

Being An Artist After The End of Art

Being An Artist After The End of Art is a two part essay that focuses on the concept of making art, after the end of art has been met. The first section of my essay acts as a call and response literary review to Arthur Danto's "The End of Art". This section is split into four parts; 1) Danto & An Institutional Theory of Art, 2) Danto & Art History, 3) Danto & The Avant Garde, 4) Danto & The Rise of Contemporary. Each segment will focus on explaining, dissecting, and re-explaining the significant components that lead to Danto's theory of "The End of Art". In return to my literary review, I proposed the question, "how and why am I an artist after the end of art?" The second half of my essay acts as a personal response to Danto's theory. It includes; my interpretation of what it means for art to have met its end, how that has affected our perception of the world and the art world, what is a work of art and who is an artist, and how in turn the end of art has affected the ways in which I create.

Arthur Danto - An Introduction

Arthur Danto (1924-2013) was an academic who had a passion for the twinning of art and philosophy. Prior to pursuing a long lasting academic career in philosophy and art, he initially set out as a practicing artist. Danto began teaching philosophy at Columbia University in 1951, earning his doctorate the following year. From 1984 until 2009, he also wrote as an art critic for *The Nation*, along with contributing critical art texts to publications such as Artforum.¹ His infatuation with critical art writing began in 1964, following his visit to the Stable Gallery in New York where he viewed an exhibition of

¹Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, "An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto's "The End of Art", Hyperallergic, March, 2015, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. This exhibition became a life changing experience, broadening his comprehension of art from a critical and philosophical standpoint. In response to seeing Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, Danto put forth a controversial theory called "The End of Art" that was published in a short commentary in the *Soho News*. In 1984 he expanded this commentary in a more complete form, when he published the piece as the lead essay in a book entitled *The Death of Art*.² In his theory of the "The End of Art," Danto attempts to explain the contemporary condition of art by examining the changing status of art in society, not solely through art history, but also through the historical relationship between art and philosophy.³

Danto & An Institutional Theory of Art

Warhol's *Brillo boxes* not only inspired Danto with their subject matter, but mainly by their form. Unlike Warhol's screen prints of soup cans and celebrities, which were a visual representations of the objects being portrayed, Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* were virtually indistinguishable from the real objects themselves. If Warhol were to place a real Brillo box next to his sculpture, perhaps not even the artist himself would be able to tell the



Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box*, 1964.

difference between the two. At this moment Danto realised that "two outwardly indiscernible things can belong to different, indeed to momentarily different, philosophical categories."⁴ Thus, the question must be asked, what distinguished one of

² Arthur Danto, *The Death of Art*, Haven Publications, 1984

³ Laura Ginn, "Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory" (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

⁴ Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 35.

the boxes as an artwork and the other an ordinary object?⁵ By asking himself this question, Danto began to theorise what was later proposed by George Dickie, an influential art philosopher, as “an institutional theory of art”.⁶ Danto explained, “to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world”.⁷ Put more simply, Warhol’s *Brillo boxes* are art because the work has an audience with the knowledge and understanding to read it as such. An institutionalised theory of art is comprised by the collective opinions of critics, curators, collectors, dealers, who can accept or neglect art theories, and also compose certain theories of what art can be.⁸ In Danto’s essay entitled *The Artworld*, he states: “What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is. [Warhol’s Brillo boxes] could not have been art fifty years ago. The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one. It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible.”⁹ Here Danto is addressing the audience, institution, and “artistic theories”, as making something art - but what about the artist’s role? Surely for there to be art, there must be the contribution of an artist? I will tackle this question in detail in the second half of my essay. For now I shall primarily be focusing on constructing a literary review of Danto’s texts, specifically breaking down and analyzing key historical moments within Danto’s *The End of Art*.

⁵ Danto, *After The End of Art*, 35.

⁶ Catherine Lorde, “Convention and Dickies Institutional Theory of Art,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 20, no. 4, (April 1980): 322.

⁷ Lorde, “Conventions and Dickies Institutional Theory of Art”, 322.

⁸ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, “An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto’s “The End of Art”, *Hyperallergic*, March, 2015, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

⁹ Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571.

Danto & Art History

The history of art, as understood by philosopher and art historian Clement Greenberg, is a Eurocentric subject containing a linear progression of movements, each situated one after the other, punctuated by the mark of individual masters. This perceived lineage of Western art history is increasingly being challenged, as it generally denies that anyone but a white male could have left but the slightest trace of a mark on the “key” moments of art history. A prime example of this hegemony can be seen in the historical depiction of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) as being one of the greatest influences of 20th century art and the master of cubism. Today, Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907) is understood as the precursor and genius behind Cubism. This supposed revelation of style originated from Picasso’s attraction to forms and imagery within “primitive” African art. “Cultural transfer,” a concept coined by cultural historian Michel Espagne in the 1980’s, introduced a model of thinking that allowed for the identifying of new dimensions and qualities of cultural exchange.¹⁰ A “cultural transfer” could more rightfully so be read as what writer Anna Malinowska redefines as a “cultural transplantation”, where selected parts become grafted from one “cultural body” onto another. Malinowska states that “unlike surgical procedures, cultural transplants do not require a complete removal of a body part from its original owner...these objects do not need to leave their original system of growth to



Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, 1907, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

¹⁰ Manuela Rossini and Michael Toggweiler, “Cultural Transfer: An introduction,” *A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 5-9.

circulate and function in systems they transfer to.”¹¹ In the context of Picasso’s *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the transplantation of primitive forms into Western art raises questions such as; who “owns” art history, who can decide what is art and what is not, and when does it begin to be art? With *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, African art is not accredited as being the founder of this style; the appropriator is credited for the new stylistic phenomena. Once brought into the context of a Western environment by a Western artist, a once primitive, uneducated or unrefined style is somehow systematically elevated and transformed into what is then considered to be art. Additionally, although these forms continue to be made within their original context, the majority remain to be considered as non-art objects, or merely as cultural artefacts with their makers and cultural significance remaining as seemingly irrelevant to the selective narrative of modern art history. While the Greenbergian narrative is widely accepted as an authority on the modern concept of art history, what is art, and when it begins to be art, it is important to remember that his theories only value a very limited demographic. Additionally, the reading of art history as a structured linear timeline inevitably supports certain concepts of what art is now, what it was in the past and where it will go in the future.¹²

Danto begins his discussion by acknowledging that in order to understand the current and future position of art, one must initially have a general theory of the history of art. The two most common models of art history are 1) progressive and 2) non progressive: according to Danto, when considered independently, neither model sufficiently explains the course of art throughout history. After making this claim, Danto

¹¹ Anna Malinowska, “Cultural Transplantation and Problems of Transferability,” *A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 29.

¹² Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, “An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto’s “The End of Art”, *Hyperallergic*, March, 2015, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

goes on to propose his own model of art history, a fusion of the first two theories coupled with a heavy dose of Hegelian philosophy, which he states makes it apparent that art has without doubt reached its end.¹³ Danto became extremely invested in the philosophical theories of Hegel, particularly his theories on what Phenomenology exemplified: the idea that a history comes to an end when the subject of the story attains self-knowledge.¹⁴

I will now summarise exactly what I mean by 1) a “progressive” versus 2) a “non progressive” theory of art history. Then I will expand more broadly on how Danto uses these models and from there my own thoughts on the current and future position of art.

- 1) A progressive model of art history is based on the recurring art historical theme of mimesis, the desire to imitate nature or to create representations of reality.¹⁵

Mimesis is one of the most dominant narratives of art history, with classical art historians heralding the ancient Greeks’ desire to imitate the human body with utter perfectionism. Mourning their techniques that were “lost” to the “Dark Ages” and then praising its recovery during the Renaissance. Credited as being the “creator” of art history, Giorgio Vassari¹⁶, amongst other early art historians, have continuously idealised artists on their achievements of mimesis. Mimesis created a presumed model of progression because art continued to move forward as each

¹³ Laura Ginn, “Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory” (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

¹⁴ Arthur Danto, “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defence,” *History and Theory* 37, no. 4 (December 1998) 127-143, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.jstar.org/stable/2505400>.

¹⁵ Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 29.

¹⁶ Arthur Danto “The End of Art,” In *The Death of Art*. New York: Haven Publications, 1984.

generation of artists desired to create images that were more illusionistic and faithful to nature than those of their predecessors.¹⁷

With the rise of photography and the moving-image throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these classical ideals of art were constantly being reevaluated, and by the early twentieth century art had fragmented into a multiplicity of co-existing movements - the avant-gardes.

- 2) This led to the idea of a “non-progressive” art history. As art shed its mimetic quality, another aspect of art came to the forefront: the use of art as a means for individual expression. Art began to be understood as a way in which the artist could communicate how they felt about something. Beginning with the Fauvists as Danto claims, art had become a “communication of feeling.”¹⁸ And thus art was no longer understood as being capable of progression, since human beings have not developed new sets of emotions over the course of history.¹⁹ In such a view, art does not progress along a linear path, but rather is simply a discontinuous manifestation of each artist's independent attempt at self-expression. If I am to interlude in this theory of a “non-progressive” model, I would like to point out the fallacy of its proposed independency, as no artist or style lives within a vacuum. By examining the timelines of avant-garde movements, it becomes clear that expressionism did indeed chart a progressive course, and thus the proposed

¹⁷ Laura Ginn, “Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory” (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

¹⁸ Arthur Danto “The End of Art,” In *The Death of Art*. New York: Haven Publications, 1984.

¹⁹ Laura Ginn, “Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory” (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

“non-progressive” model of art history fails to embody its own theories of non-progression.²⁰

Influential art historians such as Greenberg helped to developed this selective historical story of progressive and non progressive art history - a structure based on two linear, Eurocentric models. Thus, these conditions have led to a very basic, reductive and Western oriented interpretation of the history of art.²¹

These two models of art history are, as stated previously, adopted by Danto in his essay *The End of Art*. We could criticise Danto for his reliance on typical art historical models for the structure of his critique, as it perpetuates the misconceptions of a linear Greenbergian interpretation of art history. In *Danto and His Critics*, Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins discuss the “fallacy of linear history,”²² namely that our pre-dominant art historical narratives are largely a product of their retelling. “As a person (or a culture) gets older, the story gets solidified and embellished in the retelling; and of course, it gets longer. Early incidents and events are recast with forward-looking meaning they could not have possibly have had at the time.”²³ If one rejects the linear Western art narrative that Danto adopts in *The End of Art*, then the structure required for Danto’s teleological understanding of art collapses.²⁴ As Danto describes in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*: “When art internalises its own history, when it becomes self-conscious of its history as it has come to be in our time, so that its consciousness of

²⁰ Laura Ginn, “Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory” (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

²¹ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, “An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto's “The End of Art”, Hyperallergic, March, 2015, accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

²² Morgan & Purje, “An Illustrated Guide”.

²³ Mark Rollins, *Danto and His Critics* Second Edition, Wiley-Blackwell (John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2012), 176.

²⁴ Rollins, *Danto and His Critics*, 176.

its history forms part of its nature, it is perhaps unavoidable that it should turn into philosophy at last. And when it does so, well, in an important sense, art comes to an end.”²⁵ Consequently, if one does not adopt the same Greenbergian, male, whitewashed narrative of art history, then we can no longer justify art as being self aware of its own history, as strictly speaking, its history is a construct of a discriminative illusion. Therefore it could be argued that the art is either ignorant of its own history, or it has taken a selective approach in its historical narrative, mirroring its Greenbergian godfather. It is important to keep in mind that art history is largely structured of the biases and subjectivities of the Western linear time frame and the cultural hegemony of theories and philosophies. Thus, Dantos' general exclusion of non-western, non-male art is hardly surprising. Despite these criticisms, one could argue that Danto's theories on *The End of Art* are also demonstrated and validated by a detectable lack of direction in the art world after the rapid acceleration of manifesto driven art had come to its end with its new found plurality and the immense globalization of art.²⁶

Danto & The Avant Garde

As previously acknowledged, due to the growing advancements in new perceptual technologies and an ensuing rise of film and photography in the nineteenth century, previous commitments to mimesis began to decrease - inevitably leading to the decline of the imitation of nature by artists.²⁷ As a result of this abandonment, artists of the twentieth century began to explore questions of art having its own identity. Questions such as:

²⁵ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia Classics in Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-113.

²⁶ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, "An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto's "The End of Art", *Hyperallergic*, (March 2015), accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

²⁷ Laura Ginn, "Art is Dead?: A Critical Analysis of Arthur Danto's End of Art Theory" (Honors Thesis, Lee Honors College, 2005), 3.

What is art? What should art do? How should art be defined? were raised. In asking questions such as these, Danto came to a realisation that art had become self-conscious.

²⁸ Danto's theory is grounded in a philosophical theory of art, or better, in a theory as to what the right philosophical question is concerning the nature of art.²⁹ For Danto, this process of self-realisation and understanding concluded in pure knowledge. Thus, what was aroused within us by works of art, as described by the philosopher Hegel "is not just an immediate enjoyment, but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of arts means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in days when art by itself yielded full satisfaction." Hence, "Art invited us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing what art is."³⁰ Danto argued that through the course of the twentieth century, art had become so intertwined with theory, philosophy and the avant-garde movements that encompass them that "now if we look at the art...what we see is something which depends more and more upon theory for its existence as art, so that theory is not something external to a world it seeks to understand: hence in understanding its object it has to understand itself...and remaining, as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness."³¹ Therefore, it is almost as if the structure of the art world consisted not in "creating art again," but in "creating art explicitly for the purpose of knowing philosophically what art is?"³²

²⁸ Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 36.

²⁹ Danto, *After The End of Art*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

³¹ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia Classics in Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-113.

³² Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 31.

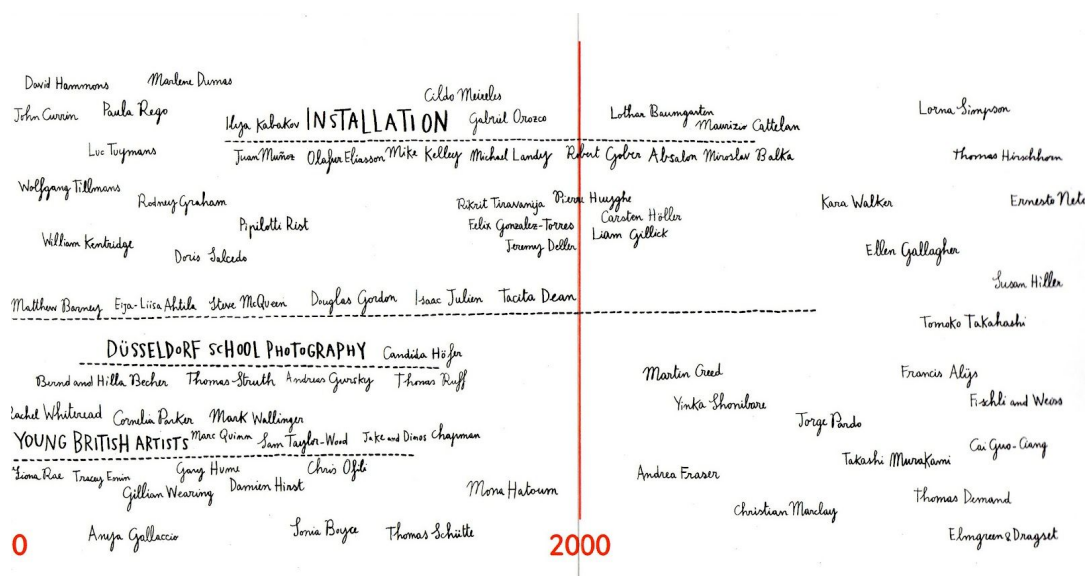
It is true that the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented acceleration of movements, with each movement forwarding its own notions of what art could be. Within the absolute abundance of manifestos from movements and “isms” during this time, each strived to unveil the “true meaning of art,” all believing that their philosophy was the only “real” or “true” way of making art. Although in truth, all movements must come to an end whether it be mimesis, which dominated art for thousands of years, or an avant-garde movement, which usually lasted no more than a few years and often no more than a couple of months. It began to seem as though “the main point of art” in the twentieth century, according to Danto, “was to pursue the question of its own identity, while rejecting all available answers as insufficiently general.”³³ The avant-garde, driven by innovation, could not ever reach full satisfaction in revealing the “truth” of art, as each time one movement claimed to have discovered it, another would contradict them by proclaiming they had in fact discovered the “real truth”, and so this pattern continued.

Danto & The Rise of Contemporary

The rapid acceleration of avant-gardes during the course of the modernist period gradually exhausted itself by the later part of the twentieth century. After the year 2000, the novelty of movements and “isms” expired and gradually ceased to exist: the art world had become a collective of individual artists with the end of modernism and the rise of contemporary.³⁴ This linear art history is the visual basis of artist Sara Fanelli’s 40-meter-long timeline of 20th-century art commissioned by Tate Modern (Tate Modern, London 2006).

³³ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia Classics in Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-113.

³⁴ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, "An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto's "The End of Art", Hyperallergic, (March 2015), accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.



Sara Fanelli, Tate Artist Timeline, 2006,
Tate Modern, London.

The timeline pinpoints the historical creation of particular movements, while also naming key historic artists. When reading her timeline we can clearly see that in the last part of the twentieth century, *movements* as they are traditionally known practically ceased to exist. For example: “Young British Artists” was a collective of diverse artists based in the same geographic area rather than a shared movement, and “installation” is alternatively a means of presenting art rather than a movement itself. Ultimately, what movement or “ism” could logically follow the dematerialisation of the art object (conceptualism) or the inescapable skepticism of extravagant theories and ideologies (postmodernism)?³⁵ It is characteristic of our post-historical moment to be immune to manifestos and to require an altogether multifaceted critical practice.³⁶ Furthermore, the lack of desire for collective avant-gardeness in contemporary times and the fact that we are living in a time of

³⁵ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, "An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto's "The End of Art", Hyperallergic, (March 2015), accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

³⁶ Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 29.

plurality within the arts puts us into a space where we are no longer projecting what the future of art should be. Because we exist within our contemporaneity, we cannot obtain the distance needed to describe larger movements in a moment that remains so near. This temporal disconnect was illustrated in 1950, when the Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted a retrospective exhibition showcasing the paintings of Chaim Soutine, who died in 1943. Whilst co-ordinating the retrospective, Monroe Wheeler, the publisher and museum coordinator for MoMa asked if Soutine was an abstract expressionist.³⁷ If our answer to Wheeler's question were to be yes, our answer is evidently not something Soutine could have said, since the concept of abstract expressionism was not to become current until after his death. This is more or less the case with narrating art history as a whole. "The narrative always refers to two time-separated events, describing the earlier with reference to the later".³⁸ Soutine could not have said that he was or was not an abstract expressionist, because the idea had not manifested within his time. Danto makes it clear that within our time of post art history, it is no part of his claim that there will be no stories to tell after the end of art, "only that there will not be a single metanarrative for the future history of art."³⁹ Ergo this is a contributing factor as to why, by the beginning of the 2000s, Fanelli's timeline becomes stripped of most if not all categorisations or groups of art/artists and merely shows encounters between individual artists in a newly globalized context.

Although widely read and acknowledged within the art world, Danto's theories on post historical art are not entirely admired by the art industry. Artists don't exactly want to be

³⁷ Arthur Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defence," *History and Theory* 37, no. 4 (December 1998) 127-143, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.jstar.org/stable/2505400>

³⁸ Arthur Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defence," 127-143.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 127-143.

told that their work has no developmental potential, or that it exists in a post art historical world.

So, I ask the question: “How and why am I an artist after the end of art?”

Within Danto’s Essay on *The End of Art*, at no point did he ever state that art should stop being made, nor did he imply it. Subsequent to the fizzling out of manifesto driven art, whose practitioners claimed that any other art was not the right “style” to illustrate what they felt was the “true” philosophy of art, a new level of philosophical consciousness was reached. There became a realisation that art no longer bears the responsibility for its own philosophical definition. During a 1963 interview, in response to the topic of manifesto-driven art, Warhol queried “How can you say any style is better than another? You ought to be able to be an Abstract expressionist next week, or a Pop artist, or a realist, without feeling that you have given up something.”⁴⁰ Warhol is essentially saying that, because art had been passed through every form of its “true self”, there could no longer be a hierarchy or correct way that works of art need to look - since all styles are of equal merit, a philosophical definition of art must be compatible with every kind and order of art. As a result, the philosophical definition of art has to capture everything and therefore can exclude nothing.⁴¹ Now, this does not mean that all art is therefore equal or equitably good. Rather, Warhol’s statement is solely articulating that the quality or validity of artworks are no more a matter of belonging to the right style, or falling under the right manifesto. Thus, what Danto truly means by saying that we have come to the “end of art” is that “finally there can be no historical direction art can take from this point on. For the

⁴⁰ G.R.Swenson, “What is Pop Art?: Answers from 8 Painters, Part I,” *Art News*, November, 1963, 26.

⁴¹ Arthur Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History*, Princeton Classics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014),36.

past century, art has been moving toward a philosophical self-consciousness, and this has been tacitly understood to mean that artists must produce art that embodies the philosophical essence of art. We now can see that this was a wrong understanding, and with clearer understanding comes the recognition that there is no further direction for the history of art to take. It can be anything artists or patrons want it to be.”⁴²

Adopting An Art Attitude

I want to now focus directly on a fragment of that last quote by Danto, “Art..can be anything artists..want it to be.”⁴³ Want, being the keyword here. Want directly links to desire. So what Danto now speaks of is that art is now whatever the artist desires art to be. I believe this to be a misleading trajectory to guide the reader through. For example, Pop Art and Fluxus movements actively worked to break down the barriers between art and the everyday.⁴⁴ A central theoretician for Fluxus, George Maciunas insisted that: “it is perception and ‘attitude’ that count. Art has reached its end, then, not by being abolished, but by being dissolved into everything else.”⁴⁵ Therefore, I do not believe that Pop, Fluxus and their inspired contemporaries were/are driven by the desire to be able to make anything that they want and then for it to be labelled art; rather, I believe they were driven by a new form of perception and attitude to the everyday. I find the word “attitude” very prevalent in the writing of Maciunas. He expressed that “there was no need for art. We had merely to learn to take an ‘art attitude.’ If people could learn to take the ‘art attitude’ toward all everyday phenomena, artists could stop making art works”.⁴⁶ Then, it

⁴² Danto, *After The End of Art*, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 36.

⁴⁴ Tiernan Morgan & Lauren Purje, “An Illustrated Guide to Arthur Danto’s “The End of Art”, *Hyperallergic*, (March 2015), accessed March 10, 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/191329/an-illustrated-guide-to-arthur-dantos-the-end-of-art/>.

⁴⁵ Jorn Bramann, “Understanding the End of Art,” *Philosophical Forum at Frostburg University*, 1998, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://faculty.frostburg.edu/phil/forum/forum4.htm>.

⁴⁶ Bramann, “Understanding the End of Art”

could be said that art at this point in history is not a certain class of objects anymore as it had been in the past, but rather a way of seeing things. Maciunas believed that art had begun to embody a sort of transcendental principle of perception. "If human beings could experience the world, the concrete world surrounding them (from mathematical ideas to physical matter) in the same way they experience art, there would be no need for art, artists, and similar 'non-productive elements'" (George Maciunas). So, why then is art still being produced and why does the artist still exist?

First and foremost, I should make it very clear that it is not possible or has not become possible for the entirety of the human race to adopt this eurocentric philosophical idea of art or to use the correct terminology "post-art". Quite frankly, I think it would be inappropriate if this were to be the sole universal means of perception or the singular and global "art attitude", as our world should seek to strive on diversity and intersectionality - a concept relatively if not altogether excluded for the greater part of art history.

Additionally, regardless of Maciunas's suggestion that "if people could learn to take the 'art attitude' ...artists could stop making art works,"⁴⁷ this ideological method of communal thinking is not possible on a global scale. As open and inviting as this theory would like to portray itself, western art is just not accessible to the masses: it speaks its own language, not a common tongue. Finally, I almost find it humorous that it was insinuated that everyone should adopt this form of perception. By virtue, the art market thrives on and strives for exclusivity: so what would be exclusive about it, if everyone could understand and speak the language of the artist and art institution? (To be clear, I myself do not strive to be exclusive, I am merely commenting on the facts.) These reasons, in my judgment,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

are why the artist is still relevant in a time where theoretically there should no longer be any use for artists - when technically everything can be art and anybody can be an artist.

The artist almost becomes a tool for perception. Everything can be art and everyone can be an artist, but it is only those who adopt that means of perception that are considered or consider themselves an artist. You have to believe it to see it, once you believe it to be art, you can see it as art - if that is what you wish. For some, they do not need an artist or a gallery to take the "art attitude," yet others need the direction of the artist and the gallery to convince them that it is in fact art. Thus the people who adopt this "art attitude" are in turn the artists, and the ones who do not, the spectators.

So really all that the artist need do is point their finger.

To begin, I will attempt to briefly summarise what Phenomenology is: Phenomenology, an immensely broad topic which is studied as a method of inquiry into philosophy, is based on the hypothesis that reality consists of objects and events ("phenomena") as they are perceived or understood in the human consciousness, and not of anything independent of human consciousness. Within phenomenology, nothing exists without a name. The existence of an object or event ("phenomena") occurs through the phenomena being constructed and named within our minds through our first person or subjective experiences. What makes an experience conscious is a certain awareness one has of the experience while living through or performing it. These experiences then become part of the human consciousness, without which the phenomena could not exist. It is human nature that once we first comprehend a lived experience, we then begin to name the experience that took place. These two steps are made through the consciousness of our

minds and then, in turn, form part of our reality. Therefore within phenomenology, I emphasise again, that a phenomenon must first be named to then exist.

Now that I have (extremely) briefly covered Phenomenology, I want to trace my steps backward and focus on the header of this section, where I stated that “all the artist need do is point their finger.” I believe there to be a correlation between the action of an artist pointing their finger at something in order for it to exist as art and the human consciousness naming a phenomenon in order for it to exist in reality. By this I mean that I interpret the artist within this context to emulate the human consciousness within Phenomenology. I understand that this can be interpreted as an extremely egotistical statement to make. Therefore I want to make it clear that my statement is intended to be proposed with no portion of the ego attached to it. I am though attempting to break down my analysis of the two, and I aim to compare and highlight what I find to be similar qualities between the roles adopted by the post-historical artist and the human consciousness within Phenomenology. I believe the artist to be a being that takes from their first person or subjective experiences of everyday life and enables these experiences to exist as art, purely by pointing their finger at it. The action of pointing their finger and saying something is art in order for it to exist as art, to me, is the same as the human consciousness naming something in order for it to exist in reality. The action of pointing their finger can be performed literally or metaphorically. My intention of meaning is that the artist has the power of selecting everyday phenomena from their first person or subjective experiences and transforming them into art via what Maciunas coined “adopting an art attitude”⁴⁸. Within the contemporary art world, there are of course many examples of people adopting this “art attitude”:

⁴⁸ Jorn Bramann, “Understanding the End of Art,” Philosophical Forum at Frostburg University, 1998, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://faculty.frostburg.edu/phil/forum/forum4.htm>.

Tracey Emin (1963) is a contemporary British artist who belongs within the Young British Artists (YBA) movement, a loose group of artists who began exhibiting their works in London in the late 1980's. *My Bed* (1998) is probably one of Emin's most notorious works

and will be the subject of my "art attitude" argument. In this work Emin presented her bed exactly how it looked during a difficult period of her life.⁴⁹ *My Bed* consists of the artist's real wooden framed bed, with its stained white sheets, blanket and pillows, accompanied by a pair of intertwined and tangled nylon stockings and dank,



Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998, Saatchi Gallery, London.

crumpled towels. Sprawled around the bed frame are other articles; crushed cigarette packages, used condoms, dirty underwear, bottles of vodka, slippers, a cuddly toy, along with other personal effects. In an interview with Julian Schnabel, Emin elaborates on her experience: "I had a kind of mini nervous breakdown in my very small flat and didn't get out of bed for four days. And when I did finally get out of bed, I was so thirsty I made my way to the kitchen crawling along the floor...I crawled across the floor, pulled myself up on the sink to get some water, and made my way back to my bedroom, and as I did I looked at my bedroom and thought, 'Oh, my God. What if I'd died and they found me here?' And then I thought, 'What if here wasn't here? What if I took out this bed-with all its detritus...what if I took all of that out of this bedroom and placed it into a white space? How would it look then?' And at that moment I saw it, and it looked fucking brilliant...And

⁴⁹ Josephine van de Walle, "Modern Classics: Tracey Emin - My Bed, 1998", Artlead, January 28, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <http://artlead.net/content/journal/modern-classics-tracey-emin-bed-1998/>

then I took everything out of my bedroom and made it into an installation. And when I put it into the white space, for some people it became quite shocking.”⁵⁰ Regardless of the fact that the work is perceived by many as taboo in subject matter, Emin is sharing the content of her first person experience. In displaying the focal point of her experience - the bed - by isolating it within a white space, she is directing the attention purely to that moment in time, a lived experience as separate from everything else around it. Emin is metaphorically pointing her finger at the subject, thus excluding it from all other phenomena existing around it and singling it out as art. Thus, the action of installing her bed within a white space and giving it the title *My Bed*, is in theory exactly the same as pointing her finger at it. Emin points her finger at a previously non-art object and transforms it into art, purely by means of adopting an “art attitude” to her subjective experience. Without Emin pointing her finger, her bed would have remained as an ordinary everyday object, without any association to being art.

This transformation from everyday phenomena into art brings me back to discuss what Maciunas believed; that art had begun to embody a sort of transcendental principle of perception. So to phrase it differently, we could understand that for Maciunas, art had begun to embody a sort of spiritual truth of seeing. This could become very long and complex to try and dissect and put back together; spiritualism, truth and seeing all being extremely heavy topics. Therefore I’m going to interpret Maciunas’s idea of perception via my own understanding, as being relative to Danto’s claim that art has become “self-conscious.” If art can see and think or even contain a higher knowledge, then it in turn is what Danto referred to as being self-conscious. That means that art is aware of its

⁵⁰ Josephine van de Walle, “Modern Classics: Tracey Emin - My Bed, 1998”, Artlead, January 28, 2017, accessed April 20, 2018, <http://artlead.net/content/journal/modern-classics-tracey-emin-bed-1998/>

own existence. Within this essay I am driving in the direction of Danto rather than Maciunas, in the approach that everything can be art rather than that everything is art. This choice is not related to any specific personal favouring of one theory over the other; Rather, my choice in direction was taken because of its relevance to my next section - selectivity.

Within this final part of my essay, I want to focus on the notion that a work of art - that being something that the artist has claimed to be art - could potentially be aware of its own history, in the sense of knowing that is it in fact art. If the artwork has become self aware as Danto proclaims, then surely it knows its maker, the conditions and context it was made under and the materials it is made of. In a sense, the art has an inner consciousness of its own. This isn't meant to imply that it has a consciousness entirely of its own, as if living within a vacuum, completely independent from any other being - as of course a part of its maker lives within it. A work of art can communicate an awareness of its history, the faults of its maker, the criticisms it may face and the perspectives for which it cannot speak. It is not an entirely independent thinking process of the art piece itself, all of that depends heavily on the understanding of both artist and audience.

This brings me back to what I discussed previously about Danto's selective narrative of art history. Although problematic in many areas as I pointed out in previous paragraphs, its is unavoidable that all narratives within history are selective. Even when writing your own memoir, a history completely formed from first person experiences, you will inevitably decide which parts of that history to narrate. You choose key historical moments from your past to analyse who you are today. Additionally, although your entire history makes up who you are, in actuality you only remember fragments of those lived

experiences. Thus, you perceive those significant fragments to make up who you currently are. The same concept could be applied then, to an artwork, if art is indeed self conscious.

Before describing the work I made and how all this information connects to it, I want to briefly run through my major points and how they link up to one another. To begin, I discussed a correlation between phenomenology, the act of naming phenomena in order for it to exist, and the action of an artist (literally or metaphorically) pointing their finger at something in order for it to exist as art. The gesture of pointing the finger thus transforms the everyday phenomena into art. This transformation in turn ignites a sort of transcendental principle of perception that is adopted by the art. From this theory, I proposed that if art can see, think or even contain a higher knowledge it must be self conscious and therefore have become aware of its own existence. As a result of becoming aware of its own existence, it must therefore be aware of its own history: its maker, materials and the conditions and context it was made under. All with consideration of the fact that every narrative of every history is undoubtedly selective.

Making Art After The End of Art

The work I have created for this show, *Making Art After The End of Art*, is an installation work including a series of practically identical sculptures made from concrete, metal and plaster.

- 1) Each sculpture consists of a base made from poured concrete. My decision to use concrete was an important one, for both practical and meaningful reasons. Practically because it is a cheap and easy to use material, additionally because it is strong, unlikely to break and able to support the structure that it holds. In terms of

meaning, the use of concrete was a personal one. Concrete is a grounding material and is used to form the foundations for building constructions. It is the base support for structures such as homes and bridges. Without having proper foundations, a structure is unstable or doomed to collapse entirely. This resonated with me on a personal level. As part of my nature, I am a very heady person; it is sometimes, if not always, very difficult to get an idea out of my head and into a physical form. Therefore making the base of my sculptures out of concrete became a necessity, as I took to understanding it as something which grounded me and became the foundation of my making.

- 2) From the centre of the concrete base, a cylindrical metal pole extends upwards. Fixed onto the tip of the first pole is a hinge with two screws. The two screws are each attached to flat rectangular bars, both bars running parallel to one another. The hinge allows these bars to move back and forth together within an approximate 90 degree angle - vertically upwards at zero and backwards horizontally at ninety. At the tip of these two bars is another hinge, which is fixed one third of the way down another, but this time singular, flat rectangular bar. The hinge allows the longer length of the pole to move back and forth within an approximate 180 degree angle, pointing upwards to the sky at zero degrees and down to the earth at one hundred and eighty. At the rear end of the bar, in the third before the hinge is a small round handle. On the opposite side of the bar is a final hinge. Attached to the hinge is a plaster cast of my hand with its index finger extended outward. The metal structure that stabilizes the hand functions as part of the art object rather than just a mere stand. It allows the hand to be maneuvered and pointed in various directions, which enhances the effect of the enactment of pointing one's finger. The hinges within the structure activate the work and allows

the various parts of it to move within different directions in unison - alike joints moving together to extend the hand in a specified direction.

- 3) Attached to the hinge is a plaster cast of my hand with its index finger extended outward. The use of plaster for casting the moulds of my hands was again (alike the concrete base) for practical and symbolic reasons. To my understanding, I find white plaster to be reminiscent of archaic forms. When visiting galleries, I often see plaster replicas of ancient sculptures. These plaster replicas that I come into contact with time and time again, are to me indicative of forms that contain an ancient higher knowledge. With regards to that, I find this albeit rather forceful statement by Hegel to be of interest: "Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place."⁵¹ Additionally, the choice of casting hands that point with their index finger was made, so that the form of the sculptures embody the connotations that are installed within the action of pointing. By this I mean to highlight a certain awareness that the gesture contains. An awareness to claim or name whatever is being pointed at, or to hold the power to isolate it from everything else and to single it out as art. Additionally it is important that the sculpture of the hand is cast from my hand, and not from the hand of another, for two reasons. Firstly, because of the statement I made previously: that an artwork, although possessing its own consciousness, will always adopt characteristics from its maker. Secondly, I am not suggesting that art has become human or has grown a physical hand to enable it to point by itself. What I am saying is that art has a consciousness. Consciousness and body are two different

⁵¹ Arthur Danto, "Hegel's End-of-Art Thesis," (1999): accessed April 28, 2018, <http://www.rae.com.pt/Danto%20hegel%20end%20art.pdf>

entities. Thus, by the art taking a cast of my hand to point, it is using part of its physical maker as a utensil to illustrate the theory that it is indeed self conscious.



Judy McNicol, Concrete, Metal & Plaster Sculpture, 2018

The hands are pointing outwards. But what are they pointing at?

The intention of my sculpture series is to give form to the concept that I have been proposing throughout the final section of my essay. If art is to be “self conscious,” then it must be aware of its own history: its maker, its materials, and the conditions or context that it was made under. Thus, the hands point at the materials they were made by, along with significant artefacts from its maker, that resulted in it being made. The hands point at a stack of research journals, texts and books, its maker’s boiler suit covered in plaster and dust from the studio, a cup of coffee, a collection of plastic buckets, raw materials, failed or discarded casts and moulds, along with other selected artefacts that formed part of its existence and thus part of its history. The hand is able to point at any object that formed part of its history, creating a selective narrative through what was chosen and its

own self consciousness towards those artefacts of its history. Furthermore, by pointing at the object, the hand then isolates it from everything else, claiming it, too, to be art. The work of art can communicate an awareness of its history, the faults of its maker, the criticisms it may face and the perspectives for which it cannot speak. There is not an entirely independent thinking process of the art piece itself, all of that depends heavily on the understanding of both artist and audience. What the art can do is be self aware and self conscious of its history and the choices that were made for it. In addition, it becomes aware of the consequences of those choices, which contribute to the reading and interpretation of itself. The installation becomes entirely self-reflective, self aware and self conscious.

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