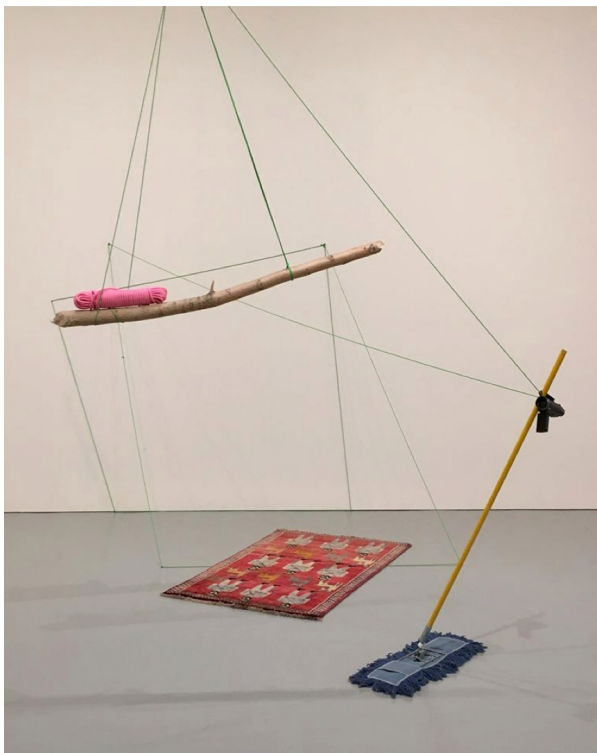


The Independent Voice of the Visual Arts

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this is a temporary replacement**

Rachel Harrison

Blake Gopnik wrote on Facebook that Rachel Harrison's work inhabits the art world with zero friction. It ticks every box for what art is supposed to look like and be and do. If Blake is writing tongue-in-cheek criticism of demonstratively low expectations then many would totally agree with him. My reaction was the art world seriously needs a wake-up call. It's just as likely that Rachel Harrison has no idea what art is, like many other artists who graduate with a degree in from the university of conformity.



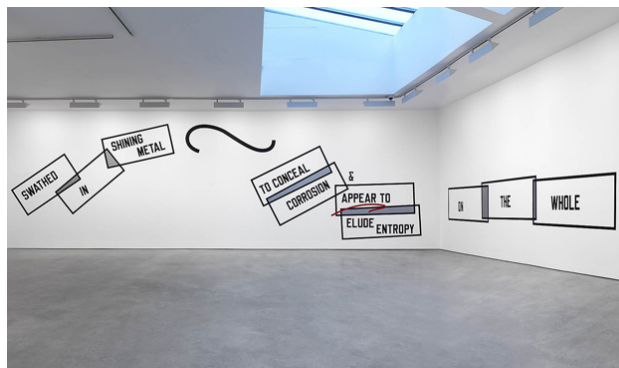
Art historian and critic Barbara Rose wrote: "What was done in Duchamp's name... was responsible for some of the most vulgar non-art still being produced by ignorant and lazy artists whose thinking stops with the idea of putting a found object in a museum."

But Jerry Saltz says it better; "Anarchy Lite; It's everywhere, and it all looks the same. Those post-minimalist formal arrangements of clunky stuff, sticks, planks, bent metal, wood, concrete and whatnot leaned, stacked, stuck, piled, or dispersed. There's usually a history straight out of Artforum or the syllabi of academics who've scared their students into being pleasingly meek, imitative, and ordinary."

Rachel Harrison's work suggests that when no one knows what art is anymore charlatans hold sway. Um... every other profession knows what they are doing. The art world is a field where you can get away with serious bullshit as it's uncouth to object; being critical is rude and feelings get hurt.

Lawrence Weiner's non-art

Weiner's work isn't art, it's interior decoration. Art historians consider Lawrence Weiner a forerunner of Conceptual art. Weiner is best known for text directly on walls. As viewers read the piece, they complete Weiner's projects - conjuring mental images of what he describes. Weiner attained fame when art became anything you could get away with. At the age of 19, young Weiner astounded art critics across the nation by blowing up a stick of dynamite in the desert. His work today is done by assistants so it's not his work, only his concept; Weiner calls himself a non-artist, calls his work non-art, so it's not art



These distinctions matter according to Denis Dutton. In his youtube video *The Art Instinct, a Darwinian Theory of Beauty*¹, Dutton argues that aesthetic awareness is an evolutionary trait, and is shaped by natural selection. It's not, as most contemporary art criticism and academic theory would have it, "socially constructed." The human appreciation for art is innate, and certain artistic values carry across cultures. It seems an aesthetic perception ensured the survival of the perceiver's genes. What does that mean

¹ Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct, a Darwinian Theory of Beauty*, youtube video Ted Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PktUzdnBqWI&t=198s>

for the entire discipline of art? Dutton argues, with forceful logic and hard evidence, that art criticism needs to be premised on an understanding of evolution, not on abstract 'theory'. Science says art is specific; it's no longer anything you can get away with. Weiner's art, what he got away with, consists of networking, marketing,. In academia that's acceptable that as a legitimate art strategy. Weiner's work isn't art, it's interior decoration.

Michael Asher's Absence

At the 1976 Venice Biennale, Michael Asher filled a corner of the Italian Pavilion with twenty-two folding chairs. He wanted the space to be a "functional" lounge where "visitors communicate with each other on a social level". Asher's "situational interventions" (as he calls them) or "institutional critiques" (as others label them) are often invisible. One of Asher's signature works consisted of removing the gallery wall dividing the office from the exhibition space, revealing the business behind the art. That exhibition took place at Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles in 1974.

Denis Dutton says that art criticism needs to be premised on an understanding of evolution and not on abstract 'theory'². That art is an evolutionary adaptation of the highest order in creating and processing subtleties of knowledge and complexities of thought. As such, art carries a statement of the artist's mindset within the culture's ideology. Duchamp's urinal said that art is to piss on, but what statement can we read in Asher's work?



His Venice Biennale project wants visitor to experience the absence of an artist, where visitors would discuss their Biennale experience as if in a café, implying that artists and art are not needed. On that case there would be no Biennale or subject for discussion, so Asher's nihilist premise is, truly, hot air. Asher promotes the effacement of authorship,

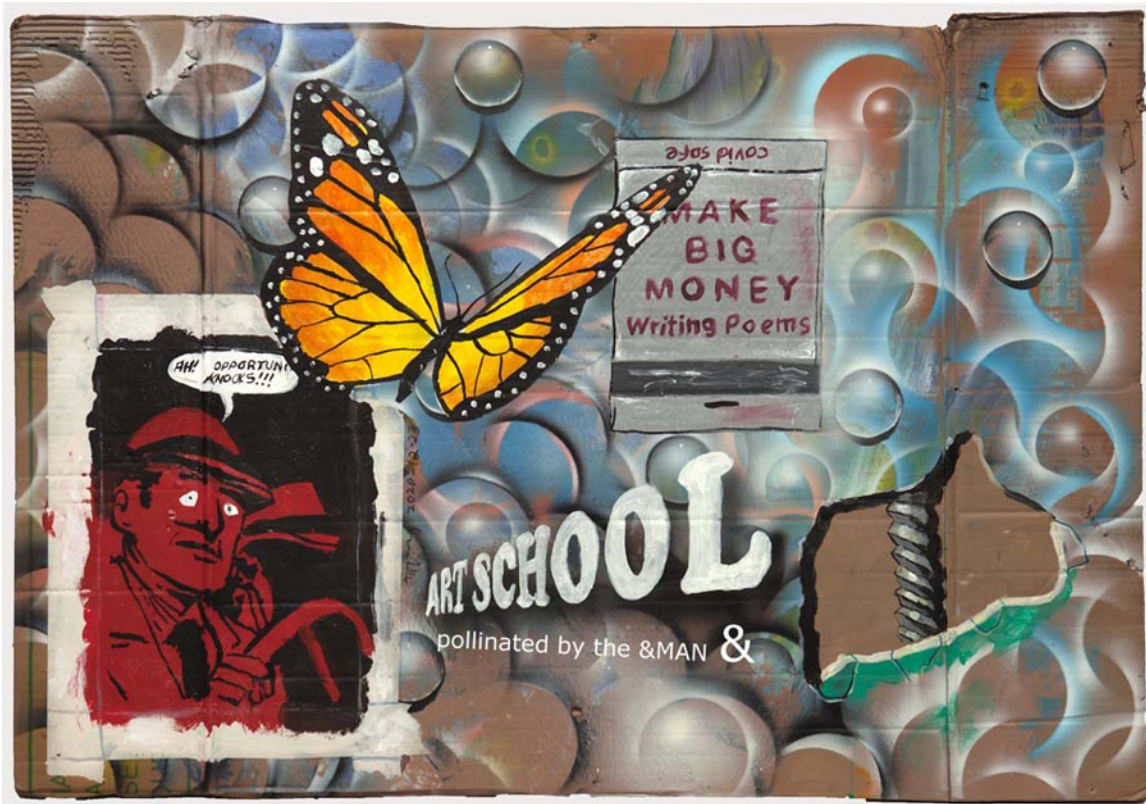
² ditto

which makes one wonder what he has to offer, since authorship is one's personal contribution to humanity, it justifies your existence.

Is Dutton right, is art an evolutionary adaptation of the highest order? Or is Asher right artists are not worth a it? Professors with nothing to teach should resign before they drives their school into bankruptcy. In 2018, 18 art institutes across the US closed due to declining enrolment.³

The Great Unlearning

In Critique as Unlearning (e-flux.conversations, 2017) These words by an Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Parsons New School, personifies a language hosting superficial trends over the realities of complex history. "It would be prudent to take the contingency of one's position as a given ...I would like to consider what it might mean if we took Gayatri Spivak's call to unlearn one's learning and unlearn one's privilege as the aim of studio critique."



In what seems a rebuttal, Chomsky asserts that knowledge of language, and probably other kinds of knowledge are not accounted for externally, through experience, but

³ Sarah Cascade, 18 Art Institutes Across the US Will Close by Year's End Due to Declining Enrolment, Artier, 2018
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/18-art-institutes-closing-in-us-1318094>

internally, in terms of principles which are not contingent, certainly not learned, but innate; not a posteriori, but a priori. This prof. tosses psychology out the window and calls for a sacrificium intellectus, in what looks a strategic attempt to destroy his student's self-confidence, promoting uncertainty and insecurity, teaching his students to hobble themselves, perhaps to eliminate any competition from potential bright minds.

This advice to give up our privilege comes from someone privileged above most others; a tenured New York academic earning many times the average wage, who is not about to give up his privilege or unlearn his own education, his power. Unlearning our way to a politically correct utopia is a childish fantasy that will not bring about the golden age of the simple minded. Superficial trends ignore complex reality, this world is awash in historical illiteracy. When a guru instructs his disciples to give up their ego, we note the guru has retained their own ego, and acquired disciples.

Teodrose Fikre wrote that there are tens of millions of uneducated white people who suffer the same generational poverty faced by minorities in the cities. But these rural poor are told they're privileged by a college educated middle class living in cities these uneducated poor could never afford to visit. Because inequality and injustice occur among all levels of society, it's education that brings privilege, and everyone studies to acquire it.

"unlearning one's learning and unlearning one's privileges"... Aren't there times when accusations of privilege are a power strategy? People have been known to claim victim status as a moral currency to dominate the narrative. Few of us are rich. In time we realize the privileged are those who are educated, while those lacking an education are unemployed. One cannot unlearn one's education nor should one wish to. Without talent there's no entitlement.

Baudrillard's Icons

In "Jean Baudrillard and Art", Douglas Kellner writes "Pop Art constitutes a turning point in the history of art for Baudrillard whereby art becomes quite simply the reproduction of signs of the world and in particular the signs of the consumer society which itself is primarily a system of signs"⁴.

A critique would say this ignores the non-verbal language for a superficial intellectual reading. It's easy to disagree with Baudrillard's pragmatic Marxist view on art. Baudrillard was an intellectual, not an artist; he lacked a sense of the spiritual, emotional, and numinous aspects of art. In *Simulacra and Simulation* he sees the numinous as delusional, the spiritual as superstition, but today we acknowledge the existence of the unconscious psyche and the instincts. Art is an instinctive judgemental function, evolved for non-verbal languages, whose themes do not export well intellectually. The sense of

⁴ Douglas Kellner, Jean Baudrillard and Art, UCLA School of Education
<https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/baudrillardandart.pdf>

mystery and human concepts of the divine may well refer to mental states for which there are no words.



Psychologist Carl Jung writes of four kinds of people, intellectuals, emotive, feeling, and intuitive types. Artists are highly driven by intuitive and feeling values, including spiritual elements which are important, but mostly hard to describe. Historically the numinous has been a powerful transcendent force, releasing endorphins, dopamine and serotonin.

Creativity in art fascinates because of the medium the artist needs to master through intuition, which is unconscious. A Jazz musician would speak of channelling a vibe. When Baudrillard writes of art as simply the reproduction of signs he misses the inner power and mysterious forces that set it in motion. As if literature consisted of putting words on a page.

Miklos Legrady, **Scouting the blogs**