

## ***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."

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## **OTHER NATIONS**

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## ***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

two centuries old.

The Gulf War made several significant changes in the region manifest. First of all, Lewis points out, it marked the abandonment of the long-cherished dream of pan-Arabism. It was, after all, "a war between Arab rulers, in which America [only] reluctantly became involved" and in which Israel was only a brief distraction.

The war also revealed that oil is no longer an effective weapon in the hands of the producer countries. "At a time when the oil supplies from two major producers were cut off—Kuwait's by the Iraqis, Iraq's by the coalition . . .," Lewis observes, "the price of oil actually fell." The power of the oil weapon is not likely to be restored, in his view. Not only are other sources of oil being found and developed, notably in the former Soviet republics, but oil's environmental and political drawbacks have spurred the search for other fuels. Oil producers realize that using their black gold as a weapon will only hasten the day when it will be superseded as an energy source.

Even more profound changes have come to the Middle East, Lewis points out, with the end of the Cold War. The most obvious is in the very definition of the Middle East. Its long-time northern limit—the Soviet frontier—no longer exists, and Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the other countries north of that line "are closely related to the countries south of it, speaking the

same or similar languages, professing the same religion, and sharing the same historical memories." The newly independent republics are being assiduously courted by the Saudis, Iranians, and Turks. A new, enlarged Middle East is sure to emerge.

An even greater change—although not yet fully grasped by many—is the end of the era of foreign domination that began in 1798, when Napoleon Bonaparte landed in Egypt, then an Ottoman province, and occupied it with relative ease. The United States is now the world's sole superpower, with no serious challenge to its influence in the Middle East (or anywhere else), but it is not an imperial power. The countries of the Middle East now face "a challenging and, for some, frightening prospect: [that] of having to take responsibility for their own affairs."

In the past, *freedom* in Arab discourse has meant simply national independence and *democracy* has referred only to the sham parliamentary regimes that the British and French set up. Now, Lewis says, many Arab thinkers and writers are showing "a new awareness of the deeper meaning of freedom and a truer sense of democracy," and many of them argue that liberal democracy is the answer to the Arab world's problems. Whatever the outcome of this debate, Lewis concludes, the nations and peoples of the Middle East now hold their destinies in their own hands.

## ***How to Stimulate Russia's Economy***

"Yeltsin's Reforms: Gorbachev II" by Marshall I. Goldman, in *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1992), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2400 N St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037-1153.

The Russian economy, twisted by seven decades of Soviet central planning, is the Gordian knot of reformers. Closing down unproductive factories is not sufficient, contends Goldman, associate director of Harvard's Russian Research Center. Successful reform means putting the products consumers want and need in their hands. Mikhail Gorbachev apparently did not appreciate that, and Goldman worries that Russia's President Boris Yeltsin may not, either.

Of the 12 economic reform proposals that Gorbachev considered (without ever fully implementing any of them), none "focused on that basic consideration, at least not in the short term," Goldman points out. Gorbachev began in 1985 by trying to stimulate production of machine tools. No visible improvement in

daily life resulted, and the public, initially in favor of change, soon grew disillusioned. When Gorbachev resigned at the end of 1991, inflation was rampant and government monopolies remained intact. Racketeers had moved in on many of the few private enterprises that did emerge.

Yeltsin brought in a new team of economic advisers, many of whom were advocates of radical, Western-style reform. Although the Russian president endorsed privatization, he emphasized the need for a "one-shot" shift to a system of market prices—"shock therapy," as some called it. His comprehensive reform plan, unveiled on January 2, 1992, freed all prices from Moscow's control, with exceptions for bread, milk, and other basics. The Russian president hoped that higher prices would curb de-