

Miscellaneous exercises for art students based on a TED talk

Who decides what art means?

By Joanna Kalinowska-Kuchno

Task One

Instruction: Read Text One:

Text One

The Intentional Fallacy was one of the main critical concepts of New Criticism formulated by a literary critic William K. Wimsatt and a philosopher Monroe C. Beardsley. In an essay The Verbal Icon written in 1946 they formulated a concept called The Intentional Fallacy as the mistake to try to understand the author's intentions when interpreting a literary work.

The question has been tossed around by philosophers and art critics for decades: how much should an artist's intention affect your interpretation of

the work? Do the artist's plans and motivations affect its meaning? Or is it completely up to the judgment of the viewer?



William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley

Task Two.

Instruction: please watch the video below.

https://www.ted.com/talks/hayley_levitt_who_decides_what_art_means

Task Three.



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Instruction: read Text Two.

Text Two



Imagine you and a friend are strolling through an art exhibit and a striking painting catches your eye. The vibrant red appears to you as a symbol of love, but your friend is convinced it's a symbol of war. And where you see stars in a romantic sky, your friend interprets global warming-inducing pollutants. To settle the debate, you turn to the internet, where you read that the painting



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is a replica of the artist's first-grade art project: Red was her favorite color and the silver dots are fairies.

Instruction: Find expressions in Text Two that mean the same as the phrases below

Walking

Eye-catching, astonishing

Energetic

Certain, sure

Spot, speck

Copy

Task Four.

Instruction: read Text Three. Fill in the gaps 1 to 10 with the words given in the section below. When you use a screen reader, the gaps in the text are marked by the instruction 'insert a word from the list'.

Words to fill in the gaps with.

less

twofold

irrelevant

intentions

art critics

unavailable

dessert

interpretation

qualities

belief

Text Three.

You now know the exact 1 (insert a word from the list) that led to the creation of this work. Are you wrong to have enjoyed it as something the artist didn't intend? Do you enjoy it 2 (insert a word from the list) now that you know the truth? Just how much should the artist's intention affect your 3 (insert a word from the list) of the painting? It's a question that's been tossed around by philosophers and 4 (insert a word from the list) for decades, with no consensus in sight. In the mid-20th century, literary critic W.K. Wimsatt and philosopher Monroe Beardsley argued that artistic intention was 5 (insert a word from the list). They called this the Intentional Fallacy: the 6 (insert a word from the list) that valuing an artist's intentions was misguided. Their argument was (insert a word from the list): First, the artists we study are no longer living, never recorded their intentions, or are simply 8 (insert a word from the list) to answer questions about their work. Second, even if there were a bounty of relevant information, Wimsatt and Beardsley believed it would distract us from the 9 (insert a word from the list) of the work itself. They compared art to a 10 (insert a word from the list): When you taste a pudding, the chef's intentions don't affect whether you enjoy its flavour or texture. All that matters, they said, is that the pudding "works."

Task Five.

Instruction: read Text Four. For gaps one to ten, choose the correct option given in brackets. Sometimes both options make sense.

Text Four.

Of course, what "works" for one person might not "work" for another. And since 1. (choose different or some) interpretations appeal to different people, the silver dots in our painting could be reasonably 2. (choose interpreted or chosen) as fairies, stars, or pollutants. By Wimsatt and Beardsley's logic, the



artist's interpretation of her own 3. (choose idea or work) would just be one among many equally acceptable possibilities.

If you find this problematic, you might be more in line with Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, two literary theorists who 4. (choose accepted or rejected) the Intentional Fallacy. They argued that an artist's 5. (choose suggested or intended) meaning was not just one possible interpretation, but the only possible interpretation. For example, suppose you're walking along a beach and come across a series of marks in the sand that spell out a verse of poetry. Knapp and Michaels believed the poem would 6. (choose find or lose) all meaning if you discovered these marks were not the work of a human being, but an 7. (choose odd or funny) coincidence produced by the waves. They believed an intentional 8. (choose creator or reader) is what makes the poem subject to understanding at all.

Other thinkers advocate for a middle ground, suggesting that intention is just one piece in a larger puzzle. Contemporary philosopher Noel Carroll took this stance, arguing that an artist's intentions are 9. (choose important or relevant) to their audience the same way a speaker's intentions are relevant to the person they're engaging in conversation. To 10. (choose understand or remember) how intentions function in conversation, Carroll said to imagine someone holding a cigarette and asking for a match. You respond by handing them a lighter, gathering that their motivation is to light their cigarette. The words they used to ask the question are important, but the intentions behind the question dictate your understanding and ultimately, your response.

Task Six.

Instruction. Choose A, B, C or D to answer the questions

1. According to the Intentional Fallacy, why should we not take an artist's intentions into account when seeking to understand their work?
 - a. *There may be no record of the artist's intention*
 - b. *Information outside of the art distracts from the work itself*
 - c. *Prior intentions don't change the quality of the finished product*



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d. *All of the above*

2. Imagine you're walking through an art gallery and see a painting of what appears to be the Garden of Eden. You research the painting and find that the artist intended to create a replica of his backyard. If your views aligned with those of Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, how would you interpret the painting?

a. *You would maintain your initial Garden of Eden interpretation*

b. *You would alter your interpretation to match that of the artist*

c. *You would consider this an unsuccessful painting and move onto the next*

d. *None of the above*

3. According to Knapp and Michaels, what gives a work of art meaning?

a. *An intentional creator*

b. *A captive audience*

c. *A talented artist*

d. *A coherent message*

4. Noël Carroll compares the relationship between artist and audience to the relationship between a (choose A, B, C or D)

a. *Teacher and student*

b. *Parent and child*

c. *Speaker and listener*

d. *Manufacturer and consumer*



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5. Instruction. Read the sentence and answer the question.

With Intentional Fallacy, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that an artist's intentions should not affect how we understand their work. What could be some undesirable consequences of that position?

6. Instruction. Read the sentence and answer the question.

Knapp and Michaels claim that artists' intentions completely define the meaning of their work. Can you think of any scenarios in which artists could wrongly interpret their own work, or overlook a valid interpretation?

7. Instruction. Read the sentence and answer the question.

What are some ways in which an audience's interaction with a work of art is similar to a verbal conversation? What are some ways in which it is dissimilar?

8. Instruction. Read the sentence and answer the question.

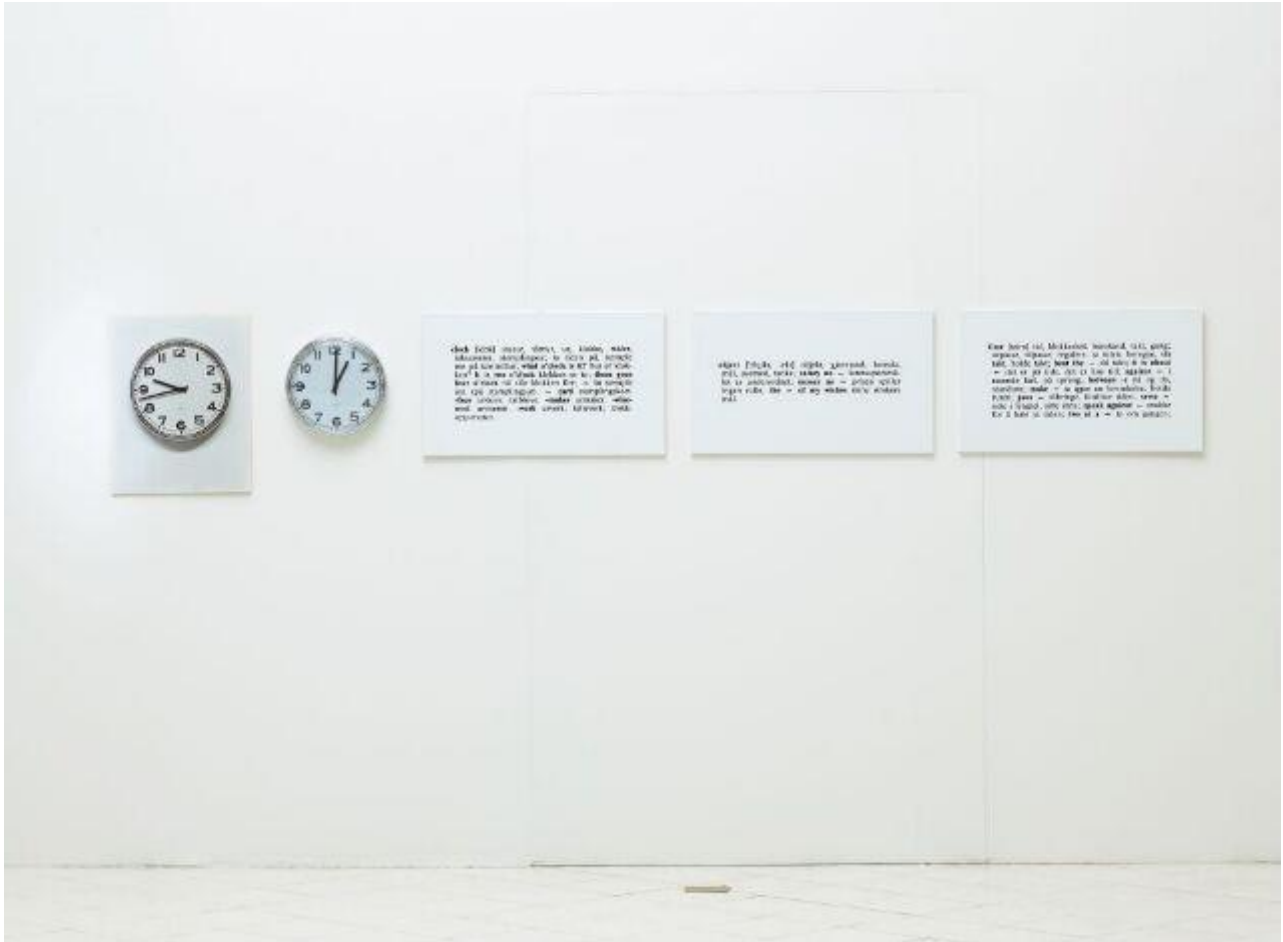
To what extent do you think an artist's intentions should affect our interpretation of their work? Is art like a pudding to be blindly tasted, or does our understanding go beyond what's directly in front of us?

Task Seven.

Instruction: read Text Five and answer the questions below the text.

Text Five

Conceptual art



Clock (one and five) [English - Norwegian] original

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kosuth-clock-one-and-five-english-latin-version-t01909>

Artist: **Joseph Kosuth**

Creation date: **1965**

Object type: **Installation**



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Conceptual art is art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object. It emerged as an art movement in the 1960s and the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

Although the term 'concept art' had been used in the early 1960s (Henry Flynt of the Fluxus group described his performance pieces as 'concept art' in 1961), it was not until the late sixties that conceptual art as a definable movement emerged. The term conceptual art was first used to reference this distinct movement in an article written by Sol LeWitt in 1967:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the



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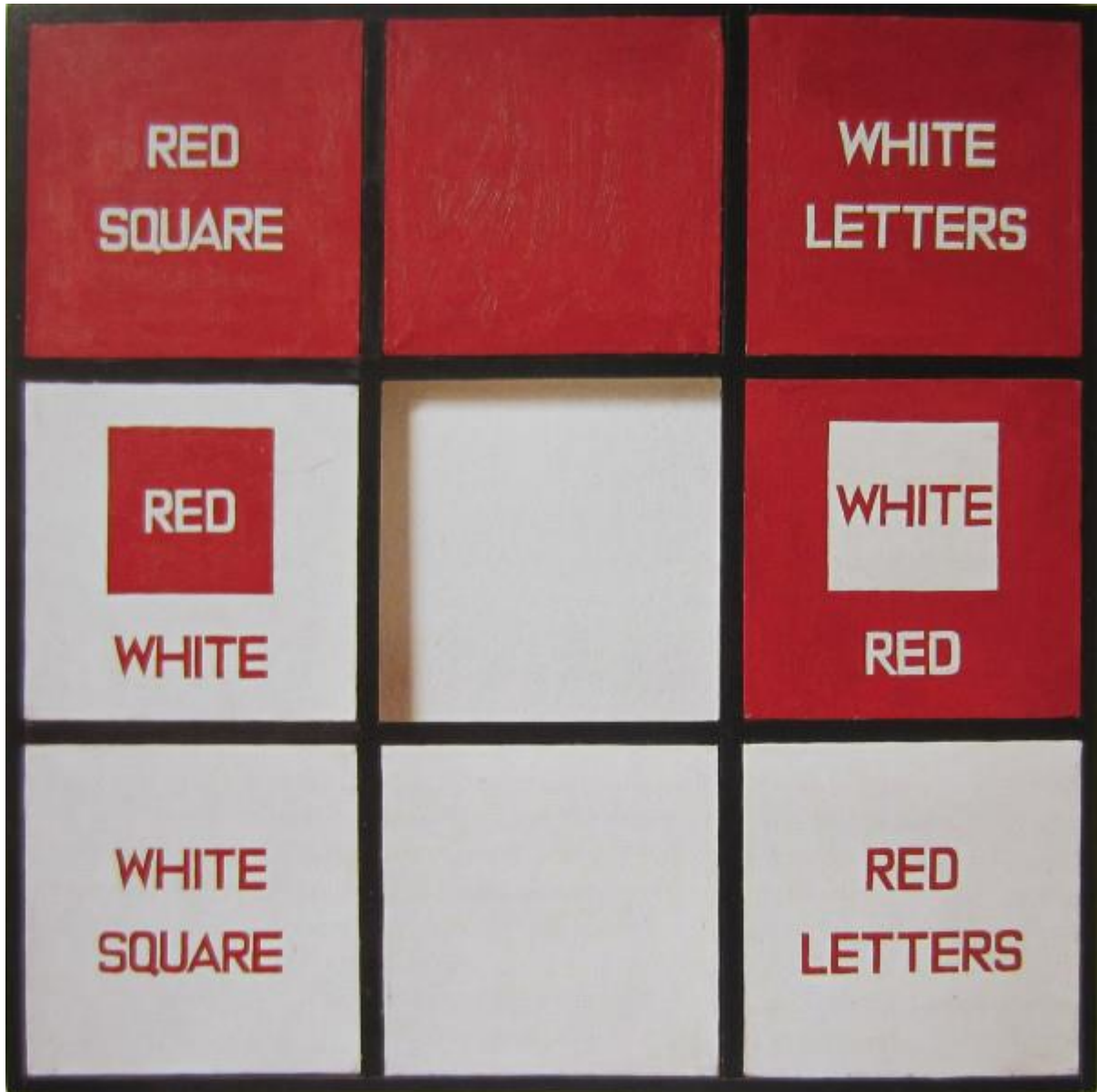


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planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a superficial affair.



Red Square, White Letters (1962) - [Sol LeWitt](#)

Conceptual artworks

Conceptual art can be – and can look like – almost anything. This is because, unlike a painter or sculptor who will think about how best they can express their idea using paint or sculptural materials and techniques, a conceptual artist uses whatever materials and whatever form is most appropriate to putting their idea across – this could be anything from a performance to a



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written description. Although there is no one style or form used by conceptual artists, from the late 1960s certain trends emerged.

When, why and where did conceptual art happen?

As a definable movement conceptual art is associated with the 1960s and 1970s, but its origins reach beyond these two decades. Marcel Duchamp is



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often seen as an important forefather of conceptual art, and his readymade Fountain of 1917 cited as the first conceptual artwork.



[Marcel Duchamp](#) Fountain, 1917, photograph by [Alfred Stieglitz](#)

The movement that emerged in the mid1960s and continued until the mid1970s was international, happening more or less simultaneously across Europe, North America and South America.



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Artists associated with the movement attempted to bypass the increasingly commercialised art world by stressing thought processes and methods of production as the value of the work. The art forms they used were often intentionally those that do not produce a finished object such as a sculpture or painting. This meant that their work could not be easily bought and sold and did not need to be viewed in a formal gallery situation.

It was not just the structures of the art world that many conceptual artists questioned, there was often a strong socio-political dimension to much of the



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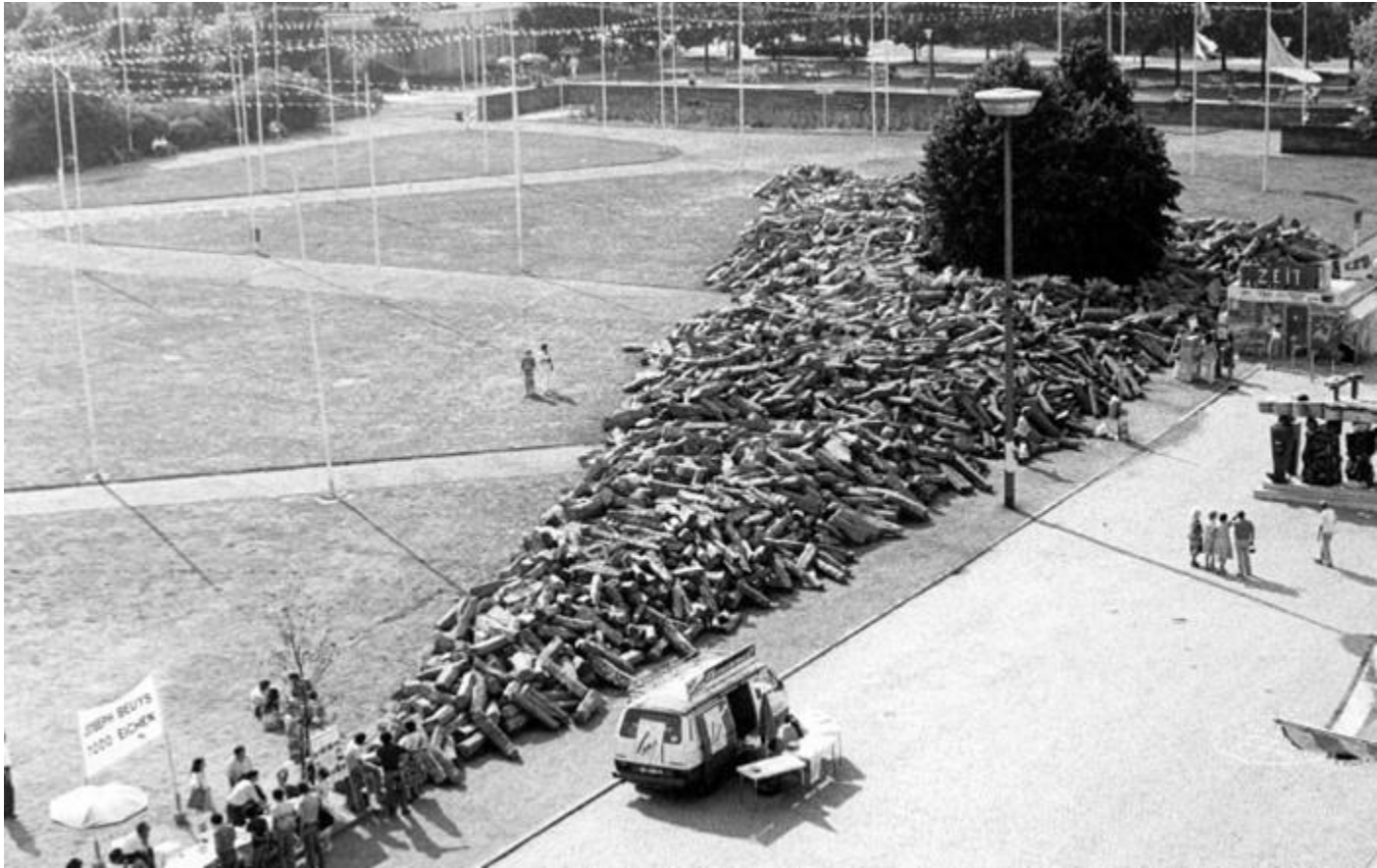


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work they produced, reflecting wider dissatisfaction with society and government policies.



Joseph Beuys's '7000 oaks' ([social sculpture](#)).

Although as a definable art movement conceptual art is associated with the 1960s, many artists continue to make conceptual art in the twenty-first century, such as Martin Creed or Simon Starling.



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Peanut Butter on Toast, 2018. Photograph: Martin Creed

What Are the Characteristics of Conceptual Art?

Although all art cannot be the same, some traits are unique to a certain art style. Conceptual art mostly includes:

Humor - many conceptual artists will use humor to convey their concept. They mostly poke fun at an idea.





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Thought - conceptual art is a thought-provoking style. It makes viewers question the idea behind the art, the piece of art itself, its reflection on society, among other things.



Time - conceptual artists mostly want to express how the idea, space, people, etc., can change with time.



5. 18. Feb 1973 - [On Kawara](#)

Space - the aim usually is to make the viewer pay attention to the space surrounding a piece rather than the piece itself. Or make them concentrate on a specific space containing the piece of art.

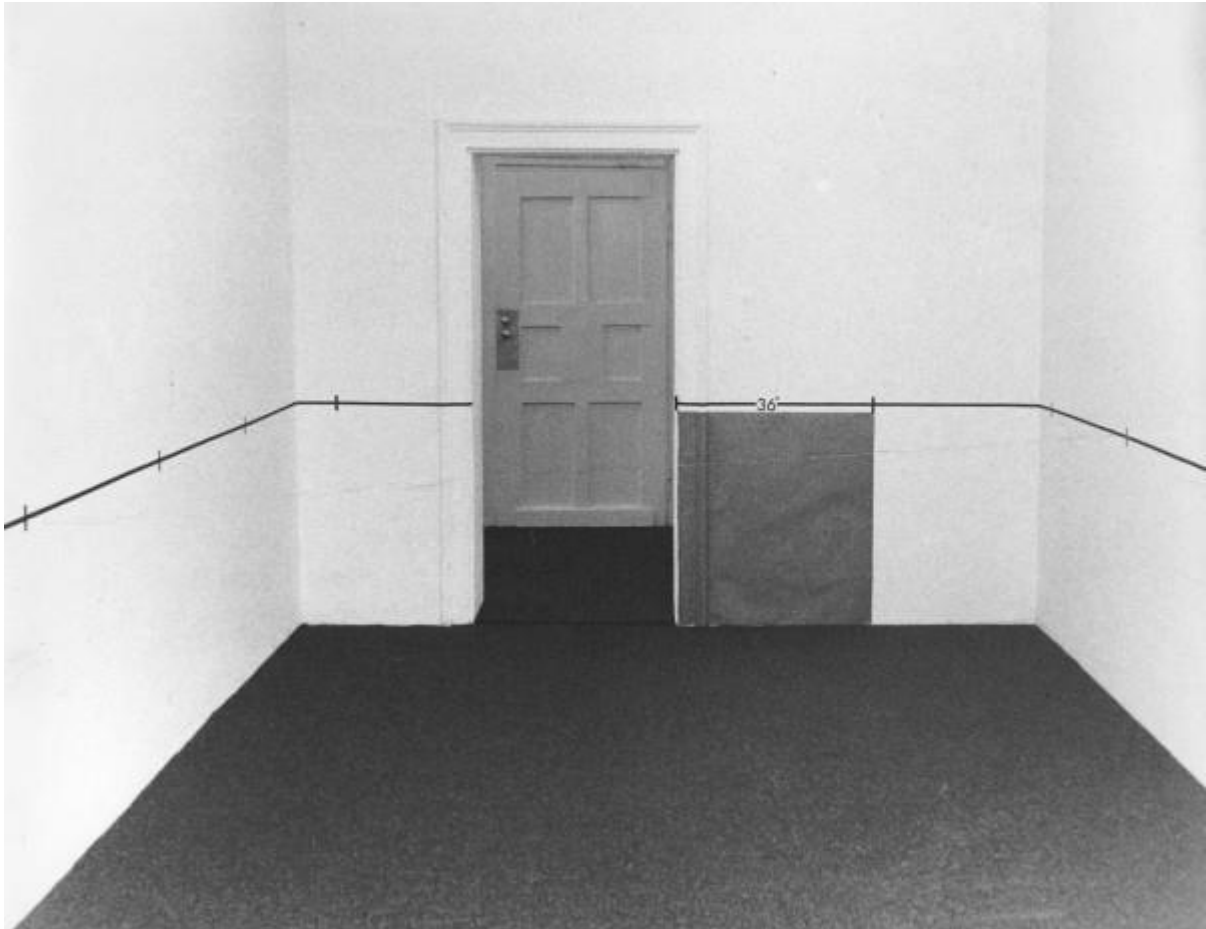


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Measurement Room (1969) - [Mel Bochner](#)

Questions to Text Five.

- *What is conceptual art?*
- *When did the movement start?*
- *Who used the term conceptual art first?*
- *What is the most important aspect of the work in conceptual art?*
- *Who was seen as an important forefather of conceptual art?*
- *What are the characteristics of conceptual art?*

Adopted for educational purposes from www.tate.org.uk

Adopted for educational purposes from www.composition.gallery

Task Eight

Instruction: look at the photographs below. Choose two of them and answer the questions below. Your written answer should be between 100 and 150 words.

Which artworks would be most attractive to the audience in your opinion?

What do you think is the meaning of these works of art?





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Task Nine

Instruction: describe what you see and consider how the three elements that compose this work are related. ***One and Three Chairs*** is an installation that includes a black-and-white photograph of a chair, an actual wooden chair, and a print of a dictionary definition of the word chair. The title refers to Kosuth's presentation of one chair using three different forms of representation: an image, an object, and words.



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Consider how the photograph and the dictionary definition function differently than the chair itself. Is one representation of the chair—visual or written—more accurate?



Joseph Kosuth: *One and Three Chairs*



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chair (châr), n. [OF. *chaïere* (F. *chaire*), < L. *cathedra*: see *cathedra*.] A seat with a back, and often arms, usually for one person; a seat of office or authority, or the office itself; the person occupying the seat or office, esp. the chairman of a meeting; a sedan-chair; a chaise; a metal block or clutch to support and secure a rail in a railroad.

I will not make any more boring art.
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Task Ten



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Instruction: Read Text Six. Describe the process of creation using your own words. Use between 50 and 150 words.

Text Six.

1960, with the help of chemists, Klein invented and patented this colour, which he called International Klein Blue, or IKB. International Klein Blue is made from pure pigment held together by a clear binder that leaves its intensity intact.

Klein claimed that International Klein Blue reminded him of the colour of the sea and sky of his hometown on the Mediterranean coast of France. Using this colour, he made many monochrome paintings, which he believed symbolized limitless space. He said, "Through colour, I feel a total identification with space; I am truly free!" [Yves Klein, "My Position in the Battle between Line and Colour," in *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic*, by Guy Brett (London: Hayward Gallery, 2000), 242.]

Klein wanted to remove the direct touch of the artist's hand, traditionally valued in painting, and so he employed female models to act as "living paintbrushes," or machines for making art. He directed the women, who covered themselves in International Klein Blue paint, to make imprints of their bodies on large sheets of paper or canvas. In his large Anthropometry series (anthropometry is the study of human body measurements), Klein made only three paintings using the imprint of his own body. To emphasize the importance of process over the finished works of art, Klein staged the making of his Anthropometry paintings as elaborate performances for large audiences, complete with blue cocktails and a performance of his *Monotone Symphony* (1960), a single note played for twenty minutes, followed by twenty minutes of silence. Klein's Anthropometry paintings register a direct trace of the body. Even though they do not typically include imprints of the

head or face, Klein believed they were superior to representational paintings as portraits, as he considered the torso to be the body's "essential mass."

Task Eleven

Instruction: choose one of the images and describe this work to your partner, paying attention to colour, materials, and composition.





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Yves Klein: *Anthropometry: Princess Helena*, oil on paper on wood



Joseph Beuys: *Eurasia Siberian Symphony*, 1963, panel with chalk drawing, felt, fat, hare and blue-painted poles

Task Twelve

Instruction: read the list of English phrases with the word blue in them. Match the phrases with their definitions from the table below

A very rare occurrence	To talk quickly and without stopping	Something very unexpected	Belonging to upper class or aristocracy	When someone is angry or frustrated
The feeling of sadness because the weekend is over	A sudden surprise or shock	To disappear, to vanish suddenly	Feeling sad or depressed	To shout loudly when you are not happy with something



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Monday blues

To have blue blood

Till someone is blue in the face

Out of the blue

Once in a blue moon

Talk a blue streak

To go off into the blue

To scream blue murder

Like a bolt from the blue

Feeling blue