

By Ilya Bernstein

Notes about the world and the nature of art

With the age of the internet, in today's globalized world, the singularity of people's access to information exists more or less on the same plane. Thus the constant noise of things happening around the world can feel heavily politicized, because the world and its inhabitants are complex organisms, and none are without conflict. It is easy to feel jaded and assume that someone else seeing it must be doing something to solve these problems. This is a luxury only us in the first world have, to be able to tune out the news of our politics domestically as an abstract, because its consequences won't ever affect our lives enough to make us tune in. Instead to dull the constant static people seek respite in places without disagreement, echo chambers which only reinforce what we find comfortable or what we already know. This climate of curated opinions has given rise to the state of fringe politics we know today, where the opposition is so demonized we can't even bear to hear what they have to say because you already know everything they stand for. People become isolated in their luxury, a comfort beyond disagreement, beyond discourse and the possibility of reconciling these different ideologies because they don't need to.

Art is a sneaky medium, an oasis from the hum of the world's pressures, pretending leisure but often delivering the most important messages. It has always been a tool for comment from the common man, because like its first iterations found on cave walls, anything and anyone can create art. This right has been displaced, usurped by a vanguard with a certain education who use its exclusivity to keep the common man and his problems out of their world. They shun anything with immediacy, any commentary on the present as obvious, because it disrupts their little bubble out of time with everything else in the world. This attitude reflects the general lack of optimism for our world's future, because the lifestyle changes necessary to curb our impact on its ecology are drastic, and people realize this. Instead they seem to be doubling down on the comfort that we already have, consciously or unconsciously recognizing the problem as a lost cause.

This hopelessness for our world's future is reflected in the art world's preference for art that is purely interpretational, shunning any commentary on our impending catastrophe because it disturbs the peaceful ignorance they seek to protect until the world's end. Although art now is the most necessary medium to bring light to the problem, because of its accessibility, the art world chooses to shut these

channels down because it undermines the hyper-inflated sensibility they've created to inform what is good art and what isn't. They fail to see their great irony because they, like everyone else, have been made arrogant by their lack of controversy, by the comfort of opinion people living in a vacuum have. They see Picasso's Guernica as a representation of some unknowable horror, and not a vignette of the brutality of the Spanish Civil War. They see Kathe Kollwitz's lithographs and sketches as elevated beyond reality, and not depictions of the real, desperate German people during and after the First World War. It's this collective amnesia of the art socialites and elite which undermines any legitimacy they pretend to have. They happen to be on the right side of time, so far away from the dangers of man's problems that they are able to deem any evidence of them in the present trivial.

They use this arrogance of time, this safety of comfort, to see art from the past as it exists in the present, as leisure objects, a no man's land free from the politics of the world instead of in the context relevant to the time of its creation. It was the Impressionists after all, the basis for modern art, who after being shunned by the academic elite, the Academie des Beaux Art's salon in Paris, decided to exhibit themselves with the likes of Renoir, Monet, and Cezanne among those displayed. They repurposed the name for the movement from Louis Leroy's review of the exhibition, meant as satire, praising the broad, erratic strokes while really underwriting its apparent lack of skill. He said this about Monet's *Soleil Levant*, what we now see as the crowning work for the Impressionist movement,

...A preliminary drawing for a wallpaper pattern is more finished than this seascape.

Le Charivari, 1874

This is the irony of the art world. They are Louis Leroy, they are the ones proclaiming the achievements and risks of the past as their own. This is why it's the responsibility of the artist to bring art back to the present, back to the general public, to bring to light the problems facing humanity that will in the next few decades move away from its most drastic examples and pull apart this façade of peaceful ignorance the west seems to revere so much. The responsibility of the artist now is to do what artists of the past have always done, move their art out of the institutions and into the public eye, to let the present and not the art world's pirated opinions of the past inform what makes art important, and what makes it good, and maybe help inject some hope into the public's opinions on the sustainability of the planet, and our possibility for a future.