

ART opinion - The Politics Of The Senses

'A story about the ecstasy of love' (2017), Painting by Punk with Paints

Any act of producing modern art, from the visual arts to performing art, drama, music and poetry, is culturally charged.

Moving beyond the connection which many philosophers and sociologists have argued between individual freedom and the practicing an art or a craft for its own sake (for even even the self-professed materialist Karl Marx linked emancipated self-activity to creativity!) the production of art delves deep into individual and social psyche. It is to manifest a philosophy of aesthetics and ethics, which in itself is a journey of the artists' realisation of identity in a given physical and psychological space – a space often hostile.

Because it must be constantly revolutionary and moving, the production of art is the production of culture and so it must aim to antagonise systems of oppression – corporation, institutionalised religion and other capital – through an apotheosis of the senses. To contest unfreedom, artists must become activists of the senses.

Like any other activist seeking social justice, we become those of aesthetics in campaigns to subvert enforced norms and debunk inherently unjust motifs. In a post-truth world, we can speak languages of protest: the canvas, the body, the scoresheet become placards of sensual messages to share, to feast upon, to own. Because the human consciousness is made of senses, producing art can be a defiant political act. This is the politics of the senses.

A politics of aesthetics is flung onto centre stage from underground subcultures during periods of great instability and upheaval; much like the one we are living through now. All great art was made in defiance. Not as a tool for propaganda but as a call for liberation. We need only turn our gaze to the western world of the 20th century, to the bold, groundbreaking 'people's' art of revolutionary Russia, to the sexualised expressionist revolution of Weimar art in the period between the two world wars, to the violent marks of abstract expressionist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, to the vibrant, angry, punk energy that hijacked youth culture of Thatcherite Britain. All were aesthetic revolutions of the individual psyche. All were sensual resistances against structures of oppression. Anti-war sentiment, sexual liberation, racial equality, class struggle – these have all found a unified voice in art.

So the duty of artists is to energise and to inspire. To wire the soul of society. It is their call but it is also in their constitution, their genetic make up. Therein lies the

lever to elevate our body, mind and soul to the heart of our humanity, for the act of producing is also a process of self-realisation. The constant renegotiation of one's own identity. Each act of art is an individual uttering; each swishing brushstroke, each fluid movement of the limbs, each beat of poetry and note is a realisation and expression of human consciousness, of our place in the world. And each such act is as fluid as our consciousness: the alchemy of pleasures, desires, ethics, sexuality that make us dynamic individuals.

Consciousness is universal but the artist, the activist, makes a decision to both express an identity and to make sense of the world outside, in spite of enforced norms and its mechanics of oppression or puritanism. In fact because of them. And in this, she or he has no choice; or rather one choses to have no choice. It is in the act of making this choice between art as activism, art as craft or a commodified product, or not making it at all that lies mental strength. And until art becomes establishment herself, this is her ideal state. Suspended by a string in the space between adversity and apotheosis. Making beautiful pirouettes

I too see my artistic practice as directly connected to identity. My portraits are not only acts of understanding consciousness; they are utterances about my ownership of a (my) mental, physical and sexual body. Through portraiture I seek to connect the body, with those of others. Men, women, and everything in-between. I chose to paint unsettlingly. In its execution and themes it is an anarchic act of for realising my bodily freedom, connecting with others. And of doing so in a public way. It is the art of freedom. It is the art of connection. It is intimate and strong. It is sex. It is raw; intense jugged figures clad in pop colours. It is finding beauty in horror. It is an ode to humanity, but most of all, it is a vibrant, colourful war cry against puritanism, prejudice, and the tyranny of the institutionalised mind.

A politics of the senses.

Words / APHRODITE PAPADATOU

'I am Love' (2017), Painting by Punk with Paints