

Marcel Duchamp

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Symposium at Philadelphia Museum College of Art, March 1961  
Address to a symposium at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art,  
March 1961

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First published in the Duchamp issue of *Studio International*, 1975

To imagine the future, we should perhaps start from the more or less recent past, which seems to us today to begin with the realism of Courbet and Manet. It does not seem in fact that realism is at the heart of the liberation of the artist as an individual, whose work, to which the viewer or collector adapt himself, sometimes with difficulty, has an independent existence.

This period of liberation rapidly gave birth to all the 'isms' which have followed one another during the last century, at the rate of one new 'ism' about every fifteen years.

I believe that to try and guess what will happen tomorrow, we must group the 'isms' together through their common factor, instead of differentiating them.

Considered in the framework of a century of modern art, the very recent examples of Abstract Expressionism clearly show the ultimate in the retinal approach begun by Impressionism. By 'retinal' I mean that the aesthetic pleasure depends almost entirely on the impression on the retina, without appealing to any auxiliary interpretation.

Scarcely twenty years ago the public still demanded of the work of art some representative detail to justify its interest and admiration.

Today, the opposite is almost true . . . the general public is aware the existence of abstraction, understands it and even demands it of the artists.

I am not talking about the collectors who for fifty years have supported this progression towards a total abandon of representation in the visual arts; like the artists, they have been swept along by the current. The fact that the problem of the last hundred years boils down almost entirely to the single dilemma of the 'representative and the non-representative' seems to me to reinforce the importance I gave a moment ago to the entirely retinal aspect of the total output of the different 'isms'.

Therefore I am inclined, after this examination of the past, to believe that the young artist of tomorrow will refuse to base his work on a philosophy as over-simplified as that of the 'representative or non-representative' dilemma.

I am convinced that, like Alice in Wonderland, he will be led to pass through the looking-glass of the retina, to reach a more profound expression.

I am only too well aware that among the 'isms' which I have mentioned, Surrealism introduced the exploration of the subconscious and reduced the role of the retina to that of an open window on the phenomena of the brain.

The young artist of tomorrow will, I believe, have to go still further in this same direction, to bring to light startling

new values which are and will always be the basis of artistic revolutions.

If we now envisage the more technical side of a possible future, it is very likely that the artist, tired of the cult for oils in painting, will find himself completely abandoning this five-hundred-year-old process, which restricts his freedom of expression by its academic ties.

Other techniques have already appeared recently and we can foresee that just as the invention of new musical instruments changes the whole sensibility of an era, the phenomenon of light can, due to current scientific progress, among other things, become the new tool for the new artist.

In the present state of relations between artists and the public, we can see an enormous output which the public moreover supports and encourages. Through their close connection with the law of supply and demand the visual arts have become a 'commodity'; the work of art is now a commonplace product like soap and securities.

So we can perfectly well imagine the creation of a union which would deal with all the economic questions concerning the artist . . . we can imagine this union deciding on the selling price of works of art, just as the plumbers' union determines the salary of each worker . . . we can even imagine this union forcing the artist to abandon his identity, even to the point of no longer having the right to sign his works. Would the total artistic output controlled by a union of this kind form a sort of monument to a given era comparable to the anonymous cathedrals?

These various aspects of art today bring us to look at it as a whole, in terms of an over-developed exoteric. By that I mean that the general public accepts and demands a lot from art, far too much from art; that the general public today seeks aesthetic satisfaction wrapped up in a set of material and speculative values and is drawing artistic output towards an enormous dilution.

This enormous dilution, losing in quality what it gains in quantity, is accompanied by a levelling down of present taste and its immediate result will be to shroud the near future in mediocrity.

In conclusion, I hope that this mediocrity, conditioned by too many factors foreign to art *per se*, will this time bring a revolution on the ascetic level, of which the general public will not even be aware and which only a few initiates will develop on the fringe of a world blinded by economic fireworks.

The great artist of tomorrow will go underground.