

Dedicated to my friends and teachers
whose guidance and inspiration have
facilitated these ideas.

THE ABSOLUTION OF TIME

**A PATHOLOGICAL PERCEPTION
OF ORDER
IN THE FALL OF ART HISTORY**

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An art against itself is a good possibility, an art that always returns to essential contradiction. I'm sick of positivists, ontological hopes, and that sort of thing, even ontological despairs. Both are impossible.

The Fall of Art History

The ease of labor assumed to be involved in the making of a painting that consists of a single line, or the purchasing of a urinal, or a painting of a can of soup, or a video of a woman screaming, or a man lying in bed for a month, is not the underwhelming effort that seems to hit many over the head. Viewers of such historic artworks like these often walk away feeling duped, betrayed, and unamused. Mostly, because of how rich some people have gotten off of these acts.

Just because someone doesn't see the punch coming, does it mean it was a sucker punch. Maybe if they just got out of the way they would realize the punch was never meant for them in the first place. The everyday person has been distracted to not see it coming, to act as a shield to the true intention and power of the punch.

You could think of all historically important artworks as punches, the ruling class can only hide for so long. It's not entirely the fault of an unenthusiastic art viewer that they feel ashamed or enraged. Yet, radical artworks continue to find them at the moment of encounter,

and... Bam! The viewer has been walloped across the face. They sit in disbelief, arguing the hit to be cowardly, where only their blindness shields the vision of their spinelessness.

To believe that art-making is training for the ideological battle of our lives is perhaps a rare condition today. Many believe art to be that of leisure, wealth, and prosperity. A tool for the ruling class to control the consumer tastes and preferences of the public. A tool for them to control ideology. Which is all true, even many artworks that were once radical in their time were then proven to be complicit to a limited ideology. Yet, all those efforts were imperative to reach a practice of art-making that valiantly sets out to destroy the ideological hierarchies of our world separating the laborers from the ruling class. For amidst the continual shit art churned out, and the realization of a past artwork's failure, there are specs of ideological weaponry that fought and continue to inform us in the war against order. Through the effort of those artists and the histories of which they slayed, immense socio-political walls have fallen. It is with art's ultimate potential for spiritual unity that the fruits of its labor cannot be reaped by the ruling class. In the words of the mythological multidisciplinary artist, Joseph Beuys, in his 1971 text *Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum*:

Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build a social organism as a work of art.

The modernist scene of painting as the art battlefield and the cartoon capitalist in a suit waiting behind a tree for the dust to settle and get rich after the artist waged into the infinite, has evolved in our recent United States art economic landscape. The artists of the past who fought for the reunion of humanity and nature, spirituality, and life, have died to the winds of time, turning art into interior design, or worse an object with which to signal virtue. The immense power

capitalists have gleaned from the modern world has given rise to an unprecedented ruling class. Few artists have since risen to wage forward into the uncertainty of the infinite for the no longer possibility of reward. For one must leave all desires of the ego behind to continue where art history truly left off.

The education of young artists toward such radical ideas and histories has been blocked by those in power, afraid of art's ultimate threat to ruling dominance. Today, the ruling class has supplanted themselves in charge of directing artists into battle, of which they will always choose the most profitable ones from the past. Young artists follow these fools of folly for the false promise of salvation from an unjust world, the same world these fools have created and continue to uphold.

As artists have fought for the destruction of the fetishized art object they have demolished all aesthetic and formal measures of value. Making any attempt of the ruling class to present aesthetic or formal values as if they are historically important, solely with the interest to serve their commercial success. The result is what can be understood today as the strange contemporary phenomenon where every aesthetic and formal value seems to exist at once. When in reality, they all only seem to exist at once because none of them exist; they no longer serve as adequate measures of value in the true historical understanding of contemporary art. Those in power will falsely champion every aesthetic and formal value because they can use the objects that present these qualities to remain and grow their power. The success of the commercial art economy depends on the anti-commercial, dematerialized history being shielded from our eyes.

The fierce training of an artist, ready to fight for an ideologically free world, has come to an end. Those of the ruling class wish for artists to only fight the battles of the past which brave artists won long ago. It's here in these early battles for an ideologically free, anti-hierarchical world, that capitalists found themselves rich off the still presence of

the art object. Their cowardice and manipulation successfully aligned themselves, and their money, to an economy that they saw as a way to get even richer. Whereas the true war of art has reached far beyond the mountains where one concerned with money cannot climb. Without future artists knowing of these grounds, the space will quickly recede. The wealth that these members of the ruling class have amassed is a strong force used to distract young artists. The young artist has become disposable. Where they are soon replaced by another young artist once they have been used to the limit of their commercial potential in an economy where the value is based solely on the ruling class saying so.

They offer artists money and false glory, but cannot see the treacherous monster they are creating by fighting the war of art, of life, with capital. The ruling class is blind to the monster growing stronger in the distance as their eyes are filled with dollar signs. Before they have a chance to run, the monster will stand before them exposing its wicked teeth. Only after devouring the ruling class, will the monster die with nothing left to consume. It is then, amidst the rubble, that a new cast of artists will come out to sharpen their swords from the histories preserved in the shadows, endeavoring to continue where art's most radical efforts to unify left off. From the books and stories of history and the self-destruction of capitalism, a future trail might be pursued for a world where art and life truly become one. A world where the final battle in the war of art against unjust order wins the ultimate utopia. Where no coward can profit from the labor of art, the labor of our lives.



Art history is thus the ever-present attempt for humanity to return to the natural state from which it came. A life that reflects the experience of cosmic understanding and the wholeness of ourselves with-

in the universe. A sense which, historically, religion has always come to fill, but which categorically finds difference with art where religion has failed us in our search for salvation, replacing salvation with ideology. Religion, as we understand it today, offers insidious individuals the power to take advantage of the vulnerability necessary to understand life. Where art, which has also become an environment overrun by insidious manipulation, can offer a vision of the ultimate religion. A religion that includes all religions, all actions, and all efforts existing simultaneously as art. Where all life is treated with the care and protection of fetishized art objects like Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. In art's purest form there is nowhere for an insidious figure to find power.

Art history could then alternatively be seen as an anti-ideology ideological enterprise. One that is constantly fighting the hierarchies made by sinister peoples and the societies they create to make for a society dominated by a hierarchy against hierarchy. At times, art history and the presentation of anti-hierarchical ideals have reached near fulfillment by small groups of artists but have seemed to only find their way back down the spiritual ladder.

One might find the opinion of a world without order as grandiose, perhaps outright irrational, but I would say no more far-fetched than the wicked fables of reincarnation and magic in the Christian bible. Comparatively, I believe art and its histories to be quite grounded, where not once do we see someone claiming to come back from the dead. But rather we do see a small few who have sacrificed their lives for the true history of art and the future they believe it to create. The artist, Bas Jan Ader, must be remembered for many things, one of which is perhaps most important to note here; In 1975 he paddled out into the open ocean for an artwork he called *In Search of the Miraculous*, never to be seen again.

The way the word “history” is used today has come to represent a wayward version of what actually happened in the past, primarily describing the extremely limited narrative told by Europeans. This limited history that we often hear or speak of is not true history, but a fragment of a story simplified and edited to serve the ideological functions of capitalism and its hierarchies. Western theory and philosophy make it hard to consider the truth to time given its mass of generalizations for control. To understand what true history might mean as an idea would be to consider how Buddhism, and many other eastern philosophies, understand a living presence of our being outside of time and that which ideology in time create. Although this effort to be outside of time seems impossible one might come closest by fully accepting and embodying time. For it is that we only live in the eternal present, not in time.

In order to expand history’s limited scope, one might try to study documents from the past not for their relationship to time but for their relationship to the moment outside of time, to the eternal present. To abandon the value of historical consideration altogether is a sentiment that will only fortify its function as an oppressive tool of the ruling class. To critique the failure of history as a fundamental quality of history itself and not that of historians is to destroy one of the most powerful tools toward a just social system. History exists as an oppressive tool only when the mass population is uneducated and manipulated by being given limited to no access to documents and materials of a primary source to the historical period they belong. It is the job of the artist, among many things, to be a historian. To creatively question the histories that are presented to us and attempt to archive and preserve the most important ideas of the past without the manipulation of information or ownership of objects for commercial or ideological dominance.

To consider the eternal moment of the past in only the eternal moment of the present, by making influential cases for a practice of art without hierarchy, we might begin to understand our world as the heaven all spiritualities reference, through the ritualized performance of life that all spiritualities practice, to understand why and how we are here.



The real craft involved in making a historically important artwork is the precision to present something to a public conditioned to believe dangerous ideals of the time. To make an artwork that begins to shed those ideals replacing them with ideals for the future, a future of art-making on a path to the destruction of power and ideology. This ballet of radicality and its ebbs and flows can be observed within the euro-centric art history, most often observed through the formal deconstruction of painting. While many radical historic efforts against order took place within the formal medium of painting, all were proven to be complacent still with the ideologies of hierarchy. Yet, all of those efforts were necessary to create the broadest and most influential impact in the end. The thousands of years it took early Roman Christian art to reach the ideals presented with Marcel Duchamp's Urinal could not have happened overnight. In the event that someone did present a urinal as an artwork, or something of equal radical deconstruction, in the 5th century, it would surely be difficult to find any record of it now. For an artist to proclaim such far-reaching ideas at that time would probably result in ridicule, torture to the point of mania, or death. Thus discouraging anyone from proclaiming and cementing what radical proposition they had made for future generations.

That's the important thing to note here, it's not that the proposition of a urinal as an artwork in the 5th century wouldn't be radical

or historically important at the time, but it would have been without the foresight and understanding of the public's capacity for ideological impact. To understand history as an artist is to understand what will be the most influential presentation to chip away at the hierarchies of the time. Without this consideration, an artist's influence may take centuries to be realized or never find realization at all. It was even Duchamp's *Urinal*, made in 1912, that didn't fully reach broad ideological influence in the economy of art until about the 1950s and 60s. Even in the early 20th century people couldn't handle the proposition that an artwork could be a store-bought urinal. It's important to consider this when looking at works of the past, to consider how their radical propositions relate to the ideology of that time, as well as how they relate to the ideology of the present, and to learn from what its previous radicality can tell us for the future.

From ideas like Duchamp's and others, some artists went on to ditch the necessity of the object altogether. It is then that I believe we saw a glimpse at an ideology of art-making that truly began to defy ideology. Where the nature of these artworks began to threaten the powers and structures that be. This is not to say that cultures or societies of the past have not or are not practicing art in this manner today, but it has yet to be widespread or has failed to remain. For art-making and living in the eternal present is a great labor, and without continued effort, it can fade away.

This all may still sound ridiculous and an impossible effort for anything, let alone art. To which I would not totally deny, for total utopia seems extremely unlikely these days, especially as long as humans are around. In fact, we seem much closer to some Armageddon where the earth rids itself of us to heal. It is important to note though that in order to achieve any sort of utopia we must alter our vision of what utopia might look like. Yet still, the eternal crystal city in the clouds with golden gates and angels with wings flying around happy and content

with their reward for some goodness they embodied on earth seems much more unlikely than the spiritual union art might propose.

The imperative drive to the ideas presented in this book are aimed at the future where the attack against art's most radical potential is furthered. No matter how long it takes, art will have its reckoning. To preserve the fall of art's historical value just might prevent its fall for society in the future. The efforts and ideas of those great artists of the recent past show that it is possible to make artworks that strive towards a spiritual end, that evade the systems of power we know today, and that allow us to imagine a world that champions the present moment of time more than the power the idea in time wields.

Although I attempt to illustrate art's historical fall as well present artists and artworks that I believe to be of great historical value I do not come close to representing what is the full scale of such works. This book primarily attempts to outline such phenomenon using some of the most prominent figures as representatives for the ideas at large. It is necessary, in addition to considering the ideas presented here, to seek out sources of information that consider radical artists and artworks more in depth and more rigorously.



I think it's important to understand the idea of history not as a tool for the selective glamorization of global or interconnected events or peoples, but as a tool for selectively identifying problems of the future using events or ideologies held by peoples of the past. Tracing the evolution of ideology might allow for a better understanding of how to change harmful ideologies of the present and future. History then exists as this cosmic soup that we can only understand depending on the form of the spoon. The spoon's form is shaped by the means of doc-

umentation at any given historical moment by which we can study a civilization or geographic location. These documents can include the drawing of people on a cave wall or the earth's capability to preserve organic remains in the sediment layers of rock. Given the immense bowl of soup, the earth's history proposes, the job of a historian is never done, and there can never be too many historians. What really is art history then? Is it the moral superiority of art on a linear path upwards on the hierarchy of judgment? Is it the development and mastery of technique? Can studying the history of art help us understand the history of action and the ideological processes involved in altering harmful societal hierarchies?

When considering the history of art from a European point of view one does not discover a moralistic vision. When I make the distinction between an art history of Europe to that of an art history in the U.S. it is not because the European version of art history is one containing heroic triumph or success, but is merely one of more material. As the history of art in the U.S. is fraught with turmoil between the ruling classes and the greater population of the oppressed, the same of course, is true of Europe's history. The dominating power of the so-called western world has left us with an overbearing view of its history compared to the histories of peoples and civilizations that were violently colonized by them. Many cultural histories that were seemingly destroyed by colonization were complexly absorbed and adopted by European invaders, distilled and stolen if such cultural ideals would aid in their growing appetite for power. What we've been left with is a Western art history, and broader history, which is dominated by European aristocracy, where below the surface small contorted clues to the reality of the past exist.

In the book *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* authors David Graeber and David Wengrow anthropologically and archaeologically explore the ways Enlightenment era Europe coincided

with the early colonization of the Americas and the subsequent discourse between native Americans and Europeans. The ideologies of native Americans had no doubt a major effect on the western world but Europeans of that time would never admit that to be the case for the risk of undermining the power structures which they wished to protect. The art history of Europe is thus an art history of many societies and cultures that do not receive the credit they are due, but for the sake of understanding, I will continue to reference the long pre-American art history as that of European art history. It is with the hope of many researchers and historians of today that new light is brought to the innovative influences colonized peoples around the world have had on the western-centric scope of history. Perhaps these discoveries, along with the ideological freedom art might propose, will lead to freer and more creative organizations of society.

Before people used the term art, what they were doing is still important to art history. As the writer Joseph Campbell proposes, artists are myth makers and the myth makers of the past were artists. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the congruency between people not knowing they are making art and people who say they are making art is the original desire to respond to our perception of a physical environment to better our experience of life. I understand that this broad definition might seem general and vague but it is that purpose that illustrates that any action or its antithesis can be considered an artwork. Where the definition becomes dicey is in regards to the determination of art's quality; as good or bad art. These determinations are what have continuously changed over time, changing what art looks like and how people think about it.

As art-making and its early economies became more and more complex, so did the ways art functioned to serve people. There was an evolution in art-making from craft and religion, to what can be considered as "High" or "Fine" art. Craft-oriented art-making continued as

a popular form of making within many early history communities, but as other communities or groups acquired large amounts of resources and power, art-making needed to serve them in new ways. A large part of “Fine” arts definition is in relation to its lack of function. A painting or sculpture sits in total silence and stillness without any applicable purpose to our basic survival in the physical world. It exists seemingly only to be pondered.

An early history culture that has no conception of art, or where art-making is still necessarily wrapped up in survival, might make a quilt to keep warm. The intricacies and decisions in the quilt’s making can communicate complicated ideological beliefs while its impetus is firstly to combat the cold. That same culture might perform rituals and worship objects, all in the name of religion or spirituality. Oftentimes this practice would overlap with craft. It is observed that many early history communities performed or created closest to what has come to define contemporary art or Fine art within the area of religion. It is with religion and its contemporary practices today even, that many are unable to see the correlation between art and its most radical histories. To fully understand the most radical evolutions in art-making and its history is to understand its synonymous nature with religion or spirituality.

When the defining term Fine art entered the human lexicon it pointed to the ways that basic means of survival for a small population were easily met leaving them with a lot more free time. Oftentimes religion would be considered in the Fine artwork’s theoretical meaning. This can be seen in the ways that narrative painting and sculpture dominated the arena of Fine art amongst aristocracies and ruling classes as the most prominent spiritual presentation to the public. From this early distinction of purely theoretical artworks, it’s not hard to see how the history of art-making led us to arrive at ideas like performance or conceptual art which replaced the fetishized art object with the fetishized performance. The seeds for these ephemeral

artworks had been planted long ago when the utility of an artwork was established psychologically. Though, it was the object that was still deeply necessary in the early distinctions of Fine art, for although the radical destruction of hierarchies began within the parameters of painting, it was painting's physical nature as an object in space that allowed for anti-hierarchical ideology to be accepted and profited. Ideology packaged by the fetishized object could continue to source money and power by the nature of its ownership and presentation.

The autocratic rule of much of Europe's history concentrated art as an object owned by the rulers and their elites, to be worshiped and idealized by the people. The ruling class would fund the production of art as a tactic for control, as a way to say, "I am important and powerful because I have this and you don't." The relationship between the education of people and their rulers became comparable when then art history, and a much broader population of artists, created a more universally attainable notion of what art could be.

More and more people found themselves making Fine art as technological progress freed up energy once spent on basic survival. New artists used their positions to forge new trails toward an ideology of art-making that continued to evolve against the ideological power structures of their time. With the evolution of things like mass printing techniques and the growing access to material and education, we begin to see how art history, understood and practiced by the masses, allowed for a platform leading to the broad dissemination of radical anti-hierarchical art ideals. As these new artists and artworks that existed outside of the royal courts became defined by their radical historical importance. A new cast of aristocracy in the burgeoning modern world was to watch closely the growing trends, investing in the ownership of the new art objects that were captivating and changing the public's notion of what modern life and art could be. Yet, little did this new plutocracy know that what they were ultimately buying into was

the beginning of their own demise. That art-making in the hands of the people is the single most ideologically freeing tool. Where the perception of power and its hierarchies are to fall to the ideologically free and experimental societal structures art is to form.

What happens then when the ruling class attempts to stop such change? When they try to shut the book on art history or any history that doesn't serve their totalitarian vision? What happens when the ruling powers convince the masses to turn back a few hundred pages in order to erase the ideas that come after? What we are seeing in the U.S.-centric global art economy of today are the results of these anti-historical actions. We are seeing the ways in which art history reached a point to threaten the hierarchies which uphold the world's power structures and the ruling classes lashing out at such histories.



The corrupt United States art economy and its history began long before Europeans colonized the Americas. In Europe, we saw a slow movement in the ideological understanding of art, primarily that of painting, from pre-Christian Pagan human idealism to painting's service to Christian fables, to paintings of the European courts and aristocracy, to paintings of the early European avant-garde. Around the time Europeans began to colonize the Americas, the age of Impressionism and avant-garde sentiments were beginning to bubble in Europe. As the rest of the 18th and 19th centuries poured on, we find Impressionism and its deconstructions of previously held ideals of value and hierarchy flourishing in Europe.

The early history of the art economy in the U.S. is, no doubt, that of its European parent. Yet, as art-making evolved in Europe, its ideologies in the U.S. were in service to craft or survival for the poor and

stayed relatively the same as what was understood from before for the rich. Art-making which was later considered folk art and craft thrived within early Euro-American communities, but most if not all of these works were defined by their European art historical influence.

Painters like John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West, Americans who were greatly educated in the techniques and histories of European oil painting, became some of the first American painters who won respect both in the U.S. and in Europe. Yet, it was the European avant-garde that was stealing the show at the time and it was the old European aristocracy that championed American painters like Copley and West.

The nature of painters like Copley and West served as an aid in the burgeoning American aristocracy. Although their paintings were seen as a great American success, the European art economy which championed their work was on its way out. Along with portrait painting in the U.S., landscape painting became a popular subject, serving to illustrate the vast and sublime natural beauty of the American landscape. In 1873 Thomas Moran painted the *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, which was later purchased by the U.S. government, and seen as an impeccable advertisement of America's natural wonders. This painting would then become integral in the U.S.'s decision in 1872 to make Yellowstone the first American national park.

When we pull back the curtain of art history we find landscape painting of such naturalistic sorts as a radical act of defiance first seen nearly 200 years prior, in the late 16th century, when El Greco painted the *View of Toledo*. It is clear from these very early examples of American art that, the American oligarchy cultivating distinctly American art, had no interest in art history or the new ideologies that were tearing down old notions of what art could be. Their only interest was in art history and artworks with the potential to sell the great American vision.

At the time El Greco painted *View of Toledo*, landscape painting was banned by the Catholic church at the council of Trent. The council proclaimed that all profane subjects were deemed unsuitable for art, and apparently a painting of a landscape was not worthy of such beatitude. Perhaps those of the council understood how the painted images of Christianity were about to deteriorate as successful manipulative tools for faith and blind adherence. *View of Toledo*, by El Greco, is a historically important, radical proposition of art from a very specific period of time, and is now comfortably stowed away in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A place where many Americans are made to believe American art history was created and resides.

It was around 1870 that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was to be opened in New York City. The museum was primarily made up of European oil paintings, as well as artifacts that had been stolen from other parts of the world. These objects primarily came from the collections of wealthy Euro-Americans interested in the new business frontier of developing an American art history. Although the U.S. had seen the likes of painters that were said to be distinctly American, the value of these collectors' collections was nothing without the European artworks and histories of which American art still fell behind.

In the early 20th century, after WWI, the U.S. would be preparing to enter into mass economic tension, in what is now known as the Great Depression. In 1929 the Museum of Modern Art was founded and a year later the Whitney Museum of American art. Both museums opened at the beginning of a mass poverty pandemic in the U.S. by wealthy Americans whose families had amassed their wealth in the early years of American industry. The success of these individuals and their museums was solely based on the value of their collections overwhelming European merit, where in large, art history was at its head.

The first exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art showed paintings by Van Gogh, Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, and Georges Seurat. The then leaders of Impressionist painting and some of the early examples of the championed European avant-garde. The second exhibition was a group of American painters now associated with the Ashcan School of New York. These American painters portrayed the unique scenes of New York city life; the detritus, innovation, and the extreme poverty it produced. It was imperative at this time for Institutions like the MoMA to attempt to build an American art economy of its own by selectively showing American artists alongside artists that were seen as the most historically important European artists of the time. This scheme of trying to get even richer off of one's existing wealth without the foresight of innovation plagues the art economy of today as well as nearly every other American economy. It fundamentally works most similar to a pyramid scheme where powerful individuals selectively buy into a given product and position that product alongside the most successful products in such a field of which they are in control. By getting in early, one secures that the low price by which they bought into the product originally, will then increase hugely presenting a major commercial return. In fact, it's this scheme that could perhaps simply define U.S.-centric capitalism, where the country's plutocracy is based extensively on the early success of ancestral industrial involvement leading to the beginning of major wealth and cultural power inheritance.

Although this early history of American painters was particularly important in the U.S., it is largely forgotten as one of the first great American art movements because of its significant failure to adapt to the growing ideology of progress in the arts of Europe. As the Great Depression continued on, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted his New Deal programs which arranged to further this burgeoning American art as well as the American economy as a whole. Museums like

the Whitney continued to show support for these American artists but not without the close adherence and protection of their wealth through their participation in the European art economy and its history.

World War II began in 1939 and ended in 1945. The result of the war was that most of Europe lay in ruin while the U.S. came out relatively unscathed and on top of the global economic and military hierarchy. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was founded by the accord of the U.S. as a tactic of defense against the Soviet Union. By using their Navy to police the oceans, the U.S. created a global economy that created great economic advantages for not only other countries but most importantly themselves. Many Europeans fled to the U.S. during and after the war to escape the ruin and hope to find a better life. Although the U.S. had established itself as the global superpower, the major critique across Europe after the war was that as the new global superpower they lacked any power in regard to art and culture. With a strong, new, and powerful economy benefiting from the newly globalized world, the U.S. began to financially endeavor to bring American art to the top of the global art economy. Museums like the MoMA and the Whitney, where the inherited presidents such as Nelson Rockefeller and John Hay Whitney had direct ties to the U.S. government, began funding what was to become the first great American art movement.

Peggy Guggenheim, the niece of Solomon R. Guggenheim and wealthy New York socialite, used her family's wealth and connections to the art economy to amass a collection of mostly European, and some American, art. In 1943 she commissioned the American painter Jackson Pollock to paint her a mural, which resulted in one of the earliest examples of American Abstract Expressionism. As the buzz continued to grow around this new great American art movement, museums and institutions in the U.S. swiftly bought and supported discourse that would illustrate the ways in which this new art movement was ideologically at the forefront of European art history. All of

this investment though did not come without the promise of money and power at the success of Ab-Ex due to the commercial viability of painting. It was here that we began to see the cracks fully forming in the divide between art's historical value and commercial value. It was at this time that many individuals with solely financial interests began to look toward the art economy as another place to get rich quickly. The success of Abstract Expressionism and the relocation of many European artists during and after the war, resulted in New York City replacing Paris as the new art epicenter of the world.

Although the U.S. government had successfully gained control of the global art economy, it was not without the still necessary aid of European art historical importance to solidify a strong historical backing to an American artist's commercial value. Abstract Expressionism was largely important and structurally valuable due to its true success in relation to European art historical discourse which had prior been on the slow-burning path toward hierarchical destruction. Ab-Ex painting epitomized the ultimate ideologically free capitalist art object but would ultimately lead to the dismissal of the object altogether. The relationship between art's historical value and economic value during the post-war art period seemed comparable. Artists at the top of the economy were seen as commercially valuable as well were, and continue to be, understood as being some of the most historically valuable artworks of the time. As the U.S. moved into the 21st century, we see the ways the art economy began to break down many ideological barriers which had previously determined and limited the possibilities of art and how the U.S. government realized and slammed the brakes.

Art history reached ideologically what is considered now to be that of performance, land, and conceptual art movements not long after the arrival of Ab-Ex painting. In 1968 Lucy Lippard co-wrote with John Chandler, the essay *The Dematerialization of Art*. Lippard's essay illustrates the ways in which art was ideologically moving away from

the commodified object to the ethereal presentation of pure intellectualism. Many critiques of the essay and its ideas state the impossible task of eliminating the art object, especially in regards to radical artworks of that time that did in fact employ objects. Yet, it is here that we began to understand that the defining nature of a truly dematerialized artwork is the impossibility of ownership and preservation of the eternal present. Sure, one could sever physical objects from what had once been parts of a performance or an action but these parts retain absolutely no trace of the artwork that was presented in the very specific moment of their action. That would be like taking the icing off of a cake and saying you still have a cake. The additional denouncement by the artist of the incongruent parts of a purely intellectual work aided in the illustration of its inseparability to the time it was performed, as well as the often reality that the objects usually employed were difficult to display as reflectors of wealth and power.

Video served to commodify art action. It was, and still is, most often used in an attempt to materialize what reaches toward dematerialization. Even major works of historical importance such as Robert Smithson's monumental 1970 land artwork, *Spiral Jetty*, was documented and shown as a video in a commercial gallery. Yet, it is precisely video's failure to recognize even slightly the true nature of a work like *Spiral Jetty* that called for a new philosophy of art-making, moving away from the presence of the video camera's eye. I will add that if one form was, and is, to archive a purely intellectual anti-commercial artwork best, it would be through the publication of ideas in book form. The history and commercial economy of books do not reflect the privatization and extreme price points found in the art economy leading to the association of status and power, as well as being produced in mass quantity to combat scarcity while preserving and presenting radical art ideas with the conception to their closest whole. Many of the most radical dematerialized artworks of the past in book form offer us

the closest glimpse of what was the art action, or what should be, the art action of the future.

These new anti-commercial ideological forms of art-making were greatly influenced by the ideas of Marcel Duchamp, which had been stirring since nearly a century prior. The art object was dead, a carcass that existed only as the message to the once great art action. Duchamp successfully compared, belittled, and set free the art action of painting and sculpting by declaring that the action of going out and buying a urinal is an art action all the same. This idea had been meticulously considered, paving a way for many artists to abandon the object altogether, championing the art action as the only true presentation of art.

Conceptual and performance artworks of the 50s, 60s, and 70s were not totally rejected by the commercially focused American art economy, even though these works threatened the commercial success of those wealthy individuals involved in the arts.



Many of those seeking to profit off of the art economy and the still ever-present creation of commodified artworks, understood that it was necessary for an artwork to be, at least, in proximity to art history in order to have a stable commercial value. Some anti-commercial artists and artworks were either pressured to make more commodifiable objects or used as art historical advertising for galleries and museums. The rest of the anti-commercial artists found their homes in the art academic institutions that were popping up across the country. It was in academia that artists who made historically important artworks in the U.S., that were difficult to sell or totally unsellable, could make a living teaching. Museums and galleries could easily find artists of historical importance when they needed to add a bit of oomph to their image in these schools.

This migration of art history out of New York and into the rest of the U.S. by way of academia further increased the rate at which artworks were to become more and more radical anti-commercial tools of egalitarian, hierarchical destruction. As art history continued in its capitalist rectifying direction, the U.S. government soon realized they brought on more than they expected as the new art economy epicenter. In the 80s we see the U.S. government struggling to reign in the new anti-commercial art history by restricting national arts programs like the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as censoring shows at institutions in which large corporate entities and donors participated.

The National Endowment for the Arts was founded in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson took a page from FDR's notebook and the New Deal Programs that were seen to have had a positive impact on the U.S. economy during the Depression. The NEA was to primarily serve as a source of funding for individual artists throughout the country as well as non-profit or small arts groups. The biggest difference between the NEA and the New Deal arts programs was the funding of individual artists in their own self-directed projects, which surely was in response to the economic success of many individualistic attitudes of Ab-Ex painters. After continued backlash by government representatives over claims of obscenity in artworks by individual artists that the NEA had funded, president Ronald Reagan, in 1985, made an amendment to the policy. The amendment stated only works of "significantly literary, scholarly, cultural, or artistic merit" were to be considered for funding by the NEA. Within the guidelines of this amendment, many of the works that were considered to be obscene to the conservative American public and its representatives embodied all of those qualities of merit. What we would soon come to find out is the U.S. governing bodies' assertion of clarity that they had no interest in actually preserving those values. They pointed the barrel at their feet and pulled the trigger.

In 1990, a group of artists now known as the NEA four had their NEA grants vetoed on the basis of obscenity. The group consisted of artists Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes. The artists took their case to court and won in 1993 but the case would find its way to the Supreme Court where the NEA would fold under pressure from congress. From that point, the U.S. government no longer funded individual artists, artists without any institutional or corporate ties. More clearly put, the U.S. no longer had any interest in the value of historical importance in the economy of art.

This U.S. art historical moment served to best illustrate what was to be a critical fall from grace for art history and its previously held relationship to financial success. Many artists who had previously made work with funding from the NEA were either already teachers or moved on to become teachers. Academia still proved to be a safe haven for artists making anti-commercial, historically important artwork during this time, but not for long.

As the necessity for economic stability within academic institutions increased, a boom of participation in academic arts programs across the U.S. rose. This influx in academic interest and the hope for its financial service after graduation led to a completely bloated academic infrastructure. Thousands of students graduate every year and the number of available teaching positions become smaller and smaller.

According to an essay written by Jon Marcus on the Hechinger report's website, fewer than one in 20 of all degrees are in humanities disciplines, traditionally associated with the liberal arts. That number is down from a high of nearly one in five in 1967. The number of bachelor's degrees conferred in history has fallen 25 percent since 2007 alone. Small liberal arts colleges continue to close for good with little to no interest given that the large amount of money paid to attend and receive a degree from these schools lacks any sort of promise of financial security after. Faculty and students continue to shrink at

major institutions across the board, where the liberal arts seem to be getting hit the hardest, given that there is no longer a high prospect of teaching after graduation as well as the even more unlikely possibility of becoming a commercially successful artist.

As the promise for teaching positions evaporates, many arts programs at large universities have chosen to shift their curriculum to focus on preparing students for other economies which offer jobs that entail creative roles such as architecture or design. The end result of this art academic evolution, or rather devolution, is a future where academia is no longer a place to protect and pass on historically important art ideas. A reality that threatens to theoretically erase the most radical efforts in the arts from the future understanding of artists and the art economy.

As we continue to see what is the last generation to have limited access to the art economy historically and commercially we must prepare for the fact that those two systems of value judgment will become in complete opposition to one another. In many ways they already are. We are seeing the last generation which could find positions in academia, be educated in the full scope of art's most radical anti-commercial history, and experience the tail end of an art economy that holds ever so loosely onto the importance of true historical value. The result is an extremely volatile art economy that can only end in collapse. A collapse the likelihood of remedy is low. It seems as though, like many biological functions on earth, our society is attempting to reach homeostasis. Where the remedy to the volatility we created will be by the destruction of that which created it. The most terminal and toxic effects of this value detachment in the art economy of today can already be observed. The illustration of which can only best serve as a historical archive for a future society where art history reaches the grounds where it last left off. For that ground can only be reached by severing the cord of an artwork's commercial value as an object symbolizing power and status.

Previous to the French art world of the early 20th century, Italy housed what was said to be the reawakening of art and culture during the Italian renaissance after what is now known as the Dark Ages. Many historians have labored to show just how much light actually existed during the age of darkness but it is important to understand why many of the 13th and 14th centuries considered it to be a culturally barren time. As I find myself thinking that art, and the culture it creates, is entering what could be considered a new Dark Age, perhaps we can take cues from the Dark Age of the past.

After emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of Rome in the third century we see Christian art go from its secret symbols and messages as a way to communicate the ideas of the religion to the elaborate paintings and sculptures illustrating the stories of the bible more broadly. Constantine's rule, and adoption of Christianity, was a success in terms of creating a universal god across Rome. Demonstrating his universal power through the universal religious doctrine. Yet, the Roman Empire would soon find hardship, bringing on the Dark or the Middle ages.

As the western Roman Empire fractured into many groups of Germanic people in the 5th century the Eastern Roman empire remained, but was renamed the Byzantine Empire. Around this same time, the Byzantine Empire saw the destructive effects of the bubonic plague and within less than a year the Byzantine capital Constantinople saw over 200,000 people die from the disease. All the while the city and Empire continued to fend off attacks from neighboring groups of Barbarians and Vikings in the west. Constantinople, through all this struggle, was to remain the largest medieval city in Europe well into the 7th century. Not long after, the Byzantine Empire would begin to

falter, slowly cracking off pieces at the loss of battles to Islamic forces from the east. The religion of Islam had begun to spread during the 7th century and Muslim forces would move further and further into Byzantine territory. The areas that were controlled by these Muslim forces became what was known as the Umayyad Empire which included the important Christian city of Jerusalem. The east and west of the old Roman Empire joined forces for what is now known as the Christian crusades, where the religious differences that had developed amid Christianity split between each region were set aside in order to reclaim their holy city of Jerusalem. Constantinople remained one of the largest cities west of China moving into the 8th century with the help of western Europe to defend against Muslim forces.

The effect of the Roman Empire's split into east and west resulted in the destruction of education. In the west, many influential and educated Romans migrated to the east to the new capital, Constantinople, and the Byzantine Empire. This caused the west to become dominated by groups of barbarians and Vikings that were uneducated in Greco-Roman cultural traditions. These barbarians and Vikings would pillage and occupy areas of what is now Europe but many would convert to Christianity due to the harsh psychological and physical punishment of life at the time. That's a whole other book on why they converted. Education did slowly find its way back into western Roman society and what is now Europe with the aid of Christian monasteries. The foundational education would prove valuable as a renewed interest in the arts and culture of the early Greco-Roman Empire would begin to spread.

In the east towards the end of the 8th century, we see the reintroduced interest in classical Greek knowledge overseen by monasteries and the noble court. This scholastic endeavor would lead to the fortification of Christian philosophy and the arts as influenced by early Greco-Roman philosophy and arts well into the 12th and 13th centuries.

It was the latest belief that ancient Greece and Rome had reached the pinnacle of art and culture and that those artists and their ideas were to be continued.

Christianity played a huge role in the Italian renaissance and the renaissance that took place across Europe, for the church stood as the most powerful institution garnering the devotion of both the rich and the poor throughout the western world. Through art, primarily painting and sculpture, the Christian church fortified control through the threat of eternal damnation visualized by artists and funded by their patrons. Through patronage and artistic merit, one was made to believe that they would find security in their position in heaven during the afterlife. But it would be through the long evolution of this ideological art that control would be slowly defeated in art's ultimate effort to create true spiritual union.

The so-called Dark Ages left people in great turmoil. Even though the Roman Empire still existed in its fractions, its collapse and the disorientation of many communities throughout primarily the west made for chaos and stagnation. It's here that we find the reasons for the definition of the age as being shrouded in obscurity. As the Italian and European renaissance continued to display the idea that the previous centuries, after the fall of Rome, were steeped in a lack of culture, the idea and definition of darkness began to stick. The renaissance was primarily the Christian continuation of Greek and Roman arts and culture causing many Europeans to believe that arts and culture had not existed since. The result of the darkness and the great efforts to find light proved to successfully produce one of the most innovative periods of arts and culture in history. A period that would spark the flame that burned toward ideological freedom and the destruction of hierarchy found in the early 20th-century avant-garde.

There is a quite commonly used Greek proverb, which is perhaps cliché but seems to best represent what should be the ethos of artists

of the present and the coming years, artists who are interested only in the genuine integrity of art-making and its histories.

Society grows great when old men (women) plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.



The U.S. has always been a commercially focused economic entity from its inception and a threat to all histories but its own. But what will ultimately result in the extreme privileging of commercial value, leaving art's historical value in the past, will be total economic collapse.

I want to bring up a few recent historical examples of artists and artworks that illustrate the ways in which the U.S.-centric art economy has already severed interest in historical value moving towards a solely commercial art market. I want to begin with the artist Jason Rhoades.

Rhoades was born in 1965 and died prematurely in 2006 at the age of 41. His first major commercial exhibition in the U.S. was in 1993. Rhoades' work was cultivated in the Los Angeles art scene, specifically that of the California Institute of the Arts, where he received his master's degree in Fine art. During the lead up and after the end of the NEA as well as the dwindling viability of a career as an artist making complicated historically important work, academic institutions like CalArts became the new hubs for radical creativity.

Rhoades graduated the same year as his first commercial exhibition. During this period of the 1990s, CalArts was considered an art history powerhouse because of the many historically important artists working there as teachers and alumni. Of which, many were represented by major commercial galleries but under the same auspices that gallery association with historically important artwork was still a necessity for the gallery's economic reputation and the sale of other

more commercially viable artists on their roster. What this ultimately meant is that often historically important artists that worked with a major commercial gallery did not create the financial returns that kept a gallery afloat or an artist living a comfortable lifestyle, but allowed for other artists and artworks, that were easy to sell, to glean a bit of that art historical value by mere association with the gallery and the subsequent historically important artists. Hence the reason many of these historically important artists taught as a way to supplement income and continue to facilitate their historic discourse.

After the show, *Helter Skelter: LA Art in the 1990s*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in California, which included many faculty and alumni from CalArts, the art academic institution was placed firmly on the U.S. art economic map. It's no accident that Rhoades was picked up by a major commercial gallery right after graduating. Rhoades added the matured air of intellect to the gallery rosters he was included in by regularly being recognized and championed by European museums and institutions as one of the most radical and historically important artists of his time. Though, it wouldn't be until after his death in 2013 that a U.S. museum would hold a retrospective acknowledging his illustrious career. Ingrid Schaffner, the curator of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, was the one responsible for this historic presentation, a part of the last generation to understand, and have the platform, to present art history in its true clarity.

During the 90s the U.S. art economy was still reliant on European art history and the European institutions that held long-standing relationships with art history far earlier than U.S. museums. These European institutions were then used to galvanize American artists as important art historical figures while then offering up commercial potential. By joining historically important artists at major museum shows abroad the gallerist successfully supplanted themselves socially within European art circles which then could be used to market and

sell other artists to a growing commercially singular art economy. Those in the European circles all of a sudden are forced to take directions from these American art imposters because at the end of the day even the European art historical economy and institutional circuit rely on money, and the American commercial galleries have access and connections to money.

Although Rhoades' work was championed in his lifetime as historically important within many European institutions and museums, that value had a hard time translating commercially to the U.S. art economy. But why didn't Rhoades' work find commercial success? He was ostensibly canonized by many European museums and institutions which should have translated to the jackpot for a crooked investor. The truth was, Rhoades' work was complicated, messy, and immensely difficult to buy, and then just simply hang on your wall. It was rooms filled with found objects, debris, and discarded material. According to one of his commercial gallery's websites, a work is described as this:

The last installment in a trilogy of work that includes Meccatuna (2003) and My Madinah: in pursuit of my ermitage...(2004), Black Pussy remains one of Rhoades' most mysterious works, and his most ambitious. Sprawling roughly 3,000 square feet, the work presents itself as a large installation, dominated by an empty stage bearing a neon sign which reads "Live in the Black Pussy." The work also features 185 neon pussyword signs, as part of the artist's ongoing project of creating a cross-cultural compendium of synonyms for female genitalia. Large storage racks are covered with myriad objects, including hundreds of Egyptian Hookah pipes from a seized shipping container, over 350 unique Dream Catchers (a traditional Native American fetish object used to filter dreams), 89 beaver-felt cowboy hats, 72 Chinese Scholar stones, Venetian glass vegetables (and Chinese knock-offs), colorful cloth rugs, a homemade aluminum replica of

Jeff Koons' famous stainless steel Rabbit (1986), and more. To one side, a large macramé textile object covers the wall. Beyond the formal juxtapositions created, the individual elements in the massive installation interact symbolically, communicating dichotomous relationships of masculine versus feminine, Eastern versus Western traditions, the handmade versus the mass-produced, and the authentic versus the fake.

Although Rhoades used and presented objects as well as made works that were more compact and easier to sell as a way to conform to the financial needs of his gallery and investors, the work he was showing at the time and the work he was historically known for was extremely difficult to sell and largely opposed the showroom style commercial exhibition. The works of his that did trade on the commercial market never fetched anywhere close to the prices of some of his painter contemporaries. The complete lack of understanding on the side of the U.S. art economy of the time proves that their vision for the future of the art economy was without works that challenged commercial viability, subtly critiquing and destroying the wealth and power the ruling class had accumulated.

In 2006 the Glenstone Museum in the U.S. took on Rhoades' work, *Black Pussy*, by purchasing it for their collection. This work proved too complicated and provocative for the director Mitch Govan and the museum's billionaire owner Mitchell Rales though as they decided to not permanently install it as was planned. The two capitalist bozos saw that Rhoades' work had achieved historical success at established museums across Europe and thought that it would be a good token for their new endeavor of playing art museum.

The Glenstone museum found itself in controversy not long after opening and spending 200 million dollars on an expansion with a lawsuit filed by the contracting company for 24 million dollars in

damages for a breach of contract. The contracting company claims that Rales' and the Glenstone museum made thousands of changes to plans while refusing to acknowledge the increase in cost and later refusing to pay any of the accrued increase putting the contracting company severely in debt. Sounds familiar to the event that led to Tommy Lee's and Pamela Anderson's sex tape scandal. This sort of business practice shouldn't be surprising for a billionaire like Rales for it's with these sorts of shady practices that one becomes a billionaire in the first place. All of this is on top of the well-known fact that the extremely wealthy involve themselves in the collection of art as well as the empty philanthropy of museum construction all for tax breaks and money laundering. It's important to add that the inception of the museum was not without Rales' co-conspirator and recent wife, Emily Wei, who began her career in the commercial throws of the New York art economy.

As we see new money museums opening attempting to compete with a global institutional precedent of art history while maintaining their mega-rich U.S. capitalist status, we encounter something like what we see here with the Glenstone purchase of *Black Pussy* and the then hiding away of the work out of fear for their own reputation. The museum and the people that make up the museum want to participate in historically important artworks but they only want the ones that don't threaten their wealth and power. What often makes a work of historical importance today is its criticism of those mega-rich museum cosplayers like Rales. When the artwork's criticism actually threatens their wealth and power they back out for fear of being seen in a bad light. The reality is that these individuals and their participation in the art, and the broader U.S. economy, is the bad light they are already standing in. What they really want are artworks to put them in a good light, hiding the atrocities they have committed and will continue to commit.

Art cons like Rales want to be criticized by artworks just enough for the work to seem historically important, but not so much that it threatens their extreme hordes of wealth and status. Perhaps it was their lack of ideological understanding of Rhoades' work that made them buy it in the first place. For a newly founded museum like Glenstone and others like it make decisions on what to collect by the radical labor of other institutions or individuals that proposed Rhoades' work to be as important as it is. It wasn't Glenstone that decided to buy Rhoades' work, they just follow the script written by museums that have already championed radical art history. They just swoop in and buy what has already been given the gold star of historical importance. On realizing their status at stake, they hid the work, squashing its existence and in many ways erasing the work by locking it away somewhere in their storage.

What becomes a museum like Glenstone's greatest threat to radical art history is when people perceive them as true arbiters of history. After they successfully play the game of associating and following the script to an art history largely defined by European institutions they successfully create the veil that they too are of a similar agency. Not too dissimilar to how American museums like the Met and the MoMa first began. Yet, it is with museums like the Glenstone that the commercial squashing of history is fully realized, where art history becomes a total tool to protect American plutocracy.

A similar controversy to Rhoades' occurred when a retrospective of the late painter, Phillip Guston, was to be staged by four major museums in the U.S. in 2020. The paintings in the show were made between the 1940s and the 1970s. The shows were successively postponed due to Guston's usage of cartoonish renderings of Klu Klux Klan members. Musa Mayer, Guston's daughter, had this to say about the postponement:

Half a century ago, my father made a body of work that shocked the art world. Not only had he violated the canon of what a noted abstract artist should be painting at a time of particularly doctrinaire art criticism, but he dared to hold up a mirror to white America, exposing the banality of evil and the systemic racism we are still struggling to confront today.” Regarding Guston’s Klan figures, Mayer stated, “They plan, they plot, they ride around in cars smoking cigars. We never see their acts of hatred. We never know what is in their minds. But it is clear that they are us. Our denial, our concealment. My father dared to unveil white culpability, our shared role in allowing the racist terror that he had witnessed since boyhood, when the Klan marched openly by the thousands in the streets of Los Angeles.

Just as Mayer states, what Guston’s work ultimately did was hold a mirror to the U.S. art economy which is steeped in white supremacy. The museums were deathly afraid of people seeing them for what they truly are.

These examples show a U.S.-centric art economy holding on to art history by a thread and only because that thread still holds the possibility of making them more money. As we move into the true art historical future, the mirror it creates towards the insidious behaviors of our country’s elites becomes all the clearer. Those in positions of power cannot escape art’s reckoning potential. They can run but they will soon reach the edge of the cliff. Art is here to destroy the power they so greatly protect. As these American oligarchs continue to try and turn our eyes from the most radical anti-hierarchical efforts of art history, toward the carcasses of ideas that once were historically important but have since been destroyed due to their aid of power and greed, we must fight to bring the true nature of their actions to the forefront. We see their attempt to fabricate a false history based on a subtle self-criticism or by the false signaling of virtue as a way to manipulate the public’s perception masking their insidious action, protecting art’s commercial value.

Let's look at some examples of artworks that represent the ways in which the art economy of the recent past has fabricated historical value wishing to use the public's suspension of disbelief and the shield of identity politics to protect as well as acquire more money and power.

Most often when a fabricated artwork of historical importance is presented we see painting as the object being historicized. This is due to the long period of paintings functioning as the most valuable form of art within the art economy. During this prolonged period of ideological repression, the efforts at undermining the cultural ideals of the ruling class found the most success while continuing to abide by the restrictions of painting. This history of value deconstruction in painting is where the U.S. art economy and history began with Abstract Expressionism. It was then that the American ruling class found painting a huge commercial success, wishing to remain forever in that historical period. The cheapness of materials, as well as the ease by which a painting can be transported and displayed as an object of status and wealth make for the perfect stress-free investment.

An artist or artwork that represents fabricated historical importance to supply a frail commercial backing is that of the painter Salman Toor. In 2021 at the age of 38 Toor had his first museum survey show titled *How Will I Know* at the Whitney Museum of American art. When one looks back to 1932 at the Whitney Museum's first Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American painting, it's not hard to imagine Toor's work fitting in well with all the other paintings in the show. What happened to the last 89 years? Did art and its ideologies remain completely stagnant? Or does this receding prove the demise of a once historical institution's necessity of capital? Is the institution as well wishing to remain in the historical heyday when both history and commercial value were aligned?

Let's look at the painter Reginald Marsh, for example, one of the artists in the Whitney Museum exhibition in 1932. Marsh's paintings are similar to Toor's, in that they primarily deal with the figure. By using expressive brushwork in a wide-ranging color palette the paintings attempt to show some genuine representation socially of the time period. This influence of painterly mark-making and vibrant color came from what was considered to be the impressionist avant-garde in Europe of the early 20th century. Even Marsh himself was behind what ideological suppression art was already beginning to dissolve in 1932 Europe.

Marsh took to painting large crowds of recent immigrants in New York after and during the war. The groups were of all social classes as the Depression continued to leave many in poverty and searching for new ways to make a living as well as enjoy what small leisure time they had. The previous ideology in the U.S., as adopted by European art history, carried over that figurative painting or portrait painting was an endeavor suited only for the aristocracy. Marsh's paintings, and others who painted impoverished New York City life of the time, made a radical proposition of beauty that wealthy New Yorkers saw as obscene. Often Marsh would paint crowds down at Coney Island and the busy New York harbors which had become highly populated, lively places, as the newly globalized trade economy took off. The New York that Marsh and many others painted was that of a multicultural American city which had never been painted and seen in this way before. The majority of those who were wealthy enough to be educated in art history saw the work as violently destructive to their idealized belief that art should serve as the representation of a superior culture of wealth and power. Marsh and his counterparts were painting a new American vision through a European art historical lens that challenged to create a new history of American art. The nature of most of these painters' European influences and the prior and current European art historical trends against the aristocratic singularity of painting is what largely

made this period of American art overlooked as the first great American art movement. So, what makes anyone think that Toor's work of a similar vein a century later is making any historical bounds?

The page dedicated to Toor's exhibition on the Whitney Museum's website places Toor's paintings within a contemporary history of identity politics in the U.S. and its conservative and harmful politics of immigration and race. There is nothing about the work's relationship to contemporary art history other than a mention of the obvious relationship to the art history of nearly a decade ago. This technique of art historical fabrication or sleight of hand by using identity politics talking points that serve the image of the museum as an arbiter of social justice aids not only their image but their wallets. Rather than presenting works that unbound the ideological oppression that creates the harmful realities the work is often said to be speaking to, the work exists as a commodity that offers virtue by ownership or mere proximity. In many ways, the discourse that seems to surround the work attempts to illustrate how the museum and Toor's celebration of these identities through painting them is enough to be considered monumental. Where such monumentality could only be considered a century prior, which was even then shown to create little to no justice for those of the laboring class. Rather the paintings further complicated and continue to complicate the clarity by which we see the ruling classes' insidious actions.

These kinds of historical valuations of guilt and misdirection limit the populace's understanding of what not only radical propositions of art can be, but as well the realities of the countries plutocracy which shrouds itself in the empty gestures of such artworks as Toor's. Instead what is presented is the easy-to-swallow association with a painting that falsely presents a sentiment against injustice. In 2019, two years before the Whitney Museum survey, Toor surpassed his estimated sale price by \$822,000, where a painting of his sold for \$867,000.

Presenting radical social justice or even mere proximity to justice as a painting to be bought and traded creates a commercial art economy that uses the empty performance of social virtue as the replacement value to that of an actually radical anti-commercial, anti-hierarchical historical value that threatens the power of the ruling class. Although those who profit from the association with art want to make us believe that the radical fight for art is a battle fought nearly 100 years ago, it does not mean that we should retreat to asserting ideologies that serve to make the ruling class richer. Even though Toor might have radically changed his and his family's social well-being from the endeavor of making and showing these paintings, it does nothing for the broad identities that the work is framed to be fighting to represent. The truth of their interests can only be exposed by the continued contending of anti-commercial artists toward the promise of actual social parity and the fall of societal hierarchies which keep oppressed identities poor and without opportunities.

The false historicizing of artworks like Toor's stunt and reverse the revolution of art, making for the existence of an art history that is easily packaged and sold by the American plutocracy. They show a false expression of guilt or penance similar to the way the rich funded Christian images illustrating their guaranteed salvation. By manipulating the public's vision of the radical evolutions in the ideological possibility of an artwork, the collectors and the museum successfully distract the public with an empty signaling of virtue. Even if the museum and those that comprise it wished to make a radical stance on what a radically anti-commercial artwork of the time is, they are still upheld by the donors and boards of wealthy American oligarchs who would never allow for anything that actually threatened their power to exist within the museum's framework. In 2010 the Smithsonian Museum in the U.S. removed a video by David Wajnarowicz from an exhibition after pressure from congress and major donors including the Catholic church.

The Whitney Museum 10 years later presents to the public that a painting akin to early 20th century impressionism, a radical proposition nearly a century ago, as historically important. While there is a necessary impetus for diverse identity representation and inclusion, in not only art but every economy, the reality of it being enacted by paintings like Toor's is destroyed by the huge commercial success funneled directly to the ruling class continuing the reign of their hierarchical rule.

By ignoring the commercial ease and certainty a painting, or other physical art objects, fundamentally speaks to, the museum tricks an uneducated audience into believing that what is presented is historically valuable while the false act of virtue the artwork and the museum claim to behold reifies art's friendly relationship with the country's conservative politics disguised as liberalism. This guise keeps the wealthy and powerful individuals that run the museum, wealthy and powerful. The final image shows the successful endeavor of the American plutocracy having created a contemporary art economy that earns them money while using a controlled self-criticism as a sleight of hand, falsely signifying virtue to compromise the hierarchical threat of truly ideologically free, historically important artworks of the 21st century.



In the past 20 years, we have seen another rising custom of the U.S. art economy defined by the attempt to push an American artist through to the top of the commercial art market without any historical importance, fabricated or not. A tactic that will outlast that of historical fabrication into the future as coming generations lose access to education in radical art history entirely. This is the ultimate end of those who profit from art and its economy and where we can observe how such circumstances have already shown to lead to extreme volatility.

A good example of an artist whose work was highly valued with no historical importance is Lucien Smith. Smith graduated from Cooper Union in New York with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art in 2011. It was estimated that only three years after graduating Smith had generated 3.7 million dollars from artwork sales, primarily paintings. Smith was only 25 years old. Smith was not alone in this phenomenon of extremely young artists making huge amounts of money right out of school. The group of young artists was later termed the Zombie Formalists by art critic Walter Robinson. The basis of the term came from the fact that most of the works that fell under the umbrella looked like half-dead or slightly mixed-up versions of paintings that presented purely formal variations and experiments in the 50s and 60s. The definition also included the ways these young painters found their works at first being bought for low prices and then flipped on the secondary art market by the early buyers. This made those art profiteers that got in early huge investment returns only to then tank the value of the artwork by their overzealous stupidity.

The unlikely probability that Smith had made a historically important career by the age of 25 is high, but sure it's not to say it's impossible. Yet, when we dive deeper into his career it is insurmountably obvious that his market value had nothing to do with any historical value in his work.

Smith had never had a major museum show in his career at the time his works were selling for insane amounts of money. There was not even the process by which institutions or museums attempt to fabricate historical value surrounding his work. He made paintings and as I have painstakingly attempted to illustrate, the fetishization of which has dissolved and resides only as a commodity of design.

While I do believe there is an inherent commercial value, from an interior design perspective, to paintings, no different than a chair or a rug, the prices and process by which paintings are manipulated,

fueled, and exhausted go far beyond their effective value as quasi-furniture. I will note that for painting, I believe the only true value historically now to be the process by which one encounters a metaphor to the infinite in the performance of its production. It is by that action that one might realize the potential to encounter the infinite in all areas of life. But by this value standard any and all paintings share an equal potential to inspire more creative encounters with the infinite thus destroying the value hierarchy which is so necessary within capitalism.

The collectors and investors that made Smith's work so valuable so fast called the work "investment-ready fare". The blank slate nature of the work commercially and the young artist's desperation made it perfect for manipulation. It was at this point that collectors and investors in the art economy realized that they could manipulate the market on their own without the slow process of museums and fabricated history. Returns this way though, came at a cost. A cost that more often than not affected the young artist as opposed to the already extremely wealthy investors and collectors. Perhaps the most notable commercial tanking for Smith is when a work sold at auction for about 12,000 dollars whereas a work of similar size previously sold for over 100,000 dollars. I know 12,000 dollars is still a huge amount of money, but compared to the bank accounts and assets of the people who are involved in this economy and the insanely high prices which trade at the top of the art market, it's worthless. The 82% decrease over an extremely short amount of time only expressed more failure and volatility for those invested in Smith's work. The people that then owned work by Smith dumped it into the market to get whatever money they could before it was worth nothing. Very comparable scenarios played out for many other young artists of a similar nature.

You might still see the art economy today play around with artists like Lucien Smith because of its increasingly insular parameters. As things like education and access by way of only money become

more and more prevalent the more and more Smith's failure seems important to the narrow sight of commercial art investors. Collectors and investors who support new museums and institutions which cosplay as art history now consider Smith's noteworthy demise and involvement in Zombie Formalism historically important. At the end of the day, true art history remains lost in a foggy abyss far into the distance. All while bankers and millionaires write stories about their conquests and failures as if they are history.

Another young contemporary painter finding commercial success without any historical or intellectual value is Alec Monopoly. Monopoly's work, again primarily paintings, is what is commonly understood as the bottom of the barrel in the art economy by many even within the economy. These art economy profiteers that attempt to differentiate themselves from those that support artworks like Monopoly's, criticize the lack of contextual or ideological value in his paintings, real or fabricated. Monopoly's work is transparently supported by people who have no interest in understanding the complexities of art history past Warhol. Those from within the art economy critiquing his work often are limited to the commodified representations of that historical complexity of which they measure artists and works like Monopoly's. More simply, their critiques are of great contradiction but it is their flaccid critique that supports their lifeless position within the economy.

Monopoly's work might be the kind of art we see make it to the end of the art economy where the only artworks trading for large sums of money are made by the same people who buy them. His primary buyer base are the likes of rich and famous celebrities with no care to arts critical ends. Monopoly himself was born into a well off New York family but is said to have moved to Los Angeles because of the New York art world's unwillingness to accept such inadequate art. Monopoly's work, and others like it, represent what will be the

complete and utter failure of the U.S.-centric art economy's detachment from art's historical importance.

The funny thing about the part of the contemporary art economy's largely held contempt with Monopoly's work is that he has had two so-called "museum" shows, of which most art economy insiders offering critique hold as being arbiters of history as well as the source of their paychecks. After some pretty basic research one can find that the two museums in question were founded in the last 20 years. I'm not going to even name them. Instead of fabricating art's historical value, financial supporters of work like Monopoly's fabricate museums to distribute art's historical value. Not too unlike museums like the Glenstone in the U.S. except the so-called museums that held exhibitions of Monopoly's work have an even more dated conception of what historically important artwork is. Since the art economy at this level is so insular no one would dare challenge or critique the system because to know the system is to be inside benefitting from the system. It would probably be a stretch to say that the most historically important artwork that one of Monopoly's museums might have in their collection is a Warhol. With a Warhol comes money and these con-men and women understand money. The rich people that play museum, then buy into works like Monopoly's, enjoying the fruits of their pyramid scheme.

Monopoly attempts to mask his work's insidious desire for cash by claiming that the intellectual virtue signaling part of the art economy that feebly upholds the notion of art historical value, real or fake, is insular, inaccessible, and doesn't understand his work. Which I agree to be true. He then goes on to state that the mass public understands his work. Which I believe to be not true. What the mass public really understands is how to fall for a pyramid scheme. We all have first-hand experience of knowing someone who fell for a pyramid scheme.

Monopoly's nearly 100 years later use of "Pop" cultural images could best be compared to historical artists such as Andy Warhol or

Roy Lichtenstein, but with a “street art” flair. Monopoly supposedly started as a “street artist”. The rise of “street art” could be simply explained as an art form that came out of graffiti. Graffiti is an art form succinctly for the people and their reclamation of the oppressive city structure. Graffiti writers seek credibility and respect from their peers with little to no chance of making money or climbing any economic ladder of success. Street art turned graffiti into a “respectable” art form that rich people could participate in. The neo-liberal street art initiative proves to clearly state that they didn’t think graffiti was respectable in the first place. By commodifying graffiti, the ruling class aimed to destroy the values which made graffiti radical. Street art became the art form most liked by investment banker millennial art bro collectors on the basis that it was a new and empty art form supported solely by themselves thus ripe for manipulation.

The “accessibility“ of artworks or paintings like Monopoly’s, is confused with nominalism. The word nominalism provides us with a definition that rejects the idea of a true universal but expresses the minute cultural influences that the audience suspends awareness of in order to understand something without thinking too hard. As Pop art of the 50s and 60s showed, a painting of a Campbell’s soup can in a gallery isn’t really a Campbell’s soup can, nor really even an advertisement for the company, although I would argue that is an effect of the work. The distortion of things like time and place, which dictate the environment, move things we think we know to areas where we don’t know them anymore. The accessibility or universality of a painting like Monopoly’s is, in fact, not the logos or the brands painted on the painting’s surface, but the use of brands and logos in the context of an artwork. All of which were radically illustrated nearly a century prior.

These works, of which Andy Warhol was perhaps the most championed in the art economy of its time, created a point of understanding which reached far beyond the insular educated class of those who

knew about art history. It was with the movement of art-making that we now associate with Abstract Expressionism, and then Pop, that the art economy found artworks of major historical importance breathing heavily over an unconscious aristocracy of the past. If only it actually happened like that, but in actuality, similar to the many times previously, ideology had been disrupted and replaced in the history of painting. The new aristocracy came and stood behind the growing avant-garde whose weapon was the concept of the everyday universal cultural ideology created by capitalism. That weapon would continue to keep everyday people at the bottom of the food chain while those who owned a Warhol, or sold one, ate like kings and queens.

The separation between those who understood art and those who didn't played a huge role in shaping the ways art history fell into place after movements like Ab-Ex and Pop. When artworks that could be considered Pop jumped onto the art economy stage, two things happened: One, it opened up a dialogue of subjects that the majority public seemingly understood, yet secondly, it also made many people of that majority detest art even more than they might have already. Seeing that the works presented a reflection of themselves and the psychological sufferings they experienced as laborers in the capitalist hierarchy sold for huge amounts of money in the form of paintings only alienated and aggravated the working class further towards the notion of art. While artists and collectors spoke about their work's success because of readability by the public, the same work continued to cut down and uphold the violent class structure that plagued, and continues to plague, the U.S. economy.

Although the vision of many of these Pop artists and their work was more ideologically free than the conception of what art could be previously, the high price of the art object and the public's poverty and alienation from such a high price, left many people in anger unable to see the work for what it ideologically represented within the history of art.

In a way, artists and works like Monopoly's just show how many art profiteers' entrance into the art economy was when Pop art was at an all-time high for both commercial success and historical success. These same people who have remained to make money in the art economy intend to force it to stay the way it was when they first bought in and Monopoly embodies that.

Alec monopoly's work will come to pass and new similar artists will be there to take their place. All until there is no one left to buy, leaving no one to continue making these redundant paintings. That is the most telling truth of artists of this nature, they wouldn't even make art if it wasn't for the fact they could become rich and famous.



As we see the result of an art economy overrun by investment-minded businessmen and women it might help to understand one of the earliest examples of profiteering flipper culture within the U.S. art economy. An event that was possibly the single most influential financial moment in art history. This moment was the liquidation of Robert Scull's private collection.

In 1973, the prominent collector made 2.2 million dollars at the Sotheby's art auction house in New York. An unprecedented amount of money for a collection of artworks at the time. At that moment the art economy saw the first major example of flipping, where artworks that were bought for low prices sold for huge amounts of money, providing huge returns for the investor. One of the most prominent and historically important artists of Scull's collection, Robert Rauschenberg, pulled a sly jab of frustration during the event, asking Scull to buy some of his new work at the same price. What really stirred the pot here was the fact that the artists themselves did not receive any

amount of the huge profit. The original price that they sold the work for was nothing compared to the return seen at auction.

The result was a moral outcry that artists and their work were becoming synonymous with commodity culture, a fact that had long existed but was now rearing the truly ugly part of its head. Although artists like Rauschenberg, one of the artists to see the largest returns in the new art economy, became quite wealthy himself, what he understood perhaps, were the ways their work strived to destroy the ideological conceptions of what an artwork was previously thought to be and the ways his work was to become the new ideology. The new art economy that was as lucrative, if not more, than the stock market was destroying the radical philosophy he attempted to present and perhaps he could see how it was going to destroy radical historical value forever.

This money spectacle of Scull's art auction invited the interest of wealthy individuals to look to the art economy as a place to get rich quickly. A majority of whom had limited to no understanding of art history or its importance other than to procure status and large amounts of cash. This event can be seen as the beginning of the fracture, where the art economy's treatment of art's historical value and its commercial value began to separate, leading us to where we are today.



Like the economy of fashion, what has resulted in the art economy, which primarily is made up of painting, is a complex cycle of consumer-based trends. When you have an economy that is mainly reliant on a consumer base's tastes and values, those tastes and values are cycled and recycled by the producers and consumers that purchase the goods. No one would dare to truly fight for the societal norm of nakedness in the economy of fashion for it would destroy the economy altogether.

Same goes with art and dematerialization when the economy is based on consumer trends. Everyone involved in the economy benefits from the success of the economy and their success in the economy determines their involvement.

The very distinct difference between painting and fashion is that the function and fundamental nature of fashion is the necessity of the consumer. The product's value is inseparable from the performance of a person wearing the product or the observance of someone else wearing it. To see a pair of shoes tossed on the side of the street is to imagine someone wearing them.

With painting and other art objects, the consumer is not necessary. There is no need for a painting's value to be determined by ownership. Although we see paintings being bought and sold regularly the conception of a painting's presentation outside of ownership or relation to a person, other than say the maker, is possible. Similar to the way we can understand a tree or a mountain to be encountered without ownership, but experienced by all that are capable. The value of a painting can be accessed without charge for those able to see and think.

Along with that categorical difference, the reality is, that because of such extreme prices in the art economy, the consumer base that has come to determine its trends is significantly smaller than that of fashion, even where fashion is its most expensive. The result of these factors is an extremely volatile art economy where the continued reliance on consumer tastes, where the consumer is not necessary, is the eventual dismissal of the taste altogether. As artworks, primarily paintings, continue to cycle endlessly based on the narrow tastes of the ever narrower ruling class, the more and more isolated the knowledge of possible tastes becomes. As the theoretical form of art has become narrowed to just paintings, the kind of paintings we see traded become narrower. Where the future art economy soon exists as solely paintings of a handful of aesthetic values, then poof, nothing at all.

The art economy's chance at survival in this self-destructive failure of art-making is the sinister fact that the consumer base that makes up the art economy has so much money and power that no matter the volatility or loss from participation, their bank accounts will remain loaded. The collapse of the art economy would seemingly have to coincide with the collapse of the entire American economy and the subsequent global economy.



When looking at contemporary art auction results, one can find a distinct line drawn separating artists who have been galvanized within the full canon of art history and newcomers to the market with no art historical backing. A recent Sotheby's auction of Modern and Contemporary art saw a list of 510 works offered, of which only 13 of those works were sculptures. The rest were works on paper or paintings—the most commercially viable art objects. Not only were there so few sculptures but within what there was of sculpture, the youngest of the artists were born in 1972. This only reflects the narrowing of the market based on a solely commercial consumer base. Sculpture serves just too difficult to sell in a new art economy where historical and intellectual value means nothing.

As I dig around more through Sotheby's auction archives I search for the sale of artwork by the artist Alex Bag. My search returns nothing. I am shocked at how this is possible. Alex Bag is perhaps one of the most important and influential artists of the 21st century. Her videos made in the 1990s speak to what young artists at the time were faced with as the U.S. art economy began its radical move towards an anti-history future. They were fed up with the economy that had lied to them and that wasn't there to champion their radical ideas of what art

could be. Bag performed characters for video that criticized art infrastructures like academia and commercial galleries of New York. Although her performances were radically defined by their tongue and cheek mirrored performance of characters within the art economy she performed them for video. Video for Christ's sake! I know videos were a little confusing for rich people to understand as art at first but by the 1990s video had at least established an institutional presence that served as the beginning of its historical backing and thus at least low-level commercial value.

Bag has shown with major museums around the world including the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh PA, Zaal de Unie in Rotterdam Netherlands, Laznia Center of Contemporary Art in Gdansk Poland, the Whitney Museum of American Art New York, and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zürich Switzerland. So why is it that an artist whose work has achieved such international institutional acclaim is nowhere to be found within one of the most major art auction house databases? The answer is quite simple.

The American art economy that invests and trades millions of dollars in art very specifically invests in painting, the chance for these individuals to invest in video art in the 90s was few and far between. It was just still too new and uncertain for investors and bankers who would rather just buy a Warhol Elvis painting or maybe a Ross Bleckner painting.

Many of Bag's videos have been bought because of their historical importance, but because they are hard to hang in one's living room, hard to show off above one's fireplace for rich friends to admire, collectors who buy these videos donate them to museums. The museum ostensibly will protect and preserve the work historically as technologies become more advanced, having to continually update the video file to the necessary software, pulling it out of the archive every so often so long as someone cares, before locking it away in some basement digi-

tal file somewhere again. The collectors that donate the video then get their name somewhere associated with the work and the donation as well build a relationship with the museum successfully oriented themselves towards history while using that association to make money off other art commodity schemes. The museums, which have budgets to purchase works for their collection, successfully acquire artwork for free leaving the rest of the money to buy highly valued paintings that make the donors and the board happy. Lucky for us though, Bag began making video art before things like digital video files were regularly bought and sold, allowing them to primarily exist free of charge to watch on early video streaming platforms on the internet.

Internet video streaming platforms played a huge role in some major video artworks that would prove to be hugely important to the history of video art. Another artist who used the internet to share video works was Ryan Trecartin. Trecartin made an unprecedented video called *Family Finds Entertainment* in 2004 while attending the Rhode Island School of Design as an Undergraduate. He uploaded the video to an internet video streaming platform where it was then seen by the Whitney Museum curator of the 2006 Whitney Biennial, Chrissie Isle. Isle contacted Trecartin and asked for the video to be in the Biennial where the work and Trecartin popped into the art world with a bang. Even as early as 2006, only two years after the work was made and two years after Trecartin graduated from school, we can see how the ideas Trecartin and his collaborators presented were way ahead of their time. While it's very unlikely that a young artist's work is truly historically valuable that young it's not impossible. Trecartin didn't pull even close to the amount of money as say someone like Lucien Smith but his historical success did pique the interest of collectors looking to align themselves with history.

Trecartin's acid trip performance and collaged narrative of psychosis spoke directly to the viewers evolving contemporary expe-

rience of the new technological landscape. It was as if the audience passively was watching a vision of their own mental breakdown and just the taste that the video provided was enough to swoon the viewer to the genius of what Trecartin and his collaborators had tapped into. The Whitney gained quite a bit of cultural capital and association in the ordeal, being tokened as the work's founder and earliest presenter. Of which the brilliant eye and chance encounter is due all to Isle. Yet, her heroism is not without the work's prescription to the commodified art object. Shortly after the show, the work was purchased and then anonymously donated to the Whitney museum's permanent collection. The successful switcheroo from collector to the arbiter of history anonymously. I mean surely the collector who did this must rave about this at dinner parties so I'm weary of their actual anonymity, but I'll leave it at that until I find out.

The thing with video is that even though it might take a collector some time to come around to the idea, the object-ness of a video still serves as a commercially viable art commodity to reel in the large amounts of money that painting often dominates. Though its most often sale is for the intangible idea of cultural capital, the sort of virtue signaling type stuff I talked about before, it only stands to last as long as the art economy finds it necessary to deal in such value.

In 2014 Ryan Trecartin's video *I-Be Area* sold at auction through Sotheby's for 62,000 dollars. Although this number is high, it is still well below the hundreds of thousands to millions that some of Trecartin's contemporaries would find with paintings that ultimately find the waste basket as flippers' market manipulation blows up in their face. All the while, Trecartin's work stands to be some of the most important of the 21st century where artists and artworks of recent years owe everything to the limits Trecartin and his collaborators pushed. Such fact could perhaps cause a market resurgence for works of historical importance like Trecartins, as a last-ditch effort before the whole art

economy keels over and dies. Yet, what is ideologically important in artworks like Trecartin's videos stands to shed its commercially viable video shell which will forever subject it to the life of a commodity, which as of equal importance includes its ability to be locked away making for a total erasure of influence.



As the writer and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard points out of the media in his 1972 essay, *Requiem for the Media*, the voice that the media proposes is “speech without response. They speak, or something is spoken there, but in such a way as to exclude any response anywhere.” The performer for the video camera is thus creating, by communication standards, a message that is presented knowing that there will be no response. From the perspective of the audience or receiver of this message, what is proposed is the destruction of the opportunity to respond. This form of consuming messages without response begins to illustrate a relationship that is unlike the model basic communications tells us and becomes completely one-sided. For as artworks, such as painting and sculpture, mediated the response of the audience as distilled through the object by the artist, video simultaneously presents the artist and the object seemingly as one. Where the audience has no way to acknowledge the action or idea proposed by the artwork, or the artist as the creator of the artwork. The perception of this merging makes unclear the distinction between artwork and reality, truth and fiction, by supplanting video as a medium that cancels out itself as a medium. Thus, the production of video entails that the artist will exist concurrently with the video while avoiding accountability by never having to confront the response from the audience to the message they propose.

The theater or performance of daily life on video is thus simulated before empty seats where the performer is fed a controlled simulation of feedback. Given that the feedback is controlled to the extent that it becomes simulated, the performer can then pick and choose which simulated responses to participate in depending upon which scenario they wish to entertain. This process of selection is often co-opted by the institutions or corporations that employ or profit from video. This loop of feedback is supplanted to fit the financial success of the major donors or organizations involved, nullifying the audience that consumes the video content by successfully orienting the consumer towards a directed consumer response. Ultimately influencing what is to be understood by the viewer from watching the video. This details the ways video or the media can orchestrate success in the event of its positive, as well as negative, reception. The arbiter of video can enlist both aspects as a way to get what they want. In a way, by removing the opportunity to respond, the audience is forced to act by virtue of their status only as consumers within the commodified marketplace where to not consume or live outside of capitalism is to destroy ones ego or ideological identity. An process of which is greatly avoided by most of the world. By providing two radically different possibilities for response the audience is fueled to choose either side by the opposition to the other. Even when people are angry or offended they buy things. Perhaps, when they buy things the most. Driving further home the notion that to be real is to consume culture without autonomy.

Philip Auslander, in his book *Presence and Resistance* from 1994, attempts to illustrate how performance art has fallen to the susceptibilities of commodity culture along with everything else. The nature of contemporary culture, including performance, as a function within the framework of capitalism, implies it is complicit. Yet, his fundamental misunderstanding of performance as a form outside of

its representation, as well as outside of time itself, creates a skewed notion of what performance truly is.

Most western critical theory in regards to postmodernism and performance art views the action through an often limited western lens. Philosophies and spiritualities of eastern cultures and religions provide a framework to consider human identity in two ways: One is the conditioned ego affected by ideology represented and considered most concisely by western theory, and the other is the spiritual understanding of the self as it exists outside of singularity, ideology, time, and consciousness. Auslander constantly skips over the understanding that the material that may be derived from a performance is fundamentally different from that which the performance proposes in the eternal present. I would like to illustrate how performance when practiced genuinely and in its most fundamental nature distills time and ideology to destruction. One must consider performance only within the eternal moment of which it and all life exists, presenting a space to create something outside of the spectacle of capitalism.

Performance, as a broad spiritual understanding, only exists at the moment in which ideology disappears. The Buddhist philosopher, writer, and teacher, Baba Ram Dass says in his 1978 book *Be Here Now*:

“What time is it? Now! Try 4:32 three weeks from next Thurs. By God, it is—there’s no getting away from it—that’s the way it is. That’s the Eternal Present. You finally figure out that it’s only the clock that’s going around... it’s doing its thing but you—you’re sitting Here Right Now Always.”

It is only with the conception of time outside of the eternal present that performance becomes a part of the oeuvre of history including that of contemporary culture and capitalism. In the eternal moment, as understood outside of the continuum of time, we are given the possibility to create or perform outside of the framework that history and time create. As I attempt to illustrate performance as a form that exists

outside of time, we arrive at performance as a symbiotic organism that directs us to observe something fundamentally different from video or any other object that attempts to represent time outside of itself. For one can only distill time by being completely within it. Auslander's take that anything the performer does or enacts can be used to sell a commodity representing the performance is not incorrect but looks at performance precisely outside of itself where it becomes commoditized. The representation or retelling of performance in time misses completely what performance is all about.

Auslander acknowledges the complications when considering the commodification of performance outside of merely those whose names are remembered as the performers. Yet, it is when one considers the performance of the audience that one begins to understand the far-reaching simplicity of Auslander's propositions to a performance's inevitable status as a commodity. Because performance is isolated to the present moment no one performance ever happens twice, creating even at a commodified level, a commodity that is nearly impossible to predict, let alone define from one audience to the next. Hypothetically, if the same performance were to happen exactly the same, from the perspective of the artist, in another location, demographic, and cultural environment, the audience would have very different ways of performing in response. In one environment the audience might be moved to tears. In another, they might be drawn to anger and revolt against what is being performed.

The way a painting represents a prior moment in time limits the power of the audience's performance or response. So much so that nearly everyone performs in the same way when they see a painting. Even when paintings draw the audience to anger, they are unable to affect the moment in which the painting represents. They are pacified by their failed ability to distill time where the painting offers a false expression of that act. It is precisely the unacknowledged performers

of the audience, when critically considered, that have expanded the once limited notion of even experimental theater in the early 20th century. For it is the autonomy of the audience of a performance that stands as a fundamental difference to how painting and video call for a passive form of digestion with the impossible notion to respond. The audience of the eternal present experiences a relationship with the creator of the message or action where their direct confrontation of the action enlists them as creators all the same.

An example of an artwork of performance that speaks directly to this relationship is Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*, first performed in 1974. For the performance, Abramovic sat in a chair next to a table where a variety of objects were placed on top. The objects varied from bread and a scalpel to honey and a gun. The audience was then invited to use the objects in any way they liked on Abramovic's body. The performance was documented through photography. The photos that remain, while some originals exist, are primarily printed and seen in the context of books or on the internet.

What is intrinsically misrepresented in the photo is the action or movement that took place and remains the imperative of the work's historical importance. Photography, while still presenting a false object or commodity as a stand-in for the performance, preserves a glimmer of the original work's integrity when compared to video. It is our understanding of photography's failure to represent time that allows us to consider the time the photograph captures more closely than that of video. When the singular frame of a photo is presented we often encounter a metaphor for the eternal moment rather than a metaphor for the infinite nature of time. Where the photo remains as a viable art object, it exists as a reminder of our failure to have experienced the moment that it represents.

What Abramovic's performance and others like it purpose is a performance that rather reads like an invitation for the performance

of the audience. An invitation that reads similar to how we act, prepare, or respond to the action of others in our daily lives. Although we enter every moment with our prior ideological and conditioned restraints, the invitation to perform outside of the intentionally limited scope those ideologies form often causes one to perform outside of their identities given ideological framework. Abramovic was touched, cut, tickled, and kissed by the audience that participated in *Rhythm 0*. The artwork was abruptly ended when one of the audience members picked up the loaded gun and pointed it at her head.

The audience is remembered as just that, the audience. Where the individuals who made up the audience in *Rhythm 0* were, themselves, performers all the same as Abramovic. Performers of equal importance in one of the most influential works of performance art to date.



As the American government funded and prioritized Abstract Expressionism as the first great American art movement in the 1940s and 50s, what they did not know was how the philosophy behind the movement was already reaching toward a spiritual, anti-commercial, art-making philosophy for the future. Many popular Abstract Expressionist painters became known as the American Action Painters, as coined by the critic, Harold Rosenberg, in his 1952 essay of the same name. In the essay, Rosenberg goes on to propose that at a certain moment, “*The canvas began to appear, to one American painter after another, as an arena in which to act.*” It was here that painting was to be understood by its audience, not as the object of art, but as a record reflecting some previous art action.

In theater, it is commonly understood that the art object of a theatrical performance is the dramatic action. The theater often em-

loys many objects and even perhaps a painted backdrop to create this dramatic action, but without the dramatic action their would be no theater. The definition of the actions drama is what is to be challenged and explored.

The move toward the theater in painting had been long underway, but it was in the post-war U.S. art economy that it became fully realized as the main objective of the artwork. In 1960 the artist Yves Klein performed what is known to be one of the most famous theaters of painting in his *Anthropométries de l'époque bleue*. During the performance, Klein employed women to have their bodies painted, then pressed into the surface of a painting where the mark that was left from the action remained. A small audience would be in attendance to witness the theatrical art action. It was here that the painting as a commodity remained to be fetishized as the record of the performance, but what the audience had participated in was much more than what the painting illustrated on the surface. The public and audience of art were beginning to want more, and they were beginning to be given more.

When the audience becomes a witness to the art action in the eternal present, as opposed to just witnessing the byproduct or record, they participate in a way no different from that of the artist. Their witnessing of the creation of the message makes them inseparable from the message itself. This sort of participation is not good for the museum, the collector, or gallerist for they have nothing to sell. We often see the sale of tickets for live events or performances, where it should really be the artists and venues who are paying the audience. Yet, for art objects and their signaling of power and ideological superiority, it is imperative to not just make a lot of money, it's imperative for it to theoretically be able to make you a lot of money again. Where even when a theater might make a bunch of money from a performance there is no physical signifier to eternally exist

in time representing the money they made, even if the action is documented by video it fundamentally becomes an art object in opposition to the performance and participation in the eternal moment. There is no way to make that money again unless another action in the eternal present is facilitated. It's here that the audience understands the emptiness of the object left as a record and yearns to participate in the real art action of its creation.

As Klein's giant blue splotchy paintings of body marks are passed around for money or presented as the flayed skin of a once important art action, it is only the audience to the original performance that got to experience the artwork that is sincerely historically valuable.

In 1950 Hans Namuth filmed Jackson Pollock, the granddaddy of American Abstract Expressionism, making some of his famous drip paintings in his studio in upstate New York. The film, as the reliquary document to Pollock's performance, has done equally if not more for his career than the paintings themselves. In 1958 Allan Kaprow wrote an essay titled *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock*. It is here that Kaprow directed his readers to see that perhaps the most interesting drips of paint in a Pollock painting are the ones that just missed the canvas falling onto the floor. As a sort of manifesto for what Kaprow would go on to create with the philosophy of performance he called Happenings, he found with Pollock the ways that art-making of the time was beginning to spill over into everyday life.

Allan Kaprow first coined the term Happening in 1959 to describe a series of performances on the farm of friend and artist, George Segal. Kaprow was a student of John Cage who was an experimental composer and teacher who began to make music based on the philosophy of chance. Much of the philosophical backing to the use of chance in art-making was found within eastern teachings such as Zen Buddhism. As a pupil of Cage's, Kaprow began to apply these ideas of chance to performance activities where the hierarchy was

destroyed and the line between participant and artist was blurred more than ever before. Now, not only was the audience a witness to the artwork but their action and participation in the performance of a Happening was indistinguishable from Kaprow's as the creator. Thus, successfully destroying the expectations of hierarchy in the spectatorship of theater. The art object of Happenings can never be duplicated, can never be sold, it is completely and totally ephemeral, remaining in the eternal moment from which it came. Happenings were the small orchestration and observation of union in life.

Many performance and conceptual artists of the coming decades were greatly influenced by artists and teachers such as Kaprow and the philosophies that his work presented. Many of these future ephemeral artists found some amount of inclusion within the commercial art world that fetishized their art's historical value. As well, many found important teaching positions within academic art institutions facilitating the growing interest in these radical art ideas of the future. The protection and presentation of these ideas would not last long, but their decline was not because of a lack of interest.



In 1983 the multi-disciplinary artist, David Hammons, performed his now famous work, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, in New York City. Hammons set up shop in Cooper Square and placed snowballs of all different sizes on an African rug as if he were a merchant of the objects that one could easily make for themselves with the snow around. This play on the absurd realities of trade within capitalist economic structures, as well as the hedged stereotypes of Black Americans within its hierarchies, successfully created a metaphor to what was rampantly defining the commercial art economy of the time. The performance

was documented through photography by a friend of Hammons but the story of the work, and the photos that archived it, remained unknown for quite a while. It's safe to say that the arrival of discourse surrounding such a work was at the helm of academia, but even academia was surely showing its turned favor for money over history. Where Hammons set up shop with his snowballs was only feet from the art academic institution Cooper Union where he taught.

Hammons' career and influence were huge bounds as revolutionary propositions to the limits of art-making in a world that was beginning to constrict the public's access to such ideas. It seems as though with the slow historical realization of Hammons' work, and others like it, artists began to understand how these ephemeral actions would struggle, if not completely fail, to be remembered in competing with the object-based capital success structure that was rearing to dominate the art economy. In a conversation with Elena Filipovic, Hammons states, "*Don't you know, chasing these stories is what it is?*" Hammons' understanding of the current limitations of the art economy illustrates the understanding and limitations of history to that of the economy. A history of the present and future, which does not exist in an art economy singularly defined by commercial value.

It is impossible to not consider that the commercial success of Hammons' other object-based artworks is why we know and consider his ephemeral performances today. Although Hammons could see the world that was coming, he was still in a world where the art economy fetishized radical art history but was imminent to fully turn their perversity inward.

What Hammons' performances, and reflections on such performances, stand to represent, are the ways radical artists and artworks of the future will be both erased from our historical understanding and erased from our conception of what history is within time. What

history might then become is the kind of history that the authoritarian fascist Soviet Union fought for. The kind of history Nazi Germany fought for. That kind of history uses time to instill a fear of the eternal moment, where society lives in total ideology. Nothing like the kind of history that art as a spirituality within the eternal moment proposes, where ideology melts into a transparent goo that is constantly stretched and looked through for the continued understanding of time only as a conception of the present. Time will remain history's ultimate reckoning influence as time always leads to self-destruction where life breathes only within the moment.



The American artist Karen Finley performed a piece called *We Keep Our Victims Ready* in 1990, in which Finley smeared chocolate all over her nude body at Lincoln Center in New York. Finley explained that she took inspiration from a horrific story where a woman, Tawana Brawley, was found alive in a trash bag covered in feces. The performance aimed to raise questions about sexual assault against women and the degrading nature with which societal ideologies present the female body for consumption. Finley had previously received grant funding from the National Endowment for the Arts but it was here that the NEA would prove to have no interest in the future of art. Conservative senator, Jesse Helms, set out to attack Finley's work and censor what was the growing discourse within the arts. The U.S. Congress began imposing restrictions on artists whose work was deemed indecent. The attack manifested against Finley and three other Artists; Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck. Finley and the others took the restrictions on their grants as a crime against the funding they had earned and brought their cases to the courts. In

1998, the case *National Endowment for the Arts v. Finley* made it all the way to the Supreme Court where the final decision was against Finley and the others.

Finley went on to continue making historically important artworks. Works that I believe to be some of the most radical and conceptually interdisciplinary artworks of their time. Artworks that disrupted the U.S. economy of the arts by creating an art economy that investors and collectors had no access to. Artworks that continue to disrupt the economy of art so long as young artists are aware. It was in the case against her and the other artists that the U.S. government was forced to express what was their true opinion on the new boundless art of the 21st century.

Finley went on to teach at New York University which allowed her the freedom to continue her radical practice as well as the opportunity to pass on her passion for radical art-making to young art students. Although many museums have shown Finley's work due to its near indisputable place within the history of radical art, this is the work that has begun to fall out of discussion in the art economy, including in academic institutions across the country. When artists like Finley retire and artists with the same vigor are not even considered for teaching positions, we risk forgetting the most radical recent history entirely. This, among the many shrinking realities in art academia, is proving that it is no longer a space for true art historical preservation and education.

From 2013 to 2017 I attended the University of Michigan Stamps School of Art and Design where I had the great privilege to learn from the performance art extraordinaire, Holly Hughes. Hughes was a member of the NEA four and a close friend of Finley's. It was there that I first encountered Finley's work, its ferocity and energy excited me to realize my passion for performance and conceptual art. When artists and teachers like Finley and Hughes have long retired and

Universities stop hiring artists that make work in this vein, carrying the direct stories and experiences of such radical artworks and histories, young artists and students will be given a very different vision of what is possible in art. There has not been even the prospect of an artist under 30 years of age reaching any amount of acclaim within the art economy making as radical and as anti-capitalist work since. Academia can't sell martyrdom. Surely, a young student could find the material of radical artists on their own, but the fact is that the likelihood of even that will continue to drop as the necessary role models to rear young artists in these directions will fall out of place.

As an artist, I feel indebted to those who have valiantly stood to defend complicated art. Art that doesn't make you rich, that doesn't serve to make you look cool, that challenges everything you've been made to believe, and has real potential to positively change the world. Writing this book does not come without great sorrow for the massive loss proposed. The present is filled with people talking about how their work, or the work of someone else, endeavors to change the world, but they change only the profits and ideology fueling the ruling class. I firmly believe that there will be great artworks and ideas that are formed during this dark age of art and culture, but it seems that for that to be true they can not be successful within the contemporary art economy. Any radical artwork presented within the art economy will be compromised for capital and proven to be complacent by its success in such a system. To be radical is to exist outside of the economic framework by the prescription of the eternal moment of art. It is this great challenge that will ultimately forge what could be a future of art-making like we have never seen before. Perhaps all of this is necessary to truly curb and combat the rampant effects of capitalism in art and the return of a spiritual understanding of ourselves. This future will not come without patience, effort, and martyrdom to that which ideology constructs us to desire. To

accept one's fate as an artist devoted to the furthering of art and its history toward spiritual union, towards an ultimately greater world, is to resign from the art economy of today. To weather the storm of capitalism by some other means, any other means. Anything but the labor of art, the labor of our lives. It is then that an artist can make freely, denounce the false attribution of value, and see clearly what the intentions of most involved in the economy of art are. In this, an artist will understand the imperative to protect their work from the ruling class at all costs, to protect their work from history, to live in the infinite eternal present.

I believe that the storytelling capacity of performance and conceptual art in the unified present are the only capable forms to communicate ideas that attempt to destroy ideology creating a human community based on the totalizing, inclusive, and infinite ideology of art. An ideology of art that destroys the hierarchies which thrive today creating a surplus of resources that a very small percentage of the population hoards in order to indulge in the intoxication of power. I believe with books one can document the radical ideas of the present and find some solace in their preservation oriented away from that of the singularly fetishized art object. To guarantee the ideologically free quality of an artwork transmuted by book publication, it must never be for excess profit and never be held to exclusive copyright or ownership. For it is in infinite ideology that we can escape and destroy ideology as a tool of control. What is inside these books must be the ideology of an artwork that no longer exists, an artwork that sacrifices its material form to live ever present in the universal moment encountered by artists of the future's eternal present. A present where freedom from ideology is sought and spread broadly to an audience that finds the continuation of such ideas imperative to their efforts, and all efforts, as an artist. Where art-making is no different from the ephemerality of our lives, in which we only exist in

the ever infinite present: the greatest artwork one could ever contemplate, perform, and protect.

In the words of the American writer Joseph Campbell, *follow your bliss.*

A Denouncement of Video

There is a fundamental difference between the way that an audience watches a video, to the way they watch the performance of an action happening in the moment physically in front of them. The on-looking done by viewers onto a screen, while showing a film or video, is a violent looking. It is a kind of watching where one has no shame for seeing without pause, no reciprocity for their participation as a viewer, and no consequence for the knives that they throw with their eyes.

When someone sees a theatrical action or an action in public, they are looking intently, as their eyes have seemingly been invited—but it is their participation in the eternal present that comes with the exhilaration in knowing that they too are being watched. For the many eyes of the crowd are matched by the eyes of those on the stage; by those who exist in the same moment and space as ourselves.

In the eternal present, outside of the conception of time and the ideology it facilitates, the viewer is held accountable for what they see. Their eyes, once again, become a perceptual tool for action. As video continues to oppress our knowledge of reality, and our sense of spiritual union in the eternal present, we must actively seek to understand the limitless possibilities of performance outside of time.

The 1758 philosopher and dramatist, Denis Diderot, observed the theatrical phenomenon that he called the 4th wall. He called it the 4th wall because of the relationship to the common three-wall theatrical set of the time. The 4th wall is the imaginary wall that would reside at the opening. The concept of the 4th wall illustrates the phenomenon of suspended disbelief by the audience when participating as viewers in the performance of a fictional drama. While the idea of the wall in theater exists more as a metaphor to the psychological habits of those that perform as the audience, the 4th wall that finds itself in video becomes more concrete.

The idea of such a wall in the theater became something for early 20th-century experimental playwrights to contend with. The evolution of this contention was ultimately the understanding of the theater's limitless observation into the performance of everyday life. As for the 4th wall in video, the contention, often called the breaking of the 4th wall, asserts but another wall of which video distinctly enacts that performance in the eternal present does not. The product of this, let's say, 5th wall to the audience's participation with the action presented through video, is perhaps most closely related to the concept of the 4th dimension in the study of Physics. The idea of the 4th dimension in the context of Physics, to put it simply, is when the continuity of time seems to dissolve from a linear nature. The 5th wall in video then acts less like a wall and more like a window, a window in which time is concurrently presented non-linearly as any and every instance of time that has experienced the presence of the video camera's eye. What

makes the breaking of the 4th wall in the context of video so disturbing is the isolated awareness of the 5th. While an audience member suspends their disbelief of the dramatic action's fiction in the theater, the audience to video additionally suspends their disbelief of non-linear time. Although the eternal present reflects the similar notion of a non-linear concept of time, it is with the present that we understand ourselves outside of the conception of time entirely, where video's non-linearity is only through the disjointed presentation of past presence through video. The suspension of this disbelief to times nonlinearity while watching a video asserts the cognitive inability to participate in the eternal moment by fulfilling our desire to do so with the participation in moments of the past as a voyeur who is unable to respond or act to what they see. It is only in the eternal present, outside of time, that ideology cannot exist, ideology that is synonymous with the hierarchy of power that structures society today. Because video fulfills the viewer's urge to exist outside of time by the orchestrated presentation of a fabricated present, the viewer becomes fully consumed by ideology. The addiction to this passive fulfillment of ideological desire causes us to continue to go back to video, making us perfectly subservient to the ideologies which service the world they create. It's with the preservation of time outside of itself in video, that time is understood so acutely as to debilitate those who believe to live within it. Within time, video thrives in fulfilling our ideological desire to live outside of it. Yet, we do not exist in time but only in the eternal present.

Video and film have come to prevail everywhere in our lives. We look, in our violent way, at the objects that display video, for hours every day. We look without shame, without the true perception of what is going on around us. It is only in the constant present, that looking illuminates the dilemma of inescapable action. Yet, video has conditioned us to hide and act out of fear or avoidance. If one is to see a man on the street pull a gun on a woman in front of them, they will be forced to act

in some way. If someone watches a video on TV or a phone of a man pulling a gun on a woman, they will do nothing. They will move closer to the screen perversely waiting to see what happens next.

Today, our identities are constructed primarily by the kind of looking or observation which requires no action, the kind used to watch videos. People watch endless fictions in the silent privacy of their minds where they look and watch in a way that destroys the privacy of those on the screen. It is a product of this relationship, that performers for the screen, perform at an intersection that can only be described as a phenomenon created by video.

Performers for video perform before an eye that does not look with human perversity but captures the action to be replayed infinitely for perverse eyes. This has allowed the performer to act as if they are not being watched in the way that they soon will. A distortion to the perception of their action, making their action entirely detached from the present, in both its preservation as a video within time, as well the infinite audience that is perceived in the eternal moment when the camera's eye is present.

By presenting an action to be experienced in the universal present, whether in a theater or on the street, an audience is forced to confront the reality of the moment and the habit of looking formed by video. To be aware of this presentation, and consider one's action in the universal moment, is to be aware of one's self as a physical interloper in space, while also understanding our succinct union to the universe we are a part of.

Today, when a scene unfolds in public that calls for action, people watch as they normally would a video. Often they attempt to see the moment as a video by filming and looking through the lens of a camera. Yet, their watching is still confronted; by the watching of someone else, and the realized consequence of what they might see. The camera cannot protect you from the eternal moment while you are

in it. Video has fully actualized a habit of looking where people believe there is no consequence, causing the viewer to encounter such consequential looking becoming shocked into a numbed state. To then try and hide behind the camera is a response to this shock. Video only becomes powerful when it replays a previous moment, in the present, it is no different than looking through an expensive piece of glass. One's inaction in these moments is an action of sorts, a violence that is caused by the ways video has conditioned us to perceive and respond to the eternal moment.

Video acts as a mechanism of conditioning that constricts the minds of us all, creating the all too often sense of fiction when suddenly faced with real dramatic action in the ultimate universal moment. The only way to combat these effects is to live and see in the here and now of the eternal moment.

Without consequence to the perception of seeing there is no chance for real reward. For the empty looking upon a screen playing a video offers only the impression of an image without the wisdom of an experience. To see life as a performance is to live in an environment where the audience perceives the construction of the world through their senses in a way that our society, and the ideologies that create it, attempt to limit. To perform is to cultivate community and express the power we have to dismantle unjust hierarchies when collectivized in the present.

There is always a reality or moment to the time that a video captures, the audience is just not able to exist in that present. It is, though, the influential nature of seeing that causes us to feel and think in ways as if we have experienced the past in the present time we are watching a video. For it is not by chance that video has so greatly grown to poison our perception of the present, but by the design of those who ultimately wield its power. With the perceptive power and control of video, one can alter the public's awareness, supplementing experience

with the passive impression of images that distract its audience from the now. The impressions one gains with video are weak compared to the participatory presence of perceptive possibility. Often when faced with such radical actions in the eternal present people act in ways they have never expected. It is only through this practice of active and consequential looking that one can begin to unlearn what has been learned through a lifetime of video.

Our response to seeing has become deformed and malnourished leaving us to avoid the risk of such radical experiences, to avoid the physical world which returns our gaze directly. It is the harnessing of the universe's returned gaze that offers the power to see ourselves as synonymous, the power to threaten those who insidiously control our understanding of the world through fear and isolation. To destroy the power expressed upon the public by the hierarchies which we are made to perceive must entail the destruction of video. We must seek the kind of looking that frightens us, that makes us vulnerable, and that challenges us to experience the present together. Not the continued absorption of ideology in isolation and seclusion. When one performs for the camera alone, another watches the playback alone. Even if one is to watch a video with others they are all able to watch without action in the privacy of their minds. We believe to understand the idea of a global community, yet have no tangible experience of our immediate community. The world and the people which inhabit it are more isolated than ever before because of video. When people are isolated, they are less dangerous. When the people of this world come together, and our power is collectivized, the global ruling class would be no match. They know this to be true, which is why they have employed video.

Since the inception of film technologies based on the successive observation of photographs taken at close durational intervals, its co-option by the ruling class to control the ideas and perception of reality understood by the masses can be observed.

In 1915 the earliest American film of huge commercial success, *The Birth of a Nation*, was released. The movie depicted the violent white supremacist group, the Klu Klux Klan, as the saviors of the American government from communities of Black Americans. The atrocities depicted in the film encouraged more race-related violence and prejudice across the country. The white American audience who watched the film and experienced the intoxicating effect of passive ideology consumption for the first time left the theater enthralled by the violent inhumane ideals that the country's leaders, who had influenced the production of the film, hoped to fortify. The film's investors made enormous profits and it is still one of the most financially successful films of all time. This was only the beginning of the sinister life that video was about to take on.

Movies feed every human desire, most harmfully, people's desire to do good. As movies of racist ideological warfare against the public continued some others attempted to attack the unjust violence. The passive nature that the audience became more and more accustomed to exhibiting while watching a video, made even the proximity to radical actions of justice as easy as sitting in a chair and watching a video. These attempts at using video to permeate radical justice against injustice failed to understand that it is video's fundamental perceptual quality of inaction, outside of the present, that supports the violence of ideology based on hatred and fear. The violent ideologies presented by videos could never be countered by more passive video consumption, rather they galvanized video as the perfect tool of deceptive control by pacifying the action of justice. It is the inconsequential way of looking and consuming video that allows people to feel the sentiment and proximity to justice without ever actually standing before injustice. Without standing before injustice ready to fight, there can be no justice, for injustice thrives on justice's passivity and inaction. This gave the movie industry all the power in the world, the power to enthrall

and mollify its audience in whichever way it desired, and its desires were always the protection and success of themselves and their power within capitalism.

Movies and videos entered the home. By the mid-1980s nearly every household in America had a video camcorder and TV. The presence of the TV in the home created an even further sinking of videos controlling teeth to manipulate the perception of the public. Having already been conditioned by movies and TV to crave the passive looking performed while watching a video created by someone else, made the idea of passively consuming one's own life through video a profound possibility. For it was with home video making that people had the chance to either break through the screen and become the performer that acts for the uninhibited perversity of the audience's eyes, or to go behind the eye of the camera dictating what was to be passively consumed. Anyone who experienced a family member who filmed everything during this time knows the feeling of the eye of the camera creating a deep sense of isolation. In this early period of accessible video-making technologies, the discomfort felt when the eye of the camera was glued to one's candid action completely changed the ease with which one would normally perform. Although for some, the camera caused them to become possessed, performing like never before as if no one was watching. It was then that one could understand how the action they might be performing was to be violently shredded of the privacy of real-time. The action was then carved in stone to be looked at brazenly forever.

Being behind the camera, offered the intoxicating power to create ideologies comparable to that of movies and TV. To create a document of the present that could be consumed without consequence for eternity. If you've watched old family videos from this period you probably are familiar with the nostalgia that is associated with not only the content but the overzealous ways in which the camera was used to film

everything, even the most monotonous of events. As video technologies became more accessible and less novel, the whole “film everything frenzy” ended. The increase in video’s threshold of creative ease made for a realization of our existential incomparability with the ideologies we were made to consume in movies and TV. It was as if what was most ideologically present in home videos was the reflection of ideology prescribed by the ruling class in movies and TV. Everyone’s home videos were only important to themselves and failed to deliver the broad ideological dictation that many sought to mimic.

After the realization that the filming and watching of your family on video did not compare to the fulfillment of desire expedited by big video corporations, the impetus to document dwindled. But it wasn’t to remain dormant forever, for as new technological platforms were to arise so was the broad access to the public’s view into passive ideological consumption of one’s self and one’s neighbor.

The broad accessibility of video technologies, as well, led to its uses in what we now consider to be video art. As the new art medium grew and entered the hands of the public, we saw experimental and alternative ways of understanding and presenting video. These early experiments did have radical importance historically for their disruption of the ideological power structures within the economy of art of the time, but would ultimately show to fail in any radicalized actuality in the future. I used the word disruption rather than destruction previously because the term reflects the shifting or replacing of power within such a structure, where the unjust hierarchy remains. Video and its function as an artwork, in its earliest form, was so new that no one had any idea what to do with it. Rich people didn’t know how to sell it, how to buy it. The ruling class didn’t know what power it had, if they should be concerned about its influence, and if they could use its influence to their own ends. Video art, in its earliest forms, instilled a new imagined landscape of what art could be. Yet, it presented all of

these profound ideas to an audience who continued to look without any real association to radical action or the consequences.

Video art presented radical ideology that challenged the framework of American plutocracy, as little candies that you could eat, enjoy the radical flavor of, and then go on about your day. The historical success of video art served to be a mechanism for selling that same historical success. Radical video art was radical art ideas to be consumed with the same passive, guilt-free gaze the public and the ruling class were used to. Thus, creating an influx of financial art institutions and museums costuming as cultural leaders, where their commercial interests were successfully masked by their alignment to the docile cultural achievement of video. In the end, video art was to be traded commercially all the same as any other art object, but it was this failure that illustrated the imperative to abandon the art object altogether, to facilitate a truly anti-capitalist artwork and art economy of the future.

As the process of capturing and performing for video has become even more ubiquitous in the 21st century, so has the ruling class resolved to compromise the potential for that ubiquity to threaten the ideological structures which give them power. Many early video-sharing platforms on the internet created a new-found frontier of public media creation and consumption outside of the normative media power structures, like cable TV and its corporate makeup. The home video had returned, but now the audience had access to anyone's home video in the world with just the click of a mouse. Yet, our desire to make and watch videos is inseparable from the inclusion of an insidious power structure that capitalizes off of the passive state in which video is perceived and consumed. Before this new framework of power had any chance for radical anti-hierarchical change, the global media oligarchs bought up the companies claiming their thrones atop these new video-sharing platforms. As more and more

people participated with these platforms their perceptions of the world and subjective identity were further controlled and established by the ideologies presented in video. The influx of video content from the user base meant free material for those in power to manipulate and re-present to the public while never having to participate in the act of video production. They figured out how to create a free labor pool, where ideology was presented even more clearly through the homogenous and familiar relationship of its users. What these platforms did, and continue to do so well, is make their users believe that they are uninhibitedly interacting with a global community. As these platforms and their ownership evolved and became more powerful, so did the techniques by which content was filtered, organized, and shared to each audience member. The presentation of which services the social condition that best serves the ruling class. Our perception of what was once considered to be an anti-hierarchical, “Do It Yourself” space, became completely dominated by a plutocracy wearing the false mask of democracy.

Where home video once seemed harmless, hidden away in your grandparent’s closet somewhere— any video made using the most common filming device today is immediately a part of an infinite archive in the technological cloud. The platforms by which we might watch, store and edit video stand to archive that video for as long as that technology exists. Those who control that technology will do everything in their power to protect its existence because that’s what keeps them in power. Where the perceived infinite audience of your grandfather’s home videos was just a theoretical perception, the infinite audience of a video made today is inseparable from its creation.

Those early home videos and early examples of radical perceptual propositions in video art will remain important historical moments as once radical, but now outdated efforts toward egalitarianism. It was the disruption of previous ideologies that served to challenge the

current framework of order, but video would only supplement old ideologies with more ideology. As time and history continue, we see how short-lived those radical artworks would be. The world's ruling class constricted their grip by facilitating and wielding the power of video, the single most manipulative tool for control to ever exist. A tool that the world's people rely heavily upon in the knowledge of themselves. A knowledge that could never be successfully used to threaten those in power.

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