

Most of the present beliefs should be dead beliefs, but, contrary to my old expectations, they'll take a thousand years to die. And then new stupidities will have filled the emptied space. It's hard to believe but in the last few years among some artists and critics there's been a revival of nationalism. More and more, art that is made in the United States is called American art. People who like it tend to give the country credit; those who don't blame it on the obnoxiousness of the United States. I gather by hearsay, since I can't stand to read his articles, that Max Kozloff lays the so-called rise of American art to the rise of American power after World War II. I've come across that opinion, and the allied one that art done in New York City and the United States is imperialistic, in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and Italy. Also Columbus, Houston, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Richmond, Kansas City, and Portland agree that art done in New York City is imperialistic.

Only religion is more primitive than nationalism. But most religion has become tepid. Nationalism, along with its fake international systems, capitalism and communism, is the real religion. It's the worst fully live and unquestioned force in the world. The nation is very much taken for granted. An instance of this, over a hundred years old, but things haven't changed, is that after Alexander Herzen supported the Polish revolt from Russia in 1863, the Russian readership of his magazine *The Bell*, all of them certainly for social reform, dropped from a couple of thousand to five hundred. Historians describe the unification of the nations only in terms of progress. But that's just that the unification of one nation forces the unification of another. The first nation becomes more powerful and efficient: better at war. Then an adjoining area has to resist and do the same. This doesn't benefit the people and primarily it has made possible the greatest organization and oppression and even killing of people ever. The people aren't much smarter now than they were a couple of hundred years ago in their small areas and yet the operations and

technology of governments have become enormous. The people can't resist such power or question it. When the Scots were cleared from the Highlands by their chiefs, with the advice of the clergy and the threats of the English, they left their homes quietly. They were docile toward eviction by a local authority. Their descendants would resist that now but they and the descendants of the various other cultures, having broadened their thinking, are just as docile toward the big governments. The attitudes of both the governed and the governors are old. The governors are as ruthless and expansionist as ever, but with new means. Maybe Scotland will secede.

The world would be a lot better off if Germany had never become unified. Its neighbor France is one of the original strong nations. The revolution there and Napoleon's regime are Europe's first example of totalitarianism. Louis the XIV was just a beginning. The people in Germany or in any country felt part of their town or county in a fairly normal way. They were made to feel part of larger and larger units, and the larger the units became the more passionate the people had to be about them. The less they knew and the less the unit concerned them the stronger their feelings had to be, like religion. Russia, which showed this century's nations what was possible, as France did those of the nineteenth century, is unified at the expense of at least fifty-three other countries: fifteen Union Republics, twenty Autonomous Republics, eight Autonomous Regions, and ten National Areas. There are eighty different peoples. Its unification is a calamity. The United States might now be a reasonable country if the Confederacy had won and left or if Mexico had won and kept its land. It would even help if the Republic of Texas hadn't joined. Thank goodness for Canada and what's left of Mexico. Since everyone is trying to learn to be nationalistic, the two present monsters are eventually going to be staring up at India and China. Since it takes a couple of hundred years to make all the citizens true patriots and since India and China will have to fight it out with

Russia and the United States and a couple of new amalgamations and then since India and China will have to fight, it's easy to see that nationalism will last a thousand years. And, as with the European religious wars, it will be hard to understand what it was all about. It will just have happened and millions, maybe billions will be dead.

Protestantism and Catholicism played about the same role for the beginning nations in those wars that capitalism and communism do for the present nations in these wars. The international doctrines give the nations room to maneuver in, give them a cover-up for each nation's self-interest and an objective aspect for the people's patriotism – God and Country. Any real international idea or effort, such as the United Nations partly was, is cooperatively reduced to a farce. It's interesting that one of the UN organizations you hear most about is UNESCO; art is the one thing Russia and the United States can agree upon since it doesn't involve anything they take seriously. Science, on the other hand, is far less international than it was in the nineteenth century, before the nations realized it was so valuable. Art has always been comparatively international within Europe. It was intentionally international in the United States after World War II. Now some artists and critics want to be part of the thousand years of nationalism.

The importance of art done in the United States since World War II (and the change started in the late 1930s) is most easily explained by saying that a few artists simply decided to do first-rate work. This argument isn't so convincing to a lot of people because it leaves this great historical event up to a few individuals. An argument more on their level is that the United States was the only place not bombed to death. The present international art is mostly "Western," it has a European history, so you couldn't expect much from the few places not in the war. Europe has tried to commit suicide twice; it's not surprising that the art there didn't revive soon after World War II. Russia was destroyed, in addition to having a horrible

government that had already finished off its artists. Australia and Canada and other undamaged countries with small populations are too small, given the contemporary ratio, to have many good artists. After all, in the United States there are only a handful of excellent artists to two hundred million people. India, which was not damaged, is not a “Western” country, which is something I’ll mention later. China isn’t “Western,” continued to fight, and is anyway the purest example of God and Country. The prevailing adulation of China by most artists and some other intellectuals is very odd since the country is Nixon’s dream come true, with nothing left but the American Legion. And China took Tibet and destroyed its civilization.

The second social reason is that while the artists in the United States were poor, the society had enough money to allow them to scrape by, to make a choice to be artists. You can’t be an artist facing plain starvation, but if you can be poor and get by on brief jobs, you can work. The third big social reason is that while the United States is hardly free and democratic, it’s sloppy, and no one is going to stop you from doing something as irrelevant as art. Certainly no government, city, state, or federal, supported art until recently. The WPA wasn’t much. If you come in contact with the governments, usually through taxes, certainly not through participation, they are hostile. New York State summoned me once to question my deduction of art materials as a second business loss when I was making about \$1,700 a year at part-time jobs. At any rate, in terms of money and freedom artists could and still can live in the cracks between the blocks of the society of the United States.

Art is a peripheral activity, almost outside of the society of the United States. I felt that I had to leave that society to be an artist. It was too wrong to deal with. If people can’t see that art isn’t imperialistic, they should understand from the social and economic conditions that the artists of the 1940s and 1950s could hardly be agents of the government. In 1965 at the

Bienal de São Paulo Barnett Newman was told by the wife of the American Ambassador to Brazil that his work and that of the others shouldn’t have been sent. They should have sent Andrew Wyeth’s. And usually they do; you just don’t hear about it. As proof of the intentions of the best artists of the 1940s and 1950s here’s Pollock’s statement again, dated 1944:

The idea of an isolated American painting, so popular in this country during the thirties, seems absurd to me just as the idea of creating a purely American mathematics or physics would seem absurd . . . And in another sense, the problem doesn’t exist at all; or, if it did, would solve itself. An American is an American and his painting would naturally be qualified by that fact, whether he wills it or not. But the basic problems of contemporary painting are independent of any country.

In the 1940s and even in the 1950s art magazines in the United States worried about whether art made there could equal art made in Europe. Art magazines in Europe ignored or despised art made in the United States. The talk about Wols being better than Pollock, even influencing him, is an example. Like a lot of problems, this problem of whether first-rate art can be made anyplace can simply be declared dead. Those bothered by that problem are looking for the spirit of where they live and of course they can’t find it. If there were such a thing no artist could live in New York City. Its visible seediness and malevolence is nothing compared to what’s in the minds of its bureaucracy.

An excellent artist has to know the work of older excellent artists as the person’s own work is being formed. It’s a case of knowledge. There’s a lot of art and a lot of artists in New York. But not all of either and most of the artists have come from somewhere else. Also most well-known artists leave New York after a while since the place is so disagreeable. There’s nothing

mysterious about New York. It's just that the knowledge and a lot of the art business are there. The city itself and the people who live there aren't interested in art. They buy less than St. Louis or Minneapolis or Milan or Cologne. It's unfortunate that art has become so centered in New York but it's been dispersing for ten years and should continue to do so. It's true to form that the accusation of imperialism occurs after the time of the greatest real activity in New York. It's another instance of the tourists talking to each other. Provincialism is in the minds of the provincials; there are probably more of them too in New York than anywhere else. It's the world's greatest producer of fresh schmaltz.

Art made in two centers or in many will still be an international art. The main reason is that art is fairly congruent with the state of knowledge, which is chiefly science. I'm appalled by art that romanticizes science or otherwise incorporates it, falsifying it, making further solipsistic art, such as Smithson's work and some of Morris's, but I think good art cannot contradict what's known at the time it's made. If it does it's just ignorant. Despite the attempts of the nations to divide science, knowledge is knowledge and art has to deal with that. I think good earlier art from all societies was made according to what they thought true. Instead of the world having lots of truths, religions at the time, it's been reduced to one truth, science, such as it is.

The social reasons for an international art aren't as determining as science, which is a barrier to the past. The most important, most given social reason is that the majority of people in the industrial nations are more alike than they are different. They all have some sort of rural and religious background one or two generations back, which they play with some, but they work in the same factories and offices, have the same amount of vague education, and live in the same awful houses and apartments with the same awful furniture. Their grandparents were removed, usually willingly, from a particular

place, where there was some local culture, always including a religion. The present people don't believe what their grandparents believed. But they don't believe much that's new either. Mostly they fill up the space with ideas like nationalism. These industrialized, mostly middle-class people can't go back to the farm. They don't have much of a past. So the few people among them who want to do something, who don't like the thoughtlessness, have to invent their own interests. They can only go ahead.

Art is already international; it exists as such, with the exception of course of the surviving older cultures. All of the industrial nations – I haven't been to Japan – that produced little or no excellent art in the nineteenth century and the beginning of this one have the same pictures in their museum stacks and on their museum walls. I've seen hundreds of paintings each from that time from Sweden, the United States, Canada, and Australia and I'm not impressed by the differences. The differences were among artists in France and Germany. There are often some nice painters you've never heard of and the landscape and architecture add a few differences but those aren't enough. At present the art in countries which have no excellent artists only reflects what's going on in the United States and Europe. A critic in Adelaide, Australia, complained that the show *Some Recent American Art*, an unfortunate title, which The Museum of Modern Art sent there in 1974, wasn't necessary because:

... it will be composed entirely of conceptual and minimal art with which we are already familiar through the work of local imitators.

At least he said imitators. Another critic thought the show simply a duplication. Australia has faded versions of all the well-known artists. So does the United States. The show was said to be an instance of cultural imperialism, The Museum

of Modern Art was described as an agent of the United States Government and of the Rockefellers. But you should learn if you live in New York a while that the Modern isn't very interested in contemporary art, doesn't do much, doesn't have a lot of money, which it would have if the government thought art was useful for imperialism, and that the Rockefellers aren't much interested in contemporary art. I'm saying that a lot of people, elsewhere and in New York, are being very careless and ignorant in their accusations. Dan Flavin was scolded by the Art Workers' Coalition a few years back because the fluorescent tubes he used were made by a company that made something for the Vietnam War. It all gets silly. Flavin pointed out that the most common toilet was made by a company that also supplied something for the war. I don't like being accused of being an agent of the United States Government, New York State, and New York City simply because I live there. And I visit New York now; I left legally because it was so awful. I don't like being lectured by doctrinaire artists, who are fortifying their work with politics, about situations I've lived with all my life and learned about angrily detail by detail. Do you remember when the United States wanted to attack Yugoslavia for shooting down a plane?

As I said, it would be useful if the countries split into their cultural entities and I'm interested in what's left of the various cultures. But I'm not part of any of those cultures nor of any religion, unless I'm part of the industrialized middle class, which seems too empty to be a culture, but is one of course, a lousy one. The industrial nations, in their left and right versions, have tried to kill off local cultures. Even Frantz Fanon says:

We must take advantage of the national military and civil service in order to raise the level of the national consciousness, and to detribalize and unite the nation. . . .

. . . What can be dangerous is when they reach the stage of social consciousness before the stage of nationalism.

If this happens, we find in under-developed countries fierce demands for social justice which paradoxically are allied with often primitive tribalism. . . . The collective building up of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale. Otherwise there is anarchy, repression, and the resurgence of tribal parties and federalism.

"Fierce demands for social justice . . . allied with . . . tribalism" sounds just fine to me. "Destiny" is a manifest myth, another excuse for cheating someone, say Mexico. The suppression of local cultures has to stop. Whatever unaffiliated people like myself think of the old beliefs, the cultures should be left alone. The problem is very serious. The difference between the people in a live old-fashioned culture and those in the industrial one is irreconcilable. The people in the old culture don't know about or don't care about such things as science and, having been kicked around a lot, dislike the rest of the world. The unaffiliated people who have become independent are bound to consider the earlier culture tight and, since it is religious, pretty ignorant. It's possible the world will develop some kinds of diversity that are not contradictory but it's not going to happen soon. In the meantime the contradictions should be tolerated.

In solving a problem, an individual should join with another person or several only as a last resort. They should join a somewhat larger group in the same way and so on out to towns, counties, and states or provinces. At no point should the power exceed what is necessary to solve the problems at that point. This is hardly the case now. And at no time should the group or institution become mysterious or moral, something greater than the problems it was created to solve. This isn't the case either. The attitude of the officials of the United States, New York State, and New York City and of most institutions is very moral and personal. They act like a laird on his land but they have the capacity to bomb Russia for being so sassy.

They are pretty primitive. Toynbee, who the *Times* today says died yesterday, is a good example of the preposterous generality and morality of the thought of the rulers. The rulers don't know what they don't know. Local control has to develop: the people have to take the power. But this is politics and economics, not art and science. For local control all you need is a place, political say, and a way to make a living; it's a practical matter. For local art you need a whole culture. If the local control is more than practical it becomes dangerous, becomes mysterious and moral and overwhelming, like the present governments. Just as no one should give up power to a larger organization except as a necessity, power should not be imposed by large organizations upon smaller ones or individuals except as a necessity. Clear examples of the necessary and the unnecessary uses of broad power are respectively of the desegregation of schools and of busing. Segregation was an outrage and wasn't going to stop. Children in the same neighborhood or town could not go to the same school. It was an insult. The federal government had to intervene and desegregate the schools. Busing, in contrast, is a typical liberal imposition. It's a typical admonishment and correction of the lower class by the middle and upper classes. The children and the schools are being used to correct the much broader problem of separate neighborhoods, caused primarily by intimidation but also somewhat by choice. Busing doesn't solve that problem. And it's a violation of geography, practicality, and local control. The people whose children are bused elsewhere feel pushed around and it only increases their antagonism. The only changes in the society that will stick are those that convince people. The government seldom changes: it settled easily into thirty years of Cold War. But the people, who have an ancient hostile attitude to outsiders, which, with more scope and circumspection, the government officials also have, are supposed to change rapidly. It may take the government forever to make a decision, but once it's made it

sends in the troops. And when the troops leave the supposed reform collapses.

This article is pretty general, so, to add another general statement, the world is usually thought of and felt as a whole in ways I don't agree with and also divided in ways I don't agree with. As I wrote several years ago I'm very wary of general statements, certainly the usual solipsistic ones, and also I'm wary of my own. The different kinds of activities should become discrete, should be considered only as a function if useful, and only as knowledge if that's the purpose. Art, dance, music, and literature have to be considered as autonomous activities and not as decoration upon political and social purposes. Only in China and Russia is it still 1935. One thing this separation of activities means is that business should be considered only as production and supply and divested of its great aura of moral, social, and political assumptions. I'm tired of being governed by the men who produce my oil, the children's milk, or move the products around. When Brooklyn was seized by Manhattan one of the arguments in favor of that was that a single sewage and water system would be more efficient. A city disappeared and the people's political power was reduced for the sake of a couple of functions. Greater separation obviously doesn't mean that those doing one thing should be more ignorant of others' activities. That's one of the present troubles and one of the causes of moralizing and of trying to make activities serve purposes outside of themselves or even harmful to them. Science, for example, is seriously abused by the governments, mostly for fancier wars, and its whole course is warped by the great support supplied for that purpose and by the little supplied for plain old knowledge.

Most moralizing occurs in the extension of personal feeling into institutions. For instance, a violent reaction if a person is attacked is justified; there's no reason to be personally pacific. But governments and institutions shouldn't be interested in violence and revenge. Those aren't practical. Organizations

shouldn't have feelings. They are, or should be, made over a long period of time in an objective way by numerous people in order to perform certain functions. The function is built in. Most institutions of the governments are highly subjective, with feelings such as the prevailing "overkill" attitude; and the built-in function is violence. The institutions are built according to feelings that should be personal. They'd be just as nuts if they were built for love, as some of Christianity was.

Competent art made in a place should be shown in that place. It's absurd to always import art, even from New York to Buffalo. But the work should be shown as simply being done there, as a practical matter, without a lot of nonsense about the spirit of the place. There's no doubt local art is insufficiently supported; certainly New York City doesn't do anything. But it's still a case of knowledge and the best art has to be seen and for most of the world that means it comes from New York and secondly from Europe. The main job of the staff of a museum is to make judgments about the quality of the various artists' work and to defend those judgments. The true proportion of quality among the various artists has to be maintained. It becomes a real mess when no one knows the difference between a good artist and a bad one, as they didn't, say, in 1959 between Rauschenberg and Michael Goldberg or Grace Hartigan. Or, say, now between Richard Long and Daniel Buren or Jan Dibbets.

Another confusion is the application of political democracy to art. Everyone should be equal politically. But they're not equal in what they do, especially artists. Art is done by people who like it and are good at it and they are few. It's not something done by several thousand hacks with jobs and pensions. It's not the same as some useful activity done by thousands of people. I don't see why art should be a guaranteed career. I think an artist should be as independent of the surrounding society as possible and should be ready to be

poor, as artists have been in the United States until recently. Naturally it's better to make a living from art and it takes money to make work.

As I wrote earlier, the international art within Europe became international art. There's no doubt that present art developed primarily from European art and within Europe and in the colonies settled by Europeans. Japan is the only country not European that has contemporary international art, proving it can be done. The main qualification to the dominance of Europe is that for a century the art of other periods and civilizations has been liked and used by the Europeans and the erstwhile Europeans. I hope my work, for example, is international and not European, but I know of course that it's not Indian or Chinese or African. But I thought about the art from those places, and I thought about it almost as much as I thought about old European art. There are some common characteristics of American art and there are some of European and of Japanese art. The proximity of the artists accounts for most of these characteristics. Very little in recent American art came from the United States, and that came from earlier American art. It's one of the many art historical clichés that the place is responsible for common characteristics. Art history is one of the world's most unexamined activities. Like the government, it has a lot of information and procedure balanced on assumptions no one ever questions and probably no one ever formulated. India, China, and Africa will probably bring a little from their traditional cultures, just as Europe and Japan did. None of these possible differences will be nearly as great as the differences between present artists making good work.