

**YAWN** is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. **YAWN** welcomes responses from its readers, especially those of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent to **YAWN** may be considered for inclusion in a future issue. Submissions are welcome and encouraged. Monetary donations are requested to help defray costs. Subscriptions to **YAWN** are available for \$10 (cash or unused stamps) for one year by first class mail. All content is archived at <http://yawn.detritus.net/>.

# ART STRIKE

## 1990 — 1993

We call for all artists in the U.S. to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their work from January 1, 1990 to January 1, 1993. We call for all galleries, museums, agencies, alternative spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools etc., to cease all operations for the same period.

Art is conceptually defined by a self-perpetuating elite and is marketed as an international commodity; the activity of its production has been mystified and co-opted; its practitioners have become manipulable and marginalized through self-identification with the term "artist" and all it implies.

To call one person an artist is to deny another an equal gift of vision; thus the myth of "genius" becomes an ideological justification for inequality, repression and famine. What an artist considers to be his or her identity is simply a schooled set of attitudes; preconceptions which imprison humanity in history. It is the roles derived from these identities, as much as the art products mined from this reification, which we must reject.

Unlike Gustav Metzger's Art Strike of 1977 to 1980, our purpose is not to destroy those institutions which might be perceived as having a negative effect on artistic production. Instead, we intend to question the role of the artist itself and its relation to the dynamics of power within our specific culture.

## Everybody knows what's wrong

We call this Art Strike because, like any general strike, the real reasons being discussed are ones of economics and self-determination. We call this Art Strike in order to make explicit the political and ethical motivations for this attempted large-scale manipulation of alleged "esthetic" objects and relationships. We call this Art Strike to connote and encourage active rather than passive engagement with the issues at hand.

## GET IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM

Art Strike will fail for many reasons, not the least of which is that it's a bad idea. But Art Strike raises a number of questions worth asking. Is there an attitude inherent in self-identification as an "artist" which implies that art-making is in itself a sufficient response to cultural issues? Is there an implication that the "artist" identity somehow absolves one from responsibility for cultural conditions? What are the possibilities for real engagement? This is not meant primarily as a critique of "art for art's sake" but rather as a critique of the perception that a class of artists exists as an independent social class. What are the priorities of the people who are calling for Art Strike? Does Art Strike, as a method for prompting dialogue concerning issues of personal productivity, commodity dynamics and cultural identity, conflict with the needs and priorities of artists who identify themselves primarily as feminists, hispanics, blacks, gays, etc.? Is Art Strike in any form a good idea?

# GIVE UP ART SAVE THE STARVING

Imagine a world in which art is forbidden! Art galleries would close. Books would vanish. Pop stars would shed their glamour overnight. Advertising would cease, television would die. We could refocus our vision not on a succession of false images but on the world as it is. A stillness would fill the air. Art has provided us with fantasy worlds, escapes from reality. For whatever else it is, art is not reality. Soap operas, novels, movies, concerts, the theatre, poetry. None of these are real as a starving child is real, as a town without water is real. Art is the glamorous escape, the transformation that shields us from the world we live in. Injustice, endemic disease, famine, war. These are real. Art has replaced religion as the opiate of the people just as the artist has replaced the priest as the spokesman of the spirit. Once men reached inside themselves to find God. Now they find art. We are regulated by our addictions and art has become an addiction. We struggle through life in a drugged dream, searching for escape, for brighter fantasies, longer voyages of imagination, louder music. Another man's life is always more interesting than our own. It is only those who have given up art who can experience the true nature of creation. Now a self-perpetuating elite market art as a commodity for the wealthy who have everything while making the artists themselves rich beyond their wildest dreams. Art is money. It is ironic that the myth of the artist celebrates suffering while it is those who have never heard of art, the poor and wretched of our earth, who truly suffer. To call one man an artist is to deny another the equal right of vision. Paint all the painting black and celebrate the dead art, there is no booze in hell. We turn away from mountains of food that rot in storage while across the globe men grow too weak to eat because it is time for our favorite TV program. We live up to our knees in blood, wasting not only hours but days—whole lifetimes—in the blind belief that art is good, art is pure, art is its own justification—and a nightmare scourges our planet. Until we end famine there will be no peace. Artists are murderers! Artists are murderers just as surely as the soldier who sights down the barrel of a gun to shoot an unarmed civilian. Without art, life would be unendurable! We would have to transform this world. Overnight, one man's dream can become a nation's future—but we do not seize power because we are enchanted by art. Forbid art and revolution would follow: the withholding of creative action is the only weapon left to men. Seeing and creating are the same activity. Those who create art are also creating the starving. In a world in which art is forbidden the deserts would flower. Give up art. Save the starving.

J O I N T P U B L I C A T I O N

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