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Arts Trade Association Dinner: Speech Research (1963-1967): Article 02

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~~The hand which serves the eye which serves the mind and heart.~~

OUR AMERICAN ART EXPLOSION

This is an effort at organized thinking in the artists supply business. It concerns the so called cultural explosion which is taking place; some of the facts leading up to it; conditions as they are today and a forecast for the future. It might help our thinking if we divide the art field roughly into fine arts and commercial arts. In the fine art field we can have further divisions of professional, amateur and the educational field. In the commercial art field we can first get a rough division of an advertising and design group and secondly, of a technical illustration group which overlaps the drafting industry. Visualizing the various groupings and their relationship will enable you to improve your service and thereby maintain and encourage the growth of the entire art field.

✶ This is a story about 195 million consumers who, before they can do what they want to do, must come to you. We hope you are ready.

The greatest surge in art interest today has come from the man in the street. Those of you who attended the Washington seminar and noticed NAMTA releases, will remember the item "What Makes Sadie Paint". Today painting and an interest in the arts is the "in" thing to do. It gives the indulger status in the eyes of his friends but aside from this shallow reason, the destinies of art interest are steered sometimes by forces beyond our control. This is an age of great change and great pressures. We have spirals of inflation, wars, the rapid growth of population and the fight for living space, littered streets, increasing crime, the pressing, frightening traffic congestion which only get worse; disturbing race riots and increasing taxation. (Megalopolis)

Because of our increasing congestion, America is being transformed and this is disturbing to many individuals and some instances, a shock to their mind and nervous system.

Eye filling architecture and buildings which commanded respect and admiration are disappearing in favor of steel, aluminum and glass boxes which are erected on an investment basis with the expectation that they will be torn down within thirty years or less. Subconsciously people suffer from the crushing effect of modern economic and social forces which they feel hopeless to control. There is less and less satisfaction in being a person.

And when they enter their homes shiny electric gadgets crowd the rooms. The man in the street has been brain washed. He's told this is progress and he must keep up with it but he's not so sure this is right. In some instances the machines no longer work for the housewife, the housewife works for the machines.

Even preparing food which has always given millions of women and men satisfaction, is bowing before the mixes, the packaged foods, the frozen dinners and production line dispensing. We are more and more becoming robots in a social economic machine instead of human beings in pleasant surroundings which assure that we are important. One of the obvious results of this assault on the human being is the increased use of psychiatrists, the vastly increased number of patients who crowd our mental institutions.

Indications of standardization and conformity are recorded literature of our times as "The Lonely Crowd", "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" and "The Status Seekers". When the lack of essential identity becomes conscious, it is often experienced as a feeling that, compared with others, one is not fully a person. They experience what Robert McIver

If life is gray, art is vivid; if life is clockbound, art is spontaneous and at least in appearance uninhibited. On a superficial or sensuous level, art brings color, variety and differentness into life. Art is peculiarly suited to meet the cravings set up by contemporary industrial society. Since we previously mentioned the work psychiatrist, let's take a jump to one of their ancient devices - A Rorschach test. To find out what goes on in a persons subconscious mind, a psychiatrist will show the patient a "butterfly". This consists of an ink blot placed in the center of a folded piece of paper. When the paper is opened the haphazard blot is shown to the patient and he is asked to describe what he sees in the various shapes. Today a large segment of our painting population are apparently applying the Rorschach test in reverse.

People are painting by the millions, in many instances in symbols intelligent only to them but which release their inhibitions and inner tensions and which have a very real part in their dream world. This is sound therapy self-applied and as the painting population increases, the proportion of those with nervous breakdowns and similar ills should decrease.

One ~~ethn~~quatrain of the Ryyyat of Omer Kayyam says "Ah, my beloved, could you and I conspire, to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, would not we shatter it to bits and remold it nearer to our hearts desire."

This explains in part what is happening when the self preservation instinct in many amateurs urges them to paint. Painting is not the only pursuit for the relief of pressure. The popularity of bowling is allied ~~to~~ life. It helps with relief of aggressions, the housewife who knocks over some pins may be subconsciously knocking over the despicable driver who cut her off at the traffic circle.

The haircuts and dress of teenagers are rebellion against conformity in a world they are not equipped to understand. The wierd and horror comics serve the same purpose for children as do the TV program "The Munsters". The paintings which they produce are generally classed as either primitive or expressionist. There are interesting factors leading to primitive pictures and expressionism of today. If we refer to the paintings of the turn of the century, we find that the young ladies who indulged always attempted to make a picture. They were particularly interested in skill and they had Vanya and Stahl studies of flowers and pastoral scenes and they copied them diligently. As the years went by this calendar cover art was not acceptable to creative people. The avante garde of the great professional fine artists as Ceyanne Matisse and Picasso, led the art world into an abandon in subject matter and new delivery which opened the minds of modern painters whether professional or amateur.

There had always been the objection on the part of the amateur "Oh, I can't draw a straight line" but it was realized that this corny, outmoded remark did not relate to creative art. Encouragement came to the amateur by seeing in newspapers and magazines, paintings that were not pictures as he knew them. They were not representational. When the amateur realized that many of these sold for fabulous sums and were accepted, he no longer felt ashamed to try painting because he could not draw. The recent era of Primitives sparked by the popularity as example of Grandma Moses, further encouraged this point of view of painting without drawing.

Wrapped up in the acceleration of painting as a hobby is the effect of numbered paint sets. When wax crayons were first marketed, children began laying on the floor or sat at a table with a coloring book as

they still do and with their crayons colored the areas outlined. This was considered an exercise in discipline for neatness and manual skill. From this a glorified coloring book for hobbyists arose called numbered paint sets. Liquid color and brushes were substituted for crayon and the sheets in the coloring book became canvas panels. Millions of these sets have been sold and it damned on millions of users that they had been using pencils and pens all their lives and there wasn't much difference between wielding a pencil and a brush dipped in color. Regardless of the creative value of the numbered paint sets, for many hobbyists they broke the ice and continue to contribute toward coaxing people to paint.

(Instant Art)

So far we have spoken mostly of a sinister side to growth and change on our American scene and its effect on the amateur painter. This is because it represents the greatest present and future area of growth. Not all of the story is sinister, and just as many well balanced people with more money, more leisure time and improved minds and education are looking for the satisfaction of cultural pursuits. All of this affects you.

The educational field is going forward by leaps and bounds. Reading from the Bergen Evening Record of August 17th, we find "Half of the United States population is returning to school. About 95,300,000 Americans are taking some kind of formal or informal instruction. This is at an estimated cost of 43 billion per year. Of this it is hard to isolate the amount for art education or the number of individuals in adult education studying art, and in correspondence schools and similar pursuits. We do know the general picture is uplifting in all categories of culture and improvement with some

surprising direct results. The ability to appreciate art is linked to think abstractly. This is what develops in the child and in higher education the picture is heartening. Dartmouth opened a seven and a half million dollar center; Brandeis put \$660,000 into art studios.

The University of Michigan spends \$150,000 a year on artists fees alone; Indiana University spends \$35,000; Ohio State spends \$60,000; Rutgers \$50,000. The art surge of higher education may be leading the field but effects will not be felt for years to come, and colleges remind us of a statistic concerning art appreciation as art practice.

Many NAMTA dealers sell prints and frames. Some of their customers paint, others indulge in art appreciation. There is a parallel in playing music as against listening to it. In a recent issue of the College Store, published by the National Association of College Stores, they list an increase in print sales of

Print sales and framing in conjunction have gone forward by leaps and bounds. Whereas this portion of our business has not increased as greatly as for example, record sales in the music field, there is a similar interest on an ever increasing level.

Perhaps it is time we turned our attention to the professional fine arts field and the absorption of professional works of fine art.

The increase in the number of galleries in the United States has leaped. In 1950 there were about 150 art galleries in New York and an equal number spread thinly across the country. Today there are over 300 galleries in New York alone and more than twice that many spread across the country.

Galleries are found in what once were retail stores and private dwellings as well as in professional setups. Here is a picture of a building on 57th Street in which there are a number of galleries

and all successful. In addition we find an enormous absorption by people purchasing in vacation spots and from outdoor exhibits. This culture binge has been partially explained but there is another angle which you should know.

It is money, finance, support.

Americans spent or donated altogether the rock bottom minimum of 3 billion dollars for culture last year. The significant point is that this sum is 70% more than the comparable estimate for ten years ago. The days of the Frick's, Morgans and the Mellons and their lavish but too few gifts to art have vanished. Today everyone gets into the act. Wealthy people have always been art patrons and there have been periods as in the Renaissance when sculptors and painters produced works of art to suit the wishes of their wealthy patrons. This constituted the "market" of those days as in the city of Florence. Today the United States, the wealthiest country in the world, has hundreds of thousands and possible millions of art patrons and there is a switch from the favored few to the bulk of the population. We find our prosperity, the new leisure, the new thirst for culture, all adding to the desirability of purchasing paintings but an investment factor has entered the scene in an unprecedented way. Perhaps in a span of twenty to thirty years you might be able to select three or four stocks for investment and if you were lucky, they would show phenomenal growth. You might do the same with real estate but if you latch on to an artist with a future, your fortune is truly made in our modern market. And art values from the investment angle have been phenomenal. Read about the auctions. In addition to this, investors who purchased pictures many years ago

can have them appraised at their current market value. In some instances, pictures purchased for \$1,500 may not be worth \$15,000. If they contribute these to museums or other institutions, they are partially tax deductible. Our present economic and tax scene has thereby unwittingly contributed to the greatest opportunity of all time for the contemporary artist, for the patron who buys the pictures, for the museums who receive them ultimately, and for the general public who benefit thereby. Our government through our tax system has given what is practically a subsidy to contemporary artists. This is a great contributing factor for keeping the art field sound and should continue as long as income and corporate taxes continue.

Since we have mentioned there is the charge the federal government has in the past failed to offer conscious recognition to the arts. It pumps money into science, heaps honors on mathematicians and astronauts. It has refused to think seriously about the place of art in American life. John Kenneth Galbraith states "The time has come for the government to recognize formally that the artist is a first class citizen and that art is one of the greatest respectable resources of society." Changes in distribution of federal, state and municipal funds - the sum given to the arts or related causes is still minute by comparison with amounts given to health and welfare but what appears to be a long range shift is occurring. Some of this is direct recognition as our arts and humanities bills. Other results come from needs of our time as urban redevelopment which in all cases is partially Federally financed. The building of multi-purpose art centers as Lincoln Center in New York, Trenton, New Jersey, Hartford, Connecticut, San Leandro, California, Peoria, Illinois are connected with urban redevelopment which has become a

national drive sociologically and economically. In all instances, culture is part of the change.

Seldom if ever in history have the arts of a nation drawn patronage simultaneously from so many diverse sources. Individuals, corporations, foundations, universities, voluntary organizations, city, county, state governments and federal governments are all in their different ways channeling the funds into the non-profit sector of the culture industry. This pluralism of patronage contrasts sharply with the patterns of the past. As Alvin Toffler says, "This system conforming exactly to the outlines of our open society, comes close to being an American invention."

Art is not a fad. Art is not hula-hoops. Art is part of life in America. It is here - it is now - it is real. Art and culture in general will go up for years to come. There are no deterring factors in sight. Russell Lynes states "I am not worried about creeping socialism in arts but about creeping mediocrity." The arts so much in the public mind as being desirable that they are a sitting duck for any politician who feels the need of making personal headlines. And the business picture

Business and industry in general are purchasing pictures and contributing to our American art explosion from several sides. Since we have mentioned business and industry, let us remind you that if you hark back to the boxlike examples of architecture which we showed, these same bare offices are being decorated with contemporary works of art. The users believe that visitors will realize how advanced the business is, how up to the minute and their office will therefore create a favorable image of being modern. In addition modern paintings fit in with the stark decor of a modern office so that contemporary pieces produced by your

customers are in demand.

Business in general smiles with approval on increased American art consciousness. Unions such as the AFL and CIO seek more of it and more culture for their members and members children. It goes with the shorter work week and the better life. The businessman also recognizes that on some products he cannot compete with imports. He must therefore, upgrade his items by better design and he must upgrade his consumers so that they will be more discriminatory, turn down the shabby article and accept the better designed one. The businessmen of today want more art training in our public schools for better workers and better customers in the future. The American businessman cannot afford to offer well designed and well made products to a nondiscriminating sales field of aobs. This interest has been going on for years and there have been many exhibits in the Albright Gallery in Buffalo and elsewhere concerning the upgrading through improved design of products and consumers acceptance. And there are other angles as the decision of Sears Roebuck and Company to go into the business of selling original paintings. The highly publicized engagement of Vincent Price, the Hollywood actor and art collector, to assemble a large collection of paintings for sales in their stores. This is overdue, common sense! Someone advertises the paper is part of the picture. Sears is saying what is obvious - the picture is part of the room. We can since add Korvettes, McCrorys, Woolworths and many others.

The rising art market of recent years has made the stock of pictures on an office wall sometimes more valuable than the stock of merchandise in the store room. General Motors Company distributed 600,000 booklets entitled "French Impressionism and Master Pieces from the Louvre." Artistic perception is as necessary to the modern manufacturer of

consumer goods as engineering skill. It will be increasingly so. The artist is being integrated into American society to a degree unprecedented in the past century and on a basis more stable than in the whole history of mankind. Art is not only your business, art is becoming everyones business.

We cannot leave industry without mentioning the terrific absorption of art items not only for the commercial art field as illustrations and fashion design but the vast use in technical illustration. As our machine age increases in complexity and there seems to be no end, the drawings required to visualize, design, manufacture, assemble, repair, to catalog, etc., also increase. The materials for this great industry are bought in artist supply stores or drafting supply stores which overlap and in our machine age, the use can only go up. This use is really a skill and not as an emotional base but the consumption of art items is great.

In conjunction there is the ever-increasing use of cold type and overlays. The increasing use of offset and other reproduction machines as well as preparation of original work for any type of reproduction has encouraged new methods of preparing originals. In most instances, these bypass costly hand compositing and certain phases of plate making. Whereas it is too technical to enter into a description of this, cold type as such is part of the commercial art picture which is here to stay and again, can only go up. The advent of Microfilming alone has forced better prepared originals.