

HANDY HINTS

The Stuckists (est. 1999)

ant-anti-art

The first Remodernist art group

Handy hints for students and others on some of the thinking behind Stuckism and the development and theory of Remodernism.

The Stuckists are a small independent group of artists who believe passionately in the painting of pictures. They are a model for like-minded people round the world who wish to stand up for the heart and soul of art.

Remodernism heralds a new epoch and is the antidote to the spiritual bankruptcy of Post Modernism. Remodernism stands for content, meaning and communication - subjectivity, emotional engagement, integrity, love, enthusiasm and a spiritual renaissance in society, art and the creative life.

1. Students should be inspired by and study the artists who they love as this is their gift to us to help us develop our own vision. (In Japanese there is a single word for to learn and to copy).

2. The language of the visionary artist is by nature always subjective, limited and partial, this is its power not its weakness. Personal truth, sought for with integrity, communicates to the inner world of us all and therefore contains the whole.

3. Objectivity is only useful in discerning the truth of our subjectiveness.

4. The naming of names and the demarcation of the arts.

It is not fascism to name a brick a brick, a shoe a shoe, a horse a horse or a painting as art.

Standing on the ground is not a type of flying. Calling walking walking does not devalue walking or suggest that walking is some how inferior to jumping up and down. Declaring a dead horse hung from the ceiling of a gallery not to be art is not racism or hatred of dead horses. It is a value judgement, and here on earth value judgements are of value.

The making of video films and the reproducing of computer images are not the avant-garde. They are a comfortable niche for people who are afraid of energy and don't like getting their hands dirty.

Computer 'art' is patterns and bad graphics. You have good film making (subjectivity, emotional engagement, moral dilemma) and you have bad film making (immoral, objective and boring), and you have art film making (just plain boring). By boring we mean it could be there or not be there and it would make no difference, but it would be better if it wasn't.

You have a painting department. You have a sculpture department. You have a film department (where you make films). You have a fashion department, which is clothes.

The painting of pictures is the painting of pictures. People agree that a shoe is a shoe and a brick is a brick, not out of dogma or closed-mindedness but to avoid walking around with bricks strapped to their feet.

A sculpture is a sculpture.

What is wrong with mixed media? What is wrong with earth, salt, mustard, a fried egg, chewing gum, marmalade and a sausage on your dinner plate?

5. Sculptors who don't sculpt aren't sculptors.

6. Freedom through limitation. Honouring our limitations. Integrity of materials is depth. Rather than being a limit, the limitations of a medium are a liberation from limitation. We must be limited to gain freedom.

Addiction to the unlimited is the worst limitation of all. That's why we have fifty-five terrestrial television stations all broadcasting crap, 60,000,000 cars all driving bumper to bumper to nowhere and an identikit fast food outlet on every street corner of every town of the world.

7. Technique is not a goal in itself, it is a means of portraying the vision. The danger of distraction by the technical, the formal and the material, is that their reality acts as a block to the artist's inner vision, because it fools you in to believing that you insight when all you have is a conjuring trick. What is conventionally considered a skill can in fact be a handicap.

8. To paint important pictures the artist has to be unafraid of being unimportant. The spiritual artist has to have the guts to search for God, fail, search, fail and look again.

9. Artist are often very flawed people. In fact it is essential to be flawed because if you are not flawed you are deceiving yourself, which is the biggest flaw of all. To deal honestly with ourselves and thereby raise consciousness is not an easy task. The first stage of growth is being realistic about who we are, what we are and where we are now. We have to be able to accept our feelings. If we feel inadequate, weak, angry, pathetic, proud, bumptious or self righteous, we start there and paint it. It is not a problem to feel these things. It means that you are a normal well balanced human being.

10. It is possible not to believe in God and be more spiritual than somebody who does believe in God.

Making a picture is an act of faith. Faith is not knowing that God exists or that everything is going to be comfortable and cosy. Faith entails bravery. Faith is found and lost again and again. Faith means that we try to deal with ourselves and life fairly and honestly especially when we don't think that we're quite up to it.

11. It can be very tempting, especially for the contemporary artist, to hide behind his or her precious style and become stuck. An extreme example of this is in the ironic copying of a previous work by another artist, which

is then claimed as 'new' original work. This is of course completely different to the traditional practice of copying the work of the masters in order to learn. It is also different to an interpretation of a previous work, whether in homage or as satire. Through the sincere copying of work out of respect we can gain insight into the shared dilemma of being a human being with shared challenges, problems, fears, hopes and limitations.

12. The Remodernist accepts everything in life but only for exactly what it is, not more and yet not less. Everything has its function and its purpose.

13. The spiritual must be connected with the everyday. An idea that is not properly manifest remains a fantasy.

14. Art can no longer be funny little games that you can't see because they're not really there.

15. The spiritual artist, the Remodernist, must walk along the road, go to the seaside, buy ice creams, bonk and jump naked from a bush. In fact they carry on exactly as they were doing before, but with a new perception.

16. The soul of art is integrity.

17. Remodernism advocates an art that is the first kind of art that man did - cave painting.

18. It is quite obvious that the apparent material winners in this world are not necessarily finding happiness and are in fact often just getting unhappier. People think materialism is going to solve all their problems but the real problem isn't material and neither is the solution. Turning everything in the world into a commodity is not the most intelligent way of finding happiness. Materialism with no thought of consequence makes bigger problems than the small ones it solves.

19. The spiritual path means by definition that we often experience ourselves as not measuring up. But that doesn't mean that we lose heart - far from it. This not measuring up is how we actually relate to the truth of who we are. Conceptualism short circuits this natural organic process, which is the actual beauty and worth of art, and replaces it with instant gratification and the silliness of its clever ideas.

20. Modern art, over the course of its development, has increasingly followed the letter of the law but not the spirit. Art theorists have made observations on historical art. These observations have been turned into definitions. These definitions have been wilfully and perversely misinterpreted by art reductionists, who appear no more than overgrown children seeking to outwit parental rules, and with as little foresight of the consequences of their actions as infants playing at the edge of cliff.

21. Let us consider the integral value of two different approaches to art. Without financial and critical reward is it conceivable that Damien Hirst would have stayed at home for 20 years pickling sheep in his bedroom? I think we can confidently say no to this question. This is because his work is not about taxidermy, art or meaning. The purpose of such a fashion/fetish object for its creator is the attention, adulation and financial gain that it commands.

At the other end of the spectrum is the example of Vincent van Gogh whose work was fuelled by an intense love and philosophy, a burning desire to contribute through the expression of his vision for the benefit of humanity. He worked and studied for many years in relative obscurity to find the means of expressing this vision. Van Gogh didn't give up on painting because his work was a commercial disaster. He continued because the communicating of personal and universal truth is the real value and reward of art.

22. The rational and the material (traditionally male characteristics) have triumphed over feeling and intuition (traditionally associated with the female). Women have quite rightly deplored the male chauvinism rampant in our society and so, as sensitive artists, do we. We likewise deplore the women who have assumed and exhibited the worst aspects of this male chauvinism in life and in an art which only too obviously manifests its barrenness. The only point of feminism is in achieving equal recognition for the male and the female.

23. It is time for art to grow up.

24. Artists are only artists when they are doing art. They are not an artist when they wake up in the morning. They are not an artist when they water flowers, or get drunk and swear on channel 4.

25. In truth you can't be what you do: you can only do what you do and be what you are. What you are is you. Someone who believes that they are what they do is either a madman or a fool. What happens to someone who smugly considers themselves to be a car driver and loathes pedestrians, when they have to get out of their car and walk down the road? We are not anything we do, but human beings who do things. It is a lack of self confidence and an inflated ego (two states that always accompany each other) that creates this need for a label in substitute for character.

26. Joseph Beuys, the artist who shares the anti-establishment establishment's accolade of being anti-establishment (along with all Brit Artists), is cited as a genius for stating that all people are really artists. The Stuckists claim their right to the title of genius by proclaiming that all people are brain surgeons.

27. The title of artist is one that has to be earned through doing art for more than five minutes. Crap builders are not known as builders - they are known as crap.

28. The main point is that there is a reason for doing art: so that man communicates with him/herself, his/her fellows and thereby participates in the universal creative process.

29. True art is not the exhibition of existing objects but the transcendence of them through interpretation in another medium. This is the difference between life and art. Some people say that life and art are the same, in which case art is redundant as we already have life. This position is patently absurd. No one would sensibly suggest that Van Gogh's bed is of equal value to, or greater value than, his painting of it. This clearly illustrates the lie to the found object as art.

30. All things are qualitatively different. A shoe is not art because of its inherent shoeyness and usefulness as a kind of 'foot-glove'. Like wise a blancmange isn't a shoe. This isn't a dilemma for most people and, until relatively recently, was not a problem for artists. Certainly it is not an oversight by God. Actually it is because of the great benevolence of

existence: grass isn't a star system and a mountain isn't a pear tree. All things have their own organic pattern which is to be celebrated in art.

31. Remodernism celebrates diversity and de-centralisation. Rather than a bland uniform art, designed for easy global consumption, Remodernism respects the diverse artistic traditions of the world.

32. There is the outward journey into the world and there is the inner journey into the self. Both are equally important and actually the same thing.

33. The apparent solidities and separations of the material world are, as Einstein pointed out, "an illusion, albeit a stubborn one" - with which it is best to co-operate (rather than attempting to walk through walls). The artist, like any other human being, lives in the world of form and has to act according to the principles of nature.

34. Some people manage to understand that everything isn't really anything but then make the mistake of thinking it doesn't matter what you do.

35. Art is of most value when it is still wet on the canvas. The drier the paint becomes and the higher the financial value rises, the less true value the painting holds. The primary revelation is the most powerful connection to the whole.

36. Most artists are stupid and don't have many ideas. On the rare occasions that they do have an idea the novelty of it strikes them with such force that they attribute great value to it, such value in fact that they consider it to be the justification of a 'conceptual work of art'. They fail to realise that what for them is a blinding revelation appears as a crushing cliché to the rest of us.

37. The artist must take the right course, which may not be the course that we thought was the right one. It may mean being humble enough to appear pompous, arrogant, silly, and sentimental and courageous enough to accept our own confusion and ignorance and not be afraid of the simplicity of love.

38. People who do not know history have no sense of where they fit into anything and remain forever dazzled by the contemporary and the ephemeral.

39. Artists of today would be horrified if they had to create to the demands of church or state yet they are quite happy to kow-tow to the demands of a gallery, a critic or especially an advertising agency for the promotion of alcohol.

40. Art, undertaken with love and respect, brings renewed awareness of the colours and miracle of nature and heightens our connection to life and the divine.

41. Creativity is the most essential ingredient for a happy and healthy society and differentiates the human soul from that of a potato.

Billy Childish
Charles Thomson
11.4.2000

APPENDICES

(i) Practical advice.

In light of the lack of technical instruction in art colleges we give some basic tips for new painters.

1. Do not use household paint a) there is no guarantee that it is light-fast
b) there is no guarantee that the colours will mix properly.

2. Oil paint is capable of a higher pigment saturation than acrylic binder.

3. Artists oils are better than student quality, but some are still dubious.
Recommended are Michael Harding paints from Atlantis, 79 Plumbers' Row, E1. Tel 020 7377 8850.

4. Use white spirit to clean brushes and turps with medium to thin paint.

5. Fat over lean i.e. succeeding layers of paint should have a higher percentage of oil to turps in the medium to prevent cracking. Likewise, paint wet on wet, or wet on dry but not wet on semi- dry.

6. Do not use ivory black as undercoat (extremely high oil content).

7. Priming. Use artist primer not emulsion.

8. Buy *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* by Ralph Mayer.

(ii) Some inspiration from Van Gogh, Munch and Christ.

I feel that my work lies in the heart of the people, that I must keep close to the ground, that I must grasp life in its depths...

Vincent van Gogh 11th May 1882

Let us try to master the mysteries of techniques to such an extent that people are deceived by it and will swear by all that is holy that we have no technique.

Vincent van Gogh April 1884

Nature is not something that can be seen by the eye alone - it lies also within the soul, in pictures seen by the inner eye.

Edvard Munch 1907/8

What I'm trying to do most is bring life into it.

Vincent van Gogh, April 1885

I have become more of what I truly am.

Vincent van Gogh, October 1884

It would be well for us to lift up our eyes at times, as if to see the invisible.

Vincent van Gogh, 30th October 1877

Jesus said, 'If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.'

The Gnostic Gospels

(iii) Recommended study

Thomas Gainsborough 1727 - 1788

He started off painting quite badly, he painted in his own way, his own style and technique. Gainsborough pioneered landscape painting by painting landscapes when it was completely unfashionable and nobody bought them. An Influence on Turner.

J.M.W. Turner 1775 - 1851

A true father of Modernism who took his paints and palette out into the raw elements to bring light, vitality and personal impression to European art.

Hokusai 1760 - 1849 and Hiroshige 1797 - 1858

Japanese printmakers bringing colour and vision of the everyday to their work. A huge influence on western art that went far beyond the Impressionists and informs Stuckism today.

Vincent van Gogh 1853 - 1890

A man wrestling with his so called lack of ability to bring a new depth and meaning to art, and one of the greatest examples of clear and dedicated artistic endeavour. The candidness and straightforward approach of Van Gogh's work typifies the essence of Remodernism.

Edvard Munch 1863 - 1944

A visionary who, like Van Gogh, ignored his detractors to wrestle with his own neurosis and transmute his inner struggle into inspirational art. One of the true masters of the Modernist school before it declined into formalism and abstraction, thereby avoiding having to face anything that matters about being a human being.

Die Brücke 1905 - 1913

The last roar of modernism and the last burst of passion and energy in western art.

Dada 1915 -1922

A movement that was deliberately anti-art, which was fine whilst it lasted.
Warning: to copy anti-art and to claim that it is art is somewhat missing the point.

Published by The Hangman Bureau of Enquiry
11 Boundary Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 6TS