

The Best Art Is Out of Sight

"The Art Nobody Knows" by Jed Perl, in *The New Republic* (Oct. 19, 1992), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Serious American artists today are in despair—though not over Senator Jesse Helms's (R.-N.C.) attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts. Rather, asserts Perl, author of *Gallery Going: Four Seasons in the Art World* (1991), their desperation results from the "near total collapse" of the "support system of galleries and grants and collectors and curators and publications that makes it possible for artists to have slow-developing, serious careers."

During the 1950s, and, to a lesser extent, through the 1970s, Perl says, the public face of the art world was "an imperfect but still pretty reliable mirror of the artists' art world." Aesthetic values reigned. With the explosion of pop art during the mid-1960s, however, the public art world became increasingly "tied to market values rather than aesthetic values. Pop art's subject matter dramatized the change: It was subject matter that had no private meaning for artists." Andy Warhol, a child of advertising, led the way. Today, the public art world lavishes attention on Cindy Sherman's huge Cibachrome self-portraits and Julian Schnabel's plate-smashings, but almost entirely neglects the important sculptures of Barbara Goodstein and the significant landscape paintings of Stanley Lewis. Goodstein, who works in plaster on plywood boards, is, in Perl's view, "the most original sculptor of her generation," yet she "has never had a dealer committed to her work, has never been the subject of a feature article in an art magazine, has never even had a work in a museum show."

Goodstein and Lewis are not alone, Perl says. There are many accomplished artists whose work rarely gets serious attention. He points to the figure sculpture of Natalie Charkow; the abstract paintings of Spencer Gregory, Bill

Barrell, Pat Adams, Shirley Jaffe, and Trevor Winkfield; "the geometricized realities that we encounter in the work of Jacqueline Lima, Richard Chiriani, and Alfred Russell, and . . . the various kinds of painterly painting that are done by Rita Baragona, Richard La Presti, Carl Plansky, Louisa Matthiasdottir, and Ned Small."

The now hype-ridden public art world, Perl contends, no longer has time for such artists, no longer nourishes "the incremental developments that are what art is all about . . . Fewer and fewer shows get reviewed; fewer and fewer galleries are willing to make the commitment to an artist's gradual development."

Museums have become the red-hot centers of art hype, Perl asserts. They now expect to draw huge audiences and feel the need to give them "a carefully shaped and predigested view of contemporary art." To do this, they "willfully deny the variety of the contemporary scene. Even as the number of artists at work has expanded geometrically, the number of artists included in major surveys has plummeted." Whereas important museum overviews of the art scene a generation ago included 100 or more artists, today's surveys often have only a half, or even a quarter, of that number.

Art magazines have further limited artists' opportunities to reach the public. During the past 20 years, Perl says, the magazines have "largely abandoned their old job of reporting on what goes on in the galleries and instead have become publicity machines for the art stars and the art star wannabees."

"The real artists are still working," Perl maintains. "The tragedy is that they have no way of making contact with the audience that really cares."

OTHER NATIONS

The New Middle East

"Rethinking the Middle East" by Bernard Lewis, in *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1992), 58 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

With the failure of the New World Order to materialize following the Persian Gulf War, many observers concluded that the Middle East re-

mains essentially the same as before. On the contrary, says Princeton's Bernard Lewis, the Middle East is now at the end of an era nearly