

BEAU GESTE

REBRANDING THE
AMERICAN ARTIST

Who Speaks For The Artist?

GORDY GRUNDY

ART REPORT TODAY



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The Colony News

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ART REPORT TODAY



WHO SPEAKS FOR THE ARTIST?

This essay must begin with a shoutout to our comrade in arts Josh Kline. His recent article “New York Real Estate and the Ruin of American Art” was a huge kick to the saggy pants of our fine arts machine. [Click Here.](#)

Kline, a sculptor, took a look at the whole of the arts industry, from an artist’s perspective, and covered all the bases, highlighting the big systemic issues we’d rather not talk about, for it reminds us how powerless and inconsequential we artists are. Kline’s solutions hit the wall and crashed, for the same reason. We are too powerless, poor and inconsequential to build a new utopia.

Our series of essays hope to expand upon Kline’s work. This series seeks real world, hands-on solutions. I put my faith into the ingenuity of the American artist. Our shoulders are wide.



THE WHAT, WITHOUT THE WHY.

I was basking in the warmth and glow of our social progress. I gave myself a hug and patted my shoulders with bonhomie. We, as a civilization, have done it. Our fine arts and cultural institutions are now held in a very high regard by the American populace. Generations of Americans appreciate the fine arts and the artist.

Over the last 75 years, from kindergarten to university, the old media, formerly known as the Fourth Estate, and the federal educational complex have worked very hard to teach us folks that the arts and its institutions are a very

good and wonderful thing in our culture. And it has succeeded beautifully.

Today, we *heart-emoji* museums and *like* all artists. Today, the art world, and all those within it, are held in valuable, great esteem.

Then why is there such chaos in the arts today? If one sneaks a peek through the opaque and reinforced mirrors of the fine arts, you will see nothing less than an orphanage fire. Most dispiriting, the firefighters are falling out of a clown car. As an arts news editor and journalist, I'm in the thick of it. I see and hear it all.

When one is waxing on about the beauty and benefits of the fine arts, I started to ask, "Why? Why are the arts so valuable?" I quickly discovered the thinking ended when the rote platitudes ran out. No one had an answer.

Simply, we have failed to teach the world *why*.

This public service messaging never made the arts personal or relatable. Souls were not touched. This is the great disconnect. And it's our own fault.

I recently met with an august hospitality resort group. They are all educated, smart and worldly people. I was quite blown away by the experience. They all loved and appreciated the arts, as a decoration. A little something to see and maybe do. That's all they wanted. The art world, as they understood it, could offer no more.

Internationally, the arts and culture demographic is the bee's knees for hospitality and tourism. Smart. Stylish. Generally monied. Trendsetters. Tastemakers. Economic boost.

Much like the 'Johnny Can't Read' scandals that are currently plaguing the nation, no one knows why an artist has chosen the life they

actively lead. Why do they do it? What does the artist get out of it?

The art world establishment, and the artist, have failed to communicate on the most basic human level.

In defense, *nuance* is hard to teach and *joy* is hard to describe.





LIKE QUARRELING LOVERS, THE CHICKEN AND THE EGG

And then suddenly, outta nowhere, the mariachi trumpets blared, and *Leapin' Lari*, the Lucha Libre wrestler known for his colorful cape and mask, flew into the wrestling ring of the New York Times editorial section and vanquished a lunkheaded art seller, in the Name of the Arts. *Ka-Pow!*

In June of this year, Marc Spiegler, a former exec at Art Basel wrote a very anxious yet thoughtful opinion piece titled “[Art Galleries Are Not OK.](#)” Our current economic crisis must now be pinching the folks at the top.

Just when the *artist* was again about to be frozen out of the conversation, I believe mild-mannered artist [Lari Pittman](#) set his brushes aside in his California studio. When no one else did, he literally stood up for the arts and walked across the studio to his computer where he typed a short note to the editor. His words were broadcast around the world:

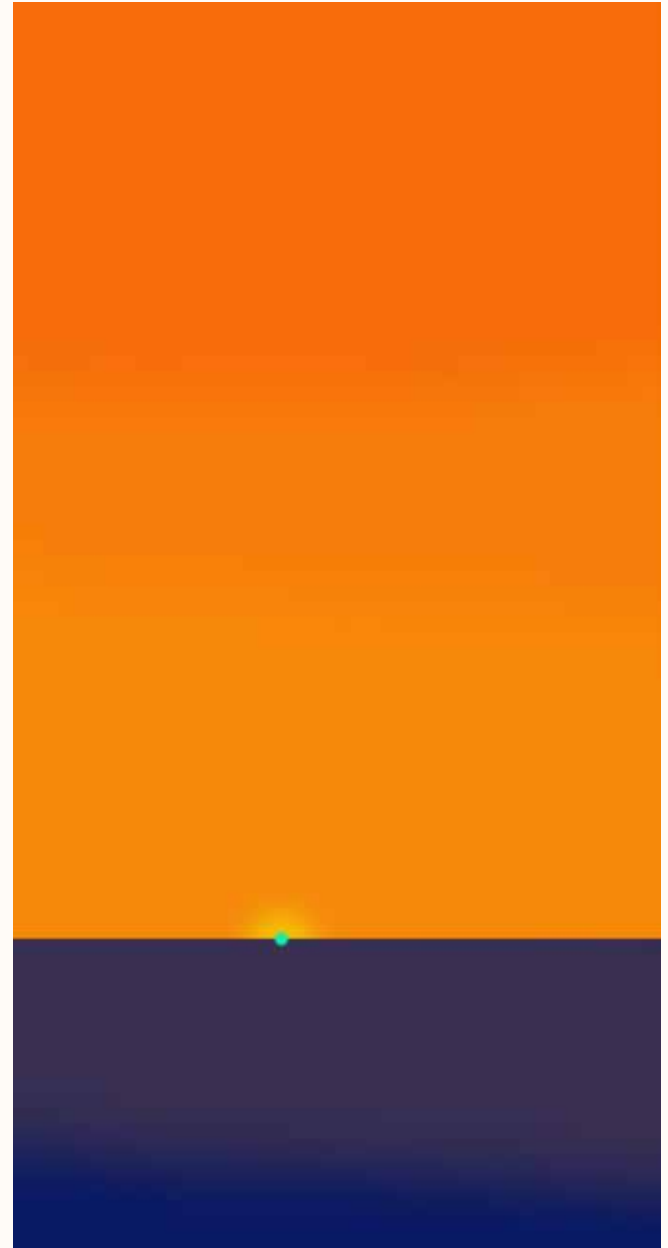
“Sorry, Marc Spiegler, but galleries are not the engine of the art world. Artists and their art are. Culture only trickles up, and money never trickles down.”

The wrestling move was deft and commanding. Pittman dealt a lethal punch from which no criticism could be uttered.

Simply put, they can't live without each other. Like the ole chicken and the egg conundrum.

Which came first? The Artist or the Gallerist?

We will never, ever know.





THE GREAT DISCONNECT

Let's not forget how short lived the *fine arts* truly are. No older than the blink of an eye in the history of humankind. I think of today's art world establishment as a frantic teen overwhelmed by puberty.

In the previous essay, "The What, Without The Why," we took a look at the public pulse on the Arts. We discovered that most everyone obediently loves and respects the arts + culture. Unfortunately, we have learned that folks just don't know *why*.

It's funny how the little things can grow into big ones, slowly over time. How spit on a hot sidewalk can mutate into Godzilla.

Less than two hundred years ago, artists began to trade their art works for essentials, like food, drink and shelter. One fine day, an art lover paid cash and everything changed. Today, we have the mega-gallery and the Freeport.

The First Voices

The business of art was the first to speak publicly. The language of the sale was our first descriptor.

Salesmanship is flattery-based. The art sales pitch found its legs over the decades. High-mindedness, a toady old favorite, promises elevation and superiority. Esteemed good taste is always the goal. "Since you took a chance on the Monet, I think you might like the work of the new Fauvism."

The fine details of the sales presentation, the window to the art world, defined the aspirations and the apathies.

Language

The arts have always had a secret language. Not so very long ago, someone attributed the word *impressionism* to a painting on a wall. The term stuck. Ditto *surrealism*, *cubism*, *afrowesternism* and all the rest.

As artistic communities began to grow, so did the terminology. Like Babel, language kept many smart people at bay.

With growth, the stakes became higher. Art works were no longer sold as an accessory in a home furnishing shoppe. A few stores began to sell art work exclusively and became art galleries. Salespeople need words to persuade you to acquire a work of great value. These retailers would later paint their walls bright white.

Academia

The birth of art academia seduced legions around the world. New and exciting expert voices flourished. How do you define the inexplicable? New opinion and its language were introduced. These exciting messages spoke to many.

Brick and mortar art schools evolved away from skills, and found great reception in academia. You can even earn a degree, a doctorate or tenure.

Conceptualism sired brave new ideas and a very opaque vocabulary. Like a Cali cult, you get it or you don't. You're in or you're out. Circle the wagons. In academia, a devoted audience lay eager, wanting more.

Art academia, in the attempt to defend its growing new self, shut the doors to the inconsequential and mindless majority. The snoot was set.

Art academia was big business. Today, the future looks very grim indeed.

Return On Investment

Like everything, the fine art world must sustain itself. Every day, I thank the One Percent for buying an artwork, shipping it to their summer home and hiring a handler to hang it on the wall.

Bless the gallerist for their courage under fire and ability to pivot whimsically. I understand why the mega-galleries have to sell *their program*. I forgive the arts media establishment for focusing their content entirely upon their advertisers and subscribers; the media has to eat too.

The world is based upon trade and exchange, a Return On Investment. The Artist's Bubble needs to touch down occasionally to smell the terra firma.

J'Accuse!

We, the artists, are to blame. In the glow and warmth of graduate school, the artist was told how to speak and how to frame their work in a greater context than one's own self. Successful communication demanded the artist sing to the choir. Your grade is based upon it.

Outside of the academic bubble, the artist sang the same song. Like nails on a chalkboard, regular folks heard a meaningless cacophony. Art issues have no relevancy at the supermarket checkout.

Snoot rules the world, in every class of society. Art is very snobbish. It has to be. It hurts when someone says, "My kid coulda painted that."

We can use our words to build walls, as a defense. Or we can command words to create new worlds and new crowds.

Making Markets and Inviting Audiences

The art world is running amok, screaming, "We need new audiences." The artists are shouting, "New markets!"

If the establishment so badly wants to baptize new congregants, then why are they still using the tired old hymnal?

Forgiveness

I guess it feels good to cross our arms, stomp our feet, and lift our noses. We certainly do enough of it. Life is hard for an artist. The road runs rough, physically and emotionally.

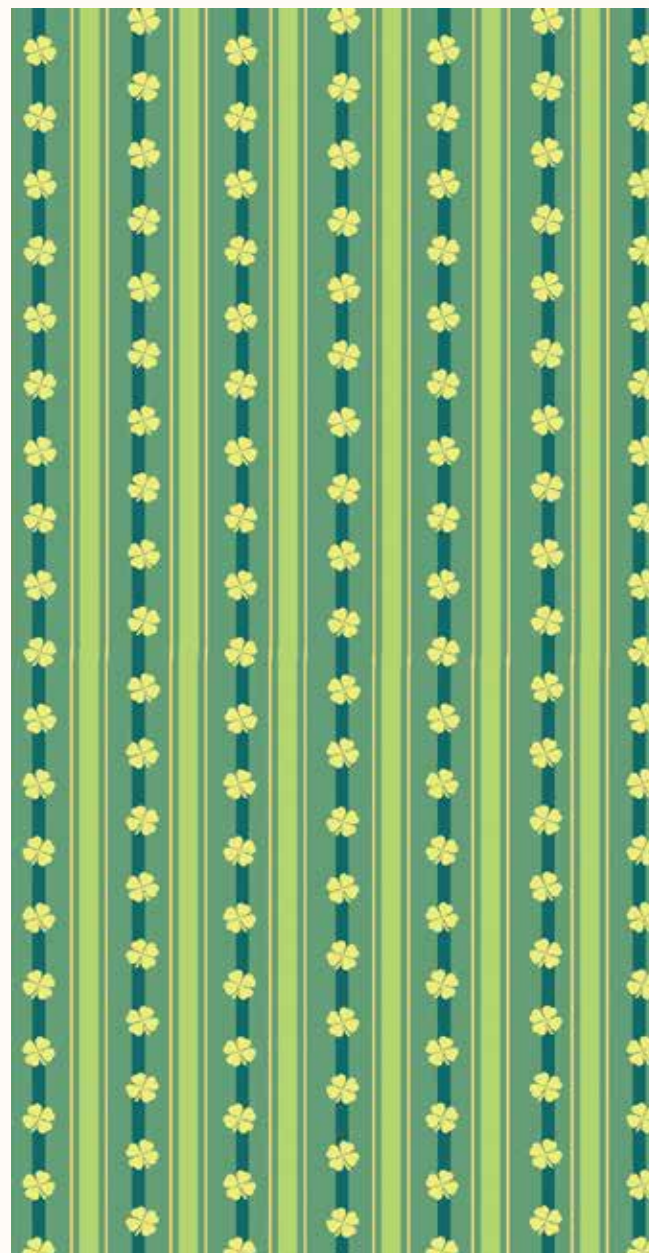
Recently, I again got the dull, blank stare. The reply that every artist knows all too well. The look of absolute disconnection and incomprehension. This time I got it from some very smart people. Instead of flipping them the bird or slapping them silly, I dove deep, not into the bottle, but into the mechanics of *why*.

As humans, no one knows why we do what we do. It's usually a defense attorney who explains it best.

Ditto, artists. We have to take back the narrative. We must rewrite the subtitles.

Art making is the most humanly emotional action. How do we put that into words? What's the new context? If art is relevant, so must the artist be. To speak relevantly, we must speak honestly and personally.

In the language of waiting at the supermarket checkout. Natch.





THE ARTS: WHY DO WE?

It's hard to care for something we don't understand.

Today we speak of the Arts with selfies and emojis.

Before Covid, we spoke in the lingo of art issues and academics.

Before the invention of the MFA, our uneducated little minds were busy speaking in an organic, very human tongue, which I would like to learn more about.

I think it will help us today, to reintroduce the arts. In a whole new way. Like a rebrand.

Unable to throw money at it, the artist will gladly bear the burden and work our magic.

Navigating Our Course

How do we repair our great disconnect?
Wrestle with this. Think back to your purest self. How do we introduce good folks to the sublime? How do we share that gut-punch of joy, awe, appreciation and a little grace? That sudden gasp when encountering an object of great personal beauty? What words do we use? How can we speak so that we are heard and understood?

By example, of course. Actions and words express our mindful humanity.

Choosing Our Voice

Today, we can see how art academia has

overstepped their utility, like a cigarette butt.

We have always joked that *Art is a Religion*, but I've always, quietly, believed it. A purpose-minded life? That's the arts. Striving for the sublime? Nothing more admirable or valiant.

How did we speak of the arts before academia? I need to read the letters of Georgia O'Keeffe. She tops a long list. Ditto the Bloomsbury gang and our historic collectives. The first MFA classes began in 1940, so anything before 1930 should be revelatory.

Summoning Our Spirits

No artist can ever speak for another. Yet we share many of the experiences that change our lives and the problems we must solve.

There *is* an Artist's Odyssey. The sequence of such events are individual. It is a progression of discovery and self-knowledge, unlike any other.

One beautiful gesture, after another.

Everyday, we choose to be creators or
destroyers. I aspire to the *beau geste*. A clean
conscience, with style.

This is how we begin again. Same instincts.
Same actions. New vocabulary.

If we strip away the refinery of academia, the
naked artist is nothing more than a simple soul,
who really likes to make things.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GORDY GRUNDY is an American artist and arts writer.

Exhibiting frequently, the painter has been influenced by sunny flights of SoCal fancy, the bold stroke and the grand gesture. Hollywood, Walt Disney, the secrets of re-creation and the Healing Power of Pop continue to fascinate him.

As a writer and columnist, he has written for *Artillery Magazine*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *the LA Weekly*, *ArtNews*, *the Huffington Post*,

and more. He is the author of *Artist Pants*, *Blood and Paint*, *Burn: A Life in the Arts*, and *Waimea Uprising*.

He is the editor-in-chief of *Art Report Today* news platforms and magazines.



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