Frames ate the art, frames are the art, the camera is the art, the text is the art, the thing is the art, art is the art

Phil Goldwhite

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Goldwhite, Phil, "Frames ate the art, frames are the art, the camera is the art, the text is the art, the thing is the art, art is the art" (1995). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from
frames ate the art frames are the art the camera is the art
the art the text is the art the thing is the art
Art is the art.

By Phil Goldwhite

A graduate thesis submitted for completion of the Imaging Arts MFA
From the Rochester Institute of Technology
Thesis Board Approval:

For *The Museum is Dead Long Live the Museum*
By Philip Goldwhite

Rick Hock__________________________

Elane O'Neil_______________________

Angela Kelly (Chair)__________________
Acknowledgments

Special thanks are due to my great love Mara Leppaluoto, without whom this project would never have come so far. Thank you for your unending support, constant questioning, and for pushing me forward. I dedicate this work to you.

Thanks also to:

Alex Miokovic
Rick Hock
My thesis board
Wataru Okada
Debbie Rieders
Courtney Grim
Mom, Dad, Julian, Paul & Lisa
McLean Goldwhite & Lisa LeValley
Marty and so many others
...the aesthetic question is not "What is Beautiful," but "What can be said to be art."

Lyotard quoting Thierry du Duve
I. "And without doubt our epoch prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being. What is sacred for it is only illusion, but what is profane is truth. More than that, the sacred grows in its eves to the extent that truth diminishes and illusion increase, to such an extent that the peak of the illusion is the peak of the sacred."

Feuerbach

The Museum is Dead

Long live the Museum

is the culmination of my studies at Rochester Institute of Technology. In creating this show I took everything I have learned about art up to this time. It consists of several different pieces, including:

Frames and Museum Drawings. Both modes of production are different ways of expressing similar notions about the state of art and the museum. The Frames represent my return to the object of art. Having spent much time absorbed in reading and deep thought, I moved to a more conceptual approach to art. The Museum Drawings stem from a love of architectural rendering.

II. I come from a background in art history, specifically with an emphasis on architectural history. I first picked up the camera to take pictures of buildings for research. I was immediately sidetracked by the seductive magic of the photograph and the process of making images and prints. While the image was the impetus, my production is influenced as much by the literary as the visual. Writers have had a profound effect on the shape of my work. Ideas are the basics. Ideas are the initial driving force. I read Susan Sontag and felt encouraged by her acknowledgment of the timeless appeal of the photograph. It was her serious attention to photography, which had been so ignored in other art.

*My interest in art begins with architecture. I was fortunate enough to study with the late Reyner Banham, my first mentor as an undergraduate at Santa Cruz. It was his love, his utter passion, that inspired in me the desire to create and contribute as an artist. He combined the simple and the complex, the serious and the humorous of an and its convoluted history in a way that no other has. He is the reason that I have continued to forge forward within the arts. I could only dream of being as brilliant and inspiring a teacher as he was.
historical texts prior to her legitimized my desire to photograph - to collect the world. Sontag also introduced me to Walter Benjamin, through her quotation of his writing.

My life changed when I read Walter Benjamin. It is difficult for me to think of a writer more influential to me, or the shape of criticism, than Walter Benjamin. Since first reading Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, it has haunted me. This reading came at a pivotal moment in my education. I was in the process of moving from art history to art making, from research to creation. To this day I often feel myself to be an undercover art theorist, merely posing as an artist. My chosen medium at the time I first read Benjamin was photography, which I had come to regard as a precious object, and his text removed me from that. For a time I attempted to alter the photograph to instill in it the unique, but the inherent lack of "aura" (as I had learned from Benjamin) restrained me from achieving this goal. I became interested in how theory and art history emptied the meaning out of pictures in trying to explain or critique them.

Critique is concerned with the truth content of a work of art, the commentary with its subject matter. The relationship between the two is determined by that basic law of literature according to which the work's truth content is the more relevant the more inconspicuously and intimately it is bound up with its subject matter. It is therefore precisely those works turn out to endure whose truth is most deeply embedded in their subject matter, the beholder who contemplates them long after their own time finds the realia all the more striking in the work as they have faded away in the world. This means that the subject matter and truth content, united in the work's early period, come apart during its afterlife; the subject matter becomes more striking while the truth content retains its original concealment. To an ever-increasing extent, therefore, the interpretation of the striking and the odd, that is, of the subject matter, becomes a prerequisite for any later critic. ... And out of this activity there arises immediately an inestimable criterion of critical judgment: only now can the critic ask the basic question of all criticism -- namely, whether the work's shining truth content is due to its subject matter or whether the survival of the subject matter is due to the truth content. For as they come apart in the work, they decide on its immortality. In this sense the history of works of art prepares their critique, and this is why historical distance increases their power. ...

---

2Benjamin as quoted by Arendt, from *Elective Affinities*, edited for its "truth content" by myself.
This quote of Benjamin, found in Hannah Arendt's brilliant biographical essay on Benjamin, shows the link between Benjamin's search for critique and my own search for modes of production. She also discusses Benjamin and his relation to contemporary criticism, through his use of "collection" and "quotation." The character of the flâneur\(^3\) with his walking and thinking, his advancing and tarrying, with his qualities of inside and outside, is indeed central to the persona of Benjamin that Arendt puts forth. The flâneur is also linked to the development of Benjamin's concepts of the collection and the power of the quotation. Benjamin was a collector, and I am a collector. Benjamin's concept of the power of quotations was, "Not to destroy the strength to preserve but to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy." This exemplifies my layered approach to Benjamin. He suffered from "Bibliomania," that extraordinary passion of collecting books, that was also central to Benjamin's character, thus linking the text as written with the collection. I too cannot resist books.

"The true, greatly misunderstood passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive. For this is its dialectics; to combine with loyalty to an object, to individual items, to things sheltered in his care, a stubborn subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable."

Benjamin's writing is deeply convoluted; it requires serious and difficult work to interpret, yet it calls for interpretation, because even on the surface it is profound. I have deeply identified with Benjamin, with his plights as described in the introduction to Illuminations written by Hannah Arendt, with his great fear of not being heard or understood, and with his feeling of lack of place.

III.

"Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis split up into reality and image. The social practice which the autonomous spectacle confronts is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear as its goal. The

---

\(^3\)The flâneur is the personification of nineteenth century Paris, the ultimate in the city as theater, as spectacle.
language of the spectacle consists of signs of the ruling production, which at the same
time are the ultimate goal of this production."

Immediately upon entering graduate school I began the conscious effort to
remove myself from my work in an experimentation of the death of the author. I
wanted to remove myself from the image making process. I felt that this was needed
to express the insecurity of the artist in control of the object and what happens to the
work after it leaves the artist. I began appropriating turn-of-the-century snap shots
and felt that I was acting as a framing device, merely repositioning the work. I felt
that it was an act closer to that of collaboration and curation, rather than creation.
My first photo combines were slickly packaged shrink-wrapped commodities.

The photo combines were chaos. I was encouraged to catalogue the Miss
Mary Brown archive in order to better “see what there was”. This lead to the
obsessive 200+ print piece Repositioning Miss Mary Brown. This was my first
museum. Miss Mary Brown seemed to illustrate the chaos and randomness in
categorization and cataloging. The obsessive ordering was a vain attempt to make
sense of the pieces of the whole.

IV.

In short: frankly, these days, without a theory to go with it, I can’t see a painting.
Then and there I experienced a flash known as the Aha! phenomenon, and the buried
life of ... art was reviled to me for the first time. The fog lifted! The clouds passed!
The motes, scales, conjunctival bloodshots, and murine agonies fell away!
All these years, along with the countless kindred souls, I am certain, I had
made my way into the galleries ... All these years I, like so many others, Had stood
in front of a thousand, two thousand ... , now squinting, now popping the eye
sockets open, now drawing back, now moving closer waiting, waiting, forever
waiting for ... it ... for it to come into focus, namely the visual reward (for so much
effort) which must be there, which everyone (tout le monde) knew to be there ... All
these years, in short, I had assumed that in art, if nowhere else, seeing is believing.
Well how very shortsighted! ... I had gotten it backward all along. Not "seeing is


\[^5\]My photo-based work prior to R.I.T. was also in the form of photo combines, or grids. But rather
than attempting to restructure a body of work, in search of a new narrative, I was attempting a more
poetic dream narrative. I used imagery from television and a technique of image deterioration to
frame the work, and then I would arrange these pictures in complex multiple-window mats, which I
carefully crafted. These pieces were inspired by the format of works by John Baldessari, Gerhard
Richter, and Rick Hock. I also experimented with smaller, shorter narratives, and the idea of non-
objective photography presented itself to me.
said that he had once committed a grave offense against public morality, but the 
estee in which he was held by all the titled families had long ago effaced this stain
on his character.

As soon as the painter had finished his coffee he was taken to the coach-
house and the carriage was uncovered. Bataille looked at it, gave an idea of the size he
thought the shield ought to be, and then, after the others had again given their
opinions, he began his work . . .

The encruchions on the two doors could not be completed until about
eleven o'clock the next morning. Everyone was present and the carriage was brought
outside so that the effect might be better judged. It was perfect. Bataille was
complimented and went on his way again, with his box on his back. The Baron, his
wife, Jeanne, and Julien all agreed that Bataille was a clever man, and might have
become a great artist, if circumstances had been favorable.7

This was in effect the museum of the Millennium.

V.

"It is here that one encounters an historical curiosity. For it turns out that, as it has
become clearer that true power lies not with production but with counter production,
with the useless rather than the useful, with the sign rather than the thing, so,
paradoxically, has it come to pass that people are less rather than more prepared to see
the work of art as difficult or serious.8

Benjamin's ideal of producing a work consisting entirely of quotations, one
that was mounted so masterfully that it could dispense with any accompanying text,
may strike one as whimsical in the extreme and self-destructive to book, but it was
not, any more than were the contemporaneous surrealistic experiments which arose
form similar impulses. To the extent that an accompanying text by the author
proved unavoidable, it was a matter of fashioning it in such a way as to preserve "the
intention of such investigations," namely, "to plumb the depths of language and
thought ... by drilling rather than excavating" (Briefe, I, 329), so as not to ruin
everything with explanations that seek to provide causal or systematic connection.
In so doing Benjamin was quite aware that this new method of "drilling" resulted in a
certain "forcing of insights ... whose inelegant pedantry, however, is preferable to
today's almost universal habit of falsifying them"; it was equally clear to him that this
method was bound to be "the cause of certain obscurities" (Briefe, I, 330). What
mattered to him above all was to avoid anything that might be reminiscent of
empathy, as though a given subject of investigation had a message in readiness which
easily communicated itself, or could be communicated, to the reader or spectator: "No
poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the
listener" ("The Task of the Translator"; italics added).9

7 Maupassant, Guy de, Une Vie, "A Woman's Life." 1883, Translated and edited by Ernest Boyd,
: Gilbert-Rolfe, Seriousness and Difficulty in Contemporary Art and Criticism, Originally given as
a lecture at Sarah Lawrence College in December 1990.
9Arendt, from the introduction to Illuminations.
This passage is central to the Walter Benjamin cult and study. Its emphasis on language as the basis of criticism shows his placement of language as the locus of meaning. The text itself contains its own critique, in a sort of humanist hermeneutics. It shows that he is all too aware of the text as an object, which must be dealt with in terms of itself. Without the direct link to Benjamin, and Sontag, I doubt that I would have been able to have hit upon this mode of production. I have found that many of the sources for my production can be traced to Walter Benjamin and the cult of Benjamin, both directly and indirectly.

Moving still further away from the image as carrier of message, I conceived of The Failure of Art to Communicate to the Masses with Wataru Okada. It was an opportunistic museum of misunderstood contemporary art. At the center of the project was the text, The Failure of Art to Communicate to the Masses, made up primarily of quotations strung together to explain the position of the text itself. My text about The Failure of Art to Communicate to the Masses, was culled from various sources in the theory of art and put together Walter Benjamin-style, so as to be read as a new whole with a new meaning.

It is the supposition of our activities that the greatest problem of contemporary art is its utter failure to communicate to the masses. Since the formation of the European Avant Garde at the turn of the past century, art has moved further away from accessibility to the masses. It has placed itself into a construction that is self-serving, and has in the past been self-sustaining. It is constantly in crisis. This crisis of art is well described by the very statements of the artists and critics and the makers of theory. The general condition of art since the turn of the century is easily characterized by the rise of abstraction, an abstraction that first moves away from an art which depicts reality and then towards a theory that denies us our very experience of reality. You see here that art moves away from being a visual communication to being a theoretical discourse. This proliferation of theory is directly proportional to the growth of abstraction, and then to the dysfunction of what is so-called Greenbergian Modernism. This theory is complex and not easily absorbed. The literature of modern art is by no means uniformly difficult to understand, but much of it is. Obscurity can occasionally be deliberate, or at least it can sometimes follow from the refusal of specific concepts and requirements of rationality by artists and their supporters, or - which may be the same thing - from a determined attempt to conscript language to the purpose of art. More generally the development of modern art is highly specialized. Upon this specialization that the communicative power of what art was has diminished. For all the claims to immediacy and universality of expression which have accompanied the development, the distinguishing experience of the modern artist has been in a large part an experience of the technical problems and possibilities. Specialization and technical
problems turn the broad communicative possibilities of art into a tunnelization of pinpointing a discourse which is based on difficult theory.

As a companion to the text there was a wall-sized grid of ink jet prints, Wallpaper (Art Theory Since 1900) mostly scanned photographs from various media sources, and found snapshots. I wanted wallpaper to be seen as a demeaning term, marginalizing what it described, reducing it to decoration, which seemed to describe what theory has done to art in the twentieth century. It was a visual version of the text, except for being even more open-ended as far as meaning. There was a performance that we did every day for two hours, in which we alternated between standing in glass museum cases, talking on citizen band radios, and sitting in chairs next to the cases talking with each other and the audience, if present. This performance was intended to illustrate the point of communication breakdown. While inside the cases, we could talk to each other, yet the conversation was made up of one way transmissions and the audience could not engage with us in that conversation. Outside of the cases, while sitting in the chairs, we were more
accessible, yet somewhat discouraging due to our uniform of all black clothing and sunglasses. The uniform was a quote from Joseph Kosuth whose writing Wataru and I had become enamored with. I also created a set of smaller works for the show, including Superfluous contents of the artist's pockets 4/6/94, consisting of some rubber bands, screws, nails, a key, a safety pin and the like. This was a play on conceptual art, and its mode of display. The work Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community, also played on Idea Art, taking its title from an essay that is particularly opaque, in the first book of Post Modern theory I ever read. The show closed with The reading of the Text. This was a performance where Wataru and I sat in our black uniform and a recorded reading of the paper was played. No one attended this performance - a video was made. The show was a success, since many people saw it and discussed it and it got its point across. This, however negated its title and signified a failure.

I took the piece a bit further after the exhibition was over, producing a mock Art in America issue covering the show, and an eight hour video projection of the final reading looped with a loud, alienating soundtrack inspired by Bruce Nauman's video installations. This was regarded as simply annoying by those who experienced it.

VI.

The following summer was spent in research for creating my own museum as a more formal construct, as a space, as a location, as a shell for my museuming activities. I had the great fortune of having the attic floor of my apartment at my disposal. It was converted, painted and cleaned to be more museum-like, with Museum of Modern Art white walls and bright flood lighting. I called it the Plastic Museum. The Plastic Museum is an institution that I created in order to have a theoretical shell with which to surround my ideas of "museuming". I developed a
corporate identity, logo, membership information packets, and advertising strategies. The inaugural exhibition was from another museum I created, called the Miniature Museum of Art. The Miniature Museum of Art is based on books printed in the fifties of collector stamps of "masterpieces" of art, primarily from the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Two collections of these books were found at the R.I.T. library, and became the inspiration for the show. I took elements from the books and re-reproduced them in a variety of ways in order to bring the idea of original or masterpiece into question. The second exhibition was to be of seven reproduction rooms from the Met and the Getty. In one of my few political moves I staged a performance in which I spray painted over a poster for the show with "canceled due to lack of funding." This was my protest to the deplorable state of the National Endowment of the Arts. As with most political art, it unfortunately only preached to the converted.

The Plastic Museum is one form of discourse on my own attraction and repulsion to museums. It is plastic in the sense that it is permanently malleable, and because "plastic" is a European word for sculpture. By becoming a museum I have made the first step towards understanding the insidious nature of institutions, as well as the benefits one can find under their aegis. I have come to have a more vague political stance to the museum than artists such as Hans Hacke, Fred Wilson and Joseph Kosuth. I choose not to be overtly judgmental. I have taken ideas from those artists and others as inspiration, but remain outwardly politically aloof in order to portray my feelings of attraction and repulsion. I want to be an institution, I want to be a museum. I am also aware of the problems that arise from those positions. Some of the problems are the inability of the individual to embody any institution in its entirety and the conflict of interest in being both artist and museum. We are in a culture of collecting culture. We are indoctrinated into collecting from a young age, and almost no one escapes this passion. Susan Sontag writes that photographers
collect the world, much as explorers colonized the globe. I see that the museum’s collections are not so dissimilar to the ones that we keep at home, the context is just slightly different. We are all museums, and I choose to live like one. The premier location of the Plastic Museum was in my attic, which blurred the distinction between my life and my museum. Most people display their collections in their living room, and use their attic for storage. I reversed this roll, and opened up my attic for an audience to enjoy and learn from my collections.

VII.

"... the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories."  
"... if there is a counterpart to the confusion of the library, it is the order of the catalogue."  

The notion of the museum as a neutral container for a series of objects for the public to contemplate undisturbed is utopian. An exhibition is a meeting-point of practices and theories, in which the work of art is located. Roughly speaking, an exhibition can be defined as on the one hand, a practical work that involves selecting and evaluating a number of objects, and on the other, a system of meanings made up by a series of statements or expressions: the individual works. At the same time, these meanings are both grasped and communicated through the titles and classifications of the exhibition, and through the textual commentaries. Moreover, exhibitions are arranged in what is basically an open-ended space-time framework where viewers are free to follow a discourse, stop, or walk back, as they think appropriate.

An exhibition can never be read as a single text. There is always a plurality of texts which have to be disclosed as well, thus functioning as a sort of text parallel to the work of art itself. The museum or gallery, its history, its collection, its building, the way the objects are displayed and labeled, the explanations, even the traffic flow are all part of the “message” sent to the viewers attending an exhibition. They are also part of the knowledge viewers must bring with them as they enter a museum. This knowledge curators and directors must take into account when programming and preparing and exhibition.

The museum is the ultimate collector's collector and cataloguer. Many contemporary art movements spring from a dismantling of the museum, and much of

11Here, library can be read as a collection.
this activity's source leads us to Marcel Duchamp. His readymade and other similar actions declared that art should take place in the mind rather than the eye, and that anything could be art simply by virtue of an artist declaring it so. Duchamp proposed the radical notion of approaching art-making in terms of strategy rather than technique in 1913. Duchamp broke away from the myth that the work of art could be understood at once. Museums still cling to an earlier model. His Boîte-en-Valise of 1936–1941 is a veritable museum in a box; it is a self-constructed miniature retrospective of his works. Made up mostly of photo-mechanical reproductions, the kind that postcards and the like are made of, this work functions as a premonition of the eventual collection of his work by the Arnsbergs and its display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a separate exhibition. The box also has served as inspiration for the display of his works at such diverse places as Pasadena, California, and Venice, Italy.

Duchamp was not alone in his exploration of the museum as a point of departure for the molding of art works in itself. The great constructivist El Lissitzky and his First Demonstration Room of 1926 could be considered an even earlier precedent for museum-based work by artists. It was a space conceived by El Lissitzky which was constructed to challenge expected museum norms. His idea was to use the room to activate the viewer just as the art would, since in Lissitzky's mind the traditional museum lulled the viewer into submission. By using the space of the museum as an art piece to elicit reaction, Lissitzky opened a door to future artists engaging the institution as a medium for art production.
is assumed to be apparent to everyone. In this way, art is removed from context, thus fragmenting it, and then re-configured into a new homogeneous work.

The museum, along with notions of the canon, act as an index for art. The exhibition functions as a guide for the viewer seeing the work of art closed and within a specific context of meaning, rather than the open object that it is meant to be. The concepts of collection, gallery, and museum are not thoroughly questioned. We think that there is a biological predisposition to them. These concepts are social constructs, with specific historical and social meanings.

In the sixties, artists emerged who would be using the museum as a format for work, as a critical platform. Marcel Broodthaers, a Belgian, was a poet, until 1964 when he decided to become an artist\(^\text{16}\). His conscious decision was part of his overall plan, which can be linked to Marcel Duchamp and Magrette, both of whom were extraordinarily influential on the artist’s production. His first objects were definitely more surreal, perhaps as a response to the rise of American pop art in Europe\(^\text{17}\). But later, as his work progressed, it became more focused on the museum as subject and fiction. His installations became increasingly museum-like and layered in the aesthetic of the museum. Look to such works as \textit{Le salon noire}(1966), containing a coffin with shelves of jars with profiles of a poet friend, black gauze, a chair, and a table with silver objects, \textit{Le Corbeau et le Renard} with word paintings, photographic canvases, and films, and his most complete and complex museum fiction, \textit{Département des Aigles}, which consisted of a collection of objects depicting the eagle. His fictions play off real museums with in a way that exposed the function of the museum in contemporary society. His work reached its pinnacle in the \textit{Musée d'Art Modern}, a project which


lasted four years\textsuperscript{18}. It started in 1968, in his own home. It was inaugurated by a speech from a genuine museum director, and consisted of empty packing crates with warning signs as well as a selection of postcards of paintings by French masters. This immediately revealed the problems of the institution. As his project continued through the years, it moved periodically from space to space, and it is generally unknown what was shown, and what was simply promised via "announcements". In 1972 it became \textit{Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures}, a most grandiose\textsuperscript{19} collection, with hundreds of objects all referring to the eagle. These objects were borrowed from real museums to fill his fiction. They were all labeled with a numbered tag which read, "This is not a Work of Art." In this way he turned what Duchamp had done with the ready-made, upside-down. Instead of taking the everyday object and bringing it into the museum, he brought the museum object and declared it was not art. This is a powerful statement of the museum as aesthetic vehicle, which serves as inspiration to my work.

In a similar vein Christian Boltanski’s work plays with notions of the museum, especially his early work, although it is a strain easily seen throughout his production. In the early seventies Boltanski created an exhibition called "Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{20}" It consisted of vitrines full of what he called \textit{Attempts to reconstruct objects that belonged to Christian Boltanski between 1948 and 1954}. These were mostly crude clay toys, clothes, and utensils, each was an attempt to remember what he had possessed. They are strangely akin to the types of reconstructions found in the natural history museum, and that was his goal, to place himself into the category of the forgotten civilization. Then there were his shows of \textit{Inventory of objects that belonged to a resident of...Location of Exhibition}. These

\textsuperscript{19}ibid.
shows were supposedly the entire inventory of an individual's possessions. It raised the question of what the collections of museums were about. Why should museums hold certain artifacts to be precious and not others? Why are museums not about us (the audience)?

Louise Lawler also undermines the space of the museum as sacred container, by collapsing the location of the artwork. Her photographs deal with art and the museum as an arrangement, like a ready-made work of art, but are credited to the persons who chose how to display the work. She turns the private space with art into the public museum. Her more recent works, which are in the form of paperweights (a collectable object) bring the conflation of her ideation to a fine point.

I also draw further inspiration from John Cage's revolutionary musical compositions of the '50s, and the first generation of Conceptualists who rejected the macho bombast of Abstract Expressionism and the slickly packaged mass culture obsessions of Pop. They looked instead to philosophy and linguistic theory and approached art-making as a means of wrestling with defiantly un-commercial questions: How is meaning constructed? Why does it take the form it does? I ask these questions too. Within current practice it is impossible to create the work of art without aligning oneself within a tradition of cultural production.

VIII.

2 Lawler, Louise, What is the Same. Maison de la Culture et de la Saint-Etienne, France, 1986. An Exhibition Catalog.
Due to my background in architectural history and critical theory, I tend to view art as the structure as well as the object. One of the most significant structures in art is the frame. It is difficult to see the work of art today without the frame, both as a physical structure, and as context. For example, the purpose of this essay, which is to act as a frame around the work which I make, which is primarily frames. The Frames act as a surrogate for the museum: they are decayed, fragmented, and they are a metaphor for the museum. The Frames are made of lead, carpenters glue, plumbers solder, acrylic, plaster, rubber, plastic, all of which are symbolic of the materials of the building, of the structure, of the museum building. The empty frame fragments represent the idea that art has been in a state of chaos since the turn of the century and the rise of museums. The frame is the art and the art is a frame.

The museum drawings, carved into mahogany, precisely filled, lovingly hand-finished like a fine piece of furniture, are an inversion. They are precious objects, yet they highlight the disposable. Unlike the furniture and spaces they show they are not functional objects. The fixtures of the museum are, for the most part disposable, changeable, intended to be ignored, not precious. I want to draw the attention to them. I want them to be the center. I want them to be the focus. I want them to be the art, for the fixtures inform the viewer as much as the art. The Museum is the great leveler, bringing the high down, and the low up to the same plateau of culture. The Museum pretends to educate, to elevate, but at best it merely occupies time and space. It eats our leisure time, and is a commodity cruncher. It sells us the art we already have.

The rise of the museum institution has completely and forever changed the practice of art. Many contemporary artists, in addition to the few mentioned in some depth here deal with the aesthetics of the museum, but few go as far as constructing the museum themselves. Museums are aware of this mode of working, and have appropriated and engulfed it. I would not suppose that anyone creating art could not
be aware that its position, its placement in time and space, is integral to the object itself. Thus what each artist creates is a museum within which the work of art has its placement, has existence.

“Working this way has become so much a part of our language that it’s now a cliché... In the ‘60s, however, I felt like a dog looking at a forest, seeing countless trees and thinking, “So little time, so much to do!” Now we’re down to one tree that hundreds of dogs have pissed on.”

John Baldessari
Conceptual Baroque Minimalism
Baroque Minimal Conceptualism
Minimalist Conceptual Baroque
Baroque Conceptual Minimalism
Minimal Baroque Conceptualism
Conceptual Minimal Baroque
Selected Bibliography


20. "Classic Cars," Television series on The Nashville Network, Sunday 1:00 AM.


39. Lawler, Louise, What is the Same, Maison de la Culture et de la Saint-Etienne, France, 1986. An Exhibition Catalog.


