

-Visual Arts- TRAC-2026



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What is considered ART?- Ke-juani James

There seems to be a lot of mixed reactions and controversy surrounding Maurizio Cattelan's "Comedian." It is a conceptual work of art depicting a banana stuck to a wall by a piece of duct tape. A lot of people had something to say, whether it was positive or negative. It became worse when this banana was sold for 6.2 million dollars. One thing is for sure that it gives a lot of hate-fuel to the people who hate conceptual art.

A lot of people hated it.

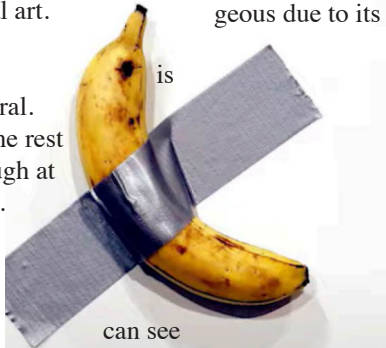
One art critic wrote that it is wrong, obscene, and immoral.

Another said that it gives the rest of the world a reason to laugh at art and not take it seriously.

Others treated the art piece as humor. A lot of people just see it as Cattelan's pranking the art world. I can see both sides of the argument.

Many don't see art as a serious profession or take artists seriously. If someone was first being introduced to art and this was the first art piece they witnessed, this could make them think badly of it. But we also need to think about the deeper meaning of the "art". It forces people to think about how art is categorized and how to calculate the value of said art. Cattelan's piece makes people really think about the way the art world works.

At first glance, a lot of people wouldn't realize that this was a piece of art. When I asked my sister, she said that in her opinion, it was just a banana duct-taped to the wall, and the money used to buy this banana could have been used on other things. To get another perspective, I asked my friend what he thought about the artwork, he said that it made him hungry and said, "Art elicits emotions and feelings (hunger) therefore this can be considered art." Both these perspectives contrast with each other. My friend sees the banana as art (and as a snack)



while my sister doesn't.

I think anything could be art. A pile of sticks could be art, just like a painting of a lake would be art. People should be allowed to express themselves and their ideas freely, even if it is in the form of a

The Real Joke is on Us -Alina Zhang

"Comedian" by Maurizio Cattelan is an amusing piece—a banana taped to a wall—with many interpretations. It was quite outrageous due to its nonsensical composition that

had no clear purpose nor much substance to derive from (one can even consider it "lazy"). It was so simple and plain. However, even more atrocious was how it eventually led to the auction of a literal banana for 6.8 million dollars. Again, whatever satire or social criticism was lost as it ended up in the hands of a filthy wealthy man.

To begin, Cattelan was already a circulated artist that was living well and indulging in whatever he wished to in arts, a true privilege given the fact many artists cannot sustain a living just by creating art. He is also a white man, which definitely allows him to face less backlash than say any person of color, especially if they are a woman. Art will always be social and political especially in a country like America, where racism and gender inequality is still very much prevalent.

The art itself is conceptual, therefore, we are led to our own interpretations. But what matters more is the audience's reactions. Without it, this artwork would not be as widespread nor have the value it was sold for.

COOP Galleries - Chesea Aguirre

Visiting Coop galleries at the Landmark Art Building, I didn't expect to connect with the artwork as much as I did. The building is full of Coop galleries, which are known for letting artists show their work on their own terms, without someone else deciding what's "marketable." And you could really feel that freedom in the pieces I saw. Every artist had their own voice. We also had the opportunity to visit Kevork Mourad's studio, a Syrian Armenian artist whose work focuses on culture, connection, and the way our histories shape us.

One of his paintings showed a long rope tied across different structures. When he explained it, he said that without the rope, everything would fall apart. I thought that was such a simple but powerful metaphor, like how communities, families, and even whole cultures only stay standing because of the ties that hold them together. In another artwork, he talked about how you can't go back and rewrite the past. You have to live with your mistakes and grow from them. That message hit me because it's something everyone knows, but seeing it expressed

visually made it feel deeper.

He also had a piece about the "tree of life," showing how all people, Muslims, Jewish people, basically everyone, are connected like branches. The way he talked about people being neighbors who help one another to survive actually made the room feel warm, like his art was trying to heal something bigger than just the canvas.

Comparing his work to the other artists in the other galleries helped me understand how differently people express ideas. For example, Renée Borkow used butterflies and city shapes to show how life keeps shifting, kind of like a kaleidoscope. Stephanie Franks used color as a language, especially blue, to express emotion and healing. Both of them worked more with symbolism and mood, while Kevork's work was more direct with storytelling and cultural meaning. Overall, what I learn is that art isn't just something you look at; it's a way of thinking. Every artist there had their own way of saying something important, but Kevork's message about connection and history stuck with me the most. It made me realize how much art can teach us about each other and even about our own selves.



ISLA -Alina Zhang

ISLAA

The Institute for Studies on Latin American Art curates exhibitions to show underrepresented artworks in the global world and the underlying cultural movements. It was established in 2011 by the collector Ariel Aisiks, who seeks to increase the value of Latin American art. ISLAA also loans or gifts to other museums to expand visibility and make these artworks more accessible to the public. It also offers opportunities, like fellowships, for curators starting out.

Marcia Schwartzor

She used oil pastels and paint on used-to-be cheap transportation bags as the canvas. Schwartzor's artworks were responses to her country, Argentina, going through great political upheaval; first the dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, then the return to democracy in the 80s.

During the times of dictatorship, she self-ex-



iled herself to Barcelona. I really enjoyed

there was a thinner man and a heavier one, carrying more fat. Her style was raw, bold and stylized. I also really share her values, according to the curator, of capturing this life and importance through portraits, which ranged from family to friends. Most of Schwartzor's pieces showcase everyday life like the butcher lady.

Violaciones Domésticas: Feminist Constellations in 1990s Argentina

This exhibition, which debuted in Espacio Giesso in Buenos Aires, featured a bold feminist

movement that reflected domestic violence (hence the name), the gender oppression women faced, and challenged social expectations through expressing desire for bodily autonomy. The artists included were Alicia Herrero, Ana López, and Cristina Schiavi.

This exhibit opened my eyes to not just feminist works but distinctive Latin American styles that

are underrepresented in the U.S. Although art is subjective and everyone is free to spend time only in what they find interesting, taking the time to understand the intentions and deliberate choices of these foreign arts is nothing short of transcending. Through each painting in the evolution of views on women (think traditional wives to Marilyn Monroe era to today), a story is unveiled in the form of paper dolls. There were different heads and different clothing of that time.

Next was the dinner table, the expected duty of women even today, that had different plates of household items. This was one of the pioneers of Kitze, a style of using everyday items and

toys. I was in awe of how some of the dishes were a spin off of actual foods like

Interstices - Iris Medina

At the Landmark Art Building, I was able to see a wide variety of artworks and artistic styles. I appreciated the diverse media presented, such as oil on canvas, paper collage, and even drawings on woven material. There were many beautiful and impressive pieces throughout the galleries. In particular, two galleries truly captivated me: one filled with clouds



and angels, and another showcasing paper collages and butterflies. I could only hope that art like this continues to exist and expand into the minds of other artists, including myself. One of the works that stood out to me was artist Margaret Vega's piece titled Interstices. The painting features a bright blue background with green-gray and beige-yellow clouds, made up of different shades and tones that shift depending on lighting and placement. On the right side of the canvas, there is a noticeable gap—a rectangular deep blue

or black space that interrupts the composition. Despite the painting's confusing yet beautiful appearance, it holds a symbolic and deeply personal meaning connected to Margaret's life. From the information provided and from walking through the gallery, it is clear that Margaret greatly enjoys art and painting. I noticed multiple works depicting angels and cloudy skies, all aiming to capture a heavenly or ethereal atmosphere. Some pieces

even included strings attached to pins, absorbing colored water. The meaning behind Interstices reflects the reality many artists face in their everyday lives: the separation between their passion and their work. Although both are connected, they are not always able to coexist unless the dream is fully pursued. The art field is diverse yet selective, often creating stress for artists. Not all artists are able to achieve the dream of practicing art as their sole profession, leading to a strain between artistic passion and professional life.

Black and African American Culture through Photographs- Kejuani James

Assane Sy is a photographer based in Brooklyn, New York, coming from Northern Senegal. He is a former participant at Art Connections in 2020. Many of Assane's works and projects feature photographs of Black people. Assane cares a lot about showcasing his culture and community. He wants to showcase the people who are close to him and uses them to tell his story. Assane's photographs not only highlight his



community but also show a safe space for Black and African American culture to feel seen and valued.

In Assane's early works from 2018 to 2021, he took many photos of a diverse age range of people, including the younger boys who would play at his local park and the older men at work.

Assane shows the range of a community. Almost every person has a different role that makes their community special. The setting of these photos is also important. The photos underneath show two separate young boys in drastically



The Black and African American community suffers from harmful stereotypes from the media that often paints them in a

bad light. Assane uses photographs to highlight the Black and African American community in a different light that the media

sometimes don't want to see, showing them in their everyday lives or displaying their culture.

different settings, and yet they still tell the same story or message. His work sheds light on deeper cultural aspects, and his style is reflected in how he includes diverse black cultures. Hair is known to be very important to the Black community, as there were times when many were criticized for their hair styling. Some view certain black hairstyles as ghetto and unprofessional. Assane takes the time to highlight hair through every photo, whether it's locs, twists, braids, or a natural fro. Assane's photos showcase how beautiful hair is and remove any negative undertones that the world might inflict.



Design, Connection, and Everyday Life: A Critical Look at MAD Exhibitions- Chelsea Aguirre

At the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), the exhibitions Untamed Gestures by Dana Barnes and Designing Motherhood: Things That Make and Break Our Births are not merely displays of objects; they are rigorous investigations into how material form and cultural context shape human experience. Both projects reveal how design is not a neutral practice but a dynamic language that encodes values, tensions, and social narratives into everyday life.

Untamed Gestures marks the first major museum presentation of Dana Barnes's singular artistic vision. Barnes works in hand-formed fiber sculpture, manipulating materials such as merino, yak, alpaca, silk, hemp, and wire into monumental landscapes that sag, climb, and unfurl across space. These works operate in the liminal zone between sculpture and environment, inviting viewers to engage with tension between motion and stillness, strength and fragility. The immersive recreation of Barnes's Lower East Side studio, complete with experimental maquettes, sacks of fiber, and handmade tools, does more than contextualize her practice; it foregrounds material exploration as conceptual inquiry, situating the artist's process as a site of meaning. By prompting viewers to confront fiber as both medium and metaphor, the exhibition challenges preconceptions about craft, scale, and the

sensory languages of design.

Designing Motherhood: Things That Make and Break Our Births expands design discourse into reproductive health, parenthood, and the socio-cultural forces that shape them. Co-organized at MAD by curators Elizabeth Koehn and Alexandra Schwartz and originating from a larger multidisciplinary project, the exhibition assembles more than 250 objects, from industrial artifacts to speculative design projects, to trace the material history of (in)fertility, pregnancy, postpartum, and caregiving. Rather than presenting these objects as mere tools, the show situates them within broader networks of industrial design, consumer culture, and public health, making visible how design intersects with access, equity, and lived experience. The curators frame these objects not simply as products but as agents of ideology, revealing how design both solves and perpetuates cultural anxieties. Together, these exhibitions illustrate that design is deeply entangled with human values and social structures. Barnes's fiber sculptures and the curated artifacts in Designing Motherhood demonstrate that design functions as a tacit language of experience, one that can reveal unseen histories and challenge the viewer to rethink the ordinary. In recognizing design as active inquiry rather than passive utility, MAD positions these exhibitions as compelling contributions to contemporary art and cultural critique.

Critical Essay on Assane's Photography- Chelsea Aguirre

Assane is a photographer based in Brooklyn, New York, whose work explores culture, identity, and community. Coming from a Northern Senegalese and Toucouleur background, Assane uses photography to show how people live between tradition and modern life. His images focus on individuals and communities who move through multiple cultural worlds, helping viewers better understand their experiences.

One of the strongest aspects of Assane's photography is how he treats his subjects with care and dignity. Instead of making people look like objects, he presents them as powerful and important. Through portraiture and documentary photography, Assane gives visibility to people who are often overlooked

and allows them to be seen with respect and presence.

Assane also uses composition and visual storytelling to create meaning. The way his subjects are framed and placed in the photograph feels intentional. His photographs often feel rich and layered, showing both personal identity and cultural history at the same time. This helps build a strong visual language that connects tradition with the present.

Overall, Assane's work is impactful because it combines strong photography skills with meaningful storytelling. His photographs encourage viewers to think about culture, identity, and representation. By focusing on real people and real communities, Assane creates work that is both artistic and socially important.



A Mad Review of Jonathan Adler's World- Kejuani Jmaes

Jonathan Adler is a famous American potter, interior decorator, and author. Adler makes "modern American glamour" art and design. Modern American Glamour is a design style blending contemporary design elements with luxurious touches. The mad MAD world of Jonathan Adler at the MAD offers an exciting look into Adler's work, taking guests on a tour through Adler's world.

The highlight of the exhibit is Optimistica. The goal of Optimistica was to "hide all the analysis and make objects that appear effortless, joyful, inevitable." When looking at the ceramics, it didn't occur to me to think about the trials and terrors of getting it done. The colours, the fun, distinctive faces

of the ceramics, and the flowers emerging from several of the vases quickly came to mind. There was ancient Greek inspiration in the vases and pots, as they had Greek patterns and depicted Greek busts and features. One of the vases has either a mermaid or a siren, which are shown in Greek mythology.

All of the pots, vases, and designs shown in the picture below fit the name of the section, Funkyana. You can tell that David Bowie was an inspiration from the lightning bolt covering the eye of the vases and the vibe it gives off while also sharing medieval jester elements. According to Adler, the idea behind the tea set was "what if a child made a Wedgwood tea set," reminding viewers of their own experiences making art for the first time.



Rico Gatson Shares A New Perspective- Alina Zhang

Rico Gatson is a black abstract artist. He was brought up in California and eventually moved to New York after consulting with an artist he looked up to at his debut. Here in New York, he worked as an assistant for many artists before settling into his own work and family life. Gatson specializes in abstract art with colorful and repetitive patterns. This was an especially unique experience as abstract art is often stigmatized in this generation given the “simplicity” or indescribable aspects that do not seem to make much sense or open to interpretation. Gatson, given his experience and the pressure to explain himself, is prepared to elaborate on certain symbols in his artworks. He often includes circles which can represent a target, the void, or even the sun. The colors are Afrocentric, those reds, yellows, greens, and blacks reflecting spiritual connections and heritage.

The work is extremely hypnotizing and entrancing: they're symmetrical, geometrical, wavy, round, and absolutely colorful. At first glance, it feels overwhelming and hard to decipher the influx of vibrant, saturated colors and designs thrown in one's face. However, time seems to slow the more one looks into them. The colors soon become meditative and the shapes, comforting. It is an astonishing experience to find oneself mesmerized by just repetitive patterns and shapes. His art is also textured! There is glitter added over black paint. His artworks are in acrylic and feel like a thick sheet of plastic. Premade templates, like the wavy strip, are used to easily replicate his design across his works.

His process is just as inspiring and tranquil. With quality Japanese tape, he showed us how he tapes and masks his circles. Gatson mentions that it really is a simple process and tells of his assistant. He thought his assistant would've grown bored or found the taping tedious, but to his surprise, she said it was a peaceful and calming experience.

critical Essay: Rico Gatson and His Art- Chelsea Agu-irre

Rico Gatson is an artist from Brooklyn, New York, who works in many different types of art. His work focuses on African-American history and culture, and he often shares important messages about social issues through his art. Gatson mixes bright colors with abstract patterns to make his pieces stand out. His art is both beautiful and powerful, showing the strength and history of African-American people.

One interesting part of Gatson's work is how he talks about history without using words. He uses shapes, patterns, and colors to tell stories. Sometimes he includes images of African-American leaders or important historical moments, but he mixes them with abstract designs. This combination makes viewers think about the struggles and successes of African-Americans. His

art can feel intense and demanding, which helps people pay attention to the important messages he is sharing.

Gatson's use of color and patterns is also meaningful. Bright colors can show energy, hope, and life, while repeated patterns can represent unity and connection. His art does not only show problems or hard times; it also celebrates African-American identity, culture, and achievements. By mixing history, culture, and design, Gatson's work teaches viewers about the past while also inspiring them to think about the present. In conclusion, Rico Gatson's art is strong and meaningful. He uses colors, patterns, and history to tell stories about African-American life. His art honors the past and inspires people to notice culture, identity, and justice. Gatson shows that art can be both beautiful and powerful, teaching lessons about history and society.



Learning Through Art- Kejuani James

Ruth Aiko Asawa was an American modernist artist known for her unique wire sculptures, often reminding viewers of corals and seashells. At MOMA, guests are given the opportunity to see her other art mediums which are drawings, printmakings, paintings, clay, and bronze. It's also worth taking the time to look through her notes from her time at Black Mountain College.

Asawa is not only a great artist, but a great teacher as well. She taught at the Alvarado School Arts Workshop, teaching students about art and how to use art for problem-solving, self-expression, and developing critical thinking. She taught her students how to make origami, milk-carton sculptures. According to her website, she states that "A child can learn something about color, about design, and about observing objects in nature. If you do that, you grow into a greater awareness of things around you."



Art will make people better, more highly skilled in thinking and improving whatever business one goes into, or whatever occupation. It makes a person broader." Asawa created her teaching philosophy grounded in her personal experiences. A lot of teachers can learn from this teaching philosophy and incorporate it into their own teaching philosophies. It can be true for many other things, not just art and observing, but for things such as science and daily things in life, like cooking. Anyone can learn if they put their heart into it.

A lot of people today don't try anymore. They give up when things get too hard or are scared to even start. What scares people from things is the fear of not being good at it from the very start but no one is good at the start. Even the best artists were once bad at art. Asawa once said that "Sculpture is like farming, If you just keep at it, you can get quite a lot done."

What is considered ART?- Kejuani James

There seems to be a lot of mixed reactions and controversy surrounding Maurizio Cattelan's "Comedian." It is a conceptual work of art depicting a banana stuck to a wall by a piece of duct tape. A lot of people had something to say, whether it was positive or negative. It became worse when this banana was sold for 6.2 million dollars. One thing is for sure that it gives a lot of hate-fuel to the people who hate conceptual art.

A lot of people hated it. One art critic wrote that it is wrong, obscene, and immoral. Another said that it gives the rest of the world a reason to laugh at art and not take it seriously. Others treated the art piece as humor. A lot of people just see it as Cattelan's pranking the art world. I can see both sides of the argument. Many don't see art as a serious profession or take artists seriously. If someone was first being introduced to art and this was the first art piece they witnessed, this could make them think badly of it. But we also need to think about the deeper meaning of the "art". It forces people to think about how art is categorized and how to calculate the value of said art. Cattelan's piece makes people really think about the way the art world works.

At first glance, a lot of people wouldn't realize that this was a piece of art. When I asked my sister, she said that in her opinion, it was just a banana duct-taped to the wall, and the



money used to buy this banana could have been used on other things. To get another perspective, I asked my friend what he thought about the artwork, he said that it made him hungry and said, "Art elicits emotions and feelings (hunger) therefore this can be considered art." Both these perspectives contrast with each other. My friend sees the banana as art (and as a snack) while my sister doesn't.

I think anything could be art. A pile of sticks could be art, just like a painting of a lake would be art. People should be allowed to express themselves and their ideas freely, even if it is in the form of a banana duct-taped to a wall.

