

YAWN

November 3, 1989

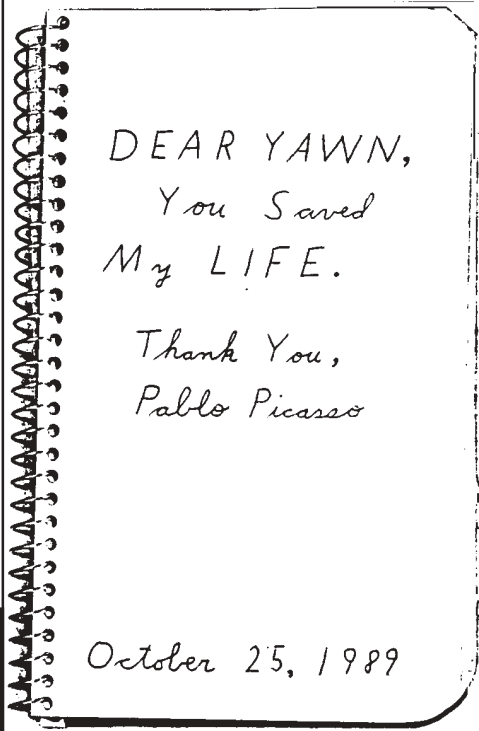
YAWN is a sporadic communiqué which seeks to provide a critical look at our culture in all its manifestations. **YAWN** welcomes responses from its readers, especially those of a critical nature. Be forewarned that anything sent to **YAWN** may be considered for inclusion in a future issue. Submissions 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.detrinitus.net/>.

DEMOLISH SERIOUS CULTURE

When the PRAXIS group declared their intention to organize an Art Strike for the three-year period 1990-1993, they fully intended that this proposed (in)action would create at least as many problems as it resolved.

The importance of the Art Strike lies not in its feasibility but in the possibilities it opens up for intensifying the war between the classes. The Art Strike addresses a series of issues: most important among these is the fact that the socially imposed hierarchy of the arts can be actively and aggressively challenged. Simply making this challenge goes a considerable way towards dismantling the mental set behind art and undermining its position of hegemony within contemporary culture, since the success of art as a supposedly "superior form of knowledge" largely depends upon its status remaining unquestioned.

Other issues with which the Art Strike is concerned include that series of "problems" centered on the question of "identity." By focusing attention on the identity of the artist, and the social and administrative practices an individual must pass through before such an identity becomes generally recognized, the organizers of the Art Strike intend to demonstrate that within this society there is a general drift away from the pleasure of play and stimulation; a drift which leads, via codification, on into the prison of the "real."



"For the true and living equality we will give up everything. Let the arts perish, if need be! But let us have real equality."

—Sylvain Marechal, "Manifeste des Egaux," published by the *Tribun du Peuple*, 1796, France

One Woman's Reaction to "A Response to the Proposal for Forced Art Participation 1990-2001"

[YAWN #4]

Oh godless, how could such error evolve (assuming evolution, not creativity). Did I not eat that day? Did I read *Hints from Heloise*? Run out of unused stamps? No matter. In the realm of infinite possibilities something could have gone. One woman (yes!) is wearing her wooly mammoth shirt. She doesn't, however, believe it makes a difference. When the premise is wrong, the end is inevitable. It's not art that's illusory, it's the criticism.

YAWN responds: Because "art" is nothing but a schooled set of attitudes, both practice and criticism

are equally suspect from a motivational standpoint. The artist, together with all of the ancillary functionaries that her/his activity supports (curators, academics, critics, gallery owners, their secretaries, janitors, spouses and offspring) have a vested interest in keeping the practice and criticism of art mystified. This is done so that everyone else perceives art as a "special" (i.e., elite) sphere of activity. This perception is heightened by the myth that art is an exclusive source of certain types of knowledge. Defending "art" and simultaneously attacking "art criticism" fails to

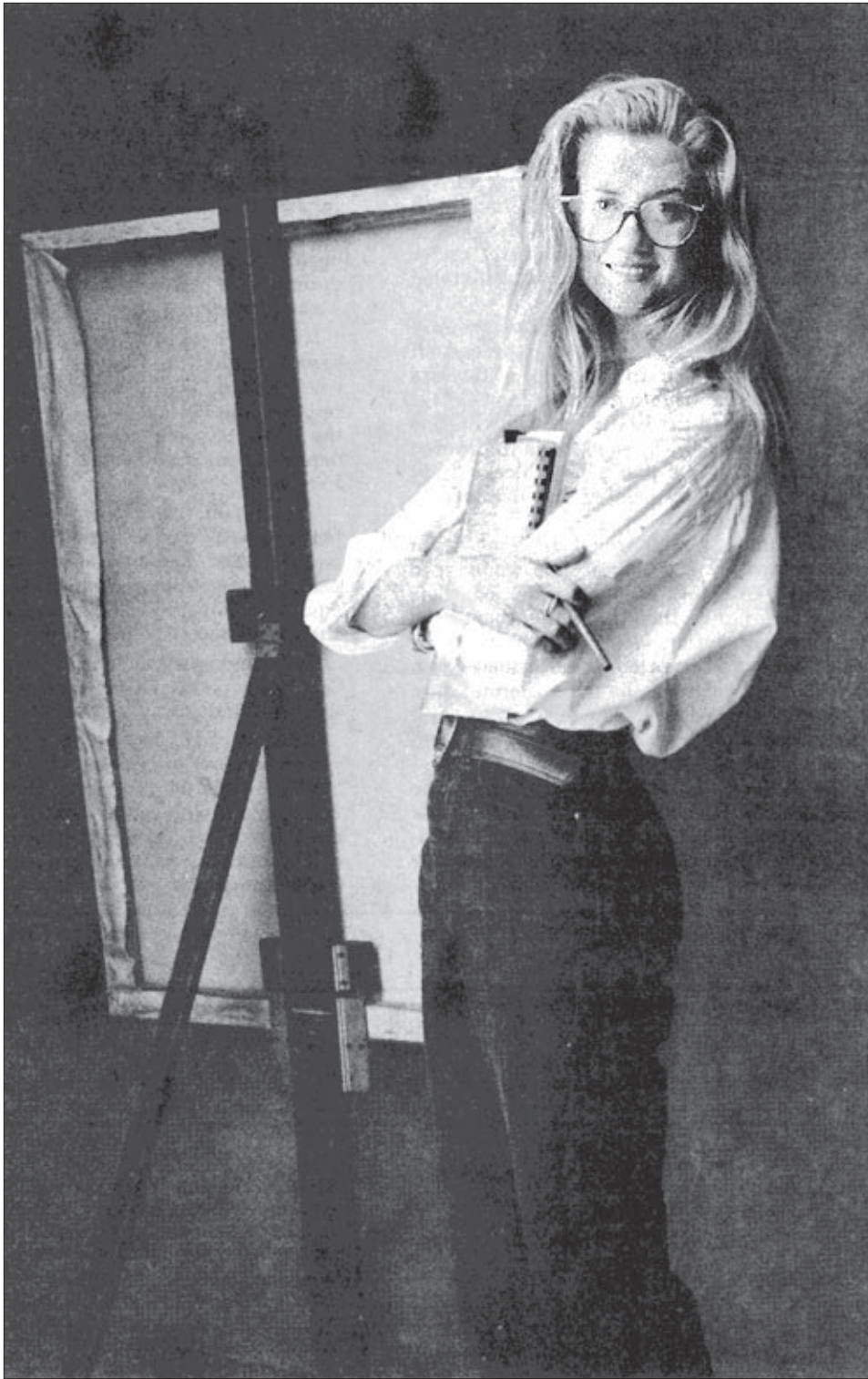
recognize that both are manifestations of essentially the same attitude.

The sense that art and art criticism are somehow at odds is engendered by the practitioners of each of those fields. This makes their respective "achievements" seem objectively "valid" because of the constructed "challenge" each poses the other; but in fact this false challenge is what supports the entire construct of art and the attitudes around it. Each creates the impression of strength by knocking down straw men.

Furthermore, it was never **YAWN's** contention that art is illusory. **YAWN** recognizes that power is always a reality in capitalist society. Art serves as an effective buttress to the power of capital by fostering the illusion that the world as it is is a bearable place to live.



“I may be an art major,
but I know a little something
about economics.”



I've done my homework. I know that money is power. And I know that this power is unevenly distributed in our unequalitarian society.

I also know that “High Art” helps buttress this power. Through complicity. Through cheering it on. Through participating in the investment game. And through its snobbish, elitist treatment of anything that fails to meet its arbitrary standards.

Another thing I realize is that the division between “High” and “Low” art is just a reflection of what occurs in society. Namely the oppression of the “lower” class by the moneyed bourgeoisie. They feel that one class is “better” than another because it can appreciate the “finer things,” and the other cannot. This is a way for the “upper” class to justify the oppression required for it to remain the “upper” class. Art fuels this in part by being class specific—the sole domain of the bourgeoisie. Make no mistake, “art” is not the universal category it claims to be: every survey of attendances at art galleries and museums demonstrates that an “appreciation” of “art” is something restricted almost exclusively to individuals belonging to higher income groups. That is, aside from the artists themselves.

The attitude that one class of people is better than another is precisely the logic which oversaw the rise of the Nazis in the Germany of the 1930s. You see, I've studied history, as well.

I refuse to participate in this social construct. That is why I've turned my canvas to the wall. But where can I turn for an ideologically coherent discourse to support my views?

The Art Strike 1990–1993, that's where.

The Art Strike offers the most aggressive and consistent critique available of the status quo of production and consumption and its power structure. Before you make your final decision, write one of the Art Strike Action Committees.

YAWN has an address list available. Drop us a self-addressed, stamped envelope today.



The Art Strike
1990–1993
The Right Choice.