

THE ART NATION

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Our nation is the art world, as Arthur Danto used to say. There we flourish, there we laugh, there we cry, and there we shall perish. Yet every nation needs a border able to be closed by someone with a short name in order to soothe the nay-sayers. As the art world is somewhat abstract (but even then less abstract than political nations) let us try to delineate our territory so as to make it closable by art nationalist nay-sayers. Similarities to current Austrian politics not intended.

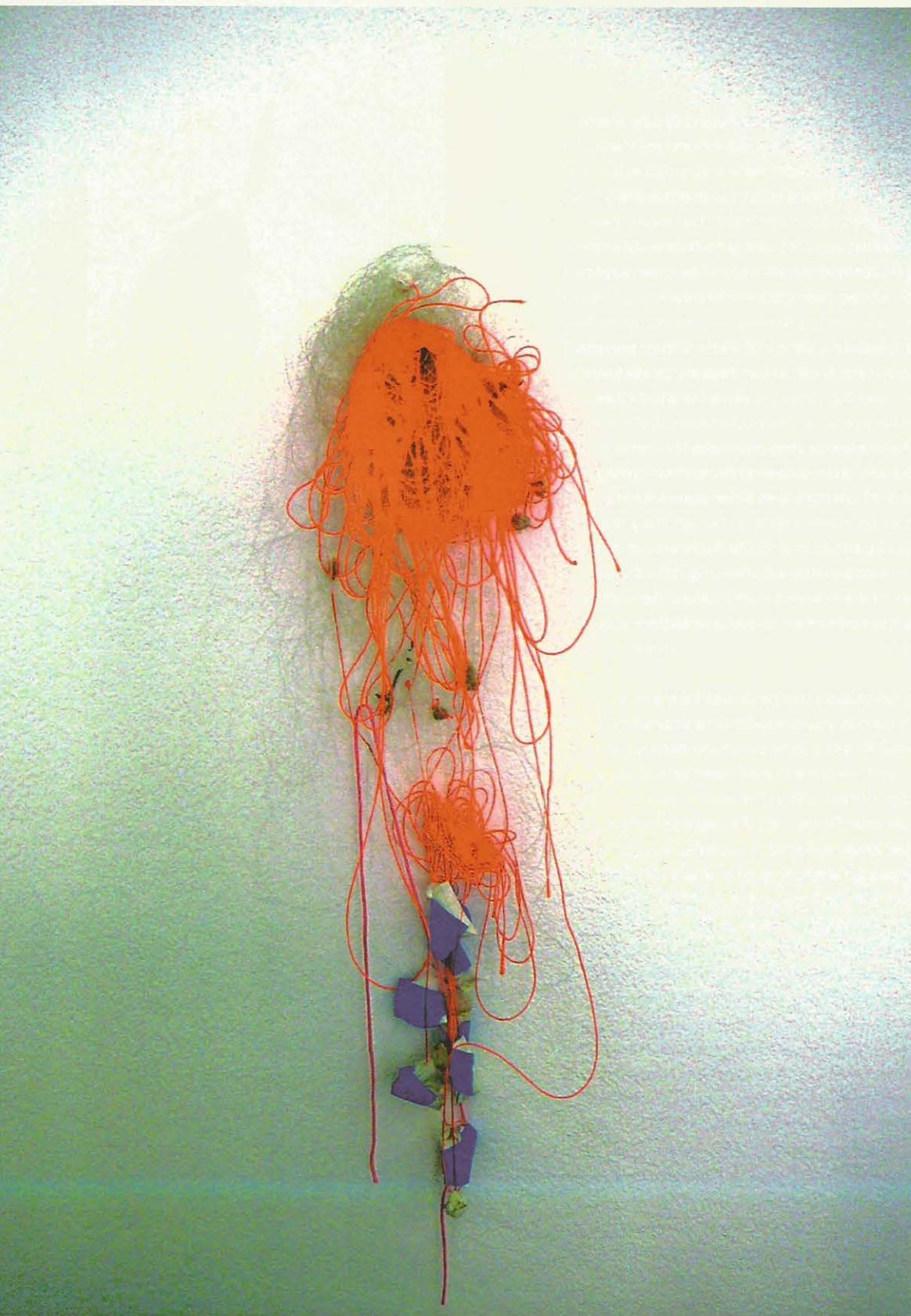
The art nation is an encapsulated milieu of like-minded people. Although many of these do live from art or related professions (art criticism, exhibition-making, catering services etc.), they do not form a professional group in the usual sense. Each and every bank employee, for instance, may execute the very same routines but at the same time have different attitudes, political orientations and, of course, sexual fantasies. In art this is reversed. Always keep in mind that, although they often behave very differently, all people in art share a few common "philosophical" opinions, mostly without knowing it (but you do now!): That art is important makes sense, makes life richer, is better than, for instance, science or New Age religion, is the only thing worth pursuing.

You will sometimes hear precisely the opposite being maintained, especially from very successful artists or critics. Don't let this confuse you! This is a very common but merely superficial attitude. In short, despite their humdrum quarrels with each other, art people share the same world view, whereas other people do not. This yields the core paradox of the art nation, which always views "other", "normal" people as mainstream – streamlined automata without "souls".

This paradox has historical roots. So-called modern art – i.e. art the form of which is the product of the "free will", taste, and ambition of its producer (rather than that of their patron) – has only been around for 250 years, tops. With the rise of industrial production in the 18th century a new social stratum gained the ascendancy: the Bourgeoisie. This stratum has two basic values: (a) a general democratic outlook, i.e. an "equal rights attitude", and (b) an economic outlook. Largely unwittingly, and in contrast to the formerly ascendant aristocracy, the Bourgeoisie is comprised of people who have mastered balance sheets, bookkeeping. Apart from the fact that the values of this new caste swept away the rule of the aristocracy, it produced a counter-movement of people shocked by the pending fall of the old values of elegance and abundance. Most importantly, social rise and decline became possible as the religious justification of roles in the production and consumption chain was replaced by freedom of choice,

TANGLES

Es sind Knäuel aus Neonschnüren, mit denen er mithilfe von Gewichten (gekaute Kaugummis) die Silhouetten von Möbeln nachbaut, z.B. die kleine Frankfurter Küche von Schütte-Lihotzky etc. Nach der Ausstellung macht er dann "Tangles" daraus. So heißen die geschickten Bilder auch.



rational bookkeeping on a mass level and democratic elections. Subsequently, the Bohemian world emerged as a significant urban offshoot of the otherwise stiff-upper-lipped Bourgeoisie, promoting a more relaxed approach, direction freedom-of-choice.

Freedom of choice notwithstanding, this nation has survived to this day consisting of only two basic types: the introverted and sceptical "intellectual" (now called "geek") and the more glamorous dandy. As the essence of art is religious, these two types have historical predecessors in the medieval Church: the geek paralleling the sophisticated and highly dedicated scholastic, and the dandy resembling the more ethereal mystic. The contemporary art nation is a sect of the Bohemian nation with leanings toward dandyism, but with healthy quotas for a certain proportion of geeks. Things can look a tad scruffy, though, as it is no longer an elite sect today but a mass phenomenon. It may share the stereotypes found in Bohemia at large, however the opinions involved centre exclusively on the myth of art, beauty, and free creativity. Like all sects, the art nation has developed a specific style of its own. In order to successfully misbehave, one obviously has to get accustomed to this style first, which starts with certain superficial "codes" concerning one's attire.

Your outfit is your ticket to the art nation. Remember that even geeks in the arts differ from, for instance, many more purist (e.g. computer) geeks in the respect that they at least develop an "anti-style" – something like a designed non-design. In other words, they know that they aren't following the prevailing fashion in the dandy fraction. The dynamics of fashion require that the ambitious misbehaver keeps a more or less beady eye on current trends. But basically, black will always be the new black in sartorial terms, and the glamorous and the grungy will continue to merge with subculture styles to give "Camp" – which does not mean bivouac, but the ironic and sometimes consciously shabby style of the mass culture elite.

You may be the most talented misbehaver ever, however without sufficient style you will be neither heard nor acknowledged. Style is easy to learn. Skip through some art magazines, sniff around at some exhibition openings, look at the CD covers of bands which are currently hip in the art nation (you find them referenced in the magazines).

You don't have to invest much thinking on clothes but will learn it automatically. Your "personal style" does not have to be fancy, so we advise you to first misbehave in some geek style before going for the dandy. Imitate when you can, but never outfits as a whole. Put your style together eclectically: Similar trousers to Kurt Cobain's, jacket from the flea market, expensive and conventional wrist watch, Madonna's bra – taken together this will do well. After having developed your own (anti-) style, start misbehaving!

For instance: Exhibition openings are the stock market of the hierarchy within the art scene. From outside they look quite dull and unimportant, but they are not. Your value is unmistakably represented in the attitudes towards you, and yours towards others; you just have to get the little hints. Do not put yourself into the limelight too early. To succeed it is useful to know the general etiquette of an exhibition opening at a gallery or museum.

HERE ARE OUR ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS:

1. *Thou shall never confess that you do not know a particular concept and/or artist (aka foreigner). Always accept everything; nod for success. This rule may at times conflict with*
2. *Thou shall try to meet and greet (but never introduce to others) as many people, famous and infamous, as possible. This rule may at times conflict with*
3. *Thou shall visit galleries and museums (aka national heritage) episodically, yet regularly, i.e. never stop going. This rule may at times conflict with*
4. *Thou shall never stumble over the uppermost step of a gallery entrance (nor attempt to use the wrong entrance, aka "route") This rule may at times conflict with*
5. *Thou shall always appear either much stressed or very relaxed (as if you were just in the midst of an intense work phase, heavy research or deep thought, or have just finished one of the above). This rule may at times conflict with*
6. *As greeting thou shall always give a flimsy nod instead of hysterically say "Hiiiiiii!" or similar. This rule may at times conflict with*
7. *Thou shall be either always honest or always dishonest. Anything else will make you appear serious which does not fit into the overall dandyism of the art nation. Cultivate your envy. This rule may at times conflict with*
8. *Thou shall either find all art great or none of it (aka everything or nothing your nation brings forth). Anything else won't give you personality, which is needed on every Index of the art nation. This rule may at times conflict with*
9. *Thou shall always or never take anything said about you personally since you shouldn't have a personality. This rule is frequently disregarded by non-misbehavers, giving you the edge, however, this rule may at times conflict with*
10. *Thou shall have strong opinions, especially about what is still art (aka traditional) and what not. This rule may at times conflict with*
11. *Thou shall always call a work of art "piece". Never use "artwork" or "work of art". If you feel that the word "piece" has already been used too often in the ongoing conversation, use "installation" and "performance," not "painting", "sculpture" or the like.*