

This letter is addressed to the members of that minority of a minority, you who are involved in both art and politics.

To those involved in politics:

The point of this exhibition to you is your belief that it places your political aspirations and ideals in a better context. You believe these scraps reflect on you some of the glory of both present cultural activities and past cultural history.

Political activity, in parliamentary democracies such as Australia, consists of exploiting people in their own name, using all the means of manipulation that a technological society provides. Since a true cultural history is a necessity for understanding the nature of exploitation and opposing it, you support art, which produces an instant false cultural history. You thus remove the historical perspective which would support effective revolt, a revolt wiping out not just capitalism but politics, art, and pointless technology. This is why the Labor Party's arts policy is in fact exactly the policy one would expect of a conservative right wing party.

To those involved in art:

You who are in any way involved in art are conventionally considered more educated, perspicacious and sophisticated than the majority of society, especially by yourselves. Your support is therefore a boon in itself, apart from its propaganda value.

The cultural history here represented is not the history of the working class, or even that of the majority of the middle class. Since the interests of the dominant group in society are always projected as ultimate values in themselves, art has become an end in itself. Originally the decorative artefacts of the ruling class, art is now projected as the repository of the highest values of society, values which in fact serve only the interests of the ruling class. In this way the natural values of the majority of society are replaced by those of the ruling class: competition substituted for co-operation, centralisation for self-government, individualism and originality for collective spirit, authority for agreement, etc. Politics is the activity of enforcing these values which art epitomises. The association of the two in this exhibition is therefore only to be expected. By your involvement in art you support anti-human values.

To artists:

In as much as they accept the forms of activity sanctioned by technological society, artists are politicians, propagandists for the machines they become. Politics is manipulation, the imposition of uniformity, the suppression of initiative, the enforcement of acceptance; the opposite of freedom. Truly creative cultural activity is the creation of, and participation in, new forms of social activity. As such, it is not the action of one, but many. There are individuals answerable for their actions, but not individualists consciously leaving a trail of evidence for their own future glorification. The artist as culture hero is really a symbol of alienation, a symbol of culture as the manipulation of society rather than culture as its everyday life. Culture and politics are basically antagonistic, and though each may attempt to exploit the other, as is happening in this exhibition, ultimately one can only succeed at the expense of the other.

‘Whatever is great in a cultural sense is nonpolitical, is even antipolitical.’

Ian Milliss

December 1974

Source: ?