

LUBBOCK, TOM (1957-2011), USA

Until further notice I am alive (2012)

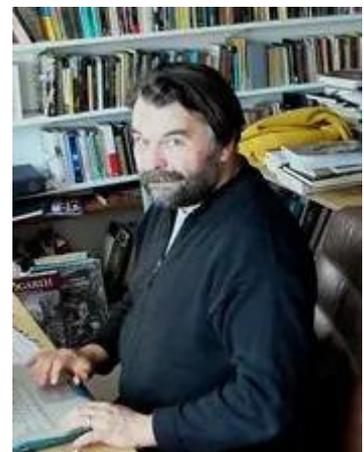
Keine Übersetzung nachgewiesen

Das Buch dokumentiert das Erleben des Autors eines Glioblastoms und der damit verbundenen Epilepsie. Es wird zitiert bei Wolfgang Herrndorf, der denselben Hintergrund hat. Die Krankengeschichte beginnt mit einem schweren Anfall, nach dem er eingewiesen und diagnostiziert wird, und von dem er sich nur langsam erholt. Hier steht der Kommentar: „A seizure; a caesura; a line drawn through my life.“

Der Tumor liegt links temporal. Die Anfälle sind dysphasisch und werden genau beschrieben. Behandlung mit VPA in abhängig von Anfällen langsam steigender Dosis. Später entwickelt er sensible Auren in der rechten Hand („clammy sensation“), vereinzelt kommen motorische Symptome dazu. Die Anfälle spielen keine große Rolle. Im Vorwort seiner Witwe werden sie gar nicht erwähnt. Äußerst genaue Analyse der Probleme mit Sprache und Schrift, die langsam verloren gehen. Dass die Diagnose tödlich ist, wird ihm sehr schnell klar und er registriert sorgsam, wie seine Einstellung dazu sich entwickelt.

Zum Autor (Brain Tumor Research, 23.6.25):

„Writer and illustrator Tom Lubbock was chief art critic of the Independent until his death in 2011. Married to artist Marion Coutts and with a son Eugene, Tom lost his life to an aggressive brain tumour aged 53, just over two years after diagnosis. Tom’s book ***Until Further Notice I am Alive*** (Granta, 2012) is a lucid and compelling description of that experience from the inside. After his death Marion went on to publish her acclaimed memoir, *The Iceberg*. (Atlantic Books, 2014).



In 2008 Tom had a fit while we were staying with friends in Suffolk. At first his doctors thought he might have suffered a stroke, but an MRI scan showed a tumour in the left temporal lobe of his brain – the area responsible for speech and language. There had been no previous symptoms to alert us.

An operation to remove the tumour revealed it was malignant, fast growing and incurable, a grade-four glioblastoma. Because of its location, we were told that Tom’s ability to read, write or speak could likely be impaired. Being able to communicate well was of upmost importance to him, his use of language was always deft, focused and pointed. As he said, “*The getting of things exactly right with words, refined and compacted, is my job of many years standing. It is my pride.*”

Yet Tom continued to work. His writing for the Independent kept going until late September 2010. An extended article, [When Words Failed Me](#), appeared in The Observer in November that year. Considering the progress of the disease and the complex, exhausting implications of the treatment, it was incredible that he continued to write, let alone write well. Readers of his column could not have known how ill he was.

Sometime in late 2009, I started to write myself: short paragraphs, late at night. It was a way of externalizing the many things that were being given to us to see and do. Writing gave me an area over which to have control. This work grew into a book. The Iceberg isn't simply a book about death; it is about life and life going on. Tom called it an adventure of being and dying.

Eugene was just learning to talk as Tom's language started to fail him. He was eighteen months old. Tom had two surgeries, three rounds of chemotherapy and one blast of radiotherapy. None of these remotely promised a cure but bought us much-needed time. As Tom noted, "Something in my head is hurrying to kill me." All his treatment was on the NHS and for this we remain profoundly grateful. His care, on the whole was amazing, but it was immediately clear to us that treatment options for glioblastoma are shockingly limited. Tumours that originate in the brain have different attributes from cancers elsewhere. Much more needs to be known about them, what causes them, how they develop and how specifically to tackle them.

Tom died on 9th of January 2011 at Trinity Hospice. Obituaries were published in The Independent and The Guardian."

Nachruf im Independent:

Tom Lubbock: 1957-2011

An untutored eye, a dazzling intellect, and always a provocative stance

Tuesday 11 January 2011 01:00 GMT

Tom Lubbock, who died on Sunday, wrote reviews that were often more entertaining than the shows themselves. Iconoclastic, thoughtful and provocative, The Independent's art critic made the most difficult art accessible to the layman. Here we reprint his brilliant review of the Turner Prize shortlist exhibition at Tate Britain, first published on 29 October 2003.

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"The media still doggedly holds to the fiction that the Turner prize is controversial. Of course, this was always the deal. You give us publicity, we'll give you controversy. And each year, by hook or by crook, controversy is extracted. It seems amazing to me. But then my problem, perhaps, is that I just don't have an eye for these things.

For example, at the weekend I went to see this year's prize exhibition at Tate Britain. I'd been looking at *Death*, a sculpture by Jake and Dinos Chapman – two inflatable sex dolls having sex on a lilo, cast in bronze. I'd been thinking how extraordinarily, bafflingly feeble their work can be, and how even taking this piece as an act of deliberate oafishness didn't make much difference. But a description of it that hadn't occurred to me was controversial.

I suppose I may be inured. Hanging around contemporary art too much, or reading too many copies of *Viz* magazine, or being a schoolboy once ... I don't know, something deadens my response. But having left the gallery, almost at once I bumped into a newspaper article describing *Death*. The author had clearly not seen it, but knew something about it that had eluded me – that this work was highly controversial. And when I read that, I thought: oh, of course, it's controversial, why don't I notice these things? Controversy in the arts is a strange phenomenon. What usually happens is that one person declares something is controversial, and then someone else comes along and warmly agrees that yes, it is indeed, and gradually a consensus materialises. Thus controversy rages – and not a cross word from anybody. Being controversial is like being perfectly round: it may need a bit of an eye to spot it at first, but once it's pointed out everyone can see it.

I leave these things to the experts. To my untutored eye, this year's Turner prize exhibition is an averagely disheartening spectacle. It's not quite as dull as last year's, but I wouldn't bother to go and see it. If you have a free afternoon, it would be better spent doing almost anything else. Three of the four short listees are artists of very limited gifts. The fourth – the Chapman brothers – have put up a show that's well below their game.

But at any rate, they have finally been short-listed. This seems to coincide with a general decision in the art world to stop seeing the brothers as nihilistic sickos and start seeing them as black jokers. In a way that's clearly true. But the striking thing about their work, often so inventive in its blasphemies and gross-outs, is its lack of comic oomph. The comic impulses are clear, but the laugh never arrives.

That's how it is with another of their works in this exhibition, *Insult to Injury*, a complete (though inferior) set of Goya's *Disasters of War* prints, which the brothers have defaced with cartoon-like clown and bunny heads. You can see how it ought to work: the additions should seem to be both a hideous piss-take of Goya, and strangely true to his visions of helpless human awfulness. But the brothers' intrusions just aren't funny enough to take effect.

But I've no doubt they should win the prize, on the basis of a work they first showed about a year ago, *Works from the Chapman Family Collection* – a series of superbly crafted pastiches of tribal artefacts, as if from an anthropological museum, with a weird twist: that each object was strangely fused with the imagery of McDonald's. It was a perfectly pitched clash of values, one of the most original and startling conceptions to come out of British art for some time. Unfortunately, the Tate cannot display it. It is currently on view (along with several other large Chapman artworks) at the Saatchi Collection. Now to the other artists.

Anya Gallaccio stays loyal to her themes of preservation vs perishability, the natural versus the artificial. Her works never have anything to say, but you know where they're coming from, and after a while you could make them up yourself. They tend to use organic materials and their main quality is an overt prettiness. And if anyone thought there was no demand for overt prettiness in contemporary art, Gallaccio's success should make them think again.

So, in preserve 'beauty', you have two big, oblong wall pieces in which hundreds of gerboas are held pressed under sheets of glass. Currently they are intensely scarlet. But over the course of the exhibition these flowers will fade and wilt. In other words, they will move from one state of loveliness (fresh) to another (decayed). Simple – and not much more. It's about transience? Oh yes, definitely about transience.

Gallaccio's work can also be a little bit disturbing, with mildly discordant combinations of the organic and artificial. Because nothing has changed looks quite like an apple tree that's been severely pollarded and clipped, but actually it's a bronze cast of a tree. Around the joints of this unreal tree, bunches of real red apples are hung, threaded on string, clustering like berries or maybe a sort of fungus. The effect, though attractive again, is, as I say, a little bit disturbing; beyond that, it is pointless.

Willie Doherty is a Northern Irish artist whose art usually arises from his homeland's political situation. People like his work because at least it's kind of about something definite and difficult, not just some abstract themes. True – but Doherty himself has a very abstract imagination. His pieces, using video and still photography, are drawn continually to motifs of repetition, frustration, impossibility, deadlock. You might think his political analysis was pessimistic. But it could equally be that artistic form is making the running. Repetition, deadlock and all that are much safer forms to work in than breakthrough and progress. Doherty has never been afraid of boredom.

He has a single piece in the show, a two-screen projection. Re-Run is a repeater. On one screen a man is running across a bridge at night, towards the camera, with the action edited in a way that keeps him running and running but never really advancing. The other screen, directly opposite, shows the same sequence, but shot from behind, with the same man running and running away from the camera. The relative positions of the two screens mean that the first man seems to be in pursuit of the second man. Over and over it goes, and of course it could be about anything, not just some scene of terrorism. It's a kind of open metaphor of inescapable endlessness, but it's done so blatantly, it's so readily comprehended, that whatever it's about, it doesn't feel worth attending to for long.

Grayson Perry works with ceramics, and makes large and entirely run-of-the-mill pots, brightly and attractively decorated with drawings, found imagery and words. But when you get up close you see that the images and the words are often obscene or violent, and sometimes concern disturbing subjects such as child abuse or fascism. You might say that Perry works with that well-known riff – at-first-sight-nice, on-closer-inspection – nasty. Or you might say he makes perfectly pleasant pots, with the minimum necessary to make them artistically respectable. It is always mentioned that Perry is

also a transvestite, who feels a deep psychological need to dress up as Little Bo Peep. I'm not sure what relevance that has. But even I can see that it's controversial.

... on Damien Hirst at the Wallace Collection, 2009

A few quick questions. 1. Are these new paintings, painted by Damien Hirst himself, any good? No, not at all, they are not worth looking at. 2. So why are you writing about them at such length? Because he is very famous. 3. And why has the Wallace Collection decided to exhibit them? Because he is very famous. 4. And why did Damien Hirst even paint them in the first place? Because he is very famous.

... Here is the director of the Wallace Collection – no names, no pack-drill – and what she says is: Hirst's paintings are "very classical in nature" and "his ethereal other-worldly treatment of the memento mori subject evokes centuries of great art ... a comparison can be made to the Wallace Collection's great Poussin, A Dance to the Music of Time."

Actually, the Wallace thinks so highly of its great Poussin that currently it exhibits it with a statuette plonked directly in front of it, so you can't see it properly. Never mind. You can see those Hirst paintings clearly enough, and then imagine what could have moved the mind of this director. Was she dazzled by stardom? Can she really not see anything?

We're all blinded, I suppose, somehow. So many things obscure a pure attention to good art. The spectacle of blazing fame and self-delusion, the joy of people talking utter rubbish, and writing rude reviews: the freak show goes on. At least today I have detained you long enough.

... on Bridget Riley at the Hayward Gallery, 1992

Try counting (at a distance) the number of different colours used in any one painting. I think you anticipate an economy of means, and expect to be surprised at how few there will be. The surprise is that there are so many – between 15 and 20 per canvas. In the course of this enumeration, you become involved in other things, a complex game of "seeing as", as the paintings offer up a range of evolving focuses and formations. What looks at first sight, and certainly in reproduction, like an intense sort of fabric design, comes into life.

Flat patterns, deeper spaces, rhythms and counter-rhythms appear and give way. It's a pretty spaced-out vision, once you get into it. A vision of what, though? The broad format of the pictures may suggest landscapes, but don't bother seeking out a view. The language of pure painting is always a teaser (which is why it's comforting to have something definite like optics to talk about). Riley herself speaks of "sensation" – she seems to mean something between the physical and the emotional. Her titles – High Sky, Set Fair, Certain Day – tend to be moody and meteorological. But I doubt whether any clearer names could be put to whatever feelings are being called upon. Her art seems to be moving in roughly the same territory as the music of Philip Glass, without being quite so annoying.

... on Francis Bacon at Tate Britain, 2008

Bacon's art is not a tunnel vision of horror, expressing the futility of the human condition or the special nightmare of the 20th century. And going to this retrospective, you shouldn't expect to be inching forward in agony through frescoes of the skull (to use a Beckettian phrase). You should expect your money's worth – and you'll get it. The art of Bacon is a variety bill. It's a hall of mirrors, a crooked house, a peep show, a ghost train, a circus, a limbo dance, a stand-up act, a piece of conjuring.

Its theatricality is obvious. Bacon's paintings are scenes, made of distinct stage areas, backdrops, doorways and assorted props and actors. His people are presented full on, usually centre-frame. I don't deny that those people are sometimes in a terrible mess. Everyone, on their first encounter with Bacon's art, gets an impression of car crash, bomb damage, burns, meltdown, slaughterhouse. The red paint and the open mouths, of course, encourage this response. But they shouldn't distract you from the amazing performance that's going on before your very eyes. Bacon is a magician, a quick-change artist. He brings off the most sudden disappearing and reappearing acts, fusions and transformations. The flesh slips, slurps, smears, flares, blurs, fades, evaporates, abruptly dematerialises. Legerdemain: you just can't see how it's done, how it moves from solid to film to spook to gleam to void and back.

... on Raphael at the National Gallery, 2004

As art historical shows go, it's exemplary. They've got works from all over the place (as well as the National's own substantial collection of Raphaels). The comparative works by other artists are well chosen. The many Raphael drawings and studies show his workings beautifully. But as for the paintings, I don't know which ones to pick out. They all leave me so cold.

Look at an altarpiece with assembled saints standing around. They look like idiots, people at a party who can't think what to say, with their cocked heads and simpering faces. Giovanni Bellini did these gatherings with such summoning grandeur. Look at St George Fighting the Dragon, striking a nice horseback pose in the vaguest of landscapes. Carpaccio did the subject with so much more realism and imagination. Look at a resurrection, and notice its utter feebleness beside Piero della Francesca's Resurrection. What is the point of Raphael? What's he supposed to be so good at?

People sometimes use words like grace, purity, serenity. These are his virtues. These are the things we don't know how to enjoy. On the contrary, we do know how to enjoy them. We enjoy them in the work of Piero. But where are they in Raphael? His work, by comparison, is fussy, contrived, posey. Go from a Bellini virgin and child to Raphael's so-called "Bridgewater Madonna". What is that baby doing, lolling and writhing across the Virgin's lap in an elaborate, hyperactive and completely meaningless gesture? Why is the Virgin on tranquillisers?"

Literatur