

ART WAS INVOLVED IN A THEORY WAR. (THE MARKET WON.)
 ART ENDURES VIOLENT TRANSITIONS. (WATCH OUT FOR THE GIANT PENDULUM)
 ART SUFFERS BITE WOUNDS FROM WRITERS.
 ART THAT DOESN'T RISK MEANING ISN'T ART. (IT'S GILDING)
 ART INCLUDES TECHNICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND INSTITUTIONAL
 IT'S EASIER TO MAKE WHAT YOU SHOULD THINK IS ART. (WHATEVER FALLS)
 ART IS A (GASP) FORM OF CULTURE WITHIN CULTURE. (NESTED HIERARCHY)

Tropes in the Art Market

William Powhida describes the narrative and use of stylistic tropes behind a selection of panels in his current solo exhibition at Charlie James Gallery, *Bill by Bill*.

IMAGE
 William Powhida,
 detail from *What Can
 We Learn About Art?*

The panels in *Bill by Bill* serve a few purposes in the show from authenticating the objects which are all unsigned products of commercial and collaborative fabrication, to contesting their implicit aesthetic values, to providing a narrative thread. The individual narratives relate the conception and execution of each object in the show, including the material and labor costs associated with each process. Much of the text began first as a kind of *insane* market-based rationalization for the existence of the object. That gave way to a more intimate, nonfiction account of each work. The specific, repetitive format of the panels is also a comment on the formulaic approach of the tropes represented by the fabrications. The narratives reveal the material and labor costs of the process behind each work along the left margin, while the body of each “page” reflects a small part of the critical inquiry that precipitated each work through a brief summary or reference to a specific text. This aspect of the panel is followed by a single sentence proposal for the object, which served as the starting point for fabrication. The outcome of that process is detailed in the remaining space of the page. Each panel tells a story about the object and the trope or formula it represents, and it is in the relationship between text and image that the critique emerges.

WHAT KIND OF ART IS THAT?

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**PINCH IMAGE
TO VIEW LARGER**
William Powhida,
detail from *What Kind
of Art is That?*
graphite and
watercolor on paper,
22" x 15", 2013

ARTISTS OFTEN COMBINE 2 OR 3 OF THESE APPROACHES W/ SOME SUBJECT MATTER OR INTENTION

HOW DO OTHER PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THIS SHIT?

WHAT KIND OF ART IS THAT?

HOME DEPOT MATERIALISM USUALLY OBJECTS OR FORMS THAT ARE PRETTY MUCH ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE MADE OF: A CHUNK OF WOOD, A SHEET OF DRY WALL, EXTENSION CORDS

'I'M REALLY INTO...' **PBA** ART THAT IS ABOUT HOW IT WAS MADE AS A RESULT OF SOME ACTION OR 'PROCESS': POURING, MIXING, MELTING, DRIPPING, STAINING, DYEING, CUTTING

JUST DOING SOMETHING **ODD** MYOPIC STRAIN OF PBA OFTEN INVOLVING THE LABOR INTENSIVE REPETITION OF A SINGLE ELEMENT OR MATERIAL IN A HIGHLY INSANELY CONTROLLED PROCESS

'MODEST BUSHWICK ABSTRACTION' **INFORMALISM** THE INEVITABLE REVIVAL OF NON-OBJECTIVE MODERNIST ABSTRACTION WITH POSTMODERN TACTICS: SPECIFICITY, AWKWARDNESS, EVEN PLAYFUL IRONY.

GIRLS DOING THINGS BOY DOING THINGS ALSO ON VIDEO **PDT** THE PHOTO-BASED PHENOMENON OF PEOPLE DOING STRANGE OR UNUSUAL THINGS THAT SEEM IMPORTANT (RITUALISTIC?) TO THEM IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA.

TILDA'D **GDT** PERFORMATIVE VARIATION OF ABOVE THAT INSTANTLY ACHIEVES **SPECTACLE** STATUS WHEN A CELEBRITY IS DOING THINGS: SLEEPING

BIG COLOR PHOTOS AND HD VIDEO (2-4 SCREENS) **NAT GEO** OFTEN POETIC OR ROMANTICIZED ANTHROPOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION OF SOME 'EXOTIC' OR REMOTE OTHER; CONTEMPORARY ORIENTALISM.

'SCIENCE ON THE BACK-END' **QUASCI** ARRANGMENTS OF DIRT, ROCKS, AND CRYSTALS/MINERALS, IMAGES OF THE UNIVERSE, VARIOUS GODS THAT LOOK LIKE SOMEBODY LEARNED SOMETHING, MAYBE...

RE-OBJECT-ORIENTED ONTOLOGY **NOOO** BASICALLY WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CURATOR WANTS TO MAKE ART BY PUTTING AN OBJECT (LIKE A SPACE ROCK) IN A VITRINE AND ASKS 'WHAT DOES IT THINK?'

'I SEE ME!' **ARTITECHTURE** OFTEN LARGE SCULPTURAL FORMS THAT ACTIVATE SPACE BY REQUIRING THE VIEWER TO NAVIGATE A PASSAGE OR LOOK AT DOORS AND STAIRS.

SHINY ART INDUSTRIAL FINISH FETISHES IN CHROME, TITANIUM, SILVER, AND OTHER MIRRORS THAT REFLECT THE BEHOLDER (AND A CERTAIN CULTURAL NARCISSISM)

CLEVER ART USUALLY AN IRONIC, SURPRISING, OR HUMOROUS REVEAL IN THE PERCEPTION OF AN OBJECT THAT SIGNALS THE END OF THE RIDE. "THAT WAS FUN!"

DUDES PAINTING SKULLS **TAT ART** ANY 'ART' PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH THE STYLISTIC IMPULSES OF A SUB-CULTURE: PUNK, BIKE, DEATH METAL, TATTOO, DRUG AS COOL TRANSGRESSIVE SHIT

REPO ART 2ND AND 3RD GENERATION APPROPRIATIONS OFTEN USED TO CRITIQUE AUTHORSHIP, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, OR THE ORIGINAL ~~THEFT~~ APPROPRIATION. META META

ART FUND **ASSET CLASSICISM** ANY ART THAT IS PREDICTED TO 'RELIABLY' OUTPERFORM THE SEP 500 BASED ON AUCTION RESULTS. WHO CARES WHAT THE FUCK IT IS!!!

#ARTÉUTIL **SOCIAL WORK** ART-BASED EXPERIENCES TO PROVIDE A USEFUL OUTCOME FOR A MARGINALIZED GROUP BY PEOPLE WITH M.F.A.'S USUALLY WITHOUT PAY.

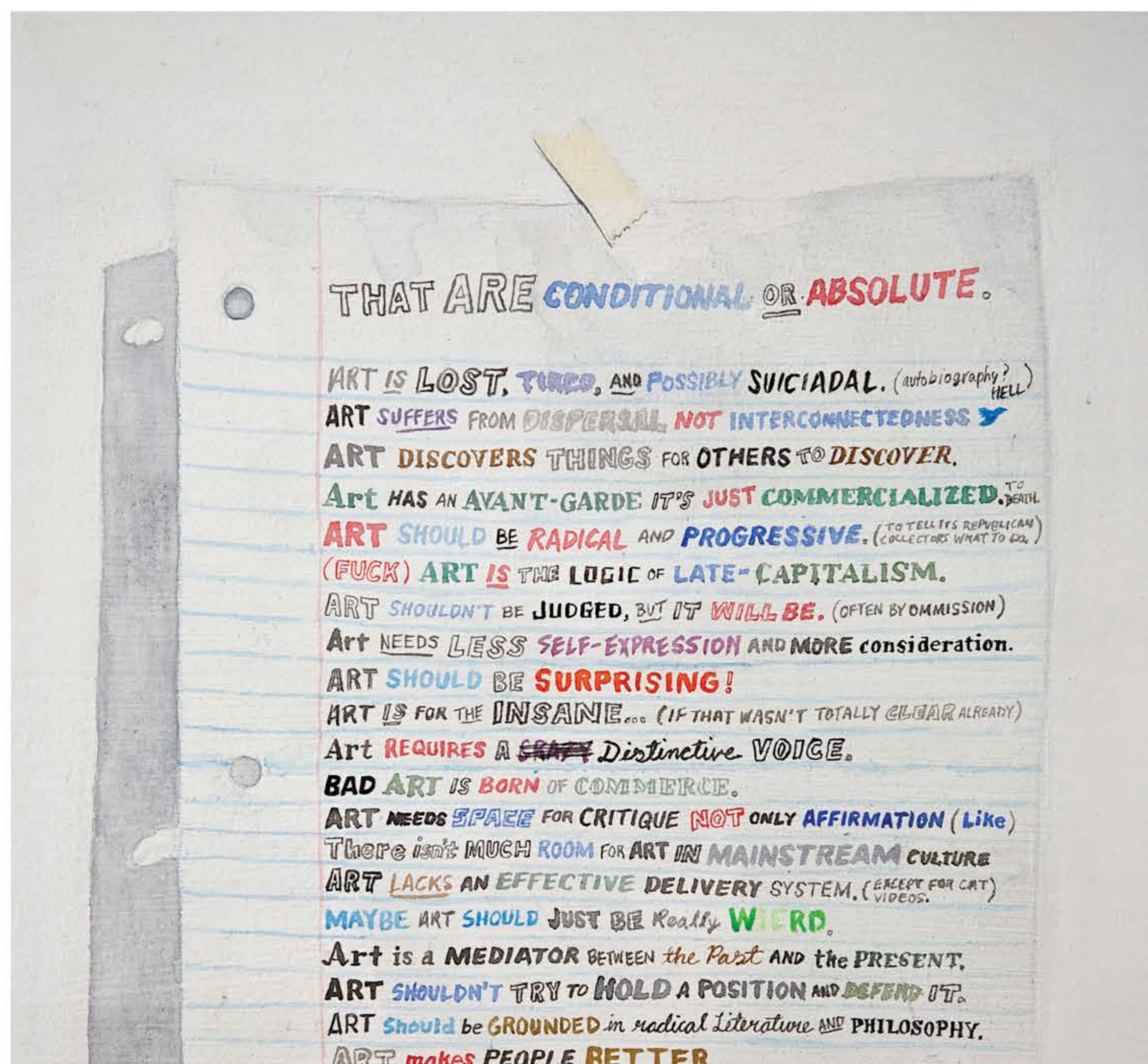
SEP GEERS AND THE LES **REMODERNISM** STUFF THAT LOOKS LIKE INVENTORY FROM '63. OFTEN IS!

THINK
WORDS BY WILLIAM POWHIDA

In between starting *Bill by Bill* and finishing the Headlands residency, I collaborated with artist Jade Townsend on a large-scale graphite drawing called *Bellum Omnium Contra Omnes* that depicts the art world engaged in a battle around some ultimate prize. Jade and I debated the meaning of the central, defensive structure holding a

In between starting *Bill by Bill* and finishing the Headlands residency, I collaborated with artist Jade Townsend on a large-scale graphite drawing called *Bellum Omnium Contra Omnes* that depicts the art world engaged in a battle around some ultimate prize. Jade and I debated the meaning of the central, defensive structure holding a golden egg, but I saw it as symbol of the impossibility of objective truth in an era of relativism. In order to make the drawing, Jade and I created a map of our internal, informal categories and classifications of art in order to identify what claims, values and ideas each faction in the drawing represented. The drawing was a reflection of broad categories and much less focused on individual intentions than our previous work *Hooverville*. This particular painting is a distillation of some of the categories I discussed with Jade, with whom I collaborated on *A (really bad, bad) Neo-expressionist painting*.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT ART?



**PINCH IMAGE
TO VIEW LARGER**
William Powhida,
detail from *What Can
We Learn About Art?*
graphite and watercolor,
19" x 15", 2013

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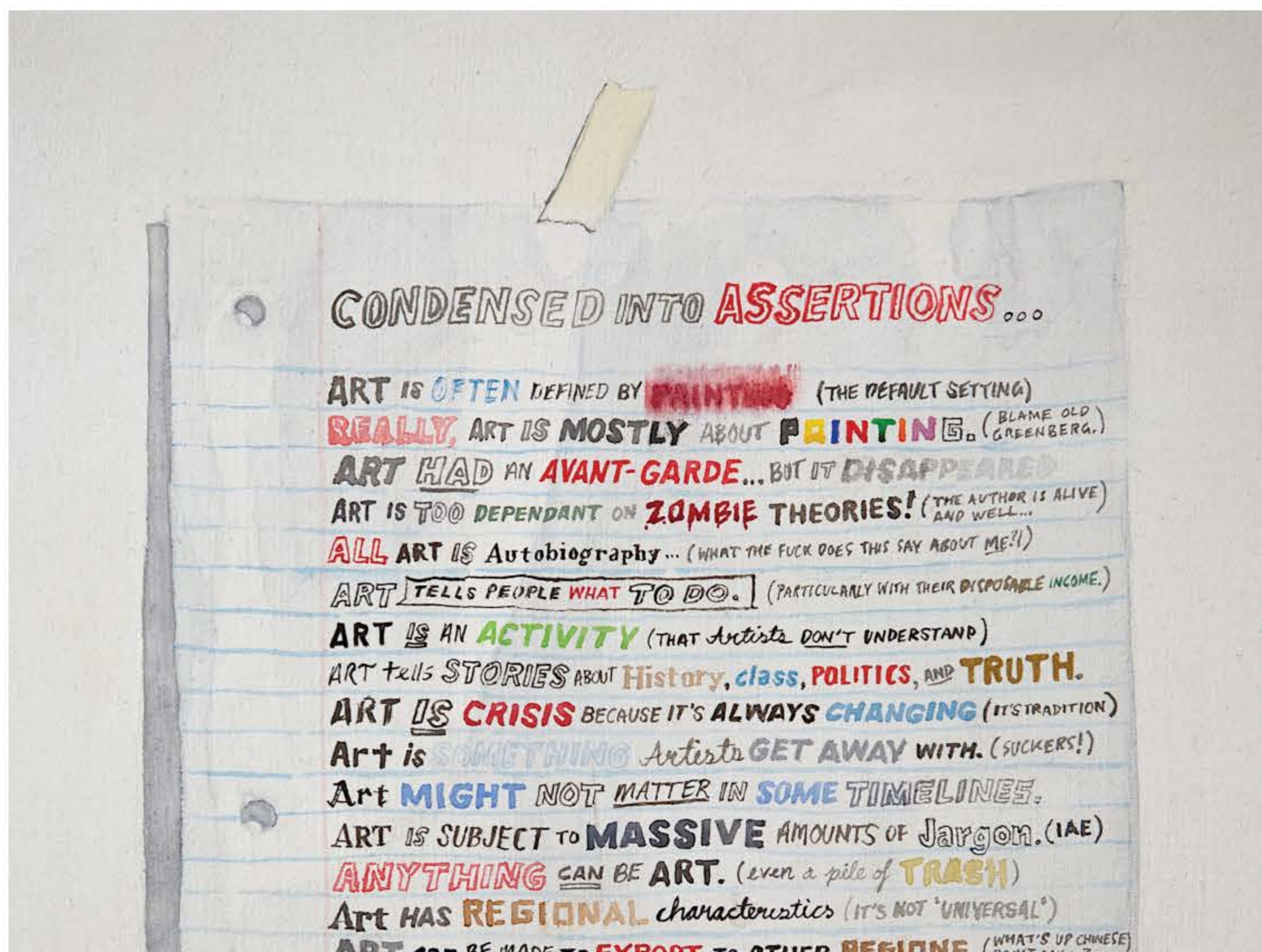
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As I was working on my own criteria and categories for art, the independent journal *The Brooklyn Rail*, published a series of responses by thirty six critics to a call by Irving Sandler to define the purpose of art criticism. Sandler's call was in response to a

As I was working on my own criteria and categories for art, the independent journal *The Brooklyn Rail*, published a series of responses by thirty six critics to a call by Irving Sandler to define the purpose of art criticism. Sandler's call was in response to a generalized anxiety about the perpetual "crisis of criticism" in the face of a high-powered art market in which capital judgment has sidelined critical judgement. Sotheby's head Tobias Meyer articulated this when he said, "The best art is the most expensive because the market is so smart." Only capital judgment could explain the commercial success of Dan Colen, whose last solo exhibition in New York was universally panned in an unusual expression of critical solidarity. There wasn't even the usual contrarian response that agreed with Meyer to explain Colen's commercial success. In the *Rail*, as the writers articulated what criticism should be for, I tried to extract the positive assertions about what art might or might not be. I felt that by examining such a wide range of critical voices, I could see contradictions and paradoxes that are far more complex and nuanced than my own particular perspective. It also showed me the way in which a single variable-- price-- becomes far easier to agree upon than metaphysics, originality, meaning, quality or emotional resonance. For me, the piece became a fulcrum for looking at the validity of the claims, "This is art," in each of the fabricated works.

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CONDENSED INTO **ASSERTIONS**...

ART IS **OFTEN** DEFINED BY **PAINTING** (THE DEFAULT SETTING)

REALLY, ART IS MOSTLY ABOUT **PAINTING** (BLAME OLD GREENBERG.)

ART **HAD** AN **AVANT-GARDE**... BUT IT **DISAPPEARED**

ART IS TOO DEPENDANT ON **ZOMBIE THEORIES!** (THE AUTHOR IS ALIVE AND WELL...)

ALL ART IS Autobiography... (WHAT THE FUCK DOES THIS SAY ABOUT ME?)

ART **TELLS PEOPLE WHAT TO DO.** (PARTICULARLY WITH THEIR DISPOSABLE INCOME.)

ART **IS** AN **ACTIVITY** (THAT ARTISTS DON'T UNDERSTAND)

ART **Tells** **STORIES** ABOUT **History, class, POLITICS, AND TRUTH.**

ART **IS** **CRISIS** BECAUSE IT'S **ALWAYS CHANGING** (IT'S TRADITION)

Art **is** **SOMETHING** Artists **GET AWAY WITH.** (SUCKERS!)

Art **MIGHT NOT MATTER** IN **SOME TIMELINES.**

ART IS SUBJECT TO **MASSIVE** AMOUNTS OF **Jargon.** (IAE)

ANYTHING **CAN BE ART.** (even a pile of **TRASH**)

Art **HAS** **REGIONAL** characteristics (IT'S NOT 'UNIVERSAL')

ART **CAN BE MADE TO EXPORT** TO **OTHER REGIONS.** (WHAT'S UP CHINESE PAINT MILL?)

ART **CAN BE** ABOUT ART BUT **META-ART IS BORING.** BOREDOM IS DEATH.

Art **ALLOWS** critics to be **Delightful** AND **self-indulgent** writers.

ART **IS** **EXCITING** AND **PROVOKES FIERCE, FIERY,** AND INTIMATE **EMOTIONS.**

ART **DOESN'T HAVE** TO BE ACCURATE TO BE **GREAT !!!** (IT SHOULD FEEL RIGHT.)

ART **FORCES** AN **OPINION** (ASSHOLE)

Art provides a **FULCRUM** FOR **dialogue.** (AND A LOT OF TROLLING!)

ART **IS** A **PERFORMANCE** THAT INDUCES **ANXIETY** TO **PERFORM.** (ALWAYS)

Art **HAS** **QUALITY** THAT **CAN BE JUDGED.** (OFTEN, WITH CAPITAL.)

ART **CAN BE** **NEW AND FRESH.** (LIKE A NEWLY MINTED MFA ART STAR.)

JONATHAN T.D. NEIL, BARBARA A. MACADAM, JEP PERL, PETER PLAGENS,

NANCY PRINCENTHAL, BARBARA ROSE, RAPHAEL RUBENSTEIN, ED SCHAD,

FROM 36 **CRITICS** WRITING ABOUT **CRITICISM**

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FROM 36 CRITICS^W WRITING ABOUT CRITICISM

ART HAS BEEN DESTROYED BY MARKET BARBARIANS. (KAGOSHIAN + MVRGABI)

ART CAN BE INSPIRED CRITICISM BRILLIANT AND HARROWING. (LIKE A

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IT'S EASIER TO MAKE WHAT YOU SHOULD THINK IS ART. (WHATEVER FACTORS SELLS.)

ART IS A (GASP) FORM OF CULTURE WITHIN CULTURE. (NESTED HIERARCHY)

ART IS A SYMPTOM OF THE STATE OF THE WORLD. (FRAGILE AND IN CRISIS)

ART can change HOW YOU PERCEIVE THE WORLD.

Art SHOULD INSPIRE *Paxelona*. (ALSO A GAY NIGHTCLUB IN CHELSEA, AT LEAST A TRIP THERE)

ART is for EXPLORATION OF THE (WAIT FOR IT) WORLD.

ART IS ABOUT ISSUES THAT MATTER.

THERE IS A LOT OF FUCKING ART OUT THERE ON Facebook™

ART PROMPTS OUTRAGEOUS AND UNINFORMED OPINIONS. (SEE HELMS)

Art can be beautiful, INCANEROUS, FORMALLY RIGOROUS, BRILLIANTLY EXECUTED

AND PRESCIENTLY WITTY, Elegantly SOLVED, Titillating, AND THRILLING!

ART IS ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH. (AN ISSUE THAT MATTERS!)

EXTRAORDINARY Art smells like perfume. (CHANEL No. 5)

Art IS TOTALLY SUBJECTIVE (DUDE.)

ART SHOULD BE AMUSING, beautiful, AND TRENCHANT.

THERE IS NOT ENOUGH GOOD PAINTING. (BAP PAINTING, HOWEVER...)

THE ONLY QUESTION ABOUT ART IS 'is it any good?' (whatever it is)

ADVERSARIAL ART HAS LITTLE INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD.

ART NEEDS ILLUMINATION. (WAIT, WTF?! I THOUGH IT ILLUMINATED THINGS?)

DAVE HICKEY, DAVID HUMPHREY, RICHARD KALINA, PEPE KARMEL,

VINCENT KATZ, MAX KOZLOFF, DAVID LEVI STRAUSS, KIM LEVIN,

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT ART

ART HAS BOTH A FORM AND AN ARGUMENT. (IT'S NOT JUST FUCKING style)

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ART IS A FORM OF GLOBAL CAPITAL MEASURED IN BUZZ. (LIKE ECON)
ART IS A WAY OF ENVISIONING THE WORLD IN NEW AND DEEPER WAYS.
ART MIGHT LOOK LIKE ENTERTAINMENT. (CONSIDER THE VIDEO GAME.)
(MAYBE) ART SHOULDN'T BE DOING ANYTHING. (SORRY ARTE) (UTIL...)

ART OFFERS A ~~FUNCTIONAL~~ EXPERIENCE.
ART CAN BE FOR LASTING INNER AMBITION OR TEMPORARY RELEVANCE

ART HAS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE (IT'S ALIVE!)
ART IS AN OBJECT WITH FORM AND SURFACE.

ART IS TEMPORAL AND CULTURALLY SPECIFIC. (IT EXISTS IN TIME AND SPACE!)
ART IS AN EXTENSION OF THE ARTIST'S PERSONALITY (THIS IS ACTUALLY THE LAW IN FRANCE.)

ARTISTS ARE OFTEN REMARKABLE ~~PEOPLE~~ PEOPLE!
ART IS A QUESTION OF HOW TO ENGAGE W/ OR LIVE IN THE WORLD.

ART IS A FORM OF PLAY IN A NON-JUDGEMENTAL SANDBOX.
ART IS BEYOND GOOD AND BAD (moral judgement). JUST ASK KOONS!

ART HAD meanings. (LIKE THE DAVINCI CODE?)
ART IS A CONDITION OF POSSIBILITY OR CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY, POSSIBLY.

ART SHOULD BE A DIRECT REFUTATION OF HYPER-COMMERCIAL ART.
ART IS A TERMITE GOING FORWARD EATING ITS OWN BOUNDARIES.

ART MIGHT HELP 'US' ILLUMINATE THE WORLD W/ ITS LIGHT.
ART IS A THING TO BE SERVED FOR THE GREATER GOOD. MEDIUM RARE, PLEASE!

ART IS A BIG OL FUCK YOU TO SOCIETY AND STATUS QUO.
'ART IS TOO HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY STUPID PEOPLE.

ART IS HATED. (THANKS FOR THE WISDOM, DAVE!)
ART NEEDS explication, contextual POSITIONING, AND JUDGEMENT.

* ALEX BACON, MAREK BARTELIK, BILL BERKSON, ROBERT BERLUND, PHONG BUI,
JARRET EARNEST, HAL FOSTER, CHRISTOPHER FRENCH, ELEANOR HEARTNEY,