upon, and I consider it as a highly valuable ethical statement: we, as exhibition visitors, artists, curators, writers, citizens even, we have to keep culture alive. Our duty is to react to it. We all have to be actors, somehow, and not those passive customers required by the mechanics of 'hyper-capitalism'. That is what a show like *Altermodern* is about: telling you a story, different from what you have been told before. This story starts with a provocative idea: postmodern times are over, let's invent the new period to come. A curator is someone who, like the African storyteller used to do under his sacred tree, will reinvent the narrative of his village, again and again. Greek tragedy was doing the same. And if I had to sum up the idea behind the *Altermodern* in a few words, I would only say this: maybe where you come from is not that important.

Maybe your identity is still to be found – do your own travel.

Nicolas Bourriaud
Gulbenkain Curator of Contemporary Art, Tate Britain,
Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009

The project name *Visual Dialogues* is well chosen. It involves a series of exchanges between works of art and audiences. The paintings ‘speak’ to the young participants in the project; they, in turn, produce a form of ‘interpretation’ to help other viewers to ‘hear’ what those works might be saying.

The intervention here - the extension of several paintings beyond their frames - plays with ideas of what a modern painting should be or can do. An ambition of modern painters was to resist narrative, to make works of art that were self-contained and autonomous (detached from the real world), to resist creating an illusion, or telling a story.

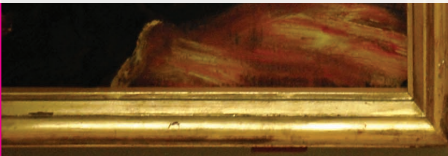
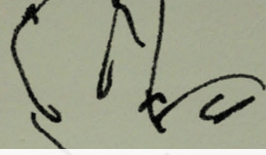
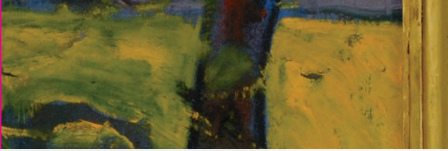
This autonomous work of art is a kind of visual machine, activating through its form and colour the space in which it hangs. The way in which Matthew Smith’s enigmatic, green nude animates the entire room is emphasised by the extension of its horizon line across the expanse of the wall.

On the other hand, Francis Bacon’s melancholic painting of his fellow-artist Van Gogh has its self-containedness removed. No longer is the subject a static, enclosed embodiment of solitary artistic identity. The road that was only implied has been imagined and extended, turning his metaphorical journey into something more literal. It is, without doubt, not something Bacon would have done but it shows how works of art can generate ideas well beyond those intended by their makers.

Chris Stephens
Curator (Modern British Art) & Head of Displays, Tate Britain



LEFT: Trevor Mathison, *Nocturne*, still from *The Ghost in the Machine*, 2009 © Courtesy of the artist
RIGHT: Francis Bacon *Study for a Portrait of Van Gogh IV*, 1957 © Estate of Francis Bacon







LEFT: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights* 1872. © Tate
RIGHT: *Extending the Line*, Photo © Nick Horroby



At first, the childish scrawl on the white walls of the ambulatories can be seen as a juvenile attempt to express our thoughts through graffiti. However, there is more depth to it than that; a concept of extending the picture beyond the parameters of its frame. As we venture out into the realm of the Altermodern, so too do these interpretations.

It is important to note, that without the original paintings, these interpretations could not exist. The interpretation shows the epilogue; the story after the event. Perhaps this symbolises that we are living through the consequences of our previous actions; a seemingly expanding web of economic crisis as a consequence of greed and misused power.

However, we can take solace that all is not doomed yet. The architecture curtails the expansion of this drawing offering a flash of hope; security within an inescapable structure.

Aisling Dundon, aged 17

As well as being inspired by a work of art in a national collection, this interpretation of Wadsworth's *Dux et Comes* / 1932, is also indebted to airplane seats, which are themselves mass-produced, and exemplify a facet of contemporary life, international travel to be sure, but one of its less glamorous aspects. We are drawn to it because of its shape and form, and because it is puzzling, giving us mixed messages as to what is and is not a work of art.

Marjorie Trusted
Senior Curator Sculpture, Victoria & Albert Museum
Author of *The Making of Sculpture*

It is all too easy to look at a painting and start imposing limitations.

It feels normal. After all, the artist has already had to make limiting choices: this colour not that, this scene not that, this idea not that. A frame both literal and figurative has gone up and separated what the painting is from what it isn't.

That frame is necessary, of course, or art would be the whole world and you could never fit it inside a gallery. The frame is a good thing, providing focus for artist and viewer. But it can have the worrying effect of making us think there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to look at art – the right way being to try to figure out what the artist intended or, even worse, what the art historian or gallery curator has decided for us.

I like to think outside the frame, to ask the 'wrong' questions, which are often 'what if' scenarios. Looking at the Bacon painting, *Study for a Portrait of Van Gogh IV* 1957, I think: what if this painting was part of a cartoon? What if there were bombs going off in the background? What if a cat/ cow/ woman was following the man? What if you made all of the red bits green? What if you could see the guy's face? These questions draw me right into the picture. What if I stopped asking such questions? That's one 'what if' I never want to have to contemplate.

Tracy Chevalier

Author of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and *Burning Bright*

The nature of Wadsworth's painting and the fact that it is itself an interpretation makes interpreting this work very difficult. Do you interpret it as an interpretation or as an artwork that is separate?

Sam Hufton, aged 17

The 'ghost in the machine' was the dismissive phrase that philosopher Gilbert Ryle used to describe Descartes' separation of mind and body. How absurd, he thought, to build a theory of reality where the two exist in separate planes but with no explanation of how they interact.

Transition from Thinking to Dreaming 2009 raises the same question – what links the abstract with the material? Is it just a bench that you could touch, sit on, possibly even slide along, or a physical manifestation of an abstract shape? That shape is derived from a painting by Edward Wadsworth called *Dux et Comes I* 1932. For Nick Hornby and the Visual Dialogues group, it becomes functional sculpture, but to me it resembles two pound signs floating in space opposite one another.

Maybe that's why I'm an economist and not an artist. Money is the ultimate ghost in the machine, a confidence trick that keeps the physical economy moving. If banks can create money out of thin air when they lend it, and the result is new factories, offices and jobs, they can just as easily destroy it by calling in those loans. Sadly our economy is suffering the very tangible consequences of this apparently abstract process.

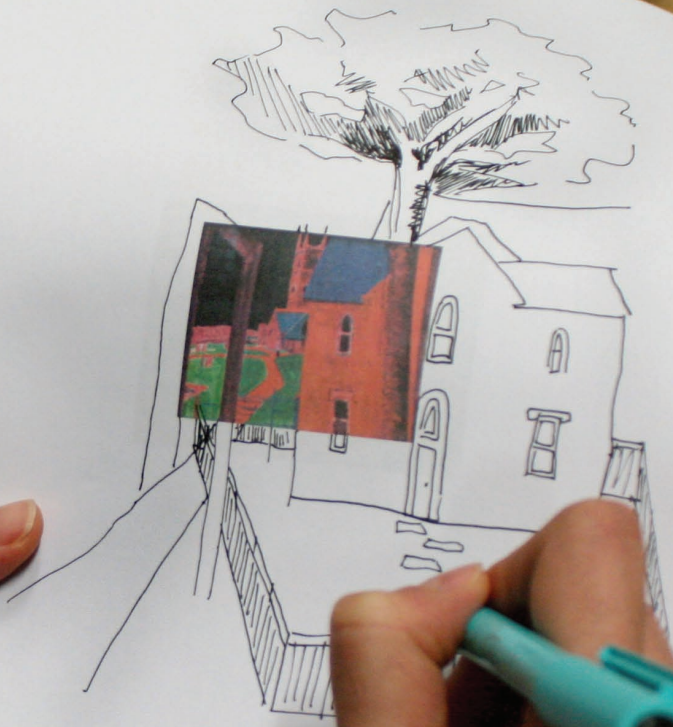
The link between the abstract and the material in this case is our psychology, our confidence – or lack of it – as consumers, investors and savers. The collective result of our individual hopes and fears is enough to transform our whole economy from boom to bust. So you may think our society is obsessed with the material, but it is built on a fragile abstraction.

In our globalised economy, this destructive cycle is happening around the world. If the postmodern was born out of a loss of faith in the modernist dream, I wonder what the last year means for the 'altermodern'. It has certainly put an end to any hopes (or fears) that the world is rushing towards a single model of market capitalism. Equally it would be a tragedy if the result was a reversal of globalisation and a withdrawal behind national boundaries. Maybe a more ethical capitalism can emerge from the wreckage. That's something to think, or dream, about.

Rupert Harrison

Economic Adviser to the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer

Extending the line, Photo © Nick Hornby





Dana Mokaddem wrote
on 04 November 2008 at 11:57

We had our session with Soweto where we began to finalise the route to the audio guide:

1. We thought about ways in which we could guide the person listening to the trail so they know where to stand, for instance, putting footprints to follow or circles. We also thought about where specifically in the room they should stand so that you can see the painting clearly whilst listening to the audio (for instance the Martin trilogy was high above so the lighting made it quite difficult to see).
2. We thought about the order in which the paintings should be seen (one idea was to start with Gupta's mushroom cloud) - Indie asked if we could in our own time walk through the route just to get an idea of the practical problems.

After the Tate session, we went to Old Street to visit an exhibition, *Donald Rodney: In Retrospect* and watched *The Genome Chronicles*, a film which showed artist Donald Rodney in the last few months of his life. What we all noticed was how effective the music they played throughout the film was, and how without the music, perhaps it wouldn't have made the same impact or such a long lasting impression on us.

John Akomfrah (the filmmaker) said, 'It had to be conceived as a song cycle...on the impossible language of suffering,' 'we were setting off to make a piece about ghosts, phantoms and possession'...'amazing what music can do for you sometimes.'

Soweto Kinch wrote
on 08 November 2008 at 12:07

1. Absolutely! Remember us also discussing music's ability to be pervasive and under the radar at the same time. We choose to visit a gallery, or watch a play, but music/sound is subconsciously affecting our mood continuously. It's really important in devising this piece, to trigger *emotional* responses to the works and to the idea of the Altermodern. How do we *feel* about new transnational processes, or the loss of an old world?

2. Glad you highlighted how the physical dimensions of the gallery space at Tate will also have a positive bearing on the content. It's also been good to explore creative ways of turning what might have been impediments to our advantage. There's a metaphorical power to having to 'stand back' and comprehend destruction in Martin's *The Great Day of His Wrath* 1851-3, or having Watts' *Mammon* 1884-5 in a separate red coloured room (financial metaphor of 'in the red').

3. I remember one of the first jazz concerts I went to, and the fuse that it lit. I saw Wynton Marsalis play with a sextet when I was 13, the bass player was playing the body of the bass as well as the strings, Wynton's trumpet playing and posture were majestic, and I remember the blistering technique the whole ensemble had. The most affecting thing was the percussion references to African rhythms, and some of the spontaneous call and response shouts. Immediately, I imagined pictures of ancient Mali, epics of West African folklore, sights and smells of a Timbuktu market. I had a whole series of associations just based on the *improvised* sound before me.

Alexander Jonathan Scripps (The Charter School) wrote
on 12 November 2008 at 13:03

During our fourth meet with Nick Hornby, we covered many topics surrounding Altermodernity and semiotics.

We started by looking at the evolution of sculpture, and more importantly its transition from 'on the plinth' to 'off the plinth'. Starting with the ancient Egyptians, Nick presented a '5 minute' slideshow of various different sculptures. We moved from Hieroglyphics, where the 'sculpture' was actually 'embedded in the plinth' through Egypt where the sculpture is still extremely static, into classical Greek sculpture. The pose is a lot more fluid and elegant but still static compared to modern day 'standards'. The next era, I think, was Renaissance when Michael Angelo's *David* 1501-04 'came along and changed the whole thing!' by actually stepping off of the plinth ever so slightly and having a much bolder and more naturalistic stance. Then comes the Baroque sensation. With enhanced dramatic movement breaking beyond, and off the plinth, it allows the audience to be incorporated into the scene. Nick showed us more contemporary sculpture

without a plinth. This allows the sculpture to become part of its surroundings and interact with everything around it. Including us. The sculpture can adapt to become whatever you want it to be, and interpreted the way you feel most, or least, comfortable with.

Next we embarked upon one of our ghost tours around the Tate in search of some artwork to expand upon for interpretation. Finding the room concealed under a blanket of darkness, Indie was sent in search of light and returned successful. Blinded by both the sudden influx of light and the astounding sight of the nude woman in Lucien Freud's *Standing by the Rags* 1988-9, the Visual Dialoguers took a moment to adjust to the surroundings. Eventually we got on with our work, tapering off into smaller groups, we found the pieces of work we decided to advance upon. We stuck small paintings in the middle of a page and had to 'interpret' what had happened in the prequel and sequel to this picture... or possibly just what's happening around it.

If you guys can remember anything else we did, I stupidly forgot to take full notes, please don't hesitate to add it in :)

Love Alex

Alexander Jonathan Scripps (The Charter School) wrote
on 12 November 2008 at 14:27

Few corrections guys:
Ancient Egypt- 5,000ish years ago
Michelangelo

Alexander Jonathan Scripps (The Charter School) wrote
on 11 December 2008 at 19:25

We also learned about how one material can be manipulated into looking like something hard or something soft. Looking at a picture of Michelangelo's *Pietà* 1548-55, we noted the contrast between the hard, bone-like knee and the weight and fleshy texture achieved in the forearm. This concept actually really interested

me and I've begun looking into it for my A-level art as I was talking about how things can be used as a metaphor for sensitivity, and I think that the idea of one material being used to create different textures would be a good reaction, and maybe even a paradox to my previous work.

Thanks Nick you really got me out of a creative block I suffer!

Nick Hornby wrote
on 12 December 2008 at 09:17

Great. Yes - most things look like what they're made of.... some things don't.
TRANSFORMATION: Tree into book, alchemical changes, sea change (remember Shakespeare's *Tempest*: 'into something rich and strange', Eucharist.
Drapery in sculpture.... when they carve (or paint in paintings) the folds and overlaps of material.

Or in Architecture: columns - or the twiddles at the top - they are trying to transform hard stone into something softer/ lighter.... more elegant...

Victorians: they were masters of transforming things like... wood... into thin elegant chairs and tables... tapered legs, curved backs etc....

Lots to do...

A good thing to do this weekend would be:

Everyone you should all go to the V&A Cast Rooms... see *David*. And *Moses*!

Dana Meir (The Latymer School, Edmonton) wrote
on 15 December 2008 at 16:31

We learned about the differences between sculpture and painting. Sculpture makes us aware of the physical space we take up and when we see it we can relate to it in that we know how it will feel (like the sharpness of scissors, the point on a pin).

Young people and artists in a visual dialogue. Excerpts from an online blog



Trevor Mathison *Mammom* still from *The Ghost in the Machine* 2009, © Courtesy of the artist

The historical works for the sonic trail may seem as though they have been randomly selected with no relation to each other. However, if you listen and look, you will discover how a more underlying theme intertwines all these works together, to tell a story, a sequence of events which leads to a dramatic outcome.

Draper's *The Lament for Icarus* 1898 for me represents all the public figures in recent history who have been idealised and put on a pedestal only to be brought down by the very people who raised them in the first place. In a time where technology is at its most advanced, media spreading across the globe in an instance, we made them into public icons that we could look up to and could be proud of, and grow to love.

This made me start to question this idea of globalisation, of advanced technology. Have we crossed the line and gone too far? Where do we stop? Martin's *The Great Day of His Wrath* 1851-3 may be a sign for this, a message that we have gone too far, that we are facing the end. We are being punished for the actions we have made, not being satisfied with what we have, and continuing to find improvements on things we don't need to improve.

Watts' *Mammon* 1884-5 first seemed to me about a man who was greedy and took advantage of those in poverty and less powerful than himself. However, I later examined his hands, and rather than appearing as though he was forcing their heads down, it seemed more as though he was comforting them too, and I saw Mammon in a different light, someone who almost regrets his past actions, and has come to realise that he is unhappy.

We are moving these historical works forward into the Altermodern through music, as it is a universal language, giving us an innate feeling which cannot be translated into words. There still is that glimmer of light in the corner, for hope, as we enter into a new era. We can either enter a world with a harrowing ending, the atomic cloud, or we can reflect on our actions to this day, and change our paths.

Dana Mokaddem, aged 17

A dark, almost recognisable city, the skeletal remains of a twenty-year conflict. An eternal stillness brought about by the total eradication of life in a world forever changed. The howling litany of wind unchecked by the presence of buildings or trees, the land completely levelled by bombs and guns. Is this a nightmare vision proposed by *The Ghost in the Machine* sonic trail, or a dystopian future a few mere steps from where we find ourselves now?

There is a definite sense of the Altermodern at work throughout the process of threading artworks together with new, contemporary soundscapes. Much of the audio has been created in workshops by the composer together with young people from varied cultural backgrounds; all of the works of art are created by artists from different places and points in time. Then there is the music itself, an amalgamation of the classical and contemporary, of jazz and hip hop, past and present day, a fusion that fully exemplifies an essential part of the Altermodern artist's credo - to 'navigate history as well as all the planetary time zones producing links between signs faraway from each other.'

The sonic trail takes this challenge firmly by the scruff of the neck, hefting it into full view of the listener. It is a reminder of humankind's eternal belief in the dominance of the mind over the material - even his own physical body. It weaves a thematic tale of human folly, of reaching for the stars while forgetting the soul, of commercial globalisation that can only foster cultural lack, unless we look into the eyes of those in other lands and see our own struggles mirrored there.

Courtia Newland
Author of *Music for the Off Key*

I've been thinking quite a lot recently about the multiple and often complex relationships forged between jazz and the post-war avant garde; relations that are summarised by two – often repeated – statements from the great jazz musician, Charlie Parker:

'Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art.'

'Learn the changes, then forget them.'

Lately I've been obsessed with how those two clarion calls for a certain sonic intent became – in the 1950s - the 'correct code' for a way of 'becoming in the moment' that infused, informed and gave shape to everything from Method acting to New Music. It was the search for the signs of this Tao, this daring and yearning for the promise of The Moment that brought me to follow the trail of the sonic *Ghost in the Machine*.

One day, a possible secret history of our modernity will be written and its thesis will be something like this: the altars of modernism are strewn with the bodies of a host of barely-recognisable figures without whom the shape of modernism - as we knew it - would never have taken the form it did. Or been as trailblazing as it became.

There is something about this strategic intervention, this new collaboration that takes me back to Charlie Parker. Something that manages to invoke, for me, the spectre and the haunting of Parker. If anything, remember, 'there's no boundary line to art.'

John Akomfrah
Artist

For fame and glory you gotta play the game

keep your head up lil' soldier never bow your head in shame
sooner or later they're gonna call your name
just make sure your tools ready to unleash all the pain
just make sure that when you're done never ever catch the blame
get rid of the evidence, burn it up in flames.

On the wings of hate, he says
what would you do to save your life today
from the hoodrats to rich kids all strayed away
different cultures but our minds are all the same
because the system leads to corruption and greed
well I say I'm alive when I bleed
fallen from grace, purposefully losing the seed
to hell with it, there is no God; only the destiny we're used to receive
so that's the story of 'name' the soldier
and now your dead: six feet under
his mamma's soul cried like thunder
he never really listened to what he told her
because the sun beams and the rays blinded his vision
to see clearly; to set his eyes on the mission
he never really had the heart to listen
and now he's gone, we're gonna dearly miss him.

On the wings of love, he said
unfortunately you lost your wings, how dread
because its you who's now dead.

Emerson Caronan, aged 19



LEFT: Trevor Mathison. Warfs still from *The Ghost in the Machine* 2009. © Courtesy of the artist
RIGHT: Subodh Gupta. *Line of Control* 2008. © Courtesy of the artist







LEFT: John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, 1851, 3. © Tate
RIGHT: Trevor Mathison, *Musroom Sax Still*, from *The Ghost in the Machine*, 2009. © Courtesy of the artist

Visual Dialogues: Programme of Events

Education Open Evening:

Cross-Cultural: *Van Dyck and Britain* & *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*

An evening of gallery based talks and workshops with free entry to *Van Dyck and Britain* and the Tate Triennial. Artist, Nick Hornby and several participants present the outcomes and process explored in using the Altermodern to reframe the modern. Includes workshop and free sonic trail.

Late at Tate, Altermodern: The Remix, 6 March 18.00- 22.00

Responding to themes in the Tate Triennial, *Late at Tate Britain* presents a night of interventions, art and music. Featuring Soweto Kinch and young participants from the *Visual Dialogues* programme. No booking required.

Tate Teachers: Teachers in Visual Dialogue

7 March 11.00- 16.00, DUFFIELD ROOM & GALLERIES

This one day course considers how contemporary practices can be used to explore social and cultural issues, informed by theory and art history.

Artist Nick Hornby, musician Soweto Kinch and young people in the *Visual Dialogues* programme expands the ways to read and interpret visual art.

Free entrance to *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* included.

BRIT/SHISTORY series

hosted by Tate Forum and *Visual Dialogues* exploring shifts in British art and culture

TALK IT UP, 19 February 18.00-21.00, AUDITORIUM

Debate the impact of globalisation and multiculturalism on visual culture with artists Mark Leckey and Gayle Chong Kwan, curator and writer Dr Mike Phillips and poet John Agard.

MIX IT UP, 27 March 18.30- 21.30, GALLERY 9 & MANTON STUDIO

How does Altermodern represent the diverse origins and identity of British music and film? Join film director John Akomfrah and musician Soweto Kinch in conversation with music by Norman Jay and live visuals by Dubmorphology. Free tours of *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* included.

MAKE IT UP, 15 & 16 April 11.00-17.00, MANTON STUDIO

What defines culture now? Work with artists and Tate Forum to create a collaborative piece. Use fashion, music, sampling and retro technology to unravel how British visual culture - from historic to modern to Altermodern - has formed.

Tate Schools: Visual Dialogues across the Curriculum

31 March, 1 and 2 April, 20 places per session, CLORE & MILLBANK STUDIOS KS2-3 10.00-15.00, Flexible start and finishing times.

How can looking at art works help the exploration of language, history and citizenship? Creative workshops led by Nick Hornby and Soweto Kinch use sculpture, image and music to explore visual literacy and interdisciplinary expression in Tate collection and *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*.

Early Years Programme: Crash, Jingle, Swish

15 April, 15 children per session

Families with children aged 2-5, 10.30-11.30, 12.00-13.00

Make a noise and build a sculpture with Nick Hornby and Soweto Kinch through ultra Altermodern play!

All children must be accompanied by an adult throughout the activity. Older brothers and sisters are very welcome to join in – please book a place for them too.

Artworks in *The Ghost in the Machine* trail are included in a special Braille trail. Ask at the Information desks for more details. A transcription of the sonic trail is also available for George Frederic Watts' *Mammon*.

All events are FREE. Please book in advance on 020 7887 8888



Visual Dialogues
The Ghost in the Machine

BACK COVER: Trevor Mathison /Carus still from *The Ghost in the Machine* 2009 © Courtesy of the artist!

LEFT: Herbert Draper, *The Lament for Carus* 1898 © Tate