



Phil Grabsky Art on the box

A big turn off

Phil Grabsky channel-surfs for art on TV but finds there's nothing to watch

Well, is there any? Art on TV, I mean. Have you watched any lately? Let's have a look at a random week and see. OK, Sunday 17 September to Saturday 23rd.

BBC1 – Sunday: nothing, Monday: nope, Tuesday: no, Wednesday: nothing, Thursday: er... no, Friday: don't be silly, Saturday: zilch.

BBC2 – Sunday: nothing, Monday: nope, Tuesday: no, Wednesday: nothing, Thursday: er... no, Friday – WAIT! Yes, found one! 3.20pm: *Crawshaw's Watercolour Cruise*. That's got to count, surely! Saturday: zilch.

ITV1 – Sunday: *The South Bank Show* (JG Ballard), Monday: nope, Tuesday: no, Wednesday: nothing, Thursday: er... no, Friday and Saturday: zilch.

C4 – Sunday: nope, Monday: nope, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday: some morning repeats on the Tate Modern and National Gallery, Saturday: zilch.

Five – Sunday: nope, Monday: nope, Tuesday: no, Wednesday: nothing, Thursday: er... no, Friday: no, Saturday: more zilch.

However, there's some good news – if you want to watch the following, there's no problem: *The Planet's Funniest Animals*, *Beauty And The Geek*, *The Bitchiest Ever TV Moments*, *The Boy Who Lived Before*, *The Teen Tamer*, *Vet Safari*, *The Sex Tapes That Shocked The World*. And this lack of art programming can't be for a lack of money; did you read that Jonathan Ross recently signed with the BBC for £18 million? Eighteen million pounds. For three years. £6 million a year. £100,000-plus per week. Blimey.

Yes, there are some great programmes on too – on BBC4, Artsworld and er... somewhere else I'm sure. But it's not great for the arts on TV is it? Five gets a huge amount of press for the films we do, but that's usually

only 38 minutes a week. Under one hour out of a possible 168.

Should we really be surprised or even care? After all, it's not as if you can ever go to the Tate Modern in London or the Walker in Liverpool and not be amazed at how busy they are. I don't know who did the sums but it's said there are more people in galleries and museums on Saturday afternoons than in football stadiums. There is clearly an enormous appetite for art in this country – but does it matter whether the TV channels reflect this or not? Maybe not. And yet I do wish someone would have the guts and sense to say: 'Hey, why can't we have a film about Holbein on at 8pm?' Broadcasters fear they'll get no attention, yet the recent 9/11 poem on Five was reviewed by just about everyone. Can you ever see the Beeb doing that? C4? Well, once maybe. Nowadays, only if *Big Brother* is having a break. Maybe that's what we need: *Big Brother* peopled by artists, poets and musicians. One thing's for sure, no one would take any notice of *BB's* rules!

So, if you're looking for music and art, you won't find it on the main TV channels, you'll have to get off your backside and look elsewhere. And elsewhere you'll find a vibrant, exciting world of art and media collaborations. Check out places like the Ikon in Birmingham or the Saatchi Gallery in London, small gallery installations, straight-to-DVD compilations like the recent *Sixteen* and, of course, the Internet. It's all out there more than ever; maybe we won't be seeing any of it after *Emmerdale* or *Supernanny*, but maybe we don't need to anymore. You get the sense that TV is simply no longer as important as it once was. Art on TV? Barely. Maybe that's no big deal but, you know, it's still kind of sad.

Is art the new rock 'n' roll?

Music producer **Paul Mex** begs the question of who's more rock'n'roll – Tracey Emin or Will Young?

Is art the new rock'n'roll? Well that was the question posed to me by an art editor whilst we were out experimenting with cocktails into the small hours of a Tuesday night, or more likely early Wednesday morning...

Rock 'n' roll appears to have fallen by the wayside since calculating corporations hijacked what was *Top of the Pops*. In today's climate, one is hard pressed to find a 'star' that could offend anybody's grandmother, let alone drop a TV out of a hotel window! Of course with the advent of *Pop Idol* and *The X-Factor*, things have become worse, with the bulk of new 'musicians' aspiring to simply be famous karaoke clowns and nothing more. Yet once there was a thin line between art and music; the well-documented art school backgrounds of John Lennon, Brian Eno and Jarvis Cocker created a blurring and merging of the two media, complete with rock'n'roll integrity. Most rockers now reek of conformity and careerism against a digital backdrop of falling record sales and leisure market fragmentation.

Measure all this up against artists like Tracey Emin, the Chapman brothers and Damien Hirst, and its not surprising art looks like the new rock'n'roll. Crazy yet innovative idealistic design jumbled in their work with sex and bad behaviour certainly goes a long way towards the nihilistic cause. Sprinkle a little politics into your art, something often missing from current pop music, and you get the complete package. Yet all is not as it possibly seems. Is the art world simply behind the times when compared to the music arena? Is rock'n'roll not an outdated concept in these Post Modernist times and past its sell-by date? Certainly many of artist Banksy's latest exploits bear a resemblance to the pop version of Situationism deployed by the Sex Pistols back in the late 70s. Yet, where does it all end up but at some LA gathering for the Hollywood 'in-crowd' and part of a mass money-making machine. Incidentally, LA is also now home of former Pistols Johnny Rotten and Steve Jones!

Rock'n'roll once represented an attitude of freedom, sexuality and fun, but apart from giving a little nudge, has never ultimately posed much of a threat other than to pop culture. So if art is the new rock'n'roll, placed within our celebrity-driven culture, it probably only amounts to being a formulated cash-cow with most of the fun and genuine attitude taken out. Besides, few really want to see simpleton bad behaviour anymore – it looks silly, is very passé and is just not polite. There's only one thing worse than a rebel without a cause... and that's a calculating careerist rebel! Viva rock'n'roll!

Freelance music producer Paul Mex has sold an accumulation of nearly a million records and worked with a host of diverse artists from George Michael to Robert Wyatt. He first emerged from the 70's punk rock revolution as a live musician and now presides as a judge on South Coast Idol.

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