NEW ART examiner

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THE ART OF PROSECUTION

Pablo Halguera

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading this independent journal of art criticism.
If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.
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The Attentive Artist

What was considered to be valuable in Europe was not necessarily considered to be valuable elsewhere. For example, many objects considered to be traditional Chinese art today were not originally created as a work of art. Thanks to European imperialism, Chinese porcelain, ceramics, and textiles found their way into art and anthropology museums. In these spaces, the objects were recontextualized to represent Chinese art and culture from a Western perspective.

During the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century, French and British troops looted and destroyed the Yuanming Palace (Old Summer Palace) in Beijing. They sent many of their spoils back to France and England, including the emperor's throne. In England, the throne is seen as a symbol of the power and might of the monarchy. It does not, however, carry the same significance in China. Furthermore, the looters favored porcelain as there was high demand for it in Europe and seen as the epitome of Chinese exoticism and culture. This shows how the European soldiers took what was deemed valuable by European standards, and not necessarily by Chinese.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

Bastian Eclercy is the head of Italian, French and Spanish paintings before 1800 at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt and a specialist in Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting. He was one of the main contributors to the 2009/10 Städel exhibition catalogue, Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion, in which he published this painting. Eclercy has curated several exhibitions, for example Maniera: Pontormo, Bronzino and Medici Florence (2016).

Alice Gribbin is a poet and prose writer on art and books. If others were writing fiery, non-academic defenses of aesthetics that railed against lazy and platitudinous utilitarian art she'd be reading that, not writing here.

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Pabloe Halguera is an artist, performer, author, and educator. From 2007 to 2020 he was Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

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Sam Vangheluwe is a Belgian painter, art historian (specialising in African arts), critic and translator. He questions preconceived notions in art theory and criticism, and what Samuel Beckett called 'academic dementia'.

Frank Zöllner is a professor of art history at Leipzig University and the author of a catalogue raisonné of Botticelli's works published in 2005 and republished in 2015.

ERRATA:
In the last Issue Mary Fletcher's review was wrongly attributed to Pendeen. The venue was The Penwith, St Ives.

We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say. If you would like to start a conversation, or enter one please visit

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QUOTE of the MONTH:

"The richness I achieve comes from nature, the source of my inspiration."

Claude Monet

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EDITORIAL

Instagram's Perfect Lie
How The Platform's Community Guidelines Are Aiding Right Wing Homophobia.

Recently, the Pines Conservation Society held its annual 'Go Native' panel on the ecology, history and culture of the Meat Rack—a bucolic half-mile of dunes and forest situated between the gay hamlets of Fire Island Pines and Cherry Grove, five miles adrift off Long Island's southern shore. This writer spoke about art made in the Meat Rack. Traditionally a cruising ground, the area's tracery of pathways can also be considered an arterial network carrying decades of individual stories, memories, encounters, anguish, and celebrations; those myriad instants that contribute to the collective experience of gay men within the larger, queer body politic. With the patina of time it has become a site of reverence, at once a sepulchre and a cradle to all that's been lost, gained and that we yet hope for. Artists have always responded to these elemental prompts.

Photographs of the panel discussion, some including slides of the represented art, were posted on Instagram, and then promptly removed for violating the platform's community guidelines on nudity and sexual activity. Initial surprise at the post's removal was ameliorated by realizing a disparity – that imagery of male bodies and gay sexual intimacy which is a fundamental aspect of the queer canon (an aesthetic DNA if you will) Instagram sees only as degenerate content to be banished. But they are historically synonymous – to delete one, is to delete both. To punish the individual user, is to delegitimize his tribal inheritance, and render invisible part of a vulnerable cultural edifice that took untold sacrifice to build.

Blanket policies that hide behind the certainty that someone somewhere will be offended are a cowardly sidestep from meaningful discourse. The late polemicist, Christopher Hitchens, addressed this stance with the disregard that it deserves: "In this country (The United States) I've been told, 'that's offensive' as if those two words constitute an argument. Not to me they don't." The engineers of Instagram's algorithms have so far failed to apply the nuance required to understand that nudity, sex and bodily affirmation are not gratuitous, unnecessary or merely humorous but to some groups, vital to selfhood and their very existence. Without that visual arc, and the artists who contribute to it, our social cartography is erased, and if we cannot access our past to know where we come from, we cannot know where we are going.

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SPEAKEASY

https://twitter.com/TomRachman

Each issue, the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest. Tom Rachman was born in London and raised in Vancouver, Tom studied cinema at the University of Toronto and journalism at Columbia University in New York. He worked at The Associated Press as a foreign-news editor in Manhattan headquarters, then became a correspondent in Rome. He also reported from India, Sri Lanka, Japan, South Korea, Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere. To write fiction, he left the AP and moved to Paris, supporting himself as an editor at the International Herald Tribune. Later, he was managing editor of Persuasion, and served as a juror for the Giller Prize.

Five years after #MeToo, how should we feel about art and evil?

Tom Rachman

Tom Rachman is a Contributing Columnist for the Globe And Mail. This Article was Published September 30, 2022

Woody Allen, now 86, has denied both recent reports that he would retire from filmmaking, and accusations that he molested his adoptive daughter in 1992. When reports circulated recently that Woody Allen might retire from filmmaking, a heated argument resumed instantly, as if only paused in mid-sentence: Was the stammering 86-year-old among the greatest artists, or merely a creep? And could he be both?

Five years since the #MeToo movement challenged the culture behind 'The Culture', dispute remains over the intersection between morality and art – or if they're distinct categories altogether. Can we still appreciate tarnished artists of the past? And ought today's creative types turn from their vanity mirrors, and dedicate themselves to bettering society?

For much of modern times, the sophisticate's position was that you should evaluate the art, and look beyond any transgressions of the artist. Scolding cultural works was for those who didn't get them.

This position held sway as long as the characters picketing galleries tended to be censorious conservatives, the sort who condemned rock 'n' roll guitarists for letting in the devil, or shunned D.H. Lawrence because he'd written that sex existed, even among the English.

Yet sophisticates weren't aloof to artists' behaviour

Film Still From Hannah And Her Sisters *(1986) Orion*

in every case. Rather, they just weren't that scandalized by godless painters, or druggie musicians, or poets who went to bed with men and women alike. Indeed, they admired (envied) artsy bohemians who scoffed at social rules. If a cultural figure did incense liberal-minded culture mavens – the antisemitism of Wagner, say, or Morrissey's flirtation with far-right politics – many found the art itself harder to appreciate.

After the #MeToo movement erupted in October, 2017, more once-venerated cultural figures lost their impunity. This reckoning was long overdue. An en-

during effect was to jolt cultural institutions into responsibility.

This new-found moral imperative directed itself at Donald Trump, with his reptilian ethics, slithering entourage, and his embrace of racism, climate disaster and inequality. After #MeToo, bigotry too deserved its comeuppance. Whether social justice was to be achieved through poetry slams and video installations was another matter.

But the intent was laudable. Usually. At times, cultural institutions were just petrified of landing on the wrong side of history (as defined by Twitter), so preened over their recent rectitude. Meanwhile, critics tweaked their judgments for moral reasons, wary of calling out mediocre art if it came with noble intent.

You had to send the right message.

In some quarters, the moral mission grew so zealous that apolitical art was deemed a disgrace. This fed off a spreading absolutism: with us or against us; everything is obvious; no discussion.

But to treat morals as obvious is childish. And to treat art as a form of pedagogy is condescending. Even if the public needs education, why are you the one to write the moral lessons? When such projects call themselves art, creativity drains away. Culture becomes an arm of power, just as authoritarians always want.

So how does this relate to whether you can still watch *Annie Hall*?

First, it's worth noting how we distinguish active artists from the long-buried. The dead can't benefit from fame, nor can their late victims suffer from it. So an artist such as Picasso – brutal and cruel – is still worshipped without much compunction. Nor do gallery-goers typically lose their awe for Caravaggio's paintings if reading on the wall text that he committed murder.

Despicable behaviour of our era is harder to stomach. If I heard incontrovertible proof that Mr. Allen had molested his adoptive daughter in 1992 (he has denied both this accusation, and the recent talk of his retirement), I'd struggle to rewatch classics such as *Broadway Danny Rose* or *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. I'd struggle to call them 'classics'. Attributing beauty to a person of such ugliness would feel like moral pollution.

At times, cultural institutions were just petrified of landing on the wrong side of history (as defined by Twitter), so preened over their recent rectitude. Meanwhile, critics tweaked their judgments for moral reasons, wary of calling out mediocre art if it came with noble intent.

Yet rationally, I do still believe that art exists apart from the artist. Or how could a work live on, even once its maker does not?

Great works often emerge from those in conflict with the world; complacent artists rarely produce shattering work. The problem is that the myth of the 'troubled artist' became a pretext for repugnant behaviour, even crime. For vile actions, culprits should face justice, without special dispensation for the artistic.

But art explores what it is to be human, the unsavoury along with the sublime. It's about transcending what we normally think, see, hear. While justice must be served, culture can't be reduced to 'guilty' or 'not guilty'.

What complicates the Allen case is that his central creation was the endearing nebbish Woody Allen played by himself. If the off-screen Allen were without question a molester, I wouldn't smile when he catastrophized on-screen about his sexual quirks; I'd want to press stop.

So you can see: I'm still conflicted about where morality and art intersect. Admitting this isn't a dodge; it's an answer. We should feel muddled.

Among the curses of our times is simplism, a lie that starts with the pushy claim: 'Look, it's actually really basic.' No, it's not.

So, in the end, how to feel about creations that a twisted mind left scratched across a page, or spattered on a canvas, or thundering from an orchestra? Complexity – in judging art, in judging humans – is sometimes as close as we get to fairness and truth.

BLONDE: Monroe Still Bleeds

By Scott Winfield Sublett

Ana de Armas in Blonde
Netflix 2022

The review in *The New York Times* of *Blonde*, the movie about Marilyn Monroe on Netflix, calls it 'the latest necrophiliac entertainment to exploit her.' The internet has piled on, too. My favorite: a young, female professor tweeting that Joyce Carol Oates, the author of the novel from which the movie was adapted, had no right to write about Marilyn because Marilyn was a hottie and Oates isn't and non-hotties can't know what it's like. Twitter twaddle such as that is why the fiction writers I know are privately bemoaning that not long from now one won't have the right to write about anybody but oneself.

A lot of critics are waxing dudgenly over Marilyn's lack of agency in the film – her soft, apologetic victim-hood, and the way she acquiesces to abuse because she sometimes can't tell the difference between it and love. I suspect that's not far from the truth. Like so many victims of childhood molestation, her abusers convinced her that her sexiness was her only worth. The Marilyn in *Blonde* is soft, yielding, apologetic: a frightened doe. That seems to be the button that's being pushed in the heads of the movie's detractors. *Blonde* doesn't follow the rule that depicting women as anything other than triumphant is a betrayal. Never mind that she's only one character in one movie, not the cape-wearing avatar of her whole gender. The real Marilyn was indeed complicated – more assertive, harder, and shrewder than *Blonde* allows – but no movie, even one 166 minutes long, can include everything.

It's worth noting that the over 700-page-long novel its based on, is explicitly fiction and, it should be noted, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. The novelist, Oates, tweeted in defense of *Blonde* (faux-casually aping the Twitter style): 'I think it was/is a brilliant work of cinematic art obviously not for everyone'. Surprising that in a post #MeToo era the stark exposure of sexual predation in Hollywood has been interpreted as 'exploitation'. Surely Andrew Dominik [the director-screenwriter] meant to tell Norma Jeane's story sincerely."

Which is not to say that the predation dramatized in *Blonde* is easy to watch. The sustained scene where America's most beloved martyred statesman orally assaults America's most beloved martyred actress is shot from JFK's point of view and narrated with Mar-

ilyn's inner monologue as she gags, weeps, and persuades herself not to vomit. It's meant to shock, and it does. Of course, Kennedy was a pig with women and ravenous. The roster of actresses he bonked includes Gene Tierney (devastated when he dumped her), Audrey Hepburn (looked so much like Jackie!), Angie Dickenson (sex with JFK was "the most exciting seven minutes of my life"), Marlene Dietrich, Lee Remick, and Jean Simmons (not the one from *Kiss*). And then there was Judith Campbell Exner, the mistress he shared with Mafia boss Sam Giancana. And by the way, who murdered Jack's lover Mary Pinchot Meyer? And for that matter, who murdered Marilyn? Was it Bobby? These are not things we Democrats care to dwell upon.

Also difficult is the scene where Marilyn engages in an inner dialogue with a fetus who asks if she will terminate this one like the one she aborted. To dramatize a woman's regrets about abortion (and by the way, I understand there's no hard evidence Marilyn had one) provokes queasy questions around the role of art in a time of fascist encroachment on the rights of women. Furthermore, fetuses can't talk. Writing them lines has political implications, intended or not.

Ana de Armas and Adrien Brodie
Netflix 2022

Yet, I have to agree with Oates that this big, sumptuous adaptation of her novel is 'a brilliant work of cinematic art,' even if 'obviously not for everyone.' Since the Old Masters painted exquisite pictures of skulls and wounds, visual art has rendered hideous things in aesthetically pleasing ways, but *Blonde* brings something new to the party, at least insofar as the Hollywood movie is concerned. Much of it is daringly shot in black & white, making the stretches of color all the more ravishing: you can't stop noticing the creamy, soft-focus sensuousness, the powdered and lacquered sheen, that aptly evokes the look of *Playboy Magazine* in the 1960s. Obviously, it's a style originally designed to idealize the female form and therefore does the dramatically necessary job of capturing the compelling loveliness of Marilyn as

The Doomed Sex Symbol Genre is tricky in that it's often about someone falling apart, and people fall apart mostly for internal reasons – hard for a camera to see from the outside, but *Blonde* does a pretty good job of it.

embodied by the outstanding Cuban actress Ana de Armas. The *Playboy* aesthetic is, of course, kitsch, and the tension between that kitschiness and the film's serious intentions somehow makes one think of Jeff Koons. So, too, does the fact that the director seizes every opportunity to display the actress's breasts, but then, artists paint what they like to look at – hence all those penises on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and in the paintings of Alice Neel.

Interesting to a professor of film history is that *Blonde* belongs to a small, seductive subgenre of which it is the most artistically ambitious example: movies that address the tragic lives of Hollywood actresses whose destruction is somehow tangled up with their provocative sexuality. Let's call it the Doomed Sex Symbol Genre, and it doesn't matter if it's a fictional character, or fiction inspired by a real actress, or a putative faithful biography, because they're all so fictionalized that the boundary disappears. The genre customarily depicts the predations of Hollywood men, though never so explicitly as in *Blonde*. They're movies about how fate elevates, then destroys, its darlings, and in that they're a bit akin to Greek drama. The specimen with the best dialogue is Joseph Mankiewicz's lush, glamorous *The Barefoot Contessa*, with Ava Gardner as a Spanish dancer who's discovered by Humphrey Bogart. Another standout is 1965's *Harlow*, with Carroll Baker, which I've watched on TV maybe 20 times and if it's on TV this weekend I'll consider catching it again. It's trashy, brassy and brash, and its sheer, swaggering energy yanks you along, as does Neal Hefti's haunting score.

The Doomed Sex Symbol Genre is tricky in that it's often about someone falling apart, and people fall apart mostly for internal reasons – hard for a camera to see from the outside, but *Blonde* does a pretty good job of it. Maybe here's the place to mention that *Blonde* takes us someplace I've never seen a camera go, a shot from an impossible point of view, that of a fetus inside Marilyn's vagina. Can one go further than that? So, then, what's the genre's future? These days, the public, or at least the press and the young people most active on social media, want stories that demonstrate how every woman in history was a feminist centuries ahead of her time, completely op-

Monrose still titillates
The Movie Poster for Blonde, *from Netflix*

pressed but bravely fighting back, all the while smarter than every man in the room and winning in the end. Those things didn't always happen in history, and they arguably cannot happen in the Doomed Sex Symbol Genre because, well, she's doomed. And seeing beauties in their prime victimized and destroyed is a cringier proposition than it once was, especially if the doomed woman is participating in the process, which Marilyn did.

Netflix, the biggest streaming service on the planet (221.64 million paid subscribers) is famously cagey about box office numbers, but they claim *Blonde* is a hit. Maybe, but I predict that the Doomed Sex Symbol Genre won't survive, and even if it does, one suspects that *Blonde* packs such a punch, and now occupies so much cultural space, that another Marilyn movie will be long in coming.

How to Visit a Museum of Fine Arts

Sam Vangheluwe

The Louvre, Paris, France.

Once upon a time, the Museum of Fine Arts used to be a dreary place. An authoritarian, elitist institution.

There was a time (Oh do tell us, grandad!), when you'd enter a fine arts museum, on a Wednesday afternoon, for example, or on a Sunday morning, and you'd suddenly be lonely and forlorn. It was the era when struggling artists were still angrily muttering that *the* museum should be burned down. The museum was a desolate with a silence broken only by the creaking of parquetry. Most exhibits remained in their allocated place for generations. You'd traverse endless galleries without encountering a living soul, except some odd museum guard, seated in a corner behind a door, staring into the middle distance. Text was scarce. No audio or human guides. How on earth should the visitor find out what the works of art were about? Nothing but naked paintings and sculptures. There was a museum shop, but it only sold postcard reproductions of the masterpieces, and a catalogue or two. When in luck, you'd be able to buy a cup of bland solution from the makeshift coffee shop. A childhood spent wandering through hushed museum galleries, with vast Baroque altarpieces looming overhead, has imprinted on my memory the indelible image of biblical muscle-bound feet in sandals. But the Museum Of Fine Arts has changed, beyond recognition.

Nowadays, when you feel the urge to visit a fine arts museum, big or small, your access depends on a measure of military-style strategic planning, and on your mastery of various digital media allowing you to select a time slot (ideally, the instant when the throng has diminished a shade – code orange). You then have to buy a ticket online and print it out yourself (that is: when you're *old school*). Upon reaching the museum, you join one of the numerous queues, first, to pass the security gate, then, to reach the cloak room. At some point, you'll have to fight off some public services assistant who will try hard to saddle you with audio gear. Finally, if your time slot hasn't expired by then, a museum guard staples a tag into your ear, which is the last condition for access. You may then join the herd.

Virtual Reality Artist's Live Performance at the Louvre.

A quiet day at the Louvre, Paris

As a rule, you first have to negotiate a stationary mass of visitors who have congregated in order to leisurely read the extensive hall texts in four languages, at the very entrance of any temporary exhibition. This crowd never quite disperses, so be cautious so as not to disturb the readers as you try to pass.

If you're something of a regular, bear in mind that you will *not* find your favourites where you saw them on your previous visit. An industrious curator will have rearranged the entire collection while you were absent. If you succeed in finding a favourite painting, expect a drove of onlookers to block your view, with smart phone cameras held aloft. On given days, wedding photo shoots are allowed in the museum, but these parties only linger for a few hours. Should you encounter a guided tour group that has taken position in front of a painting, you might as well move along, even if the guards will impede your attempts to return to it later. And do not try to listen in – you haven't paid your due. The same goes for those visitors that have been fitted out with audio gear. Let them stand in front of the paintings for as long as they like – they are concentrating on the audio, whereas you are merely gawking.

Do not trip over the trolleys laden with folding chairs, sketchbooks, pencils and other didactic materials. For that matter, make sure not to disturb the school groups. You'll recognize them as they are seated in a cosy circle in front of a chosen work of art, stay there a good while, and are somewhat more vociferous than other visitors. Bless them.

Let's face it, the visual memory of the average museum visitor is imperfect at best – that is why an attentive curator has arranged the art works according to a theme. Thus, you'll be incentivized to compare, e.g. a nude Rubens female, with one by Renoir or Jeff Koons (which one is sexier), for instance. Or the thematic instruction will show you how Matisse's treatment of light compares to that of Damien Hirst. That's to say: you'll discover the very essence of art. Just imagine a visit to the *old school* museum, passing from one painting to the next, not knowing what to look at, what to look out for (especially exasperating in the case of abstract painting – what on earth are you expected to see, after all?). At each encounter being abandoned, left high and dry in the presence of an irremediably mute work of art.

A recently developed asset to museum practice, is based on the philosophy that the museum is so much more than a collection of paintings and sculptures. Thinking out of the box, the museum has come to realize that it is first and foremost a public tribune, a platform or stage for the downtrodden arts of theatre, pop music, mime, graffiti, interior design, minority/climate politics, comic book art and stand-up comedy. In comes the artist residency. Your visit will be all the more fortuitous when it coincides with the intervention by an 'artist in residence' or guest curator in the permanent collection. It makes the hours spent in the museum so much

A Museum Hack tour group re-enacts the painting Washington Crossing the Delaware
New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art

less dreary. I well remember the day when a fashion designer of renown shut out all natural light, to highlight some details in the paintings by means of a couple of spotlights. So engaging. Or that French museum where a local comic artist had decided to mount all landscape paintings side to side, contiguously but at varying heights, and then had a blue woollen yarn stretched over *all* the paintings, to indicate the shared horizon. Now who hasn't been waiting for that?

Unfortunately, not all museums have entirely banned natural light. One moment it is bright inside, the next it is overcast. This is particularly irritating as most of historical painting was always intended to be mounted in austere white spaces. Luckily, latter-day curators or exhibition designers show their contemporary mettle, and mount paintings on walls painted lilac, emerald green, or canary yellow.

The very best of fine museam practice is to be enjoyed in a rather recent format: the 'experience', e.g. 'The Van Gogh Experience', 'The Klimt Experience', or 'The Goya Experience'. Forget the trite, tiny shack allowing room for six visitors, and showing a wretched grainy video on the artist, his history or techniques. Museums that are 'with it' have at least one giant tent installed, preferably in the main atrium (do not trip over the power cables). A glimpse inside will answer your question where all the other visitors have gone. Vast blown-up details from the masterpieces are projected in a whirling animation – the very details you couldn't make out in the real thing, because a museum guard told you to step away from the painting. All of it accompanied by emphatic incidental music. This experience, I insist, is far more valuable than the real works of art: it engages, it moves, it's alive, and, as everyone who has ever seen an art documentary on tv, the essence of a painting is the sum of its significant details.

Queue up for the museum shop. Best to set aside sufficient time (and budget) for this, as the range boggles the mind. Toys for kids and adults, colouring books (for kids and adults), painting-inspired apparel, umbrellas, garden furniture, high-end branded jewellery and watches, even fine art-themed wines and nibbles are for sale. Considering the army of multilingual guides, the ubiquitous audio guides and hall brochures, the immeasurable surface area taken up by wall texts, you'd be forgiven for expecting a slight decline in the role of the catalogue. Think again: the tonnage is beyond description.

For good reason: if you're somewhat ochlophobic, the catalogue is your last resort. In these the glory days of reproduction, a photographic or digital copy of a painting outperforms the real thing. More reliable. Portable. Accessible. Democratic. Uncomplicated. Never before in the history of art has reproduction been so close to rendering the real work of art obsolete.

The Art of Prosecution

Pablo Halguera

I saw some kind of disturbing examples of the lack of resources for criminal defendants in America and the ways that prosecutorial actions could really define the outcome of so many cases, almost regardless of what the actual evidence was. And it emphasized to me the importance of having people in prosecutorial roles who are searching for the truth as opposed to trying to put people in prison without really any kind of regard as to what the facts were.

Jason File, video still from Exactitude *(2018) video installation*

Because of the double life I led over decades and until a couple of years ago, working as both an artist and a museum educator – benefitting from the knowledge from one profession and applying it to the other but also equally having to balance both in practice – I have always been interested in other artists who have had to confront similar dualities. Sometimes the artist's daytime job is unrelated to their artistic output: The composer Charles Ives was an insurance salesman; Fernando Pessoa worked as a commercial translator. In the case of other artists, their employment had a direct impact in their creative work: Maurizio Cattelan briefly worked at a morgue as an embalmer (per his own account), which explains some of the works he has made in that category. Mark Bradford often talks about the influence that working as a hair stylist in his mom's beauty shop had in his work. Howardena Pindell's work at MoMA as curator is well known as well as how she had to negotiate that position with the continuation of her artistic practice and the way it helped inform her artistic ideas.

But seldom have I encountered an artist who literally made his exact daily job into a ready-made artwork: this is the case (pun intended) of Jason File, with whom I was in conversation for this column.

Born in St. Louis, he grew up in a family of artists: "musicians, theater people, also art teachers. I grew up in this sort of environment surrounded by the arts, but also being attracted by the more analytical, social, political aspects of society." He recalls watching, as a child, the TV broadcast of the Iran-Contra Affair hearings in Congress with Oliver North and being fascinated by it. When he approached his teenage years, he decided he would become a lawyer, not an artist, – a decision that puzzled his parents but that they supported, nonetheless.

While in law school, he decided to go into the prosecutorial track: "I saw some kind of disturbing examples of the lack of resources for criminal defendants in America and the ways that prosecutorial actions could really define the outcome of so many cases, almost regardless of what the actual evidence was. And it emphasized to me the importance of having people in prosecutorial roles who are searching for the truth as opposed to trying to put people in prison without really any kind of regard as to what the facts were."

After being a judicial law clerk in Manhattan for the Southern District of New York he went to London to work in a law firm doing international arbitration. "I thought that the kind of prosecutorial side of the United Nations work in The Hague would be an ideal next step, because it's a similar process to what you see in international arbitration."

Once in The Hague, he was hired initially to work on the trial team that was prosecuting Radovan Karadžić, the former president of the breakaway Serb Republic who was tried (and later convicted) of

Jason File, video still from Exactitude *(2018), video installation*

genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Karadžić had been a fugitive for many years and was ultimately apprehended after hiding in plain sight under a pseudonym and a bushy beard posing as a faith healer. File came in to work on the cross-examination of the defense case.

An interesting aspect about these trials is that, while open to the public, they generally proceed without much of an audience. File says: "sometimes you would just see kind of a sea of cadet military uniforms sitting in the audience, watching the trial. Other days, [when] someone who was well known somewhere was testifying you might see more media. But then there were other days where there was nobody."

Shortly before that time, File was already reconsidering the relationship with art. "I sort of had this reawakening of the contemporary art itch. And at the same time, I also didn't necessarily see my entire career as remaining inside a law firm doing international disputes."

He then started to think of the trial as a long-duration-performance that could be framed as such. "I started to see some of these courtroom appearances as not only opportunities to highlight a moment in this trial, but also to kind of treat them as vignettes that could be sort of seen on their own for what they are, as opposed to this small piece of a giant puzzle that would be very hard for someone coming in without an extensive background, not only on the history of the region, but also on the trial itself, to comprehend."

The result was a work titled *Exactitude*, a word drawn from the famous Jorge Luis Borges story titled *On the Exactitude of Science*, about a team of cartographers who, attempting to make a painstakingly exact map of a kingdom end up making a 1:1 scale map of the kingdom itself. File used the video of his own cross-examination of the defense of the Karadžić trial to present it as an artwork as a ready-made performance. "I was trying to explore how performance would function as a ready-made, how you could present something that would have a kind of true identity at the same time." He started inviting artist friends to see him perform his real-life prosecutions in court and framing the public video record of the proceedings as an artwork.

Unsurprisingly, the court staff in The Hague did not know what to make of his artistic endeavors. As File tells it, the court's response to his work "went through several stages". When he first told his supervisors that he was an artist, they thought of it in the traditional sense, as if he were a Sunday painter. "The next stage was a concern about not knowing

Exactitude *(2018) Installation View. The Opening Reception*
© Jason File

where this work was going or what I was doing in the kind of moments of understanding that I was making related to the trial process and to my position." And then, when he got to present the actual work in a gallery in The Hague and invited his colleagues to see it, they started understanding it as an "open ended inquiry" and not something that could be seen as a threat to the institution itself. "Then they were much more able to accept this dual life that I had."

While many artists have made works about the legal system as re-enactments and external observation, File's presentation as a practitioner, becoming both replica and commentary, provides a new dimension. "It just felt very important to me to provide a perspective also from the inside of one of these organizations and one that has to balance those institutional concerns with the aesthetic and critical concerns."

File's merging of creative and non-artistic professional activity belongs to a lineage that can be traced back to Mierle Landerman Ukele's *Maintenance Art Manifesto* from 1969, where she declared her daily maintenance activities as part of her work – a precursor of the aesthetic and political positioning that often characterizes contemporary socially engaged artists. File's performative coupling also makes me think of the term '*la Perruque*, a term that Michel de Certeau brings up in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. '*La Perruque*' is a term generally applied to a worker who is doing their own personal work during company time. A term often referred to as a form of rebellion against oppression. In this case, the artist is efficiently meeting the demands and duties of his job, only that he is simultaneously enveloping the activity with an additional conceptual frame. It is not so much a form of rebellion as a re-framing of an activity – the ready-made re-signification of it.

As File himself points out, the fact that international war crime trials often unfold over many years makes them nearly impossible to follow for someone who is not deeply familiar with the details of each case and seeing the exchanges on any given day can feel largely abstract. His focus then becomes to present the trial as a snapshot with all the accompanying details – "the procedure itself, the architecture of the room, the costumes and uniforms that people wear, the rituals that we go through, as well as just the facts of the testimony" – to produce a larger reflection about the process of international justice, and, more specifically, the way in which the real-life administering of justice and the pursuit of truth is not the kind of dramatic and emotional performance that one is accustomed to see in courtroom dramas, but rather a long, slow, mind-numbingly technical process; one nonetheless that eventually comes to an end, thus offering closure.

WELCOME TO DYSTOPIA – II

Frances Oliver

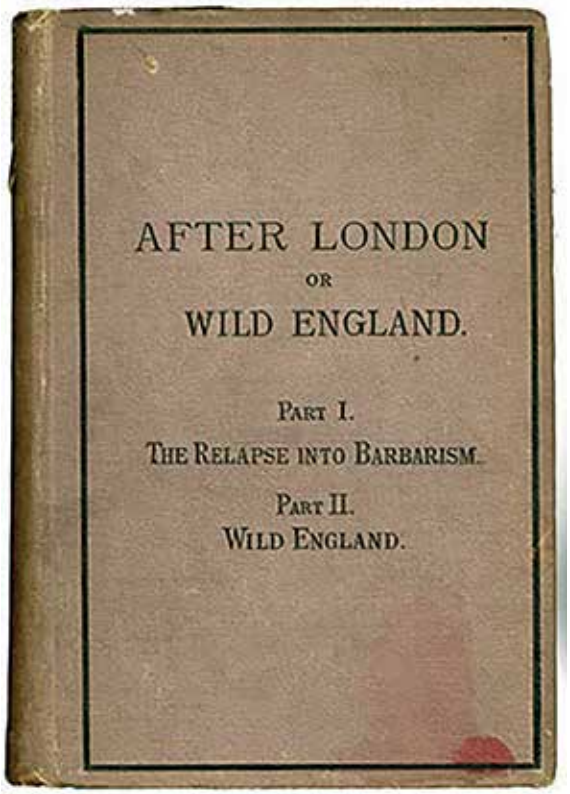
Two dystopias written a century and a half apart are set in an inundated England, where nature has produced a great rising of waters. The contrast is fascinating; in one case, the danger is the sea outside, in the other, a giant inland lake in which the great cities of England have been drowned.

Lake-filled England is the dystopia of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) who wrote essays, autobiography, and fiction. He grew up on a small Wiltshire farm; that background and a great love for nature were seminal to his writing, as was his experience of poverty and ongoing illness. He was tubercular for most of his years. *After London* or *Wild England*, his one work of science fiction, was published in 1885, not long before his death.

The first part of Jefferies' book is devoted to a kind of pocket-encyclopedia delineation of the much diminished country. This pedagogical treatise sits a bit awkwardly with the adventure tale that follows. Yet there is something touching and very plausible in the narrator's attempt at a natural science account of a world in which scientific knowledge has disappeared.

Jefferies describes the flora and fauna of this new England, the fauna mostly wild descendants of the old; domestic cattle gone wild, cats become bigger and feral, many humans gone wild as well, the 'bushmen' or 'hunter-gatherers' and bandits, the expanded, now warlike, tribes of Roma. Farmers and small towns are subject to their predations. Settled society, such as it is, exists on the great lake's periphery, much as it did along rivers in medieval times. It is in fact a medieval scene, rather like in Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, but we find no monasteries as keepers of civilization. There are little kingdoms with castles, vying for power and frequently at war. Except for merchants, whose literacy is needed for trade, literacy is confined to the elite. Most of the population live in a state of servitude, always working off debt (the nobles see to this) and servitude seems to be the common penalty for crime. The one religious person in the book is hero Felix's beloved, Aurora, who clings to some replica of Christian faith.

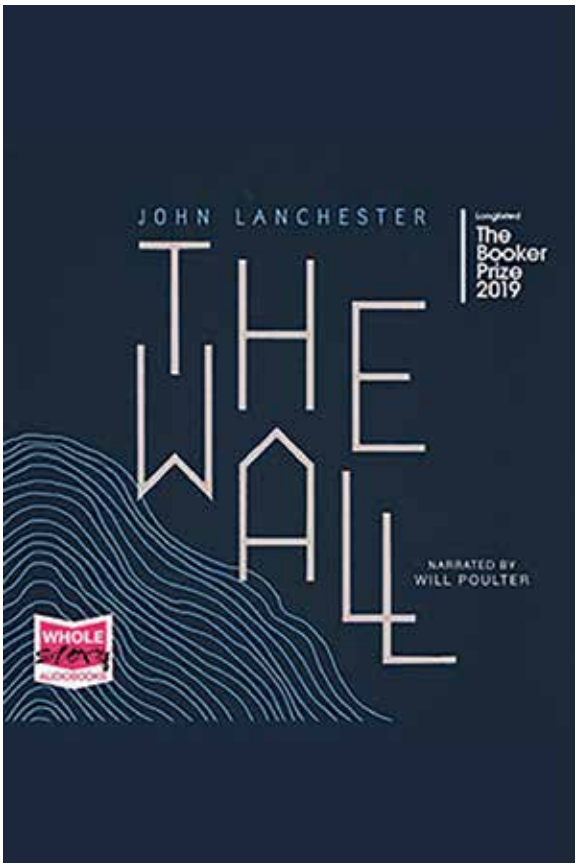
The rest of Jefferies' novel is devoted to the story of Felix, the lonely and unappreciated younger son of a local great house. He is scholarly and reflective, neither liking nor excelling in the macho virtues that mark his older brother and are admired by the popular.



He loves Aurora, daughter of a rival castle, but how can he win her with no triumph to show and an impoverished noble family behind him?

After much gloomy introspection, Felix makes a brave and eccentric decision. He will build a canoe and explore unknown distances of the great inland lake.

Felix's journey is described with a map-like precision, so this imagined crater lake becomes very real to the reader following Felix on his quest. And indeed from here the story becomes the classic quest of fairy tales. Felix is captured in a foreign kingdom and made to serve an evil ruler, but soon escapes. Again in his canoe, he is swept over the dreadful poisonous waters that cover London, and nearly dies. He is rescued by a group of sheep herders, good simple people who welcome him. His prowess with the longbow, scorned in his own country, enables the herders to win a battle against the invading Roma, and the herders make him their king. He sails back home in anticipation of bringing back Aurora as his queen and building a new kingdom he will rule with benevolence. So this Victorian dystopia does end on a note of hope.



In John Lanchester's *The Wall*, published in 2019, the risen waters are those of the sea, and a high wall protects England from the surrounding ocean and the desperate outsiders seeking entry. These outsiders are 'the Others' who live on the water or in now unknown deprived, shrunken lands where what reigns is anarchy, hunger, misery, death.

Inside the Wall this England seems very like the England of today (or should I say the England of 2019 – pre-Covid, pre-cost-of-living crisis, pre-Ukraine?). There appears to be adequate food and a stable and fairly quiet population. People go on picnics, eat in restaurants, play sports etc. as they do now. It is the Wall that keeps them secure and at peace – the Wall and a post climate-change political system that is simple, efficient and brutal.

The Wall is patrolled by teams of conscripts. All fit adults, male or female – no gender distinctions here – must serve two years as Defenders on the Wall. They must push back or kill any Others who make it to the top. For every Other who does get over, a member of the team that failed to stop her or him will be lowered down the wall in a boat, with a few supplies, to survive as long as possible on the sea. The Others who do make it are allowed to stay – but as part of the lowest class, who must work as 'servants' to the legitimate residents. Some few especially skilled or enterprising do eventually gain regular citizenship.

The parallels with present-day refugees and policies such as the Government's Rwanda scheme are obvious. When the myriad hordes of climate refugees appear, as they soon must, will patrol boats and sentries with big guns, rather than life-saving equipment, be the next step?

One such is the captain of Kavanagh, the narrator's, team.

It is a tribute to Lancaster's own skill that he dwells on the discomfort, anxiety, cold and sheer boredom of the long shifts on the Wall, transmitting all the sensation - but not the boredom - to the reader. One way to avoid service on the Wall is to become a Breeder. Kavanagh and the girl he meets on the Wall decide to apply. Being a Breeder "is a pretty sweet deal. If you can get used to the thought of bringing another person into the broken world".

But before Kavanagh and his girl Hilfa can leave the Wall there is another attack by the Others. The Defenders on their section of the Wall are betrayed by the last person anyone imagined could be a traitor. A few Others do get over and although Kavanagh overpowers and downs the traitor he and Hilfa, with two others, are lowered into a boat on the sea. With them also is the Captain, the traitor who has survived Kavanagh's wounding, and a 'Politician' whose empty words they have heard before. With unexpected luck and the Captain's navigation, they find a group of people who have learned to live off their part of the sea and form a community together. But this little enclave is soon overwhelmed by ruthless pirates; all are killed or enslaved except Kavanagh and Hilfa who manage to escape and are adrift once more. They come close to an abandoned-looking oil derrick whose sole occupant, lonely and liking the amicable look of this young couple, lowers his ladder. He invites them, after their precarious climb, to share his accommodation and still large supply of food tins. Not a happy end, but at least a happy respite, and perhaps the most that anyone off the Wall can hope for.

The parallels with present-day refugees and policies such as the Government's Rwanda scheme are obvious. When the myriad hordes of climate refugees appear, as they soon must, will patrol boats and sentries with big guns, rather than life-saving equipment, be the next step?

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The Art World is in Need of a Strong Critical Culture

Melissa Gronlund from the UAE

If I had a penny for every time someone told me there should be more critical writing about art, I'd be a very rich woman. And as someone who has spent the better part of two decades as a critic, it's hard not to take this observation personally – like the time London's Institute of Contemporary Art invited me and three others to a panel titled *The Trouble with Art Criticism*. Did they not think that one through?

The feeling that art criticism has ceased to be, well, critical is not limited to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but it feels particularly acute here: part of the culture of boosterism that manufactures genuine excitement over the opening of a new cheese bar. For a while, this enthusiasm seemed necessary to support the growing art scene. What mattered was less the calibre of exhibition or performance, but the development of an art infrastructure in which to hold these events. Others ascribe the lack of critical writing to deficiencies within the scene: there are few proper art critics, and writing appears here mainly in newspapers and a few glossy magazines, rather than the quasi-academic journals that exist elsewhere. But art critics in the UAE aren't half bad. Antonia Carver, head of Art Jameel, and Myrna Ayad, outgoing director of Art Dubai, both cut their teeth in the writing game.

And I've published my fair share of critical articles, in these pages and elsewhere, about art in the UAE. The result? I've been snubbed at soirees, disinvited from dinners, cold-shouldered at cocktail receptions. Still, these reviews haven't made a dent in the impression that art writing is unilaterally positive. The issue is larger than just shallow reporting.

Warehouse421, Dubai

Alserkal Avenue, Dubai

What is the problem that people think would be solved by a culture of criticism?

The obvious answer is: a stronger art scene. With more robust critique, art world would stop validating mediocre expression or rubber-stamping derivative works with an "A" for effort. It would enable art to interrogate itself and important social issues. Critics, this thinking runs, need to hold artists' feet to the fire. Now, I would love for a more ambitious art world to emerge, but I'm not sure more stringent criticism is the means towards it. If anything, the answer is art education: better educated people make better art and provide better critiques. And, sadly for myself, I don't think criticism still wields that much power. The critic's importance has long been supplanted by that of the curator. Everyone knows artists do better to curry favour among biennale organisers than among those of us who tromp along to the openings, notebooks in hand.

Rather, I suspect that the lament for a culture of critique comes from a disconnect between art and its public. Part of this is structural. To put it quite plainly, it's not always clear how a work of art is operating in a gallery. You need to know its back story, the artist's intentions, where it was taken from or how it was made in order to fully understand it. Readers want opinions while you're stuck explaining: it's no wonder you risk not looking like an honest broker.

And more importantly, what happens with the opinions you write? They mean nothing if they're not picked up and continued within a public discussion. In an ideal world, an artist would stage an exhibition, a critic would thoughtfully review it and the public – artistic and general – would build on the critic's judgements in serious debates over the work. It would matter if the work were good or bad, and the review would open up genuine discussion. A thought-provoking art review is a handover to the public to continue a conversation.

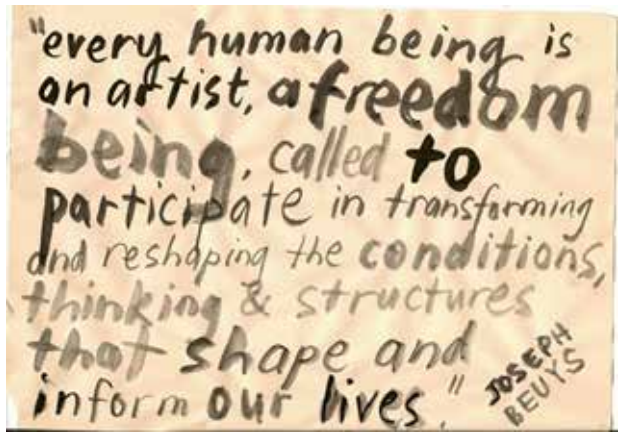
But this kind of greater engagement has to be nurtured, which is why forums for discussion have lately become so important in the UAE – whether in the extraordinary popularity of the pedestrianised spaces of Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, Warehouse421's rumoured plans for an Abu Dhabi art district, or the synchronicities among the many art organisations in Sharjah. Especially in this privatised, car-divided Gulf, we need to work harder at providing actual, physical spaces for coming together.

In the art world, a critical culture has to be normalised, so that negative feedback isn't seen as a sensational one-off. And beyond the art bubble, people feel a lack of engagement with art production and exhibition. They want a critical community around art that has a determining say in what works are shown and supported – and they also want artists to respond to the needs that impact their individual lives. They want to be included within art culture. That's not something to easily write off.

Contemporary Art and Public Opinion

Marilu Knode

Mary Louise Schumacher, the Journal Sentinel's art and architecture critic, leads the discussion and a community of writers contribute to the dialogue.



I blame Joseph Beuys.

The modernist art world became accidentally democratic again when Joseph Beuys declared "everyone is an artist."

Beuys did not mean that everyone is a visual artist, acting within the high modernist field of museums. He did not mean that the general public should be exercising sway over the product of teachers, curators and arts academics.

He did mean, however, that every citizen should be creative in his or her own field. Based on his own biography and subsequent artistic practice, Beuys did mean that artistic gestures exist everywhere in the world, and that we should all be mindful and appreciative of them. Critique could exist, certainly, if it came from common purpose and good will for changes that might result. The idea that everyone is an artist, was a challenge for citizens to take control of their own creative lives.

In the context of a devastated post-World War II Germany, Beuys was exhorting the public to resist totalitarian thought and the type of nationalistic frenzy that drove the world into a war. Beuys believed that cultural production allowed for political independence. Fifty years after Beuys' declaration, we have nothing but creative public expression and commentary on everything under the sun. Through newly available media, like blogs, pod/video casts, Facebook and Twitter, anyone is allowed to make public commentary.

The question is: To what degree should artists and arts organizations take public opinion into consideration when making aesthetic or programmatic decisions?

Some of this commentary is cultural in nature, but has it come with, as Beuys hoped, a stake in the products of culture? How does public commentary affect the people being critiqued? Is non-expert commentary just 'Monday-morning quarterbacking?' Can it only be aimed at products with similar amateur roots? Does any field, other than the arts, change its behavior based on non-specialist critique?

Beuys was right: everyone should live more creatively in his or her own world. Perhaps Beuys was reacting to the professionalization of the art world, which began to install professional degrees as gauges for artistic accomplishment. Beuys was a member of the Green Party in Germany, which is dedicated to a democratic, anti-big government platform. He taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, which eschews grades and is based on self-directed creative education. Despite his wish for democratic artistic culture, and while his performative mementos continue to inspire artists, his larger project baffles the general public.

The question is: To what degree should artists and arts organizations take public opinion into consideration when making aesthetic or programmatic decisions? Over the past two decades, museum practice has changed enormously, and several generations of artists have worked within more popular forms of culture in order to critique those commercial forms. Many examples of dynamic, democratic artistic practice abound in community-based programs from San Francisco to Singapore, from Los Angeles to Tehran. Artists resist official support or censure as well as the commercialization of public space in order to create a sense of place and community. These forms of art have evolved in response to the availability of new media and based on the social mores of its practitioners, and celebrate a place-based practice in real time.

Joseph Beuys: How To Explain Art To A Dead Hare *(original performance 1965)*
Marina Abramovic,'s (2005)

Yet the public continues to reject this type of non-material artistic practice. When surveyed the public generally prefers painting and sculpture to performance and installation.

There is a significant gap in what we in the professional art world are doing relative to public opinion, yet there are numerous examples of institutions trying to bridge that gap. Museums have instituted multiple forms of public engagement and outreach through free docent tours, extensive educational materials and wall texts, by pricing catalogues so inexpensively that they do not cover the cost of printing, to lectures in schools and other expansive modes of communication.

Below are some examples of how public opinion has affected professional artistic discourse. Ultimately, everyone is free to make art, just as they are free to start their own museum.

Museums today have a new mission: to provide experiences and services that rival the democratic forums of the Internet and discos. One way to entice public engagement is setting out a public comment book for exhibitions. This type of feedback generally produces two kinds of comments: 'this show sucks' and 'this show inspired me.' New online museum interfaces allow visitors to slide a bar toward a smiley

Grateful Dead
© Acid Museum

face to indicate their degree of like; but this is more marketing than true interaction.

Is either of these methods true interaction? Do they generate exchange? When an expert talks to an amateur, do we truly reach some form of enlightenment for either side? Rarely is there a real opportunity for thoughtful public commentary or real exchange, since there is never a museum person present to engage in dialogue. Museum websites are PR outlets, not a site for curatorial dialogue.

One project that promises to turn the curatorial keys to the public is the Wolfsonian-Florida International University's 2011 project *This Belongs in a Museum©*. Residents of South Miami Beach will be solicited to submit their choice of objects from the area that think should be in a museum. These volunteer curators will be asked to consider the intention of the creator and the role design played in the object's creation. Images of the submissions will be posted on the outside of the museum's building, making further opportunities for public commentary.

It's impossible to gauge the impact this show will have on the public, yet this does not make the exercise fruitless. This is an ongoing dialogue and comes from an institution driven by the value of knowledge generated through artistic experimentation.

Some exemplary, public, democratic museums include the Acid Blotter 'museum' in the San Francisco home of Mark McCloud. For decades, McCloud has been the collecting LSD blotter sheets, the slips of paper that people put on their tongues to get high. His sheets, with various designs, are now neutralized. His expertise comes from his own psychedelic drug history, and includes two rough brushes with the FBI. Only rarely do the police get involved in cultural places, such as when art is deemed pornographic or potentially dangerous, and McCloud's space resists authoritative control in order to preserve this countercultural remnant.

The touristy Smiley Face Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is based on the highly commercial symbol designed by Harvey R. Ball in 1963. This pop culture icon demonstrated how design and advertising became the new, monetized social landscape. This instantly recognizable symbol makes for a kitschy museum, but without any context around them, this

Antony Gormely: One An Other

museum devolves into a tourist trap.

It may be structurally impossible for museums to be truly democratic. The process of organizing shows, raising money and cultivating artists and donors requires expertise, an expertise lacking in the Smiley Face Museum.

There are other interesting examples of a cultural democratization driven by a combination of expert and non-expert collaboration. Former dealer and current museum director Jeffrey Deitch tried to break down the elitism of the professional art world by creating the reality TV show, "ARTSTAR," which ran on Gallery HD TV in 2006. It started with 400 contestants and winnowed the diverse group down to eight. Unlike *Project Runway*, the Art Stars rarely made art, which would have allowed the audience to gauge their skills; and unlike *American Idol*, the public was not invited to vote someone off the island. Sadly, the program likely reinforced the worst type of clichés about the art world. Art cannot compare to the dramatics of *Survivor*.

One television show that does deliver access and education is the *Antiques Roadshow*, produced by PBS. Each week, fine and decorative arts experts travel to cities around the U.S. appraising objects d'art buried in attics. Only the very best (and sometimes worst!) objects are put on television, with appraisers parsing out values based on things such as the shape of nail heads, the cultural significance of a child's beat-up doll or the sheer rarity of a forgotten masterpiece. This show demonstrates that anyone can have great objects of culture in their own homes, and puts expertise where the public understands it—next to money.

I propose two contradictory examples of vibrant artist engagement with the public.

The first is Anthony Gormely's 2009 project *One & Other* for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. Rather than making his own art even more ubiquitous in the UK, Gormely gave his plinth over to the public. Anyone could enter the online lottery and, for one hour, perform, recite, narrate or just simply stand atop this highly public and political spot. Gormely did a democratic thing: He gave a voice directly to the people.

One of the lottery winners was Scott Illman, who dressed as a traditional town crier. In today's world, a town crier might express popular condemnation of an unpopular war. Despite his admirably elaborate historical costume, Illman instead used his time to promote the bar he owns. Gormely surely knew that some of the people who won the lottery would use it for a commercial purpose, but that is the difficult thing about democracy—there's no controlling it.

Perhaps the most relevant work to the topic of public input into the professional art world is Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid's 1995 project where they wondered: what would art look like if produced by public consensus? They began a series of paintings, the *Most Wanted* and *Least Wanted*, based on surveys of American tastes (they later expanded their survey to much of the rest of the world).

The original survey, of 1001 adults, was conducted by Martilla & Kiley, Inc. The *USA Most Wanted*"painting is a mishmash of clichés that include religious and historical figures, kids and baby animals. In his statement about the online project, hosted by the DIA Foundation, then-DIA director Michael Govan stated:

"In an age where opinion polls and market research invade almost every aspect of our "democratic/consumer" society (with the notable exception of art), Komar and Melamid's project poses relevant questions that an art-interested public, and society in general often fail to ask: What would art look like if it were to please the greatest number of people? Or conversely: What kind of culture is produced by a society that lives and governs itself by opinion polls?"

Komar & Melamid's project was ironic on many levels. The artists emigrated from the Soviet Union before the wall came down, and their works flayed alive the representative icons of a Soviet dictatorship. The artists used the PR tools of the West to find out if capitalism was any better at developing creative symbols to inspire people. The resulting paintings are inconclusive. It seems that the particulars of place allows every nation a specific aesthetic development. What Komar & Melamid proved, however, is that taste congeals with people who have similar education and histories.

What the project proves is that what we, in the contemporary professional art world, value is at odds with what the general public wants. The contemporary, modernist art world has its own history, stars, goals and support structure. Perhaps the bottom line is that something as fleeting as artistic value cannot be dictated by non-experts. Do the New York Yankees get rid of a player because the fans don't like him, or because he isn't performing to their needs? I would argue only ever because of the latter.

Art is at a disadvantage with the public. Almost every kid takes sports in school; few take art. I don't believe we'll achieve Beuys' democratic cultural goals when there is such an educational imbalance.

I do think artists and museums want public feedback, but they expect that feedback to be somewhat informed, certainly sympathetic, even better if it is curious and not hostile.

Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid. Most Wanted Painting, France (1995)
Digital composite image

Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid. Least Wanted Painting, Holland (1995)
Digital composite image

Perhaps the problem is not with the public but with our expectations of growing our audiences. There may be a finite audience for the arts just the way there is a finite audience for astrophysics. Expert language necessarily excludes amateurs, why would art dialogue be any different?

Funny enough, Beuys was right. The thing that most endangers the contemporary professional art field is the D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) movement, where everyone is an artist.

Perhaps the real issue with public engagement in contemporary art is this: everyone can be an artist, but not everyone can be a critic.

Art for Art's Sake in the 21st Century

A French history of the concept, Nietzsche's stance, and artists of the Paleolithic

Alice Gribbin

For as long as it has been articulated, the concept of *art for art's sake* has been dismissed as degenerate and trivial. But is it obsolete? Ask the question of artists today and the response will most likely be equivocal; ask it within an arts institution and the answer will almost certainly be 'Yes: dead and gone.'

That we are living through a period in which the mainstream attitude toward the arts is stridently utilitarian is undeniable. An artwork's social, political, or moral function is seen to be its essence. The expectation that artworks instruct, that they generate audiences with commitments and produce results for the present, is widely operative. Critics bestow the words 'relevant' and 'urgent' on books, films, and exhibitions as the highest praise. One might consider the postponing of painter Philip Guston's retrospective in 2020 by four world-class museums, on the basis of the artist's own political beliefs not being made explicit enough in the show, as emblematic of the time. Earlier that year, chastised by a swath of the poetry community for being 'unfit to respond to the crises of our times' (crises including the 'genocide against Black people'), the Poetry Foundation solemnly apologized for its 'institutional silence,' pushed out its president and board chairman, announced a five-step process to addressing its 'debts to Black poets,' and pledged to redirect funds to a host of social justice efforts. Writers and artists today seeking private funding would be wise to frame their work as attending to issues such as inequality, incarceration, repair, activism, and the violence of U.S. imperialism, judging by those who were named 2021 MacArthur Foundation fellows.

The current priorities of arts institutions are signaled in part by their recent hires and the statements that accompany them. Leading art school RISD has selected for its new president the diversity, equity, and inclusion head of Boston University for her 'deep commitment to leading change': 'Art, education, and equity and justice are the three foundational focuses of my life,' she said in the announcement. The Serpentine Gallery's new director of curatorial affairs has pointed to the role of museums in 'today's imperative to attend to the most vulnerable and disenfranchised in society while dismantling white supremacy.' Two newly hired deputy directors at the Brooklyn Museum will further the institution's 'social-change efforts' and 'develop a sustained, multiyear strategy to engage audiences around issues . . . including mass criminalization and climate change.' The museum also has a new president, who stated her commitments upon her appointment: 'From a very young age I dreamed of leading a cultural institution, not only for my love of the arts but for the power of the arts to enact social change.' Curator of the 2023 Liverpool Biennial has been chosen on the basis of her 'long standing curatorial concerns around care and repair.' A recent profile in ARTnews of Elizabeth Alexander, head of the Mellon Foundation, says she has been 'transforming . . . the nation's largest funder of the arts and humanities, since she became president in 2018, by [in Alexander's words] 'doing all the work, every penny, through a social justice lens.''

Our utilitarian era, as change-oriented as it is, must be historicized. Little about the imperatives newly governing the contemporary art and book worlds is new. The utilitarians are not so inventive. Throughout the 20th century in the democratic West, art movements driven by political and social messaging

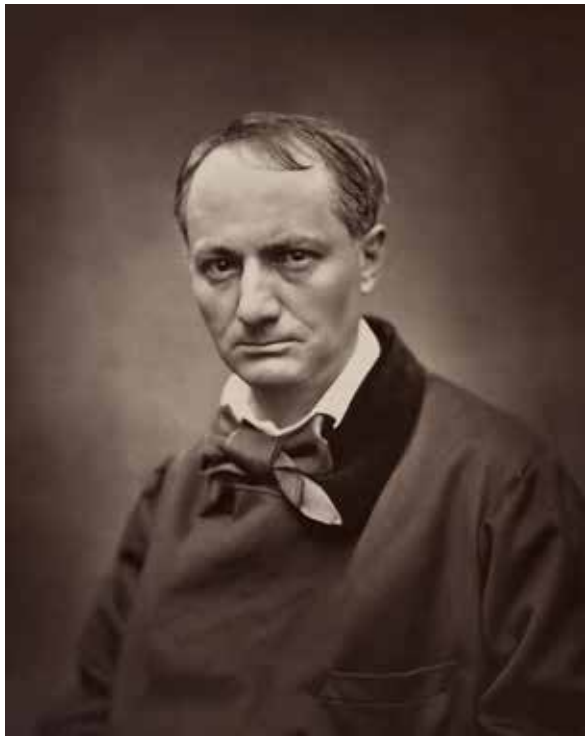
Our utilitarian era, as change-oriented as it is, must be historicized. Little about the imperatives newly governing the contemporary art and book worlds is new. The utilitarians are not so inventive. Throughout the 20th century in the democratic West, art movements driven by political and social messaging in pursuit of change have enjoyed widespread popularity among the public

in pursuit of change have enjoyed widespread popularity among the public and, sooner or later, institutional backing. What was considered valuable about individual artworks was their ability to diagnose, address, and even remedy social ills. Leftist muralists and printmakers of the thirties and feminist performance artists of the seventies have their places in the history of art. Possibly what distinguishes the status of art today is the seeming rush by institutions to align themselves with the change-demanders. But even this phenomenon – whether driven by market forces, the sincere ethical commitments of provosts and executives, or something else – is far from historically unique. The Fireside poets (Longfellow, Bryant, Holmes, and Whittier) are near equivalents to the popular political poets of today, when one looks beyond their race and gender. Both then and now, these are poets acclaimed by institutions; their faces grace magazines; they teach at private universities. These are poems of the classroom – topical, moral, frequently (in the old and new definitions of the term) abolitionist.

How best to elucidate our time, to make clear the values that are obsolete and those that are alive? Which values should we claim and promote? Art for art's sake appears to be a thoroughly neglected concept, bordering on the taboo. Yet the history of *l'art pour l'art* in France is not only fascinating but notably instructive. The origins and usage of the term by artists, critics, and intellectuals from the 1810s through to the 1860s are specific to the period. But the concept itself, I posit, is not historical or antiquated but has eternal life. We are subjects of our time: consciousness, the self, social relations are all conditioned. We require concepts for understanding ourselves and the world, including the world of art, that are particular to now, whenever now is. The contours of art for art's sake can and should be redrawn for the present. Engaging with the various adoptions and repudiations of *l'art pour l'art* in 19th-century France can help us in doing so.

Coming upon a reference to how Charles Baudelaire or Arthur Rimbaud spoke disparagingly of *l'art pour l'art* will naturally colour a person's feelings about the term. After all, these are two of our most aesthetically important modern poets in the art form's genealogy, whose writings were consequential not only for the generations of French writers that followed them but also for international Modernism in the 20th century. Were Baudelaire and Rimbaud wrong? A better question is, What exactly were they criticizing?

We must go back to before either was born. Artists associated with the Romantic movement in France



Charles Baudelaire, (c1862)
by Étienne Carjat

Henri Fantin-Latour: By the Table.
Arthur Rimbaud is second left (1872)

dominated for the first five decades of the 19th century. (Any discussion of artistic movements or groups, rather than discussion of individual artists' projects, can obscure more than it reveals. However, throughout the 19th century French artists, especially writers, often overtly associated themselves with various groups, so some generalizations are worth making.) Romanticism in music, painting, sculpture, and literature arose during the period of social turmoil following the French Revolution and in reaction to the previous era of Neoclassicism in the arts. Romantic artists shunned the Enlighten-

ment ideals of reason and order; many of them glorified nature. More stringent definitions are not especially helpful, but it's fair to say that by midcentury, literary Romanticism's abandonment of fixed forms was coupled with an embrace of personal, emotional, and politically or morally minded subject matters. With the fall of the Bourbon Restoration in 1830 and the unrest it precipitated, some Romantic writers doubled down on their commitment to serving society: George Sand championed 'proletarian' literature; poet Alphonse de Lamartine entered politics and helped found the Second Republic; Victor Hugo wrote novels, poems, and plays in defense of the poor and oppressed.

Amid this era of social Romanticism, the concept of *l'art pour l'art* takes off. The most ardent broadcaster of the term is Théophile Gautier; on the one hand a Romantic and anticlassical writer, on the other a public opposer of utilitarianism in art, who declares in the preface to an 1835 novel, "All that is useful is ugly." *L'art pour l'art* has been circulating among French littérateurs for a couple of decades, since émigré writers Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant returned to France from Germany, bringing with them news from the German literary and philosophical scenes, including news about the latest aesthetic theories. A professor and one of de Staël's readers, Victor Cousin visited some of those German thinkers, pored over an eclectic mix of philosophical works, and from 1818 started lecturing to huge audiences back in Paris on aesthetics and espousing *l'art pour l'art*: "We must have . . . art for art's sake," he told audiences at the Sorbonne. "The beautiful cannot be the way to what is useful, or to what is good, or to what is holy; it leads only to itself."

By 1860 a new generation of writers, tired of Romantic lyric poetry's preoccupation with emotional subjectivity, tired of sentimentality, and tired of the demand that literature serve society, come to align themselves with Gautier. The group calls itself *le Parnasse*, the Parnassians (after Mount Parnassus, home of the Muses in Greek mythology). Aesthetically, the Parnassians turn back to Neoclassicism; they embrace the strict old metrical forms over the lax prosody of Romantic verse. They write impersonal poems, precise as clear-cut gems, on the subject of beautiful things. And like Gautier, they present themselves as endorsers of art for art's sake.

We come to see it is the Parnassians whom Baudelaire and Rimbaud disparage. In the Parnassian usage, the *l'art pour l'art* slogan has come to mean, on the one hand, an elevation of formal technique over content and, on the other, emotional vacancy. Neither Baudelaire nor Rimbaud has given his life over

Théophile Gautier (1839)
by Auguste de Chatillon

to poetry only to treat the art form as an arena for demonstrating skill. It is no mystery why both poets, committed as they are to the imagination, to the ecstasies and torments of the spirit, resist; why Baudelaire calls the art-for-art's-sake school 'sterile, and a 'puerile utopia'; why Rimbaud can submit poems to the Parnassians at age fifteen and rail against them a year later in his *lettres du voyant*. To Rimbaud, the failure of contemporary verse is clear: "We require new ideas and forms of our poets." Shunning the *l'art pour l'art* movement, in this period in France, is in no way equivalent to denying the autonomy of art.

Ah – but Baudelaire never insists on the separation of art from its social context, and Rimbaud is inspired by the Paris Commune, scholars will retort. This assertion confuses social criticism, rebellion against sexual mores, support for revolting workers, and attacks on bourgeois values with promotion of a political agenda. Neither poet in his literary works ever had anything close to an activist agenda. But such scholars also would have us think of both men as politico-aesthetic theorists first and poets second.

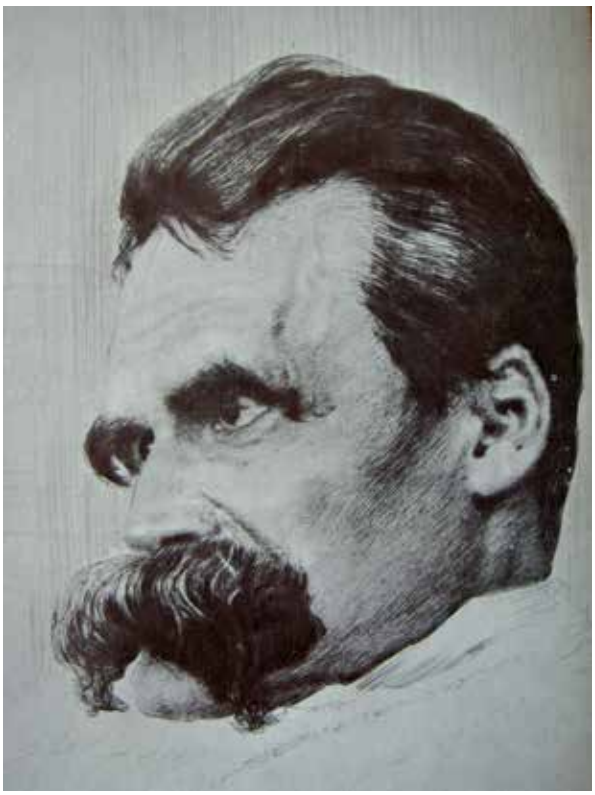
Eduard Manet: The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*, (1867-9)*
The least finished of three large canvases devoted to the execution of Maximilian I of Mexico.
(Wiki Commons)

Deep in their ideologies, academics have long tried to explain away art for art's sake in the period as a mistaken concept. Some, beholden to the more enervating strains of Marxist critique, have argued *l'art pour l'art* can be understood as market-driven, as though art is no different from journalism or factory parts. Still others have written off the Parnassian and Symbolist movements as forebears of Surrealism in their shunning of real life – in favour, presumably, of some other, fake sort of life. If this critique sounds resolutely utilitarian, that's because it is. Today's academics will tend to argue that art for art's sake is nonviable because they are desperate to see their own work as socially responsible.

What both Baudelaire and Rimbaud do insist is that artists can take on anything as their subject matter. Today's aesthete, the nonutilitarian lover of art, knows the significance of this imperative, without which Modernism will never go on to happen. No subject is off-limits to Baudelaire and Rimbaud! Their paying attention to marginalized figures does not make them political poets.

A crowd of people think that the goal of poetry is a kind of lesson, that it must fortify the conscience, perfect social mores, and ultimately demonstrate in some way or another its utility. Poetry, provided that one is willing to descend into oneself, interrogate one's soul, recall one's memories of enthusiasm, has no other goal than Itself ... I don't mean that poetry doesn't ennoble our mores, let me be understood, or that its final result is not to elevate humankind above the level of vulgar interests; that would be an evident absurdity. I mean that if the poet pursues a moral goal, it diminishes his poetic power; and it would not be imprudent to bet that his work will be bad.

L'art pour l'art is free of the Parnassian baggage for other artists. As an expression of belief in the autonomy of art, and a refusal to value art on the basis of its political, religious, or moral utility, the concept appeals to stylistically diverse writers and painters. (Asserting his commitment to social justice, Hugo in 1864 makes the rather insipid statement, 'Art for art's



Hans Olde: Friedrich Nietzsche *(1899)*

sake can be beautiful, but art for progress is more beautiful.')

In the visual arts, the concept is adopted particularly by those who oppose the new Realist movement, itself a turn away from Romanticism. Novelist Émile Zola, writing in 1866, invokes art for art's sake in celebration of Édouard Manet, who is helping usher in impressionism, the great development in painting after realism: "One must not judge him as a moralist or as a writer; one must judge him as a painter. ... He knows neither how to sing nor how to philosophize. He knows how to paint, and that's it." No moralizing veil overlays Manet's images, which are not allegorical or drawn from history. Manet paints scenes from his social environment, but not as a documentarian. He cares about the image, the experience of beholding the image, and the paint.

A close friend of Manet's, poet Stéphane Mallarmé comes to be closely associated with *le symbolisme,* France's late 19th-century symbolist movement. In 1891 Mallarmé will describe symbolism's departure from other poetic modes: The Parnassians disappoint because their poems "lack mystery; they steal from readers' minds the delicious joy of believing that they create." With Mallarmé, the art for art's sake concept becomes articulated in the ideal of pure art, *l'oeuvre pure.* For him there are two types of language;that of 'elementary discourse,' which is descriptive, utilitarian, and brute; and that of poetry, 'which is primarily dream and song' and is essential.

"But this 'art for art's sake' business did not spontaneously begin with the French," philosophically minded critics will insist. In tracing the concept's history, we are not helped by those thinkers who construe every noteworthy idea from 1800 onward as a bastardization of something first expressed by Immanuel Kant. Exactly how many paintings did he see in Königsberg before forming his theory of aesthetic judgment? In their visits to Germany, de Staël, Constant, and Cousin had become acquainted with aspects of Kant's aesthetic theories, as well as those of philosophers Schiller and Schelling. This fact aside, it does not follow that any culture's or individual's appreciation of art necessarily owes much at all to these thinkers. Try as the art lover might, she will find Kant's writings of little help when developing her own aesthetic sensibility. In the first place, Kant proposes in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment* an analysis of aesthetic judgment that is concerned not with art but instead with beauty. But we go on. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are unlike other judgments – say, about what things one likes or about what is morally good – in that aesthetic judgments are 'disinterested,' meaning they are 'merely contemplative' and 'indifferent to the existence of the object.' The kind of pleasure one takes in beautiful things depends on the harmonious play of one's imagination and understanding. And while beautiful things do not serve any presupposed purpose – that is, they do not serve as means to any ends – still they have the quality of 'formal purposiveness.'

Why are not aesthetes drawn to unifying theories of art? you may wonder. Building on his assertion that beauty is purposive without a purpose, Kant goes on to relate how beautiful things are, indeed, 'purposive in reference to the moral feeling.' So while it's true that one's aesthetic judgments are disinterested, so too is it true that engaging with art makes one grow as a moral and social being. From there, Kant goes on to argue in his closing passages for the binding together of beauty and ethics. For the individual, art, he tells us, civilizes. This dubious idea is totally alive among artists and audiences today. We hear it expressed by those novelists and filmmakers who will plainly state that their intention is to improve and educate their readers and viewers.

I hope a short, two-part retort will suffice. For Kant the faculties involved in aesthetic judgment are imagination and understanding, and not, specifically, the faculty of cognition. Whereas for the aesthete, or really anyone capable of being affected by an artwork, responding to art involves a whole range of at-

Marie Laurencin: Maternity *(1925)*
(Wiki Commons)

Paul Klee: Hilterfingen *(1895)*
(Wiki Commons)

tentivenesses, all working in combination: the spiritual, emotional, psychological, sensual, and intellectual.

Second, the person who cares about art, who has no doubt that experiences of art have made her life more worthwhile, in an instinctual way understands aesthetics not as a series of principles she holds but as an activity she carries out. It is by aesthetics that she lives her life. In comparison to her are those who don't care about art, whose lives have not been enriched by artworks, and for whom aesthetics might at best be something of a philosophical posture.

Regrettably, writing in the early 20th century, Walter Benjamin misrepresented the Baudelairean figure, the modern flâneur, as one alienated by modern life. Sociologists from mid-century to the present have similarly argued that art for art's sake reflects the alienation of the artist in bourgeois society. Baudelaire, however, wrote of the modern artist in no such way. His flâneur is explicitly not a dandy; not indifferent; not an idle wanderer, but 'ruled by an insatiable passion.' His is more accurately a Nietzschean figure, a passionate lover of life.

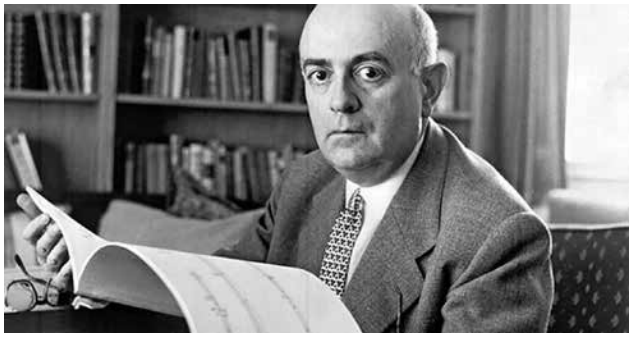
Nietzsche himself, writing in 1888, took issue with the idea of l'art pour l'art, and in the process advanced what might be considered a different but related concept, what we might term "art for life's sake." In Nietzsche's words:

> The struggle against purpose in art is always a struggle against the moralizing tendency in art, against the subordination of art to morality. *L'art pour l'art* means: 'the devil take morality!' But this very hostility betrays that moral prejudice is still dominant. When one has excluded from art the purpose of moral preaching and human improvement it by no means follows that art is completely purposeless, goalless, meaningless. . . . Art is the great stimulus to life: how could it be thought purposeless, aimless, l'art pour l'art? (Twilight of the Idols)

I adore the vigour of Nietzsche's statement—again, what might be expressed as "art for life's sake." I struggle to challenge or correct it. That art is the great stimulus to life, its great validator—that the appreciation of art gives purpose and value to life—is a tenet absolutely held by art lovers.

It is not my project here to offer a full definition of life in Nietzsche's terms. Certainly Nietzsche was concerned with how we live, how our minds and days are shaped for and by us. For the aesthete's purposes, life in "art for life's sake" need not be abstract but can instead refer to the finite and brief life of the individual art lover. For her, deriving meaning from artworks involves hours upon hours of attention and the slow cultivation of taste, art-historical knowledge, and an aesthetic sensibility.

And yet: What art for life's sake does not encapsulate



Theodor Adorno
'A painter paints a painting - not what it represents'

is, for the aesthete, the singularly important fact of art's autonomy. Art, for the art lover, and intrinsic to her appreciation of artworks, has its own life, an inorganic vitality. The life of art is entwined with but separable from the life of humankind. Art's genealogy, stretching back through the centuries and millennia, is alive at every point, along every line of descendance. Older art does not live on in what succeeds it, but lives; its insights are obtainable always. Unlike individuals and institutions, species and social systems, great art never dies, dissolves, or goes extinct. Long after the artist and his way of being in the world are gone, great art remains.

Ultimately, the aesthete appreciates great artworks not only because of what they do for her but because of what they are, and what they have made, or will make, possible for the future of their artistic medium. Recognition of this fact makes the "art for art's sake" formulation necessarily true for the present.

Finally, I do have a small disagreement with Nietzsche on the purported hostility of *l'art pour l'art*. The inaccuracy of this claim; that the concept betrays itself as a reaction against "moral prejudice . . . still dominant", is easier to see from the vantage point of the early 21st century, and can be shown by reflecting, briefly, on the deep history of art.

Simply stated, for those artists who believe in the autonomy of art, their creations do not need or seek any external justification. The art for art's sake expression is, in one language or another, most likely a few centuries old. But the foundational concept under consideration – that of appreciating or making art for its own sake – is every bit as old as the first artworks, which is to say, far older than society and its groupings, certainly older than the self (a later invention). A simple desire courses through the blood of our species: to make, to make things other than tools, and not just because particular problems need to be solved but because it is in our nature to make. Possibly all hominins shared with us this drive.

Neanderthals, we're learning, made some of the oldest known cave paintings. A zigzag pattern scratched with a shark tooth into a mussel shell around five hundred thousand years ago, which experts disagree on whether to consider the earliest example of art, was made by someone of the homo erectus species, an ancestor to Neanderthals and us both. As long as three million years ago, our prehuman ancestors were collecting stones, minerals, shells, and fossils for their visual and tactile qualities, for their weight, colours, and shapes. Early humans, unfulfilled by nature's pleasing objects, later began working nature's products through sculpture and marking for nonutilitarian purposes. Cupules, indentations made in rock by pecking, would evolve from the first artists' gestures into abstract forms, then on to the earliest figurative engravings. Incidental marks found on animal bones became the basis of carved geometric patterns.

The archaeological record shows how gradually across the planet, over hundreds of millennia, artistic phenomena emerged, withdrew, spread, and developed. By the Upper paleolithic, humans were creating figurative art objects and cave paintings, works often of overwhelming majesty and naturalism that demonstrate irrefutably the refinement of those artists. What symbolic or mystical significance art held for paleolithic people can only be guessed at, but we do know that their spiritual concerns were independent of their need for survival.

From early in the life of the species, the human imagination, our spirit, has found expression in aesthetic and symbolic gestures. Because of this deep history of ours, the art for art's sake concept always will be best understood not as reactive,in rejecting this or that political, social, or moral dictate, but as active: generative, innate, spirit-affirming. It is the original value system of art.

Man Of Sorrows

Bastian Eclercy

Botticelli's 'stunning and puzzling' Man of Sorrows
The painting, lassold at Sotheby's for $45.4m, was listed among workshop and studio pictures in Ronald Lightbown's 1978 catalogue of Botticelli's work, before being included as an autograph work in an exhibition at Frankfurt's Städel Museum in 2009. Here, in a pair of opinion pieces, two Renaissance experts give their contrasting views on its attribution

Botticelli's ultima maniera (last manner) is a rather strange and archaic one. Many people, even specialists, dislike it and tend to ignore these works, more or less. However, I consider them to be a fascinating group for that very reason – highly idiosyncratic and beyond their time. Botticelli might have felt that a younger generation was about to surpass him and therefore went to extremes to define his own way. Those paintings have often been connected with the fanatical Dominican preacher Savonarola, but some scholars have become sceptical about this way of interpreting them. Rightly so, as the Florentine friar favoured paintings that were simple and naturalistic – almost exactly the opposite of what you can say about late Botticelli's style.

It was in 2009, on the recommendation of Keith Christiansen, that I first came across this both stunning and puzzling *Man of Sorrows*. At that time, the painting was included in the exhibition *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion* at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt on which I collaborated. I had the pleasure to publish the picture for the first time in the catalogue (pp. 354–357, cat. 78) and to examine it closely during the exhibition. It was mentioned only marginally by Ronald Lightbown in his 1978 monograph, but in 1963 Federico Zeri had already attributed it to the master in a Sotheby's expert's report.

The use of subtle gradations of light and shade to model the face of Christ can indeed be compared

Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipep) Pieta - Lamentation of Christ - (*1495) (Wiki Commons)*

Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipep): Man of Sorrows *(c 1500)*
Oil on panel

(Wiki Commons)

with portraits by Botticelli, while the formation of the hands, including specific anatomical anomalies such as the bent little finger, is also typical of this painter's late period. Botticelli used the crown, fashioned from a greenish-blue branch with long, sharp thorns, in an identical form in the *Lamentation of Christ* in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan.

Above all, however, we must direct our attention to the elongated figures of the angels. With their exalted movements and generously measured, billowing garments, and even in such details as their wings and feet, they are closely related to the circles of angels in the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the Uffizi and in the *Mystical Nativity* of 1501 in the National Gallery in London. In both quality and complexity, the painting surpasses other half-length depictions of Christ from the Botticelli workshop. That does, of course, not exclude some minor intervention by assistants as was common in several Botticelli paintings.

The uniqueness and pictorial intelligence of the iconographic invention – a feature unparalleled in Italian art – also speak in favour of the work's attribution to Botticelli. The painter shows Christ as a strictly frontal half-length figure, yet he has subtly circumvented the symmetry, using a turn of the neck to shift the head toward the left. The eyes also evade precise conformity to the symmetrical design of the face. By placing the fingers of his left hand in a slit in the crimson fabric, which corresponds to the thrust of the lance, Christ calls attention to the wound, although it is actually concealed beneath his robe.

The halo formed by angels bearing the Arma Christi is a bold invention; set off in grisaille against the black background, these figures are identified as inhabitants of a different realm. With fluttering robes, they encircle the head of the Redeemer in flight, adhering to an orbit that continues behind his hair.

In this painting, Botticelli combined several thematically interrelated pictorial types whose iconographic traditions occasionally overlap: a feature of the Man of Sorrows is the display of the scars; The Ecce Homo is alluded to by the crown of thorns, the purple robe, and Christ's bonds; finally, it was the Vera Icon from which Botticelli adopted the strict frontality of the upright head.

This method of combination which operates on the levels of both form and content is as characteristic of Botticelli's devotional pictures as the principle of 'detemporalisation' which isolates motifs and their significance from their narrative contexts and condenses them into complex symbolic images. The latter merge theological indoctrination with the endeavor to spark the viewer's emotions. Thus, the Man of Sorrows not only represents an important example of Botticelli's late period, but also adds a striking facet to our understanding of the depiction of Christ in the Renaissance.

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Sandro Boticelli: My View of Man of Sorrows

Frank Zöllner

Sandro Botticelli was perhaps the best and most famous painter of his generation in Florence, not least because of his very distinctive personal style. Botticelli's contemporaries already appreciated this masculine style, presumably thinking of the striking facial features of his male figures. Characteristics of this style include high cheekbones, strong eyebrows, and sensuous lips. In addition, there is the somewhat mannered design of the hands. Often the little finger is bent to a small degree and placed at a short distance from the adjacent finger.

At first glance, many of these stylistic features apply to the *Man of Sorrows*, sold for $39.5m ($45.4m with fees) at Sotheby's, New Yorkk. However, in my view, some of the details in the *Man of Sorrows* warrant a closer reading. For example, the little finger of the right hand is not elegantly bent, but curved, and in such a way that it is as if the finger is made of a flexible chunk of rubber. I find it hard to imagine that Botticelli, who of course knew his anatomy, would have made such a mistake. It is also worrying that this little finger is noticeably turned outwards, so that its fingernail appears in a slightly foreshortened perspective.

The overall clumsiness of the hands is also striking, especially in comparison to the standards of elegance that usually characterise Botticelli's works. This lack of elegance also applies to the angels, who are arranged in a round dance around the head of Christ and carry his instruments of suffering. Rightly, this halo of angels has been compared to Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* in London. But while the angels in the London painting exude Botticelli's typical refinement and are highly individualised, the *Man of Sorrows* is surrounded by stereotypical figures for which I find it difficult to credit Botticelli himself. The robes look like sausages that are squeezed in by strings at regular intervals. And this design of the robes does not fit the forms of the angels, who are celestial beings and therefore should actually emanate a supernatural elegance. Unlike the angels in the *Mystic Nativity*, which are designed with subtlety, in the Man of Sorrows they are not.

Also among the characteristics of Botticelli's personal style is his tendency to occasionally shape the

mouth somewhat asymmetrically. This stylistic feature applies to the *Man of Sorrows* as well. However, here the upper lip is depicted so distinctly asymmetrically that Christ's mouth is given an almost contemptuous look. This exaggeration or emphasis of stylistic features is especially known from workshop paintings. To me, the *Man of Sorrows* is as an example of a workshop style that adopts the individual style of an artist, but is not quite identical to it.

To make the attribution of the *Man of Sorrows* more credible, reference has been made to the peculiarities of Botticelli's late style. But can this explain such clumsily designed hands and rather inelegant angels? Be that as it may, attributions are not decided in a day, and controversies over the authentication of Old Master paintings are not uncommon. Examples of this abound. The attribution of the recently auctioned *Portrait of a Young Man Holding a Roundel* to Botticelli has long been controversial, but is now accepted by most experts. Controversial to this day is the master's '*Rockefeller Madonna*' or, to cite another example, Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*. Only ten years ago, the majority of experts seemed to agree on an unqualified attribution to Leonardo. In the meantime, the majority view is probably the other way around. And if one compares the *Man of Sorrows* directly with the *Salvator Mundi*: doesn't the *Salvator Mundi* seem to be a much more important old master painting than the 'Christ with the Rubber Hands' now attributed to Botticelli? If I had the choice (and the money!) I would definitely go for the *Salvator Mundi*.

Cont. from page 3

Sex and its pictorial expression wasn't—and isn't—just about pleasure for gay men, it was a way to connect, to develop a sense of agency, empowerment, and brotherhood – it was a righteous political act. These were among the limited tools we had to construct a social architecture as a bulwark against the fascist mores of right-wing politicians and religious zealots in lieu of the fundamental rights denied to us: marriage, family, legal protection; yet taken for granted by the straight majority.

Instagram's duplicity is hidden in plain sight, in the painstaking yet tortured language of its post removal process. Use of the word 'guidelines' is untruthful; they are dictates carried on the promise that if you disobey them again you will (not *may*) lose access to your account and to your global audience, your allies and colleagues. Or, you can continue in compliance as a neutered version of your digital self.

Instagram trumpets community. Communities do exist on Instagram, but this is quite different from Instagram being a community. Its users are not a unified body nor do they all share common characteristics or interests. No one has any loyalty to Instagram, it just serves a purpose as today's most effective way to communicate visually – one day, it won't. With 1.5 billion users it is by its very nature an anti-community.

Throughout Instagram's pages of rules, the language is specific yet cloudy; informational yet unclear; declarative yet contradictory. The result is confusion heaped upon obfuscation strewn with paranoid hedging. For example, buried deep within their policies are two versions of one regulation pertaining to art: 'We also allow photographs of paintings, sculptures, and other art that depicts nude figures' while elsewhere 'nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is ok, too'. Subtle and easily overlooked is the missing '*and other art*' in the latter phrase, which consigns performance, installation and more conceptual (dangerous?) art forms to obscurity. You can appeal Instagram's removal of your post 'if you believe Instagram's decision is damaging for a group or issue you care about' but its shadowy review panel of independent experts (if they exist) issues a final decree that is dispatched with suspiciously robotic speed. There is a telling mistake in Instagram's explanation of how to make an appeal that hints at the company's disdain toward insubordination: 'Explain how Facebook or Instagram got your decision wrong.' Isn't it Instagram's decision that may be wrong?

To say that if one dislikes Instagram's policies one can post elsewhere is to miss the point. META, which owns Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook is not just a social media juggernaut; it is an encyclopedia, a vast organizing network, a local, national and international library. It is the principle pop-cultural repository – and broadcaster – of our age and so, to be consigned to lesser models is to 'be disappeared'.

Now, as ever, LGBTQ+ citizens are under attack from a resurgent conservative movement that META is (one hopes unwittingly) supporting. Its supremacy and influence come with responsibilities that cannot be avoided behind a gutless sanctioning apparatus that pretends egalitarianism while enforcing shame, displacement and prejudice. Florida's *Don't Say Gay* bill (signed into law by the state's Governor, Dollar Store Trump, Ron DeSantis) which bans conversation on gay and transgender subjects until the third grade (Ages 8-9), and Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas' terrifying comments that the law establishing gay marriage (among others) was "demonstrably erroneous" and should be reconsidered, are just two recent examples. If exceptions to META's teetering doctrines have to be made to protect and assert the rights of certain constituents in the face of unprecedented hostility, then those exceptions have to be made. Instagram and its overzealous parent have by their dominance forfeited the right to neutrality. Until they accept their role in countering tyranny, they are complicit in it.