

Altermodern, Tate Triennial 2009, review

Altermodern at Tate Britain, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, is the museum's fourth Triennial exhibition and shows long-established figures alongside unknowns from Britain and abroad.

By Richard Dorment

Published: 02 Feb 2009



Badger-skin headdress: Firebird, Rhebok, Badger and Hare 2008 by Marcus Coates

For better or worse, if you want to know what is happening in art today, try this experiment. Take a cab from the Saatchi Gallery's excellent exhibition *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East to Millbank*, where the fourth Tate Triennial has just opened. Though the distance is short, the journey will take you from the end of one cultural era to the beginning of another.

Each work of art in the Saatchi show is complete in itself and rooted in one time and one place. But the art in the Triennial is open-ended, formless, and refers to something outside itself. Walking through the show is like spending a few hours aimlessly surfing the net. A seemingly endless stream of politics, porn, science fiction, history, culture and science flows past you so fast that when you leave it is hard to say where you've been.

French curator Nicolas Bourriaud uses an exhibition that was originally intended as a survey of emerging artists in Great Britain to show long-established figures like Gustav Metzger alongside unknown artists who may or may not be British. He dubs this aesthetic "Altermodern" (alternative to both to Modernism and Postmodernism), but I'd have paid tribute to the French international aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières and called it "Art without Borders".

The star of this show is Indian Subodh Gupta. His *Line of Control* fills a rotunda in the Duveen Galleries from floor to ceiling with a mushroom cloud-shaped column of stainless-steel pots, pans and kitchen utensils in a work so visually powerful it gives you goose bumps. A "line of control" refers to the contested borders between disputed territories, which to any Indian means Kashmir, and the possibility that the conflict there might become the cause of a nuclear exchange. By making his atomic blast out of harmless implements that virtually every person both in Pakistan and India uses in everyday life, Gupta subverts (and therefore neutralises) the meaning of the