

Post Post Post Modern Manifesto

The art of the 20th century was vastly different than the art of the 19th century. The industrial revolution in the 19th century had brought huge changes to the structure of society. New means of transportation had increased travel and communication. People and ideas were traveling faster than ever before. In the art world, artists began to question how all these changes affected the ways that they could express themselves. All across Europe, seemingly simultaneously and spontaneously, radical art movements burst onto the scene - first the Impressionists, and later the Expressionists, the Fauves, the Cubists, the Futurists, Dada, and the Surrealists - all rebelling against the art establishment that had reigned supreme until that time. What fueled these seemingly spontaneous departures from 'the way things have always been done?

The one common thread that I see in all these movements is that artists were talking passionately about ideas. Ideas about light, about space, about color, about new technology and its meaning for society, about the meaning of art, whether art should exist for its own sake or if it should or even could be used as a support for some ideology. They met in homes, in cafes, in schools. They sketched, they painted, they debated. Manifestos were written, discussed and fought over. Magazines like "Der Blaue Reiter" and "391" and "Dada" were published to disseminate ideas and fuel the spread of theories about color, composition, structure and meaning. This type of dialogue seems to me to be sadly lacking in the art world in the US today. In our Post Post Modern Age we've convinced ourselves that there is no meaning and therefore nothing to talk about. In fact, it often seems that anyone who does confess to even wanting to find meaning in contemporary art is regarded as naive. Only a country bumpkin would think that there is any meaning to be found! Formalism is king. There is no content beyond the visual object. In his book, *The Mission of Art*, visionary artist Alex Grey states that, "A strange form of evil has infected the soul of humanity in the twentieth century, and it bears the name nihilism. Nihilism is the belief that all existence is meaningless and there is no possibility of truth. Nihilism is the hopeless darkness of the spiritually blind. And nihilism has become one of the premier attitudes displayed in popular culture."

Much of the artistic dialog and passion of the early 20th century centered around making a break with the artistic traditions of the past. The various schools of art, which had reigned supreme since the Enlightenment, espoused methods of realistic representation of subject matter and taught in a rigid and lockstep manner. Students did not dare to wander too far afield from the material they were being taught. Access to Galleries and Salons was limited to artists who had come up through the ranks in this process. The freedom to experiment with abstraction or non-traditional materials or to include new technologies in their work fueled the rebellion of the Modern Artists. They succeeded beyond their wildest dreams in securing the freedom of the individual artist to express their own vision. Ironically, this has created a new

Art Establishment that values newness and originality above content. Sadly, the public has been largely left behind in this process. Artists have earned artistic freedom at the expense of having a public that understands and believes in their work.

I propose a Post Post Post Modernist movement. We have at our disposal all the artistic styles of the past and an exciting array of new materials and technologies that have yet to be explored by artists. The potential exists for some really radical new ways of expressing ourselves, but ours will be a poor and lonely existence if artists cannot find a way to bring the public back into the understanding and enjoyment of our work. The key to getting the public to re-embrace art is to create work that is "about" something and to make that meaning accessible. I am not for one moment espousing a return to representationalism as the sole means of conveying meaning. Meaning can be conveyed in any number of ways. Many of the artists who first experimented with abstraction, did so in a quest to express more deeply spiritual concepts than they felt could be communicated by painting recognizable objects.

What I am proposing is not a specific change of style, but rather a change of attitude. I suggest that artists take responsibility for understanding and expressing verbally the ideas that fuel their work. Sometimes that understanding will not be complete. Often, an artist is trying to get at some spiritual itch that can't be scratched. Artists use their artistic expression as a means of working out difficult or problematic emotions. But even this limited understanding makes the piece more accessible if artists are willing to be open about their process. There is a trend in current "Art Think" that we should not have to explain a work of art. People should just "get it." I recognize that there is sometimes a transcendent moment when someone viewing a work of art has an overwhelming emotional connection with the work and the supposed intent of the artist who created it.

Facilitating these aesthetic experiences is (and should be) the goal of any artist who aspires to spiritual content in his or her work. However, many people do not have the tools at their disposal to connect with art in styles they don't immediately understand. This will become even more of a problem as artists explore new media and new concepts of what artistic expression means. Artists have become lazy and snobbish in deciding that it is the responsibility of the viewer to educate themselves in order to appreciate a work of art. Then they bemoan the fact that "No one buys art anymore" Well, of course, they don't! They're absolutely terrified of making a bad decision and inadvertently buying "bad art" but they have no frame of reference to determine what that is. We of the art world stand by shaking our heads and saying, "Tut, tut, our culture just doesn't appreciate art."

A Post Post Post Modernist recognizes that artistic expression has spiritual and emotional content whether the artist chooses to validate it or not. Even complete lack of meaning is a meaning in its own way. The current emphasis on formalism, with its denial of deeper intent beyond the marks on the canvas, actually has vast spiritual significance. When we aspire to no meaning in art, we are actually saying that there is no meaning in the Universe and giving voice

to the nihilism that has gripped our culture.

It is the responsibility of artists to do the internal work to attempt to gain understanding of the spiritual and emotional content of their work. It is also the responsibility of artists, through study and through dialog with others, to master the vocabulary necessary to communicate this to others. Only by immersing ourselves in the passion of our work and effectively communicating this passion, will we create a 21st Century Art that is a vibrant and meaningful part of our culture.

— Judy Gardner