

In an article in *Studio International* a couple of years ago I complained about the incompetence of art criticism and the attempts of various persons to stop thinking. That situation hasn't changed. The other great failure is that of the museums and of public support generally. At the present, other than the artists, almost all money and interest come from private collectors through the dealers. This would be all right as part of a large live situation but it's insufficient and narrow as nearly the whole situation. Business becomes too important; paintings and portable objects get made but not large objects or spatial situations; the collectors are mostly of one class, which gets pretty claustrophobic.

There should be several sources of interest and money. At least there could be an accurate art criticism and maybe even a thinking art criticism. A couple of people are exceptions to that condemnation. Also, art criticism needs money. No one can live on serious criticism.

The museums should be independent, responsible, and useful. Now they go through the dealers, not just for purchases, which they avoid if possible, but for advice, information, and the organization of their shows. You seldom hear of a curator poking around on his own and museums seldom show anything out of proportion to or simply outside of the somewhat warped scheme of the art business. The artists and the dealers pay for the museums' shows. The museums seldom want to make anything for a show and usually don't take care of what's already made.

There should be an artists' organization to object to abuses and to support artists who aren't being given a chance. Visual art must be the only unorganized and undefended activity left in the United States. A dozen of us formed a group last spring and are trying, not so brilliantly, to resist.

The various governments should support art. In the last few years some money has come from the federal government, but not much. New York State provides some. New York City

subsidizes construction unions and real estate developers but I've never heard of them buying a contemporary work of art. There have been a few ploys lately whereby you could give them something. However, the city doesn't have to spend immediate money to be a help. It could just consider artists and everyone as citizens and leave them alone. But the Wagner Administration knew and the Lindsay Administration knows that finally it costs too much in real estate to pay attention to the rights of the city's residents.

A relatively small number of visual artists, themselves insufficiently supported, are supporting by what they do a large superstructure of museums and curators, art departments and art teachers, critics, some art historians, some architects, money dispensers, some commercial art, and so on. Contemporary art is the excuse for a great amount of activity and money. But not many people are concerned with getting it done. Everyone's time is wasted. The artists might tax such dependents as Albert Shanker's art teachers.

The museums are charities that are monuments to the rich. The increase in the number of museums is evidently not so much an increase in interest in contemporary art as it is an increase in an idea of monuments. As a monument the building is crucial and not its contents. Whether private, partially public, or public, a museum is run by its benefactors and everything goes downhill from there. The museums are always doing artists the favor of showing their work. It's an honor to be associated with the company and don't ask for a raise. Museums want to be given work or pay very little because, after all, you're the suppliant. There's almost no sign of support or interest in getting work done. If any purpose is mentioned it's that the museums are educating the public. Museums are show business paid for by the artists and the dealers.

The museums patronize, isolate, and neutralize artists. When I received the press release from the Guggenheim Museum in April 1971 about the cancellation of Hans Haacke's show

I thought it a classic case of self-indictment. The two main paragraphs are worth printing:

The contents of the exhibition were to include presentations that in the view of counsel might raise legal objections and in view of the Foundation's trustees would run counter to established policies that exclude active engagement toward social and political ends.

"We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing creative and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive," Thomas M. Messer, director of the museum states. "We have high regard for Mr. Haacke as an artist and regret that agreement could not be reached on a manner of presenting his ideas."

I sent this letter to Tom Messer:

I got your press release and a copy of your letter to Haacke and his statement. You made a big mistake. You can't refuse to show one kind of art. Any political statement, either by declaration or incorporation into a context, can be art. You renege on every kind of art when you refuse to show a kind that is political. I've always thought that most museums and collectors didn't understand what they were buying; your statement that exhibitable art should be generalized and symbolic confirms that. I'm interested in making so-called abstract art and I don't like the idea that it is exhibitable by virtue of its abstractness or unintelligibility. Since the big business in New York is real estate, it's pretty interesting that that's what bothers you, the lawyers and your trustees. I imagine something against the war would have been general enough and easy enough.

The Guggenheim tried to get me to lend a piece after that and two memorable ideas in that conversation were that

I shouldn't harm the institution and that the role of the staff is that of mediators between the artists and the trustees. Other than a great building and shows of contemporary art it's hard to find the institution. I wasn't surprised at the second idea.

The museums never have much money for contemporary art but they have millions for fancy buildings. As most people know Pasadena spent \$3 million or so on an awful building and then couldn't afford anything to put in it, and in fact, I think, had to sell some things and close a couple of days a week. The new Walker Art Center, which isn't unpleasant, cost about \$4.5 million. Their budget for art has never sounded like that. While the museum was being built, its director, Martin Friedman, talked about the possibilities of the building; things could go outside; a piece of mine could go on the wall of the central highest section, which didn't seem like a good idea. As the building was being finished he asked me to come to Minneapolis and figure out what I wanted to do. I wanted to make a new piece that would go along the edge of one of the lower sections involving the angle between it and the opposite side of the street below. The piece, maybe twenty feet long, would replace the balustrade. After all that talk it took Friedman a second to dismiss the idea. It was unsafe, although it would be hard to get through the piece, and it would interfere with Ed Barnes's architecture. Friedman called Barnes just to make sure, and sure enough it was unsafe and would interfere. I consider the chance to make a new piece by a good artist very important. To be fair, I should say that Martin Friedman is one of the best directors, that the installation of shows at the Walker is good, and that the museum is fairly careful with works. However, the incident has the quality of liberalism, that is, smiling conservatism.

Last October in *Vogue*, Barbara Rose wrote about the new Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. The building cost \$7.5 million and for a change contains more art than it's worth, about \$25 million, but all past and distant. It's a strange idea

that other people's culture is your culture. It's strange that there's that much money somehow for art and that most good contemporary artists who need money to work can't get much. The situation is perverse. Barbara's remarks in *Vogue* and some quotes from the Kimbell's director Ric Brown illustrate the attitudes behind the situation:

As the medieval cleric saw signs of regeneration in the intense local competition to erect the most spectacular basilica, we may perhaps interpret the simultaneous emergence of a striking number of outstanding temples of culture throughout America, but especially in the Lone Star State, as a sign that something extraordinary is happening.

After Harvard, he worked at New York's Frick Collection, where he developed his idea of what an art museum should be – not a cold official building but a warm domestic setting like the great mansions for which most Old Master paintings were originally designed. For this reason, the Kimbell is furnished with Oriental carpets and comfortable furniture (“All made in Texas,” Brown said proudly), in simple designs that seem to belong to no period.

“I like to think that this is the palace of a great noble,” Brown makes a sweeping gesture, “and that he has invited you into his home to enjoy his collection.”

A statement of the dignity and solemnity of art, the Kimbell is a building you can't enter without entering a new frame of mind that makes you feel in touch in some way with the rational humanism of the peoples who founded our civilization.

To come on this great monument in the middle of the New World, in a place that not long ago was uninhabited cattle country, is to feel optimistic about the future of American culture generally. For what's happening in Texas is also happening, although perhaps not on such a great scale, throughout America. The reason is that for the first

time since the 1930s efforts are being made to decentralize culture through grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, which is funding museum centers from Oregon to Oklahoma and from Minnesota to Missouri.

No one can tell what all this activity will lead to, of course. Will cattle barons and oil tycoons become the next Medici princes? Perhaps there's a good chance, if the motto on Ric Brown's bulletin board holds true. It reads: "They became what they beheld."

That's all pretty amusing, to quote Bob Irwin.

The first time I had anything to do with a museum was when the Pasadena Art Museum organized the 1965 São Paulo Biennial. Gretchen Glicksman went to Santini Shipping Service's warehouse and made drawings of every piece and noted every mark and dent. I thought that that was very professional, that that was the way they did it in museums. That was about the last I saw of professional handling. The various shippers are careless and usually the museum staff that handles art is careless. The public is awful and the guards don't mind. The handling is even worse when a show is over and the museum wants it out of there fast. Insurance is a farce. It's always up to the artist or the dealer to spend two years collecting it, if they can. Insurance is not based on the destruction of a work of art, but on partial damage or the cost of replacement. The surface of a large expensive stainless steel piece of mine was damaged in Europe two years ago by being packed with the corrugated side of the cardboard next to the steel. The insurance company decided the piece was damaged 10 percent. But you can no longer sell the piece and get your money back. And also the 10 percent has never arrived.

A couple of lacquered pieces of mine have come back with Santini Shipping Service stickers stuck on the lacquer. Den Haag slid a painted wooden piece on its side along their concrete floor. They're the worst. Budworth has never

damaged anything. Auer's, which the Whitney uses, has no idea of what they're moving; they slid another wooden piece on its side across the bed of their truck. One company, whose name I can't remember, possibly connected to Auer's, tied two large metal boxes on the tailgate of their truck, between the open doors, which pounded in a side of each box. No one ever knows how the damage happened. Nothing is ever art to any of the truckmen. My work is just metal; Flavin's is just fixtures; Chamberlain's just junk; and so on.

Guards usually have the same attitude; the stuff is not worth taking care of. Someone was putting more fingerprints on one end of a piece of mine in the Metropolitan extravaganza of 1969 while the other end was being cleaned. The guard said nothing. He also didn't object to someone walking on a perforated metal floor piece. That came back caved in. It didn't do any good to complain to Henry Geldzahler. Bill Agee, though, fired a guard for going to sleep a second time leaning against a stack. It's common at an opening for glasses to be on everything and for people to sit or lean on everything. A man at the Jewish Museum leaned on one arm against the face of a box. Somewhere else a woman leaned the same way against a Rothko. Another at the Whitney one time leaned back against a Pollock.

Quite a few of my pieces have been worn out in shows, leaving me and the Castelli Gallery with the construction cost. Mostly it's accumulated damage. A few have been destroyed. A large anodized aluminum piece that was in my show at the Whitney, which cost seven thousand to make, was sent to Documenta 4. It was braced with wood for moving but after it arrived in Kassel they took the wood out and moved it again, breaking most of the welds. They couldn't show it and sent it to Van der Net's factory in Holland. The factory left it outside for two years, ruined the surface, then loosely and crookedly welded it again and sprayed it with aluminum paint. It had to be destroyed. Documenta was never interested.

It was awful this time too. They sent a letter that seemed to be missing its first half informing me that some small unspecified piece would be in the show and ordering me to check a bundle of papers they had sent. I told them I didn't want to be in their show. The museums have numerous reasons for mistreating artists and their work. Usually it's because the artists are young or are thought not so important. In this case it seemed to be that my piece was to be token history in some category for large pieces by younger artists. This is pretty ironic after the destruction of the large piece that was to have been in Documenta 4. These large shows are usually a mess and shouldn't occur. They're show business at its worst.

The whole procedure of exhibition should become slow and careful. There should be less and smaller traveling shows. A great deal of contemporary art is permanently damaged. I remember a big handprint on a painting of Still's at the Modern. I saw a painting by Newman with fingerprints down both edges of the raw canvas. Most of Reinhardt's paintings are scratched. A lot of Bell's pieces have been broken. There should be rooms somewhere or small museums where a portion of, say, Newman's work or Reinhardt's is visible and permanent. Otherwise it isn't going to last. The fast and constant exhibitions enforce the idea of performance, show business, rather than the idea of making art, either movable or for a particular situation. It's serious to make something that will be visible for a long time; it's not so serious to have an exhibition. Exhibitions also stress quantity and necessarily limit time and attention.

Installation is seldom good. Almost always everything is crowded. The plan reproduced of a room at the Modern is typical. The room showed that the museum didn't know much about the paintings and Larry Bell's piece and was certainly not capable of playing its much-publicized role of educating the public. Large shows, such as the Whitney Annuals, are always crowded. In Geldzahler's show at the Metropolitan,

paintings were behind sculpture and sculpture in front of paintings as if the walls and the floor were not in the same room. There was no idea that the paintings and the sculpture were all equal and discrete works of art, that they couldn't overlap and that they required various kinds of space. Flavin's was the only good room in the show because he did it himself.

All the conditions in museums are based upon showing medium-sized painting and sculpture. The museums are very reluctant to make particular installations. You can't even get enough light. Yet for a long time art has been large or has required special spaces or conditions. The Modern bought very little during the 1960s of even small or medium-sized work. It's of course in no way Modern. The exhibition *Spaces*, organized by Jennifer Licht, is the Modern's only effort in ten years to deal with one large portion of contemporary thinking. The large shows of Stella's and Oldenburg's work are recent. They should have occurred in 1964 or 1965.

Since the museums are educating and entertaining the public the turnover has to be fast. A month or six weeks may be all right for portable things but it's too short for large, troublesome, and expensive things. Everything is based upon exhibitions, upon display. Critics seldom write about anyone's work between shows. The conditions for looking at art are miserable. Shows are often full of people, a few of whom are idiots. You can only stand and look, usually past someone else. No space, no privacy, no sitting or lying down, no drinking or eating, no thinking, no living. It's all a show. It's just information. Art is kept isolated and half visible. You can seldom see much of what is being done in New York or of what has been done. Art isn't visible in ordinary circumstances. New York City doesn't want it around. Since art historians and trustees have so much to say about what happens to artists' work, contemporary art is treated as possible rare artifacts, but mostly bound to fail. The culture of the Kimbell Art Museum, the

Metropolitan, and Lincoln Center controls the exhibition of contemporary art – makes sure it is only exhibited. Lincoln Center is the largest cultural effort of more than a generation and it's just schmaltz. For the price of a few Oriental rugs made in Texas, Fort Worth could have had some real art. Barbara, however, is “optimistic about the future of American culture generally.”

At the opening of a show I had at the Pasadena Museum I counted sixty-four mistakes in the catalogue. Being wary, we had asked several times if we could check the catalogue. It was never sent. Barbara Haskell, who prepared it, knew little about my work. For example, one piece was given as anodized aluminum, painted blue, instead of blue anodized aluminum. John Coplans resigned as director sometime after scheduling the show but kept the job of producing a catalogue and installing the show. Bill Agee was the present director. Obviously Coplans didn't worry too much about the catalogue. He was supposed to write an essay but wrote six columns instead since he had an interview with me to fill up the space. That had been made to provide an accurate chronology for his essay. At the last minute he asked permission to print the interview in the catalogue, which I gave out of weariness. I was never asked if that interview could be printed in *Artforum*. Coplans probably got paid for it. During the installation Coplans appeared once for five minutes, maybe twice. Agee and the staff and I, Jamie Dearing, and Henry Weber from Bernstein Brothers did the work. Money was a big issue all along. At first there was to be money for a new piece or two, since that's what I get out of these shows. That disappeared. There was even a fight to get a thousand-odd dollars to get Jamie and Henry out there for the installation. Coplans got seven thousand himself as “guest director” and the stupid catalogue cost another seven thousand. That's a long way from Gretchen Glicksman.

In December 1970, *Science* magazine ran two installments of about four and three pages each on the National Endowment

for the Humanities. The articles, by Constance Holden, were cheerful and everything was art. Since I don't think museums and schools are art and since I think it's a case of individuals against institutions, I wrote *Science*:

Probably the reason the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities is so little criticized, as Constance Holden says it is, is that few people take it seriously. I'll take it seriously once. The main fact is that it gives most of its money to institutions and little, “about 4 percent,” to individual artists. “The endowment started out by handing over 80 percent of its budget for individual study and research. Now, with priorities shifting to education and public programs, the proportion is down to 35 percent.” The rest goes to “kill all kinds of birds with one stone.”

Some of the money is pork barrel. A lot goes to the promotion of history and the education of everyone on what the people who got the 35 percent are doing. Since 1967, 119 visual artists, plus about fifteen in 1970, have gotten grants of \$5,000 or \$7,500, totaling, shy of the fifteen, \$595,000. Last year I was asked to recommend artists for grants. Nobody asked me or any artist about spending a million dollars on Westbeth. I've never met anyone who wanted Westbeth to exist, much less live in it. It's despised by everyone.

THE NEAH is not comparatively free of politics. The grants to artists were “recommended by special regional panels.” But most artists live in New York City, some in Los Angeles. So grants went to artists who had never been closer to art than a Kress Collection. Westbeth is a project of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, which, according to the *New York Post* of 2 August 1969 and *The New York Times* of 1966, is an untaxed channel for CIA funds. 31 August 1964, Representative Patman: “Mr. Rogovin informed us that the J.M. Kaplan Fund has been operating as a conduit for

channeling CIA funds and hence you would rather not discuss the matter for public record. He also indicated that the fund's operations with the CIA was the reason for the lack of action on the part of the IRS." \$2.6 million has gone to make the American Film Institute, with matching funds from the Ford Foundation and the Motion Picture Association of America. That's not underground films. That's money to a big business, seldom cultural, that ought to be able to educate its employees and preserve its old movies.

The idea that imported history is culture is one of the great American mistakes. Why have sixty-one symphony orchestras, which the Ford Foundation spent \$82 million on? Why give Lincoln Center ballet so much when real dance has almost nothing? Such things are libraries. There should only be a few good ones. The same for historical art museums.

Education isn't art. It doesn't do any good to educate people in art if there isn't any. It's no good teaching some to be artists if they can't work. It's no good teaching at such a low wide level that it's only musical comedy. "Ten outstanding sculptors were invited to spend the summer chipping away at blocks of marble, and the results were left to start a sculpture park. For a modest outlay of \$10,000..." What outstanding artists? Who works three months for \$1,000? They killed ten artists with one stone. Museums and art centers are great exploiters of artists; they build fancy buildings and then plead poverty on exhibitions and purchases. They are not interested in supporting art. Money to them will not go to artists. It will only be used to exploit for education what the artists have already done with difficulty on their own. Institutions trust institutions.

A card came back saying:

Thank you for your recent letter. We are sorry to report that we have decided not to publish it. The number of communications submitted is considerably larger than the number we can publish. The Editors.

Science had room for seven pages on the subject but not room for probably the only letter they got in response to the articles. It shows what they think of you and of what you do. Since they depend on the government, perhaps the articles were just an easy way to ingratiation through a subject they didn't care about.

The subject of the National Endowment is complex and much of it I don't want to write about now. I don't know much about New York State's program but it seems to have the same faults. By law not much money can go to individuals, which forces two or three people to form small institutions in order to get grants. Join the team, come aboard. Again, grants to individual artists, dancers, and musicians should account for most of the money. Instead, in five years of the federal government's program, the portion to institutions has increased a great deal, while the amount of money to artists, at first around \$300,000 a year, dropped after the first two years. In 1970, twenty artists got \$150,000. Last October forty-five artists got \$337,500. This is the budget for two years, not one. The \$337,500 came out of the National Foundation's total for 1971-72 of \$57,750,000, more or less split between the Arts and the Humanities. \$76,200,000 has been proposed for next time. Since 1967, 184 artists have gotten \$1,082,500. This small amount of money goes to reality, to the basis for all other cultural activity, yet, for example, \$203,767 went to the University of Wisconsin "to conduct experiments on how to increase rural community receptivity to and participation in cultural programs." Brian O'Doherty, director of the Visual Arts Program, said the amount given to individuals was limited

by Congress, fixed by law. Again, it's a matter of priorities and of control. Congress knows it can't trust individuals. Matching grants are given through cities – not Lindsay's New York – for particular works, but, like sales, someone has to want something. Recently there has been \$3,000 each for specific projects, not enough but possibly a good scheme.

In return for permitting the Metropolitan to build in Central Park, New York City asked for a community program. The Met could get \$100,000 for the program from the United States government if it could match that. It matched it with \$100,000 from the New York State Council. Prior to that the Met had purchased a Velázquez for \$5.5 million. \$200,000 is two-thirds of what all artists get for two years. \$5.5 million is unimaginable in terms of contemporary art. A B-52 costs \$8 million. They're crazy. If the artists, dancers, musicians, and other individuals don't get most of the money, it's best that the government not provide it, since it only fortifies the liberals' Lincoln Center culture.

The Visual Arts Program receives suggestions from an advisory board that has had some artists as members but whose members have been primarily curators, art historians, and critics. Since the situation is a pure case of distributing money to artists, a matter only of concern to artists, it seems to me that the board should be composed of artists. It's an old point that no artists are involved in running museums. In no way do artists control their own activities. It's all done for them by the less educated for other purposes. Anyway, the main effort should be to produce works of art and that's not a very visible purpose in museums and in the National Endowment.

No one should be annoyed by this article: it's all done in a spirit of cheerful revenge. Governor Preston Smith of Texas made a great statement when he was caught trading legislation for stocks: "I don't know why public officials should be singled out for exposure."