

Reza, Yasmina. *Art*. Christopher Hampton, trans. Faber and Faber, Ltd.: London, 1996.

'Art' received its British première in this translation at Wyndhams Theatre, London, on 15 October 1996. The cast was as follows:

Marc Albert Finney  
Serge Tom Courtenay  
Yvan Ken Stott

*Directed by* Matthew Warchus  
*Designed by* Mark Thompson  
*Lighting by* Hugh Vanstone  
*Music by* Gary Yershon  
*Produced by* David Pugh and Sean Connery

Begin extract here:

*Marc, alone.*

Marc My friend Serge has bought a painting. It's a canvas about five foot by four: white. The background is white and if you screw up your eyes, you can make out some fine white diagonal lines.

Serge is one of my oldest friends.

He's done very well for himself, he's a dermatologist and he's keen on *art*.

On Monday, I went to see the painting; Serge had actually got hold of it on the Saturday, but he'd been lusting after it for several months.

This white painting with white lines.

*At Serge's.*

*At floor level, a white canvas with fine white diagonal scars. Serge looks at his painting, thrilled. Marc looks at the painting. Serge looks at Marc looking at the painting.*

*Long silence: from both of them, a whole range of wordless emotions.*

Marc Expensive?

Serge Two hundred thousand.

Marc Two hundred thousand?

Serge Huntingdon would take it off my hands for two hundred and twenty.

Marc Who's that?

Serge Huntingdon?

Marc Never heard of him.

Serge Huntingdon! The Huntingdon Gallery!

Marc The Huntingdon Gallery would take it off your hands for two hundred and twenty?

Serge No, not the Gallery. Him. Huntingdon himself. For his own collection.

Marc Then why didn't Huntingdon buy it?

Serge It's important for them to sell to private clients. That's how the market circulates.

Marc Mm hm . . .

Serge Well?

Marc . . .

Serge You're not in the right place. Look at it from this angle.

Can you see the lines?

Marc What's the name of the . . .?

Serge Painter. Antrios.

Marc Well-known?

Serge Very. Very!

*Pause.*

Marc Serge, you haven't bought this painting for two hundred thousand francs?

Serge You don't understand, that's what it costs. It's an Antrios.

Marc You haven't bought this painting for two hundred thousand francs?

End extract here.

Serge I might have known you'd miss the point.

Marc You paid two hundred thousand francs for this shit?

*Serge, as if alone.*

Serge My friend Marc's an intelligent enough fellow, I've always valued our relationship, he has a good job, he's an aeronautical engineer, but he's one of those new-style intellectuals, who are not only enemies of modernism, but seem to take some sort of incomprehensible pride in running it down . . .

In recent years these nostalgia-merchants have become quite breathtakingly arrogant.

*Same pair. Same place. Same painting.*

*Pause.*

Serge What do you mean, 'this shit'?

Marc Serge, where's your sense of humour? Why aren't you laughing? . . . It's fantastic, you buying this painting.

*Marc laughs. Serge remains stony.*

Serge I don't care how fantastic you think it is, I don't mind if you laugh, but I would like to know what you mean by 'this shit'.

Marc You're taking the piss!

Serge No, I'm not. By whose standards is it shit? If you call something shit, you need to have some criterion to judge it by.

Marc Who are you talking to? Who do you think you're talking to? Hello! . . .