

Dialogue
 Vol. 11, No. 6
 Nov./Dec. 1988

In celebration of its tenth anniversary, Dialogue asked critics, curators, educators, artists, and arts administrators from across the country to comment on the art and art world of the past ten years.

APRIL KINGSLEY

I'm afraid my view of the 1978-1988 decade is pretty negative, a downer in fact. It seems to me that esthetics followed a curve very similar to that of our nation's politics, economics, and ethics. That curve went steadily downward from a high point of esthetic freedom and potential in the late 70s. The field was as wide open as I think it has ever been the history of art. There seemed to be room for every kind of artist—emerging, established, and late blooming, big city or small town, male and female, white and all the other skin colors. (We even had to stop using the word "flesh" for a warm, pale-yellowish pink hue.) Abstract, representational, symbolist, realist, decorative, minimal, conceptual, geometric, painterly, constructivist—you name it and you could find someone doing excellent work in that category somewhere in America.

But the freedom to find quality without the "help" of trend-promoting dealers and trend-following museums, to locate it all by oneself, frightened many critics, particularly those who had an obsession with being right. With a movie star in the White House, a rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer economy, a "me first" morality based on selfishness, and with the fall of feminism in the 80s, is it any wonder that the art world returned with a vengeance to the white male star system with money dictating the terms. Instead of doing the hard work of making up your own mind about art on its merits and then finding that dealers and museum people don't think your choices will sell or draw crowds, there is a much "safer" way. Just listen to a powerful dealer tell you what's going to be the big thing in the near future, because, if there's enough money behind it, you've got a sure thing, a self-fulfilling prophecy. A critic's place seems now to be on the bandwagon, just as a woman's place, now, is in the stove.

Having reached its nadir in the absurd pomposity of Neo-Geo, the art world has no where to go but up. One hopes the curve will bring us back full circle, back to the

freedom at least some of us relished ten years ago. Lest I leave too negative an impression of recent art, let me add that I think more great sculpture may have been produced in America in the last ten years than in any other period in our history. To a large extent, sculpture, being less marketable than painting, has been exempt from art world pressures. The result has been a silent explosion in the medium. I won't mention any names because only the stars will be familiar, but at some point in the future you'll know them all. I can wait. Being right in the long run is ultimately more gratifying anyway.

April Kingsley is a critic, curator, and art historian who lives in New York.

CAL KOWAL

He said, "Isn't the art interesting this time of year?"

They said, "Our family has real framed art up."

He said, "But do you find regional art responsive to any change outside of the regional isolation?"

A bulbous time for art—full of protean skimpiness...

They said, "It's a lovely town, such a nice place to live."

She said, "I can't take the lack of depth and no water."

He said, "What if art went away for awhile, where would the 'center' be?"

They said, "You must have a black tie."

Visual arts rag, lets-get-involved-by-way-of-the-flesh-mentality...

She said, "I am so excited about my colors; I just love them."

He said, "Have you ever talked to an artist?"

**"But the freedom to find quality without the 'help' of trend-promoting dealers and trend-following museums, to locate it all by oneself, frightened many critics, particularly those who had an obsession with being right."
 —KINGSLEY**