

In Praise of Laziness

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As an artist, I learned from both East (socialism) and West (capitalism). Of course, now that the borders and political systems have changed, this type of experience will be no longer possible. But what I have learned from that dialogue stays with me. My observation and knowledge of Western art has recently led me to the conclusion that art cannot exist in the West anymore. This is not to say that there is not any. Why can art not exist anymore in the West? The answer is simple. Artists in the West are not lazy. Artists from the East are lazy; whether they will stay lazy now that they are no longer Eastern artists remains to be seen.

Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time—total amnesia. It is also indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, of futile concentration. Those virtues of laziness are important factors in art. Knowing about laziness is not enough, it must be practiced and perfected.

Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists, but rather producers of something. Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, the gallery system, the museum system, the competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects—all that drives them away from laziness, from art. Just as money is but paper, a gallery is but a room.

Artists from the East were lazy and poor because the entire system of insignificant factors did not exist. Therefore, they had time enough to concentrate on art and laziness. Even when they did produce art, they knew it was in vain, it was nothing.

Artists from the West could have learned about laziness, but they did not. Two major 20th-century artists dealt with the question of laziness, in both practical and theoretical terms: Marcel Duchamp and Kazimir Malevich.

Duchamp never really discussed laziness, but rather indifference and nonwork. When asked by Pierre Cabanne what had brought him most pleasure in life, Duchamp said, “First, having been lucky. Because basically I’ve never worked for a living. I consider working for a living slightly imbecilic from an economic point of view. I hope that some day we’ll be able to live without being obliged to work. Thanks to my luck, I was able to manage without getting wet.”

Malevich wrote a text entitled “Laziness—The Real Truth about Mankind” (1921). In it he criticized capitalism, because it enabled only a small number of capitalists to be lazy, but also socialism, because the entire movement was based on work instead of laziness. To quote: “People are scared of laziness and persecute those who accept it, and it always happens because no one realizes laziness is the truth; it has been branded as the mother of all vices, but it is in fact the mother of life. Socialism brings liberation in the unconscious, it scorns laziness without realizing it was laziness that gave birth to it; in his folly, the son scorns his mother as a mother of all vices and would not remove the brand; in this brief note I want to remove the brand of shame from laziness and to pronounce it not the mother of all vices, but the mother of perfection.”

Finally, to be lazy and conclude: there is no art without laziness.

“Work is a disease.”

—Karl Marx

“Work is shame.”

—Mladen Stilinovic and Vlado Martek