

Art and Its Double: A New York Perspective



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Within a cultural framework as well-defined and closely-knit as the New York art world, periods of transition are known to occur with a remarkable lack of grace. This doesn't mean that the indicators of change are themselves difficult to perceive, nor that the changes are so sweeping as to destroy all semblance of a mediating order. What tends to happen is that the watchdogs of the outgoing style become complacent before the shift and vindictive afterwards. Those who usher in the new modes wax with piety at first, then quickly become tyrannical. This phase is then proceeded by a long chapter involving the consolidation of business interests and the identification of shared aesthetic terrain between the two former adversaries. Once the struggle has subsided, the intervening years before the next

>transition are enlivened by the shared memories of a
well executed revolution.
As of this writing<1/4 the cluster of styles known variously
as neo-conceptualism<1/4 post modernism<1/4 neo-geo<1/4 commodity sculpture<1/4 the new abstraction<1/4 simulation<1/4 and
\ "It i<1/4 has taken more or less full control of the New York
art media<1/4 its collective imagination<1/4 and its market-
place.tl) It is useless to resist it<1/4 and yet it is probably hope-
less to compete within it<1/4 since the originators of this
style have long since been identified<1/4 and the sole re-
maining formality is to decide which of the younger generation will attain to a more or less grudging permanence. Virtually all necessary lines of support have been
drawn between the history of modern art on one side<1/4
and the European avant-garde on the other.~2) The galleries are already being swept by countless second-wave
post-modernists<1/4 and this trend is expected to intensify
during the 1986-87 season. The two questions to be
answered<1/4 then<1/4 are<1/4 What does all of this mean? and
How did it happen so fast?
While the image of overnight transition may correspond neatly to popular myths regarding the fickleness
of the American avant garde<1/4 the roots of the post-
modern aesthetic have actually been in evidence for
nearly a decade; even the identification of this range
of work as a movement is merely the official acknowledgement
of a change that has been predicted for past
few years. Certainly the recent growth of public interest in an art engaged by popular culture occurs as an
explicit response to a number of factors that have become increasingly visible from within and outside of the
art world.. The first<1/4 most apparent and yet</east significant of these factors was an unspoken agreement that
the neo-expressionist era was suffocating the possibility of meaning in art<1/4 and<1/4 relatedly<1/4 that some of the
painters of that movement had begun to appear somewhat compromised by their relationship to the international art market<1/4 ta) The second factor has been a sharp
escalation of that market<1/4 particularly as this relates to
financial speculation in young artists careers<1/4 t4) A third<1/4
and perhaps the most pervasive factor in this transition
has been a marked shift in the way artists perceive themselves in relation to the social<1/4 political and economic
superstructure of American society - print and electronic media<1/4 so called \"consumer\" culture<1/4 and multi-national corporate capitalism.
Before attempting to explore any of these factors<1/4 the
most pressing point to be made about post modernism
is that it is<1/4 in Hal Foster's words<1/4 \"not monolithic\" -
there are some closely related historical premises represented by highly divergent media<1/4 and virtually no
consensus among the artists as to overriding formal
or thematic concerns. The artists involved practice
photography<1/4 abstract painting<1/4 constructed sculpture<1/4 installations and public art<1/4 graphic design<1/4 collage<1/4
drawing<1/4 and more or less traditional methods of object
making. Some are quite politically engaged<1/4 others
deeply involved with current philosophy<1/4 and stiff
others ground their work in predominantly intuitive processes. Lastly<1/4 each artist is keenly aware of their sources in prior forms of art<1/4 and of the role they are
attempting to create for themselves in the development
of art in the late 20th century.
A final point bears mentioning relative to the theme
of this exhibition and the post-modern movement as a
whole. In deciding upon the artists and works to include
in Art and its Double<1/4 there has been no curatorial
attempt to present an authoritative summary of post-
modernist activity in New York<1/4 nor of the entire range
of ideas it suggests. On the contrary<1/4 this exhibition represents a highly personalized selection of work made
since 1980<1/4 which happens to embrace several of post-
modernism's themes. There are important styles and
artists in New York quite unrelated to this movement
 - a truth

borne out by the peripheral status of most conceptually-based art during the first half of the 80s. In addition, there are a number of vital artists working within this parameter whose work for reasons of physical /imitations in space could not be included. The overall goal in bringing this art together has been to explore how some of these variant ideas have entered the artistic mainstream and to suggest how they may continue to shape its future. Hopefully this exhibition will succeed in suspending the entire issue of art movements for a moment and bring attention instead to fifteen of the most compelling artists working in New York today. In 1914 Marcel Duchamp exhibited his first complete ready-made - a standard metal bottle-rack produced and unadorned. With this single gesture he brought into focus one of the most profound and lasting issues of 20th century aesthetics: the problem of the uniqueness of the work of art. Twenty-two years later the philosopher Walter Benjamin would take up this same problem in regard to the "aura of originality" that surrounded the art object in the era prior to that of the popularization of methods of mechanized reproduction. (8) Both Duchamp and Benjamin arrived at similar conclusions through widely divergent approaches - the modern artist could not afford to ignore the implications of technological advances which were being introduced at a startling rate: photography, electricity, radio, film, the automobile, aviation and telephones were gradually

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