

June 11, 1969

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I have been critical of the Museum of Modern Art but I am shocked at the kind of attack now being made by the Art Workers' Coalition against the Museum of Modern Art concerning the forthcoming exhibition, "The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation", particularly since I am not one of those who was "blackmailed" into giving work. Although I have not given anything, I am deeply suspicious of the motives and sincerity of the Art Workers' Coalition in this matter. Their letter of attack is too transparent.

The hysterical charge that the Museum blackmailed artists to give paintings is spurious because the artists had only to say No. Nobody was being pushed up against the wall. The moral issue here belongs to the artist--not to the Museum.

In addition, the charges they make are insincere because they are self-serving. For example: The Coalition would not be against this exhibition if it were a loan exhibition that would later disappear. But the Coalition attacks this exhibition because the Museum is attempting to acquire work by purchase and by promise to make up for its failure for not having done so years ago when the paintings were cheap. It seems to me that the Coalition would have served the cause of artists better if they had congratulated Mr. William Rubin and the Museum for trying 20 years later, "to build for the Museum" to use the Coalition's language, "the world's major collection.... of the heroic years of Abstract Expressionism". Instead they let the cat out of the bag when they say that to acquire "a larger collection under the Museum's present organization necessitates a larger building program which continues to divert money from acquisitions of contemporary art".

The charges, therefore, become a self-serving attack against their fellow artists. Their letter says very openly that what they want the Museum to do is that it buy their own work. They don't care whether buying their work will of itself necessitate a larger building. Proper housing of their work doesn't seem to worry them. What the letter means is just give us the dough.

But above and beyond all this, is it wrong for Mr. William Rubin and the Museum to go beyond the tokenism of past years so that the artists of the Coalition together with others will be able to see what really happened in those heroic years, which up until now the artists of the Coalition have only seen in bits and pieces? The attack, therefore, is not an attack against the Museum but is an attack against their fellow artists. That it will cost the Museum so much more money now than it would have 20 years ago is unfortunate but would the Coalition and the public be better served if the show were only a loan show for 6 weeks and the pictures were then sent back to their owners to disappear from public view?

Certainly there are artists who are constantly trying to build shrines for themselves in Museums. But does it really help? Yes it does--those for whom art is nothing but career. So what!

And what's all this stuff about the Coalition being concerned with what they say is "the morality of artists". This is truly offensive. After all such moral superiority can only be understood as careerism. Is this the real purpose of the Coalition. I am sorry to see it fall into this hypocritical trap. It is the easiest thing in the world to build a career by constantly taking care of everyone else's morality except one's own. We have had too much of that already. Let's let lie the sleeping watchdog ghosts of Ad Reinhardt and Anthony Comstock. The issue facing an artist should not be another man's morality but his own.

What is interesting and perhaps proves how viable a force the heroic years of the New American Painting are that, having been the target of the Establishment for so long, the work still provokes antagonism and criticism now by those who do not know the work.

The attack should please the Museum and Mr. Rubin. It indicates that they have a damn good show/collection.

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