

The art of the twentieth and twenty-first century is a distinctly urban art; dedicated to reflecting contemporary conditions it is less involved in the contemplation of nature. The city, the place where mankind re-invents itself, is the milieu in which most modern artists live, work and find their inspiration. The asymmetries of urban life provide the friction and the sparking points for most of artistic discoveries and advances. The ever changing social and cultural environment alters and transforms traditional attitudes to life and art. Drawing is for the modern artist the most accessible terrain for experimentation - an expression of freedom. Many artists use the medium of drawing, the oldest and fundamental medium, to explore and re-assess problem of form, space and time.

Like poetry, drawing is a highly sensitive medium, often open-ended, full of possibilities. Drawings explore, reflect and re-confirm visual concepts and ideas; marks, traces and erasures on paper, sometimes hesitant, sometimes performed with the intensity of scorch-marks, are the foremost means for testing them. Artists question traditional notions, either through transforming them or by discarding them. In search of truly contemporary solutions they have unlearned, willfully or subconsciously, academic skills and have learned new ways for reaching above the limitations of their chosen media.

International cultural influences have enhanced the awareness of the relativity of inherited values. Varying degrees of abstraction influence new kinds of representation and extend the range of the artist's as well as the viewer's perception and critical perspective. In the forefront of these developments were artist of the European *avant-garde* which pursued the principle of order found in geometric abstraction. These are principles, pioneered in Russia by Kazimir Malevich and others find their continuation in the minimalist and conceptual art of our days. Early innovations of Impressionists and Expressionists eventually lead to the impulsive, gestural art of the American Abstract Expressionists and their European followers. Chance and physical action have led the way to a synthesis of calligraphic signatures and graffiti-like mark making.

**Modern Times: responding to chaos** reflects on the predicament of artists addressing a period marked by world wars, nuclear and climatic threats, and accelerating technological and social change. The exhibition is being presented in non-chronological order; it explores contrasts, conceptual affinities and connections as they emerge in the work of modern artists separated by time and geography. The principle of self-critical exploration has opened a range of creative strategies to artists who generalise and utilise the prevailing condition of alienation. As the novelist Malcolm Bradbury has observed:  
'Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos.'

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