

In our society artists have no power. They have no power because they are divided against themselves and fail to organize as a group. Because they have no power, they are exploited and manipulated by those who have it. In most cases, instead of objecting to or even being aware of this exploitation, they take pride in the reason for it. We are individuals, they say, we neither want nor need organization. If you are good, you will make it in spite of the disadvantages; if you do not, you can console yourself with the thought that making it is not the artist's true objective anyway.

We do not realize that we are encouraged in this rationalization by those who exploit and manipulate us. Like women, like the black people, we are fed with a careful fiction as to the nature of our wishes and our goals. How many times have the black people in the South been told that they are happier and more contented than those in the North? How many times have women been told that to do something well or even seriously will preclude a happy relationship with a man? Anything, that is, that falls outside the conventional role of women.

For artists, if not for the public, la vie bohème, the romantic garret, the purity of poverty, the love affair with starvation may be perhaps romantic popcorn. Still overlaying it is a more serious myth. You cannot really expect to make a living from art; artists get their satisfaction from doing their work and showing it; they don't really need to be paid for it, they are already so lucky to be creative and gifted and so on.

Yet, as we all know, there is money in art; a great deal of it in fact; huge sums change hands yet somehow scarcely ever finish up in the pocket of the artist. Why should this be so?

The crux of the problem is twofold: the legal concept of art as an investment object; the social concept of art as a luxury object. Many artists have fought against this latter definition for years by changing the nature of their work; by making it too large or too ugly or too dirty or too impermanent for galleries and smart apartments. Their work has usually been deaccessioned in the end, however, and their protest has failed to make art a less eclectic commodity.

They should have realized that without an attack on the legal and financial structure of the art world, no democratization of the art object is possible. Without a change in these areas, art will remain a luxury and the artist a superfluous. (75)

What changes then can be made to diminish the value of art as investment and at the same time give an economic and legal power to the artist proportionate to his role of creator? I have four proposals to make:

Firstly: the greatest financial gains from art are realized by those who buy work cheap in the artist's youth and sell it dear when he is old or dead. Our objective should be to change the law so that one half of all such gains reverts to the artist, and after his death partly to ~~give~~ his descendants and partly to a central fund created for the benefit of all artists. Such a fund would provide work grants, old age and sickness benefits, help for dependents of deceased artists, legal advice service and other social benefits. In cases where gains are realized through tax losses obtained by collectors who donate work to museums, one half of such gains should also be passed on to the artist or his descendants and the fund.

We should strive to promote  
Secondly: the concept of renting art. Scales of minimum rental fees should be established, and all institutions charging admission to exhibitions should be legally obliged to pay fees to the participating artists. In the case of dead artists, fees would be paid to the fund. Public exhibitions of private collections should also return a royalty to the artist or to the fund.

Thirdly: Maximum commission rates chargeable by galleries should be established by law.

Fourthly: The reproduction of artists' work in books, magazines, on television or in films should return a royalty fee to the artist or the fund.

Some of these suggestions exist as fact in one form or another in the fields of literature and music. And although it can be objected that art is different since it is intrinsically valuable as a unique object whereas music and literature have value only in their idea and not in their physical form - yet, one can maintain that the sale of an art work conveys only the right to private and personal enjoyment thereof and not to the right to financial gain, personal publicity or public acclaim. Or at least not to these advantages without paying extra for them.

I have concentrated on economic proposals because I feel that all the frustrations and in relationships with galleries and landlords, museums and collectors, all the slights and inequities to which we are subjected are a direct result of our having no financial power either individually or through a representative organization. Improve our legal and economic rights and the other relationships will also

also change. ~~unrepresentative~~ But sit on every museum committee in the world and without financial backing we will always be overruled.

I have no doubt we can bring about change, even change as drastic or even more drastic than what I am proposing here. But to do so, we must stop being brain-washed into the belief that things are for the best as they are; we must be prepared to spend time building an organization to represent us; we must be able to define our demands and research the means to carry them through to law. It ~~must~~<sup>can't</sup> be quick or easy and it cannot be done only in New York City or even perhaps not only in the U.S. for the art world is international and if our reforms are to be effective, they must be applied on a global scale. It's a big job, but we can start it moving...