

SEPT 2013

CRITICS PAGE

SEPTEMBER 4TH, 2013

Is it Possible to Define Art?

by Ford Crull

- Author Bio
- Print
- Facebook
- Twitter

To even attempt a definition of art today seems almost insurmountable. But what might be more reasonable is to seek some understanding of the issues that are prevalent in our current artistic climate.

In asking many of the people I respect in the so-called art world about their definition of art, I received a myriad of answers. Yet if there was one common thread among everyone, it was whether the work (or whatever the effort) was moving or involving on some level. It made them think and/or question what the artist's intention was. I loved this thought from a dear writer friend: "Great art" always defies the rules and breaks equilibrium. And it often upsets the status quo.



Ford Crull, "4 Shields," 2013. Oil, oil stick, canvas, 84 x 66". © Ford Crull.

Art these days is concerned less with beautiful objects than with cogent ideas. The idea may be about anything, from gender to technology, social issues, religion, and even perception itself. And it doesn't matter if the object or idea has any sense of beauty at all. The important issues are whether it clearly represents the concept the artist is trying to espouse and whether it communicates with the viewer on some level.

Walking down the street I saw a large steel plate with some random rust patterns on the surface. To me it was absolutely breathtaking. It looked intentional. I much preferred it to the monolithic plates of Richard Serra, which despite being imbued with a very involved dialectic and aesthetic, seem more one dimensional in comparison. So if I took this plate and leaned it on a wall in a gallery is it art? And does it matter if the artist has any input in the creation of the object? Is it just the fact that he or she has made a decision concerning the object? I think Duchamp would have certainly said so.

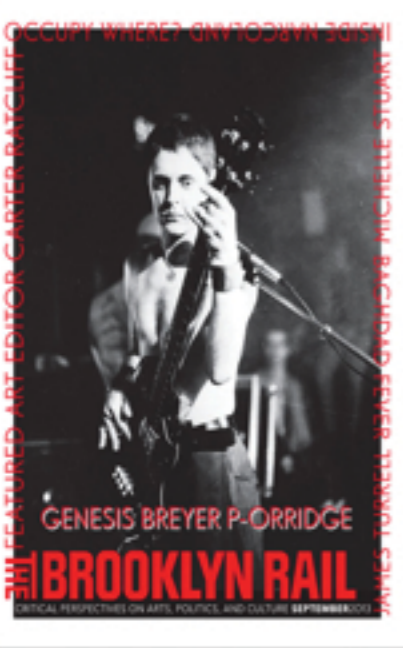
In performance art, where the artists themselves are the objects, the "art" is the experience or documentation generated by the performance. This raises an interesting dilemma, the issue of art as commodity. Art is big business these days, as everyone who has been to a major art auction will testify. With performance art and other ephemeral creative efforts, the problem then becomes: what art objects do the galleries and collectors have to sell? For many artists this might be videos or photographs of an event, (Abramović) or drawings and/or prints (Christo). In any case, the question of performance art and the "art market" raises a larger one: have we entered an era when works of art are seen as commodities and success is measured by dollar value? And who decides what is valuable? Certainly there has been a shift from scholarship to the power elite of dealers, collectors, auction houses, even the art fairs.

Assuming that the market is not all-powerful, we have to ask ourselves: is there any valid way of determining what art is now? I would suggest that lasting and significant art has a creative function in our society, i.e. it has transformative power, it communicates something deeply personal and yet archetypal, as well. It is something that almost everyone would somehow be able to recognize, and even if it lacks formalistic sophistication it reaches out and engages the viewer on some level. Basic human experience rarely changes, and art throughout history has always engaged the concerns, ideals, vision, and hopes of both the individual and society. I imagine that 100 years from now the art we acknowledge as important and meaningful will have addressed these same concerns—but with the advantage of hindsight and a certain filtering that only comes with time.

For now, I think it is safe to say that anything goes, and a healthy ego doesn't hurt to get it there.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FORD CRULL explores the expressive power of personal and cultural symbols in a series of densely painted and vividly colored compositions. He uses identifiable images such as hearts, wings, crosses, and the human figure, as well as geometrical emblems and abstract forms whose meanings are less explicit. Words, in the form of cryptic, fleeting phrases, also animate Crull's pictorial world.



LOCAL	EXPRESS
ART	ARTSEEN
BOOKS	MUSIC
DANCE	FILM
THEATER	FICTION
POETRY	ART BOOKS
LASTWORDS	CRITICS PAGE
TABLE OF CONTENTS	

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER
"From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, nothing ever came out straight"

THE MIAMI RAIL