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**REITH LECTURES 2013: PLAYING TO THE GALLERY**

**Presenter: Grayson Perry**

**Lecture 2: Beating The Bounds**

**Recorded at St George's Hall, Liverpool**

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**SUE LAWLEY:** Hello and welcome to Liverpool for the second of this year's BBC Reith Lectures.

We're in St. George's Hall, one of Britain's finest neoclassical buildings, recently restored to its original splendour. It was designed to hold concerts, festivals and public meetings like this. It's the epitome of Victorian ambition, a great example of its confident taste.

Charles Dickens, who loved Liverpool, came here many times and spoke warmly of the city's generous support of the arts. I'm told he gave his first reading of *A Christmas Carol* right here. I'm not sure what Dickens would have thought about this year's lecturer. I feel certain he would have enjoyed his arguments even if he was a bit taken aback by the way he dressed, which is why this hall is a good spot in an age very different from the one in which it was built to discuss matters of taste and the nature of art.

The lectures are called *Playing to the Gallery*. The first one discussed how we might judge good and bad art. Today's will explore what the boundaries of art are. Can it really be anything we like from a pile of sweets to a soundscape? To try to answer that question, and probably a few more too, please welcome the BBC Reith Lecturer 2013: Grayson Perry.

(APPLAUSE)

**SUE LAWLEY:** Grayson, Dickens would have made a grand job of describing what you're wearing. But as it is, it's up to us, so you go first.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** It's very short, in bone satin, with kind of renaissance style heraldic motifs of sort of orgies and teddy bears.

**SUE LAWLEY:** And it's got a kind of ... (LAUGHTER) it's got a kind of court jester top, hasn't it, with spiky bits?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Yes, it's got a little bit of a kind of Italian kind of ... what we say ... a little bit of the palio, the Siena Palio maybe.

**SUE LAWLEY:** The Siena Palio.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Yeah.

**SUE LAWLEY:** And the pop socks and the bare knees ...

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Yes.

**SUE LAWLEY:** ... and the bare thigh when the padded skirt ...

**GRAYSON PERRY:** The front few rows are going to enjoy this. (LAUGHTER)

**SUE LAWLEY:** And nice high shoes as ever. People will wonder, I have to say, why you've dressed up as a woman to deliver the Reith Lectures. I mean is there an easy answer to that? Are you more confident?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Well they always say the clothes are best on radio.

**SUE LAWLEY:** (LAUGHS) This is true. But is she ... I mean because we're talking about what is art. A lot of creativity goes into her, into the frocks and into your make-up. I mean we should say you've got pink eyebrows and heavy sequinned eyelids and so on. I mean is she a work of art?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** No. I use my artistic power to deny that.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Explain that.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Well I will do in the lecture.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Oh alright. (GRAYSON PERRY LAUGHS) Well you'd better ...

**GRAYSON PERRY:** But no, dressing up is not a work of art.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Okay, you'd better deliver the lecture then. It's called *Beating the Bounds* and we're about to find out why.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Okay.

(APPLAUSE)

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Okay. It's lovely to be here in Liverpool because I know that you enjoy your contemporary art and you probably know quite a lot about it. In my last Reith Lecture, I talked about quality and who or how or what ends up in art galleries and how it got there. In this one, I want to talk about what sort of things do and do not qualify as contemporary art.

Now if you asked that question in the art world, there'd be a lot of eye rolling and sort of like "Oh god, you know not that question again" like it's been answered. And I think that that is often ... you know there's a kind of complacent idea in the art world that anything can be art now. So it's quite a task that I've sort of set myself today in

what many people regard as kind of the post-historical art world - the post-modern, the end of art. We're in a state now where anything goes. But the thing is I think there are boundaries still about what can and cannot be art, but the limits are softer, they're fuzzier. And I think they're not formal - any thing can be art, I'm quite happy to engage with that intellectual idea - but I think the boundaries are sociological, tribal, philosophical, and maybe even financial.

And I've called this talk *Beating the Bounds*. Now beating the bounds is a ritual that used to go on right back in Anglo Saxon times before maps. So when a parish wanted to make sure that everybody knew where the edge of their parish was, that some of the older parishioners who knew them very well would take some of the younger parishioners out and they would march them round with the priest in a very ceremonial way. And when they reached a kind of major ... sort of marker stone or something like that, sometimes they would get a whip and they would beat the boys, so they had a strong emotional memory of that exact location (LAUGHTER) because that's how we remember things. Taxi drivers have told me "Oh there was a murder on that corner", and that's how they know that corner because our emotional remembering is very powerful. And so I want this evening to give you a few little stings of the whip, like that (*demonstrates*), just so that you might remember where the major boundary markers are as we trawl around the edge of the art world.

But of course there's a subsidiary question that kind of hangs in the air and I maybe want you to hold this one in the back of your mind as I'm giving this talk: why would someone want anything they're doing to be considered art? Because I mean there's quite a lot of reasons and the most obvious one is because they're an artist! "It's what I do!" Maybe they just want a good excuse to do something. You know there's a lot of, "I fancy doing that. Let's call it art." And of course probably one of the strongest reasons why you'd want your activity to be called art is economic because there's an awful lot of money - 43 billion pounds last year - sloshing through the art market, so that's quite a nice incentive to call what you do art.

Now going right back - the Greeks, they didn't have a word for fine art as we understand it. And the Romans, they thought sculpture and painting and things like

that, they put those in the dishonourable arts because they involved a lot of mess and hard labour and so they didn't see them as one of the higher arts.

And the art historian Hans Belting, he thought that the idea of art we have today - of things we go to see in galleries and that we contemplate as objects - started in about 1400. And this kind of trawled along and it was refined and we sort of took it for granted - oh yeah that's art, that's art - until modernism came along, late 19<sup>th</sup> century/mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. People started questioning what was art, what's this thing we're doing? And it went through this long transition, this very self-conscious thing where people, artists started questioning the nature of art until along came Duchamp who famously posited that anything could be art.

But the idea of the traditional still lingers on. If you're on Google maps and you put in 'object of interest: art gallery', the symbol that shows you where the art galleries is is a little black painter's palette.

That idea of what art is is still very, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century age, is still very pertinent. It's like a child's definition of art. If you asked a child what art is, they'd probably say painting and sculpture unless they were sort of a North London child, a very smart-ass child that had been to a lot of performance art or something like that. (LAUGHTER) And I am still very emotionally attached to that whole thing because you know going back to this idea of emotional memory and intellectual memory, you know I grew up thinking that was art and all the art I love is quite traditional, and so even though I can intellectually engage and even appreciate some of the more expanding field of art, I still am more emotionally attached to the old thing.

And Marcel Duchamp, the artist, who (maybe a hundred years or so ago) who decided you know that anything could be art when he got a urinal, when he brought it into an art gallery, that was a freak survival. The original urinal that he put into the independent art exhibition in New York in 1917, that was destroyed soon after. It was lucky someone took a blurry photograph of it and that it was recorded, and it went on to be this incredibly influential and important moment in art history. I find it quite arrogant that idea that he did - you just point at something and say "That's art" - and

it's a very intellectual idea of art somehow. And I would like the opposite power in many ways. I would love to point at something and say, "No it's no longer art, that there." I'd love that power.

I mean Banksy, the street artist, recently one of his works that he'd put on the side of a North London Poundland shop of a child worker sewing union jacks - that was his contribution to the Jubilee celebrations - the owner of the building hacked, very carefully hacked his painting off of the wall and then put it up for auction. And Banksy was very cross about this because his art work, he was giving it to the people, and so he said, "That's no longer a Banksy." (LAUGHTER) "You can't sell it. It's no longer a Banksy." I don't know how effective his negation of its Banksy-ness would be, but I like the idea. I thought that's a good idea.

And I like the idea when art works are somehow challenged as to their artiness, if you know what I mean. Like a group of schoolboys in 2000, they went into Birmingham City Art Gallery and there was an exhibition of contemporary art there and there was a piece by an artist called Graham Fagen. And part of his installation if you like was a pile of sweets and they all just started eating the sweets! (LAUGHTER) And they were sweets. You know that's their argument: "There were sweets. They were lying there. We ate them". You can't deny that.

The poet, W.H. Auden, he liked heavy blankets when he was in bed. He liked a weighty bed. He wouldn't have liked duvets. And once he was in this house and he didn't have enough blankets on, so he took a painting off the wall, still in the frame, and laid it down on his bed. (LAUGHTER) And I love that idea that he took a painting and made it functional.

Another way that art often I think stops being art a bit is when it becomes incredibly famous. If you go and see the Mona Lisa, it's like a celebrity. People just want to take their photograph in front of it. I can hardly see it as art. And of course the other thing that stops art almost seeming like art is when you just look at it and think oh my god, that's worth 250 million dollars. It's just like a great big lump of money on the wall.

So this idea that Duchamp ... Sorry, I'll just have a drink of water. This idea that Duchamp put forward that anything could be art that he decided was art, intellectually I think you know people engaged with it a bit. Not everybody liked it, I can imagine at the time, but it took quite a long time for people to really kind of get up on that idea and really get going with it. And it was in the 60s when it finally really came to fruition. And artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1961, he was asked to paint a portrait of a gallerist there called Iris Clert. And in response to this request, he just wrote a little telegram back to the person. He said, 'This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so'. (LAUGHTER) And that was a work of art.

Warhol, one of the most interesting artworks he did was his Brillo boxes. He made some plywood boxes exactly the same size and shape as Brillo boxes and he stencilled the sides with the pattern of the logo of Brillo, so they looked to all intents and purposes exactly the same. But they weren't! They were art Brillo boxes. And this I think was a kind of moment when almost like the whole idea of art kind of collapsed; that the difference between the real Brillo box (supposedly real one) and the art Brillo box, it was like uuurgh, I can't quite tell the difference. It was very tricky. I mean ironically - there's a nice little ironic twist, side bar to this story - the guy who designed the very attractive logo for the Brillo boxes was a abstract expressionist painter (LAUGHTER) so he kind of played a part in the sort of downfall of his own art movement in many ways.

And since the Sixties, really truly anything has gone. I mean Piero Manzoni in 61 famously canned his own faeces and sold them for the weight, equivalent weight of gold. He also made a piece called *The Base of the World* where he got a huge metal plinth in the middle of a field, turned it upside down, therefore rendering the entire globe as his artwork. And since then artists have used their bodies, other people's bodies, they've walked, they've slept, they've got shot, they've got sunburnt, they've used the landscape, they've done light, they've got film, video, computer code, doing nothing. Even pottery has been declared art (LAUGHTER). So art has become this incredibly baggy idea.

If you think ... When I think of the sort of bag that art might be, it's one of those very

cheap dustbin liners - you know the ones that when you drag it out the dustbin and you're walking towards the front door, you're praying that all the rubbish won't spill out all over the whole carpet. That's what kind of art is. It's become this incredibly sort of permeable, translucent, fuzzy bag.

A good example for me was when Loyalist terrorist Michael Stone in 2006 charged into the Northern Ireland Parliament in Stormont carrying a viable explosive device. He was luckily arrested and stopped blowing himself up or whatever. But in his trial, the excuse he gave was, or one of the excuses he gave was, it was a piece of performance art. (LAUGHTER) I thought that's a really shocking thing - you know that art, the shock value of art has become so sort of commonplace that you know shocking things, oh it must be an artwork!

This idea of doing anything you kind of fancy doing and calling it art to sort of lend it kudos or sort of viability has become you know quite common. And some Leeds art students in 1998, I think really parodied this. Or I hope it was a parody. But what they did, they got a £1,000 grant for putting on their degree show at the end of their term at art school. And when it came to the exhibition, the exhibition consisted of a series of holiday snaps of them on the Costa del Sol, frolicking on the beach, and some holiday souvenirs and the air tickets. And of course there was outrage and the papers got hold of it and it was front page news: 'Art students spend grant on holiday and call it art.' And there was you know just... Not justifiable outrage. I thought it was very funny. But then the real coup that these students pulled off was that they'd faked it - that the money was still in the bank; the tan had come from a salon; the beach they were on was Skegness; the souvenirs had come from the charity shop and the tickets were fake. I think they brilliantly double footed everybody's idea that you know art is this stupid mucking about you know that you can do and just call it art. I think they got a first. (LAUGHTER)

Caitlin Moran's husband - Caitlin Moran, the writer and journalist, her husband - when he's doing something that he knows he might fail at massively like tiling the bathroom or worming the cat, he calls it his "art project." (LAUGHTER) This is a worrying trend because I think it show ... It's a wider trend. You know this kind of

amateurism, this sort of ... this kind of mucking about thing, it's all-pervading, I think - you know that often someone who's not very good at making television programmes becomes a video artist or someone who's not particularly good at writing hit songs becomes an art band, you know.

And I kind of struggle with my curmudgeonliness here because I should be all-embracing and the art world should close ranks and we should all say yes everything we do is really brilliant. And in many ways, I am a kind of conceptual artist - I put myself among those - masquerading as a craftsman; and I employ traditional media like pottery and tapestry and etching in a kind of teasing, reactionary way because I don't want to question in many ways, though writing these speeches has made me incredibly thoughtful about what I do myself. And my personal experience if you like of the boundaries of art, I've sort of bumped up not against the formal boundaries so much, but I think of a kind of snobbery because I think beneath the sophisticated tolerance - "yeah everybody can make art and everybody ... everything they do can be art" - I think there is a little bit of interesting kind of class snobbery going on. Like a urinal - you know bring that into art, that's really radical. And a shark, you bring that into the gallery - oh my god, that's an amazing thing. But a pot, now that's craft. (LAUGHTER)

But I think what I was encountering, I called my last exhibition *The Vanity of Small Differences*, which comes from Freud's phrase, which is "the narcissism of small difference" where he noticed that the people that a lot of people hated the most were the ones that were almost the same as them. And I think that there's a thing about things like pottery and craft. It's too close to art. They're like the pretentious next door neighbour they don't really want to invite round for cheese and wine.

I mean there's this idea that you know if you think of contemporary art as the vibrant city centre of culture with all the young, happening trendy things going on, and you think of the old masters of this beautiful mellow landscape in the distance, I think sometimes they think of craft as the suburbs and they drive through it on the way to their second home. (LAUGHTER) So in many ways, I kind of enjoy teasing the art world and I kind of ... I like to operate on my anti-art power. So if somebody says,

“You dressing up, is that art?” - no, it’s definitely not because I choose it not to be art. And so when I made my TV series for Channel Four last year, I was talking to a video artist and she said to me, she said, “That telly series you did, that was art, wasn’t it?” I said, “No, it was telly and I made it with telly values!” and I wanted to hit her over the head with my BAFTA. (LAUGHTER)

But then you might think ... In the art world people might be thinking hey chillax, Grayson. Why the big deal? Why do you really want to kind of put down boundaries about art? Well I want to know when to put on my art goggles. I want to know when you know I’m going to look at something as if it’s art.

I mean the philosopher George Dickie said an artwork is “a candidate for contemplation or appreciation.” So I thought I’d start with my kind of trawl around the boundaries of art. And whole books have been written about what art could be. One I found that I kind of found quite interesting - Arthur Danto, a philosopher who writes a lot about art, he said an artwork is about something, has a point of view, you know a style, and it uses rhetorical ellipsis - i.e. that it engages the audience to sort of fill in the gaps. So call and response; you know you have to kind of respond to the artwork. And I think one of the most interesting things he said, it needs an art historical context. This is a kind of institutional definition of art. It needs to be in the context where you might find art .

But anyway, I thought I would take us all on a handy sort of boundary guide. So I have my whip here to kind of remind you when we come to one of the important little markers as I trawl around. And I’ve got several little tests that I’ve devised, so you might know when you’re looking at a work of art and not just at some old rubbish. (LAUGHTER)

So the first marker post on my trawl around the boundaries is: is it in a gallery or an art context? (*fx: whip*) (LAUGHTER) Now Duchamp’s urinal, he could have left it plumbed in - but, no, he brought it into the gallery. He went to a hardware place and he bought one and he brought it into the gallery and put it on a plinth.

Keith Tyson, a winner of the Turner Prize, he did a piece once where he just got the things in the gallery and made them into artworks with what he called his “magical activation”. So he looked at the light switch and he called it “the apocalyptic switch” and he looked at the light bulb and he called it “the light bulb of awareness”, you know. And so he was using his power, but it was within the art context.

And this art context, it can be you know quite a powerful thing, but it can also be quite a lame excuse for an artwork. Like if I got the most lovely car in the world, a beautiful vintage Ferrari that is the most beautiful thing and I put it into an art gallery and said “This is a work of art now”, it would be quite a lame work of art. It would be a lovely car, but quite a lame work of art, I think. And often I think there’s this - this happens a lot in the art world - what I call borrowed importance. You can go round an exhibition and you say “Oh I really like the politics. That’s right on, those politics. That needs saying, those things. Rubbish art though.” (LAUGHTER) Or “That’s really funny. Rubbish art though.” And so in a way the art gallery context thing you know is a good test, but it’s only a start.

My second boundary marker: is it a boring version of something else?

(LAUGHTER/FX WHIP) I call this one the opera joke phenomenon, okay, because when you go to the opera you go for the music and the colour and the costumes and the drama, get swept up in it. You don’t go for the jokes. But of course they have jokes in opera sometimes and everybody laughs uproariously at these really bad jokes. And sometimes I think that you know the things that define something as art is that they’re quite boring, that they lack entertainment value, that they lack pleasure. I mean one of the most insulting words you can call an artwork is ‘decorative’.

We stand here in this lovely hall here today. I think it’s a very noble thing to be decorative. And this idea that art is not pleasurable. Leo Tolstoy said, “In order correctly to define art, it is necessary first of all to cease to consider it as a means of pleasure and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life.” And I thought yeah, Leo, you went to a lot of video art, didn’t you? (LAUGHTER) Sitting on those uncomfortable benches. I mean Christian Marclay, a video artist, he made this amazingly clever and brilliant piece called *The Clock*. It is a masterpiece of video art

and I recommend it if you ever get to see it, but he did have sofas which might have contributed to the good reviews.

Okay, next boundary marker: is it made by an artist? (*Fx: whip*) Now ... Me bracelets fell off. Art historian Ernst Gombrich said, "There is no such thing as art, only artists." So you have to be an artist to make art.

In 1995, Cornelia Parker, conceptual artist, had a show at the Serpentine. Part of the display was a collaboration she did with Oscar winning actress Tilda Swinton where Tilda laid in this glass box; and it was called *The Maybe* and she was asleep and you could go along and look up her nostrils and sort of stare very closely at Tilda Swinton, and it was an interesting thing and it was part of this exhibition. This year Tilda Swinton decided I'm going to do it again and so she put the glass box in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And you know now we're in the age of Instagram and social media, so it's a big hoo-ha, you know. So I find that very interesting - you know that I thought she was the artwork a bit, but maybe she wasn't. But is she an artist? I don't know because sleeping in a box, that's quite old-fashioned because Chris Burden, the performance artist, he did the bed piece in 1972 and you've got to think that that's an idea that hasn't got many replays in it. (LAUGHTER)

Another sort of issue that boils up when we're talking about is it done by an artist is something like aborigine art. I went to the Australia show recently at the Royal Academy and that's got quite a lot of aborigine art in that and they're very beautiful and powerful objects, but are they art? Because the original bark paintings were kind of spiritual maps and their relationship with the universe and the landscape and they're powerful ethnic items, but are they contemporary art? You know they look like abstract specialist paintings, but are they you know because do they know about the contemporary art world? I don't know.

But then I read this story about this 81 year old white artist in Australia called Elizabeth Durack who painted aborigine style paintings under the pseudonym of Eddie Burrup and put them into an aborigine art show, and there was outrage that she should borrow their special otherness - you know the fact that they *weren't* artists.

She was borrowing the power. And yet there was outrage at that and yet there wasn't outrage about the aboriginal artists borrowing the power of being a contemporary artist somehow. It was an interesting point about you know is it art if it's not done by someone who sort of acknowledges themselves as an artist?

Next boundary marker: photography. Problematic. (*Fx: whip*) (LAUGHTER) Now in the 1990s every second show seemed to be photography, but how do you tell if a photo is art? We live in an age now where photography rains on us like sewage from above - you know endless Instasnapshots on your phone everywhere. So how do you tell if a photo's art? Well you could sort of go just looking at are they smiling? If they're smiling, it's probably not art. (LAUGHTER) I mean if you look at Thomas Struth, who's a famous art photographer - you know not many people smiling in his photos - is there a staginess to them, you know portentous? Is there a lot of meaning being emanated out from this image?

I asked Martin Parr, the very famous and brilliant photographer, if he could give me a kind of definition. He said well ... A definition of an art photo as opposed to another sort of photo. And almost in jest, he said, "Well if it's bigger than two metres and it's priced higher than five figures." (LAUGHTER) And I thought that's actually quite accurate if you think because I mean say someone like Andreas Gursky - famous, makes these huge photographs, sometimes four metres by two metres - and his photograph of the Rhine has the highest price of any photograph ever: 4.5 million dollars.

Now this brings us on to an interesting other boundary post, which can be applied to other artworks as well as photography, and that is the limited edition test. (*Fx: whip*) You know because the reason that Gursky's photograph made 4.5 million dollars is an edition of five and the others were already in museum collections, so would never be available. And so only one was left on the private market and that's why it made such a high price, and that is a kind of example exactly of how the limited edition factor works. So if something is endless, it's giving away part of its qualification as art.

And the Tate has a problem with photography I think a little bit. Only recently got a

curator of photography. I await its curator of pottery. We will find out. (LAUGHTER)

Another test that perhaps sounds facetious I have is what I call the handbag and hipster test. (*Fx: whip*) Quite often you can't tell if something is a work of art apart from the people that are around looking at it. So there's lots of people with beards and glasses and single speed bikes or oligarchs' wives with great big handbags looking a bit perturbed and puzzled by what they're staring at. That's quite a good way because art is something that is quite ... you know you might say it belongs to sort of privileged people who've got a good education or a lot of money, and so if those people are kind of staring at it, there's quite a high chance that it's art. (LAUGHTER) And the other thing you might look for is a queue because people nowadays, they love queuing for art, especially participatory art - you know the sort of art that kids can crawl around or you can take an Instagram of yourself in front of. A need for spectacle, public spectacle. I call that theme park plus Sudoku. You know people want an outrageous and exciting experience from art and then they want to slightly puzzle over what it's about. (LAUGHTER)

Right the next test I have here, the next boundary post on our trawl around the boundary, is the rubbish dump test. (*Fx: whip*) Now this is one of my tutors at college. He had this one. He said, "If you want to test a work of art," he said, "Throw it onto a rubbish dump. And if people walking by notice that it's there and say "Oh what's that artwork doing on that rubbish dump", it's passed. (LAUGHTER) But of course many good artworks would fail that because the rubbish dump itself might be the artwork. (LAUGHTER)

Jean Tinguely in 1960 made a piece called *Homage to New York*, which was this big metal mechanical sculpture that self-destructed itself into a load of scrap. And many artists have used destruction. So that's not a particularly reliable test, the rubbish dump test, but I do like it.

And of course one thing that we have now in the art world, which has *exploded* what art can be and we all have it in our lives - it's probably the biggest revolution in my life - of course is computers and the web. And art projects are very easy to do now

because everybody can do a little bit of creativity on the web and put their YouTube video up and stuff like this. So I asked somebody, I said, “Can you give me a definition?” And so this test ... I’m not sure what to call this test because it might be too rude for Radio Four if I actually sort of spelled it out to you. But anyway this test is ... let’s call this one The Computer Art Test. (*Fx: whip*) Okay, now I asked my friend, Charlie Gere, Professor of Media Theory and History at Lancaster University. I said, “Can you give me a definition when I would know that I was looking at a piece of web art and not just an interesting website?” And he came up with this. He said, “You know it might be art rather than just an interesting website when it has the grip of porn without the possibility of consummation or a happy ending.” In other words, it’s all about frustrating our urgent need to double click our way to satisfaction whether in the form of a joke, an opinion, a fact, a sale, or indeed an onanistic experience, and to detain and suspend us in a state of frustration and ambivalence and to make us pause and think rather than simply react. And in many ways that’s quite a good definition of any artwork compared to any object.

But my tests, you know they’re not watertight, but if you put them altogether in a Venn diagram, I bet the bit in the middle is pretty well guaranteed to be contemporary art.

But this pluralism that you know we have in the art world, that’s a great thing because you know you can literally do anything, and I think that is also a problem. I am haunted by this image. After a lecture once, I had a student come up to me and she said, almost whimpering like this “How do you decide what to do your art about?” And I was like “Oh ...” I said, “Well” - and I was sort of struggling to say something - and I looked at her hand and she had her iPhone, and I said “Well I didn’t have one of those.” Because she has every image, access to all information in her hand. When I started, I had none of that and I think it’s a challenge for young people today.

So I hope you’ve sort of got an idea about the boundaries of contemporary art. They are not formed by what art can be, but where, who or why. And I hope that my little stings of the whip (*Fx: whip*) will help you remember where the edges are when you’re next in an art gallery.

But the final irony of it is - and I love this story - is that if you go to an art gallery and you see the father of that explosion - Duchamp's urinal sitting there - it would have been handmade because the original was destroyed and by the time people became interested in it, you couldn't get that model of urinal anymore. And so those urinals were handmade by a potter. (LAUGHTER)

In my next lecture, I will muse on the nature of rebellion and the cutting edge in art, so thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

**SUE LAWLEY:** Many thanks indeed, Grayson. It's a tour de force every time. Now let me invite our audience here in St. George's Hall, Liverpool, to explore your views on what is and isn't art. Grayson has beaten the bounds, as we've heard. Do you agree or disagree with his definitions?

**CHARLIE GERE:** Thank you, Grayson, for a great lecture. My name is Charlie Gere. So my question to you is has art expanded its boundaries so far as to be on the verge of simply disappearing? And if it started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, might it disappear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or has art a future?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** There is a danger that art will just sort of dissipate via the web and all of the amazing delivery systems we have now; that it will just be so woven into ordinary life like a kind of fallout, like art has exploded and the dust has just settled into every single piece of culture. That's why I like the art context definition of art. I want to put my art goggles on and say this thing - there's a clear, fairly clear place that I can go, a special church, and worship at the great temple of art. So I'm quite attracted to that idea. But I think you're right in that you know the web - and I quote you here, I think - in saying that the danger is that it could bring into reality Joseph Beuys, the artist, who said everybody can be an artist; and you know we have a zillion one person television channels with 24 hour access, probably with a viewer of one as well. (LAUGHS)

**SUE LAWLEY:** That's the thing - I mean it's all subjective, isn't it, at the end of the day? You put your art goggles on, but they might be completely different from mine and everybody else's.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Yeah. Yeah, but that's the thing - it's a personal experience. And I think that's what I want to want to try and give, empower people - to use that horrid word. When they go, they can say well you know this is my sort of art.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Do you want to come back on that?

**CHARLIE GERE:** Well I do hope there's a space because the idea of art being a church is quite attractive, a space of contemplation outside us?? Maybe that's what it's for now.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Yeah.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Or for onanistic activity according to your definition?

**CHARLIE GERE:** That too. Yeah, absolutely.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I had to go away and look this up. I mean just in case the audien... the listeners would like to know, it means masturbation. Okay.

**GARY MILLAR:** That's an interesting segue from masturbation to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool. (SUE LAWLEY LAUGHS)

**GRAYSON PERRY:** *(over)* Can you wait?

**GARY MILLAR:** Thank you.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Oh there you are. Sorry.

**GARY MILLAR:** Yes, I'm the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Gary Millar, and also just finished being a member of the Arts Council North West. I see you tonight as Claire and you remind me so much of what my mother thought was art, and that is that she bought, she purchased, collected Lladro. Would you think that for a lot of people it's knick-knacks that remind them - pottery, ceramics - that reminds them of art at home, which is affordable? Would we see a range of Claire Grayson Lladro style?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** I did actually once. I was approached by Royal Doulton, I think it was - approached me if I'd got any ideas - and I came up with some rather dystopian collectible figurines ... (LAUGHTER)

**GARY MILLAR:** I would buy it.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** ... but they shied away from them.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I wonder why. (LAUGHS) Okay I'm coming to our question at the back.

**JANET HOLMES:** I'm Janet Holmes and I'm a potter and I live on the Wirral. Do you feel that we're losing skills now and it's only the idea that's important in art?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** We might be losing traditional skills, but then other skills are coming along all the time. So, for instance, if you want an equivalent for the Sistine Chapel now, you'll probably look at some digital lab in California where you know there's incredibly skilful programmers and computer animators and games designers that are making you know the apogee of 21<sup>st</sup> century creativity. I can sympathise with those lovely old analogue skills. I don't think we should get overly nostalgic if they become irrelevant.

**JANET HOLMES:** Well aren't we going to lose the ability to use our hands?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Well we may do because a lot of those kind of future alien

human beings, they've always got little hands, haven't they? (LAUGHTER)

**JANET HOLMES:** (LAUGHS) Thank you.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I'm coming to my question there and there was a hand at the back I saw. Yes?

**JAMES EYRES:** Thank you. My name is James Eyres. There's a quote which was bandied about some time ago that Picasso said "All children are artists. The problem is keeping them artists." And I always took this to mean that the idea of creativity in what produces the work of art is key and I'd like to know your feelings on this.

**GRAYSON PERRY:** I mean there's loads of rubbish child artists, I can tell you now. Their parents might have their work on the fridge, but you know not all children are that good at art. But there is a truth in that comment in that it's about that kind of relaxation and that spontaneity and that freedom. And of course one of the great enemies of the contemporary artist is self-consciousness because in its very DNA is self-consciousness. To address the contemporary art world, to work in the contemporary art world, you are achingly aware the entire time of the audience and the history and the value and all the things swishing about, and so it kills you. It can be very ... And I can tell you from personal experience that the more successful you become, the more pressure there is of self-consciousness and how I would love to be that little child with the box of Lego bricks again. So he was right in many ways, yes, but of course you also ... you can't be an innocent in the art world. You can't be the child. You have to address the self-consciousness and the art world and the history and the context you know like an outsider artist can be a fantastic maker of things, but they never have to deal with what it means to be an artist in the art world. That is the sort of central concern almost of an artist since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I think we're running out of time. Yes?

**LINDA JONES:** Hi Grayson. My name's Linda Jones. I'd just like to ask do you think it's important to be a good artist or do you think that you can be a bad artist?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** (LAUGHS) It's important to make art because the people that get the most out of art are the ones that make it. It's not ... You know there's this idea that you go to a wonderful art gallery and it's good for you and it makes you a better person and it informs your soul, but actually the person who's getting the most out of any artistic activity is the person who makes it because they're sort of expressing themselves and enjoying it, and they're in the zone and you know it's a nice thing to do. So I don't think it's important to be a good artist, no, unless you really want to be one and it can be very painful if you aren't.

**LAURIE PEAKE:** I'm Laurie Peake. I'm from Liverpool. And a simple question: can art be useful?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** Can art be useful? What use is art? Well it's kept me in kind of crisps and beer. (LAUGHTER) I mean the problem with you know art in many ways, it's had its role nibbled away over the centuries. In 1400, you know when it was in cathedrals and it had this amazing power, it was the call of duty of its day; it was the all-encompassing cultural experience and overwhelming. And now its role has shrunk and some people say all that's left is that it's an asset class or it's a sort of tittivation for the middle classes on a Sunday afternoon. I'd like to think it was more, but I think its central ... you know the role that it used to have as a communicator of the big ideas, I think in some ways it's been eclipsed by all the other media. But it still has a niche left. For me the niche is that you go and you see the real thing. That is the niche that it still has because the minute you move away from that, it's something else. Its USP is that there it is in front of me, the real thing that I can see and touch, and I think that is important for me. But I'm old-fashioned. (SUE LAWLEY LAUGHS) I can appreciate you know all the things I've talked about this evening, I can appreciate the intellectual bag that holds all that stuff, but I'm still looking for the thing in the bag.

**SUE LAWLEY:** The thing in the bag which is contained within the world of contemporary art, about which it seems to me you're pretty ambivalent. You know you knock it quite hard. You accuse it of snobbery, pretentiousness, and yet at the same time you love it, don't you?

**GRAYSON PERRY:** I enjoy the challenge. I mean I think the one great thing about the art world is that it's up for a challenge and that is what my next lecture's about.  
(LAUGHTER)

**SUE LAWLEY:** Excellent. There we have to end it. If you want to tweet about this event, please use #Reith - R.E.I.T.H.

Next week we'll be in Londonderry when Grayson Perry will look at art and the cutting edge. Is art still capable of shocking us or have we seen it all before? Until then, thank you to our audience here in St. George's Hall, Liverpool, and thank you to our Reith Lecturer 2013: Grayson Perry.

(APPLAUSE)