

Excerpt from catalogue for the show “Content Providers” (2000) - that exhibited artists that didn’t exist, but were reviewed in the press and had their works sold.

Here is some of the text I wrote.



WHY THIS EXHIBITION?

by the Exhibition Organisers

translated by Sara Hanley

words 429 LIX (readability score 45)

This catalogue presents a number of reflections offered by both artists and academics on the exhibition entitled Content Providers. The basis for their texts was the letter inviting them to contribute a text and/or works of art.

This letter is therefore reproduced in the catalogue.

This leaves us only to say a few words about how the exhibition found its venue.

Some might comment on the somewhat unusual decision to use a gallery for a system-aesthetics exhibition that is unlikely to result in sales of any substance. Indeed, for us, the organisers, the exhibition could readily have found a venue outside of the commercial domain. But the opportunity presented itself when it took just 2 minutes for Peter Weinberger to fit us into the gallery calendar after he had heard about the concept. Since then the physical layout of the gallery has proved ideally suited to this very exhibition.

As to the collaboration between the organisers and Galleri Weinberger, nobody could have asked for more. All 4 organisers produce the kind of art that Galleri Weinberger would never even

contemplate having on its books, which meant that both sides felt entirely free from any ideas in that direction. In fact, what happened was that Peter Weinberger gave us a set of keys for the gallery so we could get the exhibition up and running as and when. We don't think many other galleries would have done that. Thank you for your support.

To quickly round off the list of people that helped us, we would naturally like to thank all the participants, whether they appeared in the catalogue, the gallery or both, followed by Povlsens Lyskopi for producing this catalogue at cost price, Deel for hire of video and TV and finally, the translator, Sara Hanley, who produced the majority of the translations and did so with very little time available.

As these lines are being written, the last works are beginning to arrive at the gallery. Without revealing too much, we would just like to say how delighted we are that so many of those invited agreed to join us. Because of this the exhibition seems set to turn out just how we imagined it, that is, with the majority of the exhibitors on the 1st floor (named) from the younger generation, but the exhibitors on the ground floor (un-

named) largely belonging to the older generation and thus representing the more established half. The details in this last paragraph should become clearer after a read-through of the above-mentioned letter.

The exhibition organisers
Copenhagen, Tuesday, 25 July 2000

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

by the Exhibition Organisers

translated by Sara Hanley

words 1820 LIX (readability score 36)

Copenhagen, Thursday, 15 June 2000

Dear XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXX

In December 1999 Galleri Weinberger placed its premises at the disposal of Martin Askholm, Rasmus Eckardt, Lars Grenaae, Smike Käsner, Emil Salto and Lief Schiller. This resulted in the exhibition "White Room Parade".

Once again Galleri Weinberger has graciously provided the venue for an exhibition organised and curated exclusively by artists.

In this connection, Martin Askholm, Rasmus Eckardt, Lars Grenaae and Smike Käsner would like to invite you to participate in the group exhibition entitled "Content Providers" to be held in the last 3 weeks of August 2000.

Our reason for asking you will hopefully be self-evident when you have read the enclosed description of the exhibition concept.

Yours sincerely

Martin Askholm
Rasmus Eckardt
Lars Grenaae
Smike Käsner

Description of the exhibition "Content Providers"

Galleri Weinberger has once again kindly placed its premises at our disposal. In addition to the invitations to the private view, postage for these and refreshments, etc., all other responsibilities (including financial outlay) have been undertaken by the four above-named artists. These four will be organising and curating the exhibition.

The exhibition style will embrace system aesthetics to form an intrinsic part of the concept, but will naturally give due prominence to the individual, physical works on show. The concept will be underpinned spatially by the gallery floorage which is split into the two levels of ground floor and first floor.

Hanging of works — Ground floor

On the ground floor, works will be hung in the pre-modernist tradition, i.e. using the "salon" style of covering the entire wall space from floor to ceiling. Any sculptural works submitted will be floor-standing.

None of the exhibited works must be signed on the front (i.e. the surface visible to the viewer). The only information apart from that provided by the

work itself will be the title of the work. Neither the price list nor catalogue, the press releases or other promotional materials will reveal the artist behind the work.

Hanging of works — 1st floor

The room will contain no works whatsoever. Next to the stairs will be a couple of armchairs facing the end wall (and door to the back stairs leading to the storeroom).

Gallery visitors entering this room will be attended to by a young assistant who will invite them to take a seat and will then hand them a "menu". This menu will feature a list of artists' names with a checkbox against each name. The menu will reveal neither the title of the artist's work(s) nor the compositional media.

While the seated gallery "guests" choose the "artist of the day", the young assistant will serve them a glass of wine.

When the gallery visitors have checked the box against a name, they will then hand the menu back to the assistant who will go down to the gallery storeroom and fetch the work(s) by the chosen artist and then show this/these

to the gallery visitors.

The Concept

The scope of the exhibition is a deliberate device to invite wide-ranging interpretations.

The critical approach of the basic concept to the relationship work — artist, work — public and artist — public would hope to raise a key set of issues surrounding the self-promotional tendencies of artists on the 90s art-scene, the extended artistic domain, the culturally/aesthetically-aware public and the commercialised exhibition space.

In this context "Content Providers" aims to explore aspects of the relationship iconography-iconology. The theoretician Erwin Panofsky's original notion was that:

Iconography comprises the idea that each picture can be viewed "as is", that is to say without preconceptions. All that is required is "scrutiny". The work is autonomous.

Iconology represents the interest in what exists "beyond" the work. The work is referential and invites interest in the identity of the artist, in what else she/he has done and the source of the inspiration.

Since the idea of "Content Providers" was conceived at the beginning of the year the Gammelstrand Art Association has in the meantime held a children's

exhibition in which children could buy a graphic work on which the artist's name was covered over with tape. On hearing of this we considered abandoning our own concept, but eventually decided to swallow our pride and chose to concentrate on the fact that "Content Providers" addresses a theme that invites many angles of approach.

In order to do more justice to these many approaches all the participating artists and a number of art theorists/historians were therefore invited to contribute to the exhibition catalogue.

Exhibitors and works

Besides yourself, a number of other artists have been invited to show works on the ground floor. The space available will allow each artist wall space of 2m2 for one or more works as preferred.

You are free to choose the media (painting, graphic, photo, etc.) There will be no censorship.

Sculptural works will also be admissible, though for practical reasons we would need to base the decision on the actual work. If nothing else, the door-aperture limits the size of sculpture that can be brought in. Audio-visual works will not be feasible because of the ordinary, day-to-day running of the rest of the gallery premises.

In contrast to the first floor where the artists will know the names of their fellow exhibitors, as an exhibitor on the

ground floor you will not be told who else is exhibiting. As stated, none of the works are to bear signatures on the front. You will not even be informed as to who is hanging next to you — and the question is whether you ever will know.

This means that you will have no way of knowing if you are exhibiting next to a first-year college student or alongside Sean Scully. Apart from the 4 organisers/curators, Peter Weinberger will be the only person to know the names of exhibitors exhibiting on the ground floor.

Artists showing on the ground floor are required to make no attempt to contact the press or in any other way reveal their participation in the exhibition.

The work/works must not have been exhibited previously and should preferably not form part of a series of which parts have been exhibited previously. However, there are no restrictions regarding age of work, i.e. it could be a work that you've had lying around for many years and simply never had the right setting to exhibit in. For the 1st floor, we hope that the participants (besides the organisers) will comprise: Jesper Dalgaard, Bent Elmelund Larsen, Jes Wind Andersen, Henrik Brahe, Anne Marie Ploug, Jan Krogsgård, Erik Steffensen, Bertil Skov Jørgensen, Jeanette Schou, Sabina Mlejnek (A), Leif Schiller, Erik A. Frandsen, Hibari Ianfu (JP), Frans

Jacobi, Sophie Raben Levetzau, Mary Gosdon (USA), Susan Lachenfelt (USA), Jesper Fabricius, Kristoffer Hultenberg (SE) Latvala Sivuvaikutus (SF) and Gabi Sturm (A).

The artists from outside Denmark invited to exhibit (both those for the 1st floor and those for the ground floor) have already been asked and have agreed to take part.

The catalogue

Given that the questions addressed by "Content Providers" explore so many different facets, we are hoping to persuade participants to set out a few thoughts in writing.

Besides asking for works of art, we would therefore like to invite all participating artists to provide us with a text for the exhibition catalogue. Naturally, as an exhibitor on the ground floor we ask you to agree to let us publish your text anonymously.

Finding out what the artists have to say about an exhibition and its theme is one thing; quite another is what the scholars would tell us. Mikkel Bogh, Maria Gadegaard, Johanne Løgstrup, Carsten Juhl, Else Marie Bukdahl, Lars Grambye, Sanne Kofod Olsen and Kristine Kern have therefore also been asked if they would be willing to contribute. Finally, the organisers hope that Peter Weinberger can also be persuaded to provide us with a few words.

Clearly, if all those invited to do so can contribute a text, the catalogue will take the form more of a body of texts than a conventional catalogue. A "volume" of this kind would support the discourse we hope to promote and would naturally be taken as a vote of confidence for the relevance of the exhibition.

There will be no constraints or censorship with regard to the texts, though we would naturally hope to see texts inspired by the nature of the exhibition or the ideas that inform the exhibition concept. The idea is for the catalogue to also contain an English translation of the texts. In the event that texts are translated, we will then need to make economies elsewhere, in which case the catalogue will be printed in b/w.

The catalogue will complement the exhibition concept in that only works from the ground floor will be reproduced — incognito, obviously.

You will be issued with 10 copies of the catalogue. This will not serve as proof of your participation in the exhibition. You will be exhibiting "incognito" and if asked, the organisers will deny that you have participated.

Finance/funding

Given that this is an exhibition organised by artists rather than agents, and that it will be hard to "sell" precisely because of its anonymous aspect, the organisers are not in a position to pay fees for

permission to exhibit works or publish texts. The budgeted ceiling has already been reached in covering the costs of the catalogue, services, carriage (especially for the foreign participants), posters, etc.

The organisers have previously sought to secure awards from funds and sponsors — though without much success, which is why any hope of this form of financing can only be modest.

There will, however, be the possibility for the sale of works by exhibitors both on the ground floor and on the first floor. Exhibitors wishing to put their works up for sale must inform the organisers of their reserve price. Any prospective buyers will then be invited to place a bid. When the exhibition closes, the work will go to the buyer with the highest bid above the reserve price. Before bidding closes, no buyers will be informed as to whether their bid is still the highest or has been topped by another prospective buyer. This form of auction will be the method of sale for works exhibited on the ground and first floors. Galleri Weinberger will be assisting the organisers with the practical details of the public sale.

Please note that if your signature appears on the back of your work(s), the buyer will obviously discover your name when the work is handed over — otherwise not!

Artists will receive 80% of the sale price. The remaining 20% will go primarily towards reducing the expenses incurred by the organisers – and secondarily to cover gallery overheads. However, we would like to point out that we are not anticipating substantial sales due to the form of the exhibition and sale method.

(Rest of the letter omitted as it contains only practical details such as final dates, lists of addresses and similar)

CONTENT PROVIDERS – I'D PREFER A DESERT ISLAND.

Anon

(exhibitor on the ground floor)

anonymous translation

words 407 LIX (readability score 29)

The more I think about it, the more I could kick myself for agreeing to do this exhibition. What do I get out of it? Nada! Just hassle and expenses. No one knows I'm doing a show in Denmark. No one will ever get to know. The curators will deny that I was ever a part of it.

It was my agent persuaded me. She reckoned it was about time I did a show in Europe. Well, she can buy the works herself when they get returned. Because that's what's going to happen for sure. Who'd want to buy art without knowing who the artist was? Without knowing what else the artist had done? It's no different in Denmark. I can tell from the materials I got from the curators when I asked them to document the kinds of artists involved. One of the items was a catalogue for final-year students at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art. The résumé rolled out for every single art student was given just as much space as the prints of their works. Meaning that everyone was happy to devote half the space to qualifications and achievements rather than showing more actual works. And this for new graduates?! Christ! It's worse than over here!

Well, now they've a Danish exhibition to add to their lists - the ones that are exhibiting in Content Providers with their names published, that is. I can't do this. This is the last time I take part in this kind of dumb gag. I want to be known. I want to be famous.

All this does for me is make me start obsessing about what it must be like not to be able to stand by your art. Not to be able to say "I did this and I did that and I'm proud of it." Would I even be creating art if I wasn't allowed to tell the world that it was mine? Imagine being stranded on a desert island and not knowing if you'd ever be found. Would I be producing art? Would my fellow artists still be producing art? No way. I'd be watching TV all day if possible. That way I could keep a check on all those celebrities. Sure, I'd try to make certain I stayed as young and lovely as possible - just in case I got picked up by a bunch of stars cruising by in their yacht...

DEAR "CONTENT PROVIDERS"

Anon

exhibiting colleague on ground floor

anonymous translation

words 226 LIX (readability score 25)

Dear "Content Providers",

I think you've hit on an interesting concept, so I'd like to take part. But I don't want to chance you revealing my participation — on purpose or by accident. Please don't get me wrong. It's just that I don't know you well enough. So what I did was to visit one of my good friends. What we can offer is that he'll do the show instead of me. He and I will be the only people who know that he's participating, and neither of us will ever reveal that fact.

The only thing we've agreed to reveal is that last week his agent sold 3 works in a format corresponding to what he's planning to produce for your exhibition. They went for \$12,000 a piece. But there's no risk that this item of information can be used to trace him. The work or perhaps works he's planning for your exhibition will be deliberately very different than the work he's known for.

To make the joke complete we have agreed that you can decide the sales price for his work. And when we say that you can decide, we mean it. You can sell it for \$1 if you like.

Give me a call if you like the idea. But don't ask who he is, because if you do, the deal's off.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

SOME IDEAS INFORMING CONTENT PROVIDERS

by Smike Käsner

translated by Sara Hanley

words 2345 readability score 55

A child always resembles the man that its mother is married to. At least, this absolute conviction is what visitors to the Trobriand Islands would have encountered as late as at the beginning of the last century.

But how could these indigenous peoples of North-Western Melanesia have come to view paternity in such a strange light – at least seen with Western eyes that insist the child will take after its biological father, no matter who its mother has married?

The social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski provides an explanation in "The Sexual Life of Savages" published 1929. The Islanders acknowledge only sociological paternity, not physiological paternity.

Any Trobriand Islander will tell you it is the spirit that blows in from the ocean that makes woman with child and neither this man nor the next. To these people, any idea that sexual activity results in conception would be utterly alien.

Dr Malinowski describes the Trobriand father's relationship to his children. If you were to meet a Trobriand man with a pale-skinned babe in arms and ask him what makes him so certain that nobody else should be called its real father – if only in the sense of sociological paternity – the Trobriander, ignorant of the actual agenda behind the question, would point at the little paleface and as proof remind you that the child resembles him because he has been a good father. Any bystanders will back up their kinsman. Because you can always tell by looking at a Trobriand child if it has a good father. The more time the father spends with the child, the more the child's face will come to resemble the father's. This is just the way things are. And who would admit to being a bad father? This is why all Trobriand children resemble their mother's husband – there is just no issue here.

These ideas strike me as alarming. Just think if we also had this kind of hidden "defect" in our conceptual universe. And what if it were hidden inside the world of art? Admittedly, art is a

perceptual field and not therefore a domain in which truths are determined scientifically. But that aside, let's go ahead and mix moral philosophy and aesthetics to ask the question: what if art had this programming error that no matter how minor turned out to have huge consequences?

Where would we start looking for a "defect" of this kind? After all, this patient has a pretty complex anatomy to stretch out on our examination table.

Like the good doctor facing a possible case of stomach poisoning, let's start by asking what the patient last consumed. What would be the last thing art has had? The answer in this case would be that it has sampled every single dish there was. What other answer could you hope to get from this fragmented postmodern art, whose growing pains seem to spread in all and no directions at one and the same time? But as an answer it doesn't exactly get us anywhere.

Let's try again. Right from the beginning. We'll ask the question: Who is the patient?

What is art? If only recent art were allowed to answer, there would be a good deal of consensus: art is anything the artist says is art.

At the same time, we have a "doctrine" that tells us "novelty is everything". No one has time to digest one novelty before calling for the next. Art is like a man on the toilet, so impatient that he's shovelling his dinner at the same time.

The combination of these two trends has meant that more and more of us are tempted to stray further and further away from home.

Art is so far away from home that the individual encountering art is often in doubt as to whether it is actually art he is seeing. Only the references he brought along with him can suppress his doubt. But there is nothing new in that. The trigger for this phenomenon and therewith the all-important part played by context was released by a urinal entitled "Fountain".²

The references, which you would think might contain more and more the further away from home the journey progressed, have this tendency to cross a magic border beyond which they then become

more and more vacuous. Irrespective of their volume, the references become emptied of any real content. And why would that be? Well, if the aim is to end up at the leading edge of art, you have to stay mighty quick on your feet. The border posts are being shifted all the time, so the reconnaissance unit has to be able to pack up camp and move on fast. Quasi and Pseudo are 2 little children who always come when bidden. Artifice being a thing of clay can always be modelled to fit, but insight and perception are things less malleable.

This then is recent art, or more precisely the main division of its avant-garde. Because to be fair, it has to be said that this generation also includes those with a feeling for the past and who want to eat up a tube of paint when they see one. But that doesn't change the fact that Ad Reinhardt died just before or just after this generation hit the scene and people forgot that "Art is art and everything else is everything else".³

We've asked what art is. We'll now ask what can art do? Let's just say that these two questions explore art in both form and content.

But to cut right through the mire of all

the innumerable, eternal and ubiquitous expectations of and assumptions about what art is capable of, let's put a twist on the question and ask from the Kantian perspective: Where does art manifest itself today?

It is obvious that art's role in relation to classical beauty is regarded as played out. Apart from what has been achieved in the way of concrete attempts to liberate art from notions of what is beautiful (take, for example, Conceptual Art), the very fact of rendering nature's form visually and audibly is something that we have mastered so eminently that the illusion is close to complete. But the artist has no part to play in perfecting this illusion. This is the task of the scientist and the inventions he gives to the world. And by all means let the world be Playboy and National Geographic when it comes to producing images of what is beautiful, if these in the classical sense amount to an imitation or embellishment of Nature.

With classical beauty out of the picture, recent art might turn to the formless, indistinct, unrenderable sublime that, far from being exhausted as a subject for art, presents as great an artistic challenge now as during the time of

2 Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" entered under the pseudonym R. Mutt and rejected for a New York exhibition in 1917.

3 Adolph Reinhardt, 1913-1967, member of American Abstract Artists

4 Edmund Burke (1729-1797) inter al. "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) inter al. "Critique of Judgement"

Burke and Kant.⁴ Factions of recent art may think that this releases forces that put a strain on ability. Yet as recipients we are still the same people – even after the encounter.

An unfettered and persistent urge to cross boundaries will make a nymphomaniac of art, who will do it with every Tom, Dick and Harry. This way we get an artist who produces journalism without the journalist's knowledge and ability. The result is inferior journalism, despite the embellishment. We end up with inferior instruction, inferior engineering skills, inferior literature, inferior sociology and so on....Art created by a sociologist, say, without the artist's knowledge and ability would hardly be a worse prospect.

It is not difficult to picture a categorisation like the one we know in popular culture. Art divided into art-drama, art-drama documentary, art-documentary, art-docusoaps, art-soaps...

An unfettered and persistent urge to cross boundaries will mean that art does as the commander who attempts to take the desert, instead of closing in on what is important, that is, the oases.

If the artist's focus is solely to cross boundaries, then his or her contribution in the encounter with the world will be limited. As it with art so it is with the individual: if one has nothing to say, one can always blab on about oneself or resort to a joke.

Here, blabbing would mean art blabbing on about art. The problem is common enough. Masturbating isn't a crime for the one who does so, but it's not much fun for a partner – in this case the recipient of art.



There is good reason why this Trobriand woman isn't smiling. The legend in "The Sexual Life of Savages" reads: "A type not admired by the natives".

[Photo from "The Sexual Life of Savages"]

The blab also happens at a personal level. The self-promoting artist. But if the artist hasn't thought, felt or experienced anything beyond what the average man on the street has, this projection can easily end up so banal that it is only

interesting to the artist him/herself or fellow artists working along the same self-promoting lines.

Finally, there's the joke tactic. And of course this doesn't demand much in the way of cultural ballast and is therefore readily accessible to many – both senders and recipients. It is perhaps too accessible. Because in the hands of the overzealous artist it ends up as art that manages to be no more or less than an entertaining commercial. This is art taking the Mickey.

What should we be avoiding? More than anything else we should avoid confusing creative ability with artistic ability.

The awe for things creative in the context of cross-over art would seem to know no limits. And particularly not among those for whom the very fact of being creative is an abstraction – it's not uncommon to find art analysts here. Their awe for things creative goes hand in hand with their enthusiasm for things referential.

But being creative is merely one aspect of being artistic. All the world, except the analyst that is, can cook up art novelties in which the sole ingredient is creativity. Creativity in itself is nothing more than the ability to combine familiar concepts in a new way.

The work that contains only creativity is reliant on an explanation – let's just

carry on calling it a reference because this is precisely what it is. A reference is made to a place within the domain of art rather than a place within sociology, ethnography, the media world or wherever else the work risks ending up.

It goes without saying that whether artistic works are on the fringes of art or not, the more that are justified by reference, the more the artistic domain fills up with words, the intention of which is not to make the work accessible to the viewer, but purely and simply to validate it as art.

The result is even worse if the work in itself consist of words because then the work and the reference easily blend into one, and the work emerges as a scarcely-veiled showcase for itself.

If the modern viewer is reaching out eagerly for these references then the reason, apart from the universal fetishism and perhaps snobbery that prevails in the art world, is that for the viewer art is no longer art in the conventional sense. Here again the boundaries, or rather a few assumptions, have been shifted and the criteria have expanded.

The reason for this is given by the prevailing conditions studied by many, including Henrik Kaare Nielsen in his

"Æstetik, kultur & politik"⁵ which draws on the coinages of "culturalisation" and "aesthetisation" to explain how the marriage of secularisation and increasing complexity sends modern man out on a life-long mission to find himself and the point of his existence. And where then does he search? He searches in art and culture. But the complexity of a wide-ranging search is too unassimilable which is why the individual seeks out aesthetic rather than cognitive or moral encounters. Reflection is rejected in favour of experience and the individual is left with the risk of being locked in a world of diffuse fascinations that bring only loss of orientation and meaning.

It is the case for art as it is for modernisation as a whole that it has proceeded more rapidly than the time needed to produce the accompanying manual (and there we are having sacked the only one – God – who could have done it in a split second).

If art (see "culturalisation") is to help us to understand the nature of the individual and the point of our existence, then the individual can no longer afford to misinterpret art. Here, art also approaches a question of right and wrong. And because little time is devoted to the individual work, the reference forms a useful part of the picture. As in life

generally, in art the individual picks and chooses a bit of everything. The reference has this way of reducing the time it would otherwise have taken for the viewer to place the work in the right context for assimilation.

In this situation, the individual is tempted to accept other authorities than his own eyes.

The most important reference that any modern artist can make reference to is his own art history. His CV is his to do with as he sees fit as long as he doesn't transgress into obvious idiocy. The many Tsing Tao beers and haphazard drawings that got hung up in the hotel room that night of the field trip to Beijing being just as handy to bulk out the CV as the works for the exhibition that involved some serious thought.

There is a temptation to elaborate this personal art résumé. This is a field where the number of exhibitions clocked up is the supreme proof of success. Exactly which exhibitions is the next step up.

The argument would be that we are spending less and less time on each work. On the other hand, we spend an increasing amount of time on securing funding for art and selling art as a concept.

Increasingly we find ourselves working horizontally instead of vertically.

Having referred to his own art history, the next step for the artist is to refer to his own originality and depth. Even better than doing it himself is to get an art critic to do it for him. This avoids the problem of the lack of validity that results from self-promotion and nicely skirts the problem of revealing own ignorance of theories and history. The critic, especially the latter-day variety wears different hats, one for the artist, another for the media.

In art the only thing that matters is the metaphysical added-value on the product. He who convinces proves. Self-promotion, which is one of the characteristics of universal aestheticisation, gives conviction a leg up. But conviction, as stated earlier, must be installed with a certain measure of speed and flexibility. Time belongs to the media and they don't have time for art.

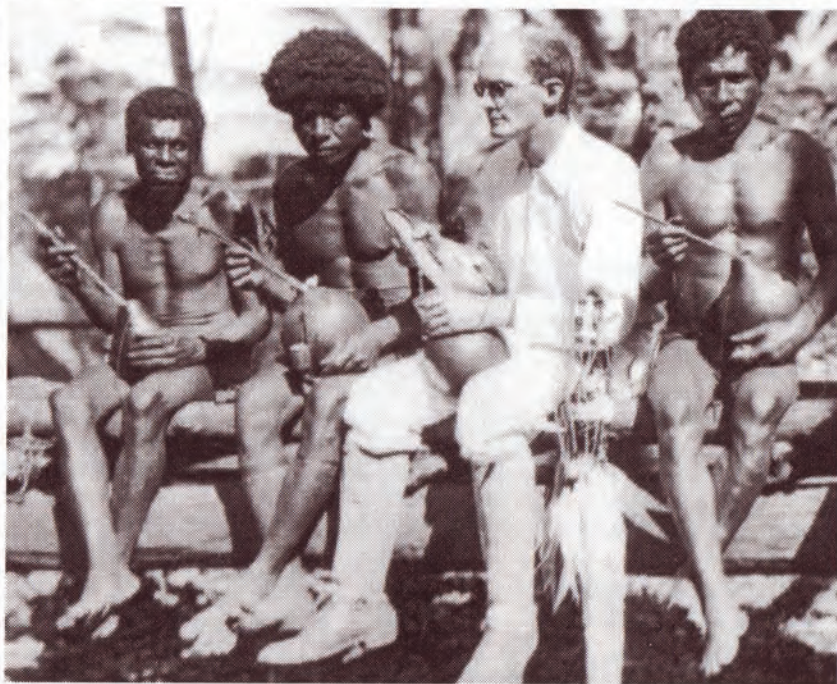
This leaves the artist, especially any artist who isn't working on crossing visible barriers, though possibly inward barriers (e.g. the previously mentioned artist who eats oil-paints for breakfast), in a dilemma. The non-artist who edges his way in because art seemed like a good option now that Hollywood is so far away, is like any actor good at the social side of things, both as regards internal networking and cultivating the critics.

If the artist doesn't react to the challenge from the non-artist, he ends up a scrapheap of excuses for not having got a slice of the money or the fame. Conversely, if he takes up the challenge he ends up spending time on something that interests no one.

Because of all this, the critic gets both the first and the last word. For fear of

rejecting anything new and thereby repeating the errors of the past in art history, he clings to the idea that only the most extreme deviations from tradition lead to progress.

The critic, assuming he or she has elected to work as a reviewer, will impair any ability to see clearly if he or she engages uncritically with the artist. In so far as



The anthropologist enjoying the company of the natives. [photo from "A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term"]

the private view is a social event with all the ambience of an in-house party for the artists, he or she will have no reason for being there.

The artist and the critic need each other. But not as bed-fellows.

The problem lies not so much with the older as with the younger reviewer. The latter has to wait for the next life to be reborn as an artist.

Art's domain is filled with references that spread like smoke into every nook and cranny and sting the eyes until we've rubbed them red and swollen. And it is with these eyes that the viewer encounters art, unless that is, he or she chooses to take art out of its narrow domain and view it in a wider context.

We asked the question "What is art?". And the answer was Everything. We asked the question "What can art do?". And the answer would seem to be Less, the more it strives to be avant-garde.

We therefore have an art that has broadened its range more than ever before, and risks being capable of less and less as the vanguard falls back and spreads out to become the ruck of tomorrow. Its scope and its ability are at risk of going each their separate way.

At the same time we see that the individual's criteria for what art should be capable of are mounting. There is a risk that expectation and ability will miss each other.

And so, negation would seem the simplest response, in the sense of establishing what art should be by narrowing it down to what it should not be. But herein lies precisely the problem of getting close enough. Negation is like when the bad guys want to reveal the Invisible Man's identity using flour or white paint. We see only the outline of his face, not his true face.

But this does not change the fact that if the best thing we find when we search our selves is the wistful memory of waving farewell to the family's Lassie dog as we set off for the big city to be artists, then we need to look for somewhere else to explore our abilities.

These were just some of that jumble of ideas that along with similar reflections from the 3 other organisers inform Content Providers. We might even go so far as to say that the exhibition is a reaction to these and other ideas. But it is a reaction mixed with the curiosity of trying to establish a new relationship to our references. At the risk of sounding trite, one might say that it is a question

of viewing the work with clearer eyes. We might use the simile of the old-fashioned transistor radio, where the stations that were out there somewhere in the world required a huge effort in fine-tuning the radio. The more noise from other stations and other radio signals that could be avoided, the more intense and alive was the music that came in from distant, exotic places. This is perhaps just one out of several paths that lead to a place in art that operates on the work's own premises. If we remove the noise blasting from our own time, the work will have a chance to live beyond its time, assuming that this is justified and indeed the intention. This rounds off the story behind Content Providers.

Long after Bronislaw Malinowski had departed from both the Trobriand Islands and this world, his widow published his personal diaries.⁶ In these Dr Malinowski reveals the problems in relying on what the noisy, ignorant and mendacious natives had told him: "I am in a world of lies here".

THE ARTIST IN HEAVEN AND HELL

by Hibari Ianfu

translated from Japanese with help from Yuko Ianfu

words 655 LIX (readability score 28)

When I had my first public art show my family was very proud. I told them this was no reason to be proud. This was just a first show. But my parents invited the entire family to celebrate me. The celebration was a huge success and everyone had a good time.

By the end of the evening almost all the visitors had gone. Except my Uncle. I started talking to my Uncle whom I had great respect for. He was a very educated man and knows a lot about classical art.

"So now you are an artist?" my Uncle asked. "Yes, I guess so" I answered him. "You are not an artist. You are just a computer boy that has been protected all his life. How can you be an artist and not have seen any of the things that art are descends from?" He said. I was very choked by his words.

Then my Uncle told me about an artist that he had known when he was a young man. This artist had developed a western painting technique. This was fortunate for him. Because at the time Western culture was becoming very fashionable in Japan.

The artist would travel from town to town and offer to paint portraits in a Western style. Many local people were

very eager to purchase such a painting of themselves or some of their family members.

When the artist was to make a portrait of a young girl he would take his time finishing the job. This way he could spend many hours alone if he had rented a room to work in. If he could win the girls confidence he would show them books of great European artist such as Watteau, Greuze, Corot and Renoir. Off course the artist would show them some of these masters paintings which showed of nude women. The artist would complain that it was so difficult to get Japanese girls to pose nude. He would explain to them that the only way to make better portraits was when the artist had a true understanding of the human body. If the girls seemed to understand this the artist would offer them half price for the portrait that was already on the way against posing for him. Very often he would succeed in exploiting this opportunity to seduce the girls.

But sooner or later the friends or relatives of the girl would discover what was going on. Then the artist was beaten and forced out of the town. When he came to the next town the story would repeat. This way of life meant that the artist all the time experi-

enced both heaven and hell. Heaven with the girls. And hell when the girls' families beat him. This tense state of mind meant that the artist developed artistically and made paintings with much feeling and inspiration.

One day the local people caught him. But this time he was not beaten. Instead he was forced to the house of the girl he had been dating. Her father gave the artist two choices. The artist could be beaten until he was crippled or he could take responsibility for his actions and marry the girl. The father of the girl insisted that the artist was the only man who now would want to marry the girl after the connection had become public. So the artist married the girl. He gave up painting and started to work in his father-in-laws shop to make an income for himself and his wife. The artist never painted again.

I asked my Uncle how he could be sure that the artist never painted again. Maybe the artist had painted in secret without anyone knowing about it. But my Uncle answered "I know the artist didn't paint again. For I was that artist".

P.S. My Uncle passed away several years ago. I have dutifully obtained permission from his family to bring this story.

Anon

(exhibitor on the ground floor)

anonymous translation

words 449 LIX (readability score 33)

At one time (I couldn't tell you if it's still true) it was the case with the Swedish pools that you could actually win a prize for getting 0 right. Statistically this was apparently just as unlikely as getting all your crosses right.

The odds against the existence of a completely anonymous artist are just as high as the odds against the opposite (let's just call it the absolute famous artist).

It is in the nature of the artist to want to be loved by persons unknown. The fact of being loved for his art is for many an artist often the result of sheer luck. The forces driving the artist are no different to those that drive an author or actor. Which is why I'm not going to distinguish between the desire for recognition and the desire for fame. The way I see it, this is so much pseudo-psychology.

When fame beckons, it won't matter how quick on his feet the artist is because there'll be no holding back. Time to claim those 15 minutes of fame.

If he gets lucky and manages to build on those 15 minutes, he'll achieve even more fame. And so on and so forth, if he tackles the situation in the right way

on each rung on the ladder of fame.

But there is a ceiling. There is a limit to how famous an artist can get - and this limit is reached in no time. Because artists are a dull lot and art alone is not media fodder. If artists weren't so dull they wouldn't be able to produce their art. Art is methodical work, lonely work, trial upon trial.

If the artist wants to make it beyond the natural limits of fame, he then crosses another barrier. He will necessarily cease to be an artist, and instead become a media personality. This is something quite different from being an artist. It may look like art is still being produced, but it's not art in the name of revelation or beauty, but art for fame's sake. This kind of art is just as ephemeral as fame itself.

But I'll tell you where I fit in. Over the years I've ended up somewhere in between. We're talking Sweden now. I'm middle-of-the-road between complete anonymity and complete fame. It's mediocre. In the same way that being "middle class" is mediocre. It's neither one thing nor the other. If it were all up to me I wouldn't hesitate to choose total anonymity. For me, this would give me

the push to really outdo myself. The paradox is that the potential for the most "famous" art lies in anonymity. History does not dispute the fact.