

How much art can a viewer see in a day? How fast can a critic 'do' a biennial? How much does a curator comprehend after ten seconds (which, as Philippe Parreno notes, is how long on average museumgoers look at an artwork) – or even one minute? These are questions I (once a normal viewer, now something between a critic and arts journalist) ask at an art fair, biennial or any exhibition of the 'mega-' sort – those events whose deeper purpose I increasingly question and whose halls and streets I now run through faster, faster, faster, to see more, more, more.

Not long ago I was slow and thoughtful – I stayed a week at my first Art Basel (I was far less experienced as a *viewer*, and possibly kinder, more patient and certainly less harried as a *person*, but that's another story). I've since become frighteningly proficient at seeing and evaluating tremendous amounts of art in the shortest times possible, rushing through crowds of fellow art professionals, some of them friends; jostling, even jumping, to 'see the work', and at times deciding whether I understand or like a piece in even less than ten seconds (unless it's a long video, in which case I throw an internal hissy fit at the inherent time commitment). Often I must write about what I saw, or 'saw', within hours.

Nearly every week a major art event opens somewhere. Which means that for critics, but also curators, flacks and collectors, speed-viewing has become a necessary if lamentable skill. There's simply too much one is supposed to see, and though it's true that after seeing a lot of art for a long time, you *do* get a quick sense of what sucks or doesn't, it's too much. Haste makes waste – sometimes I gravely misjudge, due to hurry and physical exhaustion, and there's also the siren call of mega-exhibition hearsay ('What did you think of X?' and 'Go see X; it's amazing' can easily turn into hive-mind-driven, uncritical consensus – a danger of too much scene and not enough seen, too much herd *and* heard and not enough heart, and mind, and time).

Depending on the art's quality, it's akin to gorging on a gourmet meal or, conversely, stuffing yourself with two bags of potato chips and feeling horrifically empty-but-full afterward. A critic might then figuratively stick fingers down his or her throat for the purge – writing, armed with a stack of cryptic press releases and a thousand iPhone pics, half of wall labels (maybe the writer took the pic *before* viewing, and Walter Benjamin takes another spin in his grave), a critique of stuff she was too 'full' for in the first place. Quickly describe/evaluate/contextualise, update social media status with 'Art hangover. Again' and board another plane for the next mega-event. En route, consider that artists, too, are caught in the spin cycle – spectacle be damned, just don't be forgotten or unsold,



## A once-hurried critic steps off the artworld's globalised merry-go-round to inaugurate her own Slow Art Year

by  
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both images Art Basel, June 2015. © Art Basel

or too complex and arcane. Win shares in the attention economy. Lather, rinse, repeat. See. Buy. Fly... Why?

Blame it on the market, technology, 24-hour art news websites, globalism, neo-liberalism, the culture industry. Blame it on the boogie, blame it on the rain... gotta blame it on something. But we can only blame ourselves; our peripat(h)etic lives and participation in what amounts to an offline Internet (to evoke Hito Steyerl); we physically jump between images, experiences and people faster than we toggle tabs on broadband connections. Is artworld accelerationism the ultimate in first-world problems, and where might it lead? Must we be complicit?

No one is forcing me to accept an exotic press trip (the implied assent is problematic anyway) or book another EasyJet flight I can't really afford and join what Cuauhtémoc Medina calls the artworld's 'jet proletariat'. In a moment of fatigued epiphany and subsequent Google session, I discovered that in the noughties, eccentric Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry declared the launch of the Slow Art Movement – something worth revisiting. 'Art-world acceleration I put down to various forces,' he said. 'First, we are... prone to being sucked into the idea that fast is somehow central to modernity.'

Is it? I think not, or not only. I suspect I am not alone. I'm seeing more art about the slowest but most powerful force of all – nature (perhaps as a countermovement to what Brad Troemel calls 'Athletic Aesthetics', which is about constant, high-quantity broadcasting). Established artists and dealers are leaving the game in frustration, or just to think and work. I live with an artist whose practice is about deceleration, landscape and analogue production (like his mentor-of-sorts Hamish Fulton, he *walks* – and hates my deadline-driven frenzies). This year, I've followed his lead and learned to resist my FOMO. It makes no sense to try keeping up with the Koonses.

I'm still here, and I'm OK. I'm healthier and think more deeply about more things. It is an unintentional but necessary Slow Art Year. My advice so far: go local, go peripheral. Look at a single piece in your home city for a half-hour. Ask an artist or gallerist to explain the work, and *listen* without drifting off or texting. Reread John Berger's simple but powerful *Ways of Seeing* (1972) (in fact, reread all your favourite slow stuff). Consider your smaller carbon footprint. Skip biennial openings and go a month, or months, later, when the crowded rush calms into a lovely flow, and savour, not just consume, the wonder, the transformation, the *privilege* that is good art. An artwork is one of humanity's hardest yet most fragile productions, and deserves more than a distracted ten seconds.