

Grayson Perry
Playing to the Gallery – Democracy Has Bad Taste

SUE LAWLEY: Hello and welcome to Tate Modern in London for the first of this year's BBC Reith Lectures. They're called Playing to the Gallery, an appropriately ironic title for a lecturer who says of his work "it sneaks up on people and seduces them, and I like that". After studying Fine Art at Portsmouth Polytechnic, he started taking pottery lessons and was soon exhibiting his work. That was back in 1983. Twenty years later he won the Turner Prize and the potter who up till then had been talked of as an artists' artist became an important force in the world of art. His highly decorated vases and plates are classically beautiful but they carry a subversive message, spiky, he calls it. He's made his name in ceramics but he works in other media too. His series of tapestries charting a modern Rake's Progress from working class childhood to death in a Ferrari was a centrepiece of this year's Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. He sees himself as a modern Hogarth or Gillray, an acute but irreverent observer of the social scene who can use his talents not only to mock but also to enliven and explain the way we live now. He's also a well-known cross dresser. As he said when he won that big prize, "it's about time a transvestite potter won the Turner". Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Grayson Perry.

You have fans, you have fans. I have to say, Grayson, that this must be the first time in the sixty-five year history of Reith that a cross-dresser has been the lecturer.

GRAYSON: Well, as far as we know.

SUE LAWLEY: **Touché.**

GRAYSON: Look for the eyebrows, I always say.

SUE LAWLEY: **Touché.** Listen, this is radio. You have to describe what you're wearing.

GRAYSON: Yes, I'm usually dressed by St Martins Students now so this, this sort of oversized t-shirt in psychedelic colours was made by a student called Angus, a Chinese student actually, and I'm wearing my orange patent flatforms, I think you call them.

SUE LAWLEY: Well we should describe them. I mean they're huge, they're pale orange patent. Why are they flatforms? They've got heels.

GRAYSON: Because they're not, they're quite flat, they're quite comfy but they've got a four inch platform.

SUE LAWLEY: They are comfy, are they?

GRAYSON: Yeah.

SUE LAWLEY: They are huge, and dark turquoise tights, sea green tights you prefer to call them, with matching eye shadow.

GRAYSON: Yeah I mean there's a difference between subtle and – some people think that subtle is dull. They get it muddled up but I think you can be subtle with bright colours.

SUE LAWLEY: And you're looking subtle today?

GRAYSON: Yeah.

SUE LAWLEY: Now I gather that it was originally Radio 4 in the form of The Archers which is not known as a kind of hotbed of the avant-garde that actually gave you the idea that contemporary art had now become mainstream. Is that right?

GRAYSON: Yeah I think for me the watershed moment was when Linda Snell, a kind of self-appointed cultural ambassador to Ambridge if you like, she tried to, she campaigned to try and get someone from Ambridge on the Fourth Plinth when Antony Gormley was doing the One and the Other project. And so I thought if, if Linda Snell is a kind of fan of contemporary art, then the game is won, or lost, depending on where you look at it you know. It's no longer a kind of little backwater cult. It is now a part of mainstream cultural life.

SUE LAWLEY: And you're going to deliver four lectures on it. Just in a nutshell, what do you hope to achieve with these lectures?

GRAYSON: Well I hope to ask and try to answer those obvious questions that I think that a lot of people who aren't you know members of the art world ask when they go into a gallery and they're slightly bemused or maybe angered by the work, and I want to sort of maybe say you know help them, give them tools to understand and appreciate art.

SUE LAWLEY: Grayson Perry, your podium awaits.

GRAYSON: Thank you.

Right, now the first question I'd like to answer is: why have the BBC asked me, Grayson Perry, artist, to give the Reith Lectures this year? And I think it's because I am a practising artist, I am the person who is confronted with a blank sheet of paper or a lump of clay and I have to literally make the sort of decision of what am I going to do on a day to day basis, and I'm not just a commentator on the art world. I am one of the foot soldiers, if you like. And I work on the coal face of culture but nowadays of course we live in an era when it's mainly a service economy so perhaps really it should be the call centre of culture that we work on nowadays.

And also as a practitioner, and not necessarily an expert in the wider sense, I can use that, that – what is often seen as a sin by many academics, that is autobiography as analysis. I can extrapolate from my own personal experience kind of wider

generalisations about the art world and that's exactly what I'm going to do a lot of the time. And I've called this series of lectures Playing to the Gallery and not, you may note, Sucking up to an Academic Elite.

Because I want to talk about my business, the art world, and when I mean the art world, is you know the stuff you see in museums like here in Tate Modern and in commercial galleries all around London and the world, and also in Biennales, fairs. You might see it on a roundabout and nowadays pretty much anywhere you might see contemporary art, in the street or even in cyber-space so – but I think you know that's the business that I want to talk about, visual art really, though of course you know as we will find later on, it's not all visual.

Because historically I think the art world has been fairly inward-looking because it can operate as a fairly closed circle. In many ways there are many artists who are very successful who don't need the public at all. There's a closed circle of the artist, the dealer, the collector. You don't necessary need a wider audience. If there's one message that I want these sort of lectures to carry, it is that anybody can enjoy art and anybody can have a life in the arts – even me! An Essex transvestite potter, even I, the mafia has even let me in.

And it's a nice life. Come in! It's not easy, it's not easy, I'm not saying it's, you know it's not like being a celebrity but it's a very rewarding and exciting place you know to hang out. I mean here we are in Tate Modern now. It's the first or second most popular tourist destination in the country, 5.3 million visitors a year. And I suppose in some ways I'm talking to those people but not all of them so I sort of, I looked at some Arts Council survey on audience segmentation, who are the people that I'm talking to with this lecture? And they've divided up the audience for art, museums and galleries into several categories and I don't really need to talk to what I call the urban arts eclectic or the mature explorer because they're a guaranteed shoe-in. They'd come anyway. And I haven't got a chance with the bedroom DJs or the time-poor dreamers. I'm working on the 36% who are dinner and a show, or fun fashion and friends. So that's who I'm working on, they're the people I'm talking to.

Now art is very popular but I think many people are still quite insecure around galleries, going into galleries, particularly commercial galleries which are quite intimidating. There are very good looking gallery girls on the front and all that sort of thing, and the language, and so I'm hoping, you know I want to answer a few of the very basic questions that perhaps you know people even in the art world think that it's almost too gauche to ask. They might think they're irrelevant or even they've all been answered now and everybody knows the answer. So I'm starting with this lecture and it's called Democracy Has Bad Taste, because I want to talk about the issue of quality because I think this is one of the most burning issues around our – how do we tell if something is good? And

who tells us that it's good? That's perhaps even more important. And of course now in the art world as it is, does it really matter? And I want to talk about what are the criteria by which we judge art made today.

Now there's no easy answer for this one, I'm sorry to say. I'm not going to live up to sort of like the Reith Lecturers' code of honour which is to have definite strong opinions and be a kind of certainty freak because many of the methods of judging are of course very problematic and many of the criteria that you use to assess art are conflicting. I mean we have financial value, popularity, art historical significance, or aesthetic sophistication. You know all these things could be at odds with each other. If I go back really when I started thinking about the idea of quality, in my second year at art college it was almost de rigueur at that point that you had to dabble in performance art. This is thirty years ago. It was a thing you had to do, a little bit of performance art, you know cover the basics.

So I did a little three act performance. I started off by being a kind of naked guru in a chastity belt which people had to kind of come and worship, and then the second part was a lecture I gave, sort of a facetious lecture because there were very Marxist intellectuals in our college so I was taking the piss out of them so I did a whole lecture about the fact that art was an anagram of the word rat. And then the third part which is the part I want to talk about, I ran an election in college. I put up a little ballot box in college a few weeks before to elect the best artist in the college, democratically, and of course this was a very facetious act and the audience of course acted very facetiously in response and elected me as the best artist because they knew I was organising it, and I won the prize which was a big head that I'd made.

But I learnt two things from doing that performance. One was I had to have very low expectation of audience participation, and the other one was that judging quality is a very tricky area, and my lecturer afterwards, he said to me, he said that was fun he said, but I don't know if it was good art. Because quality then, you know I realised there was this sort of tension between the idea of popularity and quality within the art world, and they seemed often to be almost at odds with each other.

I mean the fifth most popular art exhibition in the world last year was the David Hockney show at the Royal Academy, A Bigger Picture, with those big joyful landscape paintings, and it was paying. Soon after I was having a conversation with, I shall remain nameless gallery director of a major contemporary art gallery in this country, and she said she thought it was one of the worst shows she'd ever seen. And I don't think she was alone. A free gallery might I add, she had. And I don't think she was alone in thinking that you know such a popular exhibition wasn't to the taste of someone who's perhaps job was to advance the taste in art of people in this country.

Now there were two very mischievous and funny Russian artists called Komar and Melamid in the middle of the 1990s. They took this whole idea of popularity literally and they commissioned a load of surveys in different countries to find out what sort of art people wanted and then when they'd got the results of these surveys which were done professionally, they painted the paintings in accordance with the results, and it was quite shocking. Nearly every country, all it really wanted was a landscape with a few figures around, animals in the foreground, mainly blue, and every country wanted this. It's quite depressing. You know you thought they've got any choice they want, they all wanted the same thing. And they said in looking for freedom, we found slavery.

A visitor to an exhibition say like the Hockney exhibition, if they were judging the quality of the art, they might use a word like beauty. Now if you use that kind of word in the art world, be very careful. There will be a sucking of teeth and mournful shaking of heads because their hero, their hero artist, Marcel Duchamp, he said this of urinal fame, he said aesthetic delectation is the danger to be avoided, he said. And so in the art world sometimes it can feel like to judge something on its beauty, on its aesthetic merits can almost feel like you're buying into some politically incorrect, into sexism, into racism, colonialism, you know class privilege. It almost feels it's loaded, this idea of beauty, because it's a construct because where does our idea of beauty come from?

I mean Proust said something to the effect that we only see beauty when we're looking through an ornate gold frame, because beauty is very much about familiarity and it's a reinforcing an idea we have already. It's a constructive thing built up on shifting layers. It's like when we go on holiday, all we really want to do is take the photograph that we've seen in the brochure. You know you want to be on Machu Picchu on your own. Because our idea of beauty is constructed you know by family, friends, education, nationality, race, religion, politics, all these things make our idea of beauty. So somebody who chooses curtains, I'm sure they just think oh I like those curtains, they're nice you know, but when you are thinking about what art do you like, my god it's a nightmare.

The self-consciousness is in the very DNA of modernism. I mean modernism really, the whole of modernism, the last hundred years of art leading up to say the 1970s, it was all about the fact that it was self-conscious about the idea it was making art and so self-consciousness is crippling for an artist. As a schoolboy, I liked Victorian narrative painting and I've had to go through all sorts of contortions to justify my liking of this. I mean I like paintings by I think people like William Powell Frith, and George Elgar Hicks and these are – why do I like them? They're very English, lovely craftsmanship, social history, good frocks.

And I went through all kind of, the twists and turns to justify my liking of these and early on I was an early re-adopter and I was sort of, I was saying oh they're modern in their own time and

they're ironic and they're kind of almost seeing exotic now, and then I would say oh they're unashamedly popular. And then all of a sudden they were becoming popular again, they were becoming fashionable again and I'd gone oh no I've no longer got kooky taste. It'll just look like I'm jumping on the bandwagon, liking Victorian narrative painting. So you can see how difficult it is, the role of the artist.

Now my job day in day out is to make aesthetic judgments around such things. And it's, the discomfort around it is that it's a soft problem, a subjective problem you know so it's very tricky. I'm very sceptical of the idea that you can find a kind of empirical way of judging quality, particularly in art. I mean we've had attempts at it over history. I mean the Greeks, they had their golden ratio. William Hogarth, the painter, he had his Serpentine line of beauty that he used to put into his paintings thinking this was a sort of way ensuring that it would be a beautiful thing but my favourite one is called the Venetian Secret because Benjamin West, president of the Royal Academy of Art, in about 1796, he was hoaxed. Someone said they had found a Venetian Secret which was a mythical thing which was that Titian and a lot of the Venetian painters had this formula almost for painting the ideal beautiful painting and, and somebody brought this old letter to Benjamin West and he believed he was real, and he started painting paintings in this formula hoping it would work, and he was mocked hideously in the press for doing this. But I can feel, you know I can feel some sympathy with the guy in a way.

And so I did a bit of research myself and I think I have found the 21st century of the Venetian Secret and it is, I'll give it to you now, it's a mathematical formula. What you do, you get a half decent non-offensive kind of idea and then you, you times it by the number of studio assistants and then you divide it by, you divide it with an ambitious art dealer and that equals number of oligarchs and hedge fund managers in the world. And that is the ideal formula for art in the 21st century. Of course the nearest we have to an empirical measure of art that actually does exist is the market. By that reckoning Cezanne's Card Players is the most beautiful lovely painting in the world. I find it a little bit clunky kitsch but you know, that's me. \$260 million, it's worth.

Now cynics may say that art is only an asset class and that it has lost its other roles now, you know that that's the main reason that art exists any more, is that it's this sort of big lumpen load of cash sitting on the wall. And of course the opposite arguments are it's art for art's sake and that's a very idealist position to take. Clement Greenberg said though, the famous art critic in the 50s, he said that art will always be tied to money by an umbilical cord of gold, either that state money or the market money. So me, I'm sort of fairly pragmatic about it. I mean one of my favourite quotes is that you'll never have a good art career unless your work fits into the elevator of a New York apartment block.

But curiously when a commercial gallery is setting up its show, it doesn't think about quality to a certain extent. Obviously it does but when it's setting up a show and it's pricing the work, it usually prices them by size. A big painting will cost more than a small painting because I suppose there's a sort of logic to that, curious logic. It doesn't mean that the big, of course in my experience the big painting is never going to be better than the small painting. I mean an artist's big work is very rarely their best. But of course then in the secondary market, the auction, that will all come out in the wash and the good painting will always get the highest price even though if it's a tiny little one.

And there's other kind of sort of measures of quality that I find funny. Philip Hook who worked for Sotheby's, he said red paintings will always sell best, followed by white, blue, yellow, green and black. Because – but then one thing we need, we are now coming to a crux point here at this point, is that there's one thing about that red painting that ends up in Sotheby's. It's not just any old red painting. It is a painting that has been validated. Important word this in the art world, big question. Who validates? Now there's quite a cast of characters in this validation chorus that is going to kind of decide what is good art. They are the kind of panel if you like that decides on what is good quality, what are we going to end up looking at?

And so they're sort of artists, teachers, dealers, collectors, critics, curators, the media, even the public maybe. And what they form of course is this lovely consensus around what is good art. I did a pot once called the Lovely Consensus and I put on it the fifty names of collectors and galleries and exhibitions that I might be in, almost like the perfect CV, written onto this pot in a decorative way and it was in my show for the Turner Prize, and one of the names on that pot was a very famous art collector called Dakis Jouannou and he saw the pot, bought it on the phone while he was looking at it in the Tate Gallery. So that's just as an aside, little tip there to any artist. What you might want to do is write the name of famous collectors on the side of your work.

Now Sir Alan Bowness who was a previous director of the Tate Gallery, he said there's four stages to the sort of rise and success of an artist. It will be peers, serious critics and collectors, dealers and then the public but I think it's a little bit more complicated than that nowadays. I mean you can start, I think it's still very important to be recognised, I was called by Sue earlier, an artists' artist and that is a lovely accolade to have. When I first started making pottery, they used to look at me and go pottery! And then go yeah pottery, I kind of get that. Yeah and so I had to get the support of my fellow artists, and then serious critics, now I've always had a slightly sort of tense sort of relationship with critics. Everybody of course can remember their worst review. Mine started, I remember it, it was "if I had a hammer" was the first, was the first line of the review. It's still burned into my head.

And of course another, another member of that cast of validating characters are the collectors you know. Charles Saatchi in the 1990s, if he just put his foot over the threshold of your exhibition, that was it. The media was agog and he would come in and Hoover it up. And you know but of course you do want the heavyweight collector to buy your work because that gives it kudos. You don't want a tacky one you know who's just going to put it in there to glitz up their hallway. And you don't want a flipper. Now a flipper is a collector who will buy from a primary gallery at a set price and then fairly soon after will take it to auction because there's a demand for your work and will sell it for more, and that's a very bad thing to do.

Art dealers, they're the next sort of part of this chorus of validation. They're very good, good dealer brand, very powerful effect on the reputation of the artist, and also they form a part of placing the work. I mean this is always a slightly mysterious process that many people don't quite understand is a dealer will choose where your work goes so it gains the Brownie points, the buzz around it goes up. And then of course the next group of people we might think about in deciding what is good art is you lot, the public. Now since the mid-90s, you know, art has got a lot more media attention but the popularity has always been a quite sort of – I don't know – dodgy quality I think in art. The highbrow kind of critics - oh he's a bit of a celebrity and they turn their noses up about people who are well known to the public but now of course galleries like the Tate Modern want a big name because visitor numbers in a way are another empirical measure of quality. You know if loads of people come to your show, it's measurable and of course it justifies their funding.

Now perhaps the greatest accolade you can give a work of art is when you say it's museum quality. So perhaps at the top of the tree of the validation cast is the curators, and in the last century they have probably become the most powerful giver-outers of Brownie points in the art world. Willi Bongard, the German critic, he called them the popes of art, and such is the power of the curators that they are kind of bound by a kind of code of ethics in that you know they mustn't collect themselves, buy for their own private collection, work that is in the field that they are overlooking in their professional life because they are then in a position of very great power. I mean they could, if they bought a certain artist, they could then say oh I think we should do a show of X. You know it's funny how the prices have gone up since the Tate Modern has put that show on.

I live round the corner from Sir Nicholas Serota, director of Tate. He's a very distinguished curator as well. I was round his house one day and I was lucky enough to see his world class collection of Cliff Richard memorabilia so he keeps well away from his specialism.

And this validation process is I think, I mean I like to think, I don't know if I'm right in this, I like to think it's self-correcting to a certain

extent. If the glitzy collectors are buying him up and it's all shiny and lovely and they're just being parked outside arms dealers' houses, you know, the cool eye of academe will maybe go oh I don't know now. This is getting a little bit cheesy. And then the opposite tack if they're a bit too dry and heavy and kind of like oh it's so bloody worthy, the work will go (a) unsold and (b) unvisited probably because it's a bit dull. And god help you if you're popular.

But each, encounters with each of these sort of members of the cast of validation, if you like, bestows upon the work and on the artist a patina and what make that patina, it's like all these hundreds of little conversations and reviews and the good prices over time. These are the filters if you like that sort of pass a work of art through into the canon. Whether it lasts or not is another matter. I mean Francesco Bonami who curated the Venice Biennale a few years ago, he had something he called Duane Hanson syndrome. Now Duane Hanson was, is an artist who does very realistic sculptures, started in the 60s. He thought that his work wasn't standing up well to the test of time so he said it isn't collecting a patina, he said it's collecting dust.

So what does this consensus really, I mean in a way you want to sort of boil down this lovely thing that all these people are bestowing on this artwork, that anoints it with the quality that we all want and I think in many ways what it boils down to is seriousness. That's the most valued currency in the art world. When I won the Turner Prize, one of the press people, one of the first questions they asked me was Grayson, are you a lovable character or are you a serious artist?

I said can't I be both? Because seriousness is a very important currency. It's protected and how it's protected is by language. Now ethnographer Sarah Thornton in her book *Seven Days in the Art World*, she quotes an Art Forum editor, Art Forum being the magazine of record in the art world, she quotes, she says this editor said of a previous incumbent of her job, she said yes English wasn't her first language so during her tenure as the editor, the magazine suffered from the wrong kind of unreadability.

So here, so here is a wall text that I copied down from the Venice Biennale in 2011, and I'm going to quote it at length because I think you need to know the full impact of this wall text. OK, "A common ground is based on the fact that affectivity remains a central access in contemporary Uruguayan artistic production. This exhibition puts forward two seemingly anti-thetical notions of this idea. On the one hand Magela Ferrero's personal diary, a written and visual work in progress, and on the other, the discourse and meta-discourse about language in Alejandro Cesarco's constant need to shed light on what it has said and not said, multiplying the winks, quotes, repetitions and versions of his favourite subject matters."

Neither do I! This is international art English. Alix Rule, a sociologist, and David Levine, an artist, they put the entire contents of a website called e-flux where all of the art galleries from round the world put their press releases through it. They put it through a language analyser and they came up with a few observations about inter, what they called international art English. “International art English rebukes ordinary English for its lack of nouns. Visual becomes visuality. Global becomes globality. Potential becomes potentiality. And experience of course becomes experienceability.” Now they describe the kind of metaphysical seasickness you get from reading this sort of text, or it sounds all a bit like inexpertly translated French.

Now this international art English began in the 1960s in art magazines and then it very quickly spread like wildfire because everybody wanted to be thought of as being very serious about the art, and so it spread to institutions, commercial galleries, even students’ dissertations, you’ll see it in today. Now the non-fluent in this kind of language might feel a bit uneducated and they might, they think you might need to understand this in order to pass judgment. I just want to tell you now, you don’t. I mean particularly when we are confronted with conceptual art that might be like a little bit of text on a scrappy bit of paper on the wall or a black and white fuzzy photo, well in the 1970s that was what conceptual art looked like.

In the 60s, in pop art, it was about the idea of consumerism but it looked still a bit like traditional art in some ways. Now I think a lot of these artworks are luxury goods. I mean to Takashi Murakami when he had his big show in the Museum of Modern Art in Los Angeles, he actually had a real Louis Vuitton shop in the gallery, selling handbags, as part of the exhibition. He called that his version of Duchamp’s urinal. He was crossing a barrier, he was actually you know saying yeah I make stuff and I flog it. you know unembarrassed. And so in many ways when you sort of judge this art by these artists, you are kind of judging them as luxury goods.

You know there’s a new breed of collector now where buying art is just an extension of you know you get the Ferrari, and then you’ll go and get a nice handbag and then you’ll go and pick up a big shiny bit of art to put on, in the front of the house. You know that’s the way it is. I mean the banks now, they recognise the asset, the solid asset group that art is. They even have a kind of you know little space put aside in their vaults for it. I mean they have silver, wine, art and gold, or the acronym SWAG.

There’s, I mean a lot of the art has been done since maybe the mid 1990s. It’s very difficult actually to judge it on terms of quality because it’s what they call participatory art. It’s art that’s, actually to many people it wouldn’t even seem like art at all. It might be some blind people in military uniform soliciting the crowd for sex. It might – no, these are real artworks – illegal immigrants selling knock-off handbags in the gallery. I’ve seen that myself. Or it might be a pop-up Thai café. I mean the kind of thing you know

Tino Sehgal, he did a show here in the Turbine Hall last year or this year maybe in the Tate Modern here, or maybe one of the best known works was Jeremy Deller's Battle of Orgreave where he restaged the famous dispute, the miners' dispute using people from the Sealed Knot.

And the whole idea of quality seems to be a sort of contested word now like you're buying into this sort of, the language of the elite by saying oh that's very good or something, you know. Oh no, so it's really problematic about how you might judge this work because to say it's not beautiful is to sort of put the wrong kind of criteria on it. You might think, you might say oh it's dull! Oh you're just not understanding it with the right terms. And I kind of go well how do we judge these things on, because a lot of them are quite politicised. There's quite a right-on element to them, so I think well do we judge them on how ethical they are, you know or how politically right-on they are?

But then again I might say well what do I judge them against? Do I judge them against government policy? Do I judge them against reality TV? Because that does participation very well. So in the end I'm sort of, what do we do, you know what happens to this sort of art when it doesn't have validation? It's sort of left, what's it left with? Is it left with popularity? And of course we know what popularity leads to because that's in the title of the lecture you know: Democracy Has Bad Taste.

But what I've attempted to explain here is how the art that we see in museums and in galleries around the world, in Biennales, how it ends up there, how it gets chosen because in the end it's if enough of the right people think it's good and that's all there is to it. But as Alan Bennett said when he was a trustee of the National Gallery, they should put a big sign up outside, they should have one up here actually: you don't have to like it all. So in my next lecture I want to talk about the fact that though we live in an era when anything can be art, not everything is art. So thank you.

SUE LAWLEY: Great stuff, Grayson, thank you very much indeed. So we have an audience of specialists, artists, curators, dealers, critics, the cast you've been telling us about actually, and agents. And there are plenty of non-specialists here too and we want to hear from them too. So do you agree that democracy has bad taste? How do you define good taste? Let's find out what they think in discussion with you.

Q: Grayson, Ekow Eshun, writer, commentator. If democracy has bad taste, to what do you account for your own success?

GRAYSON: One of the things that the art world sort of slightly frightened me sometimes is because maybe I'm too middle brow. I mean I call it Democracy Has Bad Taste because I think that good taste is almost a sort of, it works within a tribe. So within the art world tribe, it has its own set of values that aren't necessarily the same as that as a kind of more democratic wider audience and so you

know we, we come to it accepting that that's the system that you know got the art in. If you got the public to choose the artwork that was in art galleries, I'd be interested to see what it was like.

Q: So what's your own taste?

GRAYSON: My own taste?

Q: Yeah you've talked about kind of Victorian work. In terms of contemporary art, what actually do you like? What inspires you, what moves you?

GRAYSON: I like very little contemporary art. Contemporary art is all being made now and so most of it is rubbish. If you ask the impressionist expert at Sotheby's what they see coming across the front desk every day, they see all the rubbish Impressionists.

SUE LAWLEY: OK I've got a question over here.

Q: Kate Hardie, writer and member of the public, person. You talked about popular being like the sort of horror word. That came up in your talk a lot, popular, but you also talked about a group of people that you need to like your work in order to succeed. I wondered if there's a group of people you're absolutely terrified if they like your work, then you are a failure.

GRAYSON: I've always enjoyed teasing the art world with my own popularity because I, I've always sensed that it is, they are slightly uncomfortable with it.

Q: So who are you terrified of saying that they like your work?

GRAYSON: Probably the trendies. You know when somebody, when the trendy fashionable people like your work, the inevitability of becoming unfashionable.

Q: I might have misunderstood this but it felt a little bit like the public are the last people you really want to like your work?

GRAYSON: No no no, I mean, I – I was kind of teasing about that in a way because I think you know what I was saying is right in that how art ends up in a gallery like the Tate Modern, it didn't get there by public vote. It's been through a series of juries, unofficial juries at private views and sales and fairs around the world, and nods and winks and a kind of consensus gradually forms because there aren't many people in the art world who have the confidence of a totally kind of fresh good eye. It's a collective effort, I think.

SUE LAWLEY: But the curators you say are the most influential of this cast of validators you talked about.

GRAYSON: Because of the Brownie points they can give out by giving you an exhibition in a place like Tate Modern, that will have more impact on your reputation and probably your prices than anything else.

SUE LAWLEY: We've got some curators in the audience. We should hear from them. I see Nicholas Serota sitting there. Nicholas, are you aware that you are the most influential person in this cast of validators?

SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA: I am now aware that the price of Cliff Richard memorabilia has, has – has gone well beyond my reach.

SUE LAWLEY: Just in case anything's gone wrong here and people misunderstand, you don't really, do you? No?

SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA: I never discuss my private collection.

SUE LAWLEY: OK but here's a question for you. I mean you offered \$2 million at one point for Damien Hirst's Shark. You didn't get it in the end because as we know it famously went for twelve million. What was good quality in your influential view about that?

SIR NICHOLAS SEROTA: We never offered \$2 million and in the end Damien was kind enough to give us other work but had we been in a position to acquire that work it would have been because it was a certain realisation of in one sense an idea but in, it had a very strong physical form that seemed to encapsulate a particular moment or to take for another example his Thousand Days which was about the life cycle, not just of the fly but of maggot and in a sense a metaphor for all of us in this room. So that seemed like a rather profound 1990 version of the Memento Mori.

SUE LAWLEY: I guess history will judge whether the Shark was a kind of passing madness or a truth.

GRAYSON: The process goes on through generations.

SUE LAWLEY: Yeah but what's your hunch about the Shark? Is it quality in your view, your personal view now because you've – you know?

GRAYSON: Oh you're putting me on the spot now.

SUE LAWLEY: I am.

GRAYSON: Whenever I've seen it, it was looking quite mothly and I think I, I think the problem, I think the problem with it is for me, it had the curse of the Mona Lisa. You know you go to the, you go to the Louvre and see the Mona Lisa and you're so built up because it's the most famous artwork in the world and it's inevitably going to disappoint but if you just walked in on it, you'd go wow that's an amazing painting.

Q: Hello, my name's Barbara Clark and I'm a linguistic anthropologist. But I'm wondering, do you make pots for poor people?

- GRAYSON: Do I make pots for poor people? No I never did. In fact I did a pot once called Nick-nacks for Posh People.
- SUE LAWLEY: What do they cost on average, your pots then?
- GRAYSON: Now, they go for lots now. I think my prices, my best price is over 100,000.
- SUE LAWLEY: Really?
- GRAYSON: Yeah.
- SUE LAWLEY: You don't make them for poor people then.
- GRAYSON: No. When I started, you could have bought for a week's dole money, you know, so yes I used to but now I get what I get. The market you know has decided.
- Q: I'm Will Self. I enjoyed the lecture very much, Grayson. You name-checked Duchamp, invention of the readymade but you didn't talk at all about the Work of Art in the Age of its technological reproducibility to quote the title of Walter Benjamin's famous essay. What do you think is the impact of a work of art's technological reproducibility on this notion of artistic quality?
- GRAYSON: Well if you sort of make a series of identical artworks that are churned out by a technical process, they're all, hopefully they'll all be of a high a quality as each other, won't they?
- Q: Ergo the quality is therefore diluted since the quality is then spread.
- GRAYSON: Is uniqueness part of the quality then?
- Q: Well I think it's interesting because I think of you and one of the things that makes you to my way of thinking a good artist, is that your work has a hectic quality. It is made by your hand, it is touched by your hand and it has that quality.
- GRAYSON: I think this could be fetishized. I mean I'm sometimes held up as the sort of poster boy of the handmade but I don't want to become that person because I think that you know we're in a modern world now and the idea of uniqueness, I think you can get really hung on it.
- Q: David Exurgeon, art historian. You referred to the Cezanne Card Players which you don't care for and you picked it out because –
- GRAYSON: It has the highest auction price, yes you see.
- Q: Yes it's the most expensive painting to have been bought and sold. If we could give you as a present a work of art, what would you take?

- GRAYSON: I'd probably have a Brueghel. I mean that is probably in the Viennese Kunsthistorische Museum, you know there's one of the Brueghels there like –
- Q: Are you going to have the Hunters in the Snow or the Cloudy Day?
- GRAYSON: I would have the, I think it's called Procession to Calvary, is my favourite one, I think.
- Q: Fine.
- SUE LAWLEY: There you are, you see.
- GRAYSON: Is that alright?
- Q: Very reasonable.
- GRAYSON: You could probably get a tea towel of it, it's that popular.
- SUE LAWLEY: Do we take it you disapprove of that or –
- Q: No no I think it's a fantastic choice. Wouldn't be mine but it's a fantastic choice.
- Q: Miranda Sawyer, I'm a writer. It seems to me that art, as in fine art, makes people more angry than any other form of art, theatre or films or music.
- GRAYSON: Really?
- Q: Yeah if you talked –
- GRAYSON: You can walk out of art. You can't walk out the theatre so easily.
- Q: But if you talk, there's a lot of people that I talk to who are interested in music, film, would never go into an art gallery because every time they go in there, they get really cross. And I wondered if you could explain that given that you're trying to make it a more attractive thing for people to do.
- GRAYSON: I'd be interested what they're cross about. What are they cross, they feel like they're being fooled?
- Q: Yeah I think there's an element where they think that somebody's taking the mickey out of them.
- GRAYSON: For somebody just to walk into an art gallery and expect to understand it straightaway, it would be like me walking into, I don't know, a classical music concert you know, knowing nothing about classical music and saying oh it's all just noise. It is quite tricky sometimes to get into the position where you can start to understand because you can intellectually engage with something

quite quickly but to emotionally and sort of spiritually engage with something takes quite a long time. You have to live with it.

SUE LAWLEY: Grayson, thank you very much. There we must end it. Thank you very much to the audience. Next week we'll be in Liverpool where Grayson turns to the short but complex question, What is Art? Can anything from a pile of sweet papers to a video game or a soundscape be called art? We shall learn what he thinks. Until then, my thanks to our audience here in Tate Modern and to our Reith lecturer 2013, Grayson Perry.