

# Essential Modernities

no. 5, spring 2020

price: \$0.00

## *iN THiS EDiTiON:*

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## introduction

**A**s life continues to expand, so does Essential Modernities. Yet, as some parts grow, other parts shrink. We used to live in a world without nations, without homes, without borders. I could pick any physical location on the world to release the new Essential Modernities. This time it's different, yet at the same time it's not. The art and the artists represented in this edition are just as essential as before, just as their audience. That hasn't changed. Though, the selection and the nature of the art has, but in essence it's still the same. See, this is why writing on art is both as pointless and fruitful as it is, you just keep contradicting yourself. So without further ado, let's dig into this issue.

There is the layout you're used to, this exact copy you have in front of you. But, as this has its limitations I've decided to add an appendix: em5.zip; which you can download from our website. This ar(t)chive contains video, audio and even an entire E-book! This art couldn't be published otherwise since the limitations I mentioned earlier.

The works of twelve contemporary artists are presented here in this fifth edition, this spring of 2020.

As always; everything you see and read here is the truth, just not the only truth.

David GebSKI, publisher

*click or scan the image below to download the appendix*



## Ai Weiwei

On September 16, 2016, the artist Ai Weiwei was visiting Amsterdam when he made the work pictured below:

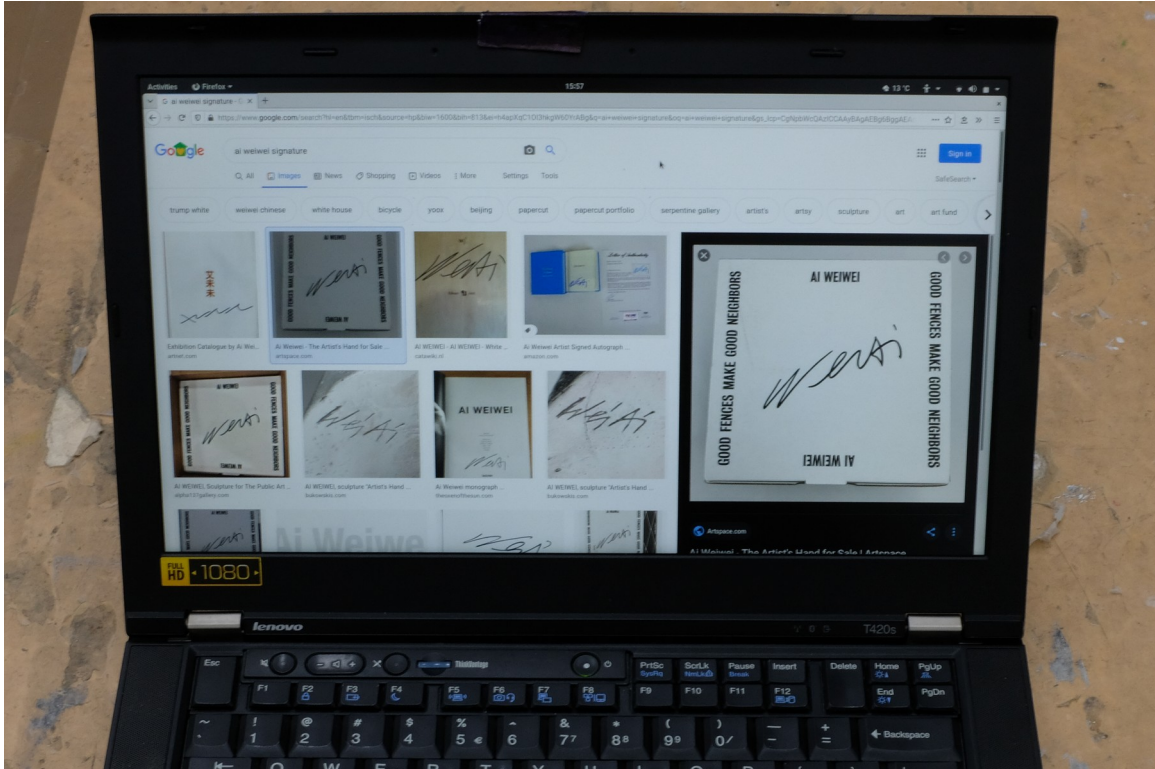


*Laptop with the artist's signature, 2016*  
ink on Lenovo ThinkPad T420s, 34 x 23 x 2.5 cm  
private collection

Written in gold colored ink, we can clearly recognize Ai Weiwei's signature in the top-left corner of the laptop. On April 29, 2020, the artist Unknown Filetype stickerbombed Ai Weiwei's piece. This performance has been documented by Ric Verstegen and published in this spring edition.

# Unknown Filetype

## *Bombing Ai Weiwei*



# Unknown Filetype

*Bombing Ai Weiwei*



# Unknown Filetype

*Bombing Ai Weiwei*



# Unknown Filetype

*Bombing Ai Weiwei*





# Sadie Pinn

pregnant with ideas

amputated years

only 19 years old

racing many miles,

two trailers

in one spot

since getting into roads

halfway through the first semester,

lots of fights

a crew piled-on

and throwing-out heads.

head on road

against an onslaught of cars

when the driver behind you pulls out

too close to your trailer

you slam on the brakes and chop in a hard turn

as you slide off the road and end up about 15 feet behind a parked car

a group of men get in your way,

only to bail when you give them the death stare.

Polat Tekdemir



# Polat Tekdemir



# Temperantia

*Het testament*

Temperantia is the pseudonym of a young writer and *Het testament* (*The Testament*) is his debut. It has not yet been translated to English and is written in Dutch.

Download the appendix containing the E-book [here](#).



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## Judging Art: How Could I?

A commentary on Hume's *Of the Standard of Taste*

In his *Of the Standard of Taste* Hume discusses the contradiction, that in art there's an unfathomable variety on taste, while at the same time there seems to be some kind of universal agreement on which of these tastes correspond to master pieces, or 'good art'. Which means there's bad and good taste. Hume offers us a treatise where he seeks to clarify what exactly is necessary to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' art; how to judge correctly?

Every kind of taste is right and true; it's the owner's own experience and it is not bound to objective reality. But judgment, on the other hand, we utter in order to say something about objective reality, which makes it an object of discussion and is therefore always 'just' or 'unjust.'<sup>1</sup> A judgment creates a bridge between the subjective and objective experience. Therefore, Hume debates it's almost an art in itself to form a judgement or criticism.

In this essay I shall try to decide how much of Hume's treatise is still relevant today, and what this says about our contemporary relationship to art. I shall leave from the position that his work is rather based on stating the human nature of judgment, than that he gives guidelines to how we should judge a piece of art. Since he says himself: "It is natural for us to seek a standard of taste."<sup>2</sup> Later on, I shall specify this. For now it only needs to be known that this would mean that Hume's treatise is not only bound to its time, but shows us something that has always been and will always be in us humans; a tendency, or perhaps even the necessity to universalize the (primarily) subjective experience.

I can very well imagine the reader already has the intuition that our contemporary idea of how to approach a piece of art is not really unifiable with the idea of making a *right* judgment of taste.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, "*Of the Standard of Taste*," 6.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, 5.

Nevertheless I'm of the opinion, that even though the objects of art have radically changed, this does not necessarily mean that our attitude towards these object has changed, simply because of the fact they are still referred to as 'art'. This word is indeed dynamic and bound to its context, but it's still the same word. What makes me believe that, throughout the ever-changing concept, a red thread is spun.

In order to elaborate my point of view I shall address some of Hume's conditions for correct judgement, and then convert these into my own interpretation, which I hope shall serve as a bridge between his words and our own contemporary perspective.

### **Refined, and free of prejudice**

Hume notices that comparing certain works of art is the same as comparing "a pond to the ocean."<sup>3</sup> Still, a great amount of widely appreciated works would belong to the category of the pond and many other, less famous, works to the ocean. Thus, the correct judgement is not based on general opinion.

We shall now discuss Hume's idea about what it is based on, starting with the "refinement of the palate,"<sup>4</sup> his first condition to acquire the ability for just criticism. In order to clarify what this means, I shall take these words very literally.

Everyone has his own taste in food, let's not stand still for too long at this evident statement. The majority of the people likes salty food. And often even; the saltier, the better. Does this mean that good food is salty? Salt does make a dish tastier, but it's more often a characteristic of bad, unhealthy food than good food. Salt can certainly bring us pleasure, but, in this case, it's irrelevant for the quality of the dish. What Hume means by "refined palate", is that one is able to taste the subtle ingredients, the specifics that grants the dish its character. A person with a refined taste, seeks rather quality than pure pleasure. In order to do so, this person has had to overcome his *craving* for salt. Because, he whose taste is only satisfied with a bold amount of salt, won't pay much attention to the other ingredients. And maybe he won't even eat a dish if it's not salty enough. This person obviously has a very plain palate.

Hume's second condition, is that one needs to take on an attitude free of prejudice: "The real genius, the longer his works endure and the more widely they're spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with."<sup>5</sup> What Hume means is that with the passing

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3 Hume, 7.

4 Hume, 10–11.

5 Hume, 9.

of time the artist becomes an unknown figure to his admirers, as in, nobody knows him personally. Hume states that because of this, his work is freed from the criticism entwined with personal feelings towards the artist. Thus the work of art can be met without prejudice, thus without interference of feelings that are irrelevant to the work itself.

At the same time, the quotation above seems to bear something of conventionalisation. The more widely the work is known, the more widely it will be known; not only is it met with a more sincere admiration, it is met with the admiration of more people. Pepper was once an exotic and strange spice, but is nowadays, without exception, found standing next to salt. The first ones who'd cough and complain about its spiciness, have made way for those who eat it with the same (or even more) gusto as they eat salt. People's palets have evolved to experience pleasure from it. Hume speaks of "the real genius", who is not necessarily recognized as thus from the beginning. But with the passing of time taste changes. Here we stumble upon a mystery: where, or with whom, does such a change begin?

### **Leaving behind pleasure and encountering the genius**

Let's first look into Hume's text in search for an answer:

But though poetry can never submit to exact truth, it must be confined by rules of art, discovered to the author either by genius or observation. If some negligent or irregular writers have pleased, they have not pleased by their transgression of rule or order, *but in spite of these transgressions*: they have possessed other beauties, which were conformable to just criticism; and the force of these beauties has been able to overpower censure, and give the mind a satisfaction superior to the disgust arising from the blemishes.<sup>6</sup>

Here it becomes clear that "just criticism" is not so much about evaluating the artist's use of certain rules, but rather his way of bending around the rules (let's say salt is the rule). This doesn't only mean a rupture of convention, but the meeting of something unsettling: "(...) and the force of these beauties has been able to overpower censure, and give the mind a satisfaction superior to the disgust from the blemishes."

"Blemishes" here are the breaking of the rules; introducing new and the strange. Those who can open up to this, let their senses be aroused by something that's not exactly pleasurable, to taste beyond the salt, can completely deliver themselves to the object and

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6 Hume, 7. (Italics by the author).



get over their prejudices, which sprout from craving, a specific desire. The ‘just critic’ is able to leave his comfort-zone, follow the path of the strange and discover its beauty. This is where the “genius” of the artist resides. It’s because we can overcome our desire to experience pleasure that we can experience new pleasure; pleasure that before had not been regarded as such.

So, we have come upon the difference in between pleasure and genius, and the conditions for a person to move along this spectrum. For it is a spectrum, though one loaded with tension, more than a duality; it’s about the *transition* from the comfortable into the strange. And this leaving of the comfort-zone contains its own kind of pleasure.

### **The Just Critic**

We have come to the conclusion that a just critic is someone who can take on an attitude of sensibility and willingness to overcome his prejudices. Even though I agree with Hume that there’s a small chance everyone would behave this way, I don’t believe we could distinguish between fit and unfit candidates. It’s important to recognize every single person’s potential; not everyone does it, but that doesn’t mean that not everyone is able to. After all, contemplating the arts demands practice, so the senses and taste can be sharpened, like a knife.<sup>7</sup>

In the end we, who consider ourselves concerned with the arts, are left to ourselves and ourselves only when it comes to deciding what we think of a piece. Assigning this job to one specific ‘just critic’ would mean that we would give away the trust we have in our senses and with that risk paying less attention to our own experience. Since, in this case, I’d grant more appreciation to the words of another than to what I see, hear, feel, smell with my own body and perceive with my own mind.

So, up until now our definition of a “just criticism” is as follows: one is supposed to at least try and free himself from his prejudice in order to contemplate the work in its tiniest details, including the repulsive. This is the way to widen one’s horizons of his aesthetic perception. That which widens, is where the genius of the artist resides; it’s the exotic spice. Here we find the hinge for the change in convention.

The case of the impressionists in the 19th century is a good example to illustrate this point. Their works were widely unappreciated. The form was vague, which made the painting seem sloppy and unfinished. This was still the era of the realists; it was the loyal

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<sup>7</sup> Hume, 13.

or even idealistic depicting of reality that attracted approbation. The art of the impressionists did not follow this convention and they payed for it. But nowadays, as Hume would have remarked, they're considered masterpieces.

Let's follow histories tracks from here and zoom in on the following period that it leads us to; the Dadaists, to whom beauty meant nothing and absurdity everything.

And now we leap to the present: this perception of the world has now evolved in such a way that in our time, there are more plain squares in museums than depictions of the reality that surrounds us. Or perhaps these squares are depictions of the reality that surrounds us. I shall now discuss how our definition of the attitude of a just critic can be applied to our contemporary conception of art.

### **The rupture of convention is the convention**

Let me begin with taking the freedom to appeal to my own experience, since we *are* speaking of personal experience, which Hume wants to 'elevate' to a universal platform. Even though I can't communicate directly with the reader, I find this the only way to come to a statement about universal experience. I know nothing about everyone, but I know of myself and I hope everyone knows of her/him/itself.



*Marcel Duchamp, Fontaine, 1917*

When I walk around in a museum, I'm often bothered by the question: is this art? Because 1. I don't recognize much of craftsmanship in it (so there's not much to arouse my "palate of taste") and 2. I find objects I encounter strange and often banale.

Hume demands of a just critic to let go of his prejudices in order to go beyond the convention to which his taste is momentarily bound, to seek beyond his craving to have his desires met. It seems that in our time every single piece of art demands exactly this of us.

Let's take Marcel Duchamp's *Fontaine* (1917) as an example. The surface is meaningless, maybe even offensive to some, but behind this is a hidden realisation, the work says something, that makes the repulsiveness and banality of the object irrelevant, or actually transcends it. It carries within it another world it's not about its pure shape.

This implicates that our palet must have evolved into one sensible to concepts, instead of sensory stimulation. The beauty, if we may still use that word, is found beyond the physical.

However, there seems to be a problem here, if we come back to Hume: “If some negligent or irregular writers have pleased, they have not pleased by their transgression of rule or order, *but in spite of these transgressions-*”.

In spite of what transgressions? What are rules we’re breaking (let’s not take specific knowledge about an art piece into consideration here, for art couldn’t be an exclusively intellectual business)?

The point is, that in a museum practically every piece of art has a strangeness about it, a strangeness that causes one to not know exactly what his judgement (or even experience) is, and because of that evokes the idea of breaking with convention. The breaking of the convention has been conventionalised. If the strange has become normal, how can we know what is conventional and what is not?

### **Communication between artist and audience**

Maybe, it’s not necessary to distinguish in between these two; we could be setting foot upon a territory where the artists can play his game freely and let bloom his originality limitlessly. There is no convention anymore to break out from. But, the path that has been paved for absolutely free expression can also serve as a path to uttering complete nonsense. Since everyone has his own subjective experience, which can never be understood by all. A new question arises here: how can we know that the artist is honest with us and is not pretentiously setting us up with a ‘piece of art’ that in itself is meaningless?

One could reply here that the Dadaïsts themselves did exactly this; speak nonsense. But that is my point, they already *did* so. The fact that they did so had a meaning in itself; the meaninglessness had meaning. The Dadaïsts had just come out of a time of war; they were driven to express themselves radically in a new manner. Why this manner was as it was I can’t go into here. The point we need to focus on, however, is that the drive behind their artistic expression had come forth from the tension with what had come prior to that; they broke with the convention. A mutual experience and understanding was the seed that sprouted. We can state here that because of this the Dadaïsts spoke the same ‘conceptual language’.

Now, to come back to my tour in the museum: I do not understand many works. Whatever the artist had wanted to convey, it doesn't arrive. I don't feel we speak the same language. And this brings me to question the boundaries between originality and the speaking the same language.

### **The blotting of the boundaries between the subjective and objective experience**

But, perhaps this state of not-knowing *is* the new enjoyment, because you can freely give it your *own* interpretation.

In this case Hume's conditions for just criticism have become rather obsolete. The critic is not any longer specifically required to 'taste' well or free himself from prejudice, no, he must be creative.

This introduces once again a new problem, which I won't be able to discuss elaborately in this work, but is nevertheless of great importance: how can we reconcile this notion with our judgement? Can the nature of our judgement be adjusted? Who knows, perhaps we're now entering the era of the limitlessly creative individual, who doesn't need to concern himself with rules but solely with the creative act itself. And this doesn't only consider the artist, but also the audience. It is exactly here we where stumble upon the core of our problem; where everything is free play. Which game do we play when everything is free?

Let me specify this: Hume sees a clear distinction between the experience and judgement, and within judgement a distinction between just and unjust. We have arrived on a territory where experience is no longer distinguishable from judgement, which causes there to be no right or wrong, because the experience is always right. This is the effect of the absence of (clear) rules.

Hume speaks of rules and the importance of the exception on the rule, where the tension lies between the convention and the new; the fun, pleasurable against the strange, genius, eye-opening – innocence and insight. With other words: rules are there to be broken.

### **Conclusion: how far can we run if there are no tracks to follow?**

I'm of the opinion that our judgement needs this tension, this distinction that is made possible by convention, to function; it requires an area where it can touch upon separate

pieces to *discern* and then put back together. This is a core aspect of our rationality; it puzzles. With that I don't mean that the aesthetic experience is solely a business of the intellect! But that the experience and its emotion, sensation, intuition, needs guidance, something to create order, so it can communicate. Just like language does.

Communication, not only with the outer world, but with oneself.

I speak here again from my own experience: it has occurred to me more than once that I didn't have access to the words that could describe my experience, because I simply didn't very well know what it was. I would find myself in a state of confusion, but under the pressure of the urge to say something, to judge, I'd utter something that merely or didn't express at all what I was actually experiencing. With this I want to point out that the human being has a tendency to judge, and that judgement might be made at the cost of truth and integrity.

Now, can we overcome or even deny this tendency? Or wouldn't it be an interesting task (especially for the arts) to guide this tendency to say something about our experience; to throw the subjective experience into the objective world?

Who knows the genius of today is he who can bring out the familiar in the strangeness – but I'm only speculating.

Humans judge, in order to build tracks in the desert of reality. It's our way of finding guidance in the world. Freedom and creativity are great virtues, but we must remember our own futility in the face of these powers that we have at our disposal. Our judgement can't be completely free, as it will always be regarded as right or wrong or somewhere in between, because it says something about the outer world and thus is relevant for other people. The most important thing in all of this, perhaps even more than that our judgement is reasonable, is that we ourselves know what we mean by it.

*Mazal Schlemiel*

## Ecstasy Police

*Lovely Animal*

Especially for this edition of Essential Modernities, the New York based underground artist Ecstasy Police has released this exclusive track.

Download the appendix containing the track [here](#).



**MAKING**

**ART**

**IS**

**MAKING**

**LOVE**

~~MAKE~~

~~ART~~

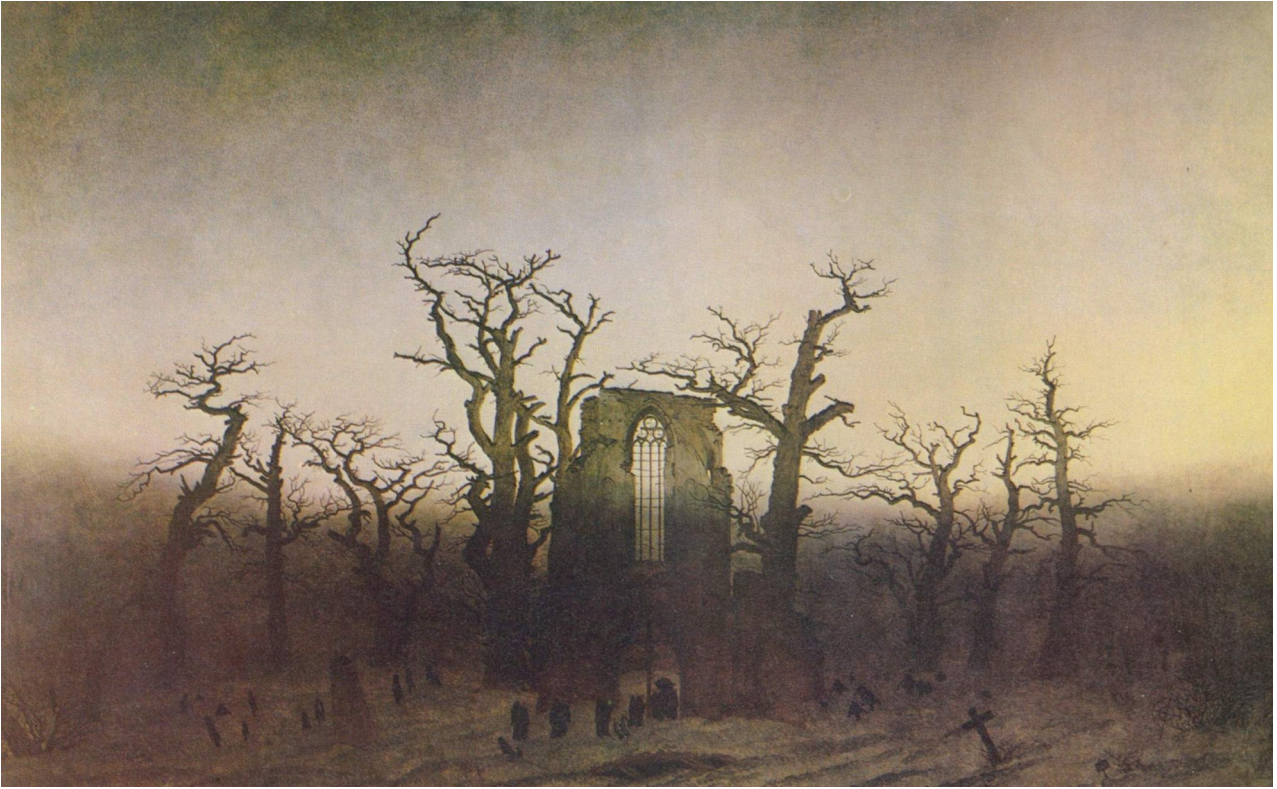
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# **FREE ART**

## Caspar David Friedrich



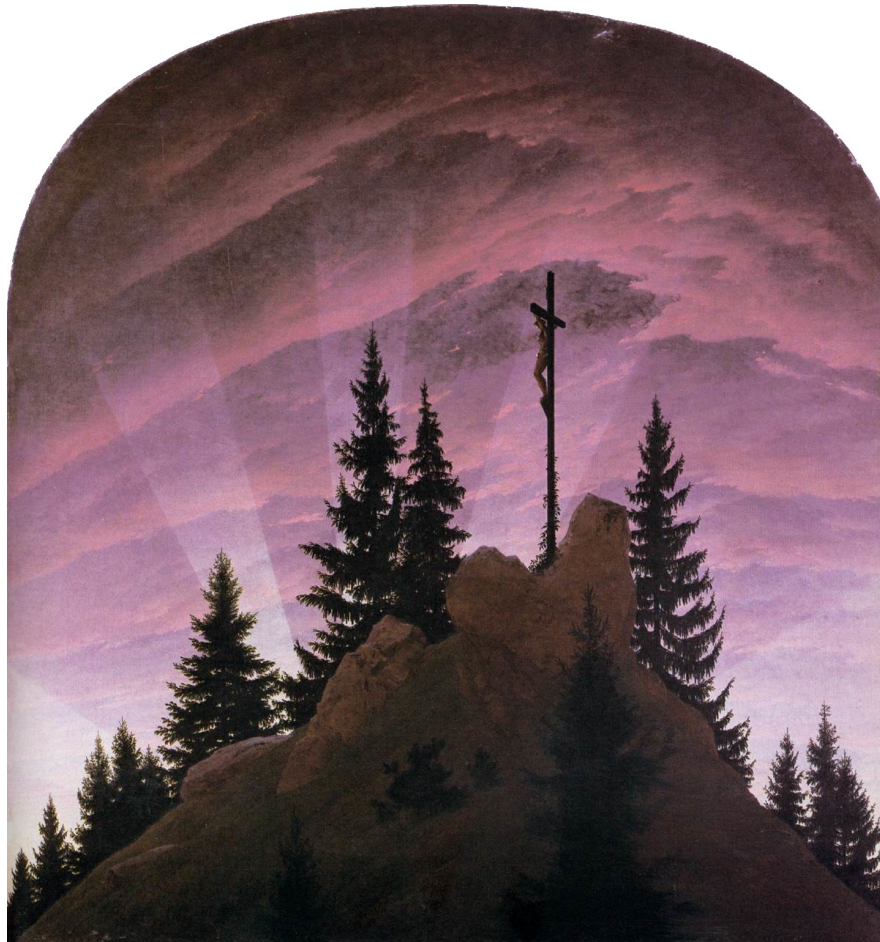
*Abbey in the Oak Wood*, 1809  
oil on canvas, 110.4 x 171 cm  
Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

## Caspar David Friedrich



*Winter Landscape with Church*, 1811  
oil on canvas, 32.5 x 45 cm  
National Gallery, London

# Caspar David Friedrich

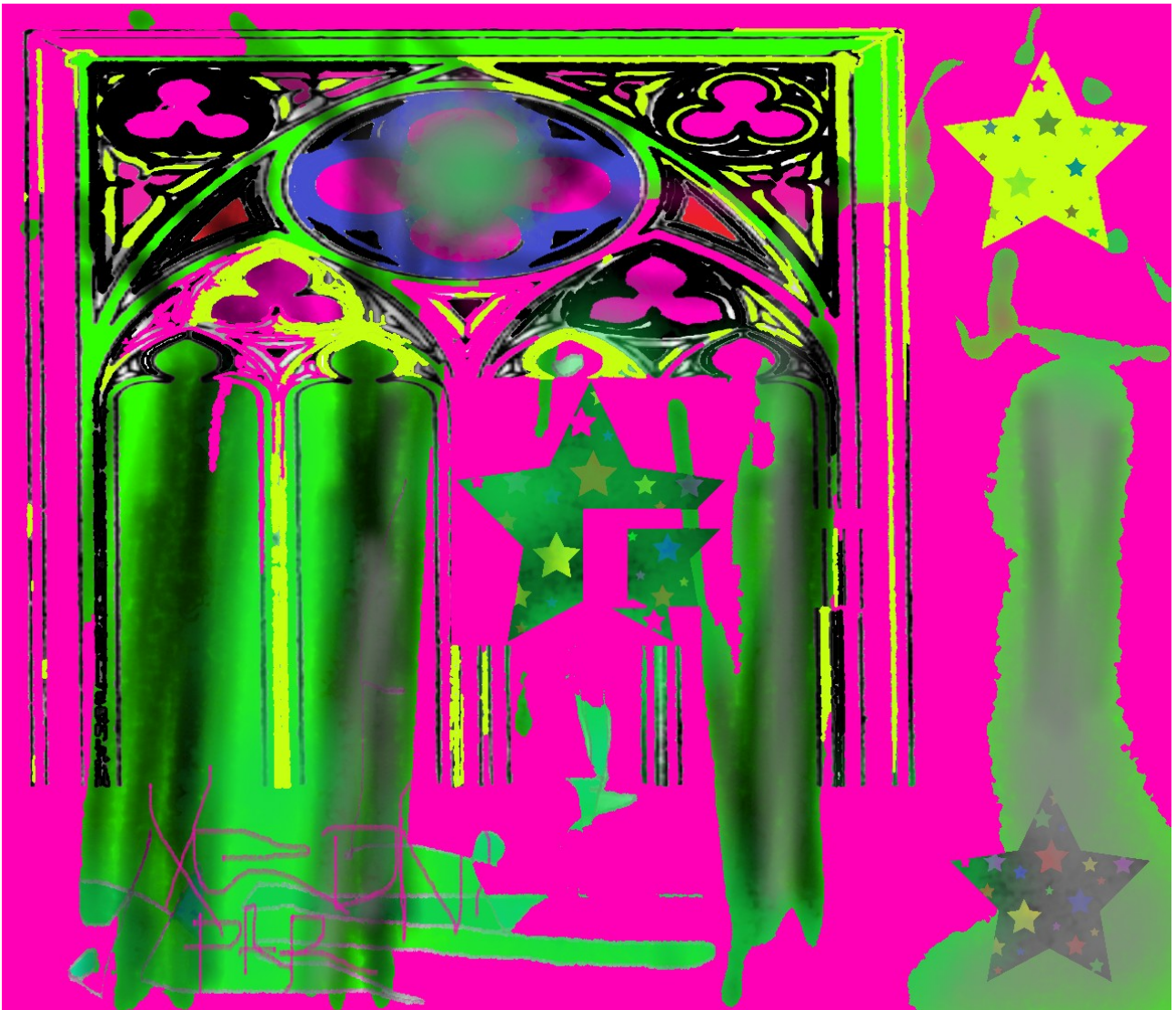


*The Cross in the Mountains (Tetschener Altar)*, 1807  
oil on canvas, 115 x 110.5 cm  
Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

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Jorn van den Berg

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## Xousha Eisenhardt

For this edition of Essential Modernities the artist Xousha Eisenhardt has made a video. It has no title, no context.

Download the appendix containing the video [here](#).



*still from the video*

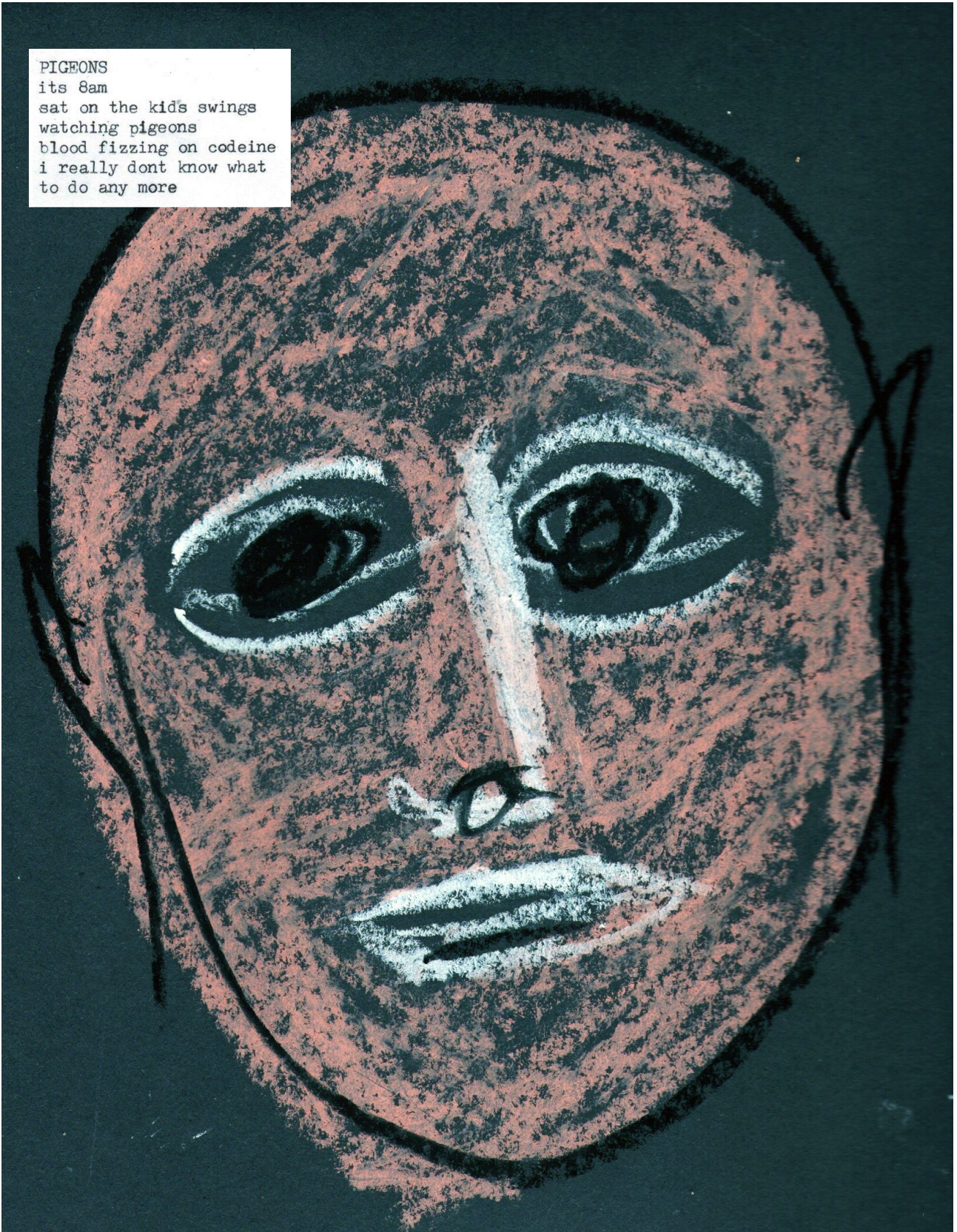
Joni Mangarella



*Dance to the Music of Crime*, 2020  
oil on board, 25.4 x 27.9 cm  
private collection

## Rou Rot

PIGEONS  
its 8am  
sat on the kid's swings  
watching pigeons  
blood fizzing on codeine  
i really dont know what  
to do any more



## interview with David Gebski about *Genocide*

by Mazal Schlemiel

The artist David Gebski has created a series of artworks that connect together as one. His *Genocide* series have started on September 22, 2018 at “Tjappas” with the first installment, *Genocide I*. On May 2, 2019 was the follow up, *Genocide II* at the elevator of his old home, the old ACTA building. The third installment, *Genocide III*, also known as *À bout de souffle*, is hosted on the artist’s website since March 28, 2020.

This interview with David Gebski was conducted by Mazal Schlemiel on the occasion of the final installment of the *Genocide* series on May 3, 2020: *Genocide IV*.

**What brought you to the idea of *Genocide I – IV*?**

**What was your motivation?**

It’s actually really simple. I had needed to quit smoking for a while, since I was smoking back when I came up with the idea of *Genocide I* and when a friend of mine asked me to exhibit at a exposition she organized I saw the opportunity to execute *Genocide I*. Part of the work is also the performance that after the exhibition I would not smoke anymore, when I would I would fail as an artist.

**Why did you see it as a performance?**

I can see everything in life as a performance and I saw this as a performance because I knew it’d be good for me. If I wouldn’t smoke I wouldn’t die of some disease and I wouldn’t have to waste all that money. When the quitting is an artistic performance I’d renounce myself as an artist if I’d start smoking again; I started smoking again three or four months later. Though, not for long, since I’ve quit since the exhibition of *Genocide II*.



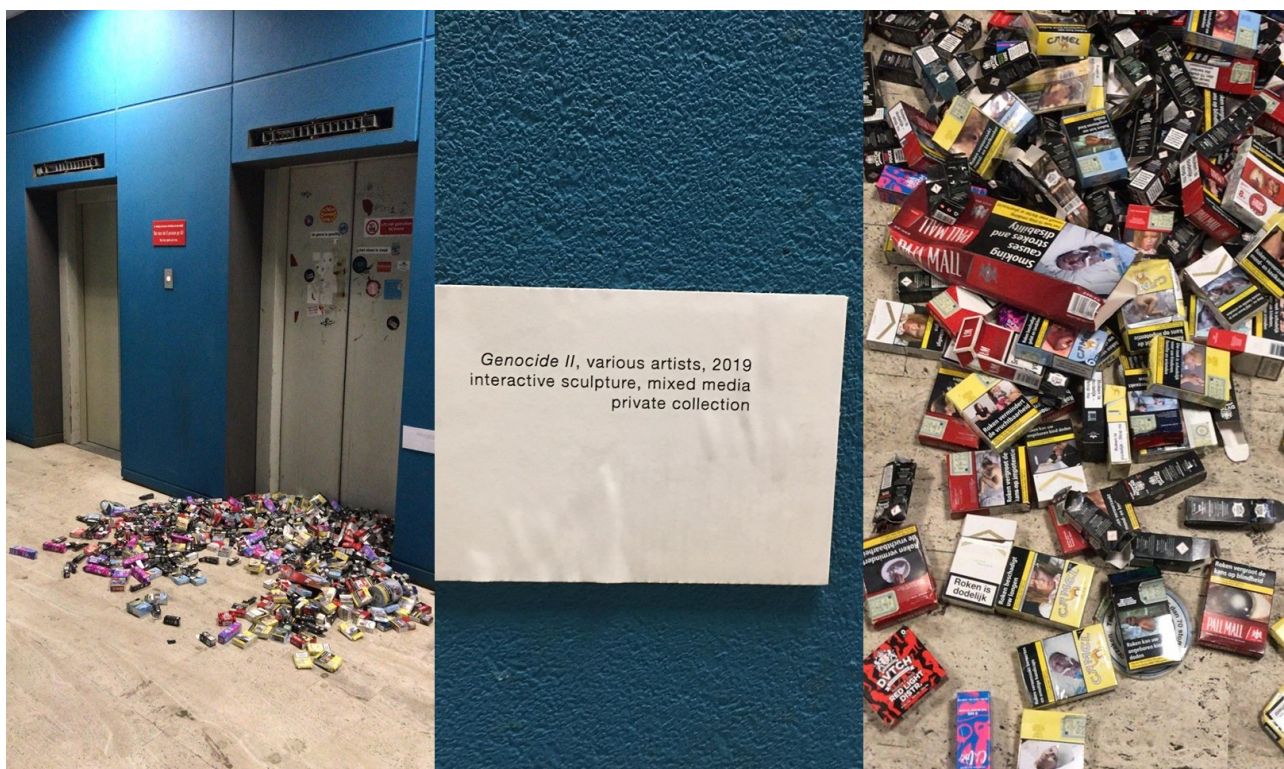
*the bucket of Genocide I, filled with cigarette butts, ash and other trash*

**Could you tell us something about *Genocide II*?**

*Genocide II* is, just like *Genocide I*, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which means it's an artwork with more than just one artist working on it and they all share a similar influence on the work. For example, the packs that I let my friend Unknown Filetype deposit in front of the elevator, were collected by me but smoked mostly by others: friends, the people living on my hallway. The idea was to leave the packs where I started smoking myself. So it's a really personal work and not a critique on society at all in the first instance, which others, and rightly so, see in the work.

**I think it's funny that it's both a *Gesamtkunstwerk* but at the same time a very personal work. You involve almost any type of human: the people who threw the packs away, filled your bucket, produced the cigarettes, but it's still about you?**

Yes.



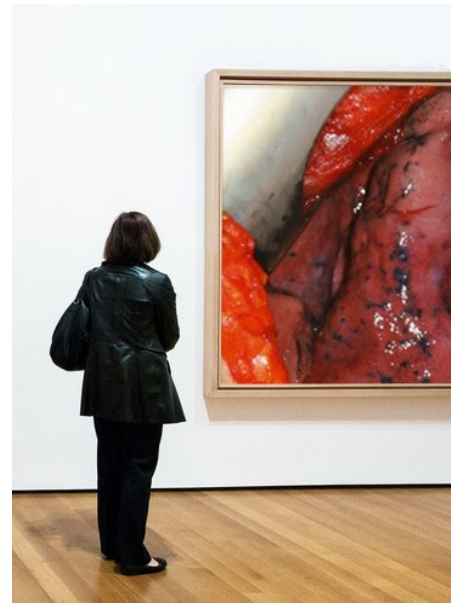
*installation shots of Genocide II at the ACTA elevator*

**And then you made *Genocide III*?**

Yes, the numbers indicate the order. It's actually a Gesamtkunstwerk too, since I didn't take the pictures, I'm the one who collected them and put them on the "wall," as a curator.

**Does that make you the artist too?**

I acted as a curator, who I think is an artist too. Look, the fact that my name is on the sign makes me the artist, but it goes for every artwork that society, everyone, is responsible for every artwork.



*À bout de souffle (1/3)*

**So you'd say that every artwork is a Gesamtkunstwerk?**

To a certain extent, yes.

**Could you specify what your idea of an artist is, David?**

Asking me to specify a term that is actually applicable on everything is asking me a lot.



*À bout de souffle (2/3)*

**Alright, we happen to walk on the street, David, and you talk about art as something that's applicable on everything. Those bikes over there, are those art too, according to you?**

Yes.

**Could you give your reason for this, or is it that because it's applicable on everything we can't actually give a reason for it?**

I like your answer.

**I notice I shouldn't have answered my own question.**

You never change, Mazal!

**Speaking of change. Has there been a change in art? Is the art that's being made today different from the art that's been made in the past?**

No, I don't think so. There's a huge conceptual power behind art, more than meets the eye, which causes a whole dynamic that's specific to art and everything around us. In the sense that everything's art, everything's relevant, because everything has a certain dynamic, specific to life.

**Would you add to that that your art has a goal?**

No, absolutely not.

**Just like life doesn't have a goal?**

You could see it like that.

**OK, now *Genocide IV*.**

I think it's funny that you go from I to IV because for me it's actually one work.

**I go from *I* to *IV* because it is *I – IV*, that gives me the inclination to start with *I* and end with *IV*. I think it's funny how you suggest with that that I have a different vision on your art than your own. Do you think this is something that you'll encounter more often with your art? That the vision of the audience is going to differ from yours?**

I can't really speak for art that's yet to be made, like when I was working on *Genocide I*, I

knew what *IV* was going to look like, but I had no clue about *III* yet. But, the way people will react to my art is something that's part of the fun of it. Not because I make it for an audience but as something that happens incidental when I exhibit it. I've done it multiple times, that at my exhibitions I'd stand at the sideline, and this is one of the benefits of being anonymous, pretending I was just a visitor too and start a conversation with someone of the audience, being able to get their opinion on my art this way. I did the same at the exhibition of *Genocide I*, and the responses I got from people made me rethink my art again. But of course, everyone reacted differently, everyone has their own vision on the world and their own experience so every artwork is experienced differently by every different person.



*À bout de souffle (3/3)*



**If you would approach your own art merely as a spectator, would you think it's good art? Can you imagine approaching your work like that?**

Yes, I'd think it's good art. Of course I can imagine that.

**Of course you can imagine that, you're an artist, a human with a strong imagination! You think it's good art, could you tell us why?**

I think it's interesting how the artist has sketched a path you're free to follow but at the same time you know, that the path you follow is your own, and you're free to use your imagination to understand the imagination of the artist, David Gebski.

**You just said that you're following a path, are you suggesting that your path could be the same as the path of other people or that by following your path they're coming to the realization they're actually following their own path?**

I'd rather say the latter, but I don't rule out that someone could have the same path as I do, but I think it's easier to think that everyone has their own path.

**Do you also think that because of that that your reason to think your art is good doesn't necessarily match with the reason others think it's good?**

This goes back to a question you asked me earlier about how others would interpret my art. Everyone interprets art in their own way, everyone has their own experience, people think it's good or bad for their own private reasons. It appeals to someone because someone's open to it or it doesn't appeal to someone for their own personal reasons, it never has to do with the art I think, my art is just good.

***Genocide IV?***

Ah, yes, we're going there, right? Literally and figuratively speaking, because we're on our way to my home where it's being exhibited. I don't know if it's because of COVID-19 that the perfect place to exhibit it is at home and not in a public space like *Genocide I*; but anyway, the bucket is empty now.

David Gebski

*Genocide IV*



## last words

*a warm “thank you” to everyone who assisted in the creation of this magazine*

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