

## Letter From an Artist in the Age of Whatever

Jorge Benitez

Dear Descendent,

How should I write to you? What can I tell you about being an artist in 2005? Should I confess my deepest secrets—tell you about my anxieties, my sex life, my frustrations, my unfulfilled dreams—in short, all the personal details that fascinate my fellow voyeurs in this era of instantaneous and incessant communications. Or should I tell you about an art world that my colleagues and I do not understand? Do people in your time wish to hear those things?

I could, of course, describe the deeper concerns of my day—the big things that fill the pages of history books. For example, my nation is at war with real and imagined enemies. We have legislation that allows the arrest and indefinite detention of a citizen without due process. Religious fanatics of all stripes want to annul the Constitution. Foreign and domestic terrorists strive to destroy our cities. The air is toxic. Fuel is scarce and increasingly expensive. New diseases threaten to grow into pandemics. Even the climate works against us.

Still, how can I share such sorrows with you when the people of my time deny their existence? You see, my dear descendent, I live in a society where even the poor are fabulously wealthy compared to the rest of humanity. All of us, rich and poor alike, gorge ourselves at a bottomless trough of goods from all over the world. We cannot live without our gadgets and the comforts they provide; and any thought that they could disappear is, well, unacceptable. We are physically, emotionally and spiritually obese. Happiness is our birthright, and by God we will have it even if it means living the rest of our lives in a drug-induced stupor that blocks out every trace of reality.

In truth, why should we face reality? More to the point, why should I, an artist, concern myself with these issues? Television tells me that intelligence, articulateness, wit and knowledge are unattractive traits. I enjoy swimming in a cesspool of youthful sexiness where the very thought of aging, much less being mature, is a social crime. But please don't think that I have fallen for a philistine popular culture. Oh, no, I hear the same message from the highest cultural peaks; and I believe it. I wish you could hear it. It is cool, hip and nonchalant—an insistent yet barely audible whisper that conveys that marvelous ennui unique to those who have everything and for whom depth is an artless bore. It's truly beautiful.

Please don't think from my tone that I disapprove. I too strive to be a hipster. Yes indeed, we are all hip beyond belief; and we take a dim view of the so-called big issues. You know the type—the meaning of life, ethics, politics, history, the nature of love, etc. No, we don't have time for such irrelevancies. Instead we cultivate a light and fluffy sense of style in what little time we have between interruptions from our cell phones.

Oh, but I forget, you will not have cell phones, will you? In fact, you probably will not even have electricity, or clean water, or breathable air, or food. How could you have such things when we used up everything that could grant you a decent life? Oh well, I'm happy, and that's all that matters. But don't fret. Millions of self-help books will probably survive. If nothing else, you'll have instructions for enhancing your self-esteem. By the way, be careful with the antidepressants left over from this era. No one really knows their shelf life. Okay? Whatever.

Your Ancestor,

*Jorge*