

**'Death, Art and Mortality Awareness: Images of the dead in contemporary art'**  
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The knowledge of love and death can make us whole, it can complete us, or it can overwhelm us. We develop elaborate frameworks and rituals to contain this knowledge, to quieten its voice and to render it manageable. But at times it violently confronts us and we know it in a new way, too urgent, too immediate and physical to be pushed aside. This paper will discuss works of art that represent the moment when information about the death becomes knowledge of death and present the site of knowing - the dead body - not to frighten or shock but to share the knowledge that life experiences offer. Focusing on the work of Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook and the exhibition *Life before Death* which showed the work of Journalist Beate Lakotta and photographer Walter Schels, this paper will explore the risk that the dominant themes in discussions of contemporary art works which show the dead - issues of consent and possible distress to viewers - may be, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, overdoing ethics. Ethical concerns can be used in the service not only of death denial but more particularly of the avoidance of the painful emotions inherent in love, bereavement and loss. This suggests a way of viewing the works discussed which goes beyond conceiving of them as what Julia Kristeva calls the abject and which sees mortality awareness as part of love and life.