

## THE PETER DORMER LECTURE 2012 GRAYSON PERRY

The following extracts have been taken from the 2012 Peter Dormer lecture given by Grayson Perry, which was held in the Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre at the Royal College of Art's Battersea site on Monday 3rd December 2012. The lecture was entitled "Turn up on time, be nice and put in the hours or How my lovely art girlfriend ran off with Mr Moneybags and Mr Know-it-all."

### INTRODUCTION

We need to face up to something: we're in the leisure industry. Often people talk about the arts as if it was a do or die thing and they're campaigning to government. It's the leisure industry! Nobody is going to die if I don't turn up tomorrow. When I was asked to do this lecture, I thought it was a great privilege. It gives me a chance to think about what I really think about the handmade. These are my thoughts my feelings, my personal opinions.

I'm not a crafty person really. I'm an art person. I went to art college. I studied fine art. I'm exhibited pretty much in art galleries so therefore this is an artist's perspective on the handmade.



1

### ON TOOLS

(Fig. 1) This is a quarter of a million years old. When I was looking around the British Museum for stuff for my show [*The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, 2011-12], it was holding things like this that was probably the most powerful thing because it reminded me that we are tool users. The very fact that we can touch our fingers and our thumb together is because of tools. We have evolved by tool using. It's making flint tools that gave us the strength and manipulation of our hands. This axe was the Swiss Army Knife of the day... from Essex.



### ON ART SCHOOL

(Fig. 2) The one thing you learn at art college is how to hate art. It's a very important thing... to become part of the long tradition of rebels... Rebels often think they're anti-capitalist. Often they actually feed it with its most precious resource – new ideas.

Craft sounded quite an interesting area to get into because that's how I always operated: follow the path of most resistance.

### ON CRAFTS SHOPS

I've always been drawn to the naff. My career again and again is marked by my venturing without embarrassment into the naffest territory that aesthetics has to offer. This is why being a transvestite is so handy – it has made me fairly immune to embarrassment.

### ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

It's something I love and I appreciate but, at the same time, when it becomes the headline of any particular artwork I think it really gets in the way. Most painting now is craft. It's a tradition.

### ON PERFECTION

What is it about the handmade that we fetishise? It must be in our DNA that we like the handmade... We like to see the presence of the human, the figure print of the human. The relationship with the material and perfection often is a dead thing.

### ON WHY SIZE MATTERS

One of the big enemies of craftsmanship in the contemporary art world is scale. As anybody here who makes things will realise it's quite difficult to make big things... But of course art galleries are getting massive.

### ON OPEN HEART SURGERY

If you could imagine embroidering prosciutto down the bottom of a bucket that's what it is like. Talk about craftsmanship. My God.



### ON THE PUBLIC'S APPRECIATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART

(Fig. 3) It's interesting in my lifetime a change that has come over the public. That's probably the biggest shift. I've been very lucky as an artist to witness the change. When people go to an art gallery they aren't going to be outraged at some of the pretensions of the contemporary art world and its lack of handmade-ness. They aren't necessarily going to say my eight-year-old daughter could do that any more. They are more likely to say my eight-year-old daughter could do that if she had a team of fabricators... It's a normal part of culture now.

### ON THE OPERA JOKE PHENOMENON

(Fig. 4) When we go to the opera we go for the lovely singing and the costumes and maybe a bit of drama. We don't go for the jokes. And yet when you go to the opera if there's a joke everybody laughs like mad – like it's the best jokes you've ever heard in the world. But if you told that joke in a comedy club there would be silence and booing. This is what I often think happens in art galleries. We wheel something in from another place – whether it be a documentary that you wouldn't even watch on the history channel – and you put it in an art gallery and suddenly it's a bit of art and nobody questions it... We're judging art by the wrong criteria.



### ON 3D PRINTING

There's a kind of look to 3D printing that I want them to kind of get over. I think it's having its 8-track moment. I don't see us all having a 3D printer in our little workshop. If it does happen it will be more like a UPS depot: you can go down, pick the thing up and they've got a warehouse size machine.