

# Frieze's Neon lights the way to artistic appreciation

Zoe Williams falls in love with OH DEED I DO and Marxist Disco Canceled but wonders if it's because they're like something someone would say on Twitter



**Zoe Williams**

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Marine Hugonnier's wall of front pages of the Guardian, some stories redacted in vivid primary colours, from the late 70s and early 80s. Photograph: Linda Nylind for the Guardian

Neon is huge at the Frieze art fair this year. [Tracey Emin](#) has a work in neon that says: "And I said I love you." I'm trying not to nitpick about tenses and punctuation here. It's hard, because if the second verb isn't going to match the first, it really needs some quote marks round it. Curses! It slipped out.

Glenn Ligon was showing a neon piece entitled Warm Broad Glow II, which said "negro sunshine". That's controverso-neon.

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster was showing a neon sign that said After, so I looked around for a Before because they'd definitely want you to buy them both, but there wasn't one; so maybe this was apocalypto-neon. You think I'm making some lame point about how neon can be art, when clearly the artist just got it made by a neon-factory.

On the contrary, I understand the ready-made tradition because I heard a programme about it once: you don't have to make the object. You just have to choose the object, and then it is art, so long as you are an artist. This tradition is referenced and, if you like, defamiliarised in Claire Fontaine's work, THIS NEON SIGN WAS MADE BY VLADIMIR RUSTINOV FOR THE REMUNERATION OF ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-NINE THOUSAND RUBLES. I couldn't tell what was a bin and what was an installation.

The ready made idea hits its apotheosis though, not in neon, but in a boat: Christian Jankowski bought it for £60m as a boat, but is selling it as art for £75m. My first thought was that that's quite a wedge, since it's small; but I'm looking at the wrong one. The Aquariva Cento, showing here, is only €500,000 (£438,000) when it's a boat – as art, it's €625,000.

I think it looks sinister and dangerous on its carpet covered mount, too expensive and shiny to survive on land, an apocalyptically costly accident just waiting to happen. But I

think that when I see little boats on trailers going down the motorway. I should say that I'm impressed by the consistency of the markup. If it was 20% on the big boat and 10% on the little boat, that wouldn't be art; that would just be a scam.

This is the fanciest crowd in London, most of their hair is a work of art in its own right, and they all whisper, either out of respect or inhibition; the only people you can hear are the ones who are fighting.

The soundscape is like a conch, with the occasional explosion of "excuse me, I take exception to that" and "rubbish!" I approach a giant book, Michael Johnson's *Slaying the Dragon*, I guess pretty true to the original, except giant.

My sister told me once that I had to remake the parameters of my appreciation to take into account how ill-educated I was. "Relying on your own taste works in theory," she said, "but not if you don't have any."

In the spirit of remaking, I fall in love with a wonderful large canvas by Dan Colen that says OH DEED I DO, and a cool poster by Scott King that says Marxist Disco Cancelled, but I don't know that's just because they're like something someone would say on Twitter.

The French artist Marine Hugonnier appears in the show with a wall of front pages of the Guardian, some stories redacted in vivid primary colours, from the late 70s and early 80s. UN Calls on Iran to Free Hostages, reads one headline.

Labour Pushed Closer to the Brink by Owen, reads another. "Good old Guardian, still going on about the same old bollocks after all these years," I think is the message.

Someone approaches the gallerist and asks whether you can get them separately. No, you really need to keep all 17 of them together. Otherwise that's totally not funny.

I started off sounding a little bit like Richard Littlejohn ("my five-year-old could do better than that!"), and by the end, it's as if he's crawled into my head. But don't listen to me – it's pure envy, that other people can see things so feelingly. That's all it is.