

I haven't written anything in quite a while; I have a lot of complaints. Most of these are about attempts to close the fairly open situation of contemporary art. There are a lot of arguments for closure: a whole aesthetic or style, a half aesthetic or movement, a way of working, history or development, seniority, juniority, money and galleries, sociology, politics, nationalism. Most discussion of these aspects is absolute; something is the only true art and something else has got to go. Usually little is said about particular works and artists and nothing about the actual differences and similarities between artists. I've read very little about the present kind of large scale and it is common to almost everyone. It's very definite and will some day be an obvious aspect of the time. That's true of color also, and of wholeness, which has been discussed some.

Everything on the list should be considered but almost never should any argument result in the destructive conclusion that is the usual ending, or apparent ending, since often it's the premise. Obviously everyone is going to prefer kinds of art. I prefer art that isn't associated with anything and am tired of the various kinds of Dada, and don't think, for example, that the work of Johns and Rauschenberg is so momentous. But it's good and I'm not at all inclined to rank them below every last abstract artist. And I know that their work has connections to so-called abstract work. (I don't like the word "abstract.") Or, I think American art is far better than that anywhere else but I don't think that situation is desirable. Actually it's international art in America and the best thing that could happen would be equal international art elsewhere.

In 1964 I wrote an article on the difference between the years just before and after 1960. Most of the artists, the followers by definition of a majority, and the galleries were fixed upon Abstract Expressionism. It was a style and the only legitimate one. Every little debaser was praised as a great artist by Irving Sandler and Max Kozloff and painted a painting in

ARTnews. But Reinhardt and Rauschenberg, for example, were irrelevant flukes. It was an unpleasant situation and somewhat like the extremely warped one that existed in the United States before the late 1940s. By 1960 it became evident that the best work wasn't among the so-called Abstract Expressionists, except for some of the original ones, Rothko, Newman, and Still, and one later one, Frankenthaler. There were Reinhardt and Rauschenberg, Louis, Noland, Johns and then Chamberlain, di Suvero, Bontecou, Stella, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, and Lichtenstein.

In the last three years or so I've thought that Clement Greenberg and his followers have been trying to form a similar closed situation. I've expected a lot of stupid things to reoccur – movements, labels – but I didn't think there would be another attempt to impose a universal style. It's naive and it's directly opposed to the nature of contemporary art, including that of the artists they support. Their opinions are the same as those of the critics and followers of the late 1950s: there is only one way of working – one kind of form, one medium; everything else is irrelevant and trivial; history is on our side; preserve the true art; preserve the true criticism. This means that Grace Hartigan and Michael Goldberg were better than Reinhardt and Rauschenberg and that Jack Bush and Edward Avedisian are better than Oldenburg and Flavin. Both groups, by these attitudes, slowly destroy the work they're protecting. The followers of the Abstract Expressionists and some of the leaders went backward toward representational painterliness. The Greenbergers, except Noland, steadily became either atmospheric or cubistic. I think Noland is the only first-rate artist involved – Louis is dead – and I like Noland's circles better than I like anything of his since. Caro is a conventional, competent second-generation artist. I don't understand the link between Noland and Caro, since wholeness is basic to Noland's work and cubist fragmentation is basic to Caro's. I think Caro had his first show in New York in

December 1964. Di Suvero first showed his somewhat similar but far better sculpture in October 1960; by 1964 di Suvero had a tiresome number of followers and Caro's work looked like that of just another of them. "Anthony Caro is a major artist – the best sculptor to come up since David Smith" – Clement Greenberg. That's only misjudgment, though. I expect that; I don't expect the little league fascism.

Barbara Reise's article on Greenberg was good serious opposition. It's surprising that it wasn't done until now. Greenberg's and Michael Fried's articles and the absence of opposition make one of the numerous instances of the incompetence of art criticism. Barbara Rose did rise up in a recent article in *Artforum*, but she concedes Greenberg a separate history as against that of everyone else. I'm harder on Greenberg than Barbara Reise is and don't take him so seriously. By now he's ignorant and hysterical. One instance is a laughable article in *Vogue* last May, ostensibly on Anne Truitt but mainly on the failings of "Minimal Art," including me. This is the nadir of the failures:

And with the help of monochrome the artist would have been able to dissemble her feminine sensibility behind a more aggressively far-out, non-art look, as so many masculine Minimalists have *their* rather feminine sensibilities. (Greenberg's italics.)

Greenberg made a garbled attempt to give the invention of "Minimal Art," though it was not worth inventing, to Anne Truitt:

But if any one artist started or anticipated Minimal Art, it was she, in the fence-like and then box-like objects of wood or aluminum she began making, the former in 1961 and the latter in 1962....

Truitt's first New York show, at the André Emmerich Gallery in February 1963, met incomprehension (from,

among others, Donald Judd, today a Minimalist leader, who reviewed the show for *Arts*)...

Had they been monochrome, the “objects” in Truitt’s 1963 show would have qualified as first examples of orthodox Minimal Art.

The last sentence is in the category of “if the queen had balls, she would be king.” An opening sentence is:

It is hardly two years since Minimal Art first appeared as a coherent movement, and it is already more the rage among artists than Pop or Op ever was.

That chronology is either intentional falsification or ignorance. The statement about my derogatory review of Truitt’s show is also shady. Regardless of work never shown, Flavin, Morris, and I were in a group show at Green in January 1963 and later that year. One of Greenberg’s worst statements, attributing everything to money, was in *Studio International* in January 1968:

The last such phase, Minimal Art, has swept the museums and the magazines and the art buffs, but it doesn’t sell commensurately because it’s too hard to install. And with Novelty Art sales decide things; Pop, Op, Assemblage, Erotic, Neo-Figurative, and the rest don’t persist in the face of economic adversity – just as second-generation Abstract Expressionism didn’t...

It’s surprising and despicable.

Greenberg was right of course in supporting Pollock and the others but mainly his writing then was only approval and disapproval. He didn’t write much about Pollock and didn’t add anything to the thinking about his work. He did little for David Smith. He did less for everyone else, including

Noland, Louis, and Caro. (I consider Olitski’s work chronically unresolved and beyond thought.) I didn’t think about Greenberg much in the early 1960s and he didn’t write much. I suppose Fried and Philip Leider, the editor of *Artforum*, kept him going. When *Artforum* moved to New York it revived the roster of New York hacks.

I gave up on Michael Fried when I heard him say during a symposium that he couldn’t see how anyone who liked Noland and Olitski or Stella could also like Oldenburg and Rauschenberg or Lichtenstein, whichever. He was very passionate about it. (Apparently Fried likes Stella but Greenberg doesn’t.) I’ve never liked Kozloff’s ornate platitudes but during this symposium he actually gave a theory for always writing about things three or four years too late. Fried’s opinions narrowed a few years ago. I remember enthusiasm for Chamberlain’s work; I’ve heard this disappeared because of Greenberg’s disapproval. Fried’s article “Art and Objecthood” in the 1967 summer issue of *Artforum* was stupid. He cross-referenced Bob Morris, Tony Smith, and myself and argued against the mess. Smith’s statements and his work are contradictory to my own. Bob Morris’s Dada interests are very alien to me and there’s a lot in his dogmatic articles that I don’t like. I was especially irked by Fried’s ignorant misinterpretation of my use of the word “interesting.” I obviously use it in a particular way but Fried reduces it to the cliché “merely interesting”:

Judd himself has as much as acknowledged the problematic character of the literalist enterprise by his claim, “A work needs only to be interesting.”

Fried is not careful and informed. His pedantic pseudo-philosophical analysis is equivalent of *ARTnews*’s purple poetic prose of the late 1950s.

That prose was only emotional recreation and Fried's thinking is just formal analysis and both methods used exclusively are shit.

Artforum, since it came to New York, has seemed like *ARTnews* in the late 1950s. There's serious high art and then there's everybody else, all equally low. Flavin plays Reinhardt, entertaining but not worth an article on his work; Bell and Irwin hardly exist; Greenbergers such as Krauss review all the shows; Darby Bannard paints a picture, Hélon relived; and articles come steadily out of the Fogg. I once complained to Leider that the magazine was dominated by Michael Fried and the third string and he said that he didn't think it was biased, that he published Robert Smithson too. That's balanced mediocrity. *Artforum* is probably the best art magazine still but it's depressing that it's gotten so bad and so close to the others. I don't know much about *Studio International*. *Artforum's* failure to evaluate artists and to think about their work is characteristic of the whole situation of current art. Art gets quite a bit of attention but the quality of that is depressing.

Greenberg and Fried are of course wrong about mainstream history or development. It's too simple and, as Barbara Reise said, it's nineteenth-century philosophy. Most ideas of history are simplistic, archaic, and destructive. One of *Artforum's* numerous vague mediocre articles was by Jack Wesley Burnham, maybe kin to the preacher but not to the painter. Burnham wrote a book, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*. Never mind the present. It's a pastiche of art survey information and misinformation. His idea of history, such as it is, is deterministic. Everyone has his hindsighted place and history rolls on. One cliché:

It is the peculiarly blind quality of historical change that we only grasp the nature of a political or cultural era after it has reached and passed its apogee of influence.

For whom? For the people who won't think now about particular things like scale? A good example of baloney and of silly futurism is this:

The shifting psychology of sculpture invention closely parallels the inversion taking place between technics and man: *as the craftsman slowly withdraws his personal feelings from the constructed object, the object gradually gains its independence from its human maker; in time it seeks a life of its own through self-reproduction.* (Burnham's italics.)

I dislike very much this sort of sloppy correlation of such highly different activities as science and art, the careless and general history, and the mystical projection of the future:

Sculpture can choose one of two courses: it can be fashioned as a reaction against technology or as an extension of technical methodology.

That's the choice? That's Max Kozloff's or Hilton Kramer's choice.

Originally I agreed to write this to keep *Studio International* from calling me a minimalist. Very few artists receive attention without publicity as a new group. It's another case of the simplicity of criticism and of the public. It seems as if magazines are unwilling to give new artists space by themselves. *Artforum* has had some discussion of single new artists, mostly by John Coplans. One person's work isn't considered sufficiently important historically to be discussed alone. But most of the so-called movements are only one person or maybe two remotely related. That's obvious by the work, by the initial development, by the fact that in two or three years the followers follow elsewhere. I hated the *Primary Structures* show at the Jewish Museum in 1966, both itself and its title — "primary" sounds Platonic. The show started out a year earlier with

Flavin, Morris, myself, maybe Andre and Bell, and maybe a couple of others. Forty-odd artists, I think, were in the show and a lot of them, most of Park Place, had become geometric during that year. Barbara Rose's ABC article was just publicity. Theme shows and movements are still produced. Discussion, such as Greenberg's in the Truitt article, is still by groups.

A few months ago *Artforum* ran another manifesto by Bob Morris entitled "Anti Form." It was illustrated with photographs of work by several very diverse new artists, suggesting by the layout that they were a group and that they were following Morris's work in felt, begun a year and a half ago. Leider recently wrote an article in *The New York Times* entitled, I think, "In the Shadow of Bob Morris." This was about a show by several of these artists – Saret, Hesse, Serra, Sonnier, Nauman, and others – organized by Morris. The show was all right but the suggestion of similarity is bad and the impression that they're fathered by Morris is terrible. Nauman's floppy pieces actually precede Morris's by a couple of years. He and Hesse were in a group show at Fischbach around two years ago. It's not likely that anyone as good as Serra developed his work from someone else's in a year and a half. The suggestion is like Greenberg's that Morris and I picked up on Truitt's work. It's impossible chronologically. Neither do good artists develop substantially from other artists' work.

See part II. I've had enough of this.