

Art as a Mirror of Our Times

When my passion for contemporary art came alive and I began collecting forty years ago, it became clear to me that art takes us beyond intellectual understanding, beyond the thinking mind. I was driven by an intuitive process that developed organically and seemed to pay no attention to the passing trends or fashions that besieged the art world. An intricate weave of being profoundly moved by a work, connecting with the artists themselves, and an indefinable intuition guided, and continues to guide, my journey into collecting contemporary art.

Our tendency to be trapped in our intellect means that we often insist on understanding art with our logical and limited thinking minds. If we cannot make sense of something, we can be quick to dismiss it as not having value. And yet, ironically, what frequently holds the most value and is the most creative is that which is *not* known. That which comes from a source beyond the mind that compulsively labels, judges, categories, and therefore deadens that which is new or unfamiliar. It is here where art and life cannot be separated. There is a yearning for something that is fresh and alive, and yet we often fear the very thing we long for because it forces us out of our comfort zone.

The issue is not so much that we must appreciate or like all contemporary art, and more that it is not actually a question

of liking or not liking. Contemporary art serves as a reflection and mirror of the world we live in. In that sense, it is of value even when it is deemed ugly, dark, tortured, mundane, superficial, dated, or pointless. Each artist represents an entirely unique lens on the world, colored and conditioned by a set of life experiences, thought processes, and feelings that are uniquely theirs. And therefore each work of art represents an aspect of a whole. A whole that precisely because it is whole excludes nothing.

Of course, many of us work very hard to exclude or reject what we do not like. Indeed, there are those who dismiss contemporary art, believing that only the art of past centuries is worthy of their appreciation. Taking such a stand, however, suggests confusion. Partly because it overlooks the fact that the likes of Turner, van Gogh, and the Impressionists were contemporary artists themselves, often decades ahead of their time and therefore frequently misunderstood, criticized, and disapproved of. And partly because the strategy of excluding or rejecting does not ultimately work, since whatever we are hoping to keep out is *already* here.

I truly believe contemporary art should be made available to the widest possible audience, and that collectors have a responsibility to make their collections accessible to the public to the best of their ability. In addition, it seems



Georg Baselitz, Untitled, 1963



Christian Lindow, Double Portrait, 1978

important to foster or facilitate the process of appreciating art. Too often in the art world, and in the wine world, people gravitate to what they feel they *should* like. They go to exhibitions that others have declared worthy. They admire the art, or drink the wine, that they have been told is good art or good wine. But to blindly follow the conclusions of others is to entirely miss the point of art: which is to discover what is true for *you*.

In today's society we are rarely encouraged to follow our own intuition, and we often defer to the alleged experts to tell us what we should be thinking. This is no less true in an art gallery than anywhere else. Naturally, the academic study of art has its place. But at some point one needs to be able to go beyond words and concepts and allow oneself to be touched (or not touched) in a more profound way. In that sense, walking through an exhibition is not only a journey of discovering an artist and his or her work, but also a journey of discovering yourself. It becomes a practice of truth-telling. Trusting that what resonates for *you* is what matters, irrespective of any thoughts about what *should* be resonating.

Over the years, as different parts of ourselves come into view, it is often surprising to see how a particular work of art can impact us differently over time. Our experience of, and relationship with, the art changes as we change. Since,

at any given time, I focus my collection on around twenty living artists (as opposed to buying isolated and varied pieces), I am able to purchase their work at regular intervals. This allows for a fascinating exploration into their development both as artists and human beings. And since what resonates in their work highlights aspects of one's own path, a parallel discovery of oneself and another is facilitated through the art.

Ultimately, after all, there is no separation between art and life. We are all artists, and the lives we lead are our works of art. Learning to be honest and truthful with ourselves is just preparation so that we might be able to look at our own life—our own work—and dare to ask the question, “what has my life stood for?”

With gratitude to all the artists who have made this collection possible.

Donald M. Hess
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