

The Artist and the Social Order

INTRODUCTION: by Peter Selz

The relationship between art and politics within the total cultural framework is extremely complex and cannot be defined in those simplified Marxist terms which would explain both art and politics as symptoms of a basic economic substructure. The patriotic subject matter and hard heroic form of David's Neoclassicism, for example, was a cause as well as an effect of the French Revolution of which David himself was one of the decisive leaders. Courbet's concern with a tangible and visible reality some fifty years later has its anti-idealist parallel in the contemporary philosophy of Historic Materialism, but is not derived from it. It is worth noting that, in fact, nobody has been more aware of the powerful impact of ideas—including works of art—on the economic-political condition than the leaders of totalitarian states.

At the end of the nineteenth century many artists and writers, among them William Morris, Leo Tolstoy, and Vincent van Gogh, were disappointed with the indifference and rejection of the bourgeoisie or were troubled by the constantly widening gulf between the artist and society. They desired a reintegration in which art was to serve a Utopian brotherhood of man. The Expressionists too dreamed of a renewal of society in which art could take the place once occupied by religion. The Bauhaus set out to train artists and craftsmen to participate in an expanding industrial society. The Constructivists felt that they were forging a weapon for a truly revolutionary art, that "the new world of the masses needs Constructivism because it needs fundamentals that are without deceit."¹

Moholy-Nagy in Budapest called for a purely abstract art of "visual fundamentals" in his "Constructivism and the Proletariat" before joining the Bauhaus, which had proclaimed at the outset that it would "create a new guild of craftsmen, without class distinctions"² and would find a way

¹ Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, "Constructivism and the Proletariat," *MA*, May 1922.

² From "The First Bauhaus Proclamation," Weimar, 1919. Quoted in Herbert Bayer, Walter Gropius, and Ise Gropius, *Bauhaus 1919-1928* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938), p. 16.

to reintegrate the artist into a technological society. At the same time artists in revolutionary Mexico turned to the topical subject matter of their Indian ancestors in large mural projects which themselves were an integral part of a tremendous building program. Painters like Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros formed the "Revolutionary Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors" and issued the Manifesto for a new, monumental art of social purpose, quoted here in its brief entirety.

Meanwhile, a much more conservative attitude toward the creative faculties gained the upper hand in the Soviet Union. After auspicious beginnings in which Constructivists and Suprematists participated together with other progressive artists as diverse as Kandinsky and Chagall, bourgeois taste prevailed and its academic artists regained supremacy. They would paint propagandistic pictures and make statues glorifying socialism or attacking its enemies, and they would work in a realistic style easily understood by the masses. Slowly the doctrine of Socialist Realism evolved in art and literature. In 1924 Leon Trotsky published his important *Literature and Revolution* in which the place of art in the revolutionary society is rather well defined as one of relative freedom under "watchful revolutionary censorship." Trotsky also explains the materialist view of a utilitarian art and has little use for the explorations of form by Tatlin and Lipchitz. Instead he visualizes art and technology in the service of the revolutionary state, and his essay ends with a view toward a gloriously Utopian future in which man will have moved mountains, and when both the earth itself and the human species will have become works of art.

While the narrow and restrictive doctrine of Socialist Realism gained ground in the Soviet Union, Trotsky's attitude toward a continuing revolution and the "complete and radical reconstruction of society" was largely responsible for his expulsion from the U.S.S.R. But it also inspired many intellectuals and artists such as André Breton, the Surrealists' "pope" who embraced the Marxist tenet of a dialectical program leading from thought to action. He published the periodical, *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1930-1933), but his belief in the interpenetration of reason and unreason was unacceptable to the more didactic Marxists. Breton and Diego Rivera, largely under the influence of Trotsky,¹ who was now exiled in

¹ André Breton in a letter to me (P.S.), Paris, 12 February 1962: "In reply to your letter of January 21, I gladly authorize you to reproduce in *The Theories of Modern Art* the manifesto: 'Towards a Free Revolutionary Art,' in the translation published in *Partisan Review* in 1938. There is, however, cause to specify (as I have done several times since then for reprints in French) that although this manifesto appeared under the signatures of Diego Rivera and myself, Diego Rivera in fact took no part in its inception. This text, in its entirety, was drawn up by Leon Trotsky and me, and it was for tactical reasons that Trotsky wanted Rivera's

Mexico, signed the *Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art* in 1938, demanding that the artist, freely following his own radical spirit, take part in the dynamic transformation of society. The International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art set out to bring about the freedom of the artist for the sake of a total revolution and, in turn, a revolution which would help achieve the complete liberation of art.

A much more matter-of-fact proposal to resolve the artist's plight had been suggested by the eminent American painter Stuart Davis. As an artist he ignored the doctrines of Socialist Realism, but created Cubist abstractions of the American urban scene in vibrating, brassy colors. But as president of the Artists' Union he sees the artist as a "have-not" and as the natural ally of the worker, who joins in the organized fight for his rights of employment, better wages, and social insurance. The union also helps the artist to "discover his identity with the working class," and standards of quality are not allowed to interfere with his class-conscious function as an "organized artist."

While the Artists' Union and its militant publication, *Art Front* (1934–1937), was a short-lived phenomenon of the Depression, the Federal Art Project was of staggering importance. It was probably the most ambitious public undertaking in support of the artist in recent times. The most remarkable thing about the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration during the Roosevelt era is not only that over 5,000 artists were given public aid, but that they were left free to follow the dictates of their own talents and wishes. The "Project" created for the first time a wide concern with art in this country; it gave artists such as Milton Avery, William Bazotes, Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, Willem de Koonig, Ibram Lassaw, Jackson Pollock, Theodore Roszak, Mark Rothko, and many others the time to gather their forces, the same forces which were eventually to change the face of world art. It was a manifestation of the possibilities of healthy cooperation between the creative artist and the body politic in a democratic society. We quote extensively from the introduction by Holger Cahill, National Director of the Federal Art Project, to the catalogue of an exhibition of WPA art held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936.

With the outbreak of World War II the Federal Art Project was abolished. It had been, as the historian of American art, Oliver Larkin, has observed, "the greatest experiment in democratic culture the world had

signature substituted for his own. On page 40 of my work, *La Clé des champs* [Paris: Sagittaire, 1953], I have shown a facsimile page of the original manuscript in additional support of this rectification."

ever seen." At the extreme opposite were the dictatorial edicts and prohibitions which Hitler, whose own early ambitions as a painter had been frustrated by his lack of talent, imposed on the artists of the German Reich. Having "cleansed" the German museums of all vital modern art from Van Gogh to Kandinsky, Hitler opened the grossly inhuman *Haus der deutschen Kunst* in 1937 and decreed that the brutally propagandistic art in the exhibition was not to change for the duration of his 1000-year empire. Any artist who demanded the prerogative of free expression was threatened with sterilization or punishment:

They would be the object of great interest to the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich which would then have to take up the question of whether further inheritance of such gruesome malfunctioning of the eyes cannot at least be checked. If, on the other hand, they themselves do not believe in the reality of such impressions by trying to harass the nation with this humbug for other reasons, then such an attempt falls within the jurisdiction of the penal law.

After World War II (and the defeat of Hitler), it was possible for Picasso, in his admiration for the personal achievements of Communists in the struggle against Fascism and Nazism in Spain, France, and Russia, to join the Communist Party and to issue a statement which suggests a more direct relationship between art and its political effect than is apparent in his own painting. While what may well be the greatest painting of our century, Picasso's *Guernica*, deals with a political and social theme, it was motivated not by political dogma but by the artist's shock at a human situation, when for the first time in the West an undefended population was destroyed by an invisible enemy. Picasso interpreted his purpose—though not the complex formal structure—of the great mural to Jerome Seckler, who interviewed him for the *New Masses* in 1945.

The opening words to the review *Possibilities* by the painter Robert Motherwell and the critic Harold Rosenberg are a great deal more ambiguous and certainly less optimistic. The postwar situation, however, was one of disillusionment with all panaceas: the undogmatic view of complete flexibility seemed the only one possible.

This attitude is certainly justified in view of the aggressive criticism by Professor Vladimir Kemenov, Director of Moscow's Tretjakov Gallery and expert on Socialist Realism, who leaves us as little room for the work of Picasso as for any kind of free expression. Again we find modern art attacked by being called decadent, antihumanist, and pathological. Personal and searching or imaginative statements by the artist are referred to as "subjective anarchy," which cannot be tolerated because the state is too acutely aware

of the possible consequence of the assertion of nonconformity. Since the 1920's, when the doctrine of Socialist Realism was first developed to the detriment of free artistic expression, the attitude has become even more frozen. An even greater control is exercised by the Communist Party. As late as 1963 Nikita Khrushchev, then premier of the U.S.S.R. and chairman of its Communist Party, endorsed this narrow-minded and restrictive position.

In our own country, we find a remarkably similar attitude of violent hostility to modern art by persons in high office. Former Representatives Fred E. Busby of Illinois and George A. Dondero of Michigan, for example, have leveled ruthless and frequent attacks against modern artists. It makes little difference that Dondero smears as subversive Communists the very artists whose work is attacked by Kemenov for being formalistic, decadent, and capitalist. An officialdom that wishes to preserve the *status quo* or use the artist for purposes of indoctrination is anxious to quell artistic freedom. The alternative, of course, is a free society, flourishing on the subjective concepts, ideas, and forms visualized and expressed by its artists.

Fortunately, the arts in the United States have not encountered a great deal of interference from the body politic and have—especially during John F. Kennedy's administration—experienced significant official encouragement.

In countries dominated by Communist parties, the situation is also in a process of change. In Cuba, Fidel Castro let it be understood that the social-political revolution would in no way interfere with the freedom of the artist, but that the arts served the people best by following their own pursuits.

Assembling an exhibition of recent Polish painting for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I traveled in Poland during 1959 and 1960 and found free artistic expression not only a goal but, indeed, a fact. Having rebelled against Socialist Realism in the mid-fifties, painters were free to explore all manners and styles and media and to exhibit their work in museums and sell it in cooperative galleries in Poland or send it abroad. Their work proved to be of high artistic merit by all international standards. In addition to putting brush to canvas, painters in Poland are actively engaged in cinematic production, stage design, book illustration, and all forms of the "useful arts."

Since the early 1960s artists in Italy, France, Yugoslavia, and Germany have banded together in groups for the purpose of collaborating on visual research in the Constructivist tradition and making use of new and often scientific techniques and media as well as evolving an experimental conceptual art greatly interested in optical phenomena and kinetic processes.

Giulio Carlo Argan, Italy's leading art critic, professor of modern art at the University of Rome and president of the International Association of Art Critics, has caused a great controversy in the European art world by becoming the spokesman of these "research teams" and endowing them with socio-political ideology.

Professor Argan, making use of unnecessarily difficult language, hopes to reintegrate the artist into a modern mechanized society, asserting that technology needs the guidance of aesthetics in order to function ethically as well as effectively. This guidance, he believes, can come from the "Gestalt research groups" and he traces their history back to the Bauhaus and sees parallels in Wright's Taliesin Fellowship and Gropius' Architects' Collaborative. He is less concerned with the aesthetic results than with the sociological ramifications. The individual in his solitude can, according to Argan, no longer exist in the modern technological society and produce significant works of art. He is being swallowed by the masses, which "in their obedient inertia do not know of aesthetic exigencies and cannot produce art." The group, however, consisting of individuals in meaningful relationship to each other, can be a dynamic "community organized for creative goals."

Many of Italy's established artists, however, protested against Argan's team spirit and reaffirmed their faith in the personal statement of the individual.

*Manifesto issued by the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors, Mexico City, 1922**

Social, Political, and Aesthetic Declaration from the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors to the indigenous races humiliated through centuries; to the soldiers converted into hangmen by their chiefs; to the workers and peasants who are oppressed by the rich; and to the intellectuals who are not servile to the bourgeoisie:

We are with those who seek the overthrow of an old and inhuman system within which you, worker of the soil, produce riches for the overseer and politician, while you starve. Within which you, worker in the city, move the wheels of industries, weave the cloth, and create with your hands the modern comforts enjoyed by the parasites and prostitutes, while your own body is numb with cold. Within which you, Indian soldier, heroically abandon your land and give your life in the eternal hope of liberating your race from the degradations and misery of centuries.

* Published as a broadside. This English translation from Laurence E. Schmeckebier *Modern Mexican Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1939), p. 31. The same translation appears in Bernard S. Myers, *Mexican Painting in Our Time* (New York: Oxford University, 1956), p. 29.

Not only the noble labor but even the smallest manifestations of the material or spiritual vitality of our race spring from our native midst. Its admirable, exceptional, and peculiar ability to create beauty—the art of the Mexican people—is the highest and greatest spiritual expression of the world-tradition which constitutes our most valued heritage. It is great because it surges from the people; it is collective, and our own aesthetic aim is to socialize artistic expression, to destroy bourgeois individualism.

We repudiate the so-called easel art and all such art which springs from ultra-intellectual circles, for it is essentially aristocratic.

We hail the monumental expression of art because such art is public property.

We proclaim that this being the moment of social transition from a decrepit to a new order, the makers of beauty must invest their greatest efforts in the aim of materializing an art valuable to the people, and our supreme objective in art, which is today an expression for individual pleasure, is to create beauty for all, beauty that enlightens and stirs to struggle.

*Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution, 1923**

Our Marxist conception of the objective social dependence and social utility of art, when translated into the language of politics, does not at all mean a desire to dominate art by means of decrees and orders. It is not true that we regard only that art as new and revolutionary which speaks of the worker, and it is nonsense to say that we demand that the poets should describe inevitably a factory chimney, or the uprising against capital! Of course the new art cannot but place the struggle of the proletariat in the center of its attention. But the plough of the new art is not limited to numbered strips. On the contrary, it must plow the entire field in all directions. Personal lyrics of the very smallest scope have an absolute right to exist within the new art. Moreover, the new man cannot be formed without a new lyric poetry. But to create it, the poet himself must feel the world in a new way. If Christ alone or Sabaoth himself bends over the poet's embraces, then this only goes to prove how much behind the times his lyrics are and how socially and aesthetically inadequate they are for the new man. Even where such terminology is not a survival of experience so much as of words, it shows psychologic inertia and therefore stands in contradiction to the consciousness of the new man. No one is going to prescribe themes to a poet or intends to prescribe them. Please write about anything you can think of! But allow the new class which considers itself, and with reason, called upon to build a new world, to say to you in any given case: It does not make new poets of you to translate the philosophy of life of the seventeenth

* First published in 1923 in a Russian edition. These excerpts from the English translation in Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1957), pp. 170–171, 219, 220–221, 235–236, 247–248, 249–251.

century into the language of the Acméists. The form of art is, to a certain and very large degree, independent, but the artist who creates this form, and the spectator who is enjoying it, are not empty machines, one for creating form and the other for appreciating it. They are living people, with a crystallized psychology representing a certain unity, even if not entirely harmonious. This psychology is the result of social conditions. The creation and perception of art forms is one of the functions of this psychology. And no matter how wise the Formalists try to be, their whole conception is simply based upon the fact that they ignore the psychological unity of the social man, who creates and who consumes what has been created

Does not such a policy mean, however, that the Party is going to have an unprotected flank on the side of art? This is a great exaggeration. The Party will repel the clearly poisonous, disintegrating tendencies of art and will guide itself by its political standards. It is true, however, that it is less protected on the flank of art than on the political front

But does not the work of culture-bearing, that is, the work of acquiring the A B C of pre-proletarian culture, presuppose criticism, selection, and a class standard? Of course it does. But the standard is a political one and not an abstract cultural one. The political standard coincides with the cultural one only in the broad sense that the Revolution creates conditions for a new culture. But this does not mean that such a coinciding is secured in every given case. If the Revolution has the right to destroy bridges and art monuments whenever necessary, it will stop less from laying its hand on any tendency in art which, no matter how great the achievement in form, threatens to disintegrate the revolutionary environment or to arouse the internal forces of the Revolution, that is, the proletariat, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia, to a hostile opposition to one another. Our standard is, clearly, political, imperative, and intolerant. But for this very reason, it must define the limits of its activity clearly. For a more precise expression of my meaning, I will say: we ought to have a watchful revolutionary censorship, and a broad and flexible policy in the field of art, free from petty partisan maliciousness

What are we to understand under the term realism? At various periods, and by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups. Each one of these realistic schools is subject to a separate and social literary definition, and a separate formal and literary estimation. What have they in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It consists in a feeling for life as it is, in an artistic acceptance of reality, and not in a shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is a striving either to picture life as it is or to idealize it, either to justify or to condemn it, either to photograph it or generalize and symbolize it. But it is always a pre-occupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In this large philosophic sense, and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the new art will be realistic. The Revolution cannot live together with mysticism. Nor can the Revolution live together with romanticism, if that which Pilnyak, the Imagists, and others call romanticism is, as it may

be feared, mysticism shyly trying to establish itself under a new name. This is not being doctrinaire, this is an insuperable psychological fact. Our age cannot have a shy and portable mysticism, something like a pet dog that is carried along "with the rest." Our age wields an ax. Our life, cruel, violent, and disturbed to its very bottom, says: "I must have an artist of a single love. Whatever way you take hold of me, whatever tools and instruments created by the development of art you choose, I leave to you, to your temperament and to your genius. But you must understand me as I am, you must take me as I will become, and there must be no one else besides me."

This means a realistic monism, in the sense of a philosophy of life, and not a "realism" in the sense of the traditional arsenal of literary schools. On the contrary, the new artist will need all the methods and processes evolved in the past, as well as a few supplementary ones, in order to grasp the new life. And this is not going to be artistic eclecticism, because the unity of art is created by an active world-attitude and active life-attitude.

De Maupassant hated the Eiffel Tower, in which no one is forced to imitate him. But it is undoubtedly true that the Eiffel Tower makes a dual impression; one is attracted by the technical simplicity of its form, and, at the same time, repelled by its aimlessness. It is an extremely rational utilization of material for the purpose of making a high structure. But what is it for? It is not a building, but an exercise. At present, as everyone knows, the Eiffel Tower serves as a radio station. This gives it a meaning, and makes it aesthetically more unified. But if the tower had been built from the very beginning as a radio station, it probably would have attained a higher rationality of form, and so therefore a higher perfection of art.

From this point of view Tatlin's project for a monument appears much less satisfactory. The purpose of the main building is to make glass headquarters for the meetings of the World Council of People's Commissars, for the Communist International, etc. But the props and the piles which are to support the glass cylinder and the pyramid—and they are there for no other purpose—are so cumbersome and heavy that they look like unremoved scaffolding. One cannot think what they are for. They say: they are there to support the rotating cylinder in which the meetings will take place. But one answers: Meetings are not necessarily held in a cylinder and the cylinder does not necessarily have to rotate. I remember seeing once, when a child, a wooden temple built in a beer bottle. This fired my imagination, but I did not ask myself at that time what it was for. Tatlin proceeds by a reverse method; he wants to construct a beer bottle for the World Council of People's Commissars which would sit in a spiral concrete temple. But for the moment, I cannot refrain from the question: What is it for? To be more exact: we would probably accept the cylinder and its rotating, if it were combined with a simplicity and lightness of construction, that is, if the arrangements for its rotating did not depress the aim Nor can we agree with the arguments which are given to interpret the artistic significance of the sculpture by Jacob [Jacques] Lipchitz.

Sculpture must lose its fictitious independence which only means that it is relegated to the backyards of life or lies vegetating in dead museums, and it must revive in some higher synthesis its connection with architecture. In this broad sense, sculpture has to assume a utilitarian purpose. Very good, then. But it is not at all clear how one is to approach the Lipchitz sculpture from such a point of view. I have a photograph of several intersecting planes, which are supposed to be the outlines of a man sitting with a stringed instrument in his hands. We are told that if today it is not utilitarian, it is "purposeful." In what way? To judge purposefulness, one has to know the purpose. But when one stops to think of the purposefulness and possible utility of those numerous intersecting planes and pointed forms and protrusions, one comes to the conclusion that if, as a last resort, one were to transform such a piece of sculpture into a hatrack, he would have probably found a more purposeful form for it. At any rate, we cannot recommend that a plaster cast be made of it for hatracks

Take the penknife as an example [of purposefulness]. The combination of art and technique can proceed along two fundamental lines; either art embellishes the knife and pictures an elephant, a prize beauty, or the Eiffel Tower on its handle; or art helps technique to find an "ideal" for for the knife, that is, such a form which will correspond most adequately to the material of a knife and its purpose. To think that this task can be solved by purely technical means is incorrect, because purpose and material allow for innumerable . . . variations. To make an "ideal" knife, one must have, besides the knowledge of the properties the material and the methods of its use, both imagination and taste. In accord with the entire tendency of industrial culture, we think that the artistic imagination in creating material objects will be directed towards working out the ideal form of a thing, as a thing, and not towards the embellishment of the thing as an aesthetic premium to itself. If this is true for penknives, it will be truer still for wearing apparel, furniture, theatres, and cities. This does not mean the doing away with "machine-made" art, not even in the most distant future. But it seems that the direct cooperation between art and all branches of technique will become of paramount importance.

Does this mean that industry will absorb art, or that art will lift industry up to itself on Olympus? This question can be answered either way, depending on whether the problem is approached from the side of industry, or from the side of art. But in the object attained, there is no difference between either answer. Both answers signify a gigantic expansion of the scope and artistic quality of industry, and we understand here, under industry, the entire field without excepting the industrial activity of man; mechanical and electrified agriculture will also become part of industry.

The wall will fall not only between art and industry, but simultaneously between art and nature also. This is not meant in the sense of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that art will come nearer to a state of nature, but that nature will become more "artificial." The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows,

of steppes, of forests, and of seashores, cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils' practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move mountains; but technology, which takes nothing "on faith," is actually able to cut down mountains and move them. Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with re-registering mountains and rivers, and will earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the earth, if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad

It is difficult to predict the extent of self-government which the man of the future may reach or the heights to which he may carry his technique. Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts—literature, drama, painting, music, and architecture—will lend this process beautiful form. More correctly, the shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of Communist man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser, and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.

*Stuart Davis, "The Artist Today," 1935**

This article deals with the artistic, the social, and the economic situation of the American artist in the field of fine arts, regarding the situation in the broadest possible way, and does not intend to stigmatize individuals except as they are the name-symbols of certain group tendencies.

The most superficial contact with artists makes it clear that the artist today is in a state of confusion, doubt, and struggle. He is not alone in his plight but has the respectable company of business men, chambers of commerce, politicians, congresses, presidents, and supreme courts. In short, the artist participates in the world crisis.

The immediate past of the American fine-artist was briefly as follows—he

* From *American Magazine of Art* (New York), XXVIII (August 1935), 476-478, 506. The article was subtitled, "The Standpoint of the Artists' Union." Davis was very active in artists' organizations, both artistic and political. He was an editor of the left-wing periodical *Art Front* during the middle 'thirties, and was president of the Artists' Congress beginning in 1936. H. B. C.

came in general from families of the lower middle class who could afford to send their children to art school, in many cases to European schools. These schools were, in their nature, schools of the middle class, and it is also generally true that the art taught in these schools was oriented towards the middle class. Consequently the work of the future artists was supposed to be absorbed by that class through the appropriate commercial channels. This does not mean, of course, that the middle class as a whole were art patrons; it means that the upper strata of the class, who were the wealthy art buyers, still retained their lower-middle-class psychology and were qualitatively one with the class as a whole in culture.

Thus the artist exercised his talents within the framework of the middle-class culture. Still-lives, landscapes, and nudes were the chief categories of subject matter, and the artists competed freely against each other for originality within this framework of subject material. In addition, there were of course the different schools of theory and method such as the impressionists, the post impressionists, the Cézanneists, the Cubists, the *Surrealists*, and always the reactionary Academy in different forms. The commercial contact of the artist was through the art dealer and gallery and the private patron, as well as the museum, which is really a collective of art patrons conditioned by the art dealer.

It follows, then, that the artist of the immediate past was an individualist, progressive or reactionary, in his painting theory, working within the framework of middle-class culture with a subject matter acceptable to that culture and marketing his product through channels set up by the middle class. His economic condition in general was poor and he was badly exploited by art dealer and patron alike.

For those unaware of this exploitation, I will briefly specify. The dealer opened shop with a free choice of the field for his stock in trade. His stock cost him nothing but promises, and these promises were not promises to pay, but promises of a vague future of affluence to the unorganized and wildly competing artists. In many cases the artists were actually forced to pay gallery rent, lighting and catalogues and advertising costs in return for the promises of the dealer. In addition, commissions of from a third to a half and more were charged for sales. In the few cases where certain artists were subsidized by dealers the situation was not different in kind but only in degree. What resulted? In each gallery two or three artists emerged as commercial assets to the dealer, and at that point a certain character was given to the gallery. This character was the result of the planning of the one-man and group exhibitions around the works of the artists that time had shown to be the easy sellers. The body of artists of the gallery were used chiefly for window dressing and quantitative filler. In addition, the dealers carried variously old masters, early American, folk art, etc., which they bought at bargain prices and sold at enormous profit, frequently to the exclusion of the work of the contemporary artists they were supposedly marketing. Art for profit, profit for everybody but the artist. With the art patron and museum the situation

is similar, free choice without responsibility, but there is the additional feature of social snobbery. Artists are subsidized with the hope of financial gain on a statistical basis; a number are picked for low subsidy with the hope that one of them will bring home the bacon, financially speaking. There is also the desire of the patron to be regarded as an outstanding person of culture among his fellow traders, social snobbery, or in cases of extreme wealth, the ability of the patron to add the prestige of charity to the excitement of gambling. For these reasons the term "badly exploited" surely applied directly to the artist.

This is a factual description of the social-economic relation of the artist body to society as a whole in the immediate past, and of course today as well.

Today, however, there are certain developments which are peculiar to the time and which directly affect the artist in his social-economic relations. They are: (1) Federal, State, and Municipal Art Projects; (2) street exhibitions and art marts; (3) the Mayor's Committee of One Hundred in New York City, appointed over the protests of the artists, whose supposed function is the creation of a Municipal Art Center; (4) suppression and destruction of murals, as in the case of Diego Rivera, Alfaro Siqueiros, and Ben Shahn, and the Joe Jones affair in Missouri; (5) gallery rackets, self-help plans, such as the Artists' Aid Committee in New York, artists' and writers' dinner clubs, five- and ten-dollar gallery exhibitions, etc.; (6) a rental policy for all exhibitions as adopted by the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers, and the refusal of museums and dealers to accept it; and (7) the organization of the Artists' Union of New York and the "firing" of members for organizational activities on the projects.

These events and others are not isolated phenomena peculiar to the field of art. They are reflections in that field of the chaotic conditions in capitalist world society today. The artist finds himself without the meagre support of his immediate past and he realizes now, if not before, that art is not a practice disassociated from other human activities. He has had the experience of being completely thrown overboard and sold out by art dealer and patron, and his illusions as to their cultural interests are destroyed. He realizes now that the shallowness of cultural interest of his middle-class audience was retroactive on his own creative efforts, resulting in a standard of work qualitatively low from any broad viewpoint. Looking about him, he sees sharp class distinction, those who have, and those (the great majority) who have not. He recognizes his alignment with those who have not—the workers.

With these realizations the artists of New York have taken certain actions. They organized the Artists' Committee of Action and undertook a struggle for a Municipal Art Gallery and Center, administered by artists. Mass meetings and demonstrations were held. The mayor of the city, La Guardia, refused to see their delegations, gave them the runaround and finally appointed a Committee of One Hundred to plan a municipal gallery and center. This committee was appointed without consulting the artists and is composed for the most part of names of socially prominent people who have no conception of the problems involved. Their first

act was to hold an exhibit in a department store, their idea of solving the artists' problem. Most of those invited to exhibit withdrew their work from the walls on the opening day in protest, and the whole story with photographs, phoned in to papers by reporters on the spot, was killed in the press because the department store was a big advertiser. After this farcical first step the Committee of One Hundred went into temporary retirement and is now planning some summer festival, another attempt to give the present administration of the city credit for patronizing the arts without doing it.

The formation of the Artists' Union over a year ago is an event of greatest importance to all artists. With a present membership of thirteen hundred artists, the Union invites all artists to membership, and locals in other cities are being formed. The most direct action taken by the Union has been on the Municipal Art Projects. Over three hundred art teachers, painters, and sculptors are employed, a small fraction of those needing employment. Those employed have the necessity of proving themselves paupers before they are eligible and after employment are often badly misplaced in regard to their best abilities. All organization by the artists on these projects is frowned upon by the administration, which subscribes to the ancient adage that paupers cannot be choosers. The administration is wrong; paupers today can choose when they are organized, and through their Artists' Union they have won some rights, have had "fired" members reinstated, and through their picket lines have shown the authorities that they are not to be kicked around at will. They fight steadily for increase in projects, against lay-offs, against time and wage cuts, for genuine social and unemployment insurance, for trade union unity, against the degrading pauper's oath on the projects, and for free expression in art as a civil right. Through their struggles in the Artists' Union the members have discovered their identity with the working class as a whole, and with those organized groups of artist-craftsmen such as woodcarvers and architectural modelers and sculptors in particular. With this realization a morale has developed which grows in spite of the efforts of the administration and its agents to break it. Exhibitions of the work of the members of the Union during the past winter showed a quality comparable in every way with the gallery exhibitions. This quality will change and improve, for reasons I will give later. The Artists' Union has an official organ, *The Art Front*, which has been widely hailed as the most vital art magazine in the country, with critical articles of high quality. The slogan of the Union, "EVERY ARTIST AN ORGANIZED ARTIST" means something which no artist can afford to disregard. Negotiations are now under way for the entrance of the Union into the American Federation of Labor.

The question of the civil right of free expression is a vital one today for the artists. It affects his life as a man and as an artist. Fascism is a powerful trend in the current political world set-up. Fascism is defined by the Methodist Federation for Social Service as "the use of open force (against the workers) by big business." We have seen it at work in Germany and Italy, and one of its first acts is the sup-

pression of freedom in the arts. Schools are closed; artists, scientists, and intellectuals are driven into exile or thrown into concentration camps. Culture in general is degraded and forced to serve mean and reactionary nationalistic ends, and the creative spirit of the artist is crushed ruthlessly. Such trends exist in this country, as any newspaper reader knows, and already individuals and small groups have committed Fascist-like acts of suppression, for ideological and political reasons. The destruction of the Rivera mural, the Siqueiros murals in Los Angeles, the suppression of the Ben Shahn and Lou Block mural for Riker's Island Penitentiary in New York by Jonas Lie of the Municipal Art Commission are examples. No artist can afford to remain complacent in the face of these and a thousand other similar cases, nor can he feel that they do not concern him directly. Organization by the artists and cooperation with the organized workers is the only method to fight these attacks on culture.

The question of quality interests artists. They say, "Yes, we agree with your ideas of organization, but what standards have you? We can't have everybody in a Union who calls himself an artist. We have a standard and we resent the implication that our standard of quality is unimportant in the type of organization you say is necessary for artists." The answer to this point is as follows: A work of art is a public act, or, as John Dewey says, an "experience." By definition, then, it is not an isolated phenomenon, having meaning for the artist and his friends alone. Rather it is the result of the whole life experience of the artist as a social being. From this it follows that there are many "qualities" and no one of these qualities is disassociated from the life experience and environment that produced it. The quality standard of any group of artists, such as the National Academy of Design for example, is valid for the social scheme of that group only. Its "world validity" depends precisely on the degree to which the life-scheme of the group of artists is broad in scope. We have, therefore, little qualities and big qualities. Any artist group which seeks to isolate itself from broad world interests and concentrates on the perpetuation of some subclassifications of qualitative standard is by definition the producer of small quality. For such a group to demand that all artists meet this static qualitative concept is of course absurd. Art comes from life, not life from art. For this reason the question of the quality of the work of the members of the Artists' Union has no meaning at this time. The Artists' Union is initiating artists into a new social and economic relationship, and through this activity a quality will grow. This quality will certainly be different from the quality standard of any member before participation in union activities and will take time to develop. As the social scheme of the Union is broad and realistic, directly connected to life today in all its aspects, so we confidently expect the emergence of an aesthetic quality in the work of the members which has this broad, social, realistic value. Therefore, an artist does not join the Union merely to get a job; he joins it to fight for his right to economic stability on a decent level and to develop as an artist through development as a social human being.

Holger Cahill, "The Federal Art Project," 1936*

. . . The organization of the Project has proceeded on the principle that it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare, occasional masterpieces. The emphasis upon masterpieces is a nineteenth-century phenomenon. It is primarily a collector's idea and has little relation to an art movement. When one goes through the galleries of Europe which preserve, in spite of war, fire, flood, and other destructive forces, an amazing quantity of works from the past, one is struck by the extraordinary amount of work which was produced in the great periods. During the early part of the twentieth century it is said that some forty thousand artists were at work in Paris. It is doubtful if history will remember more than a dozen or two of these, but is probable that if the great number of artists had not been working, very few of these two dozen would have been stimulated to creative endeavor. In a genuine art movement a great reservoir of art is created in many forms, both major and minor

FINE ART AND ART FOR USE

In organizing the Federal Art program the many forces which tend to build up a sound art movement have been considered. An effort has been made to view American art in perspective, both as to the past and as to the future. While the fate of the workers in the fine arts has seemed of paramount importance, it is clear that under the most favorable conditions these artists cannot prosper alone, nor can they by their solitary efforts create a fully developed art movement in America.

The importance of an integration between the fine arts and the practical arts has been recognized from the first by the Federal Art Project, as an objective desirable in itself and as a means of drawing together major aesthetic forces in this country. Our manufacturing system has produced much that may be called good from the aesthetic point of view, but it has also produced a fearful clutter of unlovely things, and this in turn has resulted in a degradation of popular taste, since these objects provide the only art that many individuals know. Direction from the fine arts has been sorely needed for the manufacturer, the craftsman, and the public. It has been impossible to provide a solution for all the ensuing problems under an emergency program, but an attempt has been made by the Federal Art Project to break down the artificial barrier which exists between these forms of art expression. The young commercial artist has received direction, which has often been distinguished, from teachers or workers in the fine arts. In the printshops

* From *New Horizons in American Art*, with an introduction by Holger Cahill, National Director, Federal Art Project, copyright 1936 by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and reprinted with its permission.

and workshops set up under the Project, in the making of posters, mural maps, dioramas, lantern slides for schools, of scenic models for natural history museums, young workers in the fine and the practical arts have come together to work out mutual problems. The outcome has been the accomplishment of many useful services for public institutions, and a stimulation toward higher levels in the creation of objects of common use

THE YOUNG ARTIST

For the young artist another relationship has seemed of importance. Because of the development of local or regional creative or teaching projects, the young artist has tended for perhaps the first time within the modern period to attack the problems of art at home, in his own setting, among familiar surroundings, in the midst of a social life which he is likely to know well. This situation—part of it enforced by the depression—has meant at least a beginning toward a naturalization of art in all our communities, an outcome which must be achieved if our art is to be anything more than an effervescence along the Atlantic seaboard

THE FINE ARTS PROJECTS

Naturally in any program of this kind the position of the creative artist has been considered as of primary importance. If the mainstream of American art is to continue, he must be given a chance to develop and to assume the leadership which belongs to him in a sound general movement. An art tradition may be said to have existence only as it is created anew by each generation. No matter what the museum collections tell us about the past it is in the work of present-day artists that we must look for the living tradition.

That the tradition of American art is still vigorous is amply shown by the response of creative artists to government encouragement and support. This response has been magnificent. Their production has been large and of high quality. They have worked with intelligence, energy, and initiative

A full and free expression on the part of creative artists may have come about in a measure at this time because of a release from the grueling pressure which most of them suffered during the early part of the depression. It seems to have its origin also in a special set of circumstances determined by the Project. The new and outstanding situation is that these artists have been working with a growing sense of public demand for what they produce. For the first time in American art history a direct and sound relationship has been established between the American public and the artist. Community organizations of all kinds have asked for his work. In the discussions and interchanges between the artist and the public concerning murals, easel paintings, prints, and sculptures for public buildings, through the arrangements for allocations of art in many forms to schools and libraries, an active and often very human relationship has been created. The artist has become aware of every type of community demand for art, and has had the prospect of

increasingly larger audiences, of greatly extended public interest. There has been at least the promise of a broader and socially sounder base for American art with the suggestion that the age-old cleavage between artist and public is not dictated by the very nature of our society. New horizons have come into view.

American artists have discovered that they have work to do in the world. Awareness of society's need and desire for what they can produce has given them a new sense of continuity and assurance. This awareness has served to enhance the already apparent trend toward social content in art. In some instances the search for social content has taken the form of an illustrative approach to certain aspects of the contemporary American scene—a swing back to the point of view of the *genre* painters of the nineteenth century. Evidences of social satire have also appeared. In many phases of American expression this has been no more than a reaction against the genteel tradition or a confession of helplessness. The dominant trend today, as illustrated by the Project work, is more positive. There is a development toward greater vigor, unity, and clarity of statement, a search for an adequate symbolism in the expression of contemporary American experience, less dependence on the easily obvious in subject matter, and a definite relation to local and regional environments

ART AND SOCIETY

Surely art is not merely decorative, a sort of unrelated accompaniment to life. In a genuine sense it should have use; it should be interwoven with the very stuff and texture of human experience, intensifying that experience, making it more profound, rich, clear, and coherent. This can be accomplished only if the artist is functioning freely in relation to society, and if society wants what he is able to offer.

The idea which has seemed most fruitful in contemporary art—particularly as shown by the work of artists under the Project—has been that of participation. Though the measure of security provided by the government in these difficult times unquestionably has been important, a sense of an active participation in the life and thought and movement of their own time has undoubtedly been even more significant for a large number of artists, particularly those in the younger groups. A new concept of social loyalty and responsibility, of the artist's union with his fellow men in origin and in destiny, seems to be replacing the romantic concept of nature which for so many years gave to artists and to many others a unifying approach to art. This concept is capable of great development in intellectual range and emotional power. This is what gives meaning to the social content of art in its deepest sense. An end seems to be in sight to the kind of detachment which removed the artist from common experience, and which at its worst gave rise to an art merely for the museum, or a rarified preciousness. This change does not mean any loss in the peculiarly personal expression which any artist of marked gifts will necessarily develop. Rather it means a greater scope and freedom for a more complete personal expression.

*Adolf Hitler, speech inaugurating the "Great Exhibition of German Art 1937," Munich**

When, four years ago, the solemn ceremony of laying the cornerstone for this building took place, we were all conscious of the fact that not only the stone for a new building must be laid but the foundation for a new and true German art. At stake was our chance to provoke a turning-point in the development of the total German cultural output

Germany's collapse and general decline had been—as we know—not only economic or political, but probably even to a much greater extent, cultural. Moreover, this process could not be explained exclusively on the grounds of the lost war. Such catastrophes have very often afflicted peoples and states, only to provide an impetus to their purification and give rise to an inner elevation.

* The speech inaugurating the Munich exhibition was published in "*Der Führer eröffnet die Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung 1937*," *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich* (Munich), I, 7–8 (July–August 1937), 47–61. These excerpts in English translation by Ilse Falk.

Hitler had devised a cunning means of demonstrating to the public the superiority of "true German art" over what the Nazis called "degenerate, Bolshevik, and Jewish art." This speech was delivered at the dedication of the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (now *Haus der Kunst*) a museum in Munich which conformed in style to the rigid Neoclassicism of the official Nazi architectural style. The opening exhibition was composed of German art approved by the Nazi leaders. It was in a pallid academic style verging on illustration that was concerned with the Nazi themes of heroism, familial duty, and work on the land. (But see how on the contrary Nazi propaganda leaders admitted the force of German Expressionism by utilizing it in their posters, see illus.).

For contrast Hitler had arranged a second art exhibition which opened in Munich that same summer—this one entitled *Entartete Kunst*, the infamous Degenerate Art exhibition that included virtually all the modern German artists who are important in the history of art, as well as many foreigners. This exhibition, in which paintings by the insane were mingled with the others and which was slovenly presented, was the subject of violent ridicule and vicious attack by the controlled press.

The exhibition was but a part of a great stock of nearly 20,000 works of modern art which had been confiscated from German museums by order of Joseph Goebbels with the advice of a minor academic painter of the nude, Adolf Ziegler, part of which two years later was sold abroad to finance the preparations for war and the rest burned.

Hitler's views on modern art in 1937 were not new, for as early as 1931 he had threatened "to release a tornado" against it. In 1933 official Nazi propaganda organs demanded that "all artistic productions with cosmopolitan or bolshevist tendencies must be thrown out of German museums and collections; they should be shown first to the public, the purchase price and the name of the responsible museum officials must be made known, but then all must be burned." In 1935, in a speech at Nuremberg, Hitler had threatened: "One will no longer discuss or deal with these corruptors of art. They are fools, liars, or criminals who belong in insane asylums or prisons."

The Nazi S.S. man who replaced the director of the Folkwang Museum in Essen unwittingly revealed the party's philosophy of culture when he declared that "the most perfect object created in the course of the last epochs did not originate in the studios of our artists. It is the steel helmet." (Quotations from Rudolf Schröder, "Modern Art in the Third Reich," *German Contemporary Art*, special issue of *Documents*, Offenburg, 1952.) [H. B. C.]



Hitler and Goebbels viewing the exhibition of degenerate art, 1937.

However, that flood of slime and ordure which the year 1918 belched forth into our lives was not a product of the lost war, but was only freed in its rush to the surface by that calamity. Through the defeat, an already thoroughly diseased body experienced the total impact of its inner decomposition. Now, after the collapse of the social, economic, and cultural patterns which continued to function in appearance only, the baseness already underlying them for a long time, triumphed, and indeed this was so in all strata of our life.

It is obvious that, due to its nature, the economic decline was felt most strongly, since the masses always become most urgently conscious of these conditions. In comparison to this economic decline, the political collapse was either flatly denied or at least not recognized by a great number of Germans, while the cultural collapse was neither seen nor understood by the vast majority of our people

To begin with:

1. The circle of those who are consciously occupied with cultural matters is by nature not nearly as large as the number of those who have to deal with economic matters.
2. On these cultural grounds, more than on any others, Judaism had taken possession of those means and institutions of communication which form, and thus finally rule over public opinion. Judaism was very clever indeed, especially in employing its position in the press with the help of so-called art criticism and succeeding not only in confusing the natural concepts about the nature and scope of art as well as its goals, but above all in undermining and destroying the general wholesome feeling in this domain

Art, on the one hand, was defined as nothing but an international communal experience, thus killing altogether any understanding of its integral relationship with an ethnic group. On the other hand its relationship to time was stressed, that is: There was no longer any art of peoples or even of races, but only an art of the times. According to this theory, therefore, Greek art was not formed by the Greeks, but by a certain period which formed it as their expression. The same, naturally, was true of Roman art, which, for the same reasons, coincided only by accident with the rise of the Roman empire. Again in the same way the more recent art epochs of humanity have not been created by the Arabs, Germans, Italians, French, etc., but are only appearances conditioned by time. Therefore today no German or French or Japanese or Chinese art exists, but plainly and simply only a "modern art." Consequently, art as such is not only completely isolated from its ethnic origins, but it is the expression of a certain vintage which is characterized today by the word "modern," and thus, of course, will be un-modern tomorrow, since it will be outdated.

According to such a theory, as a matter of fact, art and art activities are lumped together with the handiwork of our modern tailor shops and fashion industries. And to be sure, following the maxim: Every year something new. One day Impressionism, then Futurism, Cubism, maybe even Dadaism, etc. A further result is that even for the most insane and inane monstrosities thousands of catch-words to label them will have to be found, and have indeed been found. If it weren't so sad in one sense, it would almost be a lot of fun to list all the slogans and clichés with which the so-called "art initiates" have described and explained their wretched products in recent years

Until the moment when National-Socialism took power, there existed in Germany a so-called "modern art," that is, to be sure, almost every year another one, as the very meaning of this word indicates. National-Socialist Germany, however, wants again a "German Art," and this art shall and will be of eternal value, as are all truly creative values of a people. Should this art, however, again lack this eternal value for our people, then indeed it will mean that it also has no higher value today.

When, therefore, the cornerstone of this building was laid, it was with the intention of constructing a temple, not for a so-called modern art, but for a true and everlasting German art, that is, better still, a House for the art of the German people, and not for any international art of the year 1937, '40, '50 or '60. For art is not founded on time, but only on peoples. It is therefore imperative for the artist to erect a monument, not so much to a period, but to his people. For time is changeable, years come and go. Anything born of and thriving on a certain epoch alone, would perish with it. And not only all which had been created before us would fall victim to this mortality, but also what is being created today or will be created in the future.

But we National-Socialists know only one mortality, and that is the mortality of the people itself. Its causes are known to us. As long as a people exists, however, it is

ENTARTETE KUNST

ausstellung von „kulturdokumenten“
des bolschewismus und jüdischer
zersetzungsarbeit. vom 4. III. bis 31. III. 1936

was wir in dieser interessantesten
schau sehen, wurde einmütig
ernst genommen!!!

vierthaler

Ausstellung im Weißen Saal der Polizeidirektion, Neuhauserstraße, Eingang Augustinerstraße
Geöffnet: Werktags von 10 bis 21 Uhr, Sonntags 10 bis 18 Uhr
Eintritt: Für Einzelpersonen 20 Pfennig. Bei geschlossenen Führungen der Betriebe 10 Pfennig.
Anmeldung der Führungen im Gauamt der N.S.-Gem. „Kraft durch Freude“ Abt. Propaganda

Vierthaler (unidentified), *Degenerate Art*,
“Exhibition of ‘culture documents’ of the
decadent work of Bolsheviks and Jews,” 1936.

the fixed pole in the flight of fleeting appearances. It is the being and the lasting permanence. And, indeed, for this reason, art as an expression of the essence of this being, is an eternal monument—in itself the being and the permanence

From the history of the development of our people we know that it is composed of a number of more or less differentiated races, which in the course of millenniums, thanks to the overwhelming formative influence of one outstanding racial core, resulted in that particular mixture which we see in our people today.

This power, once capable of forming a people, and thus still today an active one, is contained here again in the same Aryan race which we recognize not only as the carrier of our own culture, but as that of the preceding cultures of antiquity as well.

This particular type of composition of our national heritage conditions the versatility of our own cultural development just as much as it does the resulting natural kinship with those peoples and cultures of the same homogeneous racial core in other European countries of the same family of peoples.

Nevertheless, we who see in the German people the gradually crystallizing end result of this historical process, desire for ourselves an art which takes into account within itself the continually growing unification of this race pattern and, thus, emerges with a unified, well-rounded total character.

The question has often been asked: What does it really mean to be German? Among all those definitions which through the centuries have been suggested by many men, the most valuable one for me seems to be that one which from the start does not even try to give an explanation, but which rather sets up a law. And the most beautiful law which I can envisage for my people as the task set for its life in this world, a great German has already long ago put into words: "To be German is to be clear." This, moreover, implies that to be German means to be logical and also, above all, to be true

Now, this deep inner longing for such a true German art which carries within it the traits of this law of clarity has always been alive in our people. It occupied our great painters, our sculptors, the formers of our architecture, our thinkers and poets, and probably to the highest degree, our musicians. When on that fateful 6th of June in 1931 the old *Glaspalast*¹ burnt down in that horrible fire, an immortal treasure of such true German art went up in flames. They were called the Romantics, but in essence they were the most glorious representatives of those noble Germans in search of the true intrinsic virtue of our people and the honest and respectable expression of those only inwardly experienced laws of life. Yet it

¹ The Glaspalast (built 1854), located in the Botanical Garden in Munich, contained at the time of the destructive fire a comprehensive exhibition of German Romantic painting. This art, which included such masters as Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) and Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810), was almost the only recent tradition of which the Nazis approved, embodying as it did a style and spirit which they took to be Germanic. Thus the destruction of many master works of this tradition presented an opportunity for Hitler to build a new museum devoted to his concept of what the art of the Third Reich should be. [H. B. C.]



H. E. (unidentified), *Degenerate Art, Nazi exhibition, ca. 1937.*

was not only the chosen subject matter that was decisive for the characterization of the German substance, but just as important was the clear and simple manner in which these feelings were represented

Art can in no way be a fashion. As little as the character and the blood of our people will change, so much will art have to lose its mortal character and replace it with worthy images expressing the life-course of our people in the steadily unfolding growth of its creations. Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism, etc., have nothing to do with our German people. For these concepts are neither old nor modern, but are only the artifactitious stammerings of men to whom God has denied the grace of a truly artistic talent, and in its place has awarded them the gift of jabbering or deception. I will therefore confess now, in this very hour, that I have come to the final inalterable decision to clean house, just as I have done in the domain of political confusion, and from now on rid the German art life of its phrase-mongering.

“Works of art” which cannot be understood in themselves but, for the justification of their existence, need those bombastic instructions for their use, finally reaching that intimidated soul, who is patiently willing to accept such stupid or impertinent nonsense—these works of art from now on will no longer find their way to the German people.

All those catchwords: "inner experience," "strong state of mind," "forceful will," "emotions pregnant with the future," "heroic attitude," "meaningful empathy," "experienced order of the times," "original primitivism," etc.—all these dumb, mendacious excuses, this claptrap or jabbering will no longer be accepted as excuses or even recommendations for worthless, integrally unskilled products. *Whether or not anybody has a strong will or an inner experience, he will have to prove through his work, and not through gibberish. And anyhow, we are all much more interested in quality than in the so-called will*

I have observed among the pictures submitted here, quite a few paintings which make one actually come to the conclusion that the eye shows things differently to certain human beings than the way they really are, that is, that there really are men who see the present population of our nation only as rotten cretins; who, on principle, see meadows blue, skies green, clouds sulphur yellow, and so on, or, as they say, experience them as such. I do not want to enter into an argument here about the question of whether the persons concerned really do or do not see or feel in such a way; but, in the name of the German people, I want to forbid these pitiful misfortunates who quite obviously suffer from an eye disease, to try vehemently to foist these products of their misinterpretation upon the age we live in, or even to wish to present them as "Art."

No, here there are only two possibilities: Either these so-called "artists" really see things this way and therefore believe in what they depict; then we would have to examine their eyesight-deformation to see if it is the product of a mechanical failure or of inheritance. In the first case, these unfortunates can only be pitied; in the second case, they would be the object of great interest to the Ministry of Interior of the Reich which would then have to take up the question of whether further inheritance of such gruesome malfunctioning of the eyes cannot at least be checked. If, on the other hand, they themselves do not believe in the reality of such impressions but try to harass the nation with this humbug for other reasons, then such an attempt falls within the jurisdiction of the penal law.

This House, in any case, has neither been planned, nor was it built for the works of this kind of incompetent or art criminal

But far more important is the fact that the labor performed here on this spot for four and a half years, the maximum achievements demanded here of thousands of workers, were not intended to serve the purpose of exhibiting the production of men who, to top it off, were lazy enough to dirty a canvas with color droppings in the firm hope that, through the daring advertisement of their products as the lightning birth of genius, they could not fail to produce the needed impression and qualifications for their acceptance. No, I say. The diligence of the builder of this House and the diligence of his collaborators must be equaled by the diligence of those who want to be represented in this House. Beyond this, I am not the least bit interested in whether or not these "also-rans" of the art world will cackle among themselves about the eggs they have laid, thereby giving to each other their expert opinion.



N.S.D.A.P.: The Iron Guard of the German Revolution (N.S.D.A.P.—National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei-Nazi), ca. 1934.

For the artist does not create for the artist, but just like every one else he creates for the people.

And we will see to it that from now on the people will once again be called upon to be the judges of their own art

I do not want anybody to have false illusions: National-Socialism has made it its primary task to rid the German Reich, and thus, the German people and its life of all those influences which are fatal and ruinous to its existence. And although this purge cannot be accomplished in one day, I do not want to leave the shadow of a doubt as to the fact that sooner or later the hour of liquidation will strike for those phenomena which have participated in this corruption.

But with the opening of this exhibition the end of German art foolishness and the end of the destruction of its culture will have begun.

From now on we will wage an unrelenting war of purification against the last elements of putrefaction in our culture. However, should there be someone among those elements who still believes that he is destined to higher ranks, then he has had ample time in these four years to prove it. For us, in any case, these four years are long enough to reach a final judgment. From now on—I assure you—all those cliques of babblers, dilettantes and art crooks which lend support to each other and are therefore able to survive, will be eliminated and abolished. For our sake those prehistoric stone-age culture-vultures and art stammerers may just as well retreat to the caves of their ancestors to adorn them with their primitive international scribblings.

But the House for German Art in Munich has been built by the German people for their own German art.

To my great pleasure, I am able to state that now already, besides the many decent older artists, who have until now lived in terror and were suppressed, but, who deep in their souls had always remained German, a number of new youthful masters are presenting themselves. A walk through this exhibition will allow you to find quite a few things that will impress you as beautiful and, above all, as decent, and which you will sense to be good. Particularly the level of the graphic art submitted was on the average from the very beginning extremely high and thus satisfying.

Many of our young artists will now recognize in what is being offered them which road they should take; but perhaps they will also gain a new impetus from the greatness of the times in which we all live, and from which we take courage and, above all, retain the courage to produce a really diligent and, thus, in the final run, competent work.

AND WHEN ONCE AGAIN IN THIS REALM OF ART THE HOLY CONSCIENTIOUSNESS WILL HAVE REGAINED ITS FULL RIGHTS, THEN, I HAVE NO DOUBT, THE ALMIGHTY WILL ELEVATE A FEW FROM THIS MULTITUDE OF DECENT CREATORS OF ART INTO THE STARRY SKIES OF THE IMMORTAL, DIVINELY INSPIRED ARTISTS OF THE GREAT PAST. FOR WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT WITH THE GREAT MEN OF THE CENTURIES GONE BY, THE TIME FOR THE CREATIVE POWER OF A FEW BLESSED MEN HAS COME TO AN END, NOR THAT

THE CREATIVE POWER OF A COLLECTIVE BROAD MASS WILL TAKE ITS PLACE IN THE FUTURE. NO! WE BELIEVE THAT ESPECIALLY TODAY, WHEN IN SO MANY REALMS THE HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENTS ARE BEING ACCOMPLISHED, THAT ALSO IN THE REALM OF ART THE HIGHEST VALUE OF A PERSONALITY AS AN INDIVIDUAL WILL MAKE A TRIUMPHANT REAPPEARANCE.

I CAN THEREFORE EXPRESS NO OTHER WISH AT THIS MOMENT THAN THAT THE NEW HOUSE BE PRIVILEGED TO REVEAL AGAIN TO THE GERMAN PEOPLE A LARGE NUMBER OF WORKS BY GREAT ARTISTS IN THESE HALLS DURING THE COMING CENTURIES, AND THUS CONTRIBUTE NOT ONLY TO THE GLORY OF THIS TRUE CITY OF ART, BUT ALSO TO THE HONOR AND PRESTIGE OF THE ENTIRE GERMAN NATION.

I HEREWITH DECLARE THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF GERMAN ART 1937 IN MUNICH OPENED!

*André Breton and Leon Trotsky, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," 1938**

We can say without exaggeration that never has civilization been menaced so seriously as today. The Vandals, with instruments which were barbarous, and so comparatively ineffective, blotted out the culture of antiquity in one corner of Europe. But today we see world civilization, united in its historic destiny, reeling under the blows of reactionary forces armed with the entire arsenal of modern technology. We are by no means thinking only of the world war that draws near. Even in times of "peace," the position of art and science has become absolutely intolerable.

Insofar as it originates with an individual, insofar as it brings into play subjective talents to create something which brings about an objective enriching of culture, any philosophical, sociological, scientific, or artistic discovery seems to be the fruit of a precious *chance*, that is to say, the manifestation, more or less spontaneous, of necessity. Such creations cannot be slighted, whether from the standpoint of general knowledge (which interprets the existing world), or of revolutionary knowledge (which, the better to change the world, requires an exact analysis of the laws which govern its movement). Specifically, we cannot remain indifferent to the intellectual conditions under which creative activity take place, nor should we fail to pay all respect to those particular laws which govern intellectual creation.

In the contemporary world we must recognize the ever more widespread destruction of those conditions under which intellectual creation is possible. From this follows of necessity an increasingly manifest degradation not only of the work of art but also of the specifically "artistic" personality. The regime of Hitler, now

* This English translation by Dwight MacDonald from *Partisan Review* (New York), IV, 1 (Fall 1938), 49-53. For tactical reasons, Diego Rivera rather than Trotsky was originally cited as co-author of the manifesto. See footnote, p. 457.

that it has rid Germany of all those artists whose work expressed the slightest sympathy for liberty, however superficial, has reduced those who still consent to take up pen or brush to the status of domestic servants of the regime, whose task it is to glorify it on order, according to the worst possible aesthetic conventions. If reports may be believed, it is the same in the Soviet Union, where Thermidorean reaction is now reaching its climax.

It goes without saying that we do not identify ourselves with the currently fashionable catchword: "Neither fascism nor communism!" a shibboleth which suits the temperament of the Philistine, conservative and frightened, clinging to the tattered remnants of the "democratic" past. True art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models but rather insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time—true art is unable *not* to be revolutionary, *not* to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society. This it must do, were it only to deliver intellectual creation from the chains which bind it, and to allow all mankind to raise itself to those heights which only isolated geniuses have achieved in the past. We recognize that only the social revolution can sweep clear the path for a new culture. If, however, we reject all solidarity with the bureaucracy now in control of the Soviet Union, it is precisely because, in our eyes, it represents not communism but its most treacherous and dangerous enemy.

The totalitarian regime of the U.S.S.R., working through the so-called "cultural" organizations it controls in other countries, has spread over the entire world a deep twilight hostile to every sort of spiritual value. A twilight of filth and blood in which, disguised as intellectuals and artists, those men steep themselves who have made of servility a career, of lying for pay a custom, and of the palliation of crime a source of pleasure. The official art of Stalinism mirrors with a blatancy unexampled in history their efforts to put a good face on their mercenary profession.

The repugnance which this shameful negation of the principles of art inspires in the artistic world—a negation which even slave states have never dared carry so far—should give rise to an active, uncompromising condemnation. The *opposition* of writers and artists is one of the forces which can usefully contribute to the discrediting and overthrow of regimes which are destroying, along with the right of the proletariat to aspire to a better world, every sentiment of nobility and even of human dignity.

The communist revolution is not afraid of art. It realizes that the role of the artist in a decadent capitalist society is determined by the conflict between the individual and various social forms which are hostile to him. This fact alone, insofar as he is conscious of it, makes the artist the natural ally of revolution. The process of *sublimation*, which here comes into play, and which psychoanalysis has analyzed, tries to restore the broken equilibrium between the integral "ego" and the outside elements it rejects. This restoration works to the advantage of the "ideal of self," which marshals against the unbearable present reality all those powers of the interior world, of the "self," which are *common to all men* and which are constantly

flowering and developing. The need for emancipation felt by the individual spirit has only to follow its natural course to be led to mingle its stream with this primeval necessity: the need for the emancipation of man.

The conception of the writer's function which the young Marx worked out is worth recalling. "The writer," he declared, "naturally must make money in order to live and write, but he should not under any circumstances live and write in order to make money. The writer by no means looks at his work as a *means*. It is *an end in itself* and so little a means in the eyes of himself and of others that if necessary he sacrifices his existence to the existence of his work *The first condition of the freedom of the press is that it is not a business activity.*" It is more than ever fitting to use this statement against those who would regiment intellectual activity in the direction of ends foreign to itself, and prescribe, in the guise of so-called "reasons of State," the themes of art. The free choice of these themes and the absence of all restrictions on the range of his explorations—these are possessions which the artist has a right to claim as inalienable. In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must, under no pretext, allow itself to be placed under bonds. To those who would urge us, whether for today or for tomorrow, to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal, and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula: *complete freedom for art*.

We recognize, of course, that the revolutionary State has the right to defend itself against the counterattack of the bourgeoisie, even when this drapes itself in the flag of science or art. But there is an abyss between these enforced and temporary measures of revolutionary self-defense and the pretension to lay commands on intellectual creation. If, for the better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a *socialist* regime with centralized control, to develop intellectual creation an *anarchist* regime of individual liberty should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above! Only on a base of friendly cooperation, without the constraint from outside, will it be possible for scholars and artists to carry out their tasks, which will be more far-reaching than ever before in history.

It should be clear by now that in defending freedom of thought we have no intention of justifying political indifference, and that it is far from our wish to revive a so-called "pure" art which generally serves the extremely impure ends of reaction. No, our conception of the role of art is too high to refuse it an influence on the fate of society. We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution. But the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art.

In the present period of the death agony of capitalism, democratic as well as fascist, the artist sees himself threatened with the loss of his right to live and

continue working. He sees all avenues of communication choked with the debris of capitalist collapse. Only naturally, he turns to the Stalinist organizations, which hold out the possibility of escaping from his isolation. But if he is to avoid complete demoralization, he cannot remain there, because of the impossibility of delivering his own message and the degrading servility which these organizations exact from him in exchange for certain material advantages. He must understand that his place is elsewhere, not among those who betray the cause of the revolution and of mankind, but among those who with unshaken fidelity bear witness to this revolution, among those who, for this reason, are alone able to bring it to fruition, and along with it the ultimate free expression of all forms of human genius.

The aim of this appeal is to find a common ground on which may be reunited all revolutionary writers and artists, the better to serve the revolution by their art and to defend the liberty of that art itself against the usurpers of the revolution. We believe that aesthetic, philosophical, and political tendencies of the most varied sort can find here a common ground. Marxists can march here hand in hand with anarchists, provided both parties uncompromisingly reject the reactionary police-patrol spirit represented by Joseph Stalin and by his henchman, Garcia Oliver.

We know very well that thousands on thousands of isolated thinkers and artists are today scattered throughout the world, their voices drowned out by the loud choruses of well-disciplined liars. Hundreds of small local magazines are trying to gather youthful forces about them, seeking new paths and not subsidies. Every progressive tendency in art is destroyed by fascism as "degenerate." Every free creation is called "fascist" by the Stalinists. Independent revolutionary art must now gather its forces for the struggle against reactionary persecution. It must proclaim aloud its right to exist. Such a union of forces is the aim of the *International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art* which we believe it is now necessary to form.

We by no means insist on every idea put forth in this manifesto, which we ourselves consider only a first step in the new direction. We urge every friend and defender of art, who cannot but realize the necessity for this appeal, to make himself heard at once. We address the same appeal to all those publications of the left-wing which are ready to participate in the creation of the International Federation and to consider its task and its methods of action.

When a preliminary international contact has been established through the press and by correspondence, we will proceed to the organization of local and national congresses on a modest scale. The final step will be the assembling of a world congress which will officially mark the foundation of the International Federation.

Our aims:

The independence of art—for the revolution;

The revolution—for the complete liberation of art!

*Pablo Picasso, statement about the artist as a political being, 1945**

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he's a painter, or ears if he's a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he's a poet, or even, if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way. How would it be possible to feel no interest in other people and by virtue of an ivory indifference to detach yourself from the life which they so copiously bring you? No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy.

Pablo Picasso, conversation on Guernica as recorded by Jerome Seckler, 1945†

I told Picasso that many people were saying that now, with his new political affiliations, he had become a leader in culture and politics for the people, that his influence for progress could be tremendous. Picasso nodded seriously and said, "Yes, I realize it." I mentioned how we had often discussed him back in New York, especially the *Guernica* mural (now on loan to the Museum of Modern Art in New York) [acquired by the museum soon after—Ed.]. I talked about the significance of the bull, the horse, the hands with the lifelines, etc., and the origin of the symbols in Spanish mythology. Picasso kept nodding his head as I spoke. "Yes," he said, "the bull there represents brutality, the horse the people. Yes, there I used symbolism, but not in the others."

I explained my interpretation of two of his paintings at the exhibition, one of a bull, a lamp, palette and book. The bull, I said, must represent fascism, the lamp, by its powerful glow, the palette and book all represented culture and freedom—the things we're fighting for—the painting showing the fierce struggle going on between the two.

"No," said Picasso, "the bull is not fascism, but it is brutality and darkness."

I mentioned that now we look forward to a perhaps changed and more simple and clearly understood symbolism within his very personal idiom.

"My work is not symbolic," he answered. "Only the *Guernica* mural is symbolic. But in the case of the mural, that is allegoric. That's the reason I've used the horse, the bull, and so on. The mural is for the definite expression and solution of a problem and that is why I used symbolism."

* Excerpt from an interview with Simone Téry, "Picasso n'est pas officier dans l'armée Française," *Lettres Françaises* (Paris), V, 48 (24 March 1945), 6. This English translation from *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* by Alfred Barr, Jr., copyright 1946 by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and reprinted with its permission.

† Excerpt from an interview with Pfc. Jerome Seckler, "Picasso Explains," *New Masses* (New York), LIV, 11 (13 March 1945), 4-7.



Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (detail), 1937, oil on canvas.

“Some people,” he continued, “call my work for a period ‘surrealism.’ I am not a surrealist. I have never been out of reality. I have always been in the essence of reality [literally the ‘real of reality’]. If someone wished to express war it might be more elegant and literary to make a bow and arrow because that is more esthetic, but for me, if I want to express war, I’ll use a machine-gun! Now is the time in this period of changes and revolution to use a revolutionary manner of painting and not to paint like before.” He then stared straight into my eyes and asked, “*Vous me croirez?*” [Do you believe me?]

“... But,” I insisted, “you do think about and feel deeply these things that are affecting the world. You recognize that what is in your subconscious is a result of your contact with life, and your thoughts and reactions to it. It couldn’t be merely accidental that you used precisely these particular objects and presented them in a particular way. The political significance of these things is there whether you consciously thought of it or not.”

“Yes,” he answered, “what you say is very true, but I don’t know why I

used those particular objects. They don't represent anything in particular. The bull is a bull, the palette a palette, and the lamp is a lamp. That's all. But there is definitely no political connection there for me. Darkness and brutality, yes, but not fascism."

He motioned to the color etching of the glass and lemon. "There," he said, "is a glass and a lemon, its shapes and colors—reds, blues, yellows. Can you see any political significance in that?"

"Simply as objects," I said, "no."

"Well," he continued, "it's the same with the bull, the palette, and lamp." He looked earnestly at me and went on, "If I were a chemist, Communist or fascist—if I obtain in my mixture a red liquid it doesn't mean that I am expressing Communist propaganda, does it? If I paint a hammer and sickle people may think it's a representation of Communism, but for me it's only a hammer and sickle. I just want to reproduce the objects for what they are and not for what they mean. If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it was not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make a painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are. It's in my subconscious. When people look at it each person gets perhaps a different meaning from it, from what each sees in it. I don't think of trying to get any particular meaning across. There is no deliberate sense of propaganda in my painting."

"Except in the *Guernica*," I suggested.

"Yes," he replied, "except in the *Guernica*. In that there is a deliberate appeal to people, a deliberate sense of propaganda"

"I am a Communist and my painting is Communist painting But if I were a shoemaker, Royalist or Communist or anything else, I would not necessarily hammer my shoes in a special way to show my politics."

*Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg, "The Question of What Will Emerge is Left Open," 1947**

This is a magazine of artists and writers who "practice" in their work their own experience without seeking to transcend it in academic, group or political formulas.

Such practice implies the belief that through conversion of energy something valid may come out, whatever the situation one is forced to begin with.

The question of what will emerge is left open. One functions in an attitude of expectancy. As Juan Gris said: "You are lost the instant you know what the result will be."

Naturally the deadly political situation exerts an enormous pressure.

* Opening statement for *Possibilities*, "An Occasional Review," (New York), No. 1 (Winter 1947/48), p. 1.

The temptation is to conclude that organized social thinking is "more serious" than the act that sets free in contemporary experience forms which that experience has made possible.

One who yields to this temptation makes a choice among various theories of manipulating the known elements of the so-called objective state of affairs. Once the political choice has been made, art and literature ought of course be given up.

Whoever genuinely believes he knows how to save humanity from catastrophe has a job before him which is certainly not a part-time one.

Political commitment in our times means logically—no art, no literature. A great many people, however, find it possible to hang around in the space between art and political action.

If one is to continue to paint or write as the political trap seems to close upon him he must perhaps have the extremest faith in sheer possibility.

In his extremism he shows that he has recognized how drastic the political presence is.

*Vladimir Kemenov, "Aspects of Two Cultures," 1947**

The basic features of decadent bourgeois art are its falseness, its belligerent anti-realism, its hostility to objective knowledge and to the truthful portrayal of life in art. Here, too, the reactionary tendency in contemporary bourgeois art is presented under the banner of "originality," of struggle against "bourgeois" ideology, etc. Those extreme forms represented by the various "-isms" of anti-realistic bourgeois art were led up to by the gradual renunciation by bourgeois artists of the finest traditions of bourgeois realism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as of the realistic traditions of the art of Greece and the Renaissance. The decline of bourgeois art became most rapid at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, with the rise of the epoch of imperialism and the decay of bourgeois culture which it involved. Even in impressionism we have a suggestion of the artist's indifference to subject matter, reflecting an indifference to the message of art. The interests of the artists of this school became greatly limited; the impressionists painted mostly landscapes and portraits, but their landscapes were approached almost exclusively from the point of view of portraying light, while their portraits, strange as it may seem, reflect a "landscape" approach to the portrayal of the human face. The interpretation of the sitter's character, his inner world and psychology are all subordinated to problems of plain air and the object of conveying the vibrations of light on the body and clothes of the sitter. But the impressionists still saw nature whole, perceiving it directly through man's visual channels.

* Excerpts from the article in *VOKS Bulletin* (Moscow), U.S.S.R. Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, 1947, pp. 20-36.

The post-impressionists, especially Cézanne, criticised the impressionists for making the portrayal of light the exclusive concern of their pictures, sometimes allowing light to diffuse, as it were, the forms of objects. Going to the opposite extreme in their zeal to confirm "material substance," they banned light from painting entirely, and in their portrayals of man and nature began to emphasize properties (volume, weight, form, structure) common to both animate and inanimate objects, gradually turning both landscapes and portraits into still-lives. In Cézanne's still-lives the objects become doubly lifeless: his fruits and flowers lack texture and aroma. Particularly lifeless are his portraits, which completely express the artist's profound and even demonstrative indifference to man. This paved the way for the ensuing anti-humanistic trends of bourgeois art. But "in his compositions, Cézanne could not yet dispense with natural objects as a foundation," laments the suprematist K. Malevich.¹ Cubism and futurism finally broke up objects into geometric lines and planes, dissected them into the elements composing their outer forms and attempted to bring some kind of order into the resulting chaos. Realism was done for, as Picasso openly proclaimed. "We now know," wrote Picasso, "that art is not the truth. Art is a lie enabling us to approach the truth It is up to the artist to find means of convincing the public of the truth of his lie."²

The underlying essence of the class ideology of the reactionary bourgeois epoch of imperialism is clearly expressed in this championing of the lie, in this denial of all objective laws and the possibility of fathoming them, in this hatred for realistic art (no less than for the materialistic theory of knowledge in science). It represents a fear of the truth, a fear of rational knowledge of life, an animal fear in the face of the inexorable operation of the laws governing the development of reality, laws presaging the inevitable destruction of monopolistic capitalism as an antiquated social form hindering the further development of humanity, smothering all that is vital and progressive, maiming the lives of millions of people for the sake of maintaining and strengthening power in the hands of a group of parasitic exploiters

In truth, the principle reasons for the gulf between contemporary art and the people, for the extreme decline and degradation of contemporary bourgeois art, is its reactionary content, that is, its militant hostility to popular ideas, and its decadent form—the result of its having cut itself off from life. Within art this is reflected in the rejection of realism, which is the sole basis of genuine artistic creation, without which an integral work of art is impossible

As for correcting the basic and all-decisive error of modern art—that is, changing its attitude towards reality, bridging the gap between art and life, returning to realism as the only road leading to progress and the flourishing of the

¹ K. Malevich, *Manifest suprematizma*. v. k.

² *Arts de France*, No. 5, 1946. v. k.

arts—that was something these experimenters and innovators in art failed to think about, and therefore their attempts to find a solution for the growing artistic crisis were doomed to failure.

Leaders of various schools of contemporary bourgeois art embarked upon a one-sided development of the diverse elements of artistic form which in classical bourgeois realism existed in unity and harmony.

Thus, the impressionists made a fetish of light and visual sensation and developed these one-sidedly to the detriment of other elements of painting. Disputing with the impressionists, Cézanne banned light in favor of geometric volumes modelled in color. The futurists, just as one-sidedly, developed problems of motion, making a fetish of that, and subordinating all else to it. The expressionists, again, one-sidedly emphasized the subjective factor and the element of exaggeration (factors, which, as such and no more, may be said to be intrinsic to the creative process), hypertrophying them, for purposes of greater “expressiveness,” to the point of hideously deforming the objects and phenomena depicted. Lesser schools have contented themselves with making a fetish of such components of painting as surface texture, geometric line, and so on (purism, tactilism). Innumerable schools and trends have arisen, each of them making pretentious claims, shouting imprecations at each other, waging a war of “principles.”

This seeming activity in the realm of art is, however, by no means evidence of virility. On the contrary, it bears witness to its progressive deterioration

For all the “freedom” which artists won after they had driven life from the realm of their formalistic art, they nevertheless tried at the beginning of the century to justify this subjective anarchy by pseudo-scientific, technical, and other subterfuges in their work, writings and declarations . . . to prove its analytical character, and so on. However, very soon even this quasi-scientific terminology was discarded, and in contemporary bourgeois formalistic art the most rampant subjectivism, proclaiming the cult of mysticism and of the subconscious, has triumphed openly, and abnormal mental states are held up as examples of the complete creative freedom of the individual.

All these features of decadent bourgeois art were declared aspects of “art for art’s sake,” which is alleged to be alien to any semblance of ideological content. As a matter of fact, this “pure” art actually disseminated reactionary ideas, ideas that were advantageous or useful to the capitalists. Formalistic artists ceased to be rebels and became the abject slaves of capital, even though from time to time they did assail capitalism, sometimes even sincerely. How are these different factors to be reconciled? Among certain formalistic artists in foreign countries a yawning chasm formed between their political views and public sympathies on the one hand, and their artistic practice on the other. This chasm proved so great that even the events of the world war against fascism, in which many of them participated as members of the allied armies or the resistance movement, could not change their views on art. They continued demonstratively to deny the ideological

content of art and all connection between the aims of art and the interests of the wide masses.

Even those formalists, who, like Picasso, have repeatedly professed sympathy for the struggle of democracy against fascism show a marked unwillingness to apply the progressive aspects of their world outlook to their artistic practice. A yawning chasm still exists in their work to this day, resulting not merely in the failure of these artists to advance the struggle of their peoples against fascism and reaction by their creative efforts, but also, objectively, in their furthering (through their art) the very aims of the bourgeois reaction against which they vehemently protest in their political utterances and declarations.

By proclaiming "art for art's sake," void of all contact with the struggle, aspirations and interests of the wide masses, by cultivating individualism, the formalists are affirming the very thing the reactionaries want them to. They are playing into the hands of the decadent bourgeoisie who in their efforts to preserve their domination look with hatred upon the development of the consciousness of the masses, upon the growth of their sense of human dignity and their feeling of solidarity, upon any rousing of their activity through the means of realistic art rich in ideological content.

It is frequently said that in his pathological work Picasso has deliberately created an ugly and repellant image of contemporary capitalist reality in order to rouse the spectator's hatred for it—that Picasso is the artist of "Spanish democracy."

This, obviously, is not true. Although Picasso's early works of his "blue" period still retain some connection with Spanish painting, when he turned to cubism his art became absolutely abstract. He then renounced all the traditions of realistic art, Spanish included, and followed the line of cosmopolitanism, of empty, ugly, geometric forms, which are as alien to Spanish as to any other democracy. When Picasso wanted to portray the suffering of the Spanish people in the war against Italian and German fascism, he painted his *Guernica*—but here, too, instead of heroic Spanish republicans, he showed us the same wretched, pathological and deformed types as in his other paintings. No, it is not in order to expose the contradictions of reality nor to arouse hatred for the forces of reaction that Picasso creates his morbid, revolting pictures. His is an aesthetic apologetics for capitalism; he is convinced of the artistic value of the nightmares called into being by the disintegration of the social psyche of the capitalist class

It is naive to imagine that an incongruous distortion of man "upsets" the bourgeoisie. This is a favorite theory (accepted without question by Madelaine Rousseau) by which Picasso's champions attempt to prove the "anti-bourgeois" and "revolutionary" nature of his art. But it is notable that this ugly distortion rouses the indignation of the plain people rather than of the bourgeoisie. This can be observed in France as well as in other countries. It was just these plain people who were most incensed by Picasso's London exhibition. Even the magazine *Studio* wrote that the pictures in this exhibition were severely judged and were defined as degrading, demoralizing, decadent and degenerate. The *Times* received

more letters about this exhibition than it received when the atom bomb was invented, and the overwhelming majority of the letters expressed the indignation of those who had visited Picasso's exhibition. As for his pictures "upsetting" the bourgeoisie, it is just the bourgeoisie who represent his principal admirers and supporters. American magazines are always prompt to report how many thousands of dollars Picasso's latest picture has been sold for.

Certain of Picasso's champions manage to find that his art is "humane," although every one of his pictures refutes this by tearing the body and face of man to pieces and by distorting him beyond recognition. (See, for example, his series of feminine portraits published in Paris in 1943, or his painting of a seated woman included in the post-war New York exhibition of 1947.) They explain his distortions by claiming that Picasso gives a true reflection of his age. Here, for example, is what the French critic Anatole Jakovski says in an article in the *Arts de France*: "Nothing human is alien to Picasso. He sees all that is human just as it is, with all its evils and ugliness, and only as a worthy contemporary of Buchenwald and Ravensbruck must often see it. Can Picasso be blamed for having chosen the wrong epoch?"¹ The same idea is met in an article by another contributor to this magazine.² In this article the author shows that Picasso's attitude to reality is one of "tenderness, sometimes turning to harshness. But is the gulf dividing these two attitudes so very great?" Such is reality for Picasso. "Of course it is claimed that he sometimes sees it as monstrous. This is a fine accusation to be made by an epoch which forces the artist to become locked up in himself and is shocked when he, like the trees in a Japanese garden, responds with nothing but thorns and prickly flowers. Picasso is also offered as proof that a genius can do nothing other than reflect the best and the worst aspects of his age, with all of its most striking contradictions."³

Thus it follows that the age is entirely to blame. There is, of course, a measure of truth in such a claim, for the epoch of imperialism has indeed crippled and mutilated the talent of many artists, including Picasso. It has led them astray and turned them from realism, the only true path in art, into the hopeless labyrinth of formalistic tendencies and endless "-isms." But it would be wrong to claim that every contemporary artist is fated to become part of the process of disintegration characteristic of decadent bourgeois art. The age (which Picasso cannot indeed be blamed for choosing) has produced not only fascism, Buchenwald, and Ravensbruck. It has also produced the heroic struggle of the peoples against fascism and works by writers and artists inspired with democratic ideas. Why have these aspects of contemporary life not influenced the work of Picasso? . . .

The Great Socialist revolution changed reality; in place of the former bourgeois-landlord structure of old tsarist Russia it built up a socialist society. On this new soil art flourished and a way was found out of the impasse presented by

¹ *Arts de France*, No. 5, 1946. v. k.

² *Arts de France*, No. 6, 1946. v. k.

³ *Arts de France*, No. 7, 1946. v. k.

formalism and ideological vacuity. In the U.S.S.R. art received the right to participate in the building up of life not as ordered by the rich patrons of the arts, but in accordance with the nation-wide state socialist plan (the construction of new and the reconstruction of old cities, architecture, sculpture, frescoes, easel painting applied to large public projects—the subway, the Volga Canal, the Palace of Soviets, etc.). Art in the U.S.S.R. again enjoys a mass audience, a wide public comprised of the millions of Soviet peoples of all nationalities and walks of life. Art has again become popular in the fullest, most literal sense of the word.

Soviet art is progressing along the path of socialist realism, a path pointed out by Stalin. It is this path that has led to the creation of a vital Soviet art, ideologically forward-looking and artistically wholesome: socialist in content and national in form; an art worthy of the great Stalin epoch.

As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, hypocritically hiding its reactionary class nature behind phrases such as “pure art” and “art for art’s sake,” Soviet artists openly espouse the ideas of Bolshevism expressing the advanced ideas of the Soviet people who at present represent the most advanced people of the world, for they have built up Socialism, the most advanced form of contemporary society. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art with its anti-humanism, Soviet artists present the art of socialist humanism, an art imbued with supreme love for man, with pride in the emancipated individual of the socialist land, with profound sympathy for that part of humanity living under the capitalist system, a system which cripples and degrades men. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art with its falseness, its rejection of a realistic, truthful reflection of life as it is, Soviet artists present the wholesome and integral art of socialist realism, expressed in profound artistic images reflecting true life, showing the struggle between the old and the new and the inevitable triumph of the new and progressive, an art mobilizing Soviet people for further victories. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, divorced from the people, hostile to the interests of the democratic masses, permeated with biological individualism and mysticism, reactionary and anti-popular, Soviet artists present an art created for the people, inspired by the thoughts, feelings and achievements of the people, and which in its turn enriches the people with its lofty ideas and noble images.

Young Soviet art has already created works of world-wide significance. Soviet artists are inspired by great tasks and purposes. Soviet art is advancing along the true path indicated by the genius of Stalin.

Among the many burdens which the young Soviet republic inherited a quarter of a century ago from old landlord-bourgeois Russia, was the decadent, formalistic art of that time. All those “original” tricks which the formalists of Europe and America take such pride in, were ousted by Soviet artists long ago as ridiculous anachronisms.

The road travelled by Soviet art in overcoming formalism is of inestimable importance to the art culture of the whole world. The experience

accumulated by Soviet artists will time and again stand the artists of other countries in good stead when they begin to look for a way out of the impasse of formalism and to create a genuine people's art.

Soviet artists were the daring pioneers who blazed new trails for the further development of contemporary art. This is their great historic contribution. The victory of the socialist revolution in the U.S.S.R. and upbuilding of socialism have radically changed the relationship between countries; it has reassigned the places of different countries on the ladder of general human progress. Much time has passed since Radishchev and the Decembrists had to go to Europe for the progressive ideas that inspired the struggle against the feudal system, ideas which they could rework and adapt to the improvement of the life and culture of tsarist Russia, then still a backward country. Today the position has changed fundamentally. Today forward-looking people all over the world place their hopes in the U.S.S.R. Thanks to the victory of Socialism, a higher social system, the Soviet Union has become the most advanced country in the world. Similarly, Soviet socialist culture is now the most progressive and highest culture. That is why the leading representatives of culture abroad look with eager enquiry, hope, admiration, and gratitude to Soviet socialist culture, to the art of socialist realism.

Soviet painters, sculptors, graphic artists, the artists of the higher social system called Socialism, are creating a real people's art, expressing the greatest ideas of the present day—the ideas of Lenin and Stalin—in the artistic images of socialist realism.

*Congressman George A. Dondero, "Modern Art Shackled to Communism," 1949**

Mr. Speaker, quite a few individuals in art, who are sincere in purpose, honest in intent, but with only a superficial knowledge of the complicated influences that surge in the art world of today, have written me—or otherwise expressed their opinions—that so-called modern or contemporary art cannot be Communist because art in Russia today is realistic and objective

This glib disavowal of any relationship between communism and so-called modern art is so pat and so spontaneous a reply by advocates of the "isms" in art, from deep, Red Stalinist to pale pink publicist, as to identify it readily to the observant as the same old party-line practice. It is the party line of the left-wingers, who are now in the big money, and who want above all to remain in the big money, voiced to confuse the legitimate artist, to disarm the arousing academician, and to fool the public.

As I have previously stated, art is considered a weapon of communism, and the Communist doctrinaire names the artist as a soldier of the revolution. It is a weapon in the hands of a soldier in the revolution against our form of government, and against any government or system other than communism.

* From a speech given in the United States House of Representatives, 16 August 1949. Published in *Congressional Record*, First Session, 81st Congress, Tuesday, 16 August 1949.

From 1914 to 1920 art was used as a weapon of the Russian Revolution to destroy the Czarist Government, but when this destruction was accomplished, art ceased to be a weapon and became a medium of propaganda, picturing and extolling the imaginary wonders, benefits, and happiness of existence under the socialized state

What are these isms that are the very foundation of so-called modern art? . . . I call the roll of infamy without claim that my list is all-inclusive: dadaism, futurism, constructionism, suprematism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, and abstractionism. All these isms are of foreign origin, and truly should have no place in American art. While not all are media of social or political protest, all are instruments and weapons of destruction

Cubism aims to destroy by designed disorder.

Futurism aims to destroy by the machine myth

Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule.

Expressionism aims to destroy by aping the primitive and insane

Abstractionism aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorm.

Surrealism aims to destroy by the denial of reason

The artists of the "isms" change their designations as often and as readily as the Communist front organizations. Picasso, who is also a dadaist, an abstractionist, or a surrealist, as unstable fancy dictates, is the hero of all the crackpots in so-called modern art

Legér and Duchamp are now in the United States to aid in the destruction of our standards and traditions. The former has been a contributor to the Communist cause in America; the latter is now fancied by the neurotics as a surrealist

It makes little difference where one studies the record, whether of surrealism, dadaism, abstractionism, cubism, expressionism, or futurism. The evidence of evil design is everywhere, only the roll call of the art contortionists is different. The question is, what have we, the plain American people, done to deserve this sore affliction that has been visited upon us so direly; who has brought down this curse upon us; who has let into our homeland this horde of germ-carrying art vermin?

We are now face to face with the intolerable situation, where public schools, colleges, and universities, art and technical schools, invaded by a horde of foreign art manglers, are selling to our young men and women a subversive doctrine of "isms," Communist-inspired and Communist-connected, which have one common, boasted goal—the destruction that awaits if this Marxist trail is not abandoned

*Giulio Carol Argan, "The Reasons for the Group," 1963**

What does it signify when there appear in the current artistic situation not only tendencies or trends, but also groups organized for research whose work is often

* Originally published as "La Ragioni del Gruppo," *Il Messaggero* (Rome), 21 September 1963. This English translation by Renée Neu.

identified only by a number, letter, or sign? Isn't the group method reserved for scientific and technological research? And what will become of personal discovery and that value of aesthetic quality which many believe is the expression of the most perfect individuality?

First answer: Group research has been practised by city planners and architects for a long time. Therefore, either city planners and architects have moved from the aesthetic to the technological field, or aesthetic research, even if limited to that area, is already group research. The schools of Wright at Taliesin and Gropius at Harvard have all the characteristics of the "team," of the research group in operation. Nevertheless, no one thinks that Wright and Gropius belong to the history of science and technology rather than the history of art.

Second answer: "Gestalt" trends seen in today's aesthetic group research were not developed recently but spring from the teachings of Moholy-Nagy and Albers at the Bauhaus some thirty years ago. These currents continue to develop at excellent institutions such as the American schools of design and visual arts and the school "für Gestaltung" of Ulm. (There is no need to repeat that every serious school is a "team" and does the work of a group.) They now emerge saliently as alternatives to movements that are, to say the least, disquieting, and represent products of the reaction to the general crisis of formal languages. Their meaning and historical significance must be valued within the limits of a dialectical relation like a force in a system.

Before one can describe the collectivism of the "gestalt groups," one must study the individualism advocated and practiced by contrasting groups, the so-called "realism of the object," the dubious American "Pop Art" and the equally ambiguous "new Figuration." Without discussing the values or even the intentions of these trends it is possible to group them in the vast category of social reportage The situation can be noted with sympathy, acquiescence, irony, nausea, but the personal contribution, when there is one, is limited to a psychological reaction which might even become an opinion but is never pushed to the point of a formed judgment. There is no ideological stimulus; this kind of observation immobilizes, it does not change the situation. Rather, it reduces it to the level of minimum values, of non-values: individuality is identified with sex and its anomalies; collectivity with the passion for comic-strips, television quizzes, and football games. The same phenomena that are the objects of this research (if one can still call it this) are also the objects of scientific psycho-sociological investigation conducted through relevant statistics. In this case, however, motivational research is united with operational research which has a tendency, when positive, to orient and, when negative, to exploit the behavior of individuals and the masses. The art of reportage lags way behind. It does not affirm the right and necessity for individual action but limits itself to insinuating that in taking stock of the situation and therefore objectifying it, one might be able to avoid as a solitary individual the law of the herd. Since one cannot suffer simultaneously from the common ills and from one's own isolation, what is defended is not the

right of the individual to his own freedom but to his own cowardice, his own neurosis, his own liver or cerebral cancer, and finally, suicide.

Aside from theoretical and functional assumptions, the "gestalt research groups" stand out in comparison with technological impersonality on one hand and the solipsistic attitudes often confused with individualism on the other. Gestalt research cannot be reduced to technological research because its goal is to verify: first, if and in what way rigorous, perceptive behavior can be translated into operative procedure; second, whether a rigorous, operative procedure is valid only in its technological aspects or as a type of moral behavior as well; third, whether a rigorous, moral behavior can realize its own ends in technologically perfect and socially useful production or if it demands to take place within a larger field with ideological motivations.

"Gestalt groups" give an affirmative answer to the first two points. As for the third one, it is readily admitted that a rigorous technology neither fulfills all the demands nor exhausts all the possibilities of moral life and that, as a matter of fact, there cannot be a rigorous technology without a largely social goal and, therefore, ideological motivations. A rigorous technology is one which produces both the object and the value; but a consciousness of the value is already a criticism of it, i.e., a condition of its historical supremacy. There cannot be value and consciousness of value without finality and aesthetic judgment. The gestaltic trend does not identify (and never confuses) technology with aesthetics, or aesthetics with ethics, but affirms that only a technology guided by a consciousness of value, or by an aesthetic methodology can be situated in an ethical field and only a technology located in ethics can consider itself a rigorous technology

There is a third answer relating to the function of the individual within the group. Group consciousness excludes individual research and discovery for the very obvious reason that one does not become part of a group to do what he can or would like to do by himself. But we are not trying to determine here whether or not interest in adventure and individual discovery in the aesthetic or any other field will disappear from the earth. Time will tell us that. Instead, at a moment when the pace of the deplorable process of massification is alarmingly accelerated, it is extremely important to know if nonindividual aesthetic experience and activity is possible. The Gestaltic groups answer in the affirmative and show that these are possible but only as experiences of groups, not of masses. The masses in their obedient inertia do not know of aesthetic exigencies and cannot produce art. Thus, in discussing the dangerous dilemma of the masses and the individual, the term "group" is substituted for "individual." This is not done arbitrarily; the danger of the actual situation lies in the fact that, instead of the sociability, it is the nonsociability, the solitude of the individual that is often advocated and defended. But the individual is desperately alone in the desert, desperately alone in the crowd. The individual, already divested of every social interest and attitude, is disarmed and ready to be swallowed by the masses. That is why artistic trends which search for indications and symptoms and then limit themselves to confirming the

situation with indifference, or perhaps denouncing it angrily, seem to us dangerously resigned and, in fact, already alienated on the moral and political level. Whoever wants to defend the free activity of the individual from the torpid and lethal inertia of the masses must realize, first of all, that the fundamental quality of the human being is the capacity, the will to place himself in relation to and associate himself with others in community; to coordinate his own actions with those of others, to become a group, to build a society which finds in its own internal dynamism the impulse to surpass itself and advance. One should not forget that the masses, or those who lead and exploit them, are always indulgent and even generous with the individual even when he rebels; but they fear the committed, organic group, detest a community organized for creative goals, mortally hate a society in movement. In order to destroy them at their roots, the masses are always capable of generating, from the darkness of their own viscera, a monstrous type of the "solitary," the "unique" individual the dictator Hitler.