

Shared reading for New Directions 2017

From "Transgressive Art as a Form of Protest" by Vishal Tondon

"Transgressive art treads the thin line between veneration and irreverence, love and hate, private and public, and the sacred and the profane. When a true artist transgresses social mores through his art, he is putting his own faith on the anvil. This is one of the true purposes of art.

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Transgressive art has the capacity to put our values those we hold as a nation or as a culture to the test. It works by confounding our interpretation and our judgment. When the beliefs we hold so dear are challenged, we are vulnerable to being offended. Yet, art that offends our value judgment should be engaged with sincerely as it exposes us to the shaky ground on which our values are so often based. In 2007, the closing of the annual exhibition at MSU Baroda, as a response to the 'offensive' works of the student Chandramohan, and his subsequent arrest were a direct assault of the rights of freedom of expression. This event recalled an incident that happened almost twenty years earlier in America, when the artwork *Piss Christ* by the photographer Andres Serrano was met with vehement opposition including hate mails and death threats.

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Understandably, artworks such as *Piss Christ*, *Two Men in Benaras* and *Tale* could outrage the moral sensibility of some viewers. Oscar Wilde, speaking for transgressive art, proposed that 'the critic should be able to recognize that the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate.' Moreover, Kieran Cashell, author of the book *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (2009) adds that to simply apply ethical evaluation to art is to somehow 'erode the intrinsic significance of art and risk compromising the exclusivity of the aesthetic experience.' Transgressive art employs dedicated means to engage with and hold the attention of the viewer. Art works that supposedly aim to outrage or violate basic mores and sensibilities actually compel us to look at reality often shorn of all artifice."

<http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=transgressive-art-as-a-form-of-protest&iid=32&articleid=938>