

“I realized that all the really good ideas I’d ever had came to me while I was milking a cow. So I went back to Iowa.”
– Grant Wood

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Original jottings preferred, but any found material that truly informs your work that you wish to share is fine.

Generally, *Sketch Papers* is about sharing: artists sharing thoughts on process, directions they’re working in, views of other artist’ work, attitudes, pitfalls, warnings, hopes, realizations, jokes, quotes from reading, snatches from sketch book notes (ex. “At first, I was furious! Tiny hand prints all over it! Then I soon realized I couldn’t have done better.” – DeKooning, 1958 on finding 2-year old daughter patted just finished painting, “Lizabeth’s Painting,” now in Lewis Collection.)

duchamps: in his own words...

Question: Why? Or how is a the urinal “art”?

Answer: When it is named “Fountain” and signed by the artist, “R. Mutt”

Let the artist explain in his own words, as discovered by “SP” researchers...

As “R. Mutt”, Duchamps signed a urinal entered for a show in NYC for which he was actually one of the jurors. You see, he didn’t agree with jurying, and felt he should test the intellectual acuity of his fellow juror Andre Breton, the noted Dadaist poet/critic. So, asked about the “Richard Mutt” case by the other jurors, Duchamps said: “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hand made the ‘fountain’ or not has no importance!

“He chose it!

“He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful

significance disappeared under the new title and point of view (and) created a new thought for that object!

“As for (it being merely) plumbing: That is absurd!

“The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges!” (Duchamps, ‘case you hadn’t heard, was French.)

At which point, some say, they should have accepted the “R. Mutt”.

Some thought a good spot for it was the restroom, near “her plumbing”. Others near “her bridges”. For example, in one of “her rivers”.

The actual urinal is in a collection in Cleveland. Go visit. – Donald Meyer

“Richard Mutt” was Duchamps’ alias.

“All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone... the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”

– Marcel Duchamp

Of the members, by the members, for the members of The Philadelphia Sketch Club.

lights: light and art an introduction

By Donald Meyer

During March and April Donald Meyer will curate a collaborative exposition on this subject with artists Dick Goldberg and Rick Wright, with technical lighting assistance from artist Fod Vick. Each participant will show for a two-week period, the series punctuated by receptions/programs on various subjects suggested by their individual work.

What follows are personal commentaries on the quality of light as experience by two of those participants.

Curator’s Notes on the “Light and Art” Exposition

Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared.

This simple statement

For one hundred years now this has been seen to be true, to be, to serious people.

Sadly, eventually it took a mushroom-shaped cloud to prove it to be true to the rest.

Not the artists, though, and many do not know that the basis of Modernism at that time (around 1905) was Einstein’s insight.

Light, energy, mass, time, space are related to a totality.

One implication was known as the Theory of Relativity.

The constant, though, was the speed of light.

Serious scientists and artists struggled with these implications.

The spirit of these implications, especially that of relativity, to serious people and serious artists, became the focus of art theory and aesthetics and created Cubism in face of the moral monstrosity of the time: World War I, then, of course, the even more monstous ‘Sequel’: WWII and the Holocaust .

Ignored, however, were the broad implications of accepting as constant: the speed of light. ¹

Most embraced Cubism as reflective of an advanced understanding of all real life being merely relative, indifferent to the

truth: Picasso summed up this attitude by saying, “The truth is a lie.”²

Others looked to the constant in the equation: Light.

They made it the icon in their work. Matisse, Bonnard. Late in his life Pierre Bonnard told a student “You will find that light is our god.”³

Therein begins the story of how the three artists of “Lights”, meeting for lunch at a centercity deli, rather like the Sketch Club’s legendary Grub Club had for years, ‘drew together’, if you’ll pardon the pun, for this exposition.

This exposition intends to explore the physical (Vick’s a lighting expert; Wright’s work’s digital: we’re introducing projection to the Stewart Room), physiological (Goldberg’s a retired ophthalmologist) and aesthetic (we’re all painters) implications of painting as an expression manipulating the universal constant: the speed of light.

In three parts, the focus will be around the work and experience of three artists. We’re all manipulators of physical light as medium as well as the medium of paint; all experienced in the physiological experience as well as the aesthetic; all will expoit the metaphorical relation between the hand holding the brush, the eye in the moment of execution, and the experience of light as icon, as relative to energy, time, space and

consciousness.

Together our differences of method we hope will isolate the constant: the speed of light as subject.

Essentially, it is believed, for the basis of this exposition, that the artist’s ‘mark’ and the manipulation of light, is the metaphor of his consciousness...of the energy of his living, his eyesight, his experience, his vision, his art left in time and space.

Notes by Artist Rick Wright on his work on the “Light and Art” Exposition

As John Sexton explains, “It is light that reveals, light that obscures, light that communicates. It is light I ‘listen’ to.”

Light and Art, the show, wants to bring its viewers well past an artwork’s initial point-of-access (the objects depicted) and into a greater understanding of light; its force, its speed, its energy, its color, its temperature. In short, its science. Light, not the quickly nameable objects in a picture, is the subject itself—the transportive and transforming agent. The viewer will consider how light can caress, erode, obscure, reveal, beckon, and conjure. How can it be used as metaphor, statement of an idea, experiment in image alchemy, dissection of photons, or an

Notes:

1. Watkins, Nicholas, *Bonnard: Light and Colour.*
2. Parmelin, Helene, *Picasso Says, 1965.*
3. Watkins, *ibid.*

“I am doing a picture...I’m not getting any younger... later I won’t be up to the effort, it’s hard enough already! It’s a good thing from time to time to attempt something beyond one’s powers.”

– Pierre-Auguste Renoir; 1881; letter to Paul Berard, on “Luncheon of the Boating Party” (1880-1); Phillips Collection Washington,DC.

light and art

continued from front

exploration of a psychological state?

An artist, in any transcendent work, enters a state of reverie – he is arrested, frozen. And in that moment, with enough awareness, intent, craft, and skill, that very reverie can be depicted in paint or pixel, painting or photo. The objects-in-the-scene become purely vessels or vehicles to transcribe this intense artistic experience – agents in showcasing the reverie that was felt.

Seen in this way, light extends well beyond mere scenic illumination. Seen as a kind of clay in a sculptor’s hand, light can gain a kind of iconic power. Light as Icon, the show, seeks to educate by celebrating this artistic reverie, this transportive force, this glowing icon. **SP**

neuro-art history? and art?

By Helen Bytium, PhD

Dick Goldberg sends us this article, a review of a book on the coming ‘science’ of neurologically analyzed artists and, presumedly, their art. –Ed.

Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki

By John Onians

225 pp, \$40.25; New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2008

The time has been, that, when the brains were out, the man would die, and there an end.

– William Shakespeare
Macbeth (Act III, scene IV)

In the new discipline of neuroarthistory, its originator, John Onians, wants to argue that a neurological understanding of the great artists of the past can give some way to restoring the brain and its conscious self, the mind, to current inquiry. Neuroarthistory is the first in Onians’ projected trilogy of books. This introductory volume, which takes a range of thinkers – philosophers, social theorists, scientists, art historians – as “neural subjects,” will be followed by a neuroarthistorical approach to European art and then world art.

Zeki uses functional magnetic resonance imaging to explore the brain activity of artists and the beholders of art, especially abstract art.

Neuroarthistory is part of the wider but also recent neuroesthetics movement encompassing the neurobiology of art, music, and literature. Semir Zeki is a leading proponent of neuroesthetics, holding the first chair in the field at the Institute of Neuroesthetics located at University College London and the Minerva Foundation at the University of California, Berkeley. Zeki uses functional magnetic resonance imaging to explore the brain activity of artists and the beholders of art, especially abstract art. The final chapter, presenting Onians’ summary of Zeki’s work, comprises some of the best material here and partly deflates an increasing sense of frustration experienced during

the preceding chapters.

Onians is prepared for a contest. In the preface he describes how, in the 1990s, as a lonely neurobiological voice in the art history world, his new ideas were poorly received despite that being the “decade of the brain.” Times have changed – witness the Institute of Neuroesthetics – but Onians still wants a new boldness. He has moved beyond feeling excitement at the potential of biological and evolutionary approaches to understanding artistic activity as demonstrated by art historians Ernst Gombrich and Michael Baxandall, anthropologist Melville Herskovits, and neuro-psychologist Richard Gregory. Yet he mourns the current leading neuroesthetics’ apparently guarded promotion of his own research: while running his experiments, the enthusiastic Zeki is still aware of the contemporary limitations of neuroscience in accounting for esthetic experience as opposed to producing increasingly precise maps of the brain’s neural activity via neuronal hemodynamics. The dichotomy between what is actually being investigated and what amounts to overblown or misconceived interpretations is the basis for much of the legitimate criticism of this emerging field. The centrality of art in human life over the long period since Homo sapiens left Africa to populate the globe is undisputed, but understanding of the historical and contemporary urge to paint, pattern, and shape and of why humans enjoy looking at the results of these activities still lags behind.

So what comes between the preface and the finale? In 24 chapters, Onians applies three ideas from the neurosciences – the formation of neural networks, neural plasticity, and mirror neurons – to his “neural subjects.” He looks at the life history and experiences, particularly the visual environment, of these thinkers, and seeks to explain their writings, ideas, theories of

vision, and art. However, what Onians gives readers in breadth of time (Plato and Aristotle on-ward) and ways of thinking (Greek philosophy, Islamic sci-ence, Renaissance thought, Enlightenment speculation, Marxism, Darwinism, Freudianism, Modernism, and Post-modernism) he takes away through the brevity of each chapter. One must be very careful about such a presentist looking to the past: think of the problems associated with retrospective diagnosis and psychobiography. For example, the context in which Aristotle worked and his interpretation of the world (which Onians wants to reinterpret in terms of its effects on his dead hero’s neurons, synapses, and chemical neurotransmitters) is cherry picked for the bits and pieces, which in translation can be read as modern neuroscience. Never mind that in the Aristotelian conception the heart, not the brain, was the center of the body and that sensation was dependent on a system of blood vessels, which arose, like all the blood vessels, from the heart.

Onians’ “neural subjects” are all men. This may be a fair reflection of the gendered history of western intellectual life. However, not until the discussion of Freud’s analysis of Leonardo da Vinci do readers get a mention of anyone’s mother. The ill health experienced by Herskovits’ mother prompted his family to move around, but in general it appears as if the role of the mother in shaping the sensibility of the young artist or philosopher is less significant than that of the father.

Onians and Zeki both believe that past and present artists’ experiments with line, form, and color are in fact neural experiments and that, either consciously or unconsciously, artists are thus neuroscientists. Again, like much of this book, Onians is most convincing when he is discussing Zeki’s work on the perception of abstract art and its differential stimulation of the brain’s visual areas. Zeki

pseudo-sanity modernism

By Scott Affleck

Most of the public still thinks of art in terms of self-expression of the individual. The social conscience is unaware that impersonal art has emerged as the most respectable current in contemporary art. What I call traditional modernism expressed the full range



of human experience from Matisse’s *Joy of Life* to the despair of Picasso’s Blue period. The artists that were revered by modernism until the late 1950’s, were traditional in that they rejected the alienated modern world and sought pre-industrial values. However, pseudo-sanity modernism (or postmodernism) rejects humanism because of a split between rational thought and emotional experience. Erich Fromm recognized that “the split between thought and affect leads to a sickness, to a low-grade chronic schizophrenia, from which the new man of the technetronic age begins to suffer.” (The Revolution of Hope) This has created a situation in which artists deny the heart and artistic activity

“It ...so affected me... never the same after the first moment... I was a convert to the field of imagination into which I was born. I had been thrown back into the body and being of my own country.”

– Marsden Hartley, on being shown “Moonlight Marine” by Albert Pinkham Ryder (1868-1917), by a dealer friend of Alfred Stieglitz in 1909. Hartley then found Ryder, and did his portrait in 1938 from memory. Both works are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

becomes an automatization. Although Minimalism was a symptom of emotional detachment, pseudo-sanity modernism takes pride in pathological irony. Hans Bellmer’s *The Doll* is a predecessor of the current trajectory that dismisses the subject with a fragmented object.

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The work of artists born after 1970 will be evaluated by “historical necessity”, from within the limits of non-recognition. Theory itself has become the postmodern Hitler. The only way to resist is by blending artistic activity with thought and feeling, because art naturally flows from truth and passion and not from aesthetic or political theory. **SP**



Hans Bellmer; March 13, 1902 Katowice, Silesia, –February 23, 1975 Paris, France; best known for the life-sized pubescent female dolls he produced in the mid-1930s; initiated his doll project to oppose the fascism of the Nazi Party by declaring that he would make no work that would support the new German state.

– http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Bellmer

alice neel

By Susan Hutton

DeAngelus

I am not a fan of Alice Neel’s work. Amidst your shock and awe, that is precisely the point about art. Not everyone is going to like the latest media darling. They are going to look at it and say, “This is good?”.

But the more you look at her work, the more you get a sense of the passion she had for art.

At the recent show at Moore College of Art & Design, Alice Neel’s grandson presented his movie about his grandmother. In it, the movie is much like her art – in your face with the pain, heartache and desire to be recognized for a talented artist.

The pain her family endured and some still endure of the lack of money or quality time spent with one’s mother only to be replaced by dodging the numerous canvases’ in the hallway of an apartment in Spanish Harlem.

When looking at an Alice Neel portrait, the immediate focus and primary concern are the eyes. They pull you in with such intensity that you can feel intrigued, embarrassed and awkward in a matter of seconds. The rest of the body is grotesque in position and the space on the canvas, almost as if she couldn’t shake the classically trained artists’ hands she had that made you start with the model’s form.

I came away from the movie and the show with a sense of sadness for Alice. That the one thing she wanted in life, recognition as an artist with merit came so late in life for her. The sadness from both of her sons – in words and in the portraits – with the lives they endured while their mother did the best she could to be a working artist and sole wage earner.

I came away content in my life that maybe one day – I’ll have my own merit as an artist, not just a graphic designer. And that for now, being from a family of artists who have always been active in and supported art as well as encouraging the next generation is the best thing I could ever have. **SP**

the soap box

Coulter Watt’s has a few thoughts to put forward that could be beneficial to our club and the membership:

1. Inviting curators, dealers and other influential figures in the art world to the club - including media types - to give talks, presentations followed by refreshments and a meet & greet gatherings to facilitate the advancement of members careers. Networking and Public Relations are crucial ingredients to a successful career in the arts.
2. A membership address book that included phone numbers, email and website address. This will advance the networking of fellow members.
3. The club needs new & note worthy, relevant, young blood, dare I say avant- garde artists without making myself sound too old, to join the club.
4. We need a little street theater to break out of the old mold to be relevant & contemporary. This could be achieved through an invitational, perhaps even a theme based exhibit of young artists making a mark in the community. Or perhaps a new event, a charity event held in a city park that would attract the Mayor and the press such as a “flag art” event that could fly on the poles of the boulevard to the Philadelphia Museum. Proceeds from the sale of the flags could benefit the city parks department or Meals on Wheels or womens shelters or...

Send us your thoughts and we’ll put you on.

book review

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therefore may be well on the way to explaining that “ah ha’ moment experienced when standing in a gallery in front of a piece of art. But then it always seems easier to know more about the present than about the past. **SP**