CONCEPTUAL ART

Conceptual art is art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object. It emerged as an art movement in the 1960s and the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.  
LeWitt, ‘Paragraphs on Conceptual Art’, Artforum Vol.5, no. 10, Summer 1967, pp. 79-83

CONCEPTUAL ARTWORKS

Conceptual art can be – and can look like – almost anything. This is because, unlike a painter or sculptor who will think about how best they can express their idea using paint or sculptural materials and techniques, a conceptual artist uses whatever materials and whatever form is most appropriate to putting their idea across – this could be anything from a [performance](https://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/p/performance-art) to a written description. Although there is no one style or form used by conceptual artists, from the late 1960s certain trends emerged.

### WHEN, WHY AND WHERE DID CONCEPTUAL ART HAPPEN?

As a definable movement conceptual art is associated with the 1960s and 1970s, but its origins reach beyond these two decades. [Marcel Duchamp](https://www.tate.org.uk/artists/marcel-duchamp) is often seen as an important forefather of conceptual art, and his readymade *[Fountain](https://www.tate.org.uk/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573)* of 1917 cited as the first conceptual artwork.

The movement that emerged in the mid 1960s and continued until the mid 1970s was international, happening more or less simultaneously across Europe, North America and South America.

Artists associated with the movement attempted to bypass the increasingly commercialised art world by stressing thought processes and methods of production as the value of the work. The art forms they used were often intentionally those that do not produce a finished object such as a sculpture or painting. This meant that their work couild not be easily bought and sold and did not need to be viewed in a formal gallery situation.

It was not just the structures of the art world that many conceptual artists questioned, there was often a strong socio-political dimension to much of the work they produced, reflecting wider dissatisfaction with society and government policies. (See for example Joseph Beuys’s [social sculpture](https://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/s/social-sculpture)).

Although as a definable art movement conceptual art is associated with the 1960s, many artists continue to make conceptual art in the twenty-first century (such as [Martin Creed](https://www.tate.org.uk/artists/martin-creed) and [Simon Starling](https://www.tate.org.uk/artists/simon-starling)).

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art>