

value vs. valuable

Over the last couple of years of gallery and fair hopping, trying to keep up as much as my schedule will allow, I have begun to notice a common thread. Blingiddy, Bling, Bling Bling! Between the mirroring of objects, placing things in front of or atop mirrors; the re-emergence of neon; the resin encrusted painting; the large flashy photograph; or the bejeweled sculpture; something has got to give, and hopefully, it has. I am sure by now, you are all aware that Damien Hirst has finally sold his diamond encrusted, platinum skull, for the tune of \$100 million, congratulations Damien. So are we done now?

Before you write to complain or to inform me of something I have not addressed, just let me say that I realize that there are many more aspects to this work than I will be addressing, within this limited space. That being said, the excess and flash that seems to be running rampant in contemporary art, cannot be a product of our time, as it was in the 80's when the cash was flowing, the economy was boomin' and everyone wanted to be livin' large. The last time I tuned into the society around me: I was under the impression the US was in an unpopular war and finding fewer and fewer friends around the world; economies the world over were flirting with recession; finding clean water was beginning to be a serious problem; and, oh yeah, the planet may be self destructing due to our poor choices.

But, man does that skull look cool.

The question is not whether Hirst's skull is valid, rather, I am asking if artists still have any idea what the difference is between value and valuable. It is not my intention to declare that all art must be socially responsible in order to be of value. However, by simply adding or using materials that are, or appear to be, valuable, does not add value to a work of art. While encrusting a work of art in diamonds does make it cost more. Does it really give it more importance? Meaning or merit? By adding the valuable to give a work value is treating the work as merely a commodity. It becomes something traded for self-gains with little more consideration. Hence, leaving the work with little value. As an artist, I understand the desire to be able to afford the basic

necessities of life. Furthermore, to afford said necessities through the sale of work, I am sure, is a common goal. However, if that means covering a work in gold leafing just to make it look like it has worth, maybe you should reconsider what it is that you have made. Instead, might I suggest instilling value into a piece, simply by making a better work of art?

Someone once told me that History was merely the story of the things that our predecessors deemed worth preserving. That being said, what will be the stuff of today that we choose to preserve? How will that shape the way our descendent remember us? In a world where the news of the i-phone, trumps that of a war, or where there is more debate over the tribulations of Britney Spears, then that of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

I hope that the time has come once again for artists to find themselves compelled to create out of passion. It is time for the artist to re-introduce content into the work of art. With that being said, I will leave you with a little something from The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, 2000, that may need a little consideration.

val·ue - n. 1. Worth in usefulness or importance to the possessor; utility or merit: the value of an education. 2. A principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable: "The speech was a summons back to the patrician values of restraint and responsibility" (Jonathan Alter). 3. Precise meaning or import, as of a word. - tr. v. 1. To determine or estimate the worth or value of; appraise. 2. To regard highly; esteem. See synonyms at appreciate. 3. To rate according to relative estimate of worth or desirability; evaluate: valued health above money.

val·u·a·ble - adj. 1. Having considerable monetary or material value for use or exchange: a valuable diamond. 2. Of great importance, use, or service: valuable information; valuable advice. 3. Having admirable or esteemed qualities or characteristics: a valuable friend. - n. A personal possession, such as a piece of jewelry, having a relatively high monetary value. Often used in the plural.

Etymology: Middle English, from Old French, from feminine past participle of *valoir*, to be strong, be worth, from Latin *valre*.