

# **1. Gill Perry - Cornelia Parker, Cold Dark Matter, An Exploded View**

GILLIAN PERRY: I'm Gill Perry, and I'm Professor of Art History at The Open University. Today, I'm going to be looking at an installation work by the British artist, Cornelia Parker. It consists of the suspended pieces of an exploded garden shed. It's called Cold Dark Matter, An Exploded View. And it was done in 1991.

And what you can see when you look closely at this work is that there's a big, or a large 200-watt light bulb in the middle, shining light on all these broken, charred, blackened pieces of the shed, fragments of the stuff that was in the shed.

It was first exhibited in the Chisenhale Gallery in 1991, when these pieces were suspended from the ceiling of the gallery. Since then, it's been exhibited at venues all over the world.

Parker often works with clichéd domestic objects, like garden sheds, teapots, dust, objects that you find around the house. And she's particularly interested in exploding or flattening these objects. She's very interested in transformation, in metamorphosis, how one thing can become something else, how it can have a kind of aesthetic resurrection.

When she made 'Cold Dark Matter', she was working on a series of what she called cartoon deaths. By this, she meant the kind of theatrical or extreme deaths that you often experience in cartoons, like explosions, or like being flattened. Those 'Tom and Jerry' cartoons come to mind.

Parker's shed underwent a rather dramatic resurrection in this work. And the garden shed is an iconic site of national domestic life. It's where, traditionally, men go off and potter. They do their DIY. They keep their bits and bobs, their old tools, their old magazines.

Parker was keen that this symbol, this kind of anti-monument to British life, particularly in the post-war period, should be exploded, should be literally torn to pieces. And she even added in it one or two things of her own, including a copy of Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past.

The theme that has interested Parker throughout her work, that's the theme of gravity. She's fascinated by the way in which gravity pulls things to Earth. And many of her works are actually suspended.

But of course, an explosion defies gravity. It sends objects flying everywhere. But Parker then pulls those fragments back. She creates order out of chaos as she suspends them around her light bulb.

Another important point to note about this work is that it's an example of installation art. Installation art is an important genre in contemporary art. It first emerged in the post-war period and has become enormously popular. It breaks away from the traditional media of painting, sculpture, drawing, and so on. It often involves multimedia.

But an important aspect of installation art is the way we view it. Artists who use this medium often claim that it breaks from a traditional relationship between the viewer and the object. You're invited to walk around an installation, sometimes to walk in and out of it, to experience it in a physical way. It does away with the traditional frame that you might expect to frame a painting.

Parker was particularly interested in this medium. She's drawn to the way in which installation art invites the spectator to move around. It does away with the idea that the object has a centre. She calls it 'this anti-centre thing' For her, her works are anti-monuments. This makes them easier for the viewer to move around, to view from different angles.

You may have wondered about the title. Cornelia Parker herself has explained why she used the term 'Cold Dark Matter'. She said, 'I like the sound of that. It's a scientific term. It was coined to describe all the stuff in the universe you can't quantify, all the stuff they know is there, but you can't see, which seemed a perfect description'.

The work is now the collection of the Tate Gallery. But unfortunately, it's not always on display. But you can find it on the Tate website if you're interested.