

[Sign into the Guardian using your Facebook account](#)

theguardian | TheObserver

Do It 20 13 – review

Manchester Art Gallery



Tim Adams

The Observer, Saturday 6 July 2013



Do It 20 13: 'The best bits of the diktat-dominated show are those which you might be moved to try at home.'

Photograph: Joel Fildes

For the next week or so in Manchester there will be flash mobs attempting to summon the Holy Ghost in the Arndale shopping centre (good luck with that); a sculpture will be created on a daily basis for "strolling" around the town hall; and each morning and afternoon a live vulture will swoop among the Lowrys and pre-Raphaelites in the Manchester Art Gallery, where visitors will be encouraged to engage with the art world, not least by picking up a broom and sweeping up the bits of multicoloured paper artlessly strewn about, or squeezing lemons on the point of an upturned bicycle seat, or (a crowd pleaser) taking a token for a beer vending machine, and subsequently wondering where to place the empty can.

do it 2013

Manchester Art Gallery

M2 3JL

Starts 5 July

Until 21 July

Details:

0161 235 8888

Free admission

[Venue website](#)

These are just a few of the compendium of "interventions" that make up the latest incarnation of *Do It*, a rule book of possibilities for art-lovers everywhere. *Do It* was originally the idea of the uber-curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist, of the [Serpentine Gallery](#). It came about 20 years ago when he was in a cafe in Paris with artists Bertrand Lavier and [Christian Boltanski](#) and had the kind of idea that conceptualists love: "What would happen if there was an exhibition that wouldn't ever stop?" Like

many of Obrist's conceptions this one isn't literally true – *Do It* comes and goes in different incarnations across the world. The eternal bit is the rules of its engagement that are encoded in a large, orange, 450-page [how-to manual](#), in which more than 150 artists from [Ai Weiwei](#) to [Damien Hirst](#) offer instructions on staging the exhibit of their choosing. Reading the book is a little like leafing through an extreme version of one of those summer holiday compilations of things to do on a rainy day, though some are more straightforward than others: the Japanese artist [Shimabuku](#) suggests, for example: "Make some art works for animals. And make them smile", while performance guru [Marina Abramovic](#) offers: "Mix Fresh Milk from the Breast with Fresh Milk of the Sperm Drink on Earthquake Nights."

Do It has taken over the exhibition space at the Manchester Art Gallery and also encroached [Banksy](#)-style into the permanent collections. Thus Hélène Cixous's poetic instruction to "Without Losing Heart/ Go every night to Lethe's wharf/ (See the address in Hamlet) to await the Dreams' arrival" crops up under a 19th-century depiction of said wharf, while [Gilbert & George](#)'s Ten Commandments grace a wall of devotional subjects. They are in many ways an improvement on the original shalt not: "Though shalt fight conformism; Thou shalt make use of sex; Though shalt have a sense of purpose; Thou shalt not know exactly what thou dost, but thou will do it..."

That latter instruction serves pretty well as an introduction to much of the rest of the work that has been realised, according to Obrist's good book, here. [Liam Gillick](#)'s instruction to "locate all the cables and metalwork hidden below the surface of a chosen wall. Loosely mark their location using a light blue pencil." Or Yoko Ono's "Make a wish. Write it down on a piece of paper. Fold it and tie it around a branch of a wish tree." Or [Peter Saville](#)'s instructions for the fabrication of a cardboard display plinth. Or [Douglas Coupland](#)'s glass case containing the paraphernalia (tape, CD, sleeping pills) that led to his infamously disastrous [interview with Morrissey](#) (for the [Observer](#)). The descriptions are in many cases more engaging than the results, which is saying something.

Some artists are in dialogue with the rules of artists that have died, halfway proving Obrist's concept that the exhibition can live for ever. Louise Bourgeois's simple instruction to Smile at the Stranger becomes in Tracey Emin's hands a suitably self-torturing poem: "I smile at a stranger, the stranger I know, but they didn't smile back..." and so on. It's a game, all this, of course, and one in which you are generally invited to take part. As a rule, the best bits of the diktat-dominated show are those which not only deem participation to be compulsory but which you might even be moved to try at home: drawing a stranger in a dark room, for instance. Or Shere Hite's "Embrace an important friend in a full-length hug for thirty-one minutes... Name the activity you have engaged in, using just one word..." Easy.



Get the Guardian's daily US email

Our editors' picks for the day's top news and commentary delivered to your inbox each morning.

[Sign up for the daily email](#)

More from the Guardian

[What's this?](#)



[Jason Statham breaks into new acting territory with Hummingbird](#)
06 Jul 2013



[Pierce Brosnan's daughter Charlotte dies of ovarian cancer at 42](#)
02 Jul 2013



[Mexico: A Revolution in Art, 1910-40 – review](#)
07 Jul 2013



[Graham Linehan: 'We couldn't make Father Ted in the same way today'](#)
07 Jul 2013

More from around the web

[What's this?](#)



[Best Backyard Barbecue Recipes](#)
(Food Network)



[The 25 Most Random Celebrity Pictures from 2012](#)
(Celebrity Toob)



[Gorgeously Dark Modern Kitchen](#)
(HGTV)



[Plastic Surgery Disasters: Lil Kim, Meg Ryan & More](#)
(Hollyscoop)