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## Toward Another Laocoön, or, the Snake Pit

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**TAKE BASQUIAT. FIVE YEARS AGO**, he didn't have a place to live. He slept on the couch of one friend after another. He lacked money to buy art supplies. Now, at 24, he is making paintings that sell for \$10,000 to \$25,000. They are reproduced in art magazines and also as part of fashion layouts, or in photographs of chic private homes in *House & Garden*. They are in the collections of the publisher S.I. Newhouse, Richard Gere, Paul Simon, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

When Jean Michel Basquiat walks into Mr. Chow's on East 57th Street in Manhattan, the waiters all greet him as a favorite regular. Before he became a big success, the owners, Michael and Tina Chow, bought his artwork and later commissioned him to paint their portraits. He goes to the restaurant a lot. One night, for example, he was having a quiet dinner near the bar with a small group of people. While Andy Warhol chatted with Nick Rhodes, the British Rock star from Duran Duran, on one side of the table, Basquiat sat across from them, talking to the artist Keith Haring.

"He'll run in here in an \$800 suit and paint all night," says his friend Shenge. "In the morning, he'll be standing in front of a picture with his suit just covered in paint."

The samples above come from the breathless account of success in today's art world that appeared as a cover story in the Sunday magazine section of the *New York Times* early last year.<sup>1</sup> A typical tale of making it in the USA, it provided a catalogue of speedily rising profits from art and of the art world's celebration of them in the same conspicuous ways as the demistars of music and television, a catalogue of expensive clothes, expensive meals, and expensive friends. It was a vulgar story, insensitive to the higher aspirations of the denizens of the artistic districts,

provoking shudders of dismay. What could the editors of the *Times* have been thinking of to let an arts-and-entertainment reporter loose in an area that requires an ability to discriminate, to understand that the gossip that is the lifeblood of many professions and that echoes through galleries, literary cocktail parties, backstage dressing rooms, and recording studios is not the same thing as discourse on the arts? What had happened to take us so quickly from one pole to another, from that good gentleman John Russell—the newspaper’s hagiographer in residence, an art writer of the right sort, one who likes to surround his enthusiasms with shimmering mists and clouds of ineffable description and diplomatic metaphors—to this rather shallowly conceived piece of evidence that the so-called journalistic coverage generated by today’s artists is as Post-Modern as they? The media experts must deem the image of “crazy modern art,” or “crazy modern artists,” no longer fascinating enough to the general public; what is now of interest is the lavish intemperance of the lifestyles of fashionable artists. No esthetic excess can match the more simply understood excess of ruining an \$800 suit by wearing it to paint after a full evening of nightclubbing. The shock of this new image must have offended on many levels, the most relevant of which here is its precise reversal of the dearly held belief of modern times that the best artists always starve in garrets, and that their rewards are posthumous.

Later in the year, a downtown gathering crowded into White Columns, a non profit gallery begun in the years of “alternative spaces,” hoping to be entertained on the foibles of art writing. Marshall Efron, Susan Morgan, Peter Nagy, and Michael Smith drew attention to the mostly ridiculous, occasionally terrible fantasies that swirl around the conjunction of life, art, and money, moving their audience to uneasy laughter on topics ranging from art credit cards to the Andrew Crispo affair. Morgan’s reading of an apparently seamless story of material success, a litany of fabulous lives, beautiful houses, and intelligent automobiles, had the crowd uncertain in its reactions. Her narrative was not exactly fiction, nor was it as seamless as it appeared. Excerpting from articles about Jennifer Bartlett, Julian Schnabel, and Robert Longo, in magazines as varied as *Artnews*, *Vogue*, *House & Garden*, and *The New Yorker*, she presented a patchwork of quotes which unfolded a pattern of absurdity and contradiction in an achingly clear demonstration of a sickening hubris, turning laughter to a discomfiting silence.<sup>2</sup> We used to know that the skimpy representations of the avant-garde that infrequently appeared in the mass media were off base, either hysterically hostile or so absurdly patronizing that even the least acute semiotician could tell what was going on. But Morgan’s reading uncovered a self-professed avant-garde assiduously courting prime-time coverage, upsetting, in traditional avant-garde fashion the conventions of accepted taste. And she showed the media responding with a welcoming smile. Gone were the reports of lovable eccentricity and dangerous lunacy threatening the daughters of the free world. The artists of the new avant-garde were being described as successes, described in terms of their net worth.

That the work of Modern art is primarily a cultural commodity is a well-rehearsed truism, but one worth reiterating.<sup>3</sup> Briefly stated, various writers have noted a congruence, in mid-19th-century Paris, between the rise of Modernism in the arts and the development of the kind of mass culture associated with a consumer society, and have suggested that Modernism and mass culture are in fact the twin offspring of a capitalism based on the principles of the free market. The older uses of painting and sculpture (as religious aids or aristocratic decor, for example) atrophied during this period, as did the older forms of popular culture—the local, mostly rural rituals we nostalgically identify today as “folk” These historical conventions, in which objects were valued

for the uses to which they were put, were replaced by a new culture of commodities which located value in cash terms. Second Empire Paris saw the repression of older forms of entertainment and solidarity, and their replacement by the carefully packaged and controlled entertainment exemplified by the department store. It also saw the first development of a self-conscious Modern avant-garde acutely aware of its position in relation to this new culture of the spectacle.

The complicity between early Modernism and consumer society was sharply stated by Meyer Schapiro in a description of Impressionist painting written in the mid '30s:

*It is remarkable how many pictures we have in early Impressionism of informal and spontaneous sociability, of breakfasts, picnics, promenades, boating trips, holidays, and vacation travel. These urban idylls not only present the objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860s and 1870s; they also reflect in the very choice of subjects and in the new aesthetic devices the conception of art solely as a field of individual enjoyment, without reference to ideas and motives, and they presuppose the cultivation of these pleasures as the highest field of freedom for an enlightened bourgeois detached from the official beliefs of his class. In enjoying realistic pictures of his surroundings as a spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres, the cultivated rentier was experiencing in its phenomenal aspect that mobility of the environment, the market and of industry to which he owed his income and freedom. And in the new Impressionist techniques which broke things up into finely discriminated points of color, . . . he found . . . conditions of sensibility closely related to those of the urban promenade and the refined consumer of luxury goods.<sup>4</sup>*

Which is to say that the claims of the Impressionist avant-garde to independence and a certain distance from the bourgeois values of their patrons were bogus. Schapiro was arguing that the advanced artists of the 1860s were little more than full-time leisure specialists fine-tuning the tastes and expectations of consumers. In their work, later identified as an early attempt to make art for art's sake, esthetics are understood as equivalent to the enjoyments available within the existing apparatus of commercial entertainment and tourism. Although Clement Greenberg was less severe in his strictures on the Moderns, he shared Schapiro's understanding of early Modernism as a flawed response to the commodification of culture. And Greenberg noted that the link between art and the market, which he characterized as "an umbilical cord of gold," would not be severed by mere bluster and assertion.<sup>5</sup>

It is also significant, given the increasingly rightward cast of the body politic in our late-capitalist times, that this first spectacular flowering of the consumer society coincided with the self-destruction of middle-class republicanism (which we call liberalism) during the authoritarian years of the Second Empire. The citizen traded the freedoms of political choice for the freedom to stroll along boulevards constructed to disrupt and more easily control the old proletarian quarters of the city, contained as much as protected by the forces of law and order. This trade was made in the name of a higher standard of living—that is, in the name of economic advantage to the privileged.<sup>6</sup> A consequence of the resultant atomization of communal identity was the colonizing of the spaces of public leisure as, paradoxically, one last place where a sense of identity could be shared. Within the special conditions of time off, a sense of solidarity could be temporarily regained in which one's singleness could appear to take part in a group life, an

amorphous community of friends, fans, supporters, enthusiasts, and experts. In his unfinished study of Charles Baudelaire and Second Empire Paris, Walter Benjamin wrote,

*The very fact that their share could at best be enjoyment, but never power, made the period which history gave them a space for passing time. Anyone who sets out to while away time seeks enjoyment. It was self-evident, however, that the more this class wanted to have its enjoyment in this society, the more limited this enjoyment would be. The enjoyment promised to be less limited if this class found enjoyment of this society possible. If it wanted to achieve virtuosity in this kind of enjoyment, it could not spurn empathizing with commodities. It had to enjoy this identification with all the pleasure and uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its destiny as a class. Finally, it had to approach this destiny with a sensitivity that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods. Baudelaire, who in a poem to a courtesan called her heart "bruised like a peach, ripe like her body, for the lore of love," possessed this sensitivity. To it he owed his enjoyment of this society as one who had already half withdrawn from it.<sup>7</sup>*

The relative generosity of Benjamin's remarks on Baudelaire's compromised position serves to emphasize the rigidity in the positions of Schapiro and Greenberg as young men. While logically defensible, their perspective, like that of so many strict theorists in the field of art criticism, failed to allow enough elasticity to provide an adequate account of the past, and therefore restricted their views of the present. Under the tyranny of their inexorable logic they had either to abandon Modernist art as a thoroughly complicit symptom of bourgeois decadence, or to seek to deny its connections with everyday life and politics altogether, seeing it as some special expression of purity within a special quarantine-zone of culture, far removed from the contagion of ordinary people and ordinary uses.

It would be a gross simplification (one not made by Schapiro and Greenberg) to assume that the consumer society was found acceptable by all, or even by all those who might be thought to benefit from it. Of course there was dissent; of course many felt a desire to identify themselves as somehow "outside," as rebels if not revolutionists. And for a period in the later part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, the avant-garde was able to function, in an on-again, off-again manner, as an authentic subculture of resistance. Yet ultimately, worn out through overuse, the idea of the avant-garde became just another property of the art market. Finally, the appearance of an avant-garde within the development of Modernism can only be adequately understood by considering it a type of passive resistance,<sup>8</sup> and a far from satisfactory one: as any history of the phenomenon shows, the avant-garde's incomplete, self-contradictory refusals follow a consistent pattern over time, spiraling into dilution as individuals and groups within the subculture become satisfied, or at least resolve to be content, with their lot. This fluctuating place of resistance is typical of all such subcultures, as is apparent from a look at the histories of some other examples of social revolt—the oppositions of youth, blacks, gays, and women over the last two decades, for example.

The pattern of fading resistance, a spiraling down ward toward extinction, that has come to characterize the history of the avant-garde can clearly be seen in operation in Claude Monet's work of the mid 1880s. His earlier Impressionism, along with that of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, depicted a world of weekend leisure amid rampant real estate development as if it were an everyday reality. In contradiction of Schapiro's strictures, it has been argued that within the

confines of this limited depiction the Impressionists were able to express a refusal of the norms of their society.<sup>9</sup> Their radically unacademic style of representation, with its freshness and directness, presented a world of gaiety as if it were everyday life to an audience that knew it was not. At their best, then, the Impressionists of the 1860s and 1870s saw a disjunction between myth and reality, and pointed to it—with both their images and their new ways of working—in a recontextualization of what we would now call the hype of the real estate developers and sporting-goods suppliers. But by the mid 1880s Monet had withdrawn from this social context, reducing his ambitions to the perfection of a number of technical feats and to the development of a tasty surface. By no coincidence, this was the decade when Monet enjoyed real financial prosperity, thanks to the success of his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, in the American market. In 1887, Camille Pissaro dismissed Monet's recent work as showy eccentricity of a familiar and marketable kind: "I say this: Monet plays his salesman's game, and it serves him; but it is not in my character to do likewise, nor is it in my interest, and it would be in contradiction above all to my conception of art."<sup>10</sup>

For Pissaro, who wished to continue working within the re-creative mode of the avant-garde, with its hope of a regeneration of actual culture through a negation of the official or the sanctioned, the next step was obvious. He threw in his lot with a younger group associated with Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, who were looking for a more marginal, less classy subject matter, and a more unnatural style of representation that would somehow speak more clearly of the realities of the contemporary world. Pissaro worked within the strictures of Neo-Impressionist theory for only a few years before moving on to a fuller reassessment of the Impressionist project to depict modern life. Not much later, with the death of Seurat, Neo-Impressionism in turn degenerated into a repertoire of pretty postcard views and sundry exotica.

In the 1980s, it all seems terribly familiar. As one looks over the hundred and some years of the history of Modernism, a regular rhythm emerges in which the artists of the avant-garde try to rescue Modern art from its fate as high-status commodity by including in their new practice elements from a debased, marginalized, or alien culture. Soon this material is sanctioned as art, deemed acceptable, and the avant-garde must move on, unable either to affirm or refuse its position in the social order, but only to represent its inherent contradiction, and so to act out the possibility of critical consciousness in general. As this century has progressed, this necessary search for new material has forced the avant-garde into an ever quickening cycle of appropriation and reappropriation. Marginal information is processed by the avant-garde, then delivered into the mainstream by the mass media, and returned to the marketplace packaged for distribution around the world. Most obvious in the instances in which artists have used material from the world of reproduction, this effect is also apparent in the more severe maneuvers of artists who turn to the materials and processes of heavy industry and light manufacturing.

The struggle against the incessant commodification of the artwork has been constant, and desperate, because it is central to the identity of the artist as an independent subject. If the artwork is to be understood as merely an expensive bauble, or a sophisticated entertainment, then the artist is reduced in status to craftsman or clown, necessarily content to manipulate a given repertoire of signs in order to provide a pretty arrangement of satisfactory "truths" about life. The Modernist achievement, fueled by a rage against such condescension, was to shatter the illusion of such manipulations and such "truths" to identify representation itself as a lie. The

repeated renewals of Modernism, the activity of succeeding generations of the avant-garde, can be understood as a series of increasingly radical attempts to overcome the bindings of the cultural and achieve the purity of natural being. As illustration, think of the progress of Impressionism and its satellites, of the development of Expressionism, of the fascination with the primitive and with madness. Think of Antonin Artaud. Think, above all, of Pablo Picasso's long, desperate career, with its many attempts to restart, to deny the reification of his mark, his sign, to avoid death. And yet the very motor of Picasso's success as an artist—the dissatisfactions of desire, the continual searching for replacement—finally moved him beyond history to a myth outside life. His almost mechanical fecundity, spawning so many repetitions and imitators, gradually made the work a shadow of itself as it got lost in an expanding field of reproduction.

The deathly rhythm of negation and re-presentation achieved a climax with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in the late '40s. The idea of a subject matter taken from some aspect of daily reality had been abstracted by the Surrealists into the operations of chance or the unconscious. The Abstract Expressionists wanted to void these operations of lingering associations and secret meanings by stressing the quiddity of their materials, by emptying their work of the "artistic." In other words, they wanted to negate what they called "Frenchness," that arty concoction of reference and surface that had finally reduced the School of Paris to a parody of itself. The grandeur of this moment of pure negativity cannot be overstated, nor can its limitations. For the sad truth is that this was probably the last authentic moment of the avant-garde. When Abstract Expressionism too, in its turn, became acceptable to capital, and, worse, was used to some degree as a propaganda tool during the period of the first phase of the Cold War, its purity and high seriousness were rendered suspect and seemingly inauthentic. Jackson Pollock's uncertainty in the years just before his death speaks of a loss of direction, perhaps of will, as does Willem de Kooning's retreat to a more descriptive, more accessible procedure. As a consequence of this historically inevitable failure, a new order of recuperation became imperative, one in which all previous avant-garde values were reversed. With Pop and other manifestations of the New Realism, the strategies of the avant-garde became camp, and camp became the avant-garde. False consciousness was conscripted as a tool against itself.<sup>11</sup>

Theodor W. Adorno has written,

*Today, every phenomenon of culture, even if a model of integrity, is liable to be suffocated in the cultivation of Kitsch. Yet paradoxically in the same epoch it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics . . . This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and now here more so than where it seems to be politically dead.*<sup>12</sup>

What we have seen reiterated again and again since the '60s is the recognition that the idea of the avant-garde as the locus of a credible resistant subculture is one of waning conviction. At that historical juncture, the possibilities of negation were absolutely diminished within the framework of Modernism. It is in this sense of limits reached that the Abstract Expressionism of the late '40s can be taken as the ne plus ultra of painting as an effective form capable of operating both for and against bourgeois culture in any way that might actually matter. Since that time, Modernist art has become absorbed by the entertainment industry, has become apart of the mass culture it had previously hoped to oppose or contradict. Its cycles of refusal and affirmation have

resulted ultimately in an unintended closure, an unwished-for marginalization more severe than any it suffered when it enjoyed the authority of oppositional culture. Consider the trajectories of the attempts that were made by certain artists to continue working in a traditional avant-garde mode in the early Post-Modern period, and consider the vast gulf between those artists' stated intentions and the possibilities of social reception available to their work. Take, for example, the melodrama of the Minimalist insistence on a kind of factual experience in the decidedly unreal confines of art gallery and museum; this was a vigorous denial of common sense, and it led, after a brief epiphany, to megalomania. Under the weight of accumulated misreadings, the precise humor of Donald Judd's early boxes and stacks turned to the sour militancy of his Marfa complex, in Texas. Richard Serra's desire to reduce art practice to a list of nameable procedures and materials, in order to dispel esthetic mystifications, hardened, in the face of public dispute, into an exclusive program that would simply banish all contradictory discourse. Or think of the deliberate absurdity of much Conceptualism, presenting an odd assortment of slogans and cryptic notations, an array of isolated and often silly gestures, as if they had some profound bearing on the authentic practice of philosophy or politics. Indeed, a great deal of this work grew out of the same, rather incoherent idealism that fueled the revolts of 1968, and, like those, remained doomed to limited success before being absorbed into the mass culture as a media sideshow. Temporarily convincing within the confines of the art world, the work achieved no more than notoriety in the culture at large.

Distinct from these attempts to continue a Modernist tradition of the avant-garde, and operating under the logic of a willed insincerity, pseudo avantgardists, attempting to get away from painting, sculpture, and all that they stood for, programmatically mined the mass-entertainment business for material as assiduously as the media returned the favor. Andy Warhol's '60s work is exemplary—the mechanically reproduced pop idols and fetishes, the deadpan appropriation of the mechanisms of stardom, the hands-off manipulation of the scandalous. Later, the language and style of the advertising industry was appropriated by many Conceptual artists, while television and popular music, especially rock, provided important models for much performance art. In an approximation of television's redefinition of the interrelationship between public and private, semiprivate locations (studios, Warhol's Factory, clubs) replaced the art gallery as the preferred site of a great deal of art activity, and provided the framework within which it was to be understood. In effect, the avant-garde was trying to reinvent itself as a convincing subculture, abandoning a pattern of behavior that had lost any useful meaning in favor of a different pattern that already existed as a type. Yet it was extraordinarily difficult to maintain this camp attitude in a critical position—it could so easily collapse into a variety of kitsch. It grew increasingly difficult to separate what we might call critical camp from its brightly lit doppelgänger, the merely fashionable period piece we can now identify in the early-'60s work of Bernard Buffet, for example, or in Warhol's since the early '70s. Success at this game required a kind of dandyism, a sustained empathy with the charm of damaged goods. This seems to have demanded the creation of a personality as a device for presenting art, as a signifier for art that could compete in luminosity with the brighter stars of public life. Indeed, personality and image became a necessary part of the work of artists as diverse as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Gilbert & George, and of course Warhol. By the beginnings of the '80s the movement of the pseudo avant-garde, the avant-garde of the poseur, had come full circle. Beuys was no longer seen as a lonely outcast but as an official guardian of German culture, and Warhol was no longer considered a seedy flake but a member of society, lionized as a portraitist. Anything seemed

possible, anything fair game—which meant that art, once again, was perceived as little more than a game, a diversion.

What I am pointing to here is the emergence of a distinctly Post-Modern understanding of the world, an understanding that recognizes that the rejection of reference becomes in time just another reference. Since the late '50s, we have known it to be increasingly true that everything can be taken for its opposite, that nothing is to be trusted. By the early years of the present decade, we had become adept at decoding the euphemisms of power and privilege, but in the process we had forgotten how to talk straight. The system of avant-garde art and its criticism had become either an arcane network of tautologies and non sequiturs, false starts and bad endings accessible only to initiates, or a starry-eyed fixation on the glamour of eccentric personalities and local heroes. And the sincerity of the Modernist, the fervor of his (mostly his) moralism, not only seemed too much but could be easily adapted to the needs of the ideological status quo. If this was only recognized by a few back in the '50s, it was there for all to see in the early '80s, a period when, for example, the righteousness of a sentimental Modernist like Hilton Kramer became caked in the pieties of the Moral Majority. Which is to say that since the '50s the value of the authentic, whether it be located in the bluechip formalism of an Anthony Caro or in the officially sanctioned avant-gardism of a Serra, had suffered a basic change and become merely lucrative, a guarantee for potential investors.

Unexpectedly, the difficult choice in this dizzying period of Post-Modern fallout turned out to be painting. Artists as diverse as Mel Bochner, Neil Jenney, and Jack Goldstein found the logic of such a move inevitable. And a younger generation, which had watched the alternative strategies of the avant-garde and its pseudo simulacrum reduced to puritanical, pretentious insignificance, also found use in a then forbidden, unquestionably discredited medium. The putative freedom granted by Minimalism and Conceptual art had served to cloak art's continuing dependence on Greenberg's "umbilical cord of gold"; the source of the necessary money had been a mystery, guarded as closely as the other mysteries of the creative process, as closely as the cash flow in a nightclub. The strategy of returning to painting blew the disingenuous cover, once again foregrounding the conditions under which art functions. Surprisingly, it allowed for a reexamination of representation itself, another attempt to figure the limits of subjectivity. For Europeans this meant a chance to look once again at a history that had been swept away by the fortuitous coincidence of Modernism's insistence on the future, consumerism's insistence on the immediate, and shame's need for forgetfulness. It also meant a chance to transgress the pieties associated with *arte povera* and similar work. Some Americans too saw a chance to return to history (perhaps more with the intention of creating history). Others, closer in their interests to those post-Conceptual artists interrogating the weird, shallow space of the media spectacle and its effect on the possibility of identity, found in painting a surprisingly fresh way to pursue that investigation.

Despite the muttered imprecations of the diehard Modernists and the old-time avant-garde, a renewed investigation of the tentacles of representation in all its forms, respectable and not, was a good idea. And an insistence on the need to include painting and all its attendant package of style, iconography, and social status in such an investigation served to ensure that the claims of these die-hards to moral superiority were no longer entitled to special privilege. To include painting was to include everything—high and low, good and bad—in an orgiastic celebration of

the bankruptcy of Western culture. The gurus of the avant-garde, the guardians of its sanctity, had been looking forward to this celebration for years. The most academic had expected the proceedings to be somber, the more politically active looked for dancing in the streets. The hippest assumed that the celebrations would come over the electronic ether, in an almost spiritual event pregnant with the hopes of a future I suppose they imagined would be financed and controlled from the new, mysterious centers of utopian power. Some of those expected to be involved included Nam June Paik, Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, and Laurie Anderson; great masters of weightless thinking, like Robert Irwin and James Turrell, were also rumored to have been invited. But the gurus always wanted to keep the proceedings clean. They did not expect the revitalized corpse of painting, which was supposed to have already dematerialized. For a good wake the body has to be dead. Besides, what with collaboration problems, distribution problems, production costs, and other irritants, this next-to-last electronic wave of the future somehow failed to crest. Worse, the best dreams of these idealists, dreams of an expanded and maybe even a mass audience reached through the miracles of technology, turned sour with the first hints of commercial sellout—when Anderson became too stagy and got easier on her music, say, or when Glass agreed to do a Cutty Sark ad. An avant-garde moment was once again turned into its simulacrum.

I still think that the decision to dress up the putrefying remains of painting for the wake was sound, but the distance covered between a good idea and its manifestation easily turns into a quagmire. Part of the confusion came about because a number of older painters, long obscure, thought their time had arrived, and came forward with a lot of superstitions about the curative powers of painting and how it might even be able to raise the dead (or at least revive sagging careers). Anxious for attention and reward, these aging healers sold their stories to an ever credible press, and to a few curators who were in the mood for something “new” but didn’t want to make the effort to find out what was really going on. Suddenly, a lot of new talent seemed to have been around for quite a long time. Compounding this confusion was a group of younger artists who grew up on the mixed messages of the Pop artists, the Happenings, the Conceptual arts, the academic avant-garde, the Minimalists, and performance. This group needed to acknowledge a wide range of bromides about self-criticism and subversion, about using the media (any media) against themselves, but it also understood the more cynical aspects of all the high-mindedness. In short, it wanted intellectual respectability, and fun too. For example, some of these intellectual appeasers decided on the tactic of working up the personality of the painter, the tortured soul who would act the part of the bereaved, creating a sad figure the media would love until that terrible moment of truth when he or she would step forth and denounce the entire spectacle. Others, more serious, chose to focus on the inert product itself, adopting a variety of tactics to expose the misrepresentations surrounding the rhetoric of originality. Of these, neo-Expressionism, that most loosely defined style of renovated painting, was originally quite successful at drawing attention to the contradictions of art in the 20th century. As a style it foregrounded its insincerity, presenting a masquerade of reprocessed fragments of what was generally considered important in art. With urgent crudity, it made us face what had become the ruin of the vain ideal of progress. We were given a kind of index of deep emotion, sensual spontaneity, and other eternal verities of culturespeak in a clever re-presentation that above all else emphasized its identity as packaging.

The risk this art faced, often unconsciously, was that of the imperceptible slide from being a leader of fashion to being merely fashionable. Much of it quickly became little more than a stylish commodity in a situation in which, as Joseph Kosuth remarked, the market was the meaning.<sup>13</sup> At lightning speed, flirting with what became the neo-Expressionist fashion as well as with what became its bedfellow—appropriation—the young Turks of the East hyped a hyped market, forgetting that the market can never be finessed for long, and certainly not on their terms. Strategies of this sort, involving a heady mix of conceptualism and camp, only really work when carried out with sufficient negativity, which is why the most meaningful cycles of reappropriation and co-option have come so fast. The other problem is that the tactic here requires that one become a connoisseur of sorts, expert in sniffing out the changing winds of taste. Such an expert must recognize which items and attributes will acquire the correct patina of what's hot. Becoming this much of a shopper, however, inevitably entails falling victim to the entropy of the commodity. The cycles of reclamation are speeded up, reclaimed kitsch reverts to type, and the consumer is consumed. To grease the market, to ensure the love affair goes smoothly, an excess of sex appeal is applied: money, spirit, street smarts, fashion, numberless exotica, glamour. The affair has gone so well that one reads about it almost every week, certainly every month, in every publication that counts, which is to say every publication that S. I. Newhouse owns. The announcement of a forthcoming movie is eagerly awaited.

We are caught in a maelstrom of sophistry and bad faith, a mind-bending confusion of ends and means. How exactly is an ordinary passerby to tell the difference between the real artist and the opportunist, between the subversive and the charlatan? No easy task, particularly since the tactic of painting, now acknowledged, has given the green light to everyone to stop chasing grants, fellowships, and residencies and to come back to what is once again a lively art market. I think the test, and it is by no means an easy one for the passerby to perform, concerns the complexity with which the entire range of problems raised by the issue of representation is addressed. How thoughtful, how provocative, is the artist's confrontation with convention and myth? How convincingly does the artist identify, within the work, its usefulness to the culture? With what kind of understanding is the work placed in the context of its presentation? In this confusing situation, many of our opinion-makers have rushed to the conclusion that it is safest to dismiss the new work that has appeared in the '80s as bad art with a bad conscience, or, and this almost amounts to the same thing, to lavish attention on the material successes of the new artists. Of the artists lucky enough to receive the media's talent scouts in their homes, precious few have been able to turn things around and return attention to the work. To succeed here a certain relentlessness is needed, a determination almost encyclopedic in its reach, like Bartlett's.

Indeed, Bartlett's ability to hold the enthusiastic attention of John Russell for close on ten years is notorious, and deservedly so, since his bracketing of her wide-ranging name-brand-shopping in the intellectual and artistic realms with his perfectly graceful, weightless prose highlights the elegance with which she is able to intoxicate the critical sensibilities of her audience. In a reprise of the early Impressionists' desire to address the rootless nature of life in a consumer society whose only real freedom is an officially sanctioned leisure, Bartlett catalogues the necessities—cabins, swimming pools, gardens, boats—of pleasure in a society that values time off to such an extent that it has enforced full-time leisure on a greater number of people than at any point since the Depression. Where the Impressionists depicted the activities of leisure in a bright and breezy way, Bartlett depicts its accoutrements in an equally bright and breezy way. And just as the

Impressionists presented themselves as resident experts, moving out to the new developments at Argenteuil the better to know their subject, Bartlett, in a stunning crescendo of gloriously choreographed press, mainly last spring, has been presented as the ultimate consumer expert, shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic on board the Concorde the better to enjoy and understand the fruits of both the Old and New Worlds.

*Jennifer Bartlett began her life in Long Beach, California, where she decided at the age of five that she would be an artist—and soon there after, that she would be a genius. [Nan Robertson, Artnews, 1983<sup>14</sup>]*

Never doctrinaire in feminist matters, Bartlett does not see why she should do without a husband who is a film star. She met Mathieu Carrière at a New York dinner party in 1980 (it was one of the few dinner parties she went to that season), and they were married in 1983. [Calvin Tomkins, *The New Yorker*, 1985<sup>15</sup>]

*“Part of [Alvar] Aalto’s genius is that his early pieces go with pieces he designed thirty years later,” says Jennifer. In a dramatic version of one-stop shopping, she and Mathieu sat in their Helsinki hotel room and improvised situations in the apartment so they could order everything they needed at once. The order was just about right, except that dinners chez Carrière are not lit by candles because Jennifer could not find candleholders she liked. And they underbought by a hair: “I wish I’d gotten twenty-four cups instead of twelve,” says Jennifer. [Doris Saatchi, House & Garden, 1985<sup>16</sup>]*

*Movie stars come to visit while Jennifer works in the studio, a house keeper cooks dinner while Jennifer apologises in California French for the burgeoning numbers at table. There is no actress glamorous enough to play Jennifer Bartlett. [Joan Juliet Buck, Vanity Fair, 1985<sup>17</sup>]*

By exposing herself so relentlessly to the adoring gaze of the publicity machine, Bartlett sets herself up as a rather easy target. The shamelessness of her ambition is reflected all too clearly in the breathless accounts of her admirers. It is true, to a degree, that people cannot be held accountable for what is written about them, but only to a degree. It is also true that in a very real sense, an artist today depends on his or her work being included in the public discourse of the cultural press, but there is a much larger problem here, a problem of representation, and of the artist’s consciousness of the ever closing space between the consumer and the consumed. As that space of difference collapses, property relations alter, and the idea of freedom becomes a bitter joke.

Given this constellation, the significance of David Salle’s role as melancholy celebrant of the commodity becomes clear. By now we realize that his art includes both his paintings and the construction of a legend around them. This legend remains deliberately vague, something of a mystification. The artist’s public statements on his work tend to be Delphic, cloaked in language that obscures the mundane processes by which he paints. But unless we are to consider the origin of these relics to be some how immaculate, we must speculate on just how Salle gets his hands dirty. Working with the crude shadows cast on the canvas by the opaque projector, he builds conundrums of density through the simple manipulation of repetition. Images spawn images in an explosion of references that cancel each other out, clouding sense in heavy portent. Salle has

denied that his work is a commentary on popular culture, saying that his subjects—comedy and pornography—are important to him not as social commentary but “in their own mechanistic ways . . . in a detached way.”<sup>18</sup> Yet no fetishist really cares about the objects of his desire; it is always the mechanism around the object that provides the charge, and it is a mechanism of mass culture that informs Salle’s work. Which is to say that his work is about pornography as a special case within mass culture, the case of ocular ownership. Salle records a world so stupefied by the narcotic of its own delusionary gaze that it fails to understand that it has nothing actual in its grasp. Amid seeming abundance, there is no real choice, only a choice of phantasms.

The world described in Salle’s work is a jaded one, rife with a sluggish melancholy. The steady leaching of meaning from objects and images breeds an enervating uncertainty. A spatial arrangement of reified signs unfolds as an unintelligible allegory. Artist and viewer alike stumble through a maze of false clues and incomplete riddles, coming on the same viewless arrangements and empty repetitions in the search for a coherent identity. Signs and props are ritually shuffled like so many commodities on the floor of a department store of the imagination, with a compulsive repetition that offers a dwindling satisfaction. In photographs of Salle’s home we can see how the artist, beset by the tiresome melancholia of intelligence, has constructed a world that is an equivalent of his paintings. In both, he collects and displays a series of objects become image, devoid of the comforts of use. They are mere tokens of desire. This reduction of the basic accommodations of life to the locus of an ascetic ritual, captured particularly well in the photographs of Salle’s loft taken by Robert Mapplethorpe, that connoisseur of the fetish,<sup>19</sup> produces a joyless perfection. This is a life of caged desire, continually feeding itself a fantasy of fulfillment that cannot be achieved because it has been abstracted to the realm of the purely optical, beyond the reach of the senses or intellect.

In these empty rooms, Salle is the paradigmatic artist of the transavant-garde, consummately acute in identifying the hopeless contradiction of wanting and loathing material success. This situation can be understood in something like class terms—the age old question of the artist’s status, questioned once again in our period, when the divinity of genius has been unmasked as a hoax. This is the source of the effectiveness of yet another photograph of Salle, here seated in his butterfly chair in front of a painting that prominently features the picture of a tired-looking worker at rest.<sup>20</sup> The two figures share an identification of sorts, an equivalence of alienation. Both Salle and the worker are slumped forward, and both stare ahead, looking somewhat dazed, or bewildered. Salle wears what looks like a Rolex watch; two diamond rings are painted over the worker’s arms. Both men appear alienated by the effects of capital, and both continue to work for it, unwilling to admit the possibility of doing otherwise, lest their comfort, or lack of it, be threatened. Both are trapped by the spell of the commodity. Under the delusionary influence of free choice, both are reduced to addressing the world with the brooding gaze of a silent withdrawal. Salle exemplifies pseudo avant-gardism at its best, a thorough deconstruction of the old avant-garde claim to stand outside society by demonstrating its palpable ties to fashion and to the market, and to underline art’s deplorable history of subservience to entrenched power. The structural brilliance of his work, which so ably fulfills Robert Rauschenberg’s oft-quoted desire to act in the gap between life and art, rests in its ability to deny such a gap. In the best of Salle’s work we are shown both life and art reduced, through the inexorable workings of consumer society, to being empty shells of an illusion.

In the early '30s, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz pioneered the study of the legends and myths that surround the image of the artist.<sup>21</sup> They discovered that in the relatively brief periods in history when individual artists have put their name to their work, a number of motifs in the stories told about artists have remained quite stable, despite changing social conditions. Kris and Kurz drew particular attention to two of these motifs. One concerns the ability of the artist to create illusions that deceive even his fellow artists, an image in which the artist, half god, half jester, is able to create life, or at least the appearance of life. The second concerns the discovery of a young, unknown, unschooled artist by an older artist who recognizes talent and offers to nurture it, only to be soon eclipsed by the ability and sudden fame of the protégé. To these might be added the often stated notion that men of talent and genius are particularly susceptible to the afflictions of melancholy, which conspires to disable their productivity, making their best efforts appear lifeless and uninteresting in their own eyes.<sup>22</sup>

In the West, after a short spell of individual notoriety in the Greece of the fifth century BC, artists were essentially incognito until the end of the Middle Ages. And in those periods when art was primarily used for ritual and magic, the artist's social position was that of the craftsman, a producer of certain kinds of tool. The formal and intellectual concerns of medieval art needed no individual artists to be singled out for fame: the glory of what was achieved was God's, not man's. But in a number of Italian city states in the 14th century some men began to think otherwise, to think that the amassing of personal fortunes might be a higher glory than any hitherto known. As these first stirrings took shape, the attributes of the divine that art once existed to reveal were gradually appropriated by the art's makers. A desire to identify and discuss individual artists was a logical development; it appeared only natural to follow the lead of the intellectuals of the Renaissance, the men who were providing the building blocks for the infant ideology of capitalism. The steady progression of half-divine, half-mad geniuses that resulted can be understood as culminating in the expressionist movements of the first half of this century, and achieving a tragicomic reprise in current neo-Expressionism.

Between the two expressionisms, the 20th century saw a rise of intellectualism in art practice—in Dada, Constructivism, Minimalism, Conceptualism. The earlier manifestations can be linked to the development of mass politics, while the later have more to do with mass culture. The difference is huge. The Dadaists and Constructivists could declare the death of painting, could attack the idea of the individual genius, in the name of a genuinely revolutionary movement, a mass movement away from bourgeois capitalism. To them the cult of genius, the fascination with individual achievement, was simply an ideological trapping of bourgeois culture. But the position of artists from the '60s onward, and their refusal of authorship, are quite different. The mass movements powered from the lower classes have so far failed, and a strengthened capitalist system has found the technological means to impose a mass culture from above, a mass culture of commodity and spectacle. Today, anonymity is an alienating factor rather than a liberating one, and belief in the worth of the individual is not only an ideological need of capitalism, but also a need with real and growing social validity, as the mass fixation of culture weakens the ability of a neutral person to perceive him- or herself acting or believing in an individual way.

One answer to the alienation of the individual is the solace of religion, and the unprecedented growth of fundamentalist sects and bizarre cults provides more evidence of the withering of our culture before the militarized state. It may be folly to suppose that the decay can be halted by any

artist short of an embalmer, but some must take action no matter how hopelessly, or how absurdly. Others find satisfaction in mini stering souls, an idea so campy that their intentions must always be in doubt, which provides perfect cover should the need arise. Take the case of Georg Baselitz. Here's a man who has cleverly built a record as a social delinquent in both Germanies: according to an article in the *New York Times*, he was expelled from East Berlin for "social and political immaturity," and in West Berlin, in 1963, a public prosecutor found his paintings dangerous enough to confiscate. In 1975 he bought himself a castle that had once been an abbey, and later had himself photographed, with full beard and shaved head, kneeling in front of his work; this image was reproduced in the pages of the same article, by Russell, and entitled "The New European Painters."<sup>23</sup> (Baselitz, by the way, has been working for at least a quarter of a century.) What brilliant self-promotion, cleverly functioning as a parody of the artist-genius genre, with its mysteries of temporal and spiritual power. Here indeed must be the new spirit in painting, the sign of renewed faith, renewed hope. Other artists have essayed variants on this sacred theme, recalling us to the majesty of the mission of art. Francesco Clemente affects a sainted look; elegantly haggard, he shows himself hovering alone in empty rooms, communing with caged birds. Longo declares himself a priest or guardian of culture, an apostle of a monumental future much like that first envisioned by Albert Speer and Leni Riefenstahl. Sandro Chia is content to offer his faith as the only necessary justification. All these claims, and others like them, are campy, but limited in their rewards. Not enough is made of them, and the artwork they embellish somehow fails to rise to the occasion. To the degree that it is scatological, Clemente's work at least engages the issue of the sacred, but the rest steers clear of even the appearance of the religious.

Recognizing that the declaration of a renewed faith in painting could use a sacrificial child to enliven it, and further recognizing that if he were to officiate, some of the spilled blood might revive his own standing, Warhol found a miracle in Basquiat. Here was a young artist who already had mythic status, street-smart with the touch of a natural, a graffitist who had attempted to free himself from the early burnout of the street artist by publicly killing off his tag, an untutored talent who had been captured by rapacious art-dealers and forced to work and work and work until he had finally run away, a rebel looking for the security of an understanding surrogate father. Warhol realised that Basquiat, as a wild child in an expensive suit, could provide a much more unsettling image of the uses of money and leisure than either the older artist's lost superstars or the relatively accessible decadence of Studio 54. With judicious planning he could get in on the act as mentor and sparring partner, given new vampiric purpose by their collaborative work. Warhol has survived so long as an important cultural figure because, lacking faith, he knows how to manipulate the need for idolatry. With cynical detachment, he has developed an understanding of the mechanisms involved, and learned to manipulate them. The resulting work is frightful, a merciless reflection of a zombie culture mesmerized by an endless procession of hollow simulacra of vitality. It may also be truthful, but its truth is too much to bear, because it does not pretend to offer hope.

*"There's a moment when you understand what complete non-existence is about and it's horrifying. No matter how rich you get, it's never going to change this terminal case of existence that we have."* [Schnabel interviewed by Elizabeth Tenant, Los Angeles Times, 1985<sup>24</sup>]

As we approach the year 2000, millenarian thinking has colored most discussions of the fate of our culture. As such thinking develops, we need another, more melodramatic way to deal with the problem reflected in the icy surface of Warhol's work. We need to believe in miracles. And this, the accomplishment of Julian Schnabel, is the invention of a character of mythic dimensions. Divinely inspired, Schnabel is apparently able to bring painting back to life by assaulting it with the piteous terror of shameless laughter. The cruel joke that he plays on the high-minded guardians of our irretrievably bogus culture is that they sing their hallelujahs to, or cast their stones at, the new-found savior just as he buries the body of painting ever deeper within the consumptive fabric of the commodity. If Salle chooses to key his attack to the pathos of hollow desire, the more extremist Schnabel pulls out all the stops, and aims for a triumph of bathos.

The paintings themselves, with the fragmented archeology of their surfaces, provide a reasonably convincing simulation of an imitation, like the heaving and seething of paint-encrusted polystyrene that scares us into believing in all sorts of monsters risen from the dead when we go to the movies. But beyond the paintings Schnabel uses a full orchestration of rumor, hype, and lots of press—good and bad, serious and frivolous—to put in place a complex of interweaving references to mythic structure. Schnabel's ambitions are Promethean; he is willing to take the considerable spiritual risks of bourgeois living to bring a spark of life back to a moribund culture. To emphasize the point, an early exhibition announcement has him striking a pose as a modern Daedalus, another Yves Klein soaring into the firmament.<sup>25</sup> Just as the mythic forebears of Greek art were credited with the ability to bring material to life, so we are to see Schnabel return meaning to a lifeless art history and a deadly mass culture. And, as a sideshow, we see in the pages of *Vogue* his wife, Jacqueline, given momentary access to the symbolic order as his Galatea.<sup>26</sup> To ensure the point is taken, Schnabel makes plenty of other references relating to more popular manifestations of the same myths. For example, all these pictures of him stripped to the waist, working, playing, and posing on the beach, evoke near-subliminal recollections of those last champions of the modern, Picasso and Pollock.<sup>27</sup> This whole litany is then made strange by the rather Brechtian device of boldly talking about life in terms of money and the joys of wealth, instead of discussing esthetics or some other branch of philosophy

*I have two little girls and a beautiful and intelligent wife,  
people are buying my paintings,  
people are writing about me: people will write about anything—  
people are writing about people buying my paintings.  
I can go where I want, eat whatever I like, make a pig of myself—and will continue to do so as  
long as I've got the money.  
As you all must know by now  
I am a "success" (conditionally). [Julian Schnabel, Artforum, 1984<sup>28</sup>]*

Schnabel's rigmarole is impeccable in its relentless cataloguing of the attributes that have nourished the myth of genius as it has so happily served the ideology of capital. Rumors of cartels, of price-rigging, of inflationary demands and back-room deals, all add spice to a very public display of grandiose expenditure<sup>29</sup> that conspires to return our attention to the mythic tropes that sound so deep and truthful but work best as grease for the market. In other words, Schnabel brings us back, through the shock of contrast, to the modern myth that artists must

starve in order to create, that dreadful lie of deferred hopes that perennially keeps the likes of Harold Shapinsky in poor obscurity<sup>30</sup>. All this noise baffles the experts, thus making Schnabel's ploy the perfect sting. His work demonstrates, less ambiguously than the rest of us dare, the hopelessness of seeking meaning within the terms of the marketplace. (Says Julian: "The world is so fickle that success today is as stable as a saltcellar in the middle of a buffalo stampede. Success? I question it."<sup>31</sup>) And, at the same time, he makes a huge killing in that marketplace. No wonder he even fools some of his fellow artists into believing that they could seek a new authenticity by imitating him.

*An artistic moment has passed. It is not that the phenomenon known as Neo-Expressionism is dead, or that the artists identified with it are no longer the subject of intense interest and debate. But the fire that was lighted by those European and American artists whose bold, large-scale, usually painted, figurative works burst into prominence around 1980 with a flair and sweep that seemed to make everything possible is now down to a glow. Together, it is unlikely that they will receive the same kind of attention again. [Michael Brenson, the New York Times, 1986<sup>32</sup>]*

As I finish this essay the *New York Times* has decided to wrap up the chapter on neo-Expressionism. In its polite way, it does not want to say that the artists of the last five years—Salle, Schnabel, Eric Fischl, Longo, Anselm Kiefer, Baselitz, Markus Lüpertz, Enzo Cucchi, Chia, Clemente, Cindy Sherman, Jörg Immendorf, and A. R. Penck are those specially noted—are washed up, but it indicates a certain ennui, a desire for some new playthings. The issues lying beneath their work have not only been spurned but declared virtually DOA. For that is the problem—they have arrived. The artists listed—interestingly, all under the tag of neo-Expressionism—are subject to comprehensive museum surveys, and many have monographs recounting their triumphs already published. Their excesses are no longer fascinating because they can no longer be seen as naughty children. They are now part of the establishment, and even the *Times* knows how boring that can be. The best were hoping to celebrate the final burial rites of a moribund culture; instead, they have arrived at the museum, finding that they are the ones to be entombed or offered up as a sacrifice so that the old cadaver might once again look fresh.

These are difficult times for artists with the ambition of reformulating the cultural identity of the society. The idea of an avant-garde of any kind is clearly no longer useful, with even the black humor of pseudo avant-garde strategies turning to ashes. There is a need to rethink the purpose of art, its value in noncash terms. Old definitions are worn thin, new definitions not yet formulated. Do we want art simply to become decor for junk-bond capitalism, or a more useful response to a new age in which that capitalism seems ever more aggressively defensive as it becomes more deeply indebted?

Artists born in the USA will have to learn how to operate in a world of diminished horizons and limited hope—to learn, perhaps, from the experience of many Europeans who already have some practice with the constraints of marginalization, or from the similar experience of cultural minorities in this country. They already know what it is to tolerate an occupation by militarized capital. They already know what it is to see the signs of their difference, their cultural identity, transformed into so many cute highlights for the tourism industry. European artists have long experience of seeing their work handsomely supported by a system of local museums and *kunsthallen* that packages them as light entertainment for lunchtime crowds. They have seen how

demoralizing that is. Let us hope we can figure some better way to represent our dreams, or we will continue to see them turn nightmarish.

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## NOTES

1. Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 10 1985, pp. 23, 20, and 74 respectively.
2. See also Morgan's article "Composite Drawings" in *Real Life Magazine* (of which she is an editor), #13, Autumn 1984, p. 2.
3. For a useful approach to this material see Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Silken, eds., *Modernism and Modernity*, Halifax, Can.: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983.
4. Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art," *The Marxist Quarterly* 1, January 1937.
5. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* vol. 6 no. 5, Fall 1939. Reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, p. 8.
6. See Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, first published in 1852 and more recently available in New York: International Publisher, 1963.
7. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, London: NLB, 1973.
8. See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals*, London: Hutchinson, 1976.
9. See Crow, op. cit.
10. Camille Pissaro, *Letters to His Son Lucien*, ed. John Rewald, Mamaroneck, NY: Paul P. Appel. 1943. The passage occurs in a letter written on January 9 1887.
11. See Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961.
12. Theodor W. Adorno, Commitment, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gerhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Urizen Books, 1978.
13. Joseph Kosuth, "Necrophilia mon Amour," *Artforum* vol. XX no. 9, May 1982, pp. 59–63.

14. Nan Robenson, "In the Garden with Jennifer Bartlett," *Artnews* vol. 82 no. 9, November 1983, p. 72.
15. Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles (Jennifer Bartlett)," *The New Yorker*, April 15 1985, p. 68.
16. Doris Saatchi, "Max Gordon's design for the Paris atelier of Jennifer Barden and actor/writer Mathieu Carriere," *House & Garden* vol. 157 no. 5, May 1985, p. 235.
17. Joan Juliet Buck. "Brushing Up," *Vanity Fair* vol. 48 no. 4, April 1985, p. 107.
18. Quoted in Robert Pincus-Witten, "Interview with David Salle," *Flash Art* no. 123, Summer 1985, p. 35.
19. Reproduced in Martin Filler, "Tribeca Textures," *House & Garden* vol. 157 no. 2, February 1985, pp. 129–35.
20. Reproduced in McGuigan. op. cit., p. 22.
21. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Originally published in German, in 1934.
22. See Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.
23. John Russell, "The New European Painters," *New York Times Magazine*, April 24 1983.
24. Elizabeth Venant, "Rebel Expressions," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1985, p. 7.
25. The announcement for Schnabel's show at the Mary Boone Gallery, New York, April 4–May 7, 1981.
26. André Leon Talley, "Portrait of the Artist's Wife: Jacqueline Schnabel," *Vogue* vol. 175 no. 3, March 1985, p. 513.
27. Examples can be found in the catalogue for the show "Julian Schnabel," at the Tate Gallery, London, in 1982; in *Untitled*, New York: Pelham Press, 1984; in *Artforum* vol. 22 no. 6, February 1984; and others. See also my short essay "Where's the Beef," *ZG* no. 10, Spring 1984.
28. Julian Schnabel, "The Patients and the Doctors," *Artforum* vol. 22 no. 6, February 1984, p. 57.
29. See Doris Saatchi, "An Artist's Life, 1985," *House & Garden* vol. 157. no. 7, July 1985.
30. See Lawrence Weschler, "A Reporter at Large (Harold Shapinsky)," *The New Yorker*, December 16 1985.

31. Talley, op. cit., p. 560.

32. Michael Brenson, "Is Neo-Expressionism an Idea Whose Time has Passed," *New York Times*, January 5 1986, Section 2 p. 1.

# TOWARD ANOTHER LAOCOON

The rewards of Money



# OR, THE SNAKE PIT

THOMAS LAWSON



Cover of *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, February 10, 1985. Jean Michel Basquiat, photographed by Lizzie Himmel. From Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money."



Advertisement for Christian Dior women's furs and men's clothing and outerwear, showing Andy Warhol (left).

Top: Magazine advertisements for, left to right: *Money* magazine, 1984; Paco Rabanne cologne, 1983; Gordon's Gin, 1983.

Take Basquiat. Five years ago, he didn't have a place to live. He slept on the couch of one friend after another. He lacked money to buy art supplies. Now, at 24, he is making paintings that sell for \$10,000 to \$25,000. They are reproduced in art magazines and also as part of fashion layouts, or in photographs of chic private homes in *House & Garden*. They are in the collections of the publisher S. I. Newhouse, Richard Gere, Paul Simon, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

When Jean Michel Basquiat walks into Mr. Chow's on East 57th Street in Manhattan, the waiters all greet him as a favorite regular. Before he became a big success, the owners, Michael and Tina Chow, bought his artwork and later commissioned him to paint their portraits. He goes to the restaurant a lot. One night, for example, he was having a quiet dinner near the bar with a small group of people. While Andy Warhol chatted with Nick Rhodes, the British Rock star from Duran Duran, on one side of the table, Basquiat sat across from them, talking to the artist Keith Haring.

"He'll run in here in an \$800 suit and paint all night," says his friend Shenge. "In the morning, he'll be standing in front of a picture with his suit just covered in paint."

The samples above come from the breathless account of success in today's art world that appeared as a cover story in the Sunday magazine section of the *New York Times* early last year.<sup>1</sup> A typical tale of making it in the USA, it provided a catalogue of speedily rising profits from art and of the art world's celebration of them in the same conspicuous ways as the demistars of music and television, a catalogue of expensive clothes, expensive meals, and expensive friends. It was a vulgar story, insensitive to the higher aspirations of the denizens of the artistic districts, provoking shudders of dismay. What could the editors of the *Times* have been thinking of to let an arts-and-entertainment reporter loose in an area that requires an ability to discriminate, to understand that the gossip that is the lifeblood of many professions and that echoes through galleries, literary cocktail parties, backstage dressing rooms, and recording studios is not the same thing as discourse on the arts? What had happened to take us so quickly from one pole to another, from that good gentleman John Russell—the newspaper's hagiographer in residence, an art writer of the right sort, one who likes to surround his enthusiasms with shimmering mists and clouds of ineffable description and diplomatic metaphors—to this rather shallowly conceived piece of evidence that the so-called journalistic coverage generated by today's artists is as Post-Modern as they? The media experts must deem the image of "crazy modern art," or "crazy modern artists," no longer fascinating enough to the general public; what

is now of interest is the lavish intemperance of the lifestyles of fashionable artists. No esthetic excess can match the more simply understood excess of ruining an \$800 suit by wearing it to paint after a full evening of nightclubbing. The shock of this new image must have offended on many levels, the most relevant of which here is its precise reversal of the dearly held belief of modern times that the best artists always starve in garrets, and that their rewards are posthumous.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Grenouillère*, 1869, oil on canvas, ca. 25 1/4 x 33 1/2". Collection of the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Later in the year, a downtown gathering crowded into White Columns, a nonprofit gallery begun in the years of "alternative spaces," hoping to be entertained on the foibles of art writing. Marshall Efron, Susan Morgan, Peter Nagy, and Michael Smith drew attention to the mostly ridiculous, occasionally terrible fantasies that swirl around the conjunction of life, art, and money, moving their audience to uneasy laughter on topics ranging from art credit cards to the Andrew Crispo affair. Morgan's reading of an apparently seamless story of material success, a litany of fabulous lives, beautiful houses, and intelligent automobiles, had the crowd uncertain in its reactions. Her narrative was not exactly fiction, nor was it as seamless as it appeared. Excerpting from articles about Jennifer Bartlett, Julian Schnabel, and Robert Longo, in magazines as varied as *Artnews*, *Vogue*, *House & Garden*, and *The New Yorker*, she presented a patchwork of quotes which unfolded a pattern of absurdity and contradiction in an aching clear demonstration of a sickening hubris, turning laughter to a discomfiting silence.<sup>2</sup> We used to know that

the skimpy representations of the avant-garde that infrequently appeared in the mass media were off base, either hysterically hostile or so absurdly patronizing that even the least acute semiotician could tell what was going on. But Morgan's reading uncovered a self-professed avant-garde assiduously courting prime-time coverage, upsetting, in traditional avant-garde fashion, the conventions of accepted taste. And she showed the media responding with a welcoming smile. Gone were the reports of lovable eccentricity and dangerous lunacy threatening the daughters of the free world. The artists of the new avant-garde were being described as successes, described in terms of their net worth.

That the work of Modern art is primarily a cultural commodity is a well-rehearsed truism, but one worth reiterating.<sup>3</sup> Briefly stated, various writers have noted a congruence, in mid-19th-century Paris, between the rise of Modernism in the arts and the development of the kind of mass culture associated with a consumer society, and have suggested that Modernism and mass culture are in fact the twin offspring of a capitalism based on the principles of the free market. The older uses of painting and sculpture (as religious aids or aristocratic decor, for example) atrophied during this period, as did the older forms of popular culture—the local, mostly rural rituals we nostalgically identify today as "folk." These historical conventions, in which objects were valued for the uses to which they were put, were replaced by a new culture of commodities which located value in cash terms. Second Empire Paris saw the repression of older forms of entertainment and solidarity, and their replacement by the carefully packaged and controlled entertainment exemplified by the department store. It also saw the first development of a self-conscious Modern avant-garde acutely aware of its position in relation to this new culture of the spectacle.

The complicity between early Modernism and consumer society was sharply stated by Meyer Schapiro in a description of Impressionist painting written in the mid '30s:

It is remarkable how many pictures we have in early Impressionism of informal and spontaneous sociability, of breakfasts, picnics, promenades, boating trips, holidays, and vacation travel. These urban idylls not only present the objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860s and 1870s; they also reflect in the very choice of subjects and in the new aesthetic devices the conception of art solely as a field of individual enjoyment, without reference to ideas and motives, and they presuppose the cultivation of these pleasures as the highest field of freedom for an enlightened bourgeois detached from the official beliefs of his class. In enjoying realistic pictures of his surroundings as a spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres, the cultivated rentier was experiencing in its phenomenal aspect that mobility of the environment, the market and of industry to which he owed his income and freedom. And in the new Impressionist techniques which broke things up into finely discriminated points of color... he found... conditions of sensibility closely related to those of the urban promenade and the refined consumer of luxury goods.<sup>4</sup> Which is to say that the claims of the Impressionist avant-garde to independence and a certain distance

from the bourgeois values of their patrons were bogus. Schapiro was arguing that the advanced artists of the 1860s were little more than full-time leisure specialists fine-tuning the tastes and expectations of consumers. In their work, later identified as an early attempt to make art for art's sake, esthetics are understood as equivalent to the enjoyments available within the existing apparatus of commercial entertainment and tourism. Although Clement Greenberg was less severe in his strictures on the Moderns, he shared Schapiro's understanding of early Modernism as a flawed response to the commodification of culture. And Greenberg noted that the link between art and the market, which he characterized as "an umbilical cord of gold," would not be severed by mere bluster and assertion.<sup>5</sup>

It is also significant, given the increasingly rightward cast of the body politic in our late-capitalist times, that this first spectacular flowering of the consumer society coincided with the self-destruction of middle-class republicanism (which we call liberalism) during the authoritarian years of the Second Empire. The citizen traded the freedoms of political choice for the freedom to stroll along boulevards constructed to disrupt and more easily control the old proletarian quarters of the city, contained as much as protected by the forces of law and order. This trade was made in the name of a higher standard of living—that is, in the name of economic advantage to the privileged.<sup>6</sup> A consequence of the resultant atomization of communal identity was the colonizing of the spaces of public leisure as, paradoxically, one last place where a sense of identity could be shared. Within the special conditions of time off, a sense of solidarity could be temporarily regained in which one's singleness could appear to take part in a group life, an amorphous community of friends, fans, supporters, enthusiasts, and experts. In his unfinished study of Charles Baudelaire and Second Empire Paris, Walter Benjamin wrote,

The very fact that their share could at best be enjoyment, but never power, made the period which history gave them a space for passing time. Anyone who sets out to while away time seeks enjoyment. It was self-evident, however, that the more this class wanted to have its enjoyment in this society, the more limited this enjoyment would be. The enjoyment promised to be less limited if this class found enjoyment of this society possible. If it wanted to achieve virtuosity in this kind of enjoyment, it could not spurn empathizing with commodities. It had to enjoy this identification with all the pleasure and uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its destiny as a class. Finally, it had to approach this destiny with a sensitivity that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods. Baudelaire, who in a poem to a courtesan called her heart "bruised like a peach, ripe like her body, for the lore of love," possessed this sensitivity. To it he owed his enjoyment of this society as one who had already half withdrawn from it.<sup>7</sup>

The relative generosity of Benjamin's remarks on Baudelaire's compromised position serves to emphasize the rigidity in the positions of Schapiro and Greenberg as young men. While logically defensible, their perspective, like that of so many strict theorists

in the field of art criticism, failed to allow enough elasticity to provide an adequate account of the past, and therefore restricted their views of the present. Under the tyranny of their inexorable logic they had either to abandon Modernist art as a thoroughly complicit symptom of bourgeois decadence, or to seek to deny its connections with everyday life and politics altogether, seeing it as some special expression of purity within a special quarantine-zone of culture, far removed from the contagion of ordinary people and ordinary uses.

It would be a gross simplification (one not made by Schapiro and Greenberg) to assume that the consumer society was found acceptable by all, or even by all those who might be thought to benefit from it. Of course there was dissent; of course many felt a desire to identify themselves as somehow "outside," as rebels if not revolutionists. And for a period in the later part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, the avant-garde was able to function, in an on-again, off-again manner, as an authentic subculture of resistance. Yet ultimately, worn out through overuse, the idea of the avant-garde became just another property of the art market. Finally, the appearance of an avant-garde within the development of Modernism can only be adequately understood by considering it a type of passive resistance,<sup>8</sup> and a far from satisfactory one: as any history of the phenomenon shows, the avant-garde's incomplete, self-contradictory refusals follow a consistent pattern over time, spiraling into dilution as individuals and groups within the subculture become satisfied, or at least resolve to be content, with their lot. This fluctuating place of resistance is typical of all such subcultures, as is apparent from a look at the histories of some other examples of social revolt—the oppositions of youth, blacks, gays, and women over the last two decades, for example.

The pattern of fading resistance, a spiraling downward toward extinction, that has come to characterize the history of the avant-garde can clearly be seen in operation in Claude Monet's work of the mid 1880s. His earlier Impressionism, along with that of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, depicted a world of weekend leisure amid rampant real estate development as if it were an everyday reality. In contradiction of Schapiro's strictures, it has been argued that within the confines of this limited depiction the Impressionists were able to express a refusal of the norms of their society.<sup>9</sup> Their radically unacademic style of representation, with its freshness and directness, presented a world of gaiety as if it were everyday life to an audience that knew it was not. At their best, then, the Impressionists of the 1860s and 1870s saw a disjunction between myth and reality, and pointed to it—with both their images and their new ways of working—in a recontextualization of what we would now call the hype of the real estate developers and sporting-goods suppliers. But by the mid 1880s Monet had withdrawn from this social context, reducing his ambitions to the perfection of a number of technical feats and to the development of a tasty surface. By no coincidence, this was the decade when Monet en-

joyed real financial prosperity, thanks to the success of his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, in the American market. In 1887, Camille Pissarro dismissed Monet's recent work as showy eccentricity of a familiar and marketable kind: "I say this: Monet plays his salesman's game, and it serves him; but it is not in my character to do likewise, nor is it in my interest, and it would be in contradiction above all to my conception of art."<sup>10</sup>

For Pissarro, who wished to continue working within the re-creative mode of the avant-garde, with its hope of a regeneration of actual culture through a negation of the official or the sanctioned, the next step was obvious. He threw in his lot with a younger group associated with Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, who were looking for a more marginal, less classly subject matter, and a more unnatural style of representation that would somehow speak more clearly of the realities of the contemporary world. Pissarro worked within the strictures of Neo-Impressionist theory for only a few years before moving on to a fuller reassessment of the Impressionist project to depict modern life. Not much later, with the death of Seurat, Neo-Impressionism in turn degenerated into a repertoire of pretty postcard views and sundry exotica.

In the 1980s, it all seems terribly familiar. As one looks over the hundred and some years of the history of Modernism, a regular rhythm emerges in which the artists of the avant-garde try to rescue Modern art from its fate as high-status commodity by including in their new practice elements from a debased, marginalized, or alien culture. Soon this material is sanctioned as art, deemed acceptable, and the avant-garde must move on, unable either to affirm or refuse its position in the social order, but only to represent its inherent contradiction, and so to act out the possibility of critical consciousness in general. As this century has progressed, this necessary search for new material has forced the avant-garde into an ever quickening cycle of appropriation and reappropriation. Marginal information is processed by the avant-garde, then delivered into the mainstream by the mass media, and returned to the marketplace packaged for distribution around the world. Most obvious in the instances in which artists have used material from the world of reproduction, this effect is also apparent in the more severe maneuvers of artists who turn to the materials and processes of heavy industry and light manufacturing.

The struggle against the incessant commodification of the artwork has been constant, and desperate, because it is central to the identity of the artist as an independent subject. If the artwork is to be understood as merely an expensive bauble, or a sophisticated entertainment, then the artist is reduced in status to craftsman or clown, necessarily content to manipulate a given repertoire of signs in order to provide a pretty arrangement of satisfactory "truths" about life. The Modernist achievement, fueled by a rage against such condescension, was to shatter the illusion of such manipulations and such "truths"; to identify representation itself as a lie. The repeated renewals of Modernism, the activity of succeeding

generations of the avant-garde, can be understood as a series of increasingly radical attempts to overcome the bindings of the cultural and achieve the purity of natural being. As illustration, think of the progress of Impressionism and its satellites, of the development of Expressionism, of the fascination with the primitive and with madness. Think of Antonin Artaud. Think, above all, of Pablo Picasso's long, desperate career, with its many attempts to restart, to deny the reification of his mark, his sign, to avoid death. And yet the very motor of Picasso's success as an artist—the dissatisfactions of desire, the continual searching for replacement—finally moved him beyond history to a myth outside life. His almost mechanical fecundity, spawning so many repetitions and imitators, gradually made the work a shadow of itself as it got lost in an expanding field of reproduction.

The deathly rhythm of negation and re-presentation achieved a climax with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in the late '40s. The idea of a subject matter taken from some aspect of daily reality had been abstracted by the Surrealists into the operations of chance or the unconscious. The Abstract Expressionists wanted to void these operations of lingering associations and secret meanings by stressing the quiddity of their materials, by emptying their work of the "artistic." In other words, they wanted to negate what they called "Frenchness," that arty concoction of reference and surface that had finally reduced the School of Paris to a parody of itself. The grandeur of this moment of pure negativity cannot be overstated, nor can its limitations. For the sad truth is that this was probably the last authentic moment of the avant-garde. When Abstract Expressionism too, in its turn, became acceptable to capital, and, worse, was used to some degree as a propaganda tool during the period of the first phase of the Cold War, its purity and high seriousness were rendered suspect and seemingly inauthentic. Jackson Pollock's uncertainty in the years just before his death speaks of a loss of direction, perhaps of will, as does Willem de Kooning's retreat to a more descriptive, more accessible procedure. As a consequence of this historically inevitable failure, a new order of recuperation became imperative, one in which all previous avant-garde values were reversed. With Pop and other manifestations of the New Realism, the strategies of the avant-garde became camp, and camp became the avant-garde. False consciousness was conscripted as a tool against itself.<sup>11</sup>

Theodor W. Adorno has written,

Today, every phenomenon of culture, even if a model of integrity, is liable to be suffocated in the cultivation of Kitsch. Yet paradoxically in the same epoch it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics. . . . This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead.<sup>12</sup>

What we have seen reiterated again and again since the '60s is the recognition that the idea of the avant-garde as the locus of a credible resistant subculture is one of waning conviction. At that historical juncture,

the possibilities of negation were absolutely diminished within the framework of Modernism. It is in this sense of limits reached that the Abstract Expressionism of the late '40s can be taken as the *ne plus ultra* of painting as an effective form capable of operating both for and against bourgeois culture in any way that might actually matter. Since that time, Modernist art has become absorbed by the entertainment industry, has become a part of the mass culture it had previously hoped to oppose or contradict. Its cycles of refusal and affirmation have resulted ultimately in an unintended closure, an unwished-for marginalization more severe than any it suffered when it enjoyed the authority of oppositional culture. Consider the trajectories of the attempts that were made by certain artists to continue working in a traditional avant-garde mode in the early Post-Modern period, and consider the vast gulf between those artists' stated intentions and the possibilities of social reception available to their work. Take, for example, the melodrama of the Minimalist insistence on a kind of factual experience in the decidedly unreal confines of art gallery and museum; this was a vigorous denial of common sense, and it led, after a brief epiphany, to megalomania. Under the weight of accumulated misreadings, the precise humor of Donald Judd's early boxes and stacks turned to the sour militancy of his Marfa complex, in Texas. Richard Serra's desire to reduce art practice to a list of nameable procedures and materials, in order to dispel esthetic mystifications, hardened, in the face of public dispute, into an exclusive program that would simply banish all contradictory discourse. Or think of the deliberate absurdity of much Conceptualism, presenting an odd assortment of slogans and cryptic notations, an array of isolated and often silly gestures, as if they had some profound bearing on the authentic practice of philosophy or politics. Indeed, a great deal of this work grew out of the same, rather incoherent idealism that fueled the revolts of 1968, and, like those, remained doomed to limited success before being absorbed into the mass culture as a media sideshow. Temporarily convincing within the confines of the art world, the work achieved no more than notoriety in the culture at large.

Distinct from these attempts to continue a Modernist tradition of the avant-garde, and operating under the logic of a willed insincerity, pseudo avant-gardists, attempting to get away from painting, sculpture, and all that they stood for, programmatically mined the mass-entertainment business for material as assiduously as the media returned the favor. Andy Warhol's '60s work is exemplary—the mechanically reproduced pop idols and fetishes, the deadpan appropriation of the mechanisms of stardom, the hands-off manipulation of the scandalous. Later, the language and style of the advertising industry was appropriated by many Conceptual artists, while television and popular music, especially rock, provided important models for much performance art. In an approximation of television's redefinition of the interrelationship between public and private, semi-private locations (studios, Warhol's Factory, clubs)

replaced the art gallery as the preferred site of a great deal of art activity, and provided the framework within which it was to be understood. In effect, the avant-garde was trying to reinvent itself as a convincing subculture, abandoning a pattern of behavior that had lost any useful meaning in favor of a different pattern that already existed as a type. Yet it was extraordinarily difficult to maintain this camp attitude in a critical position—it could so easily collapse into a variety of kitsch. It grew increasingly difficult to separate what we might call critical camp from its brightly lit doppelgänger, the merely fashionable period piece we can now identify in the early-'60s work of Bernard Buffet, for example, or in Warhol's since the early '70s. Success at this game required a kind of dandyism, a sustained empathy with the charm of damaged goods. This seems to have demanded the creation of a personality as a device for presenting art, as a signifier for art that could compete in luminosity with the brighter stars of public life. Indeed, personality and image became a necessary part of the work of artists as diverse as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Gilbert & George, and of course Warhol. By the beginnings of the '80s the movement of the pseudo avant-garde, the avant-garde of the poseur, had come full circle. Beuys was no longer seen as a lonely outcast but as an official guardian of German culture, and Warhol was no longer considered a seedy flake but a member of society, lionized as a portraitist. Anything seemed possible, anything fair game—which meant that art, once again, was perceived as little more than a game, a diversion.

What I am pointing to here is the emergence of a distinctly Post-Modern understanding of the world, an understanding that recognizes that the rejection of reference becomes in time just another reference. Since the late '50s, we have known it to be increasingly true that everything can be taken for its opposite, that nothing is to be trusted. By the early years of the present decade, we had become adept at decoding the euphemisms of power and privilege, but in the process we had forgotten how to talk straight. The system of avant-garde art and its criticism had become either an arcane network of tautologies and non sequiturs, false starts and bad endings accessible only to initiates, or a starry-eyed fixation on the glamour of eccentric personalities and local heroes. And the sincerity of the Modernist, the fervor of his (mostly his) moralism, not only seemed too much but could be easily adapted to the needs of the ideological status quo. If this was only recognized by a few back in the '50s, it was there for all to see in the early '80s, a period when, for example, the righteousness of a sentimental Modernist like Hilton Kramer became caked in the pieties of the Moral Majority. Which is to say that since the '50s the value of the authentic, whether it be located in the blue-chip formalism of an Anthony Caro or in the officially sanctioned avant-gardism of a Serra, had suffered a basic change and become merely lucrative, a guarantee for potential investors.

Unexpectedly, the difficult choice in this dizzying

period of Post-Modern fallout turned out to be painting. Artists as diverse as Mel Bochner, Neil Jenney, and Jack Goldstein found the logic of such a move inevitable. And a younger generation, which had watched the alternative strategies of the avant-garde and its pseudo simulacrum reduced to puritanical, pretentious insignificance, also found use in a then forbidden, unquestionably discredited medium. The putative freedom granted by Minimalism and Conceptual art had served to cloak art's continuing dependence on Greenberg's "umbilical cord of gold"; the source of the necessary money had been a mystery, guarded as closely as the other mysteries of the creative process, as closely as the cash flow in a nightclub. The strategy of returning to painting blew the disingenuous cover, once again foregrounding the conditions under which art functions. Surprisingly, it allowed for a reexamination of representation itself, another attempt to figure the limits of subjectivity. For Europeans this meant a chance to look once again at a history that had been swept away by the fortuitous coincidence of Modernism's insistence on the future, consumerism's insistence on the immediate, and shame's need for forgetfulness. It also meant a chance to transgress the pieties associated with *arte povera* and similar work. Some Americans too saw a chance to return to history (perhaps more with the intention of creating history). Others, closer in their interests to those post-conceptual artists interrogating the weird, shallow space of the media spectacle and its effect on the possibility of identity, found in painting a surprisingly fresh way to pursue that investigation.

Despite the muttered imprecations of the die-hard Modernists and the old-time avant-garde, a renewed investigation of the tentacles of representation in all its forms, respectable and not, was a good idea. And an insistence on the need to include painting and all its attendant package of style, iconography, and social status in such an investigation served to ensure that the claims of these die-hards to moral superiority were no longer entitled to special privilege. To include painting was to include everything—high and low, good and bad—in an orgiastic celebration of the bankruptcy of Western culture. The gurus of the avant-garde, the guardians of its sanctity, had been looking forward to this celebration for years. The most academic had expected the proceedings to be somber, the more politically active looked for dancing in the streets. The hippest assumed that the celebrations would come over the electronic ether, in an almost spiritual event pregnant with the hopes of a future I suppose they imagined would be financed and controlled from the new, mysterious centers of utopian power. Some of those expected to be involved included Nam June Paik, Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, and Laurie Anderson, great masters of weightless thinking, like Robert Irwin and James Turrell, were also rumored to have been invited. But the gurus always wanted to keep the proceedings clean. They did not expect the revitalized corpse of painting, which was supposed to have already dematerialized. For a good wake the body has to be dead. Besides, what with collaboration problems, distribution

problems, production costs, and other irritants, this next-to-last electronic wave of the future somehow failed to crest. Worse, the best dreams of these idealists, dreams of an expanded and maybe even a mass audience reached through the miracles of technology, turned sour with the first hints of commercial sellout—when Anderson became too staid and got easier on her music, say, or when Glass agreed to do a Cutty Sark ad. An avant-garde moment was once again turned into its simulacrum.

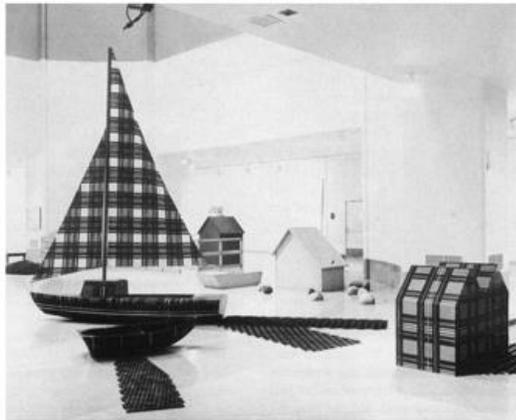


Claude Monet, *Terrace at Sainte Adresse*, 1866, oil on canvas, 38 1/2 x 51" Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

I still think that the decision to dress up the putrefying remains of painting for the wake was sound, but the distance covered between a good idea and its manifestation easily turns into a quagmire. Part of the confusion came about because a number of older painters, long obscure, thought their time had arrived, and came forward with a lot of superstitions about the curative powers of painting and how it might even be able to raise the dead (or at least revive sagging careers). Anxious for attention and reward, these aging healers sold their stories to an ever credible press, and to a few curators who were in the mood for something "new" but didn't want to make the effort to find out what was really going on. Suddenly, a lot of new talent seemed to have been around for quite a long time. Compounding this confusion was a group of younger artists who



Spread from *Artnews*, November 1983, pp. 72–73. Jennifer Bartlett, photographed by Eric Bowman. From Nan Robertson, "In the Garden with Jennifer Bartlett."



Jennifer Bartlett, "Luxembourg Garden" series (detail), 1985, mixed media. Installation view at Brooklyn Museum, 1985.

grew up on the mixed messages of the Pop artists, the Happenings, the Conceptual arts, the academic avant-garde, the Minimalists, and performance. This group needed to acknowledge a wide range of bromides about self-criticism and subversion, about using the media (any media) against themselves, but it also understood the more cynical aspects of all the high-mindedness. In short, it wanted intellectual respectability, and fun too. For example, some of these intellectual appeasers decided on the tactic of working up the personality of the painter, the tortured soul who would act the part of the bereaved, creating a sad figure the media would love until that terrible moment of truth when he or she would step forth and denounce the entire spectacle. Others, more serious, chose to focus on the inert product itself, adopting a variety of tactics to expose the misrepresentations surrounding the rhetoric of originality. Of these, neo-Expressionism, that most loosely defined style of renovated painting, was originally quite successful at drawing attention to the contradictions of art in the 20th century. As a style it foregrounded its insincerity, presenting a masquerade of reprocessed fragments of what was generally considered important in art. With urgent crudity, it made us face what had become the ruin of the vain ideal of progress. We were given a kind of index of deep emotion, sensual spontaneity, and other eternal verities of culturespeak in a clever re-presentation that above all else emphasized its identity as packaging.

The risk this art faced, often unconsciously, was that of the imperceptible slide from being a leader of fashion to being merely fashionable. Much of it quickly became little more than a stylish commodity in a situation in which, as Joseph Kosuth remarked, the market was the meaning.<sup>13</sup> At lightning speed, flirting with what became the neo-Expressionist fashion as well as with what became its bedfellow—appropriation—the young Turks of the East hyped a hyped market, forgetting that the market can never be finessed for long, and certainly not on their terms. Strategies of this sort, involving a heady mix of conceptualism and camp, only really work when carried out with sufficient negativity, which is why the most meaningful cycles of reappropriation and co-option have come so fast. The other problem is that the tactic here requires that one become a connoisseur of sorts, expert in sniffing out the changing winds of taste. Such an expert must recognize which items and attributes will acquire the correct patina of what's hot. Becoming this much of a shopper, however, inevitably entails falling victim to the entropy of the commodity. The cycles of reclamation are speeded up, reclaimed kitsch reverts to type, and the consumer is consumed. To grease the market, to ensure the love affair goes smoothly, an excess of sex appeal is applied: money, spirit, street smarts, fashion, numberless exotica, glamour. The affair has gone so well that one reads about it almost every week, certainly every month, in every publication that counts, which is to say every publication that S. I. Newhouse owns. The announcement of a forthcoming movie is eagerly awaited.

We are caught in a maelstrom of sophistry and bad faith, a mind-bending confusion of ends and means. How exactly is an ordinary passerby to tell the difference between the real artist and the opportunist, between the subversive and the charlatan? No easy task, particularly since the tactic of painting, now acknowledged, has given the green light to everyone to stop chasing grants, fellowships, and residencies and to come back to what is once again a lively art market. I think the test, and it is by no means an easy one for the passerby to perform, concerns the complexity with which the entire range of problems raised by the issue of representation is addressed. How thoughtful, how provocative, is the artist's confrontation with convention and myth? How convincingly does the artist identify within the work, its usefulness to the culture? With what kind of understanding is the work placed in the context of its presentation? In this confusing situation, many of our opinion-makers have rushed to the conclusion that it is safest to dismiss the new work that has appeared in the '80s as bad art with a bad conscience, or, and this almost amounts to the same thing, to lavish attention on the material successes of the new artists. Of the artists lucky enough to receive the media's talent scouts in their homes, precious few have been able to turn things around and return attention to the work. To succeed here a certain relentlessness is needed, a determination almost encyclopedic in its reach, like Bartlett's.

Indeed, Bartlett's ability to hold the enthusiastic attention of John Russell for close on ten years is notorious, and deservedly so, since his bracketing of her wide-ranging name-brand-shopping in the intellectual and artistic realms with his perfectly graceful, weightless prose highlights the elegance with which she is able to intoxicate the critical sensibilities of her audience. In a reprise of the early Impressionists' desire to address the rootless nature of life in a consumer society whose only real freedom is an officially sanctioned leisure, Bartlett catalogues the necessities—cabins, swimming pools, gardens, boats—of pleasure in a society that values time off to such an extent that it has enforced full-time leisure on a greater number of people than at any point since the Depression. Where the Impressionists depicted the activities of leisure in a bright and breezy way, Bartlett depicts its accoutrements in an equally bright and breezy way. And just as the Impressionists presented themselves as resident experts, moving out to the new developments at Argenteuil the better to know their subject, Bartlett, in a stunning crescendo of gloriously choreographed prose, mainly last spring, has been presented as the ultimate consumer expert, shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic on board the Concorde the better to enjoy and understand the fruits of both the Old and New Worlds.

Jennifer Bartlett began her life in Long Beach, California, where she decided at the age of five that she would be an artist—and soon thereafter, that she would be a genius. [Nan Robertson, *Artnews*, 1983<sup>11</sup>]

Never doctrinaire in feminist matters, Bartlett does not see

why she should do without a husband who is a film star. She met Mathieu Carrière at a New York dinner party in 1980 (it was one of the few dinner parties she went to that season), and they were married in 1983. [Calvin Tomkins, *The New Yorker*, 1985<sup>12</sup>]

"Part of [Alvar] Aalto's genius is that his early pieces go with pieces he designed thirty years later," says Jennifer. In a dramatic version of one-stop shopping, she and Mathieu sat in their Helsinki hotel room and improvised situations in the apartment so they could order everything they needed at once. The order was just about right, except that dinners chez Carrière are not lit by candles because Jennifer could not find candleholders she liked. And they underbought by a hair: "I wish I'd gotten twenty-four cups instead of twelve," says Jennifer. [Doris Saatchi, *House & Garden*, 1985<sup>16</sup>]

Movie stars come to visit while Jennifer works in the studio, a housekeeper cooks dinner while Jennifer apologises in California French for the burgeoning numbers at table. There is no actress glamorous enough to play Jennifer Bartlett. [Joan Juliet Buck, *Vanity Fair*, 1985<sup>17</sup>]

By exposing herself so relentlessly to the adoring gaze of the publicity machine, Bartlett sets herself up as a rather easy target. The shamelessness of her ambition is reflected all too clearly in the breathless accounts of her admirers. It is true, to a degree, that people cannot be held accountable for what is written about them, but only to a degree. It is also true that in a very real sense, an artist today depends on his or her work being included in the public discourse of the cultural press, but there is a much larger problem here, a problem of representation, and of the artist's consciousness of the ever closing space between the consumer and the consumed. As that space of difference collapses, property relations alter, and the idea of freedom becomes a bitter joke.

Given this constellation, the significance of David Salle's role as melancholy celebrant of the commodity becomes clear. By now we realize that his art includes both his paintings and the construction of a legend around them. This legend remains deliberately vague, something of a mystification. The artist's public statements on his work tend to be Delphic, cloaked in language that obscures the mundane processes by which he paints. But unless we are to consider the origin of these relics to be somehow immaculate, we must speculate on just how Salle gets his hands dirty. Working with the crude shadows cast on the canvas by the opaque projector, he builds conundrums of density through the simple manipulation of repetition. Images spawn images in an explosion of references that cancel each other out, clouding sense in heavy portent. Salle has denied that his work is a commentary on popular culture, saying that his subjects—comedy and pornography—are important to him not as social commentary but "in their own mechanistic ways ... in a detached way."<sup>18</sup> Yet no fetishist really cares about the objects of his desire; it is always the mechanism around the object that provides the charge, and it is a mechanism of mass culture that informs Salle's work. Which is to say that his work is about pornography as a special case within mass culture, the case of ocu-

lar ownership. Salle records a world so stupefied by the narcotic of its own delusory gaze that it fails to understand that it has nothing actual in its grasp. Amid seeming abundance, there is no real choice, only a choice of phantasms.

The world described in Salle's work is a jaded one, rife with a sluggish melancholy. The steady leaching of meaning from objects and images breeds an enervating uncertainty. A spatial arrangement of reified signs unfolds as an unintelligible allegory. Artist and viewer alike stumble through a maze of false clues and incomplete riddles, coming on the same viewless arrangements and empty repetitions in the search for a coherent identity. Signs and props are ritually shuffled like so many commodities on the floor of a department store of the imagination, with a compulsive repetition that offers a dwindling satisfaction. In photographs of Salle's home we can see how the artist, beset by the tiresome melancholia of intelligence, has constructed a world that is an equivalent of his paintings. In both, he collects and displays a series of objects become image, devoid of the comforts of use. They are mere tokens of desire. This reduction of the basic accommodations of life to the locus of an ascetic ritual, captured particularly well in the photographs of Salle's loft taken by Robert Mapplethorpe, that connoisseur of the fetish,<sup>19</sup> produces a joyless perfection. This is a life of caged desire, continually feeding itself a fantasy of fulfillment that cannot be achieved because it has been abstracted to the realm of the purely optical, beyond the reach of the senses or intellect.

In these empty rooms, Salle is the paradigmatic artist of the transavant-garde, consummately acute in identifying the hopeless contradiction of wanting and loathing material success. This situation can be understood in something like class terms—the age-old question of the artist's status, questioned once again in our period, when the divinity of genius has been unmasked as a hoax. This is the source of the effectiveness of yet another photograph of Salle, here seated in his butterfly chair in front of a painting that prominently features the picture of a tired-looking worker at rest.<sup>20</sup> The two figures share an identification of sorts, an equivalence of alienation. Both Salle and the worker are slumped forward, and both stare ahead, looking somewhat dazed, or bewildered. Salle wears what looks like a Rolex watch; two diamond rings are painted over the worker's arms. Both men appear alienated by the effects of capital, and both continue to work for it, unwilling to admit the possibility of doing otherwise, lest their comfort, or lack of it, be threatened. Both are trapped by the spell of the commodity. Under the delusory influence of free choice, both are reduced to addressing the world with the brooding gaze of a silent withdrawal. Salle exemplifies pseudo avant-gardism at its best, a thorough deconstruction of the old avant-garde claim to stand outside society by demonstrating its palpable ties to fashion and to the market, and to underline art's deplorable history of subservience to entrenched power. The structural brilliance of his work, which so ably fulfills Robert Rauschenberg's oft-quoted desire

to act in the gap between life and art, rests in its ability to deny such a gap. In the best of Salle's work we are shown both life and art reduced, through the inexorable workings of consumer society, to being empty shells of an illusion.

In the early '30s, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz pioneered the study of the legends and myths that surround the image of the artist.<sup>21</sup> They discovered that in the relatively brief periods in history when individual artists have put their name to their work, a number of motifs in the stories told about artists have remained quite stable, despite changing social conditions. Kris and Kurz drew particular attention to two of these motifs. One concerns the ability of the artist to create illusions that deceive even his fellow artists, an image in which the artist, half god, half jester, is able to create life, or at least the appearance of life. The second concerns the discovery of a young, unknown, unschooled artist by an older artist who recognizes talent and offers to nurture it, only to be soon eclipsed by the ability and sudden fame of the protégé. To these might be added the often stated notion that men of talent and genius are particularly susceptible to the afflictions of melancholy, which conspires to disable their productivity, making their best efforts appear lifeless and uninteresting in their own eyes.<sup>22</sup>

In the West, after a short spell of individual notoriety in the Greece of the fifth century BC, artists were essentially incognito until the end of the Middle Ages. And in those periods when art was primarily used for ritual and magic, the artist's social position was that of the craftsman, a producer of certain kinds of tool. The formal and intellectual concerns of medieval art needed no individual artists to be singled out for fame: the glory of what was achieved was God's, not man's. But in a number of Italian city states in the 14th century some men began to think otherwise, to think that the amassing of personal fortunes might be a higher glory than any hitherto known. As these first stirrings took shape, the attributes of the divine that art once existed to reveal were gradually appropriated by the art's makers. A desire to identify and discuss individual artists was a logical development; it appeared only natural to follow the lead of the intellectuals of the Renaissance, the men who were providing the building blocks for the infant ideology of capitalism. The steady progression of half-divine, half-mad geniuses that resulted can be understood as culminating in the expressionist movements of the first half of this century, and achieving a tragicomic reprise in current neo-Expressionism.

Between the two expressionisms, the 20th century saw a rise of intellectualism in art practice—in Dada, Constructivism, Minimalism, Conceptualism. The earlier manifestations can be linked to the development of mass politics, while the later have more to do with mass culture. The difference is huge. The Dadaists and Constructivists could declare the death of painting, could attack the idea of the individual genius, in the name of a genuinely revolutionary movement, a mass movement away from bourgeois capitalism. To them the cult of genius, the



Spread from *House & Garden*, February 1985, pp. 134–36. Living room of David Salle's loft, photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe. From Martin Filler, "Tribeca Textures"



Page from *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, February 10, 1985, p. 22. David Salle, photographed by Lizze Himmel. From Cathleen McGuigan, "New Art, New Money"



Georges Braque in his studio, Paris, 1911.

fascination with individual achievement, was simply an ideological trapping of bourgeois culture. But the position of artists from the '60s onward, and their refusal of authorship, are quite different. The mass movements powered from the lower classes have so far failed, and a strengthened capitalist system has found the technological means to impose a mass culture from above, a mass culture of commodity and spectacle. Today, anonymity is an alienating factor rather than a liberating one, and belief in the worth of the individual is not only an ideological need of capitalism, but also a need with real and growing social validity, as the mass fixation of culture weakens the ability of a neutral person to perceive him- or herself acting or believing in an individual way.

One answer to the alienation of the individual is the solace of religion, and the unprecedented growth of fundamentalist sects and bizarre cults provides more evidence of the withering of our culture before the militarized state. It may be folly to suppose that the decay can be halted by any artist short of an embalmer, but some must take action no matter how hopelessly, or how absurdly. Others find satisfaction in ministering souls, an idea so campy that their intentions must always be in doubt, which provides perfect cover should the need arise. Take the case of Georg Baselitz. Here's a man who has cleverly built a record as a social delinquent in both Germanies: according to an article in the *New York Times*, he was expelled from East Berlin for "social and political immaturity," and in West Berlin, in 1963, a public prosecutor found his paintings dangerous enough to confiscate. In 1975 he bought himself a castle that had once been an abbey, and later had himself photographed, with full beard and shaved head, kneeling in front of his work; this image was reproduced in the pages of the same article, by Russell, and entitled "The New European Painters."<sup>23</sup> (Baselitz, by the way, has been working for at least a quarter of a century.) What brilliant self-promotion, cleverly functioning as a parody of the artist-genius genre, with its mysteries of temporal and spiritual power. Here indeed must be the new spirit in painting, the sign of renewed faith, renewed hope. Other artists have essayed variants on this sacred theme, recalling us to the majesty of the mission of art. Francesco Clemente affects a sainted look; elegantly haggard, he shows himself hovering alone in empty rooms, communing with caged birds. Longo declares himself a priest or guardian of culture, an apostle of a monumental future much like that first envisioned by Albert Speer and Leni Riefenstahl. Sandro Chia is content to offer his faith as the only necessary justification. All these claims, and others like them, are campy, but limited in their rewards. Not enough is made of them, and the artwork they embellish somehow fails to rise to the occasion. To the degree that it is scatological, Clemente's work at least engages the issue of the sacred, but the rest steers clear of even the appearance of the religious.

Recognizing that the declaration of a renewed faith in painting could use a sacrificial child to enliven it, and further recognizing that if he were to

officiate, some of the spilled blood might revive his own standing, Warhol found a miracle in Basquiat. Here was a young artist who already had mythic status, street-smart with the touch of a natural, a graffitiist who had attempted to free himself from the early burnout of the street artist by publicly killing off his tag, an untutored talent who had been captured by rapacious art-dealers and forced to work and work until he had finally run away, a rebel looking for the security of an understanding surrogate father. Warhol realised that Basquiat, as a wild child in an expensive suit, could provide a much more unsettling image of the uses of money and leisure than either the older artist's lost superstars or the relatively accessible decadence of Studio 54.



Left: Yves Klein, *Saut dans le Vide (Leap into the void)*, 1960, performance view in Fontenay-aux-Roses, Paris. Photo: Harry Shunk.  
Right: Julian Schnabel in announcement for exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery, April 4–May 7 1981.



With judicious planning he could get in on the act as mentor and sparring partner, given new vampiric purpose by their collaborative work. Warhol has survived so long as an important cultural figure because, lacking faith, he knows how to manipulate the need for idolatry. With cynical detachment, he has developed an understanding of the mechanisms involved, and learned to manipulate them. The resulting work is frightful, a merciless reflection of a zombie culture mesmerized by an endless procession of hollow simulacra of vitality. It may also be truthful, but its truth is too much to bear, because it does not pretend to offer hope.

"There's a moment when you understand what complete non-existence is about and it's horrifying. No matter how rich you get, it's never going to change this terminal case of existence that we have" [Schnabel interviewed by Elizabeth Venant, *Los Angeles Times*, 1985]<sup>24</sup>

As we approach the year 2000, millenarian thinking has colored most discussions of the fate of our culture. As such thinking develops, we need another,

more melodramatic way to deal with the problem reflected in the icy surface of Warhol's work. We need to believe in miracles. And this, the accomplishment of Julian Schnabel, is the invention of a character of mythic dimensions. Divinely inspired, Schnabel is apparently able to bring painting back to life by assaulting it with the piteous terror of shameless laughter. The cruel joke that he plays on the high-minded guardians of our irretrievably bogus culture is that they sing their hallelujahs to, or cast their stones at, the new-found savior just as he buries the body of painting ever deeper within the consumptive fabric of the commodity. If Salle chooses to key his attack to the pathos of hollow desire, the more extremist Schnabel pulls out all the stops, and aims for a triumph of bathos.

The paintings themselves, with the fragmented archeology of their surfaces, provide a reasonably convincing simulation of animation, like the heaving and seething of paint-encrusted polystyrene that scares us into believing in all sorts of monsters risen from the dead when we go to the movies. But beyond the paintings Schnabel uses a full orchestration of rumor, hype, and lots of press—good and bad, serious and frivolous—to put in place a complex of interweaving references to mythic structure. Schnabel's ambitions are Promethean; he is willing to take the considerable spiritual risks of bourgeois living to bring a spark of life back to a moribund culture. To emphasize the point, an early exhibition announcement has him striking a pose as a modern Daedalus, another Yves Klein soaring into the firmament.<sup>23</sup> Just as the mythic forebears of Greek art were credited with the ability to bring material to life, so we are to see Schnabel return meaning to a lifeless art history and a deadly mass culture. And, as a side-show, we see in the pages of *Vogue* his wife, Jacqueline, given momentary access to the symbolic order as his Galatea.<sup>26</sup> To ensure the point is taken, Schnabel makes plenty of other references relating to more popular manifestations of the same myths. For example, all these pictures of him stripped to the waist, working, playing, and posing on the beach, evoke near-subliminal recollections of those last champions of the modern, Picasso and Pollock.<sup>27</sup> This whole litany is then made strange by the rather Brechtian device of boldly talking about life in terms of money and the joys of wealth, instead of discussing esthetics or some other branch of philosophy.

I have two little girls and a beautiful and intelligent wife,  
people are buying my paintings,  
people are writing about me: people will write about  
anything—  
people are writing about people buying my paintings.  
I can go where I want,  
eat whatever I like, make a pig of myself—and will continue  
to do so as long as I've got the money.  
As you all must know by now  
I am a "success" (conditionally) [Julian Schnabel, *Artforum*,  
1984<sup>28</sup>]

Schnabel's rignarole is impeccable in its relentless cataloguing of the attributes that have nourished the myth of genius as it has so happily served the

ideology of capital. Rumors of cartels, of price-rigging, of inflationary demands and back-room deals, all add spice to a very public display of grandiose expenditure<sup>29</sup> that conspires to return our attention to the mythic tropes that sound so deep and truthful but work best as grease for the market. In other words, Schnabel brings us back, through the shock of contrast, to the modern myth that artists must starve in order to create, that dreadful lie of deferred hopes that perennially keeps the likes of Harold Shapinsky in poor obscurity.<sup>30</sup> All this noise baffles the experts, thus making Schnabel's ploy the perfect sting. His work demonstrates, less ambiguously than the rest of us dare, the hopelessness of seeking meaning within the terms of the marketplace. (Says Julian: "The world is so fickle that success today is as stable as a saltcellar in the middle of a buffalo stampede. Success? I question it."<sup>31</sup>) And, at the same time, he makes a huge killing in that marketplace. No wonder he even fools some of his fellow artists into believing that they could seek a new authenticity by imitating him.

An artistic moment has passed. It is not that the phenomenon known as Neo-Expressionism is dead, or that the artists identified with it are no longer the subject of intense interest and debate. But the fire that was lighted by those European and American artists whose bold, large-scale, usually painted, figurative works burst into prominence around 1980 with a flair and sweep that seemed to make everything possible is now down to a glow. Together, it is unlikely that they will receive the same kind of attention again. [Michael Brenson, *The New York Times*, 1986<sup>32</sup>]

As I finish this essay the *New York Times* has decided to wrap up the chapter on neo-Expressionism. In its polite way, it does not want to say that the artists of the last five years—Salle, Schnabel, Eric Fischl, Longo, Anselm Kiefer, Baselitz, Markus Lüpertz, Enzo Cucchi, Chia, Clemente, Cindy Sherman, Jörg Immendorf, and A. R. Penck are those specially noted—are washed up, but it indicates a certain ennui, a desire for some new playthings. The issues lying beneath their work have not only been spurned but declared virtually DOA. For that is the problem—they have arrived. The artists listed—interestingly, all under the tag of neo-Expressionism—are subject to comprehensive museum surveys, and many have monographs recounting their triumphs already published. Their excesses are no longer fascinating because they can no longer be seen as naughty children. They are now part of the establishment, and even the *Times* knows how boring that can be. The best were hoping to celebrate the final burial rites of a moribund culture; instead, they have arrived at the museum, finding that they are the ones to be entombed or offered up as a sacrifice so that the old cadaver might once again look fresh.

These are difficult times for artists with the ambition of reformulating the cultural identity of the society. The idea of an avant-garde of any kind is clearly no longer useful, with even the black humor of pseudo avant-garde strategies turning to ashes. There is a need to rethink the purpose of art, its value in noncash terms. Old definitions are worn thin,

new definitions not yet formulated. Do we want art simply to become decor for junk-bond capitalism, or a more useful response to a new age in which that capitalism seems ever more aggressively defensive as it becomes more deeply indebted?

Artists born in the USA will have to learn how to operate in a world of diminished horizons and limited hope—to learn, perhaps, from the experience of many Europeans who already have some practice with the constraints of marginalization, or from the similar experience of cultural minorities in this country. They already know what it is to tolerate an occupation by militarized capital. They already know what it is to see the signs of their difference, their cultural identity, transformed into so many cute highlights for the tourism industry. European artists have long experience of seeing their work handsomely supported by a system of local museums and *kunsthallen* that packages them as light entertainment for lunchtime crowds. They have seen how demoralizing that is. Let us hope we can figure some better way to represent our dreams, or we will continue to see them turn nightmarish. □

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1. Catherine McGowan, "New Art: New Money," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 10 1985, pp. 23, 20, and 74 respectively.
2. See also Margate's article "Composite Drawings" in *Real Life Magazine* (of which she is an editor), #13, Autumn 1984, p. 2.
3. For a useful approach to this material see Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin, eds., *Modernism and Modernity* (Hulds, Cal., Press of the New School College of Art and Design, 1983).
4. Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art," *The Marxist Quarterly* 1, January 1937.
5. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* vol. 6 no. 3, Fall 1939. Reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p. 8.
6. See Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. First published in 1852 and more recently available in New York, International Publishers, 1963.
7. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*. London: NLB, 1973.
8. See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals*. London: Hutchinson, 1976.
9. See Crow, op. cit.
10. Camille Pissarro, *Letters to His Son Lucien*, ed. John Rewald. Manhattan: NY: Paul F. Appel, 1943. The passage occurs in a letter written on January 9 1887.
11. See Stuart Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1960.
12. Theodor W. Adorno, "Comments," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gerhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. New York: Urizen Books, 1978.
13. Joseph Kosuth, "Necrophilia non Anonim," *Artforum* vol. XX no. 9, May 1982, pp. 99-63.
14. Nan Robertson, "In the Garden with Jennifer Bartlett," *Artforum* vol. 82 no. 9, November 1983, p. 72.
15. Calvin Tomkins, "Proddas (Jennifer Bartlett)," *The New Yorker*, April 15 1983, p. 68.
16. Denis Sautch, "Max Gordon's design for the Paris atelier of Jennifer Bartlett and actor/writer Mathieu Carrière," *House & Garden* vol. 157 no. 5, May 1983, p. 233.
17. Joan Juliet Buck, "Brushing Up," *Vanity Fair* vol. 48 no. 4, April 1983, p. 107.
18. Quoted in Robert Pincus-Witten, "Interview with David Salle," *Flash Art* no. 123, Summer 1985, p. 35.
19. Reproduced in Martin Filler, "Tibeca Textures," *House & Garden* vol. 157 no. 2, February 1985, pp. 129-35.
20. Reproduced in McGowan, op. cit., p. 22.
21. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Originally published in German, in 1934.
22. See Rudolf and Margit Wittkower, *How Under Saturn*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963.
23. John Russell, "The New European Painters," *New York Times Magazine*, April 28 1981.
24. Elizabeth Vincent, "Rebel Expressions," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28 1985, p. 7.
25. The announcement for Schnabel's show at the Mary Boone Gallery, New York, April 4-May 7 1986.
26. Andie Leon Talley, "Burton of the Artist's Wife: Jacqueline Schnabel," *Vogue* vol. 175 no. 3, March 1985, p. 563.
27. Examples can be found in the catalogue for the show "Julian Schnabel" at the Tate Gallery, London, in 1982, in *Unfaded*. New York: Pelfant Press, 1984, in *Artforum* vol. 22 no. 6, February 1984, and others. See also my short essay "Where's the Beef?" *262* no. 10 Spring 1984.
28. Julian Schnabel, "The Parents and the Doctors," *Artforum* vol. 22 no. 6, February 1984, p. 57.
29. See Denis Sautch, "An Artist's Life, 1985," *House & Garden* vol. 157 no. 7, July 1985.
30. See Lawrence Weschler, "A Reporter at Large: (Harold Shapinsky)," *The New Yorker*, December 16 1985.
31. Talley, op. cit., p. 560.
32. Michael Brenson, "Is Neo-Expressionism an Idea Whose Time Has Passed?" *New York Times*, January 5 1986, Section 2, p. 1.