

During the past ten years, while making art first in the Midwest and now in the South, I have begun to realize two things. The first is that we artists seldom write about our art and art-making in a forum that is readily available to anyone else. This task has been given over to the critics, theorists, curators, and gallerists. The second is that artists feel an overwhelming pressure to become a part of one of the major metropolitan art scenes in order to attain success and legitimacy.

I have taken on this publication project in order to provide my contemporary colleagues with the opportunity to once again have a voice in the art world. Artists' writings used to be an integral part of the art-making process. It was a way for artists to work through ideas, to record their thoughts, and to share these ideas and opinions with others. Even today, past writings by artists resurface: in studio conversations, in seminars, while relaxing over a drink. Whether it was Smithsonian or Judd, Man Ray or Duchamp, the letters Picasso and Braque exchanged or the manifestos of the Surrealists and Dadaists, they all had something to say—and they wrote about it.

Artists are continually reading and conducting research during the art-making process, especially now that the information age has made this process so much more accessible. They are looking for inspiration, ideas, influences, context or perhaps even originality. Is it fear, which prevents them from putting their words down on paper for

others to see? Is it that the starkness of the written word on a blank piece of paper is too definitive and that they run the risk of being misunderstood? But allowing ourselves to be interpreted by others, it seems to me, is far more dangerous than speaking up as individuals. Perhaps the published manifesto should be revisited, or can we still do that, now that we are in the 21st century?

One chilly day last October I was sitting on a panel discussion consisting of an emerging gallerist, an established gallerist, a non-profit director, an independent curator, and a contemporary curator of a major museum, all from Middle America. They all had the same advice: artists must move to New York in order to establish their careers. This is brilliant, let us all move to New York and squash any chance of individuality, because if we are all one, there can be no more dissent. My question is this: Aren't there museums, art centers, galleries, and culture in every city across this country, and in fact the world? I find it hard to believe that the culture and arts of these places exist only to mimic those of the big city or that they are incapable of developing an identity of their own. The culture of our worldwide society is as diverse and as individual as each of us, and I strongly believe that the art world as a whole should reflect this fact.

My intention with this project is not to discount, bash or replace the critic, writer, museum, gallery, or even the art scene, for they all have their place in today's art world. Instead, I seek to allow the artist themselves to have a place for their individual commentary on the art and culture of today. I believe that with an equal voice we can work together to understand the culture of our times.

*- john henry blatter*