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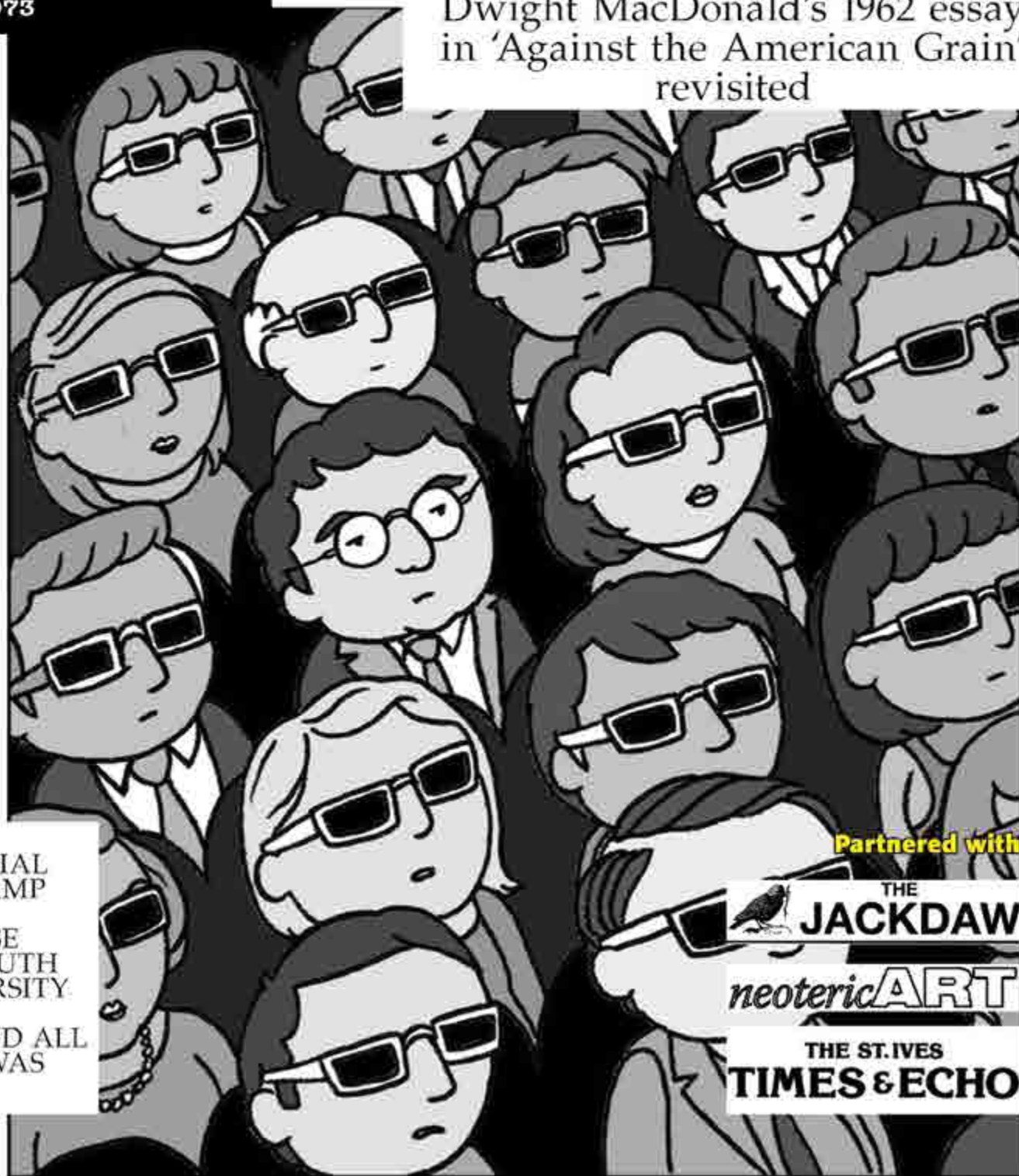
The independent voice of the Visual Arts

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CHICAGO WASHINGTON TORONTO LONDON MADRID CORNWALL

## MASS MIDCULT

Dwight MacDonald's 1962 essay  
in 'Against the American Grain'  
revisited



THE  
ESSENTIAL  
DUCHAMP

J'ACCUSE  
FALMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY

1937 AND ALL  
THAT WAS  
PARIS

Partnered with



THE  
JACKDAW

neotericART

THE ST. IVES  
TIMES & ECHO

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.

If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.

The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.



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# EDITORIAL

The shared symbolic order that defined much of art throughout human history had a lot to do ( some may say everything ) with theology. From Astarte the many breasted fertility goddess of clay, to the Parthenon through to the Sistine Chapel, endless icons and intricate designs in places of worship were the desires of patrons and states and the mainstay of the working artist.

It was necessary in a conscious mind to know what heaven may look like what eternal life may be like, what the being who bestows these onto you may look like and what he can do. Art brings the imaginings of the mind before the eyes and, in such a way, makes them real. Through the art of architecture it plants them in the landscape and gives us the mistaken excuse to suppose we have created civilisations.

With the loss of faith came the retreat of this kind of work but the inner feelings this kind of art generated, were, and are still, our inner longing. When atheism becomes strong the idea of soul in humanity becomes lessened in the imagination and theological models lose most of their context and awe. But the individual is used to seeing art in this way and looks for it to continue – to express their feelings, their thoughts, their experiences and transmute it in such a way that the image becomes the preferred language of our experience of existence. What we face today is the idea that the soul is only an idea as is the feeling that art has an unrivalled purity, imbibed by the practising artist.

To call contemporary art godless is not to define it or belittle it. Quite the opposite. But to define it as soulless is to pinpoint the lack of passion, the loss of certainty, the theft of immortality that is the culture of modern, late capitalist society. The theologies of the past were inventions of non-scientific minds trying to explain Nature. Today we still have everything to explain and no god to adjudicate the disputes.

Contemporary art tries to exhibit everything without explanation. It has none. This is the fact that disengages public perception and leaves only aficionados visiting galleries. Artists endlessly try to justify themselves and patrons attempt to make the contemporary art scene as important as in the past. The new theology that will regain this feeling without god, is to rediscover nature, landscape and our mortality within knowledge. Artists working on these issues will do well because when it comes to it, theologies end up looking the same.

Daniel Nanavati  
UK Editor

## THE ATTACK ON DEREK GUTHRIE

Dear Daniel,

Who is Joe?

When I taught logic I recommended students master the informal fallacies because they are likely to persuade more people than sound reasoning. Cynical, I suppose, but also the way things are. Honest argument is not very popular.

Joe says you and Derek are “rusty” and “not connected”. These are two of the most persuasive ad hominem used in current art politics. I am sure they will resonate with those who are “well connected”. But asserting these terms does not auto-demonstrate any falsehood or even deficiency in what any person says.

Joe does make one point though, not just about the NAE, but the whole predicament of our time. It is difficult to find stuff worthy of championing in what Darby Bannard identified as “the art glut” thirty years ago in a diatribe he wrote for ARTS. Like Darby, Joe seems to recognize not everything proffered as worthy in the art scene really is, that the pluralistic assumption that everything is equal is not true to our experience of art. Good for Joe.

But he drops the ball when he advocates finding something to champion in whatever is supposed to be hot stuff, if for no other reason than to at least avoid negativity. That is a soft substitute for conviction. The “business” of the NAE is not to champion, but to illuminate whatever it chooses to look at.

And then he complains about spelling. He used “see’s” as a verb and verbs don’t take the possessive. One walks treacherous ground when they publicly criticize someone else’s use of English. It is too damn complicated a language to reliably get right on one’s own.

*John Link*  
10/09/2017

## HELLO NEW YORK

Hello Daniel,

Thank you very much for sending me the issue. I will tell people to subscribe to the magazine. It is important that you will be able to continue your work.

If you need someone in New York to write on a regular basis, be it reviews or articles, please do not hesitate to ask me. I do not need any financial compensation and would be more than happy to be of help.

Have a great evening.

Kind regards,

*Jimi Dams*  
21/09/2017

## ST. IVES IS THRIVING

Dear Derek,

We met briefly outside Tate St Ives during Ken Turner’s performance on Saturday.

I’m writing because I’m saddened that you feel that the St Ives art scene is frozen and wanted to give you some examples of artist-led activity happening at Porthmeor Studios, which is where I’m based. In the past month Porthmeor has hosted ‘MONO’, an evening of 16 short artist films curated by Rafal Zajko; ‘Flexing Around’ a performance by Ilker Cinarel featuring opera singer Jesse James Giuliani; ‘Can you see being friends with an object for years?’ showing textile and design work of Sarah Johnson, Joe Townshend, oB wear and a woven plane; ‘Hex on the Beach’, an exhibition by artists from Anchor and Trewarveneth Studios in Newlyn; an exhibition by Katie Schwab & the Chy an Creet artists & makers, and a public talk with artist Danny Fox.

They were all great events and I hope you can join in the future. There is a Facebook page which keeps up-to-date with information about what’s on here: <https://www.facebook.com/PorthmeorStudios/>

Kind regards

*Simon Bayliss*  
23/09/2017

## THE DUCHAMP EXPERIMENT

Dear Editor

My response to Mikos Legrady’s piece on Marcel Duchamp “Plight” left me somewhat agreeing with the tone of his thought, but I acknowledge this may better be accomplished to view the legacy of Duchamp in retrospection.

Marcel’s “Plight” was not his, but ours.

In retrospection of the Dadaist movement, Duchamp stood outside the larger locus of artists that continued to make plastic/retinal art. It is Duchamp’s move away, his strategic or thought-out exit from so-called visual art that created his “stir” in the first place. It all happened in built up time. That Duchamp had been a successful, recognized painter [Nude Descending] underscores the attention or new “success of discussion” he achieved, although never, in his words, sought it. I wonder. That his performance had an ancillary life to modern art, shadowing art, not really involved in the historical issues that permeated the art scene through out the twentieth century, but always walking to the shy outside of discussion, as lone scene maker with his more involved friends, [Man Ray, Breton, Picabia, et al.] tipping his toe in the pools of art, glancing in and out, blowing kisses and pushing his wispy mystery. As a ghost who’s time was coming on... but walking in the distance. But

personally, his exit was far more given to critical response than any entrance he ever made.

The narrative attention that the Duchamp received, it's weight of coverage and critic's response, all the speculation as to his open ended "meaning" has the same glorification and pondering of sex in outer space. To me, the attention Duchamp received was not unlike the legitimization of a certain cynical position that was qualified as myth making, replete of substance, living in our passing minds and staying oh so seductive and glibly fascinating but-- what is it. ??? OH dream on culture vultures!

Now Duchamp, in a sixties movie, blithely, quietly admits he lost too many friends on the battle fields of Europe in WW1. Fine, modernism failed to replace the traditional culture of Europe in all it's promise, as in technology, government, religion, politics, culture and this failure was beyond words and no longer could he participate in what the world that recognizes as art. His work, especially his readymades, represent a protest, although late in declaration, to the tragic loss of life that he could not abide...or intellectually process given his now defunct, self deduced "cultural vocabulary". That indeed maybe the context in which we may see Duchamp, as the rest of the Dadaists in one form or another. However, that context had no legs in the USA or should have had none realistically or historically. Indeed we fought war, but fortunately not here. This notion of a total loss of culture and it's outrage spawned was not available in the American field of cultural purview, as we did not experience as such as horrible reality. But here was this man of mystery, beloved [?] who was the object of such critical, unresolved, attention that the aura around him shone above the limited works of art that he actually advanced. And after that, he played chess... for years, as a cultural expression. But tell this to the other artists of WW1, tell Hemingway, Picasso, Wilford Owen or Remarque, Boccioni, Nevinson, Sargent or Kennington or Dix or Grosz or Beckman or the hundreds of artists that manage to survive the war and suffered and courageously continued to create. Tell them of Duchamp. Tell them. Go ahead, I say.

Yet the speculators wrote on. Sixties artists conveniently glommed on. And there was no limit to the mythology and critical preponderance they could manufacture and from out of that .... Many recognized movements were substantiated --but when we actually return to man himself... not really that much-- but much made out of him. And it is this "formula of thought compiled" that is actually what we think of when we think of Duchamp. Not his work, his "story" created in print or legend.

In Duchamp's very self serving conscious decision of laying off the actual construction of art and at the "compassion of composition" around him, his support, we see the roots of any art movement that was created mostly in our minds and not on Earth. This grew steadily as America drifted further from Europe, especially after WW2 as America was directing it's getaway from Europe, ironically with many transplanted Europeans, not to mention Duchamp.

In retrospect, we can see the history of western twentieth century art as Duchamp's shadow "was eased" into the mainstream, a rationalization process that created a de-substantialization of-- plasticity/ thing making/mark making/form making/sensuality/sentient self aware art as actually created on Earth --to just ideas. Here is where it gets seductive and tricky and murky-- given to suggestion and directed focus.... the ideas are not literature or philosophy or even performance but a referential or inferential found object of attention "extant", intentionally random or for that non-matter.. only an idea, as ideated as a urinal or bicycle wheel can be "what ever labeled". And how fleeting is that by nature? Can it be captivated? This is an actual "issue" that is not realistically ever broached to the extent it plods on in an unknown mind of detached phantasms un-loosed. Ask any art student or performance artist or art historian, however thinking, thinking. Ask the Gallerists, curators, academics... grant writers...who else? The mainstream press.... And off it goes, wandering into history.....for all to take advantage of.

What the activity around Duchamp has created was

### QUOTE of the Month:

**The fact that the primitive "looks like" the Modern is interpreted as validating the Modern by showing that its values are universal, while at the same time projecting it—and with it MoMA—into the future as a permanent canon. A counter view is possible: that primitivism on the contrary invalidates Modernism by showing it to be derivative and subject to external causation.**

**Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief (1992) by Thomas McEvilly**

the legitimizing of a certain historical cynical fork in the road of modern art history. Those who plod on with Duchamp, fail to realize that the anti art stance is actually non existent. That they themselves, and I admit a certain fascination with the mythology of Marcel, are in no position of actually evaluate this un-position because of the institutionalized piled up Duchamp myth as an agreed upon "reality of art", an aesthetic grounded, which it is not, plainly NOT a given, and never has been. This so called legacy is not based on his work but of his told story, built up in time to conveniently and pragmatically match the needs of any artist or critic that needed substantiation. This critical stance has been endlessly appropriated to substantiate numerous art tendencies, many immensely popular since WW2, especially in the United States. Where "make it so" becomes art. This process to my mind has radically and

tragically placed the institution of art in the realm, although many other processes were at work, of not necessarily IMPORTANT. This is a vast departure from human history. This is a breakaway we are still in the process of rectifying one way or another. One can ask one self- is post modernism just post Art? How do we need art? What can art tell us now, in it's institutional decampment, it's defanging, it's Duchampian dither? Did Duchamp actually free you? To what?

To understand this point one must ask oneself- what is the effect "Duchamp" has had on our art thinking? Almost an impossible task in view of this electronic day and age. The real question maybe, through default, did the ghosts of Duchamp get their way? Up for debate.

*Al Jirikowic*  
09/2017



## WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

A BRIEF HISTORY AND  
PROPOSITION FOR THE  
FUTURE OF THE  
NEW ART EXAMINER

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with others

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3pm 17th March  
2018

WHO'S PULLING THE STRINGS  
IN YOUR ART WORLD?

(Ansiedad. by By Luis Utrillas  
Instagram / @Luisutrijazz)



# SPEAKEASY

Bert Biscoe

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Each issue the New Art Examiner will invite a well-known, or not-so-well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest – whatever it may be.

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Creativity as a human endeavour rarely occurs in a vacuum. It is an impulse which compels a person to act. Failure to act can have consequences, some of which can amount to some semblance of pain.

I recently helped to raise money to purchase a picture by Richard Pentreath of the C19th Zennor poet, Henry Quick. Quick was a disabled man with few if any skills, but he could read and write and he made poems – many acrostics and the enigmatically fine yet primitive 'Life and Progress of Henry Quick'. His story was told by P A S Pool. Quick wrote from compulsion and he sold broadsheets to an audience on market days in Penzance.

Many others create in many media, not for acclaim or appreciation, but because something inside moves them to it. The picture will hang in the forthcoming Kresenn Kernow Cornish National Archive and Library as a celebration of all those in Cornwall who have instinctively, compulsively written incidents, beliefs, stories, reports, journals and poems.

Where people create for audiences, it is important to place the work at formative stages in its process in front of people whose sensory experience can be translated into an engaged language to kindle, fire and clarify the creative process – as fire needs oxygen, so art needs critics – not knockers and disparagers, but people who are willing and open to becoming part of the creative process.

A good critic will intertwine, will not say too much, and will read not only the work but the process too, of an artist under his eye. Having somebody who will immerse and read your process and work can help to drive and evolve the creative endeavour. Very few, if any, artists work in isolation, or alone. Interaction and discourse are important parts of honing the expression.

Much of this happens informally, without it being cast as work. It will have diverse dynamics – some do it with a quarrel, some with a smile! We are fools to either deny it or to avoid it because, I suspect, it is the element in the creative process which generates the sparks and hooks that win and move audiences. Indeed, a good critic is an essential part of creating audiences.

The critical process is important to every member of an artist's audience. It is to be

hoped that, however an artist chooses to discuss art with their audience, the discussion occurs. A confident spectator can become involved in the creative process, and that will make the experience whole and meaningful, and the inevitable transaction more wholesome than mere commerce.

Before he died recently I was lucky to spend time with theatre director, Bill Mitchell, of Wild Works. He said that his creative ambition was to make work which broke down the barrier between player and audience so that the act of theatre becomes one of community, with everybody becoming part of the experience. At his final production, Wolf's Child, at Trelowarren, in the rain, in the woods, at dusk, his ambition was fulfilled. Without disbelief to suspend, and without the critical facility to enter into the work, such an experience would not have been possible. Even the half-drunk gossipers at the back of the promenade shut up and became immersed – as critics make work, so work makes critics, and audiences attend to the art! ■

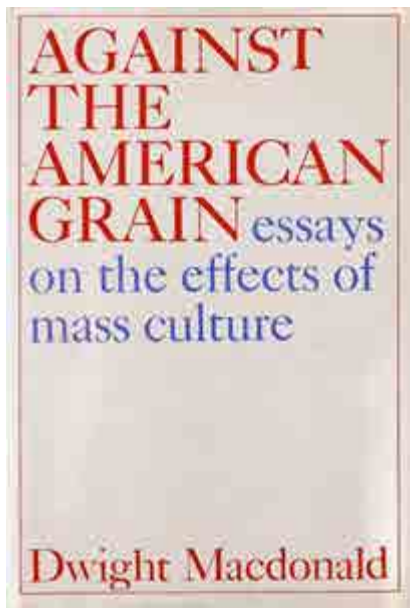
*Bert Biscoe, Viajor Gans Geryow was Barded in 1995 at Marazion for services to Cornwall. Joined GK Council in 2009. Political Advisor to Bardh Meur. .*



# "EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO BE STUPID,"

Daniel Nanavati

UK Editor



*"Every man has the right to be stupid, but Comrade Macdonald abuses the privilege. (attrib to Leon. Trotsky when talking about Dwight MacDonal'd and often quoted thereafter by MacDonal'd.)"*

Masscult and Midcult  
In *Essays Against the American Grain*, *Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* is a classic essay by the American philosopher and political radical Dwight MacDonal'd, which had a profound effect on American culture and was first published in New York in 1962. Its relevance is astounding as the currents he identified – building upon Edward Bernays, Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno – have become the centre of the postmodern cultural landscape. First published in *Partisan Review*, a magazine to which the

leading New York progressive thinkers of the 30s, who were the intellectuals who effected the transfer of the avant garde from France to New York, contributed. This article revisits some of MacDonal'd's key arguments.

The issue of mass culture in the 20th Century has politically attempted to define the entirety of western culture. But looking at the Communist ideal or the Fascist dream, we would do ourselves a huge intellectual disservice if we assumed that mass-thinking was only developed in the western world by Marxists, Leninists or the demented National Socialists of Austria and Germany. The power of rulers to impose their thinking upon followers has always been with us and the willingness of people to do as generals tell them has always been part of our societies. It is this willingness to be led that makes leadership possible.

MacDonal'd introduces the modern intellectual to the reductionism of industry and media-organised political debate. Redolent with artistic answers this speaks directly of human experience, the processes of keeping power and the present blind-spot in an art world given over to control and management which pays lip-service to the deeper needs of society accessed by artists. Behind much of Dwight MacDonal'd's essay, like a second skin growing over his quest to give the 'common man'

access to high culture, is the transposition of a narrow band of opinions into popular culture.

MacDonal'd writes:

*"The past cultures I admire - Periclean Greece, the city states of the Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan England, are examples - have mostly been produced by communities, and remarkably small ones at that. Also remarkably heterogeneous ones, riven by faction, stormy with passionate antagonisms. But this diversity, fatal to that achievement of power over other countries that is the great aim of modern statecraft, seems to have been stimulating to talent."*

Many artists have stood apart, died, suffered penury and been castigated, imprisoned, tortured and ignored to serve their art. A feature of the industrial revolution when they ceased to be valued as artists unlike more ancient cultures. But the artist has never been a part of the crowd. In *Masscult and Midcult: Essay Against the American Grain*, Macdonald points to the ways in which modern societies – across the western world – reduce and corrupt the boundaries of creative thinking and tend toward a common denominator that can be sold to everyone. Politics is the sugar factory of popularism. Movies and TV, its marketing wing. Flags and statues its symbols. Patriotism its whip, Nationalism its oratory. In putting everything up for

grabs we, monkeys that we are, grab everything with no discernment and little knowledge. And that exercise of grabbing requires no skill whatsoever. Popularism – masscult – wishes it could sell itself as high culture because it uses similar procedures – it paints, sculpts, writes, composes – but it has no skills other than selling. Postmodernism argues art needs no skill. The residue of Duchamp's challenge is that 'everything is art' and so everyone is now an artist. Equality is achieved by the illusion well-managed publicity brings to the citizen. He points out this happened in America because the influx of millions of immigrants required an immediate solution as to how to integrate them and this was achieved through the magazine culture and appealing to the lowest common denominator of taste. This formula did not readily transfer to Europe which is less of a magazine culture, but commodity run



capitalism and celebrity-as-commodity, certainly did and that now rules the art world.

Although Communism

fell the methods used in its tyranny have transmuted into late capitalism's consumer ideology with consummate ease and underpin Postmodernism. Plymouth City Council in conjunction with Peninsula Arts and Plymouth University recently promoted a cultural festival using the clenched fist and star to publicize its activities – an allusion that needs no comment. Marx and Engels described in The Communist Manifesto (1848), “Masscult (as) a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, and taste, dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes,

*scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture, ...”*

This breakdown has fed into the late capitalist system and filtered through marketing (about the only thing that does require skill anymore) becomes the selling of decorative commodities back to the masses as high culture. Or perhaps we should be more prosaic and say it is sold as the only culture one needs, the only culture that is important because it is the culture that makes money and, in theory, satisfaction is guaranteed. The lack of cultural argument, the

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*Add to this the jargon used to expound the agenda, loosely called a liberal agenda though it is anything but – and you have the perfect description of 1984 in which artists now live.*

*They may not all be getting sex on Thursdays but they have a system to masturbate, before they can achieve anything in the eyes of that system.*

---

silencing of the artist, the dominance of the few museums and galleries over the tax payers investments in exhibition spaces and projects, the limiting of chances and imposing of glass ceilings – are all communist ideas appropriated by the art world of late capitalism/postmodernism. Add to this the jargon used to expound the agenda, loosely called a liberal agenda though it is anything but – and you have the perfect description of 1984 in which artists now live. They may not all be getting sex on Thursdays but they have a system to masturbate, before they can achieve anything

in the eyes of that system. There is no fame without the shame of compliance. They have completely forgotten that recognition in one's own lifetime is not a mark of one's artistic achievement – many names held in esteem in the days of the Academies are not even known today. But the feel good factor inherent in winning a competition, or being chosen for an exhibition in a blue-chip gallery, or even about selling a work to the local doctor, is so heady an experience it has come to be seen as commentary on one's artistic merit.

Macdonald refers to Dr. Samuel Johnson, the 18<sup>th</sup> century literary giant, and places him centre stage as the progenitor of Masscult. Followed by the Grub Street journalists. It is better to look not at a time, but a process. The process of urbanisation. The artist was severed from the patron by city life and entered into a situation of consensus with the public. The same happened in ancient Rome – the selling of a culture to the known world was what it meant to be a Roman Citizen, and the pinnacle of achievement was to become a Roman Citizen, the ancient equivalent of the Green Card today. Cicero came to loathe the Games, the birthplace of fascism, though much loved by the mass Roman populace 2,000 years ago. His invocation chimes like a bell for us, “Are you terrified of not being applauded?” Folk Art, the expression of rural culture made by rural workers for their own kind without any middle-man, cannot survive in the city and new, mass culture develops as artists have to 'sell' work to people to add to the income from patrons. In short, Masscult only appears when you have a market place of anonymous buyers.

Good and original artists fight back. That is the reason

we write for the New Art Examiner. For MacDonald these good and original artists were the avant garde and were the finest opposition to Masscult

*"... by the end of the nineteenth century the movement from which most of the enduring work of our time has come had separated itself from the market and was in systematic opposition to it. This movement, was, of course, the "avant-garde" whose precursors were Stendhal and Baudelaire and the impressionist painters, ... What they had in common was that they preferred to work for a small audience that sympathized with their experiments because it was sophisticated enough to understand them."*

MacDonald did not experience today's mass culture. Our Postmodern world has an element of shared symbols and therefore we cannot escape that both religion and morality are Masscult as they both change with the changing generations. There is an ebb and flow to and from the high culture to and from the mass culture. That is not to say we will have high culture again – in fact it hasn't gone anywhere it is still the preserve of the few – but it is to say that giving high culture to uneducated people will not educate them. They are happy in their season; they would rather be fed than cook for themselves, they would rather be told they are free and believe it than see their chains. This is the shape of the child's mind masquerading as the modern citizen with money in its pocket which they refuse to give up. The security that parents do the work and they can just play outside. In late capitalism this is where we are. No one can see the blood we wade through everyday to have the comforts we have with the billions of animals slaughtered every year to underpin our economic powerhouse, and no one

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*... but it is to say that giving high culture to uneducated people will not educate them. They are happy in their season; they would rather be fed than cook for themselves, they would rather be told they are free and believe it than see their chains. This is the shape of the child's mind masquerading as the modern citizen with money in its pocket which they refuse to give up.*

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genuinely wants to exchange central heating for a love of nature or banking for a more fully thought out ethics. Business and the Inland Revenue (IRS) will never give freedoms to the individual and so lose profit. This is why they say everything must be done so as not to upset the status quo. So people are sold a green energy that benefits land owners, serves the system and deprives them of independence solar panels in every home would do away with power stations). Art is sold as meaning. What it means to be British or American, or some other comfortable illusion. Art has become a flag waved to keep liberals busy thinking they have engineered a homogeneous society.

The same process works its way out in the blue-chip art world where tax payers build museums and galleries and fund artists giving government institutions the right to be patrons, and then those institutions decide what to sell back to the people as art. Taste was once the discernment of the well informed critical eye, now it is a form stamped and dated and filed in four different

places: the government grant-aiding office, the lawyer's office, the exhibition gallery and the accountant's office. And those forms tell us what art is. As Greenberg writes in 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1939), an article MacDonald commissioned:

*"Kitsch ... predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a shortcut to the pleasures of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in the genuine art"*

Masscult is often, by its very nature, kitsch. Institutions that start off avant garde, revolutionary, meaningful quickly get swallowed up in it as the institution's name comes to mean more than the art. This is what has happened to St.Ives in Cornwall, once the leading light of the avant garde, now nothing more than a banal tourist trap. Why does this happen? MacDonald suggests:

*"... for success in Masscult is that the writer, artist, editor, director or entertainer must have a good deal of the mass man in himself, as was the case with Zane Grey, Howard Chandler Christy, Mr. Lorimer of the Post Cecil B DeMille, and Elvis Presley. This is closely related to sincerity - how can he take his work seriously if he doesn't have this instinctive, this built-in vulgar touch? ... But a significant part of our population is chronically confronted with a choice between looking at TV or old masters, between reading Tolstoy or a detective story; i.e., the pattern of their cultural lives is "open" to the point of being porous. For a lucky few, this openness of choice is stimulating. But for most, it is confusing and leads at best to that middlebrow compromise called Midcult."*

Postmodernism is a strange hybrid using masscult and midcult techniques and arguments to portray what it is not: an advanced aesthetic



worthy of a thinking, rational animal that has pretensions to travel across the stars.

*"In these more advanced times, the danger to High Culture is not so much from Masscult as from a peculiar hybrid bred from the latter's unnatural intercourse with the former. A whole middle culture has come into existence and it threatens to absorb both its parents. This intermediate form – let us call it Midcult – has the essential qualities of masscult – the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity – but it decently covers them with a cultural figleaf. In masscult the trick is plain – to please the crowd by any means. But Midcult has it both ways; it pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarize them."*

For an example of Midcult let us look at Garrison Keeler with his long running Prairie Home Companion on Minnesota Public Radio. Like the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's 'Our Town' described by MacDonald:

*"He is the perfect American pragmatist, folksy and relaxed because that's just the way things are and if any buddy hankers to change 'em that's their right only (pause, business of drawing reflectively on pipe) chances are 't won't make a sight of difference (pipe business again) things don't change much..."*

MacDonald treats of books and plays – he is a literary man – but plays are a stage of their own – a fiction of time and make-up, set design and audiences are there to be entertained. That doesn't deny they can be thought-provoking but plays must never be boring. People leave. To entertain for its own sake is to be purely Midcult. To entertain the culturally literate is to be diverting. Plays can lose their polish – how many Bernard Shaw plays

have lasted? Major Barbara is about it. Who puts on a Shellee play today or even knows the poet wrote them? A little like asking someone to quote a Michelangelo sonnet. If you don't study you won't know he wrote any but his brother, a religious zealot, told Michelangelo that although his talent must have come from god he would never be an artist until he could write a sonnet. I wonder how many of the celebrity artists today could do something in another arty form half as well.

*"The danger is that the values of Midcult, instead of being transitional – 'the price of progress' – may now themselves become a debased, permanent standard... The crisis in America is especially severe. Our creators are too isolated or too integrated. Most of them merge gracefully into Midcult, feeling they must be part of 'the life of our time,' whatever that means (I should think it would be ambitious enough to try to be part of one's own life), and fearful of being accused of snobbishness, cliqueism, negativism or, worst of all, practicing 'art for art's sake' (though for what better sake?). One might also cite Ortega y Gasset's observation, apropos of 'the barbarization of specialization': 'Today, when there are more scientists than ever, there are fewer cultured men than, for example, in 1750.'"*

He asks what can be done. Some want a return to the aristocratic class as patrons dictating taste. Others suggest a culture that only offers high culture. MacDonald continues:

*"The masses – and don't let's forget that this term includes the well-educated fans of The Old Man and the Sea, Our Town, J.B., and John Brown's Body – who have been debauched by several generations of this sort of thing, in turn have come to demand such trivial and*

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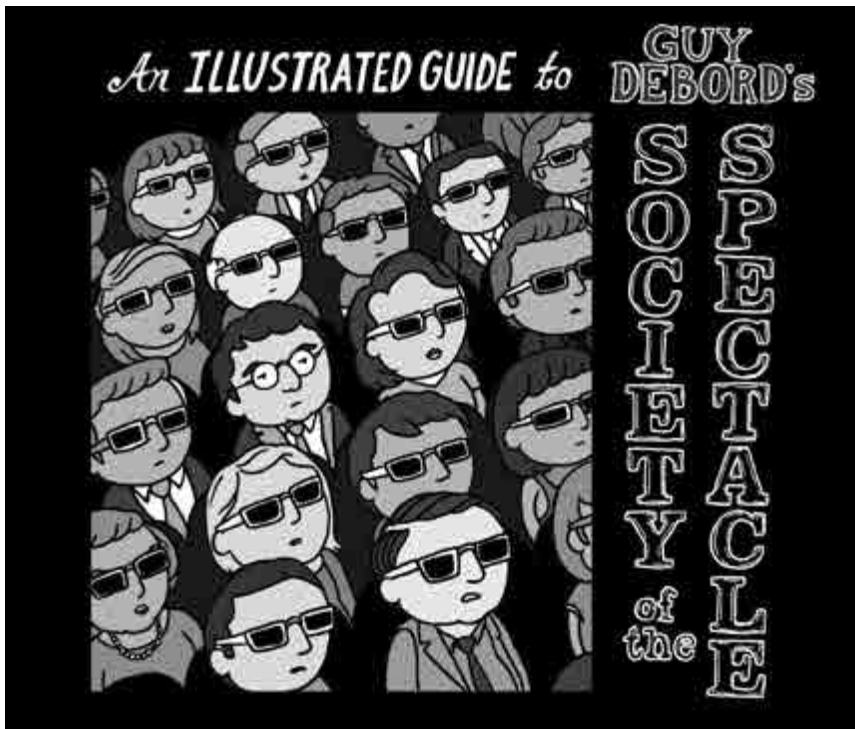
*The problem is after two generations of midcult and masscult we have produced Brexit, Trump, Nazi flags flying on the streets of the USA, one third of Jewish people feeling they may leave the UK, Blacks being targeted for execution by police, a strong reaction against diversity within countries, a hatred of political correctness and magnificent artists of every media ignored just as they were in previous times.*

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*comfortable cultural products. Which came first, the chicken or the egg, the mass demand or its satisfaction (and further stimulation), is a question as academic as it is unanswerable. The engine is reciprocating and shows no signs of running down."*

In much the same way as when this writer talks about money having to go and a new way of thinking being taught to create high functioning society without it, I point out that the sophisticated thinking needed in each individual for such a society to function does not yet exist. We have 7 billion answers to the problems and the same number to the problems of Midcult. First and foremost to get people to even accept there is a problem. What's wrong with millionaire brand name artists? What's wrong with glass ceilings if we can let artists retreat into their precious self-reliance of personal creativity and sense of purity. Many are. None of them are fighting the prevalence of Midcult.

The problem is after two generations of midcult and



From An Illustrated Guide to Guy Debord's 'The Society of the Spectacle', Hyperallergice 2016.  
© Laura Purje.

masscult we have produced Brexit, Trump, Nazi flags flying on the streets of the USA, one third of Jewish people feeling they may leave the UK, Blacks being targeted for execution by police, a strong reaction against diversity within countries, a hatred of political correctness and magnificent artists in every media ignored just as they were in the past. The trite has ruled for so long we believe the lies that politicians feed us, debate has vanished in favour of opinion, and magazines that burn with fervour are little read. The old Bohemia is dead, artists might moan but they do little because they have been neutered by their own vanity. They are artists. Their art matters **to them** therefore it matters. There doesn't have to be anything else. I beg to differ. Once a work of art is finished it belongs to the world, and what you say to the world is who you are as a human being. Say the same thing endlessly and you are

boring, be obscure and you are pointless, but put yourself on the 'thorns of life' and bleed and you will become an artist.

*"The conservatives are right when they say there has never been a broadly democratic culture on a high level. This is not because the ruling class forcibly excluded the masses this is Marxist melodrama-but quite simply because the great majority of people at any given time (including most of the ruling class for the matter) have never cared enough about such things to make them an important part of their lives."*

It has been said that a great statesman takes the people where they wanted to go anyway but makes them think they have been led there. We have to face the fact that many people like Mass- and Midcult and do not want high culture. How many they are we cannot count, but our struggle is to find those who want high culture and let it shine through to them and to do that Mass- and Midcult must also be allowed to shine, and individual taste evolved within the structures

of thinking of the individual. Our struggle is from within the art establishment, with those who have brought consumerism to the doors of talent and kicked talent out. With those who actually think the common man necessarily means a lowbrow sensibility. With vanity and ego and the turning of art into some form of monopoly where you can actually have 'the 100 most powerful people in the art world' listed in a magazine and not one of them be a critic, or a writer and but 10 or so actually practising artists.

Postmodernism is the contemporary fulfilment of Midcult. Postmodernism and cultural failure are equivalents. Postmodernism pinned its colours to money making and capitalism is dying as we lurch from one crash to another. Whatever is going to emerge from this ruination of culture, from the mad-grab to wear the clothes of Van Gogh while living in a bungalow in Cornwall or a loft in New York, the New Art Examiner will talk and write about it as we care.

The language of the image is the oldest of all languages. We are defined by the images we create as individuals and as a society. There is no place for complacency. As Louis Menand wrote in the New Yorker in 2011,

*"... it suggests the remorselessness of Macdonald's commitment to exposing the self-promotion, self-satisfaction, and self-delusion that are always wrapped up in the business of making and appreciating art. That exposure is one of the foundational tasks of criticism, and Macdonald is one of its great exemplars. ■"*

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Daniel runs his own blog at [danielnanavati.com](http://danielnanavati.com), entitled **One Man's Mind**

# A sign of the times: growth, but at what cost?

Tim Shaw RA

A sign of the times: growth, but at what cost?

I am a professional sculptor who has lived and worked in Cornwall for many years. My relationship with the university goes back 30 years to when I was a sculpture student at Falmouth School of Art between 1984 and 1989. During the 1990s and until 2005 I worked on occasion as a visiting lecturer across several of its departments, and in 2013 I was made a Fellow of Falmouth University. It is an honour that sits uncomfortably with me at this present moment.

I recently returned to Cornwall from a year long fellowship at Bonn University in Germany, to read with interest several of the press articles published last summer in connection with Falmouth University's CEO's salary, the 'Follywood' sign and reports of significant low staff morale.

I share the view that the recently installed FALMOUTH sign on Woodlane is out of place with the local landscape and community. Moreover, the university entrance is now illuminated at night by an excessive number of lights, a vulgarly intrusive display that has negatively altered the ambiance of what is one of Falmouth's most attractive avenues.

In a town that has so many artists and designers, one wonders why something more imaginative and aesthetically appropriate could not have been realised that reflects a sense of Woodlane's rich heritage. Furthermore it is important to remember that this heritage, on which the

university's reputation has been built, grew out of what was Falmouth School of Art, established in 1902.

It's also hard not to wonder whether these monolithic blocks, reminiscent of something out of Orwell's 1984, point towards some of the more deeply worrying aspects of Falmouth University's management and how it operates.

I suspect that none of Woodlane's residents had any say over the decision to install such a publicly imposing

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*It's also hard not to wonder whether these monolithic blocks, reminiscent of something out of Orwell's 1984, point towards some of the more deeply worrying aspects of Falmouth University's management and how it operates.*

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feature. Perhaps this is why the sign has been the target for vandalism and ridicule.

Walk downhill through Woodlane Campus to the building that houses the Illustration courses, and another disturbing change is evident. Until recently, this was known as the Alan Livingston Building. A plaque hung on the wall outside the door with the former Rector's name carved into slate. Photographs of the naming ceremony can still be viewed online.

For those who may not be aware, Professor Alan Livingston CBE was



*The bigger the name, the more is hidden*

pivotal to this university's development. For over 20 years, he worked tirelessly, securing Falmouth School of Art from the threat of closure in the 1980s and building it up into what has now become Falmouth University.

As Rector he was liked and respected by staff and students, above and beyond whatever policy was being implemented at the time. As well as being a distinguished graphic designer and academic, he possessed the sophisticated diplomatic skills required for someone of his position. Importantly, he was interested in listening to what others around him had to say. He also demonstrated huge support for the arts by being present at countless gallery openings and other art events in Cornwall and beyond.

Given the current climate at the Falmouth University, one wonders how many of the above qualities the current CEO, Professor Anne Carlisle possesses. What is certain is that her name will be familiar to many by association with recent negative national and local press in connection with her reported annual salary, pension contributions and benefits of £285,900 and the general mood that



prevails amongst Falmouth University staff.

The act of removing a memorial plaque is a disgrace as it demonstrates a basic disregard for the achievements of Professor Livingston. Whoever took the decision to do this should be truly ashamed of themselves. It will no doubt appear to many as a deliberate attempt to erode the institution's memory of its recent history. Again, one is reminded of Orwell's 1984.

I write this letter at a time when staff morale has for some time been extremely low. It is disturbing to listen to and read endless stories about how poorly staff members and students feel they are treated.

No doubt higher education is going through extremely challenging times, and one may congratulate the university on its rapid ascent up some university league tables. However, it is important to add that Falmouth as a college and as an art school always had a great reputation, thanks to the hard work and commitment of staff over decades and the fact that Cornwall is a truly wonderful part of the world to pursue creative studies.

Useful as they are, university league tables do not present the full picture, and one has to ask at what cost these results are being achieved and what condition is the 'engine house' of this institution is presently in? By that, I am referring to the staff who have the essential job of actually delivering quality education to the students.

Judging from what is reported and from my own conversations with staff, there is reason for alarm, and one must ask to what extent the Governors of Falmouth University are aware of what is happening at ground level.

One senior member of staff has told me: 'It's no exaggeration to say that there

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*'It's no exaggeration to say that there is a general atmosphere of fear prevailing among staff at the university. Many are deeply concerned at what's been going on, but very few have dared to speak out. Those that do so tend not to keep their jobs for very long.'*

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is a general atmosphere of fear prevailing among staff at the university. Many are deeply concerned at what's been going on, but very few have dared to speak out. Those that do so tend not to keep their jobs for very long.'

The reputation of the university in the town is also at a low-ebb, with its management being seen as pushing for expansion in student numbers in a way that damages the fabric of life in Falmouth. There are widespread reports of housing stock being taken over by developers and landlords and turned into (often sub-standard) student accommodation. Walking through the streets of Falmouth at night this weekend, it seemed obvious that the town has reached the point at which its very nature is changing, and not in a good way. The towns of Falmouth and Penryn have a total population of approximately 33,000; are the Governors of

FU really willing to endorse the proposed increase to 8,000 students (Project 8000) against the wishes of many of the town's residents?

This extremely rapid growth is inevitably impacting on the experience of the students themselves. Several undergraduate courses, with year-groups that now number between 100-150 students, are surely at risk of having their reputations ruined by volume. Indeed, I understand that the students themselves have complained not only that their cohorts are too big, but that Falmouth itself has 'too many students' for a town of its size. It would seem there are very many among the teaching staff who are deeply concerned about both these aspects, and that the increase in BA cohorts has been imposed on staff with scant consultation or understanding of the deleterious effect this will have (is having) on those courses.

Despite this expansion, under Professor Carlisle's management, quite a few arts-based courses have now closed or are about to. It's a situation that appears strangely out of kilter with an educational establishment that lays claim to being the No.1 Arts University.

One of the courses that will go into cessation in 2017 is Contemporary Crafts. This gem of a course was developed over 20 years, from a BA in Ceramics into a course that brings together a range of disciplines, enabling students to work 'hands-on' with metal, wood, plastics, clay and glass. Many successful art and crafts-based businesses in Cornwall (and beyond) would not have come into being without the grounding that this course provided.

Even while I have been writing this letter, the suspension of another long-running and highly respected



Vice Chancellor, Anne Carlisle

course has been announced, no doubt as a prelude to its closure: the Foundation Diploma in Art and Design. This very popular course serves as a vital introduction that enables school-leavers to find their way through practice into a chosen degree discipline. It has been an important gateway to the creative arts for several generations of students.

One can understand that some courses, unable to recruit enough students, are simply not sustainable. But the decision to close or suspend these courses was not due to poor recruitment – both were well subscribed. Contemporary Crafts recruited enough students to make it profitable but was apparently deemed not profitable enough to warrant the space it occupied, as has been reported in the Times Higher Education Supplement. Employability was another factor cited, to the surprise of many of the course's graduates, who have used the skills gained on the BA to make their living and start successful businesses. This is troubling, and one must ask; where does this policy, taken to its logical conclusion, leave Fine Art in the hands of present management?

Do not some courses by their nature need more space and resources than others? A studio-based course will demand more space than a writing or digital media course, because its practice extends three dimensionally.

Creativity is a broad church and innovation is vital to the growth of every learning culture. But not to the exclusion of those courses that remain vitally relevant and important. This university, and indeed this country, will be much diminished if universities streamline everything to £ per square foot, maximizing profit before education. A

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*Creativity is a broad church and innovation is vital to the growth of every learning culture. But not to the exclusion of those courses that remain vitally relevant and important. This university, and indeed this country, will be much diminished if universities streamline everything to £ per square foot, maximizing profit before education.*

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*Falmouth University is a specialist arts university located in Cornwall, UK. Founded in 1902, Falmouth has grown from a small art school into a major creative innovation hub, with over 5,000 students. Our comprehensive portfolio spans all of the creative art forms, and is explicitly aligned to the contemporary the UK's Creative Industries. Falmouth's number one strategic objective is to produce satisfied graduates who get great jobs. Our graduates are also highly entrepreneurial and well equipped to set up their own businesses.*

successful arts university will always need courses where students have the space, time and resources to create physical artefacts, because in the end if we don't value this then we will be left with a generation of computer-based operators who won't know what it is to make things in actual as opposed to virtual reality.

Employability is something that is difficult to gauge statistically. However, as an indication there is a global, multi-billion-pound industry out there called the art market, which is dependent upon artists and makers. Go to Frieze Art Fair, ArtBasel or Miami and you will observe this first hand. I am one of many Falmouth graduates who have built successful careers in this market.

As a Fellow of Falmouth University, I feel compelled to bring to the Governors' urgent attention a sense of the current mood prevailing amongst staff.

Speaking with tutors, one gets a sense that the university's staff are experiencing constant restructuring, imposed from the top with little or no understanding of the impact this will have in terms of the student experience or the ability of staff to deliver courses that match the requirements of the subject and the needs of their students. Staff who already work extremely hard are finding that they are being pushed beyond reasonable limits. One comment that emerges time and time again is that management have simply lost touch with staff.

Falmouth's latest glossy prospectus invites potential students to come to the creative edge of England in order to 'question convention' and 'reject conformity'. It seems that this ethos does not extend to the staff, who feel that they would be jeopardizing their livelihoods



*Virginia Ginny'Button, Director,  
Falmouth School of Art*

by questioning how things are run at FU.

The university has proved immensely successful in publicizing positive statistics. But significant failures have not received nearly so much attention – for example its failure to achieve Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) and its disappointing performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It might fairly be said that disappointing performances in these areas make it all the more vital that the university should value the resource on which its reputation has been built – the excellence and dedication of its teaching staff.

I am informed that the Academy of Innovation and Research (AIR), built with

EU convergence funding to be 'the home of research and business collaboration at Falmouth University' is now partly taken up with the offices of the Vice Chancellor and her immediate circle. What might be seen as a crisis in the university's research culture was underlined recently when the sudden departure of its head of research, Professor. Philip Moore, was announced in an email from the Vice Chancellor that offered neither any explanation nor any good wishes on the Professor's departure. He was only the most recent of a series of senior staff who have left, or been forced to leave, in circumstances that are far from transparent. Even without the other problems I have described, this might lead many to question whether the Vice-Chancellor's exceptionally large salary can really be justified.

With the current situation as it stands, what needs to be asked is this: Is the present CEO the right person to be leading this university into the future? Is this leadership respected within the university? Is it inspiring the university's staff and strengthening their dedication? If not, then it is surely time for change.

The role of university management should not simply be seen as a business

one where the job is to maximize profit. They are the custodians of this precious institution. Management come and go and what remains is legacy, and this matters not just because it is a vital part of the university's reputation but because it forms the very fabric of an institution, affecting the people who make their lives in and around it, for better or worse.

At the university awards ceremony several weeks ago, Professor Carlisle spoke about how the university cares about its heritage, stating that 'Falmouth respects tradition.' If this is the case then I strongly request that the Alan Livingston Memorial Plaque be reinstated to its rightful place. I would ask that this request be supported by Governors. I would also urge the Governors to take steps to make sure that they are more fully informed of the way that the university's leadership is viewed within the university and in the wider community, and to take urgent measures to address the serious problems that I have outlined. Falmouth can and should be a superb place to study the creative arts, but there are many indications that the university's current leadership may be putting this vision in serious jeopardy. ■

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# An investigation has revealed how one British university spends its money. And it's absolutely shocking

First published in The Canary 17th September 2017

Frea Lockley  
Cornwall Editor

There has been widespread criticism of high earnings by university vice-chancellors (VC). Because it comes at a time when students are facing growing levels of debt.

But there are deeper issues in some HE institutions. And some university lecturers, many who have voiced criticism, have left or been fired. One university, in fact, spent nearly £1m “shedding” highly-qualified staff, an investigation has revealed.

## Value for money?

Current criticism about VC pay emerged following the publication [paywall] of the 2017 pay survey by Times Higher Education (THE). This revealed “double-digit rises for some UK vice-chancellors”. The criticism has led to a recommendation from Universities Minister, Jo Johnson, for universities “to publish the number of staff paid more than £100,000 per year and to provide a clear justification of the salaries of those paid more than £150,000 per annum.”

Johnson said:

‘I do not want to read about VC pay in the newspapers any more than you do. These headlines raise fears that students’ fees are not being used efficiently and that governance processes, including but not limited to remuneration committees, are not working effectively.’

As The Canary previously reported, interest on student loans has gone up to 6.1%. And there is growing concern about value for money among many students. But Johnson’s comments at a recent press conference suggest that the

government doesn’t have the authority to impose changes on the sector.

## Controversial pay rises

Although not singled out in the current pay survey, Professor Anne Carlisle, VC of Falmouth University, made headline news in 2016. Because as leader of one of the smallest universities in the UK, her pay rise of almost £60k in 2014/15 was widely criticised. Even The Daily Mail called her a “fat cat leader”. In response to these claims Carlisle said:

This erroneous figure has been arrived at by misinterpretation of financial data.

She argued that the figure is, in part, “erroneous” because it adds in her employer’s contribution to her pension and that shouldn’t be included.

But Falmouth appears in the latest THE summary. And Carlisle’s salary has seemingly increased again. A Freedom of Information request from the Universities and College Union (UCU) revealed [pdf p62] that:

Carlisle’s salary (with benefits) was £297, 871 in 2015/16. This was around a 3% increase. Four employees in total earn over £100, 000 [pdf p62] at Falmouth University. In Cornwall, the average annual income is £17, 873.

As Johnson noted, the “governance processes” of remuneration committees (that lead on salary decisions) are an area of concern. And UCU findings show that:

‘Previous reports revealed [pdf p26] that the VC was a “member of the remuneration committee”

at Falmouth University in 2013/14; although documents show they should withdraw from meetings when their pay is being discussed.’

The most recent UCU survey showed [pdf p53] that Falmouth University failed to provide three years’ worth of remuneration committee minutes to the union.

But more information has emerged about the financial dealings of this particular university.

## Climate of fear at Falmouth University

An investigation for Cornwall Reports claims that:

“More than 30 staff have left Falmouth University under ‘compromise agreements’ within seven years...” The direct cost to the taxpayer has been nearly £800,000 – and this figure does not include legal fees. Once the lawyers’ fees are added, the cost of shedding so many highly-qualified academics gets close to £1 million.

Falmouth University’s finance figures actually show that 81% [pdf p5] of its income came from tuition fees in 2015/16. Only 12% came from council grants.

Graham Smith who wrote the report said:

The departure of so many staff has fuelled concern about morale at the university... A confidential survey of academic staff, conducted by the University and College Union, revealed a ‘culture of bullying’ and a ‘climate of fear.’ A remarkable 93% said they did not feel able to raise questions with the university’s executive management ‘without endangering your position.’

Nearly 97% said they did not feel their expertise and experience were 'sufficiently valued' by the executive management.

*The Canary has seen documents relating to this survey.* The findings have also been reflected in a recent report that revealed a rise in work-related stress and mental health issues across the HE sector in the UK. The report by the Royal Society found [pdf pl5]:

...the majority of university staff find their job stressful. Levels of burnout appear higher among university staff than in general working populations and are comparable to 'high-risk' groups such as healthcare workers.

The proportions of both university staff and postgraduate students with a risk of having or developing a mental health problem ... were generally higher than for other working populations.

#### **'Gagging orders'**

Falmouth University has closed or suspended some courses. These include the suspension of the Foundation Art & Design course and loss of the renowned Contemporary Craft degree. And Falmouth now offers courses such as the MA in Leasing and Asset Finance. Smith also reports:

Another senior member of staff said: 'At a recent staff briefing, staff were surprised to be informed by the Vice Chancellor that students are now to be known as 'customers' and courses as 'product', and that rather than an admissions office Falmouth now has a 'sales team.'

Robert Hillier, Director of Communications at Falmouth University told Cornwall Reports:

There are more students studying at Falmouth University, and more from Cornwall, than at any time in our 115 year history. Our

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*More than 30 staff have left Falmouth University under 'compromise agreements' within seven years... The direct cost to the taxpayer has been nearly £800,000 – and this figure does not include legal fees. Once the lawyers' fees are added, the cost of shedding so many highly-qualified academics gets close to £1 million.*

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commitment to helping them get the career they want has never been greater. Our course portfolio now reflects the creative industries, the fastest growing sector of the UK economy, which forms a key part of Cornwall's strategy to create a modern, high-wage, high value economy.

But opposition to further expansion of student numbers at the university has been widely reported.

And in the last eight years a high number of staff have left the university. According to Cornwall Reports:

Now Falmouth University's official answers to a series of Freedom of Information questions have established that since 2009, a total of 31 staff have left the university under so-called 'compromise agreements' – often after a similar pattern of suspension, followed by threats of litigation, eventually settled by large cash pay-outs and 'confidentiality clauses' (gagging orders) to prevent the staff from speaking out.

The university today confirmed that the total cost of these agreements, so far, is £789,659.34.

This number does not include staff who may have been lost through

redundancies or those working on zero-hours contracts.

#### **Silenced**

The Canary previously reported on some of the issues at Falmouth University raised by artist Tim Shaw in an open letter. And this latest report suggests things have not improved. Shaw said:

It appears that this university has made a habit of keeping people quiet. Weeks after my open letter to the press was published... a staff member of many year's service was removed from campus and suspended for expressing support, on her Facebook page, for some of the points raised in that letter... Surely a breach of the human right to freedom of speech?

And this goes further, according to Cornwall Reports:

Another former staff member, who asked to remain anonymous, said employees risked disciplinary action even for posting 'likes' to critical posts on social media.

Although approached, Falmouth University has made no further comments to The Canary.

#### **Value for money**

As the debate about VC salaries continues, it is shocking to learn how much one institution spent on "shedding" staff. Especially in light of the "climate of fear" that the survey suggests. But HE institutions demanding that university staff deliver 'products' to 'customers' could explain why. Because that's probably not a model of education many people value in the UK. ■

*Frea Lockley was an assistant lecturer at Falmouth University from 2008 - 2016. She writes for The Canary and will be writing for the New Art Examiner on a regular basis.*

# Destabilizing Marcel Duchamp

## Part 2 - Aesthetics and the Meaning of Art

Miklos Legrady, Toronto Editor

In Part 1, I noted Duchamp's history and his philosophy included a queering of norms with an antipathy to work itself

*"I did as few things as possible, which isn't like the current attitude of making as much as you can, in order to make as much money as possible ..."*

Robert Motherwell suggests that Duchamp found an ethic beyond "the aesthetic" for his ultimate choices.

*"To get away from the physical aspect of painting, I was interested in ideas, not merely visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind."*

Duchamp was unaware of a subliminal visual language in painting that was already at the service of the mind, shown in Dennis Dutton's A Darwinian Theory of Beauty.

A purely aesthetic choice bears a complexity no Dadaist ever imagined; postmodern theory is refuted by a primacy of biology that overrides any contingency to location or culture. There are unconscious factors at work that account for creative choices, there are depths of coding undecipherable by the conscious mind yet vital to our conceptual and experiential framework. Disposition, environment, practice, and experience can endow one with exceptional skills and inspiration, with a direct link to the creative unconscious of the mind. Jazz trumpet player Louis Armstrong, like many others, spoke of channeling a vibe as he played, flowing with the inner flow of a musical groove.

Duchamp on the other hand said:

*"I don't believe in the creative*

*function of the artist. He's a man like any other ... those who make things on a canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly they were called craftsmen, a term I prefer.*

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*"I don't believe in the creative function of the artist. He's a man like any other ... those who make things on a canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly they were called craftsmen, a term I prefer."*

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Michelangelo could then be described as simply one more craftsman who makes objects out of marble, mainly statues.

Our beliefs carry little weight with an objective reality that goes on with or without our approval. Creativity has been experienced and documented by so many artists and scientists, their sheer volume discredits Duchamp's assertion. Without creativity we have a limited set of possibilities that can be memorized and structured in patterns, hence Duchamp's love of chess, which is highly complex yet eventually predictable by computer ... compared to creativity which is not. The 1996 match of IBM's Deep Blue against Garry Kasparov, the Soviet grandmaster, proved that chess had a scientific consistency that could not be improved by chaotic and unrelated events, no creativity was truly involved, only an ability to memorize

patterns and remember them.

This negation of creativity would of course negate painting, which would then be simply a product – a decoration. Motherwell says that:

*"Duchamp was the great saboteur, the relentless enemy of painterly painting ... His disdain for sensual painting was... intense."*

When Cabane asked where his anti-retinal attitude comes from, Duchamp replied:

*"... from too great importance given to the retina. Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error ... still interested in painting in the retinal sense. Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral... It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change; it hasn't always been like this."* (Cabane's footnote; Duchamp uses the word "retinal" in the way many people use "painterly". In other words, Duchamp objects to the sensuous appeal of painting)

*"... in a period like ours, when you cannot continue to do oil*



*Paradise*  
1910-11. Oil on canvas. 114.5 x 128.5 cm. Duchamp.

The Philadelphia Museum of Art,  
Philadelphia, PA, USA



*painting, which after four or five hundred years of existence, has no reason to go on eternally ... The painting is no longer a decoration to be hung in the dining room or living room. Art is taking on more the form of a sign, if you wish; it's no longer reduced to a decoration..."*

On Cabane asking if easel painting is dead Duchamp replies:

*"It's dead for the moment, and for a good hundred and fifty years. Unless it comes back; one doesn't know why, but there's no good reason for it. ... The Coffee Grinder. It was there I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting. I was able to get rid of tradition by this linear method."*

We are told that "before Marcel Duchamp, a work of art was an artifact, a physical object. After Duchamp it was an idea, a concept.

Duchamp had two strategic objectives. First, to destroy the hegemony exerted by an establishment which claimed the right to decide what was, and what was not, to be deemed a work of art. Second, to puncture the pretentious claims of those who called themselves artists and in doing so assumed that they possessed extraordinary skills and unique gifts of discrimination and taste.

In an interview with Katherine Kuh, Duchamp said;

*"I consider taste - bad or good - the greatest enemy of art. I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own tastes. [My intention was to] completely eliminate the existence of taste, bad or good or indifferent."*

Duchamp was mistaken in thinking that taste was the enemy of art. Taste is the expression of the individual and what defines you as a person, taste is all you've got. As Michelle Marder Kamhi reports, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio "emphasized (that) every perceptual experience

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*"Jean Clair, director of the Musée Picasso in Paris, and in recent years a fierce critic of l'art contemporain, was a major interpreter through the 1970s of the work of Marcel Duchamp. He organized the great Duchamp retrospective in 1975 - the inaugural exhibition at the Centre Pompidou - and he wrote a catalogue raisonné of Duchamp's work. Recently he has come to hold Duchamp in large measure responsible for what he regards as the deplorable condition of contemporary art."*

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*Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2, oil on canvas  
Marcel Duchamp*

we have is accompanied by a corresponding emotional coloration - an implicit evaluation of good or bad, painful or pleasurable, according to the circumstances - which is stored in the brain for future reference. Each new object we encounter is automatically compared to those stored cognitive and emotional memories of past experience, providing an instantaneous evaluation based on past knowledge and experience ... art is not mere "cheesecake" for the mind. It is instead a cultural adaptation of great significance."

When Duchamp "contradicted himself to avoid conforming to his own taste" he was wrecking havoc with the fine tuning of sensitive mechanisms within us, the antennas by which we attune to finer things, the calibrated controls by which we apprehend the most complex understanding. No wonder ideas stopped coming and, losing interest, Duchamp took to chess. Taste is who you are; once your taste is lost your ability to make art goes with it, as happened to Marcel. We could see a lesson here, of committing oneself to an attractive idea that destroys you, but what else is nihilism expected to do? That's Dada. Duchamp wanted to destroy art and he did. The majority today who emulate him are wrecking havoc on art and harming themselves as well as the culture, which is why we live in an era of insanity in the cultural field. It's the tale of the man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7 24-27)

When everyone cheers a nihilism they haven't considered and don't understand, they will surely



*Ches Playe*  
Duchamp 1911

reap the whirlwind.

No establishment has any claim to the right to define art. The practice of art is ruled by an instinct, resurgent over time, that closely correlates to our genetic survival. Painting is not five hundred years old. We have evidence of 100,000 years of red mineral pigments (red ochre) including crayons associated with the emergence of Homo Sapiens. Then the "pretentious claims of those who assumed they possessed extraordinary skills and unique gifts" were not pretentious, they were a fact. Michelangelo proves that, as well as numerous artists since then, including myself, who did, and do, possess extraordinary skills and unique gifts of discrimination and taste. Painting is far more than mere decoration, but to experience that you unavoidably need a higher

sensitivity and more complex feelings than those that come from a purely intellectual paradigm. Hannah Arendt wrote "if men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood."

One considers Edward Fry's statement, published in 1972, that Hans Haacke "may be even more subversive than Duchamp, since he handles his Readymades in such a way

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*"Everyone is an artist", likely as much as everyone is a brain surgeon. The question is how good a brain surgeon, how good an artist, how good the art?*

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that they remain systems that represent themselves and thus do not let themselves assimilate with art."

One can only gaze in admiration at this subversion, but remind me once again what we're subverting in art and, why desire systems that aren't art? I could agree art is terrible but explain to me why. Why not let art express its dynamic and potential instead of a neurotic seeking of greener grass in other pastures? As for the urinal, pissing on your bed is rarely a good idea, and never attractive. Those who believe art is to piss on should now leave the field to those with higher spiritual values.

Destabilizing Duchamp begins with the ontology and phenomenology of visual art, which we call visual language. As noted above, ideas are the object of writing, the subject of literature, while images are the subject of vision. Ideas do complex thoughts but psychologists tell us there are other types of thinking than intellect. Obvious ones are feelings and intuition, both carry complex coded messages. More surprising is visual language and dance, both of which are an unmistakably non-verbal communication.

Albert Mehrabian born into an Armenian family in Iran, currently Professor Emeritus of Psychology, UCLA, is known for his publications on the relative importance of verbal and non-verbal messages. His findings on inconsistent messages of feelings and attitudes have been misquoted and misinterpreted throughout human communication seminars worldwide, and have also become known as the '7%-38%-55% Rule', for the relative impact of words, tone of voice, and body language when speaking.

This gives us an idea of the relative importance of visual language, a precursor



to written language and at least equal to it in complexity of expression, for a picture is worth a thousand words. Kevin Zeng Hu, a Ph.D researcher at the MIT Media Lab, writes of images that “we all know how unwieldy texting can be and how much context can be lost, especially emotional context. Once you make it visual, you have a higher bandwidth to convey nuance.”

Painting was already “at the service of the mind” and it was specifically the parts Duchamp sought to eliminate, the visual and subliminal, that were the most essential aspects both consciously and unconsciously.

Unawares, Duchamp was trying to invalidate a vital cultural expression, which explains why painting hasn't died and why it's more than a decoration. John Cage brought Duchamp's ideas to music in his piece 4'33, which was entirely silent, the musicians did not play a note. I myself have a conceptual painting performance titled “Homage to Marcel Duchamp”, where the public is asked to wear sleep masks handed them on entrance, and to let a guide bring them to a large unlit painting in a semi-dark room. After the viewer reaches the painting, they wait 10 seconds still wearing the eye mask in near darkness, and then are led out of the room. An indiscriminate practice is the realm of Thanatos, daemon of non-violent death. His touch was gentle, likened to that of his twin brother Hypnos (Sleep).

Jean Clair, director of the Musée Picasso in Paris, and in recent years a fierce critic of l'art contemporain, was a major interpreter through the 1970s of the work of Marcel Duchamp. He organized the great Duchamp retrospective in 1975 – the inaugural exhibition at the Centre Pompidou – and he wrote

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*His Cubist work shows Duchamp as a highly gifted painter with a talent he denied to favor conceptual art. Ironically, the success of his cubist paintings gave Duchamp the credibility he exercised to promote the destruction of painting and the negation of personal taste, paralyzing one's ability to make art.*

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a catalogue raisonné of Duchamp's work. Recently he has come to hold Duchamp in large measure responsible for what he regards as the deplorable condition of contemporary art.

Jean Clair writes that “after Duchamp, one could in principle make art out of anything. The era of turpentine and taste had come to an end. The era of finding a definition of art to replace the one based on aesthetic delectation had begun.”

“One could make art out of anything” or as Joseph Buys said, “everyone is an artist”, likely as much as everyone is a brain surgeon. The question is how good a brain surgeon, how good an artist, how good the art? Our definition of art emerges from the depths of time and we can at times contribute to it but we can't replace biology.

The I CHING or Book of Changes is one of the Five Classics of Confucianism; under the section on limitations we read that unlimited possibilities are not suited to humans; if they existed, our life would only dissolve in the boundless. To become strong, one's life needs the

limitations ordained by duty and voluntarily accepted. The individual attains significance as a free spirit only by surrounding oneself with these limitations and by determining for oneself what our duty is.”

In a further note on the importance of limiting parameters such as personal taste, as opposed to Duchamp's attempt to eliminate these limits, the composer Igor Stravinsky writes “My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles ... and the arbitrariness of the constraint serve only to obtain precision of execution.

His Cubist work shows Duchamp as a highly gifted painter with a talent he denied to favor conceptual art. Ironically, the success of his cubist paintings gave Duchamp the credibility he exercised to promote the destruction of painting and the negation of personal taste, paralyzing one's ability to make art. To deconstruct your process and functional aspects such as taste means you lose the function, then the motivation and so the ability to make art. This was seen by the art world as a superior wisdom, which spells trouble and leads us to call for an ideological reformation, away from the practice of nonsense towards an understanding of the complex role of sense and visual sensation, restoring both sense and sanity to the field of fine arts. ■

*Legrady's a hybrid between technical wizard, ad buster, and poli-sci commentator. He moves through a world of political, social, and cultural intrigue, trends.*



# Art and Architecture Towards Political Crises: The 1937 Paris International Exposition in Context

*Scouted from blogs by George Touche'*

The 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne ('International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life') was held in Paris: the French capital's sixth and latest International Exposition, after fairs held in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900. It took place between 25 May and 25 November, centred upon the Trocadéro, just across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower.

The Palais du Trocadéro had been built for the fair of 1878, on the top of the same hill which had been utilised – along with the Champ de Mars – for the 1867 event. Designed by the architect Gabriel Davioud, and featuring a central concert hall, two towers, and two wings, the palace was a conflux of Moorish, Byzantine, and Classical architecture which proved unpopular with the public. Damp, and lacking heating and lighting, the palace also proved unsuited to its subsequent role as Paris's first anthropological museum, the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. Picasso visited in 1907, and the museum's collection proved a decisive influence on *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which he completed later that year. Yet he remarked of his first visit, 'the smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat. It depressed me so much I wanted to get out fast'. Slightly more flatteringly, he would recall:

*'When I went to the Trocadero it was disgusting. The flea*



*Proposed Palace of the Soviets*

*market. The smell. I was all alone. I wanted to get away. But I didn't leave. I stayed. I stayed. I understood something very important: something was happening to me, wasn't it? The masks weren't like other kinds of sculpture. Not at all. They were magical things.'*

Owing to its poor condition, in 1935 the Palais du Trocadéro was dismantled, and rebuilt in preparation for the coming exposition as the Palais de Chaillot, which still stands. The Palais de Chaillot was a creation of the architects Léon Azema, Jacques Carlu, and Louis-Hippolyte Boileau, whose collaborative design won the competition held to determine the form of the new palace. In a style which combines Neoclassical architecture with Art Moderne, the palace features two arcing wings independent of the main building. These wings today house the Musée de l'Homme – the immediate successor to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro – alongside Paris's architecture, monuments, and maritime museums; while the central building is home to the Théâtre National de Chaillot. On 10 December, 1948, the Palais de Chaillot hosted the United Nations General Assembly as it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Palais de Chaillot as it appears today

The Eiffel Tower had been conceived and erected as the centrepiece of the fair held in 1889, amid a rhetoric which heralded the scientific and technological innovations of the preceding century. In the words of Gustave Eiffel, the tower his company was to build was to symbolise:

*'not only the art of the modern engineer, but also the century of Industry and Science in which we are living, and for which the way was prepared by the*



*The Nazi German and Soviet Union pavilions at the 1937 Paris International Exposition*

*great scientific movement of the eighteenth century and by the Revolution of 1789, to which this monument will be built as an expression of France's gratitude.'*

In much the same vein, the 1937 event was to showcase the best of the world's contemporary scientific and technological achievement. Pavilions were devoted to the cinema, to radio, light, the railway, flight, refrigeration, and printing. Posters advertising the exposition emphasised it as a coming together of 'arts et techniques'. Pavilions were decorated and designed by artists and architects including Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Robert Mallet-Stevens, and Le Corbusier; Fernand Léger contributed *Le transport des forces* ('The Transfer of Forces') to the exposition's Palace of Discovery; and Raoul Dufy completed and showcased his monumental mural *La Fée Electricité* ('The Electricity Fairy') – a vibrant mythologizing of the history of electricity. In fact, as with the Eiffel Tower in 1889, so too a tower was planned as the centrepiece

for the 1937 exposition. To be called the Phare du Monde ('Lighthouse of the World'), the observation tower was to be 2,300 feet (700 metres) tall – more than twice the height of the Eiffel Tower – and made of concrete. There was to be a restaurant on the top of the structure and a spiralling road ascending the exterior, which would lead to a parking garage at 1,640 feet. The tower would thereby serve as an ode to the automobile, and to the automotive industry which France had headed in Europe throughout the 1920s.

Estimated to cost \$2.5 million, however, the Phare du Monde was cancelled. More, the exposition became beset by delays. Originally scheduled to open on 2 March, the exposition was initially deferred to 1 May. But by the first of the month, only two of the pavilions from the forty-four participating nations had been completed: those by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, monoliths which faced one another across the newly created Jardins du Trocadéro, as the Eiffel Tower

across the Seine provided the backdrop. Eventually, the exposition was ready to open on 25 May.

By 1937 Europe was beset by political crises. The Second Italo-Abyssinian War had taken place between October 1935 and May 1936. The war showed the limitations of the League of Nations, but despite the meagre sanctions the organisation imposed on Italy as it embarked upon the military conquest of Ethiopia, Mussolini still used these sanctions as a pretext to curtail Italy's alliances with Britain and France, and to move closer towards Hitler's Germany. In March 1936, the German military violated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and entered the Rhineland; and by October Germany and Italy had agreed to form an axis which would set the scene for the *anschluss* between Germany and Austria in 1938. The Spanish Civil War had broken out in July 1936, and would see Germany and Italy support the Nationalist forces against the Republicans, who were backed by the Soviet Union. Elsewhere, Japan was in the process of waging war against China. World War II was just a couple of years away.

In the context of such tumult, the middle of 1937 proved a period of relative repose. Yet most of all the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne is recalled for its political connotations. The Spanish pavilion, organised by the Republican government, was designed by the architect Josep Lluís Sert. For the pavilion's art pieces, Sert called upon his friends Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Alexander Calder. Picasso's *Guernica* was painted for the pavilion. He had been commissioned to paint a mural for the fair at the beginning of the year; but it was only at the start of May,



having read accounts of the bombing of the Basque town Guernica by the German and Italian air forces, that Picasso began the work which he would eventually show. Setting to work immediately, he had finished *Guernica* by early June, and it was on show as part of the Spanish pavilion by July.

While Picasso's painting – a portrait of grotesque suffering in grey, black, and white – slowly rose to acclaim, the subject would prove popular for other artists. The surrealist poet Paul Éluard, who was particularly close to Picasso during this time, wrote the poem 'La Victoire de Guernica' ('The Victory of Guernica') the following year. In 1950, Alain Resnais would use Éluard's poem over images of Picasso's art for his short film *Guernica*.

Alongside Picasso's work was Miró's *The Reaper* (or *Catalan peasant in revolt*), a mural which he painted in situ, directly upon panelling which extended six feet high over the pavilion's two floors. Describing the process, Miró reflected:

*'I painted on a scaffolding directly in the very space of the building. I first made a few light sketches to know vaguely what I needed to do, but... the execution of this work was direct and brutal.'*

However, after the pavilion was dismantled in early 1938, Miró's mural was lost or destroyed on route to Valencia. Finally, on the ground floor was Alexander Calder's *Mercury Fountain*: a fountain in iron and aluminium which pumped mercury instead of water, and which is now on display at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona, housed behind glass for the safety of viewers.

If Picasso's *Guernica* has arguably transcended its immediate context, the 1937 exposition is perhaps best remembered today for the Soviet Union and Nazi



Raoul Dufy – *La Fée Electricité*



*Guernica*: Pablo Picasso



Entry Ticket

German pavilions. The Soviet pavilion was the product of the architect Boris Iofan. Iofan was a Jewish Soviet architect from Odessa, who completed his architectural studies in Rome. In 1932, he had submitted the winning entry for the Palace of the Soviets contest: an international competition to design a vast congress

hall, to be built in Moscow, and which was intended to become the administrative centre of the Soviet Union. The site chosen for the Palace of the Soviets was occupied at the time by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, situated on the northern bank of the Moskva River, planned after Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812, but not



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THIS  IS ART?



# EXTRAVAGANZA of the arts

A satirical review of the Cornwall arts scene to include  
artists, critics and other dubious characters of the art scene

The review is working to a story concerning 'Jack the Plumber' who is searching for the 'cutting edge'. Various characters who believe that the cutting edge in the arts is easy to come by endeavour to help with many ludicrous ideas and antics including giant melons, satirical dance, codswallop, illusions of grandeur in the world of celebrity culture, hanging committees, Duchamp song, Opera and more. But finally, Jack comes a cropper in a riotous rampage of the unbelievable contortions of the mind and body. All audience members are then invited to the inner temple of art to share the success of achieving the miraculous in art as the final discovery is attained in the most vital Extravaganza Art of the 21st Century that includes some of the most talented performers in Cornwall.

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completed and consecrated until 1883. Thus in 1931, in preparation for the Palace of the Soviets, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was demolished.

Renowned architects including Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Erich Mendelsohn submitted entries for the contest, but Iofan's Neoclassical design was the one chosen by a 'council of experts', under the guidance of Stalin. Joined by his fellow Neoclassicists Vladimir Shchuko and Vladimir Gelfreikh, upon Stalin's instigation Iofan's original designs grew ever bolder. Stalin wanted an edifice taller than the Eiffel Tower, and taller too than the Empire State Building, which had been completed in 1931, becoming the tallest building in the world at 1,250 feet. More, Stalin conceived that the Palace of the Soviets would also serve as a monument to Lenin. From an initial 853 feet (260 metres) proposal, the final plans for the Palace of the Soviets envisioned a building 1,361 feet (415 metres) tall, topped by a statue of Lenin which would rise a further 260 feet.

Le Corbusier and Frank

Lloyd Wright were among those who condemned the plans at every stage. In 1932, Le Corbusier remarked 'It is hard to accept the fact that they will actually erect that odd thing which recently has flooded all of the journals'; while Wright addressed the First Congress of Soviet Architects in June 1937, and told the Congress 'This structure – only proposed I hope – is good if we take it for a modern version of Saint George destroying the dragon'. Building work began that year, and by 1939 the foundations of the Palace were complete. But by 1941, in the midst of World War II, the building's steel frame was being cut and used towards Moscow's war effort. Iofan continued to modify his designs, but building never resumed, and in 1958 the site was converted into an open-air swimming pool – for a time, the largest in the world. In 1995, work began on the site towards rebuilding the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. The new Cathedral was consecrated in August of 2000.

Thus it was with the Palace of the Soviets project ongoing that Iofan was tasked with



*The Reaper: Joan Miro\_t*

designing the Soviet pavilion for the 1937 Paris exposition. His structure – encased in marble, and extending back in a series of rectangles which recall the Suprematism of Kazimir Malevich – was topped by Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* ('Rabochiy i Kolkhoznitsa'). Born in Riga before moving to Moscow, after studying in Paris and Italy Mukhina had developed an artistic style which combined elements of Cubism and Futurism. *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* gave her an international reputation as an eminent socialist realist. The sculpture depicts a male and female striding boldly forward, with a hammer and a sickle united in their raised hands. The male worker wears overalls, while the woman is thinly attired about her chest, but wears a long, billowing skirt. The scarf which flows from the man's waist was introduced to provide both aesthetic and structural balance to the sculpture, adding weight to the rear of the two figures.

Mukhina's iconic sculpture was adopted as the logo of the Russian studio Mosfilm in 1947. Having produced Sergei Eisenstein's body of



*Paris Exposition 1937 opening*





*The Palais de Chaillot as it appears today*

work, Mosfilm would go on to be the studio of Andrei Tarkovsky; *Viy*, an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's short story which was the Soviet Union's first horror film when it was released in 1967; Sergei Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*; Akira Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala*; and *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, which won the 1980 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and was allegedly watched eight times by Ronald Reagan in a personal endeavour to better understand the Russian spirit.

Frank Lloyd Wright met Boris Iofan during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1937. Upon his return to the USA, in August, he wrote an article full of praise for the role afforded to architecture in Soviet life – even if he was far from enamoured with the plans for the Palace of the Soviets. This article was published in *Soviet Russia Today* and in *Architectural Record*, both in October 1937; and Wright included the article in full in *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Autobiography*, first published in 1943. In the article, Wright dubbed Russian cinema buildings 'the finest good-time places for the people to be seen anywhere in the world'; and extolled 'this tremendous social construction that is calling upon Architecture for

help and direction'. More, he asserted that the West must look towards the Soviet Union and: *'marvel at her vitality and strength, her heroic growth and richness of expression, and admire especially her colorful individuality, never knowing the secret of such happiness [...] Russia may yet give to this money-minded, war-minded, quarreling pack of senile races that make up the Western world the soul they fail to find within themselves – and, I hope, in time to prevent the suicide the nations are so elaborately preparing to commit.'*

Wright was far from alone in holding such a perspective on the Soviet Union in 1930s America. In his introduction to *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, Simon Karlinsky depicts:

*'the groundswell of enthusiasm for Soviet Russia among America's intellectuals which came just as Stalin was consolidating his power and plunging the country into the worst nightmare in its history. What amazes a person even minimally acquainted with Soviet realities about the intellectual climate of America in the thirties is the almost inconceivable gullibility of the intellectual community, its lack of any meaningful criteria for comparing the situations in the two countries.'*

Citing the Sacco and Vanzetti case, which brought a spate of protest in America and demonstrations in cities across the world, Karlinsky does not dismiss the concerns it raised for intellectuals within the United States; but he notes how the case paled in comparison to the political executions carried out by Lenin and Stalin, and the Holodomor which saw millions of Ukrainians die owing to starvation caused by Stalin's policy of forced collectivisation.

Karlinsky describes how the view of Russia which developed in the United States after the October Revolution of 1917 differed from that held in continental Europe, where Nabokov lived for more than twenty years after being forced to flee Petersburg for Crimea. Throughout their correspondence, Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson would maintain disagreements regarding the complexities of Russian political life prior to the revolutions of 1917, and regarding the true natures of Lenin and Soviet ideology. Yet Karlinsky writes that, upon the Nabokov family's arrival in the United States in May 1940:

*'It is to Edmund Wilson's credit that he was able to ignore the widespread anti-emigre prejudice of those days (which had, for example, led to an attempted boycott of the Book-of-the-Month selection of a novel by Nabokov's friend Mark Aldanov in 1943 on the grounds that an anti-Stalinist emigre had to be an enemy of freedom and democracy) and extend a helping hand to a man who was a virtual unknown in the United States.'*

In his 1937 article, Frank Lloyd Wright reserved kind words for Iofan's pavilion and Mukhina's sculpture, which he had witnessed in Paris earlier in the year. Describing the pavilion, he wrote:

*'the Paris Fair building is a*



low, extended, and suitable base for the dramatically realistic sculpture it carries, whereas the Palace of the Soviets itself is a case of a thoroughly unsuitable, badly over-dramatised base underneath realistic undramatic sculpture.'

He concluded that the Soviet Union pavilion was 'the most dramatic and successful exhibition building at the Paris Fair'.

Against the backdrop of Hitler's anti-Slav rhetoric and their differing allegiances in the Spanish Civil War, The Soviets and the Germans felt the weight of competition even before their pavilions came to face one another across the Jardins du Trocadéro. Hitler had initially considered withdrawing Germany from the exposition, but he was close to Albert Speer, who he had made chief architect of the Third Reich, and Speer convinced him to participate. Speer had designed between 1933 and 1934 the plans and many of the buildings for the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg; and he conceived too the 'cathedral of light', comprised of 130 anti-aircraft searchlights shone into the night sky, which became the visual emblem of the Nuremberg Rallies. The rally grounds were notably captured on film in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a chronicle of the Nuremberg Rally of 1934.

For the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Speer modified Werner March's design for the Olympiastadion, adding a stone façade. Over these years, Speer extended the concept of 'ruin value': the idea that buildings should be designed with a view to their deterioration and eventual collapse, so that the ruins they ultimately leave behind retain aesthetic and symbolic value. While Speer gave the concept a name, the principle had a long precedent, beyond the drawings of John Soane



Paris Internal Expo 1937

and the Romantic exaltation of ruins. In Speer's memoir, *Inside the Third Reich*, he explained his theory:

*'Hitler liked to say that the purpose of his building was to transmit his time and its spirit to posterity. Ultimately all that remained to remind men of the great epochs of history was their monumental architecture, he would philosophize [...]. Naturally, a new national consciousness could not be awakened by architecture alone. But when after a long spell of inertia a sense of national grandeur was born anew, the monuments of men's ancestors were the most impressive exhortations. Today, for example, Mussolini could point to the buildings of the Roman Empire as symbolising the heroic spirit of Rome. Thus he could fire his nation with the idea of a modern empire. Our architectural works should also speak to the conscience of a future Germany centuries from now.'*

Speer was to design the German pavilion for the 1937 exposition. On a visit to Paris several months prior to the exposition's opening – at which point the site of the Soviet and German pavilions had already been confirmed by the French organisers, headed by chief planner Jacques Gréber – Speer 'stumbled into a room

containing the secret sketch of the Soviet pavilion'. Upon this good fortune, he designed a pavilion which was intended to firmly counteract the assail of *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*. While Iofan's ascending base and Mukhina's sculpture were full of horizontal movement, Speer created an indomitable vertical mass, capped by an eagle perched atop the swastika. In Speer's words:

*'A sculpted pair of figures thirty-three feet tall, on a high platform, were striding triumphantly toward the German pavilion. I therefore designed a cubic mass, also elevated on stout pillars, which seemed to be checking this onslaught, while from the cornice of my tower an eagle with the swastika in its claws looked down on the Russian sculptures. I received a gold medal for the building; so did my Soviet colleague.'*

Though Speer's theory of 'ruin value' meant a preference for stone with regard to permanent projects, this temporary pavilion was in fact a construct of steel. A surface of Bavarian granite masked a structure comprising three-thousand tons of steel; the granite rose in pillars with mosaics; and inside the pavilion, the floor was coated in red rubber. The Soviets sent a team

of specialists to assemble Mukhina's stainless steel sculpture – which had been fixed around a wooden frame and welded in Moscow, at the Institute of Steel and Alloys, before being sawn apart and shipped in sixty-five pieces to Paris. Once they had arrived, a crane was used to hoist the pieces of the sculpture into position; and the whole process took only thirteen days. However, to build the pavilion itself, the Soviets had relied on French workers. This was in contrast to the Germans, who sent a thousand-strong team of builders to construct the pavilion which Speer had designed.

If the whole of Speer's conception was derived from a surreptitious look at the Soviet Union's plans, in one point of detail Iofan was spurred equally by the Germans: it was on learning of the granite with which Speer intended to encase the Nazi pavilion that Iofan opted to cover his pavilion with marble. Speer had ensured that the German pavilion would surpass the Soviet Union's in height – so that its eagle would indeed gaze down upon the *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* – but Gréber persuaded him to limit the original scope of his design, for the sake of the other pavilions and to better cohere with the Palais de Chaillot, with which it shared the use of columns and a Neoclassical sensibility. At night, the German pavilion was lit from underneath and from within its pillars, via a lighting system designed by Zeiss-Ikon. The architectural professor Danilo Udovički-Selb has described the effect of these concealed lights as producing 'the ghostly appearance of a photo-negative'. Udovički-Selb has subsequently viewed Speer's pavilion – alongside other instances of crystalline architecture in Nazi Germany

– within a context of medieval German mythology.

Despite their ideological differences and their engagement on opposite sides in Spain, two years later, on 23 August, 1939 – with the Soviets hesitant regarding British and French motives, the Germans requiring raw materials, and both parties eyeing political gain – the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany would sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. A treaty of non-aggression, the pact also contained a secret protocol which sought to divide up much of Eastern Europe. The pact would hold until Hitler's decisive invasion of the Soviet Union, which commenced on 22 June, 1941.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the 1930s, Speer focused on completing the grand New Reich Chancellery in Berlin. With Hitler setting a tight deadline, the building was finished by January 1939. Costing 90 million Reichsmark, it included a gallery of 480 feet: twice as long as the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. The chancellery was damaged during the Battle of Berlin, and torn down by the Soviets at the end of the World War II.

Prior to the onset of war, Hitler had Speer develop plans for an extensive rebuilding of Berlin. At the centre of these plans was the Prachtstrasse ('Street of Splendour'): a grand and extraordinarily wide boulevard, which was to run three miles long in a straight line between north and south. The boulevard was to bear all of Germany's ministry buildings and embassies. As with so many of these grandiose architectural projects, there was an impetus to dwarf the great works of other cities. And Hitler continued to conceptualise his new Berlin – which Speer would later refer to as 'Germania' – in the early days of the war. He was

inspired again by the example of Rome, which he had visited in May 1938; and by Paris too, whose architecture he toured in the days following the fall of France at the end of June 1940.

Although such opportunities for sightseeing served to advance his vision, and while he handed responsibility for the details of the rebuilding to Speer, Hitler had pictured some of these proposed structures as far back as 1925. Towards the southern end of the Prachtstrasse was to be a triumphal arch, based on the Arc de Triomphe but three times as tall. Then at the northern end of the boulevard was to stand an enormous Volkshalle, rising to 950 feet and covered with a copper dome, and shaped after Hadrian's Pantheon. Hitler envisioned a completed Volkshalle serving as the centrepiece of an International Exposition which he hoped to host in Berlin come 1950.

Speer continued to work up his plans throughout the early phase of World War II, but he was quick to appreciate that while Germany was engaged in such a war, there could be no large-scale construction. Stalin, already impressed by Speer's pavilion in Paris, received in late 1939 images of Speer's models for the rebuilding. He desired that Speer take a trip to Moscow to discuss his work – but Hitler refused Speer permission to make the visit, fearing that Stalin would not allow his prized architect to return to Germany. ■

*We will be republishing as a regular feature blogs found by George Touche' who lives and works in the USA.*

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# Markus Lüpertz: Threads of History

*Hirshorn, Washington DC On view May 24 through September 10, 2017*

*Al Jirikowic, Washington Editor*

The arrival of Markus Lüpertz to Washington D.C. was a watershed moment for the artists of Washington D.C. but, alas, another visit to the Road Show D.C. came and went, in passive silence.

Although two of Washington's most noted museums featured their main stages for such a World renown figure in European art, [a feat in itself] hardly a word scrambled amid the local scene. I found it odd, no big stir. Lüpertz has been shown with the greats of post war Germany, -Peck, Keifer, Richter. but never in this country, in a large noted space. Not too much excitement here. Why?

Lüpertz is rare. A man who proclaims he sits at the "table of painters throughout history" and explores his work accordingly, his lifelong path he kept, intensely determined -- no matter where it lead. Painting to him is supreme.. "a way of explaining the world, painting makes the world viable/divine, ..painting explains the world on Earth...." And as virtuously and as vigorously he painted, as if he were a on a mission/ deal to be kept with God, it is fascinating to see how he kept his bargain of "Nietzsche Metaphysical" demand, his decisively high bar standards. He quotes his philosophy through out his artist career as it bends and breaks forward. Indeed he has been seen as a "Kunstler-Philosoph", an artist-philosopher as his work straddles the gap between

the the Apollonian world of form and beauty and on the other hand, the Dionysian - the contradictions of the pain of human existence. His challenge was self determined.. the viewer, in turn, is challenged to wonder if he kept his own designated agenda or "vision". Or if he succeeded? The results are for the viewer to struggle with.

Here is a man who sensed the need to mythologize himself into himself for his own bearing. Unlike other artists, no one was to do it for him. The propositions he set for himself are very high minded, even classically pretentious or godly impossible. We are drawn to his work as a test of personal standard as a dare to succeed, this is a dualism he consistently sets up... one of many reverberations we, his viewers, may test for the results and the work is a result of such propositions.

His earlier work, as seen in the larger galleries of the Hirshorn, are large colorful paintings of tents. Brightly, colorful tents in perhaps a dessert. These are large paintings are not on canvas or with oil or noticeable artist paint. They are on some sort of affordable industrial "Kraft" paper painted with what is known as a "distemper" or chalky commercial poster paint. He was working for a poster company at the time and wisely "borrowed" some paint. He would continue this borrowing for some time... until he got older and more successful. The brilliant wide,

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*He makes a quest for "pure art" but is always swept up in the infernal process of being on Earth, so he bestrides this dualism constantly. He is entangled with the figure at the same time he sees it as a process of painting. He reveals in paint, or the act of painting as itself an act of sharing perception and at the same time he uncovers familiarity with objects around him and nature.*

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large depictions of various tents are as much a design as an actual representations of colorful tents. Indeed, a question of how to represent and at the same time let "artfulness of the object" of the tents shine forth, let the aesthetic of the object and at the same time represent the tent as more than a tent is a rattling visual experience. How to handle the brightness and cover the large space so as to be a tent and more than a tent is a rampant dualism that characterizes his work forward. But the images are striking.

At the Phillips, we see his maturation process a fore our very eyes. He makes a quest for "pure art" but is always swept up in the infernal process of being on Earth, so he bestrides this dualism





*Marcus Lupertz*

constantly. He is entangled with the figure at the same time he sees it as a process of painting. He reveals in paint, or the act of painting as itself an act of sharing perception and at the same time he uncovers familiarity with objects around him and nature. He makes the argument for the total destruction visually of the confining critical restraint decryption of what has been seen as Abstract and what is corralled under the realm of Realism. In Lupertz, they are neither. A picture/image. They pass back and forth into oblivion of object/not object. His obsession with volume, mass, the paint can almost be seen as cultural sculptural management. But this IS idea to him, in his painterly language is "completely at the table of painters" so he is in the history house of art, acknowledges that and recoils from it. Constantly going to and fro on his canvass and

in our minds in his mind. Does one blow smoke in the company of Leonardo or Rembrandt? Hope not.

His dealing with contemporary artists is not passive, but he does stand with it. His objects/visual are in motion, familiar to our psyches but not our ready brain. He dances between art it self, as a power, and the horrible of modern German history. Unable to wrest himself entirely from history, from his celestial palace of art, he is slammed to social reality of Germany. Not unlike his contemporaries, he wrestles with the stinking dead Nazi rat wafting up through history's floorboards, as it is all around him. He depicts Nazi helmets slugged with paint to pacify them as design still life. His forty foot long painting of the geometrically arranged battlements of the Siegfried Line dominate a gallery wall as if it were a Renaissance perspective

project. The object is not important to Lupertz as much as the "artfulness of the object." Perhaps we can see it better filtered through his paint, he stakes his life on that struggle. I think it is obvious as it was to older German painters like Beckman or Dix... I, however, do not think it is obvious to Washington. The courage of the Hirshorn and Phillips, in this light, is to be congratulated.

Although Mr. Lupertz is a dapper man, with a silver tipped cane, beautifully trimmed devil beard and jaunty hat, impressive art cred for a seventy four year old man, he is not cool. At least in Washington eyes. He is painfully analog, not digital. His concerns were largely those of the passed by twentieth century where inevitably his identity is enshrined. He actually dares to speak of painters with power, with moral struggle, with ethical calling and a genuine love of art. Of beauty. He refers to our age now as the "twilight of the Gods..." a period of "blindness". "Without painting, the world is only consumed, not perceived...painting sees the inner world. Painting is culture and who says culture says the substance of the world. And painting provides the vocabulary to perceive the world." Now, who thinks and paints like that? ■

# 'Wheres the glitch fam?'

*Ian Keaveny, Ireland*

As circumstance breeds a response so computers and the Internet bred glitch or as Jon.Cates of SAIC would call it 'Dirty New Media'. In an increasingly computerized and data-centric society it would seem inevitable that the fetishization of error as a response to technology and its colonization of both our public and private lives is the new art.

If the gallery is the screen and the screen is everywhere, where can I go to find it and how do I make it?

Mathieu St Pierre started the Facebook group 'Glitch artists collective', some five years ago, in conversation with him I asked why? "Back in 2012, I felt that most groups already existing (on Facebook and Flickr) were very generic and didn't have much of an identity except asking people to post random glitched images/videos. So I thought it would be great to create a group that has a sense community, hence the "collective" within the name. Since most art movements always had a specific location/city where they evolve, I think it's important to understand the roots of glitch art which are mainly driven from Internet culture. It's a global movement that went viral and I believe GAC resonates with that. It's only recently that you can see artists actually calling themselves "glitch artists", so it's slowly taking shape and becoming recognized by the art world."

Glitch arts currency is reputation, likes and novelty - it may not last longer than your flicking through it, you may have just made it on your

smartphone with an app like Glitche or crunched through a bash script on your desktop, it could be a shot of an electronic noticeboard in the throes of software meltdown on your commute home.

Go there and look for the work of Enad Yenrac, Kaspar Ravel, Pandey Chan, Sarah Zucker and Zoe Stawska then look at the work of Tomaz sulej on codecs, specifically Glic, and the tool time counterpart of Gac.

Glitch art makes its own tools through coding or the misuse of programs and hardware, the price of entry is access and a willingness to break stuff. There's an underground of circuit bending exemplified by the work of collectives like Cracked Ray Tube who deal in re-purposing old TVs and making installations with them (and also making guides for beginners) or the work of Philip Stearns and his 'year of the glitch' which involves circuit bending digital cameras and making fabric from the resulting images. Circuit bending can be traced back to the work of Reed Ghazala, his work, though audio based, can be equally applied to that of video as seen in the work of LZK industries and the Facebook group Video Circuits.

It also has a level of self criticism, 'Wheres the glitch fam' is used when work is just simple photo-shop filter fests or after effects laziness, in a recent post to GAC Nick Yasa posted the image above which pokes fun at the laziness and self absorption of some of the posters - titled 'Fuck gac' -

although the cost of admission is free it requires you at least make the effort. But then as Rosa Menkman says 'Glitch art is dead'. ■



## Nathaniel Mary Quinn at Rhona Hoffman Gallery

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's exhibit at Rhona Hoffman's West Loop gallery is truly wonderful. The portraits in the show consist of collages and hand drawn elements, creating fractured faces and bodies. I really love the way the work mixes collage with drawn and painted areas. The fractured areas of the faces sometimes appear to be applied when they are actually drawn or painted on the surface with a hard edge, making them seem to be separate while in reality they are not. The people represented in Mr. Quinn's portraits have a disjointed

appearance, yet they also have a sense of nobility about them. Some of this is from formal positioning of the people and some is from the traditional techniques used in the pieces. Several of the works have backgrounds which seem to reference Renaissance paintings and some pull from more contemporary studio portraits like a child would have taken at a school. Nathaniel Quinn says "I hope to convey a sense of how our experiences, both good and bad, operate to construct our identities. I also want to portray a mutual relationship between the acceptable and the unacceptable, the grotesque and what is

## Chicago

aesthetically pleasing." The combination of the grotesque and the aesthetically pleasing was. For me, the hook that drew me closer. Bringing disparate elements into a harmonious work seems like a challenging task, but true to his goal, Mr Quinn achieves it successfully. ■

Prices: \$10,000-20,000  
'Nothing Funny' September 8th through October 14th

*Doug MacGoldrick*

## Fern Shaffer at I16 Gallery

Fern Shaffer has been working as an artist for over 40 years, exhibiting performances, paintings and photographs as both shaman and teacher.

In this not so quiet space of a gallery, Gallery I16, located in St. Charles, Illinois, Shaffer paints the common plants including Cannabis, Artemisia, Dandelion, Digitalis, Lungwort, Ginkgo and Gopherspurge. Large representations of one leaf of each plant, seven 5x7 ins paintings and 35 smaller works measuring 3x5 ins speak about the power of plants to heal various diseases and ailments in humans. Careful study, connection and fine draftsmanship are embedded in this body of work.

What is unusual about these paintings is the disparity of size between each plant and the paintings. It's as if each plant posed for a portrait. Drawn and painted in acrylic, a green leaf appears on a flat black background, simply, branches echo Matisse

cutouts. The details of each plant are abstracted to reveal the form of each plant, these are not botanically correct in the scientific sense.

The first painting titled, Artemisia is also the namesake of a woman's gallery in the 70s in Chicago where Shaffer was a member and officer. The exhibition hand out reads 'Artemisia has been used for a variety of digestive tract disorders including cramping, diarrhea and constipation, popular disorders of the 21st Century.'

A humble Dandelion covers most of the rectangular canvas, its edges resembling arrows both menacing and beautiful. There is something captivating in these works that defies description in words; it's the spiritual connection the artist feels for each plant and whichever one speaks to her, she paints

In 1995, artist Othello Anderson and Shaffer embarked on a nine year ritual of documenting her performance of healing. Mountains in Tennessee whose tops were blown

off for mining, parts of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans from overfishing, deleterious results from the greenhouse effect and waste material accumulation were photographed with Shaffer as shaman performing healing rituals. This kinetic performance became an exhibition in 2015 at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago

As a painter Shaffer addresses aspects of Art in tune with ethereal or invisible powers of healing, - an irony in the visual arts. Although the viewer cannot 'see' the power per se, the palpable presence is felt on a cellular level.

Shaffer's body of work includes over 25 exhibitions both here and abroad including MOCA in Chicago, the artist's home. ■

Price range \$250-\$5,000

*Annie Markovich  
Managing Editor*



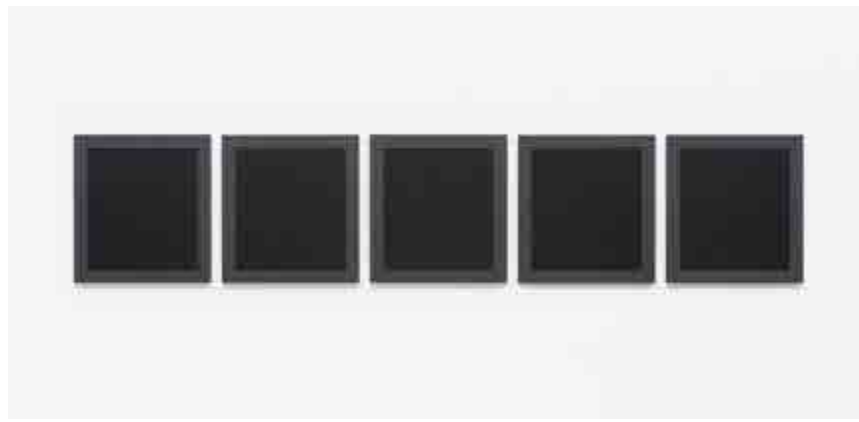
# Pittsburgh

## *Thread painting 2015-5*

light to middle gray whereas up close one can see that these shapes are actually created from individual lines in grid patterns.

Another approach to material includes the use of acrylic on acrylic tile shaped pieces. Once again he relies on systematic repetition of parts in a grid format. Wall Piece 2016-3b, Acrylic paint on Acrylic and rare earth magnets 15.25" x 29.75" x 0.25" consists of 5 rows and 6 columns of black rectangles stacked in pairs. When viewed from the side we see a cobalt blue edge to the tiles the only non-gray scale color in the exhibition.

Tabatabai's work carries on the threads of his modernist forbearers from the 50's, 60's, and 70's. The color field painters such as Ad Reinhardt and his black paintings, perhaps a bit of Mark Rothko's Chapel paintings, through Frank Stella's pinstriped minimalist Black Paintings, the hard edge paintings of John McLaughlin and perhaps most closely tied to the pencil grid work of Agnes Martin. However, Tabatabai's work is much more refined and for the most part on a smaller scale so the pieces feel more intimate, delicate, precious, and jewel like than those mentioned. There is a certain elegance to these pieces which makes the work of the aforementioned feel heavy handed. But they are positioned within the same general conceptual



The solo exhibition Hadi Tabatabai: Transitional Spaces is co-presented by the wats:ON? Festival and curated by Spike Wolff. The festival, an annual event, celebrates and honors the life and work of Jill Watson, a CMU alumna. Watson, who was killed in a plane crash in 1996, was a well-known Pittsburgh architect and was recognized for her interdisciplinary philosophy as an artist. The exhibition at the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University runs from September 23 – November 12, 2017.

Tabatabai works with a limited set of variables including: the use of grids, parallel lines, modularity and a predominantly neutral monochromatic grayscale palette.

Within the larger central space of the third floor gallery many of the pieces feature the use of painted thread stretched tautly from top to bottom, evenly spaced at 1/8" intervals in near machine-like fashion, although actually made by the hand of the artist. When viewed from afar this approach creates fields of black, white, and various shades of gray, but when seen up-close registers as line. As mentioned, he often works with modular iterations of 3,4,5,6 and 7 repeating the same scaled rectangular supports which are very close to squares with repetitive spacing equal to the borders of his pieces. All

of the work has a very thin profile and he uses acrylic and Dibond panels for his supports which are white, gray or black. Because the supports are recessed this influences how we perceive the thread which is stretched around the aluminum outer frame.

In Thread Painting 2015-5, 2015 Thread, acrylic paint, and ABS on Dibond panel, 17"x 16" x 1" (each panel) which is prominently displayed on the back wall of the central space and acts as the anchor for the exhibition, we see five identical panels pieces in a row, all with a centrally placed floating black rectangle surrounded by a dark gray border. The dark gray border is actually the evenly spaced white thread against a black background and the floating black rectangle is a result of that shape being painted on said white thread.

In the smaller space to the right of this central area the work shifts to middle gray supports and the others a white backing. Tabatabai continues to engage with many of the same variables but in slightly different ways. For instance, he uses drawn line as opposed to thread in many of these pieces and creates grids as opposed to just vertical lines. However, he still continues to explore the interplay of shape and line based on the positioning of the viewer. A greater distance produces geometric shapes in various shades of

frameworks: breakdown of the figure ground relationship, contemplative, truth in materials, non-representational, stripping down to get to the essential .... The work seems like the next logical step in this progression and I'm sure if Clement Greenberg was still around he would be championing this work. The clock like precision in which these pieces have been crafted is in large part responsible for transporting the viewer to a serene space where one enters into a trancelike state of total calm, peace and stillness.

All that being said, to see the work through this Western Art Historical lens would only partially contextualize the work. Hadi Tabatabai was born in Mashhad, Iran and spent the first thirteen years of his life living there. He moved to the states with his parents and settled in California. He received a BS in industrial technology from California State University Fresno and ten years later a BFA in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute in

1995. Since my knowledge of Iranian art is limited it would be difficult for me to speculate how much influence his time in Iran and his connection to Iranian culture has influenced his work. What I can identify in this work is the use of thread, tile like pieces and non-representational imagery. Weaving rugs, creating textiles, mosaic tiles and the use of geometric patterns have all been part of the rich history of Iranian art making. So from my blunted Western perspective these are the elements of his work that reveal a link to his Iranian heritage and perhaps this interplay of Western and Eastern influences help shape the work that is part of Transitional Spaces.

By all accounts this exhibition exemplifies the term art for art's sake. One could enter this exhibition in any decade over the last 50 years or so and have no idea, based on the work what is going on in the world outside the confines of the art world. Once again reinforcing the earlier reference to the

Minimalist Movement, one which operated during a controversial war, political assassinations, amidst divisive race relations, the feminist movement and anti-government protests ... sounds familiar doesn't it? Most would agree that this work qualifies as nonpolitical. Can art made during this time frame really disassociate itself from the political? Maybe if more people could see and actually appreciate this exhibition or better yet make work that required developing the sensitivity, skill and discipline to create this type of contemplative art we would all live in a more peaceful, harmonious world. So perhaps during these turbulent times Tabatabai's private act of looking inside to create this quiet meditative work is really the subversive embodiment of the political.

■

*Scott Turri*

### The Nail In the Coffin

"Codswallop" is a performance piece created by the Cornish veteran artist Ken Turner, inspired by the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes. At the St Ives Festival in September 2017 he placed a large, fresh cod onto a trolley and pulled the vehicle through the streets of St Ives challenging people to discuss their lack of sensibility to art. He visited the Penwith Gallery and Tate St Ives, which was closed, talking to people in the street and the cod, asking them all what they thought of the art on display. The resulting film by Huw Wahl, from which these images are taken, is available to view on [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

The challenge, which highlighted the corruption in conception and execution of the contemporary art scene was well reported by the official festival reporter. The St Ives Time & Echo promised to carry a full report on what happened but failed to do so. The Penwith Gallery complained that he did not have permission to enter their gallery and have so far ignored his request to screen *To Hell With Culture*, a film about Herbert Read by Huw Wahl, presumably because it shows a vibrant, literary mind engaging with artists. Something the Penwith Gallery is loathe to do today. The Newlyn Society have also failed to engage with Turner's

## Cornwall



performance preferring to ignore his contribution to the debate on why St Ives has lost its avant garde credentials and become a mannerist tourist trap disinterested in debate and hoping for the artists who remember to die, so they can go on churning out tourist junk-art on the backs of the names of some of the foremost artists of 20<sup>th</sup> century art history.

The wording on the side of the trolley carrying the fish 'Codswallop Concerning Corruptible Perception'

pinpoints the problem. Gaining positions of power on boards and as trustees, individuals feed off the eminence of St Ives while prices for local houses drive out unmonied artists and vested interests maintain a tight control over studio spaces. The loss of critical writing allows repetition to display itself as style. Kitsch has become excellence. Exhibitions are designed to display the Art Council's bias and thinking art has given way to the theme park. Ken



Turner's courage was not matched by a single discussion, a single challenge to his performance, a single write-up of the issues. Such silence is the nail in the coffin for St Ives. ■

*Daniel Nanavati*



*Seen 16th September 2017 at the St Ives Festival*

*Jonathon  
Xavier  
Coudrille's  
response 19th  
September  
2017*



### **Bee in my Bonnet: The Kurt Jackson Foundation Gallery, North Rd, St Just, Cornwall**

The impressive conversion of a sizeable industrial building overlooking, with large picture windows, the Tregeseal valley, was completed in late 2016. Opening with the Jackson Foundations first exhibition, in this new building, entitled "Following the Surfer".

After a six month running period the second and current installation continuing until Sept 2017 is insect themed. Publicised as "a Bee in my Bonnet, and the occasional wasp." It comprises of wall hung paintings of various sizes within the genre, an educational area upstairs displaying bee homes and habitat issues, and video

room downstairs showing among, other things, Mr Jackson shoving bees into his fridge so subdued he could use them as live models for this current exhibition .

Kurt Jackson has given himself the no small task of twice yearly exhibitions which will entail the wholesale production of entirely new collections, to a set theme .

On a quick head count in this Bee exhibition, there were 40 paintings in different areas of the four roomed gallery which measured 600 x 500 mm priced at £8,000 each. There were 3- 1200 x 1200mm paintings identical to each other at £24,000 each , and 1 large rectangular landscape 2200 x 1800mm at £42,000

In addition to these there was 1 super-canvas 2400 x 3000mm coming in at a whopping £120,000.

The smallest work and entry level purchase for an original Jackson being a framed mixed media block of wire and other effects at a humble £1,500. This was a one off, but there were other small collage pieces of broken books and bee materials in box frames as well as several 6 inch sq paintings which were being rolled at a mere £3,000 a go....

There is card stand for a normal souvenir of your visit, good washroom facilities , and after all that excitement two really good cafes within a short walk of leaving this all new and impressive,

Bee in my Bonnet March - Aug 2017. Gallery open Wed till Fridays 10-5 Saturdays 10 - 1 pm. ■

*Chris Hutchins is an artist and philosopher.*



## New Art Examiner



We are delighted to welcome Julia Weekes, originally from Boston, as our fashion editor. Julia worked for 40 years in Italy and will be bringing regular articles to the magazine on the thinking of the contemporary fashion world. We are also delighted that Stephen Lueking who wrote for the New Art Examiner in the 80s and 90s will be joining us as c-editor in Chicago and writing about sculpture. Frea Lockley who writes for The Canary and has taught critical writing, joins us as Cornwall Editor.

## TURKEY



Turkey's President, stood in the garden of his Istanbul villa welcoming guests. Those shaking his hand included a veteran bottle-blond pop star, an award-winning Kurdish left-wing folk singer and Hülya Avsar, a beauty queen-turned actress who stood beside the hijab-wearing Mrs Erdoğan in a strapless dress. The Erdogans also exchanged warm words with the transgender singer Bülent Ersoy, whose extraordinary cheekbones make her resemble Morticia from the Addams Family. From Prospect Magazine 13th September 2017. this after 265 were killed in July's protests and as publications are shut down and once-loyal film producers arrested

## LONDON:



Banks decamping to the EU could seriously weaken London's position as a financial center, a position key to its art-world stature. And as investors wait for developments in the Brexit negotiations to back the pound, the currency has fallen to an eight-year low against the euro. A weak British pound might be good for buyers of art, real estate, and other commodities from overseas, but for Londoners the city is still eye-wateringly expensive. September 27th Artsy

## NEW YORK:

Kiki Kogelnik



It has been a brutal couple of years for New York's art-world hangouts, with Moran's, Da Silvano, and the Cup & Saucer all having been shuttered; but the news earlier this week that the NoHo Star and Temple Bar, two quirky and comforting downtown mainstays, may close particularly rankles, because they were designed with the input of an artist – the late, great Kiki Kogelnik. Artnews 11th October 2017.

## BRAZIL



Conservatives have launched a wave of protests against institutions across the country that arts professionals are calling an attack on culture. Artforum. 11th October 2017.

## NEW YORK

Marina Abramovic



Marina Abramovic abandoned plans to open the Marina Abramovic Institute (MAI). She is unable to raise the purported \$31 million required to convert a space in upstate New York. A highly publicized Kickstarter campaign raised over \$661,000 for the project. According to Abramovic, the Kickstarter funds were used to pay architect Rem Koolhaas for a preliminary design of the space.

## In The Next Issue:

We interview Tim Shaw RA

We publish Derek Guthrie's interview on why he left Chicago (with Paul Germanos)

The Fall of Jerry Saltz, Art Critic

Reviews on Geoffrey Farmer, A way out of the mirror, 2017, Canadian Pavilion in

Venice, Ydessa Hendeles, The Milliner's Daughter, at the Power Plant, Toronto, Sven

Berlin at the Belgrade Gallery, St Ives, The Expanded Print at WMU (Michigan) and

more.

AVAILABLE FROM :

UNITED KINGDOM

Arnolfini Books; Capital Books, London; Camden Arts Centre Bookshop; Charlotte Street News; Daily News; HOME; ICA Bookshop, London; Walther Koenig Books, Serpentine; White Cube Bookshop; Tate Modern.

Cornwall: Belgrave Gallery, St Ives; Cafe Arts, Truro; Falmouth Art Gallery, Falmouth; Redwing Gallery, Penzance; Terre Verte Gallery, Altarnun; STERTS Arts Centre, Cornwall; Art Shop, Penzance; Cornwall Contemporary, Penzance.

Banned from: The Exchange Gallery, Penzance, Newlyn Orion Gallery, Newlyn, Penzance; Penzance Gallery, St Ives, Anima Mundi, St Ives, Trimenheste Sculpture Park, Penzance; Penzance House, Penzance.

CONTINENTAL EUROPE & ASIA

Athenaeum Boekhandel, Amsterdam; Do You Readme?! GbR, Berlin; Multi-Arts Corporation, Taipei; Pandora Ltd, Istanbul.

UNITED STATES

Chicago: Hilton | Asmus Contemporary, Corbett vs Dempsey Gallery, Firecat Projects, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Linda Warren Projects, Printworks, 57th Street Books, Martha Mae Art Supplies.

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