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# The Death of the Artist—and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur

Hard-working artisan, solitary genius, credentialed professional—the image of the artist has changed radically over the centuries. What if the latest model to emerge means the end of art as we have known it?

WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ | DEC 28 2014, 7:43 PM ET

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Javier Jaén

PRONOUNCE THE WORD *ARTIST*, to conjure up the image of a solitary genius. A sacred aura still attaches to the word, a sense of one in contact with the numinous. “He’s an *artist*,” we’ll say in tones of reverence about an actor or musician or director. “A true artist,” we’ll solemnly proclaim our favorite singer or photographer, meaning someone who appears to dwell upon a higher plane. Vision, inspiration, mysterious gifts as from above: such are some of the associations that continue to adorn the word.

Yet the notion of the artist as a solitary genius—so potent a cultural force, so determinative, still, of the way we think of creativity in general—is decades out of date. So out of date, in fact, that the model that replaced it is itself already out of date. A new paradigm is emerging, and has been since about the turn of the millennium, one that’s in the process of reshaping what artists are: how they work, train, trade, collaborate, think of themselves and are thought of—even what art is—just as the solitary-genius model did two centuries ago. The new paradigm may finally destroy the very notion of “art” as such—that sacred spiritual substance—which the older one created.

Before we thought of artists as geniuses, we thought of them as artisans. The words, by no coincidence, are virtually the same. *Art* itself derives from a root that means to “join” or “fit together”—that is, to make or craft, a sense that survives in phrases like *the art of cooking* and words like *artful*, in the sense of

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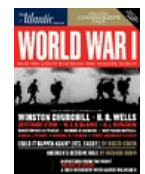
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“crafty.” We may think of Bach as a genius, but he thought of himself as an artisan, a maker. Shakespeare wasn’t an artist, he was a *poet*, a denotation that is rooted in another word for *make*. He was also a *playwright*, a term worth pausing over. A playwright isn’t someone who writes plays; he is someone who fashions them, like a wheelwright or shipwright.

A whole constellation of ideas and practices accompanied this conception. Artists served apprenticeships, like other craftsmen, to learn the customary methods (hence the attributions one sees in museums: “workshop of Bellini” or “studio of Rembrandt”). Creativity was prized, but credibility and value derived, above all, from tradition. In a world still governed by a fairly rigid social structure, artists were grouped with the other artisans, somewhere in the middle or lower middle, below the merchants, let alone the aristocracy. Individual practitioners could come to be esteemed—think of the Dutch masters—but they were, precisely, *masters*, as in master craftsmen. The distinction between art and craft, in short, was weak at best. Indeed, the very concept of art as it was later understood—of Art—did not exist.

ALL OF THIS began to change in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the period associated with Romanticism: the age of Rousseau, Goethe, Blake, and Beethoven, the age that taught itself to value not only individualism and originality but also rebellion and youth. Now it was desirable and even glamorous to break the rules and overthrow tradition—to reject society and blaze your own path. The age of revolution, it was also the age of secularization. As traditional belief became discredited, at least among the educated class, the arts emerged as the basis of a new creed, the place where people turned to put themselves in touch with higher truths.

Art rose to its zenith of spiritual prestige, and the artist rose along with it. The artisan became the genius: solitary, like a holy man; inspired, like a prophet; in touch with the unseen, his consciousness bulging into the future. “The priest departs,” said Whitman, “the divine literatus comes.” Art disentangled itself from craft; the term *fine arts*, “those which appeal to the mind and the imagination,” was first recorded in 1767.

“Art” became a unitary concept, incorporating music, theater, and literature as well as the visual arts, but also, in a sense, distinct from each, a kind of higher essence available for philosophical speculation and cultural veneration. “Art for art’s sake,” the aestheticist slogan, dates from the early 19th century. So does *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the dream or ideal, so precious to Wagner, of the “total work of art.” By the modernist moment, a century later, the age of Picasso, Joyce, and Stravinsky, the artist stood at the pinnacle of status, too, a cultural aristocrat with whom the old aristocrats—or at any rate the most advanced among them—wanted nothing more than to associate.

It is hardly any wonder that the image of the artist as a solitary genius—so noble, so enviable, so pleasant an object of aspiration and projection—has kept its hold on the collective imagination. Yet it was already obsolescent more than half a century ago. After World War II in particular, and in America especially, art, like all religions as they age, became institutionalized. We were the new superpower; we wanted to be a cultural superpower as well. We founded museums, opera houses, ballet companies, all in unprecedented numbers: the so-called culture boom. Arts councils, funding bodies, educational programs, residencies, magazines, awards—an entire bureaucratic apparatus.

As art was institutionalized, so, inevitably, was the artist. The genius became the professional. Now you didn’t go off to Paris and hole up in a garret to produce your masterpiece, your *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* or *Ulysses*, and wait for the world to catch up with you. Like a doctor or lawyer, you went to graduate school



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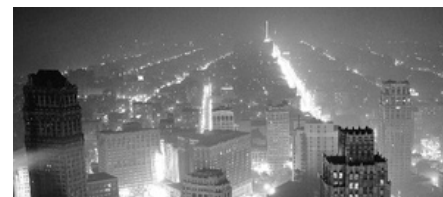
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—M.F.A. programs were also proliferating—and then tried to find a position. That often meant a job, typically at a college or university—writers in English departments, painters in art schools (higher ed was also booming)—but it sometimes simply meant an affiliation, as with an orchestra or theater troupe. Saul Bellow went to Paris in 1948, where he began *The Adventures of Augie March*, but he went on a Guggenheim grant, and he came from an assistant professorship.

The training was professional, and so was the work it produced. Expertise—or, in the mantra of the graduate programs, “technique”—not inspiration or tradition, became the currency of aesthetic authority. The artist-as-genius could sometimes pretend that his work was tossed off in a sacred frenzy, but no self-respecting artist-as-professional could afford to do likewise. They had to be seen to be working, and working *hard* (the badge of professional virtue), and it helped if they could explain to laypeople—deans, donors, journalists—what it was that they were doing.

The artist’s progress, in the postwar model, was also professional. You didn’t burst from obscurity to celebrity with a single astonishing work. You slowly climbed the ranks. You accumulated credentials. You amassed a résumé. You sat on the boards and committees, collected your prizes and fellowships. It was safer than the solitary-genius thing, but it was also a lot less exciting, and it is no surprise that artists were much less apt to be regarded now as sages or priests, much more likely to be seen as just another set of knowledge workers. Spiritual aristocracy was sacrificed for solid socioeconomic upper-middle-class-ness.

ARTISAN, GENIUS, PROFESSIONAL: underlying all these models is the market. In blunter terms, they’re all about the way that you get paid. If the artisanal paradigm predates the emergence of modern capitalism—the age of the artisan was the age of the patron, with the artist as, essentially, a sort of feudal dependent—the paradigms of genius and professional were stages in the effort to adjust to it.

In the former case, the object was to avoid the market and its sullying entanglements, or at least to appear to do so. Spirit stands opposed to flesh, to filthy lucre. Selling was selling out. Artists, like their churchly forebears, were meant to be unworldly. Some, like Picasso and Rilke, had patrons, but under very different terms than did the artisans, since the privilege was weighted in the artist’s favor now, leaving many fewer strings attached. Some, like Proust and Elizabeth Bishop, had money to begin with. And some, like Joyce and van Gogh, did the most prestigious thing and starved—which also often meant sponging, extracting gifts or “loans” from family or friends that amounted to a kind of sacerdotal tax, equivalent to the tithes exacted by priests or alms relied upon by monks.

Professionalism represents a compromise formation, midway between the sacred and the secular. A profession is not a vocation, in the older sense of a “calling,” but it also isn’t just a job; something of the priestly clings to it. Against the values of the market, the artist, like other professionals, maintained a countervailing set of standards and ideals—beauty, rigor, truth—inherited from the previous paradigm. Institutions served to mediate the difference, to cushion artists, ideologically, economically, and psychologically, from the full force of the marketplace.

Some artists did enter the market, of course, especially those who worked in the “low” or “popular” forms. But even they had mediating figures—publishing companies, movie studios, record labels; agents, managers, publicists, editors, producers—who served to shield creators from the market’s logic. Corporations functioned as a screen; someone else, at least, was paid to think about the

numbers. Publishers or labels also sometimes played an actively benevolent role: funding the rest of the list with a few big hits, floating promising beginners while their talent had a chance to blossom, even subsidizing the entire enterprise, as James Laughlin did for years at New Directions.

THERE WERE OVERLAPS, of course, between the different paradigms—long transitions, mixed and marginal cases, anticipations and survivals. The professional model remains the predominant one. But we have entered, unmistakably, a new transition, and it is marked by the final triumph of the market and its values, the removal of the last vestiges of protection and mediation. In the arts, as throughout the middle class, the professional is giving way to the entrepreneur, or, more precisely, the “entrepreneur”: the “self-employed” (that sneaky oxymoron), the entrepreneurial self.

The institutions that have undergirded the existing system are contracting or disintegrating. Professors are becoming adjuncts. Employees are becoming independent contractors (or unpaid interns). Everyone is in a budget squeeze: downsizing, outsourcing, merging, or collapsing. Now we’re all supposed to be our own boss, our own business: our own agent; our own label; our own marketing, production, and accounting departments. Entrepreneurialism is being sold to us as an opportunity. It is, by and large, a necessity. Everybody understands by now that nobody can count on a job.

Still, it also is an opportunity. The push of institutional disintegration has coincided with the pull of new technology. The emerging culture of creative entrepreneurship predates the Web—its roots go back to the 1960s—but the Web has brought it an unprecedented salience. The Internet enables you to promote, sell, and deliver directly to the user, and to do so in ways that allow you to compete with corporations and institutions, which previously had a virtual monopoly on marketing and distribution. You can reach potential customers at a speed and on a scale that would have been unthinkable when pretty much the only means were word of mouth, the alternative press, and stapling handbills to telephone poles.

**A contact is not a collaborator. Coleridge, for Wordsworth, was not a contact; he was a partner, a comrade, a second self.**

Everybody gets this: every writer, artist, and musician with a Web site (that is, every writer, artist, and musician). Bands hawk their CDs online. Documentarians take to Kickstarter to raise money for their projects. The comedian Louis CK, selling unprotected downloads of his stand-up show, has tested a nascent distribution model. “Just get your name out there,” creative types are told. There seems to be a lot of building going on: you’re supposed to build your brand, your network, your

social-media presence. Creative entrepreneurship is spawning its own institutional structure—online marketplaces, self-publishing platforms, nonprofit incubators, collaborative spaces—but the fundamental relationship remains creator-to-customer, with creators handling or superintending every aspect of the transaction.

SO WHAT WILL all this mean for artists and for art? For training, for practice, for the shape of the artistic career, for the nature of the artistic community, for the way that artists see themselves and are seen by the public, for the standards by which art is judged and the terms by which it is defined? These are new questions, open questions, questions no one is equipped as yet to answer. But it’s not too early to offer a few preliminary observations.

Creative entrepreneurship, to start with what is most apparent, is far more interactive, at least in terms of how we understand the word today, than the

model of the artist-as-genius, turning his back on the world, and even than the model of the artist as professional, operating within a relatively small and stable set of relationships. The operative concept today is the network, along with the verb that goes with it, *networking*. A Gen-X graphic-artist friend has told me that the young designers she meets are no longer interested in putting in their 10,000 hours. One reason may be that they recognize that 10,000 hours is less important now than 10,000 contacts.

A network, I should note, is not the same as what used to be known as a circle—or, to use a term important to the modernists, a coterie. The truth is that the geniuses weren't really quite as solitary as advertised. They also often came together—think of the Bloomsbury Group—in situations of intense, sustained creative ferment. With the coterie or circle as a social form, from its conversations and incitements, came the movement as an intellectual product: impressionism, imagism, futurism.

But the network is a far more diffuse phenomenon, and the connections that it typically entails are far less robust. A few days here, a project there, a correspondence over e-mail. A contact is not a collaborator. Coleridge, for Wordsworth, was not a contact; he was a partner, a comrade, a second self. It is hard to imagine that kind of relationship, cultivated over countless uninterrupted encounters, developing in the age of the network. What kinds of relationships will develop, and what they will give rise to, remains to be seen.

No longer interested in putting in their 10,000 hours: under all three of the old models, an artist was someone who did one thing—who trained intensively in one discipline, one tradition, one set of tools, and who worked to develop one artistic identity. You were a writer, or a painter, or a choreographer. It is hard to think of very many figures who achieved distinction in more than one genre—fiction and poetry, say—let alone in more than one art. Few even attempted the latter (Gertrude Stein admonished Picasso for trying to write poems), and almost never with any success.

But one of the most conspicuous things about today's young creators is their tendency to construct a multiplicity of artistic identities. You're a musician *and* a photographer *and* a poet; a storyteller *and* a dancer *and* a designer—a multiplatform artist, in the term one sometimes sees. Which means that you haven't got time for your 10,000 hours in any of your chosen media. But technique or expertise is not the point. The point is versatility. Like any good business, you try to diversify.

What we see in the new paradigm—in both the artist's external relationships and her internal creative capacity—is what we see throughout the culture: the displacement of depth by breadth. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? No doubt some of both, in a ratio that's yet to be revealed. What seems more clear is that the new paradigm is going to reshape the way that artists are trained. One recently established M.F.A. program in Portland, Oregon, is conducted under the rubric of “applied craft and design.” Students, drawn from a range of disciplines, study entrepreneurship as well as creative practice. Making, the program recognizes, is now intertwined with selling, and artists need to train in both—a fact reflected in the proliferation of dual M.B.A./M.F.A. programs.

The new paradigm is also likely to alter the shape of the ensuing career. Just as everyone, we're told, will have five or six jobs, in five or six fields, during the course of their working life, so will the career of the multiplatform, entrepreneurial artist be more vagrant and less cumulative than under the previous models. No climactic masterwork of deep maturity, no *King Lear* or *Faust*, but rather many shifting interests and directions as the winds of market forces blow you here or there.

WORKS OF ART, more centrally and nakedly than ever before, are becoming commodities, consumer goods. Jeff Bezos, as a patron, is a very different beast than James Laughlin. Now it's every man for himself, every tub on its own bottom. Now it's not an audience you think of addressing; it's a customer base. Now you're only as good as your last sales quarter.

It's hard to believe that the new arrangement will not favor work that's safer: more familiar, formulaic, user-friendly, eager to please—more like entertainment, less like art. Artists will inevitably spend a lot more time looking over their shoulder, trying to figure out what the customer wants rather than what they themselves are seeking to say. The nature of aesthetic judgment will itself be reconfigured. “No more gatekeepers,” goes the slogan of the Internet apostles. Everyone's opinion, as expressed in Amazon reviews and suchlike, carries equal weight—the democratization of taste.

Judgment rested with the patron, in the age of the artisan. In the age of the professional, it rested with the critic, a professionalized aesthete or intellectual. In the age of the genius, which was also the age of avant-gardes, of tremendous experimental energy across the arts, it largely rested with artists themselves. “Every great and original writer,” Wordsworth said, “must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished.”

But now we have come to the age of the customer, who perforce is always right. Or as a certain legendary entertainer is supposed to have put it, “There's a sucker born every minute.” Another word for gatekeepers is *experts*. Lord knows they have their problems, beginning with arrogance, but there is one thing you can say for them: they're not quite so easily fooled. When the Modern Library asked its editorial board to select the 100 best novels of the 20th century, the top choice was *Ulysses*. In a companion poll of readers, it was *Atlas Shrugged*. We recognize, when it comes to food (the new summit of cultural esteem), that taste must be developed by a long exposure, aided by the guidance of practitioners and critics. About the arts we own to no such modesties. Prizes belong to the age of professionals. All we'll need to measure merit soon is the best-seller list.

The democratization of taste, abetted by the Web, coincides with the democratization of creativity. The makers have the means to sell, but everybody has the means to make. And everybody's using them. Everybody seems to fancy himself a writer, a musician, a visual artist. Apple figured this out a long time ago: that the best way to sell us its expensive tools is to convince us that we all have something unique and urgent to express.

“Producerism,” we can call this, by analogy with consumerism. What we're now persuaded to consume, most conspicuously, are the means to create. And the democratization of taste ensures that no one has the right (or inclination) to tell us when our work is bad. A universal grade inflation now obtains: we're all swapping A-minuses all the time, or, in the language of Facebook, “likes.”

It is often said today that the most-successful businesses are those that create experiences rather than products, or create experiences (environments, relationships) around their products. So we might also say that under producerism, in the age of creative entrepreneurship, producing becomes an experience, even *the* experience. It becomes a lifestyle, something that is packaged as an experience—and an experience, what's more, after the contemporary fashion: networked, curated, publicized, fetishized, tweeted, catered, and anything but solitary, anything but private.

Among the most notable things about those Web sites that creators now all feel compelled to have is that they tend to present not only the work, not only the creator (which is interesting enough as a cultural fact), but also the creator's life or lifestyle or process. The customer is being sold, or at least sold on or sold



through, a vicarious experience of production.

*Creator:* I'm not sure that *artist* even makes sense as a term anymore, and I wouldn't be surprised to see it giving way before the former, with its more generic meaning and its connection to that contemporary holy word, *creative*. Joshua Wolf Shenk's *Powers of Two*, last summer's modish book on creativity, puts Lennon and McCartney with Jobs and Wozniak. A recent cover of this very magazine touted "Case Studies in Eureka Moments," a list that started with Hemingway and ended with Taco Bell.

When works of art become commodities and nothing else, when every endeavor becomes "creative" and everybody "a creative," then art sinks back to craft and artists back to artisans—a word that, in its adjectival form, at least, is newly popular again. Artisanal pickles, artisanal poems: what's the difference, after all? So "art" itself may disappear: art as Art, that old high thing. Which—unless, like me, you think we need a vessel for our inner life—is nothing much to mourn.

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**WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ** is the author of *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*.

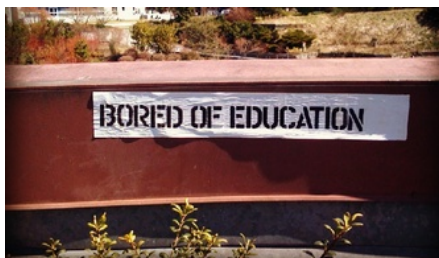
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289 Comments

The Atlantic

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**SAlfin** · 16 days ago

I think you left out the most important part of being an artist: having something to say.

You've boiled this down entirely to craftsmanship which is really only part of the story. Sure, as a creator, you need to learn the craft, but there are zillions of "talented" people who never break through because their work simply isn't that interesting.

Art--in whatever form it takes--is meant to challenge the patron's view of the world. It's meant to provide a way of looking at things others may not have viewed it before. It's not just about being the most realistic painter or the most technically proficient dancer. If there is no message or emotion, the craftsmanship is beside the point.

So, I would venture to say this "new paradigm" is more about commercialism than it is art. Some real artists get rich. But that's not why they become artists.

126 ^ | v · Reply · Share



**William Bergmann** → SAlfin · 15 days ago

I think you left out the most important part of being an artist: having something to say.

Everyone has 'something' to say. It is up to the individual to decide whether that message means anything to them.

Art--in whatever form it takes--is meant to challenge the patron's view of the world.

I think you're falling into the trap of explaining what art is (to you).

So, I would venture to say this "new paradigm" is more about commercialism than it is art.

Unless the 'artist' is already provided for, they certainly need to be commercial enough to eat. Outside of that, though, I think there's a dichotomy- are you producing art that may or may not sell, or are you engineering a product to be sold that could be mistaken for art?

I don't think that explicitly commercialized 'art' (think 'boyband') is necessarily more successful than genuinely artistic endeavors- I just think we're inclined to read into things based on prevailing narratives.

27 ^ | v · Reply · Share





**SAlfin** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

That's why most "starving artists" moonlight at other things so they can pursue their art--to feed and house themselves. The cliché of the aspiring actor waiting tables or the garage band doing gigs at local bars is actually true. There may come a time when they decide they can no longer pursue their art and start collecting a regular paycheck by teaching or doing something else entirely.

As for something to say, I've got lots to say as do you. That doesn't make me an artist.

26 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → SAlfin · 15 days ago

As for something to say, I've got lots to say as do you. That doesn't make me an artist.

I don't think we share the same view in regard to what comprises an 'artist'.

I utilize comments sections as communally edited and challenged rough drafts of thoughts that make it into longer pieces. I don't consider these to be 'art', but I recognize them as part of the grind that is the process that most people we might regard as 'artists' (bloggers/writers) go through.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

Again, having the technical skill set isn't the same as "art", IMO. Technique only gets one so far. Emotion, reflection, enlightenment, and challenging the status quo is what artists are after. "Commercial art", on the other hand, is more what you are espousing: newswriting, blogging, advertising, graphic design, industrial design, etc. etc. are all viable endeavors to make money. Can't tell you how many copywriters I knew when I worked at an ad agency were writing screenplays or theatrical plays on the side...

35 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → SAlfin · 15 days ago

We disagree on what constitutes 'art'.

I don't get how blogging is somehow 'commercial', but writing a novel somehow isn't?

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

Depends on the novel. I don't think anyone would compare Robert Ludlum with Gabriel Garcia Marquez; Ludlum is purely commercial (enjoyable, but commercial) while Marquez is literature. Big difference.

28 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Bombay Mumbai** → SAlfin · 14 days ago


You've just compared them. Beyond that, though, the main difference between Ludlum and Marquez is the arbitrary valuation of their work which exists in your head.

Dumas was the Ludlum of his time (perhaps not even so esteemed as that). What do we think of Les Trois Mousquetaires or L'Homme au Masque de Fer today?


12 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›




**SAlfin** → Bombay Mumbai · 14 days ago

 Oh please. Ludlum's cannon is formulaic fodder for action movies. Hardly literature. Which is not to say I don't enjoy his books; they are quite entertaining. But I don't think they will be making anyone's list for the Top 100 works of fiction of all time. As I said earlier, there are times when popularity and art co-exist in the same piece of work; I don't think even Robert Ludlum would put his own books in that category.


6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Bombay Mumbai** → SAfin · 14 days ago  
Again, that's your own arbitrary valuation. And again, Dumas was considered a trash serial publisher when he wrote (even by him), not literature at all but pabulum for the masses.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Al\_de\_Baran** → Bombay Mumbai · 13 days ago  
You keep using the word "arbitrary" as if there could be no good reason to distinguish the qualities of the writers under discussion, and as if your empty assertions aren't at least as arbitrary as the ones you criticize.


5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Bombay Mumbai** → Al\_de\_Baran · 13 days ago  
I keep using the word arbitrary as if it means subject to individual will, whim or judgement, as it does. There are great reasons to distinguish the qualities of writers. There are no reasons besides hubris and ego to insist that only what we like has some objective social or cultural value.

14 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›


 **Al\_de\_Baran** → Bombay Mumbai · 13 days ago  
Thanks for the clarification. As re-stated, I agree.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **woodnfish** → Al\_de\_Baran · 8 days ago  
"...as if your empty assertions aren't at least as arbitrary as the ones you criticize."


As are your assertions. You can have your own opinion, that doesn't mean anyone has to agree with it or that it is even true.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Al\_de\_Baran** → woodnfish · 7 days ago  
Please re-read. I am not the one making any assertions in this sub-thread, arbitrary or otherwise.


Also, *tu quoque* is a fallacy. No charge for the logic lesson.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **Sandra Newman** → Bombay Mumbai · 13 days ago  
Dumas is still considered a trash serial publisher, because that's what he was. He also (like many commercially-oriented writers today, but not Ludlum) had a fine writing style. The reception of his works, then and now, reflects both facts.

Likewise, nowadays, there are many writers of thrillers who are respected as writers, even though, when boiled down to its essentials, they're producing "pabulum for the masses". Ludlum is not one of these because he's not good at writing.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 **billy romp** → SAfin · 14 days ago  
How is making the top 100 lists of strangers different than

selling lots of books?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → billy romp · 13 days ago

Not strangers; the literati. You can reject the idea that an elite group of people have sway over what constitutes art, but there you have it. Again, no one is denying encouraging creativity in the masses is a good thing. But greatness is at a different level and one can usually tell the difference even without a lot of training.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → SAlfin · 12 days ago

But greatness is at a different level and one can usually tell the difference even without a lot of training.

This debate (at least the one I've been having in my head) is centered on the concept of 'Art' versus 'Not-Art'.

I agree that most people that spend time reading can place authors on a relatively accurate continuum in regards to their contribution to literature. I would even go so far as to agree that there are novels (and creations in any of the mediums) that have no interest in contributing to literature- that are purely commercial- and thus, can be safely categorized as 'Not-Art'.

Having said that, there has to be a range for there to be a continuum- from terrible to bad to good to great to outstanding. As that goes, there is a ton more 'Art' in the world than what any of the 'critics' would acknowledge- one does not need to reach greatness to be an artist.

Maybe I can convey it this way: Darko Milicic and LeBron James were both drafted into the NBA right after each other in 2003. You couldn't come up with a greater disparity in the quality of their contribution to the 'literature' of the NBA. Yet, they were both NBA basketball players. Without terrible 'art', describing something as great 'art' would be meaningless.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tavis Post** → Bombay Mumbai · 13 days ago

That was actually a contrast, not a comparison.

Dumas's work is now children's literature, largely marketed to and read by kids in junior high or highschool, and fondly remembered by adults--much like the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**woodnfish** → SAlfin · 8 days ago

It's all literature. The difference is one writes an enjoyable story to sell and the other writes because they need to. It doesn't make one better than the other, but if you want a pissing contest, Ludlum wins because more people are willing to pay to read his work. Face it, much "literature", as you call it, is unreadable crap like Joyce's "Finnegans Wake".

You say artists are supposed to challenge our thinking. Nonsense. If you want to make a living as an artist, you produce work I want to buy. If you don't produce work I like, I won't buy it.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → woodnfish · 7 days ago



**woodman** · 7 days ago

Disagree. Money is not usually an artist's motivation. It's great when they are successful, but how many "great" artists were discovered after they died and never reaped the benefit of their posthumous fame? Again, you can prefer one writer over another as is your prerogative. But popularity and saleability isn't the same as art.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**woodfish** → SAfin · 7 days ago

Says you. It is just your opinion, nothing more. Do you think those artists who died penniless and their works now sell for thousands or more would have liked to have reaped some of the financial rewards? Don't fool yourself, you know they would have.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Clarniluan** → William Bergmann · 14 days ago

Doh!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**bart** → William Bergmann · 12 days ago

You just don't.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Ohmy Shrunkenhead** → William Bergmann · 8 days ago

Blogging is contrived, writing is inspired.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → Ohmy Shrunkenhead · 7 days ago

Most blogging consists of writing. You should put down your stereotype-colored glasses.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Matthew Lashmit** → William Bergmann · 9 days ago

"most people we might regard as 'artists' (bloggers/writers) go through."

That made me laugh out loud at work.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → Matthew Lashmit · 9 days ago

??

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**tmb** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

How can you possibly say that "everyone has something to say?" Yes, we can operate our vocal apparatus and make recognizable language come out. But "having something to say," is having something both different and meaningful to say. You're correct, it's up to an individual to judge whether their thoughts have personal meaning, but art is a societal affair. If one's work doesn't resonate with society at large, in this sense it has nothing to say. SAfin is absolutely correct. I would prefer seeing artists defer publication if they don't have anything to say, just destroy the work and keep listening and working until they conjure something worthwhile. Keep silent until you have something to say ... how quaint.

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → tmb · 15 days ago

You are assuming that any one person or group is the sole arbiter of which ideas are worthy of being expressed—essentially asking people to remain silent until said arbiter is

That 'advice' runs directly counter to what I've heard from any of the writers (that have audiences) I've ever encountered. You literally have no way of knowing whether there is an audience for what you're saying unless you put it out there.

There are plenty of artists who have gone without significant recognition for the whole of their lives, only to find recognition posthumously. To say they weren't artists until society caught up with them... It would seem the height of folly in our age to keep your expression under a bushel basket for fear of not being considered an 'artist'.

24 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

But that's what separates "pop" from "culture". And yes, it does imply a certain group of literati or art mavens are the arbiters of what's good and bad, but that's because they have studied the subject and have a say in what is "art". Popularity is fine and enjoyable, and sometimes popularity and "art" are present in the same piece of work. "The Goldfinch" by Donna Tartt was both popular AND literature. "Schindler's List" was both a popular movie AND a monumentally artistic film. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones were both popular and ground-breaking.

The point is, just because it's popular doesn't make it art. But they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

14 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → SAlfin · 15 days ago

The trouble is, under your view, there are large swaths of people that are totally cut off from the appreciation of 'art'. For that matter there are large segments of 'art' that we fight to discredit, rather than experience or enjoy.

I am simply not willing to tolerate 'gatekeepers' determining what I experience as art- I would rather perceive all of creation on a continuum of 'bad' to 'good' and decide for myself.

21 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**PhiPhenomenon** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

I think you're trying a little too hard to be iconoclastic.

If we're defining artistic appreciation to be the understanding of a work's contribution outside of how an individual enjoys it then there is an objective framework to doing so by comparing it to past works, its impact upon its medium, society at large and other artists in that medium. It doesn't really speak as to whether or not you have 'permission' to enjoy it. At worst, you'll be accused of having bad taste but that doesn't preclude your own experience and you could always, well, provide substantiated arguments to current scholars and critics (whether or not that is a valuable use of your time I leave to you).

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → PhiPhenomenon · 15 days ago

I think you're trying a little too hard to be iconoclastic.

I might be coming off as an iconoclast in regard to art criticism or appreciation, but I'm certainly not trying that hard

=)

If we're defining artistic appreciation to be the understanding of a work's contribution outside of how an individual enjoys them then there is an objective framework to doing so by comparing its impact upon its medium and other artists in that medium

I understand that.

My point is, though, that like any entrenched bureaucracy, art education/criticism exists first to promulgate itself, then to elevate/distinguish itself, and only then to actually evaluate the medium. The artists 'starve' while the critics thrive.

I would much rather take my cues from the artists and their inspirations themselves, and that is what I love about the democratization of the arts occurring across the internet. Not only do we gain the bonus of direct contact with the creators we admire, but those creators are able to reach audiences that might not have even existed with geographical boundaries holding them back.

9 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tavis Post** → William Bergmann · 12 days ago

You're assuming that those artists with access to the Internet (i.e. not those who lived before the 1990s, not those in the third world, not the poor, not the technologically ignorant or inept) will find their audiences, and those who would appreciate them will find their art online. And that this will be more likely to work better and more often than other models of access, dissemination, exhibition, or consumption. This seems to me quite a leap, and one which leaves a lot of people and much of history out.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → Tavis Post · 12 days ago

I think you're a lot more likely to find an audience in the internet age, considering that you don't even need your own site, and you don't need your audience to be geographically adjacent.

I think you're grasping pretty hard, as I don't think you'll find many third-worlders or those too poor to afford an internet connection making a huge splash in the art world. Similarly, you can barely get a minimum wage job anymore if you're not computer literate.

The idea that the internet leaves out more people than galleries and the like is simply ludicrous... Especially when it isn't an either-or.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tavis Post** → William Bergmann · 12 days ago

That idea is ridiculous, which may be why I never suggested it. My point is and has been that you are not able to see everything--contrary to your previous claim; that everything you do manage to see has gatekeepers (if sometimes tacit ones); and (less explicitly) so-called democratization has brought problems as well as solutions (e.g. a glut of product, making it more difficult for the artist to stand out and for the art-goer to find new artists that are worthwhile in one's estimation). You have failed to address these points, except



to dismiss the last one, and instead focused on positions I haven't expressed.

EDIT:

I did, however, express myself poorly in my previous post. Clearly, more people have more access to more art with the Internet as it stands today, than even 20 years ago. More people also have access to the technologies necessary to take advantage of this than ever before.

see more

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → Tavis Post · 12 days ago

I don't have a problem with many of the forms of 'gatekeeping' or 'curation' so much as I have a problem with all or most of the 'gatekeepers' in an area or medium being the same type of people, from the same circles, who mostly fit in together.

Looking at music, for example, on a service like Spotify... As a Miles Davis fan, I can search out a playlist featuring 'So What' that was put together by another user. From that point, I can listen to the other songs on that playlist, look at that user's other playlists, look at followers of that playlist's other playlists, etc. Each of those options are, in a way, curated by a person or persons, to be sure. Those people, though, are much more likely to have a diversity, both of backgrounds and interests, missing in a circle of Jazz critics. Further, the exploration that is possible blows the doors off of anything that has ever existed in the medium.

To be fair, those advantages are not universal. Still, the discovery possible through sites like Deviant Art, Etsy, or Getty Images, or even Amazon Books, not to mention the ability for an artist to make some money off of their works, is a staggering leap forward. Perhaps we'll have fewer Picasso's moving forward... I still can't help but think that, even if we're bringing 'Art' down off its pedestal, we're doing so in order to bring it into everyone's life at a more personal level.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

You don't have to tolerate it. You're free to enjoy what you like and people are free to create whether it's "good" or not. By the same token, the art world is free to determine what is worthy of hanging in a museum. That's their job. But I'd venture to say that access to art is easier today than it has ever been. No more difficult than going to a public library and much cheaper than a baseball game.

EDIT: Plus, if you go to a museum, you can tour an exhibit with an art historian who will tell you why these works are important (or get the guided tour with headphones). It's a great thing to do, and quite educational.

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tavis Post** → William Bergmann · 13 days ago

There is no way you can listen to every extant recorded song, read every piece of published writing in every language, or view every hanging painting in person. Even if you had the resources necessary, you would not have the time.

Besides, if you skirt museums, galleries, and paper

publishers, which are curated by 'gatekeepers', you will not necessarily be able to see their exhibits or pieces online. And what is on the Internet is also curated (if not by companies or webmasters, then by access to the money, knowledge, tools, and time necessary for artists to digitize their own work and keep it hosted in an accessible manner--not available to the dead or the poor, among others).

Yours is a fanciful ideal not at all related to reality.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → Tavis Post · 12 days ago

Yours is a fanciful ideal not at all related to reality.

And yours is one in which apparently either the internet exists, or galleries, but not both?

Somehow, in spite of being dead, many artists' works are available online, and I'd bet a tidy sum that one can find much more material from 'poor' artists on the internet than in galleries. (Of course, you'd probably fall back to saying that much of it isn't 'art', so yea.)

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tavis Post** → William Bergmann · 12 days ago

You're the one who expressed a disdain for anything involving gatekeepers, and a decided preference for the so-called democracy of the Internet. If you also visit museums and galleries (which are not necessarily high end) or markets featuring artists, you gave no indication of this and implied a strong preference against curated material. But even if you do these things voraciously, you will still not be able to take in all art everywhere. It simply isn't possible.

Not only that, whether or not you visit art shows in person, you rely upon others to provide a space and context for the art you take in, especially any art not directly presented by the artists (but even in that case, as I argued previously). This renders your position against 'gatekeepers' at best a matter of degree rather than of principle.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Minneapolis Musician** → William Bergmann · 9 days ago

I see in this a parallel to organized religion. Those within look to the experts or "priests" to tell them the rules. To tell them what to think and how to act and what they can rightly enjoy.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**SAlfin** → Minneapolis Musician · 7 days ago

Not at all. Art critics are challenged all the time, and there are many opinions about the same piece of work. Try having different "versions" of any given religion or challenging their clergy. You'd likely get tossed out on your ear.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Minneapolis Musician** → SAlfin · 7 days ago

Yeah, but I am looking at the "believers" who look up to the critics. That was my point.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**tmb** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

No, I don't address who validates the work. My point is that the artist who mirrors convention has nothing to say personally. Whether that artist parrots convention or

someone else does, it doesn't matter, and will have no effect -- unless the artist has looked and worked past or through convention. This can only happen in the personal laboratory of personal bias. The real work of art is to overcome one's contingent models of reality and "see." The essential nature of art can be taken as not to express, which is secondary, but to "see." If the artist has "seen," then an audience has a chance to access what has been "seen," and possibly prosper from the view.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → tmb · 15 days ago

The essential nature of art can be taken as not to express, which is secondary, but to "see." If the artist has "seen," then an audience has a chance to access what has been "seen," and possibly prosper from the view.

Nothing but elitist dreck in service of the idea that one's definition of something (art) that belongs to all of humanity should hold true over all others'.

It would be the same as if we had 'religion critics' that we relied upon to tell us that certain 'religions' were terrible imitations and some others, 'true Religion' is what we should aspire to.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**tmb** → William Bergmann · 15 days ago

the opposite of elitist, the view that one's view is one's own is egalitarian. I don't see how you see that art that originates in the artist, and be determined by the experience, is elitist. Only if the individual is elite. I wonder if you are biased toward the collective. The art belongs to the artist, until it reaches the collective sphere, at which time it can afford insight or pleasure according to an individual viewer's choice. I would be careful about prescribing a totalitarian motive to others while being so insistent that others adopt your own ideas.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**William Bergmann** → tmb · 15 days ago

I would be careful about prescribing a totalitarian motive to others while being so insistent that others adopt your own ideas.

My only idea, though, is that 'art' - works of creation, exist, and to declare that something isn't art, or that a more narrow definition of art exists, or to elaborate on what disqualifies something from being art should include the 'in my opinion' disclaimer.

To say that 'Twilight' is not a very good book, that it is poor art, as it is derivative of and fails to rise to the standard of 'Romeo and Juliette' (which itself is derivative), this is obviously (a common) opinion. To say that it is simply 'not art' is a statement of fact, and one that implies more authority than one could possibly wield.

Perhaps I'm reading too much into the whole discussion... Perhaps, though, I've seen the chilling effect on thought/expression that occurs when there's a definite 'in crowd' that must be assuaged.

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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