THE NEW CRAFTS MANIFESTA

- 1. USE IS NOT A DIRTY WORD
- 2. THE EVERYDAY IS WHERE THE DOMINATION HAPPENS, SO WHYNOT MAKE ART IN, ABOUT & FOR THE EVERYDAY?
- 3. RESIST ARTS/CRAFTS DUALISM. IT'S NEEDLESS VIOLENCE TO SPLIT THINGS IN TWO.
- 4. DON'T SCRATCH THE KITSCH
- 5. WHAT IF NO ONE'S GONNA SEE IT EXCEPT FOR ME?" OK!
- 6. FOLKTHE WORLD, DECORATION FOREVER
- 7. BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BEPRETTY
- 8. REMEMBER: YOU'RE NOTA HERO OR A GENIUS
- 9. "GOOD TASTE" LEAVES A BAD TASTE IN MY MOUTH
- 10.15 IT REALLY A MARGINAL PRACTICE, OR IS IT UUST TREATED THAT WAY?

11. WE'RE GOING TO NEED KITCHEN TOWELS TO CLEAN UP THE BLOOD.



This is a manifesta¹ for crafters, artists, and people who want to think differently about art as a concept and as a cultural institution. It is completely possible to craft freely and joyfully, but if we want to make more space for our work outside of the strictures of "art," we ought to invent new processes and languages for thinking about those things which we make and see. I am reminded of what Virginia Woolf said in 1931: "Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome."2Though she is talking about literature and we are talking about art, we certainly also have a good deal of ghosts to exorcise. We'll be doing some of that in this text, which strives to develop a new feminist viewpoint on crafts.

This manifesta is intended to be read by any and everyone.3 It is not intended to be any kind of authority or objective voice on anything. In the tradition of feminist epistemology, I am seeking to re-purpose the stereotypical view that abstract thought belongs to men and everyday practical action and personal experience belongs to women. (Go back to the kitchen, the men are thinking.) I'm going to embrace what has been prescribed to me in this outdated stupid dichotomy, because it at least makes for less baffling writing. The use of an everyday conversational tone, personal experience, and emotional response is going to supplement these ideas just as much as recorded philosophy will. I implore you to bring your own perspective into the text. The moniker "New Crafts" does not mean that I am creating anything "New," rather, I am proposing an alternative approach using lessons from feminist thinkers and makers. Perhaps you can help me and refine this approach yourself. I don't have the credentials to take on the whole art world, but I can talk about some obstacles and some potential solutions.

When I mention feminism, I don't intend to imply that there is one

¹ I am using the feminine of manifesto.

² From her 1931 speech "Professions for Women," which was printed in The Death of the Moth and

Other Essays in 1942.

3 I apologize if this text is too introductory, but I am not creating it with one sole audience in mind. It would go against my intentions to write something in academic language, because I don't intend to limit these ideas to consumption by academics or anyone who already has a primer in aesthetics or critical theory. I'm also using the word "I" a lot, not to be egotistical, but because I don't know exactly who agrees with me yet. If you find that you do, change all the "I's" to "we"s in your mind

monolithic ideology girding a "feminist" approach. Rather, I want to bring attention to the fact that gender has been influential to the organization of people throughout history, and that in the patterns of varying societal structures, men have been favored over women. I am not just bringing a feminist perspective to the table - more broadly, we should question hegemonies as we investigate the crafts problem. Race, class, orientation and more are all implicated in this questioning.

This text also doubles as a kind of introduction to aesthetics. It's impossible to discuss crafts without mentioning the divide between art and craft, and it's impossible to discuss this divide without answering that ever-haunting question: "So what is art anyways?", usually followed by the dreaded "So if crafts can be art, doesn't that mean that everything is art? Where do you draw the line?" Well, I don't like to draw a lot of lines. Binaries aren't helpful for crafters or artists, but they do provide some sense of understanding for the perplexed skeptic. Nevertheless, to discuss art will inevitably require me to explain how people have decided what is and isn't art in the past, if only to form a new perspective out of the rubble.

When I use the word "aesthetics" I am referring to the field formed by philosophers that describes the way humans respond in a visceral way to cultural or natural stimuli. According to many philosophers, aesthetic sense is a cognitive activity like problem-solving or reasoning. For our purposes, it refers to both a philosophical framework and the perception of art. ⁴ There are such stubborn residues in art's unconscious that have polluted the current moment that we must investigate. Since we can't talk about what we want to be by only saying what we don't want to be anymore, we'll imagine alternatives for the future along the way.

⁴ I realize that I spend a lot of words on theory and abstract ideas for someone who is arguing for a physical, craft-based response. However, we have to have an idea of what art criticism has been and is now before we can establish a new perspective.



Utility is one of the main distinctions that has been made between art and craft. If something can be used, it is often no longer considered art. This idea has roots in an idea of "fine art" developed fairly recently in human history which basically refers to anything which is not made for a specific utilitarian purpose, but rather for more refined pursuits such as religion or the entertainment of the upper classes.

As the concept of the "aesthetic" took hold, a reaction emerged against objects of use. Aesthetic contemplation as it was formulated by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose thoughts are still a standard for the study of aesthetics today, stipulated that true art could have no purpose whatsoever. Any art created or consumed with a purpose - even religion or amusement and especially desire¹ wouldn't be good enough fodder for true aesthetic judgement.

Kant didn't believe art should be made or consumed in order to accomplish any goal. This attitude is called "disinterested." Kant's doctrines are constantly questioned by contemporary artists and theorists because they include very specific rules for what does and doesn't constitute authentic aesthetic judgement, perhaps much to the chagrin of new artists today who don't want anyone but the market to tell them what to do. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's essay Kant's Ghost, Among Others³ explores this continual exorcism - every time we begin to talk about aesthetics, it's as if we have to necromance Kant again and again in order to explain what is wrong with his ideas. Instead of continuing this exorcism, Gilbert-Rolfe suggests that the first generation can exorcize the ghosts, but subsequent generations should be able to repurpose such spirits for their own pursuits. Many feminists are no strangers to this kind of repurposing - if it can't be disposed of, we might as well see what we can make of it. In other words, we can reuse theories after cutting away the rotten bits. Use, and re-use: these

¹ Kant was an adult virgin.

² For more See Carolyn Korsmeyer, who does a great job distilling this in Gender and Aesthetics. Alternatively, from the horse's mouth, see I.Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgement [1790], ed. P. Guyer (this is the Cambridge edition of Kant's works from 2000), part 1: 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgement'

³ Gilbert Rolfe's essay, which can be found in a feminist anthology of aesthetics makes some useful points, but he does begin by saying "I have never written anything for a primarily female audience before," which is weird.

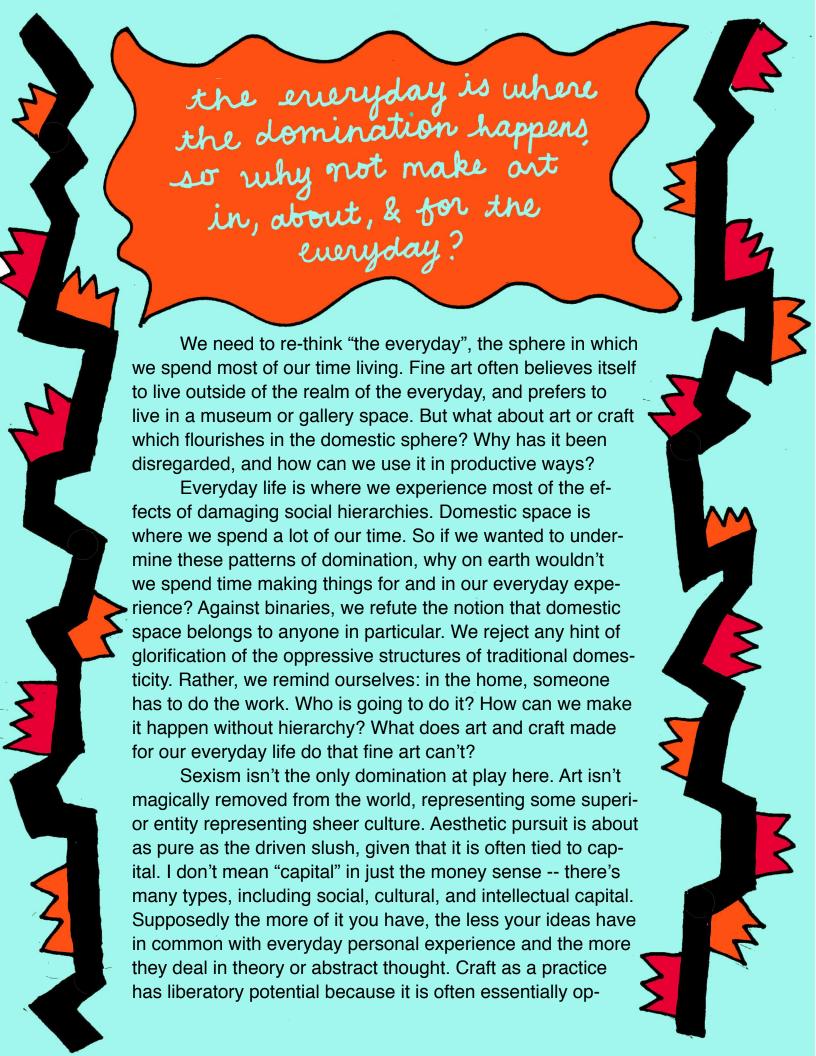
actions are crucial tools for feminists as we consider how to move forward. "Useful art," (common synonym: craft) often denotes that which is made by or for women: ceramics, textiles, domestic objects. We can patch together "useful" theory too.

So we'll cut Kant's anti-craft, anti-utility rules. What are we left with? He has a lot of rules about what constitutes an aesthetic experience, and they have a lot to do with what qualifies as proper disinterested contemplation. This contemplation is described as stoic, like a kind of meditation. However, he does claim everyone has the ability to experience this: an upside to his theory is its belief that aesthetic responses are universal in all humans, an equalizing notion which could appeal to feminists. Anyone can have moments of aesthetic contemplation. Everyone can witness something really beautiful or breathtaking, the kind of sight that you just need to take a minute to revel in it with no goal in mind other than drinking it in. But unlike Kant, we aren't claiming that this is the only use for aesthetic objects or the only way to use them.4 One of his useful rules, bastardized here in order to adapt it for our uses, is his notion that when someone believes something about work of art (or craft, in our narrative), they somehow get the idea that everyone else must agree with them. Suppose you really enjoy the pot you made. By human nature, you instinctually hope, and believe, that everyone else will like it too. This idea can lead us to disregard elitist notions of "taste" and stop worrying so much about audience reception - two issues we'll deal with later.

Since the idea that useful things cannot be art is so deeply ingrained in aesthetics, and has become one of the major wedges between the concept of "art" and "craft," it is imperative that we should perform a rehabilitation of the useful. It's not just about exorcising Kant's ghost, because I don't believe he is the only menace. Within the realm of the domestic, "useful" objects are often tied to womanhood because women have been presumed to be the key laborers in the domestic sphere.

Useful things are a part of our lives regardless of class, whereas fine art has often been tailored to be consumed by the elite. Any doctrine which argues for a purer definition of art excluding anything "useful" will necessarily exclude many crafts, traditional didactic art such as storytelling, and anything produced for entertainment - categories which often apply to the cultural productions of of women, non-elite classes, and non-Western cultures. Use is not a dirty word!

⁴ He would probably be very upset that the verb "use" is being used so much here, but that's the nature of our project.





posed to the forces of this capital. Making crafts for oneself doesn't usually appease a greedy market economy because it takes a while to do, and you are creating for yourself. You might sell your crafts, but you probably won't make a fortune, and you know that. But yet we continue to craft. What's the point in sitting around for hours tinkering with objects to make another object? If you were a pessimist could say it's a damn good way to placate the masses when they're not on the clock, but I sense there is potentially something revolutionary that can be made of this practice.

So how did crafts manage to show up in contemporary art exhibitions? Why are there more and more artists today working in the medium of craft and exhibiting this work in exclusive environments? Such exhibitions, for most people, are outside of the realm of the everyday, removed from the domestic realm. Unless we get rid of the rotting core of today's neoliberal contemporary art world around which sales, gallery representation, fairs, and biennials orbit; crafts will never belong there. Contemporary artists are paying more attention to crafts now because they're in vogue and they make such a lovely little social statement - women's work matters! It's not too earthshaking of a statement that it brings down the museum itself, which has undoubtdly been funded by blood money and thus is probably too afraid to bring the real incendiary shit because their own beloved institution will definitely be implicated.¹ No, no, crafts are innocuous enough, and if we bring in a tamed-down feminist angle the progressives will be placated, I imagine a boardroom concluding while sipping really fancy bottled sparkling water. Except crafts aren't really innocuous enough. They undo the entire framework which has

¹ Recent craft exhibitions in spaces previously reserved for modern art include "Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950-2019" at the Whitney Museum, a institution infamous for the questionable ethics of its board members (for more on this, see Black, Hannah, Ciaran Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett. "The Tear Gas Biennal." Artforum, July 17, 2019. https://www.artforum.com/slant/a-statement-from-hannah-black-ciaran-finlayson-and-tobi-haslett-on-warren-kanders-and-the-2019-whitney-biennial-80328). The Museum of Modern Art recently showed a temporary exhibition of textiles called "Taking Thread for A Walk" (https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5101),and ceramicist John Mason recently had a solo show at the global mega-gallery Gagosian titled 'Geometric force', (https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2020/john-mason-geometric-force),just to name a few.

cold beer and gossiping. Crafts are undervalued, underrepresented, and have mind?4 Whatever progressive values we gained in the seventies a "creative," and you make products and design things to sell 2 Unless, of course, you're studying the medieval period and before. of color and anti-racist work come to mind immediately. it weren't for an excessively verbose wall label.

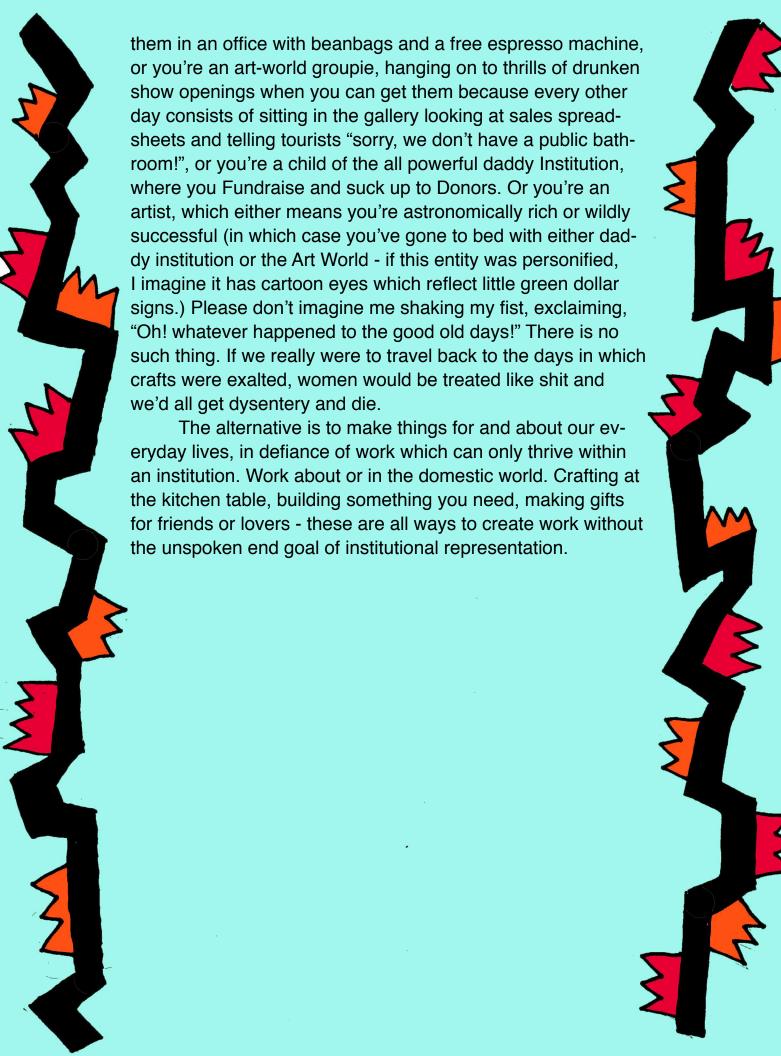
girded aesthetics since the eighteenth century. They launch us back into the days of the guild, or simply to our grandmother's era when we made things because we needed those things. I don't think crafts belong in the white-walled museum or gallery. They belong not as a topic for the boardroom table but a topic on the kitchen table, where everyone has come together to piece a guilt under soft lamplight, swilling sun tea or a nice

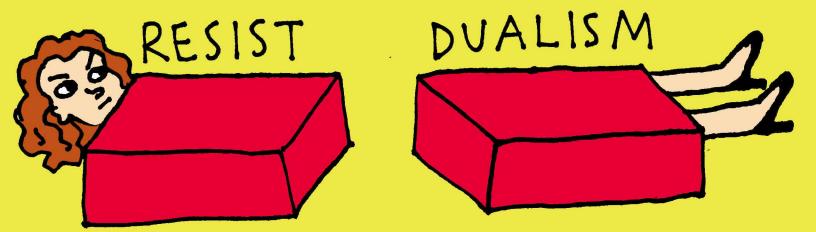
been largely omitted from the annals of capital A, capital H "Art History" for the past two or three centuries.2 So, why on earth should I be arguing that crafts shouldn't be at the heart of every single contemporary exhibition, to give them that sweet limelight they so deserve? Unfortunately, through some sinister societal mechanizations, even the most "progressive" of us creatives have come to the point where we think institutional representation is the apex - it's the proof you've "made it," the proof that what you're doing is important, historical, worthy of a glossy monograph which will look great on someone's coffee table. The blind acceptance that a lifetime retrospective at a big-name museum is what makes you an important artist means that you give these institutions the ultimate power to decide what is and isn't art.3 Do you think they have the best interest of us exalters of the everyday, us crafters in

from increased pushes for women's liberation and civil rights have been absorbed in an insidious fashion into the rules governing the art market. What space is there for creators anymore, outside of this market? We've devolved. Either you're

3 This isn't a rule, so it goes without saying that there are exceptions. Musuems need to have shows that are utterly unflinching as it lays bare the very foundation on which institutions rest - retrospectives for people 4 I love museums as much as the next artist/historian, which is a lot. But I'm torn. If it's a museum for old things, I feel like I'm entered into a

repository for treasures looted from colonized countries. If it's a museum for contemporary art, I feel like I'm choking on the art world (or should I say the art market!) and all of its little in-references (God, don't you get it? This piece by a contemporary artist references this other contemporary artist, duh!) and overly conceptual things you'd never understand if





It has been consistently confirmed among artists and philosophers that there is a difference between art and craft. I have found it very difficult to see this distinction made succinctly and clearly, probably because it is easier to maintain a hierarchy when the specific reasons for its existence aren't fully illuminated. Misogyny is greatly empowered by the belief that women's inferiority is 'natural.' To lay bare the exact mechanisms by which a gender hierarchy is maintained, or to refute the idea that women have a natural essence at all, is a stab at the heart of a project which relies on people taking the status of things for granted. Domination is best maintained when it takes pains to appear natural.¹ By repeating it over and over until it seems like a given, crafts became closely tied to femininity. Undoing this knot isn't easy.

It may seem simple enough to explain why crafts have been seen as lesser than art, and this is because they have been associated with women: when we think embroidery, we might think of ladies-in-waiting making occasional stitches while lying prostrate on one of those couches specifically designed for lounging. But in history and philosophy, the feminization of craft becomes more opaque once we realize that it wasn't always necessarily associated with women. Many crafts: pottery, woodworking, shoe cobbling, and so on, were never explicitly feminized, and in fact many of them were exclusively done by men. So how did we end up with the notion that crafts are feminine and art is masculine?

Dualism is the philosophical notion that mind and body are separate. These two categories have given rise to subsequent categorizations which affirm hierarchies and make them seem natural. Women came to be associated with the body while men were associated with the mind. Women have long been considered unable to access the revered powers of the mind, and were instead relegated to bodily work: bearing children, washing clothes in the river, and being accused of uterus-induced hysteria. It all seems terribly archaic, but you'd be surprised the effect that such ancient dualisms can continue to have on today's societal organization. Men were supposedly the only gender able to truly access the 'mind,' in that they believed they were the only gender

¹ This idea comes from John Stuart Mill, by way of Linda Nochlin in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," in Women, Art, and Power: And Other Essays. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

able to think objectively and rationally. So there you have it - somehow we got to the point where it seemed natural - woman body, man mind. Similarly, art and craft seem to easily correspond with the body and mind categories: craft requires the mark of the hand, a physical process to master; whereas art is the work of an enriched mind. Historically, a distinct ideology of femininity cropped up at the same time that a division between art and craft emerged. This happened to be the same time that the notion of "genius" as we understand it today emerged. It all happened, roughly, in the eighteenth century. Art education changed: artists were no longer trained in workshops which emphasized physical technical skill (craft...!) but had to be accepted into academies. By this time, dualism as an ideology had definitely picked up some steam, so we have a fairly clear idea of the historical advent of this division.

All of these distinctions seem fairly enmeshed, so we need to knock down the original distinction between body and mind before we can begin to tackle the distinction between art and craft. This task may seem mammoth, but it's not impossible. I think one of the most useful ways to question this divide is the practice of phenomenology, a theory which suggests that there isn't exactly an effective way to separate our bodies and minds because our thoughts are necessarily tied to our processes of perception made possible by the inhabitation of a physical body. We can only theorize about crafts (or nearly anything, for that matter) because we know what they are: we've seen them or read about them with our eyes, heard about them with our ears, touched or wrought them with our hands. Our perceptions and thoughts can't exist outside of our bodies, however, we must be careful to not rely too much on scientific notions of subjectivity because there is no one standard for how our bodies percieve things, or how they behave based on sex. Under this feminist phenomenological framework, we can witness, if we choose to, the dissolution of three big divides: body/ mind; man/woman; art/craft.

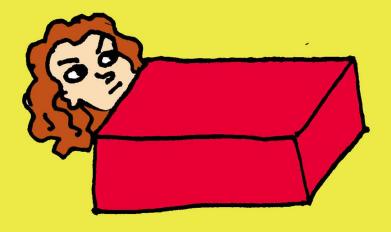
When we are faced with a category which is deemed lesser than its counterpart, there are several maneuvers we can make. The first move: call into question the reality of the categories themselves. What is a "woman," anyways? There is no one single biological blueprint nor an essential nature which defines womanhood. And similarly, we might be hard-pressed to succinctly define craft, as most of its defining characteristics could also be said about art, or for that matter, many other human (and animal) activities. Applying a social constructionist critique to the division between art and craft can work, and in any case, it is productive to question hierarchies which arise from how objects are gendered. But it might be a little bit dangerous in this specific case to argue for dissipating both categories if we haven't fully explored why craft has been coded as lesser than art. Acknowledging that the categories don't exist doesn't make the reality that one is considered lesser than the other dissipate into thin air. But, let it be said that with the advent of contemporary art and its fetish for boundary-breaking, the boundaries between craft and art don't effectively exist anymore. However, vesti-

gial attitudes towards what some might see as "lowbrow" craft still do.

R.G. Collingwood was one of the first aesthetic theorists of the twentieth century to lay out a distinct difference between arts and crafts. He claimed that craft is different from art because, in craft, there is a clear distinction between planning and execution and an obvious transformation from raw material to finished product. In other words, it's just a mere technical process. Art, however, is something much more difficult to define. According to Collingwood, you're not really supposed to have to have a blueprint for art proper. It's a little difficult to imagine what such art would look like, though I can imagine it is perhaps a little bit like being hit over the head with an idea out of the blue and immediately recording it. BONK. Viola! A masterpiece! Again, we've fallen into another trap of exclusivity or elitism: who, exactly, is afforded such an ability to receive seemingly divine random artistic interventions? Geniuses, yes? And who has traditionally been called a genius? Men, right - Because they are associated with the mind. Feminist understanding has allowed us to worm our way out of this trap.

Dividing things into two neat halves might work for third-grade math class, but it doesn't work so well for creative productions. I'm not the only person to realize this: following post-structuralist urges in many cultural productions of the later twentieth century which cropped up in literature and film, genre-bending doesn't raise eyebrows today in the same way it used to. But there is something unique and important about the specific act of craft that we ought not do away with just because it is undermined. I don't believe that explicitly making crafts - not art, but crafts - should have to serve to further marginalize craft in the endless fight between the two. We can acknowledge that the boundary doesn't effectively exist, pull the fighting categories off of one another, and allow them to coexist; respecting their differences.

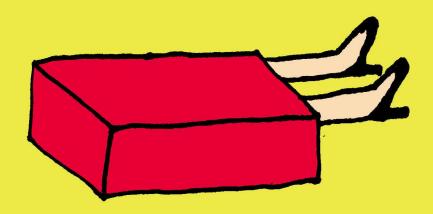
We've already acknowledged that there's no need to excessively differentiate between arts and crafts, but it is nevertheless important to praise crafts for what they can do that more traditional fine art might not be able to. Some women have taken it too far by glorifying the link between crafts and femininity, leaning on this connection to justify their inalienable right to be craftswomen, using tired essential language which suggests that crafting is an ability that only women will naturally do well. We have to find a place in the middle where we don't split things in two by gender in this way. And the solution

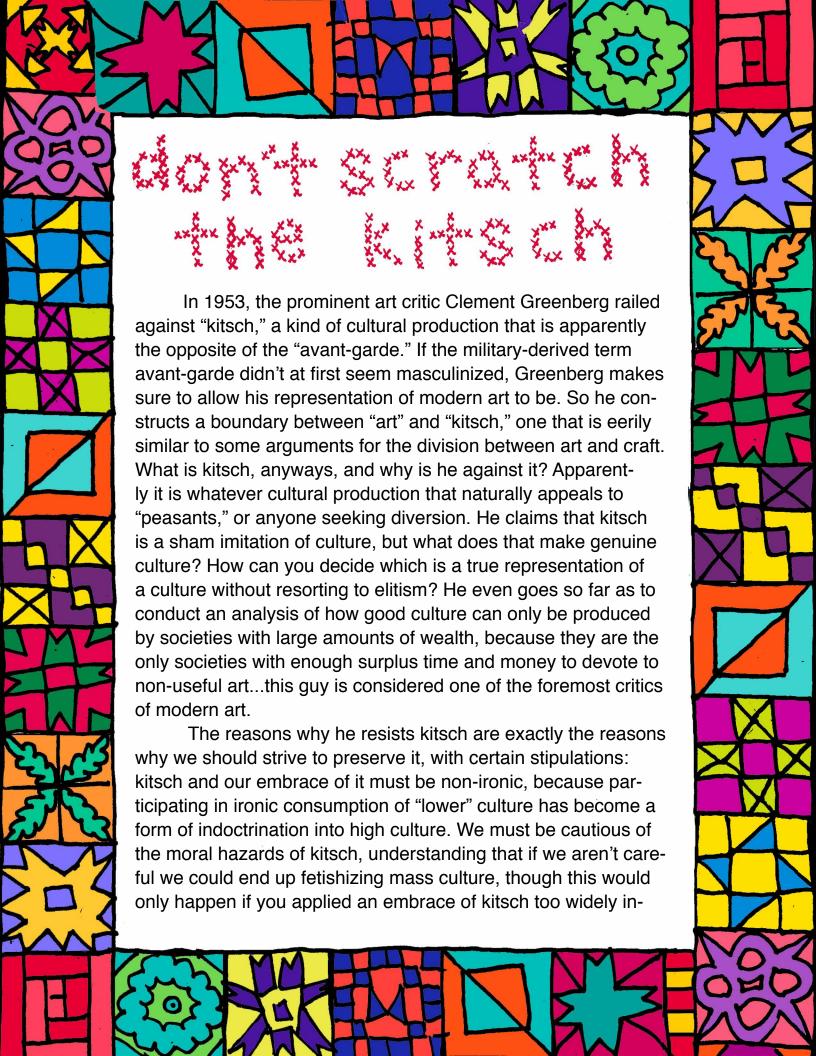


is not to simply move crafts a couple of rungs up the ladder so that it is equated with art - we have to get rid of the ladder itself.

Say my dreams came true and crafts were no longer considered lesser than art. People would easily acknowledge their differences, just as anyone can acknowledge the differences between writing music and writing books, but one could never reign over the other again. This seems idyllic, but if it was the case, making crafts wouldn't be subversive anymore. We couldn't feel secretly liberated by making things that are demeaned by the patriarchy if they were no longer demeaned. I am okay with tossing subversion to the wind - it's thrilling and sexy and to us rebellious youths, it sells - but it requires the active presence of a damaging hierarchy to work. Some contemporary craft artists might not be cool with doing away with subversion. Some artists brand their work as craft specifically to be edgy. I'm not labeling people with this attitude poseurs, but...

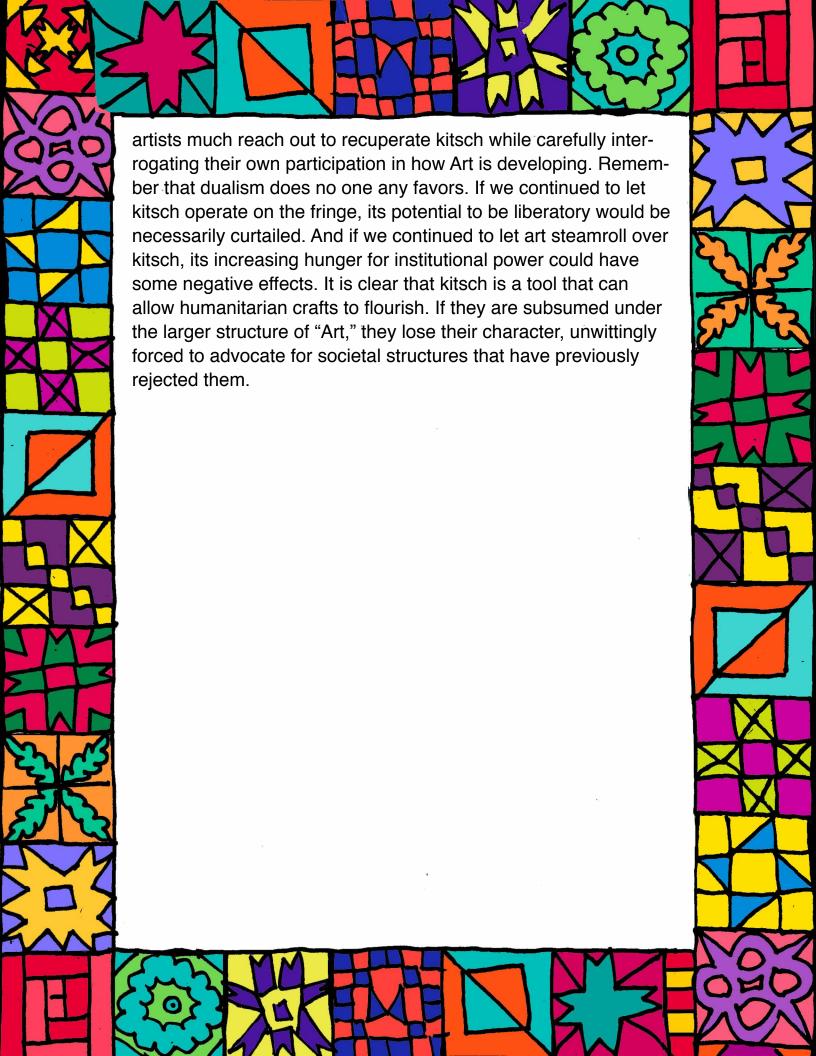
We have to resist dualism on the basis of a feminist phenomenology wherein we understand that woman is not body, man is not mind, crafts aren't essentially opposed to art - things aren't divided up so simply in everyday perception.



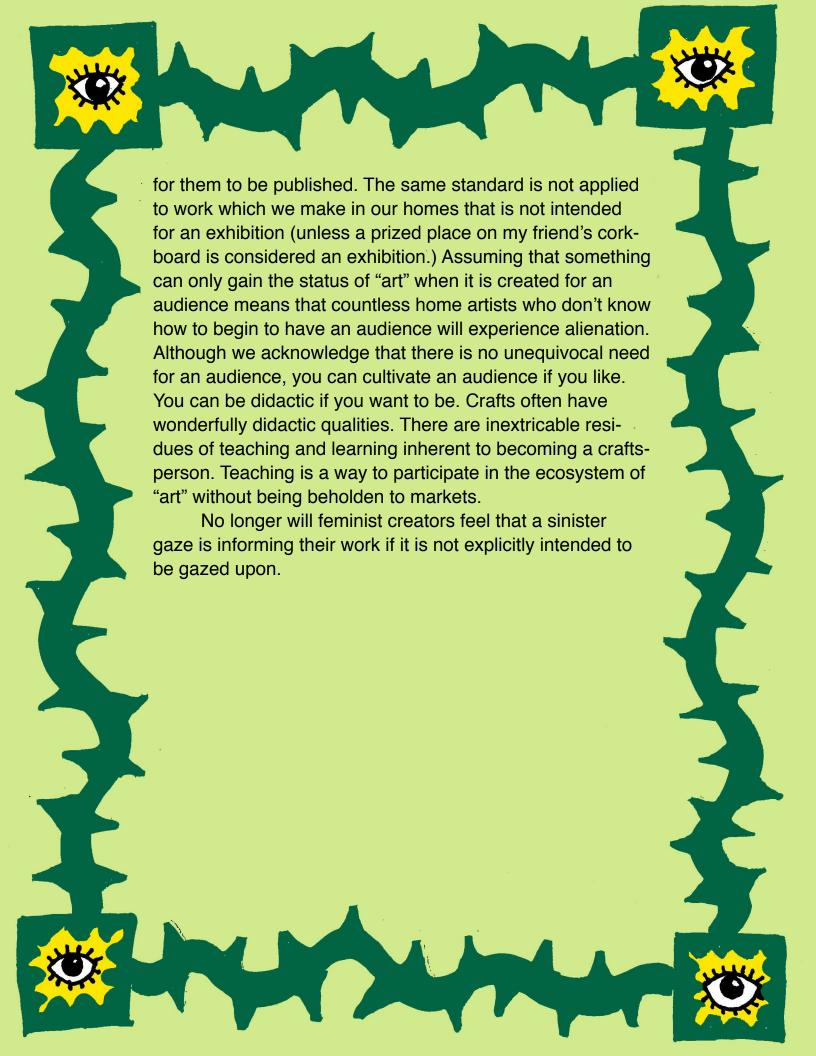


stead of in a localized, domestic way. Here is how art and kitsch have been dichotomized. The attitudes which kitsch has adopted may give us ideas for helpful alternatives to capital-A Art. Kitsch asks us to bring in the affect, that is, emotional experience. Art resists affect on the basis of modernism's resistance towards a caricature of feminized Victorian culture, but it's the 21st century, so you'd think we wouldn't be so concerned about that anymore. Because kitsch begs us to explore affect, it can be a feminist concern. Art tries its damndest to be the public conversation. Kitsch doesn't mind being personal or private. Art pities kitsch for being so regional. Kitsch is a form of situated knowledge - and as such, it is an acknowledgment that there is no one correct perspective. Feminists have long been concerned with how to acknowledge this in order to refute essentialism. Kitsch knows that there can be no one essential spirit or character of anything. Art begs for advanced thought. Kitsch doesn't particularly care what you think, it cares how you feel. Art thrives in germ-free white walls, steeped in modernist purity. Kitsch thrives in dusty houses and abandoned dumpsters. It doesn't need, or want, to be in a museum. Proper kitsch would wilt in the overly sterile conditions. Art wants to be the mind. Art wants to be the voice of a generational struggle, with the wall labels to corroborate this. Most people wouldn't want to put "Art" in their house. (Most people don't have room for today's art. Where are we going

to put Damien Hirst's shark carcass floating in formaldehyde? In the living room?) Kitsch is okay with being the body. Kitsch is okay with being a sweater or a side table. Kitsch is okay with being hung up in vour bathroom. Kitsch doesn't need a wall label. Art is mind. Kitsch is body. Art keeps institutions happy. It decorates their front steps in yawning gleaming metal forms and generic abstractions. Kitsch is content with being relegated to the private sphere of the home, but now public and private are so mixed up that it is even more marginalized than ever. Art(ists) fear that kitsch is mass-mentality, kitsch placates the sheeple, kitsch is a mind-numbing chemical wrapped up in cotton candy. Kitsch knows that art has become a tool of neoliberal politics, and as such is content to remain inside the house or in the yard. Art has a complicated and nefarious market. Kitsch is cheap, and you can make it yourself. Art is a consequence of what happened when modernism, formerly avant-garde, became absorbed into mainstream state ideology. "Modern" once meant progressive. Now new jails are modern. While kitsch has the propensity to be employed as propaganda because it inspires human emotion; no one seems to trust it with major tasks anymore - it's too twee. Art wants to be new. Kitsch is okay with mining history. Art represents the upper class. Kitsch represents the lower classes. Now that we have an idea of how they have been separated,

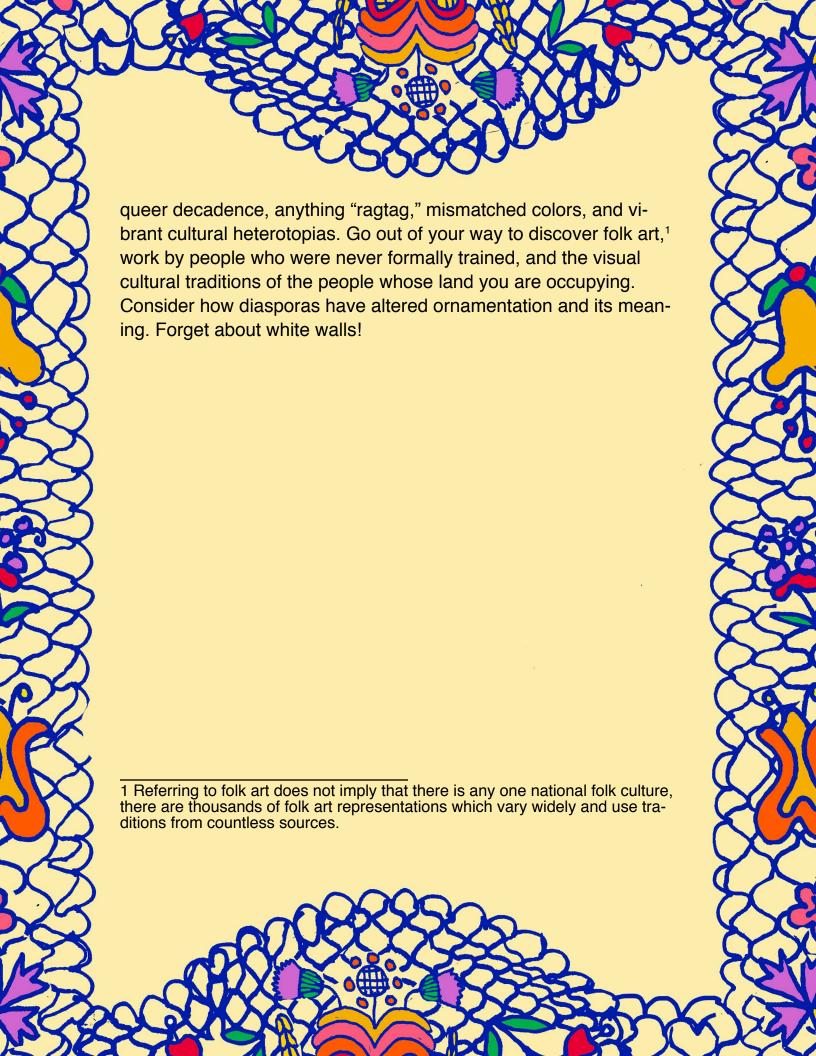








Let's commit some crimes - and get away with it. In 1908, the architect Adolf Loos published an essay titled "Ornament and Crime", a modern critique of decorative ornament. Loos felt that ornament was a crime to modern society, as he associated it with a feminized Victorian culture out of which a valiant twentieth century had emerged. This was the basis of the new modern ideology. His argument, which was certainly preposterous on purpose in order to be provocative, is anti-craft and misogynist in one fell swoop: clearly, the two often go hand in hand. Loos claimed that ornament is a waste of time. Apparently, ornament is responsible for slowing down the "evolution of nations." For crafters concerned with the subjugation marginalized people have faced at the hands of "evolving" nations, let's shout, "go ornament!" Not only is ornament seen as feminine, but it is absolutely coded as "foreign." Loos hoped that in the absence of the "dirty" superfluous decorative nature of ornament, "soon the streets of the city will glisten like white walls." What is removed in order to make a city purely white-walled? What's with this obsession with purity (and whiteness)? What (and who) does that exclude? We resist the modern critique of ornament, questioning why that which is campy or kitschy is automatically some sort of detriment to culture. Let's examine everything seemingly innocuous which has been deemed a threat to "culture," (as if culture is a monolith!) and potentially welcome it. Let's welcome maximalism,



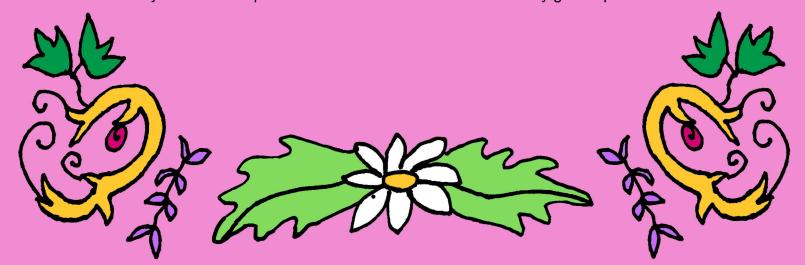


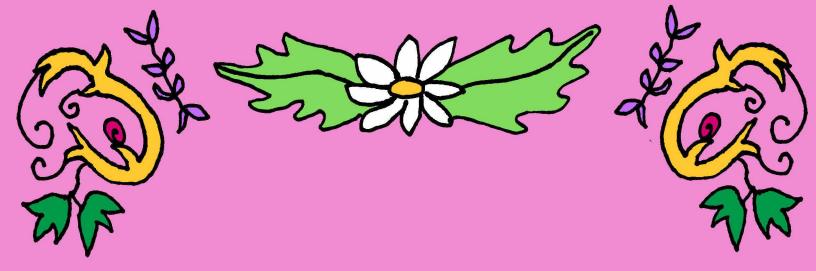
As we have seen, decoration has the potential to fit into the liberating framework of the New Crafts. But not all decoration has to be pretty. In fact, the term "grotesque" derives from decorative ornamentation discovered in grottos.¹ This ornamentation was detailed and decorative, but it featured a healthy deal of mythical monsters and frightening women. It's crucial to affirm that while decoration can be a creative defiance of fine art, it doesn't always have to abide by beauty.

Indeed, grotesqueness can be productive from a feminist perspective: it is a rejection of beauty standards, and an embrace of something forbidden for women. it can be freeing to revel in the "ugly." We must reconsider descriptors such as "ugly," "grotesque," "freak," and "monstrous," because they have had a connection to ideas of rational scientific knowledge. These terms are often applied to anyone who does not fit into a pathologized, "scientific" binary. We can recuperate the grotesque as our own, an affirmation that women are allowed to exist outside science.

Besides, the notion of "beauty" has long haunted the field of aesthetics as a determining factor in deciding what is and isn't art. Considering we're trying to distance ourselves from making needless dichotomies out of what "is" and "isn't" art,

1 see dictionary definition: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grotesque.



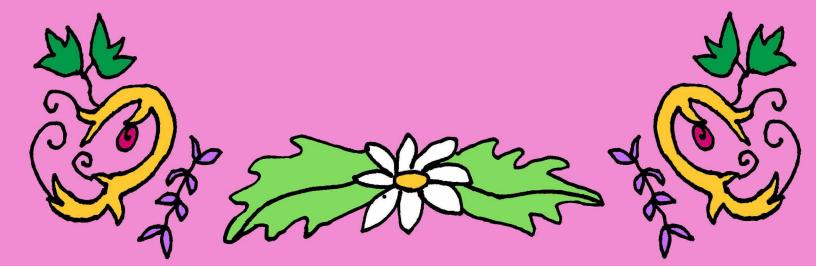


knowing that craft usually falls under "isn't", we can't rely on it in good faith anymore. Along with Kant, fellow eighteenth century philosopher Edmund Burke supposed that beauty was absolutely central to the definition of art. Burke's notion of beauty was certainly bound up in gendered ideals, considering he wrote that "The general, abstract characteristics of any beautiful object are extrapolated from the beauty of the female body." He goes on to get get seriously horny about an abstract notion of beauty, which he derived from the curve of a woman's breast and neck:

"The smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily..." So, that's one of the very pre-eminent philosophers to have cemented the definition of beauty. He isn't wrong...women are beautiful. But to apply this to inanimate objects is questionable.

Even though we're talking about aesthetics, looks aren't everything. And we can even use that which is ugly, gaudy, or freaky to give a middle-finger to the gendered framework of beauty.

² From Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757)



YOURE NOT A HERO OR A GENIUS

It is difficult to define contemporary art because it often doesn't meet the standards of disinterestedness and beauty that the eighteenth-century philosophers required for anything to be called "art." So a modern attitude has emerged which claims that art is whatever is made by an artist - the artist as an individual is supposedly the utmost creator. This is actually fairly archaic, if we want to date things, because the intense valorization of the artist as an individual stems from the Romantic concept of "genius." Defining art as that which is made by an artist begs the question: who is given the privilege to call themselves an "artist?" What makes someone a good artist when art is no longer required to be beautiful or realistic? I argue that he who is deemed a "good artist" often plays the role of a "genius" or "hero."

The idea of genius has classical origins, and was thus co-opted by the Romantics in the eighteenth century. Kant claimed that "genius is the talent that gives the rule to art." Unsurprisingly, genius was a quality mostly afforded to men.

We like to pretend like the ideas of these old dead men don't infect our theories. We like to believe that in the wake of seventies and eighties post-structuralist theory, the ghosts of previous philosophers have been successfully eliminated. But the genius is a figure who is still very much alive for many artists and critics today.

The "artist as genius" didn't always exist. In the medieval era, artists were craftspeople, and if they showed exceptional creativity it was a gift from God, not their own prowess. It wasn't until the Renaissance that distinct notions of the arts

¹ The eighteenth century is often credited as the beginning of aesthetics discourse as we consider it today simply because it saw the most writing on the subject.

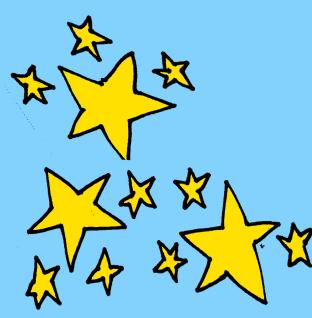




and the artist were separated from the craft guild.² The word genius itself comes from the Latin "male spirit of a gens", gens meaning clan or family, as in "genealogy." In Roman culture, such a male spirit protected (and/or haunted?) land and property, hence the term "genie." ³ As a concept, genius has a pretty sexist family history, though the word did not come to mean a particularly intelligent person until the seventeenth century. We have yet another ghost to exorcise.

And another one: the "hero." Institutional art history has contributed to this genealogy of artists as hero-geniuses, because individual artists are often celebrated for their accomplishments. Names - mostly male names - seem to make up a schema of the discipline. Rembrandt, Picasso, Dali, Pollock. All individuals, all with exceptional accomplishments, but we're not building a hall of fame, we're building a new narrative. Modern art in particular has fallen victim to the genius or "hero" complex - because of its desire to be avant-garde, it selects those individuals and small elite groups who personify the cutting-edge stuff. The attachment to hero-ism is especially evident in criticism about modern American male painters, whose bold action-based abstractions were revered as a masculine expression of energy.⁴

⁴ The idea of "manifest destiny" that was so pervasive in the white male experience of America was carried over into the ways which American white men approached abstract painting: they aimed to reach the 'new frontier' of painting, and felt that they could get there through employing violent themes and shamelessly taking from Native American cultural traditions. Jackson Pollock's cigarette ash, immortalised in the amber of his paint-splatters, demonstrates his cultural significance as a the authentic manly-man of painting: a "cowboy" character born in Wyoming with a volatile case of alcoholism, who had witnessed and identified with the techniques of Native sand painters. His work was often termed "action painting," the wording of which suggests a



² Feminist historical scholarship in the past several decades has actually proven that women were active in medieval craft guilds.

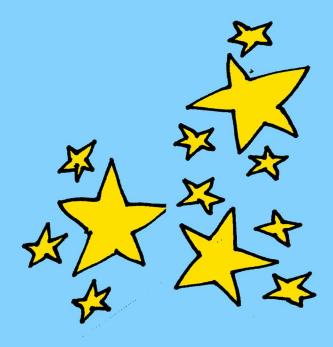
³ Online Etymology Dictionary states for "genie": 1650s, "tutelary spirit," from French génie, from Latin genius (see genius) used in French translation of "Arabian Nights" to render Arabic jinni, singular of jinn, which it accidentally resembled, and attested in English with this sense from 1748.

Jackson Pollock's suggestion that "every good painter paints what he is" is but another reminder that modern art defines itself by who made it. And the "who" has become too important, now that we often witness artists cultivating their personalities like celebrities. So it's not just about refined talent or genius, it's also about having a heroic personality. At the heart of the problem is individualism. Besides being a hallmark of elitism in art, individualism is simply counterproductive: no one artist will be able to knock down the establishment single-handedly.

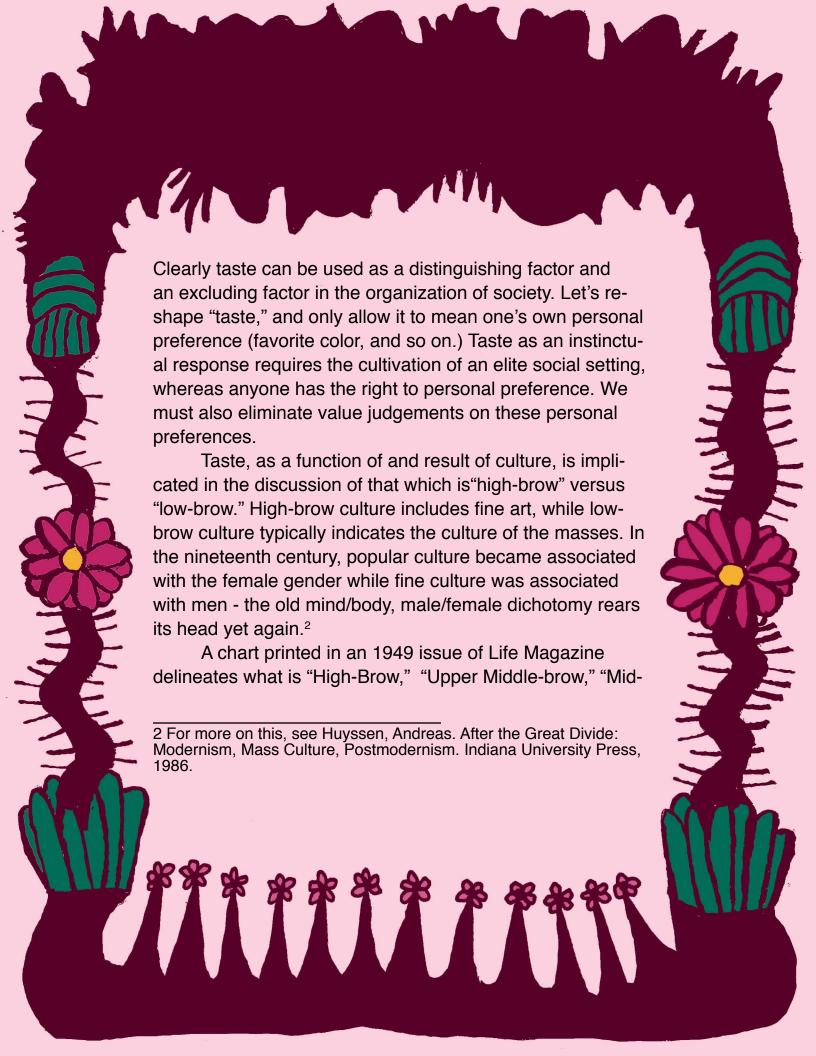
Artists who are mythologized as geniuses or heroes join a lineage beyond themselves. This lineage stretching far into the past supposedly represents and gives meaning to the terms "art," "artist," and "art history." If we reject the concept of genius and re-evaluate the hype surrounding artists as individuals, hopefully such a lineage won't stretch too far into the future.

certain automatism that came from a masculine intrusion onto the virgin canvas which was produced not from meticulousness, which would not mesh with his masculine character, but from a kind of automatism. Pollock's characterisation as the painter at the forefront of the new abstraction presents the central problem that causes the exclusion of abstractionist women: progress was bound up with masculine ideas of action, claiming, and marking one's territory. Critic Harold Rosenberg called the American [male] artist "the heir of the pioneer and the immigrant." These American men were hailed as heroes, on a quest for the spiritual truths embedded in the subconscious that could be brought to life by abstraction. The role of "hero" in culture has been typically masculine-gendered, and its purpose is to reveal opposing forces of good and evil. The evil force in the narrative of the New York School was the Cold War threat of communism, opposed dramatically by the sweeping freedoms of vast canvases.

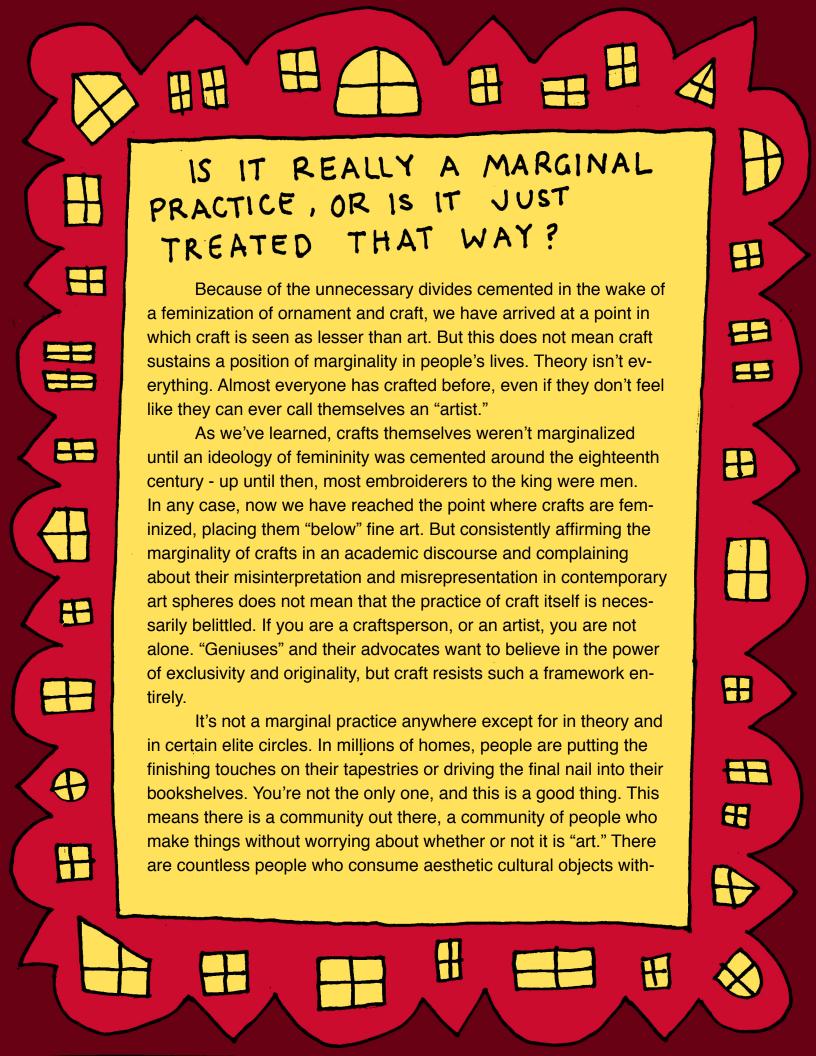
5 artnet News. "9 Quotes by Jackson Pollock on His Birthday," January 28, 2017. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/jackson-pollock-quotes-836450.

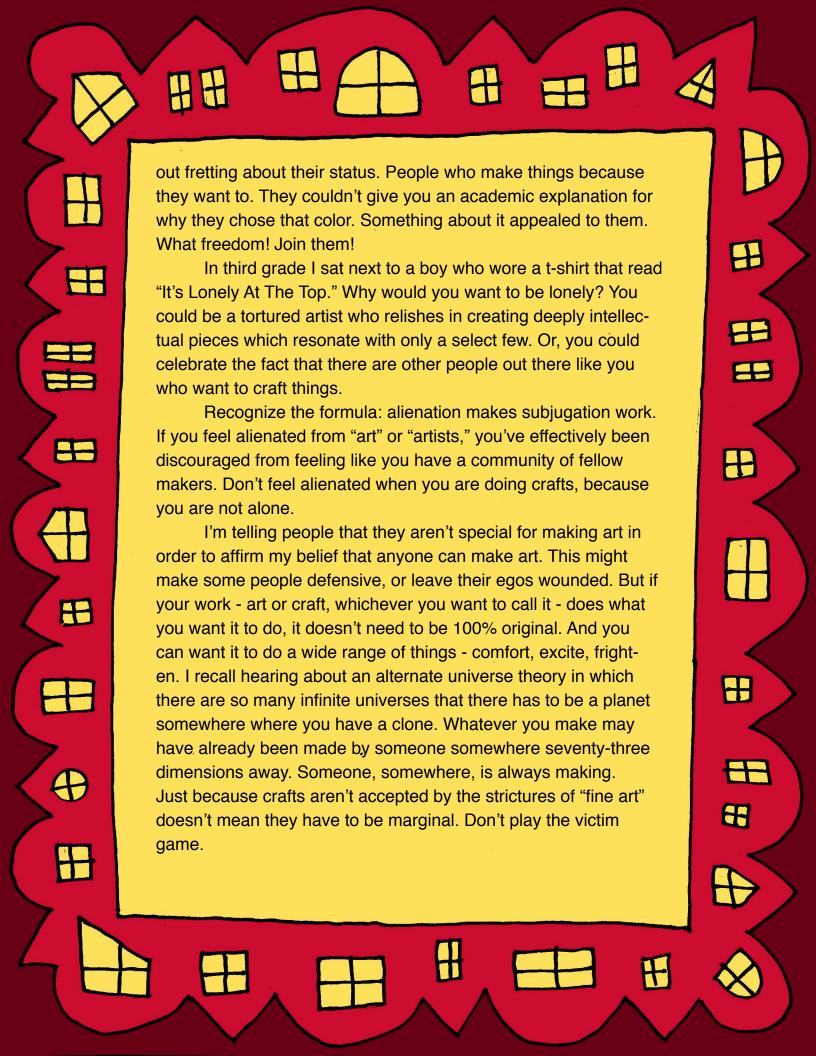




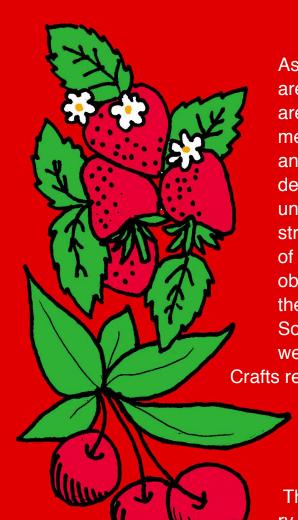












As of right now, crafts as I have been describing them are subversive, because the principles on which they are made and enjoyed do not rely upon any establish ment. Maybe one day they won't be subversive anymore, but until the neoliberal order we are living un der subsides, we are going to have to be delinquent and unafraid. The New Crafts embrace commentary which strikes at the very heart of institutions. We are unafraid of biting criticism of art. We're unafraid to make analytical observations about work without attempting to filter these observations through certain ideologies.

So we've sliced through bullshit of the art world and we're left with a pool of blood. What now? The New Crafts relies upon using radical domestic experience as a

(hopefully) temporary band-aid of sorts. We'll use kitchen towels - in other words, an anti-elitist, anti-establishment attitude rooted in domestic everyday experience - to remedy what we've slain.

The work we make at home for home fiercely resists ivory-tower art speeches, institutional trends, expectations of trained art historians, and it certainly appalls collectors and gallerists.

In today's art world, there is a lack of honest criticism - a lack of any critique that would produce even a tiny pool of blood. Most of the writing done about art today is flowery and incomprehensible, articulated in seemingly endless strains of what critics Alix Rule and David Levine have dubbed "International Art English." This language is most commonly found in press releases. For those uninitiated into the art world, press releases are documents which accompany an exhibition that try to explain what the whole point of the exhibition is. (Also, I envy you.) In a world where many exhibitions are to serve either institutions or insanely rich people looking to park their money in a piece of art so it doesn't get taxed, press releases try to dance around any definitive statements and instead attempt to affirm the elite nature of their subject by using puzzlingly academic language. They allow for no authorial presence, nor a tinge of opinion, because they have to be read as plausibly true by anyone who happens upon them. If someone were to disagree with some idea posited in a press release, that would risk the marketability of the work - a potential customer, down the drain, all because someone said how they actually felt about the art! So they use International Art English, which relies upon a lexicon of intelligent-sounding words and rambling theory-babble to embellish or entirely invent a meaningful, faux-subversive intention. This

lexicon and the endless press releases stemming from it reeks of colonialism, since it's a language adapted for the purposes of global capitalism. This style is a marketing strategy to brand art as elite (worthy of "cutting-edge" poststructuralist academic analysis), to ensure that art moves smoothly through the cycles of capital across the globe.

It is possible to dream up a new language for art and craft. With criticism as flimsy as International Art English, it isn't difficult to imagine a human alternative that doesn't sound like it came out of a parodic word generator. The New Crafts criticism, based in everyday experience, doesn't require you to have been "cultivated" by any particular academic or cultural perspective. It doesn't rely upon its readers' familiarity with critical theory. It relies upon phenomenological (that is, in relation to or in orientation with our own bodily perspective) observations that most people feel comfortable declaring. Less people would leave the contemporary art museum feeling baffled, and more people would leave thinking about what they can make, because they don't feel like they need an overly verbose theory as a starting point. Instead, they can begin from their sensual observations. Speak your truth about what you see in front of you. Say how you feel, say what makes you tick. Below are some examples of International Art English, and some suggestions for how you can be a New Crafts Critic. (Anyone of any age, ability, or background can try it.)

Examples of International Art English Criticism:

These are sentences I have made up off the top of my head which could easily fit in any contemporary press release - and could work for multiple different shows or artists. There's not a lot of specificity, so you can recycle or re-order these words, as if they were magnets on a refrigerator, to apply to countless different "contemporary problems."

- The spatiotemporal dynamics of the piece illuminate the slippages of subjectivities.
- The aporia inherent in the lacunae of the artist's visual representation of these globalities provoke a sense of productive discomfort.
- Biopolitical negations arise as the artist's practice confronts the notion of totality, forming and (re)forming her suggestive pieces.

- This body of work appears to oscillate freely between these tensions, establishing rhizomatic orientation(s) towards belief systems.
- The inherent alienation engendered by these unilateral encounters troubles the dream of heterogeneous community-building.
- The artist's attempt to interrogate reality radically alters sites of subjugation.
- The dimensionality of the piece suggests a transversal of boundaries surrounding the architecture of forms.
- The work serves to emulate the complex politics of desirability while enacting new verbosities.
- · In their rejection of totalities, the artist queers autonomy in the face of liminality.
- The malleability of this space invites various transversals, negations, and formations which represent the unlimited nature of the void.

Alternatively, this is much more understandable:

Suggestions for Domestic, New-Crafts Criticism:				
•	It is a beautiful shade of that I could stare at for hours.			
•	I want to hang it up in my kitchen/bathroom/bedroom/hallway/outside/other:_			

one.)
I relate/am repulsed by/want to dance with/don't connect with/other:____ (circle one) to the people/place(s)/object(s) in the image. Why?____

(circle

- That is an object that I want to hold in my hands.
- I trust/don't trust it (circle one) because _____(list your evidence here.)
- It feels/smells/tastes/sounds/looks like
- It reminds me of ____. (Something you have seen before: anything, it doesn't have to be another piece of art. it can be a piece of music, some trash you saw rolling around on the curb this morning, your grandma's Tupperware collection.)



•	It made me smile/laugh/cry/yell/throw up/roll my eyes/other:	(circle one)
•	This piece makes me want to make something similar/different/in	the same c

 This piece makes me want to make something similar/different/in the same color/ with the same material/other:____ (circle one.)

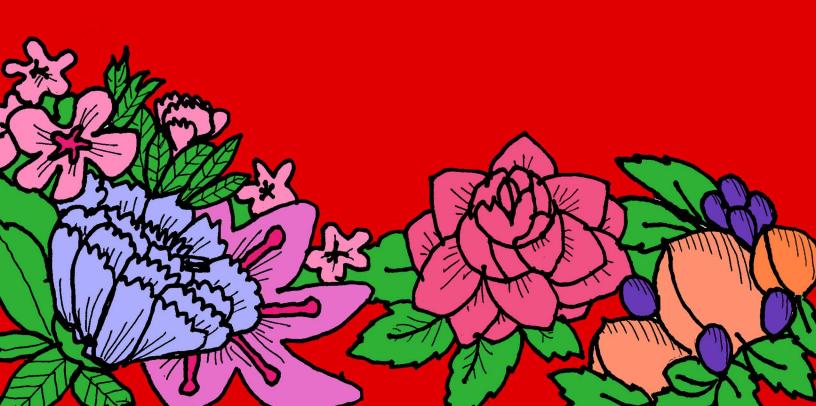
If I were the artist, I would have done this differently:_____.

This piece taught me something I didn't know before: _____.

My personal/regional/local experience gives me an insight into this work because

The use of ____ does/doesn't (circle one) work to cause this reaction:____ because: .

It is not necessarily a valiant leap to make. But being unafraid of criticism does feel a bit brave though, in opposition to the impossible-to-understand academic alternatives. If ornament is a crime, let's commit thousands of them. If International Art English is the language we are supposed to speak in, let's invent thousands of new tongues. Let's be unafraid to speak in everyday language, criticise sharply or fawn over work, and make something of it or reject it. We can stab at beating heart of what we really mean using our everyday experiences, reject meaningless art-babble, and use our emotions and senses as a creative solution to wipe up the destruction.





Optional Exit Questionnaire:

- 1. Have ever distanced yourself from crafts before in the past because you wanted to be a bona-fide artist? Has your attitude changed?
- 2. Conversely, have you ever felt alienated from "art' because you felt that what you were doing could only be classified as 'craft?'
- 3. More broadly, have you ever felt alienated from a community? Who? Why?
- 4. Art and Craft are not the only binaries to be transgressed. What other binaries do you want to see deconstructed?
- 5. What problems can you diagnose the art world with?
- 6. Do you have ideas for ways to progress from here?

If you want to, please email your feelings or ideas at ktroyq@gmail.com.

Go forth and craft by yourself or with other people, critique, ask questions, decorate your home - make things. The sculptor Eva Hesse once declared that she would "paint against every rule I or others have invisibly placed. Oh, how they penetrate throughout and all over." It could be cause for despair that these rules are everywhere, but it is also exciting to invent ways to get around them. She didn't end up painting as much - she mostly sculpted - but what was the difference if she was manipulating material with her body? Painting is sculpting, sculpting is painting, and it's all crafts. Saying that is against most rules, but we've already come up with a new set of rules, and you can come up with your own.

"The fatal weakness of manifestos is their inherent lack of evidence," remarked the architect Rem Koolhaas.² While have refrained from listing too much dry philosophical eighteenth century aesthetic theory, because it's not only often racist and sexist but just boring, I don't want to make this an entirely evidence-free manifesta. My bibliography can double as a reading list if you want to mine the evidence and come up with your own conclusions. I have a lot of online copies of these articles and books that I would love to lend you - email me and I will hook you up.

1Hesse, Eva. Eva Hesse: Diaries. Yale University Press, 2016. 2 He wrote this in his own manifesto, *Delirious New York.*

Packnowledgements P

I owe a lot to the ideas of Carolyn Korsmeyer, which were introduced to me by my friend and collaborator, Victoria Mycue. Gender and Aesthetics is a fabulous, extremely lucid text and I can't recommend it enough. Victoria's method is New Crafts personified: she is an artist, a philosopher, and a filmmaker all at once. When we paint together, we repeat to each other occasionally: "remember - no gods! No masters!" The finished pieces are never the product of an individual effort. I am also indebted to Francis Louvis, who was willing to talk to me about art theory in a conversational way. Thank you, Francis, for being so supportive and letting me use the woodshop constantly. Thank you also to the incredible Amy Gartrell, who first introduced me to art in a classroom setting and gave me the confidence to do studio art in college, which I never thought I was "talented" enough to do. A million thanks of course to the marvelous Lyde Sizer, who allowed me to do this project in the first place, in an academic class no less! And thank you endlessly to Jane Garnett, who first assigned me the works of Kant, and the rest is history.



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