

Statements 2018 & 2019

The "three key steps or moments" (i.e. 'turning around', 'uncertainty', and 'return') get lost in the clutter of "the gallery" and "the frame of art" during the final week.

Found myself looking again at three important texts:

1. Alex Comfort: 'Art and Social Responsibility', 1946
2. Robert Smithson: 'Cultural Confinement', 1972
3. Alan Kaprow: 'Art Which Can't Be Art', 1986 (extract below).

"...the relationship of the act of toothbrushing to recent art is clear and cannot be bypassed. This is where the paradox lies; an artist concerned with lifelike art is an artist who does and does not make art. Anything less than paradox would be simplistic. Unless the identity (and thus the meaning) of what the artist does oscillates between ordinary, recognizable activity and the "resonance" of that activity in the larger human context, the activity itself reduces to conventional behavior. Or if it is framed as art by a gallery, it reduces to conventional art. Thus toothbrushing, as we normally do it, offers no roads back to the real world either. But ordinary life performed as art/not art can charge the everyday with metaphoric power."

– Alan Kaprow: 'Art Which Can't Be Art', 1986

"I have no illusions when it comes to my own standing, it's all a matter of a number of individuals forming a collective school. In the arts this has always been so and very often many become known as entities, but only the tops remain as identifiable. The lesser pebbles become sand."

– Enid Marx, 1989

[May 2018]

'ART IS INTEGRATING' (as the Coventry branch of the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants said in May 1940), so I/we are 'arting' all the time and in every situation.

It is said that Dorothy Day's mother, Grace, sewed "every hem and button demonstrated love, diligence, and artistry", and that seems very close to Coomaraswamy's ['What Is the Use of Art Anyway?', 1937] "...so art is the making well, or properly arranging, of anything whatever that needs to be made or arranged, whether a statuette, or automobile, or garden."

In the same text, Coomaraswamy also said, "...just as ethics is the "right way of doing things," so art is the "making well of whatever needs making," or simply "the right way of making things..." and later said, "... activity consists in either a making or a doing. Both of these aspects of the active life depend for their correction upon the contemplative life. The making of things is governed by art, the doing of things by prudence." ['The Christian and Oriental, or True, Philosophy of Art', 1939]

In his introduction to Eric Gill's text 'Art' [1940], Coomaraswamy also said, "Art is not an aesthetic but a rhetorical activity." And in the main text, Gill wrote, "Art as a virtue of the practical intelligence is the well-making of what is needed – whether it be drain-pipes or paintings and sculptures and musical symphonies of the highest religious import."

W.R. Lethaby said (1921), "We have to refound art on community service as the well-doing of what needs doing." He also said (1923), "Full satisfaction is only to be found in the common beauty of common things of the common life" and that "Making things opens out minds."

My understanding of the nature and making of art is in line these statements and, if expanded further, would also reference Sudhana's meeting with Indriyeshvara, for whom "the substance of discipline was in using practical and artistic genius to enter the world and yet go beyond the world..." but who [still] wanted to "know the practices of the bodhisattvas, who know the number of all worlds, the number of all modes of spiritual practice, the number of pasts, presents, and futures, the number of all sentient beings, the number of the enlightenments of all the buddhas?"

– Thomas Clearly: 'The Flower Ornament Scripture, A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra', 1993.

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