

An Approximation

“By Proxy,” when we first discussed this as a theme for an upcoming issue, it was sort of out of a joke, I think “Kiss ass by proxy” was the original words to be uttered. But since then, I have had some time to consider and ponder upon what sort of relevance the phrase has upon our chosen profession. In many ways, the artist’s practice is to create and consider relationships between images, things and ideas that they observe, bring together or create. This may sound like an oversimplification, but is it not the first question we ask ourselves when we bring various things together in the creation of a new work, “How is each element impacted, by proxy to all the other elements?” Simple word play brings many questions to mind.

Art by proxy.
Artist by proxy.
Success by proxy.
Fame by proxy.
Significance by proxy.
Art historical importance by proxy?

In the bullish art market over the last several years, we as artists have become acutely aware of these relationships. In a race to get our share of the pie, it is easy to conceive of a new –ism that may define our time in the art history books of the future, Careerism. That’s right, I said it, but I know I am not the first to bring it up, as the word seems to be appearing more and more in various conversations, especially those discussions surrounding artists and the market. With the ever increasing proliferation of the ‘Art Fair’ as a desired, and perhaps viewed as the ultimate, venue for an artist to exhibit in (more like, to sell in), we are entering into a dangerous new territory.

I am sure that some, will liken this shift to that of the Institution to the Gallery, which was not too long ago. Although I would be the first to say that the emergence of the gallery was good for art, I cannot say the same for the flea market venues, called art fairs. The introduction of the gallery had a profound impact on Art, both good and bad. While it did create a market, as the proprietor needs to sell the work in order to remain open, they also provided more artists the opportunity to share their creations with more people. In addition, the gallery is able to quickly adapt to changes in the art world due to their lack of bureaucracy compared to that of the institution. The art fair, on the other hand, tends to rely solely on the market reducing all creative production down to it's mere value as a commodity, to be bought, sold and traded like cheap stereo equipment out of a makeshift tent.

This frenzied commodification of the art object has pushed the artist from creator, to entrepreneur. Like any good business person, the artist now strives to stay ahead of the competition while maintaining desirability of their product, among the consumer. With this drive to be competitive rather than culturally productive, artists must always be on top of their game, surrounding themselves with others who can help them climb to the top (or at least provide some good footing). The business model of keeping your friends close and your enemies closer is now alive among artists in the age of careerism. There are things to be learned from those on their way up and a good entrepreneur will align themselves with others on their way to the top, and if nothing else, maybe you too might get noticed, by proxy.

What happened to that romantic view of the artist? Does idealism still exist in artists? I fear that they may have been sold, two for \$5, off the folding table, by the guy in the Winnebago, next to tent three. I know I am not alone out there; believing in idealism, holding on to my romantic notions of what an artist is, and creating out of passion over anything else. It is time for us to speak out, before all we are left with, is an Approximation of Art.

- John Henry Blatter