



art brut préféré aux arts culturels

In its entirety and in translation, here is Dubuffet's (& Compagnie d'Art Brut) essay from 1949:

“Anyone who undertakes, as we do, to look at the works of the Irregulars, will find his notion of the approved art of the museums, galleries and salons – let us call it cultural art – totally transformed. This type of approved art will not seem representative of art in general, rather merely the activity of a particular clique: a cohort of careerist intellectuals. What country lacks its small clique of cultural arts: its troop of careerist intellectuals? It is obligatory. From one capital to another, they ape each other marvelously; they practice an artificial, Esperanto art tirelessly copied everywhere. Is art the right word? Does it actually have anything to do with art?

It is fairly widely thought that in considering the artistic production of intellectuals one is at the same time grasping the flower of production in general, since intellectuals, being drawn from the common people, cannot lack any of their qualities, having rather those additional qualities acquired by wearing out their trousers on the schoolroom bench – without allowing for the fact that intellectuals think themselves by definition far more intelligent than ordinary people. But is this really so? One also meets plenty of people with far less favourable opinion of the intellectual type. The intellectual type seems to them directionless, impenetrable, lacking in vitamins, a swimmer in pap. Empty, without magnetism, without vision. Perhaps the solid seat of the intellectual has been pulled out from under him. The intellectual's labours are always carried out while seated: at school, at conferences, at congresses. Often while dozing; sometimes while dead. Dead in one's seat. For a long time, intelligence has been highly valued. When one says of someone that they are intelligent, has not said everything? Nowadays people are growing disillusioned with this; they are beginning to demand other things. Intellectual qualities are less prized. People now value health and vitality. One can see that what was called intelligence is nothing more than a modicum of knowledge in the manipulation of simple, false and pointless algebraic formulae, having nothing to do with genuine vision (but rather obscuring it).

One cannot deny that on the level of vision, the light of the intellectuals is far from bright. The imbecile (or those the intellectual calls imbeciles) shows greater aptitude. It might even be that this vision gets worn out by the school benches, along with the seat of the intellectual's pants. Imbecile perhaps, but sparks fly from him, unlike Mr Grammar School, who doesn't spark at all. Good for the imbecile! He is our man! [...]

There are still people, particularly the intellectuals, who do not clearly see that the intelligent are hopeless cases, and one needs to rely on the so-called imbeciles for moments of lucidity; indeed, they just laugh at the idea. They cannot take the idea seriously.

The intellectual is of course crazy about ideas; he loves to chew them over, and cannot imagine any type of chewing gum.

One can with justification call art a chewing gum totally devoid of such ideas. One can sometimes lose sight of this. Ideas, and the algebra of ideas, may be a level of knowledge, but art is another means of knowledge, whose levels are completely different: they are those of vision. Ideas are an inert gas. It is when vision is blinded that the intellectual pops his head up.

Art exists to be a way of operating that does not involve ideas. When it is mixed with ideas, art becomes oxidized and worthless. Let there be as few ideas as possible! Ideas do not nourish art!

There are people (the present writer for example) who go so far to maintain that the art of these intellectuals is false art, the counterfeit currency of art, which is intricately ornamented but unsound.

Certainly the ornament is of some slight interest, but whether it sounds true is more interesting. Many slight works, brief, almost lacking form ring very loudly indeed; and for that reason they are preferable to many monumental works by illustrious professionals. It is

enough for certain people just to tell them that the creator of a work is a professional artist, so that the spell is immediately broken. Amongst artists, as amongst card-players or lovers, professionals are a little like crooks. [...]

True art is never where it is expected to be: in the place where no one considers it, nor names it. Art hates to be recognized and greeted by its name; it runs away immediately. Art is a person in love with anonymity. As soon as it's unmasked, as soon as someone points the finger, it runs away. It leaves in its place a prize stooze wearing on its back a great placard marked ART, which everybody immediately showers with champagne, and which the lecturers lead from town to town with a ring through its nose. That is the false Art. That is the art that the public knows, the art of the prize and the placard. The real Mrs Art no one recognizes. She walks everywhere, everyone has met her, jostled her at every junction, but no one thinks it could be her, Mrs Art herself, of whom so much has been said. She does not have the right air about her. You see, it is the false Mrs Art who has the air of being the true one; it is the real one who lacks this air. That means that one is deceived! So many people deceive themselves! It was in July 1945 that we undertook in both France and Switzerland, then in other countries, methodical research into the relevant ways of producing that which we now call Art Brut.

We understand by this works created by those untouched by artistic culture; in which copying has little part, unlike the art of intellectuals. Similarly, the artists take everything (subjects, choice of materials, modes of transposition, rhythms, writing styles) from their own inner being, not from the canons of classical or fashionable art. We engage in an artistic enterprise that is completely pure, basic; totally guided in all its phases solely by the creator's own impulses. It is therefore an art which only manifests invention, not the characteristics of cultural art which are those of the chameleon and the monkey.

Before concluding this essay we want to say a word about the mad. Madness gives man wings and helps his power of vision; many of the objects (almost half) that our exhibition contains are works by people in psychiatric hospitals. We see no reason to segregate them, unlike others. All the numerous dealings that we have had with our friends have convinced us that the mechanisms of artistic creation are the same in them as in so-called normal people. This distinction between normal and abnormal seems to us to be quite far-fetched: who is normal? Where is he, your normal man? Show him to us! The artistic act, with the extreme tension that it implies, the high fever that accompanies it, can it ever be considered normal?

Finally, mental 'illness' are extremely diverse – there are almost as many of them as there are sick people – and it seems quite arbitrary to label them all in the same way. Our point of view is that art is the same in all cases, and there is no more an art of the mad than there is an art of the dyspeptic, or an art for those with bad knees.