

That's Nasty

Out there in the internet ether one can find a video of good ol' Jack Dickson (a child that lives on a farm) pouring a bucket of cold water onto a dead pig covered with maggots. The pig covered with maggots is the Philadelphia art world, and criticism is the cold bucket of water.

'Today we are going to see what happens when you dump a whole bucket of water on maggots, with the pig'

Criticism: Something vicious has been let loose within this city. A splash of cold water in the form of lazy and mean spirited criticism has released the once dormant furies. Folks are really ripping into one another with their blogs and fake websites.

Complaining is not criticism. Bitching and moaning about the petty details of gallery management, articulating grievances such as "there are no placards" or "the gallery is only open on the weekends" serves the role of being a pernicious superego figure that enforces clichéd commercial gallery etiquette at the cost of productive messiness and an unorthodox vitality.

Criticism has in other historical moments and situations sketched out the vague contours of what is, and what is not expressible in a given historical moment. Think of contributions of Baudelaire and Greenberg. The horizon of what can be thought, encoded and decoded in our particular place (Philadelphia) and time (now) needs to be considered and worked out. This is something that

Regionalism: Many younger and emerging artists in Philadelphia appear to be striving for a kind of practice that does not bear the marks of local and embedded considerations. These concerns are banished for a 'universal' style in the hopes that they will find a glass slipper (being represented by a New York gallery), pay their student loans and get the fuck out of town.

If one spends a pleasant Saturday afternoon gallery hopping in our fair city, one mostly faces a tepid tidal wave of work that looks like copies of installation and video art that can be found on the pages of Artforum. In many art schools, students are instructed in the dejour and de facto codes of international art world etiquette and little else. Not enough emphasis has been placed on developing a situated practice that embodies a sense of context and place. Ambitious young artists are eager to uproot themselves and collect stamps in their passports. As attractive and rewarding as this may be, it may be at the expense of finding and cultivating an intellectually and emotionally enriching community that's rooted in a particular milieu.

Regional styles and considerations need to be supported and nourished. I don't mean the kind of regionalism that's associated with American Social Realists and the WPA, but one that seriously considers Philadelphia as a site for artistic production and reception. There seems to be no sense of caring for what is unique to this city. How do artists living in this city respond to the palimpsest of architectural styles found



criticism could work towards.

'A'ight, Now we gonna watch good ol' Jack Dickson dump a whole bucket of water on a maggots''

Curating: Many reputable arts organizations in this city are serving as proxy avatars for the individuals that manage them. Curating is similar to an artist's studio practice, and curators need not only represent artwork that mirrors and affirms their own assigned and chosen subject positions. This becomes boring and predictable. When one scans over a curator's past projects, and the artists chosen look, act, and think like the curator (or their ego ideal), it appears to be narcissistic. We should applaud exhibitions like 'Women and Pop' where the curator stepped outside of the assumptions of the prevailing doxa and provided visibility for artists who occupy different subject positions than his own. Philly needs more of this.

'Aww, look at dat, aw aw.. aw-ha-ha, look at dat, aw aw aw, look at dat... ah ah-haha... look at dat people, that, THAT is nasty! Haha holy jeeesus! Woo!'

in the buildings, lampposts, signs etc., that one finds while walking through the streets and alleys? Where is the artwork and public discourse that sheds light on the racial divisions between neighborhoods and within our own art community? How do the colors found in the ever-changing trees or aging facades of the city's row homes affect the palettes of those that live here? Where are the projects that discuss the undulating boundaries between affluent and struggling neighborhoods?

If Philadelphia is to be an internationally recognized city of home grown artistic merit, it may be helpful to isolate and identify what shared themes artists are reckoning with that address what it means to live here, as opposed to intellectually and manually copying what is in art magazines and imagined to be elsewhere.

-Holly Martins