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National College of Art Art and Design

**Jean Dubuffet - Painting as a means of
expression for our inner voices**

A thesis submitted to the faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in candidacy for the Bachelor of Art in
Fine Art (Printmaking).

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Introduction

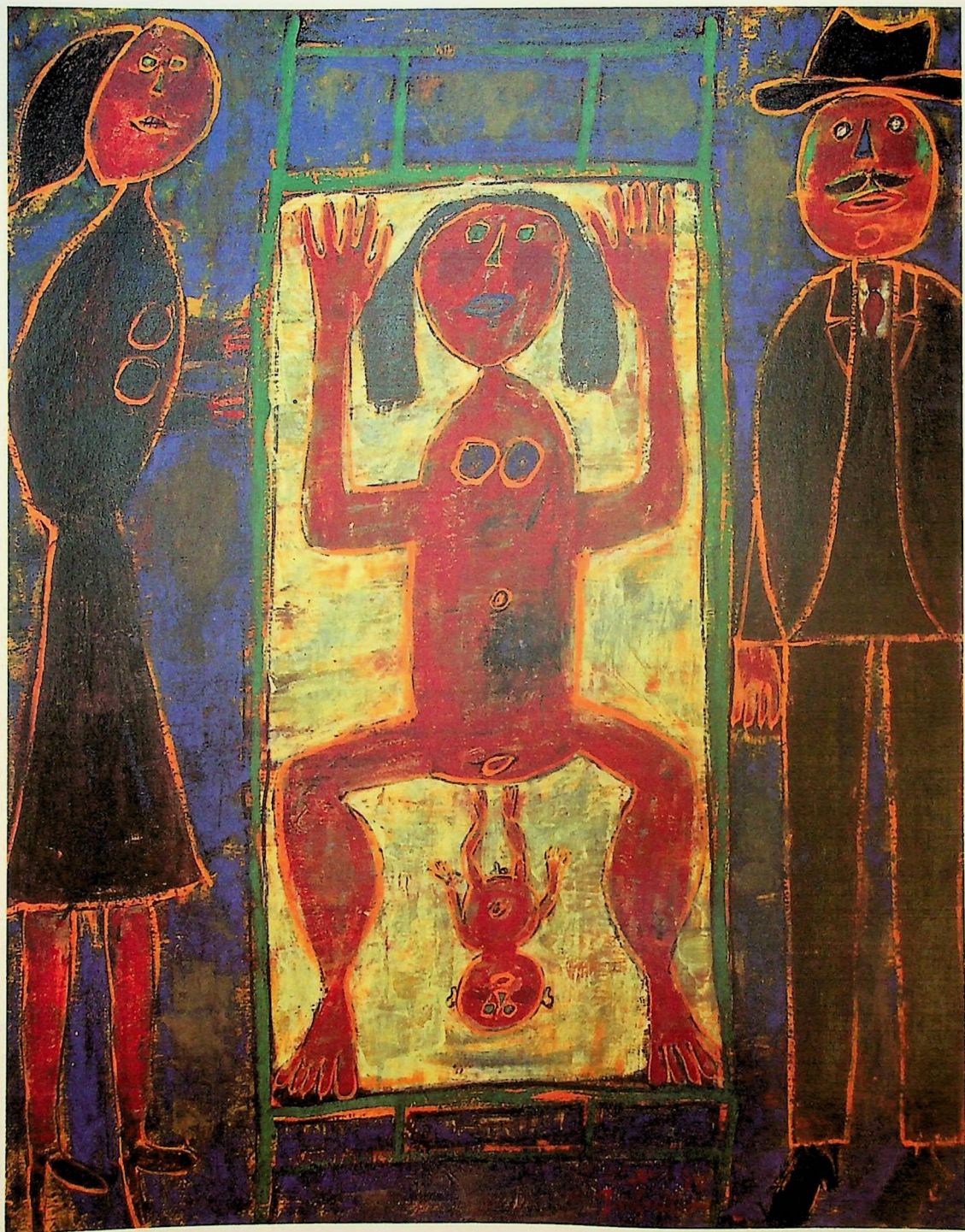
After World War two classical art was once again expected to be the art for the people. But there was too much anger and aggression in the air after the war, that traditional art needed to be halted, and a new wave of art to begin. Jean Dubuffet, born 1901 in the north of France, was one of the artists responsible for changing this traditional art.

'Everybody in the world is a painter. Painting is like speaking or walking. It's as natural for a human being to sketch on any available surface, to scrawl and daub some picture, as it is for him to speak. Don't children sketch, don't they scrawl and daub, as spontaneously as they speak.'^{LJ}

As artist, writer, collector of more than 5,000 examples of Art Brut, (works by untrained artists from the fringes of society), Dubuffet had a formidable impact on international post-war art. Refusing to conform to any one style, he dazzled his admirers with an inexhaustible inventiveness that continued nearly to his death, at age 83.

This dissertation looks at Dubuffet as the man responsible for getting the art world to recognise the art of the insane, and untrained artist. He did this through an association called 'Art Brut', whereby he collected and exhibited these 'naive' artists work. Also the influence of children's art, and the art of the primitive on Dubuffet is explored.

Dubuffet and the Surrealists had many similarities, for example their interests in the art of the insane, but Dubuffet never aligned himself with the surrealist movement as this essay will show.



Jean Dubuffet- Art Brut

There are two different orders of art. There is the art everyone is used to - polished or perfect art baptised according to the fashion of the moment, either classic or romantic art, and there is also untamed and furtive as some wild creature; Art Brut. ⁴

In July 1948 the company of Art Brut was founded in Paris, with some fifty active members. The founders, apart from Dubuffet were André Breton, Charles Ratton, Jean Paulhan, Henri-Pierre Roche, and the painter Michel Tapie.

The non-profit and non-commercial association believed that the customary art, which is displayed in galleries and museums all over the world, has succeeded in being recognised as the only art. To Jean Dubuffet this art seemed to be poor in content and lacking in personal creativity. It was the aim of Art Brut to make the public realise the misunderstanding upon which the overpowering college of professional 'artists' is built, with their pseudo 'art critics' and their art dealers. In Art Brut's opinion true art lay elsewhere.

As defined by Dubuffet, Art Brut is the spontaneous, creative activity of artistically untrained men and women, working alone, outside of any artistic movement or cultural influence, motivated only by an intense inner need to make images, and free of any concern with art. Two criteria are essential in identifying Art Brut; Intensity of expression, and freedom from cultural influence.

The collections of Art Brut are composed of works created by individuals working outside of the cultural milieu and protected from its influences. The authors of these works are for the most part uneducated... And their works arise from the spiritual status of a truly original kind, profoundly different from those to which we are accustomed. ¹⁴

Fighting on behalf of these individuals whose activity as image makers was rejected or ignored by the guardians of contemporary cultural values, Dubuffet accepted their cause as his own, committing vast amounts of time, energy and money to discovering, collecting, preserving and publishing the work of obscure eccentrics and madmen. Dubuffet, though poor in those years, assumed most of the cost of the organisation himself, even paying the yearly dues for many of the members. Dubuffet was also responsible for the collecting of the five thousand or so pieces collected by Art Brut.

Dubuffet's attack was aimed both at the art of the past and at the contemporary art establishment, at the vast apparatus of professionals - professional intellectuals, critics, historians, educators, museum curators, art dealers and artists, all of whom he saw as devoted to upholding a dead and irrelevant conception of the nature of art and artists, and a catalogue of works certified with the label of 'Art' and identified with the notion of 'beauty'. Against these purveyors of culture and the art that they promote...

I believe that this 'Art Brut', this art which has never ceased to be made in Europe parallel to the other, this savage art to which no one has paid any attention, and which often enough itself failed to recognise that it was art, that it is here. That one, on the contrary can discover the true and living art of Europe.' ⁸

There is no difficulty in distinguishing Art Brut from conventional art, for the simple reason that the work of professional artists

is excluded by definition. This restriction would exclude the work of Dubuffet himself. The creator of this art is an amateur in the sense that he is untrained, He exists on the edge of our society, an eccentric, a criminal or a fool.

I hadn't lost interest in Art Brut... but perhaps in my feelings there was the fear that too much involvement would be prejudicial to my own work; I was happy to be free of this. I needed all my time for my own work.' ¹

The company of Art Brut continued until 1951 when, as a result of financial difficulties, combined with the excessive burden that Dubuffet no longer felt able to assume, the decision was reached to dissolve the organisation and ship the collection to America.

Art Brut had succeeded in getting world recognition, but it was in danger of becoming an artistic movement which the art world was ready to grab and exploit. By ending the association when Dubuffet did, the collection was not bought up by the art dealers, but was in safe keeping in America, until Dubuffet had decided to give them a permanent home. Dubuffet once wrote that,

Art galleries are the shops for the art dealers'. Art, by its very essence, is of the new... there is only one healthy diet for artistic creation; that of permanent revolution. ¹⁴

Dubuffet felt that his personal work was suffering due to too much commitment to Art Brut. He was first an artist, and second the man responsible for Art Brut.



Dubuffet and the art of the insane.

Madness unburdens a person, giving him wings and helping his clairvoyance. Many of the objects in our exhibition (Art Brut) are by inmates of psychiatric wards. We see no reason whatsoever for putting them in a special department, as some people do. Any contact we have had with our friends who were considered, more or less insane, convinced us that the mechanisms of artistic creation are exactly the same as in those of any supposed normal person.

Dubuffet has always believed in the superiority of the anti-social, alienated artist who creates for his or her personal pleasure and satisfaction. In fact he believed . . . alienation is the condition proper to real creative activity. He believed the insane, having abandoned life in society, are driven by an irresistible need to explore their own inner reality to its furthest reaches.

The notion of Psychiatric Art is absolutely false! Psychiatrists emphasize it because they wish to believe they are in a position to differentiate, to tell who is sane, and who isn't. They reject the idea that Psychiatric Art can be equal or superior to Fine Art; They want a firm carrier, and are therefore hostile to my view of psychiatry and of the art of their patients. They want to cure creativity.

Jean Dubuffet's ideas concerning the insane cannot be dismissed as mere Romanticism, based on an idealized conception of mental illness. As early as 1945 he was visiting asylums, getting to know

psychiatrists and artist-inmates, and maintaining contact with them over the years, Nor was he ignorant of contemporary psychiatric theory and practice. Many of his ideas reflect advanced psychiatric thinking and betray an awareness of the struggle being waged by humanistic psychiatry in its efforts to grasp at the meaning and importance of psychological processes and experiences clinically identified as psychotic.

Jean Dubuffet's activity as a theorist of the art of the insane cannot be readily accepted from his work as an artist. His own paintings, drawings and sculpture, particularly those of the 1940's have been profoundly influenced by this art, to such an extent that he has, on occasion, been accused of imitation.

I was never influenced by Art Brut. I was influenced by the freedom, the liberty, which helped me very much. I took their example.²

Dubuffet was more deeply involved with the art of the insane than was any other artist in this century. His thought, his aesthetic, his approach to his own work, and the work itself, all reveal the intensity and his long relationship with 'psychiatric Art' and artists. No other artist has sought so intensively to grasp the different mechanisms at work within the spontaneous art of the insane. Inevitably, perhaps unconsciously, he absorbed their forms, their methods of working, their language.

It is well known that late nineteenth and twentieth century artists tended to turn to images deriving from cultures other than their own, from the Far East, particularly Japan, and from the 'Primitive Art' of Africa and Oceania. The art of the insane tended to be de-emphasised in the historical picture because this art form, as opposed to Primitive or Asian Art, was seen as being not really art, and therefore not fitting into the pattern of borrowings by which the development of modern art has, up to now, been characterised.

The development of Pop Art forced critics and historians to recognise for the first time that influences on contemporary painting might well come from outside the charmed circle of 'Art'. The art of Dubuffet makes similar demands. If his art is to be understood in the context of influences and reactions, a game of questionable worth, the detective work is going to lead away from the mainstream of modern art into areas of the unexpected.

Critics who desire a more than superficial grasp of Dubuffet's language will have to take more than a passing glance at the art of the insane. Dubuffet's interests ranged well beyond the art of the insane and beyond the still wider territory of Art Brut. The tendency to lump these forms of human expression together, and to point to them in passing as influences on the art of Dubuffet, is plainly insufficient.

I believe that the creation of art is intimately linked with the spirit of revolt. Insanity represents a refusal to adopt a view of reality that is imposed by custom. Art consists in constructing or inventing a mirror in which all of the universe is reflected. An artist is a person who creates a parallel universe (inflicts on him.) He wants to do it himself. This is a definition of insanity. The insane are individuals who push creativity further than the professional artist, who believe in it totally. You can refuse to use perspective and it's okay, but live your beliefs and they lock you up. 4

For Dubuffet, the essence of Art Brut resides in the intense individuality of each creator. A strong belief in the individual lies at the centre of all his thinking. He accepted no art that was not intensely private and personal. His preoccupation with the art of the insane derives from his awareness that they represent the extreme of individualism. Dubuffet believed that the insane artist pursued their art as far as possible. It was artistic creation pushed as far as it could go. They lived their art, and were locked up because they were artists. Dubuffet believed that professional

artists only half-believed in their art, and are content to lead conventional lives outside of it. He once wrote that, 'Insanity is the Great Art'.⁵ For Dubuffet, insanity represented a rebellion, a revolt against imposed reality. 'Art is a compound of intoxication and madness'.⁴

The real impact of the art of the insane on Dubuffet is not to be found by examining his works, and the works of the insane artists in search of similarities of form or content, but rather in the effect that the art of the insane had on the development of his thinking about art. Dubuffet's art and his aesthetics are closely dependent on each other, his conception of the nature of creativity and of 'Art' represents the most far-reaching attempt to demonstrate the importance of the art of the insane, if not within contemporary culture, then in terms of the deeply felt human needs of everyday men and women.



Dubuffet on the primitive and the art of children.

Between 1947 and 1949, Dubuffet made three visits to the North African desert, learning Arabic between the first and second trips. It would seem he sought escape from Western culture and further confirmation of his belief that more primitive societies held a key to true creativity. He encountered a society whose traditions were no less developed, just different than those of the rest.

Perhaps it was the time I spent in the deserts of white Africa that sharpened my taste for the little, the almost nothing, and especially in my art, for the landscapes where one finds only the formless. ⁴

Without doubt we possess, at present, the best understanding that has been available in fifty years of civilisation referred to as 'Primitive', and of their ways of thinking. Their works of art strongly disconcert and preoccupy western man. We have begun to ask ourselves whether Western civilisation might not profit from lessons provided by these 'savages'. It could be that in many areas, their solutions and their ways, which were once seen as so simplistic, could, in the long run, be more far-seeing than our own. As for me, I hold the values of the savage in high esteem: Instinct, passion, caprice, violence, insanity. ⁸

The word 'insanity' is of particular importance, in that it indicates precisely the nature of Dubuffet's conception of the primitive. Unlike artists who turned to African or Oceanic sculpture for contact with the primitive, Dubuffet sought pure savage on the edges of his own world,

among the unrecognised - the artists and rejects of society in which we live. The irresistible impulse that force a man who has not drawn since childhood, to scratch a crude sexual image on the wall of a public toilet is an example of what Dubuffet meant by the primitive in society today. 'What is expected of a work of art is quite different from a display of mere skill'.⁴

In Dubuffet's essay, entitled, 'Art Brut, preferred to the cultural arts', written in 1945 at the beginning of the association, he wrote,

True art always crops up wherever you don't expect it. Wherever no-one has been thinking about it or uttering its name. Art hates to be recognised and greeted by name. It instantly takes off. Art is a person who passionately loves going incognito. You understand, it's the false 'Mr. Art' who looks like the real one, and the real one who doesn't look like him at all! So people mistake them for one another. A lot of people mistake them for one another. Art will then revert to its real function; a far more effective one than arranging shapes and colours for a supposed delight to the eyes... Art addresses the mind and not the eyes. This is how it has been recognised by primitive societies, and they are correct. Art is a language, an instrument of perception and communication.⁴

Emerging within Romanticism, at first as mere nostalgia, was an awareness most clearly formulated by Rousseau, that so-called 'primitive cultures' might well contain something of importance for civilised cultures, that the vaunted glories of civilisation could represent a distortion of human nature, and the denial of humanity's fundamental identity.

Like so many twentieth century artists, Dubuffet was attracted by the primitive, drawn back, not into the history of civilisation, but into its specialised state. In his thought, as in his art, he searched for humanity's origins. He descended the evolutionary ladder in quest of

primitive images, requiring the liberating transfusion of pure emotion, instinct and experience. In 1952 Dubuffet wrote in his essay 'Anti-cultural Positions';

The primitive loves and admires trees and streams. He takes great pleasure in resembling them. He believes in an actual similitude between a human being, a tree and a stream. He (the primitive) has a very strong sense of the continuity, finding all things, especially humanity and the rest of the world. These primitive societies certainly have a greater respect than the western man for all the creatures on the earth. They do not see humankind as the lord of other creatures, but merely one of them. I believe (and here I am in agreement with the so-called primitive civilizations) that painting, a medium more concrete than the written word, is a far richer instrument for communication and elaborating thought. ¹

Furthermore, painting is a much more spontaneous and much more direct language than words: Much closer to a shriek or dancing. This is why painting is a means of expression for our inner voices and far more effective than words; painting is an instrument of clairvoyance. ¹

Like the Dadaists, Dubuffet extends his 'anti-cultural' position, which is a kind of primitivism, from attitude and technique, into material. But where the Dadaists, who after all, adopted the vision and structure of contemporary cubism, inevitably transform their 'inartistic' materials into art. Dubuffet's aim was to have them as close to their new state as possible.

Dubuffet's purpose is, of course, not the simple recreation of a children's art - this is never the intention of primitivist procedures. He has said of his pictures of 1942-1944 that they were painted in;

A style that, for the lack of a better word, I call 'theatrical'...I think I might say that these paintings aim at showing human emotions, man's particular ways (innocent, like the ways of

children when they draw) of transcribing the sight spread out before his eyes, and the complete harmony of mans nature, his life, and his condition with these sights, but also the painters very positive intervention... ¹³

Dubuffet is important as the developer of a powerful primitivistic technique, a raw and deliberate uncivilised procedure such as might be practiced by children or by people suffering from delusions. Although some of his paintings suggest the panoramic effects in the work of Paul Klee, he has his own distinctive personal approach. Paul Klee once wrote;

These are primitive beginnings in art, such as one finds in ethnographic collections, or at home in the nursery. Do not laugh, reader! Children also have artistic ability and there is virtue in their having it! Parallel phenomena are provided by the words of the mentally distressed; neither childish behaviour nor madness are insulting words here, as they commonly are. All this is to be taken more seriously than all the public galleries when it comes to reforming todays art. ⁴

I have always tried to represent any object, transcribing it in a most summary manner, hardly descriptive at all, very far removed from the actual objective measurement of things, making some people speak of children's drawings, and those of anyone who never learned to draw, is due to my hope of finding in them a method of reinstating objects derived, not from some false position of the eyes arbitrarily focused on them, but from a whole compass of unconscious glances, of finding those involuntary traces inscribed on the memory of every ordinary human being, and the effective reactions that link each individual to the things that surround him and happen to catch his eye. ⁴

Dubuffet's honesty led him to entertain the possibilities that images created in response to his internal situation at a given moment may well have had meaning only for himself.

It is very possible that these effects are an entirely personal matter and function for me alone. In that case, the people, and they are numerous, who see in them only an attempt to imitate the drawings that children scribble on walls, would be quite right in finding them devoid of any power at all. ⁴

Dubuffet's art and aesthetic are closely dependant on each other. His theories, while deriving from an insight into the profound importance of the spontaneous art of children, the insane and other individuals creating outside of the context of traditional cultures, can and should equally be understood as an intensely-felt justification of his own activity as an artist. The whole of Dubuffet's oeuvre, from 1942 onwards, reflects his deep involvement with spontaneous art created in the absence of aesthetic intention and cultural influences. '...In 1942 I was looking at the drawings of children, and I liked them very much. I was influenced by them.' ⁵

Dubuffet's art in the 1940's does betray a debt to the paintings of children. At times he may well have attempted, quite deliberately, to imitate the style in search of the freedom that underlay the children's art.

Everybody in the world is a painter. Painting is like speaking or walking. It's as natural for a human being to sketch on any available surface, to scrawl and daub some picture, as it is for him to speak. Don't children sketch? Don't they scrawl and daub as spontaneously as they speak? ⁴

Critics, recognising only the superficial similarities of the surface, accused Dubuffet of copying, describing his work as a 'graphic demonstration of the laboriously achieved infantilism'. There is not merely imitation but it is a clear instance of a shared vision.

Although Dubuffet's pictures are in many ways closer to those of children than are the paintings of either Klee or Miro, they are still far removed - in technique, in representation and above all in the choices,

the emphasis, and the exaggerations of his subject matter. In this sense Dubuffet's art has a very deliberate adult iconography. The comparison with the two other artists is revealing. Compared to Klee's mystic pantheism, Dubuffet's is a material continuum; compared to Miro's open, transparent spaces, Dubuffet's figures live in opaque, literally earthy surroundings from which they are often hardly distinguishable. Compared to Klee's wit and Miro's humour, Dubuffet's mood is one of aggressive immediacy, a positive pleasure in the vulgar, from which there is to be no distance, no escape, since one comes up against a solid, impenetrable wall of figures or a single figure, and of paint itself. Dubuffet's art is somehow an art of the city, even in his landscapes. He paints crowds, but beyond this, all his pictures are crowded. Dubuffet's first relation is to the graffiti of city walls, and his primitivising style, which took its characteristic tone of confined violence during the grey, huddled, and bodily dirty years of the war in Paris.

Of course the paintings of Klee, Miro and Dubuffet do not resemble those of children. They are nevertheless reminiscent of them, and quite deliberately so. It is the conscious incorporation of this reminiscence, and its evolution with a particular accent (white, grey or brutal) to comment upon man's adult condition that distinguishes the art of the twentieth century.



Dubuffet and surrealism

It would be impossible not to evoke certain parallels with Surrealism and Jean Dubuffet. In the 'twenties, Dubuffet was personally close to many of the surrealists, and though the semi-automatic drawing and other techniques for 'forcing' the possibilities of his material in his mature art owe more to Klee than to surrealism, his interest in the art of children and the insane parallel that of the surrealists, and of André Breton in particular. Breton, shortly after World War two, collaborated with Dubuffet in the formation of Art Brut.

It is probable that a number of conceptual seeds were planted in his mind at that time. The surrealists similarly considered categorical thought an impoverished aspect of the true workings of the mind. For surrealists, automatism would open the doors to the true process of thought. André Breton defined surrealism itself as automatism:

surrealism - noun, masculine. Pure psychic automatism by which proposes to express either verbally, in writing or by any other vehicle, the real functioning of the mind.¹²

Dubuffet never aligned himself with the surrealist movement and the point of non-contradiction which he sought was quite different from theirs. What the surrealists sought was an exceptional state of poetic consciousness, producing hallucinatory images of surreality, most of which occurred at the verbal level. Dubuffet's objective was neither surreality nor so-called objectivity: The visions of the delusions of an ordinary

unselfconscious subjectivity, situated at the level of the pre-verbal unconscious.

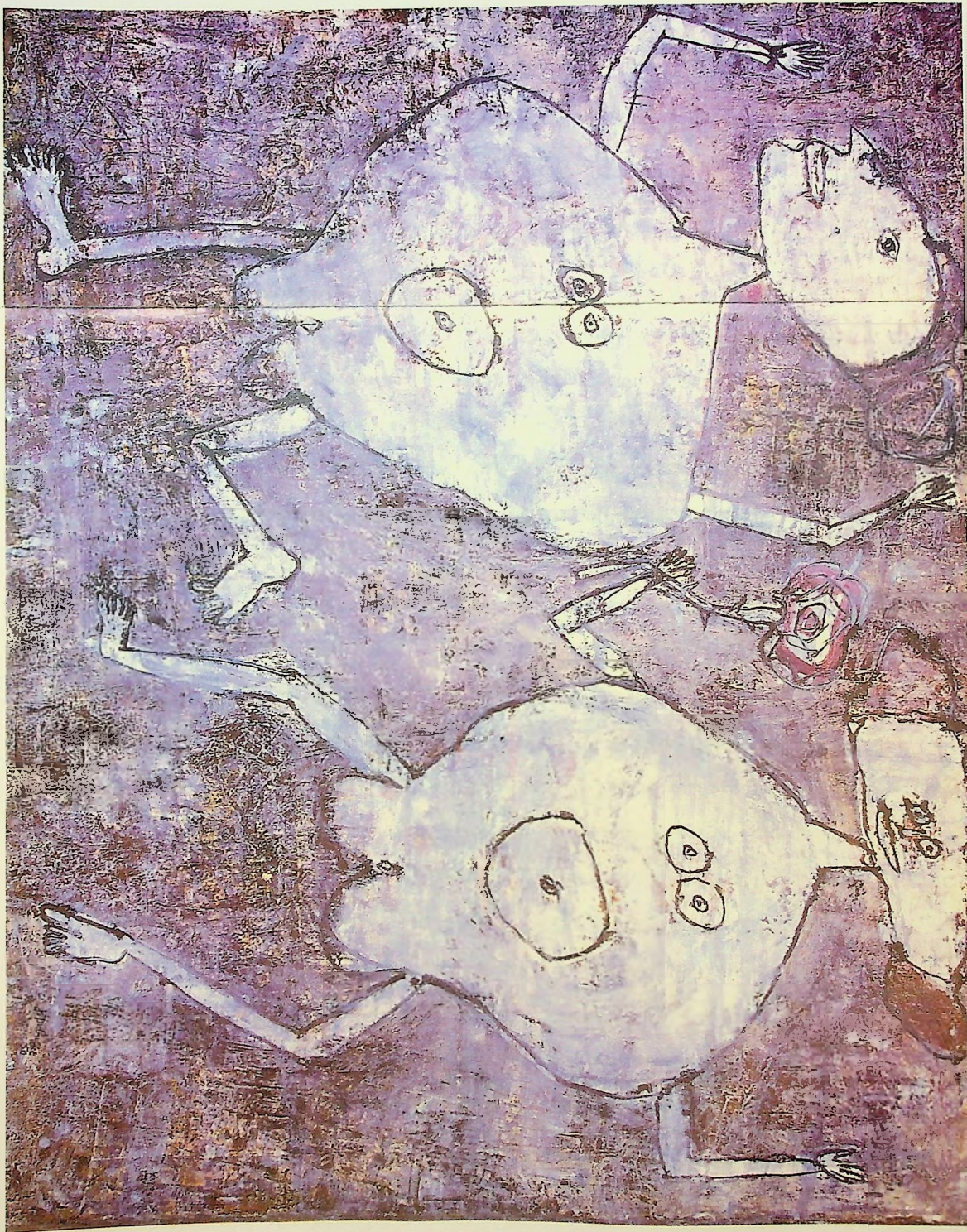
One must not confuse what the eyes apprehend with what happens when the mind takes it in. In any single instant the eyes see only a side facing them, they converge on a small field. The mind totalises; it recapitulates all the fields; it makes them dance together. It transforms them too, it reworks them in its own guise... Perhaps we live in a world invented by ourselves.¹³

Dubuffet takes as much from surrealist art as he does from abstract, in order to create his pictures of rebellion against 'art' and particularly against 'taste'. His human forms are realistic and imaginative, simultaneously naive and very knowing, and perhaps they represent landscapes or mountain ranges. The flesh of monstrous female nudes also implies the earth's crust, a shell landscape, wooded valleys, and mountains. This animal world, his evening twilight, his botanical studies, his paths that lead into unknown places are like glasses with false bottoms and transform dried-up grass and old bits of wall into comic adventures in painting. It is not cynicism and mockery that create his attitude, but rather the desire to experience even ugliness without disguise, completely stripped, as part of the banquet of beauty. Each further step foretells the transition from fantastic object to objectless fantasy. This direction brings the expected release from the surrealist reliance on the intellectuals literary background. At the same time however, it brings about a definite disassociation from the optically comprehensible world of man's existence.

If the surrealist effort to return to the primitive sources was, with a few exceptions, narrowly iconographical, the Cobra movement broadened the whole enterprise, with an immediacy capable of abolishing the traditional techniques of painting. Hence the groups interest in the work of Jean Dubuffet, and their plan to make him the subject of a number of their

review. But Dubuffet's research was already taking him well ahead, and the interdependence he established between matter and the graphic element in his work made him a prophet of the most significant contemporary developments.

In confrontation with surrealism, Dubuffet with his subversive and uncompromising approach, linked the magic of the image not so much to its own power reference, but to its mysterious apparition within matter itself. With his desire to 'take things up again from their point of departure' to be at the source of what has not yet begun, Dubuffet saw his own work confined, as he himself had vindicated ART BRUT: it was 'an individual creation without precedent.'



Conclusion

What happened in France in 1944 was that the previously established order was in total disrepute, that excepted systems of judgment were entirely discredited and that hierarchies long taken for granted were thrown into the shredder. there was a situation vacant, at that time, for someone who could make first rate art and yet nowhere bear the taint of a pre-1939 aesthetic.

The situation brought forward Jean Dubuffet, a wine wholesaler turned painter, who had his first exhibition in October, 1944, just a few weeks after the Germans had been turned out of Paris.

The immensely prolific Dubuffet probably exercised a greater influence over both his European and his American contemporaries than any other artist of the immediately post-war epoch. He did this not only through his own work but also through his own exploration and documentation of the phenomenon he called 'ART BRUT' - art produced by completely untrained artists, including children and psychotics, in which the artistic impulse seems to express itself in a completely raw state.

Dubuffet belonged to that close-knit Parisian milieu in which art and literature overlap; and he was known there as an inimitable human being; an original among originals, with the strong line in the kind of elasticized dialectic which can be pulled this way and that, at will, and yet always snapped back into place. He was a dazzling and productive writer, whose published controversial writings for the years 1946-67 came to

over a thousand pages. And in 1944-45 when most people longed only to see the return of French high culture as it had existed until 1939, Dubuffet outraged his countrymen by saying that museum art was grossly over-rated and there was quite as much to be learned from the art of madmen and guttersnipes. France had been producing great art in such quantity and for so many years that a lifetime was none too long for anybody who wanted to know it thoroughly. Rather than look around for the new and the difficult, people were delighted to settle, where the art of their own day was concerned, for the point of view epitomized once and for all by William Butler Yeats in his poem, "The Nineteenth Century and After" :

Through the great song return no more
There's keen delight in what we have :
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave. 3

Dubuffet despised this point of view. Not only did he oppose it in print, but his paintings were the antithesis of the polite, well-made, undemanding work of those who followed the masters of the French School at a respectful distance. His pictures looked as if they had not been painted at all, but scored in mud with a pointed stick. Their subject matter was rudimentary, their awkwardness flagrant, their total effect nearer to metropolitan graffiti than to traditional painting. He spared nothing and nobody. Yet if the early Dubuffet now stands out, it is not as an iconoclast. He gave, on the contrary, a paradoxical, unforeseeable grandeur to what were divided at the time as impudent scrawls and scribbles. It is to him, against all the odds, that the European imagination attached itself; and it is through him that the dream of a freer, franker and yet not less humane mood of utterance was carried forward in art.

Dubuffet in all this, looked both backward and forward. His ideas were in line, that is to say, with avant-garde attitudes as they had

expressed themselves in Europe for many years past. As a young man he had been deeply impressed by Hans Prinzhorn's book, first published in 1922, on the paintings of the mentally ill; but Max Ernst had been preoccupied with such things since before 1914. Dubuffet welcomed chance into his art as a full partner - 'It takes two', he wrote, 'to dance this dance' - but then chance had been built into the notion of art since the early days of surrealism.

At the time when John Cage was quite unknown in Paris, Dubuffet had the same ideas as he about the expressive power of sounds from everyday life. He wrote in 1946;

I know that musicians don't want to hear about them, and consider them merely as 'noise', 'But I don't see why the sound of a chair being dragged along the floor, or an elevator starting its descent, or the turning on of a tap of water should not have its place in music, every bit as much as the twelve starvelling and arbitrary notes of the scale. ²

Dubuffet arrived by his own calculations at idea after idea which had been, or was to be, propagated elsewhere as basic to a modernist attitude to life. In 1944 for example, he wrote to a friend that he did not believe in the notion of artistic gifts and there was no reason why one person should not paint as well as another. In this he paralleled one of the most radical ideas of R. Buckminster Fuller - that 'every child is a genius until he is de-geniused by education.' ²

Dubuffet was also, in those early days, for an anonymous art as distinct from the fifty years of adulation which causes a once gifted artist to coast along on his signature alone; in this, he prefigured the revolt of the late 1960's against the kind of art which barely stands higher than the autograph hunting in the hierarchy of human experience. His was an art that began from zero; but in this, once again, he had been preceded by Paul

Klee, who once said that he wanted to work as if European art had never existed and everything had to begin again, from the beginning.

So he was both new and not new; but if some of his ideas had been in the air for a generation, Dubuffet nonetheless brought to them an incisive, quizzical, unsparing turn of mind that was specifically his own. At what might otherwise have been a low point in the history of French creativity, he was able to reassert that there was no imaginative need for which an image cannot be forthcoming.

Dubuffet's position as an artist and theorist can be artificially split into two standpoints: A body of essentially negative opinion that represents a consistent and fundamentally hostile attitude toward western art and culture; and, opposed to this, a deeply positive belief in the art of individuals who, for whatever reason, are able, or are forced, to create outside of this pervasive world view. For Dubuffet these two bodies of ideas are not separable. His attack on the values of western culture is justified only because he was able to point to other values that he saw as more truly human, alive, and suited to our inner reality and needs.

Dubuffet's fascination with the paintings of mental patients, and with all that he called Art Brut, prefigured the anti-aesthetic, anti-cultural attitude which is today common among avant-garde artists both in New York and in Paris. It is as though Dubuffet's purpose all along had been to display the richness of invention and power of direct evocation to be achieved when the painter turns his back on established culture, and every aesthetic accepted by the schools or by 'good taste'. It must be kept in mind that 'naïves' and mental patients had been the true creators of that popular art which is transformed into Pop Art only when an alert and informed intelligence practices it. I think Dubuffet's art could be readily interpreted as the first coming to aesthetic awareness of non-cultural forms of expression such as the young in Paris or New York are today pursuing, and which, needless to say they will never achieve. being men of

knowledge and talent, they can not hope to return voluntarily to the naïvety that precedes art.

Jean Dubuffet was an artist who, except when physically unable, worked every day for forty years. With the exception of Picasso, no other artist of this century has produced more works, and none except Paul Klee had documented himself more fully.

As his career progressed, it became possible to see certain limits to Dubuffet's talent. His tireless inventiveness could not quite conceal an element of the facetious and the frivolous; his use of intractable or apparently unsuitable materials seemed increasingly like the last refuge of a talent fleeing from its own refinement. The late works often lack the charm and inventiveness of the early ones - they are coarse in detail, unsympathetic of texture and garish in colour. But Dubuffet worked unflaggingly, and apparently with complete personal satisfaction, until his death in 1985. Nearly forty years previous, he had said in a lecture:

I draw and I paint for pleasure, out of mania, out of passion, for myself, in order to keep myself happy, and not in the least because I want to make fun of anybody. ⁴

He would probably have considered these words a good epitaph.

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