Chapter 1
The Re-Materialisation of the Art Object

Dew Harrison
University of Wolverhampton, UK

ABSTRACT

The phenomena of the re-materialisation of the art object is presented through the shift in art-thinking since mid-last century, derived from the impact of earlier art. This shift is marked by Lippard’s seminal book on the disappearance of the art object, as reflected in the title above, with reference to the Duchampian Readymade and Greenbergian Modernism. The chapter then reviews the current situation via contemporary understandings and the writings of Beech who challenges Lippard’s view of immateriality within Conceptual art. This is followed by examples of recent practice where new technologies have allowed for a re-materialisation of the art object to include artists such as Intersculpt, Michael Eden, and those in the Second Life Kriti Island exhibition, where virtual objects solidified into physical forms. This re-positioning of the art object allows a return to the initial formative conceptual framework, and offers a way through to a cutting-edge form of postconceptual art practice.

INTRODUCTION

Within the Fine Art field, articulating the idea of the art object had made redundant the desire for the actual artifact by 1972 when text, language, and dialogue became the tools of a post-Duchampian Conceptual practice. The term ‘postmodern’ appeared in 1973, became current in the second half of the 1970s, and posited the end of art history as a linear narrative. Our considerations of art ideas were then contextualized without the need of anchorage to the history of object making. The second postmodern period, beginning at the end of the Cold War, was multiculturalist and global. Art became a form of social engagement concerned with social production, it allowed for multitemporality and syncretic identity. This era of the worldwide Web and global hypermobility
The Re-Materialisation of the Art Object

gave rise to new ways of perceiving human space and according to Nicholas Bourriaud, “The term ‘postmodern’ can be applied to art that is refractory to these two types of perspective: spatial and temporal.” The virtual worlds of the new century are the playgrounds for artists to explore space, time, and identity, the digital objects created here are experienced by avatar, without the full range of sensory perceptions we use when confronting the real world. We cannot become truly digital so is it now time for those virtual art objects to materialize into physical solid form?

Artists, designers, and craft makers are currently exploring new materials and processes such as ‘Accumulated Printing’ within their practice to bring forth new forms and extend ideas. Often this is through a hybrid dialogic process of a maker’s thoughts translated into code in the virtual world for production in the real world. Resulting in unique crafted objects created without the ‘touch’ of the hand-made, while encapsulating craft-thinking in the machine-made. This real-virtual-real approach is further streamlined, and without the craft signature, when working in shared virtual space. As artists are moving objects across the virtual from the real and back into solid form, so cyberspace gains a foothold in the real through materialisation and a return to the virtual. The second life platform is relatively new and still under development, but there are a number of artists beginning to explore the possibilities of this virtual world outside its commercial premise. For the Critical Works in SL curation project artists were invited to the island to develop their practice with regard to bridging the virtual with the real world, and two of them created physical objects, which responded directly to their virtual counterparts. These materialised objects were exhibited in the Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast.

The solid, material art object was the central focus of Modernism derived from a history of making, skill, and craftsmanship through ages of different agendas dictated by patrons and the art market. In attempting to both circumnavigate the driving economic forces and to escape the restrictions of Greenbergian orthodox Modernism artists in the 1960s and 1970s re-visited the work of artists at the beginning of that century, such as Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists. These early artists had moved away from the conventional object making of paintings and sculptures by weighting aesthetic values towards the ‘idea’ encapsulated in an artwork. The Conceptualists and proto-conceptualists then took this notion to the extreme point where the artwork had no material quality at all, no existence in the physical world. In the new century, we have virtual worlds and digital means of mass-production for manufacturing physical objects from code. We have craft-makers and artists re-investing in the exploration of materials, processes, and means of production, transferring ideas of the hand-made to machine production and formulating new approaches to making, skill, and craftsmanship. We also have social networks provided by the Internet and artists pursuing a social art practice, we have social virtual worlds in forms such as the Second Life (SL) platform on the Web, and the Web itself is in the process of development from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 to become ‘the internet of things.’ Contemporary designers and engineers have now begun to explore the potential of rapid prototyping for manufacturing solid objects from code. The code can be taken from a virtual world or Internet site, which is where artists have been working for some time, and a growing number of them are beginning to experiment with the idea of the coded object. Are we then, on the verge of a re-materialisation of the art object?

The School of Art and Design at the University of Wolverhampton has a Second Life island for creative potential and experimentation. Dr. Denise Doyle, a SL artist and researcher, has curated two exhibitions on Kriti island for showing at ISEA2008 and ISEA2009 (Doyle, 2008, 2009). The first set of artists had a clear invest-
Related Content

Pixel 2 Installation: An Approach to Immersion in Rematerialized Media-Art
[www.igi-global.com/article/pixel-2-installation/197394?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/pixel-2-installation/197394?camid=4v1a)

Building Sensorium: Perceptual and Affectual Art Processes
[www.igi-global.com/article/building-sensorium/222786?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/building-sensorium/222786?camid=4v1a)

Criteria for the Creation of Aesthetic Images for Human-Computer Interfaces A Survey for Computer Scientists
[www.igi-global.com/article/criteria-creation-aesthetic-images-human/54334?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/criteria-creation-aesthetic-images-human/54334?camid=4v1a)

Teaching Teamwork in Design: A Framework for Understanding Effectiveness in Student Teams
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/teaching-teamwork-in-design/165673?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/teaching-teamwork-in-design/165673?camid=4v1a)