

## *Art without Audiences*

“Simple Hearts: An Address regarding the Consequences of Supply-Side Aesthetics” by Dave Hickey, in *Art Issues* (Summer 1998), 8721 Santa Monica Blvd., Ste. 6, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

The art world has grown to massive proportions in recent decades, thanks to the largesse of the federal government, major universities, and public and private foundations. But something vital is missing: an actively engaged public, contends Hickey, a columnist for *Art Issues* and a professor of art at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The museums and other institutions exhibiting contemporary art have become indifferent to what their audience thinks. Since the works of art “are presumed to be valuable by governmental fiat, by executive decision,” he says, the public’s opinion of them has been rendered superfluous.

This is a profoundly mistaken approach, Hickey argues. It is the beholders, not the artist, who give value and meaning to works of art, who see that the works are remembered, because they *want* them to be remembered. By disenfranchising the beholders, the National Endowment for the Arts, the universities, and the rest of today’s artistic “support systems” have isolated artists from the broader culture. As a result, Hickey asserts, the practice of art is dying. “Art stops mattering to the individual citizens of the republic and begins to fade from public consciousness, where it *must* live. And it is fading today, as a consequence of . . . an obsession with origins, intentions, and production—an obsession with the people who make the work, their personal egos and identities, and at the expense of those citizens who might invest it with value.”

The art world, Hickey maintains, was led astray in 1972, when President Richard

M. Nixon took what had been the modest National Endowment for the Arts created four years earlier and initiated its “substantial, ongoing expansion,” transforming public art institutions into “the arbiters and primary providers of contemporary visual culture to the nation.” Simultaneously, the government phased out tax credits for donations of art to public institutions, making it less attractive for patrons to buy works of art.

“By expanding government largesse to artists and art institutions while reducing governmental incentives for commerce in art,” Hickey writes, “Nixon effectively shifted the focus of art discourse from its consequences to its causes—creating a situation in which art was much more likely to be made and much less likely to be sold.” By funding museums and other institutions, Nixon “made possible government-regulated venues in which this art (which wasn’t going to be bought) could be exhibited.” Before long, this “publicly funded art world began to conceive itself in opposition to the world in which secular commerce in art took place.” Contemporary artists became increasingly isolated and irrelevant.

But the situation is changing, he believes. “The government is tiring of funding art about which no one cares.”

In the meantime, Hickey has a suggestion for the artists, critics, and educators who are supposed to be above commerce: “If we are really as selfless and public-spirited and committed to art as we say we are, let’s just give it away, as a public service.”

## OTHER NATIONS

### *Poland’s Shocking Success*

“Miracle on the Vistula” by Elizabeth Pond, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1998), CSIS, 1800 K St. N.W., Ste. 400, Washington, D.C. 20006.

In 1992, after two years of “shock therapy,” Poland was reeling. Real wages had declined 20 percent, gross domestic product had fallen 35 percent, exports to the imploded Soviet Union had dropped 90 per-

cent, and unemployment had climbed to 12 percent. When ex-Communists emerged victorious in the 1993 general election, the message seemed clear: the radical plan to shift rapidly from a command economy to a

market one had failed. But in fact, writes Pond, co-author of *The German Question and Other German Questions* (1996), the shock therapy was just starting to work.

Despite its campaign demands for higher wages, pensions, and agricultural doles, the new government formed by the ex-Communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish Peasant Party, she says, “basically carried on” the shock therapy plan devised in late 1989 by the Solidarity government finance minister, Leszek Balcerowicz. While fudging on mass privatization of state-held enterprises, the new SLD-dominated government “kept its hands off the new small- and medium-sized private firms that were becoming the engine of the economy.”

In retrospect, Pond says, 1993 was when the economy turned around, growing by

almost four percent. Then, despite an official 16 percent jobless rate, consumption took off. “Auto purchases soared. Families and firms acquired computers at a rate that would soon exceed per capita ownership in Germany. The subterranean kiosks in the passageways under Jerozolimskie Street in Warsaw got glassed in and gentrified (and began paying taxes). . . . Thirty-five-year-olds put to work the trading skills they had acquired in a decade of dodging Communist customs inspectors with cars full of sausages and shoes. Twenty-five-year-olds began snaring well-paid junior management jobs in Western companies. . . . Poles began thinking, in a sea change, that individual talents and drive were more important than personal connections for success.”

By 1995, industrial production had

## *In the North Korean Gulag*

In the North Korean communist regime’s “far-reaching system of terror, degradation, and slave labor,” an estimated 200,000 people are now being held in more than 10 different prison camps for such “crimes” as reading a foreign newspaper or complaining about the food situation, report the editors of *Journal of Democracy* (July 1998). Sun Ok Lee, who served a five-year prison term and later defected to South Korea, tells of her experience in the “North Korean gulag”:

*On 26 October 1986, I was arrested on the false charge of “government property embezzlement,” and was subjected to all kinds of severe tortures and cruel treatment during the period of preliminary investigation for 14 months. I was so badly beaten, kicked, and suffocated that I could hardly walk from the cell to the interrogation office. They had to drag me all the way. My lip was torn half way to my ear. They frequently poured cold water on my body and left me outside in freezing winter nights for one hour each time. They called this “fish freezing.” Once I was left on the floor unconscious for many hours and woke up to find worms in my wounds. . . .*

*My days in North Korea’s Kaechon Prison began in November 1987, 14 months after my arrest. . . . Eighty percent of the prisoners were ordinary housewives who had committed a minor offense, such as attempting to buy a blanket in the market for her daughter’s wedding. . . .*

*A 52-year-old housewife failed to detect a small needle in a huge pile of used cotton for army winter uniforms. She was sent to the punishment cell, a small space with a ceiling so low that the prisoner cannot stand. The walls have sharp spikes so that the prisoner cannot lean against them and a toilet hole at the bottom so that the prisoner cannot sit. A prisoner must stay there for a week. When she was released after a week, she could not walk and had to crawl on her hands and knees. However, she tried to work hard to accomplish her work quota and get a full ration. The guards kicked her many times when she could not move fast. One day she died on a cold floor. The senior guard in charge complained: “Are we going to waste another straw mat to get rid of this corpse?” Thus a dear housewife perished without the knowledge of her family. This was only the beginning, and I was to see many similar incidents in the years to come.*

recovered to its 1989 levels. Some 62 percent of the labor force was employed in the private sector. Trade was reoriented toward the West. Polish voters had enough confidence in the new democracy to vote a national icon—President Lech Walesa, the former Solidarity leader—out of office.

The economic boom continued, as output grew by more than six percent annually between 1994 and 1997. By 1997, “up to 65 percent or even 70 percent of the economy” was in the hands of the private sector. Unemployment was down to 12 percent, inflation to 14 percent. In the 1997 election, Balcerowicz, the architect of the shock therapy, was vindicated. His Freedom Union party won 13 percent of the vote and joined in a coalition government headed by the new Solidarity Election Action (AWS).

In less than a decade, writes Pond, the



*Sign of the times: Poland's central bank in Warsaw now occupies the former headquarters of the Polish Communist Party.*

Poles “have invented instant governments, parties, civil society, watchdog media, parliaments with the wit and integrity to pass responsible budgets and legislate for an unfamiliar world, judiciaries independent of politics, subordination of security services to elected officials, ombudsmen, functioning civil servants, local self-government, civilian control of the military, and the habits of individual initiative and risk. . . . Their initial faith that democracy brings affluence has been requited.”

## *Asia's Other Giant*

“Taking India Seriously” by James Manor and Gerald Segal, in *Survival* (Summer 1998), International Institute for Strategic Studies, 23 Tavistock St., London WC2E 7NQ England.

Foreign investors rushing to take advantage of economic opportunity in China in recent years have barely paused to notice Asia's other population giant, India. That neglect is not likely to last, contend Manor, a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, and Segal, director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London.

With a population (900 million) three-fourths the size of China's, India has an economy that is still only a little more than half as large: \$225 billion in gross domestic product in 1993, compared with China's \$425 billion. In 1996, India received slightly more than \$2 billion in foreign direct investment—while China raked in \$38 billion. Eighty-five percent of the money poured into China from abroad comes from ethnic Chinese, and India has no equiva-

lent diaspora.

However, India's foreign investment total is roughly what China's was in the early-to-mid-1980s. After China launched its economic reforms in 1979, the authors point out, it took five to seven years of sustained economic growth before the outside world saw “that China was serious about reforming its domestic economy and opening to the rest of the world.” Much the same, they say, may prove true of India, which—after decades of socialism and of shunning foreign trade and investment—embarked in 1991, under then-prime minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, on a path of economic reform.

Liberalization has not gone as far as free-market enthusiasts would like, the authors say, but their modesty has made the reforms politically sustainable. “Major progress has been made in industrial deregulation, in