

The installation and context for the art being done now is poor and unsuitable. The correction is a permanent installation of a good portion of the work of each of the best artists. After the work itself, my effort for some eighteen years, beginning in a loft on Nineteenth Street in New York, has been to permanently install as much work as possible, as well as to install some by other artists. The main reason for this is to be able to live with the work and think about it, and also to see the work placed as it should be. The installations provide a considered, unhurried measure by which to judge hurried installations of my own and others in unfamiliar and often unsuitable places. This effort seems obvious to me, but few artists do it, though there is a tendency to keep earlier work, and the idea of a permanent installation is nearly unknown to the public for visual art.

There are four situations in which art is seen: the collector's home, the art gallery, the public space, and the museum. The collector's home should be fairly harmless but almost always the architecture is awful and the art extremely crowded. There are few collectors and even fewer persons who have only two or three things. Usually the art gallery doesn't look so bad, though trite, but it's the showroom of a business. Small portable work sells best, not large work that is nearly made in place. And the shows are temporary. Anyway, business shouldn't determine the way art is seen, although most of my work has been shown first in galleries, the best made and the best installed in Leo Castelli's three spaces. Art in a public space is a recent result of public money. At this point, art is art and is neither public nor private, so "public art" is a misnomer. "Public," practically, means the application of many extraneous worries to the art, which favors willing mediocrity. Some large good pieces by intractable artists have been made and they are among the public, which is desirable, but the locations are invariably appalling, leftover spaces among positive schmaltz. A bad location doesn't ruin a good work but it tends to reduce

understanding to information: you know it's good but you can't stand standing there long enough to find out why. This is also true of art in some museums and of antiquities that have been overrun by industry or suburbia. These three categories, aside from the important economic activity of the gallery and a few large pieces in public, fail to produce serious results. If somewhere there were serious and permanent installations, the ephemeral exhibitions of the gallery and the awful environments of the work in public could be criticized and endured.

The gallery is fairly controllable, if limited; the public space slightly; the collector's glass ranch house not at all. Most owners of art install it badly; little can be expected. The museum should be serious and competent and much is expected but it's a disappointment and a failure. Ways of living, societies, and grand institutions develop without much thought and so do some lesser institutions such as the museum. A museum of contemporary art, sometimes joined to a historical museum, itself debatable, has become a necessary symbol of the city and of the culture of the city all over the world. One result of the thoughtlessness of this expensive efflorescence is that no museum is able merely to physically exhibit the art of the last twenty years, barely and not well that of the last forty, and amply not that of the last hundred. Such an institution is no proof of culture.

The art museum was first the palace of a failed noble and then a bourgeois copy growing increasingly distant as the new rich grew distant from the disappearing aristocracy and as liberal functions developed, such as the obligations of the new rich to educate those they left behind. Right away it's clear that this has little to do with art. The new rich in the last century, the old rich in this, and the new rich now are basically middle class. Unlike some of the aristocracy, and of course like many, the present rich, the trustees of the museum, do not intend to know anything about art. Only business. The solution to the problem of having culture without having to think

about it is to hire somebody. The rich middle class is bureaucratic, so there's an expert for everything. The result is that there's little pleasure in art and little seriousness for anyone anywhere. A museum is the collection of an institution and it's an anthology. A few anthologies are all right, but some hundred in the United States alone is ridiculous. It's freshman English forever and never no more no literature.

Art is only an excuse for the building housing it, which is the real symbol, precise as chalk screeching on a blackboard, of the culture of the new rich. The new National Gallery is a fine example. It's the apotheosis of the public space. The main exhibition area is leftover space within the solids of a few triangles and a parallelogram, containing offices and boutiques. The power of the central government, the status of the financiers, and the mediocre taste of both are dignified by art, much of it done by artists very poor most of their lives. So much money spent on architecture in the name of art, much more than goes to art, is wrong, even if the architecture were good, but it's bad.

The handling and preservation in a museum, which is expected to be careful, is often careless. Sometimes the staff seems to resent the art. Usually the view is that the damage doesn't matter and can be repaired. Even with the best intentions of a director or a curator the installation is seldom good because the rooms are not. Always of course the exhibitions are temporary. Finally, the artist lends work, accepts damage to it – insurance is a joke – gives time, and gets next to nothing: “The work is out in public.” The artist should be paid for a public exhibition as everyone is for a public activity.

Some effort has been made by artists to take care of their work. Clyfford Still deserves credit for the installations of his paintings, about thirty each, at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the museums also for accepting the responsibility. Recently Henry Moore has given work to Toronto and Rufino Tamayo has

made a museum in Ciudad de México. There are examples in Europe of museums made after an artist's death and of enterprises such as the chapel by Matisse. There are also Giuseppe Panza's installations of contemporary art which are meant to be permanent. In the United States there is the so-called Rothko Chapel. But of all the great and very good art done in the United States in the last forty years very little can be seen. From 1946 to 1966 an exceptional amount of good art was done in New York City. A visitor now can see only two or three paintings each by Newman, Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, Kline, Guston, Reinhardt, Davis, and others, and usually none by less inventive artists, still good, such as James Brooks, if the visitor goes to four museums, the Modern, the Whitney, the Guggenheim, and the Metropolitan. And then there's a list of those who worked in the vicinity of New York and a list of younger artists. It is impossible for a visitor to acquire the knowledge of the excellence, variety, and extent of the art of this period that someone has who was in New York during this time. The three museums, not the Metropolitan, may be comprehensive as anthologies but they are not comprehensive in relation to what was done. Most of the work of that twenty years has been sold out of New York, much out of the United States. The art was in no way indigent to New York and the lack of interest of the people there is proven. That includes the museums. In the late 1940s and the 1950s the proportion of the best contemporary art in the museums was little more than it is now, which is meager.

It's easy to imagine the magnificence of a museum in New York containing a couple of dozen paintings by Pollock or by Newman. It's too late to make such an installation for Pollock, almost for Newman. There are probably enough paintings to do so for Rothko and especially for de Kooning, who fortunately is alive. In 1966 one hundred and twenty paintings by Reinhardt were shown at the Jewish Museum for longer than usual. These probably will never be assembled again and

if assembled will not be the same, since almost all have been damaged and extensively restored. In 1966 these paintings should have been hung and never moved again. Reinhardt died the next year. David Smith's sculpture should have been left in the field where he placed it. I never saw the work there and will never see so much together. And as he placed it, not as it was shown, for example, in the stupid re-creation of the theater at Spoleto in the National Gallery.

A good installation is too much work and too expensive and, if the artist does it, too personal to then destroy. Paintings, sculptures, and other three-dimensional works cannot withstand the constant installation and removal and shipping. The perpetual show business is beyond the museum's finances and capacities. The show business museum gets built but the art does not, nor even handled well, when the art is the reason for the building. And the architecture is well below and behind the best art. An example of something much better for less money would have been to have saved Les Halles in Paris, an important deed itself, and then to have given two hundred thousand dollars each, sufficient at the time, to a dozen of the world's best artists to make work to remain forever. This would have been the achievement of the century. Instead Beaubourg was built, an expensive, disproportionate monster, romanticizing the machinery of an oil refinery, not scarce. The building makes change the main characteristic of paintings and sculptures that don't change. The building and the change are just show business, visual comedy.

If the people of New York City should want the best art, they can finance, for far less than the cost of an apartment building producing a little more gallery space, the construction of work placed permanently by, for example, Serra, Oldenburg, Flavin, Chamberlain, Bell, Andre, or myself. We all are more or less old and reliable. There are younger artists: David Rabinowitch could do something wonderful. And there are older artists, less than the best but good, whose work, if

assembled, would make an installation that would outclass most museums, James Brooks for example. He is a better artist than many earlier ones “discovered” in one of art history’s several standard distances – for example, Jawlensky fifteen years ago, and Goncharova recently.

Millions are spent by the central government for and in the name of art and the same by the semipublic museums. All that money does not produce more first-rate art, in fact there is less since the government became involved. And the government is too dangerous to be involved. Money will not make good art; ultimately art cannot be bought. The best artists living now are valuable and not replaceable and so the society should see that their work gets done while they’re alive and that the work is protected now and later. If this society won’t do this, at least it could revise some of its attitudes, laws, and tax laws to make it easier for the artists to do so. Art has no legal autonomy.

I bought a building in New York in 1968, which contains my work and that of others, and two buildings in Texas in 1973, which contain my work. One building in Texas has two large rooms and the other has one. Each of the two took two years of thinking and moving pieces around. The one room took about a year. One of the two rooms was the basis for the installations in the exhibition of my work at the National Gallery of Canada in 1975, which occupies part of an office building and so has fairly plain, decent space. None of my work that’s installed is lent nor is that by other artists. Permanent installations and careful maintenance are crucial to the autonomy and integrity of art, to its defense, especially now when so many people want to use it for something else. Permanent installations are also important for the development of larger and more complex work. It’s not so far from the time of easel painting, still the time of the museum, and the development of the new work is only in the middle of the beginning.