

## The Future of Art Allan deSouza

Published: (in German) in Kunst Nach Ground Zero, ed. Heinz Peter Schwerfel, Dumont Press, Koln, Germany, 2002;  
(in French) in L'Anthologie de l'art, ed. Jochen Gerz, 2008 (forthcoming).

The U.S. is changed. While this won't have an immediately or dramatically visible effect on the kinds of art being produced, there will be certain likely shifts. Audiences will need art to matter more, requiring that it somehow take account of what else is happening in the world, rather than being self-referential. This is not a return to "protest" art, or an art that is stridently political in its intention. We will require complexity, and more than that, depth. But as Sandra Tsing Loh has said, depth has taken a holiday, and so, for a while, there will be a crisis of how to and whether to make art. However, since complexity and depth reside as much in the viewer as in the artwork, it might be that perceptions and dialogue about art will be the first to change.

Artists and curators will discover an anomaly called a "conscience," and not know what to really do with that discovery. For a while, irony and postmodernist quotation will be out, sincerity and modernist truth will be in. People will talk about "engaged" practices, though this engagement won't take the forms of, say, '70s feminism or '80s multiculturalism (these will only reappear as kitschy-chic kitchen-sink "new art" in the works of a subsequent generation of artists, who will be too young to remember or understand their appropriations. Removed from its original socio-political contexts, this body of recycled work will be lauded as innovative and truly internationalist).

At the beginning of their papers, it will be de rigeur for panel speakers to apologize with the official mantra for "making and talking about art in these difficult and trying times, but it is our duty to continue with our lives." While giving them license to then engage in any solipsism, they will prove their humility by staying on for other panels such as *Aborigine Collectives in Australia's Northern Territories*, or, *Ifugao Rituals as Urban Performance*, instead of their usual habit of heading for the nearest bar after their own presentations.

In the prevailing spirit of global compassion and the-right-to-consumable-pleasure, the Venice Biennale will be renamed the Coca Cola Biennale. Its motto, and theme song, will be: *We are the art world*. Tie-In products, such as shopping bags, t-shirts and underwear will be printed in a copyrighted *International Red* on white with a swirly text saying: *Art is it*. Copies of these, autographed by Biennale executives, will eventually find their way onto the secondary auction market.

In a display of solidarity with... --well, actually, with no one--gallery dealers will form a union to protect their working interests against the greed and predations

of Big Artists; small artists, who one day hope to be Big Artists, will form paint-ins in protest. Some will refuse to come out of their studios, others will even go on strike. For the first few years no one else will notice. But then the prices of existing artworks will soar, simply by the unavailability of new works on the market. Artists who continue to make work will be denounced as scabs, and have their shows picketed. The Guerilla Women (they will have reached maturity by now) will stage a series of daring raids on galleries and museums, designed to get "Women (artists) Out of Men's Buildings" (or WOMB for short). The strategy will work, sort of. Women's art, already scarce, will become the most sought-after commodity, thereby commanding the highest prices. Transgender artists will lobby for parity. Male artists will form underground cells to forge women's work, but will inadvertently flood the market and cause its eventual collapse. There will be a brief but lucrative fad for stickers saying, "This is not a painting." Starving artists will stalk the streets, pouncing on unsuspecting passersby to draw their portraits. Badly designed government-sponsored flyers saying "Hitler was an artist," will appear overnight on every public building. Graffiti artists will form vigilante gangs to protect their turf. Police will be given extra powers to stop and search suspicious characters for offensive art materials.

An emergency will be declared, the National Guard will be called in and art will become a felony. The Christian Right will call for making painting a capital offense: "Pro-Life; Death to Painting," will be their rallying cry. The President will admit to once having owned a brush in college, but will staunchly deny that she used it. Convicted art teachers will have to register with their local police upon release. Internet art appreciation rings will be tracked down and cracked open by the FBI using confiscated Norman Rockwell prints for sting operations. Former critics who try to defend art will be denounced as "unpatriotic" and told, "If you don't like it, go to France." Many do.

Plus ça change.

Allan deSouza, Oct. 2001