

# New artist?

Ian Milliss

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The main points that I wish to make in these notes will not be illustrated by direct reference to any of the works in this exhibition. All the objects and activities, ancient and modern, radical and conservative, which are currently lumped together as "art" are the victims and/or tools of the same repressive social process; by reaching your own understanding of the way in which the works in this exhibition are part of that process you will be helping to break down that process.

The society in which we live has a vested interest in preventing any realisation that all people can act creatively, that almost everyone is an artist "in the way of his work, in an area of his interests, in the manner that he views the world".

The complete institutionalisation of all "culture" has been a particular phenomenon of the twentieth century. The avowed aim of much twentieth century art has been to bring about social-cultural change; this had never really been an aim of previous art, although it was often a slight result. The existing power structures in society have fought back by developing "culture" as something separate from the common world. This has been reinforced by the distortion of history to present the culture of the ruling class in any era as the only culture, ignoring all evidence to the contrary. Because it has economic power over artists, and control of the communication media, the ruling class is able to distort and absorb any attempt at radical cultural change, whilst easily recruiting other "artists" to promulgate existing values or to divert dangerous movements into formalism. Official culture is to real culture what parliamentary democracy is to real democracy.

A mystique, which seems to be increasing, has been erected around "creativity" and around the "artists" whose exclusive domain it is presented as. This mystique serves to isolate "culture" from the great majority of people who, by virtue of their "uneducated tastes" are not deserving of it; to them it appears to be an intimidating, institutionalised mystery. They are made to believe that they have no control over the formulation of the values by which they measure their lives.

"Artists" are not considered artists because they are creative personalities or have creative life styles, but because they produce a commodity called "art". "Art" is any object or activity that can be used to maintain the closed system of the art world, of "culture". It is not the real social-cultural value of an object or activity that defines its value as "art" but rather the ease with which it can be commercially exploited or turned into cultural propaganda.

It is necessary for the system to continually expand the range of things considered "art", partly for economic reasons (planned obsolescence!) but mainly to alienate, and thus render safe, areas of existence which are dangerous to the existing social structure, which expose the contradictions between supposed cultural values and the violence and exploitation they disguise. Once an activity can be accommodated within the scheme of "cultural patronage" it can obviously have no real force as a political gesture.

One interesting side effect of the extreme conservatism of Australian "culture" is that overseas "culture" is treated one of these dangerous areas of experience, to be absorbed. This is why the Australian version of an art movement is always conservative and, even now, years later than overseas counterpart; if it doesn't seem as interesting that's because its function is to miss the point.

Two artists in this exhibition illustrate more than most of the others the workings of "official culture". Alex Danko is an almost classical example of the "radical artist"-capitalist, he exploits "culture" as a developer exploits land. Tony Coleing, on the other hand, produces work which is very subtly satirical of our "cultural" values, but the form of his work makes it unintentionally just as exploitative and exploitable as Danko's; the road to hell is paved with such good intentions.

Cultural change and political change form an equation which results in each being the cause of the other while impossible without the other. The substitution of "official culture" for everyday life, real culture, in the general consciousness, is the means capitalist society uses to break the connection. Since we are all brought up with this false view of cultural history we are alienated from our real history and are therefore unable to interpret our experience vis-a-vis society properly.

Given the terrorist nature of "culture" as it stands, and given that Australian society has little other cultural life, real social change, the radical reformulation of experience, which would result in the redistribution of power and resources, becomes problematic. The "official" values which must be rejected are often so ingrained as to be mistaken for reality. The concept of "culture heroes", for example, has as its mainstay the belief that people become famous because of some innate personal quality, even if their ideas are "radical" or "anti-establishment"; in fact nobody (while still alive) becomes famous and therefore powerful, in our society unless their fame will in the long run help perpetuate the status quo.

If you are doing anything at all valuable, "official culture" will eventually seek you out, no matter what disguise you wear. The only viable solution seems to be to live as anonymously as possible, spreading your ideas or insights no further than people you actually know. The ideas in these notes, for instance, have been worked out in discussion with various friends, and have only been written down after calculating their value against the fact that once published they are in the same position as that which they criticise.

The instilled values of capitalist-technological society lead us to make value judgements which bring about the division between "culture" and the way we actually live, although it appears almost conspiratorial once it is perceived. In Australia where the cultural roots of the dominant white society are geographically on the other side of the world, "official culture" with its distortions of history is accepted almost universally because the physical evidence which would contradict it is lacking. This distortion is particularly telling amongst political radicals; they either accept "official culture" unquestioningly, as the Labor Party has in its formation of the Council for the Arts, or unthinkingly reject culture in its entirety for pure politics. Either way they render the social change they seek impossible.

Once the monopoly of "artists" over "creativity" and "culture" is broken, it becomes possible for people to create real history and real change from their own personal experience. This is what "art" really is, and for obvious reasons it cannot be found in "art" galleries nor in exhibitions nor in books; only by discarding the concept altogether and then, acting on our own awareness, changing our lives, does the concept gain meaning.

To break through our alienation is to act creatively, and to break through our alienation right now in Australian society means changing our everyday life, altering our relationships with others, with society as a whole, with the city and country; means, in other words, political change. If real culture lies in the total of all our everyday lives then it is possible for any of us to change cultural values by changing the way we live.

When I talk about real culture, real art, real creativity, real artists, I am trying to use concepts which "official culture" has debased or distorted. The only way they can regain the meaning they should have is for us to reject them entirely. We must reform reality to create a society in which, if people cared to use them, they would have meaning, but in which no-one would care to use them; a society in which the ersatz meaningfulness of "culture" is replaced by an unmediated awareness of reality, by the self conscious activity of living, of maintaining and directing our society ourselves.

Ian Milliss

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