

Ofili's Virgin
Eliseo Picó, EOI Santa Coloma

GENERAL OBJECTIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of TIC in a CLIL Project.	RESOURCES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet (computer room)• PowerPoint Presentations• Photocopies
TEACHING OBJECTIVES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about modern art• Censorship and shock value in art• Developing reading, listening, oral and writing skills• Using internet to build up knowledge.• Working cooperatively• Getting familiar with the language of art criticism• Critical thinking & critical pedagogy• Process writing	LEARNING OUTCOMES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss learn about modern art• Work cooperatively to gather and share information• Learn to use internet as a source of information• Learn vocabulary related to art• Write an argumentative text about censorship in modern times• Be able to prepare an oral presentation in class
TIMING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 hours approx in 5 different class days	LEVEL <p>This unit is addressed to an Upper-Intermediate class (Level 4 EOI, CEF B2).</p>
INTERNET WEBSITE http://virginiaclil.blogspot.es/	

Procedure

Pre-task (optional): Ss read *But is it art?* Later on they do the exam to check their reading comprehension.

- 1, Teacher hands out Jerry Saltz's critique and assigns the reading and vocabulary exercise for homework. (3 minutes)
2. The following day students in pairs share their ideas of the text and the vocabulary exercise. (10 minutes)
3. Discussion of the text. Teacher and Ss discuss the text in detail and correct vocabulary exercise. (20 minutes)
4. Then Ss are given the pairwork exercise to talk about the painting. (10 minutes)
5. Teacher then presents the first PowerPoint presentation of Chris Ofili. (30 minutes)

6. After the powerpoint presentation, the teacher hands out the video exercise by Judith Nesbitt. Students will watch the video for homework. (3 minutes)
7. The following class, the video handout will be discussed and corrected. (15 minutes)
8. After that Ss will work in pairs and will carry out the retelling of texts and the discussion of the short texts. (15 minutes)
9. Next the teacher will present the second Powerpoint presentation on “Shock art” (20 minutes)
10. Task menu. Ss in groups will find information on the web about the case of Chris Ofili’s “Holy Virgin Mary” (organization: 5 minutes; information gathering: 30 minutes; it can be done as a home assignment)
11. Ss will bring their information to the class the following day. (30 minutes)
12. Then Ss will decide on what they what to write about and will make their notes. (10 minutes)
13. They will tell their partners what they are going to write about and some of the details of their topic. (15 minutes)
14. Ss will write their compositions for homework and will bring their compositions next class. (no class time used)
15. Ss will exchange their compositions with their partners. Their partners will read them and write down their comments. (15 minutes)
16. Ss will revise their compositions and will post them on their blog for other students to read. (no class time used). Optionally, they will show their teacher what they have written and will post their production later on.
17. Ss browse through other Ss productions and write comments. (No class time used)

Class time: 231 minutes (4 hours approx.)

**After this page you can find the
STUDENTS’ HANDOUTS**

But is it Art?

by Cynthia Freeland

Form A

Student's handout

<p>1. According to the author blood has been used so much in art because it has been considered our human essence and is connected to many expressive and symbolic meanings.</p> <p>2. Damian Hirst's food endeavour, his restaurant <i>Pharmacy</i>, was a success.</p> <p>3. Serrano's <i>Piss Christ</i> (1987) has largely passed unnoticed.</p> <p>4. Goya's <i>Naked Maja</i> (ca. 1800) caught the attention of the Spanish Inquisition.</p> <p>5. Goya shared the values of Enlightenment with Hume and Kant and he was a contemporary of both of them.</p> <p>6. According to the author, Chartres Cathedral embodies the main Gothic aesthetic principles of proportion, light and allegory.</p> <p>7. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gardening was considered as having no artistic value and no major gardens were produced.</p> <p>8. The reader is informed that Nietzsche enjoyed Wagner's <i>Parsifal</i> so much that he wrote a lengthy essay praising its beauty. Nietzsche disliked this opera for its content, but enjoyed the complexity of its music.</p> <p>9. Andy Warhol's <i>Brillo Boxes</i> (1964) changed the conception of art up to then, as demonstrated by art critics Arthur Danto and George Dickie.</p> <p>10. The Iznik tiles from Turkey show influence of Chinese porcelains and they are an example of cultures in conjunction.</p>	<p>11. Richard Anderson, an ethno-aesthete, has indicated that some forms of artistic practices can be found in all cultures.</p> <p>12. According to the author Spike Lee's <i>Do the Right Thing</i> is a bad example of postcolonial politics and diasporic hybrids.</p> <p>13. According to Pierre Bourdieu taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.</p> <p>14. The first public museum was the Louvre which opened in 1793. It was built for the purpose of being a public museum by the French monarchs.</p> <p>15. Photographer Cindy Sherman often uses herself as a model of her photographs wearing different garments and making a variety of postures.</p> <p>16. The author advocates in favour of a "true, absolute sense" of a work of art.</p> <p>17. Francis Bacon's monumental <i>Triptych</i> of 1973 brings to mind religious figures and altarpieces.</p> <p>18. Sigmund Freud never talked about Leonardo's <i>Mona Lisa</i> as he was a psychoanalyst, not an art critic.</p> <p>19. Michel Foucault indicated in his study of Velázquez's <i>Las Meninas</i> that the painter is painting a big canvas like the one we are watching, and that the spectator occupies the space of the King and Queen approaching the room we see depicted in the painting.</p> <p>20. In her conclusions, the author indicates that art theory is a scientific theory, in line with Einstein's special relativity theory or Darwin's theory of evolution.</p>
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Chris Ofili's Holy Virgin Mary

by Jerry Saltz, Village Voice.

"It's not the Virgin Mary. It's a painting." These were the words uttered almost in unison by a group of Brooklyn Museum guards as they stood in front of Chris Ofili's picture titled *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996), the work that launched a thousand slurs. To describe the painting is to know this image is many things, but not what its detractors make of it. A very black woman cloaked in a stippled, Prussian-blue robe hovers over an intricate golden ground of enamel dots and glitter. Her mantle is open to reveal a black breast made of elephant dung and festooned with pins. The painting rests on two clumps of dung; one is decorated with the word *Virgin*, the other with the word *Mary*.

The figure is surrounded by 100 cutouts of female genitalia and buns. At first these variously colored bottoms look like little putti, a celestial choir; it's only when you get close to the painting that these flickering cherubs turn rude.



Ofili loves to mix the sacred and the profane -- the image of the spirit with the stuff of the earth. Absurdity and humor mingle with something intensely penetrating and rise off Ofili's image like a dank perfume.

How does this mere painting transcend its origin and that of its author? How does *The Holy Virgin Mary* stop being a painting and transubstantiate into something so real and awful? Ofili slyly de-Westernizes this most Western image, and de-Westernizes painting in the process. He paints in a loopy, cartoonish, semiabstract style -- part decoration, part dream, and part parody. His images are airy, like hallucinations, but his process is derived from comic books and Australian Aboriginal art. Ofili fuses history, religion, and pop with the irredeemable.

To understand how he does this, look at *Afrodizzia* (1996), also on view at the Brooklyn Museum. A psychedelic rainbow ground of dots, lazy paisleys, and the faces of Richard Pryor, Little Richard, and Louis Armstrong (among others) is ornamented with elephant dung. These clumps are adorned with the names of Miles Davis, Diana Ross, James Brown, and Cassius Clay. But the black community isn't up in arms over this work; it isn't branding the painting "offensive." Maybe that's because black viewers know that all so-called black art (Ofili, of course, is black and of Nigerian origin) doesn't have to be serious. They also know that government officials love exhorting them to get insulted.

Ofili is a serious artist but he's also playful and ironic. His paintings discharge as much psychic energy as they generate; they create a temporary feedback loop of perpetual metaphysical motion. Those exasperated by his *Holy Virgin Mary* may be responding not to the dung but to the Africanization of an icon, the hybridization of a face that has almost always and only been white.

The Virgin is, however, not Ofili's best painting. It begins an uneven phase of his work in which he abandons his decorative, all-over wild style for specific images. The most impressive thing about *The Holy Virgin Mary* is that it seems to have survived the current onslaught of hatred, adrenaline, and misinterpretation.

VOCABULARY

cloak = anything that covers or conceals, a loose outer garment (Sp capa, manto)

a cloaked figure → una [silueta envuelta](#) or [embozada](#) en una [capa](#)

breast = Either of two milk-secreting, glandular organs on the chest of a woman (Sp pecho)

festoon = A string or garland, as of leaves or flowers, suspended in a loop or curve between two points (Sp guirnalda, festón)

clump = a compact mass (Sp terrón)

buns = *esp US* (= *buttocks*) → [trasero](#)

MATCHING EXERCISE

After reading the text, match the following words with their definitions.

1 slur	
2 stippled	Flash intermittently (Sp parpadear)
3 hover	To remain floating, suspended, or fluttering in the air. (Sp flotar, planear, cernerse, rondar)
4 enamel	A violent attack (Sp arremetida)
5 glitter	A mark or flaw that spoils the appearance of, a blemish made by dirt (Sp mancha, calumnia)
6 mantle	<i>Informal</i> slightly mad, crazy, or stupid (Sp chiflado)
7 putti (plural of putto)	To mix or bring together in combination, usually without loss of individual characteristics (Sp mezclar)
8 flicker	A vitreous, usually opaque, protective or decorative coating baked on metal, glass, or ceramic ware (Sp esmalte)
9 cherub	Having a pattern of dots
10 mingle	A pattern of small curving shapes with intricate detailing, usually printed in bright colours
11 dank	A loose sleeveless coat worn over outer garments; a cloak. (Sp manto)
12 paisley	Brilliant or showy, often superficial attractiveness, small pieces of light-reflecting decorative material (brillo, resplandor)
13 loopy	A representation of a small child, often naked and having wings, used especially in the art of the European Renaissance (Sp angelitos)
14 exhort	Disagreeably damp or humid, unpleasantly cool and humid.
15 onslaught	A representation of a small angel, portrayed as a child with a chubby rosy face (Sp querubín)
	adv Cleverly or cunningly, especially in the practice of deceit (Sp astutamente, pícaramente)
	To urge or persuade (someone) earnestly; advise strongly,

Questions

In pairs, take turns to ask and answer the following questions. Write down your partner's answers.

Does this painting offend you?

Do you like it?

Would you buy this painting?

Would you put this painting in your dining room?

Would you give someone you love a poster of this painting as a present?

Judith Nesbitt talks about the Chris Ofili exhibition

Tate Britain's Chief Curator Judith Nesbitt speaks at the press preview of the Chris Ofili exhibition 25 January 2010. The Ofili retrospective opens on January 27th and runs until May 16th 2010.

Student's handout



Watch the video and indicate whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Judith Nesbitt mentions "The Upper Room" (one of Ofili's bigger pieces) at the very beginning of her presentation. T / F	11. She then goes on to indicate that "The Holy Virgin Mary" is Ofili's most unnoticed painting. T / F
2. She mentions that the artist has not changed much in recent years. T / F	12. "The Holy Virgin Mary" created a controversy when it was shown at an exhibition in 1997 in London as part of the Saatchi collection in the "Sensation" exhibition. T / F
3. All of the pieces on display have already been shown in the UK. T / F	13. The curator indicates that Chris Ofili was brought up as a practicing catholic. T / F
4. She indicates that exhibition-goers may find a lot to discover and enjoy in this exhibition. T / F	14. According to the curator in "The Holy Virgin Mary" Ofili was working with the contradictions in his head between his religious background, prostitution in King's Cross (a station in London), and the sexually explicit depictions of the Virgin Mary in nearby museums. T / F
5. Chris Ofili thought of studying furniture design. He was told to take a foundation course. But he thought that course was a waste of time, so he did not take it. T / F	15. The painting "No woman no cry" is a response to a racist crime of Stephen Lawrence's murder in 1993. The artist was struck at the dignity of Lawrence's mother when she spoke about her grief. T / F
6. His tutor in the foundation course encouraged him to find his way to express himself. T / F	16. So according to the curator, "No woman no cry" is both a memorial and a commemoration. T / F
7. Chris Ofili found the experience of finding his self-expression "totally liberating". T / F	17. Images of Stephen Lawrence can be seen in the eyebrows of the woman depicted in "No woman no cry." T / F
8. During the time he studied painting at different institutions like the Chelsea Art College and the Royal College of Art, Ofili reflected on what was his relationship with painting. T / F	18. The crying woman depicted in "No woman no cry" wears a metal locket with a picture of Stephen Lawrence. T / F
9. He had the experience of selling dung balls on a piece of fabric in street markets in Berlin and in Brick Lane, London. T / F	19. For Ofili working in Trinidad represents a new beginning in his artistic career. T / F
10. Chris Ofili produced a sculpture, a Shithead, as a result of the experience of displaying dung balls. T / F	

Retelling and discussion: Ofili's The Holy Virgin Mary

a. Read and retell the following texts

Student A

Opinion 1: Natalie, USA

I find this piece of art very interesting. At first glance, I didn't notice the *unorthodox* materials that Ofili used in the painting. I thought the breast was a polished rock. I hadn't even noticed the two clumps of dung at the bottom of the painting. Even the pornographic images appeared to me as flowers. I saw them as orchids whose colors had been manipulated. Overall, I wasn't very receptive to the painting only because of the style in which she was painted.

However, when I took a closer look at the painting, it caught my interest. I thought it was beautiful how my eyes had fooled me initially. Regardless of my disgust for the materials used and the distasteful pornography, I really appreciate this piece of art because Ofili dared to create outside of the acceptable. This piece of art, in my mind, truly encompasses *creativity*. What I thought was especially ingenious was his use of the pornographic pictures as *putti*. It made me laugh even through my disgust. Ofili took the gall as an artist and challenge his audience to perceive these materials collectively as a work of art.

It's only natural that there was such a controversy surrounding this piece. I don't believe that we as a society are receptive to perceiving things in a different context. We are set in our ways like stone. However, no matter how reserved our thoughts are, I don't believe that the government should have tried to regulate the museum for showing this piece. Obviously, there was some artistic merit seen in this piece to have it even be selected for viewing..

Opinion 2: D. Hodges, USA

I find "The Holy Virgin" fantastic in every sense of the word. Not only does this piece invoke thought but the thought of a man resining globs of elephant dung just brings a smile to my face. This piece may not be the most beautiful artwork in the world but it isn't "sick stuff" as Giuliani so described it. I believe that Ofili was using symbolism for every medium he used. although the exact meaning of it all I can't seem to grasp.

The Government should fund all art, because art is a tool to invoke thought, educate, and widen the minds of those who see it. if funding was removed from showings that contained "offensive" pieces would cause a need to remove funding from libraries that had books that may be offensive. Art is just that, it's art, it is what it is. If the culture wishes to grow there must be at least tolerance for all types.

b. Discuss these ideas with your partner, and give your own.

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a. Read and retell the following texts

Student B

Opinion 1: Ray, USA.

My opinion on Chris Ofili's "The Holy Virgin" is similar to Giuliani's comment of "sick stuff." I'm not a religion freak but I am a Catholic. This "art" is not beautiful at all. How can a catholic person make a portrait of the Virgin Mary using "shit" as a tool? He also contradicts his religious beliefs by adding porn pictures to what he calls beauty. You can't make beauty with shit. Period.

Ofili did demonstrate the complex factors that go into an artwork's judgement, but he did it using the worst possible materials. I don't believe that government money should go to exhibitions that might be offensive to some citizens because the blame would go back to the government, by them funding the projects.

Opinion 2: Carrie Wright, USA.

When I look at this painting, I personally do find it disgusting and offensive. I was raised Catholic and we do hold Mary as a sacred symbol and this painting is just pushing the envelope, which after reading the chapter, was his point. He clearly states he wanted to create "a twilight zone, bringing together beauty and ugliness, you know they are together but you can't feel comfortable about it". Well, mission accomplished. To be honest the whole painting to me is ugly, the colors, the shapes, the little butts everywhere, and not to be forgotten, the elephant poop. I am definitely not a fan.

b. Discuss these ideas with your partner, and give your own.

TASK MENU

1 In groups, find information on the internet about the following topics

Group A Representation	What do Ofili's images represent? What does "The Holy Virgin Mary" represent? What meanings are involved in the representation of the Virgin? What things are there in the actual painting that you don't see in the photo? Is this form of representation common? Is it easily and immediately understandable?
Group B Identity	Is there any group represented or identified in Ofili's paintings? Does he show his identity in the works he produces? Was his intention to offend or shock viewers? In what ways is this image African? What is "black" in this painting? In what ways is this painting a hybrid?
Group C Production	How was this painting produced? What materials does this artist use? Does he use any materials linked to some kind of identity? How is this piece ingrained in the art industry? Did the shock it produced increase its market value?
Group D Consumption	How is Ofili considered in the art world? Do his paintings sell well? Who owns Ofili's Holy Virgin Mary now? Has it been shown again or recently? In what ways is this painting an item of consumer culture? Is this painting considered one of his finest paintings?
Group D Regulation	Has the artist or the museum in which the piece of art was exhibited been sued? Has the piece of art been attacked or in danger? Has the artist been threatened in any way? Are there places where people would feel uncomfortable with having this picture exhibited? Is any museum or institution happy to show this piece among their collections?

When you get the information, decide on your spokesperson to present what you have found in class.

2 Find information about other cases of artistic or intellectual censorship.

PROCESS WRITING

Think about a problem of artistic or intellectual censorship in your town, autonomous community or country. Make notes in the following table:

Topic	
Time and place	
What happened	
Further details about the problem	
Solution	

TEACHER'S KEYS

But is it Art?

by Cynthia Freeland

Form A

Teacher's KEY

1. According to the author blood has been used so much in art because it has been considered our human essence and is connected to many expressive and symbolic meanings. T p2
2. Damian Hirst's food endeavour, his restaurant *Pharmacy*, was a success. T p6
3. Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) has largely passed unnoticed. F it has offended many people p17
4. Goya's *Naked Maja* (ca. 1800) caught the attention of the Spanish Inquisition. T p22
5. Goya shared the values of Enlightenment with Hume and Kant and he was a contemporary of both of them. T p. 21, 23
6. According to the author, Chartres Cathedral embodies the main Gothic aesthetic principles of proportion, light and allegory. T p42
7. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gardening was considered as having no artistic value and no major gardens were produced. F it was considered one of the fine arts, alongside with poetry and painting, p.43
8. The reader is informed that Nietzsche enjoyed Wagner's *Parsifal* so much that he wrote a lengthy essay praising its beauty. F Nietzsche disliked this opera for its content, but enjoyed the complexity of its music. P. 52
9. Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964) changed the conception of art up to then, as demonstrated by art critics Arthur Danto and George Dickie. T p55
10. The Iznik tiles from Turkey show influence of Chinese porcelains and they are an example of cultures in conjunction. T p. 70-71
11. Richard Anderson, an ethno-aesthetician, has indicated that some forms of artistic practices can be found in all cultures. T p77
12. According to the author Spike Lee's *Do the right Thing* is a bad example of postcolonial politics and diasporic hybrids. F (it is mentioned as the first example of postcolonial politics and diasporic hybrids, p85)
13. According to Pierre Bourdieu taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. T p. 94
14. The first public museum was the Louvre which opened in 1793. It was built for the purpose of being a public museum by the French monarchs. F as a result of a nationalisation in the French Revolution, p. 96
15. Photographer Cindy Sherman often uses herself as a model of her photographs wearing different garments and making a variety of postures. T p. 142
16. The author advocates in favour of a "true, absolute sense" of a work of art. F p. 150

17. Francis Bacon's monumental *Triptych* of 1973 brings to mind religious figures and altarpieces. T p151
18. Sigmund Freud never talked about Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* as he was a psychoanalyst, not an art critic. F p159
19. Michel Foucault indicated in his study of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* that the painter is painting a big canvas like the one we are watching, and that the spectator occupies the space of the King and Queen approaching the room we see depicted in the painting. T p164
20. In her conclusions, the author indicates that art theory is a scientific theory, in line with Einstein's special relativity theory or Darwin's theory of evolution. F p207

VOCABULARY EXERCISE

Slur = a mark or flaw that spoils the appearance of, a blemish made by dirt (Sp mancha, calumnia)

stippled - having a pattern of dots

hover = To remain floating, suspended, or fluttering in the air: gulls hovering over the waves. (Sp flotar, planear, cernerse, rondar)

enamel = A vitreous, usually opaque, protective or decorative coating baked on metal, glass, or ceramic ware (Sp esmalte)

glitter = Brilliant or showy, often superficial attractiveness, small pieces of light-reflecting decorative material (brillo, resplandor)

mantle = A loose sleeveless coat worn over outer garments; a cloak. (Sp manto)ç

putti (plural of putto) = A representation of a small child, often naked and having wings, used especially in the art of the European Renaissance (Sp angelitos)

flickering = flash intermittently (Sp parpadear)

cherub = A representation of a small angel, portrayed as a child with a chubby rosy face (Sp querubín)

mingle = To mix or bring together in combination, usually without loss of individual characteristics (Sp mezclar)

dank = Disagreeably damp or humid, unpleasantly cool and humid

slyly = adv Cleverly or cunningly, especially in the practice of deceit (Sp astutamente, pícaramente)

loopy = *Informal* slightly mad, crazy, or stupid (Sp chiflado)

paisley = a pattern of small curving shapes with intricate detailing, usually printed in bright colours (Sp cachemira)

exhort = to urge or persuade (someone) earnestly; advise strongly (Sp exhortar)

onslaught = A violent attack (Sp arremetida)

Judith Nesbitt talks about the Chris Ofili exhibition

Tate Britain's Chief Curator Judith Nesbitt speaks at the press preview of the Chris Ofili exhibition 25 January 2010. The Ofili retrospective opens on January 27th and runs until May 16th 2010.

Teacher's KEY



Watch the video and indicate whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Judith Nesbitt mentions "The Upper Room" (one of Ofili's bigger pieces) at the very beginning of her presentation. T	11. She then goes on to indicate that "The Holy Virgin Mary" is Ofili's most unnoticed painting. F (his most notorious painting)
2. She mentions that the artist has not changed much in recent years. F (the artist has changed so considerably and significantly since he moved to Trinidad in 2005)	12. "The Holy Virgin Mary" created a controversy when it was shown at an exhibition in 1997 in London as part of the Saatchi collection in the "Sensation" exhibition. F (without causing any controversy whatsoever)
3. All of the pieces on display have already been shown in the UK. F a third of the pieces shown have not been shown in the UK)	13. The curator indicates that Chris Ofili was brought up as a practicing catholic. T (he had a catholic upbringing: he was an altar boy and went weekly to church)
4. She indicates that exhibition-goers may find a lot to discover and enjoy in this exhibition. T	14. According to the curator in "The Holy Virgin Mary" Ofili was working with the contradictions in his head between his religious background, prostitution in King's Cross (a station in London), and the sexually explicit depictions of the Virgin Mary in nearby museums. T
5. Chris Ofili thought of studying furniture design. He was told to take a foundation course. But he thought that course was a waste of time, so he did not take it. F (he took it anyway, "so he did it")	15. The painting "No woman no cry" is a response to a racist crime of Stephen Lawrence's murder in 1993. The artist was struck at the dignity of Lawrence's mother when she spoke about her grief. T
6. His tutor in the foundation course encouraged him to find his way to express himself. T (painting could be about self expression... it was about feeling your way)	16. So according to the curator, "No woman no cry" is both a memorial and a commemoration. T
7. Chris Ofili found the experience of finding his self-expression "totally liberating". T	17. Images of Stephen Lawrence can be seen in the eyebrows of the woman depicted in "No woman no cry." F in the teardrops
8. During the time he studied painting at different institutions like the Chelsea Art College and the Royal College of Art, Ofili reflected on what was his relationship with painting. T (he was pushing hard at what painting had to do with him)	18. The crying woman depicted in "No woman no cry" wears a metal locket with a picture of Stephen Lawrence. F a dung ball locket
9. He had the experience of selling dung balls on a piece of fabric in street markets in Berlin and in Brick Lane, London. F (He did not sell them, he displayed them as he wanted to know people's response to that material, and testing his own response as well)	19. For Ofili working in Trinidad represents a new beginning in his artistic career. T
10. Chris Ofili produced a sculpture, a Shithead, as a result of the experience of displaying dung balls. T	