

# 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's periods of tran  
sition 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 me  
diating order. What tends to happen is that the watch  
dogs 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 be  
come tyrannical. This phase is then proceeded by a  
long  
er chapter involving the consolidation of business in  
terests and the  
identification of shared aesthetic terrain  
between the two former adversaries.  
Once the strug  
gle has subsided the intervening years before the next

>transition are enlivened by the shared memories of a<br>well executed revolution.<br>As of this writingi¼ the cluster of styles known variously<br>as neo-conceptualismi¼ post modernismi¼ neo-geo¼ com-<br>modity sculpture¼ the new abstractioni¼ simulationi¼ and<br>\ "It i¼ has taken more or less full control of the New York<br>art mediai¼ its collective imaginationi¼ and its market-<br>place.tl) It is useless to resist iti¼ and yet it is probably hope-<br>less to compete within iti¼ since the originators of this<br>style have long since been identifiedi¼ and the sole re-<br>maining formality is to decide which of the younger gen-<br>eration will attain to a more or less grudging perma<br>nence. Virtually all necessary lines of support have been<br>drawn between the history of modern art on one sidei¼<br>and the European avant-garde on the other.~2) The gal-<br>eries are already being swept by countless second-wave<br>post-modernsi¼ and this trend is expected to intensify<br>during the 1986-87 season. The two questions to be<br>answered¼ then¼ are¼ What does all of this mean? and<br>How did it happen so fast? <br>While the image of overnight transition may corre-<br>spond neatly to popular myths regarding the fickleness<br>of the American avant gardei¼ the roots of the post-<br>modern aesthetic have actually been in evidence for<br>nearly a decade; even the identification of this range<br>of work as a movement is merely the official acknow/<br>edgement o f a change that has been predicted for past<br>few years. Certainly the recent growth of public inter-<br>est in an art engaged by popular culture occurs as an<br>explicit response to a number of factors that have be-<br>come increasingly visible from within and outside of the<br>art world.. The firsti¼ most apparent and yet/east signifi<br>cant of these factors was an unspoken agreement that<br>the neo-expressionist era was suffocating the possibil<br>ity of meaning in arti¼ andi¼ relatedlyi¼ that some of the<br>painters of that movement had begun to appear some-<br>what compromised by their relationship to the interna<br>tional art marketi¼ ta) The second factor has been a sharp<br>escalation of that marketi¼ particularly as this relates to<br>financial speculation in young artists careersi¼ t4) A thirdi¼<br>and perhaps the most pervasive factor in this transition<br>has been a marked shift in the way artists perceive them-<br>selves in relation to the sociali¼ political and economic<br>superstructure of American society - print and elec<br>tronic mediai¼ so called \"consumer\" culturei¼ and multi<br>national corporate capitalism.<br>Before attempting to explore any of these factorsi¼ the<br>most pressing point to be made about post modernism<br>is that it isi¼ in Hal Foster s wordsi¼ \"not monolithic\" -<br>there are some closely related historical premises repre<br>sented by highly divergent mediai¼ and virtually no<br>consensus among the artists as to overriding formal<br>or thematic concerns. The artists involved practice<br>photographyi¼ abstract paintingi¼ constructed sculp<br>turei¼ installations and public arti¼ graphic designi¼ collagei¼<br>drawingi¼ and more or less traditional methods of object<br>making. Some are quite politically engagedi¼ others<br>deeply involved with current philosophyi¼ and stiff<br>others ground their work in predominantly intuitive pro<br>cesses. Lastlyi¼ each artist is keenly aware o f their sour<br>ces in prior forms of arti¼ and of the role they are<br>attempting to create for themselves in the development<br>of art in the late 20th century.<br>A final point bears mentioning relative to the theme<br>of this exhibition and the post-modern movement as a<br>whole. In deciding upon the artists and works to include<br>in Art and its Doublei¼ there has been no curatorial<br>attempt to present an authoritative summary of post<br>modernist activity in New Yorki¼ nor of the entire range<br>of ideas it suggests. On the contraryi¼ this exhibition rep<br>resents a highly personalized selection of work made<br>since 1980i¼ which happens to embrace several of post<br>modernism s themes. There are important styles and<br>artists in New York quite unrelated to this movement<br>- a truth

borne out by the peripheral status of most<br> conceptually-based art during the first half of the 80 s.<br> In additioni¼Œ there are a number of vital artists working<br> within this parameter whose worki¼Œ for reasons of physi<br> cal /imitations in spacei¼Œ could not be included. The over<br> all goal in bringing this art together has been to explore<br> how some of t/~ese variant ideas have entered the<br> artistic mainstreami¼Œ and to suggest how they may con<br> tinue to shape its future. Hopefullyi¼Œ this exhibition will<br> succeed in suspending the entire issue of art move<br> ments for a momenti¼Œ and bring attention instead to fif<br> teen of the most compelling artists working in New York<br> today.<br>In 1914i¼Œ Marcel Duchamp exhibited his first complete<br> ready-made - a standard metal bottle-racki¼Œ mass<br> produced and unadorned.ts) With this single gesture<br> he brought into locus one of the most profound and<br> lasting issues of 20th century aesthetics: the problem<br> of the uniqueness of the work of art. Twenty-two years<br> lateri¼Œ the philosopher Walter Benlamin would take up<br> this same problem in regard to the \"aura of originality\"<br> that surrounded the art obect in the era prior to that of<br> the popularization of methods of mechanized reproduc<br> tion. ~8) Both Duchamp and Benjamin arrived at similar<br> conclusions through widely divergent approaches - thG<br> modern artist could not afford to ignore the implications<br> of technological advances which were being intro<br> duced at a startling rate: photographyi¼Œ electricityi¼Œ radioi¼Œ<br> filmi¼Œ the automobilei¼Œ aviation and telephones were gra<br>

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