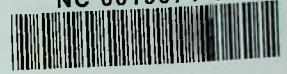


SAMES CLARK
F.A. PAINTING TESIS
FOR FRANCES RUANE

T729

NC 0019971 0



M0056269NC

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

ART AS COMMODITY:

AN HISTORICAL SURVEY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
& COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES
AND
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

BY
JAMES CLARK

MARCH 1991

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
Chapter:	
I HAWKERS AND PEDDLERS.....	9
II "THE CRITIC BLEATS".....	21
III TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.....	30
IV PRODUCT OR PROCESS.....	41
CONCLUSION.....	57
NOTES.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	62

ILLUSTRATIONS

No.		Page
1.	<u>LADY, LISA LYCN</u> by Robert Mapplethorpe.....	7
2.	<u>THE AWAKENING OR VENUS AND PSYCHE</u> by Gustave Courbet.....	19
3.	<u>MANET PROJEKT '74</u> by Hans Haacke.....	50
4.	<u>WRAPPED MONUMENT TO LEONARDO</u> by Christo.....	51
5.	<u>VALLEY CURTAIN</u> by Christo.....	52
6.	<u>NESTLEAD ABBEY</u> by Frank Stella.....	53
7.	<u>KASTURA</u> by Frank Stella.....	54
8.	<u>DEPARTURE</u> by Philip Guston.....	55
9.	<u>EDGE</u> by Philip Guston.....	55
10.	<u>UNTITLED</u> by Philip Guston.....	56

INTRODUCTION

A work of art today is no different from food, clothing, housing, or any other consumer product. The satisfaction we get from anything - including and especially a work of art - is got at a cost. That cost is measurable in money and is negotiable on the open market. Art today has become simply a commodity, another medium of exchange.

The artist finds himself caught in the paradox of making objects but not feeling committed to them as objects. His commitment is to the process of creation and of being an artist, which is always at odds with the increasing tendency in our society to downplay the process in favour of the product, to value only the object itself. The question that arises is in what way is this object valued? Is it decided by its aesthetic qualities alone, or by the price it commands? One wonders today if the work of art has any aesthetic value left anymore, or is it indeed just a luxury commodity for which a market has deliberately been created and maintained by financially interested parties, who are neither more nor less noble than the operators of any other legal sort of market. The market value of art appears to be as artificial as that of gold or diamonds.

The beginnings of the art market as we know it can be traced as far back as the 5th. century B.C. in Greece, where the ruling classes, desirous of building their own private collections plundered works of art that had once belonged to the community as a whole. In any age whenever there was a profit to be made from the buying and selling of works of art, dealers and their agents have always been close at hand. They even had their own quarter in ancient Rome, near the Villa Publica, where works of

art were bought and sold, restored and faked, for large sums of money.

In more modern civilisations royalty and noblemen employed teams of agents to scour Europe for new acquisitions to their art collections. The principal aim then was, as now, to provide those who already had all the necessities of life with an overt way of showing that they were at the top of society's ladder. Then, as now, the art market thrived on covetousness and snobbery. Only the quality of the snobbery has changed. What was once a predominantly intellectual snobbery has now become a predominantly monetary snobbery with the growth of capitalism.

More recently sections of the increasingly financially-minded art market have outplayed the stock market. Today works of art can be used like money (in some countries) to pay estate duty when a person dies. Collectors also use them as securities, for tax avoidance, and perhaps least of all, for furnishing their homes.

Governments have also played the art game in many ways. Firstly, by sponsoring national exhibitions which thereby increase the value of the artists work shown. Secondly, by using culture as a diplomatic weapon; as in a world tour of the Mona Lisa or Tutankhamun's treasure. And thirdly, by staging Biennales that attract worldwide publicity and which award prestigious prizes to the winners. Nowadays governments are meddling in the art market in a different way. The withdrawal of funding from controversial exhibitions such as the recent Robert Mapplethorpe show, raises questions of what kind of art governments wish to support and why they should support that art which they deem to be morally offensive. This has had a knockback effect on many artists, who may feel they have to

NOTE I.

FIG. I.

"tailor" their work in order to gain funding. In reality, it is nothing more than censorship.

When this new hard-line gubernatorial attitude appeared in the 80's the market itself was changing. The economics of the time created an enormous amount of disposable income, and as the rich got richer they bought art for its investment potential, as a symbol of their prosperity and as a totem of their class. This sellers market provided the auction houses with their opportunity. They stepped in quickly, demanding huge prices while taking only a ten percent cut for themselves, and in the process excluded the dealers with their hefty fifty percent cut.

With the rise of the auction houses today's art market has now reached such levels of complexity that are far beyond the simple transaction between the artist and his patron or public. One wonders where these developments leave the artist? There is a subliminal economic pressure on all artists nowadays, not just the younger ones, but also on older artists. They feel they have to produce more and faster than they otherwise might. It is simply a matter of supply and demand and at the moment the demand is high. But in the end, the artists that profit are few. Those showing in galleries and museums are the top dogs. They are like executives, part of the management team. While the rest are like menial labourers whose job it is to support that management team. The success of the top few is measured by their distance from the others.

The role of the artist today is essentially a backroom one. He is no longer able to conceive of any personal relationship to the market. It has become an economic and hence more impersonal relationship. In the past he was encouraged to regard the business end of things as really none of his affair which

resulted in the market evolving its own autonomy independent of the artist supplying it. Nowadays the opposite is true. The artist is encouraged to play the art game. But the impersonality of the market has grown to such an extent that it now dominates and dictates to the artist.

The issues raised in this introduction will be examined more closely in the following chapters, especially the development of the relationship between the artist and the market, highlighting the stance taken by some artists, and the reaction of others when faced with the machinations of the modern art market.

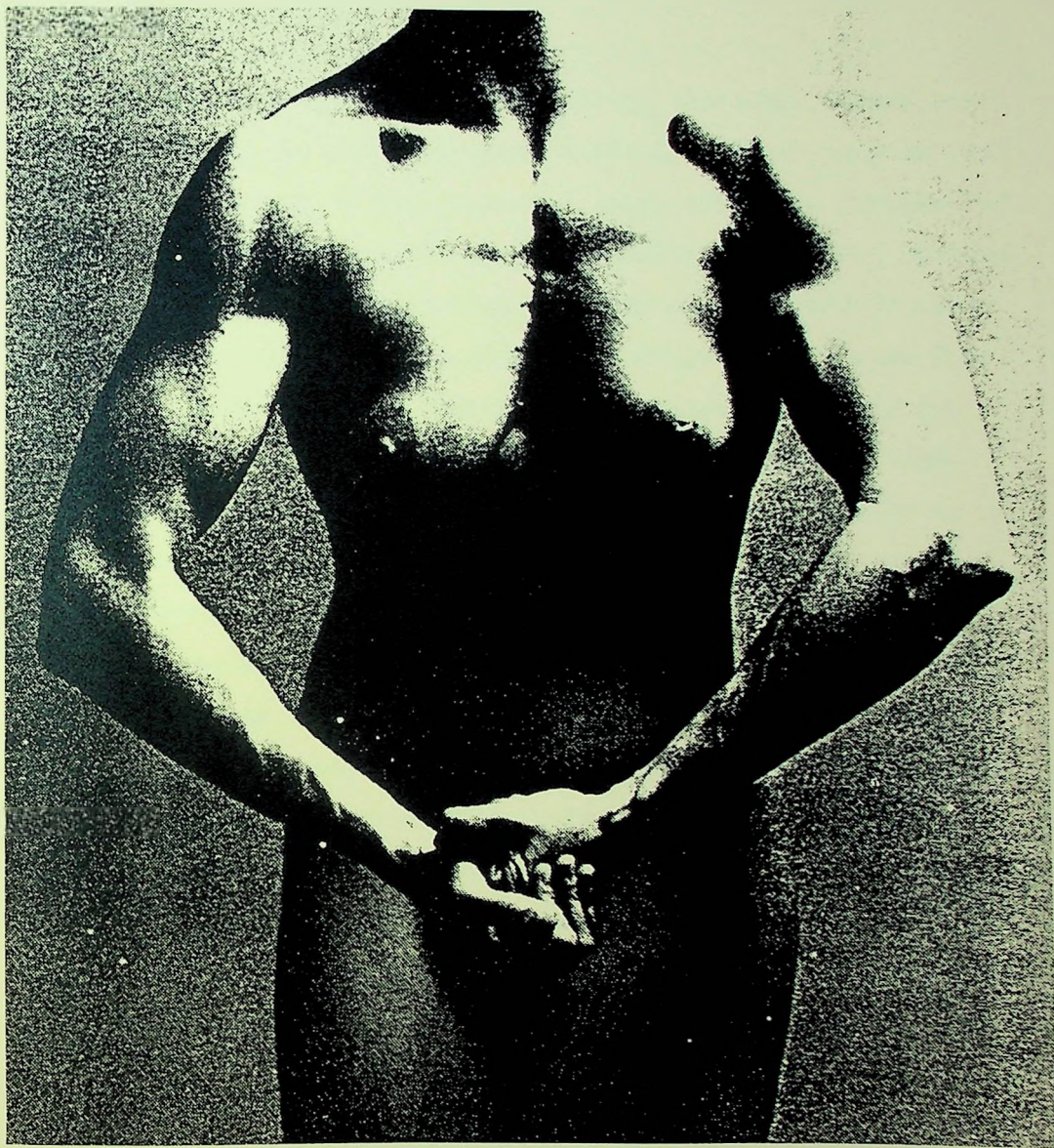


Fig. I : Robert Mapplethorpe: Lady, Lisa Lyon, 1980-82.

CHAPTER I

HAWKERS AND PEDDLERS

Since the beginning of art history there has always been those willing to sell or procure works of art, as long as there were people eager to buy them. At least since the purchase of a work of art ceased to be a direct simple transaction between a patron and an artist working directly on the patron's commission - even the humbler patron no doubt received advice from someone, while the less humble rapidly became too lofty and remote from the marketplace to negotiate such matters themselves. Soon for the job of commission^{ing} a portrait, or an altarpiece for a chapel, an entrepreneur was needed to negotiate the right price to be paid. No doubt he would have to be paid for his services by both patron and artist. Gradually a whole string of middlemen grew up. As soon as the direct link between artist and buyer was severed, a work of art might go through any number of hands before it reached an owner who wanted to keep it for himself.

What seems to have conduced more than anything else to the development of the art trade as we know it was the rise of the middle-classes as an important factor in the artist's livelihood. The prosperous burgher class of Holland began to make itself felt in the seventeenth century. Although, at that time, the directly commissioned work, especially the portrait, counted for something. The sensible middle-class Dutch preferred, when it came to choosing decoration for their homes, to have their pick from work already in existence, which they could see displayed and evaluate for themselves, rather than take the risk of commissioning a landscape, genre painting or flower piece which they might not like when they got it home. The

aristocratic patron could always reject a commissioned^s work for no other reason than that it did not please him. The middle-class patron, though, dealing with a middle-class painter, was in no position to be quite so highhanded. And if there was to be any risk in the venture of art buying, naturally he preferred it to be on the artist's side rather than his own. So, the painter began to paint as a venture, and the prospective buyer to size up what he had to sell in the studio, or more conveniently, in the shops set up for that purpose. There was already a sort of machinery in place for this, in the shape of the Guild of St. Luke (traditional patron of painters), set up in the fifteenth century to organize painters as a trade and, thereby incidentally, to regulate the sale of works of art.

These guild shops were the immediate ancestors of the art dealers as we know them today. They brought together a selection of paintings and displayed them for the benefit of prospective customers; their stocks were dependent on what was selling at the time, and they were an immediate and effective way of channeling back to the artists some idea of how the market stood. They were, at the outset, co-operative ventures set up by the artists themselves, but the step from them to shops independently run by merchants who bought paintings from artists and sold them at a profit or for the artists on commission, was a short one, quickly taken.

However, for the first time in the history of European art, painters incomes dropped significantly in Holland after 1620. This economic deterioration resulted from a huge oversupply of paintings, which occurred because the artists' guilds had disintegrated and the state no longer regulated the number of artists. The rise in demand for paintings from the middle-classes led to such a great increase in the number of painters

that the market could not bear it. As a result, many painters were forced to earn their living from non-artistic occupations. Jan Hobbema, for example, was also a tax collector and had to quit painting while at the height of his powers for purely economic reasons. Jan Steen and Aert van der Velde had to supplement their incomes as publicans. Rembrandt himself was forced to form a business partnership with his wife and son, in order to stave off his creditors, by becoming their employee/painter. Through this subterfuge he was able to save at least some of his earnings from the work he did in his later years.

The first guilds in France and Holland can be traced back to the Middle Ages, and were indeed first officially constituted in 1391. It was a straightforward professional association that guaranteed its members exclusive rights to set up as sellers of their own pictures. During the Renaissance this system fell apart, owing to the increasing cosmopolitanism of artistic milieus and to the spread of the new concept of the painter as an inspired and ungovernable genius rather than a solid tradesman. Charles I of England enthusiastically supported this view and began amassing one of the finest collections of his day. He employed agents across Europe to buy paintings and to commission new works. The activities of these agents were shrouded in an air of mystery for fear of such rival collectors as Cardinal Richelieu and the Duke of Tuscany. In 1629 alone, Charles I spent £80,000 on important works from the Gonzaga collection in Mantua.

After Charles's execution in 1649, Cromwell and Parliament ordered the sale of many of his pictures. Three commissioners - a poet, a painter and a civil servant - were appointed to dispose of the collection. Some of the pictures were used to pay court debts while others were sold directly to those who

were either buying for themselves or acting as agents for others. Buyers came from all over Europe. The Archduke Leopold William of Austria, Cardinal Mazarin and the king of Spain, Philip IV, were among the principal collectors represented. The Spanish ambassador in London, acting for the King, employed a tailor, a timber merchant, a cobbler and other equally obscure people to buy magnificent paintings by Raphael, Titian, Tintoretto, Andrea del Sarto and Durer.

Meanwhile in France, in 1648 the guild system was replaced by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, a body made of artists outside the old guild. It was set up by Louis XIV, hopefully to demonstrate the excellency of his taste and the superiority of French culture. However, academicians had to be commanded repeatedly to exhibit at the annual salon shows, as they considered all such events as vulgar and too reminiscent of shopkeepers' displays. Nevertheless, these exhibitions were to become so important and influential that the history of later French art is largely a story of the government-sponsored salon.

The Académie and its successors saw themselves as both the instructors and arbiters of art; artists were instructed in its schools, judged by its standards (it rapidly became the dictator of rights and wrongs in artistic taste and of what was and was not stylistically acceptable), and found their buying public by way of the Académie's salons.

With the revolution of 1789 artists no longer had to be members of the Académie, but if they did not find favour with the Académie's jury, or submitted works that offended their sense of decency, these artists could not expect a reasonable showing at the salons and were excluded from the market, at least until the 1860's.

NOTE 2.
FIG. 2.

In Britain things took a similar course. In 1745 William Hogarth staged a very successful sale of his own works, rivaling the then popular sales of the old masters. Some years after this, he supported a group of artists who named themselves, "The Free Society of Professors of painting", and who wished to show their own paintings in a hired room. Although the exhibition and the following auction was a failure, a start had been made towards the setting up of a Royal Academy. This was achieved in 1768.

By establishing the salon exhibitions as the normal way of marketing art, the Academies paved the way for today's dealer. The artists exhibiting would paint what they wanted to, or thought might sell, and then offer the results to a critical public which would inspect the current product and make comparisons before finally deciding what to buy. In other words, the Academies exhibitions were ideal for the small-scale, middle-class collector; they broke down still further the idea that the normal proper relationship between artist and buyer was that of client and patron, even to the extent of adding a café to the salon for the comfort of the visiting public. The painting itself was regarded as something readymade, take it or leave it, rather than as something essentially made to measure for a particular patron and a particular purpose.

Before the French Revolution the Académie's jury had been elected by limited suffrage; only honoured or decorated artists and academicians were permitted to vote. In 1868 reforms resulted in an elected jury of all artists who had exhibited in previous salons. Now that the exhibitions reflected more the tastes and styles of the majority of artists rather than those of the State, the government could no longer see any benefit in continuing to subsidise shows over which it had

virtually no control. Meanwhile the Académie still behaved foolishly in its exclusion of a large number of talented and ambitious young artists who had to find some way of access to the art buying public. Needing somewhere to show their work, the obvious answer was to turn to the private gallery, where the art dealer, with his premises for showing art, had a regular clientele to whom he could show it.

The change from the Académie salon to the private gallery was facilitated by the fact that it was becoming harder to distinguish between the collector of art and the patron. In the 18th. century the collector bought art of the past and the patron commissioned the artist of the present. But since the middle of the 19th. century, the traditional sense of the patron had become largely extinct as he was replaced by the collector attending exhibitions of contemporary painting.

The dealer of the private gallery had to employ great means of persuasion to convince the collector and to fight off the rivalry of the Académie, especially when the value of the new and difficult art was in question. It was only by "selling" the artist that the dealer could hope to sell his wares. It was logical therefore, that when risking his money on an artist's work, and in judging the likely profit margin, the dealer's natural tendency would be to take up the most conservative, conventional artists. Although the public that bought art increased in number, the dealer catered mainly for the bourgeois buyer.

Some dealers at the turn of this century were more able to combine their aesthetic ideals with their commercial interests. They felt genuine enthusiasm for their artists, paying them a regular income in return for some of their paintings. The case of Paul Durand-Ruel is well known. He did more than any other

single person to create the ideal image of a modern art dealer. He was an expert in art as well as business; a patron to artists, and shrewd assessor of quality for the speculating buyer. But ironically, after a lifetime of dealing and collecting 1500 impressionist and post-impressionist paintings, he died virtually penniless.

Durand-Ruel's idealistic image as a promoter of living artists is sharply contrasted by that of Joseph Duveen, a dealer who only dealt on works of art of the past. Duveen is probably the greatest and most famous of all art dealers. He outsold, outspent and outwitted more dealers and collectors than anyone else in any age. His success was based on the most practical of choices; which was to aim his sales at the very rich. People that were not interested in pictures as such, but could be provided with reasons why they should buy them, such as tax evasion and ironclad investments. The newly-acquired fortunes of the American industrial aristocracy had to be spent, and Duveen understood the nature of the hunger for prestige felt by his millionaire clients. By asking grossly inflated prices for his wares he gained prestige and publicity for himself, as well as conditioning his clients to the privilege of paying a premium for the priceless. Through patronage of the arts the capitalist emperors could become public benefactors. Every captain of industry could set up a gallery, an institute or a foundation which would bear their names for ever.

America at that time had too much money and too little art; while Europe had too much art and comparatively little money. In redressing the balance, Duveen made an immense profit for himself. Duveen's dealings resulted in many of the old masterpieces being taken off the market and being found a

permanent home somewhere in an American museum. Thus, the increased rarity value of old pictures in a dwindling market provoked the dealers and collectors to turn to more modern painting.

In the mid 1950's the market witnessed a boom in sales of modern artworks because of the scarcity factor in masterpieces. More than that, in the case of impressionist painting, prices rocketed out of all sensible proportion. In October 1958 the moderns marched in triumph at the Goldschmitt sale in London. For example, the "Garçon au Gilet Rouge" by Cézanne fetched £220,000, and the "Public Gardens at Arles" by van Gogh fetched £132,000. If, however, we compare the sales in those days of the most popular of the moderns with those of the old masters, the dead were still well in front of the living and the recently demised. Nowadays it is the impressionists that hold the rarified position of the old masters, while Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art take the place of the early moderns.

The auction house has now superceded the private gallery in respect of sales of Impressionist and other early modern art. And with this in mind, the art world now finds itself facing a confusion concerning the aesthetic and the material value of a work of art. The money paid for an artwork should be secondary to its appreciative worth. Normally, when a work of art passes through a gallery door it should leave the world of economics. The problem is that although art has always been a commodity, it loses its inherent value when it is treated only as such by the auction house. This area deserves further investigation and will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter.

Expensive as some contemporary art has become, it is still cheap compared to the art of the past, and therefore easier to sell in an international market that has become more democra-

tic. Pictures owners are a larger group now than ever before. Hand in hand with improved living standards has come an enormous demand for "original" works of art to furnish the home. Thus, in conjunction with worldwide recession and high unemployment, thousands more people find themselves turning to painting in the hope of supplying this expanding market.

In order to satisfy the average person's demand for "original" art some countries have gone so far as to factory produce pictures. In Belgium, for example, one painting factory has had an enormous demand for Swiss landscapes. So, one man is employed to paint the sky, one the fluffy cotton wool clouds, another adds trees or a blue lake, and yet another signs the finished composition. It is also possible to buy Hong Kong produced factory paintings on the streets of Dublin for less than one third the price of a gallery painting. As far as I can see there is little difference between this mode of production and the running of the Italian renaissance and 17th. century Dutch schools, with the notable exception that the conception of the piece and the preliminary drawing would be done by the master. In addition, the pupil would learn the full craft and eventually become a master, rather than remaining a mere employee on an assembly line.

The average dealer today knows that the big names of modern art get more of the publicity and the bigger prices, but he can still make a comfortable profit selling a lot of pictures at a few hundred pounds each. Many dealers play on the client's passionate hope that the painting or sculpture of their choice will steadily, perhaps even outrageously jump in value. This has resulted in many people treating works of art like "piggy banks".

One would expect that the popularisation and wide market-

ing of art should help the public better understand the artist and his work, and enable them to grasp the fundamental value of an artwork. Instead they still need to be convinced of its material (economic) value. Witness today the popularity of Van Gogh which is largely due to the astronomical prices achieved at recent auctions.

Today's dealer still finds himself needing to persuade the buyer, by extending his arms in elegant gestures, occasionally pursing his lips as he stares bewitched at the picture he hopes so desperately to sell. This ritual vending-dance is usually accompanied by florid expressions about "the painter's creative and dramatic use of colour", "his inexplicable ability to handle paint", or "the extraordinary way he filled each corner of the canvas with explosive feeling". This self-evident verbiage has been further extended and exaggerated by the dealer's ally in marketing hype - the critic. And the part played by the critic in the selling of art cannot be overstated.

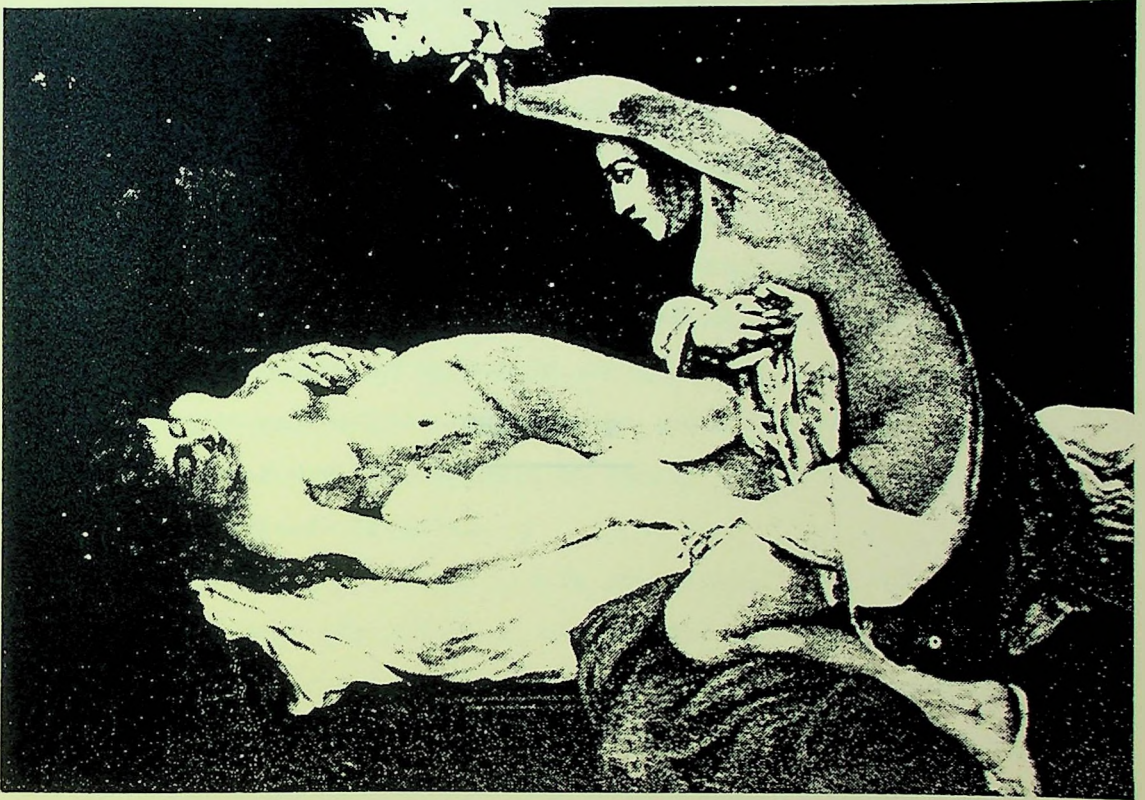


Fig. 2: Gustave Courbet: The Awakening of Venus and Psyche, 1864
(destroyed).

CHAPTER 2

"THE CRITIC BLEATS"

Robert Wraight, in his book "The Art Game Again" published in 1974, quotes Kurt Schwitters: "Critics are sheepborn, sheepsuckled by a schoolmarm and half asheep (sic) when faced with a work of art. The difference between artist and critic is this: the artist creates, the critic bleats."

NOTE 3.

In the early days of the Académie Royale in France, the "bleating" critics could be heard echoing each others obsequious and fulsome reviews of salon exhibitions. Louis XIV's government was no doubt delighted with such sychophantic approval of the spectacles it had created. When independent art critics began to appear in the mid 18th. century both government and artists reacted with shock and dismay. Artists, in fact, refused to even hold an exhibition in 1749 in protest at the unwanted intrusion.

The early independent critic saw himself as a "signpost", able to direct the public by his ability to distinguish good works of art from rubbish. As he usually promoted work that he liked, it was inevitable that the reviews favoured the artist. In those early days of art criticism the written material was invariably deadly earnest, pompous, dull and rarely critical. There were probably many reasons for this state of affairs. One of them was the pressure, real or imaginary, exerted by a journal's advertisers, most of whom were the dealers who put on the shows that were being reviewed. Another reason probably, was the closer relationship that had developed between artists and critics. Often, before reviewing a show, the critic had already visited the artist in his studio, became friendly with him and intoxicated by his personality or by the romantic atmosphere surrounding him. Thereafter a dangerous element of

hero-worship coloured the critic's attitude to that artist, so that he could no longer be an impartial viewer of his work.

The mythology of the artist as inspired visionary, eccentric outsider and creative genius encouraged dealers to promote the whole of the artist: work, personality and attitudes. It was only by selling the artist in this way that the dealer could hope to sell his wares and his most effective ally in this campaign was the art critic. The dealers were quick to realise that the critics could publicise their artists and their works. And rather than promote directly, they encouraged seemingly unbiased promotion through art magazines. So that when it came to explaining and putting over unexpected and original artwork the better critics and the better dealers happily joined hands.

In 1869 an apparently independent magazine, the "Revue Internationale de l'Art et de la Curiosité" was set up by Paul Durand-Ruel, the famous art dealer of impressionist painting. The Revue was one of the most clever tricks in the history of art marketing. He used it to bring before the public the artists he was dealing in and to help explain their work. It appeared as a critical presentation, while in fact it was simply promoting works for sale. Thus, an artificial situation arose that established the art critic as a missionary spreading the word of modern art. But while the critic may justify his role by promoting work that he liked, he was and remains so today, just another cog in the marketing machine.

Nonetheless, it was inevitable that at some stage critics would tire of the persistent pressure dealers subjected them to, and would voice opinions quite independent of market influence. The risk accompanying this position was, and still

is, that the critic could dislike the artwork because he disliked the artist. In what way therefore, can the critic be true to himself? Love the artist but damn the work, or damn the artist and love the work? Or love them both, or damn them both?

The critic today can help to make or break artists' reputations. The critic Robert Hughes, never afraid to speak his mind, once described Julian Schnabel's work in Time magazine as "tailor-made to look important ... but his line is maundering, weak and thick". Schnabel's reaction was to lampoon Hughes in his 1987 autobiography as "Robbie Huge" who wrote for "Space" magazine. On legal advice the offending paragraph was withdrawn before publication.

Such is Hughes's reputation that he can afford to take a hard line in his criticisms. But on the other side of the coin, the lesser known critics often have to stay within the boundaries drawn by the publishers. A case in point concerns the removal of the editor of "Artforum" magazine in the 1970's after he took a stronger critical line and included more photographic artwork. The publishers may have felt justified in their action in that they had to defend the commercial viability of the magazine by keeping the advertisers happy. But while most private dealers would claim that they never read art magazines or criticism, it is they nonetheless who support the magazines through advertising.

Artforum takes in fifty to sixty percent of its income through advertising; the majority of which comes from private galleries. Most of the writing in magazines like Artforum more often than not confirms existing ideas and reputations than it propagates new ones. Art magazines merely serve to influence curators, gallery owners and artists and point them

in the right direction.

It seems that only in the case of contributing editors can one expect a more human and freely-voiced opinion. Thomas McEvilley, who contributes to Artforum, believes in a certain amount of quality control and praises what he admires; at the same time criticising work that he feels either lacks quality or appropriateness. He also feels that part of his responsibility is to criticise the magazine itself. As an academic, he sees himself as a guiding-light, whose role is not only to evaluate, but to establish what values are, or should be. The question which arises here is where does he place himself in the system? Is there an external position from which to look at art in an objective or disinterested position? In admitting that his judgement is relative he cannot prevent discrimination, and his attitude certainly presupposes and to some extent precludes critical dialogue.

The late Dr. Willi Bongard, publisher and editor of the Cologne-based market newsletter "Art Aktuell", attempted to assess commercial value against an artist's reputation in the art world. From one hundred artists he worked out a points system based on where they had exhibited, how many feature articles had been published on their work, which important private and museum collections had acquired their work, and which international survey exhibitions had included them. Each gallery, museum or magazine was awarded a certain number of points depending on the rating Dr. Bongard gave them; a one-person exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for instance, was worth considerably more than one at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. A one-person exhibition was in itself worth more points than participation in a group exhibition. Against the accumulated

points scored (for some years Joseph Beuys came first with Jasper Johns close behind), Dr. Bongard would research the price of a standard work for each artist, and on the basis of the price/point ratio would make comments as to whether each artist's work was inexpensive or overpriced, good value or bad. For 150 deutschmarks per year a gallery owner, museum director, collector, critic or artist could obtain a monthly newsletter containing Bongard's opinionated views on upcoming art fairs, exhibitions, artists, prices and deals.

Bongard's writings may appear as the ultimate in disinterested criticism, but his top 100 ratings were somewhat predictable since they were culled from his contacts with the major tastemakers of Europe. He regularly legitimated a cadre of largely white, largely male artists on the basis of their financial and institutional clout. Furthermore, a streak of nationalism sometimes tainted his exhortations to buy German art, and his repeated focus on favourites such as Joseph Beuys, Arnulf Rainer, Gunther Uecker, Stefan Wewerka and Menashe Kadashman was not without ethical problems. Artists and dealers of all ilks even sent ingratiating letters (with a few notable exceptions like Tom Wesselman, who wrote a polite but firm reply expressing no interest whatsoever in Bongard's enterprise) that rendered the intimate tone of their correspondence rather suspect.

All this goes to show that Bongard had no interest in the inherent, aesthetic value of art as such. What fascinated him was his manipulation of the rules of the game played out in the art market. And by such manipulation he could fashion styles for potential investment. Such a philistine approach can only lead to the total commoditisation of art and even-

tually the artist himself.

For the times Bongard's voice was an unusual one; his surveillance of the marketplace began when rigorous anti-commercialism was the status-quo, when artists such as Carl André sold work at a percentage of the client's income, and dealers and museum directors eschewed commercial venues and boycotted art fairs.

In the late 1970's art criticism had become as tricky a business as art itself. The artist had reduced his own invention to a minimum, and so the critic felt obliged to resort to his own powers of invention in order to fill his column. The exponents of New Realism, Op Art, Minimalism, Land Art, Conceptual and Process Art gave away very little as to what they were about. Therefore minimal explanation from the artists produced maximalist critics. Having little or nothing to write about with passion, nor daring to write with honesty, they invented words. Robert Wraight in his book "The Art Game Again" gives us some marvellous passages from the art critics of the time. Joe Hirshhorn, speaking of a Sol LeWitt show, describes how:

NOTE 4.

'His concern with orthogonals and modular measure dominated post - and - lintel architecture during centuries of anthropomorphic sculpture. LeWitt's structures have always been related to their architectural contexts - if only by having primary measurements determined by the ability to pass through the average door. To me, the visual activity demanded by LeWitt's work has always been less like that of Rembrandt or Brancusi (which themselves fuse direct information of "signs" into artistically interpreted "symbols") than that of "reading"

directly informative "signs" in a temporary additive sequence without any artistically provided interpretational fusion. Of course, Lewitt limits the meaningful information of what is "read" to itself as visually perceived phenomena; his absolutely non-utilitarian "signs" demand reception from a free, active, and wide-ranging thoughtfulness for further significance.

This sort of flatulent drivel does nothing to enhance the artist's work, but merely serves to mystify the public and the potential buyer, and to try and convince them that the value of the work is such that it defies their understanding.

Taking their cue from the critics the artists themselves started including their own art statements in exhibition catalogues. Although some of them write well about their own work, the majority do not. Nevertheless, what they have done is to reverse the old critic-artist relationship, in which the simple artist didn't understand what he had created until the great critic came along and explained it to him. Thereafter, the artist would use the critic's words to explain his work to others, until finally he came to believe in them himself. Thus, in the 1970's, we had the extraordinary situation in which art critics were increasingly being forced to relinquish their true function to the word-spinning whizz-kid artists, and occupy themselves with criticism, not of the artist's art, but of his ideas about art and his literary ability in expressing those ideas.

In the same period, parallel to these developments, other critics attacked the mainstream of modern art which seemed locked into abstract and formal mannerisms favouring the look of the work over its content. Changes in the fashions and

styles of art itself only became evident towards the end of the decade. One dramatic shift was the end of the twenty year American dominance of the international art world (through magazines, art fairs, international biennales and survey exhibitions). A younger generation of European artists began to steal the limelight. There was a new spirit in art - subjective, intuitive, painterly, romantic, historical and bombastic - which gradually began to dominate the art world.

The return to easel painting alongside the modernist mainstream, broke down, perhaps for good, the rigid one style, one critic, one wave formula that had held sway till then. Many diverse styles of many diverse critics appeared. Perhaps this is a healthier state of affairs, even if it seems confusing for the art dealers, the art collectors, the art speculators, the art curators, and even many artists and art critics.

With the rise of the auction house in the 1980's, the art dealer has been virtually excluded from the proceedings and, to a lesser extent, so has the critic. He now finds himself in the position of only being able to comment on the transactions of a sale, the fantastic prices achieved, and its effect on the market rather than the artistic merits of the work on sale. Such has been the bombardment by public relations people from the various auction houses, keen to promote their booming trade and gain capital from favourable reviews, that many critics now find themselves resisting covering auction previews, because of possible conflicts of interest.

CHAPTER 3

TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

Since the early 1980's dealers have been gradually cut out of the art game by collectors buying directly at auction. And by 1988, when the auction room had been transformed into a hothouse of feverish extravagance where gilt-edged people in evening dress applauded winning bids as though they were arias sung by heroic tenors, private dealers (especially those dealing in the work of dead artists) had less margin of resale to work with. Their market share today is still enormous, but the auction houses are after it and it is shrinking rapidly.

In the old days the private buyer tended to go to the dealer. The dealer went to the auction, bought and restored paintings, and sold them to clients. The dealers had knowledge and experience and were generally respected and trusted. But the auction houses in the eighties changed the way art was "consumed". Many new buyers entered the art market by raising their hands at an auction, and in consequence they cut out the middlemen. The work of art became purely a product to be sold to the highest bidder. In their transactions the auction houses took a cut from both buyer and seller with no sense of duty, responsibility or loyalty involved.

The modern auction houses are backed by sophisticated marketing machines, that have increased the profile and interest in art considerably, with the result that many new buyers, in the main business people, seduced by the investment potential and status conferred by art ownership, have entered the market. For some there is a real interest in the subject, while others treat it as a commodity in the crudest terms. The hard lesson of the past decade is that liquidity, to many people, may be all that art means.

To the average outsider, the recent high profile of the auction house may appear something of a novelty. It is due to a heavy media concentration on the last excessive price paid for a single work of art. But in reality, the grip of the auction house on the art market is nothing new. Since antiquity the greeks have supplied the roman world, especially the richer classes, with copies of original works from the greek capital. There are also records of plunder sold at auction in Rome in order to pay for the expenses of various wars. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius sold at auction rare works of art taken from the Emperor Hadrian's collection in order to replenish his treasury.

As the trade in art continued to increase throughout history, we observe that in the more advanced bourgeois states (such as Venice or Flanders) something like the art market of today was forming. In the 16th. century, sales, according to ancient custom, were held in market squares. In Antwerp, work intended for the bourgeoisie was sold at the friday markets. With time the trade became more selective and international in character, and the value given to works of art increasingly followed the laws of supply and demand.

In 1557 the crash of the Antwerp stockmarket and high inflation following the importation of large quantities of gold from the New World significantly encouraged the trade in art objects. Their commercial value soon became more precisely determined. The prices were first influenced by the age of piece, then by whether the critics considered it equal to the work of the ancients, and lastly whether the work was produced by a dead master. It is important to note here that at that time prices were regulated by the artists themselves. In Antwerp, the Guild of St. Luke controlled a bourgeois market,

while in Italy, the judgement and evaluation of art was still the province of the master artists who catered still only to the royal courts and the high aristocracy.

Because collecting had become popular with the bourgeoisie, sales had increased everywhere. Not only in Italy and Holland who produced the most paintings, had the largest sales and lowest prices, but also in London and Paris where much higher prices were achieved. Entire Italian collections were sold en bloc in the latter markets. Tourists in general, and the English in particular, eagerly purchased thousands of paintings of landscapes in Italy. These found their way into English country houses, where they remained until postwar economic crises forced their more recent owners to sell them. Auctions were frequent particularly in France and England.

The first regular auction room with fixed prices was founded in London in 1690 in Covent Garden by Edward Millington, and was rapidly joined by others. In 1766 one of the world's most famous and important auction rooms was established in Pall Mall by James Christie in the former paint shop of Richard Dalton. Previous to this the usual place for an auction to be held was on the property of a former owner of the goods to be sold. And as the owner was usually a member of the aristocracy, his possessions could be viewed by all sorts of people, who seeing how the rich lived and collected works of art, were moved to collect in a small way themselves. The auction sales of the eighteenth century therefore, served as powerful popularisers in the collection of art. By the mid-eighteenth century the passion for collecting had grown to such a degree that a writer in the "St. James's Chronicle" in April 25, 1761 wrote:

'It is a well-known melancholy truth that the tribe

of auctioneers, connoisseurs, picture-dealers, brokers, menders, etc. etc., have monopolised the trade of pictures, and by their authority, interest and artifice with the great, have made it a matter of ridicule to purchase any modern production, or encourage an English artist. By this craft the leaders of taste of these kingdoms acquire fortunes and credit, whilst many of our painters, men of genius and industry, are absolutely starving'.

Sales in Paris at this time were still somewhat haphazard, generally taking place in the houses of former owners. But regular auctions were held in the monastery of Grands-Augustins, in the Hotel Aligre in the Rue St. Honoré, in the Hotel des Américains and in the Salle Lebrun. It was not in fact until 1854 that the official centre for art sales, the Hotel Drouot, was organised.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the entry of the United States into the field of art collecting. At that time the general level of american taste was extremely low, with mainly mediocre genre paintings prominent on the market. It was only after 1900 that the magnates of american industry and finance began to accumulate the extraordinary collections of traditional art. Such names as Andrew Mellon, J. Pierpont Morgan, and Henry Clay Frick have become part of art history due to the dealings and activities of Joseph Duveen.

The profile of the auction house was somewhat eclipsed from the beginning of this century up until now by the rise of a more assertive and aggressive type of dealer who succeeded in popularising the language and ways of the art market. Whereas in the past they were known only to art dealers and

their close associates, now they could be openly discussed by industrialists, financiers and business people in general. However, the average american collector had vastly more money than sense or sensibility. He either bought in bulk according to his own whims, or he would put himself in the hands of a reputable dealer who would more than likely promote that art in which he had a vested interest. The collector Andrew Mellon for example, insisted on an excellent state of preservation, disliked dark pictures and demanded both that the work be a masterpiece of its own kind and in accord with his own personal taste.

The american attitude to art collecting infected everyone else in the art business: the artists, the dealers, the auctioneers, the small collectors and even the art critics. The capricious collector has also been responsible for the selection and evaluation of artworks (whether traditional or modern, and particularly the latter) destined to enter museums. Thus the evolution of public taste may itself be traced back to the sometimes eccentric purchases of the private collector. Largely because of him the art trade has lost whatever dignity it may have had. Now it has shown itself to be a business like any other for marketing a commodity at the biggest possible rate of profit. Buying pictures for the love of art at the upper end of the market is virtually a thing of the past.

While Duveen had only dealt in old masters, others such as Durand-Ruel and Ambroise Vollard found collectors - just discovering the Impressionists - flocking to buy from them art which they hoped would be profitable to them in the near future. The popularity of Impressionist paintings and the high prices they began to command then, has been maintained

throughout this century, and most recently in these days of economic liquidity their rarity value has pushed prices through the roof.

The bloated prices commanded in the 1980's at auction, was helped by a punitive rewriting of the american tax laws, which destroyed all incentive for the rich to give their art away to the museums and caused a resurgence in auction house sales. Until then, tax exemption for those making donations was the basis on which american museums built their present collections. With the new legislation and the huge cuts in arts' funding, museums now find themselves starved of the means to acquire new works, with disastrous results for the future. As collectors flock to the auction houses in order to pay off tax debts, the museums, with inadequate buying budgets, find themselves unable to bid against the absurd prices. This has the inevitable result of collections draining out of America towards Japan and Europe.

There is no-one more objective than the new class of European and Japanese investor. What the Japanese are doing has very little relation to collecting as it was once understood. They are quite simply investment-buying on a huge scale while giving limitless credit to those Japanese who wish to buy western art. Like their earlier american counterparts, Japanese buyers are aesthetically unsophisticated - they buy names, not pictures - but hopefully this will change with time. Meanwhile the Tokyo market still has a weakness for pretty little Renoirs and low-rated Ecole de Paris painters like Moise Kisling, whom nobody wanted a few years back; one Japanese collector is the proud owner of a thousand paintings by Bernard Buffet. But the Japanese started going after bigger game about five years ago, and already the outflow

from the 'States is immense. Contemporary art has become, quite simply, currency. The market burns off all nuances of meaning and has begun to function like computer-driven investment on Wall Street. Sotheby's and Christie's between them sold £204,000,000's worth of contemporary art in one week in November, 1989. Of this, American buying represented only a quarter; Europeans bought 34.9 % and the Japanese a huge 39.8 %.

This indicates a radically transformed market structure. In art, as in other markets after the Reaganite economic follies, America sinks and Japan rises. In this context it is fatuous to mouth banalities about art being the Common Property of Mankind. Americans now begin to view the outflow of their own art with bemused alarm - just as the Italians and Englishmen at the turn of the century, watched the Titians, Sassettas and Turners pried loose from palazzo and stately home by the teamwork of Bernard Berenson and Joseph Duveen, disappearing into American museums. The emerging lesson of the late 1980's, which is unlikely to change in the 90's, is that America no longer controls the art market to any significant degree.

The market in Ireland at present reflects international trends to a lesser degree. Economic, social and cultural forces in the 1980's all contributed in raising the value of a number of Irish painters from Lavery and Osborne to Yeats and McKelvey; but the influence of dealers cannot be ignored. Alan Hobart of Pym's gallery in Belgravia is acknowledged as a key figure in establishing a market for Irish art in London. In 1982 he devoted an exhibition to late 19th. and early 20th. century Irish art. "The Irish Revival" was an attempt to change people's perceptions and to create a school of Irish

Painting. He followed this with a series of exhibitions such as "Celtic Splendour" in 1985, "Irish Renaissance" in 1986 and "Orpen and the Edwardian Era" in 1987. The catalogues accompanying these shows were part of the attempt to package Irish art. They oozed quality and confidence in the work. In Dublin at that time, exhibition catalogues were poor by comparison, consisting mainly of photocopied sheets. Pym's catalogues were full of information on the artists, giving the work a pedigree and a sense of value. With confidence established and a niche in the market created other galleries soon followed Pym's example.

This confidence in Irish art was further enhanced by the entrance of the institution that offered an unbeatable combination: the tension, excitement and glamour that was the auction house. Christie's and Sotheby's gave the Irish market a tremendous push when they began a series of sales of "Fine Irish Paintings and Drawings". Prices achieved were beyond all expectations. John Luke's "The Bridge", estimated at between ten and fifteen thousand pounds was finally knocked down for one hundred and seventy six thousand pounds.

Now that a booming market for Irish painters had been created in London, established Irish dealers and collectors began to sit up and take notice. The boom also attracted a new type of buyer; the business investor hoping for a bargain. Most had no knowledge of art or were simply uninterested, especially when it came to contemporary art. The art that has always sold in Ireland is of the familiar kind; figurative pictures with familiar names, preferably dead artists, do especially well.

Recently one gallery in Dublin, namely the Taylor, has attempted to corner and regulate the contemporary art market

by joining forces with the auctioneers de Vere, White and Smith. The gallery's owners have claimed that they were anxious to protect the interests of their artists by assisting in all sales of their work. The idea being that only the best paintings should appear on the market and not too many at one time. Meanwhile however, the owners have dropped many of the upcoming, younger artists that they consider might be something of a risk. This change of direction comes from a gallery once considered the most reputable in the promotion of contemporary art in Dublin and Ireland, but which now appears to be nothing more than an adjunct to an auction house dealing in dead or near-dead artists.

Another gallery which works close to the commercial edge is the George in Dublin. They recently produced a series of catalogues to provide buyers with detailed information on the work shown and shortly afterwards produced an investment portfolio to show how the prices of the work had risen. The George operates as a dealer rather than as an agent and believes its buyers would like to know that the work bought would appreciate in value.

Perhaps one of the most interesting developments in the Irish art market has been the opening of a new set of sale-rooms in Belfast by John Ross & Co., specialising in contemporary art by living artists. Recently Ross & Co. sent a letter to many artists inviting them to submit work for forthcoming sales. The letter emphasised that the auctioneers would take only 10% from a sale compared to a dealer's 40 - 60%. Although sales rarely reach the reserve price many young artists have taken up the offer. I wonder perhaps if the trick is, from the artist's side, to overestimate the reserve price in order to achieve the one he hopes for. This may be good

business from the auctioneers and buyers point of view, but it does break long-standing, unwritten agreements between dealers, agents and auction houses not to poach on each others ground. For the poorer, struggling artist though, it does help keep the wolf from the door and steers them clear of the intricate financial transactions of agents and dealers.

Some gallery owners are extremely worried about this new development and its effect on the market in general. Decorative art is being purchased by people who know nothing about good painting, while excellent contemporary work, especially abstract and the newer expressionists, continually fails to do well at auction. According to Joe McWilliams, an artist and gallery owner, there is a lack of quality to be found at these sales as the best artists do not put their work up for auction and that only second-rate artists without agents would seize this opportunity to make a sale. As a dealer whose only reality is the rent, it is understandable for Mr. McWilliams to make such comments. But the same reality holds true for the artists, whichever league they are in, and painters like Camille Souter, Tony O'Malley, Paddy Collins, Louis LeBrocqy and Basil Blackshaw can hardly be said to be second-rate and lacking in quality.

Clearly the dealers in Ireland would like to be able to exercise more control over the market price-wise. But for the moment the Irish market is still led by artists agents and the buyers who purchase by personal taste alone. For the artist this may not be the most pleasant state of affairs. But on the other hand, a market ruled by the laws of international fashion and by the dictates of dealers and auction houses would be equally unpleasant.

NOTE 5.

CHAPTER 4

PRODUCT OR PROCESS

Today many artists believe that they should be able to make a good living as an artist. They want to enjoy the fruits of their labours. But thinking about art in terms of its economic consequences is going to change the type of art they make. There is nothing wrong with making money, but when it becomes the tail wagging the dog, so to speak, then the value of the work produced and the integrity of the artist is compromised.

Nowadays, works of art imitate and are inspired by the economy. The economy itself has become like a work of art, acquiring all the qualities a work of art should have: ruthlessness, cynicism, grandiosity, communicativeness and abstraction. Economic systems and economic values rule the art world. At the moment it is the only aesthetic philosophy that is in operation. Economy isn't only about money; it is also a philosophy in the sense that it inspires and produces economic truths, economic values and morales. Very little can be done against the economy short of revolution. An artist is free to do whatever he likes in formulating his work, even the most extravagant things. But he is not allowed to say one word against the economy because the economy will punish him in the cruelest way possible. And this is usually done by a headless entity comprised of auctions, rumours and the media.

When an artist dared to speak out against the system, as Sandro Chia did when Charles Saatchi, the advertising mogul, took his works out of his collection and undersold them in order to cover his burgeoning world-wide debts, the art world shunned him. Magazines stopped writing reviews of his exhibitions and most dealers wanted nothing to do with him.

Much of the press tried to provoke the situation claiming that Chia had been destroyed by Saatchi. But this was essentially untrue as Chia still had people who loved his work and bought his paintings directly without the interference of dealers.

Since Saatchi has now sold large chunks from a collection which was presumed to be premanent, Chia has been vindicated in accusing him of being a mere speculator in art. Furthermore, now that Chia is out of the system he claims to be financially better off than when at the peak of his fame.

In contrast to Chia, Hans Haacke has found a subtler and perhaps more persuasive means of criticising the system; by exhibiting as works of art analyses of the social status, business connections, places of origin and current dwelling place of the boards of trustees of museums and museum visitors.

FIG.3 One of his more notorious pieces was the "Manet Projekt" of 1974. Invited to participate in an exhibition in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, he submitted the following general outline for installation:

Manet's Bunch of Asparagus of 1880, collection Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, is on a studio easel in an approx. 6 x 8 metre room of PROJEKT '74. Panels on the walls present the social and economic position of the persons who have owned the painting over the years and the prices paid for it.

Each panel showed who owned the painting from its first purchase in 1880 by a banker for 1,000 francs, to the time of its purchase for the museum Wallraf-Richartz in 1968 by the Friends of the Museum for 1,360,000 deutschmarks.

Dr. Evelyn Weiss the modern art curator of the museum praised the proposal, but the organising team of the exhibition rejected it in order to retain the support of the chairman

of the Friends, whose positions on nineteen boards were to be listed on a panel. Thus rejected by the museum, Haacke's work instead formed an exhibition at the Paul Maenz Gallery in Cologne with a reproduction in place of the original Manet. The museum's exhibition, subtitled "Art Remains Art" opened the same day as the Haacke show. It included work by Daniel Buren who incorporated a miniature version of Haacke's "Manet Projekt". When the museum's directors ordered the offending area to be pasted over with white paper several other artists such as Carl André, Sol LeWitt, Antonio Diaz, Frank Gillette and Newton and Helen Harrison withdrew their works in protest.

Such an exhibition challenges our perceptions of art, art institutions, their activities and their support systems. The dilemma of the museum director was whether he should give primacy to the wealthy chairman or to the invited artist. Having chosen the chairman, to what purpose then was the museum created?

There is, nevertheless, a rhetorical aspect to Haacke's work. It still remains within the boundaries of the agreed upon art world. He criticises details, but never the whole, that is the monster that is the economy of the art system. Is also ironic that inspite of his political and critical messages, Haacke is deemed collectable by the very people he attacks.

Simultaneously in the 1970's, many other artists by way of Minimalism, Conceptualism and New Realism, mounted the most sustained attack on the institutions of the art world. Investigative art practices sought to expose the layers of "framing" around the spectator's perception of a work of art, emphasising that there was no unmediated, isolated and uninfluenced view.

This coincided with the new approaches to art history that located changes in art in an historical perspective, separate from unfolding stylistic change and connoisseur-like appreciation. Artists made works that attempted to circumvent the marketplace, producing art that was temporary, specific to a location, or larger than the domestic scale. They also put their efforts into running their own non-profit galleries and studios. They argued that only through independent institutions did it seem possible to make experimental or critical work. Many of these initiatives, taking various forms in Europe, North America and Australia, needed funding from local or regional governments or their agencies, and these funding bodies in turn favoured the independent initiatives of artists. Others left the art world entirely to work as artists in the community, responding closely to local needs and initiatives.

If these artists were trying to free themselves from institutional control by challenging the structures of art, they did so from a highly idealistic position, which may have raised questions of objecthood and the attempted elimination of a marketable commodity, but it did not translate well into action. The fact that the artists were willing to sell their "works" or records of them whenever there was a buyer, and to exhibit in the very institutions they were supposedly criticising, exposes a highly conflicting position and a dependence on if not capitulation to, traditional art practices. It is no surprise therefore, that many of those same artists are now remaking works from that period or selling the plans for refabrication to galleries; a process accelerated no doubt by the burgeoning market for Minimalist and Conceptual art.

One of the more significant efforts by a single artist to

break the stranglehold of the gallery system is that of Christo Javacheff. Born in the Bulgarian city of Gabrovo in 1935, he studied at the Sophia Art Academy and moved to Western Europe in 1958, due to the constraints placed upon his work in communist Bulgaria. He became known for creating temporary monuments in public places by wrapping everything from natural to manmade objects and sites. With each project becoming larger and more ambitious he had to find a way of generating money to finance them. He achieved this by selling models, collages and preliminary drawings to dealers, collectors and museums. The money thus earned is spent on location and benefits the economy of the place where a project is staged by the involvement and employment of local people. By assuming the form of a corporation Christo has become an autonomous economic unit. Such is the scale of some of his

projects - the 1971 "Valley Curtain" in Rifle, Colorado, for example - that suspicions have lurked in observers' minds of financial machinations not immediately apparent and of profit taking in some form. While it is true that Christo's plans and drawings fetch high prices on today's market, this is irrelevant to the case in point. Whether Christo is rich or poor, he has proved that an artist can generate his own capital necessary to finance his work. His vision is unique in that he has cleverly synthesised a form of capitalism and socialism to his artistic advantage and to the benefit of those who become involved in his projects.

There are thousands of artists who to some extent work outside the official art system. They do this mostly from necessity. At this moment in time there is more art in supply than there is a demand for, and not all artists can be accommodated by the galleries and museums. Only a few artists can

profit from a system controlled by an art aristocracy of dealers, critics and collectors. Far too many have to supplement their income with a second job, usually teaching, illustration or theatrical design. Financial considerations apart, the exploitation of the artist by the market cuts much deeper. It has dominated and dictated the artists' work ever since the collapse of the Guilds in 1620 when artists lost the reins of the market and never really regained control.

Looking back at earlier centuries we can perceive a degree of logic in the way a new movement came to be born, to grow, and sooner or later, to be killed off by a newer movement that reacted against its ideas. This process was not brought about by a group of artists arbitrarily deciding that they must do something new. It was dictated to them by life. Art which did not change with the life of the times in which it existed fell to the wayside. In retrospect it is easy to see how the great movements in art belonged to the times in which they were born, but in the course of those times it was usually only a handful of artists immediately concerned who understood what they were about. The rest of the world, if it took any interest at all in the event, saw each new movement as a violation of art as they knew it.

In our days the gap between the emergence of a new movement in art and its recognition or acceptance by the art-conscious public has increasingly diminished. It is now only a matter of a few years before a new movement becomes an old movement, takes its place in the museums and is endowed with a quality of "pastness". With this in mind it is not so surprising therefore, that so many "promising" artists who have begun within a certain movement, are arrested by market

success at an early stage of development. Very few artists have risked their career by abandoning one movement and embracing another, and very few have financially survived it.

One of the few survivors was Frank Stella the "giant" of

FIG. 6 Minimalism, who decided in the early seventies that he had more or less had it with the art world. He felt he had paid his dues and earned the right to do whatever he wanted, setting himself beyond the point of criticism and embracing the maximalism of Neo-expressionism. It has to be said that Stella had been a huge financial success for his galleries M. Knoedler & Co. and Leo Castelli, and had profited well himself. Therefore he was in a position to disregard even his most important critical supporters who felt he had sacrificed for the sake of mammon, what they considered to be the principal goals of abstract painting. It was also, indeed, to Stella's advantage that minimal painting was rapidly falling out of favour with the market, while his new "maxi-
FIG. 7 malist" style was much more marketable due to the recent renewal of interest in expressionist painting by a new generation of European artists, who were disillusioned by the reductivist abstract style prevalent throughout the world.

What we are offered by the galleries is the story of Stella's conversion, but the question which arises here is that of how much does artistic integrity account for his change in direction.

Philip Guston, who made his reputation with the abstract
FIG. 8 expressionists, is another example of defiance in the face of the market and the art world in general. In the '60's he

FIG. 9 reduced his work to the point of simple line drawings in paint. Tiring of this he eventually developed a narrative,

FIG. 10 figurative style of painting in 1970, that aroused great critical animosity in the same vein of that of Stella. But while Stella may have appeared to be jumping on the bandwagon, Guston, who had began his career as a figurative painter, was later recognised as the main source of inspiration to the New Figuration movement in the 1980's.

The viability of art has spiralled according to whichever movement happened to be in vogue at the time. Cubism, at first rejected later thrived in the market. Dadaism reacted to this by mocking the market and proclaiming the death of art, but by evolving into Surrealism once more embraced the market. In the 1950's America made a move to grab the reins of the market from Europe and came up with a new "international" art, Abstract Expressionism, enabling them to dominate the market world-wide. Like Dadaism, Pop Art attempted to ridicule art values by reducing all art to commodities and raising all commodities to the level of art. Minimalism took Pop Art's jocular intentions seriously and reduced Fine Art to objects without meaning and finally Conceptualism did away with "objecthood" altogether and left the market with nothing more than archives and references. The market must have felt a great sense of relief when Neo-expressionism arrived and with it a return to easel painting and a marketable product.

This new sense of direction amongst the New Expressionists; the regrouping of ideas, the revival of what seemed to be old-fashioned painting including a reidentification with the male heroic painter, helped boost a flagging market. Since the late 1970's the new artists have tried to demystify the concept of an "avant-garde", to do away with the cult of innovation, and now look for a link with something in the past hopefully to give them a new beginning.

The obsessive forward pressure to be original has waned. The pressure now is to "make it" and to do that they have to play the game. Twenty years ago artists were uncomfortable with the market, but in art schools today students can learn how to become "successful" artists. The point now is how to enter the system immediately and market one's product. In other words, the young artist of today should sit back and pick piecemeal from any popular style of the past, and thereby create a niche for himself in the ever-hungry, novelty-seeking, post-modern art market.

Das Spargel-Stilleben
erworben durch die Initiative des
Vorsitzenden des Wallraf-Richartz-Kuratoriums



Hermann J. Abs

Geboren 1901 in Bonn. - Entstammt wohlhabender katholischer Familie. Vater Dr. Josef Abs, Rechtsanwalt und Justizrat, Mithhaber der Hubertus Braunkohlen AG, Brüggen, Ertf. Mutter Katharina Luckeraht.

Abitur 1919 Realgymnasium Bonn. - Ein Sem. Jurastudium Universität Bonn. - Banklehre im Kölner Bankhaus Delbrück von der Heydt & Co. Erwirbt internationale Bankerfahrung in Amsterdam, London, Paris, USA.

Heiratet 1928 Inez Schnitzler. Ihr Vater mit Georg von Schnitzler vom Vorstand des IG. Farben-Konzerns verwandt. Tante verheiratet mit Baron Alfred Neveu du Mont. Schwester verheiratet mit Georg Graf von der Goltz. - Geburt der Kinder Thomas und Marion Abs.

Mitglied der Zentrumsparlei. - 1929 Prokura im Bankhaus Delbrück, Schickler & Co., Berlin. 1935-37 einer der 5 Teilhaber der Bank.

1937 im Vorstand und Aufsichtsrat der Deutschen Bank, Berlin. Leiter der Auslandsabteilung. - 1939 von Reichswirtschaftsminister Funk in den Beirat der Deutschen Reichsbank berufen. - Mitglied in Ausschüssen der Reichsbank, Reichsgruppe Industrie, Reichsgruppe Banken, Reichswirtschaftskammer und einem Arbeitskreis im Reichswirtschaftsministerium. - 1944 in über 50 Aufsichts- und Verwaltungsräten großer Unternehmen. Mitgliedschaft in Gesellschaften zur Wahrnehmung deutscher Wirtschaftsinteressen im Ausland.

1946 für 6 Wochen in britischer Haft. - Von der Alliierten Entnazifizierungsbehörde als entlastet (5) eingestuft.

1948 bei der Gründung der Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. Maßgeblich an der Wirtschaftsplanung der Bundesregierung beteiligt. Wirtschaftsberater Konrad Adenauers. - Leiter der deutschen Delegation bei der Londoner Schuldenkonferenz 1951-53. Berater bei den Wiedergutmachungsverhandlungen mit Israel in Den Haag. 1954 Mitglied der CDU.

1952 im Aufsichtsrat der Süddeutschen Bank AG. - 1957-67 Vorstandssprecher der Deutschen Bank AG. Seit 1967 Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats.

Ehrenvorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:

Deutsche Überseeische Bank, Hamburg - Pöttler Maschinenfabrik AG, Langen (Hessen)

Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:

Dahlbusch Verwaltungs-AG, Gelsenkirchen - Daimler Benz AG, Stuttgart-Untertürkheim - Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt - Deutsche Lufthansa AG, Köln - Philipp Holzmann AG, Frankfurt - Phoenix Gummiwerke AG, Hamburg-Harburg - RWE Elektrizitätswerk AG, Essen - Vereinigte Glanzstoff AG, Wuppertal-Eibfeld - Zellstoff-Fabrik Waldhof AG, Mannheim

Ehrenvorsitzender:

Salamander AG, Kornwestheim - Gebr. Stumm GmbH, Brambauer (Westf.) -

Süddeutsche Zucker-AG, Mannheim

Stellvertr. Vors. des Aufsichtsrats:

Badische Anilin- und Sodafabrik AG, Ludwigshafen - Siemens AG, Berlin-München

Mitglied des Aufsichtsrats:

Metallgesellschaft AG, Frankfurt

Präsident des Verwaltungsrats:

Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau - Deutsche Bundesbahn

Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz mit Stern, Päpstl. Stern zum Komturkreuz, Großkreuz Isabella die Katholische von Spanien, Cruzeiro do Sul von Brasilien. - Ritter des Ordens vom Heiligen Grabe. - Dr. h.c. der Univ. Göttingen, Sofia, Tokio und der Wirtschaftshochschule Mannheim.

Lebt in Kronberg (Taunus) und auf dem Bentgerhof bei Remagen.

Photo aus Current Biography Yearbook 1970 New York

Fig. 3: Hans Haacke: Manet-PROJEKT '74, 1974, (panel 9, listing Hermann J. Abs positions on nineteen boards of directors).



Fig. 5: Christo: Valley Curtain, Rifle, Colorado, 1971.

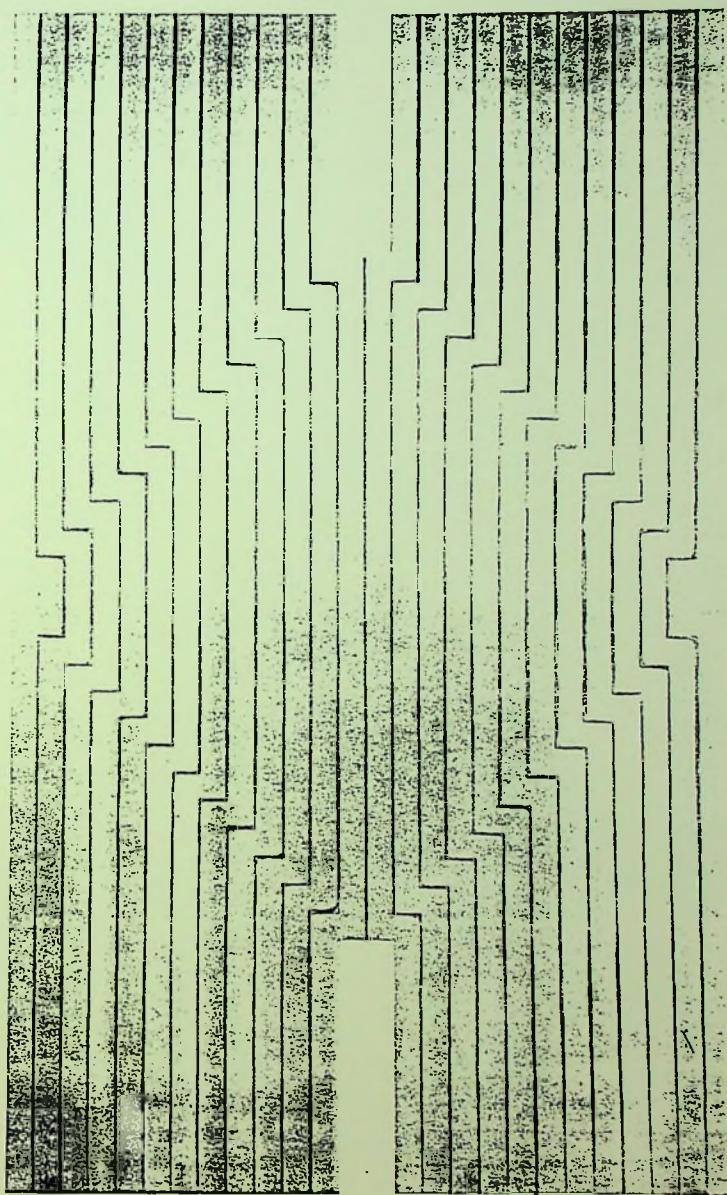


Fig. 6: Frank Stella: Newstead Abbey, 1960
(aluminium paint on canvas)



Fig. 7: Frank Stella: Kastura, 1979 (mixed media on aluminium, metal tubing and wire mesh).

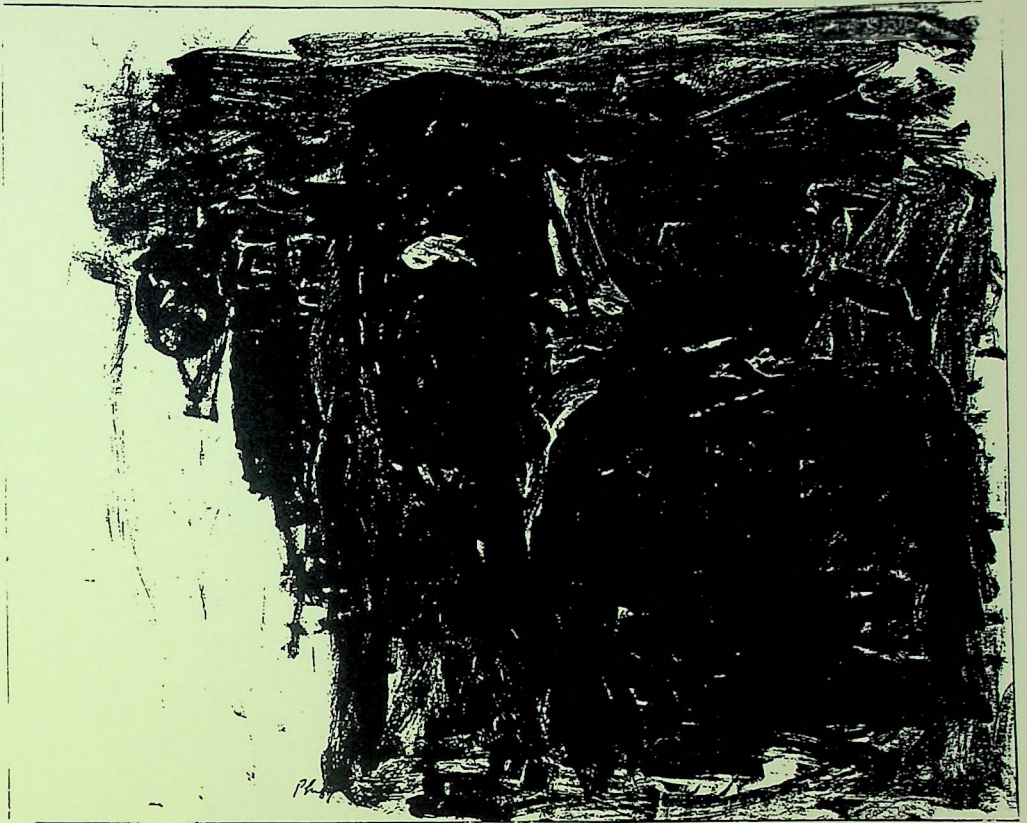


Fig. 8: Philip Guston: Departure, 1963.

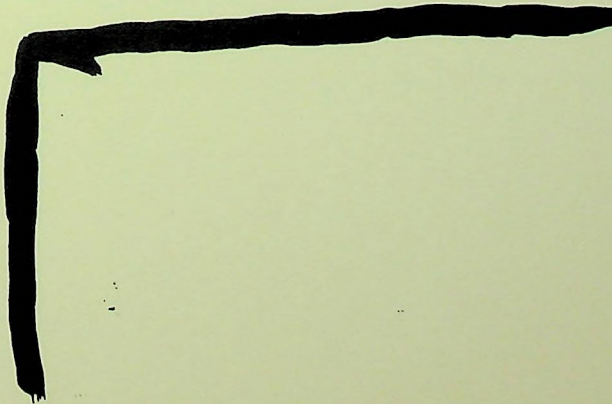


Fig. 9:
Philip Guston:
Edge, 1967.

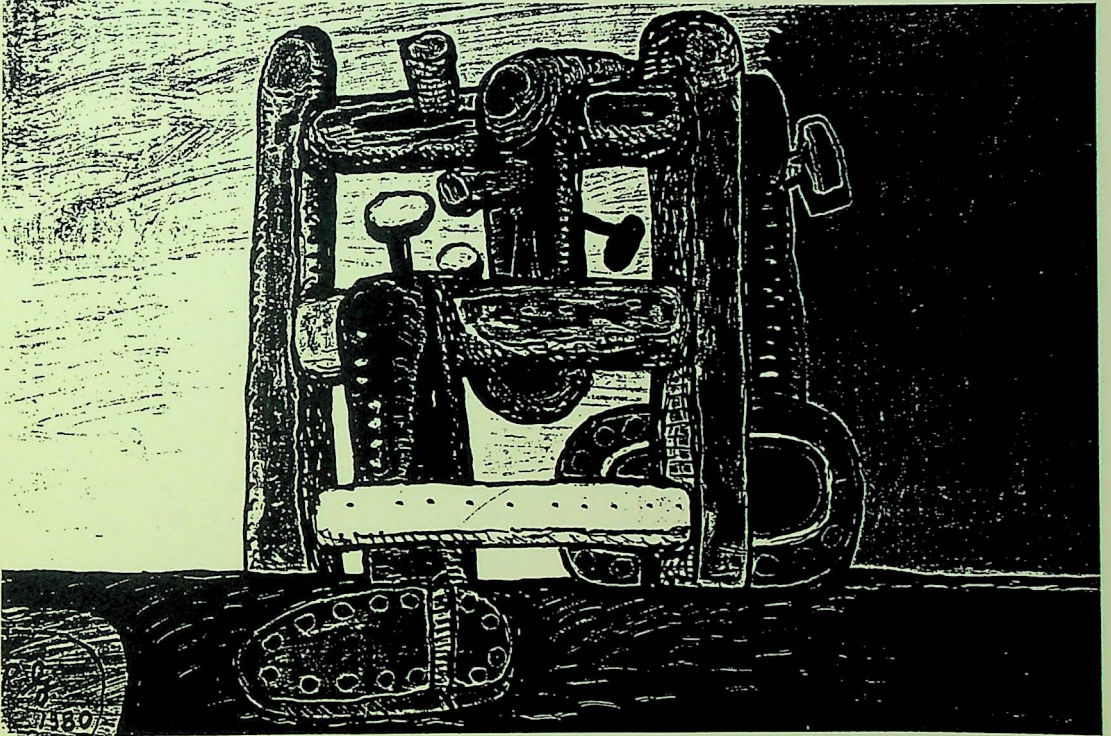


Fig. 10: Philip Guston: Untitled, 1980.

CONCLUSION

Before the 1980's art was seen as oppositional to the establishment; as something outside or above the system. Since its popularisation by the mass media it has inherited the media's inescapable structure of celebrity. It is no longer subversive, but has become homogenised and integrated. More and more, art is being embraced by the entertainment industry and the viewing public is becoming a consuming audience. To accomodate this ^{MANY} artists like Laurie Anderson, Eric Bogosian and composer Philip Glass have crossed over into the mainstream; even Andy Warhol hung around Hollywood trying to get into the mainstream movie industry.

This move has also been provoked by a frequent pattern of government cuts in arts funding which has undermined the potential of independent artists and institutions. The more conservative climate of the last ten years has concentrated funds towards more prestigious galleries and museums. The encouragement of sponsorship of the arts by the business and corporate sector has been reinforced in the United States by no obscenity rules and in Britain through new laws governing the promotion of homosexuality. Some artists may prefer to work away from the "nanny state" but when they turn to private sponsorship they have to deal with corporate censorship. Big business only wants an uncritical, unquestioning, comfortable show they can invite their stockholders to and use as a backdrop for parties

In the 1990's the structure of the art world has been transformed into something like this: artists want to have elite commodities in big galleries and more populist art-as-information (like t-shirts) in the streets. This is very

different from earlier years and is tracable to the hyper-inflated art market. Today even if an artist were willing to give up the high rewards of the system, no way out is available because there is no outside anymore.

The art world is now dominated by materialism. Even critical art cannot avoid colluding with the market. When reviewing shows leftist critics write about issues and avoid making value judgements on "quality". But if any critic writes about "critical artists" showing in a gallery, and praises their work, he can be said to be promoting them. If the criterion is no longer a quality judgement all that is left is a commercial one; and the higher the price of the work the better it can be considered to be.

Decisions on the value of works of art are often made with both public and private interest in mind, but - even when this does not directly signify commercial interest (as for critics and curators) - private interest will generally be the final concern. Many who work in the art world mask their personal and private interests behind a public front. Artists are expected to have private concerns uppermost when they make their works, but they are expected to operate entirely in the public interest in allowing their work to be exhibited, sold and controlled by others.

The artists are not the only people in the art world who can be caricatured as obsessive. The ambitions of curators, critics, gallery owners and collectors frequently match the the determination of the artists they deal with. The desire for fame and fortune, which could probably be satisfied more quickly in other fields, is not likely to be the principal motivation, but cannot be discounted. A peculiarly rich mix of intellectual debate, the excitement of innovation, the buzz

of information and gossip is offered by the art world, together with a fashionable ambience and the possibility for a few, of considerable financial gain.

Some critics are more adventurous than others in writing about new artists, some curators will risk more in organising an exhibition of unproven work, and some galleries and collectors are more prepared to step out of line to establish value where it has not already been perceived by others. Without the recognition that comes with the market no artist is likely to continue for long in his art, but for one condition, the recognition of other artists.

There is no doubt that while this system of recognition has brought to the forefront many artists whose talents seemed questionable later and afforded little recognition to a number of good ones, it has never made a permanent reputation for a poor artist. When the supportive system collapses so does the reputation. However the lack of support can probably also kill a talent. Technical proficiency cannot be maintained without practice. The artist whose work is neither selling nor recognised as good soon loses the inducement to keep his art in practice.

Who can really say what is good or bad art anyway? Who has the power to discriminate, to approve or endorse? Where is it agreed that one work of art will be worth a fortune and another much less? Why should one work be praised and another dismissed? What is "True Art"? It most certainly isn't a hedge against inflation for a fat financier or a mealticket for a hungry artist. It is price-less and priceless, value-less and invaluable. It comes in an infinite number of guises. It could even be a slit-trench in a desert - until big business sponsors it; or a dung heap in a dance-hall - until an art

dealer deals in it; or a strip-light in a studio - until

NOTE 6. Sotheby's sells it. In other words, an artwork loses part of its inherent aesthetic value as soon as it is out of the artist's hands.

Although art has always been a commodity when it becomes locked into the market circus it locks people out from its true purpose, that is, contemplation and appreciation. The nuances of meaning and the visual experience are crushed under the brute weight of prices achieved at today's auctions. Aesthetic value now has little significance. The art work's ability to signify status, cultural superiority and wealth is what matters. What strip mining is to nature, the art market has become to culture. There is a void at the centre of the "postmodern" art world and it is surrounded by triumphant capitalists with no interest in defining art other than in the marketplace.

NOTES

1. Ultra-conservative senators Jesse Helms and Alphonse D'Amato attacked the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano for its alleged obscenity throughout the summer of 1989, which resulted in the withdrawal of Mapplethorpe's retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery of Art because of fear of loss of funding. After protests the show was re-scheduled to open at the Washington Project for the Arts. It did so without incident. (Art in America, Sept.'89, p. 33.)
2. The Salon's jury in 1864 rejected Courbet's "Venus and Psyche" from that year's exhibition on the grounds that it had lesbian overtones.
3. Regretfully Robert Wraight fails to inform us of the source of this quotation.
4. Again Robert Wraight fails to reveal his source.
5. Ian Kirk-Smith, 'Over the Bridge', Circa no. 54 Nov/Dec 1990, p. 28.
6. An arrangement of three red and yellow neon tubes, by Dan Flavin, was sold for £4000 at Sotheby's on 5 July 1973.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Dabrowski, Magdalena. The Drawings of Philip Guston, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988.

Frey, Bruno S. and Pommerehne, Werner W. Muses and Markets, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

Grampp, William D. Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists and Economics, New York: Basic Books, 1989.

La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art. Christo, California, 1981.

Lynton, Norbert. The Story of Modern Art, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980.

Manfredi, John. The Social Limits of Art, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.

Martorella, Rosanne. Corporate Art, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Myers, Bernard S. ed. Encyclopedia of Painting, New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1979.

Nairne, Sandy. State of the Art, London: Chatto & Windus, 1987.

Rubin, William. Frank Stella, 1970-87, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1987.

Russell, John and Taylor, Brian Brooke. The Art Dealers, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969.

Sandback, Amy Baker ed. Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine, UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984.

Sturt-Penrose, Barrie. The Art Scene, London, New York, Sydney, Toronto: Paul Hamlyn, 1969.

Wallis, Brian ed. Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business, New York, Cambridge, London: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986.

Wraight, Robert. The Art Game Again, Newton Abbot: Readers Union, 1974.

ARTICLES

Hopgood, Susan. 'Remaking Art History'. Art in America, July 1990, pp. 115-122.

Hughes, Robert. 'Sold'. Time, 27 November 1989, pp. 38-43.

Hughes, Robert. 'The Anatomy of a Deal'. Time, 27 November 1989, pp. 44-45.

O'Byrne, Robert and McCrum, Sean and Hutchinson, John. 'Home and Away'. Circa, no. 55, Jan./Feb. 1991, pp. 18-21.

Kirk-Smith, Ian. 'Over the Bridge'. Circa, no. 54, Nov./Dec. 1990, pp. 24-30.

Lauf, Cornelia. 'Snakes and Ladders: The Archive of Dr. Willi Bongard'. Artscribe, Nov./Dec. 1990, pp. 67-71.

Mainardi, Patricia. 'Some Stellar Moments in the History of Government Sponsored Exhibitions'. Art in America, July 1990, pp. 154-159.

McCann, Cecile N. and Wei, Lilly eds. 'Making Art, Making Money'. Art in America, July 1990, pp. 133-141 & 178-179.