

Matthew Cain, Culture Editor, Channel Four News

Introduction

Matthew Cain was born in Bolton and educated at Cambridge. After leaving university he spent ten years working in TV production, including a long stint as producer and then executive producer of *The South Bank Show* under Melvyn Bragg. In September 2010 he stepped in front of the camera and made his on-screen debut as Culture Editor of Channel 4 News. As well as his ongoing role in the newsroom, he's currently filming his first major arts series as writer and presenter for broadcast later this year on Channel 4.

Matthew believes that broadcasters have identified a huge appetite for arts stories and are therefore looking at how they can deliver new arts programming.

How broadcasting is changing

It was good that Jerry spoke positively about the outlook for the arts because there are many reasons for optimism.

The economic downturn seems to have coincided with a resurgence of interest in arts on television. It's partly because the crisis in funding has stimulated an unprecedented public debate around the role that the arts play in our lives now.

It's also cyclical. Until recently, arts broadcasting had been in the doldrums for years. The South Bank Show was always being told to 'modernise' because it was seen as representing old style television, that arts tv was old-fashioned, worthy and boring and didn't fit the modern world of broadcasting. We were constantly told that the word 'arts' was toxic, in programme titles in particular. The BBC apparently spent a great deal of time thinking up the title 'Imagine' avoiding using the word 'arts'.

In 2009, the South Bank Show was axed, Channel 4 didn't have a commissioner for arts programmes and neither BBC nor Channel 4 had a culture editor working in their newsroom. Sky Arts was in the picture, but the rumour was that this was only in the Sky package to enable the male viewers, who wanted Sky Sports, to persuade their female partners that there was something in it for them.

In 2010, the tide turned. Arts TV, like history programmes, suddenly became ripe for reinvention. History programmes focused on dramatic narratives to keep people engaged in the subject. Shortly afterwards, the same thing happened with science programmes. If you could sex up history or science programmes, could the same thing be done with the arts?

The need became more pressing when market research showed a huge appetite for the arts on television. Channel 4 discovered that viewers found it difficult to sit through a whole hour of politics, war and business and that they were looking for some 'texture' in the programme. Many viewers saw this texture as being identified with culture. Presumably, the BBC discovered something similar because around the same time they appointed Will Gompertz as their arts editor.

In terms of news programming, Channel 4 wants the culture editor on screen as much as possible. In the last ten months this coverage has included the revelation of undiscovered

work by Ted Hughes and L.S. Lowry, the opening of galleries such as Turner Contemporary or the Robbie Burns Museum, and more quirky subjects such as the tenth birthday of Wikipedia or the rising sales of the ukulele. Channel 4 news looks for a genuine news hook, an opportunity for viewers to take an unexpected take on a subject they thought they already knew about, and the potential to inspire.

Outside the news, it's taking longer for this new enthusiasm to make it on to screen because of the time it takes to turn around the programming and get it into the schedules.

Channel 4 has a new arts commissioner in Tabitha Jackson. She wants to reinvigorate arts programming, with the results appearing in the next few months. The BBC has also been producing new programmes such as *Fake or Fortune* which has the principles of a dramatic storyline as mentioned earlier, *The Impressionists* and *The Secrets of the Pop Song*. Sky Arts has been investing large amounts in its programming and ITV has re-entered the fray with the celebrity led *Perspectives*. This means that there is actually also something of a bidding war around, for example, coverage of arts prizes.

It must be emphasised though, that at Channel 4 at least, there is a strong commitment to presentation which is new and re-invented, avoiding a return to the worthy 'homework' feel of arts broadcasting. Discussions around development at Channel 4 always return to the *challenge of creating programmes which are relevant to the way we live our lives now*. We say this over and over again. This is reflected in titles (on the BBC) of *the books that we really read* or *the art that we hang on the wall*.

In the autumn, a new series which I am presenting on Channel 4, will be looking at the way that science could explain how the arts work. In the episode on music, there are experiments looking at the way the brain responds to different types of music or the way that the brain responds to the same piece of music but with the tempo being moved up or down.

As mentioned, we as part of this process we also discovered the impact of art in the title. The original working title was 'The Science of Art' which was found to be a double turn-off because science turned off people interested in art and art turned off people who were interested in science. Eventually Channel 4 came up with 'What Makes a Masterpiece'.

This series was almost produced in collaboration with The Wellcome Trust. In the end it wasn't possible, but it does show that there is a desire amongst broadcasters to look at co-production and co-funding of programmes.

Record companies and film companies, for example, are looking at achieving better value for money through investing in programmes such as 'An Audience With' or 'The Making Of'. Theatre companies are entering into special arrangements involving payment in kind by waiving fees or striking deals. They are also sharing rights so that the programmes can be shown on their websites or reproduced on DVD.

So please think about engaging with broadcasters on this sort of level. In the process, try and benefit from this huge surge in interest in the arts because it really does exist.