

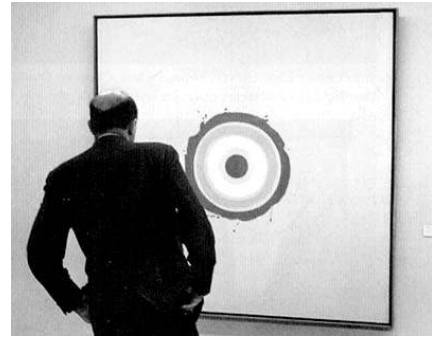
## The Permanence of Art



What role does art criticism play in the institutional world of art? Is the value of an artwork mainly determined by its quality and permanence, or is it influenced by the critics' opinion as well?

A lack of liquidity in art is clearly related to the permanence and legitimizing process of an Art Movement; to the rising popularity of the artist in the artworld,<sup>1</sup> or the assessment given by the art critique. Hence, the acceptance of art as an invaluable or valuable asset rests to a large extent on the expert opinion about the art piece in a specific time in history.

In order for us to have a clearer view of how art remains a social and intellectual activity with high importance to understanding the history of mankind, it is necessary to become aware of the continuous change and development of the concept of art. In the words of Gerard Vilar, the revolution of artistic ideas can be translated as “the divide between the enjoyment of art and its meaning, and between the aesthetic judgment and the artistic judgment within the modern world.”<sup>2</sup> In other words: it is mandatory that in our society -with iconic opulence and with *homo videns* in the leading role- the art critic has to be competent in every language.



Joan Minguet states that “if the art critic reduces his opinion to the conventional institutions assigned to the artistic environment (museum, gallery, art fairs, and biennales) his judgment will be heading toward extinction.”<sup>3</sup> After all, art critique is an articulated opinion about an artwork or a group of artistic objects. It is the emission of a judgment. This judgment can have an explicit valuation, or can be contained inside a discourse applied for those art pieces.



The goal of art critique is to use sensitive reasoning, and critic criticism as its main weapon. Problems arise when this “critic criticism” is endeavored by publicity, fashion, and convenience. During the globalization era, society became more and more consumerist and less sensitive. Art became yet another field inside the mainstream culture, and as a result, sometimes became overrated.

<sup>1</sup> The artworld refers to a combination of elements such as the artists, artworks, artworld public and institutions (Elizabeth, Hemsley, *A Defense of an Institutional Analysis of Art*, Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics, Edinburgh University, Vol. 6 No. 2, August 2009, p. 24).

<sup>2</sup> Gerard, Vilar, *The reasons of art*, Antonio Machado, Madrid, 2005, p.152.

<sup>3</sup> Joan M. Minguet Batllori, *From the Art Critique to the Curatorial Practice. Some reflections*, Disturbis Magazine, Volume 8, Autonomy University of Barcelona, Barcelona, 2010, p. 3.

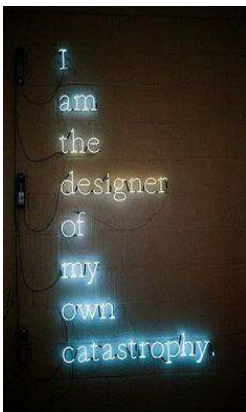


At this point you might be wondering what art critique, social media, networks, and trends have to do with a lack of liquidity in art. Well, here is the answer to that question. Ever since the beginning of Art History, art was considered both rational and sensitive human production. In the end, art is a cultural, social, and intellectual creation that reflects the political, philosophical and historical atmosphere of each century. That is why art is present in any aspect of daily life, and it can be revealed in a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, or even in a porcelain urinal.

The real value of art holds in its permanence through time and also in its heritage quality. This means that art is not a regular asset like a soda or a piece of pie. It cannot be changeable, capricious or arbitrary. When we stand in front of the Parthenon or a Rembrandt, we cannot deny that these two artistic manifestations amaze the eye and our senses. Even in the contemporary context, antiquity interacts with radical creations.



Although it is a fact that popularity and art tendencies change with social preferences or the fame of an artist given by the institutional analysis of art; art is by itself considered a unique asset. This explains why art is fairly constant on the financial market. Old master paintings or post-war artworks rarely decrease in market value. By contrast, the price and value of contemporary art changes significantly depending on the artist or art critique.



Art critique has the power to legitimize the value and significance of art by adding interpretation. That being said, we should keep in mind that art critique, too, is influenced by popular tendencies and continuous bombardment of images in our consumer society. It is possible, then, that the “quality of criticism” becomes one of many superficial and empty characterizations of what Guy Debord calls the “society of the spectacle.”

John Ruskin was the first art historian to exert an important literary influence. He was a “bestseller” who clearly became history’s first art critic (though a negative one), credited with “creating” tastes and preferences in the American market.

His influence had a negative effect on the sale of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century artworks—artists such as Francesco Solimena, Mattia Preti, Luca Giordano, Carracci, Bolognese, even Caravaggio and Ribera were omitted or negatively criticized—so much so, in fact, that these artists’ works sold in the nineteenth century for a fraction of what they had cost in the eighteenth. Solimena’s Annunciation sold for 2,000 francs in 1773, whereas Mireur has no record of a Solimena sale exceeding 600 francs at any time from 1800 to 1900. In the United States, Harvard University’s first professor of art, Charles Eliot Norton, was a disciple of Ruskin’s and another important American tastemaker. Monks and cardinals particularly annoyed him; in conversations with Ruskin he discovered they agreed about the evils of the Counter-Reformation and Italian art’s corrupt state.

Ruskin, Norton and Jarves, with the help of the era’s great dealer, Duveen, as well as his friend and



collaborator, Bernard Berenson—all of whom, it should be noted, sought to bolster high prices in the Renaissance market—saw to it that no major collector from America’s “golden age” of collecting (1880–1920)—including Jules S. Bache, Andrew W. Mellon, Henry Clay Frick, Jack Gardner, J. P. Morgan, Joseph E. Widener, William Randolph Hearst, and Clarence Mackay—purchased Italian seventeenth-and eighteenth-century painting.

Sources consulted:

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