

ART RECENTERED: A MANIFESTO

1. The reunion of artist with public.

Art should grow from and speak to the common roots and universal principles of human nature in all cultures.

Art should direct itself to the general public.

Those members of the general public who do not have the time, training, or inclination to craft and express its higher yearnings and intuitions, rightly demand an artistic elite to be the culture's prophetic mouthpiece and mirror.

Art should deny the simplifications of the political left and right, and should refine and deepen the radical center.

The use of art, and of cheap praise, to create self-esteem, is a cynical betrayal of all human cultures.

Excellence and standards are as real and universal in the arts as in competitive sports, even if they take more time and refined judgment to appreciate.

2. The reunion of beauty with morality.

The function of art is to create beauty.

Beauty is incomplete without moral beauty.

There should be a renewal of the moral foundations of art as an instrument to civilize, ennoble, and inspire.

True beauty is the condition of civilized society.

Art recognizes the tragic and terrible costs of human civilization, but does not abandon hope and faith in the civilizing process. Art must recover its connection with religion and ethics without becoming the propagandist of any dogmatic system.

Beauty is the opposite of coercive political power.

Art should lead but not follow political morality.

We should restore reverence for the grace and beauty of human beings and of the rest of nature.

3. The reunion of high with low art.

Popular and commercial art forms are the soil in which high art grows.

Theory describes art; art does not illustrate theory.

Art is how a whole culture speaks to itself.

Art is how cultures communicate with and marry each other.

4. The reunion of art with craft.

Certain forms, genres, and techniques of art are culturally universal, natural,

and classical.

Those forms are innate but require a cultural tradition to awaken them. They include such things as visual representation, melody, storytelling, poetic meter, and dramatic mimesis.

These forms, genres, and techniques are not limitations or constraints but enfranchising instruments and infinitely generative feedback systems. High standards of craftsmanship and mastery of the instrument should be restored.

5. The reunion of passion with intelligence.

Art should come from and speak to what is whole in human beings.

Art is the product of passionate imaginative intelligence, not of psychological sickness and damage.

Even when it deals, as it often should and must, with the terrifying, tragic, and grotesque, art should help heal the lesions within the self and the rifts in the self's relation to the world.

The symbols of art are connected to the embodiment of the human person in a physical and social environment.

6. The reunion of art with science.

Art extends the creative evolution of nature on this planet and in the universe.

Art is the natural ally, interpreter, and guide of the sciences. The experience of truth is beautiful.

Art is the missing element in environmentalism.

Art can be reunited with physical science through such ideas as evolution and chaos theory.

The reflectiveness of art can be partly understood through the study of nonlinear dynamical systems and their strange attractors in nature and mathematics.

The human species emerged from the mutual interaction of biological and cultural evolution.

Thus our bodies and brains are adapted to and demand artistic performance and creation.

We have a nature; that nature is cultural; that culture is classical.

Cultural evolution was partly driven by inventive play in artistic handicrafts and performance.

The order of the universe is neither deterministic nor on the road to irreversible decay; instead the universe is self-renewing, self-ordering, unpredictable, creative, and free.

Thus human beings do not need to labor miserably to despoil the world of

its diminishing stockpile of order, and struggle with one another for possession of it, only to find that they have bound themselves into a mechanical and deterministic way of life.

Instead they can co-operate with nature's own artistic process and with each other in a free and open-ended play of value-creation.

Art looks with hope to the future and seeks a closer union with the true progress of technology.

7. The reunion of past with future.

Art evokes the shared past of all human beings, that is the moral foundation of civilization.

Sometimes the present creates the future by breaking the shackles of the past; but sometimes the past creates the future by breaking the shackles of the present.

The enlightenment and modernism are examples of the former; the renaissance, and perhaps our time, are examples of the latter.

No artist has completed his or her artistic journey until he or she has sojourned with and learned the wisdom of the dead artists who came before.

The future will be more, not less, aware of and indebted to the past than we are; just as we are more aware of and indebted to the past than were our ancestors.

The immortality of art goes both ways in time.

In the light of these principles we challenge contemporary thinking and urge the reform of existing institutions.