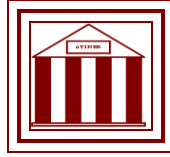


ATINER CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES No: ART2013-0696

Athens Institute for Education and Research

ATINER



ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ART2013-0696

Is Criticism Really Dead?

Firat Arapođlu

Lecturer (Ma, Art History)

Istanbul Kemerburgaz University

Fine Arts and Design Faculty

Department of Jewellery Design

Turkey

ATINER CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES No: ART2013-0696

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research.
All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the
source is fully acknowledged.

ISSN 2241-2891

5/11/2013

An Introduction to ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

Arapođlu, F. (2013) **"Is Criticism Really Dead?"** Athens: ATINER'S
Conference Paper Series, No: ART2013-0696.

Is Criticism Really Dead?

Firat Arapođlu
Lecturer (Ma, Art History)
Istanbul Kemerburgaz University
Fine Arts and Design Faculty
Department of Jewellery Design
Turkey

Abstract

We are in the post-critical period of art now. Once, the art market was walking with history and criticism interactively, from now on there is no any system of signification and assessment out of the art market. This detection leads us to the central point of discuss: What is criticism? And who is critic?

It can be gone from the point of George Dickie's statement: "Works of art are art because of the position they occupy within an institutional context". Or if we give ear to Arthur Danto: "Objects are works of art when the art world decrees them to be". It seems that texts and statements about the criticism and critic lately are about what position the critics occupy and how much critics have power.

Today, in opposition to the criticism, relationship between institutions, effective "people" in institutions and important artists decided that what is art or what it is been in view and gains values. It seems that the critics have no power to change the art worlds in which artworks are explained and appraised via market values.

In this study, it will be taken hold of these titles and will be tried to conclude them in our times: How can critics come up with their knowledge? How can they be emphasized the time with locating the historical conditions into their studies? And how can they put forward the effects of art on public and politics by comparing art objects with actions of everyday life?

Keywords: Art Criticism, Contemporary Art, Art History

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

In the recent days, the most important subjects on the agenda are the announcement of the critic, curator, professor and once an art dealer Dave Hickey that he is quitting his job as a critic (Daily Mail, 2012) and the declaration of Sarah Thornton that she will no longer continue to be an art journalist (Thornton, 2012). A lot of news, articles, translations and comments took place in various media regarding this subject. Hickey, the author of numerous catalogue articles and important books such as *Invisible Dragon & Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (1993 & 1997); by reminding the bureaucratic structures, which function in the world of exhibition, contract and art, has announced that art criticism no more has the power on these. Though Dave Hickey quit art criticism, he did not leave his job as an author of art; he still continues to write books and other essays. Thornton also has stated that she had no intention of leaving the world of art and so she only will have a break in making news about the market.

The coincidence of all these discussions taking place at the time of the sessions having a theme of “VISUAL ARTS IN TURKEY STARTING FROM THE 80S TILL TODAY: TESTIMONIES AND SHARINGS“, which is organized by Turkey branch of International Association of Art Critics AICA, is quite ironic. But more significantly, the said subject turned out to be a rich discussion with the declarations of opposite or sometimes the same opinions such as the articles written by Serkan Özkaya, Ali Akay and Cem Erciyes of Radikal (Radikal Daily Newspaper, 09/01/2013, 11/01/2013 & 12/01/2013); the opinions presented by the famous names such as Ahu Antmen, Ayşegül Sönmez and Evrim Altuğ (Radikal Daily Newspaper, 26/12/2012) and at the same time the publication of a text of Julian Stallabrass regarding the said topic in sanatatak.com (The Art Newspaper, 2012 & Turkish translation published in: www.sanatatak.com) and the evaluations of Ali Artun in e-skop.com (2013). The subject turned out to be such a case that; today while an opinion which is presented is not being (cannot be) responded just like writing on water, even the state of a subject which can become an information production mechanism, seems to be fruitful. At this point, I would like to share some cases which I observed within this period, my comments and finally my suggestions.

Art, Artwork and Criticism Today

As Ali Artun rightfully describes that we are facing the post-critical period of art (Artun, 2013). As the art market was moving forward interacting with the history and criticism once, now there is a system of sense-making and evaluation, which is out of the market. If all of these discussions are not evaluated through the institutionalization and the values of art, but assessed through individual and / or political positioning; this identification can be considered as a reality depending on where the individual positions himself. Hence, this takes us to the center of an epistemological discussion. What is

criticism? Who is a critic? But before that, we should continue by putting the analysis of the association between the “art and institutionalism” in the center.

If we are to proceed through the idea of George Dickie, “the work of art is the art because of the position it occupies within the context of institutionalism” (1997). Or if we take into account what Danto said, “the object becomes a work of art, when the world of art decides that it is art” (1974). I guess the recent statements of Hickey and Thornton, with the texts and opinions added to them; are proceeding in the axis of what is the position of the critic in the world of art and what is his/her power. It is possible to assess this in two ways. A critic, with the weakest power, is effective on directing the admiration of the public. Critics, with full power, -with the contribution of art historians and curators- can decide whether the objects are the works of art or not. Perhaps it would make the critics happy, to determine the status of the objects whether they were works of art or not but we have to be realistic. Shortly; perhaps it has to be confessed that the first one continues its existence even a little but the second one was not realized at all.

If taken into consideration, the critics state that they are going to continue to write articles, whatever their powers are. Of course while refereed journals, reviewing the texts and the references in the cumulative saving of information are effectual as a matter of course in science, as there is no such an approach in art, the paradoxes in the entire discussion are proceeding along this axis. Rather than criticism; the association between the institutions, the “effective” people in the institutions and dominant artists decide what is to be considered as art or what is to be invisible and to gain value. Then in this case, do the critics get disturbed of the change in the position of “power” here? Is the problem, not being effective and dominant in this great trade? If such a role were not demanded, would such a fuss not arise?

The critic has no power to change a world of art in which the art is being evaluated and explained through the market values – of course such a determination will be meaningless for the ones who are unaware of the existence of such a world or who do not approve and therefore refuse to be the part of such a world. Dave Hickey must have meant this, when he stated that the critic had no power. If the point that I agree with Cem Erciyes through his articles in Radikal is the rendering of art work and the activity in positioning it within the history of art (Radikal Daily Newspaper, 05/01/2013), then this type of writing is still existing but it cannot be called as criticism. It will be more suitable to call as the author of art – he also suggests the same, but uses his “suggestion” in a wrong place in his article. A critic, as a name and figure trusted by the public by defining his/her subjective judgments, who defines his beautiful / ugly concepts and directs art, no longer has power among the market values. But the power here has to be evaluated through “figurative power”. If the argument is to make a record in the “history of art” and if this still is being left to an author, then it means that the “documentation” is important. Perhaps the power is in this determination. On the other hand, as in the past of the history of art and being proved in detail in the study named “The Invention of Art” of Larry Shiner (2004); the issue regarding to earn money with art, should

be clarified. Once, the artist was demanded to have the mood of “not selling the work of art”. Is it now the critic’s turn for this mood? In that case, in a local scale the financial independency of the art author can be arrived at.

Let me now clarify some of the details of the price lists which were announced by Turkey branch of International Association of Art Critics, AICA and which were submitted to the institutions such as galleries and museums by the members –or the lists which were not submitted, but an agreement might have been made. Determining such a case, is not possible- : In the price list of AICA, the price of “Catalogue Texts of Gallery Exhibitions” is TL 1.000 (approx. 390€ or 520 \$), the price of “Book Texts or Comprehensive Monography” is TL 3.500 (approx. 1300€ or 1800\$), “Curatorship Fee for Galleries and Museums” is TL 2.000/5.000 (approx. 780€/1000\$ and 980€/1300 \$) and so on (www.aicaturkey.blogspot.com (16.02.2010)). The remaining information consists of prices for conference and panel speech-making, jury membership, interviews and the like. Here, there is no pricing related to the “art criticism”. The price of “Articles for Gallery Periodicals” is TL 250 (approx. 100€ or 130 \$), but most of the periodical authors are not paid even such an amount. With the pricing defined here, if the critic is thought to be “captured” by the world of art, in the case that he/she writes catalogue articles, undertakes curatorship, organizes conferences/panels in contemporary art institutions and therefore gets money in return; this can be claimed to be a faulty determination. This must be related with how the said author positions himself in this horizon. If you have the power of changing different hats ingeniously at the same time, this may also mean that it can be possible to defend the critical stance. If the critic is surrendering to the world of art with these amounts, it can be claimed that the purchasing power is very high and the economical situation of Turkey is very good, or we can make a boring joke that the critics are very cheap. According to the above mentioned amounts, a critic, in order to produce a high income, relatively has to write very often. Only then, the frequency of writing and the superficiality created by this can be talked about, and this may be one of the points which Hickey and Thornton did not state clearly – or could not express themselves.

The writing frequency of an author is one of the topics to be observed: Making a living by writing continuously, means a writing tempo having a dead-end. Hence this will cause the presentation of the repetition of the memorized thoughts, rather than mounting an argument in order to enable the discussion of deep thoughts in the articles and so, the text will be nothing other than “superficial”. For a qualified writing, the author has to spend some time in forming the text and to observe the object with a different standpoint –the object can be seen more clearly from a distance. However, when one of my critic friends requests me to write a “readable, understandable” text, she just means it has the risk of covering such superficial reading practices. Because, if you write a text, which argues with deep and complicated thoughts, then the language in your writing will be as much complicated as the thoughts. So if you reduce the language of the object that you are observing, it will take you to a fascist approach which will stand against the said subject. On the other hand,

it should be considered that the “visibility” issue can be as important as to the critic like that of the artist – without ignoring the fact that every single critic can have a different nature. Writing for the tabloid press, makes the authors access to a reader community consisting of thousands of people and hence creates a more popular image – I guess, some of the critics will accept to write with low wages just for this reason, because the visibility creates a symbolic capital. Monthly or bimonthly art journals are sector-specific journals and naturally their circulations are at low levels.

Another important point is the difference between authorship of art and criticism. It should be emphasized that the first one is a situation which is integrated into the market and the second one has a possibility of generating a critical text / file with a payment which will be realized probably by a fundless or at least an independent art journal or newspaper – since I have never accepted any money from any newspaper, I do not know the said amount, but I guess the amount can be between TL 60 and TL 80 (approximately 25/33 Euro or 33/44 US \$), per writing. If more than this amount is paid, I will be glad to learn. On the other hand, if a newspaper/journal does not (cannot) finance its critic and if the news will be realized on the condition that the expenses are born by the organizers of events such as biennials and exhibitions, then such a case may make the critic/author become hesitant and here, the author may not decide how he will act – this is one of the main problems of journalism. Of course, the ordinary case is that, the expenses should be born by the newspaper. However, in considering the number of the newspapers containing culture-art pages and the promises given to their authors, a lot of time has to pass for the establishment of such an environment.

A realistic panorama has to be formed regarding the criticism of the present day. Because, it is observed that in a quite different way various roles are being defined wrongly and consequently many concepts and job descriptions are being confused. If I am to give an example, some realities are still continuing today; for instance still one of the focal points for the career of an artist today is the news and critics which will be written about him in the papers and journals. In viewing their web sites and CVs, you can see that this is still an effectual phenomenon. Let’s end up by getting back to Hickey issue.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The loud mentioning of Hickey’s quit, has a little disturbing tone. I guess, rather than a philosophical withdrawal, the conversion of this quit to a photograph of a tabloid, has an effect on this. Of course the quitting announcement of an important figure like Hickey is a privilege. But it will not be realistic to think that the art market, which is rotating with an increasing rate within the wheels of the capitalist economy, will come to an end because of the quitting of either Hickey or Thornton.

Let’s remember the arguments of Ali Artun in the discussions about the origins of modernism and the death of criticism within post-modernism (2013):

A process, in which the system is mainly dependent on agriculture and aristocracy; a modernism, which proceeds in parallel with the axis of the existence possibility of a revolutionist rebellion against the current regime and new technological inventions. As Perry Anderson ingeniously specified that it was natural that this period formed creative art movements one after another; all of these movements had frames of thoughts which were against bourgeoisie (2002). But today, though the art protects its radical structure from time to time, it became integrated into the market and/or dependent on the institutions. This is a state of being nested, just like the mentality of post-modernism. This is not a system suggestion of foregrounding the borders, but the suggestion of going over the limits and the hybrid thought.

Even so, it is possible to determine the existences or returns of many concepts which were featured by post-modernism as hypothetical avoidances: Ethical rules, existence of the subject, fields of political struggle and back to the aesthetics. Is it not possible to foreground, in a modest manner, what else can a critic do, within the frame of this suffocating culture which is formed by the art market and its values in the capitalist economic regime and within the discussions at the point of this modernism / post-modernism? For example, cannot these topics be proposed? To make the pathological factors in this system visible with subjective judgments by setting forth the thoughts; to emphasize the time by putting the historical conditions at the focus of their studies continuously and finally to reveal the effects of art on the public and politics by comparing the objects of art with the activities of life. Okay then, how a critic can manage this?

The critic should obtain all his accumulation of knowledge from the public sphere. If he is only a part of the culture industry or totally inside the walls of the academy in the university, his true ending will be defined there. A critic should neither show an elitist manner, nor reveal his membership of a privileged social class, but on the other hand, once more it became clear with this discussion that this is just an illusion. Everyone has the ability to make criticism *de facto*. The acceptance of the assessments of the educated ordinary people, perhaps, constitutes the difference faced today. Criticism, which cannot keep the current system at arm's length and which does not start a new and subjective discussion within the context of creative thought, has the risk of being anonymous. In other words, if such a case comes true, then remove all the names of the authors and see that there will be no change in the meanings. Here, this is the real death of the critic. If the critic is speaking in new middle class language which reminds of the victory of the market, instead of the ethical values, then the critic and criticism have already died here.

One of the missions of the critic – if such a mission is to be talked about – is to clarify the paradoxes of the system and hence to reveal how and where the administrator elite benefits from this. As Walter Benjamin sets forth; the critic is “the man of a strategic tactic” (2005). Starting a discussion about who does and who does not do this, will mean to personalize the subject. I guess if we are to seek for the bad man of the story, then everyone can be the bad man of this movie. Otherwise, if this discussion will be solved by laying the burden only

on the critic in a system which is totally integrated into this market and which has an aesthetic, moving through the economical valuations; in a system in which only specific galleries and artists are brought to forefront; big culture centers, institutions and fairs that exist only with a particular capital, become the centers of visibility and in this way in which galleries, artists, curators with some sort of scores, are included in some specific leagues; then let's crucify all the critics. Well then, do you believe that this system will totally change in such a case?

Bibliography

- Akay, A. (2013). 'Art writing is going on: Its form changed'. *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, January, 11 (in Turkish).
- Altuğ, E., Antmen, A. & Sönmez, A. (2012). 'Did criticism become head waiterness'. Interview by *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, December, 26 (in Turkish).
- Anderson, P. (2002). *The Origins of Postmodernity*. Translated: Elçin Gen, İstanbul: İletişim Publishing (in Turkish).
- Anonymous. (2013). 'Minimum rate basis for the members of AICA'. www.aica-turkey.blogspot.com (16.04.2010) (in Turkish).
- Artun, A. (2013). 'Resigning from Criticism'. www.e-skop.com, (02.01.2013) (in Turkish).
- Benjamin, W. (2005). *Einbahnstrasse*. Translated: Tefvik Turan, İstanbul. YKY Publishing (in Turkish).
- Danto, A.C. (1974). 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33(2): 139-148.
- Dickie, G. (1997). *The Art Circle, A Theory of Art*. Evanston, IL: Chicago Spectrum Press.
- Erciyes, E. (2013). 'The boredom of art writers at market'. *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, January, 5 (in Turkish).
- Erciyes, C. (2013). 'How do a writer be free'. *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, January, 12 (in Turkish).
- Hickey, D. (1993). *Invisible Dragon*. Los Angeles: Art Issues Press.
- Hickey, D. (1997). *Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy*. Los Angeles: Art Issues Press.
- Hickey, D. (2012). 'Critic David Hickey quits as art world become "too obsessed with money and celebrity"'. *Daily Mail*, October, 28.
- Özkaya, S. (2013). 'Long live Criticism'. *Radikal Daily Newspaper*, January, 9 (in Turkish).
- Shiner, L. (2004). *The Invention of Art*. Translated: İsmail Türkmen, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Publishing (in Turkish).
- Stallabrass, J. (2012). 'A Sad Reflection on the Art World'. *The Art Newspaper*, 241, December.
- Stallabrass, J. (2012). 'On Art World'. translated: Meltem Cansever, www.sana-tatak.com (02.01.2013) (in Turkish).
- Thornton, S. (2012). 'Top 10 Reasons Not to Write About the Art Market', *TAR Magazine*, 8, Fall 2012: 83.