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Article by *max milford / London*



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the rocking horse

Article by corblimey / London

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www.binge-thinking.blogspot.com

Art is subjective. Trying to argue otherwise is like a pencil without lead - Pointless.

By now, many of you will be aware of the David vs Goliath story that has hit the headlines this weekend – the guerrilla artist Cartrain is having his balls handed to him for daring to steal a packet of pencils from 'Pharmacy' – a conceptual installation by Damien Hirst, a man with whom he has an ongoing feud. Unlike the Biblical story, things are not going well for the deviant David, he's been arrested for the prank and awaits news whether he'll be charged for stealing £500,000 worth of pencils as well as damaging an iconic artwork worth £10 million. I found the stunt and the accompanying 'missing' style posters pretty entertaining – and the reaction of Hirst and the Tate to be slightly pathetic. But what really interests me are the figures that are being thrown about. Newspapers were right to lead their stories with a paragraph about the price of the pencils. So what if they are rare "Faber Castell dated 1990 Mongol 482 Series?" They are still pencils - as functional and mundane as before they were displayed – and I cannot conceive how someone can justify pricing them at five hundred grand. But then that might be because I just 'don't get' a lot of contemporary art. During a recent trip to the Edinburgh festival I went to see Yasmina Reza's terrific play, 'Art'. The play depicts the rapidly deteriorating friendship between Serge, a self confessed

dilettante who has bought a 'white' canvas for an extortionate amount of Euros, and Marc, his friend who 'doesn't get' contemporary art, but can't accept that Serge thinks he has a masterpiece. As far as my appreciation of contemporary art goes, I'm with Marc. However, whilst I remain unimpressed by many things that aesthetes would cut off their right arm to own, I do understand that appreciation of art is subjective. I also know that when it comes to valuing something, an object's price is determined by market forces (even if the market itself may be a Hirst Inc. creation). I suppose it's not dissimilar to football transfers. Just as Ronaldo is now 'worth' £80 million, someone was willing to pay £10 million for 'Pharmacy' so that is the value it attracts. The ethical and moral questions that such attribution of value brings up are a different kettle of fish, but from a purely economic standpoint I can almost - almost - see how a shark preserved in formaldehyde could be worth seven million pounds. Needless to say were my pockets currently bulging with that sort of wonga, I would not be shelling out for contemporary art. No - I'd be going for something rather older. 66 million years older to be precise. Because a Tyrannosaurus skeleton, one of the three most complete ones in existence, is expected to sell for £5 million at auction in Las Vegas next month. As far as aesthetic majesty, sublime creativity and imagination-bending spectacle go, Mother Nature will never be matched. Contemporary art can go swivel.

I doubt 'Pharmacy' at the Tate has caused anywhere near as many audible gasps of wonder as the dinosaur skeletons that greet visitors to London's Natural History Museum. That is why, were I to possess a cool seven mill, I wouldn't buy a preserved predator; I'd buy an extinct one – and still have change enough to buy four packets of "Faber Castell dated 1990 Mongol 482 Series" pencils.



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