

T68

Mianh Kelly's thesis

3RD YEAR FINE ART
N.C.A.D.

"THINGS"

THINGS

What is art? What isn't? A 'work of art' by definition must be artificial and not natural, that is to say all works of art are things which are made by man. The word 'art' was used to mean anything that was manmade, workmen were artisans, artifacts were manmade goods. Art was not always used with a capital 'A' to describe rather awe-inspiring pictures and sculptures which are kept in museums.

A thing is anything, all things are art, that is of course with the exception of natural things. Things are just about everywhere they accumulate in particular around humans, starting with the things a human has on his body, in his immediate surroundings in the room he is in, the building he is in, the street, the city, the country, the world and even space into which man has sent things to float eternally. The city man is surrounded by things, things which he believes

3/24

he could not live without. His preoccupation with certain things is amazing. His value on them, their use, their name, their part in his life their familiarity, and he accepts them without question. Things have just about taken over his whole life. The making of them and the acquiring of them are all important to him.

Some of these things are natural but for the civilized city dweller they are artificial for the most part. That is not to say that they are imitations but that they are man-made. In the case of the chair he sits on it is made of natural wood (should he be so lucky) and some man maybe with the help of machines has changed this piece of wood — what was once a tree is now under this man's backside serving the purpose of a seat. The chair is an artifact, so also is his sideboard, the door, perhaps his African woodcarvings brought back from a recent business trip might qualify as actual works of art. However, strange as it may seem, the trees from which these things originally came are not

strictly speaking art. A tree itself is not art until some man or other singles it out and decides to make a work of art of it.

Joe Soap goes out one Sunday to paint a tree. He finds one and he paints it. Having painted the picture of a tree Joe now goes home with a rectangular work of art under his arm. Of course it must be a good painting to qualify as a work of art. If Joe Soap thinks it is good, well then it is. However Joe, as with Gainsborough and Constable, has painted a tree from his very own personal observation, he has made perhaps one or two or perhaps a million small changes here and there or perhaps everywhere. If Joe's mother does not like the painting, well fair enough, Joe and his mum are two completely different individuals. One cannot expect Mrs. Soap to fully appreciate her son's personal observations. Perhaps if Mrs. Soap was shown a photograph of the tree, she might say "That's more like it." The powerful impact a tree has on its

too much on his plate, he cannot take it all in so he has to ignore some of it. His sense of hearing would not be as acute as that of a primitive man out hunting, who is sensible to all sounds around him, the sound of his prey, the birds, movements and the occasional snake in the grass.

The urban man may have good eyesight but that does not necessarily mean that he is visually aware of all that is around him. There is an adult language of vision as well as of writing and speech, artists develop and exercise this concentrated way of looking at things. Seeing things is one thing and looking at them is another. Yet if one looks at a thing with the intention of trying to discover what it means one ends up no longer seeing the thing itself. The interpretation of an object is the denial of its mystery. One cannot speak about mystery, one must be seized by it. Familiarity breeds indifference. If one becomes too familiar with an object

one is inclined to take no notice of it. It is referred to by its name, its whereabouts, its associations and the value that is placed on it. Yet objects, their images and their names have no necessary or unalterable connections. Magritte's painting "Chambre d'écoute" (a large apple in a room, or an apple in a small room) and other such paintings sets thought free from its habitual references to the familiar, free to explore the mysteries lurking in juxtaposition of everyday things and in doing so he uncovered ~~he uncovered~~ ~~the~~ depths of terror and delight in the most devious situations.

Man Ray also likes to disturb our normal assessment of reality by use of dislocation and confrontation. His choice of commonplace objects, often things which are child-like in their simplicity, bed springs, clothes irons, coat hangers, are yet mysteriously disturbing in the surprises they bring. Man Ray's choice of an object, which by its very selection becomes intriguing, the placing

of this object or objects in a combination with another object with which it is not usually associated and an addition of a title, promotes the object to a new existence. Man Ray gets together two bed springs and calls his piece "It's Springtime". His piece called "Obstruction" consists of numerous coat hangers each hanging from each other. One of his most intriguing pieces is that of the metronome with the eye attached to it -ward

Marcel Duchamp's preoccupation with the character and authenticity of objects, even the most ordinary, led to the discovery of his "Ready-mades". He took the object out of its customary setting and placed it in an unfamiliar one. A urinal which men perhaps more so than women are accustomed to seeing attached to white tiled walls in public conveniences is certainly in unfamiliar ground when placed on a gallery wall side by side with "fine arts". Deprived of its plumbing and because of its new situation the

urinal's usefulness has disappeared. The urinal is no longer a urinal, one cannot urinate in it. However man's long association with urinals still lingers on and it is difficult to dispel one's previous experience and knowledge of urinals to look at it as a thing in itself.

Duchamp signed his piece R. Mutt but whether or not R. Mutt or M. Duchamp made it with his own bare hands is of no significance — Duchamp chose it. Not all objects are familiar to everyone. In the case of R. Mutt's urinal, I would imagine that very few women were acquainted with this object. Their reaction to it was probably different than that of the men. In fact I doubt if very many men were familiar with it either, they were still pulling chains back in those days. The same applies to his bottle rack although a very common device in France for drying bottles it must have been quite new to the American eye. Such objects have never ceased to tantalize

or infatuate their viewers. But are they "art"? If so then every other urinal, snowshovel, and bottle-rack in the world are works of art. If one mass produced object can be a work of art, then cannot all be. But before a work of art can be made or chosen, it must first be conceived in the artist's mind, every work of art is a mental event. Duchamp was interested in ideas and not merely in visual products.

Why paint the image of an object, why not present the object itself? If Sebastian Stoskopff were to have presented a real basket of glasses rather than the image of them, surely the effect would have been more shattering. Nearly three hundred years later and God only knew how many "still lives" later Magrelli got together a real live "still life" by placing an actual bottle and a stone bowl in a setting of plaster planes which he had constructed.



When Jim Dine not so many "still lives" later attached a real china wash basin to a painting Roy Lichtenstein had this to say about it "It doesn't look like a painting of a thing, it looks like the thing itself."

Harold Rosenberg was of the opinion that the work of art became more and more "a thing added to the world of things rather than a reflection of things that already exists" When Rosenberg made "The Bed" he used an actual mattress and bedclothes and with the addition of a few of his own personal touches eliminated the previous distinction between the real object and that which represents it.

Jasper Johns had a different way of going about things. Instead of making sculpture which tried to duplicate real objects, he turned the original object into a replica of itself, making it seem as though the objects were trying to become sculpture. When things like beer cans, light bulbs, flash lights

came to mind, Johns rather than presenting them two dimensionally on a canvas, he turned to sculpture to shorten the distance between life and art. Although his beer cans look like beer cans Johns says "my beer cans have no beer in them. They look like beer cans but aren't". Rather than presenting the actual object itself, as in the case of the beer cans, he presents something different. The cast bronze cans without a drop of beer are not beer cans. The lightbulb is not a lightbulb, trying to get a bronze lightbulb to light up would be like trying to get blood out of a turnip. Johns use of bronze rather than some other not so traditional material gives one the impression that the objects are desperately trying to become sculpture.

Johns painted only what was already two dimensional, flags, targets, numbers. Rather than painting a flag flying on a post with some American background scenery behind it, Johns simply painted

a flag, it was not a painting of a flag - it was a flag. The work is looked at rather than into. Instead of painting a background, the background of the painting became the wall it hung on. However Johns flag does not fly, nor does he want viewers shot at his target and if one were lost in the middle of the United States of America Johns map would be of no help at all. Wesselman who uses actual objects in his work had this to say of one of his pieces, "I use real objects in my work because I need to use them not because objects need to be used. . . . My rug is not to be walked on."

Once upon a time while Miro was out for an afternoon stroll he picked up a brushed up old tin can and immediately went into an enraptured discussion with his companion, on its beauty using terms which one usually reserves for 'master-pieces'. His companion showed some



13/

Surprise in this unusual engrossment with this piece of old rubbish. But Miró's opinion was, in the name of what scale of values should these objects be considered less admirable than a rose or a yacht. Although Miró does not despise the masterpieces of galleries he refuses to grant them greater importance than to the bashed up tin can. He stays at the same distance from all things, that is to say, he is as near one as he is to the other and he possesses the same inexhaustible power of wonderment before each one. In Miró's work one does not see direct images of objects, his images are more imaginative. Yet as the basis of the imagination there is always reality. What is imagined cannot operate without what is real, without what is there, shaping our everyday lives. No one can totally ignore all that is around one.

Some things became things of the past, some of which became collectors items.

14/

Certain exhibits and even the most mundane things of the past became treasured objects and are given more importance than they ever had in their history. Objects were put on mantelpieces, glass cases, pedestals and some even got as far as museums.

Curiosity pieces became more curiouser and curiouser. Objects became treasures, their use was of no significance, they were now being presented as things in themselves. Granted certain things increased in their value because of their rarity, and will continue to do so, thus making good investments. Others are kept for nostalgic reasons, for quality and good craftsmanship.

However there are certain items which do not qualify under any of these categories, they are kept simply because they are liked.

More and more things are being made everyday. Factories and men are churning them out by the million. There are more things in the world today than there were



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USE ONLY THE BEST OF OILS FOR WITH PERFECT RESULTS

GUINNESS

READY MIXED
CAMP
COFFEE
WITH
CHICORY

PERRIN
SAUCE

MARMITE
YEAST EXTRACT

EGG
POWDER

LYLE'S GOLDEN
SYRUP

Cigarettes 20



yesterday and tomorrow there will be more things than there are today. Millions of people make their living out of making things, selling things, designing things, advertising things, putting things together and pulling things apart and even destroying things in order to make more things.

Things change with time too, what was once red and square might be triangular and green today. They may be the same as ever or they may be improved, they may be bigger or they may be smaller, so as to make room for all the other things. They may have a new image and be marketed in new packages. One no longer sees things in ones and twos, but by the hundred. Massive mountains of baked beans in supermarkets. Heinz alone sell 1,250,000 cans of baked beans per day. Shelves and shelves of products coming in all different sizes, colours and materials. After all variety is the spice of life. Heinz alone boast of having fifty seven varieties.

Little does Mrs. Soap realize how much trouble and hard work went into getting that particular pea on the end of her fork, chefs, designers, quick-foot-jammed-in-the-door salesmen, advertisers, packaging experts, marketing men, neon signs, posters, billboards, magazine advertisements and television and radio advertisements.

The visual power of advertisements is inexorable, one cannot help but look at them, and may even in doing so, discover that they like them. After all, they do brighten up one's humdrum city life. A tube station devoid of advertising is a dull place. Advertising is the only form of art which can be found almost everywhere. Much of it may be bad but some of it is excellently clever and graphically ingenious, after all many a good brain has struggled with it for many a long day trying to come up with just the right thing. The people in advertising know what the public wants, what they like and know how



to get their message across with the utmost effect. They have the power not only to give the public what it wants but also to make the public want what they give it. A graphic work framed and hung in a small gallery is seen by few and admired by the right people. However the posters that adorn billboards and their numerous brothers and sisters may be admired by the wrong people but they are seen by millions. This may be disastrous but should the graphic be good it is tremendous. Unfortunately the only reason advertising is good is because it has a purpose and its purpose is to sell. The power of advertising is tremendous, it reaches out to everyone.

If only artists could have this power they might put it to better use, but advertising is backed by money and it is in places like the United States of America that one finds the biggest advertising. Many a person has turned up their nose at the mention of advertising, but what about people like Toulouse-Lautrec and Mucha?

One is inclined to turn up their eyes at the sight of pop art and their ears at the sound of pop music, but did not the Beatles and the Rolling Stones spring from this same era. Pop art is popular, it is of our times, not of times past or times to come but about here and now. Things which are familiar to the average person (should there be such a person) not just to the rare few. The artists of the Pop era, unlike Jee Seap who went out of his way to find something to paint, have only to open their eyes in the morning to see an ashtray of cigarette butts, to open the kitchen cupboard to find a can of soup, to open a magazine to find the image of a contemporary here, to find a child to find a comic to look out the window to see noon light. One does not have to look very far, there are millions of things surrounding one and affecting one's life. It is not surprising that the artist should turn to these things for their subject matter. Never before the world the commercial world been like this, it been

197

slowly building up to it, but in the nineteen sixties it had reached its peak — it would have been impossible not to notice it. It is not surprising that it was the American and British artists who enclosed themselves in this contemporary, popular culture of commercial images. This was the new Urban Folk Art.

The art which these artists produced was rooted in the physical experience of their own selves in relation to their surroundings. They endeavored to make an art expressive of their passionate engagement with their environment and times. To do so they made realistic presentations of mass-produced objects, which were immediately recognizable, and familiar images of their time, and so realism returned to art after fifty odd years of total abstraction.

Clas Oldenberg exaggerated the size of things, and often changed the character of his objects, what was once hard became soft and.





manipulatable. Andy Warhol used repetition and arranged his images as they might be arranged on supermarket shelves. Warhol was much taken up with supermarkets, brand names, heroes and images of our times. He says "I paint things I always thought beautiful... things you use everyday and never think about." His repetition of Coca Cola bottles, soup cans, detergent packages, monumentalize the commonplace. Not only did Warhol monumentalize the commercialities of today but he also monumentalized the heroes of our time, Elvis Presley, Liz Taylor and last but not least Marilyn Monroe. They were not so much people as symbols. Strange heroes, they were given to us, we have to have heroes, and put on pedestals by the cinema, and commercial world. Warhol revived the image of Marilyn Monroe just when everyone was about to forget it. Warhol's lurid cinema ~~spread~~ coloured images of Marilyn spread over the world like wild fire, biographies



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were written, newspaper and magazine articles, posters, printed tee-shirts, old films were revived and suddenly Marilyn seemed to be everywhere, she became a bigger star than she ever had been when alive and well and living in Hollywood.

Warhol does not live in a garret on bread and water and have once yearly exhibitions. Being a man of his times and because of his obsession with his environment, images, and ways and means, he uses modern methods, the modern media and like the advertising man, his work and name have "got around". It is not surprising that he is also involved in

film making. Like the reproduced prints, the gramophone record, the recording tape, the photograph, the film also "gets around". Film is a happening. Most of film is utter trash, but it has the potential to be the new and most powerful form of art.

James Rosenquist's work, another artist working in America, is like what one might

see on a giant billboard and like an advertisement his piece "F-111" is full of hairdryers, light bulbs, atomic mushrooms all superimposed on a segmented rendering of a jet fighter plane.

Tom Wesselman paints the great American still life, a still life of popular American consumer products. Edward Ruscha painted giant pictures of petrol stations, "Standard Station, Amarillo Texas". Art Farm, a group of artists, buried ten ~~cadillacs~~ cadillacs with their noses in the ground, which look like ducks clipping, in a Texas ranch.

Duane Hanson, his piece "Tourists" typifies the American tourist, a life size sculpture of colourful fat husband and wife with floral shirts and shorts, sandals baskets, sun hats, sun glasses and of course cameras. And with a world so full of Walt Disney cartoons, comic strips and comic books we have Roy Lichtenstein painting gross enlargements of comic strips

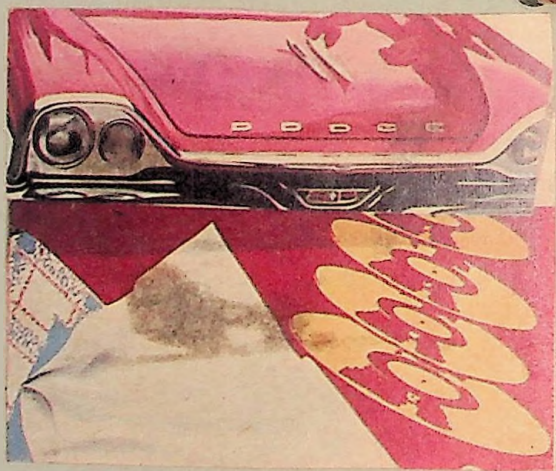


27

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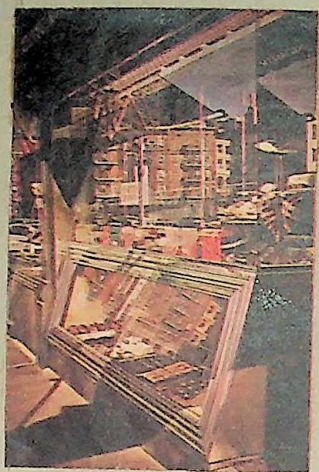




George Segal and Kienholz are more into environments and atmospheres and the people and things that make such atmospheres in their environment. The "Baconery" by Kienholz is a real environment and when inside one can feel the atmosphere, a cheap lunch counter, juke box, cigarettes vending machine, paper and magazine rack, peopled with clock faced figures, all clocks stopped at the same time and everything covered with dust.

Segal's white plaster figures give an atmosphere of eerie stillness and a suggestion of alienation. His figures are in ordinary poses and situations, in doorways, driving a bus, crossing in front of a car, in a diner. Yet the familiarity of these situations disappears on seeing Segal's work and the simple event becomes something quite new.

Clas Oldenberg is probably best known for his soft sculptures, giant objects



and imaginary projects for colossal monuments set in specific sites. Oldenburg says I am always seeing something I want to do - I see under conditions that prevent me from doing it - realizing it. It may be the situation is too public - I would be embarrassed to do it. The object of my attention may be too distant. I see it from a train or a plane. The circumstances in which his objects are placed grows from a room to a landscape. It is interesting what Oldenburg says about seeing things from a plane. This new way of travel, to move about three dimensionally in space, to see large areas from above has inspired Oldenburg to design colossal monuments for landscapes. These "Monuments for Today" are incapable of realization in most cases and Oldenburg realizes that he will never get around to doing them, however they are a new concept in art. A giant ballcock on the river Thames attached to

Tower Bridge, which would rise and fall with the tide suggesting the breathing of London. A giant ironing board for the Lower East Side in New York, assorted giant size mens hats for City Square, a lipstick for Piccadilly Circus in place of the statue of Eros.

Oldenberg did however make a large meretricious lipstick for Yale university, however it may have looked in Piccadilly, in Yale it seemed to attack the sterility and pretentiousness of the classical buildings around it. This two inch object which so many women carry around in their handbags became something of a phallic symbol once it was quantized by Oldenberg.

Oldenberg was one of the new American artists who expressed their ideas through theatre, environments and happenings rather than primarily in painting. He subjected himself to rigor.

self analyses in order to discover his own goals as an artist. It is his aim to make an art expressive of his passionate engagement with his own environment and times. He chose to live and work in New York and one can see in his work, his choice of subjects, a reflection of American life.

Art is anything, art is everywhere. One does not have to look for it, one does not have to create it, one only has to notice it. "Fine art" is locked away in museums, galleries, private collections, it may be free for all to go and see it, but it is not part of everyone's daily life. One must look closer at hand, in one's own life to find it, one must develop one's visual awareness and see the beauty, the intrigue, the mystery, the absurdity, the colour, of things around them and discover art for oneself. Art must be taken down from the high pedestal on which it stands, where no one can see it except a privileged few. Art which was once

471

what stone age man painted on cave walls
has been pushed beyond itself and it
no longer bears any relation to the
butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker
or the insurance man of today.