

**Rodney Graham** (1949-2022)  
*Campus Tree with Agriculture Building (University of British Columbia)*  
1996  
Trans-mounted c-print  
183 x 245 cm



© Rodney Graham; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Rodney Graham was a Canadian conceptual artist whose themes of history, science and perception often found witty narrative forms. His series of 'tree portraits' are photographs of large, isolated trees hung upside down.

As well as making a striking image which recalls the tree's invisible root structure, we are reminded of the artifice of the traditional photographic process. Light entering the camera lens forms an inverted image on the film negative (or originally the glass viewing plate), and this also mimics the way an image is inverted on the retina within the human eye.

The simple act of inverting an image draws connections between process, symbolism and the psychology of perception and asks us to look again at a very familiar everyday scene.

**Piet Mondrian** (1872-1944)  
*New York City I*  
1941  
Oil on canvas



Image courtesy Mondrian Trust

Modern art that radically simplifies its subjects, or fully abstract art that only makes use of shapes and patterns, has frequently presented difficulties for unlucky curators and technicians. There is a long history of artworks which have been accidentally hung upside down. Over one-hundred-thousand people visited a 1961 Matisse exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art New York before someone noticed that a painting of a boat and its reflection was the wrong way up.

Most recently, curator Susan Meyer-Büser realised that a Mondrian piece titled *New York City 1* had been shown the wrong way up since its acquisition by MoMA in 1945. By comparing it with other similar works from the same period, and examining photographs of Mondrian's studio, she is convinced that the unsigned painting was intended to be shown with a cluster of lines at the top to indicate the sky over New York tower blocks. Due to the fragile state of the painting, the museum has said that it is now not possible to correct this 75-year-old error.

## Mark Wilsher:

### Five Paintings

Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery  
30 September 2023 – 31st March 2024

This exhibition is located throughout the art galleries in Norwich Castle. The conceptual artist Mark Wilsher has chosen five paintings already on display and turned them upside down.

Included here are examples of artworks elsewhere which have been displayed upside down, either intentionally or by accident.

**Marcel Duchamp** (1887-1968)  
*Fountain*  
1917 (1950 reproduction)

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp displayed an upside-down urinal as part of an exhibition in America. The urinal was tipped over to make a more abstract form and given the title *Fountain*.



© Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2023

Five years before, Duchamp's cubist painting *Nude descending a staircase* (1900) had upset other cubist artists by featuring a nude in motion, rather than a more classical still life. Duchamp's annoyance at the group led him to believe that every avant-garde artistic movement was constrained by its own petty rules and assumptions.

In response, Duchamp conspired with friends to enter a shop-bought urinal into an exhibition as a sculpture. Intended as a comment or joke (literally toilet humour) it was based in a truth of recognition that artistic society had its limits: art should be beautiful, aspire to greatness, and be the unique result of skilful, manual labour.

Duchamp had founded an entirely new way of making art, based on an intellectual rather than visual act.

**Josep Amarós** (1683-1746)  
*King Philippe V of Spain*  
1719

The 18<sup>th</sup> century portrait of King Philippe V of Spain hangs upside down in the Almodi Municipal Museum in Xàtiva, Valencia, Spain.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Spain was divided into the two kingdoms of Castile and Aragon but ruled by a single monarch, King Philippe V. A rival for the crown led to the War of Spanish Succession from 1701-1715 in which the Valencian people ended up on the losing side. In retribution, the King ordered the town of Valencia to be destroyed and its people banished.

Some two hundred years later, after General Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil war in 1940, a proud local curator at the Almodi Municipal Museum showed his resistance to all who wanted to dominate the town by turning the 18<sup>th</sup> century portrait of King Philippe V upside down. In Spain today, it is common to find photographs of General Franco hung upside down as a form of political protest.



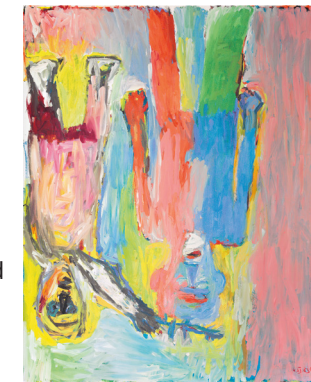
Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons

**Georg Baselitz** (b. 1938)  
*The Crowning With Thorns*  
1983  
Oil on canvas  
300 x 250 cm

In 1969 Georg Baselitz began painting portraits of friends and family from photographs that had been turned upside down. It was the artist's breakthrough moment, and this became his signature style.

Baselitz grew up in communist East Germany. When Baselitz moved to West Germany to study art, he encountered the seemingly unstoppable success of American-style abstract painting, which was widely exhibited across Europe during the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. This style of painting, however, seemed unsatisfactory to him; he thought that post-war German art should be able to depict and speak about the nation's history.

Baselitz resolved this problem by presenting inverted figures and recognisable archetypes in a naïve, messy style that emphasised the artificiality of the painted surface. This was a way to reintroduce traditional subject matter while also recognising the importance of colour and shape within abstraction. It slowed down the process of painting and slows down our looking too.



© Georg Baselitz 2023