

What have Jonathon Swift, Orson Welles, Marcel Duchamp, Yoko Ono, Malcolm McLaren, Jeremy Beadle, and Sacha Baron Cohen got in common? Toby Amies discovers how tricksters and pranksters have turned the poking of fun into an art form.



Pranking is such a part of society, we've got a specially sanctioned day of misrule in the calendar. Mark Twain described the 1st of April as "the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year". But for some people April Fool's day is just not enough; generally opposed to the status quo, they are determined to alter our relationship with reality by forcing us to question its veracity.

There are pranksters who have been determined to show us our folly all year round and most have philosophical, political and artistic reason to do so.

Toby investigates this reasoning behind pranking - discovering why people will risk consequences as serious as prison to make a point or get a laugh. Sometime the motivation behind a prank is not always only a good laugh at someone else's expense. It can be a very serious business.

Toby draws a wobbly line from the court jester to the hoaxes of Swift and Welles to Yves Klein to the playful Marxism[!] of Debord and the Situationsists, through to the commercial modern pranking industry and the work of Sacha Baron Cohen, Improv Everywhere, Jeremy Beadle and America's king of the prank, Joey Skaggs.

Presenter: Toby Amies

Producer: Rob Alexander  
A Pier Production for BBC Radio 4.

## BROADCAST

Fri 1 Apr 2011 11:30 [BBC Radio 4](#)

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Duration

30 minutes

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