

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE 
INDEPENDENT

J G Ballard: High impact on artists

As an exhibition inspired by J G Ballard's controversial novel *Crash* opens in London, Charlotte Cripps talks to the artists involved about sex, death and the late writer's influence on them and their work



Jake&Dinos Chapman *The tragik Konsequences of driving KareleSSly* (2000)

"With its spectre of contorted steel and female genitalia, Ballard's Crash was my primary motive for taking up driving lessons as an adolescent. I subsequently failed the practical test on three separate occasions, but I did manage to contort an aluminium rear bumper. Female genitalia came much later on in life. As for Ballard's intellectual influence, it offered an opportunity to reconcile a personal interest in violent death with a dystopian critique of modernity."



Jeremy Deller *Another Country (The Mall London 3/9/97) (1997)*

"Following the death of Princess Diana I took photographs of mourners in The Mall and I wrote a poem as a satire on her life and her relationship with the media, which I left alongside other people's tributes.

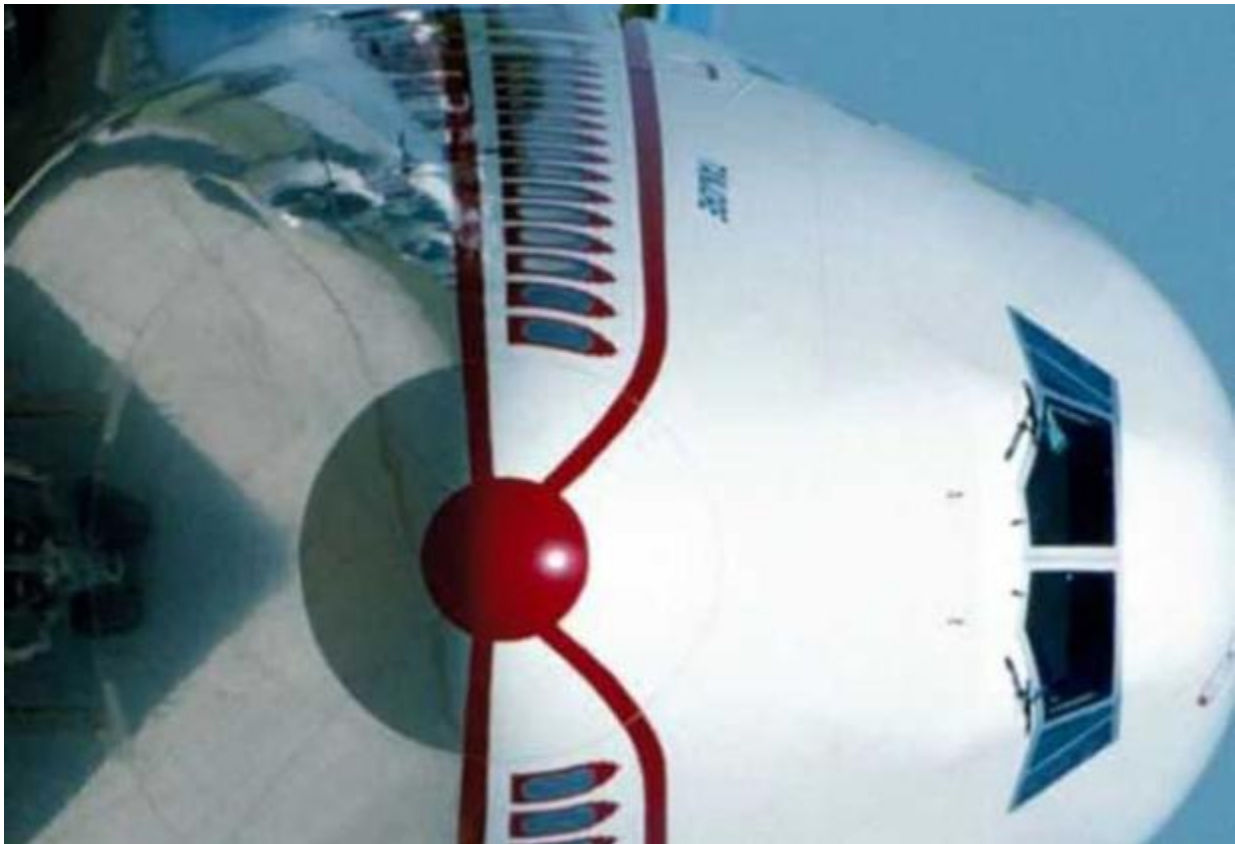
The work was less about the car crash and more about the reaction of the general public because of the hysteria. I didn't feel this wave of sorrow that everybody else felt. I

felt sad for Britain that it had come to this and that she lived and died at the hands of the press.

When I left my poem in the public place it could have turned nasty. That is what J G Ballard was interested in; the collective behaviour of the British general public. He wrote about Princess Diana before she died and also I heard him speak once about collective hysteria and madness.

It is the way Ballard looks at and interprets things that is influential. I found it refreshing that somebody was writing about contemporary society and Britain in this way. He has an artist's eye, because he is curious rather than judgmental.

When Princess Diana died, much of the British population lost all perspective. I now understand what it is like to live under a totalitarian regime when a leader dies. Everyone has to feel the same way and if you don't then you are strange."

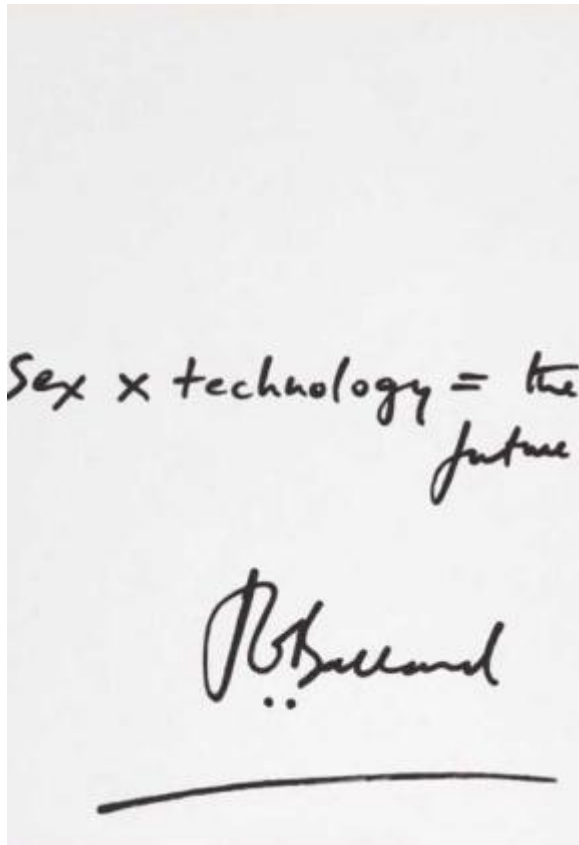


Adam McEwen *I'm So Tired 139* (2007)

"I first read J G Ballard when I was 17 or 18 ? The Atrocity Exhibition, Crash and Concrete Island. I was shaken, and vividly impressed. The calmness with which he describes any event or image, no matter how extreme, made whole areas of feeling or experience available.

When I made a series of obituaries of still-living people (Nicole Kidman, Bill Clinton, Jeff Koons etc) a few years ago, Ballard's imaginings of the deaths of film stars were a source of encouragement.

I'm So Tired has been in my head for two or three years; it shows a section of Boeing 747 undercarriage lying on its side. It comes from a more general obsession with 747s, rather than Ballard in particular. I'm interested in the late-1960s sense of optimism (which now seems very distant) in building a plane to transport that many people, and the perfect, dignified ugliness of the bulging 747 fuselage. But the fantasy of luxury in the sky is rife with sexual dreams. The spiral staircase leading up to first class on early 747s seems very Ballard: a portal to hidden sexual fantasy on board a technological marvel that threatens to smash into the earth at any second. Obliteration and orgasm. I think of that every time I see a plane's wheels touching down, with that spurt of smoky ejaculate shot out the back."



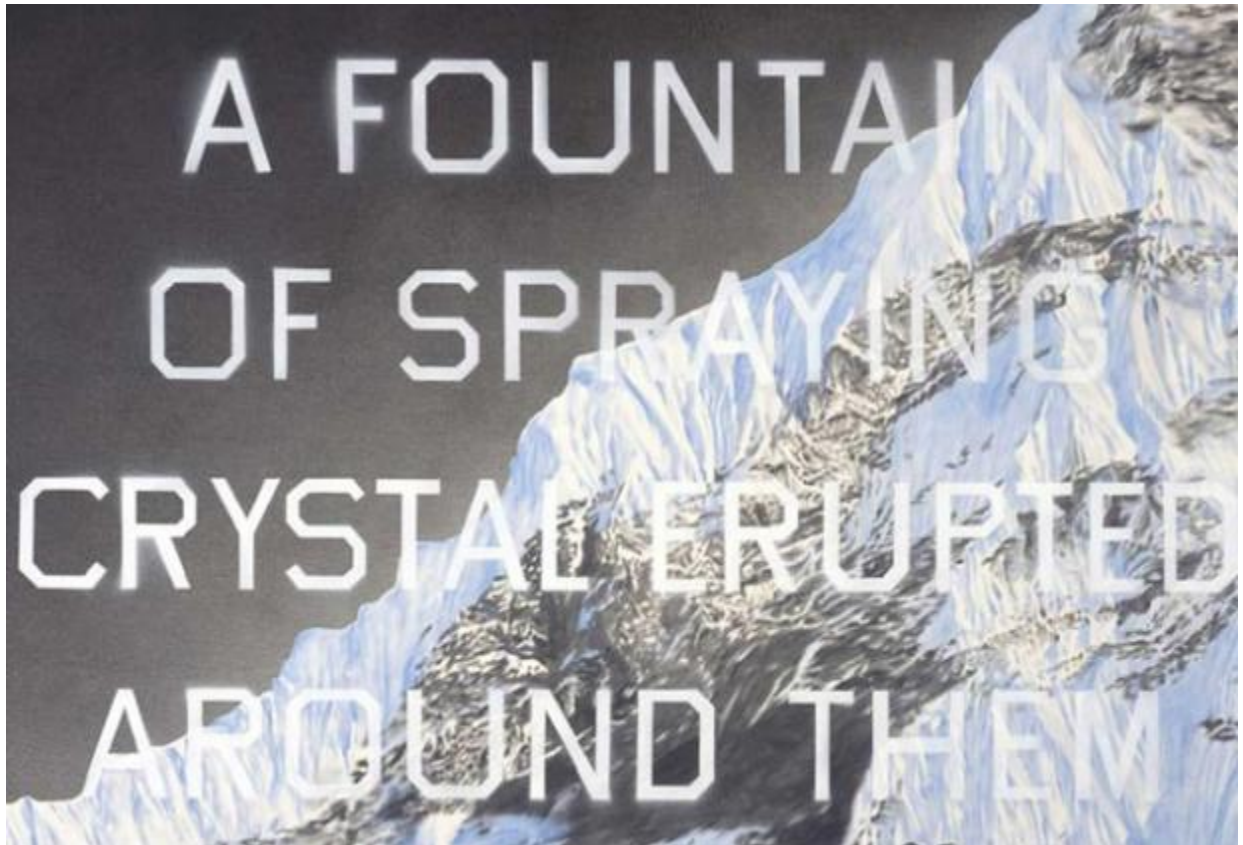
Loris Gréaud *The Future* (2009)

"I discovered J G Ballard while I was a student, and I entered a zone of great influence. I read everything of his and I became interested in his thoughts, his famous quotes. I think he was the great surgeon of the 20 and 21st century; every single idea or image is a precise incision.

J G Ballard was not in the future but in the ultra-present. I've learnt from him to follow my intuitions, and even more my own obsessions.

For the show I've taken his famous equation: "Sex x technology = the future" and made a painting out of it.

So far J G Ballard is my most important influence. His idea of the death of reality, the suburb, the future, have completely changed my vision of the present world and made me aware of what we don't see but what is constantly present."



Ed Ruscha *Fountain of Crystal* (2009)

" 'A fountain of spraying crystal erupted around them' in this work is a quote from Crash by J G Ballard - the first of his books that I read. It is like your windshield breaking in front of you and the shattering glass. This book hit me between the eyes.

It was a powerful book and so well written. It was certainly a fantasy and I came to search for more of his books. I would always find them in science-fiction categories in book stores. I wondered why he was put inside science fiction.

His wording and the way he trails you through a story and his diabolical language, just put me on alert that there could be somebody such as this, to make these stories.

Another of my works, Music from the Balconies at the Tate, is a quote taken from J G Ballard's High Rise, which is another beautiful view of the world and how people can behave.

I find myself going back constantly and picking up a book of his, and opening it up any place. Even isolated paragraphs tend to make complete sense by themselves.

He also painted a picture of a lovely decaying world. I once went on vacation to Mexico with my son, who is also a J G Ballard fan. We would visit these little abandoned resort homes right on the beach in Cozumel and every little bit of these homes, with the doors knocked off the hinges, or the way trash accumulated in corners, and the way the tempered glass would be untouched but ancient, was totally J G Ballard. Just the single concept of decay is so well approached by this author.

I thought if I was ever to meet him, what would I find? I'd find some kind of angry and twisted personality - but he was kind and gentle. In some ways ordinary, although I'm sure he didn't lead an ordinary life.

He made me appreciate concrete abutments, which appear in Concrete Island when a car crashes and the man can't escape because there are motorways on both sides of the island. He had a way of describing what we all ignore - these roadways, ramps and utility items in our lives, which we tend to overlook.

I'm not directly driven by his writing- but this man glorified something that people forget or put out of their minds. Maybe that's what I'm trying to do, and in some ways that makes a direct line from him to me."



Carsten Holler *Giant Triple Mushroom (2010)*

"My work is not a reflection on J G Ballard's writing; it's more that these mushrooms literally crash and form a new body. It's not a sexual thing like in Crash, but it works on a similar level metaphorically. It's about fragmentation, poison, paradise, cuts and wounds.

Half of this sculpture is based on the fly-agaric mushroom, (*Amanita muscaria*), which is poisonous and psychoactive, while the remaining parts are based on two randomly chosen mushrooms. It is a long story behind the fly agaric, which has been linked to madness and insanity.

I read Crash first, but I remember very clearly when I read High Rise. I was in Thailand and I was in a very difficult state of mind. This book really spoke to me. You follow the story up to a certain point and then it becomes another thing - which is very familiar to me.

I have done quite a few mushroom works, including the Mushroom Suitcase series and my work *Upside Down Mushroom Room* (2000), which was shown in 2005 at MOCA in Los Angeles. Mushrooms became a regular feature of my work from 1994, and entheogens play a role in much of my other works."



Tacita Dean *Teignmouth Electron, Cayman Brac (Ballard)* (1995)

"Even before I found Teignmouth Electron beached in the scrub on Cayman Brac, I had imagined it in the writings of J G Ballard. So in 1998, I sent him a photograph of Donald Crowhurst's trimaran, abandoned in the undergrowth of the small Caribbean island.

I wondered what Ballard felt about Crowhurst. He replied that he'd never taken much notice of Crowhurst and thought him a foolish man, but that the boat reminded him of the crashed Second World War aircraft they were still finding in the jungles of Pacific islands. This was the heart of Ballard's vision - the object at odds with its function and abandoned by its time.

I had been corresponding with Ballard since trying to find Robert Smithson's earthwork Spiral Jetty the year before in Utah. He sent me a catalogue essay about Smithson, which began: "What cargo might have berthed at the Spiral Jetty?" Smithson's jetty is not unlike the cement mandala made by Powers in *The Voices of Time*. Ballard connected with Smithson and believed him to be the most important and mysterious of post-war American artists.

In the last year or so of his life, I tried hard to persuade Ballard to give me permission to make *The Voices of Time* into a film. He never agreed but instead gave me a question to answer with my work: a riddle as legacy. So last autumn, I embarked on the research for a project in the American southwest, in an attempt to do as he suggested."