

Millennial Triptych: Three Views Of The Post-Contemporary Future

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Art 385W

4-25-2006

Mega-Paper #3

2. It's hard being an outsider artist. I mean, one does it for the love of art, or to communicate with oneself through an "inner theatre" or dialogue, or simply for survival. A "true" outsider artist is (mostly) uneducated in art (at least not at an undergraduate level or higher), and they don't expect recognition for their work or to even show their creations to others. They are a sub-culture of people with mental, physical, social, psychological, etc. disabilities who create art in solitude or near-solitude in order to deal with everyday life. They are an important "artistic minority," and along with most other identity-political groups enjoy an increased voice and role in contemporary artistic theory. They are a disenfranchised group who first gained public art-world recognition through Jean Dubuffet's promotion of the *art brut* style of painting in the 1950s. During the 1990s, outsider artists finally began to gain recognition and praise for their works, whether they wanted it or not. Contemporary artistic theory is a powerful amplification tool

for the often unheard or ignored voice of the outsider artist.

Modernism shut the outsider artist out of the artistic picture because of the era's elitist and exclusivist nature, dedication to formalism, critical concerns, and elevation of the economic stature of the art market. The art world at Modernism's height in the 1950s was very centralized. The cultural center of the United States was New York City, and Paris, France and Berlin, Germany were two examples of artistic "ground zeroes" in Europe. Outsider artists, however, tended to come from literally all over, but especially from rural areas. Even established artists with home bases other than the Big Apple (or some other major East Coast city) or the City of Lights couldn't get a fair shake in the modern art world, much less unknown "social recluses" with no connections who lived in tiny towns in rural Southern areas! Even if outsider artists would have become known in major art circles, their untrained and often representational work would not have been accepted for recognition over the abstract-formalist experiments of well-connected Expressionist artists with MFAs who studied under modern art legends and hung out in the hippest NYC coffeehouses with all the other creative greats of the period. Most would have been laughed out of town unless they happened to make the acquaintance of Dubuffet or other outsiders, which would have been difficult. Critics of the period like Clement Greenberg or Harold

Rosenberg stressed the indispensability of formal education and intellectual thrust in the making of meaningful art, as well as being leading members of the Art Snob's circle in New York. Also, the modern art market was poised to explode economically as artists like Jackson Pollock (in Life Magazine) became "worldwide celebrities" of sorts, and the increased interest of and exposure to the rich and powerful cultural elite made sure that Abstract Expressionist painting remained a precious and lucrative business. Economic (and geographic) "outsiders" were not welcome, never mind actual outsider artists.

However, in the age of postmodern/contemporary artistic concerns, the art of outsiders has an important voice and place alongside the art of the educated and socially-connected. Postmodern theory has allowed for the entry of so-called "low" art (like Pop Art or image appropriation) into the artistic pantheon. History, instead of something to be ignored or even loathed in the creation of cutting-edge art, became a central theme in lieu of elitist formalist or universalist ideas. As a result, representation became "cool" again, and art that expressed sociopolitical concerns and identities became essential over art that focused on the "inner world" and vision of the individual artist. Although outsider artists do create art from an "inner world" of sorts (or at least according to an "inner theatre" they play out in their heads), they

were primarily seen as a culturally-disenfranchised group that need representation (or at least recognition) in the extremely-pluralistic art-world of the “po-mo” Nineties.

Art museums and galleries began to dedicate many shows exclusively to the work of outsider or folk artists, and reclusive creators such as Henry Darger and the Reverend Howard Finster became well-known to the cultural denizens of New York and other cities. There was even an exhibition of outsider art at the Durango Art Center last year, which included local as well as nationally-known outsider voices. The extreme diversity of postmodern art led to the creation of cultural centers all over the United States and world, even in relatively rural areas, bringing major art institutions closer to outsiders’ homes. Thanks to contemporary art theory, outsider artists finally achieved some recognition of their “hidden” talents and the facts of their existence in the social realm. The world finally acknowledges the importance of these currently-labeled “folk” artists in the production of global culture, which might make things easier for these shy *artistes* in the future, or possibly rob them of their autonomy.

3. Art manifestos are a scarce and interesting thing in this day and age. The manifesto is a product of 19th and 20th Century political and artistic thought, and is rarely if ever used in the contemporary, hyper-pluralistic 21st

Century. The idea of an anti-manifesto fits this era more comfortably because negation can be a form of deconstruction. Because this author (under the pseudonym of peetyL) has already created a detailed manifesto of his own “Outercore movement” on the Internet titled “Outercore Blogifest0,” this anti-manifesto will draw directly from many of those ideas, but stated here in the form of negatives. The author believes that the Post-Modern era ended around 1991, and the world is now situated in the Post-Post-Modern age. This is just a (hopefully short) transitional period before transferring into what is designated here as the “After-Modern” age. The main concepts of this

After-Modern Anti-Manifesto are:

- 1) Art that situates itself far from mainstream culture should not be considered “avant-garde” or “underground” art, nor should it be considered the art of “outsiders.” The true location of art should be somewhere in-between: a mix of the individuality, autonomy, lack of technical skill, and eccentricity (plus solitude when needed) of the outsider artist with the edge, self-consciousness, desire for recognition, and contemporary art knowledge of the underground artist.
- 2) Art should not serve to advance nor satisfy the achievements and ideals of an entire creative movement, nor culture itself, nor society or any other universal ideology. Only the needs, desires, imagination and recognition of the

individual artist should be served. It is a “movement” purely “of the individual, by the individual, and for the individual.”

3) Art should not strive to be “modernist.” Modernity was a great “lie” that lauded the romantic individual in battle against the world, but only if they were part of an exclusive group of educated and intellectual artists who ultimately spiritually-strove for truths which paralleled the universal ideology which enslaved their minds.

4) Art should not strive to be “post-modernist” either. Post-Modernity was a great “conspiracy” between the intellect and the ideology of the modern age, which stated that all ideas should be deconstructed so that humanity would be truly free; people would be in control of ideas instead of vice versa. These included ideas of the universal as well as the individual. However, power could not be taken away from the universal ideas because they were not simply ideas or textual constructions but **CONTROLLING IDEOLOGIES** kept powerful by belief. This left them all-powerful over the individual.

5) Art should not be a tool of anti-individualism like everything else: it should be the primary weapon against it. Post-modernist thought strips power from individuals because it calls for the “death of the author” and the denial of the existence of individuality. A person is only a cultural and linguistic construct to be taken apart. Therefore, post-modern thought further weakens the

individual and strengthens universal ideology through robbing a being of their ability to fight using their autonomous creativity. The individual feels more powerless, and adheres to belief more strongly in order to physically, mentally, and psychologically survive. This also strengthens ideology. All that's left is surface social-identity politics. Art must end this. Art should not be for the absolute universalist ideology in any way, shape, or form.

6) Art should not bring back concepts such as craft, realism, illusion, and representation in its borrowing from the past: images only should be borrowed, not past ideologies and standards of art. This means no Stuckism (a 1990s-2000s British underground art movement that seeks a “return to figurative art with ideas”) and no ARC (the Art Renewal Center, an organization dedicated to returning art to the “realist splendor” of 18th and 19th Century art), to give two specific examples. Post-Modernity has caused widespread reactionism in the art-world, and has made it devoid of its progressive characteristics and intent. Art can't move forward if it's moving back.

7) Art should not stop in its breakdown of the fundamental concepts upon which it is based. This means the modernist process of whittling art down to its most basic elements should continue, and not just reach an end with Conceptual art. Modern art rid itself of the “time-honored” elements of craft,

realism, illusion, and representation to arrive at abstract art. Post-Modern art and beyond should continue to remove elements. The first idea to go in the Post-Post-Modern era should be that of IDEOLOGY. This should happen before or through the abolition of the following: technique, talent, skill, style, presentation, and execution. Then, in the subsequent After-Modern age, the artistic ideas to go should be emotion, reason, meaning, and finally IDEAS altogether.

8) There should be no idea of “good” or “bad” in art. This is not to say that art should have NO standards, or just simply low standards, or should only try to be as bad as possible (a “nihilistic” standard). Art should be based on an “individualistic” standard. Nihilism should only serve to reinforce the individuality of the artist while simultaneously destroying universal ideology.

9) Art should not be thought of as being only a small part of the life of the world, or just considered a hobby or Grade Z profession. Art forming culture should be the “pseudo-structure” the world is based on, replacing society and ideology. In reality, identity politics seek to unite art and life in the name of a group-based sub-level of universal ideology. An individual’s unique creative contribution combined with those of others forms culture: a loose confederation of active, self-contained imaginations forming the world’s artistic experience.

10) Art is not a subjective or an objective experience. Viewing art objectively means judging it according to universal ideology (see particularly numbers 2 and 8 above). Subjectivity, however, is really just the inverse of objectivity. Objectivity is viewed as judging something individual in terms of a universal standard, while subjectivity is judging something universal in terms of an individual standard. However, the individual standard is formed by the universal also! “Subjectivity” means exactly what its root word means: an individual view “subject” to universal scrutiny as much as it is formed by it! “Objectivity” is considered to be the third party to subjectivity and objectivity. It is a little bit of both worlds, yet really neither one of them. Objectivity is a start, but I think the true viewing point of art is an individual, unique, and completely-autonomous one.

11) Art is not a learned skill; it is an intuitive idea. A conceptual thrust for art is important, where the idea itself takes precedence over its execution. But getting beyond ideas into the realm of individualist nihilism or “acceptability” is paramount for the advancement of art in this new century and beyond.

Final Essay Question

The art-world of the contemporary era is one of infinite diversity and range of voices. Three distinct artistic minds are represented in this show. The first is a post-modern (or, in his case, actually “ultra-modern”) unskilled anti-artist who is actually a scientist and college professor in mathematics. The second is another anti-artist who is actually a commodities trader. He hires people to make his commercial objects for him. The third is an anti-artist who is actually a musician, and he makes images of people defecating and installations of stuffed animals having sex and giving birth. There has never been an exhibition with so few artists which has been as simultaneously modernist and contemporary as this one. It almost seems to hearken to a future era where the modern and post-modern and post-post-modern will synthesize and negate themselves. This exhibit can be considered the opening salvo for this new age of post-artistic creation as well as a brief-but-thorough theoretical retrospective of the past 100 years of art and culture. Taken together, these three contemporary miscreants represent the visual *coup d’etat* to end all visual coups. This is the **After-Modern Debutantes Exhibition Spectacular**.

The first artist on the docket is a complete-unknown Romanian by the name of Dr. Florentin Smarandache. By his own admission, he is not an artist

but a mathematician/computer programmer/'neutrosopher'/science professor at the University of New Mexico in Gallup. An extremely-intelligent "Renaissance"-type of man, he was refused an exit visa by Nicolae Ceausescu to attend a seminar on "internal coordinate mechanics" in Berkeley, California in 1986. Fleeing the fascist-communist regime in disgust in 1988, he spent two years in a Turkish refugee camp where he became further obsessed with math and science and honed his unique anti-artistic "skills" and ideas. He worked for Honeywell Computers in Phoenix, Arizona from 1990-95. He obtained a doctorate in mathematics from the State University of Chisinau in Moldova in 1997. Always the contrarian, he is the creator of Paradoxism, a theory which states that the opposite of an idea is the real truth. Although this guy may not seem like much of an artist, he is one of the most innovative art-theorists of the 1990s and maybe even of this whole contemporary era. In the '90s, he created the "ultra-modernist" theory and movement of "oUTER-aRT."

oUTER-aRT as stated in Smarandache's "Manifesto and Anti-Manifesto of oUTER-aRT" is a movement that seeks to make art that is "as ugly as possible, as wrong as possible, or as bad as possible...and, generally speaking, as impossible as possible!" (ellipsis Smarandache's) ¹ oUTER-aRT is a movement for those who have no talent or skill for art, and even for those

who HATE art! Although this may sound easy, it is “paradoxically” extremely difficult. One may be trying to create art that is bad, but the “modern art experts” might find it genius because the piece may accidentally work well formally. This will defeat the purpose of oUTER-aRT. One must know what it is that works in art so art which does not work can be made by doing the opposite. Surprisingly, the work of art by Dr. Smarandache in this exhibition is interesting and intriguing. Most of it is computer art done on recycled math and science printouts or quasi-nihilistic doodles on torn-out pages of his class lecture schedule. It is not really Found-Art because it is done intentionally for the purpose of art, but unconsciously. He doesn’t really consider himself an outsider artist, either. He states that while outsider art is done by “the insane, but consciously,” oUTER-aRT is done by “the sane, but unconsciously.”² Although Minimalism and Conceptualism were previously the farthest that modernism dared to go, I think Florentin’s ultra-modern post-movement sets new distance records in abstraction.

Jeff Koons is a handsome yuppie commodities trader-turned-artist who has been a shining-yet-controversial star in American art since the 1980s. His art can either make one laugh until their side hurts or red in the face with anger. He basically hires builders and artisans to construct his wacky creations, which are then treated and displayed as commercial

commodities in a very interesting and un-ironic way. He has conceived of giant silver-mylar bunny-rabbit balloons, even giant-er topiary sheepdogs, vases of flowers, photos and posters of himself in an unending array of magazine-advertisement-type situations, collages consisting of infinite amounts of appropriated images from the past half-century of commercial mass-production, and everything from Hoover vacuum cleaners and orange basketballs encased in pristine Plexiglas display containers.

Koons' work is kitsch of the highest degree, presented as a joke that the viewer either gets or doesn't get. Critic Douglas Coupland states that "... [Koons' art] causes real animosity, blazing rows. And the reason for this...stems from his work's joke-like qualities: not only do some people not 'get' it, but in not getting it they also assume...they're being made to look a fool."³ Coupland also states that Koons is the polar opposite of Andy Warhol. Warhol always stated calmly, coolly, and blankly that his work was all surface: what you see is what you get. That led people to think that his art was in reality super-meaningful and profound on a deeper level. Koons on the other hand expressed a deep and mushy love for all his creations, always with a smile on his face, and always playing loveable-but-dorky mother to his works. He has flat-out stated that all his works have a deeper level to them, which makes everyone think that they really don't.⁴ This can piss the viewer

off in a big way, or make them think he's the greatest genius the art world has ever had. In the end, his pieces remain endlessly-shallow, deeply-significant, and glowing with an intangible power all at once. The works lose their power to be simply corporate-fetish *objets d'art*, but also have no sense of the artist's touch or singular vision because they're too perfectly-crafted (and not even by him). It is neither subjective nor objective. This is a perfect segue into the "abject" work of a Detroit-based *artiste* by the name of Mike Kelley.

Mike Kelley started his art-career as a musician. He was a guitarist in the excellent proto-post-garage-punk band Destroy All monsters in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the 1970s. His art-school training would serve him well in art as well as music, however. It was an effortless transition from rock 'n' roll to poop. It was his own poop, to be exact. Kelley's work is considered "Abject art," which is art that is neither objective nor subjective. It deals with issues of disgusting bathroom humor about-the-self and also self-debasement through focus on the body and its basest functions. It is Pop Art which idolizes not Superman, Batman, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, or even Chairman Mao, but the lowly artist himself as self-esteem-less and soiled cartoon character. One who, as a cloth banner of Kelley's gleefully states, is a "PANTS SHITTER & PROUD. P.S. JERK-OFF TOO (AND I WEAR

GLASSES).”

Kelley makes drawings of people (mostly representing himself) defecating or urinating on others or the ground, scatological voids and scribbles, diagrams of the insides of himself or comic-strip characters with silly names for all of the excretory, reproductive, etc. organs and parts, outright statements debasing himself in an obscene way (like the banner), or installations and sculptures incorporating stuffed animals in suggestive poses or with dozens of other smaller toys to imply that the bigger animals gave birth to all of them. The stuffed animal sculptures explore the sentimentality towards children and childhood in opposition to their base, vaginal, and placenta-caked beginnings and to the future which will enslave them as mindless adult social automatons. Robert Storr, in his *ArtForum* article on Mike Kelley, states that “[c]ute’ packages the still incompletely formed psyche [of the child] and undifferentiated sexual body and hands it back to the unsuspecting child as a neat, unified object on which to project sanctioned fantasies that have been inscribed into its codified expressions and anatomical abbreviations and excisions...”⁵ In other words, stuffed animals represent to the child an anatomically-incorrect, fakely-happy representation of how they should be so they can be socialized properly and give in to the system smoothly and without thought when it’s their time. However, the plush toys can also

become “voodoo dolls” for “hexing adult methods of quelling juvenile anarchy and the id-driven dynamism it unleashes.”⁶ The “abject” way of presenting and viewing art can free the body and the mind to rebel in ways never before thought possible.

All three of these artists represent through their works the creative characteristics needed to move art into the deeper regions of the 21st Century. Florentin Smarandache’s work represents the truly-farthest extremes of modern art and its abstractions. Find the end of the mind, and then bash through the wall beyond the finish line. Jeff Koons’ work represents the ultimate commercial commodification of art and “artification” of the commercial commodity. Blow through the end of the “high-art and low-art” division like a monster truck soaring over and/or crashing through a row of junkyard Chevys. Mike Kelley’s work represents the obliteration of the final theoretical divide between artistic expression and rebellion and the individual artist’s body simultaneously-empowered and debased by its lowliest functions. Explode through the end of the separation between an individual and their art like a final, sudden, and violent end to the universe. These artists are all different in scope, artistic ability, theoretical prowess, choice of subject matter, medium, scientific/commercial/bodily intelligence, approach, and previous or current profession. Ultimately, they have one huge

thing in common: they all produce art that can send the creative world past modernism and post-modernism and post (times 3 or 4 or 5)-modernism into an after-post-world that is truly after-institutional, after-ideological, after-technical, and After-Modern. After that, no one person can tell what will happen next.

ENDNOTES

1 Florentin Smarandache, "A Manifesto and Anti-Manifesto: OUTER-ART," *Agonia* 23 Feb 2004, 19 Apr 2006
<<http://www.agonia.net/index.php/article/62582/print.html>> 1.

2 Smarandache 1.

3 Douglas Coupland, "Jeff Koons: Getting It," *Eyestorm* 2003, 19 Apr 2006
<http://www.eyestorm.com/feature/ED2n_article.asp?article_id=202> 1.

4 Coupland 2.

5 Robert Storr, "What's Not To Like? Robert Storr on Mike Kelley," *ArtForum* Oct 2004 265.

6 Storr 265.

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<http://www.eyestorm.com/feature/ED2n_article.asp?article_id=202>: 3 pgs.

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<<http://www.agonia.net/index.php/article/62582/print.html>>: 6 pgs.

Storr, Robert. "What's Not To Like? Robert Storr on Mike Kelley." *ArtForum* Oct 2004: 263-65, 306.